The social genesis of individual practices: 
An individualistic versus a collectivist account

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THE SOCIAL GENESIS OF INDIVIDUAL PRACTICES: AN INDIVIDUALISTIC VERSUS A COLLECTIVIST ACCOUNT

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Abstract

Whilst Bourdieu’s concept of habitus provides some useful insights into the 'social' nature of our identities, it also presents some analytical shortcomings. In this paper I expose some of the theoretical deficiencies present in Bourdieu's model and argue that these can be resolved by applying some of the insights of the performative theory of social institutions, a theory principally developed by Barry Barnes, David Bloor and Martin Kusch. These scholars provide more analytically developed notions of the nature of the social, the self, and the social construction of social identities. My paper aims to contrast these two social constructionist views of the constitution of the self. In doing so, I intend to illustrate that, with its core notion of the social as a 'collective accomplishment', the performative theory suggests new paths for an understanding of social phenomena which avoids forms of reification of objective structures as 'metaphysical posits' outside social interaction.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The existential modality of the social (unlike the structure of the societal) has been seldom held at the focus of sociological attention. (...) There is no sociological consensus, therefore, as to the meaning, experiential content and behavioural consequences of the primary condition of 'being with others'. The ways in which that condition can be made sociologically relevant are yet to be fully explored in sociological practice.¹

Individual experience, subjective knowledge, agency, freedom of will and many other notions focusing on people's individuality, have been making a strong appearance in

¹ Zygmunt Bauman, in Barnes (2000)
social sciences in recent years. The main intention of such emphasis has been to counter the prominence given to external forces over the individual found in much of mainstream social theory. The latter was the result of social theorists' attempt to decipher the logic of these apparently external forces which seem to be able to transmute independent individual behaviour into coherent collective action. Although some theories have placed greater emphasis on the micro-processes of individuals' relationships with the world and each other, others have remained faithful to the need to emphasise, to a greater or lesser degree, external determination. However, the main trend of the last few decades of social theory has been to find a compromise between the two emphases with the explicit intention to bridge, transcend, blur, weaken, or even dissolve, the opposition between the two notions at the core of this debate, namely, subjective individual experience and behaviour and wider social phenomena.

Of the two notions individual behaviour has a less problematic status, if only because in empirical terms it seems easier to grasp. However, the existence of something beyond individual activity also appears as an empirical fact, albeit a more difficult one to get to grips with. The oft-mentioned example of language seems to show that something must necessarily exist beyond our individual independent (verbal) actions which guide them into a collective coherence. Otherwise, how could we learn a means of communication that makes sense to everybody, at least at the level of everyday pragmatic exchange? It therefore has seemed obvious to conclude that a commonly shared set of linguistic norms or rules, independent of individual usage, must exist if we are to be able to communicate and understand each other.

In this debate between structural factors and individual features, much has been discussed about the exact nature of this relationship. Most efforts have been directed to bridge the dualism and find essential ontological connection between the two. However, such attempts have often resulted in what could be named a 'hierarchical mapping', that is, rather than dissolving the intrinsic separation that the two notions seem to present, one of them has been prioritised over the other. Despite grand claims by some theorists the dissolution of such dualism has rarely been convincingly achieved.

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2 Phenomenologically close accounts like Ethnomethodology and Social Interactionism are among the best examples.

3 Structuralist readers of Marx, like Althusser, Gramsci and Frankfurt School theorists are the most clear example of this position.

4 See Giddens and Bourdieu as two of the main current exponents of such an emphasis.
This relationship has been represented in many different ways, as dialectical, reproductive or co-reproductive, co-constitutive, or even as a 'sort of circuit'\(^5\). While theorists have been anxious to avoid an overly deterministic approach, they have also acknowledged that the existence of some sort of guiding structure seems inevitable. Equally, while freedom of will should be recognised, the individual should not be conceived as being so empowered and autonomous as to be totally independent of social forces.

In this paper I want to present what I believe is the most accomplished approach in providing an analytical edifice to genuinely bridge the dualistic and hierarchical gap between society and individual. This is the brand of Sociology of Scientific Knowledge, Edinburgh School, otherwise known as Strong Programme, which has been developed into a form of social theory named the performative theory of social institutions.\(^6\)

However, it is important to stress that the novel description these theorists provide encompasses not only the debate on the relationship between social life and the individual, but, and most importantly, the establishment of the exact nature of these notions. That is, what it is meant exactly when we talk of social structure has been too much a taken for granted concept in no need of being problematised; the same would apply for the notion of individual. The Performative theory provides precise analytical notions to understand the nature of social life, and in doing so, both social structural features as well as individual characteristics are explained. A comparison with another, widely known, theoretical account, that of Bourdieu's theory of practice, will also be used as an analytical strategy to not only highlight the more accomplished analytical proposals of the former, but to advance a sketch of how we can view the social nature of human life.

2. **Individual and the 'Context': Two Social Constructionist Versions**

The two theories I compare in this paper assume as an undisputed fact that any individual understanding of reality is contextual, local and subjective. Beyond this, they argue that this very same reality is to some degree affected and effected by the individually contextualised experience of it. This position is generally known as Social Constructionism. The exact nature of this causal relationship is at the core of the debate, takes different analytical forms and has been depicted using different models and strategies. By describing the underlying model that sustains the social theory of

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\(^5\) See Merleau-Ponty (1964)

\(^6\) This approach has been mainly developed by Bloor, Barnes with fundamental contributions by Kusch. See passim in the bibliography.
the two views compared, I hope to unravel their different accounts of the social genesis of individual subjectivity and the relationship between individual practices and wider social macro-phenomena.

2.1 Connecting independent individuals: two models

To start by exploring social co-ordination in order to understand the nature of individual experience may seem like building a house from the roof down. Or, it may seem to overlook, once again, the significance of individual behaviour in the constitution of wider social macro-phenomena. The aim of such an exercise, however, is to show that by exploring these two different views of what lies at the bases of the possibility of social co-ordination between independent subjective individuals' experience, the latter will be put into a clearer focus and new dimensions of understanding of the relationship between individual practices and wider social phenomena brought forward.

2.1.1. Bourdieu's model of social co-ordination

"The objective homogenizing of group or class habitus that results from homogeneity of conditions of existence is what enables practices to be objectively harmonized without any calculation or conscious reference to a norm and mutually adjusted in the absence of any direct interaction, or a fortiori, explicit co-ordination. The interaction itself owes its form to the objective structures that have produced the dispositions of the interacting agents, which continue to assign them their relative positions in the interaction and elsewhere."  

Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, one of the currently wider known attempts to construct a theoretical edifice of the constitution of social life, is founded in three main analytical concepts: habitus, fields and capitals. The intertwining of the three notions may be simplified in the following way: the fields are the arenas, or social environments, where given 'objective structures' are in place and at play. Being located in a given field exposes individuals to such objective structures which results in the development of a 'habitus'. A habitus is a set of dispositions which direct the individual to act in certain ways. Capitals are the currency, as it were, which the socially acquired dispositions provide each individual with; capitals are at the base of the dynamics of interaction between individuals within fields. From this it follows that individuals

7 Bourdieu, 1990:58. Italics are mine.
8 These three concepts are spread throughout Bourdieu's oeuvre. See especially 1990 and 1994b.
9 'Objective conditions of existence' in Bourdieu's own words.
placed in the same field will logically develop similar -homogeneous in Bourdieu's parlance- habitus.

It is not necessary, for the main focus of the present discussion, to go into detail about the concepts of field and capital. The aim is to concentrate on the idea advanced by the above quotation, that is, how individuals' habitus are at the basis of the possibility for social co-ordination. Since habitus is a set of dispositions which direct or guide individual practices and beliefs in certain specific ways, it follows that the practices of individuals with similar habitus, will be similar. Consensus and agreement is achieved, thus, not due to conscious, rational effort among self-oriented individuals but rather through the implicit agreement 'to act in the same ways' which stems from having been similarly constructed.

Let us now move from the macro-social phenomena of collective co-ordination to consider the single individual. Bourdieu's model presents a picture of individuality in which the individual's subjective experience of reality is a result of the location within a given set of 'objective conditions of existence'. In a clear attempt to present a social account of individuality, Bourdieu locates its genesis in the external world, that is, those sets of social phenomena which are at the base of the constitution of individuals' habitus. The possibility of harmonious inter-subjective communication is nothing more than the result of this similar social genesis. Bourdieu presents the following model to exemplify the existence of social consensus:

"Imagine two clocks or watches in perfect agreement as to the time. This may occur in one of three ways. The first consists in mutual influence; the second is to appoint a skilful workman to correct them and synchronize constantly; the third is to construct these two clocks with such an art and precision that one can be assured of their subsequent agreement."

That is, social agreement (agreement in times in the above clock model) may be the result of, first, individuals influencing each other, or second, the product of skilful workman directing from outside, or finally, the result of individuals being equally 'constructed'. Of the three models Bourdieu only considers the last two, ignoring the first one as of any relevance at all in his account. The second model is overtly dismissed by Bourdieu by being taken to exemplify the most radical structuralist position which sees individuals' general make up and social dynamics as determined by some sort of external entity. Such a model would present an over-deterministic

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11 What is meant by this 'externality' has been very contentious even among clear structuralist accounts and it may mean a varied set of phenomena. External phenomena have been taken to be macro-social arrangements to which the single individual has no direct access apart from the fact of being 'guided'
view of social life and a reification of external reality difficult to sustain empirically and which Bourdieu overtly criticises. Thus Bourdieu adopts the third model to exemplify his position.

In the third model of agreement there is a move towards the individual and her role in the dynamics of socially coherent interaction. It is important to stress that Bourdieu wants to place the individual at the centre of his theory. His 'theory of practice' aims to stress individual actions, encompassing what individuals do, feel or believe. For Bourdieu there are no outside forces which direct individuals' behaviour; rather what may appear to be external forces guiding individuals to act similarly is an 'inbuilt mechanism', which he names the habitus. Hence, in his theory, individuals retain power of action; the habitus directs but does not disable individual agency. The habitus works from 'inside' leaving the individual somehow 'free' to act according to her best judgement of the situation at hand. This does not amount to Bourdieu denying the existence of constraints. In fact he equally criticises theories that, by placing too much emphasis on the micro-processes of individuals' interactions, forget wider social phenomena. Bourdieu, emphatically, does not want to deny a notion of structure or objective social reality. Objective reality exists and effects an essential influence upon the individual, but, by virtue of being located 'inside' the individual leaves her in a free state to act.

12 Those theories heavily criticised as unduly individualistic by Bourdieu are mainly rational choice theories and all forms of Ethnomethodology or Social Interactionism. These are the views that would fit into the first model, that of mutual influence, a model which places emphasis on voluntaristic discourses and how they are accounted for in mutual daily interactions. Bourdieu criticises those approaches for only accounting for individual conscious interactions and forgetting the constraining nature of the social context.
2.1.2. The social theory of the performatative theory of social institutions: the nature of social co-ordination.\textsuperscript{13}

We find in Kusch\textsuperscript{14} a similar tactic of using clocks and times to model and exemplify the possibility of social co-ordination between differing individuals.\textsuperscript{15} In Kusch we also find three different clock models but with fundamental differences to Bourdieu. The first striking difference is the acknowledgement of the obvious empirical fact that individuals present differing views. This being the case, Kusch reasons, how can we understand that social agreement exists as does social life as a wider phenomena? This agreement, Kusch points out, can be the result of three different dynamics: first, of a single external authority, second, of single individual consensus, or third, the result of multiple and local consensus.

To model the three alternatives, let us imagine a community of clocks in agreement as to the time. First, a community of clocks come to agree as to the general time by all being linked to a 'master clock', a sort of authority clock which determines the time and regularly 'resets' all the other clocks. This would be the 'single authority model', which represents an 'authoritarian' view of consensus. This view is appropriate to those who stress 'external' phenomena as the explanation of social life, such as structuralist accounts which view structures as superior to and having a determining influence upon individuals.

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{authoritarian_view_of_consensus.png}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{13} This sociological approach has its roots in the general enquires of sociology of scientific knowledge; specifically in a brand of sociology of scientific knowledge developed in Edinburgh by two main theorists David Bloor and Barry Barnes. The theory developed by this school has been known as the Strong Programme and deploys specific social constructionist accounts regarding the nature of knowledge. Barnes, who has developed his approach more explicitly towards social theory, presents the view which I adopt here. The social theory of the Strong Programme is known as 'the performative theory of social institutions' and sets out to explore the nature or basis of what is the 'social'. Martin Kusch has been extensively developing this form of analysis and critically applying it to philosophy, and in doing so has been making fundamental contributions to the Strong Program. I am using some of his work to develop my account.

\textsuperscript{14} See Kusch, 1998: 271 and 2002

\textsuperscript{15} This issue has been extensively commented upon as the 'hobbesian' problem by Parsons and taken up by Barry Barnes, particularly in 1988 and 1995. In short, how is it that individuals manage to come to agreement and achieve social co-ordination despite individually differing interests.
The second model, the model of 'single consensus', is depicted as a community of
clocks all linked up to a general mechanism which receives the times sent to it by each
individual clock and resets each one of them to the calculated average. This could be
said to represent an interactionist perspective, in which an individual's input is seen to
be prior to external social phenomena. As in model one, this second model
presupposes an external device, but in this case this device is devoid of intrinsic
authority. It is, rather, a 'mediator' among individual clocks. Hence while the general
time is an 'externally organised' phenomena, it has its origins in each individual clock.
This model is intended to represent theoretical approaches which emphasise structural
features as constituted by individuals but which become reified once constituted.

The third model, the 'multiple, local consensus model' aims to depict a community of
clocks which mutually influence each other as to the agreement on time. Like the
second model this could also be conceived as representing an interactionist position,
but in this instance no external master device or general mechanism exists, only
mutually interacting clocks with a susceptibility to be reset automatically according to
the time of all the others with which each one interacts. It is this model that clearly
exemplifies the Strong Programme position regarding the nature of social co-
ordination. It highlights the constitutive role granted to single independent but
interacting individuals, showing that social life is the product of pure mutual
interaction with no outside intervention.
This model also attempts to highlight that consensus and agreement are internal to the community in that they are the product of every single individual interaction. There is no external reification of an entity which may be at the base of the constitution of social life. Unlike the other two models, interaction is essential. Individuals cannot be conceived as isolated entities. Not only is social life viewed as the product of individual interactive dynamics but also, and fundamental for the focus of the present discussion, individuals are, in turn, constantly being constituted by their own permanent interactive encounters. Returning to the clock metaphor, by colliding with each other individual clocks keep sending and receiving times. A 'mutual susceptibility' of being affected by others means that each clock will readjust itself constituting an average which is the product of taking into account the others' times. The result is that at any given moment the time that a single clock displays will be both the result of its individual timing and the average influenced by the timing of others. Thus, under this model, both consensus and individual features become viewed as a 'collective accomplishment'.


The different approaches favoured by Bourdieu and Kusch are based upon fundamental differences in their conception of social phenomena. I will highlight these differences and consider which approach I believe to have achieved a more accurate picture of the social genesis of individual experience.

2.2.1 Habitus: the individual internalization of history.

The core concept of Bourdieu's theory of practice, that of habitus, is at the basis of the clock model favoured by Bourdieu. As noted above for Bourdieu agreement among individuals is the result of their being identically 'constructed'. This 'identically constructed' entity is habitus:

the conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, That is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or express mastery of the operations necessary to obtain them.

16 This 'mutual susceptibility' phenomenon should not be taken for granted, but rather conceived as a fundamental fact of social life. The nature of 'being with others' and how we readjust ourselves to them should not be underestimated but rather should be placed at the focus of enquiry. A considerable amount of literature on the constitutive role of social sanctioning is instrumentalised by the Strong Program's performative theory in order to highlight this issue. We will explore this in more depth below.
Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the
product of obedience to rules they [the practices] can be collectively
orchestrated without being the product of a conductor.17

Habitus is the individually internalised social history, the product of a determinate set
of objective conditions of existence: a 'structured structure'. Habitus, Bourdieu stresses
emphatically, does not preclude individual calculation, and although due to its
embodied nature it 'guides' the individual in a non-conscious manner, Bourdieu does
not want to suggest that individuals are social dopes. Rather, the objective structures
incorporated subjectively in a habitus, 'structure' the practices that the individual will
engage in as "an acquired system of generative schemes". Habitus is, thus, also a
'structuring structure'. Within this conception the individual retains full power of
decision and production of thoughts, perception and actions, but, most important, only
those allowed by given objective conditions of existence: "the structure of which it
[habitus] is the product governs practice, not along the paths of a mechanical
determinism, but within the constraints and limits initially set on its inventions."18

By virtue of being the product of external conditions of existence, the habitus of
individuals placed in similar contexts will, therefore, develop similar features, that is,
similar ways of thinking, acting, and perceiving the world. In this model, agreement
and the possibility of social co-ordination is the result of this individually inbuilt
feature, an "immanent law, inscribed in bodies by identical histories" and hence "the
precondition not only for the co-ordination of practices but also for the practices of co-
ordination." 19

In Bourdieu's theory, agency and choice are seen as a set of constrained possibilities.
He wants to account for the existence of 'objective structures', which are conceived as
independent of the consciousness and desires of agents and are capable of guiding and
constraining their practices or their representations. However these social structures
are not totally unaffected by individuals' practices. His 'structuralist constructivism' or
'genetic structuralism' as he puts it himself, emphasises that the practices feed back to
the system reinforcing its structures. This feedback takes the form of a re-productive
dynamics. By acting in accordance with the systemic features of the context, the
individual reinforces these features. The social system and the individual thus establish
a circuit of co-reproduction.

17 Bourdieu, 1990:53
18 Bourdieu, 1995b:55
19 Bourdieu, 1995b: 59
This representation of individual internal life is that of an 'ontological complicity' with the external social context.\textsuperscript{20} In other words it is not that the habitus is acting according to the structure of the social environment where it is placed, rather the habitus of an individual is this structure. Individual subjective life is clearly the product of social environment; a sort of 'subjectification' of objective structures. \textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{2.2.2. Self-referentiality: a collective account}

The essence of the Kusch model presented above is the notion of self-referentiality which is at the core of Barry Barnes' 'performative theory of social institutions'. This is a theory which brings about the notion of social and individual life as a collective accomplishment. The word 'collective' acquires here a specific meaning which will be explored in the next section.\textsuperscript{22}

\textbf{2.2.2.1. Social life as a 'self-referential bootstrapped induction'.}

The notion of self-referentiality, which has its origin particularly within the sociology of knowledge debates concerning issues of reference and reference creation, has proved to be a very elusive one. In this paper I will concentrate on the meaning and use advanced by Barnes, who specifically sets out to investigate the problem of reference, that is, "that of the relationship between our speech and that which is spoken of"\textsuperscript{23}, in order to further our understanding on the nature of social life.

Barnes strives to explore the ontological nature of the 'social', which he points out is a rather neglected exercise in social sciences. His endeavour leads him to analyse the role of individuals' production of knowledge as constitutive of social life. In doing so he explores the nature of knowledge production in general and particularly the complexities of individuals' dynamics in learning, using, and creating knowledge categories. The process of categorising reality, he contends, enables the understanding of social life as collective systems of knowledge and the social genesis of both human individual subjective experience and macro-social arrangements.

\textsuperscript{20} See Bourdieu, 1990: 11-12, and 1985:14

\textsuperscript{21} Bourdieu takes a similar approach to that of Merleau-Ponty (1962:183) regarding the embodiment of habitus. Embodiment in Bourdieu's theory is a major feature: the individual incorporates structures mainly through the body and structures are reproduced by this bodily directed practical activity. Bourdieu here echoes some of Merleau-Ponty's account of individuality by saying that this embodied habitus it is also a mental habitus; the body is a 'thinking animal'. The mental life of the individual is inseparable from the embodiment of habitus. See Bourdieu, 1985:14.

\textsuperscript{22} What follows is mainly based on Barnes seminal paper 'Social life as bootstrapped induction', 1983

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.: 525.
In examining the nature of social categories, Barnes explores category ascription in general. He notes that we intuitively divide the world in two realities, physical and social reality. Physical realities are those whose referent (the entity to which a label refers) is external to the human categories which describe them. The category production and application of physical realities is represented in Figure 1.

To discuss this in more detail we have to imagine an individual as somehow containing a cognitive machinery which divides his category production into two phases. First a 'pattern recognising' phase (PR), in which the external physical reality (P) is recognised according to an internalised pattern; second a 'pattern attachment' phase (PA) in which a label (N) is attached to describe the external reality. Such physical entities are labelled by Barnes as Natural Kinds (NK).

The main features this model attempts to capture are that individuals are in direct contact with the reality categorised and from this contact inductive inferences are made. There is a causal relation between reality and individual category ascription. In addition, in Natural Kinds in particular, this is a process which involves an external reality empirically recognisable by its own physical features. That is, there is a clearly recognisable 'alter-referent'. However, and most important, the second phase, that of applying a word or label to the entity recognised, is self-referential in nature, where self-referential is understood in the sense that the label is one referred (used) as such by the community. The label 'tree' is what is referred (and used) as the label 'tree'.

The important fact to retain is that the self-referential process only applies to the second stage, that is, that of the pattern attachment (PA). In short, the label we attach is one which is in use already in the community. External empirical features are unaffected by this category ascription.

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24 It is important to understand that the notion of self-referentiality as used in the sociology of knowledge is applied to categories rather than people, as is the case in more everyday understandings.
If now we turn to 'social' realities, we find that category ascription exhibits a fundamental difference to that relating to physical realities. Let us keep in mind here Figure 2. Social realities, social kinds (SK) in Barnes' terminology, are those which are 'social' in origin: for instance marriage, authority or leadership. In such types of reality the categorization process may equally be described as proceeding in two phases; a first phase in which the entity is recognised (pattern recognition or PR) and a second phase in which a label is attached (pattern attachment or PA). The crucial difference for Social Kinds is that the entity cannot be recognized unless the label has been attached first. To give an example, a married person has to have been pronounced married prior to being recognised as such. Therefore, whereas in natural types of reality P (the reality recognised) is different from N (the label attached), demonstrating the 'alter-referent's' independent existence, in social types of reality the label attached (S) is the same as the entity recognized (S). There is no clearly empirically recognisable reality external to our labelling process. This crucial difference between the two types of reality allows Barnes to spell out his notion of social life as a purely self-referential process.
2.2.2.2. Individual inferences as collective accomplishments.

To clearly put into focus the significance of the above abstract model we have now to conceive the above operation as the individual process of knowledge production. Nothing has been said yet as to the origins of the labels which the individual ascribes to the entities referred. In Social Kinds of realities in particular, there are no external empirical features to guide our category ascription, hence we rely on categories or labels which are given to us. Barnes argues that if we examine the origins of the category we use we may conceive two possibilities first. First, one in which the label is imposed to us by an external authority (see Figure 3).

![Figure 3](image)

Although this situation may be present in human life in many occasions - think of a parent teaching ostensively to their child about categories like gender difference - the majority of social life presents the distinctly different feature that there are no external detectable 'authorities' which can be identified as the originators of a label, category or knowledge in general. Rather categories are just there being used by the members of the community and being transmitted to one another by interaction.

Barnes therefore proposes to depict the category production of social kind types of entities as a 'collective model'. The collective model places the whole community of single individuals at the centre of the constitution of social life. It is a model in which the community as a whole holds knowledge without the presence of any directive external authority. This notion is crudely represented in Figure 4:

![Figure 4](image)
What we infer from this model is that every single individual inductive inference is implicated in the constitution of what is a social type of reality (S). It is important to bear in mind that each individual (triangles in the diagram) is in permanent contact with the others. Along with the individual inductive inferences there exists the knowledge of what the others believe or establish about an S type of reality.²⁵

Barnes' model views social life as a self-sustained system with no external aid: "A good part of the problem of understanding social structure is simply to understand bootstrapped inference."²⁶ That is, individual inferences are made from a collective system of knowledge which has no outside 'aid', but only what the collective sustains in sharing knowledge through interaction. Barnes' model is designed to stress the following points:

a) The clear dialectical nature of the relationship between structure and individual. Social structure as well as individual features are social institutions, that is, the product of 'collective bootstrapped inferences': individuals make inductive inferences from the system of knowledge held by a collective but at the same time this collective system of knowledge is the product of each individual inference. This is a pure 'dialectical' process which does not prioritise one or the other of the factors involved.

b) The bootstrapped inference process results in both change and stability. The stability of the system is the product of perpetual activity, not of any reified external entity like norms, rules, or psychological features. The 'performative model of social institutions' formulates the stability of social life as the product of the inductive inferences of interacting individuals mutually influencing each other. Because individuals are conceived as naturally differing change remains inherent in the system. However much individual inferences are made within the context of a collectively shared system of knowledge, the will always be potentially differing. A mutual susceptibility to being influenced by others and reach conformity will sustain consensus and hence stability.

²⁵ It is important to note that Barnes describes this self-referential process as also applying to N types of reality. The focus on S types results from his analytical strategy to clearly highlight the self-referential nature of social life, rather than an intentional ontological division of the two types of realities.

²⁶ Barnes, 1983:538.
3. Implications of each model for the understanding of individuals as socially constructed.

3.1. Bourdieu's model: individual practices as a 'structure'.

It was pointed out above that Bourdieu conceives social co-ordination as the product of 'clocks being built identically'. This model would appear to be a version of Kusch's model of the authoritarian clock but with the difference that for Bourdieu an 'authoritarian' clock would build all the clocks identically and then disappear, as it were, leaving them to continue on their own. Consensus, hence, is the product of an inbuilt mechanism, that is habitus, which disposes people to act alike, and this is how Bourdieu argues that structural constraints do not exist as reified entities external to individuals. This model could be depicted in two separate stages; a first stage in which a primary socialisation process occurs in which the individuals are exposed to the 'objective structural features' (OS).

A second stage in which, after this initial socialization process, the external entity disappears, as it were, leaving individuals free to interact without the constrains of external rules or an organising 'conductor', to use Bourdieu's own words. The practices of independent individuals thus, present an agreement because the objective structural features have been internalised similarly by all the individuals found in similar social contexts and embodied into a 'habitus', consequently developing homogeneous dispositions. Figure 5 above would picture like Figure 6, below, in this second stage:

![Diagram](attachment:figure6.png)
Carefully analysed, however, Bourdieu's theory of practice does not fully achieve the synthesis it claims. Structural constraints remain the guiding mechanisms, but rather than reified as external to the individual, they become 'inscribed' inside the individual.

This is a model which conceives individuals' subjective experience and practices, in short, individuals' agency as epiphenomenal to structural constraints. For Bourdieu the acquisition of habitus is an active process, which occurs in and through action, that is, by experience, not by passive exposure. But in fact, in Bourdieu's model agency is precluded because he presents a circularity of re-production which grants clear priority to structural systemic features.

In this model the individual becomes viewed almost as an isolated entity due to the fact that it is a model in which social interaction is minimised. Social interaction, when acknowledged is perceived as a reproductive mechanism but not as a constitutive one. From interactive processes the system gets reproduced rather than constituted in new forms.

The key concept here is that of reproduction. Practices, by virtue of being the product of the habitus, feed back into the system, reinforcing and reproducing it. The circularity presented is that of a model of re-production not of re-constitution. See Figure 7 for a visualisation of the co-reproductive circuit:

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27 See particularly Bourdieu, 1995a: 83-84 in which the dialectics between objective structures and individual's features are clearly depicted as reproducing each other.
In granting a reproductive role to individual agency and explaining individual features as the product of objective conditions of existence, Bourdieu puts forward a specific view of individuality as modelled and produced by external factors. The inter-dynamics between individuals are characterised either by identity and harmony (among those placed in similar social environments) or difference and conflict (among those located in different social environments).  

Bourdieu's model has a number of shortcomings. First, social 'objective' structure (OS in Figure 6) remains unexplained: by virtue of conceiving objective conditions of existence or structure as constitutive phenomena, Bourdieu not only gives priority to them but cannot explain their bases or nature. Hence social structures are taken to be given and unproblematic phenomena. Second, by prioritising social structure over individual, Bourdieu cannot escape a structuralist deterministic model. In Bourdieu, therefore, we clearly find residues of a form of analytical individualism, that is by envisaging individuals' practices as the result of individually inbuilt mechanisms, actors are presented as separated entities acting somewhat in isolation from one another, and any interaction with others occurs between already ‘formed’ individuals. Third, it has been noted that Bourdieu's model has difficulties in accounting for change. For Bourdieu, change is the product of external dynamics, that is, of outside phenomena. Since his model so clearly depicts the dynamics between individual and structure as reproductive, it necessarily precludes change as the product of individuals' interaction. Individuals identically constructed may change environments and adapt to new circumstances, but according to Bourdieu this adaptation is obstructed by the inbuilt habitus structure, which the individual carries to different social contexts.

3.2. Barnes model: individual practices as 'social institutions'.

The conception of individual behaviour and subjective experience which the performative theory of social institutions proposes presents a fundamentally different picture from Bourdieu's. We need to go back to Kusch's clock model to capture this contrast, and to recall that of the three options, Kusch adopts the 'mutual influence' model as clearly representing the nature of social life. The first striking issue to bear in mind

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29 Bourdieu tries to respond to the criticism of the determinism of his account by trying to 'open' the system of dispositions to potential change. He states that habitus 'is durable but not eternal'. However he immediately observes that habitus rarely encounters different conditions of existence other than those which have produced it. Habitus is therefore reproduced rather than modified. The point is that habitus may change but only if the external conditions do so. See Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:133.


31 See for example Bourdieu, 1994a: 175 or Bourdieu, 1994b: 33
mind is that this possibility is totally dismissed by Bourdieu. He does not even contemplate that mutual influence may have any role in the constitution of social life or individual subjective experience.

The fundamental implications of Barnes and Kusch's model would be, thus, that first and foremost, social interaction is seen as constitutive. Social life, knowledge, beliefs, categories and any form of social types of realities are conceived as the result of interactive communicative dynamics. By interacting, individuals reset themselves adjusting to others' beliefs or practices (times in the clocks model). This conception of social life is analytically couched by the self-referential model presented above by Barnes. With this notion Barnes wants to convey individual practices as purely constitutive and not (only) reproductive. The self-referential model highlights two features of the individual's experience. First, the inductive means by which humans acquire knowledge through their observation of reality (social or natural). These individual inductive inferences are a fundamental constitutive factor of collective practices. However, and secondly, contact with others is also seen as essential to the full determination of individuals' beliefs or practices. In this sense, social life and individual action are in fact viewed as fundamentally collective accomplishments.

This is a view which stresses the fundamental role of collective sanctioning and contends that at the basis of human interaction there is a 'mutual susceptibility' to the input of others. That individuals constantly modify their behaviour in alignment with changing collective requirements is an empirical phenomenon which Bourdieu fails to account for. The performative theory of social institutions builds on and yet differs from interactionist accounts, because while emphasising the importance of individuals as interactive and communicative agents, the stress is on their mutual susceptibility within an extended system of shared knowledge rather than their independence as rational agents. This susceptibility may be explained in different ways. First, in that there is a need of reinforcement or negation of our inferences and given that the knowledge acquired through personal inductive inferences is somewhat unreliable,

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32 This is a position which adopts at its core the view that human agents are 'inductive learning machines.' That is, human cognition is fundamentally inductive in nature; we base our conclusions on direct observation of earlier premises, from which we will establish general conclusions or future knowledge about new situations.

33 For an expanded explanation of the open-ended and undetermined nature of individuals' knowledge see particularly Bloor's work. It is through interactive communication with others that the individual achieves the standards of right and wrong application of knowledge categories. See passim in the bibliography and Barnes et al., 1996.

34 See particularly Barnes, 1995: chapters 3 and 4.
learning is never completed. Second, in that humans are emotionally vulnerable to other's judgements and valuations. Humans appear to be susceptible to signs of approval and disapproval. This is a topic extensively treated in social theory which acquires full descriptive force with Goffman's theories of the presentation of the self. Conformity and hence constitution of collective agreement would be at the core of this 'system of social sanctioning': the system leads individuals to experience social influences as 'compelling and irresistible'. Conformity to exterior norms is rewarded by deference and feelings of pride, and non-conformity is punished by lack of deference and feelings of shame. This is not to say that we have to conceive individuals as drawn to conformity and constantly striving to avoid conflict or rift. Discordant and antagonistic attitudes and opinions are part and parcel of social life even within a system that compels people to find forms of agreement with others to avoid social sanctioning. It is precisely because individuals retain intact their inductive learning capacities that there will always be differences in the process of knowledge production, and negotiations to establish agreement will be always at the centre of social life.

The performative view of social institutions, formulates social life as characterised by both permanent mutation and stability. Such a notion is not easy to grasp due to its counter-intuitive nature. That individuals and social systems are both mutable and fixed seems to present a contradiction in terms. However, it is precisely this dual feature which I believe the social theory of the Strong Programme very convincingly substantiates. If individuals' subjective nature is the effect of permanent interaction with others in which inherent inner diversity is checked in place, then we can see how both constant change and adjustment are co-present with stability as a result of permanent inter-alignment.

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35 Barnes has also fully expanded on this issue which he calls the collective basis of knowledge. Humans appear to be susceptible to the signs of others to tell us that we have correctly grasped information, either from the environment or transmitted to us. See Barnes, 2000:99 for a summary of important psychological studies carried out to research the nature of our inter-communicability. It has been pointed out that people may be biologically adapted to function inter-subjectively in communication.

36 See Goffman passim in the bibliography.

37 Social anthropologists have long recognised the social prominence of sanctioning mechanisms. See Radcliffe-Brown, 1964:191. “The sanctions existing in a community constitute motives in the individual for the regulation of his conduct in conformity with usage (...) they are effective through the fact that the individual learns to react to particular modes of behaviour with judgements of approval and disapproval in the same way as do his fellows, and therefore measures his own behaviour both in anticipation and in retrospect by standards which conform more or less closely to those prevalent in the community to which he belongs”. The most accomplished development of such a view can be found in the work of Thomas Scheff. Scheff draws on Goffman's account of the rituals of interaction to highlight embarrassment and pride as prominent in social encounters and proposes to see shame as sociologically significant, that is, not only a fundamental individual identity-shaping micro-mechanism but also the 'threat to the profound social bond' between humans. See passim in the bibliography.
In this view of social co-ordination, contrary to Bourdieu's model, individual divergence does not need to be explained. Rather it demonstrates how it is possible that from a multitude of inherently differing individuals consensus is achieved and hence social life is constituted. Similarly, individual practices are perceived as the product of constant negotiation and therefore have a mutable nature. Practices are therefore in permanent constitution not in permanent reproduction. Identity and consciousness are as mutable and fluid at any time of life as they are stable and permanent: 38

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS: TWO VIEWS ON THE SOCIAL NATURE OF INDIVIDUAL LIFE.

The two models presented above convey two different views of how subjectivity may be explained and understood.

In Bourdieu, the individual is conceived as containing an internalized habitus. In other words, the individual is such habitus. The individual's habitus is the 'subjectivity of the objective'. Inner life is that of a 'reproduction' of external conditions, that is, the individual actively internalizes the external objective conditions of existence of her environment. However, his emphasis on 'praxis', or the practical incorporation of structural phenomena, lacks the precise analytical explanation that would substantiate such dynamics. As highlighted above, the analytical implications of his notion of habitus locks him within a model which grants priority to structure over practice.

We have also seen how his model 'separates' individuals into independent beings. His 'subjective' internalization of the 'objective' stresses a relationship between the single individual and the systemic properties of the social environment. No acknowledgement is made of the fundamentally constitutional nature of individuals' micro-interaction with others. We have seen that this view retains a methodological individualistic bias by precluding the notion of permanent interaction as constitutive.

The 'fixidity' and social deterministic quality of Bourdieu's model becomes revealed within the context of complex hierarchical societies. People can and do engage in multiple roles in different social spaces, and this makes it difficult to sustain the idea of a unique durable and transposable habitus. If habitus remains durable, and indeed a certain stability is observable, this is not due to early socialization and internalization but rather to the constant reinforcement which individuals undergo in all processes of social interaction.

38 See Barnes, 2001 and Bloor, 2001
In the performative theory of social institutions conceived by Barnes we encounter a completely different view of subject formation. I submit that Barnes introduces a truly genuine sociological account of individual action, one that not only highlights, but analytically explains, the 'primary condition of being with others'.

Barnes' model would be that of 'the objectivity of the subject'. That is, individual's inductive learning capacities and causal connection with the world are the pre-condition of social life. It is not that the individual is understood as prior to the collective, rather that the constitution of both society and individual is the result of the interactive learning dynamics in which individuals are permanently engaged. Further, the connection between the individual and the collective is always in permanent constitutive mode, and therefore so too are individuals' practices.

Barnes' theory identifies human beings as complex, independent, active creatures, who are, nonetheless, social in the sense that they are, through interaction, constituted by other human beings. Accountability (the capacity of giving intelligible accounts to others) and susceptibility (individuals are oriented toward each other by virtue of being sensitive to symbolically conveyed evaluations of their actions) are the two most important features underlying the notion of humans as social creatures.\(^{39}\)

To conclude our discussion about the nature of subjective experience it is important that we refer once more to the work of Kusch.\(^{40}\) In his analysis of inner mental experience he provides a specific account of individual 'psychological things' as 'social things'. The novelty of this characterisation is his introduction of the performative theory of social institutions into the understanding of inner mental life. Kusch presents the latter as 'social institutions' in the Barnesian sense. That is, the self, and its mental products, have to be understood as self-referring structures collectively sustained by permanent social interaction and not only by early primary socialization. Kusch brings to light the way in which individuals develop, in and through permanent interaction with others, their inner states of mind.

When Kusch points out that states of mind are social institutions in the sense that 'collective intentionality precedes individual intentionality' he does not intend to formulate individuals as passive recipients of the internalization of social structural features. Rather he intends to dispense with individualistic accounts which would conceive individuals as 'separated' entities. Mutual beliefs, he observes, cannot be

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39 See particularly Barnes, 2000.

40 See Kusch, 1997 and 1998.
reduced to a series of individual beliefs, rather, we, as individuals, constitute our beliefs by virtue of being members of a group which sustains such beliefs.

This is a view which corrects Bourdieu's implicit individualistic bias, that which conceives the collective as the summation of individual practices and social life as clusters of individual actions in agreement due to similar 'habituated' features. Rather, the picture that the performative model presents understands that different individuals agree because they can orient themselves to others and continually modify their habituated individual responses as they interact with others, in order to sustain a shared practice.41

The different implications for any attempt to unravel the nature of individual practices each model presents are fundamental. If, as Bourdieu contends, individuals are similar due to similar processes of 'formation', the understanding of individual features must necessarily direct us to general macro-social arrangements and structural features. If, on the contrary, individual's inner life is the result of the interactive modulation established among them as they interact, then to pay attention to the interactive micro-mechanisms and/or the exchange of accounts which may be happening in this interaction is essential. This would be a more 'sociological' approach which has been advanced by ethnomethodological accounts of social life.42 Social life, says Barnes: Is the continuing consequence not of sameness and aggregation, but of difference and sociability.43

In the fieldwork I have carried out for my PhD research project, rather than the stable and fixed nature of a habitus, I have encountered many examples which corroborate the fluid and open-ended character of individual's sense of identity argued by the performative theory. In the school setting where I did my research I observed this permanent reinforcement of childrens' sex and gender identity through the constant reiteration of practices. Most revealing, however, was to observe the presence of the enduring collective sanctioning which takes place in any occasion in which an individual presents a behaviour that does not fit with the standard norm. The identification of the existence of permanent sanctioning mechanisms -both in the form of positive or negative reinforcement- revealed that there is a need for the monitoring of the currently established normative standards about sex and gender identity. This necessity points at the contingent and open ended nature of our identities, that is, as the result of a continual constitutive process.

41 See Barnes, 2001 and Bloor, 2001.
42 See Garfinkel, 1967
43 Barnes, 2000:56
The performative theory formulates a notion of individual features, embodied or mental, as in permanent state of constitution, in which mutation is always occurring state and in which social stability and fixidity is the result of the performative process, that is, that of the constant reiteration of practices (verbal or otherwise) by the individuals of a given collective. In this model we encounter a most important feature of social life: if life is in permanent constitution then there is an inherent ‘space’ for negotiation of new forms of social organisation and, thus, individual’s sense of self, identity or subjective experience.

We have seen how two Social Constructionist views of individual experience can, nonetheless, fundamentally differ. As pointed out above, in Bourdieu the notion of what is the ‘social’ is not problematised, but rather taken as given. This position leads to all sorts of structural and deterministic stagnations. His notion of subjective experience is, as noted, that of the ‘subjectivity of the objective’. Macro social arrangements are at the core of the constitution of the individual, to the extent that individual behaviour is seen as a form of replication of those external forces. Hence, to understand the individual, one has to interrogate first those external conditions of existence. This view of human subjectivity condemns us to view human praxis as merely a mirror of social structure.

On the contrary, by advancing a carefully designed analytical framework of the co-constitutional dynamics between structural features and individual actions, the performative theory of social institutions provides a more accomplished notion of the social nature of the individual. To wit, individual subjective features and behaviour as rooted in the permanent interactive dynamics in which humans find themselves. As noted above, the stress placed on the individual’s inductive learning capacities, makes of the performative theory a view which envisages individuals not as homogeneous entities but rather as rationally heterogeneous, but interdependent, beings who acquire this status and come to agree with each other, in and through social interaction. If society is perceived as the result of humans’ learning activity, to explore the nature, origin and constitutive power of individuals' knowledge claims has to be, therefore, at the basis of any attempt to interrogate the social nature of human life.
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