

The Sexed and Gendered Body as a Social Institution

A Critical Reconstruction of two social constructionist models:
Bourdieu's Theory of Habitus and The Performative Theory of
Social Institutions

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Aquesta tesi està dedicada al avis d'en Samuel, Carmen i Ramon

Abstract

By highlighting the embodied forms of social life, contemporary debates in Social Sciences have created new necessity to explore two major binary oppositions, that of nature and society and structure and individual. The definition of these core notions from different sociological perspectives is currently engendering tensions which indicate a need to advance a more detailed analysis. The aim of this thesis is to explore new understandings of social constructionist accounts of the body by focusing on sex/gender identity and by critically comparing two constructionist views: Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice* and its core notion of *habitus*, and *The Performative Theory of Social Institutions*, the social theory of *The Strong Programme* (a brand of the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge developed by Barnes and Bloor).

I argue that whereas Bourdieu's novelty is that he locates social effects at the level of the body, his theory, by envisaging this socialization as a Parsonian model of early internalization resulting in permanent fixidity, suffers from an over-deterministic bias. On the other hand *The Performative Theory of Social Institutions'* basic tenet that social life is the self-referential (performative) achievement of the interactive activity of a collective of heterogeneous but mutually susceptible individuals stands in stark contrast with Bourdieu's notion of the stability of the habitus as the individual internalization of pre-existing macro-structures.

The Performative Theory, although not specifically concerned with the body, provides an analytical framework that challenges Bourdieu's materialistic account which tacitly reifies the social as a external 'objective' entity. I present Butler's performative theory of sex and gender identity to further reveal the analytical implications of Bourdieu's model of habitus as an 'externalist' structuralist model and its application to a sex/gender habitus as exposing an unacknowledged biological essentialist bias. By introducing Kusch's notion of artificial kinds, closely connected with the main tenets of the performative theory of social institutions, I develop a definition of an embodied habitus as a 'social institution', that is, as the result of the constitutive power of the performative practices of individuals. With the introduction of the work of Kusch and Scheff I also identify the constitutive role of social sanctioning in protecting meaning stability. With this I reconstruct two core themes of Bourdieu's structuralist model: that of the stability of doxic formations as the result of individuals' interactive activity (thus advancing a new understanding of the dualism between macro- and micro-phenomena) and the social genesis of the physicality of the human body (revealing new paths to explore for the nature/culture debate). The sexed body is thus the result of individuals' performative activity (verbal or otherwise), which constitutes the materiality of the body and our conceptions of it according to collective beliefs about the category of 'sex'.

The political scope of this discussion is highlighted by comparing Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power with the Foucauldian notion of 'productive power', reconstructed by Kusch as an *internal-essential relationship*. This reconstruction advances new understandings of the constructionist claim that 'power constitutes subjects'. This is a framework which better accounts for radical constructivist claims, like that of Butler, that the (sexed) body is a discursive construction, and enables the further questioning of Bourdieu's 'externalist' structuralist commitment. In comparison, I present the performative theorists as an 'internalist' structuralist model which presents a more accomplished understanding of the constitution of social life.

With the critical comparison between Bourdieu's sociological model and that of *The Performative Theory of Social Institutions*, this thesis exposes two radically distinct sociological models which I claim represent a profound rift current within sociological enquiry. Comparing the 'materialist' sociological account of Bourdieu's model with that of the 'idealist' position of the performative theorists (and Butler, Foucault and Kusch) allows me to draw on two different definitions of 'objective' macro structure, one derived from an 'externalist' metaphysical understanding of macro-phenomena and another which contends that macro-phenomena are 'internal' and exist in and through social activity. This critical comparison also allows me to introduce new understandings of the process of sex and gender acquisition, to shed light on the analytical problems inherent in the sex/gender distinction, and thus to contribute to the feminist debate on antiessentialism and the epistemological and political value of the sex/gender distinction.

Declaration:

The research contained within this thesis is my own work

Irene Rafanell

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"Perhaps something has occurred in the history of the concept of structure that could be called an "event"... that of a *rupture* ...

...up to the event which I wish to mark out and define, structure... has always been neutralized or reduced, and this by a process of giving a center or of referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin.

There are two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one that seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is not longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play....

...we must try to conceive the common ground, and the *differance* of this irreducible difference. Here is the kind of question, whose *conception, formation, gestation, and labor* we are only catching a glimpse of today... yet unnamable, which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the nonspecies, in the formless muted infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity."

Excerpts from "Structure, Sign and Play". Derrida (1981b)

Introduction

"... speaking and thinking in terms of reifying substantives can gravely obstruct one's comprehension of the nexus of events"¹

This thesis owes a debt to a body of empirical work which, although not explicitly explored in this final version, very much informs it. The initial intention of my project was to conduct empirical research into the embodied character of gender identity and gender power relationships. However, in the process of reviewing my data at the same time as theoretically exploring different social constructionist perspectives, my original hypothesis was radically transformed.

My initial intention was that my PhD be an extension of my MSc dissertation² in which I operationalized Bourdieu's concept of habitus to explore new understandings of the body as the bearer of gendered social meanings and values, and particularly how these become 'naturalised' and underlie the dynamics of gender power relationships. It was my aim to examine the possibility of talking about a 'sex/gender habitus' using Bourdieu's analytical framework regarding the formation of a class habitus. The objective of this exercise was further to illuminate current feminist arguments concerning the embodied nature of gender power relationships. My research thus aimed to test some preliminary hypotheses principally concerned with substantiating the existence of a 'sex/gender habitus', and to identify the role of the body in specific gender power dynamics involved in perpetuating patriarchal structures of domination. My thesis consequently began as an hypothesis testing exercise in which I was attempting to discover the embodied dynamics of symbolic domination, and how its embodied character effected a naturalization of gender power dynamics. To this end, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in cross-cultural school settings in Scotland and Catalonia and focused particularly on curricular subjects in which the body was the centre of attention, that is, physical, health and sex education. This was a lengthy process which consisted in participant observation of a considerable number of classes complemented by a significant number of semi-structured interviews with both the community of pupils and teachers.

However, as the data gathering process was proceeding, I was encountering phenomena which, rather than confirming a *fixed* notion of sex/gender embodied identity, were

¹ Elias as quoted in Barnes (2003:5).

² Rafanell (1995).

increasingly revealing a continuing process of *negotiation* of the children's sense of sex/gendered identity and its embodiment. Moreover, the data provided by cross-cultural analysis strongly highlighted the conventionality of cultural forms and individual behaviour, to the extent that, even if it was possible to identify two differentiated 'gendered' habitus in Scotland and Catalunya, the 'content' of such embodied forms differed so much that serious problems arose for the establishment of unifying category frameworks. Crucially, Bourdieu's notion of a 'naturalised' *fixed* gender habitus was becoming more and more difficult to sustain as data was being gathered. Although I could detect stable forms of behaviour and beliefs, I also observed a complex fabric of interactive dynamics, revealing a pervasive process of positive and negative sanctioning from teachers to students, and, crucially, among pupils themselves. Some of this activity could be seen as a positive reinforcement of accepted forms and negative sanctioning of attitudes and behaviour which deviated from the standard commonly held beliefs about gender identity. This permanent presence of sanctioning mechanisms was presenting a completely different picture than that of a primary socialisation process of habitus formation. Habitus, in Bourdieu's own terms, implied a fixidity resulting from earlier socialisation which was not to be found by my initial empirical findings.

I realized that my data collection was revealing difficulties in pinpointing exactly what was a common sex/gender habitus in both cultures. Differences appeared more prominent than common features and hence it began to be increasingly difficult to find empirical evidence to substantiate my original hypothesis. As a result of the uncertainties resulting from my fieldwork, I returned to review the theoretical frameworks I was utilizing. The notion of an embodied habitus indeed provided some useful insights into the 'social' character of our sex/gender identity, but it was also becoming increasingly clear that as an explanatory framework it suffered from some analytical shortcomings. In attempting to resolve these deficiencies, I turned to other social constructionist accounts, particularly the strong programme's performative theory of social institutions and Kusch's notion of artificial kinds.³ This led me not only to review radically my initial analytical premises, but to consider whether my empirical exercise was altogether suitable. It appeared that what I had set out to discover was not present in the empirical world, and, more significantly, that under the light of the new reconstructed analytical framework -and the related methodological approach it conveyed- my data collection should have been directed toward a search for rather

³My choice of these particular theories was related to my academic location in the departments of Sociology and the Science Studies Unit of Edinburgh University, the latter being the intellectual base where the strong programme's version of the sociology of scientific knowledge has been developed. I was thus placed in close contact with academics using and developing this theory, particularly Martin Kusch who introduced me to his own work and that of Barnes and Bloor.

different sets of phenomena. In hindsight, my interpretation of some phenomena altered some of my original intuitions. I encountered many examples which suggested that, rather than the stable and fixed nature of a sex habitus, a more accurate understanding was provided by social constructionist accounts like that of the performative theory of social institutions, which argued that individuals' sense of identity had a more fluid and open-ended character.

In the school settings where I conducted my empirical research, I observed a permanent process of reinforcement of children's sex and gender identity through the constant reiteration of specific practices. Most revealing was the observation that gender attitudes and behaviour that were unacceptable for the community of students and teachers in Scotland posed no problems to the Catalan community and vice-versa. It was only after my reflexive theoretical revision that I realized that I had neglected to acknowledge the existence of a complex, subtle and pervasive pattern of sanctioning mechanisms. The multiplicity of positive and negative reinforcement of students' activity by teachers and among students themselves indicated a need for the monitoring of currently established normative standards of sex/gender identity and its embodiment. Thus, a contingent and open-ended character of our embodied sex/gender identities, consolidating some particular features as a result of a continuous constitutive process established in collective interaction, would appear to be more accurate to the reality of the empirical phenomena I observed than the fixed sex habitus which the Bourdieuan model conveyed.

As a consequence of these dynamics between my empirical work and my theoretical analysis, this thesis implicitly contains a profound reflexive revision of my prior theoretical assumptions. Having started as an empirical substantiation of some analytical categories, the thesis now represents a theoretical exposition and analysis of the principal tensions intrinsic to the social constructionist debate regarding the body. With the benefit of the insights I have developed during the course of my work, I now realize that at the outset I was irreflexively adopting an essentialist account of the embodiment of a sex/gender identity, by not fully acknowledging the social genesis of its constitution and by implicitly adopting a biologically essentialist bias. Furthermore, by attempting to show that structures of gender power relationships had determining power over other forms of social oppression, I was also taking an inherently reificatory stance which ultimately would leave gender structures, as well as the phenomenon of masculine domination, sociologically unexplained.

Along with the realization that I had gathered my data using underdeveloped analytical tools, the exercise of reviewing Bourdieu's conceptual categories (particularly that of 'habitus' and the power theory proposed by his model) in the light of the social

constructionist accounts of the performative theory and Kusch, suggested that I was facing two radically distinct sociological frameworks which appeared to convey different ontological definitions of the realm of the social. Indeed, by reviewing the history of sociological attempts to explain the social genesis of our embodied sex identity I came to realize that most accounts could be placed in one of two different sociological paradigms, which in turn corresponded to two different ontological definitions of the 'social' world and its constitution. With the present thesis, I have thus endeavoured to delineate the analytical core of these two different social ontologies.

Outline of the thesis

In order to undertake such a large and complex task, I have focused on comparing two different models which I take to be an example of each sociological paradigm: Bourdieu's theory of habitus and the performative theory of social institutions of the strong programme.

The thesis is divided into three parts. In Part One, I introduce the most significant work on the body and sex identity with the aim of highlighting the fundamental analytical tensions which this work exhibits. I claim that these tensions are of paramount relevance not only for social constructionist knowledge of the body and sex identity but, crucially, for general enquiry within the social sciences. In analysing the efforts to produce a sociological theory of the construction of the body and sex/gender identity, I identify some general themes which are central to sociological enquiry. These are as follows:

Idealism versus materialism: from the above debates emerge different understandings of the bases and constitution of social life. The exact nature of what is 'real' and 'constructed' about our bodies is also central to this theme. Most current social constructionist positions present models which explicitly or implicitly align with a more materialist explanatory framework and reject positions which impute constitutive powers to discursive practices. The precise 'objective' and transcendental nature of social life, and how to identify it, is a crucial part of this debate.

Nature versus society: directly connected with the above, current debates exploring the nature and definition of the social genesis of the body reveal analytical ambiguities and contradictions of what is understood as 'natural' or 'social' in our embodied sex/gender identity.

Structure versus agency: the materialistic and idealistic accounts of the genesis of social life in general and our sex/gender identity in particular are intimately related to questions regarding the causal dynamics between individual action and wider social structure, and

the 'objective' status of macro-structural phenomena. Different sociological interpretations suggest a different definition of structures and its emergence, and of agency and its constrained or determined nature.

The political implications: These first three general themes directly relate to the potential political dimensions of the sociological debate concerning the body. Here too I identify crucial sources of tension between the most radical postmodern relativistic positions and the more unifying and transcendental assertions of materialist interpretations of social life.

Building on the themes and controversies identified in Part One, in Part Two I present two different sociological accounts which both tackle the above themes and exemplify two radically distinct sociological explanations, that of Bourdieu's theory of practice and habitus and that of the performative theory of social institutions of the strong programme. Focusing on Bourdieu's model helps to frame the analysis in that he is an author generally recognised not only for his contribution to the understanding of the role of the body in social life, but also for providing a theoretical framework which attempts to provide a synthesis of macro-structural phenomena and individual practice. In doing so he firmly aligns himself with a materialist account of society. Bourdieu's work has further significance in that it currently informs a wide range of sociological research of both a theoretical and empirical nature. Furthermore, in the past few years Bourdieu's analytical framework has been adopted by some feminist scholars to theoretically substantiate claims about masculine domination and patriarchal structural dynamics⁴. Thus, Bourdieu is a case in point of a particular explanatory framework which is extremely prominent within current sociological enquiry.

As well as being positively appraised, Bourdieu has been widely criticised for not fully achieving the synthesis he claims between individual and structure. No attention has been paid, however, to the implicit claims that his model makes regarding the dual division between nature and society. In this thesis I expose the implicit essentialist bias in his social constructionist account of the body, an exercise absent in current appraisals of his work, including those by feminist scholars who instrumentalize his framework for the explanation of embodied gender power relationships.⁵ Further, by systematically reconstructing the main elements of his core notion of 'dispositions', I attempt further to clarify a term which remains extremely vague in his oeuvre. This reconstruction is necessary to make further sense of the specific conception of power and domination which Bourdieu puts forward. I conclude this critical reconstruction of Bourdieu by

⁴ E.g. Fowler (2003), McNay (1999; 2000; 2002), Risseuw (1991).

⁵ See for example Skeggs (1997) and Reay (*passim*).

discussing the possibility of transferring his notion of class habitus to a sex/gender habitus and indicating how this transfer reveals further shortcomings inherent in his model.

I then go on to introduce the two analytical frameworks which will be used to reconstruct Bourdieu's model: the performative theory of social institutions and the concept of artificial kinds. The former is the social theoretical account of the strong programme, a social constructionist approach to the sociology of scientific knowledge fundamentally developed by Barry Barnes and David Bloor. The performative theory exhibits an analytical framework radically distinct to Bourdieu's. Although little known within sociological debates, the theory's core claim that social life is a *collective achievement* resulting from the interactive process established among individuals, together with their self-referential inductive inferences, fundamentally transforms current notions within the sociological thinking. I attempt to prove its superior analytical merits by using its principal analytical tools to reconstruct Bourdieu's model. I also introduce Martin Kusch's work which, although related to the strong programme in its basic analytical premises, introduces the notion of artificial kinds as socially constructed *alter-referents*, which contributes further to the debate on the social genesis of the body. Although Kusch's notion of artificial kinds is used in his work to demonstrate the alter-referential nature of folk-psychological categories, its analytical tools are suitable to develop the notion of habitus as being constituted as an alter-referential artefact by the product of the self-referential activity of a collective.

Part Three is divided into four chapters which aim to present a critical comparison of the two models outlined in Part Two. In chapter 4, the aim is to reveal Bourdieu's sociological approach to the body and to the nature/culture debate. In doing so my intention is to show that this materialist position has an implicit 'externalist' structuralist commitment which has two weaknesses: an implicit biological essentialism and a materialist position which objectifies macro-phenomena as prior to and determining micro-phenomena. In chapter 5, I instrumentalize the analytical framework of Judith Butler, a post-structuralist feminist scholar who advances a 'discursive' structuralist account which, under analytical scrutiny, reveals similar premises to those of the performative theory of social institutions and Kusch's notion of artificial kinds. However, her focus on the constitution of sex/gender identity takes the performative model closer to the embodied character of a sex/gender habitus and helps me further to reveal the analytical inconsistencies of Bourdieu's structuralist model. Comparing Butler, Kusch and the performative theory of social institutions shows their commitment to an 'internalist' modality of structuralism which helps to clarify Bourdieu's sociological

model as an 'externalist' structuralism, that is, one rooted in an ontological definition of the social world as external to individual interactive processes.

Having revealed what I believe are the most prominent analytical problems of Bourdieu's model, in chapter 6 I critically reconstruct his concept of an embodied sex habitus under the light of Kusch's notion of artificial kinds and the performative model it promotes. This chapter focuses particularly on the possibility of understanding the constitution of a sex/gender identity as a performative achievement, and by doing so I claim that Kusch's notion of artificial kinds provides an analytical framework which enriches the initial emphasis on the body introduced by Bourdieu. I argue that Bourdieu's novelty is that he places social effects at the level of the body, but his model suffers from some structuralist bias by envisaging this socialisation as a Parsonian model of early internalisation resulting in permanent fixity. With the artificial kinds theory, and its understanding of the body as a 'social institution', a more nuanced analytical framework is provided in order to understand the notion of a sexed/gendered body as a social construction. To conceive sex/gender habitus as an artificial kind also allows me to reconstruct the core notion of Bourdieu's habitus - that of dispositions - as a collective achievement, and the actions it compels as performative in their own right. Equally, the stability, drift or transformation of a sex habitus is reconsidered and formulated as being in a permanent state of constitution in which drift is constantly occurring and in which social stability is considered as transitory in nature by virtue of being the result of the *performative process*, that is, the constant reiteration of practices (verbal or otherwise) by all the heterogeneous individuals of a given collective. Finally, the key elements of the notion of habitus identified in chapter 2 are reconstructed under the light of the new theoretical insights raised by my critical comparison. The social, durable, transposable, relational and re-productive character of an embodied habitus is reconsidered and reconstructed as a stable but historical and conventional collective good, performatively constituted by the self-referential process of a given collective which effects a constraining power, and thus establishes particular normative standards via compelling sanctioning mechanisms. I use Kusch's work on the protection of platitudes and Scheff's development of the emotion-deference system, to shed light on the fundamental role of collective sanctioning as a powerful mechanism for the constitution of individual and collective practices and particularly the stability of what Bourdieu describes as the 'doxic' formation of taken for granted beliefs. This exploration brings forward new dimensions of the fundamental role of social interaction and social sanctioning for the constitution of meaning, beliefs, and practices.

The core claim of this chapter is that Kusch's notion of artificial kinds provides a more comprehensive understanding of the construction of the materiality of the body, which

accounts for both its external existence and its socially constructed nature. I submit that with such a view a more accomplished synthesis of the nature/society dualism is achieved, one which avoids several pitfalls found in current analyses of the sexed/gendered body. First, it helps us to avoid a naive biological determinism which uncritically accepts that biology fully informs our current division of two sex identities. Second, it helps to overcome an idealistic reduction of the body to a product of mere 'talk', which overlooks, neglects or disregards its physical materiality. Third, it provides a constructionist account to reconstruct those sociological analyses which, by envisaging the body as a pre-existing entity which acts as *tabula rasa* for cultural inscriptions, provide an inherently over-socialized view of the body without problematizing its biological existence.

Some of the political issues raised by the critical comparison between Bourdieu's 'externalist' model and that of the 'internalists' (the strong programme, Butler and Kusch) are discussed in chapter 7. Bourdieu's important contribution of the notion of an embodied habitus and its role in the construction of power dynamics is re-appraised under the light of the Foucauldian notion of infinitesimal power mechanisms. By comparing Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power (critically reconstructed in chapter 2) with the power theories of Barnes and Foucault, I attempt further to reveal Bourdieu's implicit structuralist commitment to a an ontology of 'externality' of macro-phenomena which inevitably provides an over-deterministic view of society. The similarities of the Foucauldian position to that of Barnes' conception of power are further revealed by introducing Kusch's reconstruction of Foucault's theory of the infinitesimal mechanisms of power as *internal-essential* relationships. Kusch's reconstruction of the Foucauldian theory of power introduces a radical new understanding of the Foucauldian claim that 'power constitutes subjects', and emphasises the social processes and mechanisms involved in the constitution of individuals' identity, both at the corporeal and psychological level. I complete this chapter by arguing that under the light of the critical comparison and reconstruction of Bourdieu's' notion of habitus and his power theory, the main theme of this thesis, namely that our sex/gender identity is a social construction, is better understood. This critical reconstruction also helps to shed further light on radical constructivist claims like that of Butler (summarized in chapter 5) that the sexed body and sex identity is a performative effect of discursive practices, and the heterosexual matrix which governs our cultures a social convention. With this the principal feminist claim of the existence of a transcendental macro-structural system of gender power relationships is newly considered and the value of Butler's performative theory of gender formation is appraised.

In the final chapter, I conclude by arguing that the new ontological definition of social life as a 'collective accomplishment', which the scholars of the strong programme present, provides more analytically developed notions of the nature of the social, the self and the social construction of social identities, and that the performative theory of social institutions fundamentally transforms the current sociological understanding of social phenomena. I have brought the discussion to the realm of biological sex and to the possibility of identifying its socially constructed nature, precisely because traditionally this has been a barely questioned realm. Rather it has been seen as a given which imposes its own objective facts. With this discussion, I am therefore attempting to bring new light to fundamental ontological questions concerning the exact nature of the 'natural' and the 'social'. I explore the constitutive role of society in our commonly held beliefs using the sex/gender division as a case study. In so doing, I expose the 'externalist' structuralist bias currently found in social theory debates, and exemplified by Bourdieu, which results in a reification of the social which has the effect of essentializing the macro-structural phenomena in a platonic third realm independent from, but determining, individuals' interactive activity. Thus, notions of calculative agency, change, stability of social formations and the productive power of the discursive are understood in new ways. I submit that, properly understood, the constructionist account of the performative theories -including that of Butler, Kusch, and Foucault- provides a way to address some analytical shortcomings present in Bourdieu's model and still prevalent in mainstream sociological debates.

I conclude by stressing that the reconstruction I present in this thesis has significant methodological implications. Indeed the new insights gained in this intellectual journey have led me critically to reconsider the methods and objects of study with which I began this project, and to be more reflexive about the guiding theoretical preconceptions which we use in empirical investigations. Whereas I began my research with the aim of 'finding' those 'sex habitus' which existed in the world and the oppressive patriarchal forms of domination present in their inter-relationships, now I would be more directed to locate those habitus and inter-relationships in a process of becoming rather than as stable entities. These are two substantially different methodological programmes.

Both of the two sociological models which I reconstruct in this thesis attempt to unpack the nature of social reality and the chain of events which lead to specific social patterns which govern the reality of people's lives. Indeed, both approaches concur that to understand how these events are constructed is crucial to imagine ways of transforming and improving social life. However, as Luckman warns, an important issue for social research is that "[b]ehavioural science is occupied with what people do, but the 'what' is

subject to two very different kinds of specification".⁶ Most of the social sciences - Bourdieu being a good case in point - work under the assumption that the social universe, however much deceptive, is yet potentially fully knowable; that appearances hide a reality, a structure of objective primary qualities, and, as our knowledge improves, the objective pre-existing 'what' will be further revealed. Thus, of profound significance for any empirical research is its definition of *what* is to be identified. What I have attempted to reveal in this thesis is that the 'internalist' structuralist approach of the strong programmers, Butler, Kusch and Foucault, provides superior analytical tools to disclose the particular chains of events which explain not only the 'whats', but the 'hows' and 'whys' of individuals' activity. A truly epistemological reflexivity can be attained by focusing on the *processes* underlying the emergence of particular social objects, rather than assuming that the objects are 'out there' pre-existing and guiding social activity. Thus, after the reflexive epistemological process brought about by the theoretical exploration undertaken in this thesis, I believe I am in a better position to begin once more the empirical research which I attempted at the commencement of this journey.

⁶ Luckman (1978:358).

Part I

**General Overview: Introducing the debate
on Social Constructionism of the body**

1

Sociology and the Body

1.1. Sociology and socially constructed reality

Sociological enquiry has its origins in a historical moment engaged in finding new explanatory modes of understanding which avoid dogmatic leaps of faith, this is manifested in an aspiration to be 'scientific', that is, base explanation in objective empirical observation of data. Sociology, also, born at a time in which all sort of social, economic, technological and cultural transformations were occurring in the western world, rapidly changing previous forms of social order, is clearly concerned in engaging with the mutable and conventional nature of human existence.

Although the discipline developed in many different directions, early social scientists were committed to finding a 'scientific' method which could not only explain but predict human behaviour. The main intention was to argue for a social genesis of human arrangements rather than deistic or biological causal explanations. Such social reality however was to be understood as an objective reality liable to be analysed and predicted in the same ways which science was developing with regard to natural phenomena. Individual behaviour as well as collective arrangements were put under scrutiny with the desire to understand their internal explanatory features. This resulted in many different approaches which were the product of different ideological and explanatory preferences. When Durkheim stated that social phenomena should be treated as 'natural phenomena', he was indicating the possibility of both reaching explanatory modes by empirical objective analysis, and also accessing some sort of independence that the social order presented respective to individual subjective life.⁰ In so arguing, he established a particular way of understanding society which has influenced fundamentally the evolution of the discipline. Such a stance proposed that social facts have an existence on their own which transcend individuals' behaviour, and act as a determining force.

This position had prominent analytical implications in so far as it conceived the possibility of objectively collecting and classifying information about social facts, a possibility which was due to its 'external' and objective nature. Appropriate methods of analysis were thought to be 'inductive', that is, based on observation of data through

⁰ It is in *The Rules of Sociological Method*, (1982:14) that we find the statement that 'the first and most fundamental rule is to consider social facts as things.'

statistical methods, which would allow the perception of patterns of behaviour and develop understanding of the laws underlying and guiding human actions. Durkheim's classic work, *Suicide*, set out to demonstrate the validity of such an approach. Individual behaviour had its causal explanatory factors in a perceived external reality, such as particular religious forms or specific cultural arrangements.

On the other hand, in trying to argue the same case for a sociological understanding of human life, other positions developed along different routes which contradicted the positivist and structuralist tenets suggested by Durkheim. Humans, it was noted, have consciousness and an inner mental life which cannot be accessed objectively from outside. Humans relate with reality in a personal 'subjective' manner. They 'interpret' what is outside, and according to these interpretations their actions take shape. It was suggested therefore that there was no 'objective' reality outside individuals' interpretations of it, rather this reality 'emerged' from the meanings which humans attached to it. Reality, in this sense, was thought to be 'constructed'. Those meanings, therefore, were the 'social facts' which lay at the basis of social life and they did not have an existence independent from individuals' consciousness. Thus, the social scientist's desire to develop knowledge must necessarily attempt to access and interpret the individual understandings which lie behind human actions. Weber's notion of 'Verstehen' was at the basis of this approach¹: in order to be able to understand others' behaviour one had to put oneself in their situation; or take their 'roles' as later followers of this tradition remarked². This 'interpretative' account was committed to 'constructivist' views which denied the notion of structure as an outside entity in the Durkheimian sense: social facts did not have an independent existence but rather were the product of human subjective dynamics. It follows that the appropriate methods of analysis, although equally inductive in nature, had to focus on individuals' accounts and their interpretation. Thus, rather than broader general statistical patterns, in-depth interrogations of actors' own subjective experience and the meanings given to their own actions were the only way to be able to understand what lay at the basis of social reality.

Both positions have never evolved in a pure state within social sciences. Even Weber and Durkheim have been differently interpreted as presenting structuralist and constructivist stances respectively. It would be impossible to draw a history of sociological thinking which located authors clearly in one position or the other. However, throughout the history of the discipline, it is possible to detect tendencies and

¹ Weber (1949).

² See Blumer (1969).

preferences either to more positivist-structuralist positions or to interpretative-constructionist ones.

Contemporary sociological theory has seen both positions flourish in different directions and apply different emphases. With different political and ideological agendas in mind, theorists have biased themselves towards one tendency or the other. In the 1960s and 1970s there was a marked tendency to favour structuralist accounts of individuals' behaviour. Based in a commitment to 'denaturalise' social inequality, these theorists' attempt to decipher the logic of these apparently external social forces found causal explanations for individuals' behaviour in the logic of the external social arrangements. They argued for an external system of laws and norms which seemed to be able to transmute independent individual behaviour into coherent collective action. These theories brought forward social deterministic accounts which had clear ideological and political agendas, to wit, to disclaim theories which blamed individuals' internal psychological or biological features for their social fate. Mostly, human inequality was to be explained in terms of contextual social arrangements. That individuals made their own history but not under circumstances of their own choosing was a Marxian axiom which guided social scientists' tendency to emphasise, to a greater or lesser degree, some sort of social structural external determination.³

Meanwhile, some theorists viewed the emphasis on structural contextual arrangements as too deterministic and precluding too much the force of individuals' personal capacity of action. Positions closer to Weberian stances were being developed, which gave more attention to individual subjective consciousness and actions. Such positions emphasised individual accounts as the originator of social life. There was an emphasis in the interaction among individuals rather than external structural features as the locus of social arrangements.⁴

The strengths and weaknesses of each position have been widely appraised. Currently, the trend is towards finding analytical explanations which encompass both views, namely, that human agency is at the centre of social life and also that external social phenomena guide individuals' behaviour. Individual experience, subjective knowledge, agency, freedom of will and many other notions focusing on people's individuality, have been making a strong appearance in the social sciences in recent years.⁵ The main

³ Structuralist readers of Marx, like Althusser, Gramsci, the Frankfurt School, or functionalist accounts like that of Parsons are exemplifications of such a position. Even universalist accounts of human mental structure like that of Levi-Strauss's binary composition of the brain, or the linguistic account of Chomsky's generative grammar could also be seen as examples of such views.

⁴ Phenomenologically close accounts, like Ethnomethodology and Social Interactionism are among the best examples. See Garfinkel and Goffman and Blumer among others, *passim* in the bibliography.

⁵ See Giddens (1984), Habermas (1987) and Bourdieu's works, among the wider currently known exponents of such synthetic efforts.

intention of such efforts of synthesis has been to counter the prominence given to external forces over the individual, to overcome over-deterministic accounts which may seem to leave the individual as too passive a subject with no power of decision and choice over structural social arrangements. Despite the emphasis on individual power of choice and freedom, there has been however a very clear intention of not abandoning the notion that the social order exists in a form which transcends individual subjective experience and behaviour. In short, such syntheses have aimed to bridge, transcend, blur, weaken, or even dissolve, the opposition between the two notions at the core of this debate: social structure and individual actions. It is the nature of this relationship which has been endlessly discussed and most efforts have been directed to bridge the dualism and find essential ontological connection between the two. However, rather than the dissolution of the intrinsic separation that the two notions seem to present, such attempts have often resulted in a sort of 'hierarchical mapping' which has resulted in one of them being prioritised over the other. Despite grand claims by some theorists the dissolution of this dualism has rarely been convincingly achieved.⁶

This relationship has been represented in many different ways, as dialectical⁷, reproductive or co-reproductive⁸, co-constitutive⁹, or even as a 'sort of circuit'.¹⁰ As a general trend, the theories which want to find a synthesis assume, as an undisputed fact, that any individual understanding of reality is contextual, local and subjective and that in turn, this very same reality is to some degree *affected* and *effected* by the individually contextualised experience of it. These are social constructionist accounts which consider social reality as the product of human activity, and human activity as affected by social contextual features. 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. Each model embodies different implications and produces different meaningful accounts of human experience.

⁶ See Holmwood and Alexander (1993), also Barnes critical assessment of structuralist and functionalist theories in (1988) and (1995).

⁷ By Marxist theorists.

⁸ Bourdieu. See passim in bibliography.

⁹ Giddens (1986).

¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty (1962).

1.2. Social constructionism and the body

At the very core of the sociological debate on structure and individual a major issue has emerged in recent years. The emphasis on the social genesis of human life which led theorists to reject biological accounts had the effect of dismissing the physicality of humans as sociologically non-relevant. Recent debates have tried to correct this dismissal by exposing the centrality of the human body in sociological debates. It has been argued that the corporeal may be seen as being located at the junction between individual and structure and thus, by reconstructing its social bases, further comprehension of the debate may be introduced.

The history of the 'introduction of the body' in sociology is a vast enterprise which cannot be even superficially presented here. I have concentrated upon summarising some more evident strands of sociological history which have placed particular emphasis on the social nature of the body. These are feminist social theory; the so called 'new sociology of the body'; symbolic interactionist accounts of the significance of physical appearance for social processes; and some related strands like sociology of sexuality. In doing so I do not attempt to give an extensive account of the development of these disciplines. Rather I concentrate in which can illuminate the core issues discussed in this thesis regarding the socially constructed nature of human life in general and the social status of the human body in particular. In order to limit such a vast enterprise I have explicitly centred my discussion on the debate surrounding sex-gender identity. It is my contention that within the boundaries of such debate we can locate, expose and analyse core issues belonging to the general sociological debate.

1.2.1. Feminism, gender and the body

When feminist movements became involved in academic debates mainstream social sciences underwent a profound transformation. Former and current attempts to theorise social reality were seriously contested by feminist theorists. The core issue of the feminist agenda, namely, women's widespread social inequality, brought to the fore the problems and flaws of sociological theoretical assumptions whose conclusions had given no weight to gender variables. Feminist theoretical approaches highlighted and problematized the most taken for granted notions of human life, namely that of gender identity and the gender division of society.

The theoretical, epistemological and methodological consequences of such debates were profound. Mainstream assumptions about social life were contested by feminist theories. The very basic objects of sociological research were questioned by the argument that

women had been made invisible to sociological research. Feminists highlighted the fact that an arbitrary division was being made when most of the issues related to women's lives were considered part of the realm of natural biological sciences, human reproduction being the most obvious one. Also major social areas were seen as unproblematic because they were located in the realm of private individuals' lives. One clear example was, they argued, that sociological enquiry had, almost to an obsessive degree, analysed from all angles and perspectives the world of labour, with all its correlated issues of class, economic wealth and poverty, state and industry, capitalism and communism, and yet had shown a total neglect and dismissal of housework or domestic labour.¹¹ The domestic sphere, mainly populated by women, was generally neglected as a focus of enquiry and considered of no relevance for sociological examination. The main foci of sociological concern were the public and collective arenas, mainly dominated by men. Sociological truths were thus based upon a flawed research vision which made generalisations about the whole population based on a partial view of the social world. Feminism demanded a reconstruction of research objects, and new epistemological and methodological issues were discussed, appraised and introduced.¹² As a result, a most important contribution of academic feminism was to introduce gender as a new variable of research.¹³ This move led to the introduction of new epistemological and methodological visions. Through the study of the domestic sphere, there was a shift towards a more micro-analytical position focused on micro-relationships among individuals. This was the moment when the 'personal' became 'the political'.¹⁴

The paradigmatic revolution that feminism was to effect in social sciences with the introduction of gender as a fundamental variable was to be central to the epistemological debate on the nature of the division between the social and the natural.¹⁵ The category of gender implied the introduction of another forgotten aspect, that of the physical reality of individuals as an object of sociological analysis. Feminist scholarship on the 1960s and 1970s, set out to show that, at the level of theoretical understanding, traditional sociological accounts of social inequality had fallen short of their ambitions

¹¹ The most important exponent of such a view is Ann Oakley, of whom two seminal works are to be cited: *The Sociology of Housework* (1974) and *Housewife* (1976).

¹² See for instance Harding (1987, 1991), Hammersley (1992), Oakley (1998), Stanley (1990), Smith (1988).

¹³ It has been argued elsewhere that this was an ontological shift in the sociological research field. See Stanley and Wise (1983), Stanley (1990), Stanley and Harding (1987).

¹⁴ See mainly Millet (1991).

¹⁵ There have been countless studies of the role and significance of feminism regarding the nature/culture divide. A.W. Frank's work is considered one of the most important illustration of what lies at the basis of this change. See Frank (1990) and (1991), also Shilling (1993) where in Chapter 2: 'The body in sociology', he provides an extensive comment on the role of feminist theory regarding 'the growing popularity of the body in sociology.'

and forgotten to account for one of the most pervasive social divisions, namely, that between men and women. Sociology, mainly dominated by androcentric 'visions', argued feminist scholars, took for granted the biological as the causal explanatory factor behind this most fundamental difference among humans. To destroy and counter-argue this 'naturalisation' of feminine and masculine traits was at the core of the feminist analytical, theoretical and political agenda. This 'naturalisation' was also to be seen and exposed as social in origin in the same way as any other social inequality. Biological features, it was pointed out, did not account for the social differentiation between men and women, never mind for the hierarchical values attached to it. The historically and geographically widespread presence of the gender division was used to assert the fundamental nature of gender inequality. Women's oppression was seen and debated as being the core of all social inequality.¹⁶

Gender characteristics were thus not directly linked with the sexual identity of the person, but rather were an outcome of the process of socialisation within particular cultural contexts. Although the body was not directly problematized as socially constituted, there was an attention to the physical nature of humans which had a long-term impact on mainstream social theory. A pervasive Cartesian dualism had dominated within social sciences, conceiving the bodily and the mental aspects of humans as ontologically distinct and only the latter as relevant to the social scientist. The former, directly and clearly connected with biology, was to be located in the realm of nature and hence remained sociologically unproblematized. Feminist analysis of gender power relationships meant that sociological accounts were promptly operationalized to demolish the arbitrary nature of such rigid dualism. In particular, feminist scholars centred their critique on the damage done to women's lives by such a division. By attributing a biological origin to the gender differentiation, gender inequality was naturalised and women's oppression justified as a given fact. Feminists argued that biological features could not be seen as justifying a social order organised around the submission of women in a system of gender power relationships.

Despite the fact that different strands of feminism developed different socio-analytical emphases, the introduction of the body as a sociologically relevant variable brought also the problematization of the binary nature/culture division. Early feminist theory, strongly committed to the then prevalent Marxian materialistic accounts, described a capitalist-patriarchal system in which economic structural features were seen as

¹⁶ See Millet's seminal text (1991: 25) in which she points out: "However muted its present appearance may be, sexual dominion obtains nevertheless as perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power."

paramount in the subjugation of women.¹⁷ Although such accounts did not directly question the artificial naturalisation of gender identities they did problematize the private realm of biological reproduction as worthy of sociological enquiry.¹⁸

However this materialist commitment was soon to be questioned within the feminist ranks, following similar trends occurring in general social science enquiry. Feminist scholars began to tap into analysis of human life that gave attention to the role of the physical body in the development of individuals' mental life. Psychoanalytical accounts were instrumentalized due to their attention to the significance of differential body features in the development of gender identities.¹⁹

Whatever route feminist analysis took it put at the centre of enquiry the embodied nature of social arrangements. Notwithstanding some hints about the presence of embodied practices²⁰, mainstream sociological analysis neglected the centrality of the body. Despite some clear warnings like that of Mauss' premonitory paper 'The techniques of the body' published in 1934²¹, in general terms the embodied practices of humans did not make an impact in social sciences until the feminist emphasis on gender inequality brought to light the embodied nature of gender identities and gender power relationships.

The evolution of this interest has taken different paths and to trace the history and different explanatory stances taken within feminist ranks is of fundamental significance in order to capture fundamental issues for the social constructionist debate. These differential positionings and their analytical implications are traced in the following sections.

1.2.1.1. Different feminist approaches within the gender/sex debate. The body from de Beauvoir to Butler

One of the obvious features which a review of feminist scholarship concerning the body allows us to perceive is the many different social constructionist positions which can be taken. The appraisal of the differential analytical stances bring to light fundamental theoretical divisions within social sciences in general and social constructionism in particular. The difficulty in reaching a general consensus regarding the social nature of embodied human features is the central theme of the following sections. In doing such a

¹⁷ See particularly Barrett (1984) also Jackson (1998) for a clear example of a materialist commitment

¹⁸ See Barrett (1984: 211) "The family household system of contemporary capitalism constitutes not only the central site of the oppression of women but an important organising principle of the relations of production of the social formation as a whole."

¹⁹ See Mitchell (1990) and Chodorow (1978).

²⁰ It has noted by Frank (1990:131) that in some way the body has always been present in sociology and in theorists of the social as early as Durkheim, Marx or Weber.

²¹ Mauss (1973).

review I want to draw attention in particular to the core problematic around this debate. I will start by recalling earlier feminist theory and its treatment of the (female) body and indicating the ambiguities and problems which these accounts raised for future analysts.

Earlier feminist scholarship gave an ambivalent and non-specified social status to the body. Although the exploration of specific sites in which gender power relationships were said to be enacted shifted the attention from the public, collective and macro-structural to the private, individual and micro-dynamics, feminism remained committed to structuralist-materialistic approaches. Within this theoretical climate, one of the first dissenting voices came from a philosophical strand of French existentialism, that of Simone de Beauvoir.

Earlier Feminist theory and the body

De Beauvoir and Millet: sex and gender

One of the earliest contributions to a feminist theorisation of gender identity was that of Simone de Beauvoir. She is seen not only as one of the founders of contemporary feminism but a firm rejecter of socio-biological explanations for gender inequality. De Beauvoir forcefully introduced the notion that feminine and masculine bodies are socially meaningful by directly rejecting Freud's biological account of gender identity formation based on embodied notions like that of 'penis envy'. In critically reviewing and rejecting Freudian claims, she heavily criticised biological deterministic notions which had become entrenched in the sociological consciousness. Her relativistic claim that there are no grounds for believing that little girls feel any type of envy of 'this outgrowth, (...) weak little rod of flesh' which, in intrinsic value, can only 'in itself inspire them with indifference, or even disgust'²² became a ground breaking notion in many different senses. It not only put the body at the focus of attention but it began to hint that the meanings attributed to bodily features could be perceived as the outcome of cultural and ideological processes rather than as biological givens. Thus, she argued, the value attached to the penis, and as extension, to masculine traits, was a socially constructed notion. That girls might feel some envy of male attributes, she argued, "results from previous evaluation of virility".²³ Culturally constructed significations were foregrounded by criticising the Freudian approach as a biological deterministic account of gender identity formation. According to de Beauvoir, Freud's account failed to disclose the social origins of the taken for granted 'sovereignty' of masculine embodied features above feminine ones.

²² de Beauvoir, (1972: 73).

²³ de Beauvoir (1972:73).

However, despite de Beauvoir's existentialist claim that 'women are not born but made', and that physical traits are culturally evaluated, we still find clear biological deterministic explanations in her account of gender inequality. In the *Second Sex*, de Beauvoir reproduces a peculiar image of early primitive life which takes for granted male physical strength as the very origin of male supremacy over women. At the same time she defines female reproductive capacity as a socially non-relevant activity due to its closeness to a 'natural' activity. De Beauvoir here accepts, without critical questioning, the devaluation of childbirth as a sub-human inferior animal activity, and indeed the source of female inferior social status.²⁴ A peculiar logical contradiction is found in de Beauvoir, who despite stressing that most of the meanings attached to gender embodied features were cultural products, ultimately provides a fundamentally biologist account of gender inequality.²⁵

Clearly, in de Beauvoir's account, the body has not yet found a clear sociological status, or at least has only an ambivalent one: it is seen not to have an effect upon gender identity formation and yet it is essentialized as the origin of universal gender inequality.

This ambivalent theoretical status that de Beauvoir grants to the body in relationship to gender identity is found, though in different forms, throughout feminist theory and social sciences in general.

By the time Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* was published in 1969, de Beauvoir had had a profound impact in the feminist Anglo-American world. Millet's book would be a most influential text of the second wave of feminism. She introduced the structuralist notion of 'patriarchy' to provide an account of the universality of gender power relationships. 'Sexual politics', she argued, is what men practice in patriarchal societies when they engage in practices to enforce domination and exploitation of women. Rather than being understood in the traditional manner, power and politics should be redefined as all those: "relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another"²⁶ This includes the most private and personal arenas, like the intimate relationship of sexual practices.

Millet's notion of patriarchy incorporated multi-factual cultural features to explain male domination over women. Ideological, economic, legal, religious, psychological and biological factors are instrumentalized by Millet to account for the existence of gender power relationships. Of particular significance for the present discussion is her criticism

²⁴de Beauvoir (1972:94): "giving birth and suckling are not activities, they are natural functions; no project is involved; and that is why woman found in them no reason for a lofty affirmation of her existence."

²⁵"Thus the triumph of the patriarchy was neither a matter of chance nor the result of violent revolution. From humanity's beginnings, their biological advantage has enabled the males to affirm their status as sole and sovereign subjects" (de Beauvoir, 1972:109).

²⁶ Millet (1971:23).

of biological deterministic accounts of gender identity. One of her important contributions was to highlight that gender roles are a social construction independent of biological sex. She introduced Stoller's differentiation between sex and gender notions, the former being biological given features and the latter, "all those areas of behaviour, feelings, thoughts and fantasies that are related to the sexes and yet do not have primarily biological connotations".²⁷ Particularly important for Millet's feminist account was Stoller's remark that, despite common beliefs, the two realms, sex and gender, were not inevitably bound together but had become linked as a result of social conditioning. Stoller's long term research on gender dysmorphia pointed out that gender roles were mostly cultural postnatal forces.

The division between biological sex and cultural gender was establishing itself as the norm. It was accepted as the obvious way to understand the distinction between men and women. Biological sex was hardly questioned, but rather seen as a given which imposed its own objective facts. However, cultural and social elements were considered to account for the psychological and cultural traits associated with feminine and masculine roles. Millet's book was published in Britain in 1971 for the first time, but by 1972, another noted British feminist, Ann Oakley, had published *Sex, Gender and Society*, a work which would become the standard text on the topic. Oakley further 'normalised' Stoller's distinction between sex and gender: "'Sex' is a biological term; 'gender' is a psychological and cultural one."²⁸ Heavily drawing, like Millet, on the research done by Robert Stoller, Oakley reaffirmed that gender traits, that is feminine traits and masculine traits, are to be seen as socially produced, yet the biologically given nature of the categories women and men remained unproblematic.

Once this division became established as the norm, explanatory efforts were directed to finding out and analysing the main factors behind the social production of gender attributes. Millet presented a sophisticated analysis which maintained that the cultural construction of gender identity is based in complex and manifold variables. Of particular relevance for the present discussion is her emphasis on human sexual practices, particularly her emphasis on heterosexual penetrative sexuality as the site of the enactment and reinforcement of men's aggressive domination over women. Millet's argument is sustained by her rejection of the notion of a sexual drive; rather she

²⁷ Stoller as quoted in Millet (1971: 29). Robert. J. Stoller, published his book *Sex and Gender* in 1968. His research in the Californian Gender Identity Center focused on the cases in which biological genital malformations at birth complicated the clear assignation of sexual identity. He concluded that we should differentiate the notion of sex, a biological given, from gender, a culturally conditioned trait.

²⁸ Oakley (1985: 158).

conceives human sexuality as the product of learning.²⁹ This notion was highly influential and became the basis of a whole array of feminist research on the issue of sexuality, the main statement of such position being that sexual practices among heterosexual couples are seen as inherently oppressive.

By suggesting that sexual practices are at the core of the constitution of gender differential personality traits, like submissive and dominating behaviour, and, as a corollary, the site of the hierarchical power relationship between them,³⁰ she clearly suggests that the body and its practices are implicated not only in subject formation but in the social and cultural arrangements of a collectivity. Here, we begin to see implicit breaches in the uncritically accepted clear cut division between cultural gender and biological sex. By problematizing sexual drives -a biologically rooted notion- Millet problematizes some biological features. When she writes, "the heavier musculature of the male, is biological in origin but is also culturally encouraged through breeding, diet and exercise"³¹ she is not only depicting the body as the bearer of social interpretations and social values but beginning to point out how cultural arrangements have the power to modify biological traits. Despite this however, Millet does not explicitly acknowledge any constructionist bias and remains trapped in major biological essentialist notions as well as macro-structural explanations. The basic fundamental division between male sex and female sex identity remains unquestioned.

Ortner and Firestone: women as the 'lower order'

Despite the initial ground-breaking separation found in de Beauvoir and Millet between sex and gender not all feminists equally operationalized it as the explanatory source for the social basis of women's oppression. On the contrary, some feminists strongly biased themselves towards biological essentialism to account for the origins of female subordination and male supremacy. Firestone, Ortner, Brownmiller, and Daly are among those theorists who perceive the origins of gender hierarchical division as rooted in biological factors.

Shulamith Firestone in particular fully embraces de Beauvoir's view that childbirth is at the root of female social inferiority.³² By doing so she links biological sex with gender

²⁹ "So much this is the case that even the act of coitus itself is the product of a long series of learned responses to the patterns and attitudes, even as to the object of sexual choice, which are set up for us by our social environment" (Millet, 1971:31).

³⁰ "The domination of one woman by her husband or lover through the 'conquest' enacted repeatedly in the sexual act, is part of the social control of women by all men exerted under patriarchy. Sexual relations are used as relations of power, and the balance of power lay with men" (Millet, 1971:36).

³¹ Millet (1971:27).

³² Firestone (1970: 19) "The natural reproductive difference between the sexes led directly to the first division of labour based on sex, which is at the origins of all further division into economic and cultural

cultural arrangements. Nature is linked again to culture as a causal factor. In an extensive descriptive analysis of family arrangements she explicitly notes that gender differences have a biological bases. According to that view, Firestone argues that women's liberation can only occur if such biological dependency is dissolved. Her radical argument maintains that the destruction of natural patterns of reproduction by introducing artificial methods of fertility is the only path to dissolve women's subordination to men. Her argument also embraces the notion of heterosexual practices as oppressive to women and thus only their dissolution and the embracement of an open 'pan sexuality' is the way forward to annul the biological constraints which are at the bases of women's subordination. The view that biological constraints are the core of women's oppression make of Firestone a fierce biological determinist, to the extent that for Firestone macro-social arrangements like patriarchy are linked to biological elements.³³

Equally, Sherry Ortner's influential text³⁴ strongly conveys an essentialist picture when she draws on biological accounts to explain the universality of female subordination. In her well-known separation of the 'order of nature' and the 'order of culture' she argues that whereas the latter is characterised as a superior symbolic machinery to constitute meanings, the former has come to be seen as a 'lower order'. Due to their reproductive capacities, pregnancy, labour and lactation, and a specific psyche more connected to the world of concrete things rather than abstract notions, women have become associated with the lower order of nature. Ortner is not suggesting a biological deterministic view over and above all social and cultural arrangements, rather she contends that it is cultural symbolic arrangements which impose the meanings which constitute the separation between culture/nature and locate women and men in those separate symbolic fields. However, despite this desire to point to culture's capacity over nature, she cannot escape biological determinism when she states that at the origin of those symbolic arrangements are women's capacity for childbirth.³⁵ De Beauvoir's ambivalent position towards biological causality is found again in Ortner, the social constructionist outlook being undermined by an ultimately biological deterministic argument. She explicitly cites de Beauvoir's remarks by stating that "the female is more enslaved to the species than the male, her animality more manifest". Women are thus, by virtue of their reproductive capacities, doomed to fulfil the natural functions whereas men are free to pursue socially abstract activities like technology, science or symbolic creations.³⁶

classes..." and later on she notes "the immediate assumption of the layman that the unequal division of the sexes is 'natural' may be well founded."

³³ See Firestone (1972: 165).

³⁴ Ortner (1974).

³⁵ Ortner (1974:79) "It all begins of course with the body and the natural procreative function specific to women alone."

³⁶ Ortner (1974: 74).

Mary Daly and Adrienne Rich: the superiority of women

The negative evaluation of women's biological capacities is challenged by arguments which, on the contrary, will maintain that such capacity is a source of superiority. Mary Daly and Adrienne Rich's position, still very much based on biological notions of gender differentiation, is totally opposite to the negative view presented above. Women's capacities of reproduction are conceived as the core of the obvious superior existential and social status of women. Daly and Rich are the representatives of a view which also essentializes biology but their interpretation is radically different. They perceive an instinctual capacity for hate and fear in men. According to them, throughout the history of humankind men have strived to dominate and subordinate women in an effort to overcome their own sense of insecurity and fear which women's obviously superior capacity to reproduce the species inspire in them. Women's reproductive power instils in men a sense of vulnerability which begets a need and desire to dominate women.

Mary Daly is a clear exponent of this biological account. To her, male envy of women's capacity for reproduction is at the root of women's universally pervasive oppression. The paradoxical fact about Daly's account is that whereas she denies any essentialist position she uses sex-specific biological traits to explain men's hatred for women: the childless state of all males leads to a dependency on women which in turn leads men to "deeply identify with unwanted female tissue". Men sense their position as worthless and hence they strive to dominate women in an effort to counter their own inferiority.

This is an account which sees women's identification as female as primary, essential and overriding any other definitions.³⁷ In Daly's work we find one of the most contradictory accounts within feminist ranks. While she tries to account for the role of social influences, she provides a picture of women as possessing a trans-historical soul or essence, a 'true self' which has been contaminated by the oppressive cultural structural forms: "It is axiomatic for Amazons that all external/internalised influences, such as myths, names, ideologies, social structures, which cut off the flow of the Self's original movement should be pared away"³⁸

A similar position is found in Adrienne Rich. She develops the two fundamental ideas found in Daly, namely, that women's reproductive capacity is a capacity strongly envied by men and that there is a universally essential women's identity. Rich will talk of "a female consciousness" which, principally, is fundamentally embodied:³⁹ "I have come to believe (...) that the female biology -the diffuse, intense sensuality radiating out from clitoris, breast, uterus, vagina; the lunar cycles of menstruation; the gestation and

³⁷ Daly (1978: 355-365).

³⁸ Daly (1978: 381).

³⁹ Rich (1979: 1).

fruition of life which can take place in the female body - has far more radical implications that we have yet come to appreciate (...) the corporeal ground of our intelligence."⁴⁰

An unexplained double position is found in Daly and Rich regarding the status of the body. They both deny any biological reductionism as to the division of mind/body which they perceive as false, yet they do this by explicitly conveying an image of female 'essence' which encompasses both spirit and body (a sort of twist towards a Merleau-Pontian position). However, in their account biological determinism, although questioned in some aspects, in others remains intact primarily by viewing female anatomy as the primary constituent of women's identity. Their view thus implicitly endorses the notion that there is an innate female essence, universal and trans-historical. Rich and Daly's views will be at the origin of a growing trend within feminism towards an essentialist and universalising notion of womanhood.⁴¹

With what has been summarised so far we can see that the body and the physical bases of human subjectivity is foregrounded constantly in feminist accounts. The main tension is found in the fact that despite the desire to include and explore social factors as main causal factors in explaining women's oppression, feminists very often resort to essentialist, ahistorical and non-sociological explanations of gender inequality. Their emphasis on the body has not yet undergone a truly sociological reflection; biological determinism and essentialism remain at the centre of their explanatory edifices by placing female anatomy as the primary constituent of women's identity and also as the bases of collective gender oppression.

Male identity is, thereby, equally essentialized. Men's tendency to adopt dominant and exploitative positions is seen as an inherent inadequacy of the male sex. Men are perceived as a universally homogeneous collective sharing inherently envious and aggressive tendencies towards women and displaying personality traits directly stemming from their biological features or rather from their biological lacks. These positions convey implicitly or explicitly that the world is essentially divided into two fundamental human types and that this division has a definite biological origin. Feminist theory had not perceived the need to analytically and empirically verify the veracity of such a taken for granted division of the world. Sex identity remains totally unproblematized.

⁴⁰ Rich (1986: 21).

⁴¹ See Echols (1983) and (1984) for a summary of all the authors who are components of this essentialist trend

1.2.1.2. *The 'problem of biology' and female diversity*

Feminism, Marxism and psychoanalysis.

Despite their desire to ground analytical explanations in social considerations, most feminist theorists until now have not been able to escape an underlying biological essentialism. With their emphasis on the essential differences between males and females, the body is foregrounded as a fundamental variable in the understanding of social arrangements.⁴² This biological essentialism is found in the two categories which are in the core of sociological debate, that of structure and individual. Feminism considers that both macro-structural collective arrangements, that is, patriarchal systems of oppression, as well as individual features -prominently sex and gender identity- are grounded in biological and ahistorical features.

The original division between sex (biological and unproblematized) and gender (cultural and contingent) frequently becomes blurred in most feminist accounts. At the level of the individual the nature of sex or gender traits is never clearly spelled out and therefore their origins as either social or biological are not properly clarified. Despite different positions, in general feminist theory assumes as an undisputed fact that sex identity is a fixed category and that the biology of humans is not a sociologically susceptible notion. However, the main thrust of feminism is to socially account for social arrangements and particularly for women's social status in society.

This ambivalent position regarding the ontological status of sex and gender identity and of the role of the body in producing these identities is clearly exemplified by Ramazanoglu when she deals with what she names 'the problem of biology'. She begins by appraising the inescapable pressure of biology: "Behind these questions [about women's universal domination] lies the problem of the importance of human biology in men's ability and willingness to dominate women. It is not clear that the relations between the sexes can be wholly independent of our biology. Men's physical dominance at the level of sexual relations, their ability to rape by force, is not a choice open to women, just as childbearing is not an option for men."⁴³ And yet Ramazanoglu continues: "At the same time, though, biological processes -sexual relations, puberty, childbirth -are given form and meaning only through social beliefs and practices."⁴⁴ In clearly conveying the tension between the causal powers attributed to nature and culture, Ramazanoglu sums up

⁴² The body is not only central when exploring the politics of sexuality or biological reproductive features. At the level of political theory we find it as the source of women's oppression. A 'sexual contract' is what men secure when marrying women. As Carole Pateman put it, the social contract which is established in marriage among men and women secures "orderly access by men to women's bodies". Marriage is a way to secure a civil right over women, but particularly over women's bodies. Pateman (1988: 6).

⁴³ Ramazanoglu (1989:28).

⁴⁴ Ramazanoglu (1989:28).

a widespread dilemma found in feminist theoretical analysis, namely, to establish the theoretical understanding of the nature/culture division, that is, of biological features and cultural arrangements. The resolution of this tension became the prominent line of thought in subsequent feminist theoretical enterprise.

The biological reductionism found in the work of many feminists was seriously challenged by other feminist theorists using Marxist premises. They argued that the multiple and varied means used to actively exclude women from power had, necessarily, to be a sign that something much more powerful than nature had to be in place as the cause of women's subordination. Marxist feminists' attempt to escape from any biological reductionism entailed the emphasis of historical, particularly economic, arrangements above any other variable.⁴⁵ According to Delphy, "it is the social division of labour, and associated hierarchical relations, which lead to physiological sex being used to differentiate those who are assigned to be dominant from those who will be part of the subordinate gender/class". With this argument, Delphy was trying to demonstrate that social arrangements preceded the values attached to biological sex:⁴⁶ a clear denial of biological capacities, like child bearing, having any intrinsic value outside social arrangements.

Although Marxist feminists' criticism very justly pointed to an unresolved tension within feminist theory, they also found themselves with serious conceptual problems. To maintain that gender relations were the primary form of domination was difficult to reconcile with the Marxist notion that the labour/capital contradiction was the fundamental variable in the analysis of social conflict.⁴⁷ The concept of patriarchy, a basic notion for the feminist agenda, clearly ran into contradiction with Marxist historical dialectics which explained the evolution of history in terms of internal economic contradictions between labourers and owners of the means of production. Moreover, Marxist feminists had to face the fact that traditional Marxism had tended to be blind to gender relations since normally women were confined to the private sphere. Different forms of Marxist feminism developed to resolve this tension while maintaining a focus on the social organisation of relations of production to explain women's oppression.

Such a position was open to the accusation of engaging in another type of reductionism, that which placed the social over and above natural factors as explanatory elements. The Marxist feminist materialist-economic account was deemed as deterministic and

⁴⁵ See Delphy (1984) and Barrett (1984)

⁴⁶ Delphy (1993)

⁴⁷ See Barrett (1984:9)

one-sided as the radical feminism of the 1970s.⁴⁸ Materialist accounts were seen as another form of determinism, particularly as an economic determinism which overlooked fundamental factors like individual subjectivity, cultural beliefs, rational and calculative powers of the individual, and indeed all biological givens.⁴⁹

In order to overcome such criticisms Marxist feminists utilised structuralist accounts which highlighted notions like 'ideology'. Althusser's 'reproduction of ideology' helped to modify the primacy of economic infrastructures over secondary ideological and cultural superstructures. Moreover, it was argued that social reproduction should not be conflated with biological reproduction.⁵⁰ However, Marxist feminists found it very difficult to resolve the tension between considering class relations as basic for social reproduction and gender relations as basic for patriarchal human reproduction. As Barrett argued: "The concept of social reproduction, as so far elaborated, is so closely tied to an account of class relations at the root of capitalist production that it cannot, by fiat, be rendered compatible with a serious consideration of male dominance (...) attempts to combine both issues represents the fundamental problem Marxist feminism faces"⁵¹ Thus, the debate regarding the primacy either of class or gender relations underpinned fundamental issues regarding the understanding of the primacy of social or biological forces for the understanding of human life.

As indicated above the adoption of Althusserian analysis on the reproduction of ideology was a way forward for Marxist feminism to resolve the tension between structural and individual causal factors. At the level of the individual, feminist theory was developing approaches which combined different variables. Of particular importance was Juliet Mitchell's psychoanalytical approach. Mitchell combined a form of Marxism with Althusserian notions and psychoanalytical frameworks, the latter based mainly on Freud and Lacan. Mitchell introduced a psychoanalytical account to challenge the macro-structural determinism of Marxism and argued that 'reproduction' (of ideological and cultural forms) happens in the psyche of individuals. However, and most important for the present discussion, in an attempt to fuse Marxist and psychoanalytical accounts she also highlighted the reproductive capacities of women as the basis for male domination. Following Millet's convictions, she argues that sexuality is the mechanism by which men construct women as 'property', as sexual objects.⁵² According to Mitchell sexual practices are *only* at the service of men's pleasure, and thus, women, by virtue of engaging in sexual activity, undergo a process of 'socialisation' which constitutes a

⁴⁸ Ramazanoglu. (1989:31.)

⁴⁹ For a good account of this dispute see Soper (1979)

⁵⁰ Barrett (1984:21-29).

⁵¹ Barrett (1984: 29).

⁵² See Mitchell (1976:148)

passive and accepting female character. In earlier life stages, such a process of socialisation, Mitchell would argue, is most intense in the Freudian oedipal phase in which the lack of penis means that girls will not have to undergo the fundamentally character-forming process of the fear of 'penis castration'. Consequently girls will remain within the inner world of the family and domestic life, whereas boys will be obliged to go beyond the family environment as a means to escape the anger of the jealous father.⁵³

With the move towards psychoanalytical explanations, Mitchell, despite critically reassessing some of the most reactionary statements found in Freud, tacitly adopts the Freudian notions of embodiment and inner psychic experience as the main variables to take into account when finding explanatory categories for subject formation. By taking on board notions like the Oedipus complex she implicitly highlights the role of biology in the formation of differential gender and sexual identities. Despite her original Marxist credentials Mitchell develops some logical inconsistencies by adopting the 'a-sociological' notion of the unconscious. In a section titled "The Different Self, the Phallus and the Father", Mitchell sketches a view which takes biological features and the inner mental world of the infant as being at the root of subject formation and psychological sexual differences. While she understands the Oedipus complex as a universal given,⁵⁴ Mitchell argues, against one of the most contested Freudian statements, that anatomy is not destiny. However, her use of the notion of the unconscious is directly related to embodied features. Mitchell accounts for the constitutive power of social arrangements by trying to convey that we should understand the concept of the unconscious as culturally dependent, that is, as the way mankind transmits and inherits its social and cultural laws.⁵⁵ However, her 'socialisation' of the unconscious is problematic precisely because she still leaves untouched the biological division made between the categories of men and women. Further, to assume the Oedipus complex as a universal is to take for granted an enormous amount of culturally contingent arrangements, like culturally specific family units, sexual desires as naturally heterosexual and biological drives, but particularly the notion that subject formation occurs in an (unexplained) realm which is pre-verbal, non-conscious and outside the reach of conscious rationality. Mitchell, by adopting the psychoanalytical notion of the unconscious, condemns herself to universalism, biological essentialism, and the fixidity of the notion of primary subject formation.

⁵³ See particularly part one of Mitchell (1990).

⁵⁴ Mitchell (1990:381) "the unconscious is the way man lives his humanity in harmony and conflict with his particular and historically determined environment. It is why ideology persists through changing cultures, changing economic modes, while having also to be altered. If you like, it is why women are everywhere within civilisation the second sex, but everywhere differently so."

⁵⁵ Mitchell (1990:403).

Mitchell's accounts thus bring us back to 'the problem of the body'. All the feminists accounts analysed thus far manifest a strong tendency to become resilient to sociological approaches. They do not seriously contest the embodied nature of gender inequality. On the contrary, despite the explicit adoption of sociological views, they exhibit logical inconsistencies which betray tacit acceptance of essentialist and biologically deterministic positions.

Some currents within feminism contested these essentialist and universalising biological accounts of gender power relationships. This critical appraisal of mainstream feminism resulted in a challenge to the very core tenet of feminist theory, namely, the feasibility of a universal diachronic and synchronic view of the very same notion of woman.

Class, race and sexual orientation: contesting feminism

As the appeal of feminism grew, some basic premises, particularly at the level of the political agenda, were fundamentally contested. The already present internal contradictions in feminist theory are highlighted by new groups of women theorists who stress the significance of differential personal experience. Women belonging to economic and socially discriminated areas of society contested the white middle-class feminism that had been dominant. The obvious existence of different social classes, races, ethnic affiliations and sexual orientations presented a challenge to the core notion of feminism, namely, that of a unified category of woman and of a universalised notion of women's oppression.

This led to the problematization of the false dualism found in most feminist theory, which envisaged gender power relationships as universal and primary. Authors like Moraga and Lorde suggested that racism and classism destroys the notion of clear cut gender power relationships. The social world presents a much more complex picture of domination than that of men dominator/woman subordinated.⁵⁶

For instance, the prioritisation of sexism over racism was seriously questioned by Ramazanoglu: "women from dominant nations, racial and ethnic groups not only play a part in the oppression of women of subordinate groups, but also benefit from the continuation of such subordination."⁵⁷ The notion of domestic unpaid work as site of women's exploitation, was seriously contested by authors like Collins, who argued that, unpaid domestic work for their families by black women is hardly regarded as a form of exploitation but rather conceived as a form of resistance to a wider racist oppression: "By emphasising Black women's contribution to Black family well-being, such as keeping

⁵⁶ See among several authors, Amos and Parmar (1984), Britten and Maynaed (1984), Carby (1982), Davis (1981), Hooks (1982), Joseph (1981), Moraga and Anzaldua (1981).

⁵⁷ Ramazanoglu (1989:117).

families together and teaching children survival skills (...) scholarship suggests that Black women see their unpaid domestic work more as a form of resistance to oppression than as a form of exploitation by men."⁵⁸

Working-class women's oppression, also a central question for Black feminists, also raises questions regarding rigid notions of universal female consciousness. Marxist feminists had already pointed out how irresolvable this question was for feminism. If gender is to be prioritised over class, an obvious difficulty of accounting for the hierarchical division among women themselves occurs.⁵⁹ Even Barrett, herself a committed Marxist, finds it difficult to present an analytical solution to the tension between Althusserian capitalistic class analysis and patriarchal theory: "To do this would be to argue that just as the capitalist class is reproduced in a relationship of total dominance over the working class, so men are reproduced as totally dominant over women (...) It would be difficult to argue, for instance, that the qualifications and skills imparted to girls at a major independent school would in any sense 'equip' her for a place in the division of labour that was subordinate to that of a working class boy who left school at the minimum age with no formal qualifications".⁶⁰ To resolve this analytical problem Barrett develops the notion of women having a 'dual relationship' to the class structure both by direct relation to their class background, which will provide their position in the labour market, and by the indirect exploitation by a male bread-winner and the attributed responsibility to unpaid housework and child care. It remains to be seen however if this duality is equally applicable, as Barrett suggest, to working class women and bourgeois women. The latter may be seen to be located in the second position, that is, by having been socially attributed the role of domestic labour and child care, to a large extent, some bourgeois women are dependent on their husband's salary. However that this dependence locates them closer to working class women as opposed to middle class men, remains to be convincingly argued.⁶¹

The same problem had already been highlighted by radical feminists. Authors like Rich had challenged feminism for 'leaving aside' lesbians. Rich presented groundbreaking texts in which she advanced a powerful feminist critique of compulsory heterosexual orientation. Rich argued that, rather than being essentially driven to heterosexual sexual

⁵⁸ Collins (1991: 44).

⁵⁹ Barrett (1984) particularly Chapter 4. "The Educational system: Gender and Class" pp114-151.

⁶⁰ Barrett (1984:139).

⁶¹ That the connection between class and gender remains unresolved is also exposed in a later book, Sylvia Walby (1990:7-13) In fact Marxist feminists draw on the same internal theoretical contradictions found within Marxist theory regarding the concept of class itself and its relation to economic variables like the relations of production based on the ownership of capital. Such economicism, it is argued, neglected other social variables like cultural, sexual and ideological aspects. To maintain that economic inequality is the basis of class hierarchy, Walby argues, results in neglecting fundamental variables closer to a more Weberian notion of class status, which are also very significant to an understanding of social inequality.

relations, in fact women are in a 'lesbian continuum'. It was clear, she argued, that if the first erotic bond, both by boys as well as girls, is to the mother, it follows that the 'natural' sexual orientation of both men and women *must* be toward women. She criticised many feminist studies for indirectly assuming that heterosexuality is innately chosen. Rich argued that these feminists had been unable to see that heterosexuality is a 'social institution' which powerfully affected the choices of women towards motherhood, relationships, sex roles and sexual practices. In short, heterosexuality is actually a culturally constituted institution resulting from structural male dominance.⁶² Whereas Rich does not question the universality of male dominance over women she is indirectly disputing the notion of a unitary female identity based on sexual orientation.⁶³

1.2.1.3. The postmodern turn: theorising diversity, materiality and essentialism

The profound rifts opened in mainstream feminism by Marxist, Black and radical feminists pointed to very important theoretical, epistemological and political contradictions within feminist theory. Those criticisms were fundamentally articulated around three main issues. First, an ontological one regarding the nature and viability of a universal category of woman. Secondly, clear epistemological issues surfaced when questioning the validity of some forms of knowledge above others and when questioning the nature of social reality. Thirdly, heated debates arose concerning political issues and particularly about different understandings of power, domination and women's oppression. The very same core notion of the feminist political agenda, that is, the universality of patriarchal structures was interrogated and new social constructionist approaches emerged which ultimately questioned the very existence of these structures.

This produced a gradual shift in the theorising framework within feminist scholarship. There was a new emphasis on the local and contextual as the source of knowledge and explanations of social reality. However, social constructionist approaches were increasingly directed not only to the social but, fundamentally, to the materiality of physical bodies. The unquestioned reality of the division between biological males and females began to be problematized from a sociological perspective.

This trend was supported by the introduction of French postmodern theories which introduced new perspectives in the understanding of the exact meaning of social

⁶² Rich, Adrienne (1983).

⁶³ Masculinity studies, a sociological stream developed around the notion that there is no clear cut gender oppression, presented similar conclusions. The authors noted that men's real experiences reveal that standard notions of men's violence and oppressive attitudes over women do not fully cohere with reality. Men exercise power over men too. Connell (1987) and (1995) becomes a major figure of this position by coining the notion of 'hegemonic masculinity'. A whole discipline flourished around this idea, see for example: Morgan (1987) where he develops a critique of MacKinnon's notion of structural men's violence against women. See also New (2001).

causality. Postmodern and post-structuralist theorists introduced the notion of 'deconstruction', which they utilised to profoundly question the most important taken for granted category in mainstream human sciences, namely that of an independent, stable, pre-given self. Emphasis was placed on the 'embodied' nature of individuals' experience. Thus, transferring some of these insights into feminist theory resulted in the problematization of the very same notion of sexual identity. Postmodernism became an important theoretical influence on feminist thought in the 1990s,⁶⁴ with authors drawing mainly upon Derrida's deconstructionism, Foucault's discourse analysis, and Lacanian versions of psychoanalysis⁶⁵. These authors provided theoretical support to those feminists who had already criticised the deep-rooted essentialist bias found in mainstream feminism.

The issue of the feasibility of a unitary category of womanhood became central in the postmodern feminist theory of the 1990s. The dissolution of the idea of 'women' as a fixed, natural category developed in distinct analytical arenas. First, a clear theoretical and epistemological debate arose around issues of production of knowledge and truth claims; secondly, a political and ideological controversy emerged when positing the notion that to sustain the belief in a unitary category of women was politically detrimental to women themselves, principally because it served to conceal the real economic, existential and ideological differences among women.⁶⁶ These ideas converged into a new current in feminist theory, and social theory in general, namely that of the embodied nature of our identities. The biological nature of sexual identity was not only seriously contested but the need to clarify its ontological status as a social or biological category became paramount in feminist debates. Feminism began to seriously debate the constitutive role of the social in the nature/culture dichotomy.

Feminist ontologies: Woman versus women versus (no) woman

Postmodern feminism observes that, empirically speaking, there exists a multiplicity of cross-cutting discourses which make the notions of women and men culturally and historically variable.⁶⁷ Different postmodern thinkers are instrumentalized by feminists to convey their concerns regarding the notion of selfhood. The subject is 'deconstructed' by using psychoanalytical accounts, particularly that of Lacan. Lacan's metaphorical theory on self-identity formation is operationalized, particularly by French feminists, to construct a new notion of women's self identity. Women as a category is seen as 'the

⁶⁴ See Groot and Maynard (1993).

⁶⁵ See principally Derrida (1981a) (1981b) (1996), Foucault, (1998) and the English translation of Lacan's seminars collected in *Feminine Sexuality*, (1982) edited by Mitchell and Rose.

⁶⁶ See Adams, Brown and Cowie (1978) "Editorial", *m/f*, 2.3:5 as quoted in Jackson, S. 1998:23.

⁶⁷ See Fraser and Nicholson (1990b).

Other', that is, an 'excluded' category on the margins of society (in Lacan's terms 'Symbolic Order'). The Other is a notion which introduces a form of social causality but one that is also tied to some given biological features. Briefly put, the Symbolic Order, according to Lacan, is only open to boys because the Phallic signifier, which underlies the Symbolic Order of the Law of the Father, cannot be internalised by girls due to their anatomy, that is, their lack of a penis. Thus, the Law of the Father is imposed upon girls too, but from outside, not from 'inside' like boys. This has the fundamental effect of constituting women as false images of a language which does not belong to them. In short, women's 'true' nature is to be 'repressed' and substituted by an externally imposed phallic language.⁶⁸

On the other hand, some authors draw on Derrida's grammar deconstruction in which he puts forward a critique of the symbolic order by sketching three main features which dominate it. First, its logocentrism, that is, the primacy of the spoken word which is less vulnerable to interpretation than the written word. Second, a phallocentrism, a primacy of the phallus drive, that is, a tendency to strive towards a single ostensibly reachable goal. And third, a clear binary dualism which sets out to define everything in terms of oppositions.

Feminists take from Derrida the notion that logocentric forces categorise identities into binary oppositions and that women should subvert all narratives that define them as opposed to men. According to Derrida, meaning does not exist outside language. His constructionist position attempts to ascertain that, contrary to common belief, language does not provide us with the meanings or essences of objects, concepts or persons somehow located outside it. Rather, language creates meaning, the only meaning to which it can, in turn, refer. Derrida advocates the abandonment of the assumption of a single origin, that is, that only one single truth or essence, a 'transcendental signified', exists as a giver of meaning.⁶⁹ In this analysis Derrida introduces the concept of 'differance', which shows the inevitable meaning-creative gap which exists in the linguistic unit of sign.⁷⁰ This concept has become fundamental and widely used by

⁶⁸ See Tong (1992:220) for an expanded feminist interpretation of Lacan's theory of identity formation.

⁶⁹ See Derrida (1981a) and (1981b).

⁷⁰ Derrida's key notion of 'differance' takes a cue from the Saussurian concept of sign as composed by a signifier (words or phonemes) and the signified (the concept, meaning or content associated with the word or phoneme) and criticises Saussure's linguistic structuralism for effecting a 'closure' between these two components of sign and collapsing them with one another. On the contrary one should understand the relationship between the signifier and the signified as that of 'differance', understood to convey both that which is 'different' and that which is 'deferred'. Differance thus attempts to point out that the meaning of the signifier depends on all the other signifiers and that there is a temporal 'distance' involved between the signifier and the signified in every act of application of a sign. The radical consequences of Derrida's (de)construction of language signs is that we cannot conceive of an essential stability of meaning (that is, a metaphysics of presence relying on an absolute origin) but rather the meaning conveyed by signs is fluid and radically 'undecidable', with no absolute site of meaning.

postmodern feminists. For instance, Lucy Irigaray argues that women exist in this gap between language and reality. Irigaray's ontology of female identity is that of the 'sexual difference' and maintains that female identity should be understood as specific in its own right and ontologically different from that of the male.⁷¹ Despite the fact that her use of Derrida's concept of 'différance' brings her to a more comprehensive view of knowledge production in which 'truth' is seen as a construction inside a phalocentric narrative or paradigm, eventually she takes a 'separationist' stance regarding women's identity, and becomes the most prominent figure within the feminism of difference.

The third of the major French postmodern theorists used by feminists is Michel Foucault, particularly his work on the history of discourses as constitutive of the notion of the subject. This is a fundamental idea for feminists who find empirically viable the notion that there is no essential subject understood as a locus of internal intentions, natural attributes or even as containing a separate consciousness. Foucault's rejection of the 'repressive hypothesis' in his book *The History of Sexuality*, puts forward the argument that there is no essential identity which is repressed by history. Rather it is those very same discourses of repression which constitute the subject identity at the centre of these discourses.⁷²

The fundamental significance for feminism of the authors mentioned above is that, if taken to their logical conclusions, their arguments effect a major shake-up within the discipline in showing that a unitary category of woman is a false and culturally arbitrary fabrication. This deconstructionist account if applied to feminist activism would result in the advocating of the dissolution of feminism itself. Within this argument thus, feminists like Julia Kristeva will argue that to be truly politically effective, one has to deconstruct all forms of repressive category formations, including feminism itself: "a woman cannot be; it is something which does not even belong in the order of being. It follows that a feminist practice can only be negative, at odds with what already exists so that we may say 'that's not it' and 'that's still not it.'" Therefore any political struggle can only have a negative function, destroying everything.⁷³

However, despite the acknowledgement of postmodern relativistic claims and deconstructionist approaches in early postmodern theorists it is still detectable clear biological essentialist tendencies. Cixous, for instance, one of the most influential early postmodern feminists along with Irigaray and Kristeva, defines a women's essence as opposite to the male and clearly based on differential bodily capacities and sexual inner life. In her definition of women's writing as 'open and multiple' like women's sexuality

⁷¹ See Irigaray (1996).

⁷² Foucault (1998).

⁷³ Kristeva (1981:137).

she is clearly conceiving not only a universal unitary sense of womanhood but one clearly rooted in biological properties.

Contrary to Cicoux and Irigaray, however, Kristeva will be one of the first feminists to strongly resist this identification with biological traits. Kristeva is quite alone in advocating, first and foremost, the dissolution of a unitary sex identity notion: "The belief that 'one is woman' is almost as absurd and obscurantist as the belief that 'one is man'. I say 'almost' because there are still many goals which women can achieve: freedom of abortion and contraception, day-care centres for children, equality on the job, etc. Therefore, we must use 'we are women' as an advertisement or slogan for our demands. On a deeper level, however, a woman cannot 'be'; it is something which does not even belong in the order of *being*"⁷⁴ Kristeva fully embraces the non-essentialism which deconstructionist accounts advocate when she says that even if womanhood is an individually experienced notion as a transcendental object it does not exist. Yet Kristeva cannot escape either some form of biological essentialism in her explanation. Her notion of the 'object', by being rooted in some sort of universal and unexplained psychoanalytical explanation of the disgust of the infant towards her own and her mother's body, brings her back to a form of biological essentialism nonetheless.

We have seen how by tracing the history and evolution of feminist theory thus allows to perceive the resilience of 'the problem of biology' to being accounted in sociological terms. In general feminism finds it useful to adopt *some* postmodern tenets, in so far as it helps to deconstruct a world conceived as 'male', and to see and explain historical narratives - accused of having obliterated women's experience and only accounting for that of men- as contingent and subject to specific points of view and therefore liable to transformation.

In this way, some postmodern tenets are thus very important to feminism, however radical deconstructionist accounts prove to be very problematic. To this extent, some feminists will be quite ready to adopt a 'soft' version of postmodernism. Such a position is based in the acceptance of the contextual and local nature of the subject but without totally denying some form of autonomy, rationality and priority of such a subject.

Few others take deconstructionist accounts to its full consequences and adopt what has been labelled as the 'strong' version of Postmodernism, of which Judith Butler is the

⁷⁴ Kristeva as quoted in Tong (1992: 230) It is difficult to define all these authors under the same umbrella of postmodernism. Although they all share some interest in and use of deconstructivist accounts, their 'final' theories profoundly differ. Kristeva exemplifies the differences that exist amongst postmodern feminists. Judith Butler later became the most important advocate of this de-essentialising position and conveyed a powerful critique of these early postmodern feminists. See Butler *passim* in the bibliography.

most prominent advocate.⁷⁵ This is a position which defends the complete dissolution of the notion of the subject's unitary self, which is seen as nothing more than the effect of discursive processes and repetitive interpellative acts.⁷⁶

Such strong version of postmodern feminism has been strongly rejected by some on the grounds that to fully accept this position would undermine the very basis of the feminist quest, namely to liberate women from oppression. To dissolve womanhood as an effect of linguistic categories would leave the subject (woman) with no possibility of resistance to the cultural order of which she is the product; in short, with no autonomy and agency. For others however it has been possible to perceive the strengths of both positions and to argue for a synthesis. According to Benhabib, a connection must be found between macro-structural constraints (such as linguistic and discursive formations) and the individual's independent capacity for reason and action. Benhabib clearly states that 'the strong version of the Death of the Subject [Man] thesis is not compatible with the goals of feminism. Surely, a subjectivity that would not be structured by language, by narrative, and by the symbolic codes of narrative available in a culture is unthinkable (...) We can concede all that, but nevertheless we must still argue that we are not merely extensions of our histories, that *vis-a-vis* our own stories we are in the position of author and character at once. The situated and gendered subject is heteronomously determined but still strives toward autonomy. I want to ask how in fact the very project of female emancipation would be thinkable without such a regulative ideal of enhancing the agency, autonomy and selfhood of women'⁷⁷. Benhabib wants to adopt both positions, that as subject identities we are cultural constructions and yet that something remains in our inner sense of self which is autonomous and independent of the culturally arbitrary. The problem with Benhabib's position is that it does not, however, expand on the origins and constitution of such an independent category. Ultimately, she implicitly contends that the social world is clearly divided into men and women, however much the complexities of the cultural worlds are implicated in subject formation. Benhabib clearly conveys the vision that to fully accept constructionist accounts of the subject's identity, particularly gender and sex identity, would necessarily preclude the possibility of a rational and calculative subject. This is a fundamental issue which runs through all postmodern feminists accounts.

Within the specific issue of individual agency nobody has more forcefully argued the strong version of postmodernism than Butler. Her discursive model brings about a

⁷⁵ See Judith Butler *passim* in the bibliography. The different ingredients of Butler's position will be expanded further in chapter 5.

⁷⁶ I have found this division between strong and weak versions of postmodern tenets in Benhabib, (1995:79).

⁷⁷ Benhabib (1995:80).

complex and sophisticated analytical edifice which makes her stand quite alone within feminist scholarship. Butler fully embraces the radical relativist position of the 'strong' version of postmodernism and yet extensively argues that this does not preclude the possibility of an independent rational subject. Her chief argument revolves around the arbitrary nature of the binary division between biological sex and cultural gender. She explicitly rejects feminist theories which work within this dichotomous reasoning, and advocates that the gendered self does not exist as such as a transcendental fixed category. Rather, the self is merely the effect of a series of discursive acts. What is important to highlight for the present discussion from Butler's argument is that by presenting a theory of identity formation beyond the dichotomy of 'sex' and 'gender' she not only questions the notion of a unitary fixed sex identity but crucially its fundamentally taken for granted biological bases: "Perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all (...) Gender is not to culture as sex is to nature, gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as pre discursive, prior to culture."⁷⁸ Butler's position is clearly directed to demolish the notion of selfhood in general and that of a trans-historical unitary category of woman in particular. When she states that we must forget the 'doer behind the deed', that is, the self as the subject behind and prior to activity, she suggests that there is no such a thing either as a sex or gender identity prior to the discourses which make sense of it⁷⁹: As feminists, Butler contends, we have to criticise the "metaphysical presuppositions of identity politics". The 'subject', Butler goes on, is the object of discourse: it is not the subject using discourse but rather the object who is utilised by the discourse itself. Hence, the subject of feminism itself is "a discursive formation and effect of a given version of representational politics (...) the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate emancipation."⁸⁰

Butler's most important analytical point is found in her critique of most feminist approaches for collapsing agency, and the capacity for reasoning and acting, with the viability of the pre-given stable existing 'subject' independent of cultural constitution. Butler goes on to say that even when the subject is conceived as culturally constructed

⁷⁸ Butler (1990a:7).

⁷⁹ Butler (1990a:25): "(...) there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results". The notion of linguistic performativity as operationalized in Butler's model unfolds in a complex combination of linguistic, philosophical and psychoanalytical theories which make her work difficult to understand and which has produced a variety of readings. I will engage and expand on Butler's notion of performativity latter on in chapter 6 when discussing the social nature of a Sex habitus -understood as an artificial kind.

⁸⁰ Butler (1990a:2).

feminists find it difficult to abandon the idea of an agent with the capacity for reflexive thought independent of cultural influence. Such a view, as that of Benhabib above, presupposes that to conceive a subject as culturally constituted amounts to an over-deterministic account in which the actor is seen as fully determined by cultural forces and hence with no possible independent capacity for action. For theorists like Benhabib the analytical rationality which guides their thinking is that agency cannot exist unless a pre discursive subject exists.

This is a point which Butler extensively addresses and clearly elucidates. As she puts it, those theorists which take Benhabib's position unwittingly adopt a metaphysical reification of social reality which leaves unexplained the mechanisms of production of social categories. The implicit image they convey is that to be "*constituted* by discourse is to be *determined* by discourse, where determination forecloses the possibility of agency"⁸¹. Butler opposes to the view that identity can only be established as a discursively transcendent entity, the notion that identity is always the product of 'structures of signification', that is, the product of the rules that regulate the production of meaningful accounts. If variation among individuals' accounts exist it is not so much the product of a transcendental individual essence, as so many feminists seem to imply, but rather a possibility effected by the constitutive nature of the performative process of repetition.⁸² Agency, then, is nothing other than this possibility of variation inherent to the performative process of repetition, and ultimately although the subject is constituted by discourse it is not *determined* by it.⁸³

Feminist Epistemologies

At the epistemological level feminism had been arguing that mainstream social sciences advocated an abstract and theoretical type of analysis which precluded and dismissed individuals' subjective accounts and real lived experiences. Feminism sought to emphasise that women's subjective experiences of their own oppressed condition provided them with the possibility of reaching 'truer' sources of knowledge.⁸⁴ Standpoint feminism took this notion further and argued that there was a distinct gendered consciousness. It was suggested that women's contact with more embodied experiences, like childbirth and child care, resulted in a closer connection with bodies and emotions. It was even argued that not only women's conscious reflexive capacities but their hidden unconscious experience of the world was radically different to men's, that is concrete

⁸¹ Butler (1990a:143).

⁸² Butler (1990a:145).

⁸³ I will return to the question of the nature of individual agency in Part III.

⁸⁴ Haraway: "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" in Haraway (1991:192). Haraway's argument is that due to their positioning as a dominated group, women are able to escape the knowledge contracted and 'organised by axes of domination.'

and unitary rather than abstract and intellectual. Lived experiences were not only a fundamental part of the formation of identity but also of knowledge production. In particular, the superior nature of truth claims resulting from female embodied experiences was emphasised.⁸⁵

Another point of debate was, as so influentially argued by Dorothy Smith⁸⁶, that the distinction between theory and experience was a false one. We are in fact, Smith argued, constantly engaged in making sense of our everyday experience, but we do this with the benefit of prior knowledge. Feminists argued that this is the same for abstract theory and that the lived experience of women cannot be divorced from the theorising of it. This position would tacitly support Black and working class feminists' critique, namely that the multiplicity of women's lived experience went against the possibility of talking of a unique women's consciousness. At this point, two lines of thought began to coexist, ambiguously and never fully clarified, one that women's multiple and complex personal experiences precluded the notion of a unitary sense of womanhood and the other that, despite this clearly empirical fact, there was some fundamental difference between women and men's identities.

It is not surprising thus to find some feminists arguing that these two lines of thought were mutually exclusive and logically contradictory. In Flax we can read:

"Indeed the notion of a feminist standpoint that is truer than previous (male) ones seems to rest upon many problematic and unexamined assumptions. (...) the notion of such a standpoint also assumes that the oppressed are in no fundamental ways damaged by their social experience. On the contrary, this position assumes that the oppressed have a privileged (and not just different) relation and ability to comprehend a reality that is out there waiting for our representation"⁸⁷.

The feminist standpoint view of women's privileged position regarding knowledge implicitly endorses an objectivist empiricism very much inherited from the Enlightenment. That is, the acceptance of an objective reality which is 'better' perceived by some rationalities than others. This position has fundamental epistemological implications at the level of understanding social determination. As Flax implicitly points out, the notion of agency it conveys is that women, by virtue of being 'outsiders' to the social relations of domination, have more capacity to tap into their 'true' transcendent self out of reach of cultural constructions.

Conflicting approaches thus developed within feminist scholarship in epistemological debates. By advocating the notion of the 'objectivity' of the oppressed, feminist standpoint theory essentialized non-existent metaphysical categories. As has been noted

⁸⁵ See Harstock (1987) and O'Brien (1981).

⁸⁶ Smith (1987) and (1988).

⁸⁷ Flax (1990:56).

by Harding herself, the notion that women's oppressed condition results in a more objective approach to reality implied a cognitive potential which directly clashed with another feminist theoretical pillar, namely, the structuralist notion that patriarchal structures are hidden to consciousness and escape women's subjective experience. In this case the truth of social relations is conveyed as opaque to women (as it was to men). Harding accounts for this conflict by proposing a middle way which, drawing on notions of the social construction of scientific research, proposes that feminists should keep in mind that even women's experiences are constructed and mediated by a social context. Indeed, even research carried out by women is socially constructed by the political and ideological context of patriarchy.⁸⁸

Harding's position, by refusing to privilege one form of knowledge creation over another, has in turn been charged with 'relativism' and hence of precluding the possibility of 'true' knowledge. She has been seriously criticised for "her ambivalence to the point of abandoning that aspect of the project of science which is to create universalistically authoritative knowledge on the basis of systematic enquiry".⁸⁹ That is, Harding's position would thus be seen to preclude the fundamental task of sociology, namely, the discovery of deep structures underlying social relations.

A major theoretical issue is raised here, namely that of the ontological nature of the social. According to Walby, Harding is almost precluding the existence of a social reality outside human construction, whereas Harding maintains that whatever reality exists outside human consciousness is also a cultural formation. This, a fundamental issue within social sciences, remains one of the central questions in current debates and one, which will be extensively addressed, in the present discussion.

Feminist power theories

Another conceptual arena of debate is around the issue of gender power relationships, the exact nature of women's oppression and the possibility of political action. The debate centres around two major contradictory positions. First, more radical postmodern theorists argue that by advocating a universal and unique category of woman in binary opposition to that of men as a universal given, main stream feminism is colluding with the mechanisms of power which are at the root of the constitution of women's oppression. The second approach is critical of radical postmodern positions and argues that, by virtue of dissolving the core category of woman into a relativistic cultural

⁸⁸ See Harding (1986).

⁸⁹ Walby (1990:19).

construct, postmodern constructionist accounts preclude any possibility of political activity.

The first line of argument contends that the idea of sex identity is a historically contingent discursive construction. By adopting a Foucauldian framework, engaged in elucidating the connections between power and the constitution of knowledge and social arrangements, postmodern feminists conceive 'subjects' as the product of 'micro mechanisms of power'.⁹⁰ Female oppression, thus, will be understood as the result, not of natural differences, but rather as a discursively constituted naturalisation of female embodiment as inferior. Sexual differentiation itself is, hence, the product of constitutive power mechanisms.⁹¹ The body is at the core of the power debate and with it, an array of conceptions around its socially constructed nature.

Foucault's constructionist approach towards the body and the emphasis on the embodied nature of power mechanisms is particularly useful to feminism to argue for an embodied female consciousness and an embodied patriarchal power relationship. Some feminists even argued that Foucault's gender blindness does not allow him to perceive that it is the female body above all that is constructed by power mechanisms.⁹²

This view led to constructivist approaches which conveyed a negative view regarding the possibility of political action. Returning to Kristeva's de-essentialising approach briefly summarised above, we saw how her admission, that woman as a universal category is a discursive illusion, leads her, consequently, to admit that any political struggle can only have a 'negative' function. In short, that of destroying current discursive formations at the base of existing structures of knowledge and signification.⁹³ If categories are the result of acts of power to use categories like women, race, sex, gender, class, etc. is in itself an act of power.

Needless to say that this position is taken to its radical conclusions by Butler who explicitly warns that the very notions of 'men' and 'women', as many other binary oppositions, are 'regulative ideals' at the core of social inequalities. Indeed she operationalizes the Foucauldian framework to argue that we must transcend the notion of a sex or gender difference itself: "there is no ontology of gender on which we might

⁹⁰ Foucault's notion of productive power conceives it as the very basis of knowledge constitution and, fundamentally, as the genesis of identity formation. The Foucauldian understanding of power as constitutive will be extensively addressed in chapter 7

⁹¹ "if the category of sex has such an important position in patriarchal logic, this is not because sex gives its shape to the social; it is because the social is able to make sexual forms seem obvious and thereby hide oppressive systems' (Plaza as quoted in McNay (1992:21).

⁹² See McNay (1992: 11) Price and Shildrick (1999:8), Bordo (1990) and (1995) Bordo has developed the Foucauldian notion of the panopticon -surveillance by self-surveillance- as at the bases of the constitution of 'normative' bodies. Embodied practices like diet, keep fit, fertility control, fashion, health care and so on, are all exposed in her work as particularly female 'disciplinary mechanisms', which literally 'produce' bodies.

⁹³ Kristeva (1981:137).

construct a politics, for gender ontologies always operate within established political contexts as normative injunctions". Butler, consequently, seriously questions the political argument of mainstream feminism, and maintains that grounding political activity around some unified categories of sex and gender presents the "internal paradox (...) that it presumes, fixes and constrains the very 'subjects' that it hopes to represent and liberate."⁹⁴ The only political possibility of subverting normalising standards is to open up to the 'proliferation' of new forms which appear when deconstructing present discourses of sex and gender. This possibility is seen by Butler as inherent within the very same process of constitution of the social order.⁹⁵

Following Butler's radical statements, some feminists have advocated a 'de-gendering' movement. If gender difference is the product of social practices, the feminist political practice is one among the others. Therefore, the only way to truly fight an unequally structured gender order is through a 'feminist de-gendering movement', one that seeks to focus on practical changes in daily life practices that locate women in unequal positions. For example, the introduction of institutional help in child care, which would allow more women to participate in paid work and hence fully achieve an independent social status.⁹⁶

In contrast to radical postmodern positions, 'softer' postmodern feminism, constructs a criticism of radical Postmodernism by accusing it of neglecting "the social context of power relations". Those who adopt this latter position contend that the Foucauldian idea of power as 'productive' precludes the notion of 'oppressive' power and thus, political activity loses its focus of attention. Indeed, it is argued that: "this dispersal together with de-emphasis of economic relations makes analyses of gender within a Foucauldian tradition overly free-floating."⁹⁷ Even when the postmodernist tendency in feminism is acknowledged as valuable in some aspects, particularly in uncovering the non-viability of universalising categories, it is criticised for not allowing for political activism. The line of argument of this second position is that patriarchal oppressive structures may be difficult to sustain theoretically but *in practice* they are very much present and need to be restructured.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Butler (1990a:148) See particularly the section "From Parody to Politics."

⁹⁵ "The symbolic order of the lacanians is too static. The symbolic is repeatedly produced, reproduced, and possibly derailed. I agree with Derrida here in his analysis of structure in 'Structure, Sign and Play' in *Writing and difference*. A structure only becomes a structure by repeating its structurality. Iterability is the way in which a structure gets solidified, but it also implies the possibility of that structure's derailment." Butler (1994:36).

⁹⁶ Lorber (2000).

⁹⁷ Walby (1990:15).

⁹⁸ See Walby (1990) and Stevi Jackson *passim* in the bibliography.

The postmodern radical analytical position is accepted insofar as it demonstrates that the notion of a 'subject' as a locus of internal intentions or natural attributes or even a privileged separate consciousness, is a cultural fallacy. However to argue that there is no essential core of repression, that is, no essential identity which is repressed by history, or that, as some feminists will argue, to be politically effective can only be achieved by deconstructing everything, even feminism, is seen by some feminists as a threat to feminism itself and any practical political agendas. Regarding the latter it is argued that deconstructionism undermines the validity of any struggle by contending that the motivations behind it will also be social constructions. As Alcoff points out: "but how can this be helpful to feminists, who need to have their accusation of misogyny validated rather than rendered 'undecidable'?"⁹⁹ Indeed, she says, if gender is simply a social construct then feminist politics becomes problematic. To view social categories as constructs precludes the possibility of justifying conceptions of justice and truth.

The 'Politics of location': a synthesis

Those feminists who are uncomfortable with radical postmodern assumptions but accept some of their tenets advocate a 'third way'. Alcoff, for instance, believes that the concept of gender should not be erased but rather conceived as 'positional'. Following Teresa de Laurentis, she argues that to accept that woman is a fictional construct does not preclude its 'historical existence'. Nominalist (idealist) positions, like those of Butler's linguistic performativity, can be avoided by linking the formation of subjectivity with experiences and practices. Laurentis' approach is a mixture of interactionism and phenomenology: "subjectivity is produced not by external ideas, values or material causes, but by one's personal, subjective engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning and affect) to the events of the world". It is in this process that subjectivity becomes engendered.¹⁰⁰

For these authors given that it is difficult to deny the empirical evidence of the historical dimension of subjectivity, it has to be admitted, therefore, that our cultural categories are contingent and revisable. They still argue however, that this should not preclude, an 'identity politics', based on taking our contingent present identity as a political point of departure. Laurentis and her followers advocate an 'identity' politics in which political struggle should not preclude the fluid, constructed nature of one's identity. Alcoff fully adopts this position and contends that woman's social status is relative not innate and yet is not 'undecidable', that is, an idealist fiction.¹⁰¹ For these

⁹⁹ Alcoff (1994: 106).

¹⁰⁰ See Laurentis as conveyed in Alcoff (1994: 108).

¹⁰¹ Alcoff (1994: 117).

authors, to conceive the category of woman as 'positional' avoids unchangeable and universalising reifications and yet allows for the objective reality of identity.

The objective of the 'third way' theorists is basically to show that despite the 'de-gendering' of categories, power is still in place. The idea that domination exists is based on the notion of exploitation of a group of people by others and that this is a historical constant.¹⁰² This is a common line taken by feminist theorists who feel uncomfortable with extreme relativistic positions. Rather than talking about categories they feel we should talk of a processual dynamics inherent in a social structural order fundamentally characterised by the production of difference. This 'difference' not only connotes distinction but hierarchical positions where different evaluative standards are in place. What is universalised, thus, is not a categorical system but a system which constitutes hierarchies. Thus, only a 'politics of location' offers a way out of the ethical cul-de-sac that postmodernism conveys when maintaining that *any* ethical position is always relative to individuals' particular social identities and material interests.¹⁰³

The political dimension of female oppression has proven to be the most resilient to be seen from a deconstructivist model. Even convinced postmodern theorists like Fraser and Nicholson find difficulties when it comes to relativistic claims regarding ethical, moral and evaluative assertions. Whilst they fully reject the notion of a unity of women they propose a historicist politically oriented conceptual approach which permits the retention of the idea of a general theory of gender inequality. By advocating the need to find a solidarity among the diversity of experiences of women in their oppression, they implicitly adopt a diachronically and synchronically universal notion of women's oppression.¹⁰⁴ This attempts to find a middle way, however, do not fully engage with the crucial point of whether we can pin-point a global 'female experience' which could unify varied and historically changing groups of people into a female subjectivity which could justify a particular political activity. The desire to link social unequal positions with the notion of womanhood (as opposed to that of malehood) tacitly adopts a global notion of sex identity which necessarily runs across different social locations. Thus, defeating

¹⁰² Masculinity studies have followed similar positions as to the viability of a unified category of men. By deconstructing this category, masculinity studies have conveyed the idea that power relations are very much present too within men: "we suggest that ethnographic studies of the production of gendered difference offer new ways of looking at 'masculinity' which take us beyond the structures imposed by continued use of a single category of 'men' (...) the shifting and contingent relation between 'masculinity' and 'men' and power becomes clear when we examine the enactment of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities in a single setting (...) Multiple gendered (and other) identities, each of which depends on context and the specific and immediate relations between actors and audience, are fluid and they are often subversive of dominant factors". Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994:10).

¹⁰³ Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994:44).

¹⁰⁴ Fraser and Nicholson (1990b:34-35).

the very same argument of 'locality' with which these authors attempt to bridge essentialist models.

Feminist Bodies

"Because of the abolition of slavery, the 'declaration' of 'colour' is now considered discriminatory. But that does not hold true of the 'declaration' of 'sex', which not even women dream of abolishing. I say: it is about time to do so."¹⁰⁵

Wittig made this radical statement during the early stages of second wave feminism. In her seminal paper "The Category of Sex" she conveyed a position which continued to resonate among postmodern theorists. She clearly notes that the dual division of sex/gender is a social product not a biological given, one which is detrimental to women, and therefore susceptible to (necessary) transformation. Biology is, thus, to be placed at the centre of social constructionist debates. Running through the themes outlined above, that is, the ontological dimension of the category of woman, the epistemological debates around women's consciousness and the nature of patriarchal power relations, there is a core notion, namely that of the embodied nature of women's social status and that of the social nature of women's physical features. Wittig's text suggests that sex is a category which stems from social arrangements; that the sexual division, which has been allocated to the natural order, should be considered as stemming from power relationships which impose a 'naturalness' upon it. The category of sex, Wittig, states, does not exist *a priori* before society.

This was a radical statement in a phase when feminist theorisation was trapped in a 'Beauvoirian feminism' which radically separated sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders. In de Beauvoir, as noted above, the attempt to escape biological reductionism failed due to her incapacity to understand the social nature of the physicality of humans. This is an internal paradox, it has been argued, between the social and the natural which will become one of the central debates in postmodern feminism.¹⁰⁶

As we have seen in the discussion above the body had been a topic in feminist writing from the beginning, but it never assumed a clear ontological and analytical status. It is precisely the introduction of postmodernist tenets which bring embodied features of humans to the fore and make this the central notion of social constructionist accounts.

¹⁰⁵ Wittig (1982: 68).

¹⁰⁶ We have seen how early feminists adopted Stoller's binary division of sex (biology) and gender (society) to problematise women's established social roles (see particularly Millet and Oakley above). In doing so the biological elements remained barely questioned. Men and women as biological entities were taken for granted; what was problematised was the social evaluations made of this 'immutable' biological fact. I take the notion of Beauvoirian feminism from Hughes and Witz (1997).

In this regard there are several lines taken even within the so called postmodern feminists. We have seen that early 'postmodern' theorists like Irigaray and Cixous were strongly criticised for their essentialist bias. Gatens articulates a strong argument against those feminists who wish to emphasise a fundamental difference between men and women based on their subjective experience of their anatomical features: "the female body cannot provide the ontological foundation required by those who assert an essential sexual difference" and the feminists of difference who, in seeking to uncover a *écriture féminine*, in fact collude with the biologist discourse at the root of the constitution of a female category taken to be inferior to that of male.¹⁰⁷

In Irigaray's 'labial politics', we encounter a important contradiction. While placing an emphasis on the embodiment of subjective experiences, which puts the body at the centre of attention, however, she ultimately reifies the dual category of male and female as a biological given. Such an argument concords with those who maintain that biological differences are at the root of existing social relations.¹⁰⁸

In Kristeva we also find a strong critique of early theorists for accepting without questioning the 'sex-gender system'. She argued that this dual division was in itself a linguistic trap which colluded with the perpetuation of women's oppression by participating in its constitution. However, she herself has also been criticised for adopting a kind of biological essentialism by accepting Lacanian psychoanalytical frameworks which locate identity formation in notions like the 'object'; a notion with clear roots in embodied features, especially female embodied features.¹⁰⁹

The 'problem of biology' is, then, at the centre of the debate. Even when it is accepted that the notion of women as a 'collective' may be an effect of cultural arrangements, biology and materiality seem to transcend and be resistant to such a constructionist stance. Riley has noted how difficult it has been 'to speak against the body'. Let us remember that standpoint feminism strongly argues that it is the specificity of women's bodies that constitutes a specific female consciousness. Even as a convinced postmodern feminist, Riley talks of how damaging it would be to ignore the powerful distinct realities of the body as sexed: "All bodies must be male or female, and the particularities, specificity and differences of each need to be recognised and represented in specific terms. The social and patriarchal disavowal of the specificity of women's bodies is a function, not only of discriminatory social practices, but more insidiously, of the phallogentrism invested in the regimes of knowledge."¹¹⁰ For theorists like Riley, the

¹⁰⁷ Gatens (1999:231).

¹⁰⁸ See Shildrick and Price (1999:6-7) for a comment on this point.

¹⁰⁹ See Kristeva (1982).

¹¹⁰ As quoted in Riley (1999:221).

fact that women's bodies have been denied means that it is necessary to make them 'visible' again. Such a necessity would not accord with a complete 'dissolution' of sexed bodies. Riley thus contends that there is indeed a 'specificity of women's bodies'.

As noted above, and worthy of mentioning it again, is not solely postmodern deconstructionist philosophy which destabilises the notion of sexual biological essentialism. Black feminists incorporated interesting accounts which seriously undermined the notion of unitary sexed selves. Bell hooks argued that, with regard to black women slaves, the analysis of their embodied nature presented a paradoxical feature, that is, they were both simultaneously regarded as 'masculinized subhuman creatures', and therefore fit to perform male tasks, and as 'sexual temptresses', that is, the essence of female sexual objects. The body, therefore, hooks stressed, cannot be seen as 'unmarked colourlessness'.¹¹¹ However, suggesting arguments like that of hooks, ultimately however they never provide explanatory theoretical accounts of the constructed nature of human physical reality.

As already mentioned it was with the introduction of post-structuralism and post-modern accounts, such as that of Foucault and Derrida, that some feminists perceived the need to develop a non-essentialist theory of the body. Social constructionist approaches to the body, however, took different directions. Authors like Donna Haraway, Alison Caddick, Moira Gatens, and Elizabeth Grosz, who all argued for a deconstruction of the traditional dualism inherent in feminist theory between body and mind, presented different versions of social constructionism. To re-appraise their differences is illustrative of the core issues involved in this debate and particularly of the unresolved questions which continue to permeate.

As seen above Gatens conveys a clear critique of the dualism of sexual difference on the basis that it perpetuates repressive cultural mechanisms. To counter this, she advocates a notion of difference which uncovers how discourses of biology constitute the very same biological differentiation. Indeed, it is through constituting difference that bodies are established as sexually different. Feminists' task is therefore to "interrogate the means by which bodies become invested with differences which are then taken to be fundamental ontological differences"¹¹² Riley makes similar remarks regarding the inherent essentialist positions and the dangers implicit in them. Above all, says Riley, the body, and also the gendered body, is a temporal entity which varies in its 'gendered' nature. Thus, the way forward for true emancipation is to destroy all existing ideas of sexual difference, including that of 'woman'.¹¹³

¹¹¹ hooks as quoted in Shildrick and Price (1999:5).

¹¹² Gatens (1999:231).

¹¹³ Riley (1999:225).

Once again this radical biological relativism was met with caution among main stream feminist theorists on the same bases as above outlined regarding the feminist theorization of power, namely that the dissolution of the notion of a biological sexual identity may lead equally to dissolve any ground for political practice and thus lead to political defeatism. This is a point clearly made by Haraway when she writes that radical constructivist positions like that of Butler's have been resisted for fear of losing the notion of women's agency and woman as subject which can be the bases of justifying political agendas. Consequently she suggests to continue to work, if only for strategic political purposes, within the sex/gender distinction. Haraway's argument thus is one that, whilst fully embracing social constructionist accounts of the materiality of the body, leave unproblematized the (political) usefulness of such reified division, which is what so forcefully Butler is trying to demonstrate.¹¹⁴

Despite all these internal tensions, the process of incorporation of the physicality of the body into the feminist debate did not diminish in its vigour. Other stances took different approaches which emphasised the constitutional power of physical features in relation to subjective experience. In Grosz we find the incorporation of phenomenological stances, like that of Merleau-Ponty, into feminist questions. By appropriating Merleau-Ponty's notions Grosz coined the notion of 'corporeal feminism' in which she places the body at the centre of attention. She argues that subjective experience is the result of a combination of variables in which the 'corporeally inscribed' social features are an integral part of the individual's identity. A 'corporeal feminism' has to take into account that there is no unitary category of a biological body but rather 'only particular kinds of bodies'. Merleau-Ponty and Lacan are instrumentalized by her to argue for an 'inside' (subjective) experience of the body. She states that an external dimension to the embodied experience has to be acknowledged and that the body should be seen as "as a writing or inscriptive surface".¹¹⁵ For the latter Grosz derives inspiration from authors like Nietzsche, Foucault and Deleuze, and introduces the metaphor of the 'Moebius strip', a sort of eight shaped surface which shows the external and internal

¹¹⁴ See Haraway (1991: 134). Her notion of 'de-centering women', that is, of conveying no unitary images but fractured, multiple identities appears more a reaction to a single identity of women rather than the complete abolition of the categories of sex. For instance a woman of color is conceived by her as a cyborg identity, that is, a mixture of identities (gender, class and race) that make sense in relation to some affinities of interest with other 'different' women's identities. Haraway continues, thus, to invoke a sort of unexplained ahistorical category of woman's identity by conceiving it in some sense opposed to that of a man's identity.

¹¹⁵ "Biological, anatomical, physiological and neuro-physiological processes cannot be automatically attributed a natural status. It is not clear that what is biological is necessarily natural. Biological and organic functions are the raw materials of any processes of production of determinate forms of subjectivity and material, including corporal, existence. If this is the case, universal or quasi-universal physiological givens, such as menstrual, anatomical and hormonal factors, need to be carefully considered as irreducible features of the writing surface, distinct from the script inscribed: a kind of 'texture' more than a designated content for the 'text' or the 'intextuated body' produced." Grosz (1990:71).

permanently merged.¹¹⁶ Although Grosz's insights are important for understanding the body as a connection between structural features and individual subjectivity, she leaves some concepts unexplained. In Grosz, the notion of the 'internal' is never clear, what it is that is internal, how it 'becomes' internal rather than external, and exactly how it gets constituted is never accounted for. A similar appraisal can be made of her understanding of the body, which by being put forward as: "the site of the intermingling of mind and culture, [which] can also be seen as the symptom and mode of expression and communication of a hidden interior or depth,"¹¹⁷ is posited as a sort of junction between what is clearly social and a kind of non-social and essential realm of individuality.

Butler obviously features prominently within the feminist debate on the social constructed nature of the body. Clearly, Butler's performative theory of sex and gender presents the most radical social constructionist position regarding the body. With one of her most radical statements that "there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body"¹¹⁸, Butler clearly points to a social constructivist tradition which emphasises the constitutive power of the discursive and the fundamentally social nature of the materiality of humans.

Heavily drawing on debates inaugurated by earlier postmodern feminists such as Kristeva, Irigaray and Cicoux, her work, particularly her second book *Bodies that Matter*, focuses on the problem created by the dynamics between discursive practices and physicality. Butler, like other feminists theorists, also appraises the work of Lacan, reconstructs it, and applies it to her own ideas. Lacan's explorations of the 'imaginary' as somewhat independent of 'real' bodily features is instrumentalized by Butler, who employs this distinction to explain the formation of sex/gender identity. Butler, however, takes Lacan further by reworking a more sociological account where the dynamics between physicality and sex/gender identity operate under the notion of 'discursivity'. For the latter she draws on Foucault's notions of 'regulatory ideals' to establish that discursive formations are not only evaluative but in fact constitute those bodies that they name.¹¹⁹ She extensively argues that to conceive the body as a discursive construction is not to deny its existence as a physical reality: "to claim that discourse is formative is not to claim that it originates, causes, or exhaustively composes that which it concedes; rather

¹¹⁶ See Grosz (1994). Grosz suggests that Western philosophy has been established on a foundation of profound somatophobia and borrows from Lacan the image of the Moebius in order to describe embodied subjectivity/psychical corporality: "The Moebius has the advantage of showing the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another. This model also provides a way of problematizing and rethinking the relations between the inside and the outside of the subject, its psychical interior and its corporeal exterior, by showing not their fundamental identity or reducibility but the torsion of the one into the other (Grosz, 1994: xii).

¹¹⁷ Grosz as quoted in Marshall (1996).

¹¹⁸ Butler (1993:10).

¹¹⁹ Butler (1993:1).

it is to claim that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body"¹²⁰ To the Foucauldian notions she adds the concept of performativity put forward by philosophers of language like Austin.¹²¹ Her position takes the form of a 'discursive performativity'¹²² in which, adopting notions from the speech act theorists, she argues that the repetitive performance of practices (verbal or non-verbal, like acts, gestures, accents, etc.) are at the base of the constitution of reality, and hence of bodily sexed identities. Butler reworks the notion of performativity to encompass a view which contends that it is through the repetition of acts that the 'process of sedimentation of what we might call *materialisation*' occurs.¹²³ In this process 'non viable' bodies are constituted too, but as bodies that have failed to qualify as fully 'normal' according to the standard norms of sexed identities. These 'abjected' bodies are the key to understanding the constructed reality of our material sexed world and by virtue of the challenge they pose to the 'symbolic hegemony' they hold the key to future political agendas.¹²⁴

Butler presents a theoretical framework which clearly suggests that, though the 'female body' may be a clear 'marginalized body', along with those of colour, age, disability, and so on, the analytical attention should be placed on the production of bodies in general and not that of particular (female) bodies. For Butler the commitment to a feminist political agenda should not be constrained to the female body but to whatever form corporeality may take.

Butler's constructionist position presents the strongest criticism of former feminist notions of womanhood. The essentialized and universalised notion of female identity which most feminism advocates and accepts applies not only to the collective social aspect of this identity but also to individual subjectivity, the underlying assumption being that there was a common identity behind all 'embodied' beings socially positioned as 'women'. Butler's political criticism is that to accept such essentialism is detrimental in that feminists do not realise that such categorisation has the political effect of producing what it wants to dissolve. If feminism adheres to a unified notion of 'woman' then it becomes normative and hence 'exclusionary in principle'.¹²⁵ Accordingly, therefore, she opposes solutions like that of Kristeva who contends that despite not having ontological foundation, the category of woman should still be in place as a political tool. For Butler such a position is at the very root of the social normative

¹²⁰ Butler (1993: 10).

¹²¹ Austin (1970).

¹²² Butler (1993:12).

¹²³ Butler (1993:15).

¹²⁴ Butler (1993:16).

¹²⁵ Butler (1990b:324, 325).



regulations that it seeks to destroy. Political activity, thus, should take other forms, forms which fundamentally question the politics of identity:

"the critique of the subject means more than the rehabilitation of a multiple subject whose various 'parts' are interrelated within an overriding unity (...) indeed, the political critique of the subject questions whether making a conception of identity into the ground of politics, however internally complicated, prematurely forecloses the possible cultural articulations of the subject-position that new politics might well generate."¹²⁶

Butler advocates the possibility of dissolving the dual opposition of sex/gender distinctions. Given that there are not enough biological grounds to sustain such a rigid division,¹²⁷ then, social factors acquire strong determinative powers with regard to reification of the binary distinction between sexes/genders. To dissolve such binary distinction should not be "lamented as the failure of a feminist political theory, but, rather, affirmed as the promise of the possibility of complex and generative subject positions as well as coalitional strategies that neither presuppose nor fix their constitutive subjects in their place."¹²⁸ The direct corollary of such a position is that political practice should be opened to the possibilities of 'resignification' that the performative process of constitution of gender/sex identities offers. Gender, Butler argues, is the *effect* of an array of actions of imitation. Within this process there is an openness to 'resignification' and recontextualization which offers the potentiality of new forms of social organisation.¹²⁹ To politically ground activity on a unified identity would be to obliterate the fundamental fact that a unified identity is nothing other than the result of power relations. Thus, sex identity cannot act as a political justification because it is in itself the product of political power.

I critically appraise Butler's model in Part III but as a closing point I will advance that I consider Butler's constructionist view as a closure to the emphasis on the body that started with de Beauvoir. Butler puts the body at the centre of her sociological account and provides an ontological explanation of the body/subject and structure/individual relationship. Her powerful image that it is the imprint in the surface of the body through all sorts of bodily acts, gestures, movements and significations which is at the basis of the illusion of an inner self is the most radical social constructionist account encountered in feminist ranks: "the idealisation of the coherence is an effect of a corporeal signification. (...) Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts

¹²⁶ Butler (1990b:327).

¹²⁷ Butler (1990b) See note 15, page 340 which points to bio-genetic research into the sex gene that shows that there are more than two genetic sexes.

¹²⁸ Butler (1990b:339).

¹²⁹ Butler (1990b:338).

which constitute its reality, and if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is a function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy thorough the surface politics of the body".¹³⁰ In Butler's model, we encounter the most powerful and convincing critique of the dual opposition between sex and gender and consequently the most developed sociological account of an understanding of the sexed body as a constructed entity: "this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender, indeed, it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all."¹³¹

Thus, with her theoretical position Butler aims to transcend several of the dichotomies present in the social scientific debate, namely that of sex/gender, nature/culture, idealism/materialism, individual/society and so on. She brings full attention to the body and the dangers of taking it as a biological given and her position concurs with those empirical studies which confirm that anatomical differences are only taken to be significant in particular cultural settings.¹³²

1.2.1.4. Appraisal of the feminist constructionist debate

Currently it would seem that feminist constructivism understands the social nature of the body in two different ways. Firstly, there are theorists who argue that patriarchal structures imprint women's and men's bodies with different meanings which locate the former in a position of inferiority in a male-dominated society. For these theorists, biological sex is taken as a given, and hence not problematized, unlike gender, the cultural meanings attached to the body. Secondly, authors who fully embrace constructionist views argue that the body constantly alters its meaning, its shape and the practices it compels. In this view, the body, both in its material reality and the symbolic meanings attached to it, is the product of cultural activity and thus its pre-existent materiality cannot be seen as the foundation of fixed gender entities. Taken to its logical conclusions, this position has, more or less explicitly, contested the binary division of sexed bodies, which dominates our world view, as a biological given. More specifically, it has not only problematized the belief that women's bodies are systematically different from men's bodies, but crucially has questioned the certainty of a unitary universal category or womanhood.

¹³⁰ Butler (1990b:326).

¹³¹ Butler (1990a:7).

¹³² Interesting albeit rather unknown anthropological studies point out that the ascription of maleness or femaleness through the genitals (penis or absence) is far from being a cultural universal. See Kessler and McKenna's or Kaplan and Rogers' work as quoted in Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994:37).

These two, broadly speaking, different positions are currently generating productive tensions for the general social constructionist debate, by opening up to sociological scrutiny, deliberation and contestation some taken for granted analytical and theoretical assumptions. The areas of contestation between these two, broad, feminists positions, reflect general areas of tension within sociological debate at large, revolving around the opposition between materialistic and idealistic accounts of natural and social. Indeed, from these different epistemological position the sociological enquiry of the body has been forced to re-examine the dualisms *nature/society* and *individual/structure*.

Regarding to the debate on the dynamics between nature and society, the need within sociological accounts to clarify the exact meaning of the declaration that the body is a 'social' construction has brought about an array of issues. Indeed, confusion and controversy abound over the exact nature of what is the 'social' and what it means for the body to be 'socially constructed'. Within this debate, post-structural discursive accounts, which envisage the natural body as a product of cultural practices, have been criticised as a form of linguistic idealism which 'disembodies' the body, that is, takes away the 'real' materiality of the physical body. Some have consequently argued that a more 'carnal sociology' should be in place.¹³³ which does not disregard the corporal nature of individual activity. However, very rarely has there been questioning and re-definition of the very same categories of 'body', 'nature' and 'society' and any attempt to do so, e.g. Judith Butler, has been too readily dismissed as a form of radical naive idealism. In short, to establish what is 'nature' (of the body) and what is 'society' and how they causally interrelate is very much a centre of this debate and will inform one of the main lines of debate of this thesis.

The different materialist and idealists explanations given about the dichotomy nature/society are intimately connected and give rise to different views regarding to another central sociological dichotomy, that of individual versus structure. Most prominently, there is a discrepancy as to how to understand the nature of macro social phenomena. Most current feminism attempts to argue a form of sociological materialism which separates macro-reality from 'discursive' activity and grants priority to macro-reality. Indeed macro-structures are not to be seen as 'collapsed' with the idealist world of discourse. There is an external reality independent to individuals' activity which constrains and determines its dynamics. This theoretical manoeuvre stems from the fear that postmodern discursive accounts do away with macro-structural phenomena seen as the bases of the dynamics of exploitative and oppressive social

¹³³ See, Davis (1997) or Scott and Morgan (1993) and Howson and Inglis (2001) emphasis the to bring the body back from structural accounts we have to pay attention to 'bodily' activity.

systems. Some material feminists, thus, have argued that late postmodern and post-structuralist accounts, which emphasise the constitutive power of discourse, "discount the world of 'things' for the world of 'words'".¹³⁴ Clearly, there is an ontological issue at stake here, which revolves around defining the transcendental and 'external' status of social reality and the type of causal connection governing the dynamics within the micro-phenomena of individuals' activity. Indeed, the radical materialist position is that a social 'reality' exists outside the discursive activity of individuals. In Jackson in particular this position takes a strong positivistic flavour with a specific ontological commitment. She defines materialistic perspectives as "presupposing a 'real' world outside and prior to discourse" and hence, "irreconcilable with much postmodernist thinking."¹³⁵ Although Jackson's radical materialist position may not be taken by many, it does not only reflect a particular understanding of postmodern discursive accounts, but crucially points to the need to further specify what as sociologists we mean exactly by a 'real' (social) world existing outside and prior to discourse. It is a crucial issue to further clarify what sociological explanations imply by the claim the human activities are 'social' in genesis. The criticism that postmodernism 'does away' with the notion of social structure implies different understandings, not only of the constitutive power of social reality but of the exact ontological status of the latter. Indeed, the Durkheimian suggestion that we need to treat social reality as a 'thing' has proved open to a number of interpretations, different paths to understanding that 'thing'. Jackson's claim that there is a 'material extra discursive phenomena' which possesses its own inherent 'reality' as a 'social fact'¹³⁶ indeed forces us to further clarify what lies behind the postmodern claim that 'discourse' is 'productive', what it is understood as 'discursive' activity, what is its constitutive powers and so on. It is important to clarifying the main points of these two different sociological explanations which form opposed views and the implicit or explicit ontological commitments they adopt. This is another central line of this thesis.

Connected to the above, there are another two main issues which are interconnected but have also been brought to light by the criticisms of postmodern discursive accounts. First, postmodernist radical constructivist positions are criticised for a political and moral relativism which precludes any form of legitimised political activity. Structural materialist theorists perceive postmodern tenets as purely idealistic and failing to account for the existence of structural social inequalities, that is, if structural inequalities are not seen as prior to 'words', as 'materiality existing *outside* language and discourse,' then there is no future for any political activity. Postmodernism thus establishes a

¹³⁴ Jackson (1998:25).

¹³⁵ Jackson (1998:25).

¹³⁶ Jackson (1998:26).

political relativism which does not allow the validation of any struggle. As suggested by Biddy Martin, if we fully accept Foucault, the question of women's oppression is obsolete.¹³⁷ Radical constructivism, by debunking the concept of selfhood, is seen to do away with the notion of agency and autonomy. Discursive accounts, like that of Butler's performative theory, which sees the subject's sex/gender identity as a 'series of performances without a subject', are seen as precluding the possibility of a normative vision of feminist politics in particular and of identity politics in general. Further, the critique of discursive accounts contends that, if the subject is seen as the 'effect' of macro-discursive forces with no independent capacity for individual creativity, then she is also logically unable to challenge the social discourse which constitutes her. Inherent in this criticism of postmodern discursivist position is another set of tensions which in a sense contradicts the accusation depicted above that discursive accounts do away with external reality. When Benhabib accuses Butler of over-socializing a subject with no capacity of free calculative agency -and thus incapable of genuine resistance and political activity- she is not only contradicting the materialist accusations placed above but is opening up another array of issues to consider¹³⁸. These include the need to define the social bases underlying the constitution of the individual as a subjective consciousness, the causal dynamics between individuals' subjective activity and macro-structural phenomena, the nature of agency and calculative activity, and, above all, the nature and definition of macro-structures of domination. Also the accusation of cultural and discursive determinism has been brought to the debate about the body via the Foucauldian claim 'we are bodies totally imprinted by history'¹³⁹, which has been interpreted as an over-socialized view of individual agency leading to political fatalism. Thus, the powerful postmodern deconstruction of the notion of the self and of an independent stable inner subjective sense of identity related to our biology, forces reconsideration of issues of construction of the self, individual agency, resistance and political activity. Above all, we need to reconsider the notion 'power' and its relationship with individual activity and further define its meanings and different understandings. This array of issues, although intimately connected with the ones above, inform a third central line of discussion in this thesis.

¹³⁷ As quoted in Alcoff (1994: 106).

¹³⁸ Benhabib (1995) For Benhabib, who reads a Butlerian position as 'objectifying' the subject, that is as understanding the subject as the 'object of the discourse' rather than 'the one who utilises the discourse', then feminist politics becomes impossible since the self becomes a "ventriloquist for discourses operating through her or 'mobilising' her". Thus postmodernism is criticised here for introducing another form of determinism which prioritizes cultural arrangements and social discourse over individual rational calculative capacities.

¹³⁹ Foucault (1991:83).

1.2.2. The 'new' sociology of the body

The path that feminism opens up in sociological thinking is paralleled by new currents in sociological theory which emphasise the importance of the body. Indeed by the end of the so called second wave of feminist theory, we see an emerging sociological arena of enquiry, namely that of The Sociology of the Body. As a general theoretical enterprise it concentrates on highlighting and correcting for the absence, or disregard, of the physical materiality of humans which dominates traditional mainstream sociology.

This is not to say that there are not earlier instances in which there is an interest in the body. Roy Porter traces a history which reveals that the body has drawn interest from many different areas of social sciences from early times. For example an interest in the body can be found in different founding figures in sociological enquiry such as Durkheim, Simmel and Mauss.¹⁴⁰ Mauss, in particular, has an important role in the sociology of the body through his seminal paper 'The techniques of the body' where he indicates the cultural conventionality of embodied practices, and thus, their social nature.¹⁴¹

However, the new interest in the body found in the 'sociology of the body' inaugurated by some theorists in the 1980s, as well as positing the body as an object of sociological enquiry in its own right, also introduces an emphasis on a sociological understanding which departs from rigid macro-structuralist accounts and focuses on individuals' subjective life and interpretations of their own realities. This shift also brings sociologists of the body closer to analyses which stress language, discourse and representations over more materialistic structural notions like labour markets.

The social constructionist emphasis has a number of dimensions. First the emphasis on the socially constructed nature of the body is seen as a necessary step to contest 'nativist' beliefs, that is, that biological imperatives are behind cultural arrangements. Rather, sociology of the body from the outset introduces the notion of the body as the product of cultural historical arrangements. Secondly, there is an emphasis on exposing the embodied nature of social relations, and how social classifications such as class, age, gender, and race are fundamentally saturated with embodied practices. This particular area specifically brings a political agenda in which an exploration of the cultural mechanisms which are at the basis of the construction of the body is paramount. Thirdly, the sociology of the body establishes the division between individual and society by foregrounding everyday experience as embodied. Fourth, the sociology of the body also aims to transcend, deconstruct and explain the body/mind dualism and its correlated categories of rationality and agency versus embodied instinctual drives. Fifth, there is an

¹⁴⁰ As reported by Porter (1992) and Shilling (2001).

¹⁴¹ Mauss (1973).

interest in exploring the role of the body in the constitution of social identities, and particularly the more political dimension of how those identities are 'naturalised'. Finally, encompassing all the above, there is the general epistemological issue around the ontological boundaries between the social and the natural.

This 'new' sociology of the body¹⁴² has located itself at the convergence of several theoretical strands. Some have even pointed out that a particular aim has been that of going beyond most feminist approaches and most postmodern approaches to the body by maintaining that whereas the first falls into forms of biological essentialism, for the latter the body becomes a cerebral, discursive and non-material entity.¹⁴³ Thus, the new sociology of the body takes up 'the problem of the body' with the specific theoretical intention of analytically grounding a more 'embodied' sociology which accounts not only for individual subjective experiences versus structural arrangements, but also the dichotomy at the centre of sociological enquiry, that of nature/society. The sociology of the body attempts to focus on and establish the social ontological nature of the body. It borrows some central ideas from feminism but extends them beyond the dual category of sex/gender identity.

The new sociology of the body has wider implications for sociological enquiry. As Frank points out, a sociological theory of the body profoundly influences the theoretical frameworks which traditionally have supported sociology. The body is seen as a reshaping force which should not be taken to be a 'sub-field' but rather as a new way of 'doing sociology', which, as pointed out above, produces a shift from more macro-structural accounts to a more interpretative micro-structural notion of social life.¹⁴⁴

Berthelot argues that the renewed emphasis on the body has the potential to transform mainstream social theory. The body however appears in most sociological debates without a systematic analysis of its status being undertaken. There is the tacit understanding that the body has to be 'sociologized', yet the very same notion of the body is unproblematized as a sociological object of study. Many empirical studies take for granted the body and its materiality (e.g.: sociology of sport, sociology of food, diet, beauty, and so on). Berthelot, thus, directs our attention to the fact that there has been little interest in defining what is exactly meant by 'body', what the interest in the body signifies, and what are the epistemological and theoretical issues involved in stressing its importance.¹⁴⁵ Berthelot's response to this is that the body has the privilege of being at the junction of fundamentally opposed views in sociological enquiry, namely,

¹⁴² Term coined by Connell in (1998).

¹⁴³ See Scott and Morgan (1993:15).

¹⁴⁴ See Frank (1990), Connell (1998) and Porter (1992).

¹⁴⁵ Berthelot (1995a) and (1995b).

structuralist and subjectivist causal explanations. Thus, the body acquires a powerful 'epistemic' status. Both positions envisage the body as incorporating social features, but this incorporation is conceived differently: either as the individual incorporation of systemic features and structural effects or as an actor's process of adaptation and symbolic appropriation of reality by which the social environment becomes constituted. In short, the body can be thought of as a mirror, or as text, or as a social operator. These are fundamentally different metaphors of the body as a social entity which reveal different emphases. The body is either seen as a passively incorporating the social as a bearer of cultural meanings or as actively transforming the social. Although not fully developed and only partly tacitly acknowledged, Berthelot's comments raise fundamental issues, particularly that of defining exactly the nature of the body.

Brian Turner provides the first attempts at a comprehensive theory of the body. Turner's text *The Body and Society* published in 1984, became a seminal text in which he presents the general argument that social sciences have often neglected the most obvious fact about human beings, namely, their bodies, because these were considered to be limited to the realm of nature. As a sociologist of the body he attempts to highlight the socially constructed nature of our bodies. He sets out to systematise a conceptual framework for a sociology of the body which develops four areas in which bodies 'encounter' society. First, reproduction of existing structures (like, for instance, patriarchal systems); secondly, regulations of bodies in space (taking the metaphor of the panopticon directly from Foucault); thirdly, individual practices regarding the body, such as self-control and restraint; and fourth the public presentations of the body in social spaces. Turner has particularly highlighted commodification processes and consumerism as crucial to understanding new social movements.¹⁴⁶ Turner's views originate from earlier theorists who place the body at the centre of their analysis. He elaborates on Elias's notions of the 'civilised' body, and on Foucault's micro-physics of power. He particularly draws on the later's emphasis on the embodiment of power mechanisms and its role in the constitution of individuals' identities.

Finally, Shilling introduces Bourdieu's model of habitus and his theory of practice within British sociology of the body. Bourdieu will be heavily instrumentalized by authors who wish to emphasise the more 'structural' aspects of the body which are said to be forgotten in the more 'discursive' approaches of Foucault and postmodern feminists. Recently, feminists have also articulated a preference for the more structuralist notions which Bourdieu provides with his concept of habitus. Although not directly dealing with gender, Bourdieu articulates an analytical framework in which the explanation for the

¹⁴⁶ Turner (1989).

reproduction of structural systems places the body at the centre of his sociological explanation. Pierre Bourdieu's notion of habitus has been operationalized by some feminists as well as sociologists of the body who have wanted to stress a more structuralist position than that of post-modernists.¹⁴⁷ The Bourdieuan notion of embodied habitus as incorporating the structural macro-world into the individual, has emerged as analytically very useful to feminists and others who have sought to describe the domination of oppressed groups as an internalised, but unconscious, self-regulatory mechanism rather than through direct, external and overt oppressive power. It has also provided analytical tools to emphasise an objective external reality outside individual practices. Bourdieu's theories of embodied class distinctions have helped theorists of the body to articulate political agendas. A number of empirical studies have taken the form of analysing the mapping of symbolic systems around bodies. By analysing the existence and production of 'different' bodies, the relationship between difference and social dominance has been analysed.¹⁴⁸

This emphasis on structural features coexists equally with more postmodern versions, but such coexistence is not devoid of the kinds of internal contradictions already detected in feminism. Foucauldian discursive versions are also operationalized to analyse how the body is involved in the perpetuation of social inequalities. Foucault's theory of the exercise regimes of disciplinary power is at the root of numerous studies on the implications of the embodiment of social regimes for the perpetuation of social inequalities. The new sociology of the body takes Foucault's emphasis on body and power and reads it as a theory of social control where bodies are seen as the sites where this control takes place. As has been pointed out, Foucault's investigations of surveillance and training become a model for much work on the sociology of the body.

The theoretical tensions which the 'new sociology of the body' brings to the fore, makes of it more than a sub-field of sociological theory. Its main claims present unresolved issues which revolve around fundamental epistemological insights into social theory. Taken directly from the feminist emphasis on the differentiated embodied nature of individuals' subjective experience, specifically focusing on sexual identity, sociology of the body aims to extend this further by noting that what is needed is a theory of embodiment that takes account, not only of sexual difference, but of all social differences – racial, class, age, disability, and so on.

¹⁴⁷ See McNay (1999), (2000) and (2002), Witz (2003), Fowler (2003). Part III will further expand of the feminist incorporation of Bourdieu's theories. See mainly Shilling (1991) and (1993) for a sociologist of the body appropriating Bourdieu's concepts.

¹⁴⁸ See Connell (1998).

The new sociology of the body takes different positions regarding the social and ontological nature of the body. Without producing a specific body of theory to analytically ground its position, it tacitly acknowledges the open and fluid nature of the body present in social constructionist accounts.

However the materiality of the body needs to be accounted for and although professing some faith in postmodern and post-structural accounts, there is an uneasy relationship with their more radical discursive elements. To avoid the accusation of idealism thus becomes a fundamental concern of sociology of the body, which places itself in contrast to social constructionism for conveying a notion of the body as a passive blank canvas, modelled by society. They see the post-structuralist approach as conceiving the body as not rooted in nature but as constituted by social meanings, thus, the body disappears as a natural phenomenon. Shilling insists that theorists who conceive meanings as stemming from language and representation contend that language is not to be seen as a vehicle to represent the pre-existing world but as constitutive of it. If language is conceived as a system of arbitrary signs which acquire meaning, not from any intrinsic connection with the world they describe, but from the inter-relation with other signs, reality is said to be unknowable as a fixed essence but only as a representation. Reality thus loses any role or input into the social arrangements that describe it.¹⁴⁹

A general lack of analytical definition and understanding of crucial notions like discursivity, constructivism, the body and its materiality, the social and the natural is also found throughout the new sociology of the body. It is therefore apparent that what is needed in sociology of the body is the incorporation of theoretical account of the exact meaning of the notion of construction and discursive when applied to the physical materiality.

1.2.3. Symbolic Interactionism: interacting bodies

The emphasis on the body which is found in Symbolic Interactionism makes of it a particularly important case. Symbolic Interactionism suggests that meanings are constituted through micro-interactive processes and that the individual's appearance and bodily practices are central.

The Sociology of the Body has drawn heavily on symbolic interactionist theories to develop its arguments, for instance in the argument that the modern self is a representational self for whom body language, appearance and gestures are constitutive

¹⁴⁹ See mainly Shilling (1991) and (1993:13,81) where he notes: "Foucault's epistemological view of the body means that it disappears as a material or biological phenomenon. The biological, physical or material body can never be grasped (...) as its existence is permanently deferred behind the grids of meaning imposed by discourse."

of self-image.¹⁵⁰ Some Feminists in turn have found symbolic interactionism particularly useful to deconstruct the established image of human sexuality as a natural drive and to challenge the normative connotations that emerge from this, such as compulsory heterosexuality.¹⁵¹

Goffman presenting the self

Without being specifically concerned with the body, Symbolic Interactionism, reacting against heavily structuralist accounts like Parsons' functionalism, developed a theory which emphasised the individual's interactive processes as the locus of social organisation. Symbolic Interactionism took a Weberian line of analysis with emphasis on the interpretations of individuals as constitutive of society rather than on structural features. In this analytical framework individuals are seen as 'constituting' society fundamentally through interaction with others and the body is seen as central to this process.

For example, Goffman's account of the presentation of the self argues that social interaction is principally based upon a shared code of embodied practices. His work provided an array of concepts (face work, back stage, role distance) for approaching the ritualistic structure of the everyday world and its importance for self-identity. Goffman argued that in the micro-order of interaction people are constantly engaged in what he calls 'impression management', that is, we are permanently aware of the reactions of others towards us, and thus try to manage the impression we give to others. This is the 'interaction order' in which what people do when they are in interaction with others is both at the root of the constitution of their identities and the social scripts which organise their face-to-face micro-interactive processes.¹⁵²

Symbolic Interactionism goes further than the exploration of individual life, and points to the fundamental ontological issue of the nature and origin of meanings and consequently the nature and origins of social arrangements. It became concerned with studying the ways in which people give meaning to their bodies, feelings, selves, biographies, situations, and the wider social worlds in which they live. It is not concerned with broader guiding structures, but rather the fluidity, variability and contextuality of meanings. As a form of sociological enquiry it sets itself apart from social structural accounts. By understanding the social world as a dynamic multiplicity of interactive agents, rather than the product of external constraining macro-structures, symbolic interactionism understands social relations as a permanent process of becoming, rather

¹⁵⁰ Featherstone and Turner (1995b).

¹⁵¹ See particularly Jackson, Stevi (1982).

¹⁵² Goffman, Erving (1956), (1983) and fundamentally (1987).

than fixed and immutable as suggested by structuralist accounts. In contrast to Parsonian theory in which the emphasis is on the psychological internalization of norms, thus locating the human embodiment as irrelevant, notions such as impression management implicitly emphasise the centrality of the body in social interaction and therefore in the constitution of social meaning.

What is important to note for the present discussion is that symbolic interactionism proves to be an account which, by focusing on embodied interactive practices, can provide insights for transcending the dichotomies of structure/individual and nature/culture.¹⁵³ However, symbolic interactionism falls short in providing an explanation of the stability of social life, and particularly the exact nature of physicality. The body is seen as a tool in the process of social interaction, but it is rarely problematized as socially constituted in itself.¹⁵⁴

Sexual practices as a social construction

Stemming directly from Social Interactionism, a new focus of sociological enquiry developed fundamentally based on the analysis of sexuality. Sexuality had never been the focus of attention in sociological studies until the symbolic interactionist school focused its interest on sexual practices. The sociology of sexuality became an interesting point of intersection of all the issues debated in social constructionism, particularly around the body, individual subjectivity and social practices.

Initially the sociological interest in sexuality drew heavily on psychoanalysis, but for sociologists it was soon obvious that psychoanalysis contained an ambivalent discourse permeated with an acute essentialist bias. The notion of cultural repression of innate sexual drives was too essentialist and deterministic. What has been called 'the Freudian left' tried to resolve this analytical problem by linking Freudian notions with macro-structural Marxist analysis. However, sexuality, seen as a major foundation of the social order, remained biologically essentialized and sociologically unproblematized.¹⁵⁵

Thus, it was not until the introduction of a social interactionist framework that sociological enquiry became directly interested in sexuality as a case study to prove

¹⁵³Goffman himself has been actively involved in this debate. See particularly his last paper "The Interaction Order" (1983). With his notion of 'the interactive order' as that process where the perception of externality among individuals gets generated, he tries to find the link between the micro and the macro phenomena.

¹⁵⁴A note of caution should be made here regarding Goffman's, rather unacknowledged, paper (1977) "The Arrangements between the Sexes" in which he explicitly notes the artificial nature the division between male and female and the provisional nature of these biological categories.

¹⁵⁵Marcuse (1966). Contrary to Freud's notion that the repression of primary sexual desires is constitutive of 'civilization', Marcuse maintained this repression was an ideological device of capitalism, and that true progress had to overcome the repression of sexuality and set free the primary sexual desires of humans.

social constructionist theses. A major contribution in this field was Gagnon and Simon's text *Sexual Conduct. The Social Sources of Human Sexuality*,¹⁵⁶ in which the authors propose a view of sexuality which dismisses biology as a fundamental causal factor and introduces social factors at the root of sexual behaviour. Most importantly, they highlight the importance of social interaction as the basis of the constitution of sexual meanings and sexual practices. Fundamental to their account is the argument that to perceive sex as a biological drive is a cultural myth, and they empirically demonstrate that sexuality is socially directed and subject to a wide range of cultural variations. Therefore there is no absolute truth about sexuality: "sex acts", they contend, "are social objects. They have meanings because meanings are assigned to them by groups of which human beings are members, for there is nothing in the physiology of man which gives a dependable clue as to what pattern of activity will be followed toward them (...) the physiology does not supply the motives, designate the partners, invest the objects with performed passion, not even dictate the objectives to be achieved"¹⁵⁷. By taking as a case study sexual practices, a taken for granted biological phenomena, symbolic interactionism introduces a social constructionist approach in which nature, in this case the body and its sexual organs, is sociologically problematized. Sexual conduct, as another social construct, is learned in the same ways and through the same processes; it is acquired and assembled in human interaction, judged and performed in specific cultural and historical worlds. Sexual practices, including sexual orientation and sexual desires, are seen as 'constructed', and thus the body is also a social product.¹⁵⁸

This position developed into a more specific field of 'sociology of sexuality', which had its main exponent in Jeffrey Weeks. Weeks takes up the sociology of sexuality to stress that sex is not an instinct whose nature is fixed; rather it is a site where the personal and the political, the body and society, become a focus of social meanings and struggles. Weeks' work criticises the universalist and essentialist claims regarding individual sexual identities, and accordingly, he views as flawed the feminist explanatory framework in which accounts of sexual identity put forwards in terms of gender. He uses homosexuality as a case study to prove his social constructionist claims and to challenge the heterosexual bias found in some mainstream feminist theory. Principally, however, by taking up Foucauldian notions of the micro-physics of power, Weeks engages in the political dimension of sexual practices, a theme which symbolic interactionism had not directly developed, and in doing so takes a relativistic position rather than adopting absolute views of normative sexual standards.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Gagnon and Simon (1977).

¹⁵⁷ Kunh, M. as quoted in Plummer (1982:225).

¹⁵⁸ See Gagnon and Simon (1977:). Also Plummer (1982).

¹⁵⁹ Weeks (1977).(1981), and (1989)

The social constructionist bias introduced into the realm of human sexuality challenges major taken for granted beliefs around the nature of the physical body. Whether by conservative forces like Christianity or by leftist Marxist thinkers like Reich and Marcuse, sexuality was seen as "an imperious, insistent and often impious force that presses universally for release and satisfaction from within the human body"¹⁶⁰ Thus, sexuality presented itself as a specific case of the interaction between biology and culture. The sociological analysis of sexuality, Plummer insists, should be a subject in its own right, but also an 'important contributor to general social theory'.¹⁶¹ Its analysis reveals issues which are central to sociological debates, namely, the nature of sociological explanation, the issue of the production of knowledge and social meanings, the processes of social change and the dynamics between natural and social factors.

Feminism foregrounded the importance of sexuality but never really problematized its nature, leaving the issue of the social construction of the body aside in favour of a political agenda of women's oppression in which (heterosexual) sexuality was seen as a major site of gender power relations. Although some feminist theorists operationalized symbolic interactionist perspectives in their account they did not fully incorporate a constructionist framework which accounted for the significance of social interaction. This latter point is important to stress: despite postmodern feminism being directly interested in sexual identity and its social constitution, the symbolic interactionist emphasis on the interactive process is somewhat bypassed. Moreover, the majority of feminist views on sexual identity take for granted an unexplained fixidity. Despite introducing social causal factors, a form of essentialism is assumed by considering the socialising process to be one which takes place in early infancy and is thereafter fixed for life. Symbolic Interactionist emphasis on sexual identities and practices as a *life long* learning process which is *historically malleable*¹⁶² was a premise which would not be further developed until much later.

Current social constructionist approaches and the 'problem' of the body

There are fundamental issues involved in the debate of the social construction of the body. Although the materiality of the body has been increasingly problematized by social analysis, this has merely pointed to the difficulties of finding a coherent analytical explanation rather than defining clear solutions to the logical inconsistencies within different theoretical assertions. Further, Frank warns that comparing theoretical

¹⁶⁰ Plummer (1982:227).

¹⁶¹ Plummer (1975).

¹⁶² Plummer (1982:235).

positions with empirical practices often leads to an "explanatory mess".¹⁶³ Social theory has not succeeded in finding an explanatory framework as to *what* the body is and *how* it comes to be constituted as we know it. Theorists remain trapped in the paradox of the unknowability of the body and its certainty. How to resolve the reality of the body, its 'objectivity' and its subjective relative nature, is the main point of discussion in social sciences. Frank, for instance, appears ultimately to advocate an objectivist claim, that is, that our bodies have a similarity which overcomes the 'multivocality' of their experience and hence 'remain amenable to consensus'. His ambivalent position points at an important task still to be done, that is, the clarification and definition of the basic notions involved in the claims of the social construction of the body. As I have noted above, the main analytical discussion is located between materialist and idealist positions which reveal at its core the need to further clarify the exact meaning of the categories involved in the dichotomies nature/culture and macro-structural phenomena/micro-individual activity. Intimately connected to it there is the need to establish the different causal dynamics which different positions convey. This forces to further elucidate the exact meaning of the notion of 'discursive' and the claim that it is constitutive of reality, that is, to elucidate the nature of the 'social' and the social bases of the 'natural'. And intimately connected to it what is meant by the notion of power as productive and what are the political implications of different sociological positions. All these questions are fundamental within the social constructionist debate and will be the main directive line of what is to be developed in the rest of this discussion.

1.3. Introducing two social constructionist views of reality: Bourdieu and the Strong Programme

To be able to develop the issues mentioned above in a coherent and systematic way I have chosen to concentrate upon two main theoretical approaches, that of Pierre Bourdieu and his theory of practice, and that of the performative theory of social institutions, the social theory of the strong Programme. My decision to use these two theories and compare them stems from several reasons. First, I consider them analytical approaches currently constituting major inputs to the social constructionist debate. Second, they provide significantly different understandings of the social constructionism and third, by concentrating on their approaches, summarising their views and crucially comparing their different stances and theoretical directions is a very appropriate medium to unpack and introduce some significant insights into the major issues highlighted above.

¹⁶³ Frank (1990: 160).

Bourdieu

My decision to select Bourdieu among all the theorists who have developed analytical interest in the social construction of the body, stems mainly from the fact that this theorist has strived to provide a theory of social dynamics in which the corporeal dimension features centrally. Bourdieu's emphasis on the body is part and parcel of the desire to develop a theory which finds a synthesis and a solution to the main tensions highlighted in the above summary, mainly structural macro-phenomena and individual activity. Bourdieu's aspiration to overcome the dichotomy between structure and individual leads him to locate the body at the junction of both notions, and he coins a new concept, habitus, to account for the individual's embodiment of cultural arrangements. In particular his most prominent theoretical question is that of finding a synthesis between interactionist accounts which seem to disregard objective reality and those structuralist positions which prioritise external social arrangements over individual subjective creativity. With his idea of habitus dispositions he tries to locate individual action in the realm of the external structural pressures, without losing sight of individual capacity of action. Contrary to what ethnomethodologists and interactionists seem to suggest, Bourdieu argues that individuals do not have the freedom to negotiate from scratch their situation in every new encounter. In addition, Bourdieu highlights that there are other levels of social action than that of the level of verbal exchange. Although fundamentally differing from a Goffman-like account, Bourdieu nevertheless attaches a similar importance to non-verbal aspects of human communication. He claims there is an enormous, and fundamental, array of social exchange and production of meaning which passes through the body. The embodiment of human features, like body gestures, body shapes, clothes, accents etc. become social symbolic producers. Bourdieu, by bringing the body back into the social picture, also implicitly criticises structuralist theorists like Parsons for whom the internalisation of social norms is a psychological event. The extreme fluidity of ethnomethodologists and the reified fixidity of Parsons are, supposedly, surpassed by Bourdieu's theory of habitus. In doing so, he also presents an analytical framework to highlight the impact of cultural arrangements into the physical transformation of the body.

A model like Bourdieu's which locates internalisation not on the level of the mental but rather on the level of the physiological, introduces a new dimension to the social understanding of human life which locates social reproduction, interaction, subject formation and social inequality at the junction between the mental (and reflexive) and the corporeal (and unconscious).

Although more recently Bourdieu has largely discussed the habitus of gendered identities¹⁶⁴ it has not been his concern to discuss the nature/culture divide as much as how the materiality of the body is the platform to reproduce existing cultural and structural arrangements, particularly class structures. However, his focus on the naturalisation of class identity has led to Bourdieu's ideas being used in a wider sense, and particularly lately also in relation to gender identity. This application of the Bourdieu's model will be extensively developed in Part III where I will explore the possibility of conceiving a sex/gender habitus. Before this however, in the next chapter I will concentrate on providing a critical reconstruction of his theory in order to be able to recognize, and clarify, the ingredients which form the bases of his theory of the embodied habitus and power relations.

The Performative Theory of Social Institutions of the Strong Programme

Any sociological account of the body has had to deal with resolving the nature of the relationship between nature and culture. The need to account for the materiality of the body and its biological reality and yet socially ground its foundations has produced many contradictory accounts. When Turner warns that "physiology is always mediated through culture"¹⁶⁵ he points to the core of the problem that the division of nature and culture presents, namely that nature does not provide with definite accounts of itself. However, Turner does little to bring forward an analytical framework which clarifies the meanings involved in this relationship, because he fails to address the nature of the 'natural' and 'cultural' worlds. What it fundamentally at the centre of enquire here is the very bases of knowledge production and the establishment of what consists in 'natural' or 'social' world. These are major categories which have been taken for granted in most of main stream social theory. Without earnestly tackling this question, efforts to produce further knowledge on the social bases of human life, including its physical dimension, is an exercise condemned to unresolved ambivalences.

Thus, and taking the above into account, I shall introduce a second analytical account, that of a particular brand of social constructionism directly related to the sociology of knowledge. The social theory of the Strong Programme, also known as *the performative theory of social institutions*, has been mainly developed by Barry Barnes and David Bloor, with fundamental contributions by Martin Kusch. It is particularly useful for the current debate because it seriously considers ontological questions regarding nature and society, whereas most positions adopt a taken for granted view of nature as being 'out

¹⁶⁴ Bourdieu, (2001).

¹⁶⁵ Turner, B, (1989:59) *The body and society: Explorations in social theory.*

there' but interpreted differently through our cultural 'glasses'. This simplified view, however, poses huge epistemological problems: what are the bases of the 'cultural glasses'? What is the causal relationship between the physical reality 'out there' and the interpretations humans make of it? In other words, what is the exact impact that nature has over human interpretations? Further, what is the impact of human interpretations upon that nature? Are human interpretations 'purely' cultural, that is, are cultural arrangements totally independent of the natural world? If this is so, does the natural world lose its 'agency' and become a mere token of cultural constructions? Are cultural constructions creations from voids or are they cultural constructions ultimately determined by the certainties of biological features?

One major issue that Social Constructionist approaches highlight when attempting to make sense of social life, is the dualism between the social and the natural. However, very few social constructionist approaches attempt to make sense of the nature of the distinction itself. Often it is not even clear what is meant by these categories. Likewise, the issue of 'reality' comes into the debates without much apparent need of clarification of what is taken to be 'reality', nor whether there should be a clear distinction and definition of what is 'social reality' as opposed to 'natural reality'. The Strong Programme school of sociology of scientific knowledge directly engages with these questions and in doing so provides with social constructionist view from which a sociological theory has been developed. Their particular brand of social theory presents a distinct constructivist understanding of the bases of social life which provides with sophisticated insights into both the dichotomy nature/culture and structure/individual. In doing so it directly engages with clarifying understandings of notions like agency, individual practice, collective and individual beliefs, norms, rules, and so on. Furthermore, and central to the present discussion, the Strong Programme models is particularly useful to unpack notions and understandings tied to biological reality. Indeed the issue of sexual/gender identity clearly points at some sort of phenomenon which is not purely social in so far as there is physical matter involved: our physical bodies. As extensively exposed above sociology has endeavoured recently in pointing out that even this physical reality should not be understood as independent of social events. Naturally, most Social Constructionist views attempt to address the role of the social on the physicality of our bodies, but the important matter is to examine the exact nature of this role. I shall suggest that Barnes and Bloor's constructionist approach, together with the further development done by Martin Kusch's notion of artificial kinds, provides an invaluable aid in understanding the exact nature of the social genesis and production of the materiality of bodies.

Part II

**Two Social Constructionist models:
Bourdieu and the Strong Programme**

2

Bourdieu's Theory of Practice: the embodiment of social reality

Bourdieu's Theory of Practice is explicitly concerned with transcending the dualism between macro-structural arrangements and individuals' capacity for action. One of Bourdieu's tenets is that the social effects of macro-phenomena are primarily located at the level of the individual body, and thus 'naturalized'. This is a novel approach within mainstream social science, which has predominantly prioritised the cognitive level. With the suggestion that the social is naturalized in the corporeal Bourdieu links two major binary oppositions in social science, that of individual versus structure and that of nature versus society.

Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus - the notions of habitus, lifestyles, embodiment, cultural, social and economic capital and symbolic struggle and symbolic violence - have become part of the common conceptual backdrop of sociological thought. His principal and guiding analytical category is that of *habitus* which lies forms the basis of his theories of Practice, of the reproductive nature of individuals' practices and of Symbolic power.

Bourdieu's work, which expanded over three decades, has revolved around the same basic tenets but often his main ideas have been developed in an unclear and un-systematic manner. It is difficult for instance to obtain a clear idea of the notion of habitus because Bourdieu appears to suggest different conceptions of habitus in different texts. This is particularly evident over time as his initial emphasis on the reproduction of structures of inequality, is subsequently rephrased to provide a more explicit account of individuals' capacity for change. Such a comparison suggests that Bourdieu might have thought it important to shift his initial focus on the reproduction of macro-structural arrangements to an approach which incorporates a more flexible, open view of the social world and the individual practices guided by a habitus.

This shift may well have been induced by a number of criticisms that his work has attracted. Over the years theorists and reviewers have frequently denounced aspects of Bourdieu's work. The most common criticism is that it is a form of over-determinism⁰,

⁰ See for instance Alexander (1995), Elster (1981) Jenkins (1982, 1994).

inevitably trapped in stasis¹. This critique is based on numerous perceived failings in his work, for instance, he is said not to fully account for the notion of agency² and to obscure unexplained contradictory assumptions as unconscious strategies³. He is also deemed to tacitly presuppose an ahistorical and rigid notion of social class⁴, or a 'hidden' hand⁵, and to produce a model which under-theorizes change and resistance⁶, or in fact precludes them⁷. At the more ontological level it has been criticised for not accounting for the bases of social structures and rules or norms⁸ or for consigning them to an unexplained realm⁹. His notion of social dynamics has also been strongly critiqued, especially those aspects relating to his notion of capital and his theory of power¹⁰. Furthermore it is seen to ignore the role of local processual interaction in the constitution of society¹¹, or to assume a collective 'agency' above that of individuals¹² and to provide an overly deterministic view of individual practice¹³. His theory of symbolic power has also been deemed to convey a general theory of power based on the struggle for profit (economic or symbolic), thus conveying individual action as utilitarian in essence¹⁴. Hence, it is cast as an economically deterministic version of individual formation¹⁵ which ultimately relapses into objectivism and over-determinism¹⁶.

It is interesting to note that whilst most of the theorists evaluating Bourdieu's model coincide in praising his introduction of the corporeal bases into sociological analysis, the criticisms also concur with the statement that Bourdieu's model is tainted by contradictory, unexplained and ambiguous notions. It is true that a clear picture never emerges from Bourdieu's complex writings and his convoluted reasoning has not helped to clarify his own model. Nor does much of the secondary literature help in such clarification as it is mainly concerned with describing Bourdieu's analytical shortcomings¹⁷ rather than elucidating his model, that is, to establish the fundamental logical consistencies or inconsistencies which permeate it. It is my contention that to be able to fully account for Bourdieu's model and to be able to properly assess its internal

¹ Sewell (1992)

² Bolstanski quoted in Lane (1990), Butler (1999a), Barnes (2000, 2001)

³ Elster (1981) Alexander (1995)

⁴ Connell (1983)

⁵ Elster (1981)

⁶ Jenkins(1994) Shilling (1991) Butler (1999a)

⁷ Alexander (1995), Honneth (1986), Sewell (1992), Butler (1997a) Barnes (2001)

⁸ Taylor (1999) Butler (1997b) Barnes (2001)

⁹ Butler (1999a) Barnes (2000) and (2001)

¹⁰ Calhoun (1995)

¹¹ Cicourel (1995) Taylor (1999)

¹² Honneth (1986)

¹³ Most criticisms point this.

¹⁴ Honneth (1986) Lane (2000)

¹⁵ Elster (1981) Honneth (1986)

¹⁶ King (2000) Bouveresse (1999)

¹⁷ See Jenkins (1994), Robbins (1991) or Swartz (1997)

weaknesses and strengths it is necessary, first, to systematically reconstruct and identify the ingredients of the key concepts that underpin his models. What follows, therefore, is not just a summary of Bourdieu's model. Rather, I aim to offer a critical reconstruction and interpretation of it, which can provide the basis for an evaluation of his model that both accounts for its positive contribution and refutes its internal inconsistencies. This is an important exercise not only to further clarify the criticisms made of Bourdieu's model but because its problems seem to be mirrored by authors who consider his approach useful. Wacquant is an example of an author who, in using Bourdieu's model, has tacitly modified Bourdieu's main tenets to quite a substantial extent. This is most notable in the way he transforms the durable and resilient nature of Bourdieu's notion of an embodied habitus into a flexible fluid conception of embodiment in which individual desire mediates, and clearly modifies, the determinative force of objective social structures over individual practices.¹⁸

Thus, in this chapter I concentrate my attention on selectively distilling what I believe to be the basic ingredients of Bourdieu's model from the most significant texts. Here I do not engage with, or seek to account for, Bourdieu's analytical problems, rather my efforts are directed towards a reconstruction of his theory on his own terms. If at times his position appears contradictory and problematic, this constitutes a reflection of his own unresolved analytical problems. These issues will be subject to discussion in subsequent sections.

I have divided this reconstruction in three sections. In the first I identify the key ingredients of the notion of habitus and the core concept of dispositions. In the second I draw the links between the notion of habitus, the individual practices it guides and how that is linked to Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power. Having done this in the last section I attempt to reveal Bourdieu's social constructionist model reflecting back on the first two sections.

¹⁸ See Wacquant (1995) and (1997).

2.1. Habitus in focus: A reconstruction of dispositions

In Bourdieu's texts we endlessly find habitus described as that which people possess, or even *are*, *once* they have undergone specific processes of social conditioning, which result in the constitution of an individually internalized underlying dispositional structure. Firstly, let us examine some definitions of the concept itself:

"[Habitus is] the *system of dispositions* produced by the social conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence."¹⁹

"Habitus, [are] *systems of durable, transposable dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them"²⁰

"The habitus is necessity internalized and *converted into a disposition* that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions; it is a general, transposable disposition which carries out a systematic, universal application - beyond the limits of what has been directly learnt - of the necessity inherent in the learning conditions (...) and they are systematically distinct from the practices constituting another life-style"²¹

These quotes present a multifaceted picture of the notion of habitus. As a quick summary, habitus is viewed to be a social phenomenon in so far as it is the result of individual internalization of contextual features. Habitus is structured by social conditions but also configures -structures- individual practices. Thus, by its very nature, habitus is at the junction between structure and action. Most of all, however, habitus is portrayed to be a 'system', that is, a compound of different features inter-related with each other. These features are 'dispositions', and they are presented as the 'structured, structuring structures' of the habitus. Habitus is defined ultimately as a 'system of dispositions' which specifically direct people's actions (practices in Bourdieu's parlance).

Since Bourdieu stresses the dynamics of individual formation and group differentiation based principally on the dispositional nature of habitus it follows that attention should be paid to the exact meaning of the notion of habitus 'dispositions'. This is especially important since Bourdieu himself does not provide a detailed definition of the scope of dispositions.

The notion of disposition has a long history in philosophical thinking and its transfer to sociological accounts cannot be taken for granted. A brief review of the difficulty in pinpointing the exact meaning of the notion of disposition for a sociological analysis

¹⁹ Bourdieu (1994a: 56) Italics are mine

²⁰ Bourdieu (1995b: 53) Italics are mine

²¹ Bourdieu (1994a:170) Italics are mine

reveals that there are complexities attached to it which cannot be by-passed. A human disposition could mean several things. Disposition essentially means the inclination towards certain activities and *not* others. However, this inclination can perfectly stem from natural bases rather than socially determined ones. Clearly there are different kinds of dispositions, for instance, a basic distinction could be drawn between biological (i.e. genetic) versus social dispositions. The disposition of a baby to suck would belong to the former whereas speaking a specific language or wearing jeans would belong to the latter. This first, apparently evident, division is confused when it is realised that of the two dispositions mentioned as social, the first, learning a language, relies on biological elements as well as socially learned ones. On the other hand, clothing preferences pose no doubts as to their purely conventional nature.

To say that habitus is a system of dispositions does not imply that *every* human disposition is habitus. Our first task, therefore, is to define the specific difference between habitus and other types of dispositions. Let's start by presenting the only reference to the meaning of disposition made by Bourdieu himself:

"The word *disposition* seems particularly suited to express what is covered by the concept of habitus (defined as a system of dispositions). It expresses first the *result of an organising action*, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a *way of being*, a *habitual state* (especially of the body) and, in particular, a *predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination*"²²

Although this definition gives us some basic understanding, Bourdieu has not yet defined the exact meaning of the social nature of dispositions. Genetically based dispositions could perfectly respond to the above description. Indeed, as philosophers have noted, the common understanding of disposition is that it is a quality inherent in objects although not necessarily manifested. For instance, pens have the disposition to write and glasses to break. Thus, under this broad definition, humans would present an array of dispositions which are clearly not social in nature. As noted above biological dispositions like the disposition of a baby to suck or that of an infant's ability to speak a language are not necessarily social. Bourdieu notes that habitus dispositions are to be conceived as socially constituted, that is, as dependent on social conditionings for their development. However, this is still too imprecise a definition, since, even socially dependent dispositions can have some biological elements involved in their formation. One could think of a disposition acquired in early age that is so imprinted in bodily habits that it would be impossible to change. Would this be purely a social disposition? Other early-learned dispositions can leave such a superficial trace that makes them amenable to easy transformation. Would such malleability mean they are not habitus dispositions? Should

²² Bourdieu (1995a, 214). Italics in the original

we, thus, talk of 'weak' and 'strong' dispositions? What then is the exact meaning that Bourdieu gives to the corporeal *and* durable nature of dispositions?

Precisely because habitus dispositions, clearly social and conventional in nature, are also embodied, this adds a further complexity in understanding the social genesis of dispositions. A particular linguistic accent is said to be an embodied disposition, but is the *capacity* to communicate linguistic symbols - based on clearly biological capability - an embodied disposition? Moreover it is not only embodied features that dispositions define but also cognitive and psychological ones. Habitus dispositions give rise to a specific manner of perceiving and symbolically evaluating the world. Here too we have to clarify what is the social nature of such cognitive tendencies.

Bourdieu's model presents a picture of individuality in which the individual's subjective experience of reality is a result of specific contextual positions. In a clear attempt to present a social account of subjectivity, Bourdieu locates its genesis in the external world, that is, those sets of social phenomena that are at the basis of the constitution of individuals' habitus. Despite their individual nature, habitus dispositions appear to be defined as group specific.

Underlying Bourdieu's model there is a 'logic', that is, a general model of individual internalization of group specific features and a logic of dynamics between groups. Bourdieu's Theory of Practice attempts to uncover the specific nature of the relationship between wider macro-social phenomena and individual micro-activity. Thus, it is not only the exact nature of an individual habitus disposition which is in need of reconstruction but we also need to further reconstruct the exact dialectical nature of the core features of habitus dispositions. Once this is established we will be in a better position to discern their internal and external 'praxis'. In other words questions like: how do dispositions relate to one another?; do they display a hierarchical position within the same habitus - that is, whether there are primary dispositions and secondary dispositions?; what is their relation with different habitus dispositions?; how do they overlap with different group identities?; what is it that determines dominant or subordinated habitus dispositions among groups?, and so on will help us to unpack Bourdieu's general understanding of social dynamics.

It is clear, thus, that habitus dispositions, in Bourdieu's analytical framework, present distinct properties and attributes which have to be clarified. To establish the analytical dimension of the central concepts of Bourdieu's theory of practice requires a systematic reconstruction of the exact ingredients which underlie the bases of the social nature of the notion of habitus dispositions. The following sections attempt to present a reconstruction of those key elements that would seem to comprise a habitus disposition:

2.1.1. Habitus dispositions are social

Dispositions are first and foremost 'social'. The specific meaning of this social quality is defined by the following features. Although the corporeal nature of dispositions is central, they have to be considered first and foremost as *acquired*, rather than innate, social dispositions:

"The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions"²³

The social nature of dispositions is further clarified by establishing that by 'particular class conditions of existence' Bourdieu refers to specific types of social arrangements (not climatic conditions for instance):

"dispositions are the product of economic and social processes and more or less reducible to these constraints"²⁴

The social basis of habitus dispositions is further emphasised by noting that they are the product of specific learning practices, that is, by social exposure to others' dispositions. Dispositions are learned in social circumstances in which interaction with others exposes individuals to their particular ways of doing things. This leads Bourdieu to emphasise that dispositions are mostly acquired in mimetic fashion and not by consciously learning or following the instructions of others:

"the process of acquisition is that of mimesis (identification) and not of imitation (a conscious effort to reproduce gestures, utterances...)"²⁵

This learning or 'training' usually starts within the social unit of the family. Throughout his work Bourdieu emphasises the family's primary role in the production of dispositions. This basically takes the form of a process that transmits the already formed habitus dispositions of the parents to their children. This process starts from birth and constitutes the bedrock of primary dispositions which will set the path for subsequent activity and further habitus development:

"[there are] two modes of acquisition (of dispositions). Total, early, imperceptible learning, performed within the family from the earliest days of life and extended by a scholastic learning which presupposes and completes it"²⁶

Secondary development of dispositions depends on the continuation of the primary ones. Thus, Bourdieu emphasises that earlier socialization has an effect of fixing the future path of subsequent socialization. Later training (i.e. schooling) may appear to have a more reflective, conscious mode but the fact that it is over-imposed onto already

²³ Bourdieu (1995b: 53)

²⁴ Bourdieu (1995b: 50)

²⁵ Bourdieu (1995b: 73)

²⁶ Bourdieu (1994a:66,77)

formed dispositions which guide the performance or ability of the individual, means that they are still a non-reflective.

The social dimension of habitus disposition is further exposed by Bourdieu's emphasis that a habitus disposition is a collective phenomena rather than an individual one:

"the relation between class habitus and individual habitus (...) could be regarded as a subjective but non-individual system of internalized structures (...) personal style, the particular stamp marking all the products of the same habitus, whether practices or works, is never more than a deviation in relation to the style of a period or class"²⁷

It is true that the family is the primary constitutive space of individual's habitus, however the family is not found in a social void. Rather, it is strongly connected to collective space by sharing specific social features (economic wealth, cultural interests, geographical location, etc.) with the members of a group. According to Bourdieu this makes dispositions a collective attribute:

"Sociology treats as identical all biological individuals who, being the products of the same objective conditions, have the same *habitus*. A social class (in-itself) - a class of identical or similar conditions of existence and conditionings - is at the same time a class of biological individuals having the same habitus, understood as a system of dispositions common to all products of the same conditionings"²⁸

The shared quality of dispositions manifests itself in two ways, by homology with members located in similar environments, and by demarcating those from other collectives which are located in different social spaces. Individuals display a relation of "homology" – in terms of dispositions - with the members of similar social environments:

"the set of agents who are placed in homogeneous conditions of existence (...) produce homogeneous systems of dispositions capable of generating similar practices"²⁹

Then, using Bourdieu's terminology, we have to speak of a 'class of habitus': the internalized form of a group condition and the conditioning it entails. This class of habitus is the result of a 'relationship of homology', understood as 'diversity within homogeneity'. Individuals are placed in homogeneous conditions of existence which result in homogeneous conditioning that produces homogeneous systems of dispositions which, most significantly, are capable of generating similar practices among individuals.³⁰ This does not mean that all individual practices are interchangeable, but that the singular habitus of members of the same class are united by a homology.

²⁷ Bourdieu (1995b: 60)

²⁸ Bourdieu (1995b: 59)

²⁹ Bourdieu, (1994a:101)

³⁰ Bourdieu (1994a:101-102-172-3)

The shared quality of dispositions not only constitutes groups but also demarcates the boundaries between them. The collective nature of dispositions, in their process of acquisition as much as in their realisation through the practices they constitute, does not imply a unifying map across society. On the contrary, it is intrinsic in the nature of dispositions, to belong to a group system that is differentiated from others. For Bourdieu, who places the socializing effect in external (to the individual) objective conditions of existence, the basic elements for the production of habitus dispositions are what he calls 'capitals', that is, the volume of economic, cultural and social resources. As these assets differ considerably across the social structure so do the groups it generates:

"Because different conditions of existence produce different habitus - that is, a system of generative schemes applicable, by simple transfer, to the most varied areas of practice - the practices engendered by the different habitus appear as systematic configurations of properties expressing the differences objectively inscribed in conditions of existence..."³¹

This is an indication of Bourdieu's analytical position regarding the dynamics between structures and individuals. Bourdieu explicitly rejects an individualist notion of social dynamics, his theory points at macro-structural arrangements as prior to and above the individual. Within his notion of class habitus individuals' small-scale interaction is dismissed:

"interpersonal relations are never, except in appearance, individual-to-individual relationships and (...) the truth of the interaction is never entirely contained in the interaction"³²

Bourdieu further notes that in the original sense of the Latin word 'habitus', there is the meaning of something learned through habit and habituation rather than the conscious following of explicit rules and principles. This signifies an important feature of the social nature of dispositions, namely that the process of acquisition is hidden to the conscious reflection of individuals, due to the non-verbal mode of learning:

"total, early, imperceptible learning, (...) an unconscious mastery of the instruments of appropriation which derives from slow familiarization and is the basis of familiarity with works, is an 'art', a practical mastery which, like an art of thinking or an art of living, cannot be transmitted solely by precept or prescription (...) the [individual] can internalize its principles of construction, without these ever being brought to his consciousness and formulated or formulable as such"³³

The internalization of practical knowledge is through action and not language. It is in social interactions that knowledge, and the consequent practical mastery of it, is acquired. Social meanings pattern the child's communicative actions and structure their intentions before they have even mastered any language.

³¹ Bourdieu (1994a:170)

³² Bourdieu (1990a:81)

³³ Bourdieu (1994a:66) also in (1995a:87)

Although implicitly Bourdieu suggests that the internalization is a result of interacting with others, he is particularly concerned to highlight the relationship that the world of external objects has with the development of habitus dispositions:

"Every material inheritance is, strictly speaking, also a cultural inheritance. Family heirlooms not only bear material witness to the age and continuity of the lineage ...they also contribute in a practical way to its spiritual production, (...) by moving in a universe of familiar, intimate objects 'which are there' (...) is a certain 'taste' (...) it is an immediate adherence, at the deepest level of the habitus, to the tastes and distastes, sympathies and aversions, fantasies and phobias which, more than declared opinions, forge the unconscious unity of a class"³⁴

With such significant power to shape meaningful social processes, the material world acquires an important social status. Social relations are objectified in things and acquire an active capacity to shape the individuals in contact with them. In this way the world of objects is related to individual's dispositions. This is a clear definition of habitus dispositions as conventional. For Bourdieu the social map of dispositions is clearly delimited by the material social background conditions which are at the base of the constitution of individuals' dispositions.

"The selection of meanings which objectively defines a group's or a class's culture as a symbolic system is arbitrary insofar as the structure and functions of that culture cannot be deduced from any universal principle, whether physical, biological or spiritual, not being linked by any sort of internal relation to 'the nature of things' or any 'human nature'.³⁵

The final aspect of the social character of habitus dispositions which Bourdieu outlines, is their specifically material basis. For Bourdieu clearly it is the 'material conditions', that is, external to individual interaction, which are mostly at the basis of habitus formation. This is clearly suggested by Bourdieu's argument that the artistic sense originates from material wealth:

"The aesthetic disposition (...) can only be constituted within an experience of the world freed from urgency"³⁶

Without spelling out what is meant by 'material' clearly, Bourdieu envisages 'external' macro-structural features behind habitus formation, loosely understood as divided between 'economic' and 'social'. It would seem that Bourdieu places constitutive emphasis on different features of the social environment. He focuses not only on the economic, in the sense of monetary potential, but also on cultural background, in the sense of symbolic forms of appreciation of the world. However, regardless of the particular definition of these social factors from other passages of his work, we recognise a priority given to economic wealth:

³⁴ Bourdieu (1994a:76-7)

³⁵ Bourdieu (1994c: 8)

³⁶ Bourdieu (1994a:54)

"These conditions of existence, which are the precondition for all learning of legitimate culture (...) are characterized by the suspension and removal [or not] of economic necessity and by objective and subjective distance from practical urgencies, which is the basis of objective and subjective distance from groups subjected to those determinisms"³⁷

2.1.2. Habitus dispositions are embodied

After its social foundation, the most fundamental quality of habitus disposition is its corporeal nature. As already noted, Bourdieu places the socialising effects mostly at the level of the body. Bourdieu explicitly rejects notions of individual practices that are mainly brought about through mental or cognitive rational and conscious manipulation. For him the embodied nature of habitus dispositions make individual practices specifically different from mental constructs. The embodied quality of habitus dispositions takes different senses.

First of all, the most fundamental primary social dispositions are embodied. We have already noted that Bourdieu distinguishes primary dispositions, that is, more durably inscribed/embedded fundamental dispositions from more secondary superficial ones. What makes dispositions belong to the first category is their corporeal nature:

"the work of transformation of bodies (...) which is performed partly through the effects of mimetic suggestion, partly through explicit injunctions and partly through the whole symbolic construction of the view of the biological body, produces (...) habitus. (...) It is through the training of the body that the most fundamental dispositions are imposed"³⁸

It is in this sense that dispositions 'produce bodies'. That is, they become part of the body by shaping it. Bourdieu devotes considerable space to describing different social activities which directly involve the body, its use, appearance, and shape as markers of different group's values and cultural habits. Sports practices, eating habits and preferences, ways of using and presenting our bodies, of talking, walking, clothing it, etc. are fundamental parts of Bourdieu's theory of cultural differentiation. But in Bourdieu bodies are not only signifiers of differential cultural worlds, they are, crucially, durably shaped by the practices that these differential cultural worlds transmit to their inhabitants, becoming in the process markers of the culture which has shaped them:

"the acquisition of this embodied cultural capital is slow in time and it proceeds in the very same biological entity of the individual (shapes of bodies, manners, ways of speaking, accents, ways of sitting, walking) as an embodied capital in which external wealth is converted into an integral part of the person, that is the habitus"³⁹

³⁷ Bourdieu (1994a:54)

³⁸ Bourdieu (2001:55-6)

³⁹ Bourdieu (1986:244-5)

This conception of the embodiment of cultural attitudes is often brought together in Bourdieu's text under the umbrella of the notion of 'taste', which conveys two dimensions - the distinct elements at the basis of shaping the body and the practices which result from the shaped body:

"Taste, a class culture turned into nature, that is, embodied, helps to shape the class body. It is an incorporated principle of classification which governs all forms of incorporation, choosing and modifying everything that the body ingests and digests and assimilates physiologically and psychologically. It follows that the body is the most indisputable materialization of class taste (...). It does this first in the seemingly most natural features of the body, the dimensions (volume, height, weight) and shapes (round or square, stiff or supple, straight or curved) of its visible forms, which express in countless ways as whole relation to the body, i.e. a way of treating it, caring for it, feeding it, maintaining it, which reveals the deepest dispositions of the habitus"⁴⁰

Taste, however, is a collective phenomena, not an individual one. Bourdieu is insistent in noting the group dimension of habitus dispositions. The embodiment of social phenomena results mostly in an incorporation of group differential features, of which class culture is the most powerful influence on the constitution of the individual's 'bodily hexis':

"[through] the elementary acts of bodily gymnastics (...) the most fundamental structures of the group [are rooted] in the primary experiences of the body"⁴¹

Thus, the individual becomes the container of the collective. Collective customs become inscribed in the individuals' body, generating an automatic bodily knowledge and bodily skills similar in all the individuals belonging to this collective. Trivial routines as banal as table manners or sporting habits are the way particular collectives inscribe in the bodies of their components their specific cultural characteristics and, on the other hand, that individual choices are representative of the tastes of a collective. The incorporation of collective cultural features is a slow process that starts within the family environment and shapes the corporeal features of individuals according to the manners (bodily habits, bodily practices, etc.) of the family. Families are inscribed within wider culturally specific environments which belong to the different group strata of society, thus, by inscribing family values into their children the values of the group are transmitted and perpetuated. For Bourdieu, individuals' dispositions are an 'embodied taxonomy' which carries the principles of social division and acts to unite or separate individuals in different groups:

⁴⁰ Bourdieu (1994a:190)

⁴¹ Bourdieu (1995b: 69, 72)

"It can be shown that socialization tends to constitute the body as an analogical operator establishing all sorts of practical equivalencies between the different divisions of the social world - sexes, ages, groups, classes - or more precisely, between the meanings and values associated with the individuals occupying practically equivalent positions in the spaces defined by these divisions"⁴²

One of the most important dimensions of the embodied nature that Bourdieu highlights is its 'instinctual' character. Because of the mimetic, non-verbal, automatic learning character of habitus dispositions, they become incorporated in the physicality of the individuals in such a rooted manner that they become totally hidden to the consciousness of the individual, and consequently to reflexive activity:

"the quasi-bodily quality of the acquired habitus of which the individual has no awareness at all, neither of its acquisition nor of its workings". "As taste shows, there is nothing in it of an act of cognition (...) but is all practical sense, is social necessity made second nature, turned into muscular patterns and bodily automatisms"⁴³

The fact that people can consciously articulate which are the 'right' ways to behave in particular social contexts (aloof or close, smart or unsmart etc.) does not mean that individuals are aware of the cultural principles that guide the particular acts of individual's behaviour. The social conditioning that has produced a particular embodied practical sense of the world also provides a basic sense of social orientation. The corporeal forms of dispositions direct people's practices in a way that cannot be reflexive, because:

"it is simply a matter of practical transfers of incorporated, quasi postural schemes (...) the most characteristic operations of this 'logic' take the form of bodily movements turning to right or left, putting upside down, going in or coming out, tying or cutting etc."⁴⁴

This is a fundamental point to stress in Bourdieu's conception of embodiment. The individual body is perceived as a vehicle for the objective structures to enter the micro-world of the individual subjectivity. The body says Bourdieu is: "an automaton that leads the mind unconsciously along with it". This is due to the specific nature of learning of dispositions. Socialization, recalls Bourdieu does not depend on symbolic interaction and learned ability to interpret others actions; it involves, rather, simply the child's unreflexive contact with "the paternal body and the maternal body".⁴⁵ Indeed, Bourdieu is particularly interested in stressing that due to the specific non-verbal nature of dispositions as embodied, they can remain implicit and hidden to conscious discourse because the body acts in a non-verbal manner. Bourdieu opposes the 'universe of

⁴² Bourdieu (1994a:475)

⁴³ Bourdieu (1995b: 66) and (1994a: 474)

⁴⁴ Bourdieu (1995b: 92)

⁴⁵ Bourdieu (1995b: 68)

practice' to the 'universe of discourse'. The universe of practice can produce activity which allows for some reflexivity but cannot allow full awareness of the principles which constitute the habitus in the first place. By virtue of being embodied these principles "function below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will".⁴⁶

This connects with another central dimension of the embodiment of dispositions, its 'naturalization'. That is, owing to their corporeal quality, dispositions are perceived as the innate properties of individuals:

"The body, a social product which is the only tangible manifestation of the 'person', is commonly perceived as the most natural expression of the innermost nature. The signs constituting the perceived body, cultural products which differentiate groups (...) seem grounded in nature"⁴⁷

Because of their physical nature, habitus dispositions generate the assumption of biological genesis. That is, they produce the appearance of naturalness and hide the social conditions of their production. In this process, habitus dispositions become 'forgotten history', that is, their social character is concealed as 'second nature'. Early conditioning produces dispositions which later appear as natural abilities⁴⁸.

As well as the constitutive power of social conditioning on embodied features and activities, strictly biological differences are inscribed with social meanings - for instance, sexual organs are imposed with certain social values which naturalize the sexual differences which are present in the culture. Bourdieu stresses that habitus effects a coherence and necessity between the essential biological differences⁴⁹ and the contingent social ones. For instance, the erected phallus becomes a symbol of a masculinity characterised as courageous, strong, direct, clear and disinterested, whereas female genitals are the symbol of obscurity, weakness, softness etc. In doing so, habitus dispositions are: "a biological (...) reading of social properties and a social reading of biological properties (...) thus leading to a social re-use of biological properties and a biological re-use of social properties"⁵⁰

Finally, the corporeal appears to have some priority over the psychological in Bourdieu's approach conveying that the corporeal internalization of the social inclines the person to certain cognitive structures: "states of the body are states of the mind".⁵¹

⁴⁶ Bourdieu (1994a: 466)

⁴⁷ Bourdieu (1994a:192)

⁴⁸ Bourdieu (1995b: 71, 73)

⁴⁹ Like those between sexes, which Bourdieu takes as biological givens. See Bourdieu (1994a:192) and Bourdieu (2001:13)

⁵⁰ Bourdieu (1995b: 79) See also particularly *Masculine Domination* (2001) as the key text conveying this view.

⁵¹ Bourdieu (1990a : 131)

The incorporated social cultural arrangements produce bodies that guide actions and thoughts. Bodily dispositions lead to mental dispositions. Bourdieu's body is a 'thinking body'. In this sense, Bourdieu is particularly interested in transcending the (artificial) dualism between body and mind. Clearly for Bourdieu material conditions produce embodied dispositions which result in cognitive dispositions. In a Merleau-Pontian twist Bourdieu states that the body is indissociable from thoughts, that the movements of the body are connected with mental states. Bourdieu does not specifically deploy a theory of individual consciousness formation, rather he wants to emphasise how the corporeally internalized social structures become the template for cognitive features. The body at its deepest and most unconscious level, what he calls the 'body schema', becomes a repository of a whole world view which constitutes the mind's processes:

"The cognitive structures which social agents implement in their practical knowledge of the social world are internalized, 'embodied' social structures (...) the body is a 'memory jogger': gestures, postures and words (...) awaken, by the evocative power of bodily mimesis, a universe of ready made feelings and experiences"⁵²

2.1.3. Habitus dispositions are durable

The conventional character, provided by their social nature, which dispositions possess does not amount to transience. On the contrary, as already pointed out in section 1.2, their corporeal nature brings about one of the most important features of habitus dispositions, namely their durability. Three main factors are critical in constituting the durability of habitus dispositions:

First and foremost is their embodied nature. To further extend the above it is worth stressing that for Bourdieu the embodied character of dispositions irreversibly imprint themselves upon the body. What has been inscribed in the body presents great resilience to change. Bourdieu does not explicitly tell us what makes embodied dispositions particularly durable but it seems that he follows Mauss in stating that the techniques of the body which different cultures imprint in individuals become permanent⁵³.

"Bodily hexis (...) turned into a *permanent* disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby feeling and thinking "⁵⁴

Second, it would appear that dispositions also owe their durable nature to their pre-reflexive character. Given that the acquisition of dispositions is pre-reflexive it is not amenable to cognitive stimuli and therefore, not amenable to conscious transformation:

⁵² Bourdieu (1994a: 468,474)

⁵³ With this he follows quite closely Mauss' (1973) suggestion that the impact of the 'training' of body techniques, like styles of walking, swimming etc, become fixed abilities which cannot be reversed.

⁵⁴ Bourdieu (1995b: 69)

"PW⁵⁵ is an irreversible process producing, in the time required for inculcation, an irreversible disposition, i.e. a disposition which cannot itself be repressed or transformed"⁵⁶

Lastly, dispositions acquire durability because they are constantly reinforced. They are so perfectly adjusted to the social context which constituted them that dispositions guide practices in keeping with the demands of the social context. An 'ontological complicity' between the social context and an individual's habitus dispositions acts to reinforce both of them. Thus there is no need to modify what it is perfectly adjusted to the social environment. This is mostly evident in the fact that individuals tend not to engage in practices which do not respond to the social context which produced them:

"the most improbable practices are therefore excluded, as unthinkable, by a kind of immediate submission to order that inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway denied and to will the inevitable"⁵⁷.

Having said this, Bourdieu points out that dispositions *can* be modified, albeit in a rather difficult way, but only if external conditions of existence undergo some kind of drastic transformation. Otherwise habitus dispositions display a resilience which makes them easily 'transposable' to other social environments. And since, in Bourdieu's view, individuals have little possibility of altering the fields of social dynamics the possibility of encountering radically different social environments is rarely found.

The durability and irreversibility, which Bourdieu envisages in habitus dispositions is 'trained', that is, they are the product of a long and slow process of socialization to the demands of the social environment. However this training has an end and the dispositions it has constituted *become* the individual. Bourdieu clearly rejects positions like that of Ethnomethodology which envisage permanent change and transformation (or reinforcement) through interaction. Individuals are formed at one point of their lives and then set up to act in predetermined ways. Bourdieu illustrates this position in his use of the clock analogy:

"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"⁵⁸

It is the last model that mirrors the true nature of the individual's practices according to Bourdieu. Habitus dispositions are thus at the core of this model; a construction which is

⁵⁵ PW, that is, pedagogic work is Bourdieu's terminology for all broad activity of training and education of the person in the early stages of life.

⁵⁶ Bourdieu (1994c:43)

⁵⁷ Bourdieu (1995b: 54)

⁵⁸ Bourdieu (1995b:59)

produced at a particular moment of an individual's life and which effects long term, long lasting, qualities.

2.1.4. Habitus dispositions are transposable

For Bourdieu habitus dispositions possess a basic knowledge which can be transported into new situations by a kind of practical generalization of the internalized patterns:

"The habitus produced by PW is transposable (...) i.e. capable of generating practices conforming with the principles of the inculcated cultural arbitrary in a greater number of different fields."⁵⁹

This is the capacity of primary dispositions to structure and create actions in social context other than those in which they were originally acquired. Bourdieu has also described this process as 'translation' or 'irresistible analogy'.⁶⁰ However, this transferability has another dimension. It not only transfers individuals' practices into different environments but also makes all individuals' practices become similarly patterned. Early dispositions in particular areas will pattern or guide other practices in completely different settings:

"the generative schemes of the habitus are applied, by simple transfer, to the most dissimilar areas of practice"⁶¹

This is what sustains the whole notion of the self-reproduction of the original conditions of existence which originally underlie the constitution of an individual habitus. In his work *Reproduction*, as the title suggests, we see how individual dispositions can be transferred. Here he stresses that primary dispositions predispose individuals to a secondary habitus which mirrors the characteristics of the primary one. For instance the success or failure of achieving school education depends fundamentally on the dispositions previously acquired in the earliest years of life:

"a disposition acquired through domestic or scholastic inculcation of legitimate culture (...) [is] a transposable disposition, armed with a set of perceptual and evaluative schemes that are available for general application, (...) and inclines its owner towards other cultural experiences"⁶²

In short, the practices of the same agent (or all agents of the same class) have an affinity of form that is the product of transfers of the same schemes of actions produced by an early internalized habitus.

⁵⁹ Bourdieu (1994c: 33)

⁶⁰ Bourdieu (1995b: 200-70)

⁶¹ Bourdieu (1994a:175)

⁶² Bourdieu (1994a:26-28)

2.1.5. Habitus dispositions are inseparable from action

Throughout the way they are acquired (section 1), the way they become corporeal (section 2) and their durable and transposable nature (sections 3 and 4) one feature stands out from the nature of habitus dispositions; namely its connection to activity over time. Bourdieu's theory of habitus is a theory of action. To put the notion in clearer terms: an intervention to the body like female circumcision – which is also socially generated, embodied, and both durable and irreversible in character – contains fundamental differences from the type of embodied dispositions which Bourdieu wants to depict. Although, without doubt, female circumcision may lead to a particular type of bodily and cognitive disposition it differs from a habitus disposition in the particular dynamics by which it was produced. Habitus dispositions are incorporated over a prolonged period of time and the individual is particularly active in incorporating them. Dispositions are inseparable from action in a number of senses.

First of all, habitus dispositions are acquired through activity: "Dispositions are acquired in practice and constantly aimed at practical functions"⁶³ Dispositions are both generated and constituted through praxis. Once constituted they become 'visible', that is, realized, only in and through action. A disposition is a tendency to act in a certain way, or to show certain characteristics, therefore dispositions cannot be defined without talking about action. Bourdieu himself has described his theory as a 'philosophy of action'⁶⁴ insofar as he places action at the core of his notion of habitus dispositions and the practices they inform.⁶⁵ Bourdieu's approach to his 'practical action theory' is the result, as he puts it, of trying to follow the line suggested by Marx in his Theses on Feuerbach. That is, attempting to fuse the materialist approach that sees men as the product of circumstances and upbringing, with that of Hegel's dialectic method which sees humans as the result of a process of permanent active construction of the world:

"Produced by the practice of the successive generations, in a particular type of conditions of existence, these schemes of perception, appreciation and action which are acquired through practice and implemented in the practical state (...) function as practical operators through which the objective structures of which they are the product tend to be reproduced in practices."⁶⁶

Bourdieu does not specifically define his understanding of social action, and this topic remains under theorised throughout his oeuvre. I can only note here that his theory of

⁶³ Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:121)

⁶⁴ Bourdieu (1998a: vii)

⁶⁵ In Bourdieu we find similar approaches to the American pragmatists who work with the tradition of 'practical action theory'. The parallels between Dewey's and Bourdieu's approaches have been noted elsewhere (see Shusterman (1999) and Alexander (1995)). In this tradition dispositions are understood as incorporated experience and as constituted by experience with the social world, knowledge is the product of active participation with the world and to problem-solving.

⁶⁶ Bourdieu (1995b: 95)

'practical sense', appears to point to 'intentional' activity but, crucially, activity that is non-reflexive. Bourdieu argues that the fact that dispositions direct action in a non-reflexive way does not mean they can be thought of simply as behaviour. Behaviour is seen as a type of action with no individual meaning attached to it (a heart beat or the blinking of an eye). Under Bourdieu's model, actions without fully conscious intention are still actions as distinct from behaviour; that is, they are still intentional in the sense that they are a routinised mode of activity which can be directed to intentional goals.⁶⁷

Bourdieu's emphasis on the collective nature of individual actions highlights that distinct groups are defined by a bundle of common (homologous) dispositions and the actions that they constitute. Society's different groups are consequently defined by a set of dispositions and the actions they constitute and are constituted by. It is in within the collective that individual actions generate and acquire a meaningful nature. One infers that individuals in isolation would not be able to put into action their habitus dispositions. It is when applied to particular situations that dispositions acquire their 'actual' state. It is important to retain from this point that for Bourdieu the actions that dispositions generate are not 'in situ' negotiations but rather are the result of an internalized habitus which predetermine a range of possible activity.

Bourdieu seems to imply that individuals do not fully develop an awareness of their practices unless they are transported to a different milieu from that which constituted the dispositions in the first place. The individual inscribed in specific social environments will produce activity suited to the demands of the social context but guided by the internalized conditioning. It is in the practice that the meanings arise, not the meanings that direct practice. It is virtually impossible to grasp theoretically the internal logic of the logic of practice because, in a few words, practice, unlike thought, excludes all formal concerns. It cannot be reflexive, because it 'understands' only in order to act. This is a 'practical logic':

⁶⁷ This reading of Bourdieu's notion of social action has been inspired by Collins and Kusch's (1998) analysis. In their work the debate of 'instinctual' action and conscious and unconscious character of actions is usefully analysed. These authors distinguish between different types of human activity, namely, action and behaviour. The philosophy of action analysis done by Collins and Kusch provides a clearer definition of what a 'social' action is. The important point they bring forward is their stress on the collective understanding of actions. They do so by showing that some actions have to be understood as 'formative', that is, actions that constitute a community (and as a corollary, differentiating it from other communities). In this sense 'action categories' can be collectively used because the actors share a 'form of life' which provides them with a common net of concepts and actions. The meanings attached to actions are shared by the community. Actions are collectively understood due to the fact that they share the common concepts that make sense and constitute an action and, vice versa, the common concepts make sense of and constitute an individual action. Although never explicitly spelled out, Bourdieu's notion of social action seems to fall under this category of non-reflexive intentional action.

"an agent who possesses a practical mastery (...) is capable of applying in his action the disposition which appears to him only in action, in the relationship with a situation.(...) this logic, like all practical logics, can only be grasped in action"⁶⁸

Bourdieu notes that "the essential part of the *modus operandi* which defines practical mastery is transmitted in practice".⁶⁹ The practical internalization of cultural features means that children do not incorporate them in an automatic mechanical manner, rather, children acquire an 'art of living' through practical activity which makes them familiar with the 'rationale' of the culture. What the child assimilates is the 'principles' which make practices coherent within the culture.

Directly related to this is Bourdieu's suggestion that habitus dispositions generate 'strategic' actions which distinguish 'agents' from 'subjects'. Bourdieu is careful not to deny autonomy to the individual agent, maintaining that individual actions are not fully determined by the incorporated social structures. Individuals, in his model, retain some control over personal activity. Individual activity is possible but it is mediated through the guiding principles, or limiting conditions, that the individual is not fully aware of and which organize the possible practices.

The notion of individual action that Bourdieu proposes is encapsulated by his distinction between 'agent' and 'subject'. In an attempt to distinguish individual action which is not a mere carrying out of a rule (that is, individual as 'subjected' to an external guiding force with no power of personal manipulation) Bourdieu speaks about 'agents' to emphasise his understanding of individual activity as constrained, but creative. To resolve this conundrum the notion of 'strategically directed' activity is introduced. That is, the strategic possibilities open to an 'agent' are limited and constrained from the outset. The structural order constitutes the universe of that which is possible:

"Social ageing is nothing other than the slow renunciation or disinvestment which leads agents to adjust their aspirations to their objective chances, to espouse their condition, become what they are and make do with what they have, (...) and accepting bereavement of all the 'lateral possibles' they have abandoned along the way"⁷⁰

Bourdieu's model of dispositions does not grant total freedom to the individual, rather it grants the competence to utilize their internal capacities to the best that contextual constraints can offer. Here Bourdieu attempts to transcend a position which envisages the individual as a passive performer of external principles and at the same time to refuse the philosophy of free consciousness. Habitus dispositions guide and constrain but in a 'generative' manner. The internalized principles of the habitus are just a few guiding

⁶⁸ Bourdieu (1995b: 92) see also Bourdieu (1995a:88)

⁶⁹ Bourdieu (1995b:87)

⁷⁰ Bourdieu (1994a:111) (1990a:13)

principles which allow, --what is more, demand-- a display of choices in specific circumstances.

It is one of Bourdieu's main aims to separate himself from theories that make individual activity an epiphenomena of structure. Rather he conceives individuals as agents who, by putting into practice their incorporated, 'generative' habitus, can apply them in variable situations. This 'feel for the game', enables a different number of practices:

"and an infinite number of 'moves' to be made, adapted to the infinite number of possible situations which no rule, however complex, can foresee"⁷¹

So, for example, he talks about 'matrimonial strategies' rather than 'rules of kinship'. It is the practical nature of habitus dispositions which makes individuals creative when confronted with new situations. Bourdieu tries to transcend the reification of abstract models which some forms of structuralism effect when they see their own theoretical constructs as giving meaning to individual actions. On the contrary, individuals are able to contradict 'official' rules if the situation in hand demands different actions. Strategic actions, says Bourdieu using Saussurian notions, are like speech over language, that is, actions that utilize general frameworks to improvise behaviour which 'makes sense' in the particular situation where it is applied.

The nature of these constraints are not those of the unconscious, conveyed by structuralist models like that of Levi-Strauss. According to Bourdieu, these models effect an 'over-determination' of individual activity which effectively dispossesses them of any individual capacity for action. To resolve such structuralist rigidity, Bourdieu introduces the notion of 'fuzziness' or 'fuzzy logic', a concept with which he wants to suggest that actions are not fully determined but rather that the internalized guiding principles leave some room for improvisation:

"As an acquired system of generative schemes, the habitus makes possible the free production of all the thoughts, perceptions and actions inherent in the particular conditions of its production -and only those. Through the habitus, the structure of which it is the product governs practice, not along the paths of a mechanical determinism, but within the constraints and limits initially set on its inventions (...) an infinite yet strictly limited generative capacity"⁷²

This generative and inventive capacity is revealed by the choices which individuals implement in specific situations. On careful scrutiny such choices are revealed, according to Bourdieu, to be perfectly adjusted to the demands of the social field. Habitus dispositions thus, generate activity which transforms the objective demands of the social environment into individual strategic activity.⁷³ Although individuals may have the

⁷¹ Bourdieu (1990a: 9-10)

⁷² Bourdieu (1995b:55)

⁷³ Bourdieu (1994a: 175)

impression that they act freely to attain personal aims, the reality is that practices will be adjusted to the external realities. This feeling of independence comes from the fact that the constraints come from inside the individual. The specific nature of habitus dispositions transforms them into 'forgotten history', internalized as second nature. This is how Bourdieu tries to transcend the problematic notion of strategic practices which are not consciously calculated. The agent is aware of the possibilities which a particular situation offers to her, but she is only aware in a very incomplete way, of the fundamental structures which underlie her social conditioning. Practical logic limits practices precisely because the generative mechanisms are beyond individual manipulation:

"the generative formula of practices has to remain within the limits that are set on practical logic by the very fact that it derives not from this formula but from its practical equivalent - a system of schemes capable of orienting practice without entering consciousness except in an intermittent and partial way"⁷⁴

Despite the fact that practices are internalized and structured by non-conscious principles, Bourdieu maintains that individual activity is oriented towards a conscious goal. Individuals seeking social recognition acquire a central role in his theory of action. Notions like honour and distinction are central to this account of social activity:

"struggles for recognition are a fundamental dimension of social life (...) what is at stake in them is the accumulation of a particular form of capital, honour in the sense of reputation and prestige, and that there is, therefore, a specific logic behind (...) the idea of strategy, (...) as the product of the sense of honour, as a feel for that particular game, the game of honour."⁷⁵

Pursuit of honour acquires a powerful constitutive role and helps to explain the nature of individual activity. It is precisely what determines the appropriate action chosen in each situation. Threats and challenges to honour are major social features to bear in mind when trying to understand the logic of practice. It would seem that a social sense of prestige, reputation, and a pursuit of 'distinction' underpin the "logic of practice" for individual activity. Within Bourdieu's general theory of practices, individuals tend to use what particular situations offer so as to maximize their social status. The individual seems to be aware that the rules of the game imply a general evaluative scheme in which some features are more valued than others. Individual, strategic activity is part and parcel of group struggles for social honour and distinction.

⁷⁴ Bourdieu (1995b:269)

⁷⁵ Bourdieu (1990a : 22)

2.1.6. Habitus dispositions are relational

We have noted that habitus dispositions are shared with other members of the same group, and that this similarity or dissimilarity is what constitutes the social map:

"My work consists in saying that people are located in social space, that they aren't just anywhere, in other words, interchangeable, as these people claim who deny the existence of 'social classes', and that according to the position they occupy in this highly complex space, you can understand the logic of their practices and determine, *inter alia*, how they will classify themselves and others."⁷⁶

Bourdieu's denial of the traditional understanding of the concept of class does not imply his denial of a differentiated social space. On the contrary, he points out the constitutive significance of differentiated and hierarchically placed groups. It is inherent in the nature of habitus dispositions to be structured in a group system. Individuals' dispositions are related to other's dispositions and it is through the dynamics of this relationship that social orders get structured and where the explanation of individual activity has to be found.

Bourdieu is not interested in how dispositions are acquired in a relationship with other individuals but rather how the relationship with others is already determined by differently constituted sets of group dispositions. Bourdieu's relational thinking does not deny substantialist approaches in which class differences are seen as based in objective elements, rather he argues that what makes these objective elements a class constitutive factor is of a relational nature. There is a 'space of differences' in the social world, but what lie underneath this differentiation are not substances but the relationship between them. Social reality, says Bourdieu, has to be understood as a 'set of invisible relationships'. In his model the 'real' is the 'relational'⁷⁷. Reality is constituted by relationships in which differentiating principles emerge. These relational dynamics take principally two modes, that of similarity and that of dissimilarity. Individuals' dispositions are in direct relation with other members of the same group. This similarity is that of 'homology' as noted in section 1.1.3.

The notion of homology suggests a mode of individual interaction that is established among already formed individuals. Interaction is a process through which individuals 'confirm' the similarities (or dissimilarities) of their already constituted habitus. The relationship appears to be more between external structural features and single individuals than between individuals themselves.

⁷⁶ Bourdieu (1990a:50)

⁷⁷ Bourdieu (1987)

The objective structures, thus, inculcate the 'art of assessing likelihoods, a sense of reality' similar to the members of the same class:

"The singular habitus of members of the same class are united in a relationship of homology, that is, of diversity within homogeneity reflecting (...) their social conditions of production"⁷⁸

The social value or meaning attached to a particular group of dispositions is the product of the relationship with another different group of dispositions and this relationship constitutes the social landscape. Bourdieu is particularly interested in demonstrating that the social world is dynamic and that some forms of structuralism, by 'treating social facts as things'⁷⁹, not only reify social reality but preclude an understanding of the true nature of social life; that of the constitutive effect of the inter-class relationships. However, Bourdieu is emphatic in denying that individuals' interactions can happen in a space that is not already structured by objective external conditions:

"the notion of situation, which is central to the interactionist fallacy, enables the objective, durable structure of relationship between officially constituted and guaranteed positions which organized every real interaction to be reduced to a momentary, local, fluid order (...) Interacting individuals bring all their properties in to the most circumstantial interactions, and their relative positions in the social structure govern their positions in the interactions"⁸⁰

The relationship between different groups' habitus dispositions is mediated by the external social structure as it exists inside individuals as a set of dispositions. Class dispositions are automatically associated with a position within the social structure according to the overall values which govern a particular moment. The permanent re-establishment of these differences between group dispositions is at the core of Bourdieu's class model. Inter-class relationships are the fundamental processes by which the differences between group's social environments are established as socially significant:

"what the competitive struggle [between classes] makes everlasting is not different conditions but the difference between conditions"⁸¹

Bourdieu denies any essentialism regarding the established order of society. Change is continual due to the class struggle to acquire distinct positions. What is stable and permanent, is the dynamics of recognition within society. Permanence and change is a 'futile' opposition for Bourdieu who envisages social contradiction as part and parcel of the continuation of the very constitutive bases of social structure, namely, that of the differentiation process between groups or classes. The substantial and objective forms of a group's social conditions may change but the relational nature of the different

⁷⁸ Bourdieu (1995b:58-59-60)

⁷⁹ Bourdieu (1994a:244)

⁸⁰ Bourdieu (1994a:578)

⁸¹ Bourdieu (1994a:164)

structural positions remains the same. This is a crux of Bourdieu's model. Individuals' nature is that of their position in the social world. Individual subjectivity formation and existence in the social world stems directly from the relational nature of the structural world. Clearly, external social reality is at the basis of individual nature. The individual is envisaged as a vessel embodying the external social world:

"the relation between class habitus and individual habitus (...) could be regarded as a subjective but non-individual system of internalized structures"⁸²

The relationship that Bourdieu sets out to illustrate is one of hierarchy. Within social space groups differentiate themselves according to the dominating and dominated positions which their acquired dispositions grant to their members. This hierarchy derives from the dominant taxonomy which valorizes some forms of dispositions over others. This is exactly what the dynamics of distinction achieves. Bourdieu is clear that it is not only 'difference' which is structured by the social struggle but a hierarchy of differences. The structural hierarchies are, however, also subject to the specific relational forces present in a particular social environment. Thus, for instance, hierarchies of legitimacy cannot be pinpointed objectively unless taken relationally within a field⁸³:

One important consequence of this is that Bourdieu takes a sort of organicist position by prioritizing the group over the individual:

"each group tends to set up the means of perpetuating itself beyond the finite individuals in whom it is incarnated"⁸⁴

That is, group interests preside over individual interests, or rather, individual interests necessarily coincide with their constitutive group's interests. Thus, the maintenance of hierarchies which confer higher social positions to some groups over others is at the basis of the constitution of social dynamics. This explains why dominating groups engage in practices that tend to preserve their continuity as a dominating group. Conversely, dominated groups keep re-establishing themselves in dominated positions as a result of practices which do not confer enough social recognition to effect any structural transformation of their established social position. Bourdieu's conception of individual activity as epiphenomenal to the group to which one individual belongs reveals his inherent commitment to prior structural arrangements, never more clearly that when he describes groups' strategies as directed by symbolic values found in the external conditions of existence:

⁸² Bourdieu (1995b:60)

⁸³ Bourdieu (1994a:86)

⁸⁴ Bourdieu (1994a:72)

"The genuinely intentional strategies through which members of a group seek to distinguish themselves from the group immediately below (...) and to identify themselves with the group immediately above [is a manifestation] of the dialectic of the rare and the common inscribed in the objective differentiation of conditions and dispositions"⁸⁵

2.1.7. Habitus dispositions are re-productive.

The adjusted quality of habitus dispositions ensures their continuity by generating practices which are reproductive in nature. The reproductive nature of habitus dispositions is visible in different operations.

First in that habitus dispositions reproduce the objective conditions that produced them. Individuals internalize a set of principles which constitute practices that can only be adjusted to, and hence re-establish the conditions which constituted them originally. Individual agents are active in the reproduction of the external structure. Bourdieu is very clear about this:

"the tendency toward self-reproduction of the structure is realized only when it enrolls the collaboration of agents who have internalized its specific necessity in the form of habitus(...). Having internalized the immanent law of the structure in the form of habitus, they realize its necessity in the very spontaneous movement of their existence"⁸⁶

That social structures are 'actively' reproduced by agents is a theme which dominates Bourdieu's whole oeuvre. Individual activity is always in a creative mode, but *inevitably* reproduces the external world. Cognitive structures dispose agents towards similar individual habitus and discourage the mixing of different dispositions. Social structural arrangements thus are perfectly reproduced and perpetuated by the attraction that habitus have towards similarly constituted ones:

"This spontaneous decoding of one habitus by another is the basis of the immediate affinities which orient social encounters, discouraging socially discordant relationships, encouraging well-matched relationships, without these operations ever having to be formulated other than in the socially innocent language of likes and dislikes"⁸⁷

Bourdieu's 'organicist' stance is never more clearly spelled out than in his reproductive model:

⁸⁵ Bourdieu (1994a:246)

⁸⁶ Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 140)

⁸⁷ Bourdieu (1994a:468)

"the habitus is the product of the work of inculcation and appropriation necessary in order for those products of collective history, the objective structures (e.g. of language, economy, etc.) to succeed in reproducing themselves more or less completely, in the form of durable dispositions, in the organisms, which one can, if one wishes, call individuals."⁸⁸

A significant feature of the model is the emphasis on how institutions affect subsequent reproduction of prior habitus dispositions. For instance school institutions reinforce primary habitus by encouraging or discouraging individuals whose habitus adjusts or not to the requirements of the system. Thus, individuals socialized in family environments that value the mastery of abstract symbolic cognitive activity easily cope in school environments that positively sanction such skills. By the same token a mirror image of 'negative reproduction' operates among those individuals whose families do not possess these skills to transfer in the first place.⁸⁹

Central to Bourdieu's model is that habitus dispositions are self-reproduced by the agents themselves. The dispositions, which act from inside the individual, conform with the requirements of the external world. It is by producing a 'compliant habitus', says Bourdieu, that the social order is reproduced,

"To say with Marx the 'the petit bourgeois cannot transcend the limits of his mind' is to say that his thought has the same limits as his condition, that his condition in a sense doubly limits him, by the material limits which it sets to his practice and the limits it sets to his thought and therefore his practice, and which make him accept, and even love, these limits"⁹⁰

Activity, embodied in schemes of possible practices, functions thus to constantly reproduce the dispositions which are at its origin. Individual dispositions tend to self-validate themselves by adjusting to what the world seems to demand from agents.

2.1.8. Concluding summary: habitus dispositions as social, collective, embodied, durable and reproductive kind of disposition

We have broken-down the key elements of habitus dispositions. Their social nature is of a kind which defines them as acquired and not innate, internalized through contact with other members of a given collective, in a mimetic fashion in the early stages⁹¹ of life, and founded on material/economic bases. They are fundamentally corporeal in nature, which makes them instinctual and pre-reflexive and appear to belong the realm of nature. Their embodied nature is also related to particular cognitive schemata. Early

⁸⁸ Bourdieu (1995a:85)

⁸⁹ Bourdieu (1994c:47)

⁹⁰ Bourdieu (1994a: 244)

⁹¹ Bourdieu never specifies when the early stages of life ends or what happens when in early stages of life there is radical shift of circumstances.

acquisition combined with their corporeal internalization makes them durable, resilient to change and transposable to varied areas of social life. Habitus dispositions constitute a type of individual activity as strategic, understood as governed by underlying principles that allow some capacity for individual choice so long as that choice is in harmony with the underlying structural principles. Habitus dispositions do not possess intrinsic social values but acquire them in a system of relationships with other groups of dispositions. As a corollary to this they effect a circle of reproduction, both of the individual internalized dispositions and of the external social conditions which constitute them.

We have so far dealt with the individual micro-phenomena of social life outlined by Bourdieu's model. We have ended by concluding that all the key elements of individual habitus dispositions concur in endowing them with a reproductive effect which is also the key element of the dynamics of social life. Bourdieu's model of social life, thus, is a theory of power which has at its core habitus dispositions and their reproductive activity. In the following sections we shall see how Bourdieu's model envisages the dynamics of macro-social phenomena.

2.2. The logic of practice: dispositions, power relations and the ordering power of Symbolic Violence

The first section of this chapter revolves around the micro-social dynamics of individual formation (habitus dispositions) and its dependence on, and connection to, macro-phenomena. To fully understand the analytical scope of Bourdieu's model, however, we have to turn our attention to its macro-social features. That is: how habitus dispositions function in the social world and the significance of the notions of fields and capitals. To complete the exposition of Bourdieu's theory of practice, we need to show how the individual habitus is 'put into practice' and examine the 'practical logics' which govern individual activity. This is essential in order to unfold two fundamental aspects of the model: first his position in the debate about structural constraints and individual agency; second, his theory of power.

For Bourdieu practices can *only* be understood in relationship to social space. Social space is a complex composite of distinct areas ('fields' in his terminology) in which the true dynamics of individual's habitus are comprehended in relation with others. Bourdieu specifies that the appropriate nature of practices can be captured in the formula: [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice⁹². We encounter thus, two other central concepts in Bourdieu's model of social action: field and capital.

Bourdieu suggests that 'capitals' are the product of a specific encounter between the practices that habitus dispositions generate and the 'field'. Field, an extremely ambiguous notion in Bourdieu's model, could be defined as the logic between the different social forces present in a particular social space. This is a position which focuses on the dynamics which order and organise social space and the constraints and opportunities for different individuals inhabiting specific social fields. Individuals move within fields endowed with differential capacities for manoeuvre which are the product of capitals which originate in their acquired habitus dispositions.

The notion of habitus is designed to account for a particular conception of power, namely, Symbolic Violence or Symbolic Power. This notion of power relations tries to account for the non-coercive procedures that characterise the reproduction of structural forms of social inequality, and specifically for a form of coercive power that is invisible to the dominated agents.

Symbolic Violence is an operation which, in Bourdieu's thinking, explains the *objectifying* effect of power relations, that is they establish the arbitrary nature of the

⁹² Bourdieu, (1994a:101)

social world as a transcendent entity, by remaining hidden from individuals' reflexive capacities.

2.2.1. Habitus and the field: the reproductive logic of struggle

"Fields are systems of relations that are independent of the populations which these relations define (...) the notion of the field reminds us that the true object of social science is not the individual (...) it is the field which is primary and must be the focus of the research operations"⁹³

Concurring with his tenet that the nature of the social world transcends individual activity to become group activity, Bourdieu presents a model of social dynamics in which the focus of enquiry is to establish the dynamics between those groups. These dynamics are what constitute a field and this is what needs to be accounted for. This dynamic is at the very core of individuals' habitus dispositions. The connection between habitus and field is that of 'an ontological correspondence', that is, practices reflect the structure of social reality. The specificity of habitus dispositions is that they are adapted to the demands of the social fields. Individual habitus is the (active) internalization of external features:

"social reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside of agents"⁹⁴

Let us recall that by its very nature habitus is not an individual feature but a collective one. Social space is distributed into clusters of different group habitus. Central to the model of social dynamics is the relationship established among these clusters of dispositions: "In analytic terms a field may be defined as a network, or a configuration of objective relations between [group] positions"⁹⁵

In Bourdieu's model interaction clearly occurs between 'positions', that is objective phenomena, not individuals. In this model pure interactions between people are dismissed in favour of relations between groups of habitus, or rather the structures which characterize the internalized collective habitus. "What exist in the social world are relations -not interactions between agents and intersubjective ties between individuals but *objective relations* which exist '*independent of individual consciousness and will*' as Marx says."⁹⁶

Social life and social structure are principally defined by the struggles among habitus groups over access to resources in a given field. These resources may differ in different

⁹³ Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:106-7)

⁹⁴ Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:127)

⁹⁵ Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:97)

⁹⁶ Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:97) Italics are mine

fields, but the dynamic which governs them is fundamentally the same. What underlies this struggle is principally a contest to dominate the valuable resources within a given field. These resources are 'capitals'. Bourdieu's notion of capitals, more so than his notion of habitus, acquires different connotations in different texts. It has produced numerous divergent interpretations because it is never fully clear what Bourdieu understands by 'capital'. At times capital appears to be a metaphorical notion that represents what groups of individuals agree to be valuable, i.e. 'symbolic capital' refers to that whose worth is the product of a specific set of values prevalent in a specific social arena. At others, capital appears to refer to concrete possessions that you either have or you don't, i.e. economic capital.

Capitals: forms and economic logic

I shall highlight three main aspects of the notion of capital. Firstly, the different forms it takes and its connection to habitus dispositions, secondly its internal capacity to be 'convertible', and thirdly how the former ingredients shed light on Bourdieu's notion of the 'economy' of practices, which is at the core of Bourdieu's theory of power. It is important to highlight that in Bourdieu's model of practices the embodied habitus and its dispositions are activated in the social world in form of capitals. How this relates to the discussion of an embodied sex/gender habitus will be discussed in chapter 4.

Let's begin by noting the connection between habitus dispositions and capitals. Bourdieu insists that the concept of field is intended to account for that area of society characterised by the relationship between groups of individuals with different habitus dispositions. Different habitus dispositions interrelate within a field endowing those groups of individuals with differential capitals.⁹⁷ Capitals appear to display themselves in different forms according to the internal laws governing a particular field, for example, among sports-people physical strength is a source of capital whereas in the intellectual field, cognitive capacities for logical reasoning are considered important. Dispositions as capitals present different forms according to the internal laws governing a particular field. There are however, 'fundamental' capitals, according to Bourdieu which can be found across the whole system of fields.⁹⁸

These are, firstly, *economic capital*, that is material properties and money the social power of which is self-evident. Bourdieu often presents this as the most clearly dominant form of capital.⁹⁹ Secondly Bourdieu conceives of *cultural capital* which manifests itself in different forms. It may be embodied in the long lasting dispositions of

⁹⁷ Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:101)

⁹⁸ Bourdieu's attempt to systematically present his notion of capital is found in Bourdieu (1986)

⁹⁹ Bourdieu (1986:247-252)

the mind and body, i.e. ways of talking, reasoning, dressing, walking and so on; it may take material form as cultural goods like pictures, books, instruments, etc.; or it can take the institutionalized form of educational qualifications. Within this multifaceted conception of cultural capital Bourdieu gives particular prominence to the embodied forms.¹⁰⁰ Bourdieu also distinctly recognizes *social capital* as a third form of capital present in all fields. This is described as the possession of a 'durable network of relationships' and the product of membership in particular groups or families. It provides its possessors with the benefits (or disadvantages) of the 'collective social capital' of the group.

Whereas economic capital is clearly recognisable by the members of a society, cultural and social capital are not recognized as such. Rather they are 'naturalized' as part of 'the ways things are' or as inherent properties of the individual. Linked to this misrecognition a fourth form of capital emerges in Bourdieu's model which appears to possess distinct properties. This is *symbolic capital*, which is sometimes described as an independent form of capital identifiable as the levels of prestige, reputation or fame that someone may possess. At other times it is described as the general capacity of an agent or a group of agents to manipulate the stakes of a field to their advantage.¹⁰¹

These forms of capital do not have intrinsic value, rather they acquire their significance within the internal structure of a field. Capitals endow agents with *relative* positions in social space. Because social space is structured by principles of differentiation among groups of individuals, capitals acquire full significance because they are the basis of the differential order. Bourdieu uses the notion of capital to understand the hierarchical ordering of habitus dispositions within a social system.

"the active properties that are chosen as principles of construction of the social space are the different kinds of power or capital that are current in the different fields. (...) These kinds of capitals, like trumps in a game of cards, are powers which define the chances of profit in a given field"¹⁰²

The hierarchical distribution of different capitals represents the structure of the social world.

The relative nature of capital connects with another key notion of Bourdieu's model, namely that of *convertibility*: "The real logic of the functioning of capital [is] the

¹⁰⁰ Such is the prominence of the embodied cultural capital that some authors have subdivided it into 'physical capital'. See Shilling (1991) and (1993)

¹⁰¹ Bourdieu is never clear in his taxonomy of capitals, particularly regarding the exact role granted to symbolic capital, which sometimes appears as a distinct form of capital and sometimes as the power which other capitals grant. An overview of his main texts points to symbolic capital as the general all-encompassing capital which operates in and through all the other forms of capital. This later understanding is the one I take to be the most accurate representation of Bourdieu's position.

¹⁰² Bourdieu (1994b:230)

conversions from one type to another".¹⁰³ The notion of convertibility as a metaphor of the capacities of capitals presents some inconsistencies in Bourdieu's texts. Intrinsically 'convertibility' implies that prior capitals are *transformed* into different capitals, and in this transformation the prior capital disappears. Although this may be what Bourdieu indicates when families consume economic capital to provide education to their offspring, more often what Bourdieu seems to suggest is that capitals can be utilized in different forms according to the nature of the field in order to increase the amount of other capitals. To quote his best known example of convertibility this means that cultural capital in the form of intellectual mastery profits individuals by allowing them to further accumulate more capitals --cultural, symbolic or economic.

Whatever inconsistency Bourdieu's notion of convertibility may convey, the important aspect to reconstruct from his model of capitals is that accumulation of capitals is most profitable when it becomes symbolic capital, understood in this case as social recognition. Symbolic capital in this sense is the fundamental form of capital because it endows its possessor with the maximum power to accumulate other capitals. "Symbolic capital, which in the form of prestige and renown (...) is readily convertible back into economic capital, is perhaps *the most valuable form of accumulation* in a society".¹⁰⁴ Symbolic capital is the notion which provides coherence to the 'general theory of the economics of practice'¹⁰⁵. It is the accumulation of symbolic capital in the form of collective recognition that underlies the accumulation of capitals.

The notion of convertibility is at the root of Bourdieu's general theory of 'the economy of practices'. Bourdieu uses the concept of economy in a broad sense to mean practices that are geared to maximize a wide range of profits, not only economic. What his economic model highlights is the universal tendency to accumulate profits of any nature. It is in this sense that we have to understand his statement that the social world is dominated by the 'brutal fact of universal reducibility to economics'.¹⁰⁶

Individuals enter into the social arena of struggle endowed with some dispositions, or capitals, which they have acquired in earlier phases. Further social activity is then geared to enhance the value of these capitals in the form of symbolic capital. Bourdieu describes the universal tendency to attempt to maximize one's social profits as the 'practical sense'. That is, although not directly obvious to the individual, converting one's capitals into more profitable forms is a fundamental aim of inter-group activity.

¹⁰³ Bourdieu (1986: 252)

¹⁰⁴ Bourdieu (1995a:179)

¹⁰⁵ Bourdieu (1995a:171-183)

¹⁰⁶ Bourdieu (1986:253)

Individual activity, directed by internalized group habitus, is aimed at maximizing one's capitals by effecting conversion strategies. Thus:

"Practices *form an economy*, that is, follow an immanent reason that cannot be restricted to economic reason, for the economy of practices may be defined by reference to a wide range of functions and ends."¹⁰⁷

Bourdieu emphasises individuals' practice as a form of economy, but his model aims to transcend a reductionist economic view based solely on monetary bases. It envisages social action as geared towards maximizing profits in a wider sense. Bourdieu describes his model of individual practices as a 'general science of the economy'. The internal logic of the accumulation of capitals is what allows us to understand apparently irrational 'economic' acts. Thus, a decision which appears to be financially ruinous, may later prove to be beneficial in the form of accumulated symbolic or other type of capitals.

Homology and heterology: a 'relationalist' model

Bourdieu's relational model stems from his earlier commitment to structuralist tenets that envisage the meaning and function of an element in terms of its relationship with the rest. However he claims to take this structuralist notion further by introducing the constitutive factor of 'differentiation', that is, a social object acquires meaning in opposition to others. Like Saussure, Bourdieu envisages the social world as a network of relations of oppositions.¹⁰⁸ Thus, individual dispositions and the capitals they entail, as collective formations are the product of an oppositional relationship with other collective dispositions.

The model thus highlights 'relationalism' over 'substantialism': the real is identified with relations not with substances.¹⁰⁹ Having said this Bourdieu notes that dispositions and capitals acquire a social value through social relationships, albeit constrained by the hierarchical logic already in place. Consequently, the important aspect of social life is the 'topology' of the relative positions which groups of individuals occupy in social space. Bourdieu, therefore, forcefully rejects interactionist accounts and contends that interactions among individuals only occur under the umbrella of existing structural dynamics:

¹⁰⁷ Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:118)

¹⁰⁸ See Bourdieu (1995b:4)

¹⁰⁹ Bourdieu (1990a:126)

"The interactions, which are accepted at their face value by people of an empiricist disposition, conceal the structures that are realized in them. It is one of those cases in which the visible, that which is immediately given, conceals the invisible which determines it. One thus forgets that the truth of the interaction is never entirely to be found in interaction."¹¹⁰

The composition of the social space thus would appear to be structured by the principles of homology and heterology.¹¹¹ The properties that define a relationship of homology or heterology among groups have to be established, Bourdieu notes, by taking into account both the 'volume' and the 'structure' of their capitals. It would appear that the 'volume' is what the group brings into play whereas the 'structure' is defined by the 'relative weight of the different kinds of capitals' within a social space.¹¹²

The 'volume' appears to refer to that property which unites individuals *within* a group. It is not surprising thus, that for Bourdieu the *objective* existence of a class or group consists of individuals who share the same habitus dispositions, that is individuals who have been exposed to the same conditions of existence. Homologous habitus underlies the unity of practices of a group or class:

"The habitus is precisely this immanent law, inscribed in bodies by identical histories, which is the precondition not only for the co-ordination of practices but also for practices of co-ordination"¹¹³

Implicit in his model of collective habitus dispositions, however, is the fact that different collectives are in a position of heterology, or differentiation. What determines the space of group differences is the volume of capital accumulated through social practices geared to achieve maximum benefits in a particular social field. This volume of capitals is clearly differently distributed across the social space and it constitutes the hierarchical structure of the social map. So distinct is the nature of differently accumulated volume of capitals that Bourdieu distinguishes a 'three dimensional space' in contemporary societies. Bourdieu's attempt to divide the 'middle spheres' into different 'class fractions' do not stop him from using the commonly accepted division of the social world into working, middle and upper-middle classes.¹¹⁴

Given that Bourdieu does not see class differences as objectively real but rather constituted in the space of relationships, the dissimilar nature of habitus dispositions

¹¹⁰ Bourdieu (1990a:127)

¹¹¹ Although in Bourdieu's text only the term homology appears, I have introduced 'heterology' to express the explicit notion that groups' interactions reveals their distinct properties.

¹¹² Bourdieu (1990a:128)

¹¹³ Bourdieu (1995b: 59)

¹¹⁴ See Bourdieu (1994a: 114-125)

only appears when a social 'displacement' takes effect. This is what Bourdieu has termed hysteresis¹¹⁵, or the Don Quixote effect¹¹⁶:

"the conditions of acquisitions of the properties synchronically observed only make themselves visible in cases of discordance between the conditions of acquisition and the conditions of use, i.e. when the practices generated by the habitus appear as ill-adapted because they are attuned to an earliest state of the objective conditions"¹¹⁷

In this context individual habitus is understood as the property of a collective. Social interaction occurs, as it were, between collectives rather than individuals. Habitus conceived as a 'structured structure' means that the principle of division into classes is individually internalized. Bourdieu goes further than this in saying that habitus itself is the product of the internalization of the division of the world into social classes. Bourdieu's model is a theory of individual formation in which the individual is seen as an epiphenomenon of group formation.

Homology and heterology, consensus and reproduction of the social structure

A significant theoretical outcome of this position is that when he comes to analyse the notion of social consensus Bourdieu relies on his notion of homology. The possibility of harmonious inter-subjective communication, thus, is the result of this similar social genesis. Bourdieu illustrates this point with the example of the clocks (see 1.1.3.3. above).

It follows from the above that homology and heterology are at the basis of the reproduction of society. Individuals' dispositions generate actions that tend to avoid discordance with the social environment, thus re-establishing their original social position. This is the 'logic of homologies':

"it is the logic of the homologies, not cynical calculation, which causes works to be adjusted to the expectations of their audience (...) it is the result of the pre-established harmony between two systems of interest (...) of the structural and functional homology between a given [individual's] position in the field of production and the position of his audience in the field of the classes and class fractions"¹¹⁸

Individuals are placed in the social structure by a process of affinity. Their habitus dispositions guide them with a 'social sense' which has internalized 'sympathies and antipathies' to other collective practices. These affinities are what keep individuals in the social environment into which they have been socialized. Different habituses are 'incompatible and socially discordant' and so discourage mobility. Thus, any

¹¹⁵ Bourdieu (1995a:78)

¹¹⁶ Bourdieu (2000: 160) and (1994a:109)

¹¹⁷ Bourdieu (1994a:109)

¹¹⁸ Bourdieu (1994a:239)

displacement of habitus dispositions from their original social location will generate negative sanctioning effects. In the case of an individual (the Don Quixote effect) social mobility is prevented by feelings of awkwardness resulting from the individual's ill-adapted practices. In the case of a whole collective effecting class mobility, the same dynamics of the principle of distinction will incite dominant classes to modify the boundaries of their distinct capitals. Class thus has to be understood as the result of the dynamics of homology and heterology. That is, as the struggle between classifications of the social world that determine the existence of differences and similarities.

Reproductive unconscious strategies

Individual dispositions are realized when they come into contact with other habitus dispositions, the capitals they embody, and the demands of a particular field. In the encounter between these three elements we find the logics of the reproduction of the social structure. The reproductive effect of individual activity, as noted in section 1.5.3, lies in the 'strategic' nature of habitus dispositions. The relationship between individuals and social structure as envisaged in Bourdieu's model presents some key features of individual activity.

First of all the notion of individual choice is that of a 'practical logic'. Bourdieu appears to suggest a form of external determination acting from 'inside' the individual: "Through the habitus, the structure which has produced it governs its practice"¹¹⁹. Bourdieu is clear in defining individual practice as 'a matrix generating responses adapted in advance to all objective conditions identical to or homologous with the (past) conditions of its production'¹²⁰. All future activity thus, is guided by this internalized matrix, which determines the appropriate responses. Individuals' choices are thus guided, by a 'practical sense' of what is reasonable in a particular situation:

"practical sense 'selects' certain objects or actions in relation to 'the matter in hand' (...) and by fixing on those with which there is something to be done or those that determine what is to be done in the given situation"¹²¹

The homologous relationship between individual habitus and the demands of a social field render the choice of habitus dispositions non-conscious. Individual choice is guided by: "a system of schemes capable of orienting practice without entering consciousness except in an intermittent and partial way."¹²²

¹¹⁹ Bourdieu (1995b:95)

¹²⁰ Bourdieu (1995b:64)

¹²¹ Bourdieu (1995b:90)

¹²² Bourdieu (1995b:269)

Secondly, strategic 'calculation' is how Bourdieu defines individual action. Despite Bourdieu's emphasis on unconscious practices, he contends that some calculative activity occurs. This calculative activity is geared towards assessing what is at stake in a field and calculating the most profitable action to take. With this move Bourdieu tries to avoid an overtly deterministic stance. He conceives of individual activity as central to social dynamics whilst maintaining the causal role of external objective reality:

"the habitus entertains with the social world which has produced it a real ontological complicity, the source of cognition without consciousness, intentionality without intention and a practical mastery of the world's regularities which allows one to anticipate the future without even needing to posit it as such"¹²³

The model thus introduces a sort of utilitarian framework in which individual activity is seen as the product of a strategic response to maximize the social profits offered in a particular social field. The accumulation of capital in the form of symbolic capital is the basic guiding principle of individual social activity:

"practices never cease to comply with an economic logic (...) the science of 'economic' practices as a particular case of a science capable of treating all practices, including those experienced as disinterested or gratuitous, and therefore freed from the 'economy', as economic practices aimed at maximizing material or symbolic profit"¹²⁴

Thirdly, the notion of strategies suggests a theory of 'regularities' rather than 'rules'. The presence of social order is the product of internalized habitus which guides individuals to 'regular' activity. That is, following a Chomskian model, he understands the internalization of a habitus as the internalization of a 'generative system' of basic principles which allow the individual to engage in a variety of activities but always according to this principle. Unlike Chomsky's model, however, these principles are the product of socialization, not of innate properties.¹²⁵ It provides fixed guiding principles that allow an 'infinite' number of moves but produce a constraining effect. This explains the regularities found in individual's practices. For Bourdieu, to act according to a rule is to have a 'feel' for the game, but a game which is historically determined and individually internalized. The constraints that the social game imposes are, thus, not a set of rules, but a sense of what needs to be done in a particular moment by individuals sharing the same habitus:

¹²³ Bourdieu (1990a:11-12)

¹²⁴ Bourdieu (1994b:122)

¹²⁵ Bourdieu (1990a:9)

"the regularities that can be observed, thanks to statistics, are the aggregate product of individual actions guided by the same constraints, whether objective (the necessities written into the structure of the game or partly objectified in the rules) or incorporated."¹²⁶

External objective structures constrain individual variation and yet strategic action allows for creativity. Bourdieu's use of the concept of 'strategies' as opposed to rules points to several issues. Bourdieu wants to give constraining power to external structural factors (rules in this context) but not in a Parsonian way. He wishes to avoid a static and automatic account of behaviour that leaves no possibility of individual variation. The notion of strategies within a rule bound world introduces some capacity for individual manipulation. In contrast to traditional sociological thinking Bourdieu attempts to deny any conscious calculation in individual's practices:

"The habitus contains the solution to the paradoxes of objective meaning without subjective intention. It is the source of these strings of 'moves' which are objectively organized as strategies without being the product of a genuine strategic intention"¹²⁷

Perhaps the best way to picture this paradoxical account is like this: Strategic action is most effective for the goal, that is, it looks the best action to take in a given situation. Internalized habitus means that an individual tends to do what is required in the situation thus giving the impression that there is a conscious choice towards achieving the best results. Choice is thus an illusion of the circular relationship between habitus dispositions and the fields where they were constituted:

"Practical logic, based on a system of objectively coherent generative and organizing schemes, functioning in the practical state as an often imprecise but systematic principle of selection, has neither the rigour nor the constancy that characterize logical logic, (...) This is why practical logic manifests itself in a kind of stylistic unity which, though immediately perceptible, has none of the strict, regular coherence of the concerted products of a plan"¹²⁸

Strategies originate in the individual but because they are pre-consciously bound to internalized social structures, they will inevitably reproduce those structures

Distinction and field dynamics as a struggle

As noted in section 1.6.2. the notion of distinction is central to Bourdieu's model of social stratification. The dynamics of the fields are driven by the pursuit of social status. Social status is key to both differentiation and the ontological status of individuals. Features are specific to a group rather than an individual. It is the group distinction which individuals unconsciously aim to establish. Being a theory of group dynamics,

¹²⁶ Bourdieu (1990a:64)

¹²⁷ Bourdieu (1995b:62)

¹²⁸ Bourdieu (1995b:102)

Bourdieu's model grants ontological existence to individuals through their belonging to a group. This is a view that perceives an inherent incompatibility between classes. Every single cultural practice becomes a signifier of social status, and of distance or proximity from other groups inhabiting the social space. To maximize such social status is at the root of the struggle between the groups of a social field:

"Principles of division, (...) function within and for the purposes of the struggle between social groups; in producing concepts they produce groups, the very groups which produce the principles and the groups against which they are produced"¹²⁹

Individuals are bound to their groups by their sense of taste (distinctive signs). This constitutes a sense of social being as group specific, as 'one of us' as opposed to 'them'. Each object or practice provides signifying power to its users. Banal and unimportant objects like foods, newspapers, and types of clothing, exercise preferences and work within a signifying system that expresses the most fundamental social differences. Individuals' social encounters are governed by a 'relationship of distinction' and with the aim of 'pursuing distinction'.¹³⁰ Group distinctive attributes possess differential value according to a common classificatory system that cuts across the whole stratified society. According to the logics of this system some groups possess more valued (distinctive) cultural forms than others. This value is capital, and it can be used to manipulate the social field to their advantage. Accumulation of social, cultural and economic capitals endows individuals with differential symbolic capital. Possessing more symbolic capital allows one to control the classificatory system. This capacity to invest specific social forms with meaning is a political dimension. To be able to impose one particular group's classificatory system is to be able to credit or discredit others and thus reinforce the groups' boundaries.

Groups, thus, are in a permanent power struggle to legitimize their own categorizations. Those groups with more accumulated capital have an enhanced capacity to dominate the classificatory system and, hence, to access dominant positions in the social structure. Groups struggle to impose taxonomies that are most 'favourable to its characteristics'.¹³¹ Classificatory systems are not a matter of knowledge but of power:

¹²⁹ Bourdieu (1994a:479)

¹³⁰ Bourdieu (1994a:226)

¹³¹ Bourdieu (1994a:475)

"Commonplaces and classificatory systems are thus the stake of struggles between the groups they characterize and counterpose, who fight over them while striving to turn them to their own advantage"¹³²

The 'logics of stigma' implicit in the process of distinction revolve around questions of power. Thus, the social constitution of the 'vulgar' is profound. It grants legitimacy to established social differences by naturalizing the specific traits of one group as inherently superior. To impose as 'refined' a particular group life-style, thus, has a 'social function'. According to Bourdieu the logic of distinction is that distinctive properties provide symbolic capital, and symbolic capital endows groups with the power to establish what the distinctive properties are and, by extension, the power to stigmatize other group's cultural forms.¹³³ The logic of distinction acquires a more ontological dimension within Bourdieu's argument that 'to be socially significant is to be different'.¹³⁴ This is a twist in which the concept of distinction acquires a constitutive dimension rather than merely an organizing one. What grants 'existence' to an individual within a social space is the degree of distinctive properties they possess:

"The main idea is that to exist within a social space, to occupy a point or to be an individual within a social space, is to differ, to be different. According to Benveniste's formula regarding language, 'to be distinctive, to be significant, is the same thing', significant being opposed to insignificant"¹³⁵

2.2.2. Bourdieu's Power Theory: The violence of the symbolic order

As we have seen, Bourdieu's analytical framework is essentially a theory that accounts for the resilience and reproductive nature of structural forms of social inequalities. It is, therefore, now pertinent to focus specifically on Bourdieu's theory of power. Two main operations are involved in this reproduction: naturalization and misrecognition of the arbitrary nature of the symbolic order.

Naturalization: embodiment, meritocracy and doxa

Naturalization is a key notion in Bourdieu's model. Arbitrary power relations, and the unequal social structure they entail, are placed beyond the reach of individual consciousness by the transmutation of socialized forms of conduct into natural features. This process of naturalization takes different forms that utilize different aspects, notably, embodiment, meritocracy and the establishment of the 'doxic' realm of the pre-verbal taken for granted.

¹³² Bourdieu (1994a:477).

¹³³ Bourdieu (1994a:7)

¹³⁴ Bourdieu (1998a: 9)

¹³⁵ Bourdieu (1998a:9)

The process of embodiment of the social is central to Bourdieu's theory of power. We have seen that a fundamental feature of habitus dispositions is their corporeal nature. By shaping individuals' bodies the process of social conditioning and the cultural basis of their practices are rendered invisible. This is a form of symbolic power which dominant classes exert automatically and without a conscious desire for domination. Different classes experience as a 'natural' reality the sense of superiority or inferiority of their personal bodies. Classes not possessing the socially valued embodied features cannot fail to experience inner social and personal inadequacy. Embarrassment is cited by Bourdieu as a self-regulatory mechanism ensuring compliance with the dominant embodied features:

"the petit-bourgeois experience of the world starts out from timidity, the embarrassment of someone who is uneasy in his body and his language (...) who by correcting himself, (...) exposes himself to appropriation, giving himself away as much as by hyper-correction as by clumsiness"¹³⁶

Bodily hexis, that is the embodied form of different cultural features, is political and a result of power relations. Symbolic power, notes Bourdieu, 'works partly through the control of other people's bodies' by naturalizing certain bodily forms as the legitimate ones. Embodied habitus conveys the fundamental oppositions of the social order, by 'rooting the most fundamental structures of the group in the primary experiences of the body'.¹³⁷ The structural differences in economic and cultural capitals are reproduced in individuals by instilling different bodily habits. These act as an 'analogical operator' of the general values of the culture so, for instance, different body shapes convey differential character traits (fat bodies are generally equated as lazy, clumsy, stupid and the opposite applies too: thin bodies are seen as conveying activity, sharpness, intelligence, control). Social customs which shape different bodies, like eating habits, are thus naturalized as inherent character traits.

Power, in Bourdieu's model, takes effect mostly at the level of the body. The profound significance of embodied forms of power is twofold. Firstly they reproduce social structural forms from within the individual by producing mechanisms of self-control. This is a self-imposed form of social coercion. Secondly, because its effects are primarily corporeal and appear 'natural' its power dimension is hidden to consciousness:

¹³⁶ Bourdieu (1994a:207)

¹³⁷ Bourdieu (1995b:69-75)

"The schemes of the habitus (...) owe their specific efficacy to the fact that they function below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will. (...) the apparently most insignificant techniques of the body -ways of walking or blowing one's nose, ways of eating or talking,- engage in the most fundamental principles of construction and evaluation (...) the division of the world of domination, in divisions between bodies and between relations to the body, as to give them the appearance of naturalness"¹³⁸

At a more cognitive level, the naturalization of power through embodiment is reinforced by a rhetoric of meritocracy. Bourdieu highlights the institutional educational system as the paradigmatic means of social reproduction. Educational settings, by ensuring that the cultural capital which is accepted and transmitted is that of the dominant classes, serve to perpetuate existing social inequalities. This is mainly accomplished by the mechanism of converting socialized abilities into meritocratic qualifications. The consequence of this process is that classes which do not have the necessary cognitive skills will not succeed in an environment where these abilities are taken for granted. By viewing these acquired skills as innate individual abilities, classes which have not been socialized into them will experience a personal inadequacy leading to self-exclusion. In this sense social conditioning is transmuted into free vocation and personal merit -or failure. The school, he notes, is where the ideology of natural 'gifts' and innate 'tastes' is established and where the most powerful reproductive mechanism of class relations takes effect.¹³⁹

By naturalizing their group-specific classificatory system dominating groups leave the dominated with little capacity to subvert the status quo. As they are themselves the product of the dominating classificatory principles they cannot envisage alternative forms. Not to accept the dominating categories risks social annihilation. Symbolic 'violence' is how Bourdieu describes this operation of power. To exist socially entails adopting the dominant forms. Dominating classes exert symbolic violence by virtue of establishing their properties as those to which everyone should aspire. To be 'truly human' one has to change one's 'nature' to that of the dominant classes: "a 'social promotion' experienced as an ontological promotion, a process of 'civilisation', a leap from nature to culture, from the animal to the human"¹⁴⁰.

Needless to say, in Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence, capitals have a major role. The transformation from one capital --embodied, economic, cultural-- to other forms of capital and particularly to symbolic capital is the fundamental operation at the basis of symbolic power. This operation is naturalized by the concealed transmutation ('social magic') of the social privilege granted by some capitals into more profitable capital. The advantages accruing to holders of socially privileged forms of physical, cultural or social

¹³⁸ Bourdieu (1994a:467)

¹³⁹ Bourdieu (1994c: 208)

¹⁴⁰ Bourdieu (1994a:251)

capital, are thus disguised as legitimate personal achievements. By the same token the negative social effects of (non-privileged) forms of capital are acknowledged as personal failures.

The most significant effect of the process of naturalization is the constitution of the doxic realm of the pre-verbal taken for granted. Accumulation of symbolic capital by those who institute the legitimate symbolic forms of classification in the social world, grants the power to institute the taken for granted forms of representation and beliefs. Symbolic power is "a world making power", that is, it can turn one class's arbitrary principles of classification and evaluation into an objective reality. Through this process a social construction is objectified as an external transcendent reality. This is a fundamental aspect of Bourdieu's theory, doxic formations are at the basis of establishing what is 'reasonable' and common-sensical. Doxic consolidation is the result of the encounter between habitus (individually internalized structural phenomena) and the field (structural phenomena constituting the habitus). Bourdieu's entire model of symbolic power revolves around the naturalization of the arbitrary social world into the --objective, naturalized, externalized --doxic realm.¹⁴¹

Misrecognition: the symbolic 'violence' of the dominant.

As described above, the naturalization of group-specific cultural features in the form of embodied, innate, and doxic qualities results in the 'misrecognition of power'. Thus it becomes a form of 'symbolic' power:

"every power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force, adds its own specifically symbolic force to those power relations"¹⁴²

Central to this operation is the tendency for groups to accept their social fate. Bourdieu is not interested in exploring how dominant classes collude in their socially constituted supremacy. It is taken for granted that the social profits and satisfaction of this position are something which dominant classes wish to conserve. Rather, the crucial element of the theory of symbolic power is the collusion of dominated groups in their subordinate status. Subordinate classes construe their own practices from the standpoint of the dominant and thus misrecognize the power operations which subordinate them as personal choices. Domination is not an operation of consciousness but rather an operation of the body, of embodied dispositions¹⁴³:

¹⁴¹ Bourdieu (1995b: 68-9)

¹⁴² Bourdieu (1994c:4.)

¹⁴³ See Bourdieu (2001) for the most extended exposition of the embodied forms of power relations.

"Insofar as it is a prolonged process of inculcation producing internalization of the principles of a cultural arbitrary in the form of a durable, transposable habitus, capable of generating practices conforming with those principles outside of and beyond any express regulation or any explicit reminding of the rule [it] enables the [dominant] group or class to produce and reproduce its intellectual and moral integration without resorting to external repression or, in particular physical coercion"¹⁴⁴

The misrecognized nature of symbolic power lies at the very heart of Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction of inequalities. However, Bourdieu is fully aware that social life drifts into new forms. A reconstruction of Bourdieu's reproductive model would not be complete if his position as to the nature of social change was not clarified.

Reproduction, change and stability

Despite, or perhaps *precisely*, because of the mutual acceptance of the dominant class world view, classes are permanently engaged in struggles for symbolic domination. For Bourdieu, social life is the product of the dispute between different groups to impose their own cultural forms.¹⁴⁵ Inter-class collision is inherent in the model and has an evolutionary impact on the class structure. Continuities and disruptions of established social forms are part and parcel of the dynamics of social reproduction. In what follows we will examine how this reproductive process operates.

First of all, Bourdieu's model seems to suggest that all disruptions are 'reproductive' in character. This is because Bourdieu notes that both dominant and dominated groups are equally adapted to the doxic world, but that the space of doxa is mainly colonised by the dominant class world-view with sufficient symbolic capital to constitute the general systems of beliefs. However, Bourdieu also sees struggle as the motor of social life. We need, therefore, to further explain how Bourdieu brings together the contradictory forces of unconscious conformity and conscious struggle. The resolution of this apparent contradiction is analytically formalized in the concepts of orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

The universe of argument: orthodoxy and heterodoxy

As stated above the (undiscussed) taken for granted doxic world happens to be homologous with the -orthodox- dominant views. However the different groups inhabiting a social field are in permanent competition to dominate the basic forms and principles which provide validity and legitimacy to the established social order. In this

¹⁴⁴ Bourdieu (1994c: 37)

¹⁴⁵ For an extended discussion of the constitutive power of class struggle see Bourdieu (1987)

contest the arbitrariness of the undisputed world may be revealed and thus made amenable to reflexive appropriation by individuals. The possibility of subverting the established norms is a by-product of the continual competition to impose the distinctive values of one particular group:

"the specific efficacy of subversive action consists in the power to bring to consciousness, and so modify, the categories of thought which help to orient individual and collective practices and in particular the categories through which distributions are perceived and appreciated"¹⁴⁶

Although the dominated cannot escape the relation of domination that its imposed on them by virtue of the homology between their internalized habitus and the external doxic conditions, there is always some room for 'cognitive struggle'. The partial indeterminacy of some objects allows for differential or antagonistic interpretations, which offer the dominated some room for resistance and enables some changes to the symbolic imposition of the dominant groups.¹⁴⁷ These are the 'heterodox' practices which open up the 'space of what is possible'.¹⁴⁸ The struggle between orthodox and heterodox views is a struggle made possible by the existence of 'competing possibles'. Thus, in their struggle for recognition subordinate classes can use alternatives which have not been utilized by dominant groups. However, and most significantly, they *cannot* transcend the possibilities constituted by the doxic order. Indeed orthodox discourse, 'the official way of speaking and thinking the world' is more than simply one way of perceiving the world, rather it is '*the universe of possible discourse*'. This has fundamental consequences, to wit, a radical censorship which "masks the fundamental opposition between the universe of things that can be stated, and hence thought, and the universe of that which is taken for granted".¹⁴⁹

Heterodox views can only effect a transformation of cultural *forms*, therefore, and not of the fundamental structure of the social world. The logic of social dynamics remains the same. This explains the 'long and partly immobile history' of the collective unconscious. The basic structure of group inequality present in the social world is not amenable to conscious transformation since social groups "far from being simple 'roles' that can be played at will are inscribed in bodies and in an universe from which they derive their strength".¹⁵⁰ Heterodoxy is incapable of actualizing views outside the 'universe of the possible', the doxic world is notably heavily protected by fear of 'exclusion from the game', that is, the social game and, thus, social identity. It follows

¹⁴⁶ Bourdieu (1995b:141)

¹⁴⁷ It is in later works that Bourdieu more explicitly engages in the topic of social transformation. See Bourdieu (2001) for the most extended review of this topic.

¹⁴⁸ This notion is also developed in latter works, especially Bourdieu (1998a).

¹⁴⁹ Bourdieu (1994c: 165)

¹⁵⁰ Bourdieu (2001:103). Here Bourdieu is implicitly taking a stance against late discursivist models.

that internal struggles can only 'lead to partial revolutions that can destroy the hierarchy but not the game itself'.¹⁵¹

Hysteresis: change at the level of the individual

Bourdieu is aware that some sort of social transformation occurs and that it often happens that individuals find themselves inserted in different social conditions from those of their origin. As noted above what happens in such circumstances is what Bourdieu terms the 'hysteresis effect'. The hysteresis effect is a recognition of the operation of social dislocation which becomes apparent when an individual habitus, with its durable and transposable character, encounters social conditions which are not those of its origin. Instead of adapting to the new forms this gives 'rise to diverse forms of allodoxia', that is, the projection of prior forms of perception to the new realities.¹⁵²

In short, the notion of hysteresis does not account for the possibility of habitus transformation, rather it is used to further demonstrate their resilience. Internalized habitus: "are always perpetuated in the dispositions constituting the habitus, the conditions of acquisitions of the properties synchronically observed make themselves visible in cases of discordance between the conditions of acquisition"¹⁵³; and the operations of symbolic violence. "The impostor who is not what he appears to be, the person who lives up in reality to his appearance, based on (...) pretension [is] always liable to be rebuffed and snubbed: What's his game? Who does he think he is? etc."¹⁵⁴

Hysteresis is commonly met with powerful negative responses. Non-legitimized distinctive habitus dispositions are encountered with social disapproval, the individual response to which is shyness and embarrassment. To avoid such ostracism individuals tend to adhere to their social world of origin or they attempt to adapt. Thus, the strength of internalized habitus combines with the negative effects of social mobility to reinforce structural stability. The reproductive circle is thus established once more.

Stability, doxa and doxic experience

Whilst Bourdieu occasionally appears to suggest that dominant groups are in possession of an enhanced capacity to be reflexive about their modes of domination and use of power resources -"symbolic violence is the gentle, disguised form which violence takes when overt violence is impossible"¹⁵⁵. he clearly states that his theory of symbolic

¹⁵¹ Bourdieu (1993:134.)

¹⁵² Bourdieu (1996b: 219)

¹⁵³ Bourdieu (1994a:109)

¹⁵⁴ Bourdieu (1994b:125)

¹⁵⁵ Bourdieu (1995b:133)

power presents a non-reflexive mode of reproductive practices from both dominant and subordinated groups. In this view the continuity of the established social order is rendered invisible and takes the form of 'symbolic violence', a hidden form of oppression, rather than overt violence. Most significantly, it is carried out from within the very same individuals upon which it is imposed. All the agents of a given social context share the same set of basic -self-evident and thus naturalized- doxic perceptual schemes. The symbolic power of the dominating group is dependent on the norms, beliefs, and categories, established as doxa. Symbolic power is possessed, or better accumulated, and therefore used, by those whose doxic world favours their internalized habitus. Inversely those lacking such correspondence between habitus and doxa are inevitably the dominated position:

"Dominated agents, who assess the value of their position and their characteristics by applying a system of schemes of perception and appreciation which is the embodiment of the objective laws whereby their value is objectively constituted, tend to attribute to themselves what the distribution attributes to them, refusing what they are refused ('That's not for the likes of us') adjusting their expectations to their chances, defining themselves as the established order designed them"¹⁵⁶

The perfect coincidence of the doxic world with individual subjective experiences and practices effects a self-fulfilling prophecy, which Bourdieu calls a 'doxic experience'. That is, the external world is taken to be self-evident, common-sensical and independent of individual dynamics:

"what characterises the 'lived' experience of the social world is the apprehension of it as self-evident, (...) This is because it excludes the question of the conditions of possibility of this experience of the objective structures and the internalized structures which provide the illusion of immediate understanding"¹⁵⁷

This doxic experience is at the core of the reproduction of doxa, and therefore of social reality itself. It is in this analytical context that we have to understand Bourdieu's claim that 'subjective expectations' (individuals' calculations) fit the 'objective probabilities' (options provided by external structural demands). Doxic experience is the most absolute of self-internalized power operations. It represents the "recognition of legitimacy through misrecognition of arbitrariness".¹⁵⁸ Thus the continuity of the social order is ensured by this 'logical conformity' between individual's categories of perception and the established system of beliefs. It is in habitus dispositions that all the other concepts converge to explain Bourdieu's vision of the production of collective and individual life, of continuity and change and of the reproduction of power relations: "Habitus, this system of dispositions -a present past that tends to perpetuate itself into

¹⁵⁶ Bourdieu (1994a:471)

¹⁵⁷ Bourdieu (1995b:26)

¹⁵⁸ Bourdieu (1994c:163)

the future by reactivating similarly structured practices (...) is the principle of continuity and regularity which objectivism sees in social practices without being able to account for it".¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ Bourdieu (1995b:290, 54)

2.3. The social constructionism of Bourdieu's model

Bourdieu's model thus systematized allows us better to detect his specific theoretical commitments but more importantly to reveal certain tacit theoretical assumptions. I noted above that I had divided this reconstruction in three main aspects: his notion of habitus, his theory of individual practices, and his theory of power. I have run through the main ingredients of his model in order to have a clearer insight into the internal logics of his analytical framework. In this section, I start to address the key themes identified in my introduction as they appear in his work. In doing so I will highlight how Bourdieu's model envisages a particular understanding of the embodiment of the social which exhibits an essentialist bias inherent in the dichotomy nature/society. This also reveals a specific structuralist understanding of the causal relationship between macro-structures and micro-phenomena. Finally, the political implications of his theory of power are discussed.

2.3.1. Habitus and individual formation: 'formative' structures and 'exteriority'

By noting that dispositions are social types of dispositions Bourdieu distances himself from nativist accounts of social reality. The social character of habitus dispositions reveals an early process of socialization through which structural phenomena are internalized as a durable features which guide further activity. The main ingredients of this type of internalization of the external structural world are the unreflexive nature of learning by 'mimesis', and its embodied nature. Both ingredients locate the internalized external structures beyond the intervention of individual consciousness. This effects a process of naturalization which further establishes the durable character of habitus dispositions. The main consequence of this is that social structures are internalized into the embodied cognitive schemata of the individual. Thus Bourdieu's model is that of the 'subjective experience of an objective reality'.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ See Bourdieu (1987: 6). Some authors are currently appropriating Bourdieu and Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the corporeal to convey a view of the embodied dimension of individual formation and experience of the world (i.e. Turner and Wainwright (2003)). I would like to suggest a fundamental distinction between the embodiment which Bourdieu's model conveys and that of Merleau-Ponty. While it is true that both theorists focus on embodiment I believe that their ulterior theoretical motif is radically distinct –and they ultimately present incompatible approaches. Whereas for Bourdieu embodiment is a way of understanding a non-reflexive mode of incorporation of the external social environment for Merleau-Ponty the notion of embodiment is a way of introducing and contesting extreme notions of freedom of consciousness (such as that of Sartre- the idea that the individual's perception of the world is 'mediated' by embodied experience). Most significant, however, is Merleau-Ponty's contention that it is in this process of perception that the meanings of the external world get constituted: "we must not, therefore, wonder whether we really perceive a world, we must instead say: the world is what we perceive". (In Preface to *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962)). Whereas Merleau-Ponty's purpose is to point out the insoluble

Agency: fuzzy, unreflexive consciousness of the rules of the game.

Bourdieu's model conveys a specific view of agency and individual practices. Habitus dispositions are collective dispositions. The individual internalizes the features which belong to a collective characterized by similar structural conditions of existence. Individual practices are thus the product of the internalization of a habitus containing a few guiding principles, and the product of structural phenomena - which act as a constraint but leave room for strategic calculation within the limits set by the structural world of the field.

The logic that guides strategic practices is 'fuzzy'. The transferable quality of the primary internalized 'schemes' of habitus dispositions possess a specific nature of knowledge formation which Bourdieu describes as 'fuzzy'. The emergence of meaningful categories is seen as the result of the 'loose' transfer of the initial (generative) schemes to other areas of life. For Bourdieu the meanings arise from the pre-verbal transfers of these internalized generative schemes and not from any conscious interaction with other individuals.¹⁶¹

link between consciousness and the world with his 'ontology of the flesh' (through which he develops the idea that lived-embodied- experience and conceptual judgement are intertwined and that the dialectic relationship between individual perception and the world is at the origin of the conception of cultural phenomena), in Bourdieu the emphasis is on the causal relationship between external reality and internal individual phenomena.

Merleau-Ponty's interest is to note that the structured perceptions are indeterminate and that phenomenology of perception is a move from the 'objective' categories of the world to the categories under which the world is 'perceived'. This is a move from those 'scientific' modes of explanation which see the objective reasons for correct perception as prior to perception. Contrary to this view Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that perception is prior to the world. The 'world' is not presented as a 'correct' taxonomy to consciousness through perception. Instead, it is organized and taxonomized by the very same process of perception. This is the meaning of Merleau-Ponty's 'creative' scope of attention (that is, perception). Perception 'articulates figures out of indeterminate horizons' and it imposes new structures on data which alone remains underdetermined. By maintaining that 'perception is constructive' in this sense Merleau-Ponty provides with a social constructionist account which quite differs from that of Bourdieu which tacitly conveys an image of individual experience as 'reflecting' and internalizing an already formed external world. See Merleau-Ponty (1962)

¹⁶¹ It is worth revisiting this position in his own words: "The universes of meaning corresponding to different universes of practice are both self-enclosed-and therefore protected against logical control through systematization- (...) they are loosely systematic products of a system of practically integrated generative principles that function in the most diverse fields of practice. [with] the approximate, 'fuzzy' logic which immediately accepts as equivalent [differing] adjectives (...) the generative schemes [of the habitus] are interchangeable in practice" Bourdieu (1995b:87)

Agency and reflexivity: a particular ontology of the subject

It follows from the above that Bourdieu has a particular notion of consciousness. Due to the nature of the process of habitus formation, individuals can't achieve consciousness of the reality of the world. Individual practices are thus directly guided by non-conscious principles. Agency and consciousness are seen as a by-product of the 'reality' of the fields and guided by the logics of a fuzzy non-consciousness. However, this non-consciousness of the objective nature of the field can be intermittently interrupted by two processes: in particular moments of social 'crisis' or by the epistemological 'break' effected by the intervention of the social scientist.

Ultimately Bourdieu's model presupposes an existing subject whose capacity for action is repressed (mostly) or enhanced (occasionally) by different social mechanisms the constitution of which is in direct relation to the causal powers of external phenomena. Both external social crises and the scientist's epistemological 'break' effect a liberation of action in the individual by revealing to her the arbitrary nature of both the doxic world and the logic of the structures which govern the fields. It is in this particular moment that social and personal transformation can occur. That is, only when there is a reflexive -and thus conscious- awareness of that which has hitherto been internalized as 'doxa' or 'bodily hexis'. This process he calls 'socioanalysis'¹⁶² and, most notably, it can be achieved with the help of the social scientist researching an individual's social situation.¹⁶³

Bourdieu, here, presents two different 'modes' of agency. To wit, one unreflexive and unconscious directed to strategic activity -and therefore more or less reproducing the external structures through the practices guided by the internalized habitus - and the other as the product of a consciousness of the arbitrary nature of the social conditions of formation of one's habitus.

Centrality of the body: nature and society

Bourdieu locates the individual internalization of social phenomena not at the level of psychology but at the level of the body. This is an important shift from social theories like that of Parsons in which internalization occurs as a mental event and ignores the fact that the human body plays a significant part in the internalization of social phenomena. In Bourdieu's model is it possible to detect two different aspects of embodiment. First is a more Merleau-Pontian position which explores, although never fully expands on, the notion that individual perception of the world happens at the pre-

¹⁶² Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:44)

¹⁶³ *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu: 1999) being the most paradigmatic text explicating this stance.

reflective level of the corporeal.¹⁶⁴ This is the meaning of the statement that the 'body is a thinking animal'. Connected to this idea is his emphasis on the 'linguistic' dimension of the body, that is, the signifying power of the non-verbal communication of embodied features and practices. This dimension of embodiment however is not the central concern in Bourdieu's model, rather he focuses on a different dimension of embodiment, namely how society is internalized into individual's consciousness through the embodying activity.

Notwithstanding the fundamental analytical differences, the latter would be a more Foucauldian position¹⁶⁵ which would envisage the body as the vehicle or junction between the individual and society, that is, particular social practices have the capacity to 'form' different bodies and in doing so to 'form' different embodied perceptions of the world.

What I am particularly interested in highlighting here regarding the latter dimension of embodiment is the particular conception of the body which Bourdieu conveys with his model. Bourdieu is not explicitly concerned with analysing how society renders the 'matter' of the bodies precise. By-passing this aspect Bourdieu regards the 'matter' of the bodies as a pre-existing entity onto which 'culture' ('world view') imposes meanings and in doing so instrumentalizes these meanings as a 'naturalized' vision of the world which justifies symbolic power operations.

This is a model of embodiment in which culture is 'written in the body'. The tacit assumption here is that culture pre-exists the process of both embodiment and the signification of the body. By introducing the corporeal nature of humans into his sociological model, Bourdieu implicitly deals with the central opposition in social sciences, namely that of nature versus society. The social nature of biological features acquires two dimensions in Bourdieu's model:

a) the body's inherent and given biological features become the bearers of cultural meanings. Physiological properties, by a process of analogy, are utilized to justify cultural meanings. That is, the 'objective matrices of universals' of the body are used as justification of social values by a process of analogy between the properties of the natural and the social.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ See footnote 160 for an explanation of their different positions in this point. For Bourdieu the body becomes a thinking animal by virtue of the internalisation of external phenomena whereas Merleau-Ponty suggest that it is via embodied perception that the world is constituted.

¹⁶⁵ This connection is not acknowledged by Bourdieu.

¹⁶⁶ Bourdieu (2001:7-22). For example, the association of phallic erection with the vital dynamic of swelling immanent in all process of natural reproduction (germination, gestation, etc.) where the indisputable natural properties of the sexually differentiated organs symbolically ratifies particular social beliefs.

b) the body is literally transformed by social practices: cultural habits produce different forms of bodies and presentations of bodies, which in turn become naturalized.

Both dimensions are different forms of the same operation in which the biological is 'instrumentalized' by different groups of society to impose their own values. For Bourdieu the 'masculine order' is the paradigmatic example both of this form of biological naturalization and of symbolic violence. Its strength lies in the fact that it dispenses with the need for justification by becoming legitimized through the biological.

2.3.2. Habitus and the field: a co-reproductive macro-micro dynamics

The model which Bourdieu presents to bridge the dichotomy between structural phenomena and individual practices envisages individual practices as strategic but unconscious, the product of the pre-reflexive internalization of the external structural world into the 'natural' realm of the body. In Bourdieu's model habitus dispositions make individuals act in accordance to the demands of the external structural world effecting a reinforcement of the prior structures which constituted them. Thus habitus dispositions are fundamentally reproductive of the external social structures. The theoretical repercussions of this view are:

A specific view of consensus, change and stability.

The internalization of a common homogeneous habitus is at the root of the social dynamics of consensus and stability of prevalent social forms. Interaction among individuals is envisaged as proceeding among individuals with already formed and fixed habitus dispositions. Social interaction mainly reinforces prior dispositions with little or no possibility of changing them. Original dispositions are constantly reinforced in and through social interaction. Consensus and co-ordination is the result of the agreement produced by individuals displaying similar practices. The incorporated dispositions are where we find the ordering principle which orients practices among individuals. This results in the stability of the social world.

The 'objective' logics of field dynamics

The field is structured by universal objective 'forces', like for instance the struggle for social recognition, which organize the positions and social meanings from which interaction between people takes place. The field is not that which comes to exist by the process of interaction between people but rather that which guides interactions. In this model individual positions which overtly contest the prevalent social values of the field -i.e. 'heretic thinkers' - are understood to be 'strategic adaptations' to changing

forms of the field.¹⁶⁷ This is a theoretical position which clearly envisages a specific epistemological commitment to an 'external' view of social phenomena. Fields and the individuals which inhabit them are governed by forces external to this particular dynamics as is apparent in Bourdieu's emphasis that the struggle for recognition is a 'structural constant'. Bourdieu's model thus conveys a view of 'society' prior to the individual. Consistent with his model Bourdieu conveys a view of class formation and differentiation as the collective internalization of different external material conditions of existence. Habitus is group forming and individual identity is conceived as a by-product of this process. The ontology of social reality is that of the 'space of differences' dominated by the struggle among groups to maximize the position within the general social hierarchy.

2.3.3. The political dimension of Bourdieu's model: A 'singular' symbolic hierarchical society

Bourdieu's model strives to provide a political theory, that is, an explanation of the relationships between people involving authority and power. His is a theory of dominated and dominating individuals. His political theory of power relations is consistent with the internal logics of his model as is reflected in the following features:

Bourdieu's theory of power and the 'realism' of structure and class struggle

Power relations in Bourdieu's account reveal a 'realist' commitment understood as conveying an external reality independent of, and guiding, symbolic accounts. The structures of the social order give meaning to the linguistic accounts and give force to all the forms of symbolic power. Bourdieu is emphatic in maintaining that symbolic power can only be exercised if it is backed up by what exists in 'reality'. Groups are not created *ex nihilo*, and dominating groups can only effect power over others - by imposing their world view as the legitimate one- if it coincides to the 'things' which are already there in the structural realm. In other words it is the pre-existing social structures which grant the authority -and thus power- to the dominant classes to impose and designate the symbolic hierarchy. Even dominated classes cannot 'transcend' the reality of the doxic order, which imposes the only 'thinkable' reality.

The basic operation guiding power relationships -for Bourdieu power relationships equal social dynamics- is that of 'distinction'. Ultimately Bourdieu's model rests on the logic of status groups. Structural factors govern individual practices through the 'reality' of status

¹⁶⁷ 'Heretic thinkers' within the academic field, for instance, are described by Bourdieu, as another form of practice to collude with the 'logics of struggle for prestige'. See Bourdieu (1988a:1988)

seeking dynamics that dominate (globally) all the groups in a society. Struggles are aimed at maximizing one's group status within a given social field. Bourdieu shares some features of classic class theory, that is, the interests associated with a group are based on features like common economic or cultural position of origin. Group formation in Bourdieu's model has a clear external basis in wider social and economic structures.

Class has to be understood as a result of the struggle to impose one group's system of classification. A crucial point in Bourdieu's model of the division of social space into different status groups is that their common struggle for social recognition is constituted by a homogeneous, and early internalized, habitus. This grants group members similar capitals and hence constitutes their practices as consensually aiming for the same goals and social goods. This is ultimately the underlying structural logic in Bourdieu's model.

It is important to note that Bourdieu implicitly seems to grant different ontological status to different capitals. Material economic conditions are primary and feature centrally in defining the nature of social conditions of existence. Economic capital appears to have a status independent of social relations because people's material wealth is objective. However other capitals like cultural or social capital acquire their value in relation to the field.

Symbolic violence mechanisms clearly reveal themselves by the sanctioning -self imposed or external- mechanisms which social migration effects on single individuals. This is another instance in which Bourdieu clearly reveals his commitment to a singular symbolic hierarchy which cuts across and dominates all different groups and fields of a society. Individuals are thus judged, positively or negatively, by the general values of distinction in a society. The Don Quixote effect produced by the 'hysteresis' of the habitus is a clear example of this.

The implication of the body in Bourdieu's theory of power

Finally it is necessary to note the central role of the body in Bourdieu's theory of power and the theoretical commitments it reveals. Physical 'naturalization' for Bourdieu is the process by which culturally dependent forms of human behaviour are objectified outside space and time, and thus perceived as independent of human activity. This is a crucial political mechanism which effects an 'eternalization' and 'essentialisation' of the social as 'non-social'.¹⁶⁸ It has been noted that the use of the body in Bourdieu's model does not deal with how it is culturally understood as a physical entity. Rather, it is used to further understand the process of the misrecognition of the social as natural. It is

¹⁶⁸ Note the title of the preface of *Masculine Domination* where he depicts embodied processes as 'Eternalizing the arbitrary'. Bourdieu (2001:vii)

fundamentally an analytical tool to explain his notion of 'misrecognition' of symbolic power and self-collusion with dominating structural forms. Bourdieu does not offer an ontological account of the body because he is not interested in locating the cultural formation of the boundaries between the social or non-social, rather, the body is a taken for granted natural entity which is instrumentalized by power operations.

3

The Performative Theory of Social Institutions: the social theory of the Strong Programme

There are a number of reasons for turning to the sociology of scientific knowledge despite its rather inconsistent attentiveness to gender issues and embodiment. In chapter one, a tension between materialist and idealist understandings of sexed and gendered bodies was noted in both feminist accounts and the sociology of the body. As I have indicated in the previous chapter Bourdieu's work offers one of the most sophisticated attempts to resolve this tension, but in the end recreates an emphasis on the structuralist/ materialist side of the dichotomy which both reifies structure in an unexplained realm and leaves the natural realm as self-evident. On the other hand we find in the strong programme arguably one of the most developed social constructionist models which emphasises a more 'linguistic idealist' understandings of both social structure and nature. The commitment to a naturalist and materialist position of the strong programmers wilts adopting and idealist logic will be exposed throughout the following sections of this chapter. The strong programme¹ offers an opposite approach to that of Bourdieu's in our search for theoretical tools which I will demonstrate in other chapters can be applied to the analysis of the constitution of sexed/gendered bodies. Being a theory developed within the general enquiries of the sociology of scientific knowledge, the strong programme has directly engaged in debating the nature and origins of our knowledge regarding both nature and society. Consequently it provides more developed analytical tools than Bourdieu's model which tackles knowledge of nature and culture more indirectly through sociological enquiry into the reproduction of power and inequality.

Like all schools of thought, the Strong Programme follows distinctive analytical conventions and has a specific background of knowledge. Those accustomed to mainstream sociological thinking may find the analytical nature of the Strong Programme's argumentation somewhat unfamiliar, and its principal analytical tenets and

¹ The Strong Programme principally originates from the collaboration between David Bloor and Barry Barnes, while at the same time owing something to the contributions of a number of other leading thinkers. Bloor acknowledges his intellectual debts to Wittgenstein, Mary Hesse, Anscombe, and Kripke among others.

conclusions have proved to be difficult to grasp due to its counter-intuitive nature. In what follows, I attempt to provide a critical summary of this position and in doing so simplify some of the most contentious theoretical statements. This summary selects from the Strong Programme's vast theoretical scope some key ingredients which provided the most important aspects of their position for the discussion of the present work. Whereas Bourdieu's whole oeuvre presents his model in an unsystematic fashion, and hence a reconstruction is required when attempting its application to other areas, the format of the present chapter is a more straightforward summary. The reason being that the work summarized here has already a more systematic nature, however an extended summary is justified because this body of work is less well known among main stream sociologists of gender and the body. I have paid particular attention to Barnes seminal paper "Social life as Bootstrapped Induction" (section 3.1.) because it is a complex piece of work which lays out the principle ingredients of the performative theory of social institutions particularly the fundamental core concept of self-referentiality.

Having introduced the basic tenets of the performative theory of social institutions as laid out by Barnes, sections 3.2. and 3.3. give an overview of the main aspects of the performative theory which relate to the present discussion: First I introduce their specific idealist approach which nevertheless incorporates external reality. In addition, I draw on Bloor's insights regarding the constitution of meaning and the collective understanding of rule following. This model presents a collectivist view of social life in stark contrast to that of Bourdieu's, in which social interaction between mutually susceptible individuals is understood to be at the very bases of the constitution of social life.

Finally in the last section (3.4.) I introduce Martin Kusch's work where he assesses the contemporary debate over folk psychology and introduces his theory of artificial kinds. In his work, Kusch introduces and develops the notion of artificial kinds to define the nature of some mental events as social in genesis but acquiring an independent alter-referential status. I believe the same analytical framework can be very usefully applied to understanding the materiality of the sexed/gendered body and its socially constructed nature and thus achieve a better resolution of the dichotomy nature/society which haunts the feminist debate.

3.1. Barnes's Performative Theory of Social Institutions: 'Social Life as Bootstrapped Induction'

Barnes' 1983 paper 'Social Life as Bootstrapped Induction' is the text in which the principal tenets of the social theory of the Strong Programme were outlined and the text which fundamentally guides this summary. The insights presented in this piece about the social dynamics underlying knowledge production are extremely relevant for any research aiming to understand the constitution of knowledge both about social and natural phenomena. Thus, I believe it provides valuable insights which can be applied to a research into constitution of knowledge about the body and social reality.

The arguments developed in his work represent a quite radical reconstruction of several taken for granted notions in sociological theory. Barnes proposes an understanding of social life as a 'collective achievement', a notion that is at the very basis of *the performative theory of social institutions* and suggests a view of society which is 'internal' to, and the product of, the interactive activity of individuals. Barnes' position is in radical contrast to that of Bourdieu and presents a form of idealism which appears to run counter to our most deeply held intuitions regarding the sources and bases of our knowledge in general and social phenomena in particular. However, carefully analysed Barnes' analysis of the emergence of social life as the product of inter-dependent interactive individuals provides a novel explanation of the emergence of macro-structural phenomena which allows us to review and reconstruct some of the current analytical shortcomings prevalent within social theory. I hope to provide a plausible explanation of the suitability of this brand of social constructionism for the study and comprehension of social phenomena and in doing so to highlight the significant contribution that the performative model provides to the sociology of the body.

3.1.1. (Di)-visions of the world: natural kinds and social kinds²

Barnes' most significant input for our discussion on the socially constructed nature of the body lies in his attempt to elucidate the nature of what we mean by, and take to be, the 'social', as opposed to what we mean by and take to be 'natural'. He reconstructs our intuitive understanding of the world as divided into natural and social realities and in the process provides fundamental comprehension of the ontological nature of social phenomena. His attempts to establish the sources of our commonly held knowledge

² The notion of kinds has a long history in philosophy of science. A *kind* is the concept used to group together things that have shared properties. Barnes and Bloor expand this concept by introducing a sociological conception of kinds.

categories takes him through a complex analytical route ending in the assertion that social life is 'self-referential' in nature. The concept of self-referentiality is at the core of Barnes' social theory and thus requires full consideration.

Self-referentiality and performativity

The notion of self-referentiality, which has its origins particularly within the sociology of knowledge debates concerning issues of reference and reference creation, has proved to be a very elusive one. Barnes thus specifically sets out to investigate the problem of reference, that is, 'that of the relationship between our speech and that which is spoken of'³, in order to further our understanding of the ontological nature of the 'social'. He examines the role of individuals' production of knowledge in the constitution of social life and in doing so explores the nature of knowledge production in general and particularly the complexities of individuals' dynamics in learning, using, and creating knowledge categories.

In examining the nature of social categories, Barnes explores category ascription in general. He notes that we *intuitively* divide the world into two realities, 'natural' and 'social'. Natural realities would be those whose referent (the entity to which a label/word/utterance refers) is understood to be external and independent of the human categories which describe it. In these instances it is their external material reality which, we believe, guides our category ascription.

Barnes proposes to analyse the internal process of category ascription of physical types of realities by reducing its complexity to an idealized operation of one single individual. Let us imagine, he says, an individual as somehow containing a cognitive machinery which divides his category application process into two phases: firstly a 'pattern recognising' phase (PR), in which the external physical reality (P) is recognised according to an internalised pattern; and secondly a 'pattern attachment' phase (PA) in which a label (N) -associated to the internalised pattern- is attached to describe and communicate this external reality. Such physical entities are labelled (for the sake of analytical clarity) by Barnes as natural kinds (NK) and the terms that describe them natural kind terms. Figure 1 gives a visual representation of this process:

³ Barnes (1983a:525)

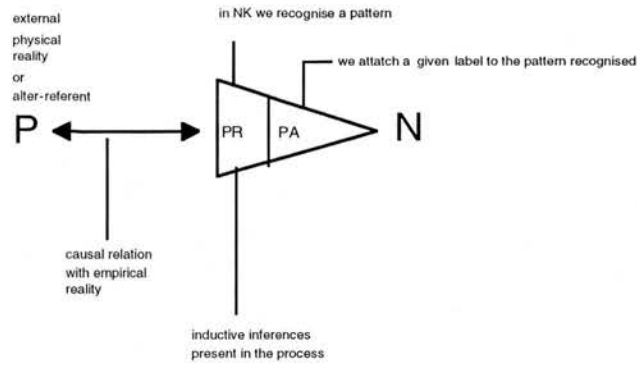


FIGURE 1
the constitution of Natural Kinds terms (NK)

The category ascription involved in natural kinds is a process which involves an external reality empirically recognisable by its own physical features (P), that is, a clearly recognisable 'alter-referent'⁴. Thus the first 'stage', that of the 'pattern recognition' proceeds in direct causal relation with the external reality.

In this model the conventional nature of the process mostly concerns the second stage, that of the application of a word, label or category. This label 'attached' is doubtless a communally constituted convention in the sense that we apply words, categories and labels which have been 'given' to us by others and which have no causal relationship with the external reality. Whereas the first stage, that of pattern recognition, is 'alter-referential' in character, the second stage the 'pattern attachment' process is *self-referential*. The label 'attached', that is the label used to describe or discriminate a particular external object, is self-referential in that it is a label 'referred' (used) as such by the community. For example, the label 'tree' is what is referred to (and used) as the label 'tree' in a community. However in the last instance, to our empirical intuition the application of terms in natural kinds is ultimately '*alter-referential*'; that is, the categories or labels refer to something other than the label itself. This means that external empirical features are, in our intuitive understanding, at the very bases of our individual process of discrimination and, also, directly unaffected by this process of category ascription. Thus external entity (P) maintains an independent existence and differential *ontological* status to the final output of this process, that is the category used to refer to it (N).

⁴ This is not Barnes' terminology. The concept of 'alter-referentiality' is introduced by Kusch to further clarify issues of 'normal' reference and 'self-reference'. My use of Kusch's notion here helps me to reconstruct Barnes' debate on the problem of reference application and reference creation.

A crucial insight that Barnes brings about by breaking down in such detail the process of categorization of the world of natural kinds is its *inductive* character. This feature will be more fully developed in subsequent chapters. For the moment, suffice to say that Barnes accounts fully for the inductive nature of individuals' designation processes. The causal impact of reality is taken into account by Barnes by thoroughly acknowledging that in the process of category ascription the individual performs inductive inferences which are at the bases and are fundamentally necessary to the process of discrimination (recognizing or rejecting the entity as such) of that specific reality with the internalised pattern. Thus, inductive inferences are at the very bases of why some entities are not labelled as N (becoming -N) if they do not comply with the requisites of similarity to the pattern internalised.

We now leave the NK terms application and turn to what, again intuitively, we take to be 'social' realities. That is, those realities which: "by definition must be applied to particulars without any appraisal at all of their empirical characteristics."⁵ Social realities would be those which have their origin in social activity, for instance, marriage, leadership, money, and authority.⁶ To apply the same understanding about how we come to refer to these realities as we have done above for Natural kind terms, we find that category ascription exhibits a fundamental difference to that concerning physical realities.

In 'social' realities, social kinds (SK) in Barnes' terminology, the categorization process may equally be described as proceeding in two phases (see Figure 2); 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 with natural kinds terms is that this process must necessarily proceed in reverse. For social kinds of realities, the entity cannot be recognized unless it has been first constituted as such through the 'naming' of it by the community involved. That is, in order to be recognised, and therefore labelled, the entity needs to have been referred as such prior to our label ascription process. To give an example, a married person has to have been pronounced married prior to being recognised as such. A leader has to have been recognized, constituted, and referred to as a leader before she can be recognized as such. Therefore, whereas in natural types of reality P (the reality recognised) is different and independent from N (the label attached), in social types of reality the label attached (S) is the same, it collapses as it were, with the entity recognized (S).

⁵ Barnes (1983a: 525)

⁶ It is important to note that Barnes' idealised model of reality in this polarised dual division of social and natural kinds does not attempt to reflect reality. The complexities involved in social life are put aside in the model he presents for the purposes of analytical clarity. Barnes does not advocate that N-types and S-types exist in such a pure form, rather he uses such simplification as an analytical strategy to pin-point the self referential nature and bases of 'social' reality and the so called 'social structures'.

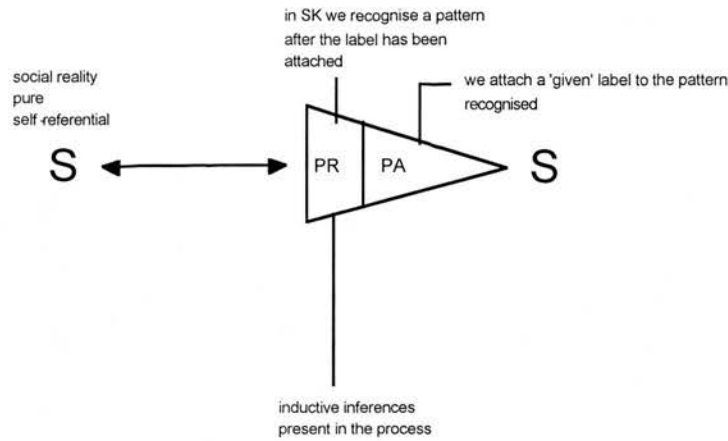


FIGURE 2

The constitution of social kind of terms (SK)

We can see, thus, that in SK there is no clearly empirically recognisable reality external to our labelling process. It is in this sense that Barnes suggests that social types of reality possess a *purely self-referential* nature. That is, the labels, words, or categories, *refer to a referred reality*. Thus, category application coincides with category *production*: social kinds come to exist by virtue of being referred to as such.

The self-referential nature of social kinds of reality is thus directly involved in their *performative* character. Barnes likens his notion of the *performative nature* of social reality to the Austinian notion of performativity of speech acts as those which '*do* something to a particular reality rather than merely describing it'.⁷ Barnes characterises the self-referential process involved in social realities as purely 'performative' that is, as constituting those things which they name⁸:

⁷ Austin, (1970) *How to do things with words*. In this text Austin reassesses former understandings of speech acts as either descriptive or evaluative. Rather his analysis shows that certain utterances are *activity* which has an effect in reality. He uses the notion of performative speech acts to define those words that 'do instead of describe'. Performative utterances form part of complex analysis of different types, namely locutionary (saying something with implicit meaning), illocutionary speech acts (what one does, such as promising, in saying something) and perlocutionary (what one brings about by saying something). A simplified understanding I use here is that there are certain instances in language where to say something is to perform the very act you say. If I say, "I promise to do x" then I have made a promise to do x. Performative refers to the fact of its own successful performance, that is, by saying it, it makes it so.

⁸ Barnes (1983a: 526). It is important to keep in mind that Barnes is not suggesting that self-referentiality is *all* that there is in S-type terms or social kinds. Clearly other factors are implicated in the constitution of Social Kinds. This, however, should not distract from the notion that self-referential processes are constitutive rather than descriptive. A performative act is that which is involved in constituting new reality. When a priest utters "I hereby declare you husband and wife" the important point to retain is that the utterance is performative in so far as it *does* something to an entity rather than describing it: it constitutes two married people.

Whereas in Natural kind terms the self-referential nature was confined to the 'pattern attachment' stage, retaining an 'alter-referential' status which accounted for a reality existing independently of the labelling process, and *unaffected* by the labelling process, in Social Kind terms their self-referential performative nature is at the very basis of their constitution. They come to 'exist' *precisely* through the process of category ascription, that is, of being referred to as such. There is, therefore, no external reality *independent* of the 'referential' process. Their ontological status is thus fundamentally dependent on the reference process, a crucial point being that if they were no longer referred as such they would cease to exist. A leader stops being a leader as soon as she ceases to be referred as such.

Needless to say that this pure self-referential performative aspect provides another important feature associated with Social kinds terms: their *self-validating* character. They validate themselves by virtue of being constituted by their own naming, whereas in Natural kinds terms one might say that they still retain some 'alter-validating' quality in which external reality provides significant input to the discriminatory process.

We have noted when analysing category ascription for natural kinds that individual inductive power is at the very basis of the operation. These natural capacities do also apply for social kinds of realities. Individual inductive inferences are also intact in this process in the sense that it is the external reality, constituted as such, which guides subsequent individual acts of category ascription. Individuals are able to discriminate between who is taken to be a leader and who is not, based on the information which they inductively gather from their surroundings.

3.1.2. Individual inferences as 'collective accomplishments'

If the self-referential performative nature of the process of category ascription is the key notion of Barnes model, it does however need to be connected with the second most important feature of his explanation, namely the collective bases of individuals' inductive inferences. Without an accurate understanding of this idea the analytical significance of the Strong Programme's approach gets obscured and its conclusions deemed irrelevant as a critical approach to social theory.

In order to understand the meaning attributed to the notion of 'collective' in Barnes model, we have to put individuals' categorization of the world into a wider perspective by addressing the necessary question of the origins of the labels they have at their disposal.

For the understanding of this particular aspect there is no need to distinguish between natural kind terms and social kind terms since they both operate in a similar fashion.

However, because we hold certain intuitive habits regarding the role of external reality in our category ascription of natural kinds, in the first instance we will concentrate on social kinds terms, because their pure self-referential nature facilitates the comprehension of the collective character of the individual process of category ascription.

So, given that in social kinds of realities there are no external empirical features to guide our category ascription, but rather they are constituted by the very naming of them, we necessarily rely on the categories or labels which are given to us to be able to initiate the labelling (and discriminatory) process. Barnes argues that if we examine the origins of the categories we use we may conceive two possibilities. First, one in which the label is imposed on us by a clearly recognisable external authority (see Figure 3).

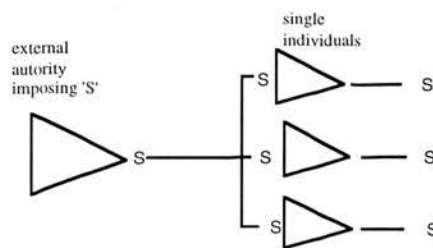


FIGURE 3

This is indeed not an uncommon means of communicating knowledge - think of a parent teaching their child the difference between an orange and a satsuma, or a teacher introducing pupils to all sorts of new knowledge about the social world. In this situation individuals receive the information or category from an 'authorized' source and proceed to accept it and apply it accordingly. In a situation like this the interaction takes place mostly between the single individual and the authoritative figure.

However, as Barnes notes, such a clear operation is not the bases of the majority of instances of category ascription in social life. Most of the exchange of knowledge in social life proceeds without the existence of a detectable external authority which can be identified as the originator of the labels, words or knowledge categories. Rather categories are 'just there' being used by the members of the community and being transmitted to one another through interaction. Thus, whereas in the first model depicted in Figure 3 interaction between individuals is not necessarily crucial for the individual acquisition of a particular knowledge category, in the second model (see Figure 4) the interactive process is *precisely* what allows the transmission of information. We learn about the use of social categories through our experience of how others use these

categories, verbally or practically, and subsequently apply them to particular instances of reality.

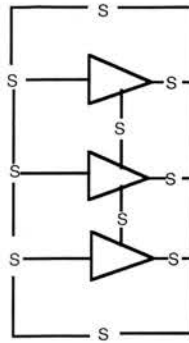


FIGURE 4

In this model, although clearly the individual inductive inferences remain intact, individuals learn from and observe others, and from this they 'extract' the necessary information. The important point to highlight is that this inductive learning process has no outside entity involved in it; neither independent empirical reality nor a designated and accepted authority are at the bases of individual inductive inferences. Rather, the origin of the individual's information is the same collective of individuals who by constantly referring to a particular social reality, constitute the existence of the reality on which the individual bases her acts of category ascription. For instance, that a particular piece of metal is 'money' is a social status granted to it by virtue of being constituted permanently by every single act of naming or using it as money. In this case individuals continue learning every day the values and meaning of money through contact with others without needing to be aware of the origins of the institution..

Inherent to this process is the fact that the individual act of category ascription is not only a product of the prior knowledge of the community but, crucially, each individual act of category ascription produces an 'output' which, in turn, acts as a reinforcement of the very same collectively held notion.

This is for Barnes a model which depicts the constitution of social life as having as its very bases the aggregate of individuals as an *interactive* collective. Nothing external to the individuals' interaction aids the permanent sustainment of the production of social kind terms. A leader continues being a leader because individuals continue 'informing' each other that that particular person is the leader.

Note that this is an idealised model which simplifies a reality which is more nuanced in process. There are, of course, individuals with a greater privilege to impose their own discretion onto others. This should, however, not be confused with the idea that they are

'external' to the feedback operation described above. Rather they should be seen as having more capacity to 'interact' with a larger number of individuals and thus to have more impact upon individual inductive inferences.⁹

From the former analysis Barnes extrapolates to the nature of social life in general. Social life, thus, according to Barnes' model, is both 'inductive' and 'tautological'. It is inductive from an individual perspective because each person inductively learns through contact with others the knowledge categories of a particular social context. Yet, social life considered as a whole, that is, understood as an act of collective reference, is tautological in nature. Given that individuals' inductive inferences are also the source of collectively assumed knowledge categories, we can see that the constitution of social life originates 'out of nothing', that is, nothing 'external' to the community of 'referring' agents. Barnes describes his model of social life as 'bootstrapped induction', using the metaphor of 'bootstraps' to aid the image of a feedback loop which is self-sustained and devoid of 'outside' assistance. Social life as a 'gigantic inductive bootstrap operation'¹⁰ is the product of every single individual inductive inference, which are then recycled via a feedback loop, thus both creating and also maintaining collectively assumed social categories.

These analytical definitions of the nature of the 'social' highlight fundamental ingredients of the nature of social life and social institutions in general. I will highlight three main aspects:

Social structures as 'invisible' self-referential social institutions

Barnes model offers a clearer understanding of the nature of social structures, understood here as large social arrangements which origins and constitution are located at the level of the collective of individuals and yet transcend individuals' conscious awareness. The single individual need not be aware that what she inductively receives from the external reality is the product of all the individual inputs. Rather such reality is intuitively perceived as existing 'out there', independent of our social encounters, decisions, or single individual inductive calculations. Following Barnes depiction of category application, within the collective the more a social category is permanently referred to as such by the majority, the more it *becomes* accepted as such. Returning to the simplified model depicted above in figure 3, the more an entity is labelled as S the more it becomes established as S. However if we imagine a huge system where a great many

⁹ This aspect will be largely developed in the section on Power.

¹⁰ Barnes (1983a:537). The image of 'bootstraps', that is, the leader loop on the sides of a boot for pulling it on, is a metaphor intended to bring about the notion that there is no external aid to one's efforts, that is, external to the individual inputs which inhabit a society.

individuals are involved, the referent creating input of each individual necessarily becomes obscured from the direct perception of isolated individuals. Money is a perfect example of a widespread bootstrapped induction social institution. By virtue of its use by a gigantic community of individuals it is impossible to perceive that it is every single act of referring (or using it as such) that is at the basis of its existence as a social institution. The socially constructed reality of the structure becomes intuitively perceived by single individuals as a 'reified' reality guiding individual actions rather than the result of individuals' activity.

The crystallization of social institutions

Connected to the above is the notion of the nature of the stability of social institutions. In such a large system of single inductive operations, if the majority of individuals act similarly there will be no modification of the final input, and thus the institution will become more and more reinforced as existing as an independent entity. It is in this way that social structures understood as 'gigantic bootstrapped operations' are experienced by single individuals as 'external' pre-existing stable entities:

"As the number of people in the array increases, so his individual contribution in terms of pattern-attachment decreases, and his knowledge increasingly approximates to knowledge of what *other* people are doing. (...) When an array is truly large, part of a monumental social institution, money for example, individual calculation may have imperceptible effects on the pattern of which it is part. The pattern may then be conceptualized (...) as a fixed entity within which straight forward inferences are made"¹¹

This is probably one of the most significant features of Barnes' model for the understanding of the nature of social structures. Namely, the invisible character of the constitutive role of single individuals' input to the very same individuals who participate in the constitution of social life. It is this invisible character which guides our intuitive perception that social structures are pre-existing entities independent of the constitutive impact of single individual actions. In this situation what the single individual perceives is that her 'decision' agrees with others' decisions, providing an image of the category ascription process as being directed by something outside the totality of the devices of the array. What we take to be money does not appear to us as that which everybody else takes to be money, rather as something emanating from the institution of money itself. To the isolated individual the inductive inferences are made from what appears to be simply 'there' in the pre-existing social context'.¹²

¹¹ Barnes (1983a:536)

¹² Barnes (1983a:532)

This is not to say that the self-referential process is *all* that is involved in the constitution of Social kinds terms. While many variables may have been involved in the origination of a term, at the practical level of everyday use in a particular historical time it becomes evident that individuals do not need to recall, or be aware of, those originating variables. Our use of money does not depend on such awareness but basically on the fact that money is treated as such by everybody else. Thus, whereas it cannot be said that the self-referential process is the unique constitutive factor, it remains nonetheless central to the functioning and continuation of a particular social institution.

However it is important to stress again that, even in gigantic social institutions like money, each individual of the array acts inductively. Each individual inductively learns what is taken to be money from experience, and future applications rely on such inferences. That these inferences are reinforced or rely on other individuals' inductive inferences does not disqualify their inductive nature. They are inductive in so far as there is no general model to deduce from but rather they rely on earlier instances on which to base the learning process and base further inferences. Thus, each individual 'learning' about a particular and checking its validity with other people's inferences is what makes up the collective understanding.

The collective 'celebrates a tautology' and the self-fulfilling prophecy character of bootstrapped inductive machines

Another way to extrapolate Barnes' analysis of category ascription processes to the nature of social life is to indicate that whereas at the individual level inductive processes have a central place, at the level of the collective the nature of social category production is tautological, that is, it makes itself true. At the collective level induction cannot take place. Rather the collective necessarily depends on what the whole array of single individuals produce. What the collective takes to be a category S is what the collective, understood as an aggregate of individuals, takes to be S. At the collective level the operation can only be self-referential or performative. There is no possibility of 'checking' the correct answer to a particular label ascription from outside the group or collective since what constitutes the answer is precisely the sum of single individuals' inferences. The system, taken as a collective, is by nature, then, self-sustained. The totality of single devices as a group only 'knows' social kind terms through what every single individual device takes to be social kind terms.

The meaning which Barnes applies to the notion of 'collective', thus, presents here a different picture than one may commonly find in other sociological commentaries. As pointed out by Kusch, one should be careful not to confuse it with the more Durkhemian notion of the collective understood as the individual 'writ large'. Rather the collective is

the sum of single individual inputs, and not the image of an individual amplified. There is no outside entity, or 'superbeing', outside the collectively sustained use of categories. To envisage the collectivity as an individual writ large would contradict this model, since it would necessarily envisage the 'social' as something independent of individuals' activity.¹³

If, as Barnes claims, society is that constituted by the sum of each self-referring individual inference and category application, if, thus, society is that 'which is taken to be society' by all individuals, then society is a *huge self-fulfilling prophecy*. If, as we have seen, the self-referent loop *creates* the referent, then we can say that the self-referent loop *is* the referent.¹⁴ With this the performative character of bootstrapped induction is further emphasised and the constructed nature of social reality established as the collective accomplishment of an array of single individuals inductively inferring and learning through interaction and in doing so constituting society by their very performative activity.

¹³ Kusch, (1997)

¹⁴ Barnes (1983a:537) Barnes draws from Merton's study on self-fulfilling prophecies to elaborate this point. Merton analysed the self-fulfilling role of untrue declarations by pointing out that an event can be led to modify itself to fit 'incorrect' initial claims. The example given by Merton was that a sound bank can be led to bankruptcy by circulating rumours about its unreliability. Barnes expands Merton's insights by stating that whereas for Merton such self-fulfilling prophecies only applied to 'pathological' situations, that is, situations which 'did not fit' reality, the self-fulfilling prophecy nature of knowledge claims is pertinent to social life in general. The 'social' is thus that which is constituted by the referring to it as such, in this way fulfilling the prophecies that the referring establishes about its existence.

3.2. From the nature of social reality to the social bases of 'nature' categories.

Having established the self-referential performative nature of social life, it is time now to reconstruct the initial description made in section 2.1.1. about natural kind terms. It was argued above that a crucial difference between social kind terms and natural kind terms is that the second retain an unaltered reality (alter-referent) independent of the process of category ascription. However, I would like now to reconstruct this assumption and extend the socially constructed (performative) nature of social kinds also to natural kinds.

When talking of the process of category ascription of natural kinds terms by single individuals we established that the pure self-referential performative nature applied mostly to the second phase (pattern attachment) of the process of category ascription. However giving further attention to the first stage (pattern recognition) reveals that we proceed to recognize an external reality by analogy to an 'internalized' pattern. This internalized pattern is a 'prototype' which has also been collectively constituted. What we recognize as the 'concept' or 'image' of a tree is a conventionally constituted pattern and accepted and used as such by a particular community of individuals. What is a 'tree' for us could be conceptualized as something else (e.g. a bush) by another community of individuals. That is, the 'content' of the label 'tree' is also a communally constituted convention and it exists in this sense as self-referential in nature as well. What an individual takes to be the 'paradigm' of a tree is what the collective takes to be the 'paradigm' of a tree.

Thus, it is in this sense, that Natural kinds of entities may be also conceived as self referential 'social institutions'. Not in so far as the external reality *comes into existence* because of the performative operation, that is, the referring acts of naming (as would be the case in Social kinds of realities) but rather because they come to exist 'culturally', and thus become part of the practical world of individual activity, by the process of categorization. No doubt the independent entity had an existence prior to the naming of it, and would remain existing even if the naming of it ceased. However, for the community of humans it comes to exist for practical, as well as 'ontological', purposes only if it is being 'labelled', that is, referred to as such.

3.2.1. Barnes' empiricist account

Within the definition of reality as self-referential it is important to note a fundamental aspect of Barnes' performative theory, that of a commitment to a realist account.

Barnes notes that many ethnomethodologists would hold the view that discourse is 'entirely' self-referring, and that no external reality is involved in this process. This pure idealist position is rejected by Barnes. He notes that although natural kinds terms are also to be conceived as social constructions, they do not have the purely self-referential nature of social kinds terms. He denies that 'knowledge with self-reference is thus the only possible form of knowledge (including knowledge of the physical world), and that bootstrapped inference must accordingly be the only possible form of inductive inference'¹⁵. On the contrary, the self-referential process is merely *one* aspect of category ascription, because reality is directly implicated in this process by virtue of its effect upon individual inductive discriminatory processes. Barnes clearly spells out that if, as shown in Figure 1, there is a pattern-recognition phase in which individuals 'match' their internalized pattern in order to be able to discriminate an entity as N, there must be an external reality towards which this pattern recognition is applied. Accordingly, he states that: 'I do not accept the assertion that reference *reduces* to self-reference'.¹⁶

With this, Barnes shows that his argument presents a different understanding of self-referentiality than the pure idealist one which would disregard any influence of empirical reality on the process of concept application. On the contrary, Barnes' emphasis on 'inductive inference' as the basis of human cognition makes his position a materialist one. His inductive commitment necessarily means that he conceives humans as in direct contact with external empirical reality, that is, capable of identifying external particulars - be they physical reality or discursive reality. It is crucial to Barnes' model that if individuals were not capable of inductively inferring pattern-recognition acts they would also be unable to identify particulars at all, that is, particulars which are identifiable by attached patterns. They would also be unable to identify speech-acts and thus unable to identify the concepts which describe and categorise the particulars. So, crucially, neither would they have any categories to 'attach' and social life would be impossible. Thus individual inductive inferences are, necessarily, at the core of knowledge production of all types of realities, be they natural or social kinds of realities. Thus reality will play a crucial role in the production of all knowledge claims.

However, something of the problem of pattern-recognition identified by those such as ethnomethodologists who adopt pure idealist positions remains. As already noted above pattern recognition activity will always require a model with which to compare the specific entity if it is to be 'recognized' and consequently labelled. This model or 'paradigm' is indeed self-referential; it is provided by the community and necessarily learned from others. The model of what is taken to be a tree is a notion which has been

¹⁵ Barnes (1983a: 540)

¹⁶ Barnes (1983a:541). Italics are mine

learned by exposure to others' teachings or indirect activity. Cross-cultural anthropological studies have provided many examples of the shifting boundaries of the exact content of the categories used to describe the world. Surely, the exact 'content' of the model of what is taken to be a tree in a western community is bound to be different from that which is taken to be a tree in a Yanomamo or a Massai society.¹⁷ Contextual factors of local cultures influence the 'decisions' of their members as to the content of the paradigms or models which will direct their pattern recognition processes. Many 'external' (non-physical) variables will also be at play in this process of establishing the content of the category of knowledge, but first and foremost there has to be an empirical reality to be categorized. For example, Inuit societies may have no word for trees, because of the lack of any vegetation in their environment.

To sum up, Barnes' position clearly advocates a particular form of social constructionism which includes as fundamental the input of external reality, but also highlights the *essential* role of the self-referential performative basis for the constitution of the final knowledge categories.

3.2.2. Barnes and Bloor 's development of the theory of meaning finitism¹⁸

We have established Barnes' position that the causal impact of the external world is a crucial part of the process of knowledge production. His is a model that clearly adopts an empiricist stance. We have also established, however, that he insists that the self-referential aspect of the process of category ascription is nonetheless essential to the establishment of human knowledge. I suggest that it is in this two-fold dynamic that we not only find the most revealing insights of the Strong Programme's model, but also the most counter-intuitive. The resolution of this apparent contradiction, namely that the external world is crucial but the community is nonetheless essential, is the very core of the strength of their position. The Strong Programme's contention that without the community, knowledge would not be possible, or to put it in other words, that 'nature' is *not enough* to constitute the final products of knowledge, has been widely misinterpreted and criticised.¹⁹ In this section I attempt to summarise what is probably the most counter-intuitive aspect of the Strong Programme's tenets, namely that the determination of the consensus of the content (meaning) of knowledge categories is the product of an interactive collective without which it would not *exist at all*. This position

¹⁷ The Yanomamo live in the Amazonian jungle, the Massai mainly inhabit African deserts.

¹⁸ The notion of meaning finitism is first introduced by Barnes in (1982b). Also particularly useful to an understanding of the collective nature of 'meaning' as contingent, revisable and agreed by consensus is Barnes' 1983b article "On the Conventional Character of Knowledge and Cognition". I have, however, based a major part of my summary on Bloor's development of the notion.

¹⁹ See Latour (1999) Hacking (1999) Searle (1995) Bourdieu (2000a) Kemp (2000) Pickering (1995)

provides a specific ontological definition of the social which I shall suggest introduces a useful corrective to some reified stagnations of some current social theory.

Of central importance here is the exact role of the community in the constitution of knowledge. Bloor's expansion of the notion of meaning finitism²⁰ is at the centre of this explanation. To put into focus Bloor's theory let us return to Barnes' idealised simplification of pattern recognition processes described above. Barnes notes that the comparison between external reality and the internalised model or paradigm can never result in full 'identity'. Naturally differing individuals will necessarily produce differing inferences which will make such an 'identity' impossible. This degree of difference, as well as due to individual factors (genetic, cultural, historical, etc.) and differing individual interests, also stems from the *inductive* nature of these inferences. Inductive inferences are those which go from particular to general, or those which from a *finite* number of earlier instances go to another particular.²¹

Therefore, it is inherent in the nature of a model (or paradigm) that it can never completely represent the boundaries of a particular entity of reality. Rather the internalised model is just an *approximation* of this particular reality, which a particular collective assumes as accurate. In other words, a model is just this, a 'paradigm'. Hence the pattern-recognition stage can only be comparable rather than identical to the model. Only radical rationalists or naive realists will want to believe that there must be a total 'identity' between the model and reality in order for the concept ascription to be able to proceed. On the contrary, Barnes points out that each act of pattern recognition involves a 'finite' sequence of acts of recognition which discriminate the entities according to a process of analogy with the internalised pattern.

Thus, an inductive view of human knowledge necessarily requires an empiricist stance. Reality does have a fundamental impact on the individual's discriminatory acts. Indeed, it could not be otherwise, since not *any* kind of reality will 'fit' the internalised pattern. There cannot be an 'infinite' sequence of acts of recognition. Reality plays a role in determining the first steps of pattern recognition activity.

However, precisely because of the inductive nature of individuals' inferences, external reality is not enough to *fully* determine an individual's final interpretation and application of a category. By virtue of their indeterminate nature, single individual inferences would necessarily differ too much to constitute the final meaning or content which a community agrees to use. And, given that everywhere we find communities

²⁰ This is a position which is consistently developed in Bloor's oeuvre. However it is particularly developed in Bloor (1991), (1997) and Barnes, Bloor and Henry (1996)

²¹ The centrality of the inductive nature of the cognitive apparatus of humans is stressed by Barnes in (1983b)

agreeing with very little conflict on what is the content or meaning of their knowledge categories, there necessarily must be a strong force which constitutes the consensus between single potentially differing individuals. Barnes points out that if we were to envisage knowledge production as an isolated individual exercise of single inductive inferences we would end up with an infinite variety of 'outputs' which would result in a permanently 'oscillating' image of reality - an impossible situation for the existence of social life.²² This is why Barnes performative theory of social institutions, and particularly the notion of social life as a huge bootstrapped sum of inductions, suggests that without collective interaction social life would not be possible.

We started section 2.1.3. on Barnes' notion of social life as a bootstrapped induction by quoting the following:

"Persons individually learning and *confirming* what they learn, collectively create its reference"²³

It is to the notion of 'confirming' that we now have to turn our attention.

Normativity and 'content' determination

Building on the above argument, Bloor expands on the different positions represented by two principal understandings of the constitution of knowledge: meaning finitism and meaning determinism. Meaning determinism is the position taken by those who believe that once the meaning of a category has been established (by direct teaching or by implicit practical training or socialization) the individual has internalized a fixed category, or 'rule', which will guide all future applications.

This is contrary to what Bloor proposes, namely a meaning 'finitist' view of knowledge production. The basis of this position is that transmission of knowledge is always based on a finite number of examples which cannot provide the learner with certainty as to the infinite possibilities that the world will present when applying the category or rule to new situations. So the learner must learn to move: "from a finite number of examples to an *open-ended*, indefinitely large range of future applications"²⁴.

In future applications the final determination of the individual's judgements will rely on different factors. First, individuals may be disposed to certain acts of categorization and not others constituted by the very same learning process. Kusch, expanding the finitist position, provides a useful description of the fact that individuals acquire a tendency to certain acts of categorization and not others. Different people, located in different

²² Barnes (1983a:535) and (1983b:39)

²³ Barnes (1983a:533). Italics are mine

²⁴ Bloor (1997:10)

environments, are subjected to different 'arrays' of examples from which to learn their models of how to apply a category. From this exposure to a particular array of examples individuals will necessarily develop dispositions to some judgements rather than others.²⁵

In addition, however, individuals *also* arrive at similar judgements because of the influence of empirical features. We have already pointed out that the Strong Programme position highlights the fundamental role of empirical reality, and empirical features will indeed play a role in judgements of similarity. We thus have two powerful determinants producing agreement among individuals as to particular cases of category ascription, that is, empirical features and socialization.

However, despite these 'determinants' individuals may, and indeed do, produce differing judgements. Particular biological or cognitive make-ups and historical or cultural factors will necessarily bring heterogeneity and variety to individuals' outputs. Individuals may hold different 'interests' and subjective views and hence have differing judgements. For example, if we want to define a tree for its projected shadow capacity, for its bearing of fruit or for its aesthetic proportions to fit gardens, these 'interests' will impinge on our final judgement.

Barnes and Bloor point out that if despite the complexities of the process of category ascription society is characterised by being able to reach consensus, something other than external empirical features and socialization processes must be in place. It is necessarily in and through interaction that individuals are able to reach *normative* conclusions as to their individual inferences.²⁶

Individuals in isolation cannot develop a sense of what *is* the right category application but rather only *what seems to be right*. What *is* right is nothing other than that which is taken to be right by a *community of interactive* individuals who by sharing and negotiating with each other their own inductive inferences produce the 'meaning' of what are 'right' or 'wrong' applications. Thus, the *collectivist* view of the Strong Programme would envisage an individual sense of what *is* 'right' as that which is provided by the 'correspondence' with others confirming it 'right'.

The interaction with others is, therefore, a crucial element of knowledge production because it provides the final standard of right and wrong application. That is, it is inherent in the nature of individual inductive inferences to tend to *confirm* with others the judgements of category ascription:

²⁵ Kusch (2002)

²⁶ See Bloor and Kusch *passim* in the bibliography, particularly Kusch 2002 and Bloor 1997

"It is necessary to introduce a sociological element into the account to explain normativity. Normative standards come from the consensus generated by a number of interacting rule followers, and it is maintained by collective monitoring, controlling and sanctioning their individual tendencies"²⁷

Thus meaning finitism states that meaning (that is the content of knowledge categories) intrinsically has no fixed content which can be imposed upon us externally in order to guide our acts (neither from external physical reality, nor from external social reality: i.e. socialization processes). Without denying the fundamental role of the former, meaning finitism suggests that *meaning* can only be constituted finally as such by the permanent act of interaction among individuals confirming and agreeing about their single acts of category ascription.

We can see here the connection between Bloor's meaning finitism theory and Barnes description of social life as the sum of all individuals' bootstrapped inductive inferences. Bloor's insights help us better to visualize the crucial role of social interaction. Indeed, as pointed out above, there are many factors implicated in the production of consensus between naturally differing individuals. Acts of category ascription are not unconstrained and similarities with previous acts of category ascription constrain new ones. Shared biological features and social conditioning undoubtedly have a 'constraining' effect on dissimilar judgements. But Bloor stresses that the final emphasis must be 'sociological': we constitute the final social consensus -and thus constitute the stability of the meaning and content of particular knowledge categories - as we move from case to case and learn from and check with others our individual acts of inference and category ascription. Hence the community is central to the constitution of meaning.

From this simplified background of assumptions the Strong Programmers summarise the central tenets of their 'finitist' position in five points²⁸:

1- social categories are *open-ended*: future applications of terms cannot be fully determined by prior applications and thus they are open to modification. The open-ended notion of finitism challenges our intuition that once a classification pattern has been established it provides a fixed path on which to proceed.²⁹ Empirical reality, according to the Strong Programme, cannot fully pre-determine classification categories. Rather, we make decisions from moment to moment based on prior judgements.

²⁷ Bloor (1997:17)

²⁸ See Barnes, Bloor and Henry for this summarised exposition in (1996:55-59)

²⁹ It is interesting to note that an author that fully embraces a social constructionist position like Searle advocates a form of idealism nonetheless by denying the constitutive role of collective monitoring when he says: "But once we have fixed the meaning of such terms in our vocabulary by arbitrary definitions, it is no longer a matter of any kind of relativism or arbitrariness whether representation-independent features of the world satisfy those definitions, because the features of the world that satisfy or fail to satisfy the definitions exist independently of those or any other definitions". Searle (1995:166)

2- Social categories cannot be proved totally correct: there is no act of classification that can be proved to be indefeasible correct due to the fact that every act of classification must proceed on the basis of analogy rather than identity. It is through interaction that the collective constantly negotiates the correctness of a knowledge category

3- All acts of classification have a provisional nature: that is, all acts of classification can be potentially revised. The finitist view emphasises the contingent nature of knowledge categories which by virtue of being continually established in negotiation with the interactive collective opens up the possibility of new acts of negotiation based on different 'analogies'. That is, a previous act of classification can be proved wrong if there is new information to change the standard applied by the collective to new acts of classification.

4- Successive applications are not independent: this point highlights that every new act of classification adds more information to the class of entities grouped under a category, thus potentially altering future acts of categorization.

5- The application of different kinds of categories are not independent from each other: classifying an entity in one group rather than in another modifies the content of other potential groupings of entities.

From a sociological perspective the most important aspects of this approach to the understanding of knowledge production is that social life presents an *underdetermined* nature; that knowledge categories are in a permanent state of *negotiation* which makes possible future modifications; and that central to the stability of the social world is the *interaction* between individuals without which there could not exist any agreement and thus any social life at all. Thus social institutions are the result of the interactive process among the members of a collective.

3.2.3. The social constructionism of the Strong Programme: a 'realist' social ontology

Before further establishing the nature of the 'social' which the Strong Programme suggests, let us pause to summarize further its 'realist' position. We have seen that the content of a category, that is, the model or paradigm necessary for pattern recognition, is constantly re-negotiated and reconfirmed in and through the interaction with other members of the collective.

This has fundamental implications for understanding the ontological existence granted to a given reality, whether a social or a natural kind. The theory of meaning finitism and Barnes' performative understanding come together to provide a picture of social or

natural categories as being constituted by every act of naming by all members of the community. This is a fundamental aspect of the Strong Programme position which needs to be reinforced, because I believe it defines the core of their particular form of social constructionism.

We have seen how Bloor's meaning finitism theory brings our attention to the fact that despite the fundamental role of external reality (be it physical or social) in initiating individual acts of classification, this reality is not enough to indicate, or constitute, the correctness of an individual's act of classification. To fully determine the 'content' of a category, therefore, there needs to be comparison with others' acts of classification. However, given that we are socialized and trained to follow determined paths in an automatic manner, what normally happens is that our individual inferences are confirmed with others' inferences. From the actors' point of view it appears as if it is an external reality which guides inferences rather than the collective self-referential activity:

"consensus makes norms *objective*, that is, a source of external and impersonal constraint on the individual"³⁰

Barnes talks about the 'invisibility' of the bootstrap operation of self-referentiality. Because we commonly arrive at automatic agreement with others, the self-referential (thus, socially constructed) nature of our inferences is lost to individual sight, and to our intuition it appears as if there is a reality 'out there' guiding our inferences yet *independent of our inferences*. Because we lose sight of the stabilising effect - particularly in large social institutions - that every single negotiated act of classification has upon the whole, the (provisional and continuously constituted) reality is perceived as 'real' and transcending individual activity. Individuals cannot be aware of the crucial role of the interactive process in meaning formation, and at the individual level the reality constituted through interaction does act in practice as a 'real' (that is objectified as a reification) external entity constraining and effectively controlling individual tendencies. This is not to say, however, that it exists as a reality *independent* from the activity of the individuals.

The theory of meaning finitism is particularly helpful to establish the specific ontological character that Barnes performative theory suggests. In Bloor's work there is

³⁰ Bloor (1997:17). Italics are mine. The 'reality' of a natural entity, as already stressed, would indeed be the result of the impact of both the raw material existing independent of our categories and the process of categorization. Alter-referential and self-referential aspects both play a role in constituting what is taken to be a natural reality. Social realities, as defined here, would present a different form of 'externality' or 'objectivity', not so much as constituted at some point and then becoming 'alter referential' in nature, as it were, but rather as becoming 'artefactual' and indeed also playing a role in informing individual inferences which also would be in need of confirmation and alignment with other individual inferences. Thus, the claim that social reality can only be said to exist through the actions of humans does not mean that it is taken to be intangible or insubstantial.

a recurrent emphasis on this particular point, namely that reality (physical or social) is not to be understood as a platonic entity or a mythical posit existing outside the temporality of human construction. On the contrary, his is a 'naturalistic' approach which grounds reality as a:

" 'spatial and temporal phenomenon' not some abstract 'phantasm' outside space and time"³¹

As Barnes suggests, social institutions (that is, social 'things'), although *performative* in essence (that is, constituted by every act of naming by each individual) exist *in practice* as something 'real'. The *nature* of this 'reality' is what the Strong Programme strives to establish. While it acquires an objective/material existence, it should not be confused with the material reality of a tangible object, neither should it be relegated to a 'metaphysics of presence'.³²

We should not understand the Strong Programme's position as a form of structuralism which, while acknowledging the constitutive role of human activity, sees this activity only as the originator of the 'structure' (or constraining social forces) which once constituted acquires an existence independent from individual (interactive) activity. On the contrary, the ontological status granted to social reality is something which is in a continuous state of constitution. If we recall Bloor's explanation of how 'meanings' do not exist independent of the continuous negotiation process which runs throughout the interactive exchange, then we can see that the Strong Programme suggests another form of *realism*: meanings (or social phenomena) exist as 'real' phenomena understood as real artefacts which transcend and guide individual activity. But these are not *independent* of individual activity in so far as their existence depends on every single output of each individual negotiating and aligning themselves via the interactive process. Nevertheless, by virtue of being continuously established by every single act of categorization the output is perceived as existing 'independent' of the referring collective, and in practice it *does* exist as an independent entity. Bloor draws heavily on Wittgenstein's notion of drilling and training of our responses through permanent repetition of the same practice which produces the 'psychological side-effect' that the guiding rules of our knowledge categories acts exist outside us:

³¹ Bloor (1997:20).

³² Bloor has written extensively about the Strong Programme's form of relativism and its realist commitment (for the most recent example see Bloor, 2003). Their form of relativism does not deny that there is a world out there which effects an impact but it contends that this world does not provide the necessary information for individual content production and thus collective monitoring is deemed essential. Therefore, it contests relativistic arguments which would convey that categories once created do become somewhat reified, fixed in their content, and thereafter guiding the 'true' correspondence between them and reality. For a social constructionist account which rejects the Strong Programme's relativism in favour of a reification of categories once they have been 'fixed' see Searle 1995.

"when we find our rule following to be smooth and mechanical we project that feeling onto the rule itself: the rule can only seem to me to produce all its consequences in advance if I draw them as a *matter of course*"³³

Bloor very clearly points out that, to envisage knowledge or social rules as guiding patterns, independent of their constant reinforcement by the practice of them at every moment of application would mean to grant them an 'agency' which would make them exist as outside space and time, that is, as reified entities. Yet individually we feel as if there is a reality outside us which compels us to act in specific ways and not others, and this is, Bloor emphasises, a genuine feeling, because we as individuals are in fact compelled by something outside us: the other people around us who make our community:

"It is society that is external to us and the true source of our sense that rules exist as an independent reality set over against the individual rule follower. So there is a reality answering to these mysterious, myth ridden feelings, but nothing that lies beyond the social collectivity and its constituent parts. We are only compelled by rules in so far as we, collectively, compel one another."³⁴

It is the achieved consensus among interactive individuals which creates the 'objective' nature of knowledge categories that is a source of external and impersonal constraint on the individual. Meaning finitism establishes an *under-determinate* nature of our categories, that is, there exists no *class* of things existing in advance and guiding our applications of the category. However, it is also true that the content of this category (established by prior single acts of application) exists as a constraining force, which is perceived, and in practice exists, as external to us. The strong programmers' ontological definition of the 'social' is thus a particular form of 'linguistic idealism' which does not dismiss the existence of a 'reality' out there, but rather conceives it as 'a reality having no existence independent of our collective thoughts about it, and references to it'.³⁵

The point is that the world of categories presents itself to us - intuitively - as independent from our category ascription processes. In relation to 'social' reality, that is, *that* constituted by our acts of self-reference, the operation of crystallization effected by automatic, socialized concept application, results also in an intuitive perception of social categories, institutions, structures, rules and so on as also having an independent existence from our naming or use of them. That is, they appear as a platonic entity (a reality understood as located in a special abstract realm independent of human practice) and, as it would appear with 'natural' reality, fully informing and determining our activity.

³³ Wittgenstein as quoted by Bloor (1997:20)

³⁴ Bloor (1997: 22)

³⁵ Bloor (1997: 35)

The Strong Programme, however, develops an analytical framework which provides an 'empiricist' approach to reality, one which understands a reality existing in and through the permanent constitution by individuals and *nonetheless* with a status of independence granted by the constant repetition of the very same practices of each individual. The socially constituted reality acts with the same constraining force of an independent existing reality. However, ontologically speaking it is dependent on the processes of collectively shared individual acts of categorization, the point being that if *all* humans stopped their self-referential labelling a particular form of social reality would also cease to exist.³⁶

In arguing social reality is the product of the sum of all the accounts of interactive individuals, the Strong Programme provides analytical tools for a 'sociological' account which further expands the sociological notion of the interaction between structural constraints and individual activity. The Strong Programme suggestion that society (understood as a collective of interactive humans sharing their knowledge) *is the very basis* of reality is a clear advance upon social constructionist notions.³⁷ A sociological account of knowledge in these terms is not an account which believes that society works upon the individual by 'interfering' or 'mediating' her knowledge, but rather, it is its 'precondition', that is, without society the individual would not be able to 'know':

"society does not attenuate or distort our ability to know and refer: it is one of its preconditions"³⁸

Thus, although the Strong Programme can be said to be a form of 'idealism' it could be also said that it differs from those radical idealist theories which totally discount reality's causality. Indeed, the Strong Programme stresses that reality has a necessary causal impact on individual acts of category ascription. If we return to Barnes' explanation of pattern-matching and pattern-recognition, those operations could not be done without attending to the empirical properties found in the external entity. However, the notion

³⁶ I have found it useful to use the image of a hologram as an analogy of the ontological nature of social reality conveyed by the Strong Programmers (that is, neither physically solid nor diffusely platonic). Thus, the 'materialization' that they describe would rely on the existence of multiple projecting points which contain the whole and constitute it by projecting it. Like a hologram the materialization of social reality would disappear if the projecting points disappeared.

³⁷ The Strong Programme also provides analytical tools to further the social constructionist scope from clearly 'social' realities to 'non-social' realities. Our intuition would easily incorporate 'sociological' determinism for some kinds of social realities. For example, the rule of driving to the left or to the right is easy to perceive as a social convention guided by nothing external to our collective decisions. However some people would argue that there are some realities, clearly not natural like a mountain, but clearly not social like leadership, which are more difficult to sustain as social conventions, one example being Mathematics. Bloor deals with the social and conventional nature of mathematical rules in several texts (see especially Bloor: 1994) and establishes that even for this type of reality, commonly perceived as 'non-social', the possibility of application of its rules, and thus, the *existence* of the rule itself, lies in the interactive collective.

³⁸ Bloor (1995:1). See particularly Bloor (1995) and (1996) where Bloor specifically tackles the accusation of 'idealism' (in the sense of dismissing the existence and causal impact of an external reality) of the Strong Programme position.

of performativity, as understood as that activity which *brings about what it names*, makes of the Strong Programme a 'linguistic idealism'³⁹.

To conclude this summary it is important to note that the collectivist position the Strong Programmers advocate does *not* contend that the collective has the power or capacity to *fully* determine the content of knowledge categories. Bloor is not saying that the collective is what makes meaning 'determinate', and the individual's possession of meaning 'indeterminate'. Importantly, Bloor is suggesting that it is the collective that constitutes any meaning *at all*, "where *all* meaning is *indeterminate*"⁴⁰. He argues that without collective normativity, meaning would not be possible, but stresses that the final result is always inherently provisional and subject to potential modification, because by nature meanings are *always* inherently negotiable and disputable.

³⁹ See Bloor (1995:4) for an extended explanation of the point that a linguistic idealistic account can also be committed to a 'robust realism'.

⁴⁰ Bloor (1996: 855) Italics are mine. Here Durkheim is quoted as representing a position in which the collective provides definite representations which individuals adopt equally. This would be according to Bloor a 'holistic' view of the 'hidden hand' which would very well represent most structuralist accounts in sociology.

3.3. Rules as Social Institutions and the Strong Programme as an 'interaction' based social theory

In this section I further spell out how from the theory of meaning finitism we can achieve an understanding of rules as social institutions:

"One of the most central premises of a communitarian epistemology is the idea that normative phenomena -rules, norms, convention, prescriptions, and standards of correctness -can exist only within communities"⁴¹

The social constructionism of the Strong Programme not only sees individual behaviour as influenced by social structures, but goes further by stressing that social structural patterns *are themselves* the product of interaction between individuals.

In order more clearly to understand the significance this has for a sociological approach we have to expand on the notion of a 'rule' and particularly what is meant by the activity of 'following' a rule. Social science's attempt to understand human behaviour has sought to unravel what is meant by 'following a rule' (or norm). The most intuitive understanding of rules would be that they are those normative standards of behaviour which exist prior to the individual, are learned by the individual, and subsequently used to facilitate interaction with other individuals. This understanding of 'rule following' has been taken up by Bloor, drawing on the criticism made by Wittgenstein and reinterpreted by Kripke⁴². Bloor criticises the position which holds that norms have intrinsic principles which individuals internalize and which then determine future activity, that is Normative Determinism. This is a form of individualism which envisages norms and rules as reified platonic entities. In other words, normative determinism understood as 'individualistic' suggests that to follow a rule is an individual exercise, that is, that once the rule has been internalized, the individual can proceed in isolation and there is no need for interaction with other people to confirm that the rule has been correctly or incorrectly followed. This is because it is assumed that rules contain their own principles. That is, normativity is something which is implicit in the rule and the individual only needs to have knowledge of the rule to be able to apply it.

On the contrary the Strong Programme contention is that to understand rule following from a sociological perspective presents a complexity which the individualistic position

⁴¹ Kusch (2002: 175)

⁴² Kripke (1982). Kripke's book makes provocative claims against previous commentaries on Wittgenstein's private language debate, which according to him have failed to appreciate the real nature of Wittgenstein's argument in his *Philosophical Investigations*, to wit, that a "private language" is impossible. Kripke's arguments revolve around Wittgenstein's rule following arguments and suggest that individuals in isolation cannot provide the meaning or the correctness of rule following. According to Kripke it is only in a community setting that there can be 'substantive assertion conditions' for the attribution of correct or incorrect rule following. See Kripke (1982: 88-99)

cannot account for. The 'finitist' position of the Strong Programme suggests that a finite number of earlier applications provide a 'sense' or disposition of how to proceed, but cannot provide clear determination of the right or wrong application in new cases. Thus, meaning finitism understands that an individual act of following a rule needs to be grasped from the perspective of establishing the difference between what 'seems' right and what 'is' right. In other words, an isolated individual can apply a rule but the determination of whether this act is the right way to follow a particular rule can only come from the sanctioning which others provide by applying the rule in the same way.

Thus, automatic application of a rule - a very common activity in social life - does not prove that the rule has a pre-existing normative *essence* but rather only proves that we have been successfully 'drilled' into its application. That is, we have learned a 'technique'⁴³ through socialization which allows for the straightforward application of the rule in future situations. However, this automatic application proves a successful socialization process has taken place but does not prove that inherent in the rule there are normative standards of 'correctness'. These can only be provided by comparison and confirmation with other individuals' applications of the same rule.

Indeed rule following activity has a dual nature. It contains a tendency or disposition to act in certain ways, which has been individually internalized according to cultural specificities. It is thus conventional in the sense that it is culturally specific. But it has a deeper 'social' status in the sense that it has to be understood as 'collective' dependent. The idea that an internalized disposition can set people to do *equally* the same thing is rejected as impossible by the Strong Programme. Difference will always exist and therefore something else is needed to achieve consensus among differing individuals. The Strong Programmers contend that the source of agreement comes from the permanent sanctioning process established by interaction with other members of the collective.⁴⁴

⁴³ Bloor expands in several texts on this point and the notion of learning a 'technique' as stemming from Wittgenstein's reflections on the issue of 'following a rule'. A very clear summary is given in Bloor (1997) and (1994)

⁴⁴ It is important to further clarify that in arguing for the necessary constitutive role of social sanctioning the Strong Programme is not aligning with pure ethnomethodologists stances which would deny any prior existence of rules outside the process of negotiation of face to face interaction. On the contrary, in relation to social rules Bloor also applies the 'objectivism' advocated by the Strong Programme. As argued above, the Strong Programme does not deny an external 'reality'. It simply advocates a different ontological understanding of this reality, and consequently strongly emphasises that whereas we cannot think of rules without considering that their existence is dependent on the normative standards applied by the collective, it is equally impossible to argue that verbal practices are *enough* to understand the activity of following a rule. In other words, dispositional activity, that is, an objective account of behaviour pre-existing each moment of application, *must* have been internalized, otherwise it would be made *absolutely* necessary for people to constantly keep checking others to make sure they do 'right'. Face to face encounters are necessary, Bloor further stresses, to confirm 'correctness', but dispositional tendency is also necessary otherwise social life would be excessively dependent on actual permanent interaction. This is evidently not the case, as shown by the fact that individual activity often proceeds in isolation.

Thus we return to the tenets laid out by Barnes in his theory of self-referentiality. Social Institutions, that is, rules, categories, knowledge and so on, exist by virtue of the performative aspect of the self-referential process. This not only emphasises the constitution of reality through the naming of it, but, most important, the fact that concepts acquire their normative properties throughout the self-referential process. That is, the community accepts and uses as correct what others have accepted and used as correct. Self-referential processes provide the normative standards of right and wrong application of a category, and thus provide the constitution of the 'content' (meaning) of the category. The same applies for rules: without the practice of application of a rule sanctioned by others as right or wrong the rule could not exist. In other words, self-referential processes provide the standard for right and wrong application, and hence self-referential processes constitute the meaning of the rule.⁴⁵

More so than in the natural world, rules in social life are not guided by an independent external referent, and will thus be open to different interpretations from different individuals. As Barnes argues: "all that is manifest with rules is *examples of their use*"⁴⁶. To act in accordance with rules is to proceed using such examples as precedents. And, given that examples can only provide an 'approximation' and consequently can only lead to similarity or analogy, it is clear that consensus as to following a rule cannot be understood from some inherent property of the rule itself but rather from the agreement established in practice among interacting individuals:

"According to finitism, there is no 'correct' response implicit in what went before. It isn't a case of 'discovering' the right status to accord the discovery that 2+2 can add to something other than 4. It is a case of deciding. (...) An act of discretion, not of discovery, is called for. And that discretion will in general be exercised collectively"⁴⁷

Given that meaning finitism points out that there may always be a possibility of things being different in new cases of application, this means that our automatic techniques may prove inapplicable to new cases. New decisions are influenced by local contingencies in which culture, interests, and changing environments may interfere with the application of a rule as before. Thus the 'correctness' of a response is something that will necessarily have to be negotiated and further established at every moment of application of the rule.

⁴⁵ See among other texts particularly Bloor (1999a) and (1999b)

⁴⁶ See Barnes (2000: 54)

⁴⁷ Bloor (1994: 26-27)

3.3.1. Rules, meaning and collective sanctioning

The Strong Programme proposes that individually differing acts of rule application are constantly *sanctioned* with the status of right or wrong by the other individuals of a collective. Barnes himself stresses that sanctions are fundamental features of the performative self-referential model. They are the vehicle by which individual inferences are validated, and thus become part of the self-referential bootstrapped induction.⁴⁸

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 is, that individuals constantly modify their behaviour in alignment with changing collective requirements is an empirical phenomenon. The performative theory of social institutions of the Strong Programme 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. Thus far we have only stressed how sanctioning is fundamental to the constitution of 'knowledge' or 'rules'. However, there is a second aspect of social sanctioning which is important. That is that humans are emotionally vulnerable to others' judgements and valuations; they appear to be susceptible to signs of approval and disapproval. Conformity and hence constitution of collective agreement is at the core of this 'system of social sanctioning': the system leads individuals to experience social influences as 'compelling and irresistible'. 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.⁴⁹

Thus to conclude this summary, it could be said that the Strong Programme contends that we have to understand rules as *social institutions*, that is, as existing in and through interaction among individuals who by each act of application constitute their existence.

⁴⁸ Barnes (1988:95)

⁴⁹ The significance of sanctioning mechanisms for the present discussion will be fully developed in more detail later. This is a topic extensively treated in social theory, and which acquires full descriptive force with Goffman's theories of the presentation of the self. This particular aspect of the role of social sanctioning will be further expanded upon when discussing Scheff's notion of the emotion-deference system.

Thus the Strong Programme advocates a particular ontological view of rules: they do not exist prior to individual acts but rather *are the result* of individual acts reaching agreement as to the correct application of a rule. Rules arise from *the practice of following them*: to follow a rule is therefore to participate in its constitution as a social institution.

The social 'reality' of a rule is thus not a transcending metaphysical reality but rather that which is the product of collective activity. Rules become institutions by virtue of being referred to and through this reference being assumed to be correct. Nevertheless, they exist in the minds of individuals as realities with intrinsic properties:

"a 'social object' is constituted by the description actors and participants give it. It has no existence independent of their beliefs and utterances about it; hence it cannot be described 'more closely' by, as it were, getting behind these descriptions. Because they are self-referring there is nothing behind them (...) this is precisely the case with the normativity of rules"⁵⁰

It is in this sense that rules are to be conceived as conventional *and* collective.

⁵⁰ Bloor (1997:35)

3.4. Kusch's further development of the theory of Social Institutions

The summary above may seem to have taken us a long way from the discussion of social constructionism and the sociology of the body. However, by focusing on Barnes exploration of knowledge production regarding the natural and social world, and by presenting Bloor's analysis of the role of the collective in the determination of knowledge and his 'naturalistic' account of reality, we can begin to recognize the contribution that the performative theory of social institutions can offer to the debate of the social construction of the body and the social bases of the formation of sex/gender identity.

Further purchase on this particular aspect of the social construction of the physicality of humans and the formation of individual identity can be gained by introducing the work of Martin Kusch. Of particular importance is Kusch's further expansion of the understanding of the self-referential nature of natural and social kinds through the introduction of the notion of artificial kinds. It will be my aim to develop in subsequent chapters Kusch's theory of artificial kinds to achieve a sharper focus on the socially constructed nature of the body and sex/gender identity.

The dynamics of the role of the collective in the establishment of social institutions and the debate on the origins and nature of social stability and drift are also put into sharper focus by this reconstruction of the Strong Programme tenets through what I will call Kusch's 'clock model'.

3.4.1. Kusch's notion of Artificial Kinds⁵¹

I have referred to the analytical division made by Barnes between social and natural kinds in order to clarify our intuitive understanding of the process of category ascription and the role of both the empirical world and discursive activity in this process.

We have established that natural and social kinds both present a socially constructed nature. Both share self-referential elements but crucially differ in the existence of what has been termed by Kusch as an 'alter-referent'.

When we try to explore the social construction of the physical body while still paying heed to its biological basis, it is necessary to introduce a further dimension. Particularly when attempting to analyse the notion of sex/gender identity as a socially constructed

⁵¹ I base my summary on Kusch (1997) and (1999)

entity we must take many variables into account; to wit, physical factors, socialization processes, collective understandings, normative standards, individual practices and emotions, and so on. Crucially however the sociological exploration of sex/gender identity strongly places the physicality of humans at the centre of consideration. I attempt to further explore the complexities of such an undertaking by introducing Kusch's tripartite division of natural, social and artificial kinds.

Natural kinds: When Kusch reconstructs Barnes theory of kinds he recalls that in philosophical terms the theory of kinds emerges from the debate between universalism or conceptualism (the world has a fixed structure which we discover) versus nominalism (the structure of the world is imposed by us upon the entities that exist prior to our structuring). Universalists hence would contend that natural kinds (as groups of entities sharing similar features and properties) exist in the world independent of us and we 'discover' them. On the contrary nominalists will take the view that only 'individual entities' exist and the grouping of them into kinds is of our doing by imposing our own criteria of classification. Kusch contends that we should infer Barnes final understanding of natural kinds as similar to the nominalist position. That is, that natural kinds (as *groups* of natural categories) exist in so far as we impose on them taxonomic divisions.

However this is not to say that the material reality of classified entities is the same as their verbal classification. Indeed the individual entities remain as external and independent, as 'alter-referents'. What is conventional and socially constituted in a natural kind of term is the category which classifies it in a 'kind'. To use an example, what belongs to the category of a cat depends on the model or paradigm of what culturally and thus conventionally we have decided fits within the category of a cat. But crucially the entity classified remains independent (as a physical reality) and would still exist if the classificatory activity ceased. In other words, if the classificatory act (the labelling of the entity) stops what would disappear is our 'knowledge' about 'cats' understood as a category (and thus cats as a kind of object in the world) which groups certain entities and separates others. The entities upon which the category is imposed, however, would continue to exist.

Social kinds: From a similar perspective it follows that social kinds are thus those kinds of object which are totally dependent on our acts of classification and have no entities existing independent of our acts of classification. They are purely self-referential and performative in the sense that the act of reference ultimately creates the reference to which it refers. That someone is a leader is a social status of leadership which is constituted by the person being referred as such and taken to be such. So leadership is a social status which only exists in and through this referential process. There is no external independent reality outside the act of classification. That the social status of

leadership is imposed onto a biological system (a person) may confuse us into thinking that leadership may be thought, equally, as a natural kind. However, that would be to collapse 'person' - a physical object - with 'leadership' - a social category - which is obviously not the case. Thus leadership is fully a self-referential entity which remains independent of the biological being to which is imposed.

At this point Kusch warns that we run into a complexity not fully resolved by the dual division used by Barnes. He points out that there are entities which do not fall into any of the above categories but rather come to exist as 'artefacts' by the very same process of labelling or activity of creation. Here Kusch introduces the notion of artificial kinds.

Artificial Kinds: Artificial kinds are those entities that could be said to stand between social and natural kinds. In natural kinds the external reality referred remains *unchanged* by the process of classification. In social kinds the reality referred comes to exist by reference to it, so there is no external reality prior to the referring act and is a reality which would disappear if the referring acts did stop. Artificial kinds, on the other hand, refer to those entities which do come to exist as independent physical reality but whose existence is directly related, and dependent, on the acts of classification.⁵² Artificial kinds would be those kinds, thus, where the self-referential process creates a reality which exists or persists independent of that self-referential process, that is, an 'artefact'. In this sense they differ from social kinds in that this artefactual nature becomes an alter-referent, namely an entity 'out there' in the world. Equally they differ from natural kinds in that they did not exist prior to the act of classification.

Artificial kinds present a further subdivision. One type would be those realities coming to exist as the product of acts of classification (or production) which use existing 'raw' material and constitute new 'artefacts' with a permanent existence independent of the act of production or classification, for example canals, temples or type-writers. A second type would be those entities which come to exist by the act of classification or reference. Some types of realities, argues Kusch, come to exist without the use of prior external materiality and yet they become constituted as durable and external to the act of reference. Kusch refers to mental events (such as love or hate) as such types of artificial kinds. A notable difference between an artificial kind like a canal and one like a mental event is that the second will be crucially involved in social activity, by producing

⁵² A similar view is conveyed by Hacking's notion of human kinds with which he points out that 'human kinds' differ from natural kinds in the fact that acts of classification of people into kinds constitutes new behaviour, that is, it can influence directly what people do. He refers to this effect as 'world making': human kinds 'make up' people in the sense that people internalise how they are 'described' and 'labelled' and alter actions and rethink themselves accordingly. See Hacking (1992: 190)

'feedback loops' to the act of classification. That is, by virtue of being constituted as new categories they can produce or change activity.⁵³

In his reconstruction of folk-psychological events as artificial kinds, Kusch suggests such a distinction by noting that our psychological vocabulary does not classify mental states and events that exist independent of the vocabulary. Rather certain words to describe certain mental events are the very bases of the constitution of such mental experience. For instance, a child learns to be, and act, generously by learning what generosity means. Or likewise a child can practise acts of cheating only after he has been introduced to the notion of 'cheat' by adults. Kusch warns that, although not in the same way as a type-writer or a temple, mental events, understood as types of artificial kinds, produce and constitute an effect on individuals' psychological make up and behaviour which acquires a durable nature even after the 'training' or learning has stopped.

"if being trained in a given folk psychology causes one to have mental experiences corresponding to this folk psychology, then obviously folk-psychological kinds are more than mere 'mythical posits'. They are *real - real as artefacts*"⁵⁴

To return to the general definition of artificial kinds, they will be durably mediated and modified, becoming in the process something different, in the way that a river may become a canal, or in the way that someone that has learned the meaning of 'meanness' will always have the concept and potential capacity to behave as mean.

Significant to the understanding of the notion of artificial kinds and its dual nature is to understand that the process of creation of the two types - i.e. type-writers or mental events - is significantly different in character. For instance in an artificial kind like a type-writer Kusch notes that the physical activity needed to create the referent is 'ontologically' separable from the activity of classification (or activity of creation). However in the second type of artificial kinds, such as notions of meanness, love, or hate, the activity of creating (teaching) a new emotion in the child's mental experience is fundamentally linked with the action of enabling the child to classify the emotion that it has internalised. That is, the act of classification is part and parcel of the act of constitution of the emotion and vice versa: 'they are indistinguishable'⁵⁵

Kusch at this point introduces in his analytical framework a Foucauldian proposition. His classification of mental events as artificial kinds attempts to highlight that we should not arrive too hastily at idealistic conclusions because culture not only shapes our minds through talk (discursive processes) but also it shapes our bodies. Indeed the notion

⁵³ This is clearly reflected by Hacking notion of 'human kinds' understood as that classification of people (and acts) into categories which 'can influence people and what they do directly' and that 'new kinds [categories] create new possibilities for choice and action' See Hacking (1992:191)

⁵⁴ Kusch,(1999: 355)

⁵⁵Kusch (1999: 355)

that bodies are 'exercised' by cultures means that socialization goes further than taking some commonly shared physiological factors that are culturally 'interpreted'. This latter assumption shares with naive realist positions the belief that nature has a pre-given structure which is differently interpreted by cultures, (i.e. human bodies are capable of feeling pain, and pain is the same in every culture however differently it is interpreted). However, Kusch's notion of artificial kinds directs us to a completely different interpretation of the role of culture in 'shaping' bodies. If culture shapes bodies it *also* shapes our sensations or even constitutes *new* ones.⁵⁶

Artificial kinds differ from social kinds in that they have an inherently stable nature. Kusch points out that mental events or subjective psychological activity cannot be conceived as purely social kinds, because they remain within the person once social training ceases (for example, a person abandoned on a desert island would be still able to feel hate, love, or anger). At this particular point let us recall that the performative theory of social institutions advocated by the Strong Programme stresses that social kinds achieve stability by virtue of being constantly reinforced in and through constant interaction, that is, as explained by Bloor's meaning finitism, by the constant 'alignment' and continuous readjustment with others. Kusch proposes, however, that artificial kinds like canals or emotions, once created remain stable, which would suggest that an individual, once socialized, will not require their mental status to be further constituted. However, this notion of creation at one point and then stability from then on is rejected by Kusch (and indeed it would contradict the main tenet of the performative theory, namely that social life is in permanent state of constitution). Contrary to this Kusch suggests that society is involved not only in the initial creation of mental states but, crucially, in the maintenance of them by constantly checking and readjusting them to new situations and requirements.

In essence, he suggests that the notion of artificial kinds allows us to perceive the nature of phenomena which acquire the status of external materiality - that is, an 'artefact-like' type of materiality - but which are not only amenable to *but* essentially require, constant adaptation and updating. In this sense he very much adopts the open-ended nature of categories which Bloor's meaning finitism advocates. Kusch's notion of an artificial kind is not conceived as something created at one point and then becoming a 'fixed', fully determined entity. Rather its stabilisation (and potential variation) is very much the product of constant reinforcement.

⁵⁶ For example Mead's anthropological studies demonstrate that the experience of orgasm is culturally variable. See for instance her studies in New Guinea among the Mundugumor (who placed significant importance on orgasm and thus taught specific bodily techniques to children) or the Arapesh (a community totally uninterested in the orgasmic experience to the extent that most individuals are incapable of experiencing it). See Mead (1939) and (1949)

I shall conclude this summary of the Strong Programme's tenets by reassessing once more what this theory offers to the understanding of the bases of consensus, stability, drift and variation. I will do this by reconstructing Kusch's 'clocks' model to analyse and further elucidate the nature of change and stability.

3.4.2. Kusch's Clock model: change and stability reconsidered

"[we have] to incorporate two important truths about social life: that individuals differ, and that consensus is often a local, rather than community-wide, phenomenon. Social institutions do not turn individuals into carbon copies of one another; even socially shaped dispositions do not fully coincide; and members of social institutions can start trends that eventually change or destroy the social institution itself"⁵⁷

We have seen that Barnes emphasises that inherent to the inductive nature of individuals' learning activity is the production of dissimilar statements which potentially can 'self-undermine' established categories or social institutions. Inductive inferences are unreliable by nature, in that individuals may arrive at different conclusions. The precise point of stressing the inductive nature of individual inferences is to distinguish the process from a more deductive mode of inference which would direct all deductions to the same inferences. So, under the inductive model of calculation which Barnes advocates, it is evident that there will necessarily be 'oscillations'. Yet, although drift and change are present in social life, despite this, people come to agree among themselves. In other words, the intrinsic differing nature of inductive inferences does not seem to pose a fundamental problem to the maintenance of consensus in social life. The role of the collective is to minimize any oscillations to the extent that they become irrelevant for the general functioning of social life.⁵⁸

Kusch further explores the nature of social co-ordination by modelling social consensus as a series of clocks.⁵⁹ In order to explore what lies at the basis of collective agreement and social co-ordination between individual independent outputs, Kusch proposes that we picture agreement as the result of three different dynamics: first, a single external authority; second, single individual consensus; or third, multiple and local consensus. To model the three alternatives, let us imagine a community of clocks in agreement as to the time. In the first example (Figure 5) agreement results from all clocks being linked to a 'master clock', that is, 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

⁵⁷ Kusch (1999: 271)

⁵⁸ Barnes (1983:534)

⁵⁹ What follows is based on Kusch (1999: 271) and (2002: 155)

accounts which view structures as superior to and having a determining influence upon individuals.

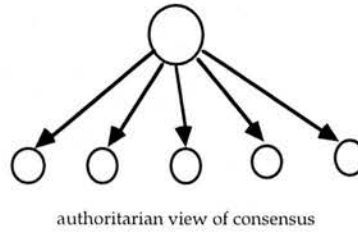


FIGURE 5

The second model (Figure 6), 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 the first model, this presupposes an external device, but in this case this device is devoid of intrinsic authority. It is, rather, a 'mediator' among individual clocks. Hence in this model, while the general time is an 'externally organised' phenomena, it still 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.

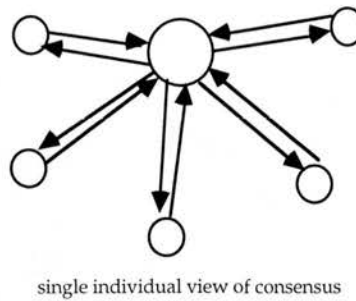
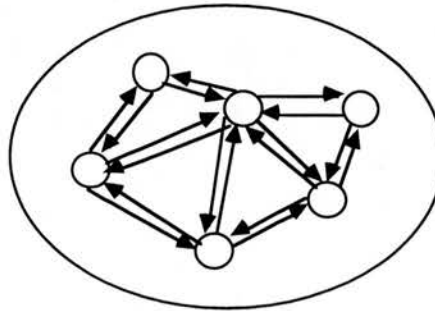


FIGURE 6

The third model (Figure 7) 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. 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.



multiple, local consensus model

FIGURE 7

This last 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 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 to and from others. A 'mutual susceptibility' to 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 are viewed as a 'collective accomplishment'.

Mutual susceptibility and the role of social sanctioning

That the 'mutual susceptibility' phenomenon should not be taken for granted, but rather should be conceived as a fundamental fact of social life is one of the central tenets of the Strong Programme's position. The Strong Programmers suggest that 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 operationalized by the Strong Programme's performative theory in order to highlight this issue.

The Strong Programme highlights that a social institution is not completely pre-formed and that it is in a constant state of (re-)constitution. Because of this, rules cannot be conceived as inherently possessing the correct patterns of application. Rather they are constituted as such at each moment of application and on each such occasion the possibility of conflict over 'correct' application arises among individuals. However, Kusch's clock model of mutual local consensus highlights that social institutions have the function of reducing arbitrariness among a variety of individual judgements, and do so by virtue of the complex mechanism of readjustment which operates among individuals. This mechanism of readjustment embodies a dual nature, in that it permits the constitution of collective normative standards through the sharing of knowledge, and instrumentalizes humans' susceptibility to emotional sanctioning by others. The readjustment to a consensus is thus produced by these two underlying forces.

Platitudes and sanctioning deviation

Barnes has drawn on interactionist theory to stress the constitutive role of interactive accounts and especially individuals' susceptibility to each other in the course of interaction.⁶⁰ Following Goffman's work⁶¹ he remarks that in all encounters individuals check constantly the responses of others based on signs of recognition, acceptance, deference, rejection, withdrawal of recognition or loss of deference, and so on, and thus readjust themselves according to the requirement of a particular situation and also account for and adapt to personal desires or needs. Goffman has stressed that as a common trait, individuals tend to seek signs of deference and recognition and earnestly avoid 'loss of face'.

Kusch has expanded upon these ideas and undertaken further analysis of sanctioning mechanisms by re-introducing the notion of platitudes present in the philosophical debate on folk psychology.⁶² Platitudes are understood as those commonly shared beliefs which are constantly referred to as taken for granted notions within a culture. To inhabit a particular cultural order involves the mastery of a universe of categories which is shared by all individuals. For instance, the mastery of a language also involves the mastery of a culturally specific set of platitudes. We tend to accept most of our beliefs as *platitudes*: for example, 'success brings about feelings of pride', 'mothers want to be

⁶⁰ See particularly Barnes (1988) and (1995)

⁶¹ See Goffman *passim* in the bibliography

⁶² Kusch (1997) and (1999)

with their children' or 'one wants to be with the person one is in love with'. Kusch notes that collectives are inherently drawn to protect their systems of platitudes, not least because they are at the basis of successful co-ordination and the possibility of shared activity. Platitudes often function as standards of rationality and normativity. Violation of these standards is often punished with judgements of irrationality or by accusations of 'improper' activity. On the same bases conformity to the general accepted platitudes tends to be rewarded. What Kusch here tries to highlight is not so much a moral issue but the notion that platitudes are the underlying bases of rational standards in a particular collective. As we well know, perplexity (that is, a form of sanction) arises when individual statements (or practices) contradict commonly taken for granted notions (for example: 'sadness induces laughter'). In a collective the system of platitudes can be taken as the ultimate collective good because it permits actions of co-ordination by constituting the necessary 'predictability' to allow interaction. Indeed, Goffman indirectly suggests that in a collective commonly taken for granted platitudes are strongly protected by serious sanctioning. Presentation of the self is thus controlled by the fact that behaviour has to be comprehensible to others, otherwise one risks social ostracism.

Kusch's elaboration of the notion of platitudes as a strongly protected *collective good* highlights this normative aspect. Any radical deviation will result in serious exclusion from social, or even civil rights. In social interaction there is a permanent reinforcement of this world of platitudes by the constant checking and resetting of individual differences: "Any human interaction is partly about checking or synchronising our plausible action explanations"⁶³.

In an analogy with Kuhn's 'paradigm' model⁶⁴ Kusch notes that it is usually humans who are tested and not the cultural platitudes. If there is discrepancy it is commonly assumed to originate in humans not conforming rather than from a possible error of the platitude. Platitudes are perceived, by virtue of being constantly reinforced by every single interactive account, as immovable, innate or external to human truths. Thus they are rarely called into question.

⁶³ Kusch (1999: 328)

⁶⁴ Kuhn states that there are two phases in science: ordinary and revolutionary. During the ordinary phase it is the scientific theory that everyone accepts; if a scientist finds evidence that contradicts this theory then it is believed that there is something wrong with the scientist not with the theory. In the revolutionary stage the error is attributed to the theory itself and the need for a new theory arises. Kuhn (1996)

Social life in constant change and adjustment

Returning to Kusch's third clock model we can see that the implications of social sanctioning are part and parcel of the process of readjustment of single differing outputs and the bases of all individuals eventually sharing similar values. The discussion of the force of cultural platitudes exerted onto individuals to conform should not distract from the fact that although individuals tend to 'share' similar values none of the clocks has 'identical' output with the others. Social interaction understood as an activity of readjustment through individual sharing of knowledge necessarily must imply that there is *constant* adjustment and thus *constant change*.

Barnes puts this idea very forcefully when he notes that we should understand social order not as 'harmony' or 'stability' but rather as a 'pattern'⁶⁵. Social life may not be harmonic or stable but always presents a pattern. However, that social life presents a pattern does not imply fixidity. Thus, the key question concerns how this patterned interaction comes to exist in social life. It should by now be clear that the Strong Programme and its performative theory holds that social patterns emerge as people interact, sharing individual inputs which create and recreate the formerly established background of knowledge. This interactionist account sees interaction not simply as a combination of pre-existing elements which come together to resolve individual interests,⁶⁶ but rather presents the notion of interaction as at the basis of individuals permanently modifying themselves through interactions. The Strong Programme conveys a view of individuals as independent rational beings but susceptible to each other, that is, to being continually constituted and reconstituted in and through interaction. The Strong Programme view of macro-phenomena has the same basis. Social institutions are perceived as both stable and changing. That is, they exist in a permanent mode of drift and mutability which achieves 'saturation' points at different moments.⁶⁷

Consensus is local rather than community wide

Kusch's clock model highlights that individuals achieve consensus by 'auto-resetting' their differential outputs, but it also stresses that there is *never* full consensus. Or, more specifically, that full consensus can only be *local* and *provisional*.

⁶⁵ Barnes (1995: 68)

⁶⁶ A more 'rational action theory' position.

⁶⁷ Of course different social institutions will present different saturation points according to how widespread they are and hence the amount of individual self-referential acts involved in their constitution. To give an empirical example, the institution of money is more stable - given the widespread self-referential operation that it embraces - than a particular fashion confined to a limited section of the population, such as an exclusive social class.

If we juxtapose the idealized clock model with the realities of empirical life it will become evident that interacting clocks have differential power to interact and, consequently, differential capability to impose their 'times' onto others. Individuals never interact in identical conditions, and their capacity to impose their own views and beliefs upon others depends on a multitude of variables. What the clock model shows is that there will always be local consensus as to the boundaries which a local community imposes on individual times; however, these boundaries will be in a state of constant redefinition and reconstitution.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ One of the most significant corollaries of this model is the importance of the individual capacity to reset other clocks according to its own time. To put it in a more empirical form, a newspaper under this model could be conceived as a very powerful clock with the capacity to 'collude' with many little clocks and hence constitute an average favourable to its own time. This is a possibility denied to the isolated person in a household with a limited capacity of interaction with a few neighbours. This is a fundamental issue of 'distribution' of power which has profound significance and needs to be properly addressed. I do this in Part III

3.5. Conclusion: the collective interactionist view of social institutions

With his clock model Kusch brings further understanding of the role of social interaction in the constitution of the social which the Strong Programmers highlight throughout their work. Central to their claims is that human beings are fundamentally social creatures, a collectivist view which understands humans and their activity not only as being 'involved' in social life, in the sense of being constrained, restricted or socialized by social factors, but rather and fundamentally as being *the very basis* of social life.

The performative theory formulates a notion of individual features, embodied or mental, as social institutions. They are in a permanent state of constitution, in which mutation is always occurring and in which social stability and fixity is the result of the performative process, that is, 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, individuals' sense of self, identity or subjective experience. The provisional, open-ended, nature of individuals' subjective sense of identity is a fundamental corollary of the performative theory of social institutions which will be fully addressed when we specifically examine the socially constructed nature of individuals' sex/gender identity.

For the time being, however, let us re-emphasise that the performative theory of social institutions reconstructs 'individualistic' accounts of social life which do not account for the constitutive force and centrality of social interaction. This is the understanding that the Strong Programme bestows to the notion of social institutions - or social structures, social order, social patterns or any social phenomena. Namely, those externalized patterns of order which are constructed through the activity of a collective of individuals sharing their individual inductive (self-referential and performative) knowledge. Social institutions in this sense although undoubtedly becoming the guiding backdrop never cease to be the product of the interactive exchange. Thus, as Bloor puts it: a social institution should be thought of as 'following' rather than 'guiding' individual usage.⁶⁹

Social institutions have to be understood as a collective achievement. They are *self-referential*, constituted by the performative process of referring to them as such by the members of a given community. They are *finite* in nature, being underdetermined and

⁶⁹ Bloor (1997)

open-ended, and they are characterised by a model of *local consensus*: patterned in provisional ways and subject to drift and mutation. Stability is thus local, temporary and group specific, that is, conventional.

Part III

**Critical comparison of Bourdieu's and the
performative theory's sociological
accounts**

4

Reassessing Bourdieu's contribution to the social constructionist debate of the body

4.1. Introducing the body

"Practical belief is not a 'state of the mind', still less a kind of arbitrary adherence to a set of instituted dogmas and doctrines (beliefs), but rather a state of the body. (...) Enacted belief, instilled by the childhood learning that treats the body as a living memory pad, an automaton that 'leads the mind unconsciously along with it' and as a repository of the most precious social values"⁰

Bourdieu's emphasis on the embodied nature of habitus dispositions draws attention to the fact that socialization processes are internalized at the level of the physicality of the body, and that much of individual activity is carried out through practices of the body rather than merely verbal ones.¹ The strong programme on the other hand, rather neglects the more material level of the corporeal and it does not offer much analysis about the physical nature of humans, other than the general taxonomy of artificial kind developed by Kusch. We have seen how Kusch's notion of artificial kind incorporates the physicality of humans, by noting that culture, by constituting new mental states, shapes the physicality of the brain. But we need to understand further the effects of the social upon the embodied aspects of human life and Bourdieu's work provides an important contribution. Whereas the performative theory of social institutions frames self-referential activity mostly at the level of the verbal, Bourdieu's input allows to understand how self-referential structures can also be understood to operate in bodies and their dispositions, that is, beyond verbalisation. Bourdieu's focus on the body consequently enables the introduction of a more materialistic perspective to the social constructionism of the performative theory. I have reconstructed his emphasis on the body as follows.

⁰ Bourdieu, (1995b: 68)

¹ The significance of Bourdieu's introduction of the body for the sociological understanding of individual action has been widely recognised and many social theorists have acknowledged as important the emphasis on the corporeal which Bourdieu's theory of the habitus incorporates into social theory. See for example Shilling (1991), Turner (1989), (1995) and (2003), Jenkins (1996), Bouveresse (1999), Margolis (1999) as well as a number of feminist theorists like Butler (1997b) and (1999a), McNay (1999), (2000) and (2002), Witz (2003). Many empirically focused researchers have sought to operationalize Bourdieu's notion of habitus as a guiding analytical tool: see Wacquant (1995) and (1997), Risseuw (1991), Pizani (1996), Bordo (1995), McRobbie (1994), Reay (1995).

A theory of action through the body.

Bourdieu suggests that it is through bodies, and not so much via verbal statements, that practices are enacted. For Bourdieu all sorts of non-verbal practices become markers of social significance: dress, movement, physical appearance, accents, and so on. Understanding individual action as a bodily practice raises a number of theoretical questions of importance. It bases a theory of action on non-reflexive activity and hence conceives human activity as both dispositional in nature and resistant to transformation via reflexive activity. The corollary of this is a specific conception of human agency not as conscious calculative activity but rather as a routinized 'feel for the game'. Individuals' practices are directed by 'inscribed configurations' in the body which also underlie the formation of mental events.

Bourdieu's notion of non-calculative activity is open to contention and will be discussed later. However, his emphasis on the dispositional nature of individual activity is of significant importance in social theory in order to unravel and understand the constraining nature of social forces. Many authors have noted the relevance of dispositional activity for achieving a synthesis between macro structures and micro individual activity and some have seen in Bourdieu a way to develop individual activity as dispositional.² In short Bourdieu's model introduces a theory of embodied social dynamics which opens up new ways of understanding social phenomena, in particular the relationship between individual and structure.

A theory of production of social knowledge through the body: the constitution of the doxic realm

Directly connected to the above is Bourdieu's emphasis on the central role of the corporeal in the production of doxic beliefs. This is a view which locates within embodied practices a major input in the constitution of cultural conventions as taken for granted forms of belief. The practices that use body features, postures, manners, shapes, attitudes and so on, are particularly suited to effect a naturalization, and hence locate beliefs outside the realm of human construction or cultural conventions. Bourdieu makes a point of showing how the doxic experience which the body constitutes is the absolute form of legitimacy for cultural arrangements: it makes the arbitrary divisions of the

² Searle develops a notion of 'background dispositions' which he equates with Bourdieu's notion of habitus. Searle seems to suggest that social training sinks into the 'background' and becomes dispositional in nature, thus unconscious and guiding. See Searle (1995:144). Bourdieu's notion of disposition has also been equated with Dewey's philosophy of education. Shusterman (1999) stresses that to successfully train or educate requires already inbuilt experience. Authors like Bouveresse (1999) and Taylor (1999) have also sought to rework Bourdieu's notion of internalized disposition as embodied and constituting an automatic and non-articulated background knowledge as a way to understand consensual activity.

world appear as natural and self-evident and hence not open to individual questioning. Social relations between collectives thus bear the embodied bases of individual praxis too. Once again Bourdieu's suggestion that beliefs and mental dispositions are produced, structured and somewhat pre-determined by bodily dispositions may be in need of analytical clarification but in itself it is a proposition which is of great significance. It is important to stress that our habits of thinking are largely fixed by the way our bodies are trained. Bourdieu here refers not only to the way we think about our bodies but to the ways in which our bodies produce an effect in our mental activity. Our 'trained' and socialized bodies develop personal tastes, and a psychological sense of the possibilities, hazards or risks within the physical and social space. The embodiment of the social world constitutes a sense of ourselves which 'attunes' us to certain beliefs rather than others.

It is also important to stress that to understand inter-communication processes it is necessary to look beyond the level of the verbal. Bourdieu's statement that 'the physicality of the habitus can produce the equivalent of an act of generalisation without the recourse to concepts'³ is very important. In this sense Bourdieu would extend the notion of performativity to argue that performative operations need not necessarily be only 'verbal', but that habitus can be understood as performative in the sense that bodily 'hexis' (bodily acts) as well as linguistic acts can constitute reality. Indeed, bodily acts may do this even more efficaciously and insidiously than verbal acts because of their 'implicit' communicative power located at the 'pre-verbal' level. Bourdieu highlights (and here he is in accord with social interactionists like Goffman) that bodily features such as shape, movements, inflexions, clothing, accents, and so on are powerful social markers which are central to meaning formation. This is close to Merleau-Pontian positions which envisage human experience as a concrete lived experience in which the body is not a mere object but rather an 'expressive' entity which reveals the general meanings of a particular cultural universe.

Mechanisms of constitution of bodies, and minds, as cultural artefacts: habitus as an 'artefact'

Bourdieu also introduces a dimension which the strong programme neglects, that is, that the socialization of the body leaves durable marks. The somatization which the notion of habitus suggests sees dispositions as an 'artefact': a permanent imprint on the body. We have seen how Kusch's conceptualisation of the notion of artificial kinds as an artefact introduces the significance of understanding some social phenomena as entities

³ Bourdieu (1995b:89)

which result in durable materialization. However, his focus on mental events means that the categorization of the body as an 'artefact' is not fully developed. Bourdieu observes the profound impact of the social in 'shaping' the body, but he lacks an explanatory framework as to how this process is enacted and how the social world constructs the body as a particular 'reality' and not another. Bourdieu's notion of individual habitus can thus be usefully reconstructed using Kusch's notion of artificial kinds, and doing so can further our understanding of the body as a socially constructed entity. This is the central focus of chapter 6.

Bourdieu also helps us to think about the nature of the constitutive mechanisms that produce bodies. Habitus dispositions can only be the result of very specific mechanisms of constitution. In this sense Bourdieu stresses that socialization into a specific habitus is not the work of explicit, direct pedagogic activity but rather the result of practices of socialization which are hidden to explicit reflection (as conveyed by his notion of mimesis versus imitation)⁴. With this Bourdieu suggest how habitus dispositions render specific practices automatic and *not* others -for example, Kabile women would never dream of picking olives off the tree standing on a stool, rather they bend over to pick them up from the floor. And by stressing that embodied practices also carry specific meanings - in the above instance, humility, self-deprecation, insecurity, acceptance of the superiority of males, etc.⁵, Bourdieu implicitly directs our attention to the fact that embodied practices are fundamentally active in the permanent constitution of individual self-identity as well as social dynamics. With this Bourdieu signals a path, although he does not develop it, to analyse individual formation as a 'technique of the body' which results in particular types of subjectivity and agency. Once again he can be usefully reconstructed using a more performative approach which I shall develop using Butler's Foucauldian framework in chapter 5 which helps to understand the social genesis of our subjective sense of personal identity. His notion of the body as a 'thinking animal' suggests that cognitive processes are also transformed by the socialization which forms the dispositional nature of individuals.

Obviously the emphasis on embodied practices in habitus dispositions is a direct reference to the implication of the corporeal in individual agency. However in Bourdieu's model this link takes a specific quality. It is within the habitus that 'belief and the body' mirror each other⁶. In practical terms this means that the body incorporates

⁴ See points 2.1.1 and 2.1.2. in section 2.

⁵ Bourdieu's oeuvre is full of examples of such mechanisms: he brings to our attention how eating habits, sports habits, even sexual practices (like penetration), as well as the spatial organization of private and public spaces, are part and parcel of the constitution of embodied properties and particularly of the constitution of dispositional practices.

⁶ Bourdieu (1995b:66)

the external reality of the social world (and its 'beliefs') and in doing so organises the structures of individual practices through the dispositional nature of the habitus. The corporeal here is a 'constrainer' of the individual range of practices. His notion of pre-reflexive agency which acts in a fashion similar to the activity of a sports person is interesting in so far as it points out that 'trained' activity is necessary if humans are to interact efficiently. However, what needs to be reconstructed in his model is the undertheorized contention that practices are 'inscribed configurations' in the body through which objective structures direct subjective practices from 'inside'. So too does Bourdieu's tenet that, by virtue of the 'quasi' perfect adjustment of the habitus and external demands, the practices of individuals will always be 'coherent' with the environment, and thus subjectively speaking individuals have the 'illusion' of control over their choices and of freedom from any constraints. Thus, Bourdieu's sense of the 'rationality' of individual's activity can only be seen as directed by the internalized conditioning of external social forces and not as calculative individual choices made when confronted with a particular situation.⁷

An 'embodied' theory of power

Bourdieu's theory of power focuses attention on the constitutive mechanisms of bodily practices and, crucially, on the ordering power of such mechanisms. We have seen that embodied practices produce negative and positive social sanctioning, and although not fully developed this is another important contribution of Bourdieu's model. He depicts emotions like embarrassment and ease as significant operations of Symbolic Violence. Established symbolic structures place some embodied dispositions over others. By producing mechanisms of legitimacy or exclusion these dispositions shape the normative establishment of accepted social categories. In this sense Bourdieu significantly points to the internalization of power mechanisms which leads individuals to exercise self-control and self-discipline over their bodies and selves to fit the normative standard. However Bourdieu's emphasis that this effort is doomed to fail (a durably internalized habitus interferes with conscious manipulation and transformation of embodied features) makes his emphasis on social sanctioning a phenomenon among already constituted agents rather than the bases of its constitution as we shall see the performative theorists contend.

⁷ Bourdieu (1995b:46-49)

Relocating Bourdieu's contribution of the corporeal

Bourdieu's emphasis on the embodiment of the social world helps us to reconsider some opposed theoretical positions. Broadly speaking, in ethnomethodological thinking, for instance, we find an account of social life as moving from situation to situation and negotiating each interaction anew. For ethnomethodologists social life is characterised by a degree of fluidity in which social norms are established at the very moment of interaction. Thus ethnomethodology does not specifically account for the role of external forces or processes of socialization which are brought to, or bear upon, the interactive exchange. Moreover, in this model the emphasis is on negotiation between individuals which is mostly based on verbal exchange.⁸ At the other end of the analytical spectrum it would be possible to locate Parsons who, contrary, to ethnomethodology, focuses on the individual internalization of norms and stresses the weight of systems as external guiding structures. However his model also works within the mental domain, since external norms are seen as psychologically internalized. Neither of these social theories grants full, or even adequate, attention to the corporeal dimension and its involvement in social exchange and the socialization of human activity.

The Parsonian model coincides somewhat with Bourdieu's in that social dispositions are seen as durably internalized structural constraints which direct individuals to act in certain ways and not others, but in Parsons such internalisation is a psychological 'event' rather than corporeal.⁹ Both models however pose several unresolved questions. For

⁸ Because Ethnomethodology, and mainly Garfinkel, historically speaking emerges as a challenge to Parsons and his Grand Theory approach, they are particularly concerned in rejecting the 'social dopes' they perceive in the Parsonian approach. Thus they stress that it is within interaction that individuals develop a sense of common understanding of the world and such interactions work as a self-fulfilling prophecy through which the features of the social world are produced by 'the persons' motivated compliance with background expectancies'. Ethnomethodology became seminal in highlighting that 'meaning' had to be problematized and its constitution located in individual interactive verbal exchange. The corollary to this being that our social reality is thus also the result of interactive exchange of accounts. See Garfinkel (1989) Bloomer give a famous statement about constitution of meaning based on the contention that meanings mediate interaction between people but that it was in and through interaction that these meanings were handled and modified through an interpretative process of the individuals. Blumer (1969). My interpretation of ethnomethodology may appear to preclude any social structures when in fact some ethnomethodologists have argued that 'meanings emerge from the shared interaction of individuals being society itself constructed out of the behaviour of humans, who actively play a role in developing the social limits that will be placed upon their behaviour. Meltzer (1975:vii). My interest lies in highlighting the emphasis on the verbal which ethnomethodology brings about, although some symbolic interactionists like Goffman have also emphasised the role of the body as a social marker. We have already noted that Bourdieu takes an extreme critical stance against ethnomethodological and interactionist account on the bases that a position like ethnomethodology precludes the understanding of the social conditions that constituted such accounts in the first place 'in so far it precludes the mechanism of objectivation necessary to analyse such 'taken for granted' views of the world given by the primary experience of the individuals' Bourdieu (1995b:21)

⁹ Parsons's (1969) functionalist approach is mainly concerned to explain social order, that is, how consensus is achieved and maintained. He develops the notion of 'value consensus' to explain why individuals direct their actions to similar goals and thus avoid drift, dissent and social chaos. His emphasis is on the process of socialization through which values are internalized and transmitted from one generation to the next, fundamentally and primarily by the family and subsequently by the educational system. Parsons explains the stratification process as a result of common values. Individuals are evaluated according to generally shared values and placed in the socially established hierarchical order. Thus, those

instance: how permanently and durably are cultural systems able to inscribe norms into people's consciousness? Also, how can we understand the individual *application* of a norm out of these durably internalized norms in any situation which offers different solutions? In the Parsonian model the application of a norm is a straightforward process because everybody has internalized the same normative standards, but this leaves an unexplained gap when we have to think about a new situation. The Bourdieuan model subscribes to similar analytical premises but attempts to highlight an unreflective 'strategic' capacity to deal with new situations. However, to apply a norm in a new situation would require an amount of reflexivity and improvisation which the Parsonian or the Bourdieuan model cannot account for. This is a fundamental point to which I will return in section 6.2.

On the other hand, Bourdieu's model appears to provide not only a materialist, but also a structural grounding to theories like those of ethnomethodology. Internalized corporeal dispositions account for much of the social agreement which ethnomethodology would ground mostly in permanent social sanctioning among individuals. And whereas for Bourdieu rules are internalized and then enacted, for the ethnomethodologists the meanings of rules are constantly negotiated, and in the process established, in and through social interaction.

Notwithstanding his differences with both theoretical positions, Bourdieu indeed provides a more materialistic account of the social phenomena of durable internalization of non-verbal conditioning which results in the reproduction of established norms and rules. Despite unresolved issues as to the nature of social consensus in Bourdieu's model, what clearly distinguishes him from the above theories is that he places the social effects at the level of the body. The corporeal is the junction between social structures and individual activity and the space where cultural macro-phenomena are enacted and mostly re-produced. Bourdieu in this sense provides a more explicit theorization of how social systems reproduce themselves in a physiological manner -in the 'forgotten history of the corporeal' which leads him to define individual activity as non-reflexively conscious and this explains how individuals can almost irreflexively and automatically come to agreement with each other.¹⁰ For Bourdieu the point is to highlight that the embodiment of dispositional activity can be useful to a sociological development of a

whose activity accords with these values will be placed in the higher spheres of the hierarchy. The internalization of general social values is done by moulding the psychological personality of the child to the central values of the culture.

¹⁰ The mental internalization which Parsons depicts needs constant social control to keep individuals from deviating from the established norms. This is because acceptance or transgression of norms is very much a conscious decision in the Parsonian model. This means that it is difficult to sustain the notion of social stability. This is one of the main issues of Parsonian sociology, and what he has named the "Hobbesian question". Parson's sociological commentary was one of the first to bring attention to the sociological relevance of such issues

theory of action which might seek to explain action as by-passing, as it were, conscious activity and becoming routinized and performed automatically. It is important to stress further that Bourdieu is eager to highlight that this dispositional 'training' resulting in quasi automatic activity is the result of acquiring a 'practical mastery of the *tacit laws* governing the field'¹¹ were these laws pre-exist in a social world prior to the individual activity and its acquisition results in a durable permanent training.

Notwithstanding the analytical aspects which are in need of reconstruction Bourdieu's model suggests a representation of social dynamics governed and organized in great part by embodied practices, which if not so directly obvious and efficient as verbal language, are certainly more potent in their effects. What Bourdieu thus contributes is a warning of the need for theorising the non-verbal aspect of human practices.

Having stressed the positive contribution of Bourdieu's theory of practice and habitus, I shall now turn my attention to how to redress its shortcomings. It is by closely looking at how his model transfers from a formalized analysis of a class habitus to a sex/gender habitus that we can see more clearly its internal logics and analyse if the propositions it offers to understand the role of the corporeal in social life can be fully sustained.

¹¹ As quoted in Brubaker (1995). My italics.

4.2. The embodied habitus and sex identity: the social nature of embodied sex/gender identity in Bourdieu

It was noted above that in Bourdieu's model there is an implicit reference to the 'artefactual' nature of the human body. In particular he expands on the 'artefactual' nature of sexual differences. However two cautionary remarks should be made before analysing Bourdieu's understanding of the social construction of the body and specifically of the sexed body.

First, Bourdieu is not interested in directly providing a constructionist account of the body as such, but rather he uses the corporeal to advance a theory of domination characterized by being hidden to conscious rationality. Following on the notion of class inequality as embodied in an acquired habitus, masculine domination is also seen primarily (perhaps more so than class domination) as the effect of the somatization of the social inequalities embedded in pre-given biological sexual differentiation. Secondly, and resulting from the above, Bourdieu never makes a clear distinction between the categories of sex and gender: throughout his work both terms are used interchangeably

It is when Bourdieu transfers his model of class habitus to sex/gender that we perceive the exact nature of his social constructionist stance. Although he strongly suggests that the psychosomatic features of socialization have a 'material' effect on bodies, he does not explicitly focus on the problematization of biologically grounded sex identities (which he envisages as a taken for granted natural fact) or on the exact significance of socialization for the literal manipulation of physical attributes. This analytical ambiguity and vagueness is reflected in the following paragraph:

"Through a permanent work of shaping, of *Bildung*, the social world constructs the body, as a sexed reality and at the same time as a receiver (depository) of the sexual categories of perception and valuation, which get applied on the body and its biological reality"¹²

It is unclear what is Bourdieu's position regarding to the social construction of the body, and what is the biological 'reality' to which cultural categories get 'applied'. It would appear that Bourdieu does not deem it necessary to contest or problematize the notion of a prior biological 'reality' to which social values are imposed.

However, in other contexts he seems to suggest that the very same biological reality is 'transformed' by social practices but denies that this transformation originates in any process of category ascription -or naming- and suggests that 'symbolic construction' has to be seen as more than 'naming':

¹² Bourdieu (1990b:11) Translation is mine.

"The work of symbolic construction is far more than a strictly *performative* operation of naming which orient and structure *representations*, starting with representations of the body (which is itself not negligible); it is brought about and culminates in a profound and durable transformation of the bodies (and minds)"¹³

What is not clear in Bourdieu's account is first, what is 'symbolic construction' if not how the world is *represented*, and how those symbolic constructions exactly effect those durable transformations in bodies and minds which he alludes to.

In the last instance however, Bourdieu appears to deny any role to processes of category ascription in the constitution of the biological reality of sex differentiation which he tacitly assumes to be a pre-given biological phenomena operationalized by the symbolic schemes of particular cultural universes. Thus, the 'phallus' becomes constituted as a symbol of virility and the differences between biological bodies are operationalized as 'objective foundations of the difference between the sexes, in the sense of *genders*'¹⁴ Clearly for Bourdieu nature pre-exists culture and culture pre-exists nature, they are conceived as two different already constituted objects which relate to one another in a dynamics in which symbolic schemes instrumentalize the biological world to satisfy the cultural requirements of a particular society. Ontologically speaking the body of humans pre-exists culture rather than being constituted as such by it. Bourdieu clearly does not problematize the notion of female and male biological difference as a socially constructed notion and tacitly conveys a view in which this dual division is in direct correlation with pre-existing biological givens. In accordance with this the transfer of his notion of class habitus is, in fact, applied to a 'gender' rather than a 'sex' habitus. In doing so Bourdieu implicitly accords with the division between biological givens and cultural meaning advanced by early feminists who defined sex identity as a biological given upon which cultural significance is imposed to construct the 'sociologically' relevant notion of 'gender identity'. Consequently, following mainstream feminism, Bourdieu implicitly adopts the view that what is cultural and conventional, and thus ontologically 'social' is 'gender' identity, and not 'sex' identity.

'Eternalizing' the arbitrary and the 'paradox of doxa':

Bourdieu is less interested in debating ontological and epistemological issues involved in knowledge of the natural and social orders than he is in establishing a theory to understand the resilient nature of structures of domination. He sees masculine domination as a paradigmatic example of the symbolic violence underlying the permanence of the social order through a misrecognition of the arbitrary nature of this

¹³ Bourdieu (2001a:23)

¹⁴ Bourdieu (2001a::22) Italics are mine...

social order as 'natural'. Given that the division between sexes is so clearly biologically related, the effect of 'naturalization' is a straightforward one which symbolic cognitive operations can accept without contestation. Thus, Bourdieu defines the notion of gender, i.e., 'a sexually characterized habitus' as a perfect example of how structures of domination of one group over another are legitimized by instrumentalizing different representations of natural reality.¹⁵ The paradoxical nature of doxa is thus that the beliefs it embodies are of social origin but it appears as a natural universal. For example, that women are inferior and weaker beings than men is perceived as a 'natural' object, self-evident and therefore not amenable to contestation. This naturalization constitutes individuals' practices in perfect compliance with the doxic beliefs, which explains the fact that they are not permanently contested by individuals even in the most unfair, or even intolerable, social positions:

"... still more surprisingly, that the established order, with its relations of domination, its rights and prerogatives, privileges and injustice, ultimately perpetuates itself so easily, apart from a few historical accidents, and that the most intolerable conditions of existence can so often be perceived as acceptable and even natural"¹⁶

The 'eternalization' of the macro-structure of masculine domination is thus mainly located in the physical properties of individuals. By instrumentalizing observable biological differences the symbolic cultural arrangements impose a particular relationship between genders as 'natural'. This naturalization of the symbolic categories of maleness and femaleness, by warranting them biological status, renders them part of the doxic realm. This 'doxification' of the arbitrary symbolic division between male and female is pre-reflexively internalized, by both the 'dominant' males and the 'dominated' females, and lies at the basis of the 'genderization' of the habitus.

Whereas he attempts to perceive the structure of masculine domination as a social construction: 'what appears in history as being eternal [that is, masculine domination] is merely the product of a labour of eternalization performed by interconnected institutions'¹⁷ at the same time he characterizes it as a synchronic and diachronic universal present in all different cultural environments.

By virtue of removing of any constitutive role to the permanent activity of individuals on the macro-social phenomena of masculine domination Bourdieu appears to present a position in which there is a separation between the *dynamics* between objects from the *objects* themselves. Those social objects thus are not constituted by the relationships but rather they come to relate once constituted as such. Thus the relationships between

¹⁵ Bourdieu (2001a: 3)

¹⁶ Bourdieu (2001a: 1)

¹⁷ Bourdieu (2001a::viii)

sexes are seen as conventional and socially constructed but the 'sexes' themselves are not seen as the product of these social dynamics. Moreover what lies behind the types of relationships between sexes -that is, the structural world- is seen as a pre-existing reality outside, and guiding, the relationships between sexes.

In the last instance thus, Bourdieu attempts to make history 'eternal'. Masculine domination is a paradigmatic case for him, that is, a social structure which has developed in such a way as to become 'immune' to change.

The outcome of such doxic operation is that all change is either the result of external (to society) crises¹⁸ or is merely a superficial modification which leaves intact the deep structural forms of domination. Bourdieu does not however specify the nature of the major crises which have to occur in order to "break the doxa and expand the space of what is possible"¹⁹ and, most importantly, the driving forces behind such 'crises'. In Bourdieu's model of masculine structures of domination, crises just happen. Despite his emphasis on the objectification, and thus, resilience of structures of domination, Bourdieu cannot be oblivious to the fact that social drift is an empirical phenomenon. He thus reconciles such contradictory phenomena via the model of 'permanence through change', arguing that fundamental social structures (e.g. that of a masculine *libido dominandi*) never really change. This is proven, according to Bourdieu, by the empirical evidence that 'other things being equal, women always occupy less favoured positions'.²⁰ It is important to note that whereas in the explanation of class formation Bourdieu argues that the principal determining factors are structural material conditions of existence, in the formation of a gender habitus the principal determining factors would be ideological or cultural, that is, that 'libido dominandi' embedded in the world-view of the doxic realm. Because the constitutive mechanisms of such a masculine world-view based on a 'libido dominandi' remain unexplained he is forced to recourse to essentializing notions, similar to those of Levi-Strauss, of a universal cognitive structure which divides the world into oppositional sexual categories.²¹ Thus, despite apparent change, the condition of women will always 'obey the logic of the traditional model of

¹⁸ To account for the transformation which women themselves have effected in their social position in the last decades Bourdieu recourse to the notion of a social crises which effects a displacement from the unconscious to conscious knowledge of the arbitrary nature of the doxic realm of taken for granted beliefs, which generates conscious discontent and thus desire for change. See Bourdieu (2001a:88)

¹⁹ Bourdieu (2001a:89)

²⁰ Bourdieu (2001a:92)

²¹ See all descriptions of the cognitive world view of the Kabile society characterized in pairs of oppositions which are symbolically applied to describe the masculine as positive and the feminine as negative and (2001a:91). Bourdieu might have been following the trend created by the anthropological structural studies of Levi-Strauss. Alongside the view that there are universal cognitive structures which underlie the binary oppositional and hierarchical organization of social life, Levi-Strauss also conveyed the view that the hierarchical opposition between men and women was prior *and constitutive* of all other forms of domination. See Levi-Strauss (1969) and Godelier (1982). This inherent unexplained reification of masculine domination structures seems also to be inherited by Bourdieu.

the division between male and female'²². However separated in their social space, there is something in common between the 'woman managing director' and the 'woman production-line worker in the metal industry', namely, 'the fact that they are *separated from men by a negative symbolic coefficient* (...) which negatively affects everything that they do'.²³ . Let's see now how Bourdieu himself transfers his model of class domination to gender domination.

From class habitus to sex habitus: the material bases of habitus and masculine domination as libido dominandi

We have seen how Bourdieu's notion of differential class habitus formation is rooted in differential material 'objective conditions of existence' which characterise different socio-economic groups. The transfer from materially based habitus formation to cross-cultural, cross-economic groups such as 'women' or 'men' does not seem to pose formal or logical inconsistencies for Bourdieu himself. He simply notes that each class operationalizes different notions of 'womanhood' or 'manhood' in relation to the class specific structures of gender domination. This suggests that the 'content' of the category of maleness and womanliness is dependent on the class where it operates. However that would clash with Bourdieu's emphasis on a unifying cross-class definition of gender habitus established in the doxic realm. Bourdieu runs into analytical trouble when he attempts to put together a model of class domination with a model of gender domination running across classes. He attempts to resolve this by arguing that each class develops different 'forms' of the *same* basic phenomenon of 'masculine domination'. The doxic notion of a 'libido dominandi' is for Bourdieu a class universal dynamics. Bourdieu not only leaves unproblematized the core categories of woman and man as sex or gender categories/identities, but the notion of cross-class gender oppression is also a taken for granted phenomenon. Bourdieu does not seem to think it necessary to address the content of a general universal notion of 'masculine domination'. This leaves us with a void which is very revealing of Bourdieu's approach. In his model the universality of masculine domination is not only taken to be an example of an universally pervasive form of domination but is in fact taken to be a notion in no intrinsic need of problematization. The only task for the analyst is to unravel the internal dynamics not question their ontological nature or empirical existence. As Bourdieu himself puts it:

"the true nature of the structural relations of sexual domination can be glimpsed when one observes, for example, that women who attain very high positions (...) have to 'pay' in a sense for this professional success with 'less' success in the

²² Bourdieu (2001a:93)

²³ Bourdieu (2001a:93). Italics in the original.

domestic realm (divorce, late marriage or no marriage, difficulties or failures with children, etc.)"²⁴

Conversely 'success' in the domestic realm ('success' being defined as the opposite of the above) is only achieved by renouncing 'professional' success.

Leaving aside the dubious empirical basis of such a statement (is it empirically proven that women who stay at home do not divorce or do not have 'failures' with children?), I will focus on Bourdieu's interest in showing that masculine domination, albeit taking different 'forms', is a cross-class phenomenon. The closest he gets to a definition of the content of this 'universal' structure of domination is to point out that there is an inherent homology in the relationship of domination and submission between males and females which permeates 'various social spaces':

"the making of this connection [homology of relations of masculine domination in different social spaces] enables one to understand how the same relation of domination may be observed, in different forms, in the most contrasting social conditions (...) The structure of masculine domination is the ultimate principle of these countless singular relationships of domination/submission, which, while they differ in their form according to the position in space of the agents concerned (...) separate and unite men and women in each of the social universes"²⁵

Bourdieu wants to remain faithful to his own model, namely, habitus as something internalized at one point of a life of an individual and 'carried' along to all new situations. The conversion of the model of class habitus to describe gender habitus implies that a 'gender habitus' is also a transposable, durable, non-conscious, non-reflexive, set of dispositions which dispose (gendered) individuals to activate similar practices in all the different social spaces where the individual finds her/himself. Significantly, these dispositions will differentiate individuals from one gender habitus (e.g. females) from the other (males), regardless of differential class origins. What remains unresolved in Bourdieu's account is how the notion of early internalization of sex/gender habitus as a cross-class phenomena is reconciled with the fact that habitus is the result of class specific features like 'objective -economic and cultural- conditions of existence'. How the embodied habitus of a working class male (exposed to the objective conditions of necessity and to symbolic forms of cultural inferiority characteristic of his socio-economic group) is more akin to the embodied habitus of an upper-middle class male (constructed under class specific forms of economic ease and cultural symbolic superiority) than to that of his female 'class counterpart' is something which Bourdieu does not subject to question. On the contrary, he continues to insist that 'manliness' or 'womanliness' is an internalized habitus, mainly embodied, which is universally found across different classes:

²⁴ Bourdieu (2001a: 107)

²⁵ Bourdieu (2001a: 107-8)

"It is through the training of the body that the most fundamental dispositions are imposed, those which make a person both *inclined and able* to enter into the social games most favourable to the development of manliness [and womanliness] (...) Early upbringing encourages boys and girls very unequally to enter into these games, and favours more strongly in boys the various forms of *libido dominandi*"²⁶

The core of Bourdieu's argument is thus this notion of *libido dominandi*. He takes it as a given that structures of gender domination not only exist universally but do so in the form of 'masculine domination', that is, of men ruling over women and imposing their interests over and above those of the women with whom they share their social life. Bourdieu hints implicitly that what is universally internalized in the form of a 'male' habitus is a *libido dominandi*, that is, a (presumably unconscious) tendency or desire to dominate over others, particularly females. Conversely, a female habitus is characterized by the internalization of a desire to be dominated. The latter, according to Bourdieu, accounts for the collusion of women in their dominated position in the social world.

His account of the internalization of a gender habitus would thus only locate the process in the embodiment of symbolic forms -that is, culture symbolically instrumentalizing nature²⁷- where material objective conditions would not be of much relevance. Yet in the case of class habitus it is these very material conditions which are fundamental. The two kinds of habitus are thus envisaged as constituted by two different types of factors, and this poses problems for the analytical coherence of Bourdieu's model as a universalistic account rather than a relativistic one.

²⁶ Bourdieu (2001a: 56). Italics in the original.

²⁷ "The social principle of vision constructs the anatomical difference" which in turns becomes a justification of the social principle of vision then a 'relationship of circular causality' operates between practices of domination and the world view which legitimizes them. Bourdieu (2001a:9)

4.3. Final evaluation of Bourdieu's structuralist model: the 'force' of things or a social ontology of 'externality'

Bourdieu's desire to detach himself from intellectualist, nominalist, foundationalist, discursive and idealist philosophical positions (and equally from their sociological counterparts, i.e. Interactionism, ethnomethodology, phenomenology) is the backbone of his whole analytical enterprise. Indeed his whole approach attempts to prove that there is a world of 'objective' things that are not the result of the interactive processes among individuals. The world of 'words' for Bourdieu, that is, the symbolic world view of categories of perception, is presented as the *effect* of the existing 'objective' social structures. Bourdieu recognises this himself when he rejects 'performative' positions like that of Butler which, following Austin's theories of linguistic utterances as performative, grant constitutive power to language.²⁸ The constitutive power of language, Bourdieu argues, exists because the pre-existing objective structures invest it with 'authority' to constitute:²⁹

"As instruments of knowledge and communication, 'symbolic structures' can exercise a structuring power only because they themselves are structured"³⁰

However we have above seen that in the case of sex/gender inequality he grants constitutive power to symbolic 'constructions' of sex and gender. Bourdieu insists that the power of speech (that is, symbolic constructions) to constitute reality is granted by an extra-linguistic logic: the logic of social structures. He critiques Austin's notion of the 'illocutionary force' of utterances, arguing that the power of the speech act resides in the social authority delegated to a 'legitimate spokesman' who has been previously authorized as such by the structural position she inhabits.³¹ Bourdieu warns that the 'linguistic' should be separated from the 'extra-linguistic'. Failing to do so is an error which leads to 'formalistic' accounts, and consequently Austin's emphasis on the performative power of the linguistic can only be taken seriously if one takes the 'extra-linguistic' into account:

"Austin's account of performative utterances cannot be restricted to the sphere of linguistics. The magical efficacy of these acts of institution is inseparable from the existence of an institution defining the conditions (regarding the agent, the time or place, etc.) which have to be fulfilled for the magic of words to operate"³²

Unless one takes into account the 'market effect' of symbolic capitals all interpretations of Austin's performative will be 'narrowly linguistic'³³. As a consequence Austin 'fails to

²⁸ See Bourdieu (2001a: 7, 9, and 103)

²⁹ See chapter 3: 'Authorized Language' in Bourdieu (1994b)

³⁰ Bourdieu (1994c:166), (1994c:xxv)

³¹ Bourdieu (1994c:xxv)

³² Bourdieu (1994b:73)

³³ Bourdieu (1994c:73)

address the question of the social conditions of possibility of this very particular standpoint on the world and more precisely on language, the body, time or any other object of thought'.³⁴ Bourdieu extends his criticism to all those sociological (and philosophical) stances which embrace 'discursive' accounts. He expands on this by noting that some philosophical thought has not been able to see in the 'language game' the source of a number of fallacies, the most important of which is forgetting that language has a 'socio-logical' nature.³⁵ Consequently, post-modern feminist stances, which follow linguistic approaches to explain the constitution of sex/gender identity, are at the centre of his critique:

"this is true, for example, of one kind of feminist critique which tends to make the female body, the female condition of women's lower status a pure product of performative social construction and which, forgetting that it is not sufficient to change language or theory to change reality [and] uncritically attributes political efficacy to textual critique. (...) It amounts to ignoring that, while categorization by sex, race or nation is indeed a sexist, racist or nationalist 'invention', it is inscribed in the objectivity of institutions, that is to say, of *things* and *bodies*."³⁶

Bourdieu applies a similar critique to the Strong Programme. Although he rarely engages with this school of sociology of knowledge, Bourdieu argues that the Strong Programme position displays a 'naïve cynicism' as a result of refusing to engage with the social conditions which underlie the production of knowledge. According to Bourdieu the strong programme's naïveté displays itself in two forms. First, by uncritically accepting the idea that representations are freely produced and not the product of an accumulation of symbolic capital in the hands of a few, and secondly by failing to grasp the material conditions of possibility which give rise to the world of representations. Bourdieu notes that the 'naïve' relativism of the strong programme does not interrogate the social conditions of the genesis of scientific knowledge. Bourdieu is vehement in emphasising that the Strong Programme's relativist position leads to a 'nihilist moral relativism', as do all postmodern discursivist positions which contend that truth is merely an effect of power relations and local discourses.³⁷

In opposition to the 'discursivist' Bourdieu thus claims that his model should be seen as a 'realist' social theory where the pre-existing underlying social structures which constitute the discursive/linguistic realm of categories can be uncovered by sociological analysis.

³⁴ Bourdieu (2000a:13)

³⁵ Here he is referring to the works of Austin, Wittgenstein and other 'ordinary language philosophers'. Bourdieu (2000a:12-14)

³⁶ Bourdieu (2000a:108). Italics are mine.

³⁷ Bourdieu (1994d: 61-97). According to Bourdieu relativistic positions like that of the Strong Programme are a political cul de sac because they preclude the possibility of universal scientific reason which brings 'una sorte de nihilisme subjectiviste'. (1994d:94). Foucault, Derrida and Althusser are equally criticized by Bourdieu upon the same basis. See Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:48, 94, 155-6) and particularly the comment devoted to Foucault in (2000a:107) "Foucault's analysis of power, which observing the micro-structures of domination and the strategies of struggle for power, leads to a rejection of universals and in particular of the search for any kind of universally acceptable morality".

Power relations, that is, those objective structures which are found in the social world -the world of 'things'- are primarily what give ontological substance to symbolic categories, that is, the world of 'words'. Bourdieu's structuralist modality sees history as 'objectified' at some point and then acquiring a clear 'external' status in relation to individual practices. Bourdieu's particular concern appears to refute those 'voluntaristic' positions which, according to him, do not envisage any constraints -presumably macro-social phenomena- upon individual activity. Relations of power definitely cannot be reduced, in Bourdieu's understanding, to 'relations of communication', as understood by 'interactionist' accounts. On the contrary, relations of communication are structured by pre-existing power relations.³⁸ Therefore, it is pre-existing power relations which underlie the universal domination of gender relationships and the constitution of gender identity.³⁹

Here Bourdieu touches upon what is the most fundamental issue in sociological accounts of human life: the ontological status of the 'social' and power relations as social 'events'. He professes an ontological commitment to 'things' rather than 'words', 'things' meaning entities external to the processes of human interaction. Thus, reconstructing what Bourdieu leaves unexplained, he would appear to suggest that there is a clear ontological distinction between the objective -external and universal- world of 'things' (i.e. structures and the body) and the subjective -and therefore internal and relative- world of words (categories, symbolic schemes of description of the world), the only connection being that of a relationship of causality from the 'external' and therefore pre-existing (structures) to the 'internal' (language). There is thus, something 'external' from which symbolic constructs, language and activity originate from. What would underpin the formation of a gender habitus, for example, would lie in the external and pre given structural 'order of genders'. The kind of social constructionism of sex/gender identity that Bourdieu advocates could thus be characterized as a 'weak' version of constructionism⁴⁰. In other words it is a sociological account which attempts to account for the conventional nature of cultural forms without adopting relativist stances. It explicitly rejects biological essentialism but implicitly accepts sex as a biological given. It rejects structuralist accounts but depicts discursive models as being unable to account for structural constraints. It rejects ahistorical positions but talks of the 'eternalization'

³⁸ Bourdieu (1994b:167)

³⁹ It is worth quoting Bourdieu at length in this point: "to see the futility of the strident calls of 'postmodern' philosophers for the 'supersession of dualisms'. These dualisms, deeply rooted in things (structures) and in bodies, do not spring from a simple effect of verbal naming and cannot be abolished by an act of performative magic, since the genders, far from being simple 'roles' that can be played at will, are inscribed in bodies and in a universe from which they derive their strength (...) it is the order of genders which underlies the performative efficacy of words" Bourdieu (2001a:103)

⁴⁰That is, as discussed in section 1.2 in Part I, those sociological accounts which envisage ontological existence of social structures prior to social dynamics.

of history. It puts the physical materiality of the human body at the core of the notion of habitus - by stressing that the social is embodied- and does not consider it necessary to discuss an ontology of the body.

Bourdieu's failure to address the ontological question of what constitutes the 'natural' in the establishment of the definition of a sex/gender habitus, and therefore *what* is exactly constituted in the socialization process of a sex/gender habitus is a key weakness in his analysis. It results in an analytical imprecision which locates him as a 'naive' realist who understands nature as an outside entity projecting its meaning to the cultural world. When he says that 'anatomical difference is socially constructed' he refers to the symbolic elaboration of pre-existing anatomical differences. The causal relation between nature and society is one which takes nature as a 'justification' for the ideological foundations of domination, but which leaves intact the ontological status of such a natural reality as existing 'out there' independent of individual acts of categorization of it. In this sense in Bourdieu the body remains an unproblematized category. It is seen as 'social' in so far as it is a medium to convey cultural meanings, but it is not conceived as the product of social elaboration of category ascription or knowledge production. Bourdieu in fact explicitly denies any social constructionist views which envisage the body as a cultural artefact which is meaningfully 'constructed' through cultural mechanisms. He specifically argues against Butler's 'performative theory', which he understands as reducing the specific *substance* of the body to a system of signs. Bourdieu thus clearly accords with those social constructionist accounts of the body which emphatically criticize discursivist understandings of social reality which he sees as conveying an idealistic account which leaves the causal role of pre-given natural material unaccounted for. However, his position clearly does not account for the origin of the structural world or symbolic constructions which underlie individuals' social activity. Bourdieu appears to be happy with acknowledging that the structural world pre-exists individual activity, gender relationships, class relationships, positions of authority and power relationships of domination, but never does seem to think it necessary to account for the precise origins of such a structural world, as we have seen is the main concern of the social theoretical account of the strong programmers.

I would like now to turn my attention to the feminist target of most of Bourdieu's criticism of post-modern accounts, who professes an understanding of social determination completely opposite to that of Bourdieu's, and with this presents a radically distinct structuralist account to him and a similar one to that of the Strong Programme.

5

Discursive Feminism Evaluating Bourdieu: The Structuralist Controversy Within The Sex And Gender Debate

5. 1. Introducing Butler's examination of Bourdieu's model.

Unlike other scholars of sex/gender Butler has critiqued the very bases of Bourdieu's model. Butler considers the notion of an embodied habitus to be an important contribution to sociology, a discipline which has rather neglected not only the effects of social phenomena *on* the body but also the social effects *of* the body. She argues, however, that the direction of the causal relationship which Bourdieu's model establishes, misinterprets the real connection between macro-structural social phenomena and the micro-world of individuals' subjective identity.⁰ Butler's core criticism is that Bourdieu's model is a form of structuralism which forecloses any forms of agency that are not a by-product of structural constraints. I have reconstructed Butler's criticism around two main elements: Bourdieu's (mis)understanding of the performative process and his notion of habitus as *over*-determined.

Butler and Bourdieu's interpretation of performativity.

First Butler considers Bourdieu's understanding and criticism of the Austinian notion of the performative. We have seen that Bourdieu stresses that the internal logics of the macro-structural world grant constitutive powers to speech acts and not the opposite. In direct contrast, Butler states that the 'performative' antedates both speech acts made by 'authorized' individuals *and* the structural order that authorizes them:

"Although Bourdieu is clearly right that not all performatives 'work' and that not all speakers can participate in the apparently divine authorization by which the performative works its social magic and compels collective recognition of its authority, he fails to take account of the way in which social positions are themselves constructed through a more tacit operation of performativity."¹

Butler acknowledges that no speech utterance has the power to constitute *ex nihilo* new social phenomena. The constitutive power of performatives is always subject to a

⁰ Butler's examination of Bourdieu's model is found mainly in two texts: Butler (1997b) and (1999a)

¹ Butler (1999a:122)

'constraining' social environment. What Butler wants to achieve here is a deeper analysis of the bases of these constraining forces. She suggests that these forces are *also* the result of a performative process. In short, some speakers are capable of performative speech (constituting reality with their speech acts) because their status has also been performatively achieved. They have authority as a result of 'being addressed or interpellated as such'. She also questions Bourdieu's implicit view that the performative capacity is only possessed by particular individuals who have been legitimized as 'speakers'. Rather, she contends that much of the performative process is diffused throughout the whole community of individuals. In particular she argues that much of the performative constitution of subject identities (for example racial or gender) is the product of the performative acts of multiple and diffuse individuals who are by no means legitimated official speakers.

Butler argues that Bourdieu's understanding of the power of the performative as engendered by the structural conditions of possibility underlying and surrounding linguistic practices does not provide an analytical understanding of the bases of the emergence of social structures which allow a performative to succeed. Butler states that any social position, including juridical and state sanctioned ones, are produced through a repeated process of interpellation which does not take place exclusively through the existing powerful social positions. She thus argues that Bourdieu's model, by positing the constitutive powers of the performative as 'extra-linguistic' -i.e. as the result of pre-existing institutional conditions- leaves the structural world unaccounted for and under-theorized.

Butler's criticism of habitus formation focuses on the concrete nature of the relationship between habitus and the field which constitutes it. In Bourdieu, Butler notes, the habitus *is* somehow the field in so far as it is the incorporation of the rules of the game which govern a given social space; habitus thus becomes a 'feel for the game' which underlies the structures the field. Consequently, habitus 'presupposes the field as the condition of its own possibility'.² Furthermore, by saying that the practices that habitus generate -as the embodiment of the social world- reinforce the existing structures of the objective world, Bourdieu contradicts his own efforts to show that there is a mutually formative dynamic relationship between habitus and field. This is because habitus is a posterior 'event' in which the field is ultimately a pre-given, pre-existing reality. Bourdieu's model of the dynamics between habitus and the field can at most only account for habitus' 'adaptation' to the needs of a pre-given field, the corollary of this is that

² Butler (1999a:117)

habitus cannot 'think' of practices that are not adjusted to the field.³ The durable, transposable, nature of the habitus conveys an image of habitus formation that can only foster practices which adapt to the needs of the field, but not those which have the power to constitute the field's game. Butler further points out that, in the effort to avoid the pitfalls of subjectivism, Bourdieu's emphasis on the objective nature of the social world and its pre-given reality takes him to the other extreme, the dissolution of the subject as an active agent and therefore the conception of the field as inalterable. Butler here implicitly directs our attention to a specific ontological understanding of the notion of the social in Bourdieu's model:

"[Bourdieu's model] offers an account of the social as formative of the subject where the dramatic scenario of the 'encounter' between habitus and the social reduces that relation to that of a naive and disingenuous epistemological exteriority"⁴

This critique goes to the very basis of the understanding of social phenomena and offers a criticism similar to that I have pointed out above when analysing Bourdieu's structuralist commitment to a social ontology of 'externality'. Butler thus, also highlights that Bourdieu not only does not provide a truly dialectical link between the 'social' and the 'linguistic', but rather that he does not account for its constitutive origins either. For Bourdieu the determining power of external social conditions at the bases of individual habitus and the symbolic hierarchies which rule a particular field's game, also underpin the accumulation of the 'capitals' which grant power and legitimacy to some individual's speech acts and, in the process, render other's speech acts socially ineffective, or rather, socially *non-existent*. Butler on the contrary contends that the *performative* is the basis of *all* social positions.

Butler's critique has important implications for our concern with the body. First, Bourdieu's model of habitus casts the body as merely a mediator between macro (objective structural forces) and micro (subjective incorporation of the social structural). This position has two analytical consequences. Firstly, that agency is foreclosed at two levels, both at the level of conscious mental creative activity (i.e. beyond the pre-given possibilities of a field) and also, although not explicit in Butler, Bourdieu's model totally excludes any possibility of envisaging the materiality of the body with agency.⁵ The corollary of this is a notion of resistance not as an individual endeavour but as the result of the external dynamics of the structural forces of a given field.⁶ Secondly, at the individual level the embodiment of a subjective identity into a habitus follows the same

³"The most improbable practices are therefore excluded, as unthinkable, by a kind of immediate submission to order that inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway denied and to will the inevitable". Bourdieu (1995b:54)

⁴ Butler (1999a:120)

⁵ Further attention to this point will be given in the following section 4.3.

⁶ In this sense individual resistance in Bourdieu's view would be merely aimed to achieve the social status legitimized by the symbolic hierarchy (already) present in a given field.

process of internalization of the external structural forces present in a social field. Dispositions thus 'incline' the individual to act in conformity with the field, and the *formative* capacity of the habitus gets reduced into a hermetic circular reproductive model. Once again habitus and the individual practices (and beliefs) it generates is inevitably a 'posterior event'.⁷

Butler implies that Bourdieu has misinterpreted Austin's performative acts theory. According to Butler's understanding, and use, of it Bourdieu's 'separation of the 'linguistic' and the 'social' as two different entities' is misleading.⁸ The performative capacity of speech acts is made possible not by the social positions that the 'authorized' speaker *already* has, rather, this social authorization is itself the product of performative processes. The performative speech act is more than an activity performed by a pre-given subject, Butler notes. Rather it is one of the foundations on which subjects are constituted or 'called into being' and 'inaugurated into sociality by a variety of diffuse and powerful interpellations'⁹. Since an understanding of the performative as that specific linguistic act *which brings about that which it names* is Butler's main theoretical pillar, an examination of her notion of performativity, is necessary to provide a better insight, both into her position, and into her critique of Bourdieu.

⁷ Butler (1999a:117)

⁸ Butler (1999a: 120)

⁹ Butler (1999a: 125)

5.2. Butler's discursive model: the force of 'words' or a social ontology of 'internality'

Butler's performative model of sex and gender: revisiting the category of 'sex'

Butler engages with earlier critiques of the dual division of sex/gender by authors like Wittig and Rubin¹⁰ who suggested that the category of sex could not be conceived as existing *a priori* before 'society'¹¹. Butler's path to the notion of performativity begins with her attempt to elaborate on the notion of heterosexuality as a social institution, introduced by some feminists in the 1970s as a challenge to a more biologically essentialist positions which uncritically accepted heterosexuality as innate. Wittig's contention that sex was a 'category' suggested that it was a discursive 'illusion' which aggregated multiple biological attributes into a clearly delimited binary sex division. As noted in Part I, French post-structuralism also provided insights into how the 'boundaries' of biological categories were the effect of discursive practices. In particular the Foucauldian notion of discursive formations -understood as 'productive' power mechanisms which, by constituting the defining boundaries of bodies and their identities, effect the reality of human subjectivity- was very important in contesting naive structuralist accounts of human formation.¹² Butler's work links these different strands to Derrida's use of Austin¹³ and his concepts of 'iterability' and 'citation' indicating that the constitutive power of performative speech acts is effected in and through repetition of linguistic utterances.¹⁴ Within this discursive approach she also takes up Derrida's criticism of Lacan's notion of the phallus and argues that rather than viewing the phallus as a 'reified primary signifier' it should be seen as becoming a 'signifier' category -for sex/gender subject formation- as a result of the repeated citations of it as a signifier. Crucial to this, the phallus thus comes to 'existence' as a clearly delimited biological object as a result to the constant process of reference by the community. That is, it does not pre-exist the reference process -as Bourdieu would have it- but rather it becomes such object in and through the acts of reference.

The core of Butler's reworked performative theory is the argument that it is not possible to justify the dual taxonomy of sex and gender as two ontologically different categories based on distinct phenomena, that is, biological and cultural/social. She aims to prove that the very category of sex is a discursive achievement, and that to ground it in

¹⁰ See particularly Wittig (1982) and Rubin (1975)

¹¹ See in Part I the section *Feminist bodies* in page 46

¹² Further insights into the complexities of the Foucauldian notion of 'discursive formations' will be developed in section 6 on power.

¹³ Taking up the definition provided in footnote 7 of chapter 3, Austin's performative theory of speech acts will be taken to indicate that some speech acts have the power to *bring into being* that which they name.

¹⁴ A brief indication of this is given in Butler (1994: 33)

biological traits presupposes a 'natural' body which contains and provides us with all the necessary information to justify this dual division. This 'natural' body with definite delimited boundaries clearly does not exist, thus, it is impossible to prioritise biology when biology itself is embedded in a web of linguistic symbols which provide its meanings. The body comes into existence as cultural knowledge, and therefore as a 'graspable' entity, after it has been named as such, therefore the category of sex is only apprehensible from within a particular discursive universe which brings it into 'being' in the first place. Language is the means by which physiology is not only described but 'interpreted' and in doing so brought into 'reality', that is, provided with 'ontological substance'.

Here Butler draws attention to the fact that the constitutive powers of language, not only bring into existence that which they name but also, by naming a category as a 'noun' -i.e. a substantive-, create the illusion that a material object exists *before* the naming:

"(...) the notion of sex appears within hegemonic language as *substance*, as, metaphysically speaking, a self-identical being"¹⁵

She criticises much of mainstream feminism for subscribing to this 'metaphysics of substance'¹⁶ without realizing that it is precisely the operation of naming something, that is, of taking it as a 'substantive' -in grammatical terms- which effects the constitution of the category of sex as an external natural entity. It is here that Butler connects her analysis to Nietzsche's philosophical critique, and notes that 'metaphysics of substance' is a phrase associated with contemporary criticism of philosophical discourse.¹⁷

In short, Derrida's interpretation of Austin's notion of some speech acts as performative, Foucault's analysis of power mechanisms understood as discursive

¹⁵ Butler (1990a:18)

¹⁶ In Part I, I have already outlined her critique of most of mainstream feminist theory for subscribing to the "metaphysical presuppositions of identity politics". See section 1.2.1.4. For the purpose of this chapter and to provide a context for Butler's use of the notion of 'metaphysics of substance' I shall simplify its understanding to that of believing that an abstract reality exists outside the materiality of space and time, particularly outside the human construction of it, which informs our perceptions. The critique of the notion of 'metaphysics of substance' in Butler's thought appears to be directly related to the Derridian critique of a 'metaphysics of presence' which understands that which 'exists' or 'is' as prior to our descriptions of it. Thus, the social scientist who tries to argue that there is a reality that's not reducible to the activity of the individuals raises a metaphysical issue. Essentialist and universalizing understandings of the nature of the social world would subscribe to a metaphysics of 'presence'.

¹⁷ Nietzsche's critique is based on arguing against traditional philosophy for tacitly incorporating a *deus ex machina* in its metaphysical tradition. Nietzsche forcefully introduced an epistemological relativism when criticizing traditional philosophy for implicitly or explicitly adopting a 'platonic' modality of reason which qualifies it as a superior metaphysical knowledge. This Nietzschean criticism aims to question the taken for granted intuition that discourse merely reflects a prior ontological reality of substance. For Butler the Nietzschean critique of the nature of knowledge is thus particularly useful to question, and put into analytical light, the widely held belief that our inner subjective identities are 'substances' when in fact they are 'fictitious unities having at the start only a linguistic reality' (Butler on Nietzsche in (1990a: 21))

formations with constitutive force, and the ontological Nietzschean critique of the metaphysics of presence, are articulated in Butler's work to reveal a social constructionist theory of sex and gender identity which roots its emergence in the 'discursive' practices of individuals. The category of sex/gender, within an inherent discourse of a 'metaphysics of substance', becomes 'performative', that is, constitutes the identity 'it is supposed to be'.¹⁸

Further developing this core idea, she re-examines Nietzsche to suggest that we may have to rethink our prevalent intuitions about the direction of the causal relationship between subject (substance) and act (deed):

"The challenge for rethinking gender categories outside of the metaphysic of substance will have to consider the relevance of Nietzsche's claim in *On the Genealogy of Morals* that 'there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed -the deed is everything"¹⁹

Sex/gender is the product of a 'repetition' of acts which, performed within an existing set of discursive categories, end up 'congealing' the illusion of a 'substance' as a 'natural' kind of being. The categories of sex identities or male and female are thus, those 'coherences' contingently created by virtue of being exposed to culturally established 'nouns and adjectives'.²⁰ In sum, Butler attempts to dissolve the dualism between sex and gender which has informed most feminist critique since the 1970s.

Constructing 'materiality': the 'realism' of Butler's social constructionism

The notion of 'congealing' mentioned above has two different dimension in Butler's model, that of forming an inner subjective sense of (sexed) self, and that of forming the materiality of the physical into (sexed) 'bodies'. This is an important point because a careful reading of Butler's position reveals that she does not deny the 'existence' of sex identities within society, as many critics of her position have said. Rather she views the 'objectivity' of these notions as a metaphysics of 'contingent ontology' not as a metaphysics of universal 'pre-existing substance'.

I have shown how Butler's constructivist approach has been attacked as a radical idealist linguistic approach that conveys a form of voluntarism which both precludes the existence of a physical materiality and structural constraints on individual freedom of choice.²¹ However, she insists in the introduction to *Bodies That Matter* that to attack

¹⁸ Butler (1990a: 25)

¹⁹ Butler (1990a: 25)

²⁰ Butler (1990a: 23-24)

²¹ It is difficult to summarize briefly the main ingredients of the criticisms made of Butler's model because they often contain totally opposite claims. Butler has been attacked both as over-deterministic in her linguistic account of human formation -and thus not leaving room for agency (Benhabib (1995), Fowler (2003), McNay (2000, 2002), Lovell (2003)), for over-socializing the notion of inner psychic subjectivity (Cealey Harrison (2002)); and as over-voluntaristic -and thus conveying a notion of a subject without

her model as an approach conveying that every individual is free to 'perform' gender is to totally misunderstand her position. On the contrary, her notion of performativity points out that it is by *performing* 'gender' that the individual *comes to exist* as a sexed entity. That is, there is no individual subject who pre-exists the performative acts, let alone an individual 'free' to perform any gender identity. The discursive effects on the body are also a crucial part of the performative constitution of a sex identity. Thus, where *Gender Trouble* concentrated on the performative nature of sex identity as a psychological phenomena, *Bodies That Matter* focuses more on the formation of the 'materiality' of bodies as the biological foundations for the formation of a sex identity.

It is important to further examine this issue given that Butler's notion of performativity as constitutive has incited many criticisms as a form of 'idealism' that renders the physical reality of human life redundant and non-significant. Following Foucault she redefines the notion of 'productive', not as beneficial or positive, but as having the power to constitute, that is, 'formative' power:

"The claim that a discourse 'forms' the body is no simple one, and from the start we must distinguish how such 'forming' is not the same as a 'causing' or 'determining', still less is it a notion that bodies are somehow made of discourse pure and simple"²²

Notions like materiality, form, substance, matter, and so on, have to be carefully read within the philosophical and analytical context within which Butler uses them. When she states that sex identity is a discursive construction, she indicates that we have to pay attention to, and *explain*, how the 'materiality' of sex is 'forcibly' produced by discursive practices which are varied in nature: bodily practices, categorization of embodied practices, embodied features, regulatory practices towards gendered bodies, and so on.²³

Most importantly, however, in *Bodies That Matter* she is particularly interested in clarifying the notion of 'constructionism'. She stresses that we have to abandon the intuition that what is 'constructed' is not 'real' and permanent, but rather artificial and dispensable. Her performative theory of materiality/substance/form, brought into being by the reiteration over time of discursive activity and practices, points not only at the social mechanisms underlying the formation of our sex embodied identities but crucially at the mechanisms by which these identities become stable 'substances' in practice. Taking a Foucauldian stance, she states that it is that the reiterative discourse activity that has the power of 'producing' the phenomena that it names. But that crucially these

external constraints (Bourdieu (2001a) Lovell (2000)). A lot of the criticism however coincides in noting that her performative model is a form of 'foundationalism' which excludes any causal role of the pre-existing material entity of the body (Bordo (1992)), or the specificity of the female -reproductive- experience of her body (Witz (2000)).

²² Butler (1997a: 85)

²³ Butler (1993: xi)

discursive processes are embedded in and through with regulations and constraints which are at the bases of those mechanisms which underlie the constitution of particular social objects and not others. Discourse as constitutive cannot be understood as total freedom to categorize in any chosen ways; on the contrary, the discursive activity is profoundly regulated by collectively shared conventions. To the individual those shared conventions appear as transcendent to her and thus the referent of discourses, though constituted in and through discursive practices, becomes ontologically established as a perceived 'reality' outside individual activity. Butler here can be seen as very much coinciding with the strong programme's view of reality as relative to the collective but as 'absolute' to the individual.²⁴

With her constructionist stance Butler reveals a commitment to a mode of realism which has escaped many of her commentators. Her position, I suggest, is encapsulated in the following question she poses:

"What are we to make of constructions without which we would not be able to think, to live, to make sense at all, those which have acquired for us a kind of necessity?"²⁵

Our discursive constructions are what allows social life at all. We can communicate, exchange accounts, symbolise and act practically in the world because of the knowledge categories which allow us to make sense of the world out there. Butler is not denying the existence of a prior material physical entity which co-exists, and informs, our categories of human materiality. To understand the body as 'constructed' is not to say that nothing exists prior to the discursive acts. Rather, it is to state that what exists as 'raw material' acquires 'existence' - social and cultural meaningful existence, and hence 'real' existence - through discursive performativity. This is *not* to say that the surface of the body is imposed with cultural meanings, rather it is to say that the body as such, as a surface and as an interior, with its delimited boundaries, meanings, and interpretations, becomes *intelligible*, and thus comes to 'exist', through the performative effect of highly regulated discursive practices:

"...if certain constructions appear as constitutive, that is, have this character of being that 'without which' we could not think at all, we might suggest that bodies only appear, only endure, only live within the productive constraints of certain highly gendered regulatory schemes"²⁶

Language categories do not 'create' physical bodies, but shape materiality by determining the relevant similarities in the world which, by process of reiterative citational practices, become obscured in individuals' minds as 'natural' realities.

²⁴See section 3.2.3.

²⁵ Butler (1993:xi)

²⁶ Butler (1993:xi)

Butler highlights the 'constraining' constitutive power of discourse. The constraining nature of the discursive lies in the fact that categories such as sex are 'normative', that is, have the power to regulate bodies as *particular things* - as sexed bodies based on a dual opposition, male and female - and *not as other things*. Discourses constrain bodies into what Butler calls a 'heterosexual matrix' by virtue of a multitude of mechanisms, bodies being demarcated, circulated, named, differentiated, dressed, exercised, fed and so on, that is, regulated by practices which delimit exactly what *is* the sexed body and what *is not*. Butler's core contention is that the regulatory discourse with most power to 'form' bodies is the heterosexual matrix which produces the opposition of male and female. The normalization of (hetero) sexual orientation lies at the heart of the matrix and becomes a powerful mechanism in forming an embodied sex identity:

"the category of 'sex' is, from the start, normative; it is what Foucault has called a 'regulatory ideal'. In this sense, then, 'sex' not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice *that produces the bodies it governs*"²⁷

It is through repetition and reiteration of practices (verbal or otherwise) over time, that the 'crystallization' of an abstract idea of material substance is produced.

Butler goes on to suggest the dissolution of the sex/gender dualism. She notes that the sex/gender opposition goes back to the nature/culture dichotomy and it is an effect of the metaphysical oppositions between materialism and idealism embedded in our grammar. We should therefore dissolve such oppositions by understanding that the power of discursive performativity lies in both the constitution of matter and our categories about it. For Butler, sex, or the materiality of gender, is an effect of the 'norm' in place within the heterosexual matrix. She sums up her position by pointing out that 'matter' comes to exist, becomes cognisable, via our interpretations of it. The only priority which can be granted to the materiality of bodies is that of 'indecible' matter, that is, pure potentiality. Potentiality can only exist through form, that is, discourse. Butler reworks this constructionist idea by pointing that regulative ideals, i.e. norms, categories, etc. effect a 'constraining' effect which underlies the materiality of the body. That is, to claim that the materiality of sex is constructed through a 'ritualized repetition of norms'²⁸ does not mean to indicate that that which is constructed does not exist as such and that is 'dispensable'. Butler goes on saying that the problem lies in the understanding of the notion of 'construction', normally taken to mean as referring to the creation of an ideal and dispensable reality. Construction, says Butler, should be understood as that process of 'constitutive constrain'. She states both that materiality is neither the cause - 'empiricist foundationalism'- nor the effect of discourse - an untenable

²⁷ Butler (1993:1) Emphasis is mine.

²⁸ Butler (1993: x)

nominalist position. Rather she argues that we should "displace the causal relation though a reworking of the notion of 'effect'"²⁹: To claim that sexual categories -and thus sexual differences- are "indissociable" from discursive demarcations is not the same as claiming that discourse *causes* sexual difference³⁰

This is, I believe, the most misconstrued claim of Butler's performative theory. What Butler introduces, here, directly following a Foucauldian constructivist account, is a different understanding of the notion of 'causality' where the discursive activity is seen as a process through which social reality comes to being materialized. The materiality of the body is thus, the result of the process of *forced* reiteration of norms. This process has the power of 'constraining' discursive activity and the objects it materializes. This power is "established in and through its effects, where these effects are the dissimulated working of power itself. There is no power taken as a substantive".³¹ Rather, power (understood as discursive formations), and the materiality it constitutes, are both the effect of an 'epistemic field and a set of knowers'. Power is not that structural order which *creates* materiality. We should cease to understand construction as a type of causality in which discourse is seen to *cause* sexual differences. Rather, our perception of an independent materiality is the effect of a process of power (discursive) mechanisms, thus 'materiality is the dissimulated effect of power'.³²

Butler is instructive in pointing out that materiality has to be understood as the effect of constant acts of 'regulated iterability'.³³ I suggest that Butler is attempting to describe the operation through which the aggregate of single individuals effect the constitution, and stabilization, of categories by participating in specific contexts of knowledge categories, and by using and repeating them in their daily practices. This, Butler argues, is an incentive to examine the norms -the discursive activity (verbal or otherwise)- that regulate the materiality of sex. Matter has to be seen not as a surface when meanings are imposed but as that "process of materialization that stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter"³⁴. Thus the 'matter' of sex is not a given, as taken to be by feminists which want a 'grounding' external reality to epistemological and ethical claims, but rather an effect of those constraining mechanisms of construction of the (sexed) subject -i.e. certain exclusions like the one exemplified by the abject, certain censures or erasures, certain proliferation and so on. Thus the bodies that 'matter', that is, those bodies that *count* socially are those which are 'normalized' and hence 'naturalized' by the reiterative process of repeating the 'norm'

²⁹ Butler (1993: 35 and 251)

³⁰ Butler (1993:1)

³¹ Butler (1993: 251)

³² Butler (1993:251)

³³ Butler (1993: 252)

³⁴ Butler (1993: 9)

and this repetition sediments then as 'natural'. That is, those that 'matter'.³⁵ In direct correlation to this, those bodies that do not fit the norm are placed in the realm of the abject.³⁶

Constructionism as Butler understands it, that is, constructionism as performativity, that is the reiterative application of norms (categories and acts), takes account of the constraints which are at the very bases of the performative process. The performative process should not be understood as a 'performance', that is, an individual -and singular- free act, rather needs to be seen as a 'ritualized production (...) reiterated under constraint'.³⁷

Ontological commitment to a 'non-origin'

To conclude this summary on the aspects of Butler's work which frame my discussion I would like to draw attention to the specific ontological view which Butler's model suggests and engages with.³⁸ My interpretation of Butler is that she provides a constructionist model which rejects an 'external' view of social structures: that is, as existing outside -and guiding- individual activity. Rather, those constitutive dynamics are seen as the precondition of the same power mechanisms that constitute the bodies they regulate. She takes up the Foucauldian rejection of power as 'an external relation'³⁹, and conveys power as productive as an 'internal' operation of grammar. Our grammatical activity compels us to speak in ways which 'enforces a metaphysics of external relations' and with this we come to assume that power [structures, categories, and so on] *acts* on bodies rather than being understood to *form* them⁴⁰

I suggest that Butler attempts to present a different notion of social constructionism, that is not trapped in the myth of the 'origin' (be that discourse or matter, structures or nature). Construction, warns Butler, 'must mean more than a simple reversal of terms'⁴¹. In other words, to maintain that discourse is the cause of the subject/body is to fall into a form of idealism which reverts back to a metaphysical position of external presence.

³⁵ Butler (1993:16)

³⁶ Butler further develops this idea by operationalizing the Aristotelian notions of 'matter' and 'form' which understands matter as potentiality and form as actuality. For Aristotle matter cannot appear unless is under certain *schema*, that is, a form, shape, a particular grammar or naming. Matter therefore cannot be perceived outside of the formal principle that constitutes it. Butler (1993: 31-35)

³⁷ Butler (1993:95)

³⁸ As I have noted Butler's work is informed by three main authors: Foucault, Derrida and Austin. I would like to stress that, although she draws a lot on psychoanalytical theory, mostly Lacanian, her engagement with Lacan aims to reconstruct his basic tenets from the analytical standpoint which her engagement with the other authors provides her. Butler does not directly apply the Lacanian model but reconstructs it in light of a sociological account: "the symbolic law in Lacan can be subject to the same kind of critique that Nietzsche formulated of the notion of God: the power attributed to this prior and ideal power is derived and deflected from the attribution itself" (Butler 1993:14 and 87).

³⁹ Butler (1993:34)

⁴⁰ Butler (1993:34)

⁴¹ Butler (1993:9-8)

The same applies for forms of structuralism that envisage structures as the origin of social phenomena. This argument is fundamental to Butler's explanatory efforts, and I believe that to neglect it would obscure the entirety of her theoretical enterprise. It is my contention that Butler's critique here is directed at a form of constructionism which, despite acknowledging the social genesis of human activity, fails to fully account for it because it misconstrues the ontological nature of the elements involved in the constitution of social phenomena. Structures, be they Culture, Discourse, Power, Capitals, or whatever cannot be seen as occupying a 'subject' place, that is, as entities with their own lives separated from the activity of the individuals they construe. This is what Butler attempts to bring to light when she notes that structures seem to occupy 'the grammatical site of the subject' in most social constructionist accounts - ways of understanding social construction that are still trapped in 'the metaphysics of the subject'⁴². Structures are 'personified' -objectified- as the ultimate originator of social phenomena and individual activity.

To clarify Butler's philosophical terminology I suggest viewing Butler's analysis as pointing towards a different form of social constructionism than that of main stream social theory, which reifies the structural bases of social life as those 'realities' which, partly created by social activity, become determinants (the 'origin') of social life. On the other hand her own position is radically opposed to the former in that it does not consider structures as having an 'external' stability -and reality- from where they determine micro phenomena. Rather both (macro) structures and micro (individual) phenomena are conceived as the product of the same process, namely the process of 'reiteration' of the performative.⁴³

Butler's ontological commitment to a 'non-origin' constructionist account is developed via her notion of performativity. Performativity is effected through the constraints of existing discursive formations. Butler's 'performative', constructionist stance is arguably built on two central notions: 'citationality' and 'constraint'. Citationality refers to the process by which repetitive naming constitutes 'substantives', and consequently, materialization. However, this notion is not fully clear in her model unless it is evaluated alongside the notion of 'constraint'. Citationality constitutes matter via the forced reiteration of 'normative constraints', which establish what *is* and what *is not*. However for Butler, the constitutive power of constraints effects the very possibility of performativity. It is important to stress that Butler emphasises the performative not only to present a plausible model of discursive constructionism, but also to specify the mechanisms of construction of the sexed subject which, by normalizing the boundaries

⁴² Butler (1993:9)

⁴³ Butler (1993:9)

of 'inclusion' and 'exclusion', create the materialization of the category of sex. In short, for Butler the constraining forces are organized by the 'logic of repudiation', i.e. the fear of being ostracized to the world of the 'abject' or worse of the unthinkable. Sex identity and the naturalization of a heterosexual duality of beings between male and female are constituted by mechanisms which consign the non-conforming to the realm of taboo, ostracism and social death.

Butler's position highlights important issues in sociological theory. First, it reinstates an understanding of the causal connection between discourse and sexual difference, according to which sexual differences are *inseparable* from discursive demarcations. This is radically different from suggesting that discourse *causes* sexual difference. Secondly, she proposes an understanding of the category of sex as crystallised in any given moment but still dependent on the performative process of materialization through time. This is not a permanently fixed condition of the body but rather a construct which acquires its material existence in the process of 'forced reiteration of norms'. Butler's specific ontological commitment coincides with that brought forward by the performative theory of social institutions. I believe, however, that she lacks a systematic analysis of the collectivist understanding of the self-referential process of category ascription and that this obscures her position, very often appearing to suggest that the performative is the work of isolated individuals. The application of the self-referential model would allow to clarify those 'ritualized' and 'constrained' individual performative acts as the self-referential process of an interactive a collective of individuals activating, sharing, negotiating and aligning through interaction, their individual self-referential inductive acts of category ascription.

5.3. Reviewing Butler's evaluation of Bourdieu's model

Butler is sympathetic to Bourdieu's efforts to locate the incorporation of social phenomena in the corporeal but she reconsiders Bourdieu's particular modality of 'incorporation' by suggesting that further attention should be paid to the question of *how* it is that the norms that govern speech [society] come to inhabit the body. She is not convinced by Bourdieu's explanation that norms have the power to craft and cultivate, and thus shape the body in a particular habitus. Despite highlighting the very important issue of the routinized nature of the embodiment of social norms, this explanation still leaves the question of the 'origin' of social norms unresolved.

The principal differences between Butler and Bourdieu can be summarized under the two sections below.

Butler's ontology of 'words' versus Bourdieu's ontology of 'things'

For Bourdieu embodiment is that process which incorporates the pre-given social, and only *after* this can the body become a vehicle for the performative process. Butler, on the other hand, sees the performative process as made possible precisely by embodiment of the social, whilst simultaneously constituting the social itself. Her 'reconstruction' of Bourdieu's habitus sees habitus both as a result and a vehicle for the performative, thus collapsing into the same operation the constitutive and the constituted:

"The practical sense is carried by the body, where the body is not a mere positive datum, but the repository or the site of an incorporated history. The body is not only the site of such a history, but also the instrument through which the belief in contemporary obviousness is reconstituted"⁴⁴

For Butler the social life of the body is produced through a performative reiteration of acts, as is the social life of norms. In the case of the body this 'interpellative call' takes the form of embodied 'stylistics' that in turn will become performative acts themselves. In Bourdieu we find a clear distinction between the 'social' (the pre-existing order) and the 'performative' (the power to constitute made possible by the pre-existing order). Butler, on the contrary, states that the habitus is performatively constituted and becomes 'the tacit and corporeal operation of performativity'⁴⁵. Thus, she intimates that the theoretical distinction between the social and the linguistic is impossible to sustain.

Butler implicitly suggests that Bourdieu's habitus conveys a different notion of the 'construction' of the materiality of the individual from hers. The habitus presupposes a

⁴⁴ Butler here is referring to the doxic world. See Butler (1997b: 152)

⁴⁵ Butler (1997b: 153)

notion of a pre-given ontological understanding of the body that is instrumentalized, as it were, by cultural structures, but not constituted by them. Here, Butler would contend that Bourdieu and traditional feminism concur in that they work under the same paradigmatic understanding of social constructionism.

Butler's open-ended versus Bourdieu's closed/fixed nature of social phenomena.

For Butler it is misleading to conceive of socialization as presupposing stable and fixed structures which become embedded in the corporeal materiality of the individual and constitute a cognitive schema that subsequently guides all actions. This denies several important factors of social phenomena. Firstly, structures are those phenomena which exist in a particular moment of 'crystallisation' of the performative, they cannot be conceived as pre-existing the process of performative construction but rather as the result of the performative process. Secondly, the concept of an internalized habitus that is constituted and organized at some point and subsequently reinforced by the practices that it constitutes effects a 'closure' which leads to over-determinate stances. This, Butler contends, denies the process of fluctuation revealed by the performative process: the contingency present in the permanent process of reinforcement.

In Bourdieu's model, according to Butler, the body merely *represents* the tacit normativity of the social field. That is, the body becomes a habitus by appropriating those rules present in a given social field, and this results in a formed habitus which is resistant to unknown possibilities. Butler, however, says the body does not reproduce social norms *automatically*. On the contrary the constitution of the body is embedded in 'failures' to be constituted. Because the process of interpellation is never based in 'definite' boundaries of the categories or rules it uses to interpellate, the body will always be liable to 'exceed' such interpellations. Butler emphasises that in Bourdieu there is no room for the 'unspeakable' and she instrumentalizes Derrida's notion of 'break' to account for that 'force' which 'opens up the performative to an unpredictable future'.

Through Butler's understanding of 'censorship' as formative we get an insight into her conception of the social as open-ended. She notes that a "regulation that states what it does not want to state thwarts its own desire".⁴⁶ The resonance with Foucault's model of the productive power of repressive discursive formations is readily apparent here.⁴⁷ Thus Butler conveys a notion of performative activity which, by using constraining/delimiting logics (explicit censure being the most obvious form) implicitly opens up to new

⁴⁶ Butler (1997b:130)

⁴⁷ Foucault (1998:27). "Silence itself -the thing one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers -is less the absolute limit of discourse, that other side for which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies... silences are part of the new regimes of discourses".

unpredictable forms. She redefines censorship as a 'productive form of power' in that precisely because explicit censorship by regulating that which does not want to exist incurs in a performative 'contradiction', that is, it imposes into public exposure that which wants to suppress. And because explicit censorship usually does not want to fully define that which represses it opens up an space of potentiality and contestation.⁴⁸ On another more implicit way censorship, by constituting the legitimate -authorized and collectively accepted- boundaries of the content of the categories is indeed directly involved in the formation of subjects identities. Equally this productive character of censorship should be seen as applicable to the formation of the bodies. The body is constituted performatively by the repetition of the norms which govern a particular moment of the field. However, this performative process only under-determines; bodies, says Butler, cannot reproduce automatically the norms. There will be always room for variation and in a sense thus, the body once constituted exceeds its own constitutive constraints by virtue of having adopted new forms which are not fully determined. Thus the possibility of bodily acts to take non-ordinary activity is always present and it is precisely the 'political promise of the performative'⁴⁹. Butler's performative account corrects the fatalism inherent in Bourdieu's pessimistic view of the impossibility of social change. Butler, on the contrary, contends that every act of performative constitution of the social world opens up to unpredictable futures, and offers clear possibilities of political future activity. We have to envisage performative speech acts, Butler notes, as embedded in contexts that already contain certain heavily constrained linguistic categories which make them difficult to break. However, this does not imply that speech acts are fully determined in advance, rather they are always in state of negotiation and therefore potentially open to transformation and this has to be seen as the platform for operationalizing any form of political resistance.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ "The effort to constrain the term (or act) culminates in its very proliferation (...) The prohibition thus conjures that speech act that it seeks to constraint". Butler (1997b: 131)

⁴⁹ Butler (1997b:158)

⁵⁰ Butler (1997b: 161). I further develop the political dimension of the discursivist accounts in chapter 7

6

Sex habitus as an artificial kind: a reconstruction

Although in Butler's work we find a clear account of the performative power of speech acts (verbal activity) the performative dimension of non-verbal, corporeal activity is under-theorized in her work. Indeed I have already noted that this is a lack in most analysis of individual action, i.e. interactionist accounts, the Parsonian model and even the performative model of social institutions. However, I have also pointed out in Kusch we find a framework, albeit under-explored, to account for the socially constructed nature of the body which embraces a more materialistic understanding of the performative nature of the corporeal. It is this particular dimension of the notion of artificial kinds that I attempt to develop in this section. These three models - Butler's performative theory of sex/gender identity, Bourdieu's concept of habitus and the practices it guides, and Kusch's notion of artificial kind as constituting an alter-referent - converge in one particular regard which is the corporeal constitution -and the practices it compels- of a sex/gender identity. Through developing the points of coincidence and discrepancy between these three theories, it is my aim to provide an account of how we could further our comprehension of the social nature of human bodies by considering a 'sex habitus' as an 'artificial kind'.

Several issues spring from this critical comparison. In Bourdieu's model the emphasis is on the incorporation of already constituted cultural and social forms into the physical -the corporeal is thus seen as the 'site' of the 'social'. In Butler, by contrast, the corporeal is one more phenomenon of the constitutive power of the performative of the 'social' (sex identity in her studies). On the other hand Butler focuses on the formation of sex identity as a subjective inner psychological event and locates the formation of the body as another aspect of this process. Bourdieu, however -if only implicitly- suggests that the inner subjective identity is an epiphenomenal result of the embodiment of external social structures.

I have commented above that Bourdieu's emphasis on the level of the physiological is an important corrective for understanding the notion of a 'social disposition' which is not located only at the level of the verbal. I suggested that such a notion could focus our attention on how the social systems emerge also from the more material area of 'social physiological dispositions'. Despite this useful emphasis on the body we have seen that Bourdieu's model does not explicitly account for its ontological status -that is, how it comes to exist as a socially meaningful entity. He, thus, leaves an array of issues

which remain ambivalent, under-theorized or simply taken for granted. Indeed, we have seen that he uncritically adopts the division between sex identity as a biological given and gender identity as a cultural construct with the result of a biological essentialist dimension to his model which partially undermines his social constructionist claims. The ontological status of the materiality of the body and its socially constructed nature needs to be addressed to properly implement Bourdieu's concept of habitus. The sex/gender dichotomy results in another undertheorized arena in Bourdieu's model, namely that of individual subject formation. These oversights are the two main areas of Butler's performative model of sex/gender identity but the possibility of comprehending the performative dimension of 'bodily' acts -clearly implicit in her work- remains underdeveloped.

Bourdieu's emphasis on the corporeal world offers an interesting point of departure to further develop our understanding of embodied human activity, but he falls short of providing an understanding of what exactly the social nature of a embodied dispositional action is. I seek, therefore, to discuss the particular nature of human embodied activity.

This section, thus, revolves around two main themes. First I concentrate on exploring the *social* nature of the physical body. I do this by expanding Kusch's theory of artificial kinds and how, in conjunction with Bourdieu and the performative model, it can provide further insights into the embodied dimension of sex/gender identity formation. I shall also highlight how thinking of the internalization of the social as a 'habitus' helps to bring our analysis back from the verbal to the corporeal. As a corollary, issues around the 'reality' of the body will be discussed and a re-definition of a social constructionist account of the body will be proposed. The underlying intention of this attempt is to address the question of a possible synthesis within nature/culture debate around sex/gender identity. This attempt has been central to feminist scholarship since de Beauvoir and, as shown in Part I, it remains broadly unresolved.

Secondly, and directly related to this I focus on how the notion of artificial kinds can help to illuminate the inner subjective formation of sexual identity. Recalling Butler's critique of Bourdieu, we see that she mostly confines her analysis to the structure/agency debate and questions his structuralist model of causality by suggesting that it is trapped in a metaphysics of 'externality'. This leaves the objects engaged in the causal relationship unproblematized. Although Butler does not directly engage with how Bourdieu differs from her model on issues of the micro-dynamics of identity formation, I suggest that envisaging the formation of a sex habitus under the theoretical framework of artificial kinds would illuminate Butler's structuralist critique. This is especially the case in that it highlights the fundamental, constitutive role of individuals' mutual susceptibility displayed in social interaction.

6.1. Sex habitus and the nature/culture debate: a synthesis

6.1.1. Sex habitus as an artificial kind of 'artefact': key ingredients of the 'social' bases of an embodied sexed habitus.

The traditional distinction between sex (natural) and gender (cultural) tacitly presumes 'sex' to be a natural kind entity with no self-referential content -as opposed to how Barnes depicts natural kinds.⁰ Usually, nature is presumed to fully inform the dual division of the human world into two different sex categories. Gender on the other hand, has traditionally been conceived as a social kind type of reality, that is fully self-referential from a Barnesian point of view. Butler, however, directs our attention to the fact that 'sex' identity as well as 'gender', should be understood as a social category or, in Barnesian terms, as a social kind type of reality constituted by our acts of reference to it. She warns against a purely idealistic account of sex identity that ignores the empirical reality of a biological materiality by acknowledging the existence of the corporeal, but she carefully posits this to be the result of performative processes. She points out that physiological phenomena cannot automatically be attributed a natural status but rather should be conceived as the 'raw' material which are fully constituted by our discursive practices. Butler's stance here is similar to that of the strong programmers in acknowledging the fact that the body's biological raw material is *not enough* to explain the categorizations of it. Thus, the apparently universal features which define our 'sexed' corporeality -reproductive capacities would probably feature centrally- need to be considered as the result of discursive performativity by which they are constituted as the 'relevant' sex categories. Butler is adamant that her performative model does not deny that biological differences among human beings exist, rather her endeavour is to problematize those taken for granted essential universals and ask "under what discursive and institutional conditions, do certain biological differences become the salient characteristics of sex."¹

Despite discussing the (discursive) mechanisms which underlie the constitution of bodies as 'knowledgeable' matter, and because her work focuses on the notion of sex/gender 'categories' and the formation of individual sex identity, Butler does not directly engage with the precise nature of the activity of a body once constituted as a 'sexed' entity. The

⁰ Barnes' analytical schema shows that not even the intuitively taken for granted natural entities are independent from our self-referential processes. I refer back to section 3.1.

¹ See Butler (1994: 33) Butler: "Although women's bodies generally speaking are understood as capable of impregnation, the fact of the matter is that there are female infants who cannot be impregnated, older women alike, women of all ages who cannot be impregnated, and even if they could ideally, that is not necessarily the salient feature of their bodies or even of their being women. What the question does is try to make the problematic of reproduction central to the sexing of the body. But I am not sure that is, or ought to be, what is absolutely salient or primary in the sexing of the body. If it is, *I think it's the imposition of a norm, not a neutral description of biological constraints.*" (Italics are mine).

notion of habitus, on the other hand, without paying much analytical attention to the role of the social in the constitution of the corporeal, implicitly points to the notion of the body as an habitus conveying specific social practices. To describe sex identity as an artefact, that is as a durably acquired sex 'habitus' compels us to account both for the social and biological elements involved in its formation, but also for what type of human practices generate once is constituted as such.

Under the taxonomy of 'kinds' I summarized when presenting Kusch's theory we saw how natural kinds are understood to be those whose referents are constituted by the act of reference. Crucially, however, the entity classified remains independent of the act of reference, both prior to and after the referring activity. What the act of classification 'does' is to constitute this entity as 'knowable' by grouping it as a certain kind of entity and not another. On the contrary social kinds of reality are those totally dependent on, and come to exist via, our acts of reference. For such kinds of reality there is no prior or posterior existing entity independent of our discursive practices.

In this light we can clearly see that Bourdieu implicitly adopts a naive realist understanding of the sexed body as a natural kind by assuming that it is the product of pre-given biological features. As I noted these pre-given biological features may be taken to symbolize a masculine ideology of female domination, but they are not seen as constituted by ideological and cultural views. Butler on the other hand could be said to understand the sex body as a constructed artefact which is both different from prior existing raw material and acquires a durable existence. I submit that the notion of artificial kinds allows for a better account of the type of social construction of the body which Butler endorses. In this sense sex habitus as an artificial kind would differ from a social kind in that social activity constitutes an alter-referent that becomes 'artefactual', and to some extent acquiring an independent nature. Equally it would differ from natural kinds in that they did not exist prior to the act of classification. Conceiving of the constitution of a sex 'habitus' as an 'artificial kind artefact' provides an explanatory framework which highlights several key ingredients of this process of constitution.

First, the performative character of sex 'habitus' is revealed. By incorporating the main tenet of the performative theory of social institutions advocated by Barnes and Bloor, Kusch notion of artificial kinds highlights that discursive activity is fundamental to understanding the constitution of a sex habitus. Thus a sex habitus would be that which is taken to be a sex habitus by the collective. Barnes' work, let's recall, sees the nature and bases of social kinds of entities as self-referring social institutions. In other words the 'reality' -that is, the reference of the predicates- of these entities is constituted by the social practice of making references to them. However, his work not only accounts for 'social' knowledge but for *all* knowledge as a social institution. This include, cultural

understandings and knowledge of a physical independent reality. Such knowledge does not cease to be performative but rather becomes a combination of self-referential and external referential activity. Barnes notes that the link between self-reference and external reference is that the latter presupposes the former, and that without the former we would not be able to make sense of the latter. A clearer picture emerges if we envisage the work of performative self-referential activity as constituting an artificial kind, that is, as those things whose identity -and shape- is defined by their role within a group who create such identity -and shape- through their practices. Thus, sex habitus has to be understood as the product of the continuous collective practices of reference.² Barnes and Bloor's work highlights the *collective* character of any form of knowledge, that is, it is only by collectively sustaining a set of concepts that genuine and coherent reference to an external reality becomes possible.³ Barnes' model of self-referentiality points out that the fundamental aspect of reference creation is that it is a collective achievement. This means that without the agreement or alignment of the collective as to what is the 'right' or 'wrong' understanding -and application- of a term, there is no possibility of ascribing a content to a category. Without content there is no possibility of genuine reference at all. The self-referential model, thus, reveals the process by which society is fundamentally involved not only in our understanding of the world but also in how the world is meaningfully constituted. It is in this sense that self-referential processes are *essential* to the existence of the external reference. According to this view what constitutes our knowledge of a sex identity is that it is referred to as such by a collective which keeps checking and aligning each individual practice and knowledge category with each other by means of interaction. Thereby the collective understanding and content of this identity is established.

In this sense Barnes' self-referential model coincides with Butler's performative theory of speech acts in that they both conceive acts of naming (interpellation, citation, references and so on) as constituting that which the speech act refers to. To be called a 'girl' or a 'boy' over time from the beginning of one's existence brings those categories into existence –to be 'girded' or 'boyed' in Butler's parlance⁴. There is a coincidence, thus, between the discursive and the social constitution of the subject.

Secondly, however, sex habitus is an 'artefact' of prior raw material performatively constituted. Highlighting the performative nature of the notion of a sexed body should not distract us from what I have already noted: the notion of habitus (and thus sex 'habitus') points to the 'artefactual' character of the corporeality of human bodies.

² 'Referring', here, broadly means both discursive and non-discursive practices.

³ Bloor (1999b:135)

⁴ Butler (1999a:120)

This directs our attention to two important aspects. First of all to view the sexed body as sexed 'habitus' forces us to acknowledge a prior material entity, an external referent which constrains our acts of categorization. The constraining effect, however, should not be understood as 'determining' but rather as under-determining.

As noted above, Bourdieu's model implicitly conveys that the materiality of the body -particularly of the sexed body- meaningfully pre-exists categorisation and serves the purposes of cultural ideological strategies. Thus Bourdieu regards the 'phallus' as already existing as such in nature and as 'instrumentalized' by a masculine ideology but not, as Butler would contend, as the result of such cultural practices. Under the conceptual lens of artificial kinds, the physical features which are taken to be central to our characterization of a female or a male body are shown to be relevant, and thus, come to exist in their full social status as a result of our discursive practices. Materiality becomes 'matter' and thus, becomes artefactual in nature, as the result of a universe of taxonomic categories and actions. The notion of artificial kinds allows us to see how the embodiment of a sex identity -a habitus- is an artefact whose alter-referential existence is the product of conventional beliefs on binary sexual division among human beings. The 'matter' of the sexed body, thus, cannot be understood as pre-existing the materialization effected by the social terms and practices which describe it. This is not to deny a pre-existing physical reality outside our self-referring activity, but to understand that such reality does not provide us with a determinate meaning of how to interpret, understand and categorize it.

Third, viewed under the finitist theory, sex habitus as an artificial kind helps to develop Butler's idea that the process of 'forming' matter through a reiteration of 'gendering' acts results not in a static given but rather in a permanent state of transformation and inherently contains a 'transformative' capacity. Butler's account of the 'Derridian break'⁵ highlights that performative activity is always in negotiation with the context where the utterances are performed but they are never fully determined by it, therefore, the performative is always unpredictable. Sex habitus, and the meanings it conveys, is never fixed and it is in constant state of revision as a result of its permanent 'use'. In a similar fashion the finitist theory of the strong programmers understands the meaning of a term or rule as determined by the individuals' use of them in and through activity. So a sex habitus can be understood as the result of individuals' practices, verbal and corporeal. Sex habitus thus is not constituted at a particular point of individual history, as Bourdieu suggests, but is permanently in a state of constitution. This perspective resolves the tension encountered by Bourdieu's attempt to convey a sex habitus common to all differential social groups (classes in his work). Rather, it has to be

⁵ Butler (1997b: 141)

understood that each social group constitutes their own definition of what a sex habitus is.

With a finitist understanding of a sex habitus we can better theorize its contingent character and therefore account for its transformation, but the performative constitution of a body as a sex habitus also results in a 'durable' artefact. The notion of durability understood under the analytical framework of artificial kind acquires a different dimension to that conveyed in Bourdieu's model. Whereas for Bourdieu habitus has a durable existence because it is permanently constituted at an early point of an individual's history and then acquires an independent existence which guides future activity. On the contrary using Kusch's insights a sex habitus is never fully constituted but is continuously created from moment to moment. In Kusch's framework a degree of stability is achieved by the permanent collective control of bodily activities which are then accepted as the 'normal' practices of a sexed habitus in particular cultural settings. Although it is true, as Bourdieu suggests, that the corporeal character of a sex habitus renders the routinization of practices inaccessible to conscious awareness of their conventionality, this is not sufficient to explain the similar practices of a collective of individuals. This durability, as well as the intuitive perception of a transcendent entity, is permanently re-made in and through interaction by the mutually controlling processes of individual activity. Also since culture creates bodies as artificial kinds through activity and a variety of mechanisms which shapes us physically: it constrains, forms, shapes, distributes, feeds, clothes, exercises and so on according to local conventional cultural conventions, bodies (sex habitus) put in isolation, or separated from this particular context, would indeed, and significantly be able to persist as a sex habitus but would result in deviation. The agreement to particular standards of a collective as to what is a sex habitus is thus the result of an ongoing process of permanent readjusting of our bodies to the collectively sanctioned demands and standards of what is taken to be a sex habitus.

If the notion of durability is understood as the result of specific routinized activity, however, it becomes clearer that its former features can never be fully stable, thus the transfer to different social settings can -and in fact do- effect changes to this habitus. So, the process of acting a sex habitus always needs confirmation in new settings, and hence, it is re-negotiated and re-established in ways that may result in more or less degree of variation. The characterisation of a sex habitus as a finitist entity allows us to understand that change and transformation are inherent in the activity of constitution. This sheds light on the empirical fact that there is considerable variation of what is seen and internalized as a sex habitus among different groups. This introduces a fundamental corrective to the notion of 'durability' conveyed by Bourdieu. Bourdieu's notion of habitus inevitably ends up effecting a 'totalization' of its content outside specific

localized groups. In artificial kinds theory, by contrast, sex habitus is understood as acquiring its content in specifically localized interactive activity.

Formative actions: the 'types' of actions of a sex habitus

The three ingredients summarized above -the performative, artefactual and finitist nature of sex habitus as an artificial kind- force us to reconstruct the 'verbal' character of performative activity and rework the performative power of non-verbal embodied activity. I consider this to be fundamental to social constructionist debates on the body and one which I have found to be unsuccessfully theorized in most social constructionist theories. By pointing out new avenues to understand the performative as an 'embodied' activity my aim is to show how embodied 'practical' activity results in performative effects constituting *that which they act*.

Let's start by recalling Butler's argument that the social life of the body is produced through a performative interpellation akin to that which constitutes the social life of norms. In the case of the body this 'interpellative call' takes the form of embodied 'stylistics' that become performative acts themselves. Bourdieu, however, does not see habitus as constitutive in a performative sense, but as something which is acquired at some point and then 'performs' in an already constituted field. My reconstruction of a sex habitus, however, is that the habitus is *that* which is permanently constituted in the field by its own activity. As it stands in Bourdieu's model the power to constitute ultimately resides in a pre-existing order. A sex habitus as an artificial kind would convey habitus as the product of performativity and in the process of becoming, as Butler would describe it, 'the tacit and corporeal operation of performativity'⁶.

Given that performative power is traditionally understood to function through verbal statements some explanation is required to transfer the constitutive power of performative activity to non-verbal embodied actions. I suggest that we could also see how bodily activity is fundamentally involved in the constitution of the social rules, norms and categories it seems to obey. Butler seems to suggest such a departure when she notes that "to master a set of skills is not simply to accept a set of skills, but to reproduce them in one's own activity"⁷ An embodied habitus thus, should be seen not just as acting or generating practices according to a set of internalized rules or categories, but rather as constituting those rules and categories in and through the embodiment of them in the course of action.⁸

⁶ Butler (1997b: 153). Clearly, thus, Kusch and Butler coincide in that it is not only the sexed body as an artifact which is performatively constituted but also the performative capacity of the body itself.

⁷ Butler (1997a:119)

⁸ See Taylor (1999) and Bouveresse (1999) for some authors who do explain rules as embodied but still existing outside the formative activity of individuals.

The embodiment of a habitus conveys the notion that the performative process may be different from the verbal activity of the self-referential performative model. Let's recall that Kusch's notion of platitudes understands stability as the permanent talk of taken for granted beliefs. An interesting tension is posed here when this notion is contrasted to that of the un-verbalized world of the taken for granted doxic realm in Bourdieu. How can the notion of performativity be explained in terms of the naturalization of cultural conventions into the *practices* of a habitus? The latter understands stability precisely as that which is not even spoken about because it has been naturalized as the 'forgotten history' of the body. My intention is to re-work this useful notion to refer not so much that which is forgotten and thus not amenable to conscious awareness but as dispositional routinized bodily activity.

This requires us to develop our understanding of what a bodily action would be, but in particular what a 'bodily' action as performative would be, that is, as constituting the rules which govern its behaviour. I suggest understanding such activity as *formative* in the sense conveyed in Collins and Kusch's text '*The shape of actions*'⁹. Thus, an embodied action is a self-referring social institution in the sense that it cannot exist and subsist unless it belongs to a shared network of activity which provides collective sense to that activity. In other words, individual embodied action is the product of conventional collective self-referential activity. Embodied actions can, therefore, be understood as 'formative' because they constitute a shared network of commonly accepted actions. That is, an embodied action achieves constitutive force because it is shared and congruent with the actions of others and not guided by a pre-existing set of norms. The embodied action of a sex habitus is what the group collectively takes this action to be. This enables us to understand the fully conventional nature of a sex habitus activity. Different cultural contexts present different taxonomies of bodily activity and movements which may be related to different sexes, so what may appear as a feminine or masculine body shape, movement or activity, in one culture may not be the same in another. The important point to retain here is that each culture positively or negatively sanctions what is taken to be the 'right' or 'wrong' sex habitus embodied action. Thus, the constitution of a body as a sex habitus should be seen as achieved by the repetition of bodily acts that perform an array of embodied practices according to what the collective takes to be the practices of a sex habitus. In the process this constitutes particular male and female 'habitus' and not others.

⁹ Although those authors have not explicitly developed the notion of a 'bodily' action their work usefully develops a theory of human actions which I extrapolate here in my discussion on the notion of performative embodied actions. See Collins and Kusch (1998).

That is, to be constituted as a sex in a specific way and not another has the effect of 'enabling' particular actions and not others. To put this idea into a clearer focus, imagine a natural kind type of reality like a tiger. In the case of a tiger the self-referential component constitutes its ontological status in so far it makes it 'knowable', that is, culturally graspable through the categories which define its boundaries in relation to other types of natural entities. However the categorization of an animal as a 'tiger' does not affect the activity of the existing external referent. A tiger does not act differently -become more aggressive, ferocious, or faster- because we have categorized it as a ferocious, aggressive or fast animal. A body also presents an alter-referential factor, that is, something exists before it is categorized and known through the categories which describe it but when categorized as a 'sex habitus', however, this has much more fundamental and significant repercussions than the categorization of a natural type of reality. It changes, transforms and instigates new forms of activity according to the content of the categories which describe it. For example, a body categorized as 'female' will develop an array of practices in accord with the array of practices that is collectively believed to be what female body ought to behave and look like.

Linking this understanding of the body as an artificial kind which generates new forms of activity to the notion of corporeal activity as 'formative' we can begin to grasp the performative nature of bodily practices. In this sense we can talk of the *agency of materiality*, that is, an embodied habitus as an artificial kind can be perceived to participate actively in social life by producing 'feedback loops' to the acts of classification which originate their activity in the first place. That is, human bodies produce or change activity in response to being constituted as specific bodies.¹⁰ The habitus embodied action has to be seen as synchronically and diachronically non-static. To put a simple example, the coquettish fluttering of eyelashes is a learned activity which may have had different meanings, origins, or even forms, in different cultures and historical periods. Thus the meaning and the formative power of a habitus action will be always culturally dependent, contextual and variable.

6.1.2. Sex habitus as an artificial kind: the 'reality' of the body.

Having seen all the elements involved in understanding sex habitus as an artificial kind, lets conclude this section by returning to the main issue within the nature/culture debate on the body and the ontological nature of the sexed body. Given that there has been a clear reluctance to fully adopt social constructionist stances which embrace 'discursive'

¹⁰ Hacking also reflects on this, by noting that the classification of human acts into new kinds of categories creates new possibilities for choice and action. See Hacking, (1992:191).

approaches it is now time to turn our attention to the notion of the 'realism' or 'objectivity' of a sexed body.

I have already noted that the current resurgence and adoption of the Bourdieuan model in feminist theory may be an attempt to counteract radical constructivist accounts, like that of Butler, which fully embrace 'discursive' approaches. Some feminists have seen in Bourdieu a way to overcome the perceived relativism of those discursive accounts and to provide structural force to idealist positions which are seen as not granting any status to external reality. Witz usefully summarises this tension when she notes that the problem for feminist sociology is to 'retrieve the body' from discursive accounts which do not account for its material reality. Witz thus suggests that we need to develop "an ontology of gendered social beings that does not abdicate embodiment".¹¹

As I have indicated in several places, however, discursive accounts like that of Butler and the Strong Programme do account for the material reality of the body. Butler's point is that the 'discursive'¹² constitutes the body *fundamentally*¹³. This means that a body does not come to exist culturally until it is named, and it is only accessible to us after this. Furthermore she says that 'there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body'.¹⁴ I would like to address this particular issue and help to dispel the common misreading of Butler as an idealist by further developing the strong programme argument regarding the 'objective' nature of the natural world.¹⁵ We find in Bloor's writings a useful understanding of the notions of 'objective' and 'reality'. The fundamental tenet of the strong programme theory -that meanings are the product of an interactive aggregate of individuals in contact with external reality- should also be applied to understand the notion of 'objectivity' and 'reality'.¹⁶

Thus, 'objective' knowledge and the idea of an 'objective' reality is the result of a dual interaction with both the physical environment and our social context. We know the physical world with and through society, with the network and systems in place of self-referential knowledge categories. Thus objective and practical knowledge is always the result of the mediation between our cultural institutions and the impact of a physical reality which only becomes known via our categories. In this sense what we take to be

¹¹ Witz (2003).

¹² Although Butler may not have explicitly developed the notion of 'discursive' as taken to imply verbal and non-verbal activity as I have outlined above, I believe that this is implicit in her work. From now on the discursive will refer to more than purely 'linguistic' statements.

¹³ Butler (1997b: 5)

¹⁴ Butler (1993: 10)

¹⁵ The strong programmers have had to repeatedly defend themselves from the same accusation as we have seen in section 3 in Part II.

¹⁶ I have based this summary on several of Bloor's texts. See (1991), (1995), (1996), (1997), (1999), and (2001).

'reality' exists but in a sense has no existence independent of our collective thoughts about it.

Bloor's arguments are particularly instructive in highlighting the traps of our common sense understanding of what we take to be reality. Mostly, Bloor warns, reality is understood in two senses. Firstly as an independent reality located in a special abstract realm (i.e., Platonism. An example of this would be the notion that the reality of a mathematical rule exists outside our uses of it). Secondly, the most commonly accepted view is that there is an independent world which our senses perceive (i.e. naive empiricist accounts). In the first understanding of 'reality' abstractions are real objects located in a 'third realm' outside space and time; in the second there is a 'reality' which is perceived by our sense-organs.

Contesting these views of 'reality', as seen in section 3.2.3., the particular form of realism which the Strong Programme suggests is different. Bloor denies both understandings of reality and says that there is indeed a 'reality' which is inductively and empirically perceived -as naive empiricist would have it -but such reality is 'sociological' in nature- and thus not directly accessed by our senses. That is, there is no reality out there ready to be 'discovered'; rather we access the external world through our (self-referential) categories and in doing so we constitute that which we take to be 'reality'. This constituted reality, at the practical individual empirical level becomes as 'real as real artefacts' but this does not make it 'non-social'. There is neither an abstract mythical entity nor an empirical reality that is accessible independent of human intervention.

Thus, the 'social' bases of this taken to be 'reality' does not deny the prior material existence which effects individuals; rather what is taken to be 'reality' is collectively established. Neither does this understanding deny that, for practical purposes, this constructed 'reality' is as 'real' as a real artefact.

"[Individuals] create a standard which is external to each individual by their citing it, using it, appealing to it, and criticising each other in the name of the standard (...) the crucial step is the realization that bringing in social interaction does not rule out or diminish the part played by the causal interaction with things. Its role is not removed but supplemented with interaction between concept users. We must say that the engagement with the world is a collective engagement, and think of its collective character in terms of the self-referential model of social institutions"¹⁷

I stress this particular point of the strong programme's notion of the 'reality' and 'objectivity' of an empirical reality because I believe it provides not only for a useful corrective to the naive empiricist approach implicit in Bourdieu's understanding of the

¹⁷ Bloor (1996: 3)

human body,¹⁸ but also because the stress on the necessary role of the collective is undertheorized in Butler's work. The strong programme, as we have seen, stresses that without the normative powers resulting from processes of negotiation among an interactive collective there would be no possibility for concepts with 'genuine' content to exist. Consequently, there would be no possibility of identifying anything outside as an 'object'. It is important to note that it is the concept, name, category or practice which is 'constructed' not the external reality to which they are applied, and this construction is a collective achievement not an individual one.

Let's recall once again that according to the strong programme's propositions it is impossible to envisage 'individual' knowledge production. Individuals in isolation may proceed to apply categories but when confronted with other individuals there will always be variation due to individuals' inherent variability. Thus, the only way individuals can perform similar operations and agree on the content of the categories in use within a community is through negotiation within social interaction. The content of a category, thus, is a collective achievement not an individual one. We have to shift from individual activity to collective interactive activity if we are to better understand the social nature of human life.

We can see the profound significance of this analytical framework in developing Butler's notion of the construction of the 'materiality' of the bodies. Social constructionism in a Butlerian and Strong Programme performative sense, does not ignore the material reality existing prior to our categorisation. Our categories to describe, understand, and taxonomize bodies do not directly 'mirror' a prior reality and convey its meaning, rather our categories are the *only* means to contact such reality. It is in this sense that reality is 'constructed', that is, the 'mirror' constructs the reality, as it were. These categories will necessarily be established in and through collective negotiation. A number of studies have shown that there are a variety of ways in which a human body can be categorized.¹⁹ Nature does not provide one definite right and unique classification, it would be clearly impossible to extract from nature exactly what it is that constitutes the content of the category of male and female. These discursive social constructionist accounts do not deny the existence of certain kinds of biological difference, but they emphasise the need to ask under what social and discursive conditions certain biological differences become the prominent characteristics of the category of 'sex'. Thus, external materiality

¹⁸ And for all those theoretical approaches which uncritically accept a 'direct' relationship and causal connection between the reality of the body and our knowledge of it.

¹⁹ It is worth mentioning Money and Ehrhardt's (1972) study of sexual differentiation which concludes that it is not possible to talk of sexual differences only in terms of biology, because they prove that biological differences among men and among women can be much greater than those between men and women.

informs but does not determine which choices the community will make when taking from it the elements to construct their world view.

The notion of artificial kind as artefacts expands Butler and Bloor's understanding of construction even further to give a more 'material' effect. Kusch thus presents an alternative, more analytically developed sense in which we can understand the body as constructed in 'reality', not only created and referred to in our talk, but rather as created in a sense that an artefact is created. The body as an artificial kind is an example in which the self-referential social process creates a reality that then has a degree of independence from the process. I believe that the notion of artificial kind gives a better sense of a 'habitus' as socially constituted like a material artefact. Rejoining the above debate on the stability of the sex habitus, the body in this sense acquires stability in a more artefactual sense that pure social kinds - which could be said to disappear once the self-referential process stops. However, this is not to suggest that socialization converts them into natural kinds type of objects. That is more akin to what Bourdieu's model seems to suggest, namely, that once created they can exist independently of further social intervention.

On the contrary Kusch's model indicates that society creates bodies as artefacts but at the same time there needs to be a constant check and readjustment for them to subsist as such. This is a very important dimension which the notion of artificial kinds highlights. In order to fully address this question I shall reconstruct and compare both models of social consensus and stability and indicate that these two models present a totally different ontological commitment to the nature of social reality.

6.2. Social sanctioning and its constitutive role for individual formation.

I shall start by examining Bourdieu's general sociological model based on the reconstruction I presented in Part II and also the social theory of the strong programme, and will compare their different understanding of the bases of consensus in social life.

Two views of social phenomena: 'deistic' versus 'continuous' creation

Bourdieu defines his sociological position by comparing Descartes' theory of 'continuous creation' and Leibniz's doctrine of pre-established harmony:

"The opposition between, on the one hand, universes of social relations that do not contain within themselves the principle of their own reproduction and have to be kept up by nothing less than a process of continuous creation, and on the other hand, a social world carried along by its *vis insita*²⁰ which frees agents from this endless work of creating or restoring social relations, is directly expressed in the history (...) of social thought"²¹

Of these two Bourdieu explicitly rejects the Cartesian understanding of the world as a 'continuous creation'. He therefore rejects those sociological positions (such as ethnomethodological or interactionist views) which contend that the social world is created and maintained by the continuous activity of individuals. On the contrary, he finds Leibniz's 'deistic creation' view more convincing.²² This envisages the world as created at some point and then endowed with *vis propria* -an internal force- which guides subsequent activity. By using the latter theological analogy, Bourdieu is not advocating a form of nativism or essentialism rather he tries to account for the independence of macro-structural phenomena from day to day individual activity. For him there is a process of 'objectification' of social structural arrangements that, once constituted, "can then subsist without the agents having to recreate them continuously".²³

Central to this 'objectification' is his notion of 'habitus'. Just as the deistic creation view of the world conceives God as an originator who then withdraws from participation in the world, Bourdieu contends that individuals are socialized into a specific habitus, which, once constituted, underlies and guides subsequent activity without any necessary recourse to the original social structures. From this it follows that individuals placed in the same field will logically develop a similar habitus. Since habitus is a set of dispositions which direct individual practices and beliefs, it follows those with a similar habitus will have

²⁰ This may be translated as: Inner force or inertia.

²¹ Bourdieu (1995b: 130). Italics in the original

²² *Deism* is the belief developed by Christian theologians in late 17th century that there is a supreme being who created the world but no longer intervenes in it.

²³ Bourdieu (1995b: 131).

similar practices and beliefs. What is inferred from this model is that self-identity and consensus among individuals are not the result of continuous interactive activity among calculative, self-oriented, differing individuals embedded in processes of negotiating inter-agreement as the performative theory of social institution would contend. Instead, the constitution of self-identity and thus agreement among individuals is brought about by similarly internalized habitus.

In a theoretical position like Bourdieu's a sense of 'belonging' to a particular community - i.e. a sex category - would be the result of sharing a 'homogeneous' habitus with other individuals. In the Bourdieuan model social sanctioning only occurs when an individual moves from the social environment in which their internalized habitus was created, and encounters a group of people with whom they do not share a similar habitus. Others react negatively to the 'intruder', thus serving to 'penalize' individuals' social migration.²⁴ Whereas Bourdieu rejects the notion that social life is established through a process of 'continuous creation' among interacting individuals, this is exactly the position that the performative theory of social institution advocates.

Barnes's metaphor of social life as a 'bootstrapped inductive process' conveys that there is no external reality at the basis of individual's activity, rather it is in and through individuals' learning and categorizing and acting in the world that the crystallisation of the 'social' occurs. Each individual reference act is self-referential and thus performative and social 'reality' results from the aggregate of those self-referential individuals' acts of making references to it. Social life is thus both 'inductive' and 'tautological'. Individuals inductively learn the knowledge categories they use at any given moment in and through contact with others, and social life, considered as a whole, is that which is referred to as such by the collective. We have also seen how this view of reality does not result in the denial of macro-phenomena. Barnes indeed stresses that there is an 'objectification' of the social world and that macro-phenomena ultimately acquire an existence which transcends individuals, but he conveys a different ontological understanding of that 'objectivity'. Social institutions are large social arrangements whose origins and constitution transcend single individual's capacity for knowledge. Indeed when faced with social institutions in which a huge number of individuals are involved (for example, money or in our case sex identity), individuals cannot be aware that it is every single act of use and reference to it which maintains such institution. Despite the fact that the stabilization and 'crystallisation' -that is 'objectification'- of social structures is the result of individuals' acts of reference, at the individual (actor) level the institution is

²⁴ Bourdieu (1979:109). I refer back to the notion of 'hysteresis' described in section on 'Homology and heterology in chapter/section 2 of Part II.

intuitively perceived as existing 'out there', independent of, *and guiding*, individual activity.

We also explained how the exact role of the interactive process is further emphasised by the theory of *meaning finitism*. This holds that individual activity is based on a 'finite' number of earlier instances which can never *fully* determine future applications. Thus, consensus as to the content and meaning of social phenomena (rules, beliefs, categories, and so on) is the product of the re-adjustment which differing individuals undergo when interacting with other individuals, learning and crucially *confirming* their own individual conclusions. The point that the strong programmers stress about socialization processes is that the internalization of collective customs generates a disposition to act in certain ways and not others. Pre-existing features do impact on individual formation, but unlike Bourdieu, socialization is seen to result in *tendencies* which do not contain determinate meanings and patterns of activity. Individuals differ in their activity since individual features, characteristics, and biographies will inevitably result in differential inferential activity of the reality at hand and thus necessarily lead to heterogeneity. Consensus and agreement among these naturally differing individuals is constituted by their sharing and negotiating with one another the content of their individual knowledge. 'Determination' of any social categories or patterns of activity can therefore only be achieved by the 'sanctioning' of the interactive collective. Crucial to the strong programme's position is that individuals can only set *normative* standards in and through interaction. Hence meaning is never *fully* determined but is in a permanent 'mode' of constitution.

This view does not ignore the causal role of pre-existing phenomena, but stresses that the central factor for understanding both micro and macro structural phenomena is the process of 'continuous creation' effected by the performative activity of (calculative and rational but inter-dependent) interactive individuals. If we apply this conception of social life to the particular issue of sex identity it suggests that such identity is not internalized at early stages of life providing a 'generative' basis for activity, but that certain dispositional tendencies are internalised and achieve full determination in each moment of social interaction. Thus the 'open-ended' character of the finitist model equally applies to sex identity. Its content is permanently being established in interactive relationships. In this process of interaction each 'act' or self-reference to a sex identity constitutes the content and inner subjective sense of identity. Stability, consensus and agreement are always *indeterminate* phenomena. This explains why the content, attitudes and forms attached to our sex categories is never fixed, but keeps drifting to new forms.

Such models appear to suggest that there is no social stability. On the contrary, stability and consensus are achieved -and are necessary if social life is to proceed at all- but this

stability is conceived differently to Bourdieuan models in which a pre-existing structural world is seen as the source of determination. The radically different understanding of social life, both at the level of individual macro-phenomena and individual micro-formation is exemplified by Kusch's clock analogy which adopts a multiple, local consensus model of individual clocks displaying the same time due to mutually checking and readjusting themselves with other clocks.²⁵ The constitutive power, thus, is all internal to the interaction of individuals with no outside intervention of a reified entity or mechanism. This leads us to the notion of a 'mutual susceptibility' to being affected by others. This is envisaged as a 'susceptibility' to the sanctioning effected on one another by all the members of a given community.

The constitutive role of sanctioning

If the idea that an internalized disposition can condition people to do *exactly* the same thing is rejected as impossible then something else must explain the emergence of agreement on social categories. The strong programme contend that, whilst dispositional activity *must* have been internalized these dispositions are insufficient to determine collective agreement. Confirming our knowledge with others is an essential part of the constitution of agreement and in this process individual activity is exposed to continual sanctioning:

"In reality we need methods for sanctioning and modifying our individual dispositions to keep them in line. This is mediated by verbal commentary, criticism and evaluation; e.g. by saying you can or you must"²⁶

No sociological theory has emphasised the *constitutive* role of social sanctioning more than the strong programme. Meaning finitism highlights the 'unfinished' nature of social phenomena and argues that that which an individual takes to be the correct way to act is always 'sanctioned' by the other members of the collective. Individual 'rule following', and equally, the subjective notion of a sex habitus and the activity it compels have to be understood not as the result of an internalization of a rule with its own pre-existing meaning, but rather as that which comes about by a process of learning from others following the rule. Thus, the strong programme introduces a further dimension to the phenomenon of collective 'sanctioning'. Namely, that individuals' 'mutual susceptibility' to the sanctioning of others has a powerful emotional dimension, in that humans are 'emotionally vulnerable' to others' judgements and valuations, and particularly to signs of approval and disapproval. Conformity is the product of a system which leads individuals to experience social influences as 'compelling and irresistible'. This is not to say that individuals are inherently drawn to conformity and constantly strive to avoid conflict or

²⁵ I refer to section 3.4.2.

²⁶ Bloor (2001:101)

rift. This would contradict the empirical evidence that discordant and antagonistic attitudes and opinions are part and parcel of social life. We can better understand these apparently paradoxical phenomena by re-examining Kusch's analysis of 'platitudes' and Thomas Scheff's 'deference-emotion system'.

Kusch's analysis of stability formation via sanctioning mechanisms

It is worth recalling here Kusch emphasis on how social sanctioning is at the bases of the formation of the cultural world of platitudes.²⁷ Kusch analysis of the taken for granted nature of platitudes presented above reveals different aspects of the constitutive power of sanctioning mechanisms. First, there is a level of collective knowledge which transcends reflexive awareness and becomes that 'which is taken for granted', self-evident and almost naturalized. This is a level of knowledge, beliefs and habits which is normally not put into question by individuals. As mentioned above for individuals immersed in a particular cultural universe it appears irrational, incoherent or even insane to contradict some of these beliefs (e.g., sadness induces laughter). Kusch reminds us that the world of platitudes is a strongly protected collective good because it establishes the standards of rationality of a particular collective. Thus to deviate from them generally encounters strong opposition from other members of the community.

Secondly and related to this first feature is the fact that owing to the collective self-protection of their own universe of platitudes, these beliefs acquire a solid stable nature. To modify them requires considerable time and effort from sub-collectives which personal interests in modifying them. Let's recall for example that the notion that the orientation of our sexual desires may be directed to the same sex individuals still appears to a considerable amount of cultures and collectives to be a 'natural' aberration. The fact, therefore, that the collective adheres so forcefully to their taken for granted world of platitudes has two powerful effects: it constitutes those particular beliefs into stable notions and, by virtue of doing so, it transforms them in transcendent entities immune to the reflexive capacity of the individuals of a particular collective. Indeed this effects a process of 'naturalization' of socially constructed notions which acquire an ontological status of pre-existing, self-evident, immutable truths.

By adhering to their collective universe of platitudes with their practices or/and accounts, individuals tend to constantly reinforce and stabilise them.. Following the performative theory, thus, one can see how every single individual action further re-constitutes the universe of platitudes and how from the actors' point of view they appear to exist as independent to our activity or even as determining our activity.

²⁷ See section page 167 in section 3.4.2

By highlighting the powerful role of social sanctioning when it comes to protect the world of platitudes, Kusch aim however is to reveal that despite their solid, stable and hardly mutable nature these taken for granted beliefs are socially constructed in nature and dependent on the continuous practices of individuals activity. Indeed, conformity to generally accepted beliefs tends to be rewarded and non-conformity discouraged via accusations of irrationality.

The social sanctioning experienced by those who dissent from platitudes may extend to the 'accusation' of madness at its most extreme, but usually takes less extreme but equally effective forms. A plethora of emotional sanctioning mechanisms exert social pressure on individuals to conform to commonly held beliefs and norms. I have noted already Goffman's work on impression management²⁸ has been used by Barnes to emphasise our susceptibility to the positive or negative reactions of others. The analysis of our susceptibility to forms of deference and recognition has been extensively developed by Thomas Scheff, an authors who convincingly highlights the fundamental role of emotional sanction in the formation of our sense of self.

Thomas Scheff and the 'deference-emotion system'.²⁹

Scheff core argument is that, although it is cast as a negligible emotion, shame is at the centre of all human contact and the organization of human interaction and social life. Scheff is particularly concerned to highlight the role of emotions like shame and pride as fundamental to social bonding and the construction of the subjective sense of identity. Shame, as an individually experienced emotion, also functions as a signal of distance between persons, allowing us to regulate how close we are to others.

From a different angle Scheff adopts a similar position to Kusch's notion of platitudes with his 'deference-emotion system'. He stresses that conformity to exterior norms is rewarded by deference and feelings of pride, and non-conformity is punished by lack of deference and shame. As a result humans tend to conform to the immediate collective in a semi aware fashion. Adopting Goffman's emphasis on face-to-face interaction, Scheff expands it by maintaining that the propensity to be susceptible to others' evaluation is not only universal but may also be biologically based.³⁰ Citing numerous studies Scheff suggests that humans may have an inbuilt, innate, tendency to be 'social', understood as a

²⁸ See section 1.4. and 3.4.2.

²⁹ See Scheff *passim*. Scheff draws on a variety of theorists, included, Goffman, Cooley, MacDougall, Darwin and Lewis who have all stressed the different social dimensions of the phenomena of shame.

³⁰ Scheff quotes a number of studies and theories including Darwin's assertion that blushing is a universal human peculiarity.

capacity to be oriented to others by a mutual awareness towards others' responses.³¹ Shame, for Scheff, is that emotion which most clearly highlights human 'sociability'.

He particularly draws attention to the significance of others' evaluations for the constitution of self-perception. Shame is *the* social emotion which is most significant in constituting our sense of self, he notes, "arising as it does out of the monitoring of one's own actions by viewing one's self from the standpoint of others".³² Continuously checking others' perceptions of ourselves serves to constitute individuals in accordance with commonly held beliefs. Scheff contends that the deference-emotion system explores less visible forms of social monitoring than those traditionally stressed. Rather than the visible forms of formal sanctioning and coercive techniques of social control, Scheff argues that the system of rewards and punishment which collectives use to negatively or positively sanction individual behaviour takes an informal appearance which conceals it from conscious awareness.³³

What I wish to highlight from Scheff's analysis is his insistence that this 'deference-emotion system' acts between and within interactants and efficiently functions to guarantee the alignment of thoughts, feelings and actions among individuals. I find Scheff's analysis remarkable in its sociological treatment of individual personal sentiments like feelings of self-esteem for the development and establishment of our sense of identity. Self-esteem for Scheff is "the balance between pride and shame in a person's life"³⁴. The result of this ubiquitous deference-emotion system is "the ability of humans to constantly monitor their own selves from the point of view of others".³⁵

Reconstructing Butler's abject.

To return to the main topic of my discussion I shall compare Kusch and Scheff's with the Butlerian notion of the 'abject' as fundamental to the constitution of our sense of (sex) identity. Butler draws on the significant constitutive role of our sense of identity as conforming to the 'heterosexual matrix' standards of the collective. The heterosexual

³¹ The key phrase here is 'inbuilt *tendency*'. In other words this is not a biologically determinist position. It is also worth repeating that neither I nor the Strong Programmers deny the existence of biology. The fact that a tendency is biologically present does not explain its social significance.

³² Scheff, 1988:398

³³ Following Goffman, Scheff stresses the prominent role of the earnest avoidance of embarrassment in every social encounter. Shame is experienced as such an unbearable emotion that it has been 'tabooed' from explicit acknowledgement. People feel embarrassed by others' embarrassment, or ashamed to be ashamed, such that the tendency is to disguise or ignore that such feelings arise. Here Scheff can be read to indicate that the reluctance to acknowledge our feelings of embarrassment overtly is another key aspect in understanding the hidden character of the constitutive character of individual activity.

³⁴ Scheff, 1988:399

³⁵ Scheff, 1988:400

matrix³⁶ establishes a set of characteristics which define what is taken to be a man or a woman, and establishes as a platitude that the 'natural' direction of our sexual desire is heterosexual. Thus, until rather recently and still prevalent in certain communities, our cultural linguistic universe conveys the belief that 'naturally' individuals are sexually attracted to people of the opposite 'sex'. The sexual categories established within the heterosexual matrix could thus be seen to function like platitudes, that is, like standards of *acceptable* identities. They establish what is considered 'rational' or 'irrational' behaviour. The need to conform to the platitudes of the heterosexual matrix is experienced as 'obligatory', because people who violate or contradict such platitudes will be mostly marginalized and rejected: homosexuals, transsexuals, bisexuals and so on. Our subjective and more or less unconsciously experienced fear of becoming the 'object', that is, excluded from the accepted knowledge standards of society, gives rise to constant self-regulation of individual activity and which is constitutive of our self-ascription of inner sense of self as a man or a woman.

The arbitrariness and performative (self-referential) nature of sex identities is concealed by the stability that results from the permanent control exercised on individuals' differing behaviour by the establishment of standards of 'rationality' and 'irrationality' and the emotional sanctioning in social encounters that ensues. Such permanent control, is usually hidden to our awareness due to the 'common-sensical' character that the world of platitudes appear to possess, thus results in a reification of the binary division of sex identity. Such control routinizes particular tendencies of 'sex' category application that effects its ontological 'objectification' as an external entity. Naturally differing individual desires, actions, sense of individual self and sexual identity are constantly held in place by the notion of the 'object' -the outsider- that the boundaries of an accepted 'heterosexual matrix' tacitly convey. The 'heterosexual matrix', which in Butler's analytical framework refers to those taken for granted cultural beliefs through which we define the normative content of our sex/gender categories, is continuously constituted by the performative effect of naming who 'belongs' and who is 'excluded' from it. Our sex categories are partly constituted by establishing what they are not: i.e. the hermaphrodite, drag, homosexual, lesbian, etc. The performative thus constitutes 'belonging' by establishing non-belonging through the rejection of acts and practices which do not conform the normalized view of sex identity. Every act of repudiation of the 'outsider' serves to constitute the 'insider', that is, our taken for granted sex identity as male or female.

³⁶Later on she shifts from using 'heterosexual matrix' to 'heterosexual hegemony' to avoid misinterpretations of her theory of totalizing an external arbitrary fixed and not open to rearticulation. See Butler (1994: 36)

Conclusions: Sanctioning protects stability but does not overrule dissent:

One of the most significant conclusions from the reconstruction above is that (sex) identity is never fixed in any way or similar for all individuals in a way that would allow smooth social interaction without need for further negotiation. We have seen that this is exactly what Bourdieu's model conveys with his notion of an internalized embodied habitus. In the Performative Theory of Social Institutions³⁷ individuals are never fully socialized. Rather, the independent, rational, calculative beings constantly monitor one another and achieve consensus in the process. Consequently, there will always be room for potential disagreement. In other words, this view understands dissent to be *inherent* to social life. In a new situation, or in the same one but with differently acquired habits or categories of knowledge, individuals' inductive activity may lead them to develop different opinions from the rest or from their own earlier accepted views.

The threat of sanctions from the collective occurs through a myriad of mechanisms which are also collectively constituted and manipulated. Some individuals may develop disregard for some sanctioning threats and act in opposition to certain collectively established norms or behaviour. Calculative independent capacities do not disappear under the socialization process rather they are the precondition for the establishment of social life. Individuals do not comply, conform, and go along in agreement with the rest of the community due to an internalized system of dispositions, as Bourdieu's 'deistic' view has it. Instead, individuals acquire some dispositional tendencies which only underdetermine future activity and do not override their inherent inductive learning capacities. In some circumstances, and particularly in those areas of society which are as strong a collective good as the binary division of sex identity, the tendency to 'belong' rather than to 'diverge' has in great part to be seen as the product of the compelling pressure to conform among mutually susceptible individuals. Returning to Kusch's 'continuous creation' clock model we can see that social sanctioning is fundamental in readjusting various single outputs such that individuals ultimately share similar values. The force of cultural platitudes exerted upon individuals to conform should not distract us from the fact that despite individuals' 'sharing' similar values none of the 'clocks' has 'identical' output to the others. If social interaction is understood as an activity of readjustment through individual sharing of knowledge this necessarily implies that there is *constant* adjustment and *constant change*.

Barnes makes this point forcefully by insisting that we should understand social order not as 'harmony' or 'stability' but as a 'pattern'³⁸. That social life presents a pattern does

³⁷ By now I hope to have established that Butler's theoretical position and that of Barnes, Bloor and Kusch, share the same analytical commitments. So I will tacitly include Butler in referring to the performative theory of social institutions from now on.

³⁸ Barnes (1995: 68)

not imply fixidity, however, so the key issue is how this patterned interaction comes to exist. It is clear that the strong programme sees social patterns as emerging through interaction which creates, and *re-creates* previously established background knowledge.

Strong Programmers adopt the 'continuous creation' view which is rejected by Bourdieu, and the performative theory formulates a notion of individual features, embodied or mental, as 'social institutions'. Social life is in a permanent state of constitution, in which transformation is always occurring and in which social stability and fixidity is the result of the self-referential performative processes, that constantly reiterate and sanction practices (verbal or otherwise) by the individuals of a given collective.

This model highlights an important feature of social life: if life is in permanent constitution there is an inherent 'space' for negotiation of new forms of social organisation and, thus, individual's sense of self, identity or subjective experience. The provisional, open-ended nature of individuals' subjective sense of identity is a fundamental corollary of the performative theory of social institutions. Contrary to Bourdieu's model, this identity is understood as in permanent constitution, open to future negotiations and transformations, but heavily circumscribed by the force of social sanctioning.

6.3. The micro-dynamics of identity formation: Sex habitus and the formation of an inner sense of identity.

In this section I shall address how perceiving the habitus as an artificial kind helps to develop another undertheorized area in Bourdieu's model, namely, that of identity formation at the inner subjective level.

For Butler the idealization of an inner sense of identity achieves coherence from the performativity of the body as a sex identity. Our sense of a sex identity is a 'fantasy' that originates in every act of the body. Butler, thus, raises a question which is uncritically taken for granted in Bourdieu's work: the conventional and not universal status of the sex categories of womanhood and manhood. Butler's work, as already noted, indicates that feminist theory appears to assume that within the diversity of human experiences there is a common identity between all 'embodied' beings socially positioned and categorized as 'women'. She warns that the notion of 'being' a woman is more complex than it appears for it refers not only to the social category but to an inner sense of self which, according to her performative account, has to be seen as a culturally conditioned and constructed subjective identity. In this light there is no unified category of 'woman' around which feminism can ground a universal political agenda.³⁹

The category of sex habitus reconstructed in conjunction with an artificial kind of reality helps to clarify what Bourdieu implies in his statement that the body is a 'thinking animal', that is that bodily experiences and practices constitute mental experiences and practices. This process however should be rescued from its individualism and rooted in the collective understanding of bodily practices. The inner sense of self thus has to be interpreted as constituted through collectively sanctioned practices.

The social interventions, which the notion of artificial kind mentions when talking about the constitution of an external artefact and alter-referent, refer explicitly to those physical or non-physical interventions that create a new kind of mental experience.⁴⁰ Culture conveys practices which shape both physically and psychologically. In a Foucauldian turn Kusch notes that: "it is because culture shapes our bodies that it shapes our brains; and it is because culture shapes our brains -literally causing some areas to grow more, others less that at least some states of the brain might well be called social

³⁹ For Butler any attempt to define a universal category of woman would inevitably be normative in character and legitimize some views over others. Consequently it would end up becoming exclusionary.

⁴⁰ I refer back to section 3.4.1. or Part II where I summarize Kusch's understanding of the conception of an artificial kind of artefact whereby permanent mental states are understood as artefacts. However a reading of such literature may seem to advocate a form of essentialism which is not my aim. I attempt to locate the connection between mind and body more than to establish a permanent and fixed transformation in the mind.

states".⁴¹ Expanding the Bourdieuan notion of the body as a thinking animal, then, bodily changes may result in new states of consciousness and cognitive capacities.⁴²

If we view the formation of an inner sense of identity (as a result of the formation of a sex habitus) as an artificial kind this helps us to understand how our sense of identity is the product of existing beliefs and practices -verbal or otherwise- which classify an individual according to a finite number of earlier examples, habits and judgements. In particular our inner sense of self has to be understood as the result of practices which act out platitudes and of grammatical constructions that are predicated on the existence of subjects within sex categories.

Kusch's artificial kind concept, which explains the constitution of a mental event as an artefact, can help to further understand Butler's contention that the subject is an 'effect of grammar'⁴³. In other words the permanent citing and practising of platitudes, which govern the 'I' talk ascribed to one's sex, constitute the subject it is supposed to originate from. The utterance, 'I am a woman', presupposes that behind the utterances exists a pre-existing subject identified as a woman. Butler, and Kusch as well, would contend that the illusion of a subject prior to the utterance is precisely an effect of 'grammar'. However, that very same performative power brings the object of the verbal references into 'reality'. The self-validating character of self-referential performative utterances makes reality conform to the references to it. Thus, in ultimate terms, the sense of identity is constituted, and most significantly perceived, as a 'real' artefact. The iterative character of routinized practices renders utterances *descriptive* in the last instance. In this sense the subject understood as a 'sexed subject' is an artificial kind because it is a construction that, once instilled in the brain, is durable and dispositional.

Whereas Bourdieu focuses on group relations and implicitly presents individual formation as epiphenomenal and *posterior* to collective identity formation, Butler presents us with a view of individual identity formation as the core of social configurations. When Butler criticises Lacan's notion of the law for reifying identification processes and argues that identity formation is the result of an unstable process of reiteration and a constant re-enactment which is at the bases of patriarchy, she conceptualises social construction as occurring from the bottom up (from practices to norms) rather than following the Bourdieuan, top down, position (from norms to practices). This is why Butler's framework pays a lot of attention to the micro-phenomena of (sex) identity formation, whereas very little of this is found in Bourdieu.

⁴¹ Kusch (1999:359)

⁴² Neuroscientific accounts like that of Rose (1993) point at such connections between bodies and minds. Processes of learning change the physiological structure of the brain resulting thus in new and different cognitive capacities.

⁴³ Butler (1993)

Bourdieu's shifting attention to the issue of gender, in latter stages of his work, is more concerned to 'prove' his theory of 'arbitrary' universal⁴⁴ than to develop an analysis of identity formation. Butler's work on the contrary, particularly viewed under the analytical tenets of the strong programme, is particularly concerned to describe how individual formation results in the constitution of an individual psychological core, and how sex/gender identity is essential to it.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ As Fowler (2003) has rightly point out, Bourdieu's interest is to show the relative autonomy of gender domination and its enduring structural constancy irrespective of mode production.

⁴⁵ "There is no human who is not sexed: sex qualifies as a necessary attribute" Butler (1990a: 111).

6.4. Reconstructing the key ingredients of the habitus seen as an artificial kind.

Reconstructed under the insights of the artificial kinds notion a sex habitus has to be understood as *social* in genesis, and thus *conventional*. Specific biological features are operationalized according to contextual cultural practices and systems of beliefs. Neither it is possible to conceive a sex habitus as an ahistorical universal. Conventional does not mean 'arbitrary', within different specific cultures the standards and norms which define particular sex habitus are powerfully constrained according to the collectively taken beliefs and practices. Individually speaking, an internalized sex habitus is compelled to be somewhat coherent with that of the other members of a given community if it is not to give rise to negative sanctioning.

A sex habitus is *embodied*, but its '*materiality*' is self-referential and performative. It acquires its 'material' existence and 'objectivity' through the reiterative, self-referring activity of individuals interacting within collectively accepted embodied forms. Also the sexed body is an 'artefact' kind of reality in the sense that it is transformed by the self-referential process and becomes another independent materiality. Society is involved in constructing the body at the level of its 'knowability' as well as at the level of its corporeal delimitation. Social practices not only categorize the body but act upon it. Under the artificial kind theory the synthesis between nature and society is better accomplished. External material reality is taken into account by the artificial kinds theory, but not understood as pre-existing our categories about it (naive realism). Rather a sex habitus is taken to be a 'natural' and 'objective' reality, within the community of knowers, due to the continuous self-referential (performative) activity of the collective which acts and beliefs it to be such. The notion of artificial kinds and the performative theory of social institutions help to develop Bourdieu by clarifying the internal contradiction that may arise when linking the category of sex (commonly related to biological factors) with that of habitus (understood as purely a social construction). These two can now be put together if we think in terms of artificial kind which incorporates the materiality of bodies but plaing the 'social' at its bases.

The *durable nature of a sex habitus* is thus seen under a different light, not the result of early internalized and fixed pre-existing structural phenomena, as Bourdieu's model conveys, but rather as that which is crystallised from moment to moment and made stable by the sanctioning of a collective of mutually susceptible individuals. Thus durability is not to be seen as 'permanent' stability but as transitory equilibrium. Sex habitus is 'unfinished' and 'open-ended' in character, that is, never 'fully' defined or formed -and always in permanent drift according to new contingencies modifying the

self-referential process of individual practices operating in particular social settings. The 'content' and 'form' ascribed to a sexed habitus has to be understood relative to local and contextual social conventions. What it means to have a sexed habitus has to be seen as culturally contingent. This is the result of human activity, cultural schemes and categories which are constantly reformulated and so is the artefactual nature of the body they produce.⁴⁶ Therefore drift and transformation have to be seen as inherent in the process of habitus constitution and not, as Bourdieu's contends, that habitus transformation can only happen in moments of 'crisis' when the conventional character of habitus surfaces into the consciousness of individuals and thus opens the possibility of reflexive intervention.

The individualistic bias inherent in the Bourdieu's model is also usefully reconstructed under the artificial kinds insights. The socialization into a habitus constitutes tendencies, not as those which once created can function in isolation, but rather as those which are collectively inter-dependent and constantly 'updating' any individual differing activity with the collective.

The *transposable nature of a sex habitus* is radically reconstructed under the artificial kind model. Individuals carry routinized dispositional activity into different contexts but one which, crucially, cannot *fully* determine activity in new situations. The phenomenon of 'transposability', thus, has to be seen in different light to Bourdieu's model. Not as carrying a definite sense of identity or behaviour but as predisposing individuals to certain activities and not others. Furthermore it can be modified, and empirical reality proves it is, when the individual is exposed to new 'training' activity of new situations.

To understand *sex habitus dispositions as 'formative' types of action* helps to rework Bourdieu's emphasis that a habitus disposition is only fully realized in 'activity'. It is only through activity and interaction with others that a sex habitus and the practices it compels is 'installed' in the individual (subjective and corporeal) realm. Habitus activity understood as 'formative' actions -that is performative in nature- constitute that which they act, that is, a sex habitus. The 'actions' of a sex habitus cannot be defined as pre-verbal and pre-conscious -beyond conscious awareness by individual actors- rather a routinized tendency allows for non-conscious activity but action is always amenable to verbal explanation. Thus, by moving from context to context individuals continually

⁴⁶ We have seen that habitus applied to a notion of 'class' is less problematic because it is recognized that there is no biological data which 'informs' our class belonging. However when extending the notion of class habitus to a sex habitus, Bourdieu experiences problems in expanding the concept logically and coherently because he has not developed an analytical model to explain the nature of the social construction of bodies. The notion of Artificial Kinds helps to unravel the constitution of a sex habitus. By the same token and using the same analytical framework we could also apply it to class habitus, an age habitus, an ethnic habitus, and so on, as artefactual in nature.

reconstitute their sex habitus and therefore their actions. This, in turn effects a modification of the macro-structural phenomena via the self-referential input that modified habitus activity of individuals effect on the social environment. Habitus activity, understood as social institutions are formative, self-referring activity which performatively constitute the sex habitus they originate from and the external social environment which individuals inhabit. Under this light the *re-productive* character of a sex habitus (that is, as reinforcing previously internalized macro-structural phenomena) is transformed into *re-constitutive* (as transforming -if only slightly- prior macro-structural arrangements in and through the self-referential performative activity of the habitus).

We saw, in section 2.1.6, that Bourdieu conceives *habitus as relational*. In Bourdieu's model this 'relationality' is established between individuals with already constituted habitus dispositions that encounter others in a social space -fields- already constituted with particular symbolical hierarchical structure. Thus, in and through relationships with others, individuals come to realize the social 'value' -capitals- attached to their dispositions. This model conveys the social world as made of relationships between already formed objects. On the other hand the performative theory acknowledges that individuals come to interact with each other with some dispositional activity but that this only under-determines future activity. Individuals' interactive exchanges modify prior forms and new negotiations reconfigure both the habitus and the field where those habitus interact. This position, thus, sees 'relations' not as interactive activity occurring among already constituted objects but rather as crucially at the bases of constituting those objects.

7

Identifying 'power': 'to be' and 'to have' power

"It may seem a paradox, but it is nonetheless the simple truth, to say that on the contrary, the decisive historical events take place among us, the anonymous masses. The most powerful dictators, ministers, and generals are powerless against the simultaneous mass decisions taken individually and almost unconsciously by the population at large (...) Decisions that influence the course of history arise out of the individual experiences of thousands or millions of individuals."⁰

In this section I shall address different aspects of the political dimension of the discussion of the body and sex identity as socially constructed. It is my chief aim to indicate that Bourdieu's structuralist model presents a radically different understanding of power relationships than those approaches – such as Foucault's and that of the performative theory of social institutions - which understand social life as constituted by the interactive activity of a collective. I shall also emphasise the methodological implications of both views for the identification of particular empirical instances of power relationships.

I shall begin by describing Bourdieu's understanding of social domination and his implicit conception of power, and how this conception bears upon his understanding of the nature of agency and individual practices, social determination and resistance, and the sources of social change and stability. My principal focus will be on the role of the body in power relations which Bourdieu presents.

7.1. Bourdieu's 'external' view of power: to 'have' power.

My reconstruction of the key elements of Bourdieu's theory of power have been outlined in section 2.2. and 2.3. and can be summarized as follows:

•*A conception of power as 'domination'*: This is the key ingredient of Bourdieu's theory of power and that which gives shape to his whole theoretical edifice. His form of domination is 'symbolic'. That is, the dominant sectors of society do not engage directly

⁰ Haffner (2003)

in the overt-coercive exercise of power but rather power is 'invisible' in that none of the parties involved are aware of it. This is the result of an internalized embodied habitus, both by dominant and dominated sectors of society, which automatically displays the structural hierarchy present in the social structure. What governs the dynamics between different groups of individuals is thus a struggle to maximize profits according to the capitals which a particular acquired habitus possesses in relation to a social field. Bourdieu's theory of power locates him in the tradition of 'conflict' theorists, that is, those theories which envisage the dynamics of society as driven by conflict between different groups (classes in his theory). In Bourdieu it is conflict and the struggle to maximize one's class profits which is at the core of social dynamics and which establishes which groups are constituted as dominant or dominated.¹

•**A zero-sum view of power:** What determines the outcome of this struggle is the 'distinctive' value of the differential group habitus. Power is thus endowed to those who possess the distinctive capital in a given field, resulting in the powerlessness of the other non-distinctive capitals. The struggle among groups is directed by maintaining the status quo of the dominant capitals over the others. Bourdieu's economicist view of the dynamics of individuals practices as geared to maximize and accumulate more 'distinctive' capitals is also located in a zero-sum logic in which accumulation can only be accessed by devaluing others' capitals. Thus social inequality is the result of this unequal distribution of capitals and the capacity to maximize profits according to the value (thus capacity) granted to different forms of capitals in a given field. Individuals enter into 'competition' in a given social space with already unequal capacities for accumulation. A given field is conceived as having limited resources which are at the basis of the struggle between groups. Social dynamics cannot produce further resources which can benefit the whole community of individuals inhabiting a field.

¹ It is worth introducing the historical context in which Bourdieu may have been operating when he was reworking his notion of domination. Although he appears to go against views like that of Althusser's which he sees as granting determining causality to macro-structural social arrangements over individual practice (see Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:8) and wants to locate 'inside' the practices of the individuals the logic of the macro-world, he may have inherited from this period his understanding of power as domination. From what I have already argued it could be inferred that Bourdieu's structuralist account, despite his denial, appears not to be very radically distinct to the Althusserian one because by conceiving habitus as the internalization of 'external structures' he is in fact not profoundly denying structural approaches which 'externalize' structure. Within the same analytical tradition I suspect that he also may have inherited the particular conception of power he subscribes to, that is, power understood only as domination, a conception which dominated the intellectual world in the France of the structuralist Marxists (e.g. Althusser and Poulantzas). Those authors explicitly established that when talking about power one should distinguish between the phenomena of 'pouvoir' -domination of (particularly) one class over another - and '*pouissance*', a capacity to influence others which refers to those omnipresent activities which are not relevant politically. See Poulantzas (1978). Of course, under this view one could see why feminists within the tradition started by Millet (1991), who argue that the 'personal is the political', may have been operating within this background and trying to apply macro-structural class theories of power to the practices of daily life between sexes, arguing that even those apparently non 'politically' significant forms of power (e.g. between husband and wife, parents and children and so on) are profoundly invested with power understood as 'domination'.

• ***A power theory which conveys a singular society:*** Both the conflictual nature of social dynamics and the zero-sum character of power convey a notion of a society dominated by a singular symbolic hierarchy. That is, an external pre-existing social structure incorporates, and defines and shapes, all activity encountered in the social space. All group dynamics are directed by a hierarchical modality of society in which some individuals possess the valuable resources which others in lower positions of the hierarchical structure strive to possess. 'Lower' (working) classes and 'middle' classes constantly aspire to the positions of those groups located at the top of the hierarchy (upper-middle classes in Bourdieu's use of traditional class terminology). This is the result of the fact that society is one big symbolic structure which defines the value of all the groups' habitus features and consequently guides the dynamics between them. Thus his theory of the 'economy' of practices is based on this conception of 'moving up', that is, the logic of individual practices in general follows the logic of maximizing the value of capitals (symbolic value) which may help to move up in the social hierarchy. Social inequality thus is also defined as the incapacity to access the goods of those who are in higher positions in the hierarchy: not only their potentially powerful capacities but the goods those positions entail. (i.e. a particular 'dominant' culture imposes its taste for particular art forms, clothes, sport, intellectual cognitive capacities, social relations and so on to the other forms of culture of other classes)².

• ***An 'external' conception of power:*** What guides individual activity and what grants some groups power over others comes from an already structured society which exists in an objectified form as external to individual interactive activity. Power is granted to some (groups of) individuals by virtue of their structural position in the social field. Power clearly lies outside individual activity and guides it, rather than being the result of it.³ His formula to describe social dynamics and specifically individual practice, that is, (habitus)(capital)+(field) = practice, is intended to convey that practice is the result of two *already* 'structured' components, that of habitus and field. Following the logic of this argument, power as established in the first part of the equation is also external to the practices of individuals and acts as the guiding force.

² See Bourdieu (1994a:395) Without using the notion of 'singular society' Lane has very insightfully described and revealed that in Bourdieu's picture of society culture is only one dominant type. Bourdieu implicitly refuses to acknowledge subgroup cultures as independent and valued in their own right, and conceives working classes as not 'having art', because their immediacy to their material does not grant the necessary capacity of distant contemplation which understanding 'art' requires. Lane (2000:162-165). Fowler has also noted that Bourdieu's disregard of the autonomy and value of 'popular culture' is a flaw in his model. Fowler (2000)

³ "the interactions, which are accepted at their face value by people of an empiricist disposition, conceal the structures that are realized in them. It is one of those cases in which the visible, that which is immediately given, conceals the invisible which determines it. One thus forgets that the truth of the interaction is never entirely to be found in interaction". Bourdieu, (1990a:127)

As a corollary of the above, another dimension of this 'external' conception of power is further revealed by the very same explanatory equation used to explain practices. In this view, individuals come to interact with already constituted capitals which operate in a field already structured - mainly by universal objective forces like that of struggle for social recognition. Individuals thus come to interact with already constituted 'amounts' of power, that is, individuals *have more or less* power.

The analytical implications of Bourdieu's view of power for the explanation of social phenomena are as follows:

•**Agency and individual practices:** Following the same formula as above [(habitus)(capital)+(field) = practice] we can extract different conclusions. As we have already noted, in Bourdieu individual practice is always epiphenomenal to the group. He does not conceive something as a genuine individual practice,⁴ but rather individual practices correspond to those of the similarly constituted class. Due to the nature of the internalization of structural constraints mainly through the body, practices are never reflexive, that is they are non-intentional and non-conscious. Practices in Bourdieu are 'never the product of genuine strategic intention'. However they are driven by the economic logic of struggle for accumulation, and if that appears to contradict his notion of non-intentional action, he resorts to his power theory to say that individuals come to the field with different amounts of power (capitals) which allow the dynamics of this struggle not to surface to the conscious awareness of individuals. In a sense, in Bourdieu's, power has a life of its own, which guides individual practices from outside. Power is thus conceived as constituting social practices and social dynamics, rather than practices and social dynamics constituting power.

•**Social determination and resistance:** As a corollary of the above Bourdieu insists that resistance to domination has also to be 'external' to the system in place. By virtue of the internalization of a habitus which contains all the 'doxic' domain of the taken for granted world, individuals cannot be aware of their dominated positions. They just accept these as the 'way things are', and make of their lived situations a 'virtue out of necessity'. Literally they cannot think of situations other those which they inhabit, and those in the most precarious situation are 'denied' such a vision because rather than blaming the 'objective order' they see their own personal inadequacies as the explanation for their deprived situation. In Bourdieu's model resistance thus only occurs in moments when profound social crises reveal the 'arbitrary' nature of the objective world, and oppressed individuals perceive that their social position can be reversed. This kind of 'raising of consciousness' that Bourdieu implies is also revealed by his notion of

⁴ See section 2.2.1.

'socioanalysis', a process of achieving awareness of the arbitrary laws of the social world to which the sociologist can contribute by revealing to dominated individuals what their structured subjectivity cannot perceive.

•**Change and stability:** Bourdieu's theory of power results in a picture of society and social practices which are compelled to reproduce each other. Social life features a dynamic of permanent stability. For the most part change only occurs in the forms of domination and the 'class-fractions' which dominate the social field. Change is never as profound as to modify the deeper structures of domination. Thus social life is regular and predictable because external structures operate *within* the very same practices of the agents via the internalized habitus.⁵

•**The role of the body in Bourdieu's theory of power:** The most important aspect to highlight from Bourdieu's model of power is his emphasis on the role of the body in perpetuating structures of domination. Bourdieu's entire model rests on the notion of the embodiment of a habitus which is at the core of the 'naturalization' of the structures of domination. The corporeal internalization of social structures effects a further 'objectification' of relationships of domination. His notion of 'symbolic violence' attempts to indicate that power relationships, by virtue of being located at the non-verbal, non-reflexive level of the corporeal, become hidden to individual consciousness, becoming part of the 'doxic' realm of *the taken for granted*. Consequently the 'truth' of structures of domination becomes invisible to the individuals participating in social life.

Whereas Bourdieu's emphasis on the embodiment of social structures is an important contribution to the understanding of the phenomena of power and social life in general, his model contains some important contradictions. He cannot provide an empirical understanding of groups interested in different social goods and goals. In Bourdieu's 'singular society' the same symbolic hierarchy governs the entirety of a society. Groups' 'distinctive' attributes possess the same value according to a common classificatory system that cuts across the whole stratified society. However, this homogeneity cannot be reconciled with the fact that the structural laws which, according to Bourdieu, govern relationships of domination among classes, are different to those which govern relationships of domination between genders. Whereas class dynamics are based on differential economic and cultural conditions of existence, masculine domination appears to be based on a more symbolic structural feature like the acquisition of a 'libido dominandi'. That a working class male 'dominated' by an upper-middle class male is

⁵ Bourdieu has repeatedly likened his model to that of Chomsky's internalized 'deep linguistic structures' but with the difference that he wants to define those structures not as an anthropological universal but rather as historically constituted. See Bourdieu (1985a:13), (1990a: 9-13) and (1995b: 38-57)

located in a more dominant position than the female counterpart of the latter is something which, in empirical terms, remains unresolved in Bourdieu's model.

In general Bourdieu appears to suggest that in a symbolic power relationship neither the power holder nor the power subject are aware of the relationship of domination in which they are involved. His notion of 'misrecognition' thus raises some analytical problems when considering particular instances of power relationships of domination in which the agents involved are very much aware of the oppressive situation. It could be argued that Bourdieu wants to focus specifically on those power relationships in which the parties involved are unaware of its existence. In this situation however, it is difficult to envisage a specific empirical situation in which the dominated overtly feel that an alternative social order is necessary to fulfil their interests. Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence as conveying that the dominated accepts the power relationship of oppression as the way things are would not account for the tendency of social groups to rail against existing orders. Class struggle, or for that matter feminist movements, would have no place in Bourdieu's model of symbolic power. In those specific instances the power holders are overtly seen to exploit the power subject to fulfil their own interests. For Bourdieu such awareness is not possible since the very nature of symbolic violence is to be 'misrecognized', that is, hidden to consciousness.

Moreover, what would apply to a definition of class struggle cannot be applied to a definition of gender struggle. As feminists have pointed out, economic class interests cannot be seen as applying to gender oppression. It is difficult to argue that, for example, a white British upper-middle class man shares more economic 'interests' with a lower working class black immigrant than with the white upper middle class woman who enjoys a life of economic ease by exploiting men and women from the lower class. Thus the principal problems with Bourdieu's theory of power are, first, the tendency to ignore the conscious awareness of particular instances of social inequality and exploitation, and, second, to align into unifying social categories (classes or genders) the variety of individuals which, due to their lived experiences, are united in specific political struggles to further common interests. In doing so Bourdieu precludes the reality and feasibility of plausible contextualized and informed political activity. Politically speaking Bourdieu's subjects are social 'dopes' lacking any reflexive agency.

Given that Bourdieu's core task has been to attempt to overcome structuralist accounts which locate in the external macro-structural world the logics of individual activity, by internalizing these logics into the notion of habitus as the 'generative' principle of activity, it may appear as contradictory to describe his conception of power -and as a consequence his notion of structure- as 'external'. I have already suggested some of the internal logics of his analytical model which lead to a conceptualization of him as a

deterministic structuralist trapped in his own model of 'internalization of the external' and therefore not fulfilling the synthesis he aims to achieve. I hope further to reveal this analytical insufficiency by introducing how the 'performative' theorists explain the notion of 'power' and its different social dimensions. With this I attempt further to assess the radical differences between a sociological model like Bourdieu's and that of the performative theorists. I shall start by delineating Barnes' conception of power and establishing its fundamental differences to that of Bourdieu. In doing so, I also attempt to demonstrate the superior analytical merits of the latter by highlighting two aspects. First, how power can be seen as internal to the aggregate of knowledgeable individuals envisaged with inductive calculative capacities to understand the power relationships in which they are involved. Second, I shall suggest that the Barnesian analytical framework is better suited to understand the empirical realities of power relationships, which become obscured by using a theoretical framework like Bourdieu's.

If Barnes allows us to highlight the fundamental issues regarding the relationship between power, systems of beliefs and knowledge, and calculative agency, he does not account for the role of the materiality of bodies in the social systems of power relationships. Thus, I shall turn to Foucault to provide a more materialistic account of power. I shall use Foucault's understanding of power relations as constitutive to reconstruct that which I believe is a positive introduction by Bourdieu into sociological theory, namely the role of the materiality of human bodies for the constitution of social life and systems of power. My reconstruction will highlight that although fundamentally consistent with the performative theory of Barnes, Foucault's emphasis on the body is a useful expansion of the performative theory of social institutions. Moreover, whereas Barnes provides an excellent account of the performative dimension of individual discursive self-referential activity, Foucault can be seen to further extend this tenet by showing that it is in specific types of interaction that particular mechanisms at the bases of the constitution of our identities are to be found. In this sense Foucault brings forward a different dimension of power, that which has to be understood as what constitutes us as *what* we are. Focusing more specifically on Foucault's theory of power mechanisms is also a way to penetrate further the insights of Butler's performative theory of sex/gender identity, which is in great measure informed by a Foucauldian understanding of the 'productive' dimension of power. Both Foucault and Barnes locate at the core of their explanations an 'interactionist' account, that is, an emphasis on the constitutive powers of individuals' inter-relationships. They thus share a commitment to an 'internalist' type of structuralism which locates them in a radically opposed theoretical stance to that of Bourdieu.

7.2. 'To be' power and 'productive' power: Barnes and Foucault.

7.2.1. Barnes: power as capacity and as a distribution of knowledge.

"The problem of why a power is obeyed is no deeper than that of why a traffic-light is obeyed"⁶

I have noted that Butler's main criticism of Bourdieu is that he does not account for the bases of the structural world and that he misinterprets performative power as that which only authorized individuals have. To invoke the structural world as the basis of such authority, as Bourdieu does, does not provide enough clarification because the bases of this structural world remains unexplained and at best reified as an immutable external entity. When Butler notes that not all linguistic acts are to be considered performative, but rather the performative power of the discursive can only be granted from within the 'regularised and sanctioned set of conventions'⁷ she is pointing to a specific way to understand the emergence of structural phenomena. When an individual is 'authorized' to cite performatively such capacity does not come from her 'authority' but from the conventions which give authority to cite in this manner. The crucial question is thus from where do the laws or conventions present as macro-entities which grant authority to some individuals come?

Barnes' theory of power directly draws from his self-referential model to provide an answer to this question. It is useful to begin by noting that Barnes' theory of power should be located among those theorists who do not separate power as capacity from power as domination. Rather he is among those theorists who have drawn on the distinction between 'power over' and 'power to', and advocate, contrary to Lukes,⁸ that one does not exclude the other but rather the latter is the precondition of the former. Barnes notes that theories which understand power as that 'possessed' by someone who can force another to do something against her wishes do not really address *what* power is. The crucial question is "why it is that someone happens to be in a position of being able to enforce influence or coercion onto others"⁹. Thus a definition of power must entail an understanding of both its *nature* and its *origins*.

To locate Barnes' discussion of power it is useful to recall his 'realist' commitment. Barnes considers power as that which is 'real', that is, that which is found in the

⁶ Barnes (1988:59)

⁷ Butler (1993:107)

⁸ See Wartenberg (1990) and Lukes (1974) for an overview on this distinction.

⁹ Barnes, (1988:7)

empirical reality of human activity, "located in the activity of real people with their real properties and tendencies"¹⁰ and not as something which emanates from a metaphysical entity located outside individual activity. Indeed, just as he conceives social structures as 'real' but located in the realm of the interactive collective, he understands power in the same way. We should thus locate power in the realities of empirical activity and not as something granted to individuals from structural external phenomena.¹¹

The first and most significant element of Barnes' theory of power is his interest in arguing that power can be understood as a 'capacity', that is, power, should be understood 'dispositionally'. With this he attempts to show that realistically power is that which exists in people as a capacity to do something. That is, departing from theories which only understand power as 'power over', Barnes indicates that power should be understood as 'power to'. In order to understand the significance of this claim we have to locate Barnes' analysis of power within his overall analytical framework of the self-referential performative character of social life. Power is therefore the product the collective achievement of individuals' self-referring activity.

Barnes' 'realist' commitment leads first to consider empirical reality in order to define the nature of power as that *capacity* to do things. That is, when we analyse power in its *use* we are far from seeing a zero sum notion of power (i.e.: an increase in power in A signifies a decrease in power in B). Rather some uses of power by some individuals may increase the interests of others or of a whole community.¹²

The crucial aspect of this insight is thus to establish what is at the basis of this power that some individuals have. Following his own model of the general constitution of social institutions, Barnes argues that the power that some individuals have comes from the *communal belief* in it. Since we are dealing with a notion that is intuitively understood as negative and originating from coercive actions let us expand upon Barnes' understanding of power as based in belief by pointing to an extreme situation in which power may have indeed originated with brute force. In an analytical framework like that of Barnes the role of brute force may well have been to contribute to the initial chain of belief in power. That is, as a result of brute force and violence some individuals may have generated a belief in the power of that particular agent and spread this belief to

¹⁰ Barnes (1988:xi)

¹¹ I.e. global and totalizing notions like class or gender positions. (My example).

¹² Barnes' example is that of a political leader who is granted capacity to act -i.e. power- which will result in the interests of the community. Some authors have also seen 'power over' as productive. Reacting to some feminists who convey power as 'domination', other feminists have portrayed power over as a positive capacity. They argue that far from women's position in society being one of 'powerlessness', they have in fact significant amounts of 'power over' other social agents which they use for purposes other than that of domination, and that some forms of power over can be used to benefit other individuals.

others. From then on such belief becomes a collective property which by virtue of being referred as such by the members of this collective becomes legitimized and self-validated, the significant point being that if the belief disappears so does the power granted to the individuals who initially used brute force.

Of course this simplification does not complete the full picture of the success of all coercive situations found in history. We will return to the bases of coercive power below, but now I shall continue to bring to light the full analytical dimension of Barnes' conception of power by highlighting that the fundamental question is how the belief in power is constituted and maintained if it cannot be understood as being based in the *means* of coercion being potentially used by some individuals. In other words, to understand the bases of power we need to ask where the communal belief in powerful agents comes from. For Barnes the answer is that the community has granted the powerful agents the 'right' to be powerful. This brings us back to the main tenet of the performative theory of social institutions summarized in chapter 3, to wit, that is it through the self-referential performative activity of a *collective* - and not an *individual* - that social institutions come to be constituted. Given that individual inductive calculative activity presupposes two dimensions, that of learning from background knowledge and that of constituting this knowledge via learning it and citing it as such, every act of learning about the powerful status of one particular agent (or group) will in turn contribute to establishing this status. Thus under Barnes' conception of power the social status of powerful individuals is linked to individual beliefs. Individuals learn from the context the current collective belief of some one's powerful status, not in a passive sense, but in circumstances where individual disagreements are constantly negotiated. The power granted to some individuals, like norms, rules and all social institutions, is the result of a particular *distribution of knowledge* among a community, and if society is to be understood as a distribution of knowledge within a collective, power has to be understood as just another aspect of that distribution: "power is not independent from the knowledge of power".¹³ Barnes offers here a different understanding of social power in which domination is only *one* aspect. When he says that "A shared distribution of knowledge confers a capacity to carry out routines and execute projects in concert, which is an added capacity for action, which is social power"¹⁴ he highlights that power has a productive nature not only a repressive one.

This indeed stands in stark contrast with the Bourdieuan notion of power as 'domination'. In fact, it helps better to locate Bourdieu's understanding of power as a zero sum view in which the power conferred to some (*habitus*) capitals results in the loss

¹³ Barnes (1988: 54)

¹⁴ Barnes (1988:57)

of power in another group's capitals. His notion of symbolic power resting on 'distinction' clearly exemplifies this conception of power as zero sum, in that the struggle for distinction is aimed at enhancing one's distinctive properties at the expense of devaluing those of others (particular those of other classes).

That power is the result of a distribution of knowledge does not mean that the capacity to influence bootstrapped self-referential performative activity is equally distributed across the community. There are, of course, individuals with a greater privilege to impose their own discretion onto others. This should, however, not be confused with the idea that those individuals' powers to impose their views, beliefs and knowledge categories, are 'external' to the feedback operation described above. Rather they should be seen as having more capacity to 'interact' with a larger number of individuals and thus to have more impact upon the community of individuals' inductive inferential processes.

Power as capacity and coercive power

Under the model of power as a distribution of knowledge, coercive power can be understood as a particular distribution of the discretion to act granted to some individuals. Power 'holders' thus would be understood as those with *more* discretion than others, that is, power 'subjects'. Under this view powerful individuals are those to whom the collective have granted enhanced 'discretion', that is, the capacity of deciding what to do or not to do.

"Social power is *possessed* by those with discretion in the direction of social action, and hence predominantly by those with discretion in the use of routines"¹⁵.

If such discretion can be exercised it is because the collective must have granted the 'right' to act as such, that is, the collective must have recognized this group as having the right to act as such. Discretion of power cannot be possessed unless others recognize the power holders' rights to use that discretion. Under this light let us review Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence throughout monopolizing the 'distinctive' features of a society. According to Bourdieu some individuals have power because they hold the most distinctive traits in the social hierarchy. This may be in itself a recognizable empirical fact, that is, that within a collective the features of some individuals are recognized as more 'distinctive' than others. However the established hierarchy governing distinctive traits must have been a collective achievement, and hence without the participation of the whole community the more 'distinctive' subjects would not be able to hold such status. Thus, the problem of symbolic power in Bourdieu needs to be reformulated in terms of calculative action and shared knowledge. The second fundamental point to

¹⁵ Barnes (1988:57)

question in Bourdieu's model is his 'singular symbolic hierarchy'. It is indeed empirically difficult to substantiate that the whole society at large will abide by such a single model of distinctive traits. If society is to be understood as the product of interactive individuals learning from their immediate background it would appear that society is divided into a multiplicity of 'knowledgeable' groups with their own locally held distinctive hierarchies. As exemplified by the clocks analogy (see section 3.4.2.) the constitution of collectively shared knowledge is directly related to the background knowledge of an *interactive* collective, and does not stem from an external authority. Thus, what may be counted as 'distinctive' among one particular collective may not be taken as such in another. Collectives are indeed drawn to sanction their own world of platitudes and conventions but given that such a world of platitudes is the product of the immediate interactive collective, one cannot envisage a totalizing distinctive set of attributes which cover a whole society.¹⁶

In the Barnesian community everybody has at least some discretionary powers. Ultimately, powerful agents are granted their 'right' to be powerful by the performative operation of the calculative knowledgeable self-referential acts of the rest of the collective. Such operation can indeed be 'manipulated', but such manipulation requires the full calculative conscious activity of knowledgeable individuals if it is to be successful, and not the unreflective, pre-consciously socialized individuals which Bourdieu's model of habitus suggests. The significance of this model of power for the structuralist debate is fundamental. Barnes' understanding of power as a collective achievement is a corrective to those theorists who cannot escape a reificatory understanding of power as residing in particular individuals -and their coercive tools- or in an external metaphysical reality (like universal economic class interests). To advance an 'internalist' (that is, social structures as internal to the collective) view like that of Barnes it is not to deny the 'real' existence of these social structures. Rather it is to locate it ontologically in the realm of the activity of individuals.¹⁷

¹⁶ The astute remark of the novelist William Thackeray is an excellent example of such phenomena: "Thus, my dear civilised reader, if you and I were to find ourselves this evening in a society of greengrocers, let us say; it is probable that our conversation would not be brilliant; if, on the other hand, a greengrocer should find himself at your refined and polite tea-table, (...) is possible that the stranger would not be very talkative, and by no means interesting or interested". *Vanity Fair* (1983: 791). It has been widely noted by some of Bourdieu's critics that his overarching model of the struggle for 'distinction' is not fully consistent with the fact that different collectives and societies develop 'internal' distinctive tastes not related to other groups of society. In this sense his concept of habitus as a set of dispositional tendencies would be more consistent with the empirical reality that individuals tend to adopt the tastes of their immediate group rather than continually striving to achieve the distinctive traits of other groups. (See Elster (1981) and particularly Honneth (1986) for an account of this empirical inconsistency of Bourdieu's model).

¹⁷ Barnes (1988: 61)

Change and stability of domination and dispositional activity:

Barnes's theory does not in any way convey a picture of permanent stability since he stresses, following the finitist meaning theory, that individual category ascription and rule following by virtue of acting 'analogically' is always open to some degree of oscillation. Social institutions, and therefore power, is not *whatever* individuals believe to be power or powerful agents. Rather, the whole collectively sanctioned distribution of knowledge which constitutes a particular *discretion* of power to some agents is the very constitution of that power. Social power is the product of a particularly *patterned* distribution of knowledge and *not* of mere individual belief. Because power is the result of this patterned distribution of knowledge it appears as a transcendental entity to any single individual who cannot be aware of her fundamental (though minute) input to the self-referential bootstrapped inductive process.

How does this model explain the particular form of power which Bourdieu engages with, namely, a type of symbolic domination which is exemplified by the compliance of the dominated to the demands of the dominators?. For Bourdieu, this is the result of the internalisation of the general hierarchical structure of symbolic values of the dominators by the dominated. This is a process which by virtue of being both internalized in the pre-reflexive, non-conscious realm of the habitus and naturalized onto the materiality of bodies, predisposes people to unconsciously act in a way which is to the benefit of the group which dominates the structure of the symbolic hierarchy. For Barnes, on the contrary, such unconscious compliance does not exist as an empirical phenomenon, because agents always retain their calculative powers of learning. In fact, as noted above, any distribution of power is the result of knowing who holds the power and thus it is as a consequence of acting under the influence of this knowledge that the power of those powerful people is created. However this calculative activity is based in a set of dispositional beliefs which impel individuals to act in accordance with a particular distribution of knowledge. That is, a tendency to habituation and routinization which ensures that consciously calculative action occurs against a continuing background of routine action, thus allowing a certain degree of re-production of current systems of power. Routinized activity however does not preclude conscious calculative activity, as Bourdieu suggests, rather it is a necessary condition for calculative action to proceed. Systems of power are never left intact without individuals constantly checking, questioning and negotiating their validity. Such activity continually introduces to general systems of knowledge a degree of stability but also a degree of oscillation. Systems of power, like systems of knowledge, are never in static modality; on the contrary they are always in drift and mutation. Thus, a universal, objective, eternal structure of domination like that which Bourdieu's model tries to capture does not exist empirically.

Rather it is the construct of a theory which confuses a temporary centring of experience and contextual empirical phenomena for an ahistorical universal transcendent reality. The type of non-reflexive compliance which Bourdieu wants to theorize is better understood thus as the routinization and habituation of dispositional beliefs, not as an internalization of the structures of domination into a realm which is not accessible to conscious reflexivity.

The case of consciously rejected coercive power

The Barnesian model may appear to convey a consensual modality of attribution of power from the collective which is at odds with the stability of forms of domination which are exploitative, violent, and therefore consciously disputed and rejected by the community of power subjects. However, I have argued that power should be understood as an aspect of a distribution of knowledge and that the overall system of knowledge is the product of the learning, confirming and disconfirming of members of the community engaged in interaction. The basis of the stability of coercive, violent systems of power can be explained similarly. Given that empirically speaking most coercive systems of power rest in the hands of a few, there must be something which sustains their dominant position other than violent means of coercion. If all dominated agents were to revolt the power holders could not resist their challenge. Rulers must have a capacity to impose the knowledge of their powerful status and they will use several mechanisms to do so. The threat of sanctions -violent or otherwise - is the most common. Thus is established a self-sustaining system based on the widespread distribution of knowledge of where power is located. The point I wish to argue here is not that coercive systems of knowledge are 'accepted' by power subjects and therefore sustained, but that if the knowledge about their powerful status -and therefore the knowledge of their capacity to sanction- disappears, the power which power holders sustain disappears too. Most of the time rulers who wish to sustain their power position will resort to the manipulation of knowledge rather than direct violent coercive means. By the same token the overthrowing of oppressive regimes has to be the result -and often is- of engineering a transformation of the system of knowledge (among the dominated individuals in the community) concerning the status of the powerful.

Therefore, the source of power has always to be seen as *internal* to the community of interactive individuals and not as emanating from a transcendental structure located outside the constitutive realm of the system of knowledge present in a given society. As a consequence, we cannot invoke general overarching ideological systems, like masculine domination, or universal structures of material economic class vested interests, to understand the dynamics of domination. Analyses of power which operationalize such an

analytical strategy fall into the essentialist and objectivist pitfalls of an ontology of the transcendental which not only does not permit explanation of its constitution and origins, but precludes the possibility of finding and designing plausible political agendas and activity. Bourdieu's emphasis on an 'eternal' and universal system of domination which, despite his desire to locate it in the 'historical' realm, he refuses to see as the outcome of individual interactive activity, is an example of such misguided theoretical analysis, because he does not recognize that his theory is constrained by a social ontology based in a metaphysics of 'externality'.

To understand the dynamics of coercive systems, we should avoid the preconceptions that such a social ontology entails. Rather, we require a methodology which locates the focus of attention in the realities of a particular locus of domination, and what this says about more generalized dynamics beyond a particular situation. We have to understand the exact mechanisms by which a power holder A comes to exercise oppressive power over a power subject B, and see if that situation is commonly found beyond that particular relationship. This demands an analytical desire for finding detail in the realities of concrete phenomena, and locating the description of the dynamics and particularly the specific accounts given by both agents about their knowledge of this particular situation.

Barnes's analysis of power helps to overcome the totalizing nature of Bourdieu's model of power which conveys an image of a society organized at the macro-level for the reproduction of inequality (in which major social institutions such as schools, state, art, sports and so on play a fundamental role) by showing that structures and relationships of power cannot be envisaged as external phenomena operating across a whole society and impelling individuals to act according to their rules. So, for instance, where Bourdieu sees the interaction dynamics between classes as governed by a symbolic competition to gain 'distinction', and that this behaviour is the product of a pre-reflexive internalized structural phenomena in the corporeal bases of activity, Barnes suggests that the specific interests and goals of individuals, and what groups them together, are the result of individuals inductively -and thus calculatively- learning from their environment and being mutually susceptible to realigning themselves with each other in and through social interaction. So where Bourdieu sees power relationships as organized by a macro-structural arrangement which grants some individuals with that 'distinctive' value to their habitus (and thus accumulation of capitals), leaving others with a non-valued habitus, and thus powerless, Barnes offers a view where power is the effect of the activity of *all* individuals in a community, in which some individuals or groups access a certain discretion of power which enables them to manipulate and control the distribution of knowledge in wider areas of society. Barnes and Bourdieu, consequently provide a

completely different view of agency. In Bourdieu 'strategies' to maximize profits operate most of the time at the pre-verbal level of bodily activity. Barnes understands individual strategies as that calculative capacity to learn from the environment and reflect on potential activity according to different interests, goals and possibilities. Thus whereas for Bourdieu individual strategies and preferences are homogeneous to a collective and structurally determined by the economic social conditions, in Barnes the aggregate of individuals interacting in a given situation is what is at the basis of the formation of the collective and of the macro-structural world. But whereas Barnes may help us to reconsider Bourdieu's external structural model, he has left unaddressed a very important aspect of power regimes and power relations which Bourdieu does highlight, namely the effects of power at the level of the materiality of the body. To rework this aspect of Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power I shall turn to Foucault as another theorist who has emphasised the effects of power relationships on the body,

7.2.2. Power 'mechanisms' and productive power: a reconstruction of Foucault's theory of power.

One of Foucault's most powerful and significant theoretical contributions is his emphasis on the *mechanisms* of power: how those mechanisms very often operate through bodies rather than minds and how they constitute the subjects through which they operate. An analysis of his position can help further to clarify the relationship between 'power' and the body and the constitutive effects of this relationship. We have already seen how Bourdieu's theory of habitus emphasised the materiality of the bodies at the centre of symbolic power operations and also how Butler locates bodies at the centre of her constructionist claim that sexed identities are a social effect. My reconstruction of sex habitus as a social institution using Kusch's theory of artificial kinds also emphasised the material mechanisms of shaping identity and action by shaping bodies. This emphasis on materiality is absent from Barnes' analysis of power as a result of a distribution of knowledge. Whereas Bourdieu's account of power acting through bodies projects an externalist notion of structural conditioning, the other two theorists, Butler and Kusch, draw heavily on the Foucauldian framework of power and its internalist account. Adopting this position they can be seen as closer to a Barnesian analytical framework than a Bourdieuan. These four theorists can be brought together to suggest a way to understand the social constructionist claim that bodies are a social construction, and ultimately the political implications of such claim.

Kusch's analytical position is heavily informed by his previous work on reconstructing Foucault's theory of power.¹⁸ Particularly relevant is Kusch's emphasis on the Foucauldian explanation of *what* constitutes a power relationship. Kusch shows that Foucault, like Barnes, does not uncritically 'presuppose' power but rather warns that it needs to be 'explained', both in terms of defining what is meant by power and how it comes about. Foucault thus introduces several dimensions of the phenomena of power. Namely, what types of power can be distinguished, how power works, how power interacts with knowledge, and how power is constituted in each of its dimensions.¹⁹ I have indicated that Bourdieu's model of power precludes plausible political action. I shall suggest that the profound significance of Foucault's *methodology* of how power and its effects are to be investigated is crucial to potential political action. Foucault's methodological investigations are the outcome of his concern with criticising and transforming particularly vicious forms of power - prisons and asylums are examples he uses. Drawing on this particular aspect of Foucault's studies and critique of power allows me to draw attention to the particularly central role of the body as a locus and effect of power relations. I shall conclude that whereas in form Foucault's power model strongly parallels Barnes' theory of power as internal to the micro-level of interactive activity,²⁰ it complements him by emphasising the 'materialization' of power onto the body. This in turn allows me to return to Bourdieu's concept of habitus, and how such a useful notion can be reconstructed under the tenets of the 'discursivist' theorists.

Kusch's reconstruction of Foucault's theory of power as an 'internal-essential relationship'

In order to understand the more explicit emphasis on power in Foucault's 'genealogical' phase it is useful first of all to trace the anti-structuralist commitment to the emergence of systems of knowledge which is evident in his previous 'archaeological' period. In this first period Foucault is mainly concerned to trace an 'archaeology' of knowledge which shows that the traditional history of 'ideas' is based in three main elements: genesis, continuity and totalization.²¹ This, suggest Foucault, is a misleading understanding of the

¹⁸ The main text informing this particular section on Foucault and power is Kusch's *Foucault's Strata and Fields* (1991).

¹⁹ Kusch's text is very illuminating in providing us with an overview of the main theorists of power and how they have sought to classify its different forms: i.e. power as overt coercion and force, as covert manipulation, as legitimized authority, or whether physical violence should be considered social power (See Giddens (1979) for a theorist who considers that physical coercion should not be considered a power relation). See Kusch (1991:118-121)

²⁰ Foucault reaches his conclusions about the nature of power through completely different intellectual routes than Barnes. Whereas the former draws substantially on the Nietzschean tradition of philosophical critique of metaphysics, Barnes' input is more connected to sociological accounts of knowledge. The fact that they reach similar conclusions from such disparate intellectual backgrounds can only provide further support for the type of social constructionism which they advocate.

²¹ Foucault (*Archaeology of Knowledge*: 138) as quoted in Kusch (1991:46)

constitution of knowledge which has as an underlying assumption that there is a unique 'origin' -an 'origin myth' -for the source of knowledge, which also guides its continuity. This amounts to a totalization which cannot be 'scientific' when analysing empirical reality. In fact striving to think in terms of 'total' theories, that is, those which understand the world as determined by particular singular structural features, proves to be a 'hindrance to research'²² One of the major contributions of this period of his work is to problematize theories which base their explanatory conclusions on constructing such a 'structuralist' commitment to a unique explanatory causal factor. Foucault however does not deny that there are indeed social phenomena which transcend micro-activity, but such phenomena have to be explained by means other than ahistorical universal explanations. The central analytical concept of this period, and one which attempts to capture the existence and formation of transcendent macro-phenomena, is 'discursive formations'. Discursive formations should be understood not as solely emphasising the linguistic as the realm of meaning (a common misinterpretation)²³ but as directing our attention to the fact that history is the result of a multiplicity of interrelated events and not of one single causal element. Discursive formations are 'series' of interrelations which display specific regularities, or rather, discursive formations are practices constituted *by* the inter-relations between several series of factors and conditions. Discursive formations are thus macro-structural social phenomena but nevertheless have to be conceived as the contingent effect of multiple series of events rather than the outcome of singular causal phenomena. Foucault's major interest however is to show the 'objects' which such discursive formations constitute and which in turn reformulate and reconstitute the discursive formations themselves.

Foucault's genealogical phase is a continuation of his refusal of 'totalitarian' historical analysis. He attempts to outline a theory of power which is not based on an 'origin myth', that is, power based on some pre-existing social conditions (e.g. economic relationships) but rather as something which is in need of explanation. In order to systematize Foucault's position Kusch identifies four different ingredients of Foucault's 'genealogy'. To wit, *a theory of power* which attempts to explain how we should understand power relationships and identify in them different 'forms' of power; a *methodology* of how power should be studied and identified and which social objects are its product; a *political criticism*, which presents a political project different from that of classical politics; and a *historical analysis* of the emergence of 'objects' of power such as prisons, asylums, schools, sexuality, and so on.

²²Foucault (1980:81)

²³ See Shilling (1991) for an example of such an interpretation

In his theory of power Foucault's principal focus is on the notion of *mechanisms*. He identifies different forms of power as the result of series of *types of relations* and is concerned with identifying the mechanisms which are at the bases of the various identifiable forms of power. Foucault indicates here a way to understand 'power' which is radically different to our common-sense intuitions. Power is not the 'effect' of particular relationships of power, but rather those 'forces' which constitute these relationships. Foucault appears to suggest that we can only identify power through studying its 'effects'. In a sense, he could be interpreted as giving another dimension to the Barnesian notion of power as 'capacity'. In Foucault's work this capacity of power is that of 'producing' new forms of social life, or 'objects'. This is clearly not a zero sum notion of power like that conveyed by Bourdieu.²⁴ Foucault's notion of power as productive is exemplified by his rejection of power understood as 'repression', for example of nature, instincts, or of individuals or particular groups or social classes.²⁵

Kusch reconstructs Foucault's notion of power to define it as an *internal* and *essential* relationship. Let us focus first on the notion of 'internal' relationships. In order to understand what this notion attempts to capture we have to go back to Foucault's conception of power not as something 'possessed' but rather 'exercised': "power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of non egalitarian and mobile relations"²⁶. Power can thus only be captured in interaction, that is, in the process of relationship between individuals. Kusch, drawing from medieval philosophical insights, explains that a power relation in a Foucauldian sense has to be understood as an *internal relationship of interaction* and not as an *external relationship of comparison*.²⁷ In short, the distinction that Kusch draws is between different types of 'relationships'. There are relationships in which the 'identity' of the objects being related is independent of the relationship (A is taller than B) and relationships which define the identity of the objects in relationship (A loves B). Whereas in the first type of relationship there is an element of *comparison* (A's height is independent and compared to B's height) in the second type of relationship the identity of the objects depend entirely on this relationship (A being a 'lover' depends on B being a 'beloved'). The

²⁴ Foucault's own terminology suggests a similarity to Barnes and his conception of power: "there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. These 'power-knowledge relations' are to be analysed, therefore, not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system, but, on the contrary, the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge" Foucault (1979:27-28)

²⁵ See Foucault (1980:90). Clearly he refers to Freudian, Marxist, and Feminist analyses which see power as an exercise of oppression -repression- of some groups by others who possess the capacity -power -to do so. Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence could be located as this type of conception of power.

²⁶ Foucault (1998:94) see also (1980:89)

²⁷ Kusch (1991:130)

crucial insight of this definition applied to Foucault's notion of power as existing in its exercise is that power does not come from the individual who 'possesses' power and employs it to subject another individual, but rather that the mechanisms through which power is exercised determine A's and B's identity as a power holder and a power subject. Here one can draw the first connection between Foucault's theory of power and his interest in *mechanisms*, that is, power is that which comes to exist through the mechanisms which govern the interaction.

This is a radical departure from more traditional views of power, and indeed also from that of Bourdieu, which envisage a power interaction as an act in which the power holder *already* possesses the power that will be exercised over the power subject. Let us pause at this point and reconsider Bourdieu's theory of power, in which individuals are constituted (they internalize a habitus at some point of their biography) and then engage in a power relationship when they interact in a pre-given field which provides the differential value (capitals) to different groups' habitus. That is, already internalized habitus (and the social identities and dispositional activities they embody) are located, via the structures and macro-features of a given field, in a relationship of external comparison. Such a model of power *is* concerned with the 'amounts' of power that individuals possess. That is, how much symbolic, cultural, social or economic capital one party has in comparison to another. In this conception of power one pays attention to the interaction in order to establish how the differential powers 'compare' (that is, power becomes a 'commodity'), and not how from the interaction the power relationship establishes the power positions of each party as power holders and power subjects. Thus a model like that of Bourdieu's clearly would be an 'external' relationship of comparison rather than an 'internal' relationship of interaction.

Relations of power, says Foucault, are those processes through which people are transformed, changed or constituted. This is the core feature of Foucault's theory of power. Kusch also further clarifies this statement by arguing that a Foucauldian conception of a power relation is 'internal-*essential*' rather than external-*accidental*²⁸. He explains that 'essential' attributes are those thought to be fundamental to the identity of the object (chairs must have legs to be considered as chairs) whereas 'accidental' attributes are those which are not fundamental (chairs can be of different colours). Applied to the Foucauldian conception of a power relation as productive, this means that a power relation is 'essential' to establish the identity of both parties involved in a relationship of power, that is, they become *what* they are in and through this particular relationship. This is what is to be understood by Foucault's claim that 'subjects are the

²⁸ Kusch (1991:134)

result of the effects of power'.²⁹ A relationship of power thus is at the basis of the constitution of both the power subject and the power holder. In a Foucauldian view of power individuals do not come with already constituted identities and social meanings attached to these identities, but rather, those identities and its meanings come to exist via a multiplicity of inter-related interactions.

This adds explanatory power to Butler's assertions that the authority and power of individuals is the result of 'performative' processes, and that such performative processes, that is the very activity of individuals, are at the basis of the constitution of individuals' identity, and not an 'exterior' relation of power between already constituted individuals.³⁰ Indeed her performative theory of sex identity clearly rests on a Foucauldian notion of power as a process through which the subject becomes constituted as a subject: 'subjection is literally the *making* of a subject'³¹ Thus, Butler clearly aligns herself with those 'internalist' social constructionist accounts like that of Barnes and Foucault.

To return to Kusch's analogy that chairs must have legs to be identified as chairs, equally power subjects and power holders must have particular types of power relationships to be able to be identified as such. This returns us to the notion of mechanisms: it is in the type of power relationships, that is the type of mechanisms employed in this relationship, that we will identify not only the subjects constituted by power, but crucially power itself. The emphasis on particular mechanisms through which we can locate the workings -and thus existence- of power is crucial to the second ingredient of Foucault's theory of power identified by Kusch. That is, his emphasis on a particular methodological investigation which allows us to identify power and its location. This position further reinforces the radical separation between a Foucauldian model of power and that of 'externalist' theorists like Bourdieu. Whereas in the latter the objects found in a relationship of power have been constituted prior and external to the power relationship, for the former it is in the very same interactive process which power and its objects come to exist. So both authors present substantially different methodologies. In Bourdieu macro-phenomena need to be identified prior to the investigation of the power relationship between individuals. Thus, forms of symbolic power can only be identified in the struggle between already constituted 'classes' (through their differential habitus). These forms of symbolic power also rest on an already constituted field with its own universal structural laws, namely, a universal tendency for struggle to maximize one's capitals (and the social and economic profits which correlate to this

²⁹ Foucault as quoted in Kusch (1991:135)

³⁰ See Chapter 5.above.

³¹ Butler (1997a:84) That is, from her point of view, subjection is a form of power which 'activates' the subject.

maximization) via the increase of the 'distinctive' values of one's habitus over those of other groups. For Foucault, on the contrary, no objects can be presupposed in advance. Rather the study of micro-mechanisms of power will direct us to those objects which are being constituted in the process of power relations.

To end the summary of the micro-level of mechanisms of power and their essential relationship to our identities, what remains to be noted is that in Foucault, by virtue of being the product of those micro-mechanisms of power relations, identities will change over time as those micro-mechanisms change. Once again in opposition to a view like that of Bourdieu which attempts to link the stability of our identities to external macro-phenomena somewhat immune to change, particularly from the micro-dynamics of interaction with others, Foucault thus conveys an image of individuals in a permanent state of transformation according to the transformations of power mechanisms. This indeed appears to be more consonant with our individual subjective experience of our identities, because as Kusch astutely puts it, it is quite common for individuals to realize the different 'time-slices of our lives' sometimes present quite different people.³²

Structures as networks of power

However, there is indeed a degree of 'stability', or rather certain 'densities' of continuity of which Foucault is very much aware and wants to explain. It is possible to say, in fact, that Foucault's entire oeuvre is a 'structuralist' discussion, designed to explain macro-structural phenomena but without accepting 'top-down' explanations, and above all denying those explanations of the evolution of history which rely on uniform, unchanged and universal principles. At the same time he denies definitions of his analytical position as only paying attention to 'discontinuity' and total 'contingency'. On the contrary, his is a theory of power which attempts to identify those forces which may be the product of a contingent historical arrangement between different layers of society (e.g. medicine, law, sexuality, science and so on) which at some point come to work together to 'constrain' practices and thus develop a new 'regime of truth'. He calls this the question of 'what governs' -and thus constitutes- society.³³ That is, it is the social constraints that are present in the functioning of discursive regimes of truth which are at the bases of both the constitution of its objects and the continuity of those objects.

Above all Foucault warns that if power is 'an omnipresent network of forces in the social field'³⁴ then power is not equally distributed. Power relations within a network of forces

³² Kusch (1991:137)

³³ Foucault (1980:111-113)

³⁴ As quoted in Kusch (1991:138)

can be more dense in some regions and less dense in others. The Foucauldian power network notion, put together with his conception of power relations as *internal-essential* is crucial to understanding that individuals cannot be defined outside this network. Thus, it is the position of the individual in the network, with the different densities and the different interactions which the network defines with others, which constitutes individuals' identity (as well as other objects, like institutions, categories of truth, and so on). It is important to reiterate that Foucault conceives the constitution of the network and its permanence as the result of the different relationships of the individuals (or groups) inhabiting it. So 'society' (that is, macro-phenomena) is nothing other than a network of a variety of internal-essential relationships (micro-phenomena) spread at different levels of society and thus subject to the different constraints appropriate to each level. Those constraining elements, the densities they constitute and the 'objects' of the network which result, are in a permanent state of internal negotiation, and thus transformation. There is nothing outside the network: not God or hidden hand (such as nature or a metaphysical entity located outside space and time). Thus Foucault's is an 'ascending analysis' coming from micro-relations to macro-relations. His whole historical work is dedicated precisely to substantiate this claim. Institutions like schools, prisons, asylums, the institution of Victorian sexuality and so on, are the result of particular densities in the networks of power constituted by a multiplicity of practices across all levels of society.³⁵ Thus there is no absolute place where power comes from but rather power is that which is found all across the different layers of the 'infinitesimal micro-activity' of individual inter-relations. This constitutes macro-level phenomena which Foucault calls *dispositifs*, which can indeed convey oppressive and dominant forms of power. They in turn inter-relate with other *dispositifs* (for example prisons are informed by legal, medical, moral and other systems or *dispositifs*).

The theoretical implications of this view are by now transparent. Macro-level phenomena cannot be explicated outside the multiplicity of relationships at the micro-level, and these macro-level phenomena have to be understood as 'transitory coalitions'³⁶ some of which persist and others immediately break up. Foucault thus appears to suggest that macro-level power mechanisms cannot be explained by external explanations like class power relationships for instance. By the same token individuals,

³⁵ Foucault notes that the coercive institution of locking people up in prisons is a historical development -hence a conventional institution not a universal one- which evolves from a multiplicity of often disconnected practices from medieval times, which in themselves had not the intentional reasoning of modern prisons. See particularly *Madness and Civilization* (1967) and *Discipline and Punish* (1979)

³⁶ Foucault (1980:208)

their identities, their activity and their inter-relationships have to be seen as the interplay between micro-level and macro-level mechanisms.

Foucault helps us to understand power dynamics in two crucial ways. First to rework the Bourdieuan model of power relationships which understands them as determined by external structural dynamics like that of class struggle for distinction and symbolic power, or by the same token, a universal tendency of masculine domination. And, connected to this, he provides a different view of social transformation to Bourdieu's. Whereas for the latter social transformation appears only on the superficial level, leaving intact the structural forms of domination³⁷ Foucault sees change both at the micro and macro level as inherent in the power dynamics of the field networks.

Secondly, it is by now apparent that Barnes and Foucault share an 'internalist' structuralist model, but Foucault also complements the Barnesian model in another way. Due to Foucault's particular commitment to describing the emergence of particular coercive institutions (prisons and sexuality in particular), that is, particular forms of 'power over', he therefore pays particular attention to the processes (mechanisms) which constitute them. Unlike Barnes he provides a specific *methodology* to study the particular type of mechanisms implicated in the emergence of coercive institutions. This particular methodology has to be committed to identify the *actual* agents which engage in *actual* exercises of power over others, and above all to identify which interests do these particular exercises of power fulfil:

"We need to identify the agents responsible [...] those which constituted the immediate social *entourage*, (the family, the parents, doctors, etc.) and not to be content to lump them under the formula of a generalized bourgeoisie"³⁸

We need to investigate the real logic and rationale of the agents involved, that is, to which needs, desires, goals, or tendencies, they responded. To capture the precise 'conjuncture' by which certain practices or mechanisms of power have begun to appear as advantageous or functional or rational to some, we need to look at the objects which these mechanisms refer to, the actual people involved in these power relations, the meanings of the categories and identities which are the result of these practices, and so on. This is a crucial aspect of the Foucauldian methodology, which can be seen to coincide with the Barnesian model of identifying the sources of power in actual people and actual situations. In short, it is not that we can identify those mechanisms as the product of already constituted classes, or, by the same token, already constituted class interests (economic or political) but rather middle-level dispositifs, so to speak, interacting with micro-individual activity in the social entourage are actually the origin

³⁷ See sections 2.3 and 4.2.

³⁸ Foucault (1980: 101) as quoted in Kusch (1991:144)

of the emergence of classes such as bourgeois or working classes.³⁹ In other words, individuals are ultimately the sustaining force of macro-phenomena. This aspect of Foucauldian methodology is particularly revealing of some phenomena which remain unexplored by most theories of power over, which simplify power as a relationship between those with power to coerce and powerless individuals. Attention to the inter-relations between different levels of mechanisms of power relations - those micro levels of individuals at the bottom, those dispositifs located at the middle and those macro-phenomena like classes - forces us to identify power relations as populated and governed by a multiplicity of 'bottom level officials'.⁴⁰ That is, no macro-level mechanism would be able to proceed efficiently -or even subsist- in its coercive exercise if it was not sustained by an army of individuals.⁴¹ As Barnes acutely points out, there is no vicious coercive system that can persist without the collaboration of a fairly big section of society. This is related to the last of the Foucauldian methodological prescriptions that I wish to present, namely, the need to recover the contingent nature of history⁴². Extra-historical structural phenomena do not exist. Equally, Butler, following Foucault, has argued that the 'heterosexual matrix' and the gender domination it embodies is an 'internal' consequence of micro-mechanisms and micro-practices and not an external ahistorical structure guiding those micro practices.

Foucault's 'political anatomy'

I have already noted that one underdeveloped area in Barnes' analysis of the nature of power is that he does not pay attention to the significant role of the 'materiality' of bodies in relation to power mechanisms. That is, how power is 'naturalized': how human bodies are shaped, constricted, exercised and constituted by those specific power relations. This is indeed something which forms the core of Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power. However, despite Foucault and Bourdieu coinciding in the need to bring to light the implications of the body in power relations, their understanding of this role is fundamentally different. Whereas for Bourdieu the body is the site where the existence of power relations is hidden from the consciousness of individuals -particularly from

³⁹ A very useful and explanatory discussion of the interconnection of the different 'strata' of Foucault's 'ascending analysis' can be found in Kusch (1991:145-6)

⁴⁰ Kusch (1991:147)

⁴¹ For instance, the army, prisons, asylums, stigmatizing regimes of sexuality, race, class, gender categories, particularly vicious or unpopular government administrations and so on.

⁴² In Foucault's terminology, recovering 'agonistic events'. Kusch (1991: 167). That is, in order to make history fully 'social' and in order to advance a proper sociological account which aims to be both scientific and capture the reality of systems of oppression, we need first of all to recover the contingent, historical, and non-universal nature of such systems. That is, to diachronically (historical studies) or synchronically (anthropological studies) capture the changing and thus conventional and relative character of particular systems of power relations. We can then identify what lies at the bases of those particular systems and what sustains them.

those oppressed - Foucauldian oppressed bodies are not unaware social 'dopes' which, as Bourdieu would have it, blindly follow a set of internalized dispositional bodily behaviour, but rather 'conscious' bodies, conscious of their being manipulated, excluded, exercised, isolated, marginalized, organized, tortured, trained, and so on. Power relations, warns Foucault, have an 'immediate hold on the body.'⁴³ Foucault's focus on the body's relation to power stems from his belief that bodies are more effectively manipulated than minds and mentalities, and that to study the effects of power we have to identify how bodies become *disciplined*, that is, how they become 'docile'.⁴⁴ We need to specify the exact difference between this notion of a 'disciplined' body and the Bourdieuan notion of a dispositional set of habituated responses.

Foucault's 'political anatomy' is distinguished from other accounts of the body and power by its direct emphasis on the immediacy of the suffering of the body. Most regimes of coercive power use the immediacy of physical pain to send the message, and thus establish the belief among the oppressed, that deviating from the demanded course of action will be penalized.⁴⁵ For instance, even in modern societies there are regimes of power which very often operate on the basis of physical suffering.

However Foucault also emphasises that power does not operate 'repressively' -as the above comment would suggest- but rather 'productively'. That is, if it is true that the bodies of individuals subjected to regimes of power like prisons, asylums, armies etc. are constrained, they are also 'stimulated'; they are constituted as new identities by the very same techniques of bodily power mechanisms. They are constituted as inmates, insane, soldiers, etc., and new identities are constituted in the process. Regimes of power productively 'stimulating' bodies can be seen in all orders of society, not only directly coercive violent systems. Every society has its specific 'political anatomy'⁴⁶ in which bodies become 'sexed', classed, 'aged', 'raced' and so on, by particular mechanisms of power local and historical to a specific community.⁴⁷ This is what Butler draws on in her argument that our sense of sex identity is in great measure the result of exercising and censoring bodies into the 'materiality' of sex. In this sense the pre-discursive nature of bodies as 'natural' objects is problematized. But for Foucault looking at bodies is primarily a tool to identify mechanisms of power. A problematization of the 'naturalness' of the body is a political exercise:

" what is needed is to make it [the body] visible through an analysis in which the biological and the historical are not consecutive to one another, as in the

⁴³ Foucault (1979:25)

⁴⁴ Foucault (1979:135-170)

⁴⁵ We can already observe here the parallels between the Foucauldian and the Barnesian emphasis on constituting beliefs -knowledge- as at the base of power relations.

⁴⁶ Here I follow closely Kusch's reconstruction of Foucault's 'political anatomy'. Kusch (1991:183)

⁴⁷ See specially *Discipline and Punish* and *History of Sexuality*

evolutionism of the first sociologists, but are bound together in an increasingly complex fashion in accordance with the development of the modern technologies of power that take life as their objective. Hence I do not envisage a 'history of mentalities' that would take into account of bodies only through the manner in which they have been perceived and given meaning and value; but a 'history of bodies' and the manner in which what is most material and most vital in them has been invested"⁴⁸

The implications of such a position are profound, not only because the 'body' in society cannot be taken to be a biological taken for granted entity, in that the nature-culture divide gets blurred, but rather and most importantly, to study 'bodies' is to study power mechanisms, that is, to identify what types of things are *done* to them, and to identify the 'identities' which are the result of those mechanisms. It is indeed a 'political anatomy' which directs us both to a particular ontology of the body and a particular methodology of how to study its 'origins'. As Kusch points out:

"To tackle this problem is, for instance, to study the emergence of the 'sexualized bodies' (and the differences between male and female bodies) in and through the interplay of various discourses (sexology, medicine, eugenics, demography, pedagogy, jurisprudence, psychiatry, obstetrics ...), methods of control and surveillance (in boarding schools, birth clinics, army camps...), as well as techniques of stimulation (pornographic literature, films...)"⁴⁹

The body's 'dispositional beliefs'

To end the discussion on power and the body I shall now show how a synthesis of the arguments of Bourdieu, Barnes and Foucault can provide a fuller understanding of the relationship between power and the body.

We have seen that Barnes' analysis of the nature of power rests on the emphasis of individuals' knowledge, that is, beliefs, in that powerful people are those who are known -believed- to be powerful. On the other hand Foucault's emphasis is on how power 'materializes' in and through its exercise onto apparently 'docile' bodies. Thus it would appear that the calculative, reflexive, knowledgeable actor of Barnes disappears in Foucault's docile bodies. However, the approaches that these two authors take are not as incompatible as they appear.

To see their similarities we have to look at beliefs as 'dispositional'. That is, beliefs can be seen as 'occurrent': what we believe at the moment of the action of believing, what we can convey about the action performed at a particular moment (e.g.: 'I put on my jacket because I am cold'). On the other hand there are 'dispositional' beliefs which inform an action but not explicitly (e.g.: 'I put on my jacket because it is cold' , and thus, I attempt to fight a potential cold, or not to be seen as a fool by others, or because

⁴⁸ Foucault as quoted in Kusch (1991:185-186)

⁴⁹ Kusch (1991:186)

everybody uses jackets when it is cold, and so on). Most dispositional beliefs are not immediately occurrent to the reflexive mind. Most of the time they belong to the realm of the taken for granted and thus need not be explicitly externalized. As I have previously argued, artificial kinds of actions are those type of actions. Barnes' emphasis on beliefs underlying the constitution of power could be reconstructed, not as occurrent beliefs (or at least not always) but also as dispositional beliefs.

Further, bodily actions are also 'beliefs' in the sense that our acts are influenced by what we believe (to give a simple example, we bow in front of kings and queens). Our bodily behaviour follows our knowledge of what is appropriate and demanded from us in our encounters with powerful people -and we could analyse a numerous array of bodily behaviour which 'speaks' to the powerful about our beliefs, that is, movements which convey deference, courtesy, veneration, reverence, respect, obeisance, adoration, devotion, or fear, apprehension, terror, etc. All are actions of the body guided by certain beliefs.

Finally, Bourdieu and Foucault further complement Barnes, by emphasising another dimension of the dispositional nature of bodily acts. Namely, the mechanisms of power which shape the 'materiality' of the body and are directly implicated in shaping the 'dispositional' tendencies of those bodies. Beliefs are formulated not only verbally but also by bodily activity. Bourdieu is indeed correct to indicate the dispositional properties of a 'bodily hexis' when internalizing a habitus. However, the crucial difference between the Bourdieuan model and the Foucauldian is that for Foucault this dispositional activity is in a permanent mode of constitution, stability and transformation whereas, as Bourdieu would have it, these dispositions are constituted at some point of the individual's biography and carried along in an unmodified character (at least in its fundamental features) through time and space.

7.3. Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have critically considered the political dimension of the different positions of Bourdieu, Barnes and Foucault. I have indicated that Bourdieu's theory of power underlies a commitment to an 'externalist' structuralist modality -where the power holder and power subject are seen as constituted prior to the relationship they engage in- whereas Barnes and Foucault, although adopting different analytical perspectives, share a commitment to an 'internalist' structuralism -power holder and power subjects are the result of the (power) relationships, that is, interactive activity. With this I have aimed to show how these two different approaches present different ontological understandings of the *nature* of power relations and particularly of the *bases* of power. I have highlighted that the Foucauldian understanding of power relations -as constitutive of our social identities- connects power and the materiality of bodies - an area underdeveloped by the strong programmers. I have indicated that the performative theory of social institutions, and the Foucauldian model deepen our understanding of the mechanisms by which social groups become constituted as dominant and dominated. This brings to light fundamental questions of how to understand different forms of power, different forms of social domination, and, crucially, different methodological approaches to empirically identify specific power relationships.

I have indicated that Bourdieu's notion of symbolic domination relies on groups interacting in an already formed structural field dominated by a singular symbolic hierarchy relating to the power of the habitus of the different -already formed- groups. With this Bourdieu conveys a notion of dominant groups 'having' power over dominated (powerless). That is, a zero sum view of power.⁵⁰ I have also noted that Bourdieu's

⁵⁰ I do not explicitly acknowledge which sociological positions are similar to that of Bourdieu in their understanding of power and domination. I take to be similar to Bourdieu's position all those theories which understand power as 'power over' - that is, as that which is possessed by some individuals and not others and which confers the capacity to rule over others. These are views which take up an idea that 'power' is only that type of social practice in which some human beings engage in dominating and exploiting others. The so called 'conflict theories' -those theories which view social conflict between groups as endemic in societies- would be in this category, Marxist theory being the most prominent. Most of feminist theory accords to that view. A few authors, however, have attempted to define different meanings of power encountered in different sociological traditions, and in doing so have brought to light the importance of specifying what we mean by 'power' before we engage in analysing its effects. Wartenberg's (1990), for instance, provides a very enlightening accounts of different conceptions of power and concludes that power is a 'transformative' phenomena. Whereas his analysis and definition of power locates him closer to the accounts of the performative theorists in that he treats power as the 'result of the ongoing interactions of human social agents' (1990:3) another widely known theorist of power, Lukes, contends that only power as 'domination' -that is, 'power over'- should be considered 'power', and that views that emphasise the notion of 'power to' as capacity, facility and ability, in fact ignore issues of 'power over' and virtually make 'conflict' disappear in society. Lukes explicitly claims that Foucault's notion of power and the mainstream western sociological notion of power are so different that it can be said they are not dealing with the same phenomenon. See Lukes (1974) and (1986:15). However different their definition of what is power, both authors provide an important historical overview of the differences between theories of power and the discussion around notions of 'power over' and 'power to' which can help to locate those theorists

notion of 'domination', by virtue of being based on the notion of an already formed habitus, runs into analytical problems when confronted with the empirical realities of identifying the power relationships in a field where different groups (classes, gender, races, and so on) interact. Contesting this view of power I have indicated that Foucault provides an analytical framework better suited to identifying the multiplicity of contingent elements which lie at the bases of power relations -particularly those of 'domination' of one group over the other., and most importantly, how these power relations have to be seen as *constituting* those groups rather than as performed by already constituted groups. I have paid particular attention to the methodology that Foucault proposes because I believe it provides a more realistic understanding of the empirical realities of power relationships, and methodological tools better suited to identifying -and therefore enabling resistance to- particular instances of social domination.

Theories of power like Barnes and Foucault's direct us to understand instances of domination as contextualized. They are often the result of a multiplicity of contingent events coming together in particular areas of the social network. Foucault and Barnes help us to understand that power is not located in reified overarching macro-structural entities like that of class oppression or masculine domination, but rather in localized instances of actual individuals engaging in social relations and utilizing a multiplicity of different mechanisms which result in the formation of power holders and power subjects. If contextualized forms of social oppression are what is found in empirical reality, we should aim to reveal the contextualized specific mechanisms through which those power relationships come to be established. Universalizing notions like 'patriarchal structures' or 'class struggle' are not only theoretically, epistemologically and methodologically unsound, but ultimately cannot provide methodological tools properly to identify the exact mechanisms through which power is exercised, and consequently they preclude the possibility of political transformation.

who would abide by Bourdieu's conception of power and those who would be closer to the conception of power of the performative theorists.

8

Conclusions: new approaches to a sociological enquiry of the sexed and gendered body

Sociological denials of nativist and essentialist explanations of human activity emphasise that human life in great part owes its features to human based arrangements. As a consequence the notion of 'society' is paired with and opposed to that of 'nature'. Durkheim's methodological prescription to understand society as a 'thing' - a transcendent entity derived from individual behaviour - points to another core theme in the field, that is, establishing what 'society' is. It is particularly concerned to establish not only a distinction between individual activity and macro-orders but to find its causal connection. These two dual oppositions, which have dominated the core of sociological thinking to the present day, form the thread that runs through the discussions in this thesis.

As I showed in Part One, feminism has been one particular field of enquiry where these oppositional categories have fundamentally intertwined. Feminist attempts to contest essentialist understandings of the division between women and men and their distinct social roles, led to the use of the sex/gender distinction. In feminist theory this distinction, which originated in medical discourse about the correlation between anatomical sex and psychological identity was used to separate sex (dictated by human biology) and gender (the result of cultural, conventional phenomena). This distinction was highlighted to support political agendas which challenged biologically essentializing arguments that a core gender identity was directly related to biological sex. Feminism argued that gender traits were conventional, and therefore amenable to transformation. However, the history of internal disputes within feminism over the last three decades has revealed that such division is epistemologically difficult to sustain and politically very problematic.

Central to feminist debates have been the problems encountered when trying to reconcile the desire to bring (cultural) conventionality to the dynamics between genders and macro-social institutions whilst retaining the possibility of defining the category of 'woman' as a universal one. This has raised debates about the usefulness of the sex/gender distinction, the need to define the exact boundaries of such distinctions and, as a corollary, about the assumption that a (sexual) body is a natural given. Feminism has

been at the heart of the sociological debate about the centrality of the human body in social life, its ontological status as a natural or social entity, and its role in the dynamics between individual practices and macro-structural arrangements. Indeed, the body has been placed at the junction of the two main binary oppositions in sociology, nature/culture and structure/individual. As noted in Part I, new sociological currents, like the Sociology of the Body, have made these questions central to their analytical enterprise.

Furthermore, a long history of sociology of knowledge, anthropological and historical studies have revealed that culturally and contextually accepted systems of knowledge - and political, religious, ethical conceptions about social life - mediate the production of knowledge, our understanding of human life and our social arrangements. These disciplines have helped to reveal that it may be difficult to define the 'natural' character of the human body with precision or relate to it the definition of our sex identities. It is no longer feasible to envisage the duality of sex/gender as specifying what belongs to the biological realm and what to the social/cultural. The old accepted idea that 'sex', to use Nicholson's metaphor, was an empty coatrack on which 'gender' (the different cultural 'clothes') was hung,⁰ has increasingly appeared problematic. Historical theorists like Foucault, and social scientists like Mauss, Elias, and Bourdieu, have noted that the very biology of human bodies is directly mediated and *transformed* by culture in such a way that the body has to be rethought as a cultural product.

This current of thought has been reflected in feminist debates by theorists who contend that the notion of 'sex' - far from being an empty, neutral coatrack - is itself, heavily mediated by culture. Some have argued that the very notion of 'sex' should also be conceived as a social construct just as gender is understood to be. Also, from another perspective, Feminist theorists arguing from differential standpoints -class, race and lesbian feminism- following similar sociological propositions, have also questioned and challenged the sex/gender distinction for implicitly providing a stagnant and reified notion of woman that is epistemologically unsound in that it is a reflection of specific women's empirical experiences. Furthermore, these feminists note that political activism could not be based on categories which only reflected a limited social area of empirical evidence.

The introduction of the body into sociological debates has emphasised how much we need to rethink traditional ontological understandings of human corporeality. In doing so it has questioned the binary division between 'nature' and 'society' and forced us to rethink definitions of both what is 'natural' and what is 'social'. Also, it has revealed

⁰ Nicholson as quoted in Soley (2000)

different ways of understanding the nature of individual activity or agency, the determining forces of macro phenomena or of collective practices, the nature of social order and in particular the bases of the structured and patterned character of social life.

In this thesis the main focus on trying to establish new ways to understand the 'ontology' of the 'sexed' body, has raised an array of core themes. Specifying how the recent sociological claim that the materiality of the human body is a social construction raises questions about the causal powers of social dynamics and how to identify what is natural, external and independent of human activity from that which is purely social. Exploring how social dynamics are related to the constitution of the materiality of human bodies also opens up questions about the dialectical links between individual micro-dynamics and wider social structures.

The critical comparison between Bourdieu's theory of habitus and the performative theory of social institutions (Part II) presented two different analytical traditions with different understandings of the nature of social phenomena. Analysing the relationship between individual micro activity and transcendent macro phenomena is intimately linked to this discussion. Whereas Bourdieu's analysis is relevant to my discussion for his emphasis on the internalization of the social in the corporeal, this focus is not found in the performative theory of social institutions. However, the strong programme's insights on the sociology of scientific knowledge have illuminated the social bases of knowledge formation on both social and non-social entities. Thus, although the 'body' has not directly been the focus of their analytical enterprise I suggest that the conceptual tools they provide prove to be very relevant in unravelling the social bases and nature of the materiality of humans. I have indicated thus, that their understanding of knowledge as a self-referential collective accomplishment can complement and correct important shortcomings in Bourdieu's model. On the other hand my critical comparison has revealed crucial differences in their understanding of the 'social': what the social world is, what social structures are, and, fundamentally, how they come to emerge and to exist as patterned phenomena that are somewhat transcendent from individual activity. Whereas Bourdieu's model presents an 'externalist' view of social life in which the objects engaged in social dynamics are seen as already constituted, the performative model of social institutions provides an 'internalist' account which maintains that it is in and through social dynamics (social interaction) that the objects come to be constituted from moment to moment.

Having presented their different positions in Part II, Part III returned to the core subject of the thesis, that of the 'sexed' body, by introducing and comparing the insights of the two models. I have indicated that Bourdieu's useful introduction of the body into sociological theory as a means of transcending the division between the structural world

and individual activity, is negated by the internal logics of his own model of habitus which ends up prioritizing the macro-structural world over individual activity. I have noted that although Bloor and Barnes do not pay direct attention to the body, a similar theoretical account is found in Butler and Kusch. From different theoretical backgrounds to the former they reach similar sociological conclusions and more explicitly help to theorize the formation of a sex habitus as the result of the (micro) activity of an interactive collective performatively constituting the objects they refer to. In chapter 6 I introduced Butler's performative theory specifically to analyse two main underdeveloped issues of Bourdieu's model: the social ontology of the category of sex (which Bourdieu implicitly portrays as a biological given) and the nature of macro-social structures (which in Bourdieu's model remain undertheorized as 'external' and prior to individual activity). I have indicated that Butler's model suggests similar tenets to those of the strong programme in arguing that *that* which is macro-structural is the result of the performative power of the citational activity of individuals. Here it worth stressing that Butler's emphasis on the constraining and constitutive nature of interactive activity is underdeveloped and that her notion of the performative power of citationality can be further clarified by reading it - in line with the Barnesian model of social institutions- as the product of the self-referential activity of a mutually susceptible interactive collective. What Butler does not stress sufficiently is the necessity for performative citations to be a *collective* activity.

In chapter 7 I attempted to take Butler's claims further and clarify more specifically how the notion of habitus can be expanded and reconstructed under Kusch's notion of artificial kinds. Whereas performative explanations of the world of the 'social' may be more readily accepted, one needs to be careful when dealing with phenomena like the body which straddles the natural (biological) and the social (human made). The notion of artificial kinds helps to reveal how the natural reality of the body is socially mediated to become a 'sex' identity in the form of a cultural artefact like 'habitus'. The core issue of this section was to problematize the notion of the sexed body as a 'natural' pre-given entity, and also to perceive a sex 'habitus' as an relatively independent alter-referent resulting from the performative process of self-referential activity, both verbally *and* corporeally enacted.

I have argued that theorizing the 'body' as a social construction is a particularly complex undertaking in which both idealistic and realistic positions need to be drawn upon. I have indicated that an idealistic account of the sexed body as a habitus is partially true (that is, the collective achievement of self-referential activity, verbal or practical, in constituting the categories and cultural platitudes that define what is taken to be a male or female habitus) and yet should not be seen as oblivious to physical materiality. Self-

referential category ascription 'forms' the body through the cultural categories used to refer to it in the sense that it is via these categories that the body becomes 'knowable', and thus socially significant. Furthermore, along with the purely discursive practices of category ascription, there is an array of activities which directly 'shape' the physicality of the human body into particular sexed/gendered forms. Both activities constitute the body as an 'artefact', that is a relatively independent 'alter-referent' which endures beyond its process of formation.

The notion of finitism, connected with the performative model, has helped me to unravel the mutable character of forms of sex habitus. Pre-learned tendencies only under-determine future activity. Bodies and behaviour, confronted with constantly changeable situations, undergo permanent realignment with a collective's prevalent standards of what is the accepted and prescribed sex habitus. Individuals learn from and confirm with the immediate collective what the accepted standard sex behaviour, and its 'bodily hexis' (i.e.. sex habitus), is. In learning they also act according to what is learned, thus creating a self-referential bootstrapped loop to the collectively held notions of what a sexed habitus is. The activity of individuals thus effects as self-referential circularity which further normalizes the learned sex habitus, and confirms it as a self-fulfilling prophesy in the Barnesian sense. Although immanent to the collective, at the individual level the sex habitus is perceived as transcendental, that is, external to individual activity and guiding it. Reconstructing sex habitus as an artificial kind allows us to see how the sexed body becomes 'naturalized' into the realm of biology in and through the permanent collective sanctioning. These collective standards constitute the symbolic schemes which act performatively and make the body 'matter' (to use Butlerian terminology), thus the sex habitus 'materializes' the body as an alter referent which is then collectively believed to be a 'natural kind'.

In the last chapter I directed my attention to the political dimension of the analysis of the body and its relationship to forms of power. I presented Bourdieu's and Foucault's models of power as directly concerned with its exercise onto bodies, and my aim has been to further highlight how these two models present different ontological versions of the social. In this chapter my objective was to analyse the different structural dynamics which both models present and to further expose Bourdieu's commitment to a notion of macro-structures as 'external' to interactive activity. Foucault's notion of power as an 'internal-essential' relationship, by contrast, is ontologically committed to an 'internalist' view which highlights that macro-phenomena is the product of the activity of collectives of individuals. By bringing together the Foucauldian view of micro-power mechanisms as constitutive and Barnes' definition of power as a distribution of knowledge within the collective, I have attempted to accentuate the different social

ontologies conveyed by models like Bourdieu's and those which emphasise micro-dynamics at the basis of the social world. The main point of this thesis has been to highlight how the latter offer a more adequate understanding of several core sociological issues and debates. I shall now briefly outline how an 'internalist' structuralist account offers a better sociological explanation of the several issues highlighted in this thesis regarding the nature of the sexed body, the dynamics between individuals' practices and the macro-world, and the role of power mechanisms in the constitution of social reality. Related to this, I consider methodological and epistemological issues regarding the nature of individual practices and agency, and the definition of what is the social. These appear to locate the two sociological social constructionist models in two radically different sociological traditions and reveal a commitment to an 'externalist' and 'internalist' sociological paradigm.

8.1. Sex habitus as an artificial kind: a synthesis between 'nature' and 'culture'

By introducing the performative theory of social institutions I have sought to clarify the relativist position presented by Butler when she argues that, in analysing the nature of our sex identities, we should not see 'the body in the mirror' as representing a body which is as it were 'before the mirror'¹. It is the mirror - that is our cultural representations, which casts the body as a pre-existing reality. Following the insights of artificial kinds, that the body is constituted as an 'alter-referent', helps us to understand Butler's assertion that the performative effects of cultural citational activity do not override external materiality. Rather, it constructs it as a 'delirium, which we are compelled to live', that is, as a forceful materiality which constrains independent individuals' activity. Butler's performative theory, explained under the light of artificial kinds, helps to provide a radical constructionist analytical framework which does not advocate pure voluntarism. Rather it is a way to understand how macro-structural products need not be located in an external pre-given realm to argue that they have immediate practical implications for the lives of human beings.

I submit that the performative theory of social institutions helps to shed light on the Foucauldian framework which Butler utilizes and her relativist account, and further supports her argument that there is no benefit in reifying as an ahistorical universal what is in fact a social construct. As mentioned in Part I most feminism still relies on a 'metaphysical presupposition of identity politics' which is in need of revision. We should conceive of the subject as an object resulting from cultural practices and not as an

¹ Butler (1993:91)

already existing entity using cultural practices. Hence, the subject of feminism itself is "a discursive formation and effect of a given version of representational politics [that is] the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate emancipation."²

This position helps to open new ways of reconstructing the ambivalent status of the body in feminism since de Beauvoir's formulation of the cultural basis of sex/gender identity. The notion of artificial kinds, the performative theory of social institutions, and the Foucauldian analytical framework of power micro-mechanisms offer insights into the taken for granted essentialist bedrock of biology which dominate perceptions of sex identity.

I have used a critical examination of Bourdieu's model of habitus to highlight the avenues which the performative theory of social institutions and similar theorists -Butler, Foucault and Kusch - provide to resolve some of the underdeveloped analytical suppositions which remain in the sociological analysis of the body and the sexed body in particular. Indeed, the notion of artificial kinds helps to reveal and correct two implicit assumptions in Bourdieu's model, which appear to be common in most current understandings of sex identity. We find that Bourdieu's explanation of sex/gender habitus oscillates between two positions: on the one hand a biological determinism resting in a naive realist understanding of the sexed body as a natural given, for which 'habitus' provides cultural variable 'gender'; on the other, an 'over-socializing' view of the (sexed) body, that conceives it as a mere *tabula rasa* for cultural inscriptions. In doing so Bourdieu implicitly oscillates between granting full 'agency' to the body (that is, biology fully informs our binary sex category division) and granting it no impact or constraining effects on the cultural and symbolic schemes which inform our beliefs about the sexed body.

In my reconstruction of sex habitus as an artificial kind, however, I suggest that the materiality of the sexed body and its habitus have to be seen as an 'artefact' both in the form of cultural categories about sex gender identity and in the form of a materialization of an 'alter-referent'. In and through citational activity, thus, it becomes 'normalized' as a collective good shared by the whole community. In this light, a sex habitus cannot be conceived as formed at a particular point of an individual's history and then acting as a guiding structure for future practices, as Bourdieu suggests. It is not, to use the strong programmers' analogy, that socialization constructs 'a railway track stretching out ahead of individuals'.³ Rather, a sex habitus has to be seen in a permanent state of constitution,

² Butler (1990a:2)

³ Barnes et al (1996:54)

in which prior socialization processes can only *underdetermine* future activity. Activity will always be subject to the contingencies of newly encountered phenomena.

Sex habitus, thus, has to be understood as the product of the continuous collective practices of reference but, by virtue of its corporeal nature, the types of actions which it generates need to be defined beyond mere verbal speech acts or the perception of bodily activity as 'implicit' talk. I have thus, argued that in the case of a sex habitus we have to redefine the particular type of actions it generates and how they performatively contribute to its self-constitution and transformation. I have suggested that habitus practices can be seen not only as 'formed' by self-referential activity but as *enabling* further self-referential (performative) activity once constituted as such. This view rests on the finitist tenet of the open-ended nature of human activity of category ascription which contends that no act of classification fully informs new activity. On the contrary once constituted as a sex habitus an individual will relate to an array of potential possibilities which open up the space for new activity.

Highlighting that those theorists who envisage social life as the product of the interactive collective express a sociological commitment to an 'internalist' structuralism, has been inherent to this debate on sex habitus formation. I have further revealed this distinction by analysing their structuralist commitments to a 'continuous' (postulated by Kusch) versus a 'deistic' view of the social world (adopted by Bourdieu). This has helped me to further unravel Bourdieu's implicit commitment to an ontology of the social which, by refusing to grant any constitutive role to the micro-interactive process, falls into the trap of over-deterministic, and metaphysical structuralist, models which he wishes to avoid. Thus, in Bourdieu, micro level activity occurs between already formed entities - both the individual and the social field which they inhabit - and this, I submit, forms the core of a commitment to an 'externalist' type of structuralism. To rescue Bourdieu's important contribution of the notion of an embodied habitus I have suggested reformulating its key ingredients in light of the insights of the performative theorists. This reconstruction allows it to be more in tune with the contingent, conventional, and changing forms of the content of the category of sex identity as a 'habitus, and the practices that it generates, governs and normalizes. From this perspective, sex habitus dispositions should not be understood as *re-productive*, but as *re-constitutive*, that is, as constituting new -if only slightly- forms in the two levels of macro-social world and the micro-phenomena of individual activity.

The form of social constructionism which the 'internalist' theorists provide dissolves the duality between nature and society by conceiving the notions of 'causality' and 'construction' in a different light. It is the descriptions of the world that are considered to be constructed and *not* the world that they describe. However, and crucially, given

that without those descriptions the world could not be grasped, in a sense the world *is* 'constructed' by our descriptive categories. The strong programme's sociological position reveals that the relationship is not between the 'object' and the 'knowledge' of this object, but rather that knowledge of the object is always mediated by the categories that are collectively constituted. In this sense the 'object' as external reality is only part of the final constitution of our knowledge. This contradicts naive realistic positions that conceive a direct correspondence between categories and the entities in the world to which they refer, but also discredits accusations of pure idealism directed at the performative theorists.

In this sense, sex habitus is a contingent, local, and contextual reality which intuitively appears as an external absolute. This is how the relativistic position of the performative theory should be understood: not as denying 'reality' but as denying 'absolutism' or 'essentialism'. The classification of humans into a binary sex category should, thus, be understood as *one* way to interpret human biology but not the only one and nothing in nature determines that one classification is 'truer' than another in *absolute* terms. True and false sex identity attributions have to be understood in relative terms as always related to a particular collective.

Clearly this analytical framework allows us to better place the current dispute within feminist ranks around the issues of 'realism', 'objectivism' and 'materialism'. These notions do need to be carefully considered and cannot be dismissed as unproblematic categories. Discursive and performative accounts do not deny that contextually speaking there is a 'realistic', and thus 'objective' way to categorize certain humans as females and others as males. Indeed, within a specific culturally agreed universe of categories, those classifications are not arbitrary and open to free modification by the individuals who inhabit a particular collective. By the same token to acknowledge that the collectively accepted taxonomic division of sexes is relative to a collective does not deny that such classification has all sorts of practical, political, and ideological dimensions attached to it. Practical everyday realities of such divisions may -and do- lead to a variety of social orders that result in unequal positions and distributions. That such taxonomic divisions have fundamental political consequences, some of which may need to be redressed, should not disguise the fact that they are the product of contextual, local, inherently provisional and thus drifting, collective universes of categories.

Feminist political debate reconsidered

The influence of the performative theory is apparent in late feminist accounts. Many have attempted to locate the constitution of sex/gender identity and relationships in 'the

constant enactment in our daily life'.⁴ This statement has often been understood as providing a voluntaristic account of performativity as the 'performance' of independent, reflexive individuals. As I have indicated, however, the notion of performativity goes beyond a voluntaristic understanding of 'performance'. Gender -or sex- is not that activity which we, already formed, subjects 'perform' somewhat at will. The 'sexed' subject, on the contrary is the *result* of the performative activity, as are macro-structural systemic properties. Thus, when Lorber insists that gender is 'performed' under the influences of the 'general rules of social life', she is trapped in the same kind of ontological mystification as Bourdieu. To wit, to envisage two already formed objects -rules and subjects- as being in a relationship of external dynamics. This results in the reification, *outside* human activity, of the notion of 'rules'. As I have indicated this metaphysical reification is what the strong programme, Butler, Foucault and Kusch help to overcome. In particular reference to the category of sex, Butler's whole oeuvre emphasises that the heterosexual matrix as a macro-phenomena is the result of the aggregate of individuals' citational activity. Whereas for Lorber -and many feminist theorists- the social order is seen as 'structured for stability', the performative 'internalist' theorists view the stability of social order as always transient and in a potentially vulnerable position.⁵

The main issue of the political debate among feminists has been the 'ontological' nature of the notion of sexual domination and gender power relationships. Many feminists, contrary to radical post-structuralists, have argued that to dissolve the core category of woman into a relativistic cultural construct results in the relativization of gender power relationships which in turn results in the impossibility of political activity. Butler's ontological contestation of the category of sex and gender, viewed under the performative model of social institutions, helps not only to perceive the relative nature of the categories of women and men, but also the taken for granted universality of masculine domination. Empirical attempts to identify particular instances of women's oppression may find it impossible to locate a universal use of the binary division of sex identity or universal patriarchal and masculine domination across class, ethnic, national, religious, cultural, economic, or other factors. Therefore, when attempting to understand the dynamics of particular instances of women's oppression, and there are many, we should see them in relation to particular contexts as localized and often the contingent

⁴ Lorber (2000:93)

⁵ Butler's contention that feminism should embrace a 'feminist de-gendering movement' is not aimed at dismissing empirical instances of sexual oppression. Rather she points out that by invoking the category of 'woman' as universal, feminists produce the 'sexual differences' (and the oppressive practices they compel) they wish to eliminate. A feminist de-gendering movement, thus, would be one that did not need to locate universal abstract realities to identify in the empirical reality of specific practices, the power relationships between individuals, and the specific inequalities they constitute.

result of a complex of different activities, goals, and interests of various groups implicated in a network of relationships. To suggest that particular instances of sexual oppression are relative does not, as some feminists appear to suggest, take away the empirical reality of this particular instance of domination. Instead, it contextualizes such domination in the real world of individual activity and the power dynamics in which such activity occurs.

The criticism that radical, relativistic postmodern accounts neglect the social context of power relationships has no grounds when we understand that rather than precluding the existence of oppressive power relationships, idealist arguments of performative theories explain their existence at the empirical level of individual self-referential practices. That is, rather than being located in a position of 'exteriority' from individual's activity, power relationships and domination are the very result of such activity. To argue that the motivations behind a particular power relationship are themselves a constructed phenomenon should not preclude any (relative) conceptions of justice and political struggle. As Butler argues, 'to call a presupposition into question is not the same as doing away with it; rather, it is to free it from its metaphysical lodgings in order to understand what political interests were secured in and by the metaphysical placing, and thereby to permit the term to occupy and to serve very different political aims'.⁶

Thus feminism should not feel threatened by the notion that sex identity can only be grasped as a performative effect.⁷ That the category of womanhood is undefinable (as a universal) does not mean to say it is an 'idealist fiction'. Reconstructed as an artificial kind, the category of sex identity and its 'habitus' is a cultural artefact with a clear 'graspable' material alter-referent that is the result of also empirically observable power mechanisms. Crucially however, the notion of artificial kinds, allows us to see the collective nature of a sex habitus. This helps to correct views of those like Alcoff who convey it as single, individual, 'subjective engagement in the [objective] practices, discourses and institutions'.⁸ Contrary to the understandings of 'objectivity' which those feminists envisage, the objectivity of a sex habitus is precisely the result of collective self-referential activity constituting the content of the category as transcendental to the individual and thus 'objective', but immanent to the collective and thus relative to it.

As noted in Part I even the feminists most favourable to postmodern deconstructionism ultimately reject a relativistic stance when it comes to 'deconstructing' masculine domination as a relative phenomena. Close to the Bourdieuan stance most feminists conceive masculine domination as a 'historical constant' based in an essentialization of

⁶ Butler (1993:30)

⁷ See Alcoff and others in the section *The politics of location* in page 44

⁸ See Alcoff as quoted in page 44

the patterns of difference. Indeed even those feminists who advocate a 'politics of location', by suggesting that the practice of women's oppression is diachronically and synchronically universal, end up converting particular instances of women's oppression into the product of an essentialized structure. I have indicated thus, that only by locating sexual oppression within the relative context of an interactive collective can we properly locate and identify particular instances of those power mechanisms which are at the bases of specific instances of oppression. This is paramount for working out feasible modes of political activity.

When Butler notes that we have to do away with the 'doer being the deed', she is pointing at the fact that there is no metaphysical abstract universal category of womanhood preceding individual performative practice. Instead, this 'doer' is the result of her practices, but this does not make them any less real in empirical terms. Relativism, thus, should not lead to political inactivity but to more effective localized activity. It would appear that the fear of relativism is grounded in the fact that relative and contextual human activity cannot validate our moral and ethical standards. When feminists like Alcoff contend that what post-structuralists accounts like that Foucault or Butler do - by arguing that 'race', 'class' and 'gender' are 'constructs' - precludes the possibility of 'decisively validating conceptions of justice and truth because underneath there lies *no natural core* to build on and liberate⁹ they fall into two errors. They assume, firstly that something 'constructed' is not 'real', and secondly that 'reality' is only *that* which is granted by an unexplained metaphysical entity called 'nature'. Relying on unexplained notions of 'nature', 'reality' and 'objectivity' to validate our reasons for social struggle is replete with the political dangers of absolutism and dogmatism.

However, as I have argued, theories which base their understanding of the bases of social life in an 'internalist' approach provide a model of social understanding which opens up new ways of resolving these logical paradoxes. That social life is a 'social kind' of reality does not mean that it does not acquire an 'objective' status for the individuals of a collective. Macro-structural phenomena, social life, rules, norms, categories, collective ethical and moral evaluations, can be perceived in the same light. They are artefacts resulting from our collective self-referential processes, but this doesn't make them any less 'real'. They belong, in a broad sense, to the realm of the 'objective', not as rooted in an external platonic non-material ontology, but rather as that is which the result of empirically visible practices and relationships located in collective activity. Thus, the position of such theorists can help us understand that a 'linguistic idealist' understanding

⁹ Alcoff (1994:106)

of social reality need not revert to an 'ontological idealism' which dispenses with reality altogether.

The fundamentally different sociological approaches to the constitution of the social in general and individual sex habitus in particular, conveyed by Bourdieu and the performative theory of social institutions have profound implications for the understanding of individual practices. In what follows I shall draw some conclusions on that particular issue.

8.2. Reconsidering the 'logic' of practices: a synthesis of 'micro' and 'macro' phenomena, agency and structure

In Bourdieu's model the connection between the macro structure and the micro world of individual activity (how individuals' personal interests and goals correspond with the structure of the macro-world) is conveyed in the following way: individual interests and goals are 'constrained' by the macro-world allowing a limited repertoire of practices. The general system of collective practices self-reproduce and in doing so reproduce the macro-world. For Bourdieu social agents are 'virtuosos' who know the script so well that they can improvise from already internalized themes which the objective world dictates.¹⁰ Practices thus have the character of an internalized 'sense of the game'. Like accomplished football players who having an intimate understanding of the object of the game, individuals can improvise according to the internalized rules of the game. This notion of practices presents not only a static view of the rules internalized, but conceives individuals as independent players interacting with each other on the basis of already internalized guiding principles. Practices are not seen as the result of a reflexive and calculative readjustment to the requirements of a given situation, but rather are pre-reflexively internalized and unconsciously guide how individuals will deal with those requirements. Thus practices will be somewhat predictable and concordant with the internalized habitus. We have seen however that Bourdieu's model is very static and fails to account for the fact that practices change constantly over time.

In order further to elucidate the internal logics of Bourdieu's analytical proposition with regard to practices, I will return to the clock analogy which I presented in section 3.4.2. It would appear that Bourdieu explains the notion of shared practices among individuals as the result of an external device (macro-structures). That is, individuals inhabit a particular social environment which 'forms' their habitus, and the practices it compels, in ways sufficiently similar to enable independent individuals' behaviour to accord with others. In this sense Bourdieu aligns himself with a model like that exemplified by Figure

¹⁰ Bourdieu (1995a:79)

5 (see page 165) in which structures are seen as prior and determinant. Indeed, we have already seen that Bourdieu himself has used the clocks and times analogy -used first by Leibniz- to clarify his position (see page 85 section 2.1.3) on the nature and bases of the durable character of habitus dispositions.

Of the three 'clock' models depicted by him, Bourdieu only considers the last two, ignoring the first one as of any significance, that is the model of mutual influence. The second model, i.e. clocks' times as being permanently synchronized by an external 'skilful workman', is explicitly dismissed by Bourdieu by being taken to exemplify radical structuralist positions 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 view of social life and a reification of external reality difficult to sustain empirically.

In order to avoid such an untenable reificatory stance Bourdieu adopts the third model. That is, to envisage individual clocks constructed from the start with such precision that their individual times will always coincide. Although Bourdieu is clear in his understanding of practices as *structured*, that is, as the product of objective conditions of existence, he also sees them as *structuring*, in that the macro-structural world gets reproduced by those practices. Thus the dynamics between individual and structure oscillate between the model represented in Figure 5 (see page 165) which represents the period of habitus formation, and the model of Figure 6 (165) which exemplifies the dynamics between individual and structure as co-reproductive. Thus, in a sense, Bourdieu alternates from one model to another when, on the one hand describing individual socialization, and on the other the dynamics between individual and structure. These two models also appear to be at the bases of two different social phenomena. The first model would explain how different individuals' practices achieve co-ordination and consensus, whereas the second model would explain the stable and unchanging nature of the social world. However, whichever model is utilized the ontological status of the macro-structural world remains always in a position of exteriority to individuals' interactive activity.

A model like this conveys a particular view of agency. Because for Bourdieu the structural world clearly becomes 'internalized', structures are not reified outside individual activity but rather are reified as an internal (subjective) state. Thus Bourdieu explains that individuals *appear* to be 'free' to act without the constraints of a visible coercive external force. In Bourdieu's model individual practices are the 'subjectivity of the objective'; they are the result of external conditions and adjust to new environments with an internalized 'principle' which is that of the external structural world. In Bourdieu the individual habitus *is* the objective external world.

This model clearly envisages individuals as *independent* beings. The '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.¹¹ This view retains a methodological individualistic bias by precluding the notion of permanent interaction as constitutive. Not only do macro- and micro-phenomena stand in a position of externality, in which the dynamics of interaction is between two already constituted objects, but the model also grants priority, and thus determinative power, to macro-structures over individual practice. The formula which Bourdieu employs to transcend the duality between macro and micro activity is encapsulated in the image of an orchestra in which all the individuals have internalized the melody equally and thus their individual practices 'can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of a conductor'.¹² Bourdieu attempts to achieve the synthesis between the macro-structural world and individual activity by locating the systemic requirements not outside the individuals -as he says structural objectivism does- but rather inside individuals. The problem with this view is that rules still exist in a reified form in so far as they remain independent of, and act as guiding systems to, the reflexive activity of interactive individuals.

On the other hand the strong programme view of consensus and collective practices conceives the metaphorical orchestra as a group of individuals who have indeed internalized some dispositional tendencies which are reflexively modified according to the requirements of the situation. In the strong programme's view individuals have internalized musical skills and tunes but this does not make them identical to others. Rather, by virtue of a multiplicity of factors, there will always be a degree of dissimilarity between individuals' internalization. So, in order to achieve viable collective activity those individuals necessarily will adapt their individualized tendencies to the rest of the collective. This view does not envisage an 'external' conductor, but nor does it conceive this conductor as internalized inside the single individual, as Bourdieu's model suggests. Consensus and collective agreement in practices are based upon interactive activity. Thus, the achievement of a common melody (i.e. macro-phenomena) is the result of interactive activity (i.e. micro-phenomena). In this model both the macro-structural world and the micro-phenomena of practices are intimately interconnected in

¹¹ "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 coordination*. 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, (1995b:58). Italics are mine.

¹² Bourdieu (1995b: 53)

their co-constitution. One *presupposes* the other in a truly dialectical fashion. According to the performative theory of social institutions, shared practice and structural systemic features are *collective achievements*, in which, crucially, calculative activity is at the core. Shared practice is the result not of individuals having been similarly 'constructed', and then being able to non-reflexively activate their dispositional tendencies, but rather of individuals coming to interact together, with certain routinized activity, which is constantly modified and transformed according to the reflexive and calculative inductive inferences about the requirements of a given collective.

This is a model of practices exemplified by the multiple 'local consensus model' represented in Figure 7 (see page 166) It suggests that there is nothing external or internal to independent individuals, only that which is the result of the constant co-ordination of actions. The reified existence of collective practices and consensual activity is the result of the accomplishment of the shared activity of a collective. They exist in the form of an agreement among the collective, but, crucially, such agreement is generated from moment to moment. Because individuals' learning activity is an ongoing process, the practices it compels are continually readjusted and transformed.

An ontological definition of rules: the priority of practice

It is from the consensus achieved by social interaction that rules, norms and the possibility of collective practices arise. Rules are accomplished at every moment of following them. It is in this sense that practice has to be understood as *prior* to rules. We are socialized into specific practices of 'rule-following' activity and from this routinized activity derives the perception that there exists something outside our practices, guiding them. The subjective belief in an abstract set of rules is the result of practice not its cause.¹³ This is a view which strongly highlights the contingent and unintentional nature of rules. Indeed, the strong programme's understanding of rule following activity aligns with the Foucauldian position that macro-structural phenomena -dispositifs- are not the result of a teleological historical evolution but rather the consequences of contingent and chance events located together in a (power) network of relationships. There is no unified and coherent set of external macro-phenomena which pre-dates practice, but rather a multiplicity of rule-followers which although socialized into particular ways of routinized behaviour, re-constitute and modify previous habituated activity via the specifically encountered needs, goals and contingencies of a given collective. From this consensus achieved in and through interaction rules obtain their 'normative' status.

¹³ Bloor (2001:96).

Thus rules only exist in the realm of the 'social', that space which is the accomplishment of an interactive self-referential process of the collective. They do not exist outside social activity. Unlike Bourdieu's model of rules, the performative theory contends that nothing in the rule itself fixes its application in a given case, that the right or wrong application of a rule does not come inherently from an 'external' meaning of the rule but rather that which is taken to be the meaning of a rule is the result of continuous, conventional and often contingent interactive activity. Thus, empirically speaking, in the world we find only dispositional activity and rule formulation, and not a third object called 'rules'. Rule formulation in turn affects dispositional activity and activity reconstructs rule formulation, and from these dynamics the meaning of rules arise.

Agency and resistance re-examined

The adoption of an analytical framework like that of the 'internalists' provides a different understanding of the role of reflexive/calculative agency, which is seen as the *necessary* condition for sociability rather than, in Bourdieu's model, as a capacity mediated and constrained by the social.

For Bourdieu agency, and its strategic character, indicates that activity is 'constrained' by external phenomena. Agency is that 'creative' capacity which remains once the rules have been internalized. Following the Chomskian model (although without its biological foundations) habitus dispositional activity allows for creative (strategic) capacity always within the constraints of some internalized 'generative schemes'. In Bourdieu's own terminology, a habitus disposition is 'this durably installed generative principle of regulated impositions'. It is thus easy to understand why for Bourdieu calculative agency is not a permanent feature of individuals' activity but rather something which acquires different modalities. From an automatic unreflexive activity it can be transformed to a more fully reflexive activity which appears only as a 'temporary state arising in [structural] crisis'.¹⁴ Full reflexive activity can only arise when the structural character of the social fields undergo sudden radical changes producing a discrepancy between the internalized world view and that of the external world which allows for a 'raising of consciousness' effect. Agency for Bourdieu is a 'slip', not a permanent state.¹⁵

¹⁴ Bourdieu argues that although dispositions are subject to a degree of revision (when encountering different objective conditions) the transformation is never radical, that is, it never transforms the fundamental generative principles internalized prior to the new situation. This is because the 'agency' of a habitus works on the basis of the premises established in the previous state. Bourdieu (2000a: 160),

¹⁵ Bourdieu (2000:163): "there is also the relative autonomy of the symbolic order, which, (...) specially in periods in which expectations and chances fall out of line, can leave a margin of freedom or political action aimed at reopening the space of possibles" (ibid:235)

Under the light of the insights of the performative theory of social institutions, however, in social dynamics consciousness has to be seen, not as raised, but 'changed'. The possibility of collective practice and consensus is understood to be based in constant calculative and reflexive activity. Strategic activity, viewed under the strong programme's tenets, has to be understood as the reflexive calculative assessment of the demands of the context in a given moment and readapting prior internalized activity -a habitus- to fit the newly encountered situation, according to personal goals, interests and so on. Agency is not that which remains after the socialization process but rather that which is at the bases of the socialization process. Agency is the crucial medium through which collective interaction is engendered and mobilized and which constitutes social life.¹⁶ The collective character of social life portrayed by the performative theory of social institutions understands agency neither as an epiphenomenon of an over-socialized individual nor as an independent capacity of isolated individuals. Individuals do not make calculative inferences in isolation, but rather they are profoundly influenced by others in their judgements and actions, and constantly take account of other people. That individuals are mutually susceptible to collective sanctioning does not however override their calculative inductive capacities. Thus whereas in Bourdieu we find a notion of agency constrained by the individual internalization of external social constraints, the performative theory stresses the causal nature of individual interactive processes and understands individuals as possessing calculative power but in a relationship of interdependence with others.

Because social life is thus the result of the permanent self-referential activity present in collective action, change and stability are both the result of the same activity. There is thus no difference between actions which transform and actions which reproduce a particular social order. If social structure is, as Butler argues, dependent upon the 'enunciation of its continuation'¹⁷, every act of enunciation poses both the possibility of further stabilization or potential discontinuity. Resistance is in this sense inherent in the very same constitutive process. Since the rules, norms, laws, categories and so on must be repeated to remain as macro-structural phenomena, the very practice of self-referential activity, that is, citation, contains the possibility of transformation. Resistance in the performative model is a by-product of the performative process.¹⁸ This

¹⁶ As Barnes puts it: "Voluntaristic discourse is actually the vehicle of human sociability through which its users co-ordinate their actions and cognition, and thereby constitute every level of their amazingly elaborate social life" Barnes ,(2000:5)

¹⁷ Butler (1997b:19)

¹⁸ Butler (1997b:129). For Butler, for instance, precisely because rules are the result of 'repetition' and repetition can never be performed in identical conditions to past experience, repetition cannot be equated with 'redundancy', that is, with identical activity. Thus, between the past application of a rule and the new application there is always a gap, and this gap is the space of agency. A similar proposition is found in Foucault's declaration that resistance is never in a position of 'exteriority' in relation to power (Foucault,

is a similar proposition to that suggested by the finitist theory of social institutions, namely that past instances only under-determine, and thus individuals alter their activity over time. Agency, resistance, transformation and change are inherent to social dynamics. For the performative theorists the performative process is not merely an act used by a pre-given subject, but rather the very same process by which the subject is socially constituted. This process thus is a crucial part not only of subject formation but of the ongoing political contestation and reformulation of the categories, norms, rules, and so on which exist in the social order. Indeed, consciousness is not raised but possibly changed in any act of political contestation.

The radical difference between this position and that of Bourdieu is clear. For Bourdieu, "the specific efficacy of subversive action consists in the power to bring to consciousness, and so modify, the categories of thought which help to orient individual and collective practices and in particular the categories through which distributions are perceived and appreciated"¹⁹. This is a view which clearly conveys that the categories of thought exist externally, inapprehensible by individual consciousness, in an already constituted state and as guiding structures. On the contrary, for the performative theory acts of classification have a performative nature in a particular sense. They not only constitute that which they cite or refer to but this constitution creates a new state of affairs which opens up new, unpredictable, and unknown possibilities. When the self-referential activity ascribes categories to the social world, particularly to individuals, consciousness changes to new forms which makes new kinds of experience possible and offers the possibility of a new world previously unthinkable. It is in this sense that self-referential activity by effecting the emergence of new kinds of categories create new possibilities for choice and action.

Methodological implications: researching mechanisms

In chapter 7 I indicated that both Barnes' and Foucault's theories of power coincide in suggesting similar methodological programmes. What they suggest is that only when a systematic structure of practices of domination can be identified can we speak of domination. Domination only exist as an exercise of power mechanisms. The proposition implicit in this view is that in order to identify (and understand) instances of exploitative power relationships we have to move from an ontology of abstract metaphysics based on overarching macro-structural entities like class domination or patriarchal exploitation, to the empirical reality of particular instances of power

1998:95). For Foucault relations of power constitute both the agency of the subject and the possibility to resist.

¹⁹ Bourdieu (1995b: 141)

relationships found in social life. The methodological implications of such a position are evident. We cannot identify 'power' from already preconceived overarching notions of the sources of domination as Bourdieu does when he attempts to identify instances of domination as the product of a universal symbolic order supporting masculine domination or a universal structure of class struggle. A 'puzzle solving methodology'²⁰ of this type approaches the world with an already preconceived view of what is to be found.²¹

A more Foucauldian methodology, on the contrary, and equally that implicit in the performative theory of social institutions, emphasises that first of all we have to identify and analyse 'nexus of events' before we can identify structures of domination. It is in the realm of social interaction that power mechanisms are exercised, come to exist, and constitute those objects involved in the relationship. Empirically speaking, regular patterned types of actions, and equally instances of power mechanisms, are normally the result of interacting individuals negotiating their narrowly defined interests and goals. We should thus aim to reveal those instances of activity which result in collective action. Empirical studies of collective activity, as Barnes has noted, are always bounded, circumscribed and oriented to the circumstances of a particular collective.²² Macro structural phenomena have to be identified in specific instances of activity,²³ and not as pre-existing and guiding collective activity.

A Foucauldian methodology prompts us to look first and foremost at the social practices through which powers are exercised, and through which those powers and their objects comes to exist as such. The 'reality' of power can only be captured by identifying those specific mechanisms by which individuals come to exist as particular subjects in a social relationship. We have to look for those specific (power) relationships between individuals located in particular contexts, identify which type of interactive activity they engage in, and thus which objects are defined and constructed by those particular relationships. Thus, when attempting to identify and define how sex habitus is

²⁰ I take this analogy from Kuhn (1996: 36-9).

²¹ Thus for Bourdieu the analysis of class patterns of consumption does not reveal genuine group choice, taste and desires, but rather a tendency to acquire cheap versions of those goods possessed by the group(s) placed higher in the symbolic hierarchy. In this sense his notion of classes corresponds to an already constructed image of society.

²² Barnes (1995:185) It is interesting to note that whereas for Bourdieu what *makes* a 'community' is its oppositional relationship with others which configure its 'distinctive' traits and thus its ontological existence, for the performative theorists a community is understood to be constituted internally, that is, as a 'network' of social relations in a particular social space which strongly connects individuals and separates them from the outside world. Consequently, to identify a particular community, class, group, identity, and so on, attention needs to be paid to those internal networks of social relations.

²³ As MacKenzie reminds us, 'all history is a record of actions, and it is only individuals who act' and not metaphysical macro-structures. Manifestations of activity which suggest class struggle (e.g. strikes), or women's exploitation (e.g. lower salaries for the same jobs as men) indeed exist in the world, but this does not mean that there is a 'thing' called 'class struggle' or 'patriarchal structure' that can be identified independently of its manifestations. MacKenzie (1981:499)

constituted and which forms, meanings, and shapes it comes to acquire, one should consider the following elements. First, the particular accounts, actions, and verbal statements which are made, how they are positively or negatively sanctioned, what type of activities are seen, and thus constituted, as acceptable, unacceptable, proper, improper, natural and deviant. Second, what types of bodily shapes, movements, clothing, foods ingested, and care taken, are enforced and discouraged. Third, the multiplicity of allusions, threats, limitations, exclusionary practices, and enforcements which are at the bases of delimiting the boundaries of a specific sex habitus. And fourth, how individuals try to live up to those expectations, challenge, negotiate, transform, contest and perpetuate them.

Thus to take a Foucauldian methodological approach implies an attempt to identify those mechanisms by which power relationships, and the power holder and the power subjects they produce, are materialized in social interaction. This, indeed, is a radically different view of power to that of Bourdieu's which conveys power as an already existing 'force' with particular characteristics which determine the social practices of the power holder and the power subject. When Bourdieu argues that political change can only come from 'bringing the laws [of the social field] to light' so that the dominated, by virtue of gaining consciousness of their existence, can attempt to change these laws, he does not actually provide any feasible political agenda because these 'laws of the social field' are a theoretical construct which does not exist in empirical reality.

If the analytical tenets of the performative theorists are correct the conditions for successful collective political activity must come from locating individuals in an interactive situation which enables them to constitute, their political activity as a collective good. Once such a collective good is identified the necessary actions to achieve it can also be discerned. Most failed attempts to change a particular state of affairs are based on misidentifying a homogeneous collective which does not empirically exist. For instance, feminist attempts to change empirically real discriminatory practices may have been hampered, not only by the impossibility of all women coming to act together, but also by the impossibility of determining a single collective good which is shared by the multiplicity of subgroups which comprise all women across society. By virtue of remaining trapped in a metaphysical ontology of universal reified notions of patriarchal structures and masculine domination, a multiplicity of local instances of oppressive situations in which some groups of women live have passed unrecognized, particularly when they are the product of a multiplicity of contingent events which cannot be related to masculine domination.²⁴

²⁴ There are a great many instances, for example, of exploitation of women and men by other women.

Postscript.

The structuralist debate: 'externalists' versus 'internalists'

The type of structuralist analysis which Bourdieu offers is indeed a clear example of a sociological commitment to an 'externalist' model. Such a position is never more evident than when he describes in his own words his type of structuralism:

"By structuralism (...) I mean that there exists, in the social world itself, (...) objective structures which are independent of the consciousness and desires of agents and are capable of guiding or constraining their practices or their representations. By constructivism, I mean that there is a social genesis on the one hand of the patterns of perception, thought and action which are constitutive of what I call the habitus, and on the other hand of social structures, and in particular of what I call fields or groups, especially of what are usually called social classes"²⁵

Bourdieu, after having clearly separated the macro- and the micro-world in a relationship of causality which locates the former in a position of exteriority and determinative priority with the latter, insists that both are 'social products'. Whereas it is clear in his model that the activity and features of the micro-world are the result of macro-structural phenomena, Bourdieu cannot provide a clear view of how the macro-structural world is dependent on the features of micro activity. When Bourdieu places the macro-world as the causal factor of which the micro world is the effect, he leaves the macro-world unexplained, and grants it full determining powers. By virtue of denying that macro-phenomena originate precisely in the realm of collective interactive activity, this type of structuralist modality inevitably reifies macro structures in a metaphysical space of externality. Bourdieu's constructionist position assumes that there is an objective social reality that can be 'discovered'.²⁶ This is a structuralist model which inevitably implies the existence of a single totalizing source, a centre, a founding basis, a principle.

Bourdieu's sociological endeavour, in trying to locate the historical outside the realm of the contingent and relative nature of social interaction, inevitably falls back into the ahistoricism which he wishes to leave behind. Thus, Bourdieu can only explain historical transitions by relying on dynamics of chance and sudden discontinuity, which are once again external phenomena. Thus social dynamics are not immanent to social activity but dependent on the particular structural 'moment' whose features govern, and determine, these social dynamics.

In radical opposition to the Bourdieuan form of structuralism we have seen that the authors I have defined as 'internalists' suggest another way to understand structure which

²⁵ Bourdieu (1990a:123)

²⁶ Thus Bourdieu adopts a similar ontological position than those feminists which adopt a form of materialism which locates the macro-phenomena as external and existing independent of individuals' discursive activity. See particularly Jackson as quoted in chapter 1.

contends that in social reality there is no 'hidden unity to be grasped at once'²⁷ What the social theories of the strong programmers, Butler, Kusch and Foucault provide, is an altogether different way to understand social causality, one which accounts for the contextual, local, constraining forces in a particular space as the bases of the emergence of macro-structural phenomena. Hence the possibility of a fixed locus of meaning external to individuals' activity is an metaphysical illusion. The social order is thus perceived to be a multitude of ongoing encounters or interactions in which individuals are permanently transforming prior forms and constituting new social orders which cannot be understood simply as a combination of pre-existing elements. Rather "there is an interaction order 'sui generis' which basically manifests an improvisatory quality".²⁸

I have attempted to show that the idealist position which the 'internalists' theorists adopt is not, as has often been accused of, a negation of the macro-structural world. It is rather, another way to understand its ontological status. Hence when Foucault, in his famous lecture, appears to reject the label of structuralism,²⁹ he is in fact not rejecting a notion of society as ordered in some sense and constrained to certain (discursive) practices. Rather he is rejecting that particular form of structuralism which 'objectifies' macro structures outside the dynamics of individuals' practices and locate them in an unexplained platonic realm. On the contrary, the type of structuralism which Foucault advances is synchronic and relative to a particular historical moment. That is, some macro structural forms of knowledge -*epistemes*- come to exist as a transitory crystallization both stemming from and regulating social life.

For Foucault the tendency to adopt an 'externalist' form of structuralism is a 'fear of discourse' (discourse meaning that forming principle in which life evolves into unpredictable forms), a fear to realize that there is not a unique foundation to our beliefs and to social life but rather an open-ended and discontinuous *insensible* order of events, a dynamics governed by 'the iron hand of necessity shaking the dice-box of chance'³⁰. Hence, it is his advice, that the study of society has to abandon the search for mechanically causal links or an ideal of 'necessity' among its constitutive elements. And this is indeed the lesson we can extract from Foucault's genealogical studies, to wit, to focus on the identification of those mechanisms which underlie the formation of patterns of activity which are at once, scattered, discontinuous and regular. Those processes of crystallization which are the contingent result of a series of power mechanisms, power being understood as that domain of constitution of social objects in

²⁷ Derrida (1981b:287)

²⁸ Barnes (1995:74)

²⁹ "And now, let those who are weak on vocabulary, let those with little comprehension of theory call all this -if its appeal is stronger than its meaning for them -structuralism...." Foucault (1996: 360)

³⁰ Nietzsche as quoted in Foucault (1991:89)

relation to which one can affirm or deny true or false propositions³¹. Although Foucault may appear to suggest that there is an original 'fear' installed in humans as an essential trait³², a notion that would be somewhat self-defeating to his own anti-foundational discourse, I suggest that by reading Foucault using the analytical tools of the performative theory of social institutions, it can be argued that the tendency to abide to a particular system of knowledge which conveys that social life is the product of forces transcendental to our social activity, is nothing other than a performative operation. That is, the result of individuals believing in the existence of such forces as transcendental and external to our activity.

We have seen that, as a Foucauldian and a Derridian, Butler's deconstruction of the heterosexual matrix as a contingent and conventional phenomenon resulting from performative activity, can be seen as a case study of the epistemological and methodological programme opened up by the former authors.

On the other hand, although the social theory proposed by the strong programmers relies on different analytical traditions than the above authors,³³ they provide a set of analytical tools which not only offers insights which closely align with those of the authors above, but help to understand and further develop their propositions. For instance, the Butlerian notion of 'iterability', taken from Derrida, to explain that structure is that 'solidification' which occurs in and through the repetition of practices and thus open to potential modification, can better be understood under the meaning finitist argument that nothing prior to self-referential activity fixes its future practice, but only under-determines it, and therefore new social forms resulting from individual practices, acts of category application, and activity will always be subject to a certain degree of unpredictability.

The analytical lesson which the strong programme provides is that above all, when attempting to analyse, understand and explain the social world, the emphasis must be 'sociological'. That is, by stressing that the social world is constituted by the activity of an aggregate of individuals learning from others, acting on their learning, and thus effecting self-referential performative activity which is at the basis of the constitution of the social world, the strong programmers offer a truly sociological account of social life, one which locates constitutive activity as internal -and not external- to the

³¹ Foucault (1996:356)

³² In a way that has resonances with Giddens' notion of the human need for 'ontological security'.

³³ Strongly influenced by a Wittgensteinean analysis of knowledge formation and the theoretical background offered by the sociology of scientific knowledge, most prominently Kuhn, Anscombe, Hesse, Douglas and Shapin.

interactive dynamics of a collective. To use Latour's phrase, what the social theory of the strong programme permits is 'one more turn after the social turn'.³⁴

Thus, I have suggested that the comparison of these two sociological models presents two different interpretations of the social world, that is, two different forms of structuralism, one that continues to dominate the field of social sciences, and another which is arduously breaking new paths. If the first is exemplified by the Bourdieuan structuralist modality, the second is beginning to take some shape in the different guises that theorists like Butler, Foucault, Kusch and the sociological analysis of the strong programmers represent. In his influential classic text Derrida, as quoted at the beginning of this thesis, pointed out that post-structuralist deconstructionist efforts were effecting a 'rupture' to existing sociological understandings which were opening new underdeveloped paths. With this thesis I have suggested that the analytical tools of the performative theory of social institutions can be perceived as helping to reorganize new conceptual spaces to advance the other interpretative paradigm which Derrida depicted as a 'formless infant'.³⁵

Finally, it is important to stress that the analytical exercise offered in this thesis, of critically comparing and deconstructing two different structuralist models, should not be perceived as a solely theoretical exercise. On the contrary, furthering our knowledge with the effect of transforming our intuitions is the precondition to generating new capacities to understand and, hence, transform the social world.

³⁴ Latour (1999)

³⁵ Derrida (1981b:293)

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