

The *habitus* and the critique of the present. A Wittgensteinian reading of Bourdieu's social theory

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Abstract. I tackle some major criticisms addressed to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* by foregrounding its affinities with Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of rule-following. To this end, I first clarify the character of the *habitus* as a theoretical device, and then elucidate what features of Wittgenstein's analysis Bourdieu found of interest from a methodological viewpoint. To vindicate this reading, I contend that Wittgenstein's discussion of rule-following was meant to unearth the internal connection between rules and the performative activities whereby rules are brought into life. By portraying rules as tools that allow agents to stabilize and renegotiate practices, I illustrate the active role social agents play in the production of shared accounts of practices. I conclude by showing that, if viewed through this prism, the *habitus* proves to be meant to provide guidance on how social theory helps historicize and denaturalize the social world.

Keywords: Bourdieu, *habitus*, negotiation, rule-following, Wittgenstein.

Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus*, which an interpreter has plausibly defined as his "signature theoretical concept" (Emirbayer 2010: 41), is a highly debated intellectual tool. It emerged as "a creative blend of concepts" (Lizardo 2004: 376) originating from the legacy of proto-structural anthropology, post-Saussurian structural anthropology, phenomenology, and genetic structuralism (see e.g. Bourdieu 1990a: 12). It denotes a *generative dynamic structure* that disposes social agents to move within constraints that are set by the socio-historical conditions of its own production. Bourdieu's (1990b: 53) much-quoted definition depicts the *habitus* as a set 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." Put otherwise, the *habitus* is meant to account for the relationship between what the agents do in a given field and the multiple limits that constrain their actions within that field. As I will explain in more detail later on, this notion was intended to replace two opposite but equally flawed visions of social action: the idea that people's conduct is determined by invisible mechanisms that they are unaware of and the idea that people are guided by conscious rules and are the makers of free and autonomous decisions. According to Bourdieu, the *habitus* puts due emphasis on the continuous interplay between the limitation of possibilities imposed by the agents' past experience and the vast number of actions that are possible within those limits.

However, the multiple formulations of this notion he provided in his many books and articles leave room for ambiguity. For example, in *The State Nobility* he avers that "practices are founded in *habitus*, which, in the most widely different domains of practice, tends to reproduce the conditions of its own production by producing the objectively coherent and systematically characteristic strategies of a particular mode of reproduction" (Bourdieu 1996: 272-73). In this picture, Bourdieu seems to fall prey of the fallacy that he himself calls "the abolition of the subject" (Bourdieu 1990a: 10), to the extent that it is the *habitus* that determines each of the steps taken by the agents, whose actions are doomed to reproduce the structures where they are performed. In other words, despite Bourdieu's stated objective to get rid of mechanistic determinations (see e.g. Bourdieu 1990a: 107; Bourdieu 1990b: 27), the *habitus* appears to carry with itself an indelible tendency to perpetuate the structures it is built into.

Because of this ambiguity, this notion has been subject to a variety of criticisms. In particular, critics chide Bourdieu because of three major shortcomings. First, the *habitus* is too deterministic, in that it explains social action with reference to mechanisms that operate behind the agents' back. Second, it is a functionalist account of social practices that fails to identify the connection between people's actions and social change. Third, it ends up providing an objectivistic understanding of people's activities in the social realm and therefore offers a portrayal of practices that takes no notice of people's conscious and reflective attitude to their doings. It is worth briefly examining these criticisms. In doing so, I will make the claim that the third is the most insidious.

Some critics (e.g. Archer 2010) claim that the *habitus* is overly deterministic, others (e.g. Jenkins 1992) that it is a sophisticated version of functionalism. On the one hand, it appears to impose inescapable limits on the agents' choice and to belittle people's reflective attitudes, in that all the considerations and seemingly conscious decisions that agents might make while performing actions have already-and-always to be in accord with the *habitus*. In this sense, *pace* Bourdieu's own interpretation, it is not so much a generative mechanism as it is a bare determinant. On the other hand, the *habitus* seems to presuppose the existence of a close feedback loop between the subject's dispositions and the objectivity of the social field, each confirming each other, so much so that social change becomes difficult to account but in terms of the various social fields' functional change. Therefore, the agents' considerations and seemingly conscious decisions turn out to be passive representations of cognitive processes induced by the context where the *habitus* unfolds. In both scenarios, the *habitus* is charged with effacing all agential and reflexive aspects. This deprives Bourdieu's theory of heuristic and explanatory force, especially when it comes to understanding how people's activity affects their environment and triggers social change. As I will illustrate in the subsequent section, these criticisms were addressed and rebutted by Bourdieu himself with persuasive arguments in many contexts (e.g. Bourdieu 1990a; Bourdieu 2004). However, there is a further criticism that, according to some commentators, he never fully disproved.

This more pungent charge is targeted at the unbalanced relation that the *habitus* is claimed to posit between the theorist's point of view and the agent's point of view (Gerrans 2005). The major concern of this third type of critique is with a theory's claim to be able to capture and explain motivations behind the agents' actions that the agents themselves are completely unaware of. As I will explain in more detail in the subsequent section, theory of this sort not only deprives people's cognitive processes of any value in terms of what determines them to act in such and such a way. More radically, it is a relation between theory and people's conscious intuitions about their actions such that the latter can neither prove nor disprove the former. This would amount to a self-confirming portrayal of the social world, which claims to detect tacit mechanisms operating behinds people's back, whether or not people agree on the explanatory model the theory provides. It follows that this model could only find support in the coherence with the theory's own premises. Everything is brought in accord with the hypothesis on which the theory is premised, one that postulates invisible variables that only the theorist is able to detect. If this criticism were valid, then Bourdieu's life-long struggle against objectivist perspectives (see e.g. Bourdieu 1977: Chap. 1; Bourdieu 1990b: Chap. 1; Bourdieu 2000: Chap. 3) would backfire on him. Exactly like the theories he excoriates in his texts, Bourdieu's use of the *habitus* would turn out to be but a way to project onto the social domain a construct elaborated by the theorist, one that pays no heed to the concrete dynamics governing people's interaction.

It is my contention that while Bourdieu made his case when he claimed that the *habitus* escapes the Scylla and Charybdis of determinism and functionalism, the charge of objectivism still needs to be addressed properly. This article sets out to show how this third critique can be rejected by providing a deeper understanding of what the *habitus* is, how it works in the social

domain, and how it is supposed to orient the activity of the social theorist. I will achieve that by scrutinizing how Bourdieu brought Ludwig Wittgenstein's (2009) reflections on rule-following to bear on his methodology. This means that my analysis of the *habitus* will mainly be contrastive and indirect. In the first section, I will clarify Bourdieu's own understanding of the *habitus* and will bring into light the objectivist flaw that some critics claim affects it. In the second and the third sections I will discuss the relationship between Bourdieu and Wittgenstein. I will explain why Bourdieu (1990a: 39) defined Wittgenstein as the one who "effortlessly brings together all the questions evaded by structural anthropology and, no doubt, more generally by all intellectualism." I will argue that Bourdieu's chief interest in Wittgenstein's deflationary conception of rule-following had to do with the latter's successful rejection of the idea that rules can be used by theorists to draw a map of the social domain. To illustrate how the notions of rule-following and the *habitus* strengthen each other, the fourth section will foreground a crucial element of rule-following, which helps understand what role the *habitus* is supposed to play in the study of social dynamics and in the 'critique of the present,' which will be the focus of the Conclusion.

The objectivist predicament

In Bourdieu's overall theory, the *habitus* intends to account for the way present actions depend on *the reiteration of patterns over time*, that is, the multiple occurrences of a set of circumstances where people acted in the same way. This is why some interpreters (see e.g. Emirbayer 2010) have rightly pointed out that the *habitus* bespeaks Bourdieu's obsession with history and temporality: "time, with its rhythm," (Bourdieu 1977: 9) is the key to social agents' doing what they do in the here and now. On this reading, the *habitus* is a structured structure of incorporated temporality that brings one's inherited and acquired experience to bear on her present and future actions. As I noted above, Bourdieu himself strove to make it clear that the *habitus* should not be regarded as a device meant to explain how fields reproduce themselves and dispose people to act in accordance with their internal mechanisms. His main argument boils down to two key points: first, the *habitus* is innately relational; second, it is a scheme of perception and appreciation.

As to the first point, Bourdieu depicted the various fields comprising society as "fields of forces," where agents' actions always are the result of an encounter between their past experience and the variables currently at play in the field. In this setting, social agents determine actively the situation that determines them. As Bourdieu (1990a; 1992) pointed out in his responses to the accusation of determinism, social agents are determined only insofar as they are, as it were, self-determined, given that the agents' position towards one another and their concrete strategies have an actual effect on the field where agents are located. In fact, the *habitus* is a dynamic structure that is both sensitive to the field where it unfolds (the agent's "sense of the game" that Bourdieu frequently hinted at) and is capable of changing the field according to the way it is concretely actualized. In this regard, Anthony King (2002) praises Bourdieu's emphasis on the relevance of the interaction among agents within the field. This is why he insists that Bourdieu's view of practices is at odds with various strands of sociological theory that advance the notion of structure and pit it against the agent within the framework of a dualistic ontology.¹ In Bourdieu's social theory, "individuals are embedded in complex, constantly negotiated networks of relations with other individuals" (King 2002: 421). Hence, the view that

¹ I refer, among others, to critical realist authors such as Margaret Archer (1988; 1995) and Roy Bhaskar (1991; 1993). For a general view see Archer et al. 1998. Attempts have recently been made to reconcile Bourdieu's and Archer's concepts of reflexivity (Adams 2006; Elder-Vass 2007), but Archer (2010) appears to be dissatisfied with them. Interesting critiques of critical realism can be found in King 1999 and Dépelteau 2008.

the *habitus* reifies these networks into static structures that exist before and beyond individuals and determine them to act in such and such a way is scarcely tenable.

As to the second point, Bourdieu refers to the *habitus* as a set of “schemes of perception, appreciation and action which are the precondition of all ‘sensible’ thought and practice, and which, being continually reinforced by actions and discourses produced according to the same schemes, are excluded from the universe of objects of thought” (Bourdieu 1990b: 14; see also *ibid.*: 54-5, 60, 139; Bourdieu 1989, 18-19; Bourdieu 1990a: 14, 16, 183; Bourdieu 2000: 138, 170, 183; Bourdieu 2001: 8, 44, 65). On this account, the *habitus* is nothing other than the way in which history (incorporated in one’s dispositions) operates in a given field by disposing the agents in such a way as to affect *their range of possible actions and possible choices*. If this holds true, then the *habitus* possesses no essence or materiality. It is nothing perceptible and observable by the theorist. It is the “sense of one’s place” (Bourdieu 1989: 19) that originates from a system of schemes of classification that serves as a grid of intelligibility. The *habitus* allows the agents to perceive the social world in compliance with specific categories that are necessary to understand what their position in the field is as well as the position of the others. It follows that the *habitus* is what imposes constraints on *the range of possibilities in the here and now* of a context of action.²

These two points taken together persuasively reject the charges of determinism and functionalism. In effect, against the former charge, it would not make sense to say that agents are *determined* by their active interaction or by the absence of alternatives. On the other hand, against the latter, the *habitus* does not stand simply because it meets some needs that are indispensable for the survival of the broader social field. Rather, people’s capacity to adapt to a given field is governed by a more or less extensive range of embodied cognitive resources that predispose them to act in such and such a way, while the way they interact with one another exerts transformative effects on the field.

Nevertheless, such a more refined view of the *habitus* fails to provide a convincing reply to the more insidious charge of objectivism. King (2002) pinpoints this latter (alleged) flaw with clarity as he claims that Bourdieu confined himself back to the objectivist straightjacket because he maintained that social practices are governed by opaque processes of which social agents are not aware. Although Bourdieu (1990b: 35) was highly critical of methodologies that tend to superimpose a “logic” on the observed practices – what he defined as a “generative formula”, i.e. a set of independent and coherent axioms which the observer constructs in order to explain practices –, his notion of *habitus* seems to imply an unbridgeable gap between the causal mechanisms that the theorist sees at work and the reasons that agents would put forward if asked to verbalize what led them to do what they did. As a result, despite the dynamism that the interactions among agents bring in, the *habitus* as a set of constraints on the thinkability of alternatives appears to allow scarce or no awareness to the agents who interiorize these schemes of perception and appreciation. In effect, in Bourdieu’s (1990a: 115) own view, such schemes are likely to work more efficaciously and to produce longer-lasting effects when they get incorporated in “pre-reflective, quasi-instinctual” attitudes that turn into “[n]ature and the natural” as the “best instruments of sociodicies.” If the productivity and efficacy of the *habitus* is

² That the issue at stake is the stock of symbolic resources people can rely on when devising possible courses of action is evident in those slimmer but no less dense texts where Bourdieu examines particular fields or specific aspects of the social domain. In “The Force of Law” (Bourdieu 1987) and in *Masculine Domination* (Bourdieu 2001), where Bourdieu dwells on how the law works in society and how the social world replicates the sexual division of labour, Bourdieu’s analysis revolves around how officially ratified schemes of perception restrict the number of possible actions and interactions. He holds the view that what bring the *habitus* into existence is a comprehensive “work of symbolic construction [that] is far more than a strictly *performative* operation of naming which orients and structures *representations*”, in that it culminates in the exclusion of alternatives “from the universe of the feasible and thinkable” (Bourdieu 2001: 23). This aspect that makes the *habitus* a ‘regime of practical intelligibility’ goes somewhat unnoticed in the literature on the *habitus*.

conditional upon its capacity to be invisible and imperceptible to those whose perceptive categories are governed by it, then the agents' reflective attitudes and conscious intuitions are of no relevance in the complex interactional setting where the *habitus* is at play. Consequently, in a properly functioning field, the *habitus* and its effects are concealed and work over people's head to such an extent that only the theorist is equipped to discover the mechanisms that govern interaction and to provide a reliable account of the field where the *habitus* is at play.

A view of this type incurs a dilemma that Gerrans (2005: 68) brings out more clearly than other critics of contested concepts such as the background or tacit knowledge. Let me make an example that illustrates his reasoning. In the field of queer studies a good many critical and radical theorists today make the claim that marriage equality paradoxically risks being detrimental to homosexuals (see e.g. Barker 2013; Franke 2006; Robson 2009). For not only is the recognition of same-sex marriage yielding new hegemonic categories that separate 'good' citizens (whether heterosexual or homosexual) who have access to the set of rights and benefits attached to marriage from those who do not meet a certain threshold of 'respectability' (such as, for example, singles, unwed parents, prostitutes, people involved in polyamorous relationships, or more simply people who do not want to get married). At a deeper, less visible level, critics contend, this movement is also harming 'good' homosexuals, because they are forced to adapt themselves to a categorial grid and an emotional lexicon that are deeply ingrained in a sexist and heterosexist culture. The patriarchal and heteronormative structure of both society and the law compels, as Bourdieu (2001: 13) would have it, "the dominated [to] apply to what dominates them schemes that are the product of domination" and to structure "thoughts and perceptions [...] in accordance with the very structures of the relation of domination that is imposed on them."

This example epitomizes the objectivist predicament in which Bourdieu's *habitus* seems to get caught. In effect, the core of the critique set forth by queer and radical scholars is that the type of rights claims made by homosexuals is strikingly different from those erstwhile generations made. A few decades ago, liberationist movements accused marriage of being one of the structural pillars of a sexist and heterosexist culture which had to be straightforwardly eradicated. Today's homosexual movements (for a variety of reasons that I can hardly summarize here) consider marriage as a means to the end of being recognized as normal and respectable citizens (for a general analysis of these socio-political change, see Croce 2015a and Croce 2015b). One of the various explanations that queer and radical scholars advance is that the battle for homosexual rights has been transferred into the legal field, which imposes its rigid schemes of perception and acts back on the everyday categories that homosexuals use to construct their identity. Put otherwise, after the aggressive politics of rebellion and liberation was abandoned, entrance into the legal field affected homosexual individuals' schemes of perception and led them to adopt those categories that were believed to be the root cause of their oppression.

A Bourdieusian reading of such a remarkable societal transition is of help. People's desiring what the state desires – to wit, the negotiation of new sexual standards with a view to protecting the institution of monogamous marriage (see Croce 2014a) – has to do with the encounter between homosexuals' schemes of perception and the grammar of the legal field. This brought to light a basic division in the homosexual community between those whose past experience and socio-cultural background granted them the potential for becoming the new 'normal citizens' and those whose past experience and socio-cultural background prevented them from benefiting from the renegotiation of the standards of normality. Such an intra-group division, at the same time, had a remarkable inward-looking impact on the range of alternatives available to 'good' homosexuals. For, in this critical hypothesis, they have come to believe that the only path to liberation is the access to such a transient and context-specific institution as marriage. This is evidence that an analysis in terms of people's *habitus* allows us to understand

what made this rift in the gay community possible and also to account for an internal change into the categories that today determine “the universe of the feasible and thinkable” when it comes to people’s sexual and intimate life. An analysis of this type showcases the flexibility and adaptability of the *habitus*, in that it is able to explain how people’s schemes of perception change in accordance with the events that bring about societal transformations in one or more fields.

Nevertheless, the charge of objectivism in question appears to remain valid. In effect, the analysis of queer and radical critics highlights a tacit and mostly unaware intention on the part of ‘good’ homosexuals to reinstate a dominant lexicon that determines an oppressive scenario. Much as there might be conservative homosexuals who *deliberately* pursue a ‘negotiated’ accommodation of this sort, this hypothesis portrays the bulk of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people as fully unaware of their collusion with the dominant ideology: they believe they are fighting for a more equal society, while they are inadvertently making it more unequal.³ Gerrans’ (2005: 68) objection to this type of theoretical hypothesis is that “the theorist then needs to tell us how” a tacit intention to restore a patriarchal setting and to subsume homosexuals under a homonormative grid transforms itself “into the explicit intention to help them, which then has the consequence of subjugating them in accordance with the original tacit intention. Isn’t this explanation a little over intricate?” In addition, he goes on to say, in this hyper-objectified scenario, “actors never know why they are doing things, only the interpreter knows. Yet there is no means of verifying the interpreter’s hypothesis other than by pointing to the presence of the regularity it interprets and saying it is consistent with the interpretation.”

This objection is so relevant that, if faced inadequately, no account of the *habitus* would be able to rescue it. In effect, this charge of objectivism appears more compelling than those of determinism and functionalism, because it characterizes the theory based on the *habitus* as a map that fails to come to terms with concrete societal dynamics and is content with offering a self-confirming description of invisible mechanisms at play. This is why resorting to the notion of *habitus* would add up to a convoluted strategy to restore the primacy of the theorist’s point of view over the agent’s point of view. I believe that there is more than one way to overcome this puzzle. Yet, a viable one stems from a correct analysis of Bourdieu’s persisting interest in the late Wittgenstein’s philosophical work and a minor amendment to Bourdieu’s conception of the *habitus* in light of the relationships between these two leading scholars.

Bourdieu’s Wittgenstein: genuine affinities or unwitting misappropriation?

The relevance of Wittgenstein’s (2009) remarks on rule-following to Bourdieu’s conception of rules and the *habitus* has been the object of a variety of studies (Bouveresse 1999; Gerrans 2005; King 2000; Margolis 1999; Schatzki 1997; Taylor 1993). As the story goes, Bourdieu was attracted to the late Wittgenstein because the latter had identified the limits of “regulist” (Brandom 1994; Rouse 2006) accounts of social action, that is to say, the view that people’s conduct is consciously guided by rules and that therefore the key to people’s behaviour is grasping those rules. Although Wittgenstein provided no thoroughgoing analysis – to such a degree that interpreters have come up with irreconcilable readings (see e.g. Baker and Hacker 1984; Kripke 1992; Williams 1999) –, the fact remains that he aimed to debunk a calculus-type conception of rules, according to which rules are out there, before our eyes, to guide our actions. In effect, one of the main threads in *Philosophical Investigations*, published posthumously in 1953, is the author’s strenuous attempt at disproving two ideas: that rules exist like “a visible section of rails invisibly laid to infinity” (Wittgenstein 2009: § 218) and that their use requires interpretation on the rule-followers’ part.

³ The literature on this paradoxical outcome is voluminous. Recent instructive analysis are Schulman 2012 and D’Cruz and Pendleton 2013.

Wittgenstein denied rules being formulae that agents are required to interpret at any further application. Famously, he tried to disclose the untenability of this position by noting that more than one interpretation of a rule can be squared with a given pattern of action in a given circumstance. Wittgenstein's (2009: § 185) much-debated example is that of a teacher who tells her pupil to continue a series of numbers which she is writing down. The pupil knows the series of numbers and "at the order '+1' he writes down the series of natural numbers. – Let's suppose we have done exercises, and tested his understanding up to 1000. Then we get the pupil to continue one series (say '+2') beyond 1000 – and he writes 1000, 1004, 1008, 1012." Wittgenstein points out that this seeming deviation from the rule that the teacher had in mind might be squared with the pupil thinking that the rule was "[a]dd 2 up to 1000, 4 up to 2000, 6 up to 3000, and so on" (2009: § 185). Such a paradoxical example is meant to demonstrate that each single step in a pattern of action can be subsumed under alternative normative frameworks and can be shown to make sense in all of them. Most interpreters – those who do not provide a sceptical reading of the view lying behind this example⁴ – are convinced that Wittgenstein intended to emphasize two main elements of rule-governed activities: first, they need a 'pragmatic history,' that is, a set of past circumstances where the same situations arose and people acted in the same way (Williams 1999: 199-200); second, one's following a rule requires no intellectual mediation (Bonderup Dohn 2011; Frascolla 1994, Chap. 3).

This is Wittgenstein's affinity with Bourdieu that Charles Taylor (1993) identifies as a common aversion to "intellectualism." In Taylor's reading, Wittgenstein's is an argument against there being an intellectual mediation (like an interpretation or any other mental representation) between one's following a rule and the actual action that complies with the rule. In this reading, Wittgenstein is contending that, if it were the case that more than one interpretation could be offered of a given pattern of conduct (like in the '+2' example), then it would make no sense to ask whether or not one followed a rule *correctly*. So, what is it that establishes the correctness of one's following a rule? To cut a long story short, Wittgenstein thinks of rule-following as the mastery of a practical technique that sets public standards of correctness. His conclusion is that "[t]o follow a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are customs (usages, institutions)" (Wittgenstein 2009: § 199). In other words, if one follows a rule correctly, then she is doing the same thing that she and others did in previous circumstances and that she and others will do again when appropriate circumstances arise (Baker and Hacker 2009: 49-50).

There is little doubt that both Wittgenstein and Bourdieu were scarcely sympathetic to views that deem rules to be conscious guidelines governing actions by way of the agent's interpretation of these rules. But does this common aversion provide the grounds for concluding that the two authors agreed on the mechanisms that, in lieu of rules, govern social action? As far as I can see, there are two principal ways of interpreting the affinities between rule-following and the *habitus*: the first centres on the relationship among rules, regularities and the mechanisms that lead agents to conform to regular patterns of behaviour; the second – which I advocate and will develop in the next section – contends Bourdieu's reading of Wittgenstein's conception of rule-following revolved around the position an observer should take if she aims to account for the practice she observes. Although the first interpretation grasps important elements that nurtured Bourdieu's interest in rule-following, it eventually reinforces the conclusion that Bourdieu came up with an objectivist conception of practices. Quite the reverse, the

⁴ A good many debates have been centred on whether Wittgenstein's paradox should be interpreted as the basis for a sceptical argument *in se* (Kripke 1982) or whether it is the starting point for an argument that debunks a sceptical reading of rule-following (Baker and Hacker 1984). Without taking stance on this specific issue in the limited context of the present analysis, I believe that Wittgenstein was not committed to solving the paradox, but to making it dissolve (Voltolini 2010).

second interpretation builds on the nexus between rule-following and the *habitus* to overcome the objectivist impasse and to make a crucial point on the role of social theory generally.

Scholars who favour the first interpretation (e.g. Bouveresse 1999; Gerrans 2005; King 2000; Taylor 1993) point out that Bourdieu capitalized on Wittgenstein's two complementary insights that I summarized above. On the one hand, rules are not static and pre-determined guidelines for action that cause people's behaviour. On the other hand, rules are independent of the distinction between conscious and unconscious behaviour, because the way in which rules are related to the agents' actions does not depend on intellectual performances on the agents' part. If this reading is correct, then the Wittgensteinian element behind the *habitus* is the idea that the performance of rule-governed actions is a pre-reflexive and intuitive participation in "a form of life" (Wittgenstein 2009: §§ 19, 23, 241). Philip Gerrans (2005) observes that this view of rules as embedded in intuitive everyday practices and based on practical knowledge provided Bourdieu with *prima facie* suitable philosophical foundations for his dispositional understanding of the *habitus* as the deployment of socially acquired capacities that presuppose no cognitive mediation. On this account, Bourdieu attributed to Wittgenstein a view of rule-following as the product of habituation and glued it to Aristotle's *hexis* as a condition because of which one is so disposed as to act in such and such a way (Achtenberg 2002: 53).

One of the implications of this reading is that, while Bourdieu got Wittgenstein's anti-intellectualism right, the former fundamentally misused the latter's reflection to offer a theory of what is at work if not rules. In other words, Bourdieu followed Wittgenstein insofar as the latter dismantled the idea that conscious rules are at the basis of social action. Yet, he parted ways with the Austrian philosopher the moment the latter refused to cut deeper into habitual practices to detect the mechanisms that lie behind their reproduction. Unfortunately, Gerrans (2005) argues in his critical analysis, Wittgenstein's lesson is even more sceptical and imposes a ban on the type of use that Bourdieu made of it. Wittgenstein eventually dispensed with the very idea of searching for the foundations of normativity: the set of concordant acquired dispositions that accord with a form of life does not help in any way explain social regularities and how they materialize. Instead, acquired dispositions are nothing other than the "bedrock" reached by the philosopher's "spade" when she struggles to penetrate the conundrum of normativity: "Once I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: 'This is simply what I do'" (Wittgenstein 2009: § 217). If this is the case, then Bourdieu made the mistake which Wittgenstein intended to denounce, for the former held on to the idea that the theorist can get to the core of what brings about concordant dispositions to provide a portrayal of that. This all proves that Wittgenstein's was meant to be a conclusive attack on all theories that claim it is possible to unearth the bedrock and explain the mechanisms that it contains. Bourdieu's misuse of Wittgenstein's anti-regulist view to produce an analysis of what causes regular patterns of behaviour other than people's conscious activities is what confined Bourdieu's social theory back to the domain of objectivism.

However, I believe this reading of the relationship between the two authors is fundamentally mistaken. It is my claim that a sounder understanding of Wittgenstein's discussion of rule-following casts light on what Bourdieu found so attractive in it and on how this helps overcome the objectivist puzzle. In the following pages I will advance a different interpretation of Bourdieu's interest in Wittgenstein to make the case that neither of them were interested in capturing the connection between people's actual conducts and the invisible mechanisms that condition them. Rather, Bourdieu took Wittgenstein's remarks on rule-following to be meant to suggest *what position the theorist should take* if she intends to foreground the connection between rules (as verbalized entities) and regularities (as recurrent patterns of behaviour that come to affect the way people verbalize rules). Put otherwise, in my opinion, Bourdieu rightly deemed Wittgenstein's analysis of the role rules play in social life to be instrumental in understanding how and where the theorist should position herself vis-à-vis the agents she observes and the practices

she studies. To vindicate this reading, I will first take issue with Wittgenstein's analysis of rule-following and will then elucidate how it contributes to clarifying the role played by the *habitus* in the study of social dynamics.

Following rules and observing conducts

To understand at what level Wittgenstein's remarks on rule-following and Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus* are positioned, a crucial distinction to be made is the one between two aspects of following rules that often tend to be conflated: a *first level perspective*, that is, the attitude of the agent to the rule that is supposed to govern her actions, and a *second level perspective*, that is, the position of someone who aims to account for an agent's actions. For present purposes, this distinction is more appropriate than the one between the agent and the observer. In effect, as it will become clearer as we go along, the flexible and continuous passage from one level to another is key to understanding the relationship between rules and regularities. In fact, the main problem I will tackle is *what allows one to say that one has followed a rule and has followed it correctly*. From a second level perspective, the issue is not how rules guide actions. Rather, it concerns the grounds on which one can determine that one (whether this is herself or another person) has followed a rule. On the one hand, this is clearly a meta-level issue, because it has to do with someone observing, or describing, or commenting upon (second level perspective) one's acting (first level perspective). On the other hand, however, it might well be the case that the one who observes, describes or comments is the same who acts. Therefore, the first and the second level perspectives can be adopted either by *two different agents* (one acting and the other observing) or by *the same agent* who acts and then tries to make sense of her own conduct.

The central role of a second level perspective surfaces in one of the fundamental passages in Wittgenstein's sophisticated argument about the *public* nature of the practice of following rules. As I stressed above, he was at pains to show that one's following a rule correctly does not depend on one interpreting the rule and following it as a formula, but on there being a stable practice where public standards are available and people can assess each other's conduct on their basis. The argument he deploys to shed light on the impossibility of one's assessing the correctness of her own conduct with reference to a rule is placed on a second level perspective, where the agent herself tries to determine the correctness of her action. At this stage, Wittgenstein introduces a distinction between *following* a rule and *thinking to follow* a rule: "That's why 'following a rule' is a practice. And to *think* one is following a rule is not to follow a rule. And that's why it's not possible to follow a rule privately; otherwise thinking one was following a rule would be the same thing as following it" (Wittgenstein 2009: § 202). To corroborate his assertion, Wittgenstein – who was generally inclined to highlight the inconceivability of potential counter-arguments rather than provide full-fledged justifications – asks us to imagine an individual who gives a name to her sensations. Not only does the very same activity of naming presuppose "a great deal of stage-setting in the language" (2009: § 257). In addition, he goes on to say, when the subject associates the letter 'S' to her sensation and keeps a diary about its recurrence so as to identify S precisely when it occurs, she does nothing but adopt a procedure that may help her remember *correctly* the connection between her definition and the recurrence of S.

Wittgenstein is saying that the individual tries to render her mental image of her sensation into an objective standard that can help her ascertain whether S_1 is the same as S or whether she is associating them by mistake. However, he argues, this attempt falls short because an individual on her own can put in place no standard. It is worth quoting Wittgenstein at length:

Let us imagine a table (something like a dictionary) that exists only in our imagination. A dictionary can be used to justify the translation of a word X into a word Y. But are we also to call it a justification if such a table is to be looked up only in the imagination? – 'Well, yes: then it is a subjective

justification’ – But justification consists in appealing to something independent. – ‘But surely I can appeal from one memory to another. For example, I don’t know if I have remembered the time of departure of a train right and to check it I call to mind how a page of the time-table looked. Isn’t it the same here?’ No; for this process has got to produce a memory which is actually *correct*. If the mental image of the time-table could not itself be *tested* for correctness, how could it confirm the correctness of the first memory? (As if someone were to buy several copies of the morning paper to assure himself that what it said was true.) Looking up a table in the imagination is no more looking up a table than the image of an imagined experiment is the result of an experiment (2009: § 265).

Here is Wittgenstein’s main conclusion on the publicness of rule-following: if justification consists in appealing to something independent, then standards of correctness must be public and must be managed publicly. As shown by Peter Winch’s (1990) influential analysis, this is the main leitmotiv of Wittgenstein’s considerations on rule-following, that is to say, the *standard* is something against which one is to establish what *counts as the same as* something else. As a consequence, when one wonders if she has followed a rule correctly, she does nothing but put herself on a second level perspective where she refers to the public standard that the practice of which her conduct is an instance provides her with.

This leads to a first important conclusion on what a rule is in *Philosophical Investigations* and what the relevance is of this conception to Bourdieu’s notion of the *habitus*. In Wittgenstein’s portrayal, rules are *devices meant to ensure the occurrence of the same behaviour on every occurrence of a similar set of circumstances*. In other words, a rule is something whereby agents are put in the position to determine if, in such and such a circumstance, one is *doing the same* that she or others have done in the same circumstance. It is no coincidence that a famous section of *Philosophical Investigations* reads that the “use of the word ‘rule’ and the use of the word ‘same’ are interwoven” (Wittgenstein 2009: § 225). Winch (1990: 28) comments that “someone is following a rule if he always acts in the same way on the same kind of occasion [...] it is only in terms of a given rule that the word ‘same’ acquires a definite sense.” If this all is true, then the agent from the first level perspective and the observer from the second level perspective *are on an equal footing*. This does not mean that the distinction as such vanishes. Rather, it means two things: first, the agent does not have special access to her own conduct, because its correctness can be ascertained only in a practice to which both she and the observer are party; second, the observer does not possess any bird’s-eye view on the agent’s action, as she needs to be involved in the practice to determine whether an agent is really following a rule.

In sum, given that there is no immediate, first-person access to a conduct performed under a rule, the agent on her own cannot determine whether or not she is following it. The rule is, as it were, opaque, non-transparent to the agent herself. If an agent wants to determine if she is doing the same as she and other did in the same circumstance – or rather, if she is following a rule correctly – she is called upon to adopt a second level perspective where she can assess her conduct with recourse to the public standards set in the social practice of which her conduct is but an instantiation. By the same token, in the eyes of an observer, the relation between the agent and her conduct is as opaque and non-transparent. In fact, for the observer to determine whether the agent has followed a rule, she has to rely on the same public practice to which the agent has recourse. I believe this is the core aspect of Wittgenstein’s conception of rule-following that kindled Bourdieu’s interest. The French scholar realized that taking into account the non-transparency of rules at *both* a first level and a second level perspectives is a crucial stepping stone for a sound methodological approach to social action.

My interpretation finds a confirmation in the juncture of *Outline of a Theory of Practice* where Bourdieu (1977: 29) quotes Wittgenstein’s (2009) remark 82. In the section “The fallacies of the rule,” Bourdieu, in a truly Wittgensteinian spirit, is intent on disproving the explanatory power of rules from both a first level and a second level perspectives. He notes how important it is to distinguish two common usages of the term ‘rule’ in a variety of academic

fields: either in the sense of a social norm that is expressly verbalized and is recognized as valid by rule-abiders (that is, a rule from the first level perspective), or in the sense of a construct devised by the theorist in order to account for the agents' conduct (that is, a rule from the second level perspective). Bourdieu insists that in both cases reliance on rules ends in a deadlock, because regularities that are believed to be in accord with the rule have not been caused by it. Recourse to the jargon of rules, Bourdieu (1977: 29) concludes, risks providing an illusory answer to "the question of the mechanisms producing this conformity [between rules and regularities] in the absence of the intention to conform, by resorting to the fallacy of the rule which implicitly places in the consciousness of the individual agents a knowledge built up against that experience." This is evidence that Bourdieu is following in Wittgenstein's footsteps in arguing that rules are neither formulae guiding the agents' conduct nor reliable intellectual devices that allow the theorist to discover the mechanisms producing the agreement between rules and regular patterns of behaviour.

However – and this is vital to the rest of my argument – it is my claim that Bourdieu is more preoccupied with rules in the second level perspective. Or rather, his concern is at one and the same time methodological and meta-theoretical. In effect, in the section of *Philosophical Investigations* he quotes, Wittgenstein is taking issue with how one is to establish what rule an agent is following in a specific course of action: "What do I call 'the rule according to which he proceeds'? – The hypothesis that satisfactorily describes his use of words, which we observe; or the rule which he looks up when he uses signs; or the one which he gives us in reply if we ask him what his rule is?". Evidently, here Wittgenstein is discussing the second level perspective (as was in section 54, where he asks "But how does the observer distinguish in this case between players' mistakes and correct play?"), whereby one tries to make out another's behaviour and to decipher it with reference to a rule. This remark must be read against section 201, where Wittgenstein claims that "if every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule, then it can also be brought into conflict with it." In the face of this dilemma, Wittgenstein rules out the first option he himself provides (a "hypothesis that satisfactorily describes his use of words"). For it makes no sense, from a second level perspective, to seek to tease out the rules and to construct an explanatory model for one's behaviour, because any finite set of observations can always be subsumed under an alternative explanatory model based on other rules. The second option is already dismissed, as Wittgenstein continually reiterates that most often than not agents do not consciously refer to rules when they act, as demonstrated by the fact that agents themselves are "prepared to withdraw" the explanation they offered and to "alter it." As a consequence, this also jettisons the third option, since, not unlike the observer, an agent can construct conflicting explanatory models for her own actions.

The internal relation of rules and practices

The one introduced in section 82 of *Philosophical Investigations* is the theoretical problem that Bourdieu believed Wittgenstein had the merit to identify with admirable clarity and that he aimed to solve with the introduction of the notion of *habitus*. In this sense, not only did Bourdieu do justice to the strength of Wittgenstein's remarks; more than that, he intuited the far-reaching consequences of the rule-following analysis from a social-theoretical and methodological vantage point. In fact, the way-out of section 82 opens up to a type of social analysis that, according to Bourdieu's (1990a: 15), is meant to historicize and, by doing so, to denaturalize and defatalize. In other words, solving the dilemma that crops up at the second level perspective has two main virtuous consequences: it gets Bourdieu out of the objectivist quagmire and sheds light on the critical force of social theory. And yet, Bourdieu never fully explained how and why the theory's capacity to denaturalize and defatalize makes it impermeable to objectivist biases. In order to make this case clearly, I need to return to Wittgenstein's rule-

following to show that it successfully provides us the key to understanding the relationship between the cognitive performances of the agents and the sedimentation of regular patterns of conduct. Thus, what I set out to highlight in these pages is how in *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein envisaged the link between people's cognitive performances and the stabilization of regularities, and what the source of these regularities is other than the mysterious bedrock given by an agreement in the form of life.

In the preceding section I argued that Wittgenstein viewed the process of learning as the archetypal form of making and applying rules. As a first step to a better comprehension of the relationship between following rules and the emergence of regularities, it is crucial to note that the relation between the act of learning and the rule is *internal*, in the sense that the one is not thinkable without the other. Picking up a rule means being trained on how to apply it. Therefore, learning amounts to being instructed in a technique (see Williams 1999: 178-179), to get to master it, with no "mediating entities between the formulation of a rule and the acts that accord with it" (Baker and Hacker 2009: 87). The rule is thoroughly embedded in the practice. Basically, this is what Wittgenstein took to be an agreement in the form of life. The activity of learning epitomizes the way in which dispositions to follow patterns of rules develop. Wittgenstein (2009: § 198) clarifies this point when he gets out of the paradox he himself ignited – "So is whatever I do compatible with the rule?" – by saying that when one follows a signpost (another celebrated example of his), the connection between the signpost and one's following it is that "I have been trained to react in a particular way to this sign, and now I do so react to it". One could pick up this disposition, he adds, "only in so far as there is an established usage, a custom."

It would be a mistake, though, to conclude that such a dispositional view effaces any trace of mediated, reflexive knowledge. In fact, the issue of knowledge arises when someone misapplies or breaches the rule. In the "+2" example I related above, the pupil is explained how to go on based on a progression initiated by the teacher. But then the teacher and the pupil get to discuss the rule that was supposed to be guiding their actions and they come up with different normative descriptions of the practice. Now, we know that this paradox in Wittgenstein's eyes dissolves, because the pupil is simply deviating from the practice he was instructed in. Despite this, it is interesting to note that it is precisely through the activity of bringing rules into question that agents give life to a 'normative referent,' that is, a description of the pattern that the two were supposed to be following, or better, an account of the broader practice of which their actions were supposed to be instances. When the agents find themselves thematizing the rule, they move from the first level perspective, where they act intuitively, to the second level perspective, where they put their doings into words. Crucially, this oscillation provides the condition for rules to come into existence in the form of statements, that is, verbalized entities that seldom guide actions *ex ante*, but can be verbalized at any moment by the agents.

The fact that the agents who verbalize rules always need to locate themselves on a second level perspective makes the processes of verbalizing rules inescapably public and interactional: given that there is no privileged access to a rule from a first level perspective, agents are called upon to verbalize the rule *as if* they were observers, to the extent that, as far as verbalization is concerned, there are neither agents nor observers. Actions, as it were, are constantly exposed to the fluctuations of ongoing linguistic exchanges meant to identify the standard of correctness. In fact, if we recall Wittgenstein's ruling out the possibility of one's ascertaining correctness on one's own, the identification of the rule is the appeal to the external standard that allows recognizing a practice as that practice. In the example of the signpost, the standard is the conformity of reactions to a given signpost in the framework of a time-tested custom.

This interpretation, however, does not suffice to correct the false impression that Wittgenstein relies on a radical (and finally ingenuous) form of contextualism. Culturally-situated agents are instructed in a technique, get to master it and incorporate it through habituation. Their (re-)actions are caused by their training. From time to time, agents engage in critical exchanges when some conflicts arise over what the proper conduct should be in the light of the rules agents elicit from the habitual practice. Despite this, I would like to make the claim that such a contextualist view of Wittgenstein's rule-following is too simplistic and that a sounder one is able to vindicate both its richness and its closeness to the *habitus*. I think David Bloor's (1997) interpretation of Wittgenstein's rule-following offers a precious insight into how reflexivity comes into play.⁵ He believes that the process of training should not be read as the mere transmission of information from one generation to another. Rather, teaching serves as the prototypical example of how some accounts of what practices are, and how they should be performed, acquire the status of *sedimented, reified entities*, which offer guidance for future applications of the same pattern of conduct. Social regularities, symbolized by the figure of the teacher, impart instructions, train, and correct when appropriate circumstances arise. In the face of it, critical exchanges that are triggered by a misapplication of the pattern are meant to address the relation between the individual conduct in the here and now and the reified practice that has become the standard.

But Bloor's understanding of these critical exchanges is a rich seam to mine. When people cite rules, theirs is a *performative citation*, one that allows to interpret a certain pattern of action as an iteration of a specific practice, on which people find themselves commenting. Every time people cite rules, the conduct that the rules are supposed to be guiding is subsumed under a regular practice (of which it becomes an instance), which is used as a standard of correctness. This means that the rule, as a verbalized entity, is brought into existence at the very moment it is cited, while citing stands for putting a conduct into words and assessing it with the litmus test of what people regularly do in the same circumstance. Bloor (1997: 32) describes this movement as a "circle of talk about talk, where the reference of the talk is the practice of reference itself." On his account, there is an inside and an outside. And yet this distinction is not ontological but temporal: the before and the after of the practice of citing, whereby a reiterated pattern of conduct is transformed into an objective basis for assessing the correctness of a conduct in the present. Hence, two conclusions: first, the rule only exists in the act of citing, to the extent that "the phenomenon of following a rule is not distinct from the descriptions given of it" (1997: 33-4); second, standards are also the product of performative citations. It is worth elaborating on these points.

Bloor understands this process as entirely performative and self-creating. It is performative because citational activities produce effects on patterns of actions by bestowing a specific configuration on them. It is self-creating because the very same process of citing is not, as a naïve reading of Wittgenstein might suggest, a mere reference to a standard with which an action is to be compared. Rather, by citing, the subjects themselves subsume their present actions under the regular practice that they come to adopt as a standard. In other words, citational activities are performative because they give life to a verbalized entity (the rule) that permits the agents to institute the connection between what they do and a social regularity they adopt as the standard of correctness. The relevance of the agents' point of view reveals a further, crucial element about the performative force of citing. If regularities are invoked and adopted as standards, if the connection between the concrete action and the regularity is instituted by the agents, then the activity of citing exposes regularities to a variety of interpretations that might come to change the way people interpret them. Unexpectedly, the existence of a standard

⁵ It is worth stressing that Bloor's Wittgenstein is not Wittgenstein proper (if any). Still, I believe his interpretation spells out many of the puzzles that leave readers wondering what Wittgenstein meant in a few intricate passages of *Philosophical Investigations*.

is shown to depend on people's activity of citing rules and commenting on their own actions: it is this and only this that makes something a standard. Standards do not exist unless they are selected and adopted as such in the context of citational activities.

In truth, one of the main virtues of Bloor's interpretation is that it demonstrates that the activity of citation, whereby people tease rules out and comment on them, is by no means parasitic on regularities. Quite the reverse, it is a reflexive activity that proves crucial to providing accounts of regularities. On this view, regularities are not self-evident objects that lend themselves to external observation and description. They are negotiated entities that are set as standards when people engage in citational activities. It follows that there is a constant interplay between regularities and the way people verbalize rules. This is why "negotiation" is a suitable term for describing what people do when a conflict arises over what rule governs a given course of action. In negotiating over rules, agents verbalize, fix, reify them, or rather, give them a substantive shape. But, since regularities are sensitive to negotiations, the rules on which the agents agree might even end up providing quite a different account of them. This does not imply that the notion of rule I provided above has to be jettisoned. Rules are devices people use to make sure that they are doing what they did and will do in the same circumstance. And yet, the standards they refer to while using rules to ascertain sameness can always be affected by the way the agents reconstruct them in the framework of their citational activities.

In summary, this insightful reading of Wittgenstein's rule-following has two chief advantages. First, rules are portrayed as tools that allow agents to renegotiate practices and provide novel accounts of them. Reflexivity is so relevant that it is deemed to exert performative effects on what is to be regarded as a regularity. Secondly, standards (viz., accounts of regularities) are historical constructs emerging out of negotiations, where some aspects of social reality are emphasized while others are downplayed or even concealed. This view draws our attention to the enormous investments in terms of material and symbolic resources that are necessary to the production, and *a fortiori* the protection, of (reified descriptions) of regularities. It is nothing but an ongoing struggle over legitimate ways to account for what a community, or a field, is.

Conclusion: social theory as the critique of the present

The interpretation of Wittgenstein's rule-following I advocated clarifies why it is relevant to rebutting the charge that Bourdieu's *habitus* leads to an objectivist portrayal of social practices. Both the rule-following analysis and the *habitus* intend to explain what the relationship is between the verbalized (or verbalizable) entities that are believed to govern a given practical context and the pragmatic history that affects the way the agents perform these verbalizations. Both are conceptual devices that urge the theorist to adopt a specific attitude to practices, one that historicizes current performances and reads them against the background of past ones. On this account, the concrete interaction among agents is by no means demoted to a mere reflex of the context's internal functioning, because citational activities, where people engage in critical exchanges meant to verbalize rules, have multiple effects on this context. For they fix and reify the regularities that draw the boundaries of the context, give them the normative value of standards of correctness, and even revise them by offering different accounts of them. In short, the rule-following analysis and the *habitus* invite to see regularities not as unreflexive patterns of behaviour that accrue through time by way of sheer reiteration, but as the outcome of ongoing negotiations that ratify and naturalize a specific interpretation of them.

Such a subtler understanding of people's reflexive performances in the establishment of regularities illuminates why the rule-following analysis and, more importantly for present purposes, the *habitus* are at odds with objectivist reading of social practices. On the one hand, it is true that reflexivity does not involve the whole transparency of the citational process. In fact, on a first level perspective, the act of following rules remains entirely internal to (and thus

coextensive with) the act of sticking to recurrent patterns of conduct. On the other hand, however, the role of the agents and their activities of citation prove to be central to the very existence of these recurrent patterns. This implies that observation and description on the part of the theorist can hardly neglect people's citational performances, that is to say, the way they actually interpret and describe the practices in which they are embedded when they engage in critical exchanges over them. Put otherwise, if these practices get fixed and ratified through people's citational activities on a second level perspective, then the theorist must embrace this very perspective to understand what it is that people identify as having the force of standard.

If these elements testify to the intimate link between Wittgenstein's and Bourdieu's theoretical toolkits, there is a further crucial aspect that Bourdieu's *habitus* brings to light – one that Wittgenstein failed to see or, most probably, which he had no interest whatsoever in pinpointing. This aspect relates to the capacity of theory to pave the way for what Bourdieu regarded as an analysis of the social world that is meant to dereify and defatalize it. The theorist's interest should not be limited to the study of regularities as the encounter between people's past experience and their present conduct. An analysis in terms of *habitus* also contributes to understanding that the different fields comprising the social domain emerge as crystallized negotiations meant to establish what counts as 'the natural' and 'the normal', that is, as a *correct* and *adequate* conduct within them. Such a critical nuance of the notion of *habitus* lists among the main tasks of social theory that of understanding how certain accounts of practices get fixed and naturalized *to the detriment of possible others*. In this sense, the *habitus* rectifies Wittgenstein's reassuring scenery where all the agents are believed to be equal contributors to the construction of a shared form of life. The concrete, historic structure of fields endows the agents with different skills and capabilities and thus different capacities to renegotiate accounts of practices and thus to determine common standards of correctness.

In light of this, my analysis evidences that Bourdieu's social theory not only is exempt from objectivist biases, but also offers a precious instrument of critique to pin down the relationship between a context's pragmatic history and the naturalization of standards of correctness within that context. The *habitus* is a set of schemes of perception through which people distinguish what is appropriate and inappropriate, correct and incorrect in a given field. From a first level perspective, the negotiated nature of standards – as the "implementation of socially constituted taxonomies" (Bourdieu 1990a: 15) – is concealed, because the relation between people's conduct and standards is non-transparent. In other words, in the framework of everyday interactions, the fact that the establishment of certain accounts of practices always implies the obliteration of alternatives is invisible. Socially constituted taxonomies tend to be perceived as distinctions affixed to an alleged nature of the social world. But even critical exchanges between agents on a second level perspective are likely to be blind to this aspect. For they are reflexive contexts where people discuss what the rules are that are guiding their conduct. These discussions might provide an account of regularities (the standards) that might confirm social regularities just as it might disrupt them. Therefore, Bourdieu warns us, one more effort is needed to find out if people's accounts are confirmative or disruptive. Here the social theorist comes into play with her theoretical devices (like the *habitus*) that accentuate the issue of temporality and tease out the relationship between past and current accounts of practices. The social theorist carries out the task of studying how the schemes of perception that led to the production of past accounts of a practice affect and/or constrain current ones. Only the examination of the specific nature of the different fields, in conjunction with the study of the strategies employed by the agents therein and of the lexicon that they adopt to provide accounts of what they do, allows deciphering the relationship between competing accounts.

All in all, an analysis that takes advantage of Bourdieu's methodology truly vindicates the role of social theory as a contribution to "neutralizing the mechanisms of the neutralization of history" (Bourdieu 2001: viii). Such a demanding activity of historicization and dereification

calls for an ongoing collaboration between theory and the agents on the fields. On the one hand, the opaqueness and non-transparency of the citational process whereby the agents themselves turn regularities into standards makes it hard for them to spark historicizing and dereifying processes on their own. In this respect, one of the main tasks of social theory is to provide the agents with critical instruments that can be adopted by them when they find themselves questioning the regularities that are taken to be obvious, self-evident standards. On the other hand, in order for social theory to perform this task, it must remain sensitive to the performative activities carried out by the agents in the social domain. This is the reason why I claimed the charge of objectivism is the most insidious: if theory ended up being a self-confirming map of the social domain, then the chasm with social action would be unbridgeable and the role of theory would prove useless from the agent's point of view. Quite the reverse, however counterintuitive and counterfactual theory might *prima facie* be, it must be employed as a way to bring history into the picture, to question what appears to be natural, to defy what is presented as normal. To put it otherwise, theory is called upon to help agents look at this constructed relationship through the prism of temporality and to reject the view that such "reifying abstractions" (Bourdieu 1990b: 37) are integrated in the genome of their form of life. Social theory must help social agents free current accounts of practices from the yoke of reification so as to favour the emergence of alternatives that may successfully challenge the transient and arbitrary nature of available social taxonomies.

Based on that, I would like to conclude by returning to the example offered above. An analysis founded on Bourdieu's *habitus* helps explain that homosexuals are not being driven by a *prima facie* intention to obtain equality that (inexplicably in their eyes) lapses back into a new form of subjection. The understanding of the *habitus* and rule-following provided in the preceding sections invites to focus on the interplay between the renegotiation of practices and the field where the renegotiation takes place. From this sounder vantage point, the argument of queer critics could be reframed along the following lines. The field where today the practice of homosexual sexuality and its social acceptability are being revised is the legal field (see e.g. Joshi 2012; NeJaime 2003), as more and more people bring their claims to courts to urge parliaments to reform policy frameworks. This renegotiation occurs in a bounded framework, where the available lexicon for revising the boundaries of sexual practices are not completely left to the agents themselves (Croce 2014b; Ruskola 2005). This is why, critics argue, homosexuals are gaining recognition insofar as they (whether inadvertently or not) accept to frame their claims in a way that conforms to a determinate cultural unit, that is, the monogamous couple, rooted in the narrative of romantic, life-long, and committed love.

There is no tacit knowledge that inexplicably turns positive outcomes into a burden. Rather, the legal practice of forming a family is being placed in the flux of renegotiations, which in the specific field of the law is conducive to a new understanding of what counts as a respectable couple. In this context, as a Bourdieusian reading demonstrates, those who participate in this process are not mechanically determined by their past experience and do not just replicate the structures they dwell in. The outcome of negotiations is conditional upon the interaction between people's past experience and the structure of the field. In other words, homosexuals are not contributing to the definition of new standards in a social vacuum, but in a context where multiple variables are at play, not least the grammar of the field where renegotiations are being conducted and the strategies of the groups that are involved (such as lawyers, civil society organizations, pressure groups, and others). Therefore, the result is not a mere subjugation, but the production of standards of respectable sexuality that only in part accommodate the richness of homosexual sexuality. Homosexuals' performative citations of what being a homosexual should be like emphasize certain aspects, which are instrumental in legal recognition, and downplay others, which might be detrimental to legal recognition. It turns out that the portion of history which gets cited in this renegotiation is the one that supports the narrative of

love and coupledness, by which the respectable relationship comes to be the one where people are united by a life-long, responsible, state-sanctioned bond. The result is the reification of sexual categories that effaces features of sexuality which once were common patrimony of the broader community of homosexuals and today are *de facto* being used to exclude a vast range of new unacceptable sexualities.

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