

# Converging principles of norm, rule, and practice: Tracing normativity beyond semantics in Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice*

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*Abstract* In Bourdieu's theory, normativity is detectable as a fundamental category which determines the stratification mechanisms of social interaction. However, normativity lacks a formal conceptualization. One could argue of course, that the lack of a formal normativity-concept indicates the lack of an empirical normativity-entity, but as the following analysis will show, within Bourdieu's work *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, normativity is located between an *a priori*-entity and an *a posteriori*-entity. Expressed through ongoing negotiations about the status and shape of applicable norms, normativity is the substratum on which norms are cultivated.

A substantial task in this paper, along with the project of bringing supportive evidence to the hypothesis of norm, rule, and practice as expressions of normativity, is the introduction of normativity as an evidence-statement per se. Normativity, because it is applied as both an ontological concept and a meta-theoretical term, is initially approached from both an inductive and a deductive perspective.

Therefore, this paper defines normativity<sup>1</sup> as *the human notion of the necessity of norm existence which functions as a device ensuring social regulation, consistency of values, as well as legal stability*, and precisely this sense of normativity offers a double explanation: It explains the way in which the selection of a *specific norm* from the vast variety of *available norms in a society or community* is carried out in a specific situation by a particular individual, and it also delivers a solution to the problems related to classification of *norm* and *rule* and the distinction between them.

All of Bourdieu's key concepts have clear anthropological imprints and are not easily unhinged from the context and phenomenology of traditional ethnographic tasks such as participation, observation, and interviewing. The examination of normativity as a fundamental, legally inspired principle seldom dealt with in anthropology<sup>2</sup> - though recently more and more often touched upon by sociology of law - offers the opportunity to identify the intersection between regulation/law and interactional group dynamics unfolded within culture, social interaction and religious expression.

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, normativity is treated as an ontological dimension – not a as metadimension.

<sup>2</sup> Here I will delve into some helpful remarks by sociologist of law, Håkan Hydén, who argues that social sciences need a revision carried out by means of 1) the theory of normativity that can combine considerations about individual perspectives and cognitive conditions on one side and structural systemic preconditions for social interaction on the other (Hydén 2002a: 6). Also, Hydén draws on the Habermasian opposition between on one side life world and norms related to primary socialisation and on the other side norms related to system and to secondary socialisation stressing in his description elements that seem to point towards the basic function of norms as one of metaphoric exchange (Hydén 2002a: 96). First and foremost, norms as a sociological category spring from a behaviouristic sociological tradition that regards norms as being produced in a stimulus-response circuit.

### *Introduction*

“What is the point here? On only a few occasions in the work selected here does Bourdieu address norms and rules. And when that happens, he most decisively uses norms and rules to form a critique of structuralism“. This statement, I am afraid, might be the immediate reaction to this article and its methodological set-up. However, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, is one spot in Bourdieu’s immense work, where we can unravel a few inductive approaches without the use of a priori concepts. As a supplement to the more traditional analyses and as an exception to the rule. The aspect of dominant classes and their expression in taste and selection of cultural products, however intensely debated and academically well-described, is not the only key to Bourdieu’s conceptual world, as the following analysis will show.

Therefore aesthetics and the use of symbolic violence, however significant to Bourdieu’s total work is not the only essence that can be derived from his reflections on representation.

This article does not contribute to a new way of reading Bourdieu, but simply tries to flip a stone or two in Bourdieu’s vast literary production over to see what is underneath. There is no intention of re-positioning Bourdieu’s corner stones. Additional details are the operative words here: in no way does this article postulate to derive a new theory on *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, it basically attempts to differentiate between specific layers of semantics that are detectable in one specific part of Bourdieu’s work.

As the objective is to focus on the terminological instruments by means of which Bourdieu addresses the methodological and anthropological problem of practice, and analyze the densely interwoven semantic network of Bourdieu’s key concepts “norm”, “rule”, and “practice” in order to try to trace normativity *beyond* the semantic wrapping, the main intention of this paper is to unravel the underlying principle of normativity that seems to inform and mould the terminological trinity *norm, rule* and *practice*. This methodological approach seems adequate as it takes into consideration the fact that norms direct action but assume actual existence and social significance beyond private attitudes only when being pointed out and

equipped with a discursive structure. Norms come into being by language<sup>3</sup> - but norms can be traced beyond semantics.

Therefore, the discursive dimension is important and central, but it does not cover the entirety of the particular norm formation and fully explain the fundamental structures. Hydén has pointed out that some norms are augmented to legal principles (Hydén 2002a). Laws, then, are simply the most developed norms (Hydén 2002a: 129). The intimate relationship between law in its capacity of conflict solver and norm has been analyzed by Baier (2003), who reaches the conclusion that “Law seems to loosen its ability to solve conflicts when there is a strong consensus around fundamental values among the actors involved.” (Baier 2003: 184). This shows the power and penetrating force of norms and it indicates how norms are both an object and a methodological approach, both a theoretical and an empirical dimension.<sup>4</sup>

### *Norm as practice and negotiation*

Induction as a logical and philosophical problem arises from Hume’s dictum:

Hume’s answer to the question of how predictions are related to past experience are refreshingly non-cosmic: When an event of one kind frequently follows upon an event of another kind in experience, a habit is formed that leads the mind, when confronted with a new event of the first kind, to pass to the idea of an event of the second kind. The idea of necessary connection arises from the felt impulse of the mind in making this transition. (Goodman 1992: 24).

This leads to the question related to norm as practice and cognition: Does norm inform rule and does rule rule practice? The following paper, in seeking answers to this question, focuses on the ‘division of labour’ between the three socio-political categories norm, rule, and practice in Bourdieu’s *Outline of a*

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<sup>3</sup> Bourdieu sheds light on the problem of language-analogies in anthropology and the habit of turning ethnographic fieldwork into semantic decoding operations and communication analyses: “The anthropologist’s particular relation to the object of his study contains the makings of a theoretical distortion inasmuch as his situation as an observer, excluded from the real play of social activities by the fact that he has no place [...] in the system observed and has no need to make a place for himself there, inclines him to a hermeneutic representation of practices, leading him to reduce all social relations to communicative relation and, more precisely, to decoding operations.” (Bourdieu 1977: 1; see also this text’s footnote 14)

<sup>4</sup> Baier (2003: 48) calls attention to the abduction side of normative theory. The abduction approach consists in the explanation and understanding of a given phenomenon based upon a hypothesis in which the true nature of the phenomenon is depicted and outlined in detail. Bourdieu’s approach in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* does not qualify as abduction in the classical sense of Charles S. Peirce, but the dialectical movements between subjectivism and objectivism in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* in order to develop an understanding of practice bears some similarities to the method of abduction.

*Theory of Practice*, and it tries to uncover some of the mechanisms behind micro-structural, social (self-)regulation. Based on his ethnographic study on the seemingly unchangeable, traditional endogamous marriage strategies specific to Kabyle kinship culture in Algeria, Pierre Bourdieu outlines an anthropological *theory of practice*, in which he unhinges “practice” from the simplistic mechanism of pure reproduction and social adaptation. Coining “practice” as a contextual mediation of both subtle cultural principles and situational rational action - and eventually introducing habitual tradition into scientific discourse - Bourdieu portrays *the practice performing individual* as not only *a non-reflexive object* determined to a large extent by reproductive cultural patterns but also as *a reflexive and strategic subject* maximizing cultural and social capital in his often meticulously planned social action. Norm, rule, and practice are not just signifiers of a particular post-modern semantic distribution of a certain power vocabulary. The three terms are in fact crucial to understanding normativity in its capacity as an underlying nexus between social structuration and cultured semantics in post-modern society. Norm, rule, and practice are neither empty signifiers nor a purely analytical terminology, but they are in fact gravitating principles that are strategically deployed by agents in a specific field in order for them to individually accumulate a maximum of social and symbolical capital. Norm, rule, and practice as an interactional pattern discovered by Bourdieu in his research on Kabyle marriage strategies are in fact three deployments of the ontological phenomenon of normativity<sup>5</sup> which informs social interaction and decision-making. Normativity is accessible only through the gateways provided by

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<sup>5</sup> Goodman points to the irregularities and inconsistencies that are attached to Hume’s philosophical approach: “The real inadequacy of Hume’s account lay not in his descriptive approach but in the imprecision of his description. Regularities in experience, according to him, give rise to habits of expectation; and thus it is predictions conforming to past regularities that are normal or valid. But Hume overlooks the fact that some regularities do and some do not establish such habits; that predictions based on some regularities are valid while predictions based on other regularities are not.”(Goodman 1992: 38). In relations to the specific question of norm formation, the points made by Goodman hold two important implications relevant to the project of this paper: 1) habits are not always predictable which means that there is no absolute, identifiable, and simple causality between regularity and habit and 2) as norms are cognitively established evaluation-habits, we cannot predict which norms will develop and which will not. Also, Hume’s stressing of retrospection (cf. “thus it is predictions conforming to past regularities that are normal or valid”; Goodman 1992: 38) draws attention not only to the importance of social history in understanding the upholding of norms but also to the significance of individual cognition and personal history, i.e. biography, when considering the identification of norms and the behaviour guidance by means of norms.

generally accepted, solid and verbalized norms that hold fixed and well-known positions in community discourses.

This paper is focused on the dimension of social strategy, the foundation of which is constituted by the principles of *possibility* and *intention*.<sup>6</sup> The dialectical connection between possibility and intention is the hallmark of negotiation.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the balancing of legal intention and societal possibility is the mother of all law formation and the key to sociology of law. In this way, the concept “practice” as defined by Bourdieu, hinges on to static “law in books” as well as to dynamic “law in action” because it is applying rule and norm as its progression devices. Change and adaptation thus become the underlying principles of the norm formation process. At the centre of this paper’s analysis is the assumption that norms, besides having a cognitive and psychological side to them, are first and foremost a phenomenological phenomenon. This can be detected and pinpointed in the numerous informants’ accounts that constitute the empirical foundations of Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, whereas normativity, which remains unmentioned and receives no description in his outline, constitutes an ontological structure approachable only through a series of deduction manoeuvres.

The principle of “sense”, then, touches down on pre-reflexive instinctive individual notions, and it also refers to well-structured, highly rational conceptions (“the making sense of”) as an effect of skilful interpretation.

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<sup>6</sup> Though there are some apparent similarities between the possibility/intention-dialectic of normativity theory and the economy based maximization of advantages and disadvantages particular to rational action-theory. But, whereas rational choice is focused on the choice made and the action taken by the individual, the theory surrounding the notion of normativity is focused on the rational selection of relevant norms used to legitimate the choice made and the action taken.

<sup>7</sup> Negotiation is a term closely associated with liberalism and the market forces. I argue that negotiation is linked to both a consensual and a conflictual basis. The basic reason for negotiation are common interests shared by at least two parties that agree on the significance of the issue being negotiated whereas the means to the particular end and the final discourse shaping, the social interests and the actual political implementation of the issue remains a disagreement. I am aware that this definition bears some resemblances to Mouffe’s definition of the post-modern “enemy turned adversary”. Torfing sums up the characteristics of antagonism in democratic society as described and analyzed by Mouffe in this way: “Within [...] an antagonistic democracy enemies would not be destroyed, but rather turned into adversaries whose politics we might disagree with, but whose existence would be legitimate and should be tolerated.” (Torfing 1999: 255). Mouffe’s point is that democracy as a constitutional design provides a number of both high- and low-scale political arenas for different conflicts to be displayed in a civilized and controlled manner. Whereas enemies confront, adversaries interact and constitute each other. This reciprocity is unique to the relations between adversaries and it provides an explanation to the way alliances between parties are constructed.

Norm, rule, and practice as defined in Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* are converging principles that gravitate towards pure normativity.<sup>8</sup> Obviously, at the very core of deduction as a strictly cognitive manoeuvre lies the ability and possibility to deduct from any existing element the potential being or coming-into-being of another element. The semantic distinctions ("sensed norm" as opposed to both "rule" or "law") serve as cracks that allow an insight into the very ontology of normativity as depicted in Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. This does not mean that the concepts "rule" and "norm" are drained of their semantic contents, but that semantic analysis of selected norm- and rule-related text samples from Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* provides empirical evidence of this convergence in such a way that it seems plausible to interpret the dynamism at work as a sophisticated, socio-politically<sup>9</sup> marked-out law of gravitation.<sup>10</sup>

Bourdieu voices his disapproval of the very principles of universality which generally underpin ideas of "laws" of any kind. Instead, he insists on a more intense focus on the particular and singular, of which the latter category includes the potential exceptions to the proverbial "rule":

We must find [...] a reason for questioning not only the very notion of prescription or preference, but also on the one hand, the notion of the genealogically defined group, an entity whose social identity is as invariable and uniform as the criteria for its delimitation and which confers on each of its members a social identity equally distinct and permanently fixed: and on the other hand, the notion of *rules* and *rule-governed behaviour* in the twofold sense of behaviour conforming objectively to rules and determined by obedience to rules." (Bourdieu 1977: 31)

Bourdieu voices the methodological inadequacy and insufficiency of the concept of the social "rule" and disconnects the idea of rule from the notion

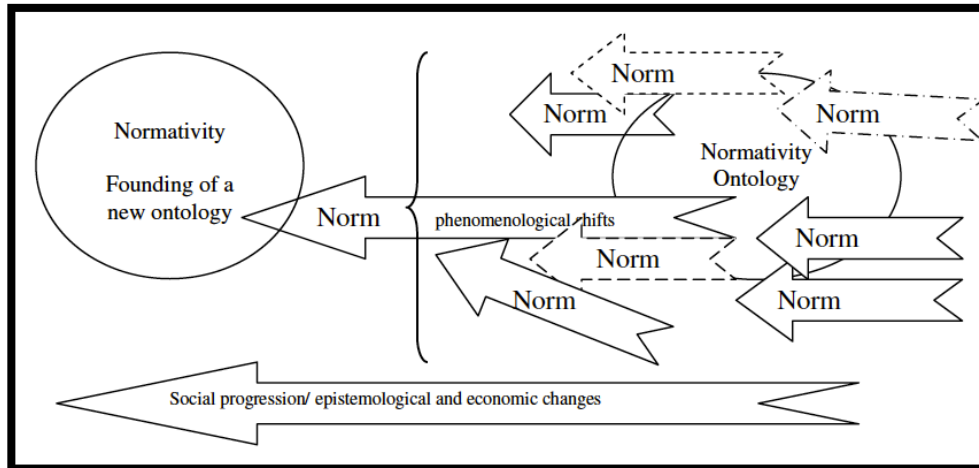
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<sup>8</sup> I do not claim that semantic distinctions are illusory. From a classical Saussurean perspective there is no necessary link between signifier and significant. This arbitrariness discloses in a way some of the basis of the converging principle itself as the terms point towards the stable constitutional principle of non-logic.

<sup>9</sup> Using Bourdieu's examples of politics of distant marriage strategies as a starting point, I define politics as the contesting of intentional strategies embodied in a form that is compatible to the discourse of organizational or state formation. Bourdieu states that "[...] political marriages, as opposed to ordinary marriages which follow well-worn tracks, are not and cannot be repeated, since the alliance would be devalued by becoming common." (Bourdieu 1977: 54). This means that the political gesture is that of exclusivity and therefore non-repetition. Political marriages break simple kinship-boundaries. Torfing defines politics as "Politics basically involves taking a decision in an undecidable terrain. As such, politics is simultaneously a constitutive and subversive dimension of the social." (Torfing 1999: 304).

<sup>10</sup> I deliberately select this concept "law of gravitation" from within the domain of natural science in order to underpin the aspect of causality and determinism that is often related to the study of norms.

of causality. Slowly, a new norm system that pays attention to the underlying transformativity of social interaction seems to be emerging from the shattered structures of an unreflected and insubstantial social determinism that bears the resemblance of pure “tradition”.



**Figure 1:** Intersecting and contesting norms of different intensity depict the phenomenological shifts which mirror over-all societal changes. Normativity, thus, is always related to specific sets of norm systems being displayed in a social context

*Possibility and intention – normative formation on the move*

Whereas possibility is related primarily to external structures constituting what we, using a rather broad term, may call “the world”, intention, on the other hand, is related primarily to internal structures that we, using an equally broad term, may refer to as “the inner world”. The intricate idea of the world, its equipment, and the ability of the human mind to fully grasp the complexity of the world’s essence and boundaries, and the capacity of the human spirit to function within the framework of the world’s social structures has been addressed on numerous occasions in the history of Western philosophy.

Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* states that: ”Die Welt ist alles was der Fall ist.” (Wittgenstein 1989:11; 1), and ”Fall” („case“, „fact“) is the manifestation of a verbalized logical category based on observation. In his positions no. 5.6331 and 5.634 in *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (Wittgenstein 1989):

5.634 Das hängt damit zusammen, daß kein Teil unserer Erfahrung auch a priori ist.  
Alles, was wir sehen, könnte auch anders sein.  
Alles, was wir überhaupt beschreiben können, könnte auch anders sein.

5.6331 Das Gesichtsfeld hat nämlich nicht etwa eine solche Form:



5.634 Das hängt damit zusammen, daß kein Teil unserer Erfahrung auch a priori ist.  
Alles, was wir sehen, könnte auch anders sein.  
Alles, was wir überhaupt beschreiben können, könnte auch anders sein.  
Es gibt keine Ordnung der Dinge a priori.

Wittgenstein illustrates the contingency of the world's constituents. There is no order of things a priori – order is entirely an a posteriori category constituted by the human mind reflecting on and categorising the eye's perceptions and the body's sensations.

Closely linked to the idea of the world and the inner-outer-dichotomy accompanying it in Western philosophy is the understanding of the boundaries between world, body, and mind from which the definition of “reality”<sup>11</sup> is derived. We may benefit from using a Cartesian position as our starting point here: the classical “cogito ergo sum” that uses cognition as the corner stone of reality and human identity may be expanded to “negotior ergo sum”.<sup>12</sup> “Negotiation”, in the immediate context of this paper, thus covers the mediation between two categories: a) empirical “knowledge” regarding the outer world, and b) “assumption” which, within an inner world, constitutes a

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<sup>11</sup> The understanding of reality calls for a transcendental act of realization whereby the nature of pure, tangible things is widened. This understanding of the ontology of things is accomplished through either rational reflection or emotional insight - or a combination of both (See the definition of “Realität” in *Philosophisches Wörterbuch* 1982: 573).

<sup>12</sup> According to the University of Notre Dame online *Latin Dictionary and Grammar Aid* ([www.archives.nd.edu](http://www.archives.nd.edu) 2011-03-21), the basic meaning of the Latin verb “negotior” (: negotior, -ari dep.) is “to carry on business”, whereby “business” seems to mean trading in the broadest sense. The dimension of trade implies the reflection of maximization of economy, advantages and disadvantages particular to the theoretical system of rational choice. My choice of “negotiator” as a terminological building block used to support the argument that the choice of norm to support and legitimate a specific action also corresponds to Bourdieu’s economic term “capital” (Bourdieu 1977) whereby the semantic compatibility between negotiator and capital is maintained. “Negotiator” as a term covering various trading activities also logically involves the process of negotiation in the modern sense of the word.



number of mental models of the outer world and helps guide, direct, re-direct, and even balance individual intention.

Balancing and direction both presuppose a spot from where to balance and direct from. Objectivism implies such a fixed spectator-position in a fixed world:

Objectivism constitutes the social world as a spectacle presented to an observer who takes up a 'point of view' on the action, who stands back so as to observe it and, transferring into the object the principles of his relation to the object, conceives of it as a totality intended for cognition alone, in which all interactions are reduced to symbolic exchanges. (Bourdieu 1977: 96)

Subjectivism, on the other hand, as it is derived from the Cartesian *Cogito ergo sum*, implies cognition as a central dynamism and therefore accentuates the subjectivity as a core element to all intellectual and scientific truth (cf. *Philosophisches Wörterbuch* 1982: 675).

Though apparent oppositions, subjectivism and objectivism also constitute one another; Bourdieu has drawn attention to the nexus of subjectivism and objectivism as well as to the ideological sphere that they inhabit together:

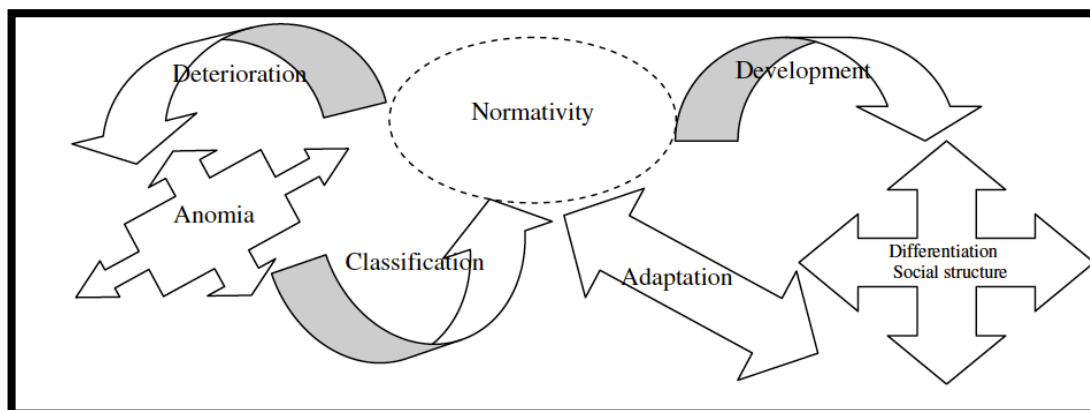
[...] how could one underestimate the ideological couple subjectivism/objectivism when one sees that the critique of the *individual* considered as *ens realissimum* only leads to his being made an epiphenomenon of hypostatized structure, and that, well-founded assertion of the primacy of objective relations results in products of human action, the structures being credited with the power to develop in accordance with their own laws and to determine and overdetermine other structures? (Bourdieu 1977: 84)

Subjectivism and objectivism seem to be each other's flip-side, and Bourdieu tries to insert habitus as a mediation between the two. Habitus, thus, becomes a multi-focal instrument that enables the subject to select from the multitude of relevant and genre-related norms the specific norms that in a given situation seem to serve the intentions best that constitute his own project.

Bourdieu's rhetoric is sophisticated, when he accounts for the inconsistency between practice and representations of practice and when he calls attention to the fact that rules are derivatives and not individual driving forces:

However close it may come to the logic of practices (and to the extent that it does), the abstract diagram which has to be constructed in order to account for that logic is liable to obscure the fact that the driving force of the whole mechanism is not some abstract principle (the principle of isotomy, equality in honour), still less the set of *rules* which can be derived from it, but the sense of honour, a disposition inculcated in the earliest years of life, and constantly reinforced by calls to order from the group, that is to say, from the aggregate of the individuals endowed with the same dispositions, to whom each is linked by his dispositions and interests. (Bourdieu 1977: 14p)

Bourdieu describes representation (cf. “abstract diagram”) as a clouding device, which is by its nature of absolute description unable to shed light on the nature of dynamic practices and he goes on to depict rules as a derivate (cf. “derived from it”). The choice of the somewhat blurred concept of “sense” seems at first sight to maybe not be the best choice of words, but a closer look reveals that the “sense” serves a proper semantic purpose as it able to bridge the gap between pre-semantic emotion and post-semantic idea



**Figure 2:** Normativity is a field surrounded by a number of driving forces some of which constitute cognition (e.g. classification and differentiation) while others seem to rather determine the social setting (e.g. development) in which the notion of normativity is emerging. The punctured lines indicate that normativity has no fixed limitations and position but is being constantly negotiated in the over-all system.

*Field circumference*

Navigating between the pre-fabricated patterns of tradition and the immanent innovation of diverse social performances, the Kabylis, as an ethnic group, offer a unique insight into the social coherency of ongoing conversion of pre-cognitive patterns into social action and vice versa. In the attempt to further

investigate “practice” and its subdivisions “norm” and “rule”<sup>13</sup> in Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. “Mimesis”<sup>14</sup> as an analytical tool especially well-equipped when it comes to penetrating into the social and mental field of habitus and interaction. Starting from a cognitive point of view, as norms cannot be seen as entities separate from *intention* and *possibility*. The so-called “norm-model” developed by Hydén and Wickenberg (Hydén 2002a: 284; figure 7.3) incorporates cognitive principles, will and values into the mechanism behind the making of a norm. It seem valuable to not eradicate norm in presenting it as something separate from cognition but to try to determine the importance and significance of reflection and negotiation as dimensions that are imperative to the building, upholding, or changing of a norm. Possibility and intention shape a mental framework to cognitive practice as such. In this way, this paper serves as a further development of a small section<sup>15</sup> of the original Hydén & Wickenberg-model.

As intention and possibility are closely linked to a “here-and-now”-reality inhabited by flesh-and-blood-humans, this “intention and possibility”-approach, attempting to add an interactional and situational dimension to traditional theory on norms, widens the domain of norms as it implies that norms are chosen, discarded, and upheld by the twofold principle of *intention and possibility* which serves as a cognitive device adapted to the power structures of the social setting in question. Intention and possibility stress the aspect of meticulous decision-making and the ability to see the mutual causality embedded in the choice of norms and the action taken. The establishing of alternating hypothetical scenarios the educated comparison of

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<sup>13</sup> I establish the hierarchy of high-level division (practice) and low-level subdivision (norm, rule) based on Bourdieu’s own differentiation between mechanical law and unconscious principle (Bourdieu 1977: 4p) that is greatly inspired by the critique that Lévi-Strauss directed towards Mauss’ gift exchange. Logically, practice is constructed through the application of norms to social activity and serves the purpose of gaining or *maintaining* status. The detectable rules that the social setting plays by all differ according to the actual participants and their particular (personal) objectives.

<sup>14</sup> In this paper, I use the elaborate mimesis-definition as developed by German cultural scientists Gebauer and Wulf who describe mimesis as a “*conditio humana*” (Gebauer & Wulf 1992: 9) that by its very nature expands onto the domain of imitation but which is not identical to the act of systematic reproduction. Mimesis is the human capacity of redirection and reattribution that subliminally negotiates between established cultural patterns and individual perception and cognition. Mimesis, thus, both challenges social norms and conforms to cultural patterns.

<sup>15</sup> The norm model developed by Hydén is a circle shape accessible through three main gates: knowledge, will and possibility. They are interrelated but not determine each other and their form a dynamic structure that is not just parts added on to one another (Baier 2003: 52).

which sheds light on the intimate and intricate relation between norms, choice and action, are crucial to the positioning of the individual<sup>16</sup> in social space.<sup>17</sup>

The point is that any change of intention will cause the subject to look for new possibilities just as the change of possibilities at his disposal may alter the subjects intentions altogether. Therefore, intention and possibility shed light on the way in which norms embrace an individualistic dimension along with the collectivity and pre-existing social relations traditionally linked to theory of norms (Hydén 2002a).

### *Mirrors: Mimesis and normativity in Bourdieu*

Traditionally, mimesis has strong roots in arts and aesthetics, but mimetic acts, as they are agent driven, also contain aspects of performativity and staged representations that serve various social purposes.<sup>18</sup> Not alone does mimesis cover reproductive strategies – mimesis integrates the negotiation and selection of normative strategies and offers an explanation of intention and effect.

In Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, methodological dimensions and epistemological perspectives such as “model”, “subject(ivism)”, and “object(ivism)” are shaped into an analytic trinity and placed upon the epistemological, Kantian, problem of “representation”. A representation always stands *for something to somebody in some way at a certain time*, and this implies that representations have 1) a mirroring effect and hold 2) certain communicative contents depending on the contextual setting<sup>19</sup> while at the same time they are dynamic and culturally sensitive.

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<sup>16</sup> Bourdieu states that all positions ever occupied by an individual are always still part of his social and cognitive being. That way position becomes an index to the individual: “In fact it is their present and past positions in the social structure that biological individuals carry with them, at all times and in all places, in the form of dispositions which are so many marks of *social position* and hence of the *social distance* between objective positions [...]” (Bourdieu 1977: 82).

<sup>17</sup> The term social space broadly covers the domain of the domain within which the individual can find and uphold a position investing him with sufficient power to fight off contesters. The social space is defined by the number of significant agents with whom the individual in question is interacting or wishes to interact.

<sup>18</sup> Though he uses practice as a mediating factor, Bourdieu does not delve into the performativity systems of mimesis. He only stresses it in the use of an Aristotle quotation as an introduction to his chapter three (Bourdieu 1977: 96).

<sup>19</sup> When Bourdieu warns against a fundamental anthropological methodological fallacy fostered by the objectivist spectator role of the anthropologist, which “[...] inclines him to a hermeneutic representation of practices, leading him to reduce all social relations to communicative relations, and, more precisely, to decoding operations.” (Bourdieu 1977: 1), he is in fact addressing a different form of communication than

The mirror image itself does not represent anything. It is merely a stable, minute-to-minute portrait of “what is there just now” and it becomes a representation only through the interpretation developed by the spectator facing it.<sup>20</sup> Norms may assume that very same kind of mirror structure. Hydén argues that norms transcend the boundaries of sociology and society and he pinpoints that many norms emanate from politics and economy (Hydén quoted in Baier 2003: 36). Baier (2003) stresses the phenomenon “norm as statistics” as developed by Therborn (Baier 2003: 53)<sup>21</sup> whereby he describes norms as pure habit and common conduct in the sense of what most people would agree on as being the best.<sup>22</sup> Both Baier and Hydén call attention to norms as social signs (i.e. norms as semiotics) as well as to norms as a reciprocal phenomenon (Baier 2003: 37). Norms also acquire the function of Kantian imperatives (Baier 2003: 37) and thus call attention to the ability of norms to, by its imperative, bring something new into being (actions) (Baier 2003: 38). As standardizations of normal behavior norms reduce social complexity (Baier 2003: 38) and stabilize the infrastructure of society (Baier 2003: 38).

Between “possibility” and “intention” there is a dynamic knowledge system serving as a simple buffer: It seems helpful to, at this point, turn to Horkheimer, who has defined knowledge as a process with no closure; in his psychological anthropology, Horkheimer has detected different levels of normativity in his analysis of the authoritarian character. Normative action as opposed to rational action is directed towards the accentuation of norms in action and the stressing of a system of rules followed.

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that of the mirror image. What Bourdieu has in mind is the Luhmannian reductive autopoiesis of self-referring communication in the group observed - as viewed by a spectator who out of concern about his scientific validity divorces himself from the interaction -, whereas the inherent communication of the representative mirror image sketched above consists in prompting the spectator to reflect and interpret the image in a hermeneutic operation that allows him to integrate different contextual structures into the interpretation and thereby expand his understanding. Basically, what Bourdieu criticises is reduction of social interaction to *in-group* communication. What the mirror image has to offer is the expansion of the mere spectacle to various *insights*.

<sup>20</sup> The mirror image, then, offers a mediation between objectivist spectating and subjectivist self-integration, while at the same time the mirror image also provides the opportunity of framing the spectacle and naming the segments of which it consists.

<sup>21</sup> Therborn quoted in Baier (2003: 53).

<sup>22</sup> “The best” does not by definition include an ethical dimension. Much more the semantic construction “best” simply indicates what is regarded suitable and preferable to the individuals assessing a specific situation and deciding on actions to be taken.

In contrasting the philosophical positions of objectivism and subjectivism, Bourdieu attempts to unveil the complex and immanently contradictory nature of practice as a significant cultural representation and he subsequently faces the difficulties of dealing simultaneously with practice as both a concrete spectacle and a theoretical implication, which confronts him with the problematic task of a twofold interpretation of practice in 1) empirical and 2) methodological settings, which gravitate towards one another.

### *Negotior as practice*

Besides its ethnomethodological implications, the concept “practice” in its almost vague, yet basic, everyday use covers a vast variety of intentional, skilled, and seemingly random social activities that evoke a number of immediate interrelated associations in the form of logically linked concepts such as “situation”, “intention”, “information”, “causality”, “individuals”, “consciousness”, and “cognition” that all call for different, yet specific, approaches as well as deliberate and detailed consideration.

If, for instance, one deals with the situational dimensions of practice, the socio-political context and the historic preconditions of the individuals involved, the nature and status of their interaction as well as the implications of the situation become imperative. On the other side, if one chooses to concentrate on the aspect of “intention”, the attention is inevitably directed towards the cognitive equipment of the individuals involved in strategic development and systematic assessments and evaluations of possible outcomes. Also, it should be taken into consideration, that intentions are seldom static and rarely linear per se. By their very nature, intentions are founded on specific situational platforms, which are afloat and constantly shifting, which is why, fundamentally, intentions are never stable but remain subject to ongoing restructuring and reorientation according to the progress of the situation in which the intention is developed and the possibilities it offers, not to mention the unforeseeable impact of external factors on the context within which the intention is shaped.

In no way, can individual intentions be detached from their contextual settings and the number and character of possibilities available. The logical interrelation between intention and possibility shows us how the introduction of new possibilities into the cognitive arena alters and shapes the actual intentions and how, on the other hand, the scoping of intentions and the estimation of future potential success calls for a systematic search for specific possibilities designed to support and secure the project planned whatever its nature.

Even more importantly, as intentions are directed towards a future event, they encapsulate a time dimension, intentions are estimated and evaluated differently all according to whether a retrospective or anticipatory perspective be applied. The factors surrounding the concept “practice”, all point away from the mere idea of practice as coherent grammar based activity, and indicate instead the importance of consideration of contextual substructure and the texture of semantic distribution.

Quite aware of the pitfalls of introspective approach, Bourdieu stresses that from a scientific point of view, informant discourses, even though they serve as excellent opportunities to verbalize rationalizations in retrospect, reduce practice to individual actions and so cloud the general generative principles of practice as a group dynamics:

But the subtlest pitfall doubtless lies in the fact that such descriptions freely draw on the highly ambiguous vocabulary of *rules*, the language of grammar, morality, and law, to express a social practice that in fact obeys quite different principles. (Bourdieu 1977: 19)

As Bourdieu himself, in using the term “vocabulary”, draws attention to the semantic sensitivity of his core concepts, it seems reasonable to approach the principle of practice as a gate to the *Outline of a Theory of Practice* from a semantic/semiotic point of view paying special attention to the differences in semantic strategies related to particular concepts constituting the vocabulary of Bourdieu’s practice-theory. In applying deep semantics to his approach, Bourdieu displays awareness about the necessity of disciplining and grooming the contextual frame work of his analytical tools.

His objective, then, is linguistics, as practice as an instrument of transmission cannot be artificially isolated from the semantic efforts displayed by the spectator-anthropologist and his scrutinized self-aware informant. Bourdieu hinges on to the Levy-Strauss'ean and Durkheim'ian idea of practice as a process that may be interpreted as a grammar based communication strategy and in an attempt to define his scientific field and the terminology constituting it, Bourdieu, then, using the work of Levy-Strauss<sup>23</sup>, directs his attention to the fundamental differences between a number of intersectional key concepts, the content of which he briefly analyzes in reflecting them against the following Levy-Strauss-quotation:

The question of how far and in what proportion the members of a given society respect the *norm* is very interesting, but a different question to that of where this society should properly be placed in a typology. It is sufficient to acknowledge the likelihood that *awareness* of the *rule* inflects *choices* ever so little in the *prescribed* direction, and that the percentage of *conventional* marriages is higher than would be the case if marriages were made at random, to be able to recognize what might be called a matrilateral 'operator' at work in this society and acting as a pilot [...] (Bourdieu 1977: 27p)

What Levy-Strauss refers to here as a "pilot" is in fact not the explicit discursively transmitted norm as much as the actual notion of *normativity* operating in society and hence producing the idea of specific structures, incidents and relations as natural and legitimate. The norm is approachable by discourse and interaction, whereas normativity remains a subtle socio-cultural dimension, a notion, detectable by deduction but beyond the reach of language and reflection and therefore not an object of explicit social manipulation.

In that respect, normativity as a signifier to the human need of structure, also, ensures the promotion of stability through the predictability of constant repetition and hence becomes the fundament of metacategories like ethics and morals.

I propose that norms *also* have a linguistic signifier as they inform and support human action whereas normativity is merely a cognitive category. The point of differentiating between norm and normativity, then, is to detect the

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<sup>23</sup> Quotation from Levy-Strauss's preface to the second edition of *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté*. (Bourdieu 1977 : 27f; footnote 42).



dynamics that produce the actual norm from the notion of normativity. Norms are basically verbally elaborated and qualified forms of the normative categories “do” and “don’t”.

#### *The norm – Bourdieu and the vocabulary of rules*

Bourdieu introduces the concept norm (Bourdieu 1977: 19-21) as an account of rule which means that the norm is a second order cultural and communicative structure. What Bourdieu calls norm, then, is cultural (self-)observation objectified into a set of rules semantically accounting for the likeliness of the repetition of specific social activities. It seems that norm is then nothing but an effect or a mere deduction related to objectivism and the study of the rules accounted for by informants. If norm is just “rule summarized”, there is an obvious norm outside the discursive formation.

#### *The rule*

In order to clarify the content and implications of Bourdieu’s core terminology, I now approach his term “rule”. Bourdieu introduces the ambiguity of the rule in his record of the ethnographer’s discursive interaction in his non-symmetrical relationship with his informant, and stresses the fact that rule is a rhetorical and semantic device and not a social entity forming an object to observation. The haziness of “the highly ambiguous vocabulary of *rules*, the language of grammar, morality and law [used] to express a social practice [...]” (Bourdieu 1977: 19), then, according to Bourdieu’s observations, becomes a practical device of its own kind, a “grammar[ ] of practice” (Bourdieu 1977: 20) and a mastery of non-communication defined as “[...] *the learned ignorance (docta ignorantis)*, a mode of practical knowledge not comprising knowledge of its own principles” (Bourdieu 1977: 19). Ignorance may be interpreted not as lack of sufficient knowledge nor as pure absence of knowledge but a non-discursive, non-reflexive attitude to reproductive patterns the existence of which are apparent to the agents in the field. Ignorance in Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice*-perspective is related to the causality accounts of the *why* and not to the descriptive account of the *what*. The lack of the informants’ interest in digging deeper in order to acquire

a more substantial understanding of their own field along with the willingness to repeatedly reproduce existing patterns may be taken as supportive evidence to the idea of the principle of normativity being a pre-verbal notion to the informants more than a distinct verbalized principle.

The non-correspondence of the semantics of rule and the social practice detected among the Kabylisians is at the centre of Bourdieu's attention. The semantics of rule impinge on the dynamic quality of practice. Also, the rule excels at erasing its own traces:

The rules last *trick* is to cause it to be forgotten that agents have an interest on obeying the rule, or more precisely, in *being in a regular situation* [...] perfect conformity to the rule can bring secondary benefits such as the prestige and respect which almost invariably reward an action apparently motivated by nothing other than *pure, disinterested* respect for the rule. (Bourdieu 1977: 22)

Obeying the rule for the sake of the rule itself points to the status of rule as both tradition and reproductive strategy. Bourdieu has pointed to the fact that the rule and thereby regularity is equipped with a quantitative quality: the rule is basically the, from a statistical point of view, more probable outcome<sup>24</sup>, and hence the effect most likely to be achieved, whereas the norm is the main guideline that for some reason or other, people choose to neglect in specific situations and yet obey in others. Bourdieu states his contempt for the fallacy of quantitative approaches to norm structures:

To consider regularity, that is, what recurs with a certain statistically measurable *frequency*, as the product of a consciously laid-down and consciously respected *ruling* (which implies explaining its genesis and efficacy) or as the product of an unconscious *regulating* by a mysterious cerebral and/or social mechanism, is to slip form the model of reality to the reality of the model. (Bourdieu 1977: 29)

The quotation above indicates that Bourdieu's opposition, as established between an objectivist "model of reality" and a subjectivist "reality of the model" is basically about the difficulties of precise verbalization and the problems of adequate description. When addressing the "inadequacy of the language of prescription and rules" (Bourdieu 1977: 31), Bourdieu draws a line

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<sup>24</sup> Referring to Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology-definition of "norm" from the year 2000, Håkan Hydén (2002a: 98) argues that the banal, mainstream and everyday semantics surrounding norms are important if one wishes to understand the ontology of norms. In an everyday perspective norms describe, are what most people would consider the most natural action in a specific situation. To this quantitative perspective, Hydén adds the dimension of socio-legal sanctions (2002a: 98).

between the rule as an empirically based statistical fact and the prescription as a discursive, normative dimension. The prescription, serving as a mere “should”, indicates the preferred action taken, but does by no means necessarily hold the possibility of social sanctions.

Thus, within the field of endogamous kinship among the Kabyla<sup>25</sup>, and tracing the weaknesses of basic fieldwork instruments, the inadequacy of which inevitably affects the validity of anthropological research, Bourdieu establishes a differentiation between “official kin” and “practical kin” (Bourdieu 1977: 33). This linguistic labelling of two significant analytical categories serves the purpose of intersecting the projections of the anthropologist onto the field analysis. This attempt on Bourdieu’s part to circumvent methodological subjectivism fosters a dichotomy between the official and the practical, the prescribed and actualized. Where as the “official” seems to imply aspects such as macro-social impression management, the practical seems closer related to micro-social strategies. In that case, practice becomes a transformational item and the “official” holds the position of the prescribed, e.g. the norm. The genealogical, normal and traditional, choices of marriage partners “are reserved for official situations in which they serve the function of ordering the social world and of legitimating that order” (Bourdieu 1977: 34) imply the importance of the naturalization of the socially constructed order providing society with a sense of correspondence between cosmology and social stratification. Norm is discourse put into action and action moulding discourse, and from that point of view Bourdieu pinpoints the difficulties of the average ethnologist to differentiate between kinship status of different kinds:

The ethnologist is in a particularly bad position to detect the distinction between official and practical kinship: as his dealings with kinship (at least, the kinship of others) are restricted to cognitive uses, he is disposed to take for gospel truth the official discourses which informants are inclined to present to him as long as they see themselves as spokesmen mandated to present the group’s official account of itself. (Bourdieu 1977: 37)

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<sup>25</sup> The ethnographic material on the Kabylans, Bourdieu gained through his fieldwork in Algeria during the time of the Algerian war.

This preliminary dichotomist model is elaborated, later on, in a language bearing at least some resemblance to Saussurean ideas about static *langue* and dynamic *parole*, when Bourdieu describes the correspondence of practice and meaning:

The universes of meaning corresponding to different universes of practice are at once self-contained – hence protected from logical control through systematization – and *objectively* consistent with all the others, insofar as they are the loosely systematic products of a system of more or less completely integrated generative principles functioning in a structurally invariant way in the most diverse fields of practice. (Bourdieu 1977: 123)

The principle of diversity signified in the plural forms “universes” indicates the multifunctionality of conceptualization and thus serves as a support of Bourdieu’s idea of practice as a discursively structured and grammar related and transformative strategy.

The diversities of meaning are roofed under the coherency and structural transparency of the social cosmology and therefore touch upon each other, to a certain extent overlap but remain within their own domains and so avoid discursive struggle. A certain Luhman’ian autopoiesis rings through the Bourdieu’an rhetoric in the description of meaning as structured systems organized as separate and immanent universes accessible by specific discourses operated in specific situations for specific purposes. These systems are by their very nature and their metaphysical and cosmological garments essentially norm providers and illustrate how sets of different, contesting norms co-exist in paralleled domains, thus avoiding open conflict. Norms, then are not stable but function as accessible cords that the group members strike depending entirely on their intentions and possibilities.

The rule, Bourdieu states, is to be found in the intersection between forced choice and free choice:

Parallel-cousin marriage may in certain cases impose itself as a necessity which is, however, not that of a genealogical rule. In practice this ideal marriage is often a *forced* choice, which people sometimes try to pass off as a positive choice of the ideal, thus making a virtue of necessity. (Bourdieu 1977: 46)

He concentrating his efforts on the empirical findings in Kabylia, he adds that the rule as it derives from social usage, and defined in the sense of a

quantifiable category translating broadly into “the majority of which”, can become an explicit self-inflicted norm upheld to signify status and accumulate social capital:

In practice, parallel-cousin marriage does not take on the ideal significance and function which the official accounts attribute to it, except in those families which are sufficiently strongly integrated to want this reinforcement of their circumstances [...] (Bourdieu 1977: 47)

Obedience of the norm, then, constitutes the norm itself, and thus the importance of socio-cultural reproduction becomes evident. Hydén has pointed to “culture” as a reservoir of schematized knowledge to which the members of a given society refer when they interpret the world in a way that provides communication between individuals (Hydén 2002a: 65). A lack of reproductive mechanisms leads to incoherence and the loss of consistent norms (Hydén 2002a: 68). This may serve as an explanation to the celebration of the rule as a cultural artefact. This use of the rule as pure application seems to escape negotiation, but implies the use of estimation and anticipation as the means to the end and the benefits obtainable are deliberately scrutinized.

#### *Assessing norms and addressing normativity from a performance perspective*

Hydén (2002a), from the perspective of theory of normativity as developed within the field of sociology of law, focuses on the emergence and alterations of law formations channelled through varied human interactions. Thus, Hydén is defining norms as fundamental parts of complex performance systems (Hydén 2002a: 114) and claiming that norms deliver answers to questions regarding agency, matter and intention as manifested in the question “Who acts, in what manner do they act and with what objective do they act?” (my translation; Hydén 2002a: 136), Hydén stresses the difficulty of identifying *singular norms* detached from contextual settings. Also, Hydén states that the existence of an objectively detectable norm is detectable only by observation of empirical acts in time and space as carried out by the individuals involved (Hydén 2002a: 314). Thus, it makes sense to define norms as interactional determinators (Hydén 2002a: 267). Norms establish the cognitive frame necessary to assess a situation, understand the impact of its

context, and determine the choice of appropriate conduct. Therefore, in the analysis of norm formations it is of paramount importance to distinguish between 1) the ontology of norms, 2) the sociology of norms and 3) the operationalization of norms within politics, economy and, social settings. Using Habermas as a philosophical framework setting his analysis off, Hydén differentiates between the explicit and formal system norms and the tacit norms of the life world (Hydén 2002a: 70). Logically, normativity as a *common* notion to the inhabitants of both system and life world, seems to be the source of norm production.

Hydén differentiates between three sets of norms and their related “statements”: 1) constructive norms state how interaction is supposed to take place (Hydén 2002a: 109), competency norms state the decision making authorities (ibid.), and action norms prescribe how people should or must act (Hydén 2002a: 110). The hierarchical principle fostered by societal stratification, specialization, and the division of labour creates a verticality because of which norms on a higher level outrank norms on a lower level (Hydén 2002a: 113), which then illustrates the paradigmatic relationship between social formations and habitus-management.

### *The socio-politics of norms*

Using kinship and marriage relations as a means to demonstrate the effects and motors of practice, Bourdieu differentiates between “the utilization of *connections*” (Bourdieu 1977: 34) to demonstrate how kinship is bent and stretched in the game of practice for specific reasons. Bourdieu is explicitly referring to kinship as something people “*make* and with which they do something” (Bourdieu 1977: 35). The contribution of the anthropologist is merely the drawing of a genealogical diagram which

“[...] reproduces the *official* representation of the social structures, a representation produced by application of the structuring principle that is *dominant in a certain respect*, i.e. in certain situations and with a view to certain functions.” (Bourdieu 1977: 34)

Semantically, Bourdieu indicates that the general and seemingly objectivist description (“in a certain respect”, “a view to certain functions”) confuses the

particular for the general, is unable to capture the particular, and therefore overlooks the real mechanisms at play.

The political system of negative reasons and positive reasons (Bourdieu 1977: 56) shows the amount of reflection and economic interest related to the actual selection of rules.

An important issue stressed is the comparison of potential actions to factual actions exemplified in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* by the institution of marriage: “However, any particular marriage is meaningful only in relation to the reality of simultaneously possible marriages [...]” (Bourdieu 1977: 57)

This is where normativity comes into play as there seems to be an underlying structure not only determining the decision of choice of norms and the selection of rule but also informing the social interpretation. In a particular situation a number of marriages are possible though varying in status and social compatibility so the interesting thing is what choice precisely is being made and how this particular choice is being informed by a variety of possibilities.

Within the domain of (free) choice Bourdieu stresses the important issue of understanding the choice itself. Choosing of course is not identical to acting but as acting is regulated by a choice of norms the close connection between norm and action is vital to the understanding of actions (see Hydén 2002b: 10). Hydén warns against the use of a causality based analysis arguing that this methodological approach disregards the complexity of the situation or the event studied (Hydén 2002b: 14), and this complexity calls for a more multifaceted approach. Bourdieu points to the complexity of the value system informing the double strategy in choice of marriage type: “[...] on the one hand, the integration of the minimal unit and its security, on the other hand alliance and prestige, that is opening up to the outside world, towards strangers. (Bourdieu 1977: 57). The reproduction of tradition as opposed to the invention of new practices are both founded on the choice of norms relevant to the intention and the possibilities provided by the situation.

Habitus defined as “the material conditions of life, and of pedagogic action (Bourdieu 1977: 63f) includes norm strategies which are applied according to position and perspective:

But it must be borne in mind, contrary to the tradition which treats each marriage as an isolated unit, that the marrying of the children of the same family unit [...] depends on the marrying of all the others and thus varies as a function of each child's *position* [...] within the particular *configuration* of the whole set of children to be married [...] (Bourdieu 1977: 69)

Norms being highly sensitive to social stratification when they are put into practical operations cannot be reduced to a mechanical reaction but seem to be fostered by a sense of the normative which seems to also be the only explanation for the generative schemes (see *Outline of a Theory of Practice* chapter III). Normativity is a pure implication within the theoretical systems of both Bourdieu and Hydén where it seems to serve as a cognitive resource that is mobilized whenever subject-oriented decision-making calls for an imprint of collectivity and common tradition in order to tone down the fact that personal interest has been put before common interests. Rule-application seems to become the norm whenever the intention is to disguise personal strategies.

If one looks closely at the definition of ignorance – in its form as both subjective and objective ignorance – in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, it becomes clear that it in many ways is related to normativity. In the scholarly, learned ignorance there is a blindness to the normativity underneath ritual performance: “Ignorance of the objective truth of practice as learned ignorance is the source of innumerable theoretical errors, not least the error from which Western philosophy originated” (Bourdieu 1977: 156).

Subjective ignorance, on the other hand, the learned ignorance, provides evidence to the idea of normativity as a hidden structure – hidden to the subject in the shape and form of learned ignorance – and hidden also from the eyes of the scholar. Ignorance implies that there is something to disregard which means that in his choice of wording, Bourdieu points to an underlying and combined logic affecting both human interaction and cognition.

### *Conclusion*

The analysis has produced evidence to the thesis of norm, rule and practice not just being signifiers of a particular post-modern semantic distribution of a power vocabulary. The terms enable us to understand normativity as an



underlying nexus between social structuration and cultured semantics in post-modern society. Norm, rule, and practice are gravitating principles that are employed strategically by the agents in a specific field in order for them to individually accumulate a maximum of social and symbolical capital delivers a solution to the problems related to classification of *norm* and *rule* and the distinction between them. Wittgenstein's idea of no a priori-order is deeply embedded in Bourdieu's text. His ethnography shows how ontological order is detectable only as an a posteriori category constituted by the human mind reflecting on and categorising the eye's perceptions and the body's sensations but his ethnography also reveals how the sense of order displayed by individuals as phenomenology seems to develop more in the direction of an a priori category. Basically, we can derive from Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* an understanding of norms, rules and practice as a inductively detectable a posteriori-phenomena and normativity as a deductively detectable a priori-phenomenon: Norms are something we arrive at, and normativity is something we start from.

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