

# Bourdieu, Marx, and Capital: A Critique of the Extension Model

Sociological Theory  
31(4) 318–342  
© American Sociological Association 2013  
DOI: 10.1177/0735275113513265  
stx.sagepub.com  


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## Abstract

It has been claimed that in extending its critical problematic to the cultural sphere, Pierre Bourdieu transcends the economism of Marx's concept of capital. I argue that this claim must be rejected. First, I show that Marx's concept of capital was not economic. Second, I trace Bourdieu's changing understanding of capital, showing how it became less compatible with Marx's over time. Third, I point out ambiguities in Bourdieu's concept of capital that, despite gestures toward a Marxist understanding of capital, further distance him from Marx. Fourth, I argue that Bourdieu tends to take the economic field and economic capital for granted, unlike Marx. I conclude that if different forms of capital are but extended forms of economic capital, the notion of economic capital that they extend is not a Marxist one.

## Keywords

Bourdieu, Marx, capital, critical sociology

How should we understand Pierre Bourdieu's relation to Marxism? While some have labeled Bourdieu a Marxist (Ferry and Renaut [1985] 1990; Frank 1980; Rasmussen 1981), others have emphasized his distance from Marxism (Brubaker 1985; DiMaggio 1979; Wacquant 1993). This ambiguity has its basis in Bourdieu's own writings. Clearly, he was influenced by Marx. Yet it would be a mistake to overestimate this influence. Indeed, Bourdieu rarely missed an opportunity to criticize Marxism for its supposed economic reductionism and substantialism. Moreover, his own accounts of his intellectual history suggest that he oriented himself against the kind of Marxism that was fashionable in postwar France, in either its Sartrean or Althusserian forms ([1984] 1993, [2004] 2008). So although there is no denying that Bourdieu was a close and appreciative reader of Marx, his relationship to Marxism remains ambivalent.

In this article, I consider one particularly common interpretation of Bourdieu's relationship to Marxism: that he transcends Marxism's narrow economism by extending its critical problematic beyond the economic sphere and into the cultural and symbolic spheres. I look

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specifically at the concept of capital, which is central to both Bourdieu and Marx, and whose cultural and symbolic forms in Bourdieusian theory mark that theory's originality and constitute the basis for the perception that Bourdieu extends Marxism. By tracing the evolution of Bourdieu's understanding of capital and its place in his theoretical system, and through a close reading of his attempts to define capital, I argue that this model of extension must ultimately be rejected. I argue that whereas Bourdieu's early use of the concept of cultural capital was, because it was metaphorical and symbolic, compatible with a Marxist theory of capitalist exploitation, his later attempts to systematize his concept of capital effectively rendered it incompatible with Marx's. What is especially ironic is that the articulation of Bourdieu's notion of capital with Marx's became problematic precisely as Bourdieu defined it in terms that evoked Marx, albeit incorrectly. In short, the concepts of cultural and symbolic capital are not extensions of an economic capital conceived in a Marxist sense, and the concept of economic capital of which the other capitals are extended forms is not Marxist.

But what, then, is being extended? I conclude the article with a discussion of Bourdieu's treatment of the economic sphere, which constitutes a kind of empty referent in his theory of capital. I show how, inconsistent with the critical epistemology that characterizes his cultural sociology, Bourdieu has a tendency to treat economic phenomena, including economic capital, as self-evident. I compare this to Marx's concept of capital, the point of which was to theoretically reconstruct the social and historical relations of exploitation that fetishized economic practices concealed. Thus, the Marxist concept of capital is far from economic. Rather, it is Bourdieu's sometimes undertheorized treatment of the economy and economic capital that remains vulnerable to charge of economism. Not only, then, must we reject the idea that Bourdieu extended Marx's analysis of capital into noneconomic spheres of practice, but we also must reject the notion that through this extension Bourdieu transcended the economism that Marxism is (falsely) thought to represent.

## THE EXTENSION MODEL

A particularly persistent interpretation of Bourdieu's relation to Marxism has been that Bourdieu extends Marxism's critical problematic to the cultural and symbolic spheres, thereby transcending its narrow economism. So, for example, according to David Swartz, "the first way Bourdieu distances himself from Marxism is by extending the notion of economic interest to ostensibly noneconomic goods and services" (1997:66). The second way, Swartz goes on, "is by extending the idea of capital to all forms of power, whether they be material, cultural, social, or symbolic" (p. 73). Rogers Brubaker, too, identifies the "real significance of Bourdieu's relation to Marx" in his attempt to "round out the Marxian system by integrating . . . the study of the symbolic and the material dimensions of social life" (1985:748). According to Brubaker, Bourdieu's substantive theory is thus "not a radically different mode of reasoning from that required for the theoretical understanding of the (material) economy, but an extension and generalization of this mode of thinking" (p. 748).

More recently, Hans Joas and Wolfgang Knöbl have written that the particular way in which Bourdieu develops his theory

does not entail a complete break with utilitarian or Marxian notions. . . . Bourdieu deploys the term capital, which originates in "bourgeois" and Marxian economics, but he extends its meaning and distinguishes between *different forms* of capital. ([2004] 2011:15)

In the same vein, Bowen Paulle, Bart van Heerikhuizen, and Mustafa Emirbayer have claimed that Bourdieu "tried to escape from . . . Marxist 'economism' by adding to the

classical concept of economic capital other types of capital: cultural, social, and symbolic types of assets being the most noteworthy” (2011:161). Bridget Fowler goes so far as to argue that Bourdieu “effectively operates within the Marxist tradition” and that he “neither abandons the Marxist method of historical materialism . . . nor repudiates Marx’s own texts” (2011:33–5). Aligning him with the likes of E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams, she claims that Bourdieu “provides his most powerful critique of orthodox Marxism . . . by taking up and extending Marx’s own analytical instruments to great sociological effect” (p. 36). Indeed, she praises Bourdieu for drawing attention to “misrecognized or misunderstood features of social action, particularly those that function analogously to the extraction of surplus value in the labour process” (p. 34).

To be fair, these interpretations seem to correspond with how Bourdieu understood his own relation to Marxism. His frequent use of Weber, for example, was not meant to negate Marxism entirely but rather to “close one of the gaps in Marxism” by elaborating a “materialist theory of the ‘symbolic’” (Bourdieu, Schultheis, and Pfeuffer [2000] 2011:115–6). Indeed, in Bourdieu’s view, “in contrast to the usual regression of Marxism towards economism, which understands the economy only in the restricted sense of the capitalist economy and which explains everything in terms of the economy defined this way, Max Weber broadens economic analysis (in the generalized sense) to areas that are generally abandoned by economics” ([1984] 1993:12). The predominantly Weberian influence in Bourdieu’s “general theory of the economy of practices” (Bourdieu [1980] 1990a) is clear, but even then Bourdieu suggests that this is not so much a rejection of Marx as an extension of his critical problematic to new domains. Hence, Bourdieu has even called his field theory a “generalized Marxism” (1983:316n.3).

In evaluating the claim that Bourdieu’s “general theory of the economy of practices” extends or generalizes the Marxist problematic and thereby transcends its economic distortions, it is helpful to examine Marx’s and Bourdieu’s concepts of capital. Not only is capital the conceptual glue holding Bourdieu’s “general theory of the economy of practices” together, it is also an obvious point of terminological convergence between Marxism and Bourdieu. If Bourdieu does in fact extend or generalize Marxism, then one might expect this to be especially the case in his theory of the different forms of capital. Indeed, this extension is precisely what Bourdieu seems to suggest, albeit in an ultimately problematic way. But before we can critically examine Bourdieu’s concept of capital, we must review what capital means to Marx.

## THE MARXIST CONCEPT OF CAPITAL

It is easy to forget that Marx himself conceived of his project as a *critique* of political economy.<sup>1</sup> This seems to have eluded even Bourdieu, who, although sympathetic to Marx in some ways, often criticized Marxism for its supposed economism (e.g., [1987] 1990b, [1994] 1998, 2012). Bourdieu even claimed that Marxism was “the most economic tradition that we know” (Bourdieu and Eagleton 1992:114). But it was precisely Marx’s project to criticize the self-evidence of political economy’s fetishized categories and to demonstrate how “a world’s history” was in fact implicated in them (Marx [1867] 1977:274). In what follows, I summarize the basic features of Marx’s theory of capital in order to demonstrate to what extent the charge of economism is unfair.

For Marx, capital is first of all not a thing. It is, rather, “a definite social relation of production pertaining to a particular historical social formation, which simply takes the form of a thing and gives this thing a specific social character” (Marx [1894] 1981:953). Thus, Marx argues that money and commodities are capital only insofar as they are mobilized in the pursuit of surplus-value, represented by the “general formula for capital,” M-C-M’ (Marx

[1867] 1977). But while the generalized formula correctly defines capital as a process, it still only grasps this in a fetishized way.

Appearing as the self-expansion of value mediated by the exchange of commodities, the M-C-M' circuit does not reveal the social relations that underlie it. Marx's point, however, was that this fetishized form is the "form in which [capital] appears directly in the sphere of circulation" ([1867] 1977:257). In circulation, value does indeed appear to possess "the occult ability to . . . [bring] forth living offspring, or at least [lay] golden eggs" (p. 255). But Marx also rejects an explanation of surplus-value in terms of unequal exchange, arguing that "the capitalist class of a given country, taken as a whole, cannot defraud itself" (p. 266).<sup>2</sup> The general formula thus appears to contain a fundamental contradiction: Within the conditions of equal exchange, either the production of surplus-value, at the level of the total social capital, is impossible, or it can only be explained in a fetishized way in terms of self-valorizing value.

This impasse presented by capitalist circulation, which appears as "the exclusive realm of Freedom, Equality, Property, and Bentham," is precisely what Marx's concept of capital is meant to overcome (Marx [1867] 1977:280). What, then, is Marx's concept of capital? The theoretical pivot is the concept of labor-power. Göran Therborn (1976) points out that for Marx, a capitalist economy is not the same thing as a market economy. Capitalism is the articulation of generalized commodity production with a class structure defined by the separation of the owners of the means of production from commodified labor-power. The valorization process occurs within the context of a class-divided society, which has its own historical determinations. The concept of labor-power thus does not only signify the commodity-form of the human capacity to labor: It contains within it the history of primitive accumulation. Capital presupposes this existence of classes and, with it, the history of their production and reproduction. To paraphrase Bourdieu, classes are not the derivative products of a structure; rather, they are a form of accumulated history.

We may expand the general formula to reflect this coincidence of the valorization process and the relations of production thus: M-C[MP+LP] . . . L . . . C'-M', with MP standing for means of production, LP for labor-power, and L for the labor process. The introduction of the concept of labor-power within the circuit of capital allows for an account of valorization that is not fetishized. Marx of course argues that value is abstract labor, that is, the expenditure of labor-power, and that its measure is socially necessary labor-time.<sup>3</sup> The source of surplus-value thus lies in the unique quality of labor-power to produce more value than it is itself worth. The surplus-value appropriated by capitalists at the end of the capital circuit is the form in which surplus-labor appears under the conditions of generalized commodity production and exchange. Capital denotes the specifically capitalist mode of extracting surplus-labor from the direct producers. Indeed, the object of historical materialism is precisely the particular form in which surplus labor is extracted in different historical conjunctures. The concept of the relations of production denotes the totality of social relations inasmuch as they bear on the historical relation between necessary and surplus labor. Marx's understanding of capital as "a social relation of production" is at its core a theory of the specifically capitalist mode of exploitation.

Just as the source of surplus-value is obscured in capitalist circulation, so too is the fact of exploitation obscured in the experience of wage-labor. So, for example, without a theoretical concept of labor-power, the distinction between necessary labor and surplus labor would not be legible, since in capitalism the two are experienced together in a unitary labor process. The wage-form, too, obscures exploitation, since the payment of wages appears as compensation for labor performed, rather than for the value of labor-power (Marx [1898] 1935). In short, the fetishized experience of economic production and exchange produces a

misrecognition of capital's essence as a social relation of exploitation. Only by constructing a theoretical concept of capital that breaks from this fetishized experience was Marx able to show, first, that the valorization process only exists in and through the concrete labor process and, second, that the production of surplus-value is only a historically specific form of extracting surplus-labor from direct producers.

Moreover, this social relation of exploitation itself entails a host of other relations that determine its conditions of possibility. A full discussion of Marxist theories of social reproduction is impossible here, but suffice it to say that the question of reproduction is immanent to Marx's concept of capital. Although Volume I of *Capital* mainly addresses the basic relation of exploitation, in Volumes II and III Marx begins to develop a broader theory of the reproduction of this relation of exploitation. He argues there that landowners, money-lenders, and merchants, although they do not themselves produce value, each provide vital services to the realization of surplus-value and as such command a share of the total social surplus-value ([1885] 1978, [1894] 1981; see also Resnick and Wolff 1987). Class struggle, too, is internal to Marx's concept of capital. Both the length and the intensity of the working day, as well as the value of labor-power, and hence the rate of exploitation, are determined by economic, political, and ideological class struggles. For Marx, then, class struggles are not struggles *over* capital but struggles *within* it. What all this indicates is that the relation of exploitation that capital denotes is overdetermined by the social structure as a whole.

To sum up, for Marx capital is doubly social in that it entails in the first instance a social relation of exploitation and in the second instance the totality of social relations that reproduce this fundamental relation's conditions of possibility. The concept of capital thus does not refer exclusively to the "economic" sphere. In fact, Marx's point is to demonstrate how even apparently straightforward "economic" phenomena are constitutively social, political, and cultural. So, whereas capital may appear here as money and there as means of production, Marx's concept of capital allows us to pierce this fetishized form and to see capital not as a thing, but as a process; and not just a process, but a process of exploitation; and, finally, not only a process of exploitation, but also a social totality.

## BOURDIEU'S NEW CAPITALS

Bourdieu rejects the philosophical-anthropological foundations of economism while at the same time demonstrating the interestedness of supposedly disinterested fields of practice. The dynamics of power are not, according to Bourdieu, limited to the economic sphere but pervade the cultural and symbolic spheres as well. The theory of economic practices is thus only "a particular case of a general theory of the economy of practices" (Bourdieu [1980] 1990a:122). It is as part of this general theory that Bourdieu develops his notion of the different forms of capital. Bourdieu attempts to break from the common-sense experience of capital as "economic" and demonstrate instead how the power dynamics designated by the term *capital* are also operative in noneconomic spheres of social life, albeit in misrecognized forms. As Frédéric Lebaron (2003) and Johan Heilbron (2011) point out, Bourdieu's importation of economic language in extending the concept of capital to culture, far from implying a kind of economic reductionism, was intended as a sort of epistemological shock challenging both the enchanted view of culture as disinterested and the economic view that sees all power and interest as ultimately economic. Like Marx, then, Bourdieu seems to be sharply critical of economism's fetishized conceptions of capital and fully committed to an understanding of it that highlights its social and historical quality. A close reading of his concept of capital, however, reveals a more ambiguous picture.

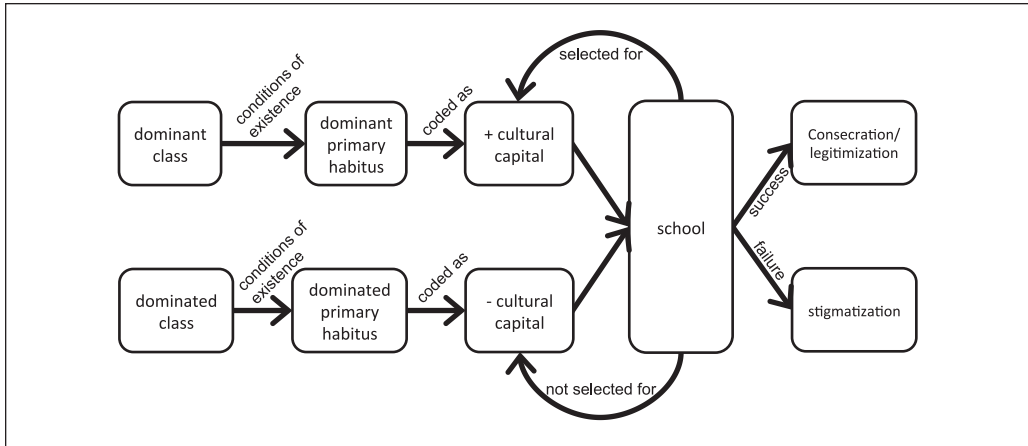


## Cultural Capital in Reproduction

Bourdieu was famously averse to elaborating his theoretical concepts outside of the empirical contexts for which they were crafted. This is especially the case with his concept of capital, the specific forms of which he only gradually defined over time. Take the concept of cultural capital, the form of capital with which Bourdieu is most associated (Sallaz and Zavisca 2007). Used for the first time in 1966 (Bourdieu 1966), the concept was developed by Bourdieu (with various collaborators) during his research in the 1960s on the relationship between education, cultural reproduction, and social reproduction (Bourdieu [1971] 1973; Bourdieu, Boltanski and de Saint-Martin [1973] 1978; Bourdieu and Passeron [1970] 1977). In these works, Bourdieu argues that the educational system legitimates the social order by dissimulating class differences and transmuting those differences into differential academic sanctions. Far from being neutral institutions dedicated to the transmission of a universal culture, schools are classed institutions whose delegated function is to impose a dominant cultural arbitrary defined by the dominant class. The successful inculcation of this cultural arbitrary, which is recognized by positive academic evaluation, is a function of the degree to which one possesses the means to successfully appropriate the cultural arbitrary, which is in turn a function of inherited cultural capital. By inherited cultural capital, Bourdieu and his collaborator Jean-Claude Passeron generally mean a basic cultural, social, and linguistic competence produced by a process of primary socialization within the family and inculcated in a “primary habitus” (Bourdieu and Passeron [1970] 1977). This cultural capital is unequally distributed among social classes, such that the “upper classes” possess more cultural capital than the “lower classes.” Students from lower class origins thus lack the means necessary to appropriate the dominant cultural arbitrary, both because it is not their cultural arbitrary and because they lack the cultural capital necessary to master it. And because the successful appropriation of this dominant cultural arbitrary is the mark of academic success, their lack of cultural capital condemns them to academic failure or, by an anticipation of such failure, self-exclusion. Conversely, the privileged are able to appropriate the dominant cultural arbitrary with a minimum of effort because, being inheritors of cultural capital, they already possess, as a result of their primary socialization in the family, a mastery of the codes necessary for successful socialization in school. In other words, the educational system only demands from the privileged a symbolic mastery of what they have already mastered practically. The ease with which privileged students seem to achieve academic success is a function of the proximity between what the educational system demands and what those students already possess as bearers of cultural capital. The educational system is thus a mechanism that ensures that cultural capital accumulates more cultural capital.

The reproduction of the distribution of cultural capital, moreover, contributes to social reproduction by transmuting social advantages into academic advantages, which, due to the relative autonomy of the educational system, have the appearance of legitimacy. Cultural capital is conceived as a mediating factor in the reproduction of the class structure. The dominant class uses its wealth of cultural capital to obtain academic credentials that, because they appear as merited, dissimulate and thus legitimate differences in social origin.

The precise relationship in Bourdieu’s writings on education between cultural capital and social class is worth considering further. For Bourdieu, cultural reproduction doesn’t so much produce class differences as symbolically legitimate them. The school is an instrument of “bourgeois sociodicy.” As such, the educational system essentially stands in a superstructural role, albeit one that is relatively autonomous, to the class structure.<sup>4</sup> Especially in *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture* (Bourdieu and Passeron [1970] 1977 henceforth referred to as *Reproduction*), what Bourdieu and Passeron seem to construct is a regional theory of the educational system as it is articulated to a given social order that theoretically precedes it. Indeed, they treat as given the “specific form of the relations and



**Figure 1.** Explanatory sequence in *Reproduction* (1970).

antagonisms between the classes” ([1970] 1977:210). The precise nature of the class structure is left unexplored in *Reproduction*.

Just as a theory of social reproduction implicitly precedes a theory of cultural reproduction, cultural capital, as the operator of cultural reproduction, is also implicitly preceded by a concept of class. Of course, Bourdieu and Passeron argue that cultural capital is correlated with class. Indeed, it is because cultural capital is a sort of misrecognized proxy for class that the school system, by recognizing cultural capital, academically consecrates class differences. But it is not because one possesses cultural capital that one is in the dominant class; rather, it is the other way around. The *a priori* of *Reproduction* is that there exists a dominant class that delegates to the educational system the task of reproducing its dominant cultural arbitrary.

The dominant class imposes its own cultural arbitrary as the dominant cultural arbitrary, the symbolic mastery of which it seeks to inculcate through the educational system. The success of this inculcation is a function of the cultural capital one brings to it, and this cultural capital is unevenly distributed according to class. But it is precisely because the specific competencies designated by cultural capital are those that are produced in the habitus of families from the dominant class that they are *ipso facto* considered cultural capital. It is not because dominant families are more able to transmit cultural capital that they remain dominant. It is because the dominant are dominant and can thus delegate to the educational system the task of symbolically consecrating what they already have, that what they have is misrecognized as what is necessary for academic success. The value of a given habitus as cultural capital is thus determined by its relation to a preexisting relation of class power.<sup>5</sup> In short, it is not cultural capital that determines class in *Reproduction*. Rather, it is membership in a class that determines whether one’s particular habitus counts as cultural capital (see Figure 1). So while cultural capital may help legitimate the relations of class power, it presupposes these relations in its very functioning.

The preceding analysis suggests that in *Reproduction*, the concept of cultural capital is not conceived as an objective principle of stratification. It is not a resource that confers power upon its holder. Rather, it is an effect of power, a sort of shorthand for the set of competencies specific to the dominant class that become misrecognized as objective resources. There are really two moments of misrecognition in the process of reproduction. The first is that the unequal distribution of cultural capital is misrecognized as unequal merit, objectified in academic credentials. The second, which actually precedes the first and without

which cultural reproduction could not contribute to social reproduction, is that the concept of cultural capital itself is already a class power misrecognized as a bundle of objective properties. Cultural capital is the name given to the dominant class habitus when it is apprehended symbolically within the context of a relation of class power. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is here far from being a fetishized category. It implies, as a condition of its own existence, an understanding of the production and reproduction of class relations. Consequently, if conceived as a theory of ideology and legitimation, it is compatible with a Marxist theory of class exploitation. As Jacques Bidet and Anne Bailey have pointed out, *Reproduction* only claims that cultural reproduction *contributes* to social reproduction, thus leaving open the possibility that Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction be supplemented by a theory of the "infrastructural conditions of the reproduction of the relations of production" (1979:207).

But why call it cultural *capital*? *Reproduction* suggests a more or less metaphorical use of the term. Cultural capital is profitable in the sense that it is a kind of self-expanding cultural recognition. In *The Inheritors* ([1964] 1979), however, Bourdieu and Passeron largely anticipate their argument in *Reproduction*, with the significant difference that they speak of cultural "privilege" instead of cultural capital. It is only with his contribution to *Le Partage des bénéfices* (1966) that Bourdieu begins to refer to the set of cultural privileges described in *The Inheritors* as cultural capital. But in *Reproduction*, there is no notion of capital as such, or even economic capital, to which cultural capital is conceptually linked. What process is denoted by the term *capital*, and why the set of cultural privileges referred to by cultural capital should be considered capital, remain unspecified.

### Cultural Capital in Distinction

In *Distinction* ([1979] 1984), as in *Reproduction*, Bourdieu examines the ways in which class differences get transmuted into symbolic differences. In it, however, his understanding of the social order and the places of class and capital within it changes significantly. Whereas in *Reproduction* cultural capital was implicitly conceived as a primary euphemization of class habitus, effected by a theoretically presupposed relation of class power, in *Distinction* Bourdieu conceives of cultural and economic capital as objective categories of analysis that, rather than presupposing a theory of class, constitute it.

The object of *Distinction* is the relationship between the social and symbolic spaces, and as such it contains both an objectivist and a subjectivist moment in the analysis. The objectivist moment comes with Bourdieu's construction of a three-dimensional social space whose dimensions are defined by volume of capital, composition of capital, and the trajectory of these two dimensions for any given agent. According to Bourdieu, "primary differences, those which distinguish the major classes of conditions of existence, derive from the overall volume of capital, understood as the set of actually usable resources and powers" ([1979] 1984:114). Careful to avoid the error of substantialism, Bourdieu points out that different societies have different principles of differentiation, that is, their social spaces are organized by the distribution of different forms of capital. But in modern France, the effective forms of capital are economic capital, cultural capital, and to a lesser extent social capital. The distribution of the different classes "thus runs from those who are best provided with both economic and cultural capital to those who are most deprived in both respects" (p. 114). Within these classes defined by volume of capital, class fractions are "defined by different asset structures, i.e. different distributions of their total capital among the different kinds of capital" (p. 114). Capital, then, is conceived as an objective principle of differentiation within a scientifically constructed social space, and classes refer above all to proximities in this space effected by similar endowments of capital.



Proximity implies similarities in conditions of existence, which in turn implies a similar habitus. Bourdieu's aim in *Distinction* is to analyze the relationship between different positions in the social space and the different position-takings in the symbolic space of lifestyles. The habitus is the conceptual operator that connects the two spaces. Different endowments of capital, by defining the conditions of existence of classes, determine class habitus, which in turn determine consumption and classification practices. But the habitus determines these practices in a way that translates the conditions corresponding to different endowments of capital into the symbolic space:

Because different conditions of existence produce different habitus . . . the practices engendered by the different habitus appear as systematic configurations of properties expressing the differences objectively inscribed in conditions of existence in the form of systems of differential deviations which, when perceived by agents endowed with the schemes of perception and appreciation necessary in order to identify, interpret and evaluate their pertinent features, function as life-style. (P. 170)

Each class condition is simultaneously defined by “its intrinsic properties and by the relational properties which it derives from its position in the system of class conditions, which is also a system of differences, differential positions” (pp. 170–2). Bourdieu shows how the aesthetic taste for luxury has its intrinsic basis in material conditions of existence defined by a distance from necessity, made possible by the possession of capital. Those who lack capital, in contrast, develop a “taste of necessity,” making a virtue out of that to which they are in any case condemned—a case of “social necessity made second nature” (p. 474). But the symbolic space is not just a differentiated space; it is also a relational space. While the intrinsic dimension of conditions of existence may determine position-takings in the symbolic space, the way this space is apprehended, that is, the way one cognitively classifies this space and assigns value to the different practices within it, is a function of the internalization of the relative dimension of one's position in the social space. So the network of binaries (e.g., high/low, spiritual/material, fine/coarse, etc.) that organizes the symbolic space has its source in “the opposition between the ‘élite’ of the dominant and the ‘mass’ of the dominated” (p. 468). In other words,

the seemingly most formal oppositions within this social mythology always derive their ideological strength from the fact that they refer back, more or less discreetly, to the most fundamental oppositions within the social order: the opposition between the dominant and the dominated, which is inscribed in the division of labour, and the opposition, rooted in the division of the labour of domination, between two principles of domination, two powers, dominant and dominated, temporal and spiritual, material and intellectual, etc. (P. 469)

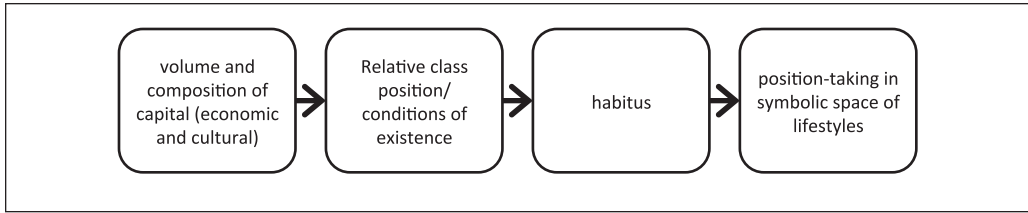
In short, one's endowment of capital determines one's habitus, which internalizes both the objective limits of one's conditions of existence, defined in terms of available capital, and also the relative structure of the social space, organized along the dominant/dominated axis. The habitus, as the internalization of both dimensions of one's conditions of existence, in turn generates practices in the symbolic space adapted to its objective conditions of production and also apprehends the symbolic space in terms of hierarchical binaries such that, although they may claim a “taste for necessity,” dominated agents nonetheless recognize their own tastes as inferior.

We can see from the above that the status of the concepts of capital, class, and habitus changes with *Distinction*. In *Reproduction*, the entire analysis presupposed an unspecified relation of class power. The explanatory sequence ran from class, to habitus, and only then to cultural capital. The specific class habitus of the dominant class comes to be designated as cultural capital only because it is selected for by an educational system already captured by the dominant class. The concept of cultural capital, then, does not really belong to the social space as an objective principle of differentiation. Rather, it is the symbolically misrecognized habitus of the dominant class.

In *Distinction*, the explanatory sequence is different. This difference lies in Bourdieu's new conception of the constructed social space, which he developed over the course of the preparatory studies that culminated in *Distinction* (de Saint-Martin 2013) and which would become the basis of his theory of class (Bourdieu [1984] 1985, 1987, [1987] 1989, [1978] 2013). Constructed against both the standard socioprofessional categories then used for statistical analyses in France (de Saint-Martin 2013) and the Marxist concept of class, which he considered too substantialist, economistic, and objectivist (Bourdieu [1984] 1985:723), Bourdieu recast the social space as a "multi-dimensional space that can be constructed empirically by discovering the main factors of differentiation which account for the differences observed in a given social universe, or, in other words, by discovering the powers or *forms of capital* which are or can become efficient . . . in this particular universe" (Bourdieu 1987:3–4). The novelty of this reconceptualization of class, even within the arc of Bourdieu's theoretical development, should not be underestimated. Indeed as Loïc Wacquant has pointed out, Bourdieu in his career "shifts . . . from documenting the enduring significance of class . . . to the mapping of the invisible structure of social space within which classes emerge (or not)" (Wacquant 2013:281–2). So although before *Distinction* Bourdieu "takes class as a structural given and concentrates on tracing its manifold impacts and manifestations across realms," with his new theory of the social space he "drops that presumption to stress the inherent multidimensionality of the distribution of efficient resources in a given social formation" (Wacquant 2013:282). My point is that with this reconceptualization of the social space, capital steps forward as the foundational concept. As a concept pertaining to the objectivist moment of analysis that seeks to scientifically construct the space of socially determinant positions, capital becomes the principle explanatory factor in *Distinction*, determining both class and habitus and, through them, agents' position-takings in the symbolic space (see Figure 2).

This framework is problematic for several reasons. The concept of capital is still undertheorized. Given the different capitals' centrality as explanatory principles, the lack of a clear conceptual definition of capital as such is troubling. Whereas cultural capital in *Reproduction* was more or less metaphorical, in *Distinction* Bourdieu relates economic and cultural capital as two commensurable forms of something common such that one can intelligibly speak of a total volume of capital. But what generic understanding of capital authorizes this move? Bourdieu defines capital in *Distinction* as "actually usable resources and powers" ([1979] 1984:114). Elsewhere, Bourdieu defines as capital "those properties capable of conferring strength, power and consequently profit on their holder" (1987:4). It seems, then, that capital is deployed in a rather capacious and banal sense, as a power-conferring or profit-generating resource. As such, it is hard to see why Bourdieu should not use a less suggestive term. By subsuming these resources under the category of capital, Bourdieu implies a level of conceptual precision that is not forthcoming in *Distinction*. Instead, we get a weak notion of capital as objective power resource. Capital is the basic principle of explanation in *Distinction*, but it is not itself adequately explained.

The conceptualization of class in *Distinction* is also problematic. For Bourdieu, objective classes and their fractions are determined by volume and composition of capital and as such are essentially quantitatively defined constructs. But such a definition of class is analytically



**Figure 2.** Explanatory sequence in *Distinction* (1979).

limited. The only relationship one can construct between classes so defined is one between dominant and dominated. As we saw, Bourdieu does indeed consider this to be the fundamental opposition of the social order, and the one on which binaries in the symbolic space are based. The problem is that a notion of class defined primarily in relational terms of domination gives no indication as to its historical conditions of possibility.<sup>6</sup> One might wonder what determines the distribution of effective capitals in the social space. Answering this question requires a concept of class that goes beyond simply describing a given state of the distribution of efficient resources. While the quantitative distribution of resources has determinate effects, if class as a concept is to be a principle of historical explanation, it must also be grasped in its positive historical determinations, and not just relationally as difference. Moreover, by redefining class broadly as a particular distribution of all forms of capital effective within a social space, Bourdieu loses any theoretical traction for accounting for exploitation as a mode of power distinct from domination or exclusion.<sup>7</sup> Although Bourdieu theorizes class in both its objective and its symbolic forms, his conception of its objective form is limited to its distributive dimension. Insofar as Bourdieu does talk about “discontinuous oppositions” between classes, it is limited to the symbolic order. In the social space, there are only “continuous distributions” ([1979] 1984:175). It is hard to see how a social space constructed in this way can render exploitation theoretically legible.

In *Distinction* and associated works, then, Bourdieu seems to limit the points of possible convergence with a Marxist theory of class exploitation and social reproduction that existed in *Reproduction*. The conceptual commensuration of economic and cultural capital within a newly developed theory of the social space raises the question of the fundamental social processes or relations that capital as such, whatever its form, denotes. But far from even attempting to extend a Marxist problematic that would define capital in terms of a sociohistorical relation of class exploitation, Bourdieu instead forwards an undertheorized and thus fetishized notion of capital and an ahistorical and distributional definition of class.

### *Symbolic Capital*

Bourdieu shows how the symbolic order serves a function of sociodicy by transmuting objective inequalities into symbolic distinctions that, by dissimulating their origin in an arbitrary distribution of capital, confer legitimacy upon that distribution. Capital thus has an objective and a symbolic existence. Although he almost exclusively uses the term in its objective sense in *Distinction*, Bourdieu later restates the main thesis of *Distinction* in terms of “symbolic capital”:

Distinction . . . is the difference inscribed in the very structure of the social space when perceived through categories adapted to that structure. . . . Symbolic capital—another name for distinction—is nothing other than capital, in whatever form, when perceived by an agent endowed with categories of perception arising from the internalization (embodiment) of the structure of its distribution, i.e., when it is known and recognized as self-evident. ([1984] 1985:731)

In *Pascalian Meditations* he writes,

symbolic capital . . . is not a particular kind of capital but what every kind of capital becomes when it is misrecognized as capital, that is, as force, a power or capacity for (actual or potential) exploitation, and therefore recognized as legitimate. ([1997] 2000:242)

Symbolic capital also refers to the specific capital effective within a given field, as both a weapon and a stake within it. Indeed, Bourdieu argues that fields can be analytically defined once the field-specific form of symbolic capital is discovered (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). This means that there are as many forms of symbolic capital as there are fields. So, for example, Bourdieu speaks variously of “academic capital” (Bourdieu [1984] 1988), “scientific capital” ([2001] 2004), and “juridical capital” ([1994] 1998).

Of course, competition for symbolic capital within fields does not occur on an equal footing; the ability of agents to appropriate this capital depends on their position in the social space. We thus have two conceptions of capital, one objective and one symbolic. While the broader point that objective principles of differentiation underlie and are in turn reinforced by symbolic distinctions is a valid one, it is not clear with what degree of specificity Bourdieu means to relate the social and symbolic orders by designating both of their principles of differentiation “*capital*.” Does symbolic capital denote the same process in the symbolic space that the objective capitals denote in the social space?

Robert Boyer accuses Bourdieu of being “clumsy” in his use of the loaded category of capital, especially considering that there is neither a “global indicator of capital” independent from the field in which it operates nor a theoretical measurement of economic capital ([2004] 2008:353, 360). For Bourdieu, Boyer argues, capital essentially refers to “the accumulation of the skills necessary to operate within a field, not to the sum total of capital in the economic sense” (p. 391). Symbolic capital is thus simply a field-specific power and therefore does not stand in any necessary conceptual relation to other symbolic capitals. Nor does it stand in a quantifiable relationship to an objective measure of economic capital. As for the term *profit*, Boyer argues that

Bourdieu’s own use of the notion of *profit* is more metaphorical than typically economic. The term designates the result of action, and finds a specific definition within each field, so that profit can be symbolic as much as economic, if not more so. . . . A more exact term would actually seem to be that of the (unequal) distribution of attributes or of benefits within a given field. (P. 352)

Indeed, in *Distinction* profit is considered only symbolically, as a profit in distinction or legitimacy, and is as such not in any significant way distinct from a more generic notion of benefit.<sup>8</sup> Profit, in other words, designates “simply the remunerations that are specific to each field” (p. 391). But while such a notion surely guards Bourdieu against a crude economic reductionism, we might still wonder whether there is anything more to the terms *capital* and *profit* than a kind of epistemological provocation. Are these just words, or are they concepts?

The problem of defining Bourdieu’s generic notion of capital, that is, of specifying the common conceptual core of all the different forms of capital, becomes all the more difficult when capital as a concept straddles not just the economic and cultural but also the objective and the symbolic. The difficulties resulting from this capaciousness can, to a certain extent, be mitigated if we accept a purely metaphorical interpretation of symbolic capital, much like with cultural capital in *Reproduction*, in which the notion already pertained to the symbolic

order. But unlike cultural capital in *Reproduction*, symbolic capital does not stand alone. It is defined in relation to a notion of objective capital, as its recognized form. Thus we must still define capital as such.

## TOWARD A DEFINITION: THE FORMS OF CAPITAL

In "The Forms of Capital" ([1983] 1986), Bourdieu attempts a rare systematic formulation of his theory of the different forms of capital.<sup>9</sup> He begins by underlining the centrality of this theory to his general theory of practice:

A general science of the economy of practices, capable of reappropriating the totality of the practices which, although objectively economic, are not and cannot be socially recognized as economic, and which can be performed only at the cost of a whole labor of dissimulation or, more precisely, *euphemization*, must endeavor to grasp capital and profit in all their forms and to establish the laws whereby the different types of capital (or power, which amounts to the same thing) change into one another. (Pp. 242–3)

I have already noted how the common conceptual designation of cultural, social, and economic capital *as capital* raises the question of their relation to each other as different manifestations of the same process. In the article Bourdieu explicitly addresses this question. But the way in which he deals with it is far from satisfying, especially if one is expecting to find there a solid basis for claiming that he extends or generalizes a Marxist theory of capital.

In the section on "conversions," Bourdieu argues that "economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital" and that these other capitals are "transformed, disguised forms of economic capital" (p. 252). So what is it that is common to the different forms of capital and that underlies their theoretical commensurability? Bourdieu here defines the substance of capital as "accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its 'incorporated,' embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor" (p. 241). As for the measure of this substance, Bourdieu argues that

the universal equivalent, the measure of all equivalences, is nothing other than labor-time (in the widest sense); and the conservation of social energy through all its conversions is verified if, in each case, one takes into account both the labor-time accumulated in the form of capital and the labor-time needed to transform it from one type into another. (P. 25)<sup>10</sup>

These passages of course evoke Marx's labor theory of value. As such, it is tempting to claim an affinity between Bourdieu's concept of capital and Marx's. But a closer reading suggests otherwise. So, for example, while Marx posits his theory of value as a premise for establishing a condition of equal exchange between commodities, it is not in itself a theory of capital. In fact, Marx shows how the production of surplus-value is possible despite the fact that commodities exchange at their values. That labor is accumulated in things and that those things become exchangeable according to the amount of labor accumulated is merely descriptive of commodities. It is not yet a theory of capital. For Marx, capital entailed a relation of exploitation that was not reducible to the circuit of commodity production and exchange. In the Marxist sense, then, Bourdieu's definition of capital is really only a definition of commodities.



Consider also Bourdieu's conception of profit. He says,

capital, in the sense of the means of appropriating the product of accumulated labor in the objectified state which is held by a given agent, depends for its real efficacy on the form of the distribution of the means of appropriating the accumulated and objectively available resources; and the relationship of appropriation between an agent and the resources objectively available, and hence the profits they produce, is mediated by the relationship of (objective and/or subjective) competition between himself and the other possessors of capital competing for the same goods, in which scarcity—and through it social value—is generated. The structure of the field, i.e., the unequal distribution of capital, is the source of the specific effects of capital, i.e., the appropriation of profits and the power to impose the laws of functioning of the field most favorable to capital and its reproduction. (Pp. 245–6)

There are two competing principles of value here. On one hand, labor-time is the “measure of all equivalences” and is the principle that determines the exchangeability of the different capitals. But on the other hand, inasmuch as Bourdieu is interested in accounting for the profitability of capital, its value is determined by its scarcity within a competitive field. Bourdieu here seems to be confronted by the same problem that confronted classical political economy: namely, how to account for profits when assuming that things exchange at their equivalents. Marx's solution to this problem entailed developing a concept of the relations of production as relations of exploitation. But Bourdieu repeats the error of political economy by assimilating profits entirely to the sphere of circulation, which forces him to either abandon the assumption of equal exchange or accept a notion of self-valorizing value.

Bourdieu seems to come close to suggesting a link between profits and the relations of production, but this is only a result of the confusion produced by his lack of a conceptual distinction between commodities and capital. If we read between the lines, for Bourdieu, insofar as the different forms of capital are considered only in their dimension as embodiments of accumulated labor, they are commodities. But what defines capital *as capital* for Bourdieu is not its nature as accumulated labor but its exclusive appropriation and its subsequent investment as a weapon and a stake within a field. In other words, commodities become capital insofar as they are put to profitable use. But profit, for Bourdieu, has little to do with production. It is a closure effect, that is, a consequence of the leverage entailed by exclusive appropriation. As such, it belongs entirely to the sphere of circulation.

The problem with such a conception, from a Marxist perspective, is that it does not explain the production of the total social surplus-value; it only explains the power to claim an outsized share of that surplus. While Bourdieu's concept of profit might account for the struggle over the distribution of the available surplus-value, it cannot account for its production in the first place. Bourdieu's invocation of a *marxisant* theory of value thus does not actually shed any light on his theory of profit. In fact, his account of profit violates the law of equal exchange that he himself posits.

For Marx, the production of surplus-value is the unity of the class relations of production and the process of commodity production. Surplus-value is produced in and through the concrete production of commodities. The valorization process and the labor process are thus two dimensions of the same process. But for Bourdieu, the production of commodities precedes the production of profits. Commodity production produces objects for circulation, but these objects are valorized and rendered profitable only later, within the sphere of circulation. The profitability of any given commodity is thus completely independent of both the relations of production and the concrete labor process within which it is produced. So whereas for Marx capital denotes the social relation of exploitation—that is, the extraction

of surplus-labor—contained within the production of commodities, for Bourdieu capital designates an object insofar as, due to its unequal distribution within a field, it is capable of accruing benefits to its owner. In other words, capital, for Bourdieu, simply designates an exploitable object, not a social relation of exploitation.<sup>11</sup> This remains a fetishized conception of capital as a thing.

Following Craig Calhoun (1993) we could say that what Bourdieu's theory ultimately lacks is an idea of capitalism. Calhoun points out that Bourdieu does not examine the historically specific conditions under which the different labors that produce the different capitals are made equivalent through a process of abstraction. Of course, Bourdieu has argued that the relations between the different capitals are contingent on the "field of power," where struggles over the relative value of capitals take place (Bourdieu [1989] 1996, 1999, 2011). However, this does not really address the problem, which is that his generic concept of capital is transhistorical. The issue goes beyond the historical relation between the capitals to the very conceptual content of capital itself. As Calhoun also notes, by capital Bourdieu seems to mean simply any resource insofar as it yields power (Calhoun 1993:69). In the end, what Bourdieu's notion of capital lacks is not only an idea of capitalism as a particular historical formation but more fundamentally an idea of exploitation as a particular operation of power.

## CAPITAL, EXPLOITATION, AND THE ECONOMIC FIELD: THE LIMITS OF BOURDIEU'S CRITICAL SOCIOLOGY

Bourdieu's theory of the different forms of capital has as its reference point a concept of economic capital, just as the economic field of interested action is the reference point for his "general science of the economy of practices." If all other capitals are dissimulated forms of economic capital, it would then seem necessary to understand the role that capital plays in the economic field. But Bourdieu rarely attempted to define economic capital, saying that he did not want to "dwell on the notion of economic capital" because "it's not [his] area" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:119; Bourdieu [1984] 1993:32). Even in "The Forms of Capital," very little space is devoted to it (Bourdieu [1983] 1986). This abdication of conceptual definition is surprising. A Marxist conception of capital has sometimes been projected into this void, but as I have argued, this is a dubious assumption. Rather, the absence is indicative of a critical weakness in Bourdieu: He sometimes takes the economic field at face value and as such grasps capital only in the fetishized form in which it appears in it. Marx constructed a concept of capital precisely to demonstrate the constitutively historical and social character of these reified forms and to render legible the relations of exploitation that they entailed. Bourdieu's theory of capital has been praised for extending the scope of the concept beyond the economic field, but what it extends is not in fact a Marxist concept of capital but only capital's appearance as a power resource. In insisting on calling these different power resources "capital" without developing a concept of capital as such, Bourdieu obscures the relations of exploitation which Marx's concept of capital renders legible.

How does Bourdieu conceptualize the "economic" sphere? According to Bourdieu ([1972] 1977), "archaic" societies euphemize the objective facts of interest, competition, and exploitation by transmuting these practices into a symbolic "good faith" economy. But the necessity for such symbolic dissimulation is, Bourdieu suggests, historically specific:

If it be true that symbolic violence is the gentle, hidden form which violence takes when overt violence is impossible, it is understandable why symbolic forms of domination should have progressively withered away as objective mechanisms came to be constituted which, in rendering superfluous the work of euphemization, tended to produce the "disenchanted" dispositions their development demanded. ([1972] 1977:196)

This process of disenchantment corresponds to the historical constitution of the economy *as an economy*, free from the work of euphemization and dissimulation. Indeed, in a discussion about the progressive differentiation of the economic field from the different cultural fields, Bourdieu argues that “only at the end of a slow evolution tending to strip away the specifically symbolic aspect of the acts and relations of production was the economy able to constitute itself *as such*, in the objectivity of a separate universe, governed by its own rules, those of self-interested calculation, competition, and exploitation” ([1997] 2000:19). A universe is established “in which the law of exchange of exact equivalents becomes the explicit rule and can be expressed *publicly*, in an almost cynical manner” ([1994] 1998:105). So, Bourdieu says, “contrary to everything demanded by the economy of symbolic goods, there one can call a spade a spade, an interest an interest, a profit a profit. Gone is the work of euphemization” (p. 105). The emergence of the economic field thus

marks the appearance of a universe in which social agents can admit to themselves and admit publicly that they have interests and can tear themselves away from collective misrecognition; a universe in which they not only can do business, but can also admit to themselves that they are there to do business, that is, to conduct themselves in a self-interested manner, to calculate, make a profit, accumulate, and exploit. (Pp. 105–6)

From a Marxist perspective, the above passages are quite problematic. Bourdieu here seems content to take the economic field at face value. While the symbolic order dissimulates the economic field, the economic field is itself theoretically considered a sphere of practice free from any misrecognition. Marx, in contrast, showed that it was precisely the fetishized experience of the economy *as such* that was, in the first place, ideological. The whole point of Marx’s concept of capital is to give the lie to the notion that in the economic field of circulation everything appears as it really is, that profit and exploitation are immediately available to experience.

In the above passages, Bourdieu in fact implicitly reproduces the contradiction of the “general formula for capital.” This contradiction consisted in the fact that the circuit of capital had to account for the existence of surplus-value without violating the conditions of equal exchange. To do so without a concept of capital that breaks from the fetishized appearance of the M-C-M’ circuit required either systematic unequal exchange or a fetishized conception of the auto-valorization of value. Bourdieu’s suggestion that economic phenomena are transparent to experience traps him in the contradiction of the general formula, but without the conceptual tools necessary to resolve it. Bourdieu suggests that profit and exploitation, and the recognition of their existence in a noneuphemized and transparent form, belong to the “universe” in which “the law of exchange of exact equivalents becomes the explicit rule” ([1994] 1998:105). But for Marx it is precisely the coexistence of profit and the law of value that is impossible without a theory of exploitation in production. Bourdieu’s notion of exploitation, however, pertains not to production but, together with profit and the law of value, to circulation. What we have, then, is an assertion of the coexistence of equal exchange, profits, and exploitation on the same experiential plane and a refusal to recognize the truth of these in a different analytical space. So while the economic field is conceived in some sense as the truth of the cultural and symbolic fields, the truth of the economic field is found within itself, on its surface.

This is not to argue that Bourdieu lacked an economic sociology or that in it he always took the economic field at face value. Bourdieu produced at least three rich empirical studies on economic topics over the course of his career (Swedberg 2011).<sup>12</sup> In the research project culminating in *The Social Structures of the Economy* ([2000] 2005), Bourdieu turned his

epistemological suspicion to the housing market, showing how the market can only be explained with reference to the field of producers and to the social, cultural, and political construction of supply and demand (Bourdieu [2000] 2005). And yet, Bourdieu was rather inconsistent in his characterization of the economic field. So while the study of the housing market is an exemplar of what a critical sociology of the market might look like, when it comes to theorizing the place of interests, profit, and exploitation, and hence capital, in the economic field, Bourdieu too readily suspends his critical epistemology and switches critical registers. Whereas the importation of terms such as capital from the economic to the cultural sphere was meant to effect an epistemological break with an enchanted view of culture, in elaborating a critique of economic reason Bourdieu often seems content only to historicize economic practices whose disenchanting nature he accepts. Telling in this regard have been the responses to the critique of Bourdieu as a closet utilitarian and economic reductionist (Caillé 1981; Favereau 2001). Bourdieu's defenders, including Bourdieu himself, have responded to this charge by rejecting any foundationalist anthropology and pointing out that interests and practices are the sociohistorical products of specific fields (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Boyer 2003; Convert 2003; Lebaron 2003). But even if we accept that Bourdieu was neither essentialist nor reductionist, it remains the case that within advanced societies the economic sphere is held up as a space wherein the logic of power that underlies all fields is uniquely transparent. So while in precapitalist or symbolic worlds the (economic) truth of practices and the experience of those practices do not coincide, the "instituted cynicism" of the economic economy "means that in this case the boundary between the native representation and the scientific description is less marked" (Bourdieu [2000] 2005:200). It is in this sense, as a kind of paradigmatic model, and not in a strictly reductionist sense, that the economic sphere for Bourdieu constitutes the referent for his general economy of practices. My point, though, is that the kinds of critique to which Bourdieu subjects the noneconomic and economic spheres are subtly different. Whereas his critical sociology generally consists in theoretically unmasking the hidden logic of power within cultural fields, Bourdieu implies that for the economy, where science and native experience coincide, critique consists only in historicizing its already transparent logic. Power being transparent in the economy, critical sociology is left without an object and gives way to economic anthropology. Consequently, phenomena such as exploitation are conceived not as the dissimulated structural relations of capitalist production but rather as dispositional features, albeit historically contingent, of economic actors.

Consider the more programmatic sections of *The Social Structures of the Economy*. In the introduction, Bourdieu writes that

against the ahistorical vision of economics, we must . . . reconstitute, on the one hand, the genesis of the economic dispositions of economic agents . . . and, on the other, the genesis of the economic field itself, that is to say, we must trace the history of the process of differentiation and autonomization which leads to the constitution of this specific game. ([2000] 2005:5)

But once this economic field is constituted,

in a kind of confession to itself, capitalist society stops "deluding itself with dreams of disinterestedness and generosity": registering an awareness, as it were, that it has an economy, it constitutes the acts of production, exchange or exploitation as "economic", recognizing explicitly as such the economic ends by which these things have been guided. (P. 7)

The “economy” is here equated with economic “ends.” While the disposition toward such ends as well as the constitution of a field of play wherein those ends are accepted as legitimate may be historically and socially constructed, the nature of those ends remains transparent. The question of exploitation is thus reduced to one of intentionality, that is, of the genesis of a disposition to exploit. Bourdieu may historicize this disposition to exploit, but the objective relation of exploitation is not in itself considered a theoretical object, presumably because it is transparent in the economic field. Bourdieu assimilates all “economic” phenomena—profit, exploitation, accumulation—to an economic field considered only in its dimension as a sphere of circulation and exchange and wherein agents recognize the truth of these phenomena. Although the conditions for this recognition, in terms of both the constitution of an autonomous economic field and the constitution of *homo economicus*, may be historically and socially determined, this does not change the fact that within the field, Bourdieu considers these phenomena to be immediately given to experience.

Where exploitation is transparent, capital has no secrets to betray. For Bourdieu, economic capital has an objective existence in the social space and serves as a reference point for all other capitals—that is, as a universal equivalent. But Bourdieu does not consider, as Marx did, that this objective economic capital is itself symbolic in that it denotes a social relation of exploitation. Capital is taken for granted within a taken-for-granted economic field. So, whereas capital in the cultural and symbolic orders is dissimulated as such, in the economic field capital, like profits and exploitation, can be admitted as such and hence does not require a conceptual definition separate from the way in which it appears to native experience. We saw that for Bourdieu capital is essentially a resource to be possessed, albeit one that only operates as capital when it is used as weapon or a stake in a struggle. For Bourdieu, economic capital as such denotes only a commodity or a resource insofar as it is struggled over within an objectively given economic field. This is not the Marxist understanding of capital.

As Bidet argues, “Bourdieu does not thematize ‘capital’ as a process in the manner of Marx: he understands it primarily as a differential endowment” ([2001] 2008:588). As such, Bourdieu’s theory of capital pertains to the sphere of circulation. Capital is conceived as something whose distribution and relative value are fought over. But while Bourdieu incisively analyzes such distribution struggles, by assimilating capital entirely to circulation he ends up obscuring the appropriation of surplus-labor and the social and historical relations that make it possible. Indeed, we saw that even though Bourdieu refers to “exploitation,” he attributes it to the sphere of circulation as something that is openly recognized by all agents. The term cannot refer, as it does for Marx, to the appropriation of surplus-labor, which, in capitalism, is dissimulated by the economic field itself. Indeed, by “exploitation” Bourdieu seems to refer simply to unequal exchange or to the subjective disposition toward instrumental gain. It is clear, then, that although Bourdieu is sensitive to class conflict, he does not in fact have a theory of exploitation in the sense of appropriating surplus-labor. Class conflict is instead conceived either as a conflict over the distribution of capital or as a conflict between the holders of different capitals.

Bourdieu’s conception of class, as noted earlier, is not determined by historically specific relations of production but rather by a quantitative distribution of capitals. Classes thus constructed can only describe a relation of relative domination and subordination; they cannot positively explain the historical appropriation of surplus-labor. Whatever the virtues of Bourdieu’s reconceptualization of class (Wacquant 2013), its capaciousness in including within the category any and all potential processes of group-formation is in this instance a liability. Bourdieu is off the mark in criticizing the Marxist concept of class for restricting itself to the relations of production (Bourdieu [1984] 1985:736). The particularity of the Marxist concept lies not in some economistic bias that dismisses all other collectivities and



forms of power; rather, it lies in the particularity of the form of power, that is, exploitation as the historically variable form of appropriating surplus-labor from the direct producers, that it seeks to render legible. This is lost on Bourdieu, who in broadening the concept of class loses sight of the qualitatively different relations of power that characterize the relations between differently constructed groups.<sup>13</sup> For Bourdieu, exploitation has no distinct conceptual content.<sup>14</sup>

Bourdieu's blindness to exploitation is perhaps best expressed in the section of *The Social Structures of the Economy* on "the firm as field" ([2000] 2005:205–7). In a passage that echoes Marx's famous passage in *Capital* where he invites the reader to leave the "noisy sphere" of circulation "where everything takes place on the surface and in full view of everyone" and follow the owners of money and labor-power "into the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there hangs the notice 'No admittance except on business'" ([1867] 1977:279–80), Bourdieu invites us to "enter the 'black box' that is the firm," where "we find not individuals, but, once again, a structure—that of the firm as a field, endowed with a relative autonomy in respect of the constraints associated with the firm's position within the field of firms" ([2000] 2005:205). But whereas Marx finds in the "abode of production" the secret of capital as a process of exploitation, Bourdieu finds only "the structure of the distribution of the capital among the various directors . . . of the firm, that is, between owners of and 'functionaries'—managers—and, among these latter, between holders of different species of cultural capital: predominantly financial, technical or commercial" ([2000] 2005:206). Absent from Bourdieu's consideration of the internal structure of the firm is a concept of the working class and its exploitation.<sup>15</sup> In the end, Bourdieu's notions of capital and class remain firmly within a Weberian problematic of social closure and its distributional effects. Capital, the possession of which—in all its forms—defines class position, refers generically to any unequally distributed principle of domination that, by the fact of its unequal distribution, generates profits for its possessor. In this view classes exploit capital in order to dominate other classes, but capital does not in itself denote a historically specific form of class exploitation. Marx is not even met, much less generalized or transcended.

## CONCLUSION

The merits of Bourdieusian sociology are clear. That Bourdieu turned our attention toward important spheres of practice that have traditionally been ignored by Marxists is without doubt. I do not claim that any rapprochement between Bourdieusian theory and Marxism is doomed from the start, nor do I claim that it is impossible for one to build off the other. Indeed, I believe that in order for Marxism to have a future it must recognize its explanatory limits and open itself up to the best that sociology has to offer. Likewise, for Bourdieusian sociology to be true to its critical vocation it must take Marxism more seriously than it has in the past.

Any future rapprochement between Bourdieusian theory and Marxism will have to think through the nature of the relation between the two. My goal in this article has been to evaluate one particular understanding of this relation: that Bourdieu *extends* Marx's critical analysis beyond the economy and thereby transcends Marxism's economism. I did this by looking at the concept of capital, which has been the most obvious point of potential convergence between Marx and Bourdieu. I make four main points:

First, the notion that Marx's conception of capital is economic is unfair. Marx attempts to show how what is misrecognized as a simple economic object in fact denotes a sociohistorical relation of exploitation. As such, capital is already a symbolic concept that condenses the myriad processes that make this exploitation possible.

Second, between Bourdieu's earlier work on education and the theoretical system inaugurated by *Distinction*, the notion of cultural capital undergoes important changes that have implications for how we understand its potential relation to a Marxist concept of capital. Whereas in *Reproduction* cultural capital pertained to the symbolic legitimation of preexisting class differences and was only implicitly and metaphorically related to a still unspecified notion of economic capital, in *Distinction* Bourdieu places cultural and economic capital on the same analytical plane, as objective principles of differentiation of a scientifically constructed social space. I argue that the former notion of cultural capital can potentially be articulated to a Marxist conception of capital, precisely because Bourdieu remains indifferent as to the nature of the class structure and of economic capital. But as Bourdieu begins to suggest a more definite conceptual relation between cultural and economic capital, and as their distribution comes to be considered the objective determinant of class, it becomes much more difficult to claim that Bourdieu's understanding of capital is related to Marx's. Bourdieu here implicitly raises the question of capital as such, that is, of its generic conceptual content. In *Distinction*, an answer to this question is not forthcoming, and the notion of economic capital to which Bourdieu relates cultural capital clearly does not conform to the Marxist idea of it.

Third, in the most systematic statement of his theory of capital, Bourdieu claims that all capitals are dissimulated forms of economic capital and that the value of a given capital, and hence the principle of its convertibility to other capitals, is the labor-time accumulated in it. Bourdieu's attempt to define a generic concept of capital evokes Marx's labor theory of value. But Bourdieu in fact confuses what is for Marx simply a feature of commodities for a definition of capital as such. In accounting for the profitability of capital, Bourdieu does not refer to any process whereby a surplus is generated through a historically specific relation of exploitation. Rather, he explains the profitability of capital as an effect of its scarce appropriation—an explanation that is possible only through a systematic violation of the theory of value he himself posits. When applied to economic capital, it is clear that this explanation clashes with Marx's, the point of which was after all to account for surplus value even under conditions of equal exchange.

Fourth, although Bourdieu refers all forms of capital to it, the notion of economic capital remains largely undertheorized. In various statements on the different forms of capital, Bourdieu consistently gives this particular form of capital short shrift. And yet, this is supposedly the form of capital of which all others are but disguised forms. I suggest that Bourdieu in fact deploys a rather fetishized understanding of economic capital as a power-conferring resource and of exploitation as a subjective will to exploit. This is symptomatic of a surprising tendency in Bourdieu to treat the economic field as a transparent field that is free from the kinds of dissimulation that he so trenchantly critiqued in the cultural domain. Bourdieu more than once suggests that economic phenomena need not be theorized since they reveal their true nature openly on the surface. The contrast with Marx, whose major theoretical statement was devoted to laying bare the relation of exploitation that the capitalist economy obscured, could not be sharper.

Considering the above, two conclusions should be drawn. First, if the different forms of capital are but extended forms of economic capital, it is clear that the notion of economic capital that they extend is not a Marxist one. Nowhere does Bourdieu define capital as a historically specific mode of extracting and appropriating surplus labor, nor is it clear what extending such a notion of capital to the disparate phenomena designated by cultural, social, and symbolic capital would mean. Second, the claim that Bourdieu transcends Marxism's economism by extending a concept of capital is dubious for the reasons that Marx's concept of capital was never economic in that it always denoted an overdetermined sociohistorical relation of exploitation, and that what Bourdieu supposedly extends and generalizes to the

cultural and symbolic spheres is a conception of economic capital that, because grasped only in its fetishized form, is itself marked by an economic belief in the revelatory truth of economic experience.

I have sought to criticize an interpretation of Bourdieu's relation to Marxism according to which Bourdieu extends and thereby transcends Marxism's critical problematic. It is possible, however, to think of this relation differently. Rather than positing a relation of extension or identity, the search for possible points of articulation between Bourdieusian sociology and Marxism seems a more fruitful approach. In the spirit of theoretical pluralism, the question should not be about who transcends or surpasses whom but about what processes each approach can uniquely render legible and how these theories can be used together in such ways that better explain concrete social phenomena. Still, a commitment to pluralism should not gloss over problems in compatibility where they do exist. I have suggested that Bourdieu's notion of capital became less compatible with Marx's precisely as it sought to subsume different principles of power under a single concept. In order to bring Marx and Bourdieu together, then, it might be necessary to loosen the screws a bit on the totalizing project of a "general theory of the economy of practices."

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for *Sociological Theory*, Barry Eidlin, Jean-Louis Fabiani, Robert Jansen, Howard Kimeldorf, Paul Lagneau-Ymonet, Camilo Leslie, Peggy Somers, George Steinmetz, and Elizabeth Wingrove for their valuable feedback on earlier versions of this article.

## NOTES

1. The precise nature of this critique is a matter of debate within Marxism. Nonetheless, in what follows I have sought to present the essence of Marx's concept of capital in a way that most Marxists would find uncontroversial. I draw especially on David Harvey (2010) and Göran Therborn's (1976) noneconomic interpretations of Marx's concept of capital.
2. As Louis Althusser ([1969] 1971:63) and Jacques Bidet ([1985] 2009:181) have pointed out, the relevant unit of analysis for Marx is the total social capital, not the firm.
3. A full discussion of Marx's theory of value is impossible here. Suffice it to say that for Marx, the particular form that value takes is the product of determinate social and historical conditions. His labor theory of value is only intelligible as a particular case of the "law of value," which references the fact that in all societies, the total social labor is distributed in a particular way. As Marx explains: "What matters in the determination of value is the overall social labour-time, the total amount of labour society has at its disposal and whose relative absorption by the different products determines, as it were, their respective social weight" (Marx [1894] 1981:1022). Still, Marx's theory of value remains controversial. For the purposes of my argument in this paper, however, what matters is what Marx sought to render legible through his concept of capital and whether Bourdieu extends Marx's problematic.
4. N.B. Just because something is superstructural does not mean that it is epiphenomenal.
5. Michèle Lamont and Annette Lareau point out an ambiguity in Bourdieu and Passeron's understanding of cultural capital and value: "In *Reproduction* . . . cultural capital is defined as cultural goods and values that are transmitted through class differentiated families and whose *value* as cultural capital varies with its *cultural distance* (dissimilarity?) from the *dominant culture* promoted by dominant agencies of socialization. This suggests that various types of cultural capital could have different values, and that some are even 'illegitimate,' or of low value. However, most of Bourdieu's writings suggest that cultural capital refers only to highly valued signals" (Lamont and Lareau 1988:157). At stake here is whether cultural capital is to be conceived as a symbolic effect of class power, as I believe it is in *Reproduction*, or an objective principle of analysis.
6. Indeed, Rogers Brubaker describes Bourdieu's conception of class as "extremely general and transhistorical" (Brubaker 1985:761).
7. Erik Olin Wright defines domination as the ability to control others' activities, whereas exploitation refers to "the acquisition of economic benefits from the labour of those who are dominated" (Wright

2009:107). While Wright assimilates both domination and exploitation to a Marxist problematic of class, the way in which Bourdieu discusses domination has more to do with the Weberian problematic of social closure, or Tilly's related concept of "opportunity hoarding" (Tilly 1999; Wright 2009:104-107). Wright argues that both the Weberian and Marxist approaches are relational but that the latter is relational in a stronger sense in that "there is an ongoing relationship between not only the *conditions* but also the *activities* of the advantaged and disadvantaged" (Wright 2009:108). Like Wright, I believe an integrated approach to class to be possible, but as he points out different approaches get at different causal processes.

8. Bourdieu writes, "Because the appropriation of cultural products presupposes dispositions and competences which are not distributed universally (although they have the appearance of innateness), these products are subject to exclusive appropriation, material or symbolic, and, functioning as cultural capital (objectified or internalized), they yield a profit in distinction, proportionate to the rarity of the means required to appropriate them, and a profit in legitimacy, the profit par excellence, which consists in the fact of feeling justified in being (what one is), being what it is right to be" (Bourdieu [1979] 1984:228).
9. While discussing his theory of the constructed social space in *Distinction*, Bourdieu writes in a footnote: "A fuller presentation of the fundamental principles of this construction, i.e., the theory of the different sorts of capital, their specific properties and the laws of conversion between these different forms of social energy, which is simultaneously a theory of the classes and class fractions defined by possession of a given volume and structure of capital, is reserved for another book, so as not to overcomplicate the present analysis of the judgement of taste" (Bourdieu [1979] 1984:572n.17). This book was never forthcoming, and the "Forms of Capital" is the closest Bourdieu came to elaborating his theory.
10. Bourdieu has come under criticism for not specifying the measure underlying the interconvertibility of the different forms of capital (Cot and Lautier 1984). But even with a measure of equivalence, Michel Grossetti questions to what extent Bourdieu's different forms of capital really stand in a relationship of convertibility with each other (Grossetti 1986). So, for example, social capital exerts a multiplier effect on other capitals and institutionalized cultural capital represents a claim to a certain level of compensation. But it makes no sense to claim that social capital or cultural capital is converted into economic capital since in neither case does the original capital disappear through the conversion. Of course, everything hinges on what Bourdieu means by "conversion," but in that case why bother defining a measure of equivalence?
11. Bourdieu often speaks of the exploitation of *capital*, for example, "the use or exploitation of cultural capital presents particular problems for the holders of economic or political capital" (Bourdieu [1983] 1986:245).
12. Richard Swedberg has in mind Bourdieu's early work on the Algerian economy, his work in the 1960s on banks and credit, and his later work on the housing market (Swedberg 2011). Bourdieu's writings on the transformation of work in Algeria share some thematic concerns with Marxism, but I don't discuss it here since my focus is on the concept of capital, which is not central in Bourdieu's Algerian period. Moreover, my argument is that Bourdieu's relation to Marxism became more problematic precisely as he developed his theory of the different forms of capital.
13. Characteristic in this regard is Bourdieu's argument that status groups, contra Weber, are not different kinds of groups from classes but rather "*denegated classes*" (Bourdieu [1978] 2013:300).
14. Bourdieu's notion of the field of power (Bourdieu [1989] 1996, 2011) subsumes all power under the category of domination. So although there is a division in the work of domination among the holders of different capitals, there is no sense in which exploitation is distinct from other kinds of domination, other than in the principle of its domination.
15. This supports DiMaggio's observation that "the struggles that concern [Bourdieu] most are not battles between workers and capitalists but conflicts within the dominant class—between sectors rich in, respectively, economic and cultural capital" (DiMaggio 1979:1465).

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