

„Capitalism makes societies work - The de-historization, naturalization and totalitarization of the rationale of capitalist materialism“

Bourdieu – A mastermind for global critical thinking

Bourdieu's theory about cultural and social capital is certainly one of the most cited scientific thought, especially among critical thinkers in the former colonized world. With their odd critique, arguing against a "Eurocentrism", saying that theories created in Europe suit to the European societies, but not beyond, they confirm what these theories say and adjust them to local societies elsewhere – thus help that these theories continue ruling thinking worldwide, especially thinking in what this "de-colonial" critique calls the "southern" world. This is a drama, because theories like Bourdieu's about cultural and social capital are an affirmation of capitalism and deserve to be critiqued in what they say instead of being spread across the world, and this even as any critical thinking. There is no other way to reject theories but to disprove what they say. And though Bourdieu is a master in juggling with Marxist terminology, Bourdieu's theory is the opposite of a critique of capitalism - this is what my paper will prove.

Proving if my critique of Bourdieu theory about cultural and social capital is convincing, this is what the readers must decide.

This is what Bourdieu is saying:

„Capital, which, in its objectified or embodied forms, takes time to accumulate and which, as a potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form, contains a tendency to persist in its being, is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible.^[1] And the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices.

It is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory. Economic theory has allowed to be foisted upon it a definition of the economy of practices which is the historical invention of capitalism; and by reducing the universe of exchanges to mercantile exchange, which is objectively and subjectively oriented toward the maximization of profit, i.e., (economically) self-interested, it has implicitly defined the other forms of exchange as noneconomic, and therefore disinterested.“ p1¹

1. De-historization, naturalization, totalitarization

¹ Bourdieu, P., The forms of capital. In: J. Richardson (Ed), Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education, New York, Greenwood, 241 – 258. My quotations count these pages from page 1 to 14

B. critiques economic thinking to only know one form of capital serving the “self-interest”, that is the materialism of humans directly accountable in money, profit, though there are other forms of capital serving the materialism he names social and cultural capital.

With this statement about *profit* as only *one* form of capital serving material interests that needs to be complimented by two other forms of capital, his cultural and social capital, as he insists also serving the same materialism, B. identifies any materialism with this very capitalist form of materialism - capitalist because it defines this capitalist materialism, as an abstraction from any utilitarianism, measured in quantities of reified abstract labor, in units of money.

De-historization,

With this statement, insisting on widening the concept of capital towards other form of capital, B. firstly *de-historizes* this capitalist form of materialism as the particular form of capitalism. Though he constantly talks about Capitalism, the rationality of Capitalism is for him the same across the different societies history. He thus presents any materialism across the different historical society systems, any interests of humans, as aiming at this odd capitalist interest of accumulating abstract wealth, wealth that denies any other criteria of wealth, any utilitarian criteria of wealth for the production of wealth if they is not serving its accumulation of its abstraction from their utilitarianism; wealth, which with its denial of any utilitarianism creates with its exclusionary form of this abstract wealth, the implied exclusion of those who produce this wealth from this wealth, that is this very capitalistic poverty and this poverty as its means to produce this wealth.

This generalization of mankind’s history as a history of capitalism results in such oddities, presenting subjects of feudal societies as an illustration of what he describes as the capitalistic nature of a society. Thus a feudal noble becomes the symbol for a representative of a form of social capital.

Example: *“The noble is the group personified. He bears the name of the group to which he gives his name (the metonymy which links the noble to his group is clearly seen when Shakespeare calls Cleopatra ‘Egypt’ or the King of France ‘France,’ just as Racine calls Pyrrhus ‘Epirus’). It is by him, his name, the difference it proclaims, that the members of his group, the liegemen, and also the land and castles, are known and recognized.” P 8*

Naturalization

He thereby also *naturalizes* this capitalist materialism aiming at the accumulation of this abstract wealth, reified and counted in units of money, as the nature of any human materialism. His complementary forms of cultural and social capital are

not called forms of *capital* by coincidence. His critique of economic thinking is that this thinking does not see that the capitalist rationality of materialism does not only apply to the sphere of the economy, he critiques that they reduce this rationality to the market relations, but that this capitalist materialism is the nature of any sphere of human activities and therefore he argues to apply this rationality of the capitalist materialism to any human activity, namely to any cultural and social activity as executing nothing but this rationality, he therefore names other forms of capital.

Example: *"....specific profits which children from the different classes and class fractions can obtain in the academic market,"*

Or: *"....the possession of the means of 'consuming' a painting or using a machine, which, being nothing other than embodied capital,"* ^[8] P 5

Totalitarization

Arguing that it is the nature of any social and cultural activities to aim at the capitalist materialism and that their nature is therefore characterized as resources of this materialism presents any society and any social activity as being ruled by the rationality of the capitalist materialism. This is what I call the totalitarization of the capitalist materialism across any human activity, he calls *"A general science of the economy of practices,..."*

Example: *"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."* ^[21] p. 2"

Example *"...the conversion rate between academic capital and economic capital"*
p 6

2. Cultural and social capital: from the disappearance of social antagonisms to their reversal - how to translate poverty into wealth and servitude into rulership

a) The subjugation of interest to the exclusive ratio of capitalist interest

In order to define education as cultural capital, that is as a form of capital, one must submit education to the criteria of judging everything and anything in this society

according to whether it submits to the equation that interests are only interests if they submit to this definition on interests. as being capital.

In fact, in capitalist societies, the ratio of capitalist pursuit of interests rules with the subordination of every interest to the service of the increase of money and negates every interest that does not place itself in this service. B. not only does not criticise this use of every interest, no matter how private, for the growth of money, this subordination to this single decisive goal of all life goals or usefulness, but rather fabulates this practically made capitalist definition of interests as money interests with the equation, which he shares, of every interest in the interest in money and its extension to every interest in the nature of every interest, which is for him as the same as biological nature.

Then to interpret education, of all things, as capital perverts this subjection to the definition of interest valid under capitalism to what capitalist interests allow as interest, and does so in the case of education, of all things, with the reinterpretation of an interest that exists only as a service to the interest of capital, in order then to operate this dependent interest called education, which can be operated at all only through this service to this capital, and this as a service to what he calls, with the - inevitable - pleonasm, economic capital, a service in which the application of education and its products is appropriated by this economic capital, thus excluding the owner of education from it, in order then to present this interest, which only formally belongs to its "owner", as equal to the interest of the beneficiaries of its services, as the cultural capital of those who have nothing except their potency to work. With his interpretation of education as capital, B. thus turns the citizen who is excluded from capitalist wealth and possesses nothing into a capitalist who possesses wealth and whom nothing distinguishes from the real owner of capitalist wealth.

b) The transformation of all products of human activity into capitalist wealth

*"...pictures, books, dictionaries,
instruments, machines, etc..." Education, schools, families, etc*

etc, etc.....simply all objectifications of the human spirit, including their capitalist institutionalisations, are all cultural capital for B., and thus, as cultural capital, indiscriminately have the same social nature defined for them by B. as cultural capital. Books, pictures and machines, education, titles and knowledge, from a sociological point of view all the same, cultural capital, indiscriminate representatives of the same invented wealth, made into subspecies of capitalist wealth, a wealth that actually negates any content in capitalist reality thanks to its quality as abstract wealth, just as sociological thought, with its abstraction of the functioning of a society of the practised capitalist view of things, with its practical abstractions from all utilities, congenially arrives in its thought at such mental enumerations and thus at their theoretically generated equations, and with these enumerations attributes to everything enumerated the theoretical blessing as the identical social nature inherent in all these mental manifestations, cultural capital - and thus shows this thinking to be a congenial theoretical product of those practical abstractions of capitalism, thus presenting this sociological thinking as a quasi-methodological apologetics of capitalist societies.

c) How the competences of labor become a form of capitalist wealth of the have-nots....

It is the concern, which drives B. with his sociological thinking, whether and how society as a whole functions, which for the finding of this functioning in social reality makes all social differences and opposites in this reality disappear, if it can be discovered in them that society practices these opposites and therefore cannot be any. In order to prove this functioning, these opposites of interests are redefined into their sameness, so that the wealth of capital and the exclusion from this wealth by the latter become the same wealth.

Even if B. is not unaware that his "cultural capital" is a sociological invention ("academic investment has no meaning unless a minimum degree of reversibility of the conversion it implies is objectively guaranteed"), i.e. education only becomes money for the educated at all if (economic) capital uses this knowledge and with this use for the production of wealth excludes the educated from appropriating the wealth it produces, for B. this is no reason to question his invention of a cultural capital that produces profit like economic capital. The false thought attributing what he calls "cultural or social capital, i.e. labor the quality of capital equally as what capital is originates from the equality attributed to any property legally as private property, extinguishing their differences in the economic substance. But B is not only tricked by the abstract equality of equal private properties with his definition of educated labor as cultural capital. On the contrary.

Even if B. is aware of the differences between his real and invented forms of capital and that "economic capital is the "dominant form of capital", i.e. in capitalist societies those money relations have exclusive validity, which he holds up to economists as the only form of capital considered by them, on whose disposal every material interest in capitalist reality depends, i.e. everything that does not represent money in this society is a dead nothing, and for this reason alone, in the rationality of capitalist pursuit of interests governed by money, there is a quite fundamental opposition between the interest in the usefulness of things and the interest in increasing money, B. manages to attribute to his invention of cultural capital, i.e. education, learned knowledge or practical competences, i.e. competences directed towards the production of a certain usefulness of things, the property that this education in its invented form of capital called cultural capital is like economic capital the source of capitalist wealth, i.e. as another form of capital it is like economic capital and thus equates both of them as forms of capital, and the latter with the capital that is the reason for the exclusion from wealth of those who as bearers of education have their knowledge that is the source of wealth, who, as bearers of education, can only turn their knowledge into money in the first place only if they are paid this by economic capital for using their education for the production of economic capital, but that it is also this use of their education for economic capital with which they, with the use of their educated labour, cede to the owner the wealth they have produced in economic capital, that is, with the use of "cultural capital" they exclude their bearers, the workers, from the ownership of capital.

d)and those excluded from capitalist wealth become the real wealthy people

With the idea of education as capital, B. not only makes the opposition of capital and labor disappear, but with the invention of his "cadre forces", the holders of cultural capital, meaning labor, i.e. the people in capitalist societies in which nothing counts but the possession of capital in the form of money, the people who possess zero capital in the form of money and possess nothing but their potentiality to work and this only when capital can profitably use this labor for the growth of capital, these possessors of nothing but their supply of labor for others are, according to B., to be counted among the group of rulers.

„If it is emphasized that they are not the possessors (in the strictly economic sense) of the means of production which they use, and that they derive profit from their own cultural capital only by selling the services and products which it makes possible, then they will be classified among the dominated groups; if it is emphasized that they draw their profits from the use of a particular form of capital, then they will be classified among the dominant groups.“ P 5

This logic is remarkable: Though B. knows that his idea of cultural capital is an invention it must be though introduced for his complete picture and to create this picture as “the immanent structure of the social world” p 1 he takes the freedom to create his cultural capital and, hence, emphasizes that education is a “particular form of capital” and with this emphasis arrives at the insight, that the “non-possessors in the strict economic sense”, the very sense he wants to throw over board to introduce his sociological view, “ to account for the structure and functioning of the social world” he does not want to exclude those from owning capital who own nothing and hands with them theoretical power their social capital. And not only this.

More than that, the collective power of the holders of cultural capital, those workers, are the real rulers, at least in tendency, which only makes them not the rulers of economic events because of their "tendencies to competitive behavior." Inclinations which he attributes to the "logic of competition in school and examinations", a logic of competition which he cannot discover in the real capitalists. The logic that the pursuit of cultural capital makes the holders of cultural capital "the group of the dominated" only if, and therefore not necessarily because, they "allow themselves to be put in a competitive situation" by economic capital because of their competition for their educational capital, describes the competition for educational qualifications and jobs quite as if this competition were a matter, that the owners of labor and not the users of labor and the organizers of education, the state, impose on them with their kind of education as a hunt for educational certificates for the hunt for jobs, as if this education were about state certificates, about something other than this selection that this education imposes on everyone, that is, about this competition imposed on the learners, which B. holds up to them as "inclination". For B., inclination or not, the true ruling interests in capitalist societies are, despite this inclination, these have-nots competing for jobs:

"Everything suggests that as the cultural capital incorporated in the means of production increases (and with it the period of embodiment needed to acquire the means of appropriating it), so the collective strength of the holders of cultural capital would tend to increase - if the holders of the dominant type of capital (economic capital) were not able to set the holders of cultural capital in competition with one another." P 5

e) Capitalist materialism ensures the functioning of society

The equation of its cultural capital with the nature of man discovers in capitalist society by means of this equation, generated by what moves sociological thought, its concern, ignorant of all questions about the content and purposes of a society, for the functioning of the social world, that this society, like biology, regulates its members of society to function like nature:

"It is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognised by economic theory." P1

That it is this theoretical interest "to account for the structure and functioning of the social world", that for the construction of its theories of the social, the construction of this interpretation produces every human activity in all its forms of capital invented by it for this purpose, it establishes the existence of sociological thought and that it is therefore only this sociological thought, that is capable of reproducing in its theories the capitalist gaze on the capitalist world that reigns in this world, this self-praise of the sociologist for his adaptive capacities to reality, his affirmative thinking, needs the addition that this sociological gaze, with its concern for the functioning of the social world, is a gaze that originates from the standpoint of the political violence of this society and serves this political violence with its concerned theories about structures and their functioning. Capitalism works!

3. The capitalist political power, the nation state – a powerless service for its citizens

And it is also this aim of sociological thinking "to account for the structure and functioning of the social world" that makes all forms of power disappear while sociologists like Bourdieu are talking about them. Not only does the power that is needed to force the major parts of these societies that their existence is dependent on their services for the production of the growing wealth in the hands of those who own the economic capital, the capitalists, disappear in the relation within this society, B. calls a relation of "dominance", that is a gradual difference of essentially the same people, people all owning their different forms of capital, distinguished along the amount of capital they gain and the ways they gain their "profits" with their different forms of capital, thus all equally capitalists, thus all conflictual interests eliminated for the sake of finding a structure that works. The political power, the state and its

political bodies, such as the education system, enforcing with their power monopoly the capitalist materialism on people's life in B.'s theory about his theory about *"the structure and the functioning of the social world"* nothing but the institutionalization of the performance of people's materialism.

„By conferring institutional recognition on the cultural capital possessed by any given agent, the academic qualification also makes it possible to compare qualification holders and even to exchange them (by substituting one for another in succession). Furthermore, it makes it possible to establish conversion rates between cultural capital and economic capital by guaranteeing the monetary value of a given academic capital.“

Sociological puts everything upside down, because its view finding out how things are functioning, this view only works if one eliminates any power forcing people to do what a power wants them to do. Such a view of an *enforced* materialism carries the smell of an enforced will and therefore the smell of non-functioning. Determined to account for how societies are functioning, the politically enforced aims of a state driven education system, forcing people into a competition about learning aiming at selecting people for the various departments of the labor market, covering the demands of capital as a whole for a national workforce and making this aim of the political power of capitalist societies by force a matter of people's life careers, in sociological thinking the bodies of the political power, here the education system, become the service of for the institutionalization of the owners of cultural capital and the selection between the people for the different departments of the workforce becomes in B. sociological thinking a service to compare their cultural capital and to *"to establish conversion rates between cultural capital and economic capital."* In this neat image of an education system, in which any interest of the political power that runs this service system is not only successfully any enforcement of any aim of the political power eliminated, which though runs this system, and runs this as an obligation enforced on people with its power of laws. Competition among people about certificates is not the politically enforced relations between people for the sake of their self-selection, but their bad human habits, undermining the power they would have thanks to their imaginary capital handed to them by B. with his sociological thinking.

Thus, this sociological thinking about how societies as such function transforms both any conflicting interest inside their imaginary societies into *dominations* of essentially equalized interests as it eliminates any political power enforcing any aims of a political power on people via forcing them into a competition and appear as what this thinking calls the institutionalization of people's materialism, here of their cultural capital. As a consequence, if political institutions are made institutionalizations of people's interests, the political body of capitalist societies, the power monopoly loses its power and any thoughts about this political power are dissolved into its functioning. Thanks to Bourdieu's three forms of capital his conceptualization of capitalism give societies a *"structure"* making them function – this homage to his theory is the main finding of this thinking.