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# The Economy of Enrichment: Towards a New Form of Capitalism?

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**Abstract:** The main purpose of this paper is to provide a critical overview of the key contributions made by Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre in *Enrichissement. Une critique de la marchandise* (Paris: Gallimard, 2017).<sup>2</sup> With the exception of one journal article, entitled 'The Economic Life of Things: Commodities, Collectibles, Assets'<sup>3</sup>, their collaborative work has received little attention in Anglophone circles.<sup>4</sup> This paper aims to demonstrate that Boltanski and Esquerre's *Enrichissement* contains valuable insights into the constitution of Western European capitalism in the early twenty-first century. In order to substantiate the validity of this claim, the subsequent inquiry focuses on central dimensions that, in Boltanski and Esquerre's view, need to be scrutinized to grasp the nature of major trends in contemporary society, notably those associated with the consolidation of the enrichment economy. In the final section, attention will be drawn to several noteworthy limitations of Boltanski and Esquerre's analysis.

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2 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a).

3 Boltanski and Esquerre (2016). Cf. Boltanski and Esquerre (2014b).

4 See Fraser (2017) and, in response, Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b). See also Outhwaite (2018).

## 1. Commodities and Commodification: Between States and Markets

In capitalist societies, actors 'are constantly immersed in the *universe of commodities*<sup>5</sup>. Caught up in this universe, their lives are impacted by the systemic imperatives of capitalism, to such an extent that its underlying logic of functioning permeates 'their experience of what they conceive of as reality'<sup>6</sup>. A commodity 'finds its unity in the operation by which a price is assigned to things, every time it changes hands, against monetary means'<sup>7</sup>. Capitalist processes of production, distribution, circulation, and consumption are unthinkable without the social construction of commodity exchanges. Notwithstanding its ubiquity, 'the universe of commodities presents itself not as *an opaque totality*<sup>8</sup>, which would make its *modus operandi* incomprehensible and 'impenetrable'<sup>9</sup>, but as '*a structured whole*<sup>10</sup>, whose fetishizing spirit – owing to its pervasive power – is capable of colonizing virtually every aspect of social reality. Firmly situated in '[t]he age of the "commodity fetish"'<sup>11</sup>, all behavioural, ideological, and institutional dimensions of capitalist formations are dominated by the instrumental telos of profit maximization.

The worldwide influence of 'European industrial powers'<sup>12</sup> cannot be properly understood without examining 'the distribution of commodities between different forms of valorization'<sup>13</sup> attributed to objects within

5 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 9 (italics added): 'sont constamment plongés dans l'univers de la marchandise'.

6 Ibid., p. 9: 'leur expérience de ce qu'ils conçoivent comme la réalité'.

7 Ibid., p. 9: 'trouve son unité dans l'opération par laquelle un prix échoit à ces choses, chaque fois qu'elles changent de mains, contre des espèces monétaires'.

8 Ibid., p. 9 (italics added): 'l'univers de la marchandise se présente non comme une totalité opaque'.

9 Ibid., p. 9: 'impénétrable'.

10 Ibid., p. 9 (italics added): 'un ensemble structuré'.

11 Ibid., p. 10: '[l]'âge de la « marchandise-fétiche »'.

12 Ibid., p. 10 (translation modified): 'la puissance industrielle européenne'.

13 Ibid., p. 11: 'la distribution de la marchandise entre différentes formes de mise en valeur'. In the English editions of Boltanski's writings, the most common translation of the notion '*mise en valeur*' is '*valorization*'. See, for

networks of economic exchange. In the most general sense, a commodity can be defined as '*anything to which a price is assigned when it changes its owner*'<sup>14</sup>. Hence, every commodity has a monetary value, which fluctuates across diverging transactional contexts. Granted, the 'commercial dexterity'<sup>15</sup> with which actors may, or may not, be equipped can vary considerably between them, depending on 'their level of market-specific socialization'<sup>16</sup>. Without 'a minimal competence'<sup>17</sup> facilitating their participation in the construction of the economy, however, 'actors would be simply lost and incapable of making their way in the world'<sup>18</sup> of capitalism, which is profoundly shaped by 'market transactions'<sup>19</sup>. In historical formations whose societal developments are largely driven by business and trade, 'actors are expected to know how to negotiate'<sup>20</sup>, thereby positioning themselves in relation to others.

The task of uncovering the '*structures of the commodity*'<sup>21</sup> is essential to shedding light on the *specificity of capitalist reproduction*. Just as the structures of the commodity are marked by their 'historical nature'<sup>22</sup> and, therefore, by spatiotemporal contingency, so are the capitalist systems in which they are

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instance, Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), pp. 67, 68, 69, 70, 72, 73, 74, 75, and 76. Please note, however, that an alternative (and, in some cases, preferred) translation of this concept is the English term '*valuation*'. See, for example: Boltanski, Esquerre, and Muniesa (2015); Lamont (2012).

14 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 12 (italics added): 'toute chose à laquelle échoit un prix quand elle change de propriétaire'. On Boltanski and Esquerre's conception of '*commodity*', see also Boltanski and Esquerre (2014b) as well as Boltanski and Esquerre (2016). Furthermore, see Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), esp. pp. 60 and 70–76. Cf. Fraser (2017), pp. 60 and 64.

15 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 12: 'dextérité commerciale'.

16 Ibid., p. 12: 'leur niveau de socialisation marchande'.

17 Ibid., p. 12: 'une compétence minimale'.

18 Ibid., p. 12 (translation modified): 'un acteur serait simplement égaré et incapable de faire son chemin dans le monde'.

19 Ibid., p. 12: 'des transactions marchandes'.

20 Ibid., p. 108: 'les acteurs sont supposés savoir négocier'. On this point, see also Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), p. 70: '[...] actors are supposed to know how to negotiate commercially and are encouraged to become sellers themselves [...]'.  
 21 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 12 (italics in original): '*structures de la marchandise*'.

22 Ibid., p. 13: 'caractère historique'.

embedded and in which they exert their hegemonic power.<sup>23</sup> 'The diversification of commodity structures'<sup>24</sup> emanates from varieties of capitalism<sup>25</sup>, united by a common mode of production and separated by diverging ways of sustaining it. *Different types of capitalism generate, and depend on, different degrees of commodification.* Key differences between capitalist regimes manifest themselves in diverging *regional* traditions<sup>26</sup> (for instance, Anglo-Saxon, continental European, Latin-American, Asian, and African models) and in diverging *national* traditions<sup>27</sup> (in Europe, for example, Great Britain's neo-liberal 'spectator state', Germany's neocorporatist 'facilitative state', and France's neostatist 'developmental state'). Unsurprisingly, these traditions are marked by varying degrees of commodification: the more market-driven and the less state-interventionist a particular type of capitalist reproduction, the more intense and the more extensive its processes of commodification. Irrespective of the historical specificities of economic forms of governance, the 'condition of the commodity'<sup>28</sup> is built into the architecture of capitalism: *there are no dynamics of marketization without processes of commodification.*

## 2. Price and Value: Between Justification and Critique

In capitalist economies, things have 'their *price* and *value*'<sup>29</sup>. Far from categorically accepting monetary arrangements as if they were incontestable,

23 On this point, see, for example: Braudel (1967); Braudel (1979a); Braudel (1979b). See also, for instance: Bonefeld, Gunn, Holloway, and Psychopedis (1995); Holloway (2005 [2002]); Holloway (2010); Holloway and Susen (2013); Susen (2012a).

24 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 14: '[L]a diversification des structures de la marchandise'.

25 On *varieties of capitalism*, see, for instance: Hall and Soskice (2001); Hancké (2009); Hancké, Rhodes, and Thatcher (2007); Miller (2005); Soederberg, Menz, and Cerny (2005); Susen (2012a), p. 306; Susen (2015a), pp. 134 and 310–380.

26 On this point, see Weiss (1997a), pp. 16–17.

27 On this point, see Dunning (1997), pp. 244–282 (on Great Britain), pp. 335–358 (on Germany), and pp. 313–334 (on France).

28 See Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), pp. 107–111: 'La condition de marchandise'.

29 Ibid., p. 9 (italics added): 'leur prix et la valeur'. See also Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), esp. pp. 68–72 and 76. Cf. Fraser (2017), esp. pp. 57, 59, and 60 (on 'price') and pp. 57–64 (on 'value').

actors – owing to their 'polysemic'<sup>30</sup> dispositions – are able to *criticize* and, if required, to *justify* prices and values.<sup>31</sup> By doing so, they confirm the ineluctable contingency permeating the social structures of capitalist economies. Broadly speaking, prices are monetary expressions of values attributed to objects, subjects, and/or states of affairs. In *Enrichissement*, we are presented with several competing conceptions of value, two of which are particularly worth mentioning:

- In Marxist accounts of economic relations, value is regarded as 'a simultaneously *substantial* and *mysterious* property of things'<sup>32</sup>. On this view, value is not only real and genuine but also, paradoxically, imagined and fake. This assumption lies at the heart of Marx's critique of commodity fetishism.<sup>33</sup> In capitalist societies, things take on a life of their own, insofar as their *exchange value*<sup>34</sup> is elevated to a quasi-metaphysical status of ontological preponderance, whereas their *use value*<sup>35</sup> is degraded to a praxeological element of subordinate relevance.
- In Boltanski and Esquerre's account of economic relations, value is interpreted as 'a device of *justification* or of the *critique* of the price of things'<sup>36</sup>. On this view, value can be sustained only to the extent that it can be *justified* because, in principle, it can be *criticized*. More specifically, value is established as a combination of objective, normative, and subjective dimensions:
  - (a) it exists as an *objective* part of reality, since it has a tangible impact upon the empirical constitution of social relations;

30 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 12: 'polysémique'.

31 See *ibid.*, p. 12: 'de critiquer ce prix ou de le justifier'.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 12 (italics added): 'la valeur pour une propriété à la fois substantielle et mystérieuse des choses'. Cf. Fraser (2017), p. 60.

33 See, for example: Marx (2000/1977 [1857–1858/1941]); Marx (2000/1977 [1859]); Marx and Engels (2000/1977 [1846]); Marx and Engels (1987/1945 [1848]); Marx (2000/1977 [1867]). For an excellent overview, see Marxhausen (1999).

34 See Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 111: 'valeur d'échange'.

35 See *ibid.*, p. 111: 'valeur d'usage'.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 12 (italics added): 'un dispositif de justification ou de critique du prix des choses'.

- (b) it exists as a *normative* part of reality, since it acquires different meanings in different cultural settings;
- (c) it exists as a *subjective* part of reality, since actors confirm its presence by making it an integral part of their imaginaries when participating in both the material and the symbolic construction of society.

For Boltanski and Esquerre, then, a critical sociology of economic exchanges needs to explore the multiple ways in which, within 'the universe of commodities'<sup>37</sup>, *prices are justified and/or criticized*.<sup>38</sup> These processes of justification and critique illustrate that capitalist modes of socialization are contingent upon 'different forms of valorization'<sup>39</sup>, without which there would be no symbolically mediated dynamics of market-driven profit maximization.

Proposing a 'distinctive *pragmatics of value-setting*'<sup>40</sup>, Boltanski and Esquerre distinguish *four forms of valorization*<sup>41</sup>, whose 'relationships can be articulated as a set of *transformations*'<sup>42</sup>:

- (a) the '*standard form*'<sup>43</sup>, which is vital to industrial economies and which allows for the possibility of mass production;

37 Ibid., p. 9: 'l'univers de la marchandise'. See also *ibid.*, p. 111.

38 On this point, see *ibid.*, p. 13: 'différentes façons d'en justifier (ou d'en critiquer) le prix'.

39 See *ibid.*, p. 13: 'différentes façons de les mettre en valeur'. On Boltanski and Esquerre's conception of '*valorization*', see also, for instance, Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), esp. pp. 67–70 and 72–73.

40 Fraser (2017), p. 59 (*italics in original*).

41 For a useful summary of these four '*forms of valorization*', see Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), esp. pp. 69–70. See also *ibid.*, pp. 72–76. On the notion of '*forms of valorization*' [*les formes de mise en valeur*], see Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), Chapter IV.

42 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), p. 68 (*italics in original*). Boltanski and Esquerre spell out that they conceive of this 'set of transformations' in Claude Lévi-Strauss's sense of the term. On this point, see Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), pp. 164–165 and 196. See, in particular, Lévi-Strauss (1962). See also Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 586n12, and Maniglier (2002), pp. 55–56. On the relevance of Lévi-Strauss's work to Boltanski and Esquerre's argument, see, for example: Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), pp. 120, 164–165, 196, 242, 282, 494, 582, 586, 594, 598, and 609; Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), pp. 68–69. Cf. Lévi-Strauss (1962); cf. also Lévi-Strauss (1949) and Lévi-Strauss (1971).

43 On the '*standard form*' [*'forme standard'*], see Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), esp. Chapter V. More specifically, see *ibid.*, pp. 21, 129, 157, 159, 165, 166, 173, 178, 179, 181, 182–183, 187, 201–242, 234, 295, 357, 394, 395, 429, and 524–526.

- (b) the '*collection form*'<sup>44</sup>, which prevails in enrichment economies and which is based on a narrative attached to an object's past;
- (c) the '*trend form*'<sup>45</sup>, which is crucial to fashion economies and whose principal reference points are appealing discourses, which are often linked to contemporary high-profile figures and present-day celebrities;
- (d) the '*asset form*'<sup>46</sup>, which is preponderant in financial economies and which is driven by the incentive to re-sell objects for a profit at some point in the future.

Despite the considerable differences between these four forms of valorization, the '*specific arenas of transaction*'<sup>47</sup> to which they are attached share one significant feature: the prices of the commodities by which they are sustained 'can be justified or criticized according to a range of *different arguments*'<sup>48</sup>. The co-articulation of these four forms of valorization is central to the rise of a new form of capitalism:

To mark the specificity of the form of capitalism that takes advantage of all four forms of valorization, we will speak of *integral capitalism*.<sup>49</sup>

The secret of success underlying this type of economic organization consists in 'exploiting new lodes of wealth and *interconnecting different ways of valorizing things*'<sup>50</sup>, thereby securing that these are put into circulation for acquiring maximum profit.

44 On the '*collection form*' ['forme collection'], see *ibid.*, esp. Chapter VII. More specifically, see *ibid.*, pp. 68, 129, 165, 166, 178, 179, 181–182, 188, 243–325, 349, 352, 401, 403, 404, 417–419, 429, and 527–529.

45 On the '*trend form*' ['forme tendance'], see *ibid.*, esp. Chapter IX. More specifically, see *ibid.*, pp. 175, 179, 181, 184, 188, 226, 327–353, 394, 404, and 526–527.

46 On the '*asset form*' ['forme actif'], see *ibid.*, esp. Chapter X. More specifically, see pp. 159, 165, 174, 178, 181, 184, 188, 224, 226, 288, 293, 327, 355–372, 394, 395, 399, 401, 442, 484, 493, and 529–530.

47 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), p. 70.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 70 (italics added).

49 *Ibid.*, p. 74 (italics in original). On the concept of '*integral capitalism*', see, for instance: Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), pp. 26, 375, 399–400, and 566; Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), pp. 68 and 73–75.

50 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), p. 74 (italics added).



In their analysis of profit generation, Boltanski and Esquerre draw on both Marx's notion of profit derived from labour ('surplus-value labour' [*plus-value travail*])<sup>51</sup> and Braudel's notion of profit derived from commerce, trade, and exchange ('commercial surplus-value' or 'trading profit' [*plus-value marchande*])<sup>52</sup>:

The specificity of the enrichment economy [...] lies in profits derived from a commerce of objects that, even when they are manufactured industrially, give rise to a valorization based primarily on the three other forms. It is associated with particular ways of exploiting a highly qualified local workforce entrusted with the tasks of such valorization. In this sense, the profits it generates depend in part on the extraction of surplus-value labour. Nevertheless, what makes this type of economy distinct is above all its reliance on systems that enable it to extract much larger commercial profits than can currently be made from standard objects, which face a higher level of competition. Finally, it should be noted that whereas a mass economy relies principally on exploitation of the poor, whether as workers or consumers, an enrichment economy derives its profits essentially from the wealthy. As Braudel's analyses have shown, it is primarily trade in 'rare' or luxury goods destined for the wealthy that generates especially large commercial surplus-value. As these remarks suggest, integral capitalism is not the expression of a 'postmodern' capitalism that would no longer rely on profits derived from surplus-value labour, or even on the production and circulation of material objects. But it is a form of capitalism whose flexibility enables it to take advantage of a much wider range of things

51 On the concept of 'surplus-value labour' [*plus-value travail*], see Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), pp. 180, 379–383, 388, 389, 400, and 592. See also Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), esp. pp. 71–76.

52 On the concept of 'commercial surplus-value' or 'trading profit' [*plus-value marchande*], see Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), pp. 180, 184, 233, 384–388, 389, 400, and 610–611. See also Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), esp. pp. 71–76.

than in the past, whose diversity is not only preserved but valorized, to exploit the differences it establishes between the status of varying commodities.<sup>53</sup>

Given their emphasis on the relationship between, on the one hand, *price and value* and, on the other hand, *justification and critique*, Boltanski and Esquerre take issue with the Marxist distinction between 'use value' and 'exchange value'.<sup>54</sup> In their eyes, it is by 'reference to *value*'<sup>55</sup> that it is possible 'to criticize or to justify the price of things'<sup>56</sup>. Their value-focused approach, however, 'discards [...] the convoluted debates on the relationship between use value and exchange value'<sup>57</sup>. As such, it rejects any simplistic reading of Marx's account of commodity fetishism, according to which social scientists are required to pursue the 'uncovering'<sup>58</sup> mission of 'ideology critique'<sup>59</sup>, permitting them to unearth the stifling logic that pervades mechanisms of 'reification'<sup>60</sup>, which convert subjects into objects by reducing humans to things.

Notwithstanding the dehumanizing consequences of commodification processes in capitalist formations, the social construction of price

53 Ibid., pp. 74 and 75.

54 See Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 111. On *the distinction between 'use value' and 'exchange value'*, see, for example, Susen (2012a), pp. 307–308 and 324–325n165. Cf. Haug (1999a) and Marxhausen (1999).

55 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 111 (italics in original): 'la référence à la *valeur*'.

56 Ibid., p. 111: 'de critiquer ou de justifier le prix des choses'.

57 Ibid., p. 111: 'écarte [...] les débats alambiqués sur la relation entre valeur d'usage et valeur d'échange'.

58 Ibid., p. 111: 'dévoilement'.

59 On *the concepts of 'ideology' and 'ideology critique'*, see, for example: Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner (1980); Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner (1990); Apel (1971); Boltanski (2008); Bourdieu and Boltanski (1976); Bourdieu and Boltanski (2008 [1976]); Browne and Susen (2014); Conde-Costas (1991); Eagleton (2006 [1976]); Eagleton (2007 [1991]); Holloway and Susen (2013); Larrain (1991 [1983]); Marx and Engels (1953 [1845–1847]); Marx and Engels (2000/1977 [1846]); Rehmann (2004); Reitz (2004); Simons and Billig (1994); Susen (2008a); Susen (2008b); Susen (2012a); Susen (2014a); Susen (2015a), esp. Chapter 2; Susen (2016c); Wacquant (2002 [1993]); Weber (1995); Žižek (1989); Žižek (1994).

60 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 111: 'réification'.

and value cannot be separated from the normative forces of justification and critique:

These forms of *valorization* contribute to both the *partitioning* and the *structuring* of the *universe of commodities*, because they are associated with modalities – that is, at the same time, *devices* and *arguments* – making it possible to make statements concerning the *value* of different things and to carry out tests substantiating these arguments. In a way, arguments generated by different forms of valorization render possible the *mediation between objects and prices*. On the one hand, they *build on certain properties of objects* considered as pertinent. On the other hand, they *serve to criticize or to justify the price*.<sup>61</sup>

In brief, the realm of commodities is shaped by subjects capable of justifying and criticizing the prices attributed to objects on the basis of evaluative devices and arguments, whose epistemic validity can be confirmed or undermined by multiple tests [*épreuves*].

Boltanski and Esquerre distinguish between 'price' and 'metaprice':<sup>62</sup>

- In the world of commercial transactions, the *price* is essentially 'a sign associated with a thing'<sup>63</sup>. As such, it constitutes a value-laden aggregate that is assigned to an object in order to express its monetary worth.
- The *metaprice* is, literally, 'the about-the-price', constructed by cognitively equipped and discursively engaged subjects. It is '*meta*'<sup>64</sup> in

61 Ibid., p. 111 (italics added): 'Ces formes de mise en valeur contribuent à partitionner et par là à structurer l'univers de la marchandise parce qu'elles sont associées à des modalités – c'est-à-dire à la fois à des dispositifs et à des arguments – permettant de former des énoncés concernant la valeur de différentes choses et aussi de mettre en place des épreuves pour fonder ces arguments. Les arguments générés par différentes formes de mise en valeur font en quelque sorte la médiation entre les objets et les prix. D'un côté, ils prennent appui sur certaines propriétés des objets considérées comme pertinentes. De l'autre, ils servent à en critiquer ou à en justifier le prix.'

62 On the distinction between 'price' and 'metaprice', see *ibid.*, esp. pp. 124–133. See also Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), p. 71.

63 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 124: 'un signe associé à une chose'.

64 Ibid., p. 132 (italics in original): '*méta*'.

the sense that, rather than representing a mere 'fact' or 'event'<sup>65</sup>, it emanates from 'a reflection on the price (a discussion, a comparison, a critique, a justification, etc.)'<sup>66</sup>.

Prices can be challenged in numerous ways, two of which are particularly important:

- (a) *silently*, when, based on the competition principle, a buyer decides to change suppliers;
- (b) *verbally*, when – as is common in insufficiently competitive environments – a buyer explicitly calls a supplier's price(s) into question.<sup>67</sup>

Rather than assuming that the competition principle that is built into capitalist market economies is 'pure and perfect'<sup>68</sup>, a critical sociology of material and symbolic exchanges needs to account for the extent to which social networks are shot through with power relations. Market-driven economies are characterized by 'a difference of *power* between supplier(s) and buyer(s)<sup>69</sup>, producers and consumers, workers and capitalists.

Given the discursive nature of social relations, in every economy the *construction of value* is inextricably linked to the *justification of price*.<sup>70</sup> In many cases, the explicit justification of a price emerges in response to the buyer challenging the price demanded by the seller.<sup>71</sup> To the degree that *processes of valorization*<sup>72</sup> cannot be divorced from *processes of justification*<sup>73</sup>,

65 On this point, see *ibid.*, p. 132: 'Les métaprix ne sont pas des faits, ils n'appartiennent pas à l'événement [...].'

66 *Ibid.*, pp. 132–133 (translation modified): 'd'une réflexion sur les prix (d'une discussion, d'une comparaison, d'une critique, d'une justification, etc.)'. In the original version, the word 'price' appears in the plural [*les prix*].

67 On these points, see *ibid.*, pp. 134–138. Cf. Hirschman (1970) and Hirschman (2013 [1977]).

68 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 134: 'pure et parfaite'.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 134 (italics in original): 'une différence de *pouvoir* entre offreur(s) et demandeur(s)'.

70 See *ibid.*, pp. 138–144: 'La valeur comme justification du prix'. See *ibid.*, p. 138: 'Nous définirons la valeur comme étant un dispositif de justification du prix.'

71 See *ibid.*, p. 138: 'La justification du prix peut soit être une réponse à la contestation du prix demandé'.

72 See *ibid.*, p. 140 (italics in original): 'un *processus de valorisation*'.

73 See *ibid.*, pp. 13, 111, 113, 114, 133–139, 143–144, 149, 160, 172–173, 195, 235,

different social values are attached to different monetary prices in different interactional contexts.<sup>74</sup>

In economic trade, 'the role of *reflexivity*'<sup>75</sup> is crucial. For 'the seller must *convince* the buyer that what he [or she] offers is acceptable at a certain price'<sup>76</sup>. Within liberal-capitalist settings, both parties enjoy 'the freedom to criticize'<sup>77</sup> and, thus, draw on their 'reflexive capacity'<sup>78</sup> when grappling with '*things + prices*'<sup>79</sup>, as they navigate their way through endless supply-and-demand chains. When doing so, actors need to put forward 'arguments permitting [them] to justify and to criticize the relationship between a thing and a price'<sup>80</sup>.

Such an arguably *hermeneutic* conception of the economy<sup>81</sup> obliges us to take seriously the *interpretive* resources mobilized by social actors when establishing a more or less *meaningful* relationship with things and prices. Inevitably, their lives are shaped by processes of production, distribution, circulation, and consumption. Without them, there would be no capitalist exchange of goods and services. Yet, these *economic processes*

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242, 375, and 467. On the concept of '*justification*' in Boltanskian thought, see, for example: Blokker and Brighenti (2011); Boltanski (2002); Boltanski (2009b); Boltanski and Thévenot (1991); Boltanski and Thévenot (2006 [1991]); Borghi (2011); Corcuff (1998); Eulriet (2014); Habermas (2004 [1999]); Jetté (2003); Lemieux (2014); Livet (2009); Müller-Doohm (2000); Silber (2011); Stark (2009); Stark (2017); Susen (2017e); Turner (2007); Vaisey (2009); Wagner (1999).

74 See Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 138: 'Attacher la valeur au prix [...]'.

75 See *ibid.*, pp. 193–195 (italics added): 'Le rôle de la réflexivité'. See *ibid.*, pp. 17, 171, 189, 190, 193–195, 499–500, and 504. On the concept of '*reflexivity*', see, for example, Susen (2016b). In addition, see Susen (2007), pp. 9, 11, 19, 20, 23, 25, 35, 41, 52, 57, 94, 119, 120, 133–137, 139, 145n6, 215, 216, 222, 225, 226, 227n29, 235, 236, 243, 249, 256, 262, 269n7, 276, 287, 293, 296, 308, 309, 311, 312, 313, and 314.

76 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 193 (italics added): 'l'offreur doit convaincre le demandeur que ce qu'il offre est valable à un certain prix'.

77 *Ibid.*, p. 193: 'la liberté de critiquer'.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 193: 'capacité réflexive'.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 193 (italics in original): '*choses + prix*'.

80 *Ibid.*, p. 194: 'arguments permettant de justifier ou de critiquer la relation entre une chose et un prix'.

81 Cf. Lavoie (1990), Prychitko (1995), and Thompson (2017). On the *justification and critique of prices*, see Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), pp. 13, 111–114, 133–139, 143–144, 149, 160, 172–173, 195, 235, 242, 375, and 467.

– far from being reducible to 'social facts' that exist independently of human experience, understanding, and reflection – *are embedded in a world of purposive, regulative, and projective actions*. In capitalist societies, multiple 'forms of valorization exert an impact on the organization of commodities'<sup>82</sup> insofar as they are influenced by, and in turn influence, 'the composition of *discourses about things*'<sup>83</sup> that are regarded as commodities and, as such, are associated with prices. From a positivist perspective, the economy is tantamount to a 'universe of things considered *independently* of all discourse'<sup>84</sup>. Challenging this 'positivist logic'<sup>85</sup>, Boltanski and Esquerre insist on the hermeneutic features of capitalist systems, drawing attention to the pivotal role that 'critique and justification'<sup>86</sup> play in framing economic transactions.

### 3. Society and Enrichment: Between Things and Persons

According to Boltanski and Esquerre, the rise of the *society of enrichment*<sup>87</sup> marks the arrival of an unprecedented era. 'The emergence of new sources of the creation of wealth is one of the principal factors commonly mentioned to make sense of the changes within the composition of a social formation.'<sup>88</sup> In Marxist terms, the incessant development of the *forces*

82 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 194: 'les formes de mise en valeur n'exercent un effet sur l'organisation de la marchandise'.

83 Ibid., p. 194 (italics added): 'la composition des discours sur les choses'. On Boltanski and Esquerre's conception of 'discourse', see also, for instance, Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), p. 68. On Boltanski and Esquerre's conception of 'narrative', see Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), pp. 169–170, 175–176, 283, 422–423, and 444; Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), pp. 69–70; Fraser (2017), p. 61. On Boltanski and Esquerre's emphasis on the discursive construction of the value of objects, see *ibid.*, pp. 57 and 60.

84 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 194 (italics added): '[u]n univers de choses considérées indépendamment de tout discours'.

85 See *ibid.*, p. 194: 'logique [...] positiviste'.

86 Ibid., p. 375: 'critique et justification'. On Boltanski and Esquerre's emphasis on *processes of critique and justification*, see Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), pp. 70 and 71, as well as Fraser (2017), pp. 57 and 60.

87 See Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), esp. pp. 441–457 (Chapter XIII): 'Les contours de la société de l'enrichissement'.

88 Ibid., p. 441: 'L'émergence de nouvelles sources de création de richesses est l'un des principaux facteurs communément invoqués pour interpréter les

of production manifests itself in the constant transformation of the *relations of production*, which are embedded in perpetually evolving *modes of production*. Rather than focusing exclusively on spheres of production, however, Boltanski and Esquerre reflect on two elements that are fundamental to the constitution of any society: (a) *things* and (b) *persons*.<sup>89</sup>

A key characteristic by which *things* and *persons* are divided is their *lifespan*. In industrial societies, the former tend to have a shorter lifespan than the latter. 'One of the most radical changes introduced by the mass production of standard things has been to populate the world with things, which are conceived of as having a lifespan that is largely inferior to that of persons, as is the case with the majority of technical artefacts.'<sup>90</sup> The main reason for this discrepancy is that 'the life expectancy of human beings has been extended'<sup>91</sup> significantly, due to a general improvement in standards of living and considerable advancements in levels of health and medicine. Another important reason is that most industrial products are designed to have a limited lifespan, so that they have to be replaced with new ones – representing an economic cycle that is in the interest of profit-seeking sellers.

Aiming to identify the central features of *enrichment*, Boltanski and Esquerre distinguish two meanings of this term:

- (a) enrichment of '*things* already there'<sup>92</sup> – for instance, the enrichment of a natural resource, such as metal;
- (b) enrichment of *persons*, based on access to and accumulation of socially relevant – notably material, symbolic, and/or financial – resources.

It is the latter, rather than the former, meaning that is vital to Boltanski and Esquerre's analysis. In the advanced economies of 'the West',

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changements dans la composition d'une formation sociale.'

89 See *ibid.*, p. 441: 'une société est une composition de choses et de personnes'. On this distinction, see also Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), p. 75.

90 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 442: 'L'un des changements les plus radicaux introduits par la production de masse de choses standard a été de peupler le monde de choses conçues pour avoir une durée de vie très inférieure à celle des personnes comme c'est le cas de la plupart des artefacts techniques.'

91 *Ibid.*, p. 443: 'l'espérance de vie des humains s'est allongée'.

92 *Ibid.*, p. 11 (*italics added*): 'des choses déjà là'.

members of the wealthy sectors of society tend to use 'commerce [as] a supplementary source of enrichment'<sup>93</sup> and, in many cases, significant amounts of income. In these economies, enrichment tends to be generated by and aimed at the affluent members of society.<sup>94</sup> Irrespective of whether we take into consideration 'the arts, especially fine arts, culture, antiques trade, the creation of foundations and museums, luxury goods industry, heritagization, and tourism'<sup>95</sup> – all of these spheres are essential to the 'economy of enrichment'<sup>96</sup>.

This 'economic reorientation towards the rich'<sup>97</sup>, and hence towards the privileged sectors of society, taps into a far-reaching trend of the early twenty-first century: there has been an 'increase in inequalities at the global level'<sup>98</sup>. Thus, the number of poor and extremely poor as well as the number of rich and super-rich have 'significantly increased over the course of the past twenty years'<sup>99</sup>. While the gap between poor and rich has grown, the presence of both 'underprivileged' and 'overprivileged' social groups has steadily augmented in recent decades.

Contemporary societies, therefore, are shaped by both tendencies towards *impoverishment*<sup>100</sup> and tendencies towards *enrichment*<sup>101</sup>. In their inquiry, Boltanski and Esquerre choose to focus on the latter, rather than the former, suggesting that this analytical emphasis enables them to flesh

93 Ibid., p. 11: 'commerce, une source supplémentaire d'enrichissement'.

94 See *ibid.*, p. 11.

95 Ibid., p. 11: 'les arts, particulièrement les arts plastiques, la culture, le commerce d'objets anciens, la création de fondations et de musées, l'industrie du luxe, la patrimonialisation et le tourisme'.

96 On the concept of 'économie de l'enrichissement', see *ibid.*, pp. 11, 17, 26, 52, 56, 67–72, 94, 97, 152, 221, 239, 251, 294, 299, 314, 320–325, 378, 391, 399, 400, 403, 443, 476, and 487–495. See also, for example: Boltanski and Esquerre (2014b); Boltanski and Esquerre (2016); Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b). In addition, see Fraser (2017) and Outhwaite (2018).

97 See Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), pp. 63–65: '[u]ne réorientation économique vers les riches'.

98 Ibid., p. 63: 'L'augmentation des inégalités au niveau mondial'.

99 Ibid., p. 63: 'a considérablement augmenté au cours de vingt dernières années'.

100 See, for example, Butterwegge (2009).

101 See Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), pp. 67–104 (Chapter II): 'Vers l'enrichissement'.



out the nature of historical trends that are of paramount importance to the structural development of contemporary Western societies. When doing so, they emphasize that their own account of '*the economy of enrichment*'<sup>102</sup> fundamentally differs from Bourdieu's notion of '*symbolic economy*'<sup>103</sup>. The use of the adjective '*symbolic*'<sup>104</sup> is, in their view, 'both too broad and too vague'<sup>105</sup> to capture the specificity of the dynamics shaping highly stratified exchanges of goods and services in advanced societies. Bourdieu's perspective, they posit, remains caught up in the orthodox Marxist opposition 'material' vs. 'ideological' (and, correspondingly, in the philosophical division 'materialism' vs. 'idealism').<sup>106</sup> Contrary to this – arguably artificial – separation between 'material' and 'symbolic' realms of society, they maintain that 'all things that are part of an economy can be considered under these two aspects'<sup>107</sup>. On this interpretation, the distinction between 'material' and 'symbolic' designates a conceptual, rather than an ontological, differentiation. Even if, however, one wishes to distinguish between 'material economy' and 'immaterial economy'<sup>108</sup> (or, in their words, between 'the trade of things'<sup>109</sup> and 'the trade of "immaterial" goods'<sup>110</sup>), these two market spheres are inextricably linked.

102 Ibid., p. 70 (italics added): 'l'économie de l'enrichissement'.

103 Ibid., p. 70 (italics added): 'l'économie symbolique'. See also, for instance: Bourdieu (1971); Bourdieu (1977); Bourdieu (1992); Bourdieu (1992 [1977]); Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992b). In addition, see, for example: Addi (2001); Grenfell and Kelly (1999); Honneth (1984); Jurt (2004); Ledeneva (1994); Leneveu (2002); Mauger (2005); Peter (2004); Susen (2007), esp. Chapter 5, section 3; Susen (2011b), esp. pp. 176–184 and 193–197; Susen (2011d); Susen (2013a); Susen (2013c); Susen (2013d); Susen (2013e); Susen (2014e); Susen (2014 [2015]); Susen (2015c); Susen (2016a); Susen (2016c); Susen (2016b); Susen (2017a); Susen (2018c); Terray (2003); Wacquant (2002 [1993]).

104 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 70: 'symbolique'.

105 Ibid., p. 70: 'à la fois trop large et trop vague'.

106 On this point, see *ibid.*, p. 70.

107 Ibid., p. 71: 'toutes les choses qui s'insèrent dans une économie peuvent être envisagées sous ces deux aspects'. On this point, see also *ibid.*, p. 331.

108 On this distinction, see *ibid.*, pp. 239–242: 'Économie matérielle, économie immatérielle'.

109 Ibid., p. 241: 'le commerce des choses'.

110 Ibid., p. 241: 'le commerce de biens « immatériels »'.

Over the past decades, a profound 'economic change'<sup>111</sup> has been taking place in Western Europe. This transition is epitomized in the consolidation of an *economy of enrichment*, centred upon the creation of *new sources of wealth*.<sup>112</sup> It is not the case that, in this context, material goods have lost all significance. It is the case, however, that those 'goods often characterized as immaterial'<sup>113</sup>, along with those commonly described as 'material', constitute a major source of economic profit. Goods may be considered *immaterial* not only in the sense that they have 'a "symbolic" dimension'<sup>114</sup>, but also in the sense that they may be regarded as having a life that is seemingly '*independent* of their physical foundation'<sup>115</sup> – a life whose discursive reconstruction may become the decisive reference point when determining their value.

#### 4. Cultural Workers and Cultural Capital: Between Privilege and Precariousness

The aforementioned development is expressed in 'the economic condition of *cultural workers*'<sup>116</sup>, who, as 'creators'<sup>117</sup>, are the protagonists of the 'society of enrichment'<sup>118</sup>. It is no accident, then, that the acquisition of '*cultural capital*'<sup>119</sup> is crucial to dynamics of social positioning within an

111 Ibid., p. 107: 'un changement économique'.

112 On this point, see *ibid.*, p. 107.

113 Ibid., p. 239: 'profits des biens souvent qualifiés d'immatériels'.

114 Ibid., p. 239 (italics added): 'une dimension « symbolique »'.

115 Ibid., p. 239 (italics added): 'indépendamment de leur assise physique'.

116 See *ibid.*, pp. 459–467 (italics added): 'La condition économique des travailleurs de la culture'.

117 Ibid., p. 459: 'créateurs'.

118 See *ibid.*, esp. pp. 441–457 (Chapter XIII): 'Les contours de la société de l'enrichissement'.

119 Ibid., p. 445: 'capital culturel'. On *Bourdieu's conception of 'capital'*, see, for example: Bourdieu (1975b); Bourdieu (1979b); Bourdieu (1986); Bourdieu (2013 [1978]). See also, for instance: Albrecht (2002); Aldridge (1998); Beasley-Murray (2000); Calhoun (1995); Gouanvic (2005); Hakim (2011); Hakim (2012); Herz (1996); Neveu (2013); Reay (2004); Robbins (2005); Shilling (2004); Sullivan (2001); Susen (2007), chapters 5–8; Susen (2011b), pp. 181, 194, and 195; Susen (2011c), pp. 368, 369, 370, 372, 384, 386, 387, 389, 390, 392, 403, 406, 408, and 409; Susen (2013d), pp. 210, 214–215, 219, 222, 226, and 229; Susen (2013e), pp. 324–325, 329, 349, 354, 370, and 371; Susen (2016a); Susen

economy oriented towards, and driven by, symbolically mediated forms of enrichment: the passing-on of culturally codified resources through families, schools, universities, and educational institutions from one generation to another allows for the accumulation of symbolic profits, from which those at the upper end of the social hierarchy tend to benefit the most.<sup>120</sup> 'People who dispose of cultural capital'<sup>121</sup> permitting them to enjoy high degrees of symbolic distinction 'play a central role in an economy of enrichment'<sup>122</sup>, as illustrated in 'the rise of their numbers since the 1960s-1970s'<sup>123</sup>.

Literary or artistic types of cultural capital<sup>124</sup> are tantamount to 'commercial competences'<sup>125</sup>, insofar as, potentially, they put those who are equipped with valuable resources in economically advantageous positions over those who are not. There is no doubt that 'artistic and cultural activities, notably in the domains of luxury and tourism, [...] make a significant contribution to capitalist prosperity'<sup>126</sup>. The advent of the 'credential society'<sup>127</sup>, which is closely related to the 'crisis of the salary society'<sup>128</sup>, reflects the emergence of an era in which 'cultural professionals'<sup>129</sup> exercise substantial influence on the established order. They do so by mobilizing expert resources derived from 'organizational, administrative, and statistical devices'<sup>130</sup>, to which they have access and upon which

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(2014e), pp. 105 and 107; Susen (2016b), pp. 53 and 71; Susen (2017a), pp. 135, 141–142, 143, and 146; Susen and Turner (2011), pp. xix, xxiii, and xxvi; Swain (2003); Urban (2003); Verter (2003); Wacquant (2004 [1997]); Wacquant (2013).

120 On this point, see Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 445.

121 Ibid., p. 459: 'Les personnes qui disposent d'un capital culturel'.

122 Ibid., p. 459: 'jouent un rôle central dans un économie de l'enrichissement'.

123 Ibid., p. 459: 'l'augmentation de leur nombre depuis les années 1960-1970'.

124 See *ibid.*, p. 459: 'capital culturel littéraire ou artistique'.

125 Ibid., p. 459: 'compétences commerciales'.

126 Ibid., p. 484: 'les activités artistiques et culturelles notamment dans les domaines de luxe et du tourisme qui apportent une contribution non négligeable à la prospérité du capitalisme'.

127 Ibid., p. 468. See Collins (1979).

128 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 460: 'crise de la société salariale'.

129 Ibid., p. 468: 'professionnels de la culture'.

130 Ibid., p. 468: 'dispositifs organisationnels, administratifs et statistiques'.

they draw when engaging in different forms of 'valorization'<sup>131</sup>, without whose structuring function it would be impossible to 'sustain the economy of enrichment'<sup>132</sup>.

A striking phenomenon of the economy of enrichment, however, is 'the constraint of *self-exploitation*'<sup>133</sup>, which limits the room for agency enjoyed by cultural workers and intellectuals. The interactional spheres in which they operate are shaped by fundamental tensions – such as collaboration vs. competition, solidarity vs. rivalry, unity vs. division.<sup>134</sup> Notwithstanding their symbolically privileged position in society, large numbers of 'precarious intellectuals'<sup>135</sup> are obliged 'to promote themselves'<sup>136</sup> in 'intellectual fields'<sup>137</sup>. In many cases, they spend several years seeking to establish themselves (by working on research projects, pursuing academic studies, aiming to obtain university degrees, often at prestigious institutions) only to realize that – after having made a considerable mental, emotional, and financial investment – they find themselves in a vulnerable situation. If they are *very lucky*, they may end up working in a sector that is directly or indirectly related to their qualifications and experience. If they are *fairly lucky*, they may be able to secure employment in a sector that is largely or completely unrelated to their area of interest and/or field of expertise. If they are *unlucky*, they may not succeed in

131 Ibid., p. 485: 'la mise en valeur'.

132 Ibid., p. 485: 'soutient l'économie de l'enrichissement'.

133 Ibid., pp. 473–478 (italics added): 'La contrainte d'auto-exploitation'.

134 On this point, see *ibid.*, p. 473: 'un environnement qui est à la fois un monde commun et un espace de concurrence'.

135 Ibid., p. 474: 'intellectuels précaires'. On this point, see also, for example, Susen (2017f), pp. 34 ad 73.

136 See Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 474: 'ils se mettent eux-mêmes en valeur'.

137 Ibid., p. 474: 'champs intellectuels'. On *the sociology of 'intellectual fields'*, see, for instance: Baert (2017); Bautista (1987); Boschetti (1985); Boschetti (1988 [1985]); Bourdieu (1984b); Bourdieu (1993); Bourdieu (1993 [1984]-a); Bourdieu (1993 [1984]-b); Bourdieu (1993 [1984]-d); Collins (1998); Fritsch (2005); Fuller (2005); Fuller (2009); Gross (2002); Gross (2008); Kauppi (2000); Mahar (1990); Miller (2003); Nash (2005); Pecourt (2007); Pecourt (2008); Pels (1995); Picò and Pecourt (2013); Pinto (1991); Ringer (2000 [1990]); Schwengel (2003); Sintomer (2005); Sintomer (2011); Susen (2011d); Susen (2017f); Susen and Baert (2017a); Susen and Baert (2017b).

finding any job at all, forced to live on benefits and without a prosperous professional future.<sup>138</sup>

It appears, then, that in the era of 'neoliberalism, neomanagement, and financial capitalism [...], *people [are] responsible for their own exploitation*'<sup>139</sup>. Instead of breaking out of the straitjacket of economic heteronomy, imposed upon those seeking to realize the dream of artistic and/or intellectual autonomy, the protagonists of the cultural and creative industries of contemporary societies are immersed in a stratified horizon of class-divided realities. Far from having disappeared, the antagonism between *workers*, who sell their labour force, and *capitalists*, who own the means of production, continues to exist within the economy of enrichment.<sup>140</sup> Unlike the traditional or blue-collar proletariat, however, 'cultural workers' and 'knowledge workers' tend to be conceived of as a 'creative class'<sup>141</sup> and 'new class'<sup>142</sup>, whose members – insofar as they belong to a resourceful 'cognitariat'<sup>143</sup> – are driven by high degrees of dynamism, imagination, and innovation.

## 5. Capitalism and Neoliberalism: Between Crisis and Critique

The critique of capitalism is as old as capitalism itself. Yet, whereas between 1965 and 1975 the critique of capitalism intensified, reaching its peak in the revolts and radical social movements of 1968, between 1985

138 On this point, see Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), pp. 460, 464, 474, and 616–618. See also, for example: Bettahar and Choffel-Mailfert (2014); Tasset (2014a); Tasset (2014b); Tasset (2015).

139 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 476 (italics added): 'le « néolibéralisme », le « néomanagement » ou le « capitalisme financier » [...], les personnes responsables de leur exploitation'. On Boltanski and Esquerre's conception of '*exploitation*', see *ibid.*, pp. 398, 400, 475–477, 488–490, and 605. See also Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), pp. 71 and 73–76, as well as Fraser (2017), pp. 57 and 61–64. On Boltanski and Esquerre's conception of '*self-exploitation*', see Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), pp. 473–478. In addition, see Foucault (2004), esp. pp. 33, 55, 68, and 247, as well as Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), pp. 149–152.

140 See Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 477: 'des travailleurs, ne possédant que leur force de travail [...], et des propriétaires des moyens de production'.

141 *Ibid.*, p. 479: 'classe créative'. Cf. Fraser (2017), p. 61.

142 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 479: 'nouvelle classe'.

143 *Ibid.*, p. 479: 'cognitariat'.

and 1995 it became less and less significant, reaching its lowest point with the collapse of state socialism in 1989/1990. From a Fukuyamaian perspective, this dissolution of one of the most influential macro-teleological projects of modernity signals 'the end of history'<sup>144</sup>, epitomized in the consolidation of liberalism as the triumphant ideology of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.<sup>145</sup> The implosion of state socialism in several parts of the world has strongly 'delegitimized the parties and trade unions of communist inspiration'<sup>146</sup> in Western countries. In this new global political climate, even the most powerful 'communist' player, China, although it has maintained its official ideology, has been converted into a market-driven, albeit state-controlled, society. The 'end of the Cold War'<sup>147</sup> dissolved the ideological rivalry between the two diametrically opposed systems of capitalism and communism: whereas the latter – despite a few real or nominal exceptions (China, North Korea, Vietnam, Laos, and Cuba) – has effectively disappeared, the former has established itself as the hegemonic mode of production across the globe.<sup>148</sup>

Another key factor contributing to the dominant position of capitalism on the world stage is its enormous *adaptability*.<sup>149</sup> '[T]he capacity of capitalism to overcome crisis'<sup>150</sup> has been essential not only to its survival

144 On *Francis Fukuyama's conception of 'the end of history'*, see Fukuyama (1992), esp. pp. 276–277. On this point, see also, for example: Blackburn (2000), p. 267; Boltanski (2008), p. 63; Bourdieu and Boltanski (2008 [1976]), p. 53; Eagleton (1995), esp. p. 66; Fukuyama (2002); Good and Velody (1998), pp. 5 and 9; Hammond (2011), pp. 305–306, 310, 312, and 315; Horrocks (1999), pp. 7 and 13; Kellner (2007), p. 119; Osamu (2002); Paulus (2001), p. 745; Susen (2014e), pp. 103–104 and 110; Susen (2015a), pp. 169, 170, 271, and 317n207; Susen (2016c), pp. 204 and 212; Williams (2010), p. 309.

145 On this point, see Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 482.

146 *Ibid.*, p. 482: 'décrédibilisé les partis et les syndicats d'inspiration communiste'.

147 See Susen (2015a), pp. 26, 32, 35, 126, 169, 170, 194, and 306n305.

148 On this point, see, for example: Blackburn (2000), p. 267; Boron (1999), p. 63; Davies (2014); Delanty (2000), pp. 145–146; Eagleton (1995), esp. pp. 59–60 and 69–70; Gane and Gane (2007), pp. 134–135; Hammond (2011), pp. 305–306 and 310–315; Paulus (2001), p. 745; Sloterdijk (2013 [2005]); Susen (2012a), pp. 294, 303, and 307–308; Torfing (1999), pp. 1–2.

149 On this point, see Susen (2012a), esp. p. 287. See also Holloway (2010), esp. pp. 6–7, 17, 51, 65, and 180. Cf. Holloway and Susen (2013).

150 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 482: 'la capacité du capitalisme à surmonter la crise'. Cf. Habermas (1988 [1973]). On *the sociology of crisis*, see, for

but also to its ability to assert itself as the seemingly most efficient economic form of organization available in the early twenty-first century. Granted, the recent global financial crisis, which peaked in 2008, was a stark reminder of the fact that capitalism is an inherently unstable and volatile socio-economic system.<sup>151</sup> Yet, the fact that the political left has failed to capitalize on this major event (in terms of both its causes and its consequences) indicates that, paradoxically, *in times of systemic crisis the legitimacy of capitalism may be reinforced by normative agendas that make its presence appear not only inevitable but also desirable*. In light of this tension-laden situation, actors who hold state power have been able to push through neoliberal austerity policies on a large scale, often with devastating implications for the most vulnerable groups in society.<sup>152</sup>

The transformation of contemporary capitalism involves 'the reorganization of businesses'<sup>153</sup>, a large part of which recruit and make use of the abundantly available work force in low-salary and low-tax countries, thereby increasing their profits and putting themselves in a stronger position when competing with other economic players in the global market. The gradual shift 'from collective property to private property'<sup>154</sup> – illustrated in neoliberal policies of *economic deregulation*<sup>155</sup> – has 'undermined and dismantled the working class'<sup>156</sup>. This radical transition has eroded (a) its *institutional* capacity to defend its members' interests through trade unions, (b) its *socio-cultural* capacity to build upon a collectively shared

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example, Cordero (2017) and Susen (2017c).

151 On this point, see, for instance: Adkins (2011); Adkins (2014); Berberoglu (2010); Browne and Susen (2014); Brummer (2009 [2008]); Cordero (2017); Doyran (2011); Farrar and Mayes (2013); Habermas (1988 [1973]); Jessop (2001); Lascelles and Carn (2009); Mimiko (2012); Susen (2012a); Susen (2017c); Turner (2008).

152 On this point, see Browne and Susen (2014). See also Susen (2017b), pp. 156, 169–170, and 178.

153 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 482: 'la réorganisation des entreprises'.

154 Ibid., p. 482: 'de la propriété collective à la propriété privée'.

155 On this point, see Susen (2015a), pp. 124–125 and 130–135.

156 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 482: 'a désarçonné et démantelé la classe ouvrière'. Cf. Fraser (2017), p. 58: 'the concomitant decline in working-class power'.



identity, and (c) its *ideological* capacity to offer a viable alternative to capitalism. In short, we are confronted with the gradual disempowerment of the working class on a global scale.

In light of the previous reflections, a thorough 'critique of neoliberalism'<sup>157</sup> needs to address the following *key aspects of the current world order*:

- (a) '*the power of financial markets*'<sup>158</sup> in national and international trade zones, leading to the emergence of a 'casino capitalism'<sup>159</sup>, characterized by unprecedented levels of monetary flows and economic volatility;
- (b) '*the difficulties of nation-states to deal with debt*'<sup>160</sup>, especially if and when they are expected to repay unrealistically high volumes of money to powerful lenders, while seeing themselves obliged to impose radical austerity policies on their populations;
- (c) '*forms of domination through work*'<sup>161</sup>, which are exercised not only by regulating labour in accordance with the systemic imperatives inherent in the capitalist mode of production, but also by normalizing 'mass unemployment'<sup>162</sup>;
- (d) '*the exploitation of so-called "natural" resources*'<sup>163</sup>, affecting not only several so-called developing countries but also numerous "'native" populations'<sup>164</sup>, whose environment is controlled and, in many cases, destroyed by exogenous political and economic powers;

157 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 482: 'critique du néolibéralisme'. On this point, see also, for instance: Berberoglu (2010); Boltanski and Esquerre (2014a); Browne and Susen (2014); Davies (2014); Gane (2014); Harvey (2006); Marcos (1997); Soederberg, Menz, and Cerny (2005); Susen (2015a), pp. 124, 134, 185, 194, 195, 201, 257, and 273.

158 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 482 (italics added): 'la puissance des marchés financiers'.

159 On *the concept of 'casino capitalism'*, see, for instance, Strange (1997 [1986]). See also Susen (2015a), pp. 124, 127, and 130.

160 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 482 (italics added): 'les difficultés des États-nations confrontées à la dette'.

161 Ibid., p. 482 (italics added): 'des modes de domination par le travail'.

162 Ibid., p. 482: 'chômage de masse'.

163 Ibid., p. 482 (italics added): 'l'exploitation des ressources dites « naturelles »'.

164 Ibid., p. 482: 'des peuples « autochtones »'.



- (e) '*the spread of an "individualist" morality*'<sup>165</sup>, which constitutes one of the cornerstones of philosophical, political, and economic liberalism and which permeates the behavioural, ideological, and institutional modes of functioning adopted by large-scale populations in the twenty-first century;
- (f) '*the decline of solidarities and even the dissolution of collectives*'<sup>166</sup>, expressed in generalized tendencies towards social atomization and 'individual responsabilization'<sup>167</sup>, resulting in the consolidation of low-trust societies, whose members' lives are shaped by high degrees of anomie and alienation;
- (g) constant '*competition between all and at all levels*'<sup>168</sup>, generating divided and divisive communities, whose normative compass is dominated by instrumental and strategic, rather than communicative or substantive, rationality.

In the current socio-political climate, so-called 'metanarratives'<sup>169</sup> – based on grand ideas, utopian ideals, and/or major ideologies – appear to be less and less significant. Rightly or wrongly, this trend has been interpreted as a sign of the arrival of the 'postmodern age'<sup>170</sup>, which, according to some commentators, constitutes a historical condition characterized by 'the end of metanarratives'<sup>171</sup>. Given the 'multitude of actors'<sup>172</sup> shap-

165 Ibid., p. 482 (italics added): 'la généralisation d'une morale « individualiste »'.

166 Ibid., p. 482 (italics added): 'le déclin des solidarités et même la dissolution des collectifs'.

167 Ibid., p. 482: 'responsabilisation individuelle'.

168 Ibid., p. 483 (italics added): 'la concurrence entre tous et à tous les niveaux'.

169 On *the concept of 'metanarrative'*, see, for instance: Susen (2015a), esp. Chapter 4. See also Susen (2016d) and Susen (2017d).

170 On this point, see Susen (2015a), esp. Introduction and Chapter 4; see also Susen (2016d) and Susen (2017d). It should be noted that Boltanski and Esquerre explicitly distance themselves from the contention that we have been witnessing the rise of 'a "postmodern" capitalism'; see Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), p. 75.

171 On *'the end of metanarratives'*, see, for example, Susen (2015a), esp. Chapter 4. See also Susen (2016d) and Susen (2017d). In addition, see, for instance: Coole (1998); Friedrich (2012); Halttunen (1999); Kellner (2007); Kellner (1987); Pieters (2000); Stone (1979); Thompson (1993); White (1980); White (1984); White (1987); Zagorin (1999).

172 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 485: 'multitude d'acteurs'.

ing societal developments, there is no single individual or collective subject capable of monopolizing the stage of history for its own purposes.

## 6. Markets and Culture: Between Authenticity and Inauthenticity

At the heart of the economy of enrichment lies the contradiction between *authenticity* and *inauthenticity*.<sup>173</sup> This contradiction manifests itself in one of the most curious paradoxes of the economy of enrichment: on the one hand, its actors are '*anti-market*', in the sense that they seek to bypass the constraining mechanisms of commodification, commercialization, and objectification; on the other hand, its actors are '*pro-market*', in the sense that they buy into the logic of capitalism, ranging from those who barely succeed in making ends meet to those benefiting – in some cases, considerably – from social processes of enrichment.

In this respect, tourism may serve as an example. In the early twenty-first century, France has one of the most developed economies of enrichment in the world – not least because it enjoys the status of being 'the first global destination for tourism'<sup>174</sup>. An obvious paradox of the tourism industry can be described as follows: while most of its promoters aim to exploit the idea of providing people with '*authentic experiences*'<sup>175</sup> in different places, vacations are packaged in terms of '*standardized travelling*'<sup>176</sup>, especially if they fall into the category of '*mass tourism*'<sup>177</sup>. Ultimately, the vacation industry is driven by profit maximization, rather than by the ambition to circumvent the hegemonic influence of the capitalist market. Ironically, '*patrimonial sites*'<sup>178</sup>, whose incommensurable value may derive from their '*ancestral and unique*'<sup>179</sup> history, are reduced

173 See *ibid.*, pp. 31, 34, 174, 209, 265, 268, 269, 283, 302, 331, 337, 341, 363, 393, 568, and 596. Cf. Fraser (2017), p. 61.

174 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 320: '*première destination mondiale pour le tourisme*'.

175 *Ibid.*, p. 320 (italics added): '*les expériences authentiques*'.

176 *Ibid.*, p. 320 (italics added): '*voyage standardisé*'.

177 *Ibid.*, p. 320: '*le tourisme de masse*'.

178 *Ibid.*, p. 321: '*sites patrimoniaux*'.

179 *Ibid.*, p. 321: '*d'ancestraux et d'unique*'.

to commodities, the experience of which can be bought by financially resourced consumers.

'[T]he relation between the merchant *exploitation* of the past and the development of ideologies that place the emphasis on *culture*<sup>180</sup> illustrates the tension between instrumental rationality (*Zweckrationalität*) and value rationality (*Wertrationalität*) – that is, between *using culture as a means to an end* and *treating culture as an end in itself*. No matter how hard tourist agencies – including its 'alternative' variants – may intend to sell '[t]he world of art and culture as if it constituted a realm outside capitalism'<sup>181</sup>, they remain trapped in the stifling horizon of a market-driven system, capable of converting the quest for cultural authenticity into a commodity.

High-end markets of luxury goods and services, including those in tourism, may be shaped in such a way that their protagonists can purport to replace the industrial tendency towards mechanical *standardization* with self-legitimizing claims to social *distinction*, thereby challenging the ubiquity of *inauthenticity* by promising experiences of *authenticity* to the privileged – that is, financially fortunate – members of humanity. At the heart of the enrichment economy, however, lies the contradiction between the reality of *inauthenticity*, *market-dependence*, and *means-to-an-end* and the pursuit of *authenticity*, *market-transcendence*, and *ends-in-themselves*. Those immersed in, and benefitting from, 'important characteristics of the economy of enrichment aim not to resolve this contradiction, but to render it acceptable, or at least habitual, as if it were self-evident, in the sense that one could learn to live with it'<sup>182</sup>.

A major task for critical sociologists of enrichment consists in demonstrating that the myths by which capitalist markets tend to be sustained

180 Ibid., p. 321 (italics added): 'la relation entre l'exploitation marchande du passé et le développement d'idéologies qui mettent l'accent sur la culture'.

181 Ibid., p. 321: 'Le monde de l'art et de la culture [...] comme s'il s'agissait d'un dehors du capitalisme [...] nouvelles formes d'exploitation'.

182 Ibid., p. 324: '[d]es traits importants d'une économie de l'enrichissement visent non à résoudre cette contradiction, mais à la rendre sinon acceptable, au moins habituelle, comme si elle allait de soi, de façon à ce qu'on puisse apprendre à vivre avec'. On this point, see also Harvey (2001).

are – to use Marx's famous phrase – 'real sham'<sup>183</sup>: they are 'real' because they have a tangible impact on social reality; at the same time, they are 'sham' because they conceal the underlying logic that permeates human relations in capitalist formations. Irrespective of the question of whether or not, in market-driven societies, *enrichment for some* actually means *impoverishment for most*, the contradiction between authenticity and inauthenticity poses a fundamental challenge to the civilizational accomplishments of humanity in the era of modernity.

### 7. Valorizability and Temporality: Between the Present and the Past

Every economy depends on the exploitation, distribution, circulation, and consumption of different resources. In the economy of enrichment, one resource is of supreme importance: 'this resource is *the past*'<sup>184</sup>. Far from being reducible to a peripheral expression of a nostalgic attachment to something that is no longer relevant to the present, the past constitutes not only an integral element of the enrichment economy, but also a key reference point for those participating in the hermeneutic construction of its reality. As such, it is vital to both the material and the symbolic reproduction of its existence. Its centrality is reflected in the fact that the economy of enrichment 'rests not mainly on the production of *new* objects but, above all, on the valorization of objects that are *already there*'<sup>185</sup>. In fact, the older an item is, the more precious it may be for those seeking to acquire it. Its 'embeddedness in the past'<sup>186</sup> may be its principal selling point and, as such, more decisive than its use value or aesthetic value in defining its exchange value. The commodified exploitation of temporali-

183 On Marx's concept of 'real sham' [realer Schein], see, for example, Fischer (1978). See also, for instance: Susen (2007), p. 165; Susen (2014c), p. 345. In addition, see, for example: Haug (1999b); Marxhausen (1999); Rehmann (2004); Reitz (2004); Steiner (2008); Vester (2008); Weber (1995); Wolff (2004).

184 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 11 (italics in original): '[...] cette ressource est *le passé*.'

185 Ibid., p. 11 (italics added): 'prend appui non pas, principalement, sur la production d'objets neufs, mais surtout sur la mise en valeur d'objets déjà là'.

186 Ibid., p. 11: 'ancrage dans le passé'.

ty is essential to the ways in which objects are signified and resignified by 'prestigious brands of the luxury goods industry'<sup>187</sup>, which seek to make financial profits from attaching a specific – history-laden – type of worth to objects, whose value is, to a large degree, derived from their age.

### 8. Non-Reproducibility and Hierarchy: Between Distinction and Domination

The development of the enrichment economy hinges on 'the increase in number, activity, and wealth of collectors, in the proper sense of the term'<sup>188</sup>. The growing significance of social practices motivated by the pursuit of the '*collection form*'<sup>189</sup> of objects, followed by dedicated buyers, appears to indicate 'the displacement of capitalism towards new domains of activity'<sup>190</sup> driven by 'new forms of valorization'<sup>191</sup>. One aspect to which these buyers attribute particular importance is the notion that the value of an object is marked by its 'singularity'<sup>192</sup> or 'rarity'<sup>193</sup>, as opposed to the commonality and frequency of 'standard objects'<sup>194</sup>. These objects are unique and 'exceptional'<sup>195</sup> – not only because they stand out due to their functional or aesthetic properties, but also because, unlike industrial items, they are '*not reproducible*'<sup>196</sup>. Irrespective of whether one conceives of their remarkable features as 'natural and absolute'<sup>197</sup> or 'cultural and relative'<sup>198</sup>, the *non-reproducibility* of particular objects is regard-

187 Ibid., p. 11: 'des marques prestigieuses de l'industrie du luxe'.

188 Ibid., p. 287: 'l'augmentation du nombre, de l'activité et de la richesse des collectionneurs, au sens propre du terme'.

189 Ibid., p. 287 (italics in original): '*la forme collection*'.

190 Ibid., p. 287: 'le déplacement du capitalisme vers de nouveaux domaines d'activité'.

191 Ibid., p. 287: 'nouvelles formes de mise en valeur'.

192 Ibid., p. 287: 'singularité'.

193 Ibid., p. 287: 'rareté'.

194 Ibid., p. 287: 'objets standard'.

195 Ibid., p. 287: 'exceptionnelles'.

196 Ibid., p. 288: 'pas reproductibles' (italics added).

197 Ibid., p. 287: 'naturelle et absolue'. Cf. Ricardo (1966).

198 In opposition to the previous point.

ed by their owners and/or buyers as symptomatic of their irreducible authenticity in the enrichment economy.

Human actors are equipped with a dispositional apparatus of perception, comprehension, appreciation, and judgment. The economy of enrichment relies on its participants' 'cognitive capacity permitting them to appreciate the value of things considered "exceptional"'<sup>199</sup> and non-reproducible. As a tension-laden economy, it is organized around diametrically opposed spheres: 'between work and leisure (or non-work); between necessity and surplus; between action oriented towards commerce (business) and action oriented towards disinterest'<sup>200</sup>. The former sphere is marked by *reproducibility*, since it is driven by instrumental rationality, allowing for the more or less efficient organization of capitalist society. The latter sphere is characterized by *non-reproducibility*, since it is shaped primarily by creativity, enabling actors to escape the stifling logic of the systemic imperatives that permeate target-driven realities.

In a psychoanalytic fashion, one may interpret the enjoyment of 'pleasure, passion, [and] consumption'<sup>201</sup> as reflecting 'a simultaneously aesthetic and sexual orientation'<sup>202</sup> and, consequently, as providing 'a substitute for sexual activity'<sup>203</sup>. The social construction of *gender binaries* fits into the aforementioned scheme of normative oppositions: on the one hand, the '*masculine*' is associated with 'business, money, labour, science, sport, and outdoor activities'<sup>204</sup>; on the other hand, the '*feminine*' is brought into connection with 'taste, the novel, indoor practices, and

199 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 288: 'un cognitif permettant d'apprécier la valeur des choses jugées « exceptionnelles »'.

200 Ibid., p. 289: 'entre le travail et le loisir (ou le non-travail) ; entre le nécessaire et le surplus ; entre l'action orientée vers les affaires (le business) et l'action orientée vers le désintéressement'. Cf. Veblen (1970 [1899]).

201 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 289: 'le plaisir, la passion, la dépense'.

202 Ibid., p. 289: 'une orientation à la fois esthétique et sexuelle'.

203 Ibid., p. 289: 'substitut de l'activité sexuelle'. On this point, see also Baudrillard (1968), esp. pp. 122–125. Cf. Boltanski (1975). Cf. also Moreau Ricaud (2011).

204 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 289: 'les affaires, l'argent, le travail, la science, le sport et les activités d'extérieur'.

religion'<sup>205</sup>. Insofar as the former covers the 'professional, institutional, and lucrative'<sup>206</sup> dimensions of the social universe, it is controlled largely by those occupying *dominant* gender roles. Insofar as the latter covers the 'disinterested and spending-focused'<sup>207</sup> dimensions of the social universe, it is pursued mainly by those occupying *dominated* gender roles.

Notwithstanding the regulative functions of gender-based binaries, the economy of enrichment reinforces the influence of *social hierarchies* defined around 'undesirable' and 'desirable' characteristics: 'old' vs. 'young', 'ugly' vs. 'beautiful', 'rustic' vs. 'famous', 'poor' vs. 'rich', 'ordinary' vs. 'stylish' – to mention only a few.<sup>208</sup> Those at the top of the pecking order enjoy the privilege of benefiting from 'the value of useless accumulation'<sup>209</sup>, driven by '*accumulation for the sake of accumulation*'<sup>210</sup>. In the economy of enrichment, the rich continue to enrich themselves, as they possess, and profit from, the means of enrichment. The 'double movement of mimesis and distinction'<sup>211</sup> forms part of a circular process: actors *adapt* to their social environment by means of *assimilative* dynamics, while seeking to *differentiate* themselves from others (individually and/or collectively) by means of *discriminatory mechanisms*.

205 Ibid., p. 289: 'le goût, le roman, les pratiques d'intérieur et la religion'.

206 Ibid., p. 289: 'professionnelle, institutionnelle et lucrative'.

207 Ibid., p. 289: 'gratuite ou associée à la pure dépense'.

208 See *ibid.*, p. 329: 'Les « vieux » sont en manque de ne pas être plus « jeunes »; les « moches », de ne pas être « beaux »; les « péquenots », de ne pas être « célèbre »: les « pauvres », de ne pas être « riches »; les « quelconques », de ne pas être « chics », etc. ; [...]' – Cf. Susen (2016a), esp. pp. 79–102.

209 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 292: 'la valeur d'une accumulation de l'inutile'.

210 Ibid., p. 292 (italics in original): '*une accumulation pour l'accumulation*'. See also *ibid.*, p. 293. Cf. Adorno and Horkheimer (1997 [1944/1969]), p. 158: 'The principle of idealistic aesthetics – purposefulness without a purpose – reverses the scheme of things to which bourgeois art conforms socially: purposelessness for the purposes declared by the market.' On this point, see also Susen (2011b), esp. pp. 188–190.

211 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 329: 'double mouvement de mimétisme et de distinction'.

## 9. Alienation and Anonymity: Between Empowerment and Disempowerment

One need not be a pessimist to acknowledge that a key feature of the historical era commonly described as 'modernity' is the experience of *alienation*. Of course, one may identify different – for instance, social, political, or cultural – forms of alienation. What these variations of alienation have in common, however, is that they entail a degree of *estrangement* and *disempowerment* suffered by those directly or indirectly affected by it.<sup>212</sup> As such, it involves 'the loss of the possibility of "possession or mastery of oneself, or of self-identity [...] caused by external constraint"' <sup>213</sup>.

The standardization of products constitutes a crucial element of industrial economies.<sup>214</sup> Interestingly, one finds *radical critiques of human alienation* caused by industrial standardization processes both on 'the left' and on 'the right' of the political spectrum. On the left, among the most influential examples are variants of critical theory – notably those developed by thinkers whose works are linked to the intellectual tradition of the Frankfurt School.<sup>215</sup> On the right, among the most influential examples are defenders of Western civilization, such as Oswald Spengler<sup>216</sup>, and phenomenology, such as Martin Heidegger<sup>217</sup>. All of them draw attention to the *dehumanizing* consequences of alienation, which, to

212 On this point, see Susen (2015b), esp. pp. 1025–1030 and 1032.

213 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 221: 'ce que la condition de l'homme moderne avait de spécifique. C'est-à-dire la perte de la possibilité « d'une possession ou maîtrise de soi, ou d'une identité à soi [...] du fait de la contrainte extérieure »'.

214 On this point, see *ibid.*, p. 221. Cf. Susen (2011b), esp. pp. 190–192.

215 See, for example: Behrens (2002); Benhabib (1986); Boltanski, Honneth, and Celikates (2014 [2009]); Bronner (1994); Cannon (2001); Cordero (2017); Frère (2015); Geuss (1981); Habermas (1981a); Habermas (1981b); Held (1980); Honneth (1991 [1986]); How (2003); Hoy and McCarthy (1994); Ingram (1990); Kellner (1989); Macey (2000); Schneider, Stillke, and Leineweber (2000); Schroyer (1973); Stirk (2000); Susen (2007), esp. chapters 1–4 and 10; Susen (2009); Susen (2010b); Susen (2011a); Susen (2015b); Susen (2017c); Susen (2018b).

216 See Spengler (1973 [1918/1922]).

217 See Heidegger (2001 [1927]).



a greater or lesser degree, can be experienced by *all* members of modern societies.<sup>218</sup>

By 'placing the emphasis on the "*authenticity*" that is anchored in the autonomy of the subject, in contrast to the *inauthenticity* of "*mimetic desire*", which, driven by the "*desire of desire of the other*", plunges alienated persons into the anonymity of the "*we*" [in French: *on*; in German: *man*]<sup>219</sup>, it becomes possible to draw attention to a central sociological problem: the disempowering facets of modern society rob human actors of their ability to realize their creative potential as sovereign subjects.

Challenging the widespread experience of alienation, the world of artistic production appears to provide a realm of individual and collective emancipation, permitting its protagonists to escape both the administrative and the economic constraints of advanced capitalist formations.<sup>220</sup> Hence, 'the development of the critique of the society of consumption, publicity, fashion, and the media'<sup>221</sup> is essential to the view that modernity constitutes a deeply *ambivalent* historical condition, which is characterized by the contradictory confluence of positive and negative, bright and dark, empowering and disempowering dimensions.<sup>222</sup>

218 On this point, see Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 222. Cf. Borch (2012) and Le Bon (1977 [1995]).

219 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 331 (italics added): '[...] mettant l'accent sur « l'authenticité » ancrée dans l'autonomie du sujet, par opposition à l'inauthenticité du « désir mimétique » qui, mû par le « désir du désir de l'autre », plongerait les personnes aliénées dans l'anonymat du « on ».' In this context, Boltanski and Esquerre mention Adorno and Heidegger. It should be acknowledged, however, that these two major thinkers provide fundamentally different interpretations of modern social life.

220 On this point, see *ibid.*, p. 223. See also, for instance: Adorno (1973 [1966]); Adorno (1997 [1970]); Adorno (1991); Susen (2007), pp. 107–111; Susen (2011b), esp. pp. 185, 186, 188, 191, 193, 196–197, 199, and 200n12; Susen (2015b), esp. pp. 1031–1032; Wellmer (1985). On *the concept of 'emancipation'*, see, for example: Antonio (1989); Benhabib (1986); Bensussan (1982); Bhaskar (1998); Boltanski (2009a); Harding (1992); Laclau (1992); Laclau (1996); Lukes (1991 [1983]); Nederveen Pieterse (1992a); Nederveen Pieterse (1992b); Nuyen (1998); Pease (2002); Ray (1993); Santos (2006); Santos (2007); Scruton (1996); Susen (2009); Susen (2015b); Weiss (1997b).

221 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 224: 'le développement de la critique de la société de consommation, de la publicité, de la mode et des médias'.

222 On *the ambivalence of modernity*, see, for example: Bauman (1991); Bauman and Tester (2007), esp. pp. 23–25 and 29; Hammond (2011), pp. 305, 310,

'[T]he transition from a society of consumption to a society of commerce'<sup>223</sup>, which has been taking place since the second half of the 1990s, indicates the consolidation of a civilizational order that is 'almost totally dominated by the power of money and profit-seeking'<sup>224</sup>. One may go back to the French Revolution of 1789 to examine the significant impact of 'liberal themes'<sup>225</sup> on the development of modern societies. The abolition of traditional political, legal, and institutional constraints preventing the free 'circulation of persons and of goods'<sup>226</sup>, as well as of capital and services, can be interpreted as a major attempt to liberalize society. The aim of promoting and protecting the free movement of labour, goods, capital, and services has always been vital to establishing a market-driven order whose material and ideological developments transcend national boundaries. A key part of this process, however, is the *tendency 'to detach things from persons and to liberate the exchanges'*<sup>227</sup> of commercial nature. This liberalization provides access to almost anything, 'no matter where, by no matter whom, to no matter what, on condition that it can be assigned a price'<sup>228</sup>.

*Anonymity* is a noteworthy feature of capitalist economies. 'The anonymity of things matches the anonymity of the buyers of these things, who henceforth intervene within the market space as consumers.'<sup>229</sup> The cri-

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312, and 315; Iggers (2005 [1997]), pp. 146–147; Jacobsen and Marshman (2008), pp. 804–807; Kellner (2007), p. 117; Mulinari and Sandell (2009), p. 495; Quicke (1999), p. 281; Smart (1998); Susen (2010c), esp. pp. 62–78; Susen (2015a), pp. 1, 16–18, 190, and 236; Susen (2016d), esp. pp. 430 and 432–433; Susen (2017d), esp. pp. 104–105; van Raaij (1993), esp. pp. 543–546, 551–555, and 559–561.

223 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 224: 'le passage d'une société de consommation à une société de commerce'.

224 Ibid., p. 224: 'presque totalement dominée par le pouvoir de l'argent et la recherche du profit'.

225 Ibid., p. 235: 'thématiques libérales'.

226 Ibid., p. 235: 'la circulation des personnes et des bien'.

227 Ibid., p. 235 (italics added): 'de détacher les choses des personnes et de libérer les échanges'.

228 Ibid., p. 236: 'n'importe où, de n'importe qui à n'importe quoi, à condition d'y mettre le prix'.

229 Ibid., p. 236: 'À l'anonymat des choses répond l'anonymat des acheteurs de ces choses, qui n'interviennent désormais dans l'espace marchand qu'au titre de consommateurs.'

tique of commodity fetishism – which is central to most, if not all, currents of Marxist thought, including the intellectual tradition of the Frankfurt School – 'denounces an extension of standardization from things to human beings themselves, resulting in the *reification* of social relations and persons'<sup>230</sup>. Put differently, commodity fetishism implies the subjectification of objects and the objectification of subjects, to the degree that things are treated as if they had human-like attributes and humans are treated as if they could be degraded to things. The classical distinction between 'things equipped with a price'<sup>231</sup> and 'human beings equipped with desires'<sup>232</sup> is undermined in a world in which a monetary value is attached to *both* objects *and* subjects. From a Marxist point of view, the construction of the capitalist market is inextricably linked to dehumanizing aspects – such as reification, fetishization, stratification, exploitation, and alienation. From a liberal perspective, by contrast, it is imperative to recognize 'the emancipatory role of the market'<sup>233</sup> – that is, not only its capacity to bring about freedom, democracy, meritocracy, and formal equality, but also its tendency to stimulate its participants' dynamism, creativity, and sense of autonomy.

### 10. Mass Production and Restricted Production: Between Standardization and Specialization

Advanced capitalist economies are marked by the separation between markets of *mass production* and markets of *restricted production*.<sup>234</sup> The former cover the realm of 'standard products, commercialized by the businesses of large-scale distribution aimed at less wealthy buyers'<sup>235</sup>.

230 Ibid., p. 236 (italics in original): 'une extension de la standardisation se déplaçant des choses vers les êtres humains eux-mêmes, dont le résultat a été une *réification* des relations sociales et des personnes'. Cf. Perec (1965). Cf. also Benjamin (2008).

231 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), pp. 236–237: 'des choses équipées de prix'.

232 Ibid., p. 236: 'des personnes humaines équipées de désires'.

233 Ibid., p. 236: 'le rôle libérateur du marché'.

234 On this point, see *ibid.*, esp. pp. 65–68. See also *ibid.*, pp. 13, 21, 217, 376, and 442, as well as Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), pp. 69 and 73–75. In addition, see Fraser (2017), pp. 60 and 64. On this point, see also, for instance, Susen (2011b), pp. 176–184. In addition, see Fuller (2016) and Gartman (2012).

235 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 65: 'produits standard, commercialisés

The latter encompass the realm of 'products that are defined precisely by their distance in relation to standard objects and are aimed at satisfying the needs of more wealthy buyers'<sup>236</sup>.

- Markets of *mass production* have major economic, political, and cultural implications insofar as – in the context of modernity – they have *enlarged* the scope of access to products to a level that is unprecedented in human history. In this sense, they constitute a significant sociological phenomenon that can be, and has been, 'legitimized in democratic terms'<sup>237</sup>, rather than merely in terms of an expanded supply-demand chain.
- Markets of *restricted production* have major economic, political, and cultural implications insofar as – in the context of modernity – they have *reduced* the scope of access to products to a level that is reserved to relatively few members of society. In this sense, they constitute a significant sociological phenomenon that is essential to the economy of enrichment, which 'seeks to exploit the purchasing power of those who can access exceptional goods'<sup>238</sup>.

In contemporary capitalist societies, a substantial gap between 'rich and poor'<sup>239</sup> continues to exist. This disparity is crucial to 'understanding the dynamic of the economy of enrichment'<sup>240</sup> by taking seriously the stratifying role of 'differentiated social classes'<sup>241</sup>, which are divided by diverging – and, at several levels, diametrically opposed – interests. The economy of enrichment is marked by a curious paradox: in *financial* terms, it is aimed mainly at the wealthy sectors of society; in *cultural*

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par les entreprises de grande distribution à destination des acheteurs les moins fortunés'.

236 Ibid., p. 65: 'se définissent précisément dans leur écart par rapport aux objets standard, et qui sont destinés à satisfaire les manques d'acheteurs plus fortunés'.

237 Ibid., p. 65: 'se légitimait en termes démocratiques'.

238 Ibid., p. 65: 'vise à exploiter le pouvoir d'achat de ceux qui peuvent accéder à des biens d'exceptions'.

239 See *ibid.*, p. 65: 'le couple riches et pauvres'.

240 Ibid., p. 65: 'comprendre la dynamique de l'économie de l'enrichissement'.

241 Ibid., p. 65: 'classes sociales différenciées'.

terms, it is aimed not only at affluent actors but also at those who may not be able to benefit economically from it. Although it 'is directed primarily at the rich and the very rich, one of its peculiarities is that it is also directed at others as if they *were* rich, or at least richer than they actually are'<sup>242</sup>. Actors belonging to the lower strata of society may lack the *economic* capital required to participate in markets of restricted production. Yet, to the degree that significant proportions of them are equipped with the *cultural* capital necessary to enjoy, or at least to admire, some of the symbolic and/or material products from whose consumption they are financially excluded, they may be able to participate – at least marginally – in the construction of the enrichment economy.

In industrial economies, material products 'see their price greatly *reduced* with time'<sup>243</sup>. In fact, these products are supposed to last only for a limited period, so that they have to be replaced with new ones, which, again, are meant to last only for so long, and so on and so forth. The limited lifespan of industrial items forms part of a seemingly endless cycle of production, distribution, consumption, ejection, destruction, and substitution. Obviously, the *economic* logic of profit maximization, which lies behind this process, defies the *environmental* logic of ecological preservation. Unlike the former, the latter is vital to the survival not only of the human species but also of other species and, in a more fundamental sense, of the planet as a whole. In large-scale industrial formations, the disposal of waste 'has become a major concern'<sup>244</sup> – both for citizens and for those who represent them in political institutions. It is no accident that, in most Western liberal societies, 'green' agendas have found their way into the political mainstream.<sup>245</sup>

In the economy of enrichment, goods that are not part of the conven-

242 Ibid., p. 65 (italics added): '[...] s'adresse d'abord aux riches et aux très riches, une de ses spécificités est de s'adresser aussi aux autres comme s'ils étaient riches, ou, à tout le moins, plus riches qu'ils ne le sont'.

243 Ibid., p. 67 (italics in original): 'voient leur prix *diminuer* fortement avec le temps'.

244 Ibid., p. 67: 'est devenue une inquiétude majeure'.

245 On this point, see, for example: Bradley and Hedrén (2014); Doyle (2005); Doyle and MacGregor (2014).

tional market 'see their price *increase with time*, following a movement that is opposite to the one affecting industrial products'<sup>246</sup>. Indeed, these items are supposed to last for a large amount of time, potentially for as long as they are not (deliberately or accidentally) destroyed. Unlike industrial products, they cannot be substituted, since they are considered irreplaceable. With a few exceptions, such as high-end quality food, the lifespan of many of these items is, at least in principle, unlimited. Similar to industrial products, these items – although, eventually, they may be used for non-economic purposes – can be exchanged with the intentions of money-making and profit maximization. The economy of enrichment is inconceivable without the 'work of selection [...], conservation [...], heritage inventory [...], collection'<sup>247</sup>, forming an indispensable component of the collective effort to convert the time-laden constitution of objects into a source of, rather than an obstacle to, symbolic (and, if desired, monetary) value. In short, *whereas in industrial economies 'increase in age' is tantamount to 'decrease in price', in enrichment economies 'increase in age' is tantamount to 'increase in price'*.

Processes of *industrialization* are inextricably linked to mechanisms of *standardization*.<sup>248</sup> 'The *standard* form is one of the principal innovations on which the development of industrial society has hinged'<sup>249</sup> ever since it came into existence. In industrial settings, methods of production, distribution, circulation, and consumption need to be standardized in order to make the life of commodities relatively *predictable, measurable, and profitable*. By definition, industrial goods are replaceable and reproducible, implying that, in technologically advanced societies, the same types of items can be provided for large amounts of consumers. Industrial econ-

246 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 68 (italics in original): 'voir leur prix *croître avec le temps*, selon un mouvement inversé de celui qui affecte les produits industriels'.

247 Ibid., p. 68 (italics removed from 'collection'): 'travail de sélection [...], la conservation [...], l'inventaire du patrimoine [...], *collection*'.

248 On this point, see *ibid.*, pp. 201–224: 'La forme *standard*' (Chapitre V).

249 Ibid., p. 201 (italics in original): 'L'invention de la forme *standard* est l'une des principales innovations sur lesquelles a reposé le développement de la société industrielle.'

omies, then, depend on '*the use of standards*, which are often associated with brands and models'<sup>250</sup> as well as styles and series. In 'economies of scale'<sup>251</sup>, in which actors aim to secure proportionate savings in costs through increased levels of production, there would be no financial profits without the fabrication of *standard* items, *standard* tastes, and *standard* behaviours.

An illustrative example of industrial standardization are department stores.<sup>252</sup> Within these stores, items are distributed between different departments and sections, each of which contains and presents a multiplicity of objects, which – irrespective of their differences – share one central feature: *substitutability*.<sup>253</sup> In each subdivision, one is expected to find 'a specialized Sales Assistant'<sup>254</sup>, or a 'Department Manager'<sup>255</sup>, able to provide potential buyers with relevant information, useful advice, and competent answers to any product-related questions they may have. A key characteristic of these stores is that the products on offer 'are *detached* from the people who have crafted and dispatched them, in such a way that the buyer cannot attribute a personal identity to them'<sup>256</sup>, apart from the one that they may, or may not, attach to the Sales Assistant who has aided them. The development of local, national, regional, and global brands has been, and continues to be, crucial to the standardization of commodities in capitalist economies. 'This homogenization of the commodity relation to heterogeneous objects constitutes a historic process of primary significance'<sup>257</sup>, which signals a decisive rupture with precapitalist economies.

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250 Ibid., p. 201 (italics added): 'l'usage de standards, qui sont souvent associés à des marques et à des modèles'.

251 Ibid., p. 201: 'les économies d'échelle'.

252 See *ibid.*, p. 231: 'les grands magasins'.

253 Ibid., p. 230 (italics added): 'substituabilité'.

254 Ibid., p. 231: 'un vendeur spécialisé'.

255 Ibid., p. 231: 'le « chef de rayon »'.

256 Ibid., p. 231 (italics added): 'sont détachées des personnes qui les ont confectionnées et acheminées, en sorte que l'acheteur ne peut leur conférer une identité personnelle qu'en les associant à la personne du vendeur'.

257 Ibid., p. 231: 'Cette homogénéisation de la relation marchande à des objets hétérogènes constitue un processus historique de première importance [...].'

The economy of enrichment is shaped by '[t]he plurality of *non-standard things*'<sup>258</sup>, which, on some levels, constitute 'a sort of *outside-of-capitalism*'<sup>259</sup>, in that they *do* escape the constraining logic of standardization and – to the extent that their aesthetic value is deemed more significant than their use value and/or exchange value – *appear* to escape the instrumental logic of commodification. The 'link between contemporary art and collection'<sup>260</sup> lies at the core of the economy of enrichment, illustrating the emphasis that its protagonists place on the aesthetic value, as well as on the real or imagined uniqueness, of the products that they sell and buy. This does not mean that we are witnessing the emergence of a post-capitalist economy, since both the use value and the exchange value of traded items continue to define their destiny. Far from being reducible to the idealistic formula 'art for the sake of art'<sup>261</sup> or the self-referential – let alone autopoietic – logic underlying 'the formation of specific and relatively autonomous fields, within which artists and “creators” compete for recognition'<sup>262</sup>, the economy of enrichment constitutes a social universe shaped by the commodified pursuit of monetarily measurable values of aesthetic and symbolic distinction.

## 11. Capitalism and Critique: Between Reproduction and Transformation

For Boltanski and Esquerre, a comprehensive analysis of the economy of enrichment is inextricably linked to the '*critique of capitalism*'<sup>263</sup>. In this

258 Ibid., p. 237 (italics added): 'La pluralité des choses non standard'.

259 Ibid., p. 237 (italics in original): 'une sorte de *dehors* du capitalisme'.

260 Ibid., p. 315: 'Le lien entre art contemporain et collection [...]'. On this point, see *ibid.*, pp. 315–325.

261 Ibid., p. 317: 'l'art pour l'art'. On this point, see also, for example: Bourdieu (1968); Bourdieu (1975a); Bourdieu, Boltanski, Castel, and Chamboredon (1965); Bourdieu and Darbel (1969); Gartman (2012); Heinich (2004); Moulin (1987 [1967]); Stewart (2014); Susen (2007), p. 177; Susen (2011b); Susen (2011d), p. 59; Susen (2013d), p. 207; Susen (2016a).

262 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 318: 'la formation de champs spécifiques et « relativement autonomes »'.

263 Ibid., p. 487 (italics added): '*critique du capitalisme*'. On *the critique of capitalism*, see *ibid.*, pp. 209, 236, 380, 477, 482–485, and 487–495. See also, for



respect, three issues take centre stage:

- (a) '*the relationship between capitalism and the state*'<sup>264</sup> and, hence, the confluence of commodification and bureaucratization processes in modern societies;
- (b) '*forms of exploitation* that are put in place within the context of an economy of *enrichment*'<sup>265</sup> and, thus, mechanisms of profit maximization by means of which some actors, or groups of actors, are wealthier than others;
- (c) '*the role of commodification in the displacements of capitalism*'<sup>266</sup>, illustrated in the deterritorialization of capital and monetary flows across the globe.

Boltanski and Esquerre's critical understanding of these issues informs their entire analysis of the economy of enrichment. The following conceptual oppositions are crucial to their account:

- '*State Capitalism*' vs. '*Private Enterprise Capitalism*': The second part of the twentieth century was marked by the transition from 'state capitalism' to 'private enterprise capitalism'.<sup>267</sup> The former illustrates the historical 'importance of the nation-state as a centre of profit'<sup>268</sup>, whereas the latter 'benefits private entities'<sup>269</sup>, elevating them to 'the principal actors of capitalist dynamics'<sup>270</sup>. Contrary

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example, Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), pp. 68 and 75. In addition, see Fraser (2017), pp. 58, 59, and 62–65.

264 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 487 (italics added): '*la relation entre le capitalisme et l'État*'. Cf. Foucault (2004), esp. pp. 33, 55, 68, and 247, as well as Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), pp. 149–152.

265 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 487 (italics added): '*formes d'exploitation qui se mettent en place dans le cadre d'une économie de l'enrichissement*'.

266 Ibid., p. 487 (italics added): '*le rôle de la marchandisation dans les déplacements du capitalisme*'. On Boltanski and Esquerre's analysis '*displacement*', see *ibid.*, pp. 381, 384, 385, 388, 389, 392, 494, 610–611 (of commodities), pp. 294, 388–393 (of buyers), pp. 163, 393–396 (of things), and pp. 9, 94, 149, 190, 223, 375, 376, 378, 491, and 496 (of capitalism). Cf. Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), pp. 67, 72, 73, and 76.

267 On this point, see Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 488.

268 Ibid., p. 488: '*l'importance de l'État-nation comme centre de profit*'.

269 Ibid., p. 488: '*bénéfice des entités privées*'.

270 Ibid., p. 488: '*les principaux acteurs de la dynamique du capitalisme*'.

to alarmist announcements regarding the 'the death of the state'<sup>271</sup>, the nation-state continues to constitute a key institutional apparatus for the concentration of wealth.<sup>272</sup> The pivotal role it plays in both 'the formation and the accumulation of wealth'<sup>273</sup> manifests itself at several levels – for instance, in 'aeronautics, arms industries, and nuclear industries (both civil and military)'<sup>274</sup>. The worldwide influence of 'private entities, super-rich individuals, international firms and markets'<sup>275</sup> – while 'operating at a global level'<sup>276</sup> – may give the impression that nation-states have become 'the principal victims of capitalism'<sup>277</sup>, insofar as their steering capacity has been significantly undermined by seemingly uncontrollable economic forces. Whereas early capitalism is linked to the liberal ideal of 'the wealth of nations'<sup>278</sup>, late capitalism is associated with 'the accumulated wealth of entities or individuals owning capital or firms'<sup>279</sup> acting as 'autonomized'<sup>280</sup> entities. Irrespective of how one seeks to

271 For *recent debates on the relationship between the state and globalization*, see, for example: Amin-Khan (2012); Ashford and Hall (2011); Baraith and Gupta (2010); Berberoglu (2010); Böss (2010); Boyer (1996); Boyer and Drache (1996); Carlson (2012); Chernilo (2007); Chernilo (2008); Cohen (2006); Crouch, Eder, and Tambini (2001); de Larrinaga and Doucet (2010); Farrar and Mayes (2013); Gritsch (2005); Herrschel (2014); Hirst and Thompson (1995); Holton (2011 [1998]); Jessop (2007); Lachmann (2010); Löhr and Wenzlhue-mer (2013); Morris (1997); Nayar (2009); Piketty (2013); Reid, Gill, and Sears (2010); Ripsman and Paul (2010); Rosecrance (1996); Susen (2015a), pp. 132–135; Weiss (1997a); Weiss (1998).

272 On this point, see Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 488: 'États-nations constituent toujours des cadres au sein desquels se concentrent les richesses'.

273 Ibid., p. 488: 'la formation et l'accumulation des richesses'.

274 Ibid., p. 488: 'l'aéronautique, les industries de l'armement et le nucléaire (civil et militaire)'.

275 Ibid., p. 487 (italics removed from 'super-rich'): 'des entités privées, individus *richissimes*, firmes internationales et marchés'.

276 Ibid., p. 487: 'opérant sur un plan global'.

277 Ibid., p. 487: 'les principales victimes du capitalisme'.

278 See Smith (2008 [1776]).

279 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 487: 'la richesse accumulée par des entités, individus propriétaires de capitaux ou firmes'.

280 Ibid., p. 487: 'autonomisées'.

capture the essence permeating the 'new spirit of capitalism'<sup>281</sup>, the relationship between the state and the market is constantly being redefined.

- 'Collectivization' vs. 'Individualization': Within industrial economies, the social class of wage earners is 'framed by *collective conventions* put in place after long struggles'<sup>282</sup>, especially by those that took place in the second half of the twentieth century, leading to the consolidation of state-regulated forms of welfare capitalism. Nowadays, 'each of the enrichment workers is forced to become his or her own exploiter as a *trader with him- or herself*, that is, he or she is, at the same time, a trader and a commodity'<sup>283</sup>. In this context, 'the indefinite extension of individual working time is uncoupled'<sup>284</sup> not only from employees' income but also from 'the distribution of wealth'<sup>285</sup>, including those 'who participate in its creation'<sup>286</sup>. To put it bluntly, 'the economy of enrichment enriches mainly the rich-est'<sup>287</sup>. Far from being accessible to, let alone contributing to the wealth of, the majority – or, as some call it, 'the 99%'<sup>288</sup> – of the world population, the economy of enrichment constitutes a space of material, symbolic, and financial exchanges shaped by, and aimed at, the most privileged members of society. Consequently, it is marked by what may be described as *commodified hyper-individualism*:

281 See Boltanski and Chiapello (1999). On this point, see also, for instance: Boltanski, Rennes, and Susen (2010); Chiapello and Fairclough (2002); Fairclough (2002); Gadrey, Hatchuel, Boltanski, and Chiapello (2001); Susen (2012b); Susen (2012a); Susen (2015a), p. 201; Turner (2007).

282 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 489 (italics added): 'encadrée par des conventions collectives mise en place après de longues luttes'.

283 Ibid., p. 489 (italics in original): 'chacun des travailleurs de l'enrichissement est contraint à devenir son propre exploiteur en tant que *commerçant de soi-même*, c'est-à-dire qu'il est à la fois le marchand et la marchandise'.

284 Ibid., p. 489: 'l'extension indéfinie du temps de travail individuel se trouve découplée'.

285 Ibid., p. 489: 'la distribution des richesses'.

286 Ibid., p. 489: 'qui participent à leur création'.

287 Ibid., p. 489: 'l'économie de l'enrichissement enrichit d'abord les plus riches'.

288 See Gould-Wartofsky (2015).

Insofar as *every individual actor* is envisaged as a *centre of autonomous profit*, it may seem utopian to defend the validity of collective arrangements oriented towards the redistribution of income.<sup>289</sup>

Hence, we are confronted with the radical *individualization of both success and failure*. For the ultimate core of constantly monitored, audited, and evaluated performance is the individual, rather than the collective. In industrial economies, by contrast, 'workers can be remunerated in accordance with their working hours and the certified competences that they possess, recognized by collective conventions'<sup>290</sup> and institutional norms. This 'archaic conception of capitalism'<sup>291</sup>, which is based on 'the properly collective nature of the creation of wealth'<sup>292</sup>, is gradually being eroded by the economy of enrichment, which 'relies on other devices'<sup>293</sup>, notably on those perpetuating the logic of hyper-individualism.

- '*Commodification*' vs. '*Non-Commodification*': All capitalist societies – irrespective of whether their economies are governed by liberal or social-democratic, monetarist or fiscalist, laissez-faire or interventionist policies – are characterized by the discrepancy between commodified and non-commodified elements of behavioural, ideological, and institutional patterns of existence. Indeed, capitalism works 'at the limits of the commodifiable and the non-commodi-

289 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 490 (italics added): 'Chaque acteur individuel est donc envisagé comme un centre de profit autonome, il peut sembler utopique de défendre la validité de dispositifs collectifs de redistribution des revenus.' As Boltanski and Esquerre point out, there are different explanations of 'profit', whose sources have been 'traced to entrepreneurial innovation (Schumpeter), monopoly effects limiting competition (Chamberlin), action in situations of uncertainty (Knight), or access to power positions from which competition can be paralyzed (Veblen)'; see Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), p. 71.

290 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 490: 'les travailleurs peuvent être rétribués en fonction de leurs heures de travail et des compétences certifiées qu'ils possèdent, reconnues par des conventions collectives'.

291 Ibid., p. 491: 'une vision archaïque du capitalisme'.

292 Ibid., p. 491: 'Le caractère proprement collectif de la création de richesse'.

293 Ibid., p. 491: 'recourir à d'autres genres de dispositifs'.

fiable<sup>294</sup> – that is, different types of capitalism generate different degrees of commodification in different areas of social life. These limits are constantly being defined and redefined by discursive processes located in the superstructure of society: while these limits are 'sustained by social and moral norms'<sup>295</sup>, which are solidified in judicial arrangements, they can be transformed, to the extent that they are challenged by particular groups of actors.

- *'Human' vs. 'Non-Human'*: The task of 'separating the commodifiable from the non-commodifiable'<sup>296</sup> goes hand in hand with drawing a distinction between 'the human' and 'the non-human'. In an ideal world, human subjects are exempted from entering 'the cosmos of the commodity'<sup>297</sup>, whereas things, at least under the systemic umbrella of capitalism, are 'commodities by destination'<sup>298</sup>. Of course, a central purpose of Marx's critique of commodity fetishism is to uncover the extent to which, in capitalist societies, subjects are objectified and objects are subjectified, as illustrated in the reification of human relations. The standardization of the social universe is accompanied by the homogenization of people's lifeworlds<sup>299</sup>, owing to their colonization by the functional imperatives of the state and the market. Granted, it is far from obvious whether or not the colonization of everyday life by functionalist rationality involves the gradual dehumanization of humanity. It is unquestionable, however, that the widespread commodification of the relations that human actors establish (not only in relation to the non-human aspects of their existence, but also in relation to one another) poses profound civilizational challenges.

294 Ibid., p. 492: 'aux frontières du marchandisable et du non-marchandisable'. On this point, see also Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), pp. 75–76.

295 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 492: 'soutenues par des normes sociales et morales'.

296 Ibid., p. 492: 'séparant le marchandisable du non-marchandisable'.

297 Ibid., p. 492: 'cosmos de la marchandise'. On this concept, see also *ibid.*, pp. 81, 110, 158, 160, 162, 227, 234, 237, 375, 378, 399, and 496.

298 Ibid., p. 492: 'marchandises par destination'.

299 See *ibid.*, p. 493: 'à uniformiser le monde vécu'.

## 12. Pragmatism and Structuralism: Between Action and Structure

The theoretical framework that informs Boltanski and Esquerre's sociological exploration in *Enrichissement* can be defined as *pragmatic structuralism*.<sup>300</sup> In essence, this project aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the confluence of 'action and structures'<sup>301</sup> in the unfolding of social life. Before examining the main assumptions underlying this endeavour, let us consider Boltanski and Esquerre's research strategy.

Seeking to shed light on 'the dynamics of capitalism'<sup>302</sup> in the early twenty-first century, Boltanski and Esquerre propose to combine 'two approaches, *historical* and *analytical*'<sup>303</sup>:

- Their approach is *historical* in that it takes into account the development of capitalism in terms of its spatiotemporally contingent specificities.
- Their approach is *analytical* in that it aims to identify key elements of capitalism that undergird different evolutionary stages reflecting its transformative constitution.

In order to deliver such a historico-analytical framework, Boltanski and Esquerre move back and forth 'between different disciplines, different methods, and different fieldworks'<sup>304</sup>. Thus, their inquiry is (a) *inter-disciplinary*, (b) *inter-methodological*, and (c) *inter-investigative*:

- It draws on different *disciplines* (notably sociology, anthropology, economics, political science, philosophy, and history).
- It combines different *methodologies* (especially archival work, primary and secondary data analysis, quantitative and qualitative methods, discourse analysis, and ideology critique).

300 On the concept of 'pragmatic structuralism' ['structuralisme pragmatique'], see *ibid.*, pp. 16, 495–502, 503, and 522.

301 On this point, see *ibid.*, pp. 487–502: 'Conclusion : Action et structures'.

302 *Ibid.*, p. 13: 'la dynamique du capitalisme'.

303 *Ibid.*, p. 13 (italics added): 'deux approches, historique et analytique'.

304 *Ibid.*, p. 14: 'entre différentes disciplines, entre différentes méthodes et entre différents terrains d'enquête'.

- It covers different *fields of research* (focusing on economic, cultural, political, and demographic factors shaping the development of capitalist societies).

Similar to Bourdieu's project<sup>305</sup>, part of Boltanski and Esquerre's ambition is to transcend counterproductive divisions in the social sciences. Given the thematic focus of their study, a central area of inquiry in which they seek to accomplish this is *economics*:

- On the one hand, there are 'orthodox'<sup>306</sup> approaches, which insist on the 'autonomy of the economy'<sup>307</sup>, whose logic of functioning can be grasped by virtue of 'mathematics'<sup>308</sup> and statistical methods in a law-uncovering fashion. According to 'orthodox' accounts, the relationship between supply and demand follows 'a classical logic of the market'<sup>309</sup>, in which the price of products is the result of a quasi-natural equilibrium created by the structural relationship between sellers and buyers.
- On the other hand, there are 'heterodox'<sup>310</sup> approaches, which tend to resort to 'data stemming from other social sciences'<sup>311</sup> and which, consequently, are open not only to recognizing but also to scrutiniz-

305 On Bourdieu's ambition to overcome counterproductive antinomies in the social sciences, see, for example: Bourdieu (1980), pp. 29, 43, 46, 77, 78, 87, 103, 135–138, 178, 202, 209, 234, and 242; Bourdieu (1982a), pp. 35–37; Bourdieu (1982b), p. 14; Bourdieu (1982c), p. 36; Bourdieu (1984a), p. 5; Bourdieu (1993 [1984]-c), pp. 55, 57, and 59; Bourdieu (1994a), p. 169; Bourdieu (1994b), p. 3; Bourdieu (1995a), p. 8; Bourdieu (1995b), p. 120; Bourdieu (1997), pp. 16–17, 43, 77, 122, 157, 159–160, 163–167, 185, and 225; Bourdieu (1998), pp. 9 and 110; Bourdieu (2005 [2000]), pp. 210–213; Bourdieu (2001a), pp. 7, 24, and 31; Bourdieu (2001b), pp. 76, 151, and 153; Bourdieu (2002), p. 353; Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron (1968), pp. 34, 93–94, and 101; Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992c), p. 66; Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992d), pp. 121–122; Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992e), pp. 151 and 162. On this point, see also, for example: Susen (2007), pp. 18, 149–157, 171, 172, 173, 174, 183, 217, 218, 239, 249, 250, 270n21, and 310; Susen (2011c), p. 368, 374, 393, 394, and 402; Susen (2011d), esp. pp. 80–81; Susen (2017a), pp. 140–141 and 149–150n34.

306 See Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 15: 'les « orthodoxes »'.

307 Ibid., p. 15: 'autonomie de l'économie'.

308 Ibid., p. 15: 'mathématiques'.

309 Ibid., p. 108: 'une logique classique du marché'.

310 See ibid., p. 15: 'les « hétérodoxes »'.

311 Ibid., p. 15: 'données venues des autres sciences sociales'.

ing the numerous dimensions influencing both the constitution and the evolution of the economy. According to 'heterodox' accounts, there are material and symbolic goods whose price depends on 'a value or an evaluation'<sup>312</sup> based on socio-culturally contingent criteria – such as reputation, recognition, accolades, and 'hierarchies of qualities *via* rankings and prize lists'<sup>313</sup>.

Unsurprisingly, Boltanski and Esquerre favour the latter over the former perspective. Hence, they endorse the idea of a constructive *dialogue between economics and other social-scientific disciplines*:

Our main worry was to detach ourselves from the often difficult relations that sociology and anthropology maintain with economics, leading a number of sociologists and anthropologists sometimes to ignore economics (as if there were an autonomy of *relations of symbolic exchanges* with regard to *relations of the exchanges of goods*) [...].<sup>314</sup>

In order to overcome the limitations of such a narrow vision, which is based on a simplistic opposition between *social constructivism* and *economic positivism*<sup>315</sup>, it is – in Boltanski and Esquerre's eyes – necessary to bridge the gap between different epistemic comfort zones. As anticipated above, they set out to achieve this by means of a *pragmatic structuralism*.<sup>316</sup> One of the noteworthy advantages of such an approach, they argue, is that it 'permits to articulate, at the same time, a *social history* and

312 Ibid., p. 108: 'd'une « valeur » ou d'une « évaluation »'.

313 Ibid., p. 108 (italics in original): 'hiérarchies des qualités *via* des classements ou des palmarès'.

314 Ibid., p. 15 (italics added): 'Notre souci principal a été de nous dégager des relations souvent difficiles qu'entretiennent la sociologie et l'anthropologie avec l'économie et qui conduisent nombre de sociologues et d'anthropologues tantôt à ignorer l'économie (comme s'il y avait une autonomie des relations d'échanges symboliques par rapport aux relations d'échanges de biens) [...].'

315 On this point, see *ibid.*, p. 16: 'positivisme (fréquentes en économie) et [...] constructionnisme (plus fréquentes en sociologie)'.

316 On the concept of '*pragmatic structuralism*' ['structuralisme pragmatique'], see *ibid.*, pp. 16, 495–502, 503, and 522.



an analysis of *cognitive competences* that actors mobilize in order to act<sup>317</sup>. Such an explanatory framework studies reality from both a *structural* and a *pragmatic* (or *normative-pragmatic*) point of view.<sup>318</sup>

This twofold project, then, is concerned with both the *systemic* and the *cognitive* components of human life forms in general and of capitalist societies in particular:

- At the *systemic* level, it attempts to shed light on '*structures* in the sense that it examines the *configurations of constraints*, whose interaction produces a *field of forces*'<sup>319</sup>.
- At the *cognitive* level, it sets itself the task of drawing attention to the pivotal civilizational role played by '*the competences upon which actors draw when they have to act*'<sup>320</sup>.

Thus, Boltanski and Esquerre aim 'to reconcile the use of two types of approaches that are often conceived of as antagonistic'<sup>321</sup>: the *systems* approach and the *pragmatic* approach.<sup>322</sup>

The former designates a *macro*-sociological undertaking, focusing on sets of *structural relations*, whose influence largely escapes ordinary actors' common-sense perception of reality. The latter refers to a *micro*-sociological venture, which is '*closer to actors*'<sup>323</sup> in that it explores the everyday 'conditions of action and the processes of reflexivity'<sup>324</sup> by which large proportions of their performances are guided. The former requires 'catch-

317 Ibid., p. 16 (italics added): '[...] permet d'articuler à la fois une histoire sociale et une analyse des compétences cognitives que les acteurs mettent en œuvre pour agir'.

318 See ibid., p. 197: 'à la fois d'un point de vue structural [...] et du point de vue d'une pragmatique [...] d'une « pragmatique normative »'.

319 Ibid., p. 189 (italics added): 'des structures au sens où elle prend pour objet des configurations de contraintes dont l'interaction produit un champ de forces'.

320 Ibid., p. 189 (italics added): 'compétences que les acteurs mettent en œuvre quand ils doivent agir'.

321 Ibid., p. 496: 'concilier le recours à deux types d'approches souvent traitées comme antagonistes'.

322 See ibid., p. 496: 'l'approche systémique' et 'l'approche pragmatique'.

323 Ibid., p. 189 (italics added): 'plus près des acteurs'.

324 Ibid., p. 189: 'conditions de l'action et les processus de réflexivité'.

all descriptions covering the *long term*<sup>325</sup>, thereby unearthing – 'in a causal fashion'<sup>326</sup> and at 'a macrohistorical level'<sup>327</sup> – 'the necessity generated by a *set of constraints* within a context of competition'<sup>328</sup>. The latter centres on '*reflexive individuals*'<sup>329</sup> and, in many cases, on 'the *decisions* of a small number of actors'<sup>330</sup> when seeking to explain societal trends and tendencies.

The former 'endeavours to shed light on *large-scale* processes'<sup>331</sup>, scrutinizing the extent to which they are, on a '*systemic scale*'<sup>332</sup>, permeated by structural asymmetries and power relations.<sup>333</sup> The latter centres on *small-scale* processes and 'seeks to grasp people's action by analysing the *cognitive* structures that sustain their exchanges'<sup>334</sup>. The former places the emphasis on the '*constraints* surrounding their field of action'<sup>335</sup>, in 'a historical sense'<sup>336</sup> of constant exposure to constellations of variables shaping behavioural, ideological, and institutional elements of human existence. The latter grapples 'not only with actors, but also with the dispositional structures that motivate their actions and give them *meaning*'<sup>337</sup>, which cannot be dissociated from the 'tests'<sup>338</sup> [*épreuves*] they undergo when making judgments about objective, normative, and/or subjective elements of their

325 Ibid., p. 191 (italics added): 'les descriptions surplombantes portant sur la longue durée'.

326 Ibid., p. 191: 'de façon causale'.

327 Ibid., p. 191: 'un niveau macrohistorique'.

328 Ibid., p. 191 (italics added): 'la nécessité engendrée par un jeu de contraintes dans un contexte de concurrence'.

329 Ibid., p. 191 (italics added): 'individus réflexifs'.

330 Ibid., p. 191 (italics added): 'les décisions d'un petit nombre d'acteurs'.

331 Ibid., p. 496 (italics added): 'envisage de mettre en lumière des processus de large ampleur'.

332 Ibid., p. 496 (italics added): 'l'échelle systémique'.

333 See ibid., p. 496: 'les asymétries et les rapports de force'.

334 Ibid., p. 496 (italics added): 'vise à éclairer l'action des personnes en analysant les structures cognitives qui soutiennent leurs échanges'.

335 Ibid., p. 496 (italics added): 'des contraintes environnant leur champ d'action'.

336 Ibid., p. 496: 'un sens historique'.

337 Ibid., p. 496 (italics added): 'non seulement les acteurs, mais aussi les dispositifs qui motivent leurs actions et leur donnent sens'.

338 Ibid., p. 496: 'épreuves'. On Boltanski and Esquerre's emphasis on the crucial role of 'tests' in the construction of the economy, see also, for instance, Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), p. 68. In addition, see Fraser (2017), p. 60.

lifeworlds. The former takes into consideration 'a multitude of external so-called "social" variables'<sup>339</sup>, seeking to uncover 'the centre of *power relations* and *structures of domination*'<sup>340</sup> by which human practices are influenced or, in extreme cases, even determined. The latter focuses on the *communicative 'coordination between actors'*<sup>341</sup> and, thus, on the more or less *purposeful organization* of their practices.

The project of *pragmatic structuralism*, then, takes into account, on the one hand, 'global determinations'<sup>342</sup> of societal developments (at the macro-level) and, on the other hand, 'practical necessities of everyday life'<sup>343</sup> (at the micro-level). It contends that the very possibility of 'critique depends on actors' competence'<sup>344</sup> to engage with reality in a cognitive, reflexive, and discursive manner, enabling them to call the legitimacy of social arrangements into question and to shape their practices accordingly.

In short, the conceptual and methodological challenge faced by Boltanski and Esquerre consists in *combining, cross-fertilizing, and integrating macro-sociological structuralism and micro-sociological pragmatism*:

To many people, the expression *pragmatic structuralism* may appear to be a sort of oxymoron. In order to defend its validity, it is imperative to clarify the relationship between *structure and experience*, that is, the relationship between *structure and history*.<sup>345</sup>

Such an enterprise may permit us to dissolve the 'apparent incompatibility between a structural approach and a pragmatic approach'<sup>346</sup> in

339 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 497: 'd'une multitude de variables externes dites « sociales »'.

340 Ibid., p. 497 (italics added): 'l'axe des rapports de force et des structures de domination'.

341 Ibid., p. 497 (italics added): 'coordination entre des acteurs'.

342 Ibid., p. 495: 'des déterminations globales'.

343 Ibid., p. 495: 'les exigences pratiques de leur vie quotidienne'.

344 Ibid., p. 495: 'La critique dépend de la compétence d'acteurs'.

345 Ibid., p. 497 (italics added; except for '*structuralisme pragmatique*', which appears in italics in the original): 'L'expression du *structuralisme pragmatique* paraîtra à beaucoup être une sorte d'oxymore. Pour en défendre la validité, il faut clarifier la relation entre structure et expérience, c'est-à-dire la relation entre structure et histoire.'

346 Ibid., p. 497: 'L'apparente incompatibilité entre une approche structurale et

the social sciences. This ambitious undertaking obliges us to recognize both the *historicity of structures* and the *structurality of history*: structures evolve across spatiotemporally contingent contexts, just as history unfolds through the interaction between different layers of structures. Irrespective of whether one considers social, cultural, political, judicial, demographic, or economic dimensions – *all* human life forms are permeated by the convergence of structurality and historicity.

In the social world, the existence of *structures* – notwithstanding their typological specificity – can be regarded 'as a prerequisite and even as a [pre]condition for all *experience*'<sup>347</sup>. One may even go as far as to suggest that, in the human universe, structures occupy a 'transcendental position'<sup>348</sup>, given that they are 'anchored in a collective entity'<sup>349</sup>, such as community or society, whose building blocks are passed from generation to generation by virtue of rituals, traditions, customs, and conventions – that is, by *culture*.<sup>350</sup> Social life, then, is sustained by 'circular relations between two levels, that is, "the objective" and "the subjective"'<sup>351</sup>, to which one may add 'the normative'. These realms of existence – that is, (a) *objectivity*, (b) *normativity*, and (c) *subjectivity* – are foundational in the sense that human experience is constituted by all three of them.<sup>352</sup>

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une approche pragmatique'.

347 Ibid., p. 498 (italics added): 'la structure comme un préalable et même comme une condition de toute expérience'.

348 Ibid., p. 498: 'position transcendantale'.

349 Ibid., p. 498: 'ancrée dans une entité collective'.

350 On this point, see *ibid.*, p. 498: 'des traditions ou des « cultures »'. Cf. Susen (2007), pp. 287–292. Cf. also Sperber (1996).

351 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 498: 'des relations circulaires entre deux instances, dites « l'objectif » et le « subjectif »'.

352 On the relationship between the objective, normative, or subjective dimensions of human existence, see, for instance: Susen (2012b), p. 712 (see point c); Susen (2014 [2012]), p. 192 (see point c); Susen (2014c), pp. 349–350 (see point 13); Susen (2015a), pp. 101–103; Susen (2016e); Susen (2016b), pp. 50, 51, 52, 59, 62, 65, 68, 70, 72, 73, and 74; Susen (2016f), pp. 122, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, and 136; Susen (2017a), pp. 139, 140, and 146; Susen (2017c), pp. 104, 115, and 120; Susen (2017d), pp. 109–110; Susen (2017e), pp. 351, 362, 364, and 367; Susen (2017f), pp. 15, 37, 43, 54, 61, 63, 70, 78, 96n431, and 97n449.

Of course, the 'flow of life'<sup>353</sup> can be interrupted when actors are faced with situations of crisis and/or with unexpected circumstances.<sup>354</sup> It is in those moments that – instead of relying on implicit, taken-for-granted, and intuitive knowledge – they may be obliged to develop and to draw upon explicit, discursive, and reflexive knowledge. In fact, '*reflexivity*', when it detaches itself from *experience*'<sup>355</sup>, elevates actors – if only metaphorically – from the conditions in which they find themselves immersed. By virtue of their reflexivity, which is embedded in their linguistic capacity, actors are able to attribute meaning to the world – including 'their previously lived experiences'<sup>356</sup> – on the basis of 'language games'<sup>357</sup>, in which they engage in order to establish a symbolically mediated and hermeneutically informed relationship with their natural and social environment as well as with themselves.

*'Both experiences and structures are anchored within the "scheme of existence".'*<sup>358</sup> In other words, human existence is unimaginable without the confluence of experiential processes and structural constellations. This is not to suggest, however, that actors are always in a position to mobilize

353 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 498: 'flux de la vie'. In this regard, the *relationship between 'pragmatism' and 'sociology'* is central. See, for example: Durkheim (1955); Durkheim (1983 [1955]); Durkheim (2010 [1898/1924]). In addition, see, for instance: Baert (2003); Baert and Silva (2013); Baert and Turner (2007); Deledalle (1959); Joas (1984); Karsenti (2012); Lapoujade (1997); Rawls (1997); Susen (2010c).

354 On this point, see Susen (2007), pp. 216 and 241. See also Cordero (2017) and Susen (2017c).

355 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 499 (italics added): '*la réflexivité, quand elle se détache de l'expérience*'.

356 Ibid., p. 499: '*expériences vécues antérieures*'.

357 Ibid., p. 500: '*jeux de langage*'. Cf. Fraser (2017), p. 60 (italics added): 'Value, a Wittgensteinian might say, belongs to the *language game* of justifying and criticizing prices.' On Boltanski and Esquerre's *conception of language*, see, for instance, Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), p. 68. On the *concept of 'language game'*, see also, for example: Susen (2007), pp. 75 and 242; Susen (2011d), pp. 58 and 78; Susen (2012a), pp. 291, 295, and 313; Susen (2013d), pp. 202, 209, 212, 220, 221, 224, 225, 226, and 228; Susen (2013e), pp. 332, 338, 341, 344, and 371; Susen (2013b), p. 85; Susen (2015a), pp. 7, 8, 35, 44, 56, 60, 62, 63, 78, 101, 147, 171, 181, 184, 193, 200, 215, 231, 245, 248, 250, and 280; Susen (2016c), p. 202.

358 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 500 (italics added): '*Expériences et structures sont ancrées, les unes et les autres, dans le « plan d'existence ».*'

their cognitive dispositions to attach meaning to their immersion in the world in an *insightful*, let alone *empowering*, fashion. In fact, often human subjects apply cognitive schemes to their experiences that prevent them from relating to and acting upon their environment in a perceptive and self-realizing manner.<sup>359</sup> This is particularly the case when they are faced with major changes that force them to confront high degrees of uncertainty.<sup>360</sup>

One need not be a phenomenologist to acknowledge that people's experiences of reality are shaped by 'what they conceive of as reality'<sup>361</sup>. *Pragmatic structuralism*, therefore, may be described as a form of *phenomenological structuralism*. For it not only takes people's interpretations of reality seriously, but also seeks to shed light on the extent to which their meaning-generating practices contribute to both the symbolic *and* the material construction of their lifeworlds. While they are 'constantly immersed in the universe of commodities'<sup>362</sup>, actors contribute to its reproduction by relying on perceptions and misperceptions, conceptions and misconceptions, representations and misrepresentations of that universe.

Human subjects possess 'a tacit competence'<sup>363</sup> based on 'interiorized structures'<sup>364</sup>, enabling them 'to orient themselves in the universe of commodities'<sup>365</sup>. Regardless of whether one conceptualizes the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in terms of '*habitus*' and '*field*' (à la Bourdieu) or in terms of '*competence/experience*' and '*structure*' (à la Boltanski and Esquerre), the development of the social world rests on the dialectics of internalization and externalization. Without a 'minimal

359 On this point, see *ibid.*, p. 500: '[...] les acteurs appliquent à leurs expériences des schèmes qui sont impuissants à leur ouvrir la voie d'une interprétation permettant la poursuite d'une interaction avec l'environnement'.

360 On this point, see *ibid.*, p. 500: '[...] et cela particulièrement quand la réalité est confrontée à des changements majeurs qui mettent directement l'expérience au contact du monde, c'est-à-dire de l'incertain, voire de l'inconnu'.

361 *Ibid.*, p. 9: 'de ce qu'ils conçoivent comme la réalité'.

362 *Ibid.*, p. 9: 'l'univers de la marchandise'.

363 *Ibid.*, p. 9: 'une compétence tacite'.

364 *Ibid.*, p. 9: 'structures, intériorisées'.

365 *Ibid.*, p. 9: 's'orienter dans l'univers de la marchandise'.

competence<sup>366</sup> to *internalize* key aspects of their positionally structured environments and to *externalize* key aspects of their dispositionally structured bodily apparatus, 'actors would be simply disoriented'<sup>367</sup> and incapable of taking part in *any* type of inter- and transactions, including 'economic transactions'<sup>368</sup>.

To be sure, praxeological capacities may be 'unequally distributed'<sup>369</sup> and, hence, asymmetrically structured.<sup>370</sup> Notwithstanding their uneven supply among actors, however, the existence of socio-ontological competences – that is, of foundational capacities with which human actors need to be equipped in order to be able to contribute to shaping their life forms – is a precondition for the consolidation of social order.<sup>371</sup> There is no social 'field of possibles'<sup>372</sup> without a series of human competences allowing for the realization of objective, normative, and/or subjective potential.

For Boltanski and Esquerre, then, the unfolding of social life is unthinkable without the pivotal 'role of *discourse*, regardless of whether it takes an *analytical* or a *narrative* form'<sup>373</sup>, upon which actors draw in order to attribute *meaning* to their lives and the world by which they are surrounded. In the human universe, power relations are permeated by discursive

366 Ibid., p. 12: 'compétence minimale'.

367 Ibid., p. 12 (translation modified): 'un acteur serait simplement égaré et incapable'.

368 Ibid., p. 12: 'transactions marchandes'.

369 Ibid., p. 109: 'inégalement distribuées'.

370 On this point, see Susen (2013d) and Susen (2013e).

371 On this point, see Susen (2007), Chapter 10. See also Susen (2016e).

372 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 443: 'le champ des possibles'. On this point, see also, for example: Bourdieu (1979a), pp. 52, 55, 122, 230, and 536; Bourdieu (2000 [1997]), p. 151; Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992a), pp. 152–153. In addition, see, for instance: Susen (2007), pp. 174–175 and 244; Susen (2011c), pp. 369 and 385; Susen (2013d), p. 228; Susen (2014c), p. 341; Susen (2014d), p. 690; Susen (2014e), p. 102 and 105; Susen (2014 [2015]), pp. 319, 322, and 325; Susen (2015a), pp. 178–179; Susen (2016a), p. 59; Susen (2017a), pp. 136 and 148n13.

373 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 497 (italics added): 'rôle du discours, qu'il prenne une forme analytique ou narrative'. On *the distinction between 'analytical form' (or 'analytical presentation') and 'narrative form' (or 'narrative presentation')*, see also, for example: *ibid.*, pp. 167–170; Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), p. 69.



– or, if one prefers, justificatory or noumenal – practices.<sup>374</sup> Thus, '*at the heart of power lies the power to develop a discourse about things*'<sup>375</sup>. In capitalist societies, such a discourse – or, rather, set of discourses – involves the assumption that things have not only a *use value*, a *symbolic value*, or possibly a *personal value*, but also, crucially, an *exchange value*. Indeed, in any market economy, the worth of a commodity is defined by a *combination* of types of value, which may be discursively invoked by subjects capable of engaging in purposive processes of interaction and transaction.

In light of the above, there is no point in replacing *pragmatic structuralism* with *systemic structuralism*<sup>376</sup> if such a paradigm shift is motivated by the conviction that the only persuasive 'metanarrative'<sup>377</sup> is the one that puts systemic-structural constellations at the centre of the social universe. Instead of advocating such a narrow view, Boltanski and Esquerre, while insisting on the structural determinacy of human sociality, stress the vital role played by actors' critical and reflexive capacities.

### Limitations

Let us, by way of conclusion, reflect on the *limitations* of Boltanski and Esquerre's analysis. For the sake of clarity, it makes sense to follow the thematic structure of the preceding sections:

1. Boltanski and Esquerre offer a compelling interpretation of the central place *commodities* occupy in capitalist societies. Yet, their inquiry contains

<sup>374</sup> See, for instance: Forst (2015a); Forst (2015b); Susen (2018a). In addition, see, for example: Susen (2007); Susen (2008a); Susen (2008b); Susen (2009); Susen (2011a); Susen (2012a); Susen (2012b); Susen (2013d); Susen (2013e); Susen (2014a); Susen (2014e); Susen (2014b); Susen (2016c); Susen (2016e).

<sup>375</sup> Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 497 (italics added): '*au cœur du pouvoir, se trouve le pouvoir de développer un discours sur les choses*'. On this point, see also, for instance: Foucault (2002 [1966]); Foucault (2002 [1969]); Foucault (1980); Foucault (1988). In addition, see, for example: Habermas (1987 [1985]); Kögler (1996); Kögler (1996 [1992]); Susen (2008a); Susen (2008b); Susen (2013d), esp. pp. 205–208 and 223–225; Susen (2014b), esp. pp. 12–13; Susen (2014e); Susen (2015a), esp. Chapter 2 and pp. 117–118; Susen (2017a); Susen (2018a); Susen (2018c); Susen (2018d); Torfing (1999).

<sup>376</sup> On the concept of '*systemic structuralism*' ['*structuralisme systémique*'], see Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), pp. 189–195, 496, and 500–502.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., p. 501: 'grand récit'.



little in the way of a systematic engagement with the question of whether or not there are *non-capitalist commodities* (and, indeed, *non-capitalist forms of commodity fetishism*). If so, a critical approach to reification should identify the qualitative differences between capitalist and non-capitalist commodities. In addition, it remains far from obvious what exactly determines which *type of value* (for instance, use value, exchange value, monetary value, personal value, reputational value, symbolic value, historic value, etc.) constitutes the *preponderant* force in defining the price of a commodity in a *particular* transactional context. Arguably, the worth of a commodity is the result not only of the *confluence of different types of value* but also of the *confluence of objective, normative, and subjective criteria*. A sociology of enrichment needs to provide a comprehensive account of the multifaceted composition of commodity value.

2. Boltanski and Esquerre rightly insist on the pivotal role played by *justification and critique* in the construction of prices and values. Yet, they tend to conceive of justification and critique as *system-immanent*, rather than *system-transcendent*, resources.<sup>378</sup> The question remains, however, to what extent the normative forces of justification and critique can serve not only *corrective* (and, ultimately, *affirmative*) but also *transformative* (and, potentially, *subversive*) functions, enabling actors to challenge – and, if required, to alter – the rules of the economic game in a *radical* manner.
3. Boltanski and Esquerre draw a *distinction between 'things' and 'persons'*, which is crucial to the values attached to the lifespan of objects and subjects. It is striking, however, that they fail to reflect on the degree to which *traditional boundaries* – such as those established between 'the non-human' and 'the human', 'the natural' and 'the cultural', 'the material' and 'the symbolic' – are *increasingly blurred*. Given the interconnectedness of integral elements of the world, it appears that classical conceptual dichotomies do not capture the ontological

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<sup>378</sup> On this point, see Fraser (2017), p. 58: 'critique today is weak and disabled, its "artistic" strand recuperated and its "social" strand disoriented by a new type of capitalism'. On this issue, see also Boltanski and Chiapello (1999). In addition, see Boltanski (2009a), Susen (2012b), and Susen (2014 [2012]).

intertwinement of constitutive facets of our existence. It would have been interesting to scrutinize the extent to which, paradoxically, the rise of the enrichment economy has contributed to *both* the hardening *and* the blurring of traditional boundaries – not least because those participating in its exchange chains may use *eclectic* valorization criteria, which, in many cases, defy the stifling logic of semantic enclosure.

4. Boltanski and Esquerre offer an astute assessment of the social conditions experienced by cultural workers in the economy of enrichment, emphasizing that their *cultural capital*, which forms the basis of their commercial competences, is essential to their relative success or failure. It is noticeable, however, that their investigation does not entail a thorough consideration of *other* forms of capital that *also* determine the asymmetrical positioning of actors in the economy of enrichment. In stratified societies, power relations are shaped by access to, engagement with, and employment of *numerous* forms of capital: social capital, cultural capital, educational capital, linguistic capital, political capital, economic capital, erotic capital, reputational capital, symbolic capital – to mention only a few.<sup>379</sup> A critical sociology of enrichment needs to expose the extent to which, in terms of both opportunity and outcome, commodified exchange mechanisms are influenced by *various types of capital*, representing the multidimensional resources with which interconnected actors are equipped.
5. Boltanski and Esquerre give an insightful account of the spatiotemporal contingency permeating the *critique of capitalism*, which reached different levels of intensity and radicality in different historical contexts. As they point out, it climaxed during the 1968 protests, but it was significantly weakened by the collapse of state socialism in 1989/1990. The systemic capacity of capitalism to overcome crisis must not be underestimated, as illustrated in the hegemonic influence of neoliberal regimes of governance across the world. What the two French sociologists have not looked into, however, is the degree to

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379 On this point, see, for example: Bourdieu (1975b); Bourdieu (1979b); Bour-

which *new ideological narratives* may evolve in the medium-term future, permitting individual and collective actors not only to call the seemingly triumphant status of global capitalism into question, but also to provide a credible alternative. The 'new spirit of capitalism'<sup>380</sup> may require a 'new spirit of anti- and/or post-capitalism'<sup>381</sup> to convert the economy of enrichment into a sphere of exchanges available to the many, rather than the few. And yet, it is far from clear how the creative energy, resourceful capacities, and cross-sectional potential of the 'multitude of actors'<sup>382</sup> can be mobilized in order to demonstrate that there *is* an alternative to the global hegemony of capitalism.

A broader problem arising in this regard relates to the question of whether or not Boltanski and Esquerre *overstate* the impact of enrichment economies – not only on social practices and structures, but also on collective struggles and antagonisms in the twenty-first century. They tend to *overestimate* the influence of the 'collection form' (enrichment economies) and to *underestimate* the influence of the 'standard form' (industrial economies), the 'trend form' (fashion economies),

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dieu (1986); Bourdieu (2013 [1978]). See also, for instance: Albrecht (2002); Aldridge (1998); Beasley-Murray (2000); Calhoun (1995); Gouanvic (2005); Hakim (2011); Hakim (2012); Herz (1996); Neveu (2013); Reay (2004); Robbins (2005); Shilling (2004); Sullivan (2001); Susen (2007), chapters 5–8; Susen (2011b), pp. 181, 194, and 195; Susen (2011c), pp. 368, 369, 370, 372, 384, 386, 387, 389, 390, 392, 403, 406, 408, and 409; Susen (2013d), pp. 210, 214–215, 219, 222, 226, and 229; Susen (2013e), pp. 324–325, 329, 349, 354, 370, and 371; Susen (2016a); Susen (2014e), pp. 105 and 107; Susen (2016b), pp. 53 and 71; Susen (2017a), pp. 135, 141–142, 143, and 146; Susen and Turner (2011), pp. xix, xxiii, and xxvi; Swain (2003); Urban (2003); Verter (2003); Wacquant (2004 [1997]); Wacquant (2013).

380 See Boltanski and Chiapello (1999). On this point, see also, for instance: Boltanski, Rennes, and Susen (2010); Chiapello and Fairclough (2002); Fairclough (2002); Gadrey, Hatchuel, Boltanski, and Chiapello (2001); Susen (2012b); Susen (2012a); Susen (2015a), p. 201; Turner (2007).

381 On this point, see, for example: Browne and Susen (2014); Byrne (2012); Calhoun (2012); Castells (2011); Castells (2012); della Porta, Andretta, Mosca, and Reiter (2006); Holloway (1998); Holloway (2003); Holloway (2005 [2002]); Holloway (2010); Holloway, Matamoros Ponce, and Tischler Visquerria (2009); Holloway and Susen (2013); McDonald (2006); Pleyers (2010); Santos (2006); Streeck (2011); Susen (2008a); Susen (2008b); Susen (2010a); Susen (2012a); Taibo (2011); Torres López, Garzón, Ortega, Almenara, Roitman, and Tuduri (2011); Velasco (2011).

382 Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), p. 485: 'multitude d'acteurs'.

and the 'asset form' (financial economies) on contemporary societies. Granted, they rightly insist that these four principal forms of valorization hold sway in 'integral capitalism'<sup>383</sup>. This does not absolve them from the task of recognizing, however, that *all four* play a vital role in shaping power dynamics in advanced capitalist societies. The asymmetrical distribution of power under 'integral capitalism' hinges not *only* on 'exploitation through enrichment', but *also* on 'homogenization through industrialization', 'normalization through fashionization', and 'expropriation through financialization'.<sup>384</sup> The sociological 'critique of commodities'<sup>385</sup>, in order to be genuinely comprehensive, should avoid giving undue weight to one dimension, at the expense of acknowledging the far-reaching significance of the others.

6. Boltanski and Esquerre's study demonstrates that the *contradiction between authenticity and inauthenticity* lies at the core of the enrichment economy. This contradiction is reflected in the *tension between 'anti-market' attitudes and 'pro-market' actions*. It may (or may not) be possible to bridge the gap between, on the one hand, the pursuit of *authenticity, market-transcendence, and ends-in-themselves* and, on the other hand, the reality of *inauthenticity, market-dependence, and means-to-an-end*. Irrespective of whether or not one considers the task of resolving this discrepancy a worthwhile endeavour, however, a more fundamental issue concerns the very distinction between 'authenticity' and 'inauthenticity'. The term 'authenticity' is commonly

383 On the concept of 'integral capitalism', see, for example: *ibid.*, pp. 26, 375, 399–400, and 566; Boltanski and Esquerre (2017b), pp. 68 and 73–75.

384 For instance, Fraser criticizes Boltanski and Esquerre for, in her view, failing to shed light on the 'unacknowledged *asymmetry* between *finance* on the one hand, and *industry* and *enrichment* on the other'; see Fraser (2017), pp. 63–64 (italics added). See also *ibid.*, p. 64 (italics in original): 'Whereas exploitation through enrichment must remain a relatively restricted, even provincial concern, *expropriation through financialization* is potentially of very broad interest.' On this point, see also Fraser (2016) and Lapavistas (2013). In addition, one may ask to what extent Boltanski and Esquerre's account applies more to some countries (e.g. France, possibly also Italy and Spain) than to others (e.g. Germany, whose economy continues to have a strong manufacturing base).

385 See the subtitle of Boltanski and Esquerre's book: 'Une critique de la marchandise'; see Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a).

employed to designate the genuineness of physical attributes (*objective* level), social constellations (*normative* level), and/or personal intentions (*subjective* level). Hence, words such as 'originality', 'legitimacy', and 'sincerity' are often used to describe particular states of 'authenticity'. One need not be an Adornian philosopher to be suspicious of 'the jargon of authenticity'<sup>386</sup>. Regardless of whether or not one shares Adorno's critique of Heidegger's obsession with 'authenticity' [*Eigentlichkeit*], it is somewhat disappointing that Boltanski and Esquerre's book does *not* contain a concise definition, let alone a detailed explanation and an in-depth discussion, of this term.<sup>387</sup> *The experience of authenticity may be enriching, just as the experience of enrichment may be authentic.* Given the pivotal role that the relationship between 'authenticity' and 'enrichment' plays in Boltanski and Esquerre's inquiry, their readers deserve to know what exactly the authors have in mind when attributing a special place to both the latter *and* the former in their investigation. One may allude to *objective* criteria (realism), *normative* criteria (constructivism), and/or *subjective* criteria (perspectivism) when making a claim about the (in)authenticity of something or somebody. A critical sociology of enrichment needs to flesh out the various (mis)understandings of (in)authenticity, in order to shed light on the wide-ranging parameters defining value creation in capitalist societies.

7. For Boltanski and Esquerre, a resource that is of supreme importance to the economy of enrichment is *the past*. Historicity constitutes a key factor in the valorization of luxury goods: the older a product, the higher its symbolic and monetary value. Unlike most industrial

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<sup>386</sup> Adorno (2003 [1964]).

<sup>387</sup> On *Boltanski and Esquerre's use of the term 'authenticity'*, see Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a), pp. 31, 34, 174, 209, 265, 268, 269, 283, 302, 331, 337, 341, 363, 393, 568, and 596. On *the concept of 'authenticity'*, see, for example: Adorno (2003 [1964]); Cooke (1997); Feldman (2015); Fleming (2009); Lindholm (2008); Varga (2012). See also, for instance: Susen (2007), pp. 109, 139, and 184; Susen (2010c), p. 75; Susen (2011d), pp. 60–61 and 70; Susen (2012a), pp. 311 and 325n170; Susen (2013e), p. 358; Susen (2015a), pp. 41, 42, 99, 230, 245, 259, 264; Susen (2016a), pp. 54, 73, and 95; Susen (2016b), p. 74; Susen (2016f), pp. 124, 125, 129, 135, and 136.

items, which tend to lose value over time, goods traded in the economy of enrichment tend to gain worth the longer they have existed. A central issue that Boltanski and Esquerre could have examined in more detail, however, concerns the ways in which goods can be situated *simultaneously* in (a) industrial economies of 'standard forms', (b) enrichment economies of 'collection forms', (c) fashion economies of 'trend forms', and (d) financial economies of 'asset forms'. The values attributed to an item may differ across 'form-specific' economies and across spatiotemporal contexts. To be precise, the set of values attached to a product is contingent not only on its historicity (that is, on *how long* it has been used for), but also on its socio-geographic location (that is, on *where* it is being used and *where* it is being sold).<sup>388</sup> The past of a product may either increase or decrease its value, depending not only on its objective properties (*realism*), but also on the ways in which its worth is normatively assembled by members of cultural communities (*constructivism*) and/or subjectively perceived by performatively engaged individuals (*perspectivism*). In brief, it is not always obvious in which particular economy a product is placed, let alone by which set of criteria its value can, or should, be judged.

8. Boltanski and Esquerre highlight the *stratified constitution* of society. In this respect, the divisive function of *social hierarchies* constructed around conceptual *binaries* is crucial: 'rich' vs. 'poor' (class), 'male' vs. 'female' (gender), 'white' vs. 'non-white' (ethnicity), 'young' vs. 'old' (age), and 'abled' vs. 'disabled' (ability) – to mention only a few. Power relations – which, in their asymmetrical forms, can be converted into modes of domination – permeate the *multiple* ways in which different types of wealth are distributed. It is not self-evident, however, *why* human societies produce inequalities of different kinds, let alone *why* most of them generate binary patterns of material and symbolic differentiation, on the basis of which structural asymmetries are

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388 For instance, an old Chevrolet may have (a) a *high use value*, (b) a *medium exchange value*, and (c) a *low symbolic value* in twenty-first-century Havana, but (a) a *low use value*, (b) a *medium exchange value*, and (c) a *high symbolic value* in post-1989 Dresden.

justified. Constructivist truisms (such as 'anything that can be *constructed* can be *deconstructed* and *reconstructed*'<sup>389</sup>) will not get us very far in minimizing the detrimental effects, let alone in grasping the origins, of social inequality. Boltanski and Esquerre's interdisciplinary spirit, which seeks to combine insights from various areas of research in the *humanities and social sciences*, has to be extended to knowledge produced in the *natural sciences*, in order to demonstrate how social inequality can be not only theoretically explained but also practically challenged by recognizing the *multiple factors* shaping its existence.<sup>390</sup>

9. Boltanski and Esquerre's study is a powerful reminder of the deep *ambivalence of the modern condition*. For modern life forms are characterized by the contradictory confluence of positive and negative, bright and dark, empowering and disempowering dimensions. Experiences of alienation, anonymity, and anomie belong to the condition of modernity no less than experiences of fulfilment, connectedness, and community. The sociologically more difficult question, however, is to what degree these tension-laden experiences are integral to *all* technologically advanced large-scale societies. Admittedly, different societies are separated by significant behavioural, ideological, and institutional specificities. If *all* of them – in particular, capitalist *and* state-socialist formations – are marked by the aforementioned confluence of empowering and disempowering experiences, a key task for critical sociologists consists in identifying not only the necessary conditions for human self-realization, but also the root causes behind the emergence of social pathologies. The uncomfortable truth to which we may have to face up, then, is that many of the rather unpleasant aspects of social reality, far from being reducible to historically contingent consequences of modernity, are built into the human condition.

389 On this point, see, for example: Susen (2007), pp. 174–175; Susen (2015a), pp. 4, 42, 67, 78, 106, 111, 146, 167–169, 173, 182, 201, 243, 269, 271, and 275.

390 On this point, see, for example, Pinker (2002). See also Flannery and Marcus (2012) as well as Price and Feinman (2010).



10. Boltanski and Esquerre give a solid account of the separation between markets of *mass production* and markets of *restricted production*. At least three questions arise when assessing the validity of their analysis:

- (a) To what extent are the boundaries between these two spheres of production increasingly blurred?
- (b) To what extent have more and more goods of 'markets of restricted production' become part of 'markets of mass production' (and/or vice versa)?
- (c) To what extent would the separation between these two spheres continue (or cease) to exist in a post-capitalist world?

The point is not to overlook the fact that the economy of enrichment constitutes a sphere of material and symbolic exchanges. Rather, the point is to acknowledge that enrichment economies have existed long *before* the rise of modern capitalism (and, arguably, would continue to exist in a post-capitalist era), adjusting to different historical circumstances, including constantly evolving modes of production. Insofar as consumers' purchasing power increases over time, more and more sectors of society will be able to participate in the construction of the enrichment economy. This is not to suggest that one day it will be sufficiently widespread to colonize the sphere of economic exchanges to such an extent that it will effectively become the market of mass production *par excellence*. Rather, this is to recognize that, in the future, it may not retain the spirit of 'exclusivity' that Boltanski and Esquerre appear to attach to the *contemporary* enrichment economy.

11. Boltanski and Esquerre touch upon *central issues in the sociological analysis of capitalism*, especially in terms of paradigmatic tensions such as the following: (a) 'state capitalism' vs. 'private enterprise capitalism', (b) 'collectivization' vs. 'individualization', (c) 'commodification' vs. 'non-commodification', and (d) 'human' vs. 'non-human'. An important matter to which they pay hardly any attention, however, is the problem of *intersectionality*. It is difficult, if not impossible, to make sense of power relations in capitalist so-



cieties without scrutinizing their intersectional constitution, emanating from *multiple* sociological variables – notably class, ethnicity, gender, age, and ability.<sup>391</sup> Indeed, the aforementioned tensions – between (a) 'the public' and 'the private', (b) 'the collective' and 'the individual', (c) 'the commodified' and 'the non-commodified', (d) 'the human' and 'the non-human' – are pervaded by the *intersectional*, rather than monolithic, *constitution of power relations*.<sup>392</sup> It would have been interesting to explore to what degree and in what ways intersectionally constituted power dynamics shape the economy of enrichment. In any capitalist society, processes of production, distribution, circulation, and consumption are based on people's asymmetrically structured access to material, symbolic, and financial resources – that is, on the intersectional interplay between foundational sociological variables (such as class, ethnicity, gender, age, and ability). In this respect, the economy of enrichment is no exception.

12. Boltanski and Esquerre's theoretical framework, which they label *pragmatic structuralism*, is arguably the most disappointing aspect of their book. On several levels, this undertaking can be regarded as a synoptic repetition of Boltanski's previous attempt to reconcile his *sociology of critique* with Bourdieu's *critical sociology*.<sup>393</sup>

391 On the problem of 'intersectionality', see, for example: Chow, Segal, and Tan (2011); Das Nair and Butler (2012); Doetsch-Kidder (2012); Fraser and Nicholson (1994 [1988]); Grabham (2009); Krizsán, Skjeie, and Squires (2012); Lutz, Herrera Vivar, and Supik (2011); Lykke (2010); MacDonald, Osborne, and Smith (2005); Nicholson (1990); Oliver, Flamez, and McNichols (2011); Susen (2012b), p. 716; Susen (2012a), pp. 284 and 290; Susen (2015a), pp. 9, 36, 71, 91, 109, 110, 111, 173, 184, 185, 186, 200, 201, 208, 220, 263, 280, 302n187, and 320n58; Susen (2016f), pp. 136–137; Taylor, Hines, and Casey (2011); Young (1994 [1989]); Young (1997).

392 Cf. Fraser's perceptive remark that, in the contemporary world, we are confronted with 'a congeries of different economies – or, as I would prefer to call them, of different economic sectors, *each possessing its own form of value, mode of exploitation, and potential for conflict*'; see Fraser (2017), p. 63 (italics added). Arguably, this insight is relevant to the analysis of other – non-economic – social fields, whose relatively autonomous, and yet interconnected, logics of functioning can be studied in *intersectionalist* terms.

393 On the controversial relationship between 'critical sociology' and the 'sociology of critique', see, for instance: Bénatouïl (1999a); Bénatouïl (1999b); Callinicos

- The former may be characterized as *pragmatic*, in the sense that it seeks to take ordinary actors seriously, acknowledging that they are equipped with fundamental socio-ontological – especially critical and reflexive – capacities.
- The latter may be called *structural*, in the sense that it insists on the preponderant force of underlying power constellations, by which agents are largely determined, but whose ubiquitous influence largely escapes their doxic perception of the world.

One may go a step further by contending that *the entire history of sociology is marked by the attempt to co-articulate – or even to reconcile and to cross-fertilize – pragmatist and structuralist approaches*. Debates on core sociological dichotomies<sup>394</sup> – such as 'interpretivism' vs. 'positivism', 'subjectivism' vs. 'objectivism', 'voluntarism' vs. 'determinism', 'methodological individualism' vs. 'social holism' – are intimately related to the paradigmatic opposition 'pragmatism' vs. 'structuralism'. It is far from obvious what Boltanski and Esquerre have contributed to these scholarly disputes in a genuinely original and thought-provoking manner. More importantly, unsympathetic readers may question whether Boltanski and Esquerre's *pragmatic structuralism* informs their analysis of the enrichment economy in an illuminating fashion. Unless it is possible to demonstrate that their theoretical framework permits them to make sense of their empirical data in a way that would not have been possible otherwise, it remains difficult to make a convincing case for its usefulness.

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(2006), pp. 4–5, 15, 51–82, and 155–156; Celikates (2009), pp. 136–157; de Blic and Mouchard (2000a); de Blic and Mouchard (2000b); Frère (2004), esp. pp. 92–93 and 97n4; Nachi (2006), esp. pp. 188–189; Nachi (2014); Robbins (2014); Susen (2007), pp. 223–224, 227n25, 228n50, 229n51, 229n52, and 271n24; Susen (2014e); Susen (2014 [2015]); Susen (2015c); Susen (2016c); Susen (2017e), pp. 355–356; Wagner (1999); Wagner (2000). On this debate, see also, for example: Boltanski (1990a), pp. 9–134; Boltanski (1990b), pp. 124–134; Boltanski (1998), pp. 248–253; Boltanski and Chiapello (1999), pp. 303–311; Boltanski (2002), pp. 276–281 and 281–284; Boltanski (2003), pp. 153–161; Boltanski (2008); Boltanski (2009a), esp. pp. 39–82; Boltanski and Chiapello (1999), esp. pp. 633–640; Boltanski and Honneth (2009), pp. 81–86, 92–96, and 100–114; Boltanski, Rennes, and Susen (2010), pp. 152–154 and 160–162; Boltanski and Thévenot (1991), pp. 40, 41–43, 43–46, and 265–270; Boltanski and Thévenot (1999), pp. 364–365.

394 Cf. Jenks (1998).

On a concluding note, it seems appropriate to consider the following observation:

In choosing the term '*form*' [rather than '*spirit*'] to name the concept through which they identify and analyze capitalism's different '*economies*', Boltanski and Esquerre signal that they have *shifted the plane of analysis* from the *subjective-motivational-ethical level* [...] to the *structural-institutional level* [...].<sup>395</sup>

In Boltanski and Esquerre's defence, it must be said, however, that one of the principal aims of their project is to *co-articulate* these two levels of analysis, rather than to shift the emphasis from the former to the latter. In this sense, their '*two-level conception of capitalist society* [...]' encompasses both "*spirit*" and "*form*"<sup>396</sup>, taking into account *both* the '*subjective-motivational-ethical*' conditions (à la Weber) *and* the '*objective-structural-institutional*' conditions (à la Marx) by which economic processes are shaped. This comprehensive diagnostic focus, especially given the breadth and the depth of Boltanski and Esquerre's study, is a major intellectual achievement, for which the authors are to be commended.

#### Note

All in-text translations of passages from Boltanski and Esquerre (2017a) are mine.

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<sup>395</sup> Fraser (2017), p. 59 (italics added).

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., p. 62 (italics added).

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