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From Cultural Capital to Knowledge. Review of the substantial and cognitive uses of an arbitrary social relationship

Abstract: Introduced by Bourdieu and Passeron in the 1960s, the term cultural capital has become a widely used concept in sociology. It represents the explanatory factor of social reproduction and of the social distribution of cultural tastes and practices. Cultural capital is supposed to take its sociological content in relation to the concept of 'field', i.e. its strictly relational definition. The aim of this article is to demonstrate how notion has now acquired a generic use, an indistinction of the dimensions of domination and cognition, and a use that goes beyond the process of socialization that was initially at its foundation. I argue that the notion of cultural capital should be reserved for the description of the social uses of culture in a social relationship and be replaced by that of knowledge whenever it is a question of designating knowledge or a practical competence in a situation that so requires.

Keywords: cultural capital, knowledge, level of education, domination, cultural practices

'Cultural capital' is a notion central to the sociology of cultural practices, perhaps even one of the constituent aspects of sociologists professional knowledge, at least in France. It is an ordinary notion of sociology, mobilized to take account of cultural practices, consumption practices and educational or social pathways. J. Johnston and S. Baumann (2007) argue that in addition, 'the appreciation of authentic foods requires high cultural capital'; F. Khosrokhavar[1] writes that 'the mix of middle classes and suburban or deprived youth in Syria can be explosive, each bringing to the other what it lacks, cultural capital or vengeful motivation.' And 'we know that the probability of succeeding in school is all the higher the more one has parents with high cultural capital,' says B. Lahire (2016). The notion gives rise to sociological projects such as 'Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion' in England (Bennett, Savage, Silva, Warde, Gayo-Cal, and Wright 2009)[2], with cultural capital, like age, functioning as a socio-demographic, if not objective[3], variable.

Forged by P. Bourdieu, the concept has both an explanatory value, of the social reproduction and social distribution of cultural practices, and a critical function, 'the critique, not of culture, but of the social uses of culture as a capital and an instrument of symbolic domination' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). It has two initial empirical foundations, scholastic reproduction and cultural practice. But according to Bourdieu, along with economic capital, the concept gains general validity as the second component of the social being (through the concept of *habitus*, the 'aspect of capital that is embodied' (Bourdieu 2015: 683)). In this, cultural capital is a notion that explains not only social reproduction and cultural consumption, and voting, eating practices, marital and friendship choices, but also the form that interactions etc. take, etc. – something that the book *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1979a) testifies to by correlating it to 'lifestyle' in general.

[1] F. Khosrokhavar, 'Les profils pluriels du djihadisme européen', *Le Monde*, 26/03/2016.
[2] Project of the *Economic and Social Research Council* in 2003 and 2004 in the United Kingdom.
[3] Use of the "cultural capital" syntagm might certainly be interpreted in turn as the social use of an idea, the strategic use of a word in the professional world of sociology. A feature of professionalism.

Two features characterize the history of this notion: its gradual imposition in Bourdieu's sociology based on the initial notions of 'knowledge' and 'level of education', and its extensive definition in terms of content: there is no existing text that allows us to know whether cultural capital specifically designates this or that, goes from one dimension to another or eliminates any other. A. Prieur and M. Savage' (2013) write that 'the book [Distinction] does not contain any formal definition of the concept'. Indeed, J.-L. Fabiani also points out that 'if cultural capital is not defined as a concept, it is approached by its modes of existence [embodied, objectified and institutionalized]' (Fabiani 2016) and, we might add, by its concrete sociological acceptations or uses. Certain sociologists thus report the absence of any precise definition and the risk of a 'catch-all concept in which are stored a whole series of diverse and varied mechanisms, processes and realities' (Draelants and Ballatore 2015).

If it is possible to do without a broader definition of cultural capital it is in the name of its 'relational' definition, which attaches it to the notion of 'field': there is 'total interdependence between field and capital', writes P. Bourdieu (2015:521). Coupled with a field of application, the nature of cultural capital is to be *specific*, just like 'scientific capital' or 'literary capital' (Bourdieu, 2015:524), which are respectively articulated with a 'scientific field' and a 'literary field'. Capital refers to 'an attribute of the person that confers certain kinds of advantage in particular fields' (Bennett and Silva 2011), 'that culture which socially functions socially as capital' (Champagne 2008). Cultural capital is based on a 'social relationship' in the Marxist sense of economic capital as domination: As K. Marx (1990 [1867]) wrote, 'instead of being a thing, capital is a social relationship between people, which relationship is established through things'.

One characteristic of cultural capital is that it appears under the acceptation of 'cultural capital' in the singular. This ordinary use of the concept in sociology corresponds to the *generic* acceptation where cultural capital is identified in terms of level of education. 'A visit

to a museum or exhibition has always been a practice closely linked to cultural capital. In fact, the 'diploma' variable systematically emerges as the best explanation of the practice, both in 1973 and today,' writes O. Donnat (2007). The most common definition of cultural capital as 'level of education' is no more precise. Treated generically, cultural capital is no longer coupled with field, or else when field is implicitly understood it is itself conceived in a general manner, 'school', 'arts', 'culture', 'social space', etc. This usage is found in ordinary assertions such as 'the higher one climbs in the hierarchy of educational qualifications, the more cultural capital individuals possess' or 'higher categories possess cultural capital that they pass on to their children'.

It would appear that the generic acceptation of cultural capital as a homogeneous (rising) and universal (non-specific) function has become widespread. Contemporary use of 'cultural capital' reflects an historical evolution of the concept, both in *conceptual intension* (its definition), the shift from knowledge to capital, and *in extension* (the objects to which it refers) (Ogden and Richards 1923) the addition of information in general to the initial classical culture (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992a). Regarding shifts in the notion, it is worth noting here the recurrent use by Anglo-Saxon sociologists of this term, which departs from the use forged by P. Bourdieu, according to whom cultural capital is a condition or determinant of practices; for these sociologists, cultural capital becomes the cultural manifestation of its synonym - distinction. J. Johnston and S. Baumann thus write that 'one of the many social functions of food, and the modes in which it is consumed, is to serve as a form of cultural capital' (Johnston and Baumann 2007). An article title such as 'Arts participation as cultural capital in the United States, 1982-2002: signs of decline? (DiMaggio and Mukhtar 2004) contradicts the meaning of cultural capital, a concept that has not been put forward as a manifestation of social value but as its cause. The question is what is meant by 'artistic participation as cultural capital' given that cultural capital is supposed to be the determinant of

practices. The effect is taken to be the cause. Reading a novel by P. Modiano, eating Indian food or travelling to China would be examples of cultural capital. Cultural capital has become an objectivity that manifests itself just as social distinction manifests itself.

In this article, we would like to return to the archaeology of cultural capital, to manifest its generic and specific acceptations, before revealing the universal significance that the notion has acquired, which is demonstrated through its *generic* and *substantialist use* on the one hand, and its *cognitive use*, distinct from its meaning in a relationship of domination on the other. Cultural capital' mobilized in a generic fashion (as a 'general equivalent') loses its descriptive value and becomes an endowment (automatic, generic and abstract) of higher categories, in exactly the same way as the gift against which it was built: these categories *have* cultural capital. The cultural capital has become their *natural capital*.

We will show that when we look more closely, it would seem difficult to argue that there is what one might refer to as a substance called 'cultural capital' embodied in 'states' ('objectified', 'embodied' or 'institutionalised'). An examination of the article 'the three states of cultural capital' in 1979 (Bourdieu, 1986) (published in French in 1979 (Bourdieu 1979b) raises doubts about the question the descriptive relevance and conceptual coherency of the notion. In our view, there is no such thing as 'the domestic transmission of cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986:17), but rather: 1. the transmission of material objects of a cultural nature; 2. the transmission of propositional (*knowing that*) and practical (*knowing how*) knowledge; 3. the transmission of a lifestyle (ways of being, values, ethos, etc.) proper to each social group. We will support the idea that, as capital, culture is conceived as a *resource - arbitrary - on a market* or *in a social relationship* and that it cannot be conceived as *knowledge* because *knowledge* is measured in terms of its *relation - adequate and legitimate - to an object*. To this end, it is necessary to distinguish between the domination aspect of a social relationship where it is a case of mobilizing this capitalistic value and the cognitive aspect which calls

upon the notion of knowledge; we must distinguish between the interactive (interactional) situation and the cognitive situation in the use of this concept, reserving the capitalistic use for the interactive situation yet re-specifying its symbolic nature of make-believe or knowledge relationships.

Fundamentally speaking, cultural capital justifies itself in designating the arbitrary dimension of the resources possessed in the social relationship (whether it covers ethos or any other given capacity). This is why it is not the equivalent of knowledge. The social relationship described as a relationship between cultural capitals is not a relationship between ‘knowledges’ but an arbitrary relationship (of domination), described as such, a semblance of resources or class resources. If it were a knowledge relationship, it would have no critical function in the place of a descriptive function. Our article conducts two types of criticism: a sociological criticism (what the notion of capital refers to is either knowledge, or recognized assets, diplomas or ethos) and an ideological criticism (there is no generic cultural capital that is increasingly possessed, just distinct knowledge). Reflection brings 'knowledge' to the fore as an adequate notion with which to describe culture in all its cognitive uses (looking at a Manet painting for example) and its 'knowledge' relationships (between experts and laymen, professionals and non-professionals). Works on cultural transmission in schools or families demonstrate the relevance of this dimension of cultural knowledge. This is one of the differences with the sociology of organizations and work, where the cognitive and technical aspects were formerly embodied in the central notion of knowledge (Benamouzig (Benamouzig and Borraz 2016).

Culture: from competence to cultural capital

We will begin by examining the initial cognitive characterization of culture in P. Bourdieu's sociology, for which the notion of cultural capital will be substituted, while at the same time including it.

Archaeology of the concept: culture as knowledge

P. Bourdieu's first works with J.-C. Passeron and A. Darbel do not mention the notion of cultural capital but talk about of 'knowledge' and 'understanding'. This is the case in the sociology of education.

> 'In every area of culture in which it is measured - be it the theater, music, painting, jazz, or the cinema - students have richer and more extensive knowledge the higher their social origin' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979).

> 'All teaching, and more especially the teaching of culture (even scientific culture), implicitly presupposes a body of knowledge, skills, and, above all, modes of expression which constitute the heritage of the cultivated classes' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979).

In the sociology of cultural events, the term 'artistic competence' is used to describe the cultural conditions of museum practice that constitutes the field of analysis of *L'amour de l'art* (Bourdieu, Darbel, and Schnapper 1991).

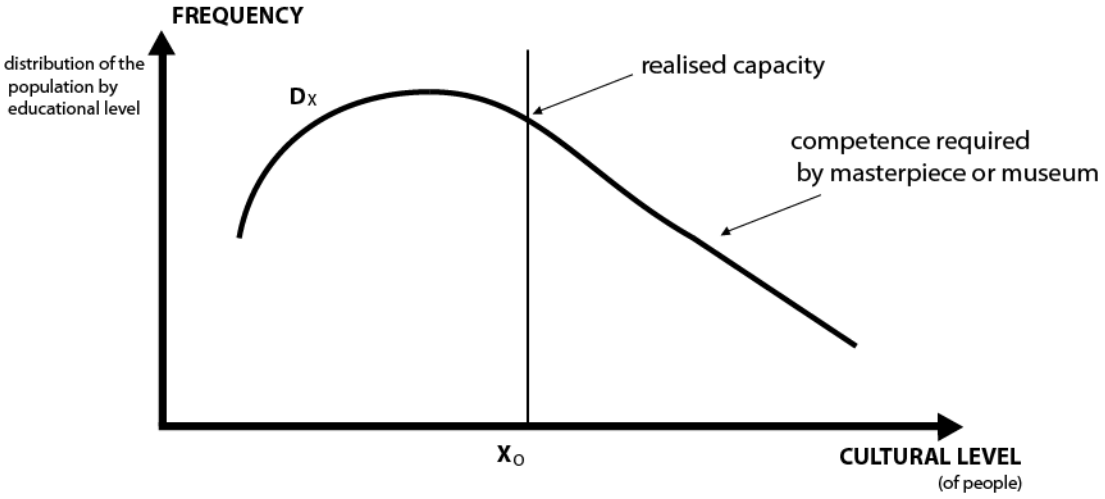
> 'Artistic competence is thus defined as prior knowledge of the specifically artistic principles of division which allow a representation to be situated, by classification of the stylistic indices it encompasses, amongst the possibilities of representation which constitute the artistic universe' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979).

The archaeology of cultural capital reveals the notions of knowledge competence and understanding to which must be added the dimensions of family ('cultural heritage') and

school acquisition and long-lasting embodiment (habitus). 'This embodied capital, external wealth converted into an integral part of the person, into a habitus (...)', as P. Bourdieu (1986:18) would later say.

The conceptualization of culture as cultural capacity is represented in the graph of the distribution of people viewing works and visiting museums according to cultural level in *l'Amour de l'art* (Bourdieu, *et al*., 1991:73) (cf. Figure 1). The aim of this graph is to represent the linear relationship that is established between the level of educational competence of individuals and the level of information offered by a masterpiece or museum. The further the vertical line Xo is to the right, the more the work or museum requires a high level of educational competence from a portion of individuals that is decreasing.

Figure 1: Archaeology of cultural capital as capacity ('distribution according to cultural level of the public viewing/visiting masterpieces/museums')



Source: Bourdieu, Darbel, The Love of Art: 73.
FREQUENCY = % of people at each cultural level: CULTURAL LEVEL = level of educational competence; D = Demand curve; X = level of information offered by masterpiece or museum.

There are two aspects of note in this first matrix of the analysis of cultural practices: firstly, an epistemology of competence and secondly the idea of a linear scale of competence

(which P. Bourdieu and A. Darbel call the 'approximately continuous hierarchy of scales of educational levels' (1991).

A museum visit as a manifestation of the encounter between a possessed competence and a required competence leads to an abstract and general correspondence. One might think that if this *physical encounter* takes place (the visit measured in terms of actual rates of attendance or even declared rates of attendance), it is perhaps sociologically presumptuous to add to it a symbolic equivalent - the cognitive encounter. An heuristic hypothesis that nevertheless represents the umbilicus of the abstract conception of cultural capital: the manifestation of cultural success will conceptually correspond to the statistical - probabilistic - encounter between an individual and an object, i.e. a level of education and a work of art or a museum. The problem raised by such an abstract figuration of cultural level is that it does not require any formulation of the content concerned by the encounter, that it corresponds to a linear, statistical and universal function that can only be observed, as an achieved capacity, to the exclusion of all other significance (in particular that which results from the survey). It is for this reason that the coding/decoding model to which it refers is not an interpretative model of the sociology of reception but rather a cultural model of the sociology of the conditions of practice[4].

The cognitive characterization of culture, which takes the latter to be a competence appropriate to its object, is, as we can see, in a privileged manner embedded in the study of

[4] Similarly, there is a clear difference between the decoding that is normatively required by the work of art, according to P. Bourdieu and A. Darbel, and the decoding that is ideologically required according to S. Hall (1980) and, more broadly, by the *reception studies* (Glevarec, Macé, and Maigret 2020). For P. Bourdieu and A. Darbel, the reception, and more particularly the dominated reception, is in no way conceived to be a "negotiated" or "oppositional" decoding. The popular receptor makes an erroneous reading because he does not understand what constitutes the symbolic coding of the object, in the same way as someone who does not understand the meaning of the common words of a language even though he is one of its speakers. Later on, J.-C. Passeron and E. Pedler endeavoured to approach reception via the notion of "pact" (Passeron and Pedler 2019 [1991]).

the aesthetic relationship with works of art[5]. It will be included in the capitalist characterization through the study of the school situation. This is the phase of assimilation of knowledge to cultural capital.

The components of culture as 'capital': inheritance, acquisition and class ethos

Culture is described as 'cultural capital', particularly in work on educational attainment. The term is intended to describe the functioning of culture as an asset.

> Indeed, it seems that a sociological explanation can account for the unequal achievement usually imputed to unequal ability. (…) Each family transmits to its children, indirectly rather than directly, a certain cultural capital and a certain ethos. The latter is a system of implicit and deeply interiorized values which, among other things, helps to define attitudes towards the cultural capital and educational institutions. The cultural heritage, which differs from both points of view according to social class, is the cause of the initial inequality of children when faced with examinations and tests, and hence of unequal achievement' (Bourdieu 1974).

Cultural capital has two possible components, the possession of certain useful knowledge and the ethos (of the dominant one)[6], and the first, itself, has two sources: family inheritance and acquisition at school ('educational capital'). As the titles of the statistical data tables in *Distinction* suggest, 'cultural capital' is statistically operationalized as 'educational capital' *plus* 'inherited cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1979a). 'Cultural capital' covers things as varied as academic knowledge and class ethos.

As from *Les Héritiers*, the 'cultural heritage' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979)of the upper echelons is both a scholastic culture and a social culture, of knowledge and customs arbitrarily

[5] 'Thus, the relationships observed between museum visiting and variables such as socio-economic category, age or environment are almost totally reduced to the relation between level of education and visiting' .(Bourdieu, Darbel, and Schnapper 1991).

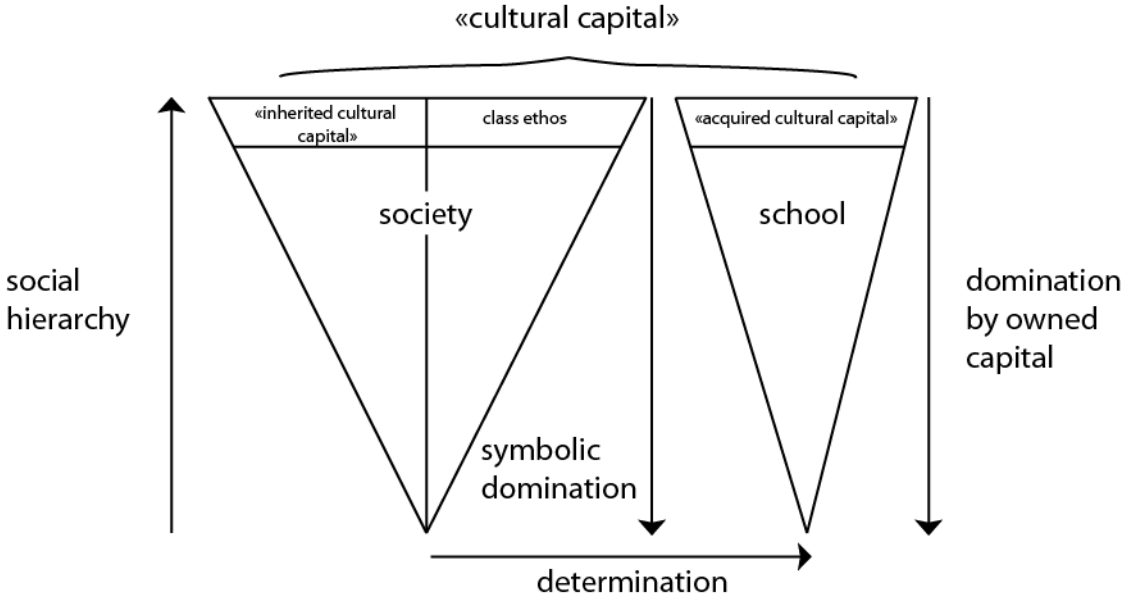
[6] While the ethos in question is not that of the higher categories, it is not added to the educational cultural capital that is inherited or acquired. The ethos of a working-class child is not added as cultural capital to the cultural capital that he/she would have acquired by doing a doctorate, for example. At the very best it is a specific capital.

valorised by representatives of the school institution. The social function of culture here refers to the idea of an impure use of culture: to dominate and reproduce domination, particularly in scholastic examinations. Knowing and valuing, knowing something and valuing it for that something it possesses, somehow come to be assimilated. Bourdieu thus talks about the 'two dimensions of cultural capital-possession of specific knowledge of composers and the 'flair' which is needed to make it profitable' (Bourdieu 1984a).

The *social use* of culture (cultural capital) will integrate and assimilate the initial *cognitive use* (stemming from *knowledge, competences, understanding* and *ability*). 'This is so because, at bottom, the value of a species of capital (e.g. knowledge of Greek or of integral calculus) hinges on the existence of a game, of a field in which this competency can be employed' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Due to the substitution of knowledge capital, this example does not make it possible to know whether knowledge of Greek is a type of capital in a social market (a professional market, for example) or knowledge in relation to an object (being able to read a text written in Greek). Yet the difference is one of nature. The shift from cognitive use to social use represents a conceptual rupture.

Inheritance, acquisition and ethos are the three initial components of capital and their possession increases in volume with social hierarchy. They can be represented as follows (Figure 2):

Figure 2: inherited cultural capital, acquired cultural capital and class ethos



The archaeology of the notion shows that cultural capital functions in the explanation of cultural practices by being articulated with the mastery of artistic codes of access to works and institutions, whereas it functions in the explanation of educational and social reproduction by being articulated with specific, arbitrary features possessed by higher categories. In other words, the descriptive meaning of cultural capital is not the same in the case of the 'cultural situation' and that of the 'educational situation', which are, more precisely, for the former an *activity* of an aesthetic nature and, for the latter, an *examination* of a scholastic nature. The meanings are even opposite if, in the first case, cultural capital aims to describe a variable necessary for deciphering the work or a condition of cultural practice (a code), and, in the second, it aims to describe an unjustified variable (i.e. characteristics) (a way of being proper to higher categories that is valued by examiners) at the heart of the scholastic examination (Bourdieu and Gros 1989).

In 1994, on the occasion of a review article for the *Encyclopédia Universalis*, Bourdieu wrote this sentence, which testifies to the two theories of culture of competence and

domination and a desire for assimilation: 'This embodied code that we call culture in fact functions as cultural capital because, being unequally distributed, it automatically provides profits of distinction' (Bourdieu 1984a). The question is how a 'code' can 'in fact function' *as* 'cultural capital'. The only thing it could do is 'function in addition'. The code required to decipher cultural assets functions, *in addition,* as capital. To put it another way, P. Bourdieu is attempting to assimilate two distinct ways that cultural knowledge functions: *as code* and *as capital*, one referring to a relationship of understanding an object and the other referring to a social relationship between individuals or institutions. We cannot simply argue here that it is by forcing words to play to the limits of their logical potentials that sociology advances, or justify an assimilation to an infeasible lexicon that would be specific to sociology. It is not by confusing dimensions of practices (code and capital) that sociology advances or that it is interesting or justified.

Generic extension of the concept

While the first stage in the development of the notion of 'cultural capital' consisted in assimilating the cognitive dimension of culture and of an ethos in a social relationship, an assimilation we will return to later on, the second stage lies in the generalization of the notion.

From a specific and relational use to a generic use

The article 'The three states of cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1979b) presents as a defining article of the notion. P. Bourdieu presents the notion as follows:

> The notion of cultural capital initially presented itself to me, in the course of research, as a theoretical hypothesis which made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes by relating

> academic success, i.e., the specific profits which children from the different classes and class fractions can obtain in the academic market, to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions' (Bourdieu 1986).

P. Bourdieu defines 'cultural capital' in a roundabout manner: 'cultural capital' is what allows one to understand educational inequality on the basis of 'cultural capital'. The text contains no indication of the content that P. Bourdieu gives to what he generically calls 'cultural capital'. The only content mentioned is 'writings, paintings, monuments, instruments' (Bourdieu 1986), without any type of cultural property being designated. Is it all books, for example? Let us examine the two possible defining options: the universalist option and the pragmatic option, which in fact cover the two abovementioned uses of the notion: generic use and specific use.

The universalist option or generic use corresponds to the maximum extension of cultural capital to all symbolic assets owned: *all* books, *all* paintings, *all* instruments owned. This version of 'cultural capital' dispenses with any dependence on a particular space, on a 'field' according to P. Bourdieu's conceptualization. It is a possessed cultural capital that allows one to form phrases such as 'so-and-so owns cultural capital' or 'so-and-so owns more cultural capital than someone else'. Its content is universalist and undifferentiated and does not relate to any particular use. Cultural capital appears just as universalist as the cultural practices it determines. The universal acceptation includes linguistic performances, life skills and body *hexis*, the knowledge and diplomas of one's parents, and the cultural activities of the family.

It may be reasonably argued that P. Bourdieu initially had a 'classical' acceptation of cultural capital (that which could be valued on the school market in the 1970s), language proficiency, artistic culture and intellectual knowledge, which he then extended to include all information in general. In 1989, Fournier and Lamont wrote that 'several [sociologists], following Bourdieu, have chosen to define cultural capital as familiarity with 'cultivated culture'' (Fournier and Lamont 1989). In 1992, in *Réponses*, P. Bourdieu stated that the notion of

'cultural capital' would be better called 'informational capital' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Between the 1960s and the 1990s, the cultural field expanded, calling for – it would appear - an extension of the notion. But what is most sociologically significant does not lie in any nowhere-to-be-found definition or in a cultural extension of the concept; it lies in the empirical fact that for sociologists, cultural capital most commonly corresponds to level of education and to possession per se, and not to use as an asset. In this respect they follow P. Bourdieu, who evaluates cultural capital, at the minimum, in terms of the educational level.

> It follows that the least inexact of all the measurements of cultural capital are those which take as their standard the length of acquisition-so long, of course, as this is not reduced to length of schooling and allowance is made for early domestic education by giving it a positive value (a gain in time, a head start) or a negative value (wasted time, and doubly so because more time must be spent correcting its effects), according to its distance from the demands of the scholastic market' (Bourdieu 1986).

P. Bourdieu is talking here about 'cultural capital', not in terms of its relationships to a field of application, but as a product of institutions, the family and the school, which is already a confirmation of substantial value.

The second option is 'pragmatic' and corresponds to the specific use of cultural capital, where the latter is what makes it possible to dominate in a relationship, situation or field, or makes it possible to succeed in said domination. The cultural capital is then the second piece of a couple that it forms with a field. In reality, this is the fitting definition of cultural capital, that of being the cultural asset of a field.

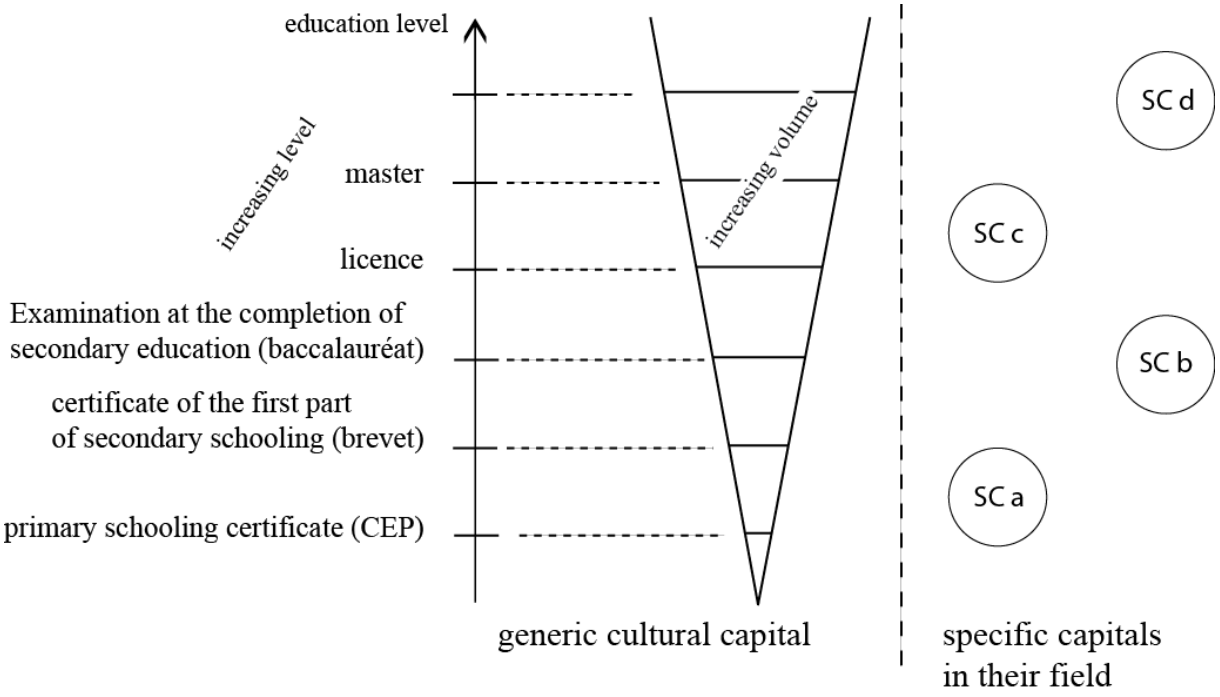
> 'A species of capital is what is efficacious in a given field, both as a weapon and as a stake of struggle, that which allows its possessors to wield a power, an influence, and thus to *exist*, in the field under consideration, instead of being considered a negligible quantity. In empirical work, it is one and the same thing to determine what the field is, where its limits lie, etc., and to determine what species of capital are active in it, within what limits, and so on. (We see here how the notions of capital and field are tightly interconnected.) (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

> 'I would say, at this level, that there are basically as many different types of capital as there are fields: there is an interdependence between the definition of a field and the definition of the capital that is at stake. When I say field, I am automatically speaking of cultural capital' (Bourdieu 2015).

The particularity of sociological uses of the notion is that they employ both generic and specific acceptations. Yet from a conceptual coherence standpoint, the generic use is hardly justified since it amounts to mentioning cultural capital but *without* its field of application or with an implicit field that is itself of a generic nature. Generic cultural capital then refers to the universal aspect of culture, viewed as an asset in markets that are themselves generic (school must be conceived in this way).

Figure 3 shows the two uses of cultural capital, its 'generic' use and its 'specific' use. In its generic use, cultural capital increases in line with the level of education (this is how the 'volume of cultural capital' axis is understood in *Distinction* (1979a, pp. 140-141)); in its so-called specific use, it varies in nature and volume according to the particular field to which it applies: 'literature', 'rap music', 'computing', 'politics', etc. 'CS a', 'CS b', ... illustrate specific types of asset which can just as well be correlated to different levels of qualification (specific training) or exogenous to educational acquisition (training through practice).

Figure 3: Generic cultural capital and specific capitals



Not having any precise definition in terms of content, cultural capital represents a linear function that is illustrated by the usage 'having more or less cultural capital'. Does it mean the gradual mastery of written knowledge (reading, writing and arithmetic...), knowledge of the artistic and intellectual works in the list (recognized and taught), knowledge of contemporary artistic and intellectual works, or any knowledge as long as one follows the very extension that P. Bourdieu imposes by expanding it to include 'information'? In reality, 'cultural capital', in the generic sense, is not intended to designate basic competences, which would, moreover, increase, but a volume of capital without specifying what 'volume of capital' designates at each of its levels.

Value of the generic use of cultural capital

It would seem that *generic use* does not correspond to *relational use* of the notion coupled with a specific field. When generically conceived, cultural capital refers either to the one's level of education (thus requiring us to ignore Bourdieu's assertion that level of education is said to not guarantee knowledge but to function as a sign (1979b)), or to a general possession that increases in line with social standing. In relational use, cultural capital is the x that is valued on the X field that allows domination, a capital that people possess to varying extents. Yet if cultural capital x has a generic dimension delimited by its scope, it is within the strict limits of *x on field X* or *within the X ratio*.

Can 'cultural capital' refer to a universal equivalent of a cultural nature? Can a cultural equivalent cover things as heterogeneous as the mastery of a language, different from all others, of a discipline (history, medicine, mathematics, history of art...), different from all others? If having money means one can buy almost everything, having a high level of education does not mean that one knows how to do everything or to exercise cultural power over everything. Cultural capital is not like economic capital, a quantitative variable whose continuous function can be isolated, somewhat as if owning one unit of cultural capital is like knowing an additional letter of the alphabet.

Having a master's degree in biology does not confer knowledge of contemporary art. Yet does such a level of education provide generic knowledge that corresponds to 'cultural capital' without any other specification? It cannot be a generic asset that is valid in a social relationship or field that is itself generic, i.e. in all relationships and in all specific fields, since there are in all likelihood only specific fields.

Furthermore, equating to level of education does not make the content of cultural capital any clearer, as it means producing a theory on this capital in its generic (or volumetric) form corresponding to the different levels of education. Once the basic generic skills (*literacy*) of

reading, writing and mathematical counting operations have been declared, a graduation of the content of 'cultural capital' in its generic form remains non-existent. What is the volume of (generic) cultural capital at the *baccalauréat* level? Does what is known by a student who has passed his/her *baccalauréat* exam have a generic and volumetric nature that is valid in a social relationship or in a field that is itself generic? Are we not dealing each time with specific knowledge? Approximation by default, which has become an equivalence, which makes level of education synonymous with the notion of 'cultural capital', consists on the one hand in substantiating what is supposed to be a social relationship and in turning academically acquired knowledge into things of the 'same fabric', whereas the knowledge of a philosopher, an engineer, a doctor, a pastry chef, a car mechanic or a ski instructor, for example, is specific knowledge. On the capital-intensive use of 'popular assets', J.-C. Passeron says:

> 'Is it not a conceptual fiction to construct a conceptual fiction when one accounts in the unified language of comparable 'assets' (which for a given 'species' of capital can never differ except in volume) for the role played by technical masteries and symbolic competences that are as different, both in function and in mode of use, as those of the dominant and dominated classes? ...] Would the only differences between dominant and dominated be that they are more or less 'the same thing'? Would all 'resources' be cut from the same cloth? (J.-C. Passeon in Grignon and Passeron 1989).

It goes without saying that any volumetric use, i.e. ordinary generic use of the notion of 'cultural capital', assumes that all resources are cut from the same cloth.

The generic acceptation of cultural capital is pursued in a *theory of capital conversion* that seems to lose its sociological realism as it becomes more generalised. For example, P. Bourdieu says: 'Within the space of cultural capital, for example, what are the conditions for transforming a physicist's capital into a sociologist's capital, or a historian's capital into a sociologist's capital' (Bourdieu 2015). The answer to this question should be that one simply *needs to change one's profession*. The general economy of the practices advocated by P.

Bourdieu here encounters the heterogeneity of knowledge types (becoming a sociologist requires specific training and practice)[7].

The generic meaning of cultural capital tends to impose itself in usage, thus signalling a problematic rupture with the relational definition of this notion. Another, earlier development took place with the introduction of capital as an instrument of a relationship of domination in the order of cultural consumption practices, which constitutes a rupture with the cognitive dimension of *competence* and *knowledge*.

Substantification of cultural capital and analogical conceptualization in sociology

In its generic use we have underlined the fact that cultural capital loses its relational condition to become a homogeneous possession. It seems intelligible that it is transformed into substance. In this respect the article 'the three states of cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1986) merits close examination. What is being considered is not the relationship of cultural capital to its field but cultural capital's modes of being. The article argues that there are three 'states' of cultural capital: the 'objectified', the 'institutionalized' and the 'embodied' states. Such a conception in fact constructs cultural capital as a substance that is embodied in states.

'Embodiment': indistinction between the dominant ethos and mastered knowledge

Let us first examine the 'embodied state' of cultural capital. It refers to 'the long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body'. P. Bourdieu does not indicate at any point what is embodied. 'This embodied capital, external wealth converted into an integral part of the

[7] Regarding 'would-be systematic thinking' which comes down to '[applying] its universally applicable schemes to every object', P. Bourdieu (1984b) points out its 'amusing effects'.

person, into a habitus' (Bourdieu 1986). 'The habitus is the aspect of the capital that is embodied', Bourdieu repeated in the early 1980s (Bourdieu 2015). What kind of asset is it? There is every reason to believe that embodied cultural capital is in fact a synonym for 'studies' or 'specific cultural competence'[8], although, Bourdieu adds: 'This proposition implies no recognition of the value of scholastic verdicts; it merely registers the relationship which exists in reality between a certain cultural capital and the laws of the educational market' (Bourdieu 1986).

The question we would like to ask is this: why refer to this as 'embodied' possession and not simply as 'owned' or 'mastered' possession? What does the physical dimension of embodiment add to the intellectual and cognitive possession (means of appropriation, 'competencies') that it in fact is? It seems to add a dimension of practical knowledge ('knowing how') to that of propositional knowledge ('knowing that'). But does saying that cultural capital is embodied have another meaning than saying that it is mastered? If cultural capital is knowledge, then to say that it is embodied is less descriptive than to say that it is possessed knowledge, admittedly made one, through learning and habit, but in a banal sense, like sporting techniques which are effective knowledge and certainly not ways of doing things that we could do without. In short, we can see that cultural capital is not so much embodied as mastered. The embodiment of cultural capital appears to be an unnecessary conceptualization of the nature of cultural knowledge, which is just as much practical as it is propositional, and which is mastered[9]. For example, we do not describe the language we speak (cultural competence if ever there was one) as an embodiment. Embodiment does not provide any

[8] '(…) the use or exploitation of cultural capital presents particular problems for the holders of economic or political capital, whether they be private patrons or, at the other extreme, entrepreneurs employing executives endowed with a specific cultural competence (not to mention the new state patrons)' (Bourdieu 1986).

[9] This is why a formulation such as 'cultural capital is essentially transmitted through embodiment par incorporation' (Jourdain and Naulin 2011) is obscure. Aside from the specific case of an introduction into the body, nothing is transmitted between individuals through embodiment. If cultural capital ends up being "embodied" (though we deny this special quality if it is a case of talking about knowledge that is merely mastered), it is transmitted through contact between people, impregnation, imposition, by whatever mechanisms of transmission and indoctrination we might imagine, but not through embodiment.

justified descriptive or conceptual qualification. Embodiment would appear to be a superfluous entity to characterize this thing that is a cultural competence that one possesses.

The use of the embodiment dimension derives its *raison d'être* from the *class ethos* component of cultural capital. That the embodiment dimension refers to *ways of doing* or *ways of being*, that it includes what P. Bourdieu calls 'ethos', clearly indicates that it is not a question of competences and knowledge but of ways, styles or traits. If it is a question of class behaviour, functioning positively or negatively within a social relationship, then it is a question of 'symbolic capital'. It may therefore be argued that what the term 'embodied' correctly refers to is not culture as knowledge, but what Bourdieu calls ethos. What is embodied are ways that are specific to social groups (accents, postures, manners, etc., but also affective, emotional and desiring dimensions) that also manifest themselves in bodily traits (such as whether or not to have the slim physique required for the orchestra seats in a theatre). Yet the class ethos and affects embedded in bodies are not cultural capital or knowledge, but simply, in an improper sense, *ways of*, functioning *symbolically* and not culturally, according to a field of social norms that correspond to them and individuals who value them. As Bourdieu says, 'by virtue of the fact that symbolic capital is nothing more than economic or cultural capital which is acknowledged and recognized' (Bourdieu 1990). This is precisely why it is also via the 'symbolic capital' syntagm that J.-C Passeron characterizes cultural capital and its embodiment: 'it is a property presupposing all the social symbolism that makes up the specific value of a symbolic capital, the ability to be recognized as, and thus to become objectively, the most objective and personal thing in a person, his very body: gait, walk, mimicry, intonation, manners, silhouette, etc.' (Passeron, 1982:576). Yet he does not revise the adjective 'cultural'. Speaking French is thus a type of knowledge. Doing so with no accent is a way that might be characterized as French functioning as capital if said way is valued in a type of relationship, in a market, in a field (which would appear to be the case between

accents or 'absence of accents'). But it is no less a capital (in a social relationship) that must be described as 'symbolic' and not 'cultural'. There is an essential conceptual distinction to be made here, which consists in remembering that culture functions as 'capital' in a social relationship of recognition, of a symbolic and non-cognitive nature, and of an arbitrary nature, which gives it its critical value. This distinction is that which shows that the class ethos (of the dominant) is not knowledge (acquired in the family or through studies).

'Objectification': a possession of goods of a cultural nature

The 'objectified' state of cultural capital expresses the materialization of culture in physical media. As P. Bourdieu says, it represents a paradoxical state in that, without changing its conceptualization, if it has value it is as an object but without its cultural dimensions, like any object that can be bought and sold on a market; indeed, the 'cultural' value of objectified cultural capital remains dependent, *conditioned*, on the capacity to appropriate it, specifically, via the so-called embodied 'cultural capital', which is indispensable.

> 'Cultural capital, in the objectified state, has a number of properties which are defined only in the relationship with cultural capital in its embodied form. The cultural capital objectified in material objects and media, such as writings, paintings, monuments, instruments, etc., is transmissible in its materiality. A collection of paintings, for example, can be transmitted as well as economic capital (...). But what is transmissible is legal ownership and not (or not necessarily) what constitutes the precondition for specific appropriation, namely, the possession of the means or 'consuming' a painting or using a machine, which, being nothing other than embodied capital, are subject to the same laws of transmission' (Bourdieu, 1986:19).

In other words, objectified cultural capital is not a capital that functions culturally; it is *just* a capital, like a plane that one possesses but without knowing how to fly it oneself (or

knowing how, which is equivalent for the purposes of defining it). Similarly, what an individual possesses when he owns a Master's painting is not a (possible) embodied cultural capital *plus* an objectified cultural capital; it is just a (possible) embodied cultural capital and a *painting*. In order to be fully 'cultural', 'objectified cultural capital' must be embodied; it is something that should, to be precise, be called a *possession of cultural property*. 'Objectified, it [the value of cultural capital] tends to be confused with a material value and only takes on its cultural dimension if it is activated by a singular body,' says J.-L. Fabiani (2016, pp. 111-112). The value of objectification would be relevant only if it designated for the owner (of a painting, for example) an exteriorization of his competence ('in his/her relationship with' (sic)). However, this quality is rightly withdrawn by P. Bourdieu from cultural objects as objects. The owner of a cultural object is not the owner of an 'objectified' cultural capital, but of a capital of a 'possessed' cultural nature. In terms of possession, what is presented as 'objectified cultural capital' is the only true capital, pure currency, with an exchange value but no value of automatic use (Caillé 1986). Yet the term 'cultural' seems inadequate when talking about the functioning of an object or capital that is never cultural in nature, but is either symbolic (a display, an ostentation that has value in a social relationship) or marketable (an object that has value on a market).

In other words, a professor who owns Cicero's books in Latin does not possess an objectified capital but a marketable capital that only functions on a rare-book market. It can hardly be said that P. Bourdieu is making a salutary criticism or taking a useful step forward by giving the books in the library - for example of a researcher, let us be modest - the status of 'objectified cultural capital' when he may not have read or understood them. Is he not constructing a cultural illusion? Is it not glorifying the owners of paintings, books, etc., to see their material possessions as 'cultural capital' instead of the marketable goods they are, or mere 'capital'? From P. Bourdieu's critical perspective, objection has sociological value.

'Institutionalization': a symbolic capital

'Institutionalized capital' represents the 'cultural capital in the form of titles' albeit without being a competence or knowledge validated by the examination or test, says P. Bourdieu. 'A school qualification can be similar,' writes J.-L. Fabiani, 'although Bourdieu does not say so, something such as a transferable security: it can be exchanged on a market and the rate of convertibility depends precisely on the state of the market. (...) In the final lines of his article, Bourdieu introduces a new kind of capital, ‘educational capital’, which is fully substituted for cultural capital in order to account for the third state of this type of capital. In other words, the sociologist himself translates the embodied state in terms of habitus, and the institutionalized state is translated into ‘educational capital’' (Fabiani, 2016:111). The question then becomes what is meant by 'educational capital'.

To define the institutionalization dimension of cultural capital, P. Bourdieu writes: 'One has only to think of the *concours* (competitive recruitment examination) which, out of the continuum of infinitesimal differences between performances, produces sharp, absolute, lasting differences, such as that which separates the last successful candidate from the first unsuccessful one, and institutes an essential difference between the officially recognized, guaranteed competence and simple cultural capital, which is constantly required to prove itself' (Bourdieu 1986).

In order to define the institutionalized form, P. Bourdieu distinguishes it from the real form, the so-called 'simple' form, of cultural capital. There can be an 'infinitesimal difference' between an institutionalised cultural capital and its 'neighbour', which remains 'simple capital': in other words, cultural capital in its so-called 'institutionalised' form is recognised, whereas simple cultural capital is not. In reality, institutionalized cultural capital is a symbolic capital, a capital of recognition, whose characteristic is to be 'institutionalized' by comparison with 'natural' or 'proven' characteristics for example, and not by comparison with 'embodied' or

'objectified' characteristics; as long as it is not real, the cultural dimension does not specify it any more than anything else: a qualification, a status, a nature.

P. Bourdieu says of the academic qualification: this 'certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture' (p. 20). What does the expression 'in relation to culture' mean? Let us not forget that cultural capital theory does not imply any recognition of the value of school verdicts, but relates to the relationship that is actually established between a certain cultural capital and the laws of the scholastic market. Ultimately, what part of the possessed culture does institutionalization refer to, if of that which is recognised it refers only to the effect and not the cause, to the qualification and not the competence? Bourdieu stresses the fact that objectified capital is not validated knowledge, but a recognized sign. So whenever it is a question of mobilizing institutionalized capital as a measurement of cultural capital, it is in fact symbolic capital. It would appear that the level of degree can therefore serve just as well to indicate true cultural capital as an institutionalized version of a possession that is only universally recognized *via* qualification-awarding mechanisms. This seems to be a contradiction.

In short, the three types of cultural capital appear unrelated to each other. There are errors of categorization of the culture in question: cultural knowledge, market goods and qualifications. More than a 'vague nature of the relationship between the three states of cultural capital', as J.-L. Fabiani (2016:112) notes, here we find a heterogeneity of cultural things to be at stake on each occasion. In 'the embodied', culture as capital is knowledge (i.e. a 'means of appropriation'), in 'the objectified' culture is a marketable object and in 'the institutionalized' culture is a sign. 'Knowledge', 'object' and 'sign' do not express the same substance. 'Possessing books in Latin' and 'knowing Latin' do not represent two modes of

being 'Latin cultural capital'. The so-called three 'states' refer to strictly different objects that are not the transformation of the same thing, such as water into solid, liquid and gas. At best there would be a cognitive capital (of knowledge), a material capital (of symbolic objects) and a capital of educational qualifications (*i.e.* of signs). One might add that if, in addition, it is a question of describing culture in an anthropological manner, i.e. of describing cultural goods as objectifications of human culture, then the three 'states' would appear to be insufficient to describe the forms that culture takes: organisation, rules, norms, laws, institutions, rituals, etc. are then manifestations that are missing.

The following table (table 1) qualifies the manifestations of the three forms, 'knowledge', 'object' and 'educational qualifications', that are referred to in the 'three states of cultural capital' according to the different functions in question: 'symbolic' (the non-functional recognition of certain possessed traits as valued traits), 'commercial' (the market value) and 'cognitive' (the capacity to function in relation to an object).

Table 1: Manifestation of the three cultural forms according to their functioning

		Functioning		
		symbolic	**marketable**	**cognitive**
Culture as	**knowledge**	supposed *(embodied)*	exchanged	mastered
	asset	displayed	owned *(objectified)*	appropriated
	qualification	*institutionnalised*	bought	validated

'Embodied' and 'institutionalized' qualify the symbolic (i.e. recognized) functioning of knowledge and qualifications, here academic. Embodiment, in so far as it actually designates class manners, must in our opinion be reserved for the (dominant) *ethos* and is a symbolic mode of functioning; it does not appear to be the most accurate term to designate what is recognition, a relationship to the 'subject supposed to know', to use J. Lacan’s

formulation (2018). It should be referred to as *supposed*. Its cognitive dimension should be more accurately described as the mastery of a given knowledge. Embodied capital corresponds precisely to these distinguished manners long acquired by the higher categories and representing a real advantage in the eyes of others. 'Objectified' qualifies the commercial functioning of an asset of an artistic nature. An 'objectification' designation would be better described as a 'possession'. Its symbolic mode of functioning is a *display* (showing one's paintings, one's library) and its cognitive mode is an *appropriation* (of 'means of appropriation', says P. Bourdieu). As for the diploma, in terms of its commercial mode of functioning, it is *bought* (which sometimes exists), and in terms of its cognitive mode, it is synonymous with *validation*. The double slash that separates the 'cognitive' function of culture from the other functions is justified by the fact that unlike the symbolic and commercial functions it is not a question of exchange, , but of an *instrumental relationship* (the relationship of knowledge to its object). The reconceptualization proposed here has as its corollary a critique of the analogical value of the notion of cultural capital.

The metaphorical and analogical conception of investment: does cultural capital have a special grammar?

B. Lahire (2015) describes the notion of cultural capital as 'metaphorical'. While this is an accurate qualification, is it a defendable scientific characteristic? In this situation, is not saying that 'cultural capital' is a metaphor the same as saying that the notion is so-called even though it does not refer to the concept of 'capital'? From a theoretical point of view, are sociological concepts metaphorical by nature? If so, in what way is an 'as if' different from a 'like'? The argument that the status of the analogy is 'experimental' and identical to an

'everything happens as if'[10] would seem hard to accept from the standpoint of scientific argumentation and the epistemological status of sociological notions or concepts. Indeed, the problem is that of the scientific status of an analogical notion that does not assume its analogy.

P. Bourdieu thus uses the word capital but to in fact mean investment.

> 'Ethnology and comparative history show us that the specifically social magic of institution can constitute almost anything as an interest and as a realistic interest, i.e. as an investment (in both the economic and the psychoanalytic senses) that is objectively rewarded, in the more or less long term, by an economy' (Bourdieu 1993).

Does introducing the notion of investment as a 'sufficient reason' in no way alter what P. Bourdieu then calls an economy ('paying back')? If '*homo economicus* is merely the universalization of *homo capitalisticus*' (ibid.: 34), the introduction of cultural capital is the application of capitalist logic to the cultural realm. In L. Boltanski's and L. Thevenot's (2006) vocabulary of the sociology of cities, the introduction of cultural capital through the sociological discipline characterizes a functioning of culture that is not of the 'industrial' type - where (cultural) competence is exercised - but of the 'commercial' type - where (cultural) capital is exercised[11]. Cultural capital aims at making a utilitarian break with sociology.[12]

In defence of cultural capital, F. Lebaron writes that 'Bourdieu's 'general economy of practice' is the precise opposite of this attempt, showing the specificity of the fields of cultural production where an economy of supply develops by rejection of economic criteria' (Lebaron 2003). The question is what is an 'economy' (general economy of practice) that rejects

[10] 'Researchers do not always say: "everything happens as if the world were a game" or "let's act as if the world were a game and see what happens" (Lahire 2001).

[11] One might add that cultural capital in no way includes any notion of virtue, epistemic virtue for example (open-mindedness, intellectual honesty…) (Zagzebski 2005). No-one ever says: "for an academic, having cultural capital is to have epistemic virtues".

[12] 'economic analogy" clearly contradicts the idea of "free" creation. Bourdieu is clearly "utilitarian", if that means that he refuses the charismatic ideology of creation and its "anti-causal" (and "antiscientific") vision of art, the enchanted conceptions of family relations, the normative idealization of science, etc., and all the universes where interests are denied or at least euphemized' (Lebaron 2003).

economic criteria. Might this simply be because it is not a question of money but of culture and social statuses? It hardly seems conceivable to talk about 'capital' while at the same time refusing to introduce the grammar of interest, of profitability, of investment, of calculation, of return on investment, *etc*. There do not appear to be two meanings of 'economics', one that is monetary and the other symbolic. Accounting economics and symbolic economics have the same conceptual equipment; that of interest, market, capital and profitability[13]. A 'functions as' is an 'as'. Cultural capital is indeed an economy, but one of status. A cultural capital which does not belong to the economic grammar is similar to the crowned king in the chess game of which L. Wittgenstein speaks: 'I want to play chess, and a man gives the white king a paper crown, leaving the use of the piece unaltered, but telling me that the crown has a meaning to him in the game, which he can't express by rules. I say: "as long as it doesn't alter the use of the piece, it hasn't what I call a meaning"' (Wittgenstein 1965). There is no general economy of practices of which market economy would be a specific concept; it is simply a 'way'[14].

Distinguishing between domination and understanding, capital and knowledge

As we have seen, cultural capital is mobilized to explain social interactions of an ordinary or institutional nature as well as cultural, food, sports and other practices. In doing so, the

[13] 'Nonhuman capital, which in this book [Capital] I will call simply “capital,” includes all forms of wealth that individuals (or groups of individuals) can own and that can be transferred or traded through the market on a permanent basis.'(Piketty 2018) He adds: ‘I always exclude what economists often call (unfortunately, to my mind) “human capital,” which consists of an individual’s labor power, skills, training, and abilities' . This remark is valid for cultural capital.

[14] For the analogical use of the concept of capital in the field of culture, J.-C. Passeron offers a paradoxical defence based on what it lacks with regard to strict analogy. 'Recourse to the analogical concept of cultural or educational “capital” is therefore often wrongly criticised: critics are the only ones to take this designation literally. This analogical designation fulfils heuristic functions, not just through the services that it provides directly, but also in as much as the inadequacy of what is suggested by the economic meaning of the concept of “capital” forces us to ask how such capital does not function as capital in the strict sense' (Passeron 1982). We are entitled to which characterisation of capital does not function in the strict sense.

notion combines the relational dimension (where a capital is a function of its field) with a cognitive component that cannot be assimilated, which is a matter of knowledge.

To *value as* is not *to know*, *to dominate* is not *to understand*

J. Goldthorpe (2007) compares what he calls the 'domesticated' use of cultural capital with its 'wild'. The former refers to cultural capital as a restricted sociological concept, produced within the framework of a sociology of school. It is a variable whose explanatory value is disputed by the research community. The latter use, 'wild', consists in making cultural capital a key concept of a new paradigm of social inequality and of social hierarchy in general, more broadly of a theory of the social subject (what Bourdieu calls 'habitus'). The social being is essentially made of economic capital and cultural capital. J. Goldthorpe then points to the amalgamation of 'status' and 'skill', of possession and competence. He encourages its abandonment in favour of the notion of 'cultural resources' within 'a theoretically more neutral and more limited one' (Goldthorpe 2007). However, the notion of cultural resource maintains the confusion between knowledge and social use.

The notion of cultural capital functions as a synonym for capacity, whereas a capital does would not appear to be of the same nature as a capability, because, as we have said, Bourdieu introduced cultural capital after introducing the notions of 'competence' and 'knowledge' (Bourdieu and Darbel, 1969). The transition from knowledge to capital takes place over the long term and the two notions of 'competence' and 'capital' both appear in Bourdieu's 1966 text on cultural transmission, as do the notions of 'cipher', 'cultural knowledge', 'cultural level' or even 'knowledge' and 'know-how' (Bourdieu 2002). In other words, it is in Bourdieu's own hand that the assimilation of knowledge into capital, the inclusion of the cognitive dimension into the idea of possession, takes place.

Yet we must argue that capital is not a competence except in a play on words that would say that 'to possess reading capital is to know how to read' or, in another field, that 'to know how to interpret a symptom is to possess medical capital'. A capital is a possession, and a possession does not permit an act of comprehension. Conversely, competence is not capital because it is know-how. Understanding the works of the painter Manet does not require a capital but a competence, for example the competence that P. Bourdieu's works on Manet were supposed to provide (Bourdieu 2013). We do not say that a work of art requires capital in order to be understood, but a competence, for example, which mobilizes knowledge or know-how. Know-how is applied to an object while capital has value on a market. One might consider that the word 'capital' works as a synonym of a 'Group' (just as one says 'he owns a flock'), an acceptation from which the ideas of 'capital of competences' or 'capital of knowledge' are conceivable. Yet cultural capital is not understood as 'culture capital' but as a culture that functions as an asset in a given market, in a given social relationship. Capital cannot be conceived as a possession as such, or as knowledge. To do so is to fetishize it, or even substantiate it.

The notion of cultural capital should be strictly confined to the description of a market situation in which there is a relationship of domination between beings, outside of which the notion of knowledge would seem to be required, being more appropriate to its purpose: to have a practice because one has mastery of an area of knowledge. While 'to have capital is to possess x' makes sense, 'to have capital is to know x' does not. The definition of capital as the 'symbolic appropriation' of cultural assets (Bourdieu, 1979b:5) is thus a correct definition of cultural knowledge. Cultural capital is a grammar of domination (culture functions as capital) and not of understanding (culture functions as knowledge) (cf. table 2).

Whenever it is a case of considering the functioning of 'culture' to be appropriate to an object (execution of know-how, understanding of a work), i.e. of accounting for a cognitive

situation or the cognitive component of an interaction, what is referred to as 'cultural capital' would benefit from being replaced by the notion of knowledge, by pluralizing and specifying it, thus regaining P. Bourdieu's initial conceptualization of culture as cognitive mastery, 'cipher' or 'code'.

> 'Culture, in the objective sense of cipher or code, is the condition of intelligibility of the concrete systems of signification which it organizes and to which it remains irreducible, as a language is irreducible to particular utterances. A the same time, culture in the subjective sense of a more or less complete mastery of the code is nothing but that (objective) culture internalized and become a permanent and generalized disposition to decipher cultural objects and forms of behaviour by using the code according to which they are enciphered' (Bourdieu 2002).

It turns out that in the field of education, researchers endeavouring to learn what 'cultural capital' means are in fact talking explicitly about competences or knowledge. H. Draelants and M. Ballatore write: Sullivan (2001) thus shows that television, whilst being a medium that is emblematic of popular culture, shares with books the capacity to promote academic success in as much as it facilitates, through certain programmes (...) the development of linguistic skills and cultural knowledge' (Draelants and Ballatore 2015) (our emphasis). We can see that the assets of the most well-endowed children do not relate to any ethos or arbitrary culture valued in school, but to 'linguistic skills' and 'cultural knowledge'. N. de Graaf *et al*. (2000) make similar observations when examining the effect of parents' reading and attendance at artistic venues on their children's success at school in the Netherlands:

> ‘First, parents who read frequently have linguistic and cognitive skills that were rewarded in school and can pass these educational skills on to their offspring. (...). Second, parents who read more frequently not only have more educational skills at their disposal, but they add to a cultural home environment that has an affinity with and resembles the cultural school climate' (De Graaf, De Graaf, and Kraaykamp 2000).

'Language and cognitive competence', 'learning environment' and 'academic competence' are all accurate descriptions of knowledge. Is it therefore wise to use the term 'cultural capital' for something that is conceived as being of a nature that is neither relational nor arbitrary in nature, but as universal and required by the school? What is cultural capital in the strict sense is 'the cultural family environment that has an affinity with and resembles the cultural climate of the school' and only this means an arbitrary asset that favours those who benefit from it.

Studying the effect of musical practices, considered as 'competences' (possessed by certain pupils), in the social inequalities of academic success, M.-C. Huguet concludes that 'results show that musical practices constitute a cultural capital that helps with academic success' (Huguet 2008). Treating competences as cultural capital amounts to transforming all 'technical' relationships (in the sense of being competent to do something) into social relationships (arbitrary and of domination according to the definition of cultural capital). A critical and interactionist concept is in reality used to refer to knowledge (competences). This is why it is appropriate to not say that 'musical practices constitute cultural capital that helps with academic success' but rather that 'musical practices constitute competences that help with educational success', uses that are very different from 'the social uses of culture as capital and as an instrument of symbolic domination' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

Knowledge relations and symbolic relations

As we have seen, 'cultural capital' tends to operate in relation to two types of heterogeneous situation: relationship to an object (for example, the practice of visiting museums or, more broadly cultural practice conceived as the practice and as a decoding) and interaction between people (interaction at school, ordinary or codified social interaction such as a job interview, a service relationship, etc.). In terms of domination, culture appears in two forms: relationships of knowledge, particularly between holders and non-holders of specific

knowledge; symbolic relations, between individuals who attach superiority or inferiority to a given trait. The idea that domination is exercised through culture (and not only via financial means) in an interaction (be it interpersonal or institutional) supposes an impurity in the criteria of the situation that tends to valorise and to give credit to holders of a certain type of culture. In the school situation described by J.-C. Passeron and P. Bourdieu, this type of culture turns out to be the dominant ethos on the one hand and the dominant culture on the other. Characterized in this manner, culture is not knowledge but cultural arbitrary[15] (Kambouchner 1995).

Table 2 aims to restore the essential distinction to be made between the cognitive component and the interactive component of social situations (cultural practice, scholastic examination and social situation in general). For the former, culture functions not as capital but as capacity. In the second, culture functions either as domination through knowledge, or as symbolic or even economic domination.

[15] 'Value [of the cultural goods transmitted by the different family pedagogic action] qua cultural capital varies with the distance between the cultural arbitrary imposed by the dominant pedagogic action and the cultural arbitrary inculcated by the family pedagogic action within the different groups or classes' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990).

Table 2: Uses and forms of culture

		Situation or component of the situation	
		cognitive *comprehension*	**interactive** *domination*
Culture as	**knowledge**	capacity	through knowledge
	asset		symbolic and economic
	qualification		symbolic
	ethos		

It may be that the notion of cultural capital is therefore inadequate to describe not only the comprehension dimension of a situation but also the nature of the relationship of domination which is either a *relationship between different types of knowledge*, and thus a 'domination' by a knowledge differential, or simply a *symbolic relationship of recognition*. On the one hand, the notion of cultural capital is inadequate to describe a cognitive capacity (knowledge of the history of art, for example), and on the other hand that of social relations, breaks down either into a relationship of knowledge or know-how (for example possessing or not possessing medical knowledge, knowing (or not) how to make furniture), or into a symbolic relationship (recognising or being recognised through an academic qualification or class ethos, or the absence of said recognition or qualification), or even into an economic relationship (possessing or not possessing visible cultural assets).

As A. Sullivan points out, since the very origins of this notion that is used to think about the scholastic examination, there has been an assumed indistinction between arbitrary standards of the situation that favour the social traits of higher categories and legitimate standards that favour resources that the latter already possess. Arbitrary standard and

legitimate standard form the two distinct ways that culture is used, as capital and as knowledge. 'However, he [Bourdieu] does not clearly enough distinguish between standards which are prejudicial to lower-class pupils and students because they are arbitrary, and standards which are prejudicial to lower-class pupils and students because they do not have the resources to meet those standards' (Sullivan 2002).

The amalgamation of knowledge and domination in 'cultural capital' manifests itself as a contradiction when one uses this concept to simultaneously talk about inequality and democratization. It cannot be argued that the virtue of the concept of cultural capital is to be able to say the following two things: that culture is an instrument of domination and, at the same time, an instrument of emancipation. Using cultural capital as a factor with which to explain cultural practices while at the same time denouncing cultural inequality is contradictory, given that if cultural goods are deemed to be desirable, it is not for their instrumental, capitalist or socially useful value but, at least in part, for the emancipatory, edifying or experiential value of the knowledge they convey '(Glevarec 2013).

Conclusion: Higher-category natural capital and culture reduced to capital

It would seem that, in the writings of P. Bourdieu, 'cultural capital' has gradually assimilated the knowledge and the symbolic, arbitrary value of certain traits (ethos, manner, ease, etc.) that people express. More generally, the notion gives rise to a substantified use that breaks away from its definition as a social relationship and social use (culture is capital in a relationship). As an antidote to the belief in gifts, the notion has ended up replacing it with a world of objectivity of the possession of cultural capital and a belief in generic cultural capital, possessed and measured in terms of level of education. The possession of a diploma is now truly considered to be 'the possession of cultural capital' without needing to add anything

more, to specify which dimension operates in which type of social relationship. The notion has not only requalified the cognitive skills of individuals and their diversity, it has ended up replacing them. Cultural capital is a concept that was epistemologically sceptical but whose use has become substantial and foundational in the sense that philosophers give to basic knowledge that is presented as justified or self-evident (Engel 2000; Tiercelin 2005).

Cultural capital has hardly any critical virtue when it is attached in an abstract fashion to the level of education of individuals and their ascendants and is logically associated with them. We believe that one of the most important criticisms to be made of the notion of cultural capital is its transformation into *a possession* of higher, singularly intellectual categories. We might therefore refer to cultural capital as the 'natural capital' of higher categories. No longer an innate possession like a gift, but an automatic and necessary possession.

To use the syntagm 'cultural capital' in a generic manner is to make of the use of a cultural thing, to be for a cultural thing, an asset in a market, a means of domination or a concept. It is to substantiate the *social use of culture as capital and as an instrument of symbolic domination*. This is why the problem with the notion of 'cultural capital' is not so much the 'deceptive force of analogy', as Wittgenstein (1965) said of certain analogies, in this case with regard to economic capital, but its substitution for the word culture itself. Culture is thus reduced to capital.

The analysis we have performed here represents a dual conceptual and sociological critique of the notion of cultural capital. The conceptual critique comes first and relates to the use and *a fortiori* substantial understanding of cultural capital. The sociological critique concerns the confusion introduced by the conceptual inclusion of the cognitive dimension to the notion, the fact that culture cannot be reduced to a capital, and level of education to a synonym of capital.

We argue that what is referred to as 'cultural capital' would benefit, on the one hand, from being requalified as 'symbolic capital' operating on the basis of recognition when it is a question of sociologically designating the dimension not required by a test (scholastic examination for example), a dimension of being or having and possessed *a priori* by the higher categories, and, on the other hand, from being replaced by the notion of *mastered knowledge* when it is a question of sociologically qualifying what is required in an exam or necessary in a relationship to an object (to a cultural asset, for example). If in reality the notion of 'cultural capital' is intended to refer to possessed knowledge, then we need to talk about a 'knowledge relationship' (between levels of competence); if the notion is intended to refer to something beyond or different from knowledge, then we must talk about a 'symbolic relationship' (of the imposition/recognition of symbolic, arbitrary traits). The fact that we note that any interaction, be it ordinary, institutional or an examination, always mixes the two things, the legitimate and the illegitimate (the required knowledge and the arbitrary of a relationship of domination), changes absolutely nothing with regard to the pertinence of maintaining, on the one hand the analytical distinction between knowledge and symbolic capital, in relation to individual assets, or, on the other hand, the distinction between legitimate and arbitrary standards, in relation to situations. One can hardly defend the idea that cultural capital has the advantage of encapsulating things as different as knowledge, ways of (ethos) and symbolic traits. One cannot fully argue that P. Bourdieu used this concept intuitively, for creative purposes, with the intention of discovering hidden social relationships, without immediately finding oneself in the intellectual embarrassment of defending an intuitive conceptualization in sociology rather than one that is true and well-founded in reason.

If by 'cultural capital' we really mean 'knowledge', then Occam's razor applies and 'cultural capital', both generic and specific, is a superfluous entity. Yet it is indeed this

cognitive acceptation (of knowledge, understanding, competences) that is referred to in usage. At the very least, it would seem vital to separate knowledge from cultural capital, or else the very condition and relevance of what is said is called into question, first and foremost that scientific knowledge can be knowledge and not mere capital. The notion of cultural capital must be stripped of its cognitive aspect and its dimension of social relationship must be restored in the symbolic (and economic) order on the one hand and in the order of knowledge but not arbitrary knowledge on the other. In order to do this, sociology must not be suspicious of knowledge, its task being to produce it[16]. That the children of well-educated parents inherit more knowledge than other children seems highly probable if not logical. The fact that we see that at school actors attach a positive and discriminating value not only to the knowledge required for a scholastic test, but also to *additional* knowledge ('extracurricular culture') (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979) does not in any way alter the fact that this is knowledge (Glevarec 2019). The concept of cultural capital is not inadequate just because it is economic and extends a utilitarian view of cultural assets and cultural competences, but because it purports to concern competences that are not described in a logic of exchange, competition, 'accumulation', 'resources' or 'profit', but in a logic of validity, pertinence, capacities and knowledge. As for the use of the *as if* of the capitalist analogy, it is hardly convincing, whereas it is justified if it is assumed. It is similar to any mention of 'truth' put in quotation marks, a conceptual double game identical to that which one minute makes capital real knowledge and the next a power of a relational nature. On the contrary, this critical reflection places knowledge at the centre of its argument.

[16] The fact that it produces knowledge does not mean that said knowledge is correct. Its accuracy is discussed in a scientific universe and is not the equivalent of a cultural capital of which we cannot say whether it is arbitrary or not.

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