

Pierre Bourdieu : Economic Models against Economism¹

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Abstract

The use of economic analogies by Bourdieu has often been the object of much criticism. For some scholars, it reveals an “economistic” vision of the social world too much inspired by neoclassical economics. For others, it is a kind of mechanical metaphor transposed to cultural phenomena in a determinist way, as in the holistic (Marxist) tradition. In order to understand this usage and to refute these contradictory criticisms, we return to and focus on the very first occurrences in the 1958-1966 period – the focus of our paper - of what Bourdieu would call a “general economy of practices” in his book *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique*:

Two central aspects, often been forgotten by critics, are presented here : first, the close but very particular link between his work and economics as a growing scientific discipline during these years ; second, the criticisms Bourdieu makes of the economic model as a general scientific tool for the social sciences. If one insists only on one of the two sides of the coin, one risks to misunderstand Bourdieu's original scientific *habitus* and intellectual project. By contrast, this “double” position opens the possibility of an “integrated” vision of social and economic factors of practices, thanks to the introduction of the “cultural” and above all the “symbolic” dimensions of social life.

¹ This article is the expanded version of a communication at the Bourdieu Conference in Boston, October 2002. I thank David Swartz and Niilo Kauppi for their comments on a first version of this text.

The use of economic analogies by Bourdieu has often been at the center of much criticism and discussion. For some scholars, it reveals an “economistic” vision of the social world too much inspired by neoclassical economics². For example, Alain Caillé analyzes this view as a particular variant of the “utilitarian” conception that has been gaining a strong influence across the social sciences. He argues that through the “economicization” of his sociological language, Bourdieu has legitimized a reduction of the diversity of human behaviors to the general quest for personal *material* benefice or satisfaction. Even if Bourdieu sometimes criticizes that sort of “Beckerian” reduction, it is right that Bourdieu has put personal interests (often denied) at the center of his model and has expressed a strong skepticism for moral or normative explanations; that are common indigenous perspectives, especially in the spheres of religion; and cultural production³.

For other scholars, the economic analogy is a kind of mechanical metaphor, inspired by a holistic vision of society. Bourdieu is accused of generalizing determinist Marxist conceptions of individual action and/or culture; by reducing them to socioeconomic infrastructures, especially the class structure defined by capital inequalities. His notions of interest, capital, etc. are (supposed to be) defined by objective class conditions, that is to say by structural (or global) determinist dimensions. Individuals, especially artists and creators, are denied any singular capacity of creation and of rational action corresponding to cognitive autonomous strategies or representations⁴.

One could say that Jean-Claude Passeron’s position in this debate⁵ is an attempt to clarify the consequences and to assess the limits of using “metaphors” imported from economics, especially “inflation” and secondly “market” and “capital”. Passeron⁶ insists first on the possibilities of empirical accumulation related to this systematical use, which should not be refrained by a positivist kind of auto-censure : these metaphors are sorts of generative matrices of new, dense and stimulating observations. But at the same time,

² Caillé, Alain, « La sociologie de l’intérêt est-elle intéressante ? », *Sociologie du travail*, vol. 23, 3, (1981) : 257-274 ; Favereau, Olivier, « Penser (l’orthodoxie) à partir de Bourdieu. Ou l’économie du sociologue », Communication au séminaire IRIS, 2000.

³ See here the recent issue of the *Economic Sociology. European Newsletter*, 4, 2, 2003, especially the articles by Richard Swedberg and Bernard Convert. I also want to thank Marie-France Garcia, Johan Heilbron, Odile Henry and the other participants to the group « economic sociology » at the Centre de sociologie européenne for our discussions about Bourdieu and economics.

⁴ See for example Menger, Pierre-Michel, « Temporalité et différences interindividuelles : l’analyse de l’action en économie et en sociologie », 3, juillet-septembre (1997) : 587-633.

⁵ Passeron, Jean-Claude, « L’inflation des diplômés : remarques sur l’usage de quelques concepts analogiques en sociologie », *Revue française de sociologie*, 23 (1982) : 551-584.

⁶ Ibid. See also Passeron, Jean-Claude, *Le raisonnement sociologique. L’espace non-poppérien du raisonnement naturel* (Paris : Nathan, 1991).

they appear to be limited by various kinds of “inadequacies”, especially when they are transposed too mechanically from one frame to another. This is a third kind of criticism, much more centered on the limits of validity of what one could call a “linguistic” economic formalization of social realities. This criticism can not be reduced to one of the previous two. It opens a discussion about the nature of “economic” words (in which sense they derive from a particular disciplinary frame and correspond to particular sorts of objects; defined as “economic”) and about the notion of “economic analogy”, which is often used with Bourdieuan notions of “capital”, “market”, etc.

1958-1966 : seven fieldworks

One way to understand Bourdieu’s “economic” language and to discuss and refute most of the contradictory criticisms, is to return to the very first occurrences, during the 1958-1966 period – the focus of this article –, of what Bourdieu would call a “general economy of practices” in *Esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique*⁷. By 1965-66 Bourdieu had already participated in seven important empirical “social and economic” (collective) studies, dealing with various objects that occasioned confrontations with economic theories :

- The transition of a traditional society to capitalist modernity and the transformation (rationalization) of economic *ethos* (the “Algerian period”, that yielded several publications from 1958 to 1977⁸). This early work allows a first incursion into the discussion of the “Rational Action Model”, which begins to be popular, in particular at the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) and among young government economists. This discussion is related to both ethnographic and statistical observations of work, employment, and time structures in Algeria. It is also a period when Bourdieu begins to use Marxist notions in a completely different frame and even meaning, such as the notion of “simple reproduction”, which he applies to the cyclical conception of time prevailing in the traditional society.
- The somehow rather similar transition occurring at the very same time in the Southern region of France where Bourdieu was born (Béarn), generating a particular form of anomie among young male peasants (the “Béarn study” with a first article published in 1962⁹). This work allows him to reflect on the expansion of a “market economy” inside traditional societies, especially its consequences regarding the transmission of capital through marriages, which appear to be a central point for the reproduction of economic inequalities. “Inheritance” is the most clearly “economic” object *and* concept that stimulates Bourdieu’s sociological theoretical work

⁷ Bourdieu, Pierre, *Esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique, précédé de Trois études d’ethnologie kabyle* (Paris/La Haye : Mouton, 1972).

⁸ Bourdieu, Pierre, *Sociologie de l’Algérie* (Paris : PUF, 1958) ; Bourdieu, Pierre, *Esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique, précédé de Trois études d’ethnologie kabyle* (Paris/La Haye : Mouton, 1972). Bourdieu, Pierre *Algérie 60: structures économiques et structures temporelles* (Paris : Minuit, 1977).

⁹ Bourdieu, Pierre, “Célibat et condition paysanne”, *Etudes rurales*, 5-6, avril-septembre, (1962) : 32-136.

since this time. It will be extensively used in the enquiry about French students and as a basis for the notion of “reproduction strategies” developed later¹⁰.

- The way a deposit bank deals with the various social characteristics of its customers and the way it organizes the concrete interactions between demand and supply of credit (the *Compagnie Bancaire* study¹¹). This is a more direct incursion inside the sphere of money and finance, where Bourdieu and co-researchers come back to the original notion of “credit” (and “saving”), which appears to be related to trust and to be embedded in concrete social relations structured by inequalities of resources. It is a moment when Bourdieu starts to come to grips with marketing professional discourses and management issues. He relates the acquisition of credit to the possession of a personal capital and relates the variations of consumers perceptions of credit to their economic and cultural resources.
- The economic and social determinants of inequalities in schooling, especially at the University (which will be published in *Les Héritiers [The Inheritors]* in 1964¹²). This study is the heart of the shift from an economic definition of inheritance (*patrimony*, and especially *land*) to a generalized definition, where land or monetary/financial capital are particular cases of “things” families transmit to their children in order to maintain or improve their position inside society: class values, cultural hierarchies and practices, etc.
- The determinants of cultural practices of such as photography (the “Kodak survey” published in 1965 with the official support of the CEO of Kodak-Pathé¹³). These cultural practices are related to the general process of inheritance and reproduction of the social order. But they are *not* presented as depending mainly on economic resources as they are sometimes considered in critical progressive discourses. Cultural resources and class *ethos*; are denied but very influential (and related) explanatory factors of practices. The reproduction of families is put at the center of the use of photography. Esthetic conceptions of photography are related to social uses, class *ethos* and to the distribution of cultural resources.
- The determinants of cultural practices of museum visits (the “museum survey”, published in 1966¹⁴). This survey will be the strongest and most direct attempt by Bourdieu *and Darbel* to use the power of mathematical

¹⁰ Bourdieu, Pierre, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique, précédé de Trois études d'ethnologie kabyle* (Paris/La Haye : Mouton, 1972).

¹¹ See “unpublished report” of 1963 : Bourdieu, Boltanski, Chamboredon, « La banque et sa clientèle », Rapport du Centre de Sociologie Européenne (Paris : CSE, 1963).

¹² Bourdieu Pierre, Passeron Jean-Claude, *Les Héritiers. Les étudiants et la culture* (Paris : Minuit, 1964).

¹³ Bourdieu Pierre, Boltanski Luc, Castel Robert, Chamboredon Jean-Claude, *Un art moyen, essai sur les usages sociaux de la photographie*, (Paris : Minuit, 1966).

¹⁴ Bourdieu Pierre, Darbel Alain, *L'amour de l'art, les musées d'art et leur public* (Paris : Minuit, 1966).

formalization and statistical validation, deriving from economics, to analyze a cultural practice. It shows the comprehensive appropriation by Bourdieu of “microeconomic” and “econometric” perspectives and their provocative transposition to the realm of culture, where the notion of “cultural level” plays a central role as central indicator of non-economic sociological—and cultural- factors.

- The social dimensions of global economic changes in France after World War II and especially the question of the reproduction of social inequalities in a rapidly growing economy (the “colloque d’Arras” held in June 1965, its acts published in 1966¹⁵). This is the most intense and formal occasion of confronting leading economists on their own terrain, namely macroeconomic changes, and to put together theoretical and empirical insights that help to “formalize” the challenge with economics.

During this intense period of collective work, which one could describe as a sort of intellectual (and collective) “cauldron”, Bourdieu begins to build, in a very practical manner, his own theory of society. He will use these various fields as sorts of matrices in a process of generalization, extension and transfer (crossing the fields, the objects, hybridizing methods, concepts and comparing results). This program will be continued; collectively and individually even after 1966.

Two central aspects of the 1958-1966 period, which have often been forgotten by critics, are briefly presented below : the close but very particular link between his work and economics as a growing scientific discipline during these years and the criticism Bourdieu develops against the Economic Model as a general scientific tool for the social sciences. If one insists only upon one of the two sides of the coin, one risks to misunderstand Bourdieu’s original scientific *habitus* and intellectual project. This “double” position, however, opens the possibility of an “integrated” vision of social and economic factors of practices; due to the introduction of the “cultural” and above all the “symbolic” dimensions.

Bourdieu close to economics... and economists : from Alger to Arras

During the years 1958-1966, Bourdieu is in close intellectual and personal contact with young government statisticians and economists from the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE), who have been educated by neoclassical economists like Edmond Malinvaud, who had himself discovered “modern” economic theory at the Cowles Commission¹⁶. These contacts are very intense in Algeria where Bourdieu works in close cooperation with Alain Darbel, Claude Seibel, and a few others¹⁷. During this period, very innovative survey methodologies are tested and applied in a context of (paradoxically) relatively unconstrained work for young government

¹⁵ Darras, *Le partage des bénéfices. Expansion et inégalités en France* (Paris : Minuit, 1966).

¹⁶ See Lebaron Frédéric, « La croyance économique. Les économistes entre science et politique », (Paris : Seuil, 2000) : 67-71.

¹⁷ Bourdieu Pierre, Darbel Alain, Rivet Jean-Pierre, Seibel Claude, *Travail et travailleurs en Algérie* (Paris-La Haye : Mouton, 1963).

economists (especially regarding questions about the definition of “work”, “employment/unemployment”, etc.)¹⁸.

In the following years, these contacts remain strong and this cooperation is recognized by government officials of the INSEE, which, at that time, is considered to be one of the central places of the Keynesian spirit inside the French administration¹⁹. The “colloque d’Arras” in June 1965 (Arras conference, in June 1965) is organized under the auspices of Claude Gruson, who is the general director of the INSEE in the 1960s. In the preface of the acts of the Arras conference published with the signature “Darras” in 1966 in Bourdieu’s collection *Le sens commun*, Gruson underlines the profound originality and the various interests of the confrontation between economists, demographers, and sociologists.

The general theme of the conference is economic expansion, its determinants and its effects. The participating economists paint a broad picture of a process of quick recovery after World War II and describe a rapidly changing economy, which gives birth to many structural problems (including inflation). But the entire book – and not only the parts or chapters written by Bourdieu, Darbel and other sociologists from the Centre de sociologie européenne – is centered on the question of social inequalities *within* economic changes. Many authors (sociologists, economists) evoke the “mechanisms of transmission of economic and cultural heritage”, which contribute to a surprisingly strong social “inertia” in a period during which the discourse of change is everywhere (with the theory of “Massification”). Thus, from Algeria to *La domination masculine*²⁰, we find a permanent and central scheme of Bourdieu’s sociological thought; namely tendencies to inertia are most of the time under-evaluated and they are not the simple consequence of economic reproduction (for example exploitation) or material/physical constraints. Even in a period of strong economic changes, cultural and symbolic factors limit drastically the “fluidity” or the “flexibility” of society²¹. This view opposes popular journalistic conceptions of change (“Massification” in the 1960s ; “Globalization” today), but also a conception of economy in which changes are easy because actors react rapidly to new conditions. Rational actors are actors without a past, oriented to the future, constantly adapting their actions to their objectives without reference to their social experience. (This capacity is linked to the idea of “adjustment” used about markets). For all these reasons, Bourdieu is very skeptical about a mechanical conception of the economy : he is too concerned about social differences in the dispositions toward various kinds of behavior (“rational” or not) to accept the fictive microeconomic foundations of a mythical macroeconomic story.

¹⁸ These points are developed by Marie-France Garcia in an oral communication, Centre de sociologie européenne, September 2002.

¹⁹ See Fourquet, François, *Les comptes de la puissance. Aux origines de la comptabilité nationale et du plan* (Paris : Encres, 1980).

²⁰ Bourdieu, Pierre *La Domination masculine* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1998).

²¹ The three notions of habitus, cultural capital, distinction are already central in Bourdieu’s texts of *Le partage des bénéfices* (Paris:Minuit,1966).

A careful look at the book reveals a closer connection between Bourdieu and the young economists and statisticians working at the INSEE. In a chapter on the end of Malthusianism in France after World War II, Bourdieu and Darbel try to understand the link between the evolution of birth rates and fertility, on one hand, and the global social and economic changes, on the other hand. They discuss work by demographers using what we call now Rational Action Models in order to explain the growth of birth rates in France. They show that in these matters economic rationality is particularly difficult to isolate from various social factors, such as what they call “systems of value” or *ethos*. These kinds of factors always affect the “decision” to procreate and the “chosen” number of children. But the authors are not afraid of economic models. They write the equation of the marginal cost of a child and conclude that it goes through a minimum in the middle classes, which is coherent with statistical observations.

The problem with a simplified rational model is, as they say, that it does not explicitly include an analysis of the complex and multiple social determinants of economic expectations : the mean number of children can be schematized as the consequence of a large number of factors, including social moral, group moral, level of instruction, economic security, etc. Econometric techniques such as linear regression (the same could be said today about logistic regression) fail to isolate correctly one factor from another, because of the problem of multi-collinearity. Here, Darbel appears as a good student of Edmond Malinvaud, who exposes very brilliantly in his seminar/books the limits of regression techniques due to multi-collinearity²² (very common with the kind of data we have to deal with in social sciences). In other works, Bourdieu and Darbel will go rather far in an attempt to “model” practices like the economists do, without losing possible sociological explanatory factors²³. Yet in these same studies, they remain disappointed by the technical limits of econometrics (regression techniques). A few years later Bourdieu will discover with great interest the new Data Analysis methods, invented in the first half of the 1960s by Jean-Paul Benzécri, which allow summarization of dense statistical information²⁴.

²² For a recent point of view on this issue, see Rouanet Henry, Lebaron Frédéric, Le Hay Viviane, Ackermann Werner, Le Roux Brigitte, « Régression et analyse géométrique des données : réflexions et suggestions », *Mathématiques & Sciences Humaines*, vol. 40, 160, (2002) :13-45.

²³ Bourdieu Pierre, Darbel Alain, *L'amour de l'art, les musées d'art et leur public* (Paris : Minuit, 1966). See also the formula in Bourdieu Pierre, *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris : Minuit, 1979).

²⁴ For Bourdieu, the mathematical formalization of economics cannot be criticized in itself but in the way that it allows neo-classical economists to separate economic logic even further from the social and historical conditions in which it is embedded. The use of simple models and the practice of hypothesis testing simulate the experimental method without any chance of obtaining universal conclusions because they are not explicitly understood as historical and contextual. The simplified models of economics are mostly very removed from the ethnographic or sociological observations of the underlying realities. Bourdieu has therefore intensively used geometric data analysis (GDA) methods, which rest on a simple epistemological principle expressed by

In Bourdieu's works about education and culture, the economic language, which has been tested during this period, will become the vector of criticism against idealism, and the way to introduce the possibility of explanation and modeling in sectors that are profoundly resistant to scientific "objectivation" (heritage, capital, investment, interest, accumulation, profit, price but also reproduction, class struggle, surplus value, etc.). The analogy of "market" will be used for "non-profit" practices like the production of symbolic goods, language²⁵, etc. This "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 "anti-scientific") 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*. Norms or values would not be efficient if they were not embodied in specific interests. This does not mean that he reduces social interests to economic ones, on the contrary; he will develop the "economic analogy" to grasp the specificity of symbolic objects and to systematize the hypothesis that certain universes (art, science, bureaucracy...) can define economic interests as impure and secondary in comparison to specifically, pure ("relatively autonomous") symbolic interests²⁶. The central problem here, pointed to a certain extent by Passeron, is the question of the limits of the analogy, not because it is sometimes empirically inadequate (and useful as such); as Passeron thinks, but because any economic term can be understood in either a restrictive or a "generalized" meaning. For example, the notion of "educational market" used by Bourdieu about the French system of education means that, whatever the official structure of the educational institutions (public or private), agents are obliged to make *choices* inside a spectrum of differentiated possibilities, that institutions are to a certain extent in *competition* against each other, and that the "game" has *winners* and *losers*. It *does not* mean that there exists a general "price mechanism" in the monetary sense. If Bourdieu speaks about "prices" on the "linguistic market", he *does not* mean that these "prices" are measured in "monetary" units, which is an element of a

Benzécri: 'the model follows the data, not the reverse'. Guided by a sociological frame-model, the sociologist does not presuppose any strong relation between two or three variables but tries to explore the entire system of interrelations among many variables and, simultaneously, to reveal the distances between agents (which can be individuals, enterprises in a market, etc.). This use of GDA reveals structural homologies, for example between global social space and specific fields of production (for example the field of *house builders*), which permit an understanding of the social process of fit between market supply and demand.

²⁵ Bourdieu, Pierre, « Le marché des biens symboliques », *L'Année sociologique*, vol. 22 (1971) : 49-126. Bourdieu, Pierre, *Ce que parler veut dire. L'économie des échanges linguistiques* (Paris : Fayard, 1982).

²⁶ He will frequently use the expression « maximization of material and symbolic capital » in 1972 , see Bourdieu Pierre, « Les stratégies matrimoniales dans le système des stratégies de reproduction », *Annales*, 4-5, juillet-octobre, (1972) : 1105-1127. This expression clearly shows the attraction of neoclassical schemes in Bourdieu's thinking.

purely economic definition of a “price”. If educational credentials are evaluated by the society, through wages, levels of qualification they provide, etc., their process of “devaluation” is *not* measured and socially quantified as can be the rate of exchange. One could say that Bourdieu gives economic terms a non-monetary and a non-quantitative meaning, as if “social evaluation” was a general phenomena whereas strictly monetary or quantitative evaluations are historically specific constructs giving birth to the “economic field”). This brings one back close to a Durkheimian hypothesis, which had been at the basis of a sociological reconstruction of economic objects.

Economics as a scholastic fallacy : a wrong philosophy of practice

The critical use of economic models and econometric techniques is clearly consistent with Bourdieu’s idea, developed a few years later²⁷, that neoclassical theory is a particular case of the scholastic fallacy. He will develop this point into an explicit point of view in theoretical texts related to the Algerian period : *Esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique* (in 1972), *Algérie 60* (1977), *Le sens pratique* (1980, translated in English in 1990). Economic theory will be taken as a key example of both hyper-subjectivism and mechanism produced in specific social conditions. It is a theory that confuses the things of logic with the logic of things, and makes ordinary economic agents reason like pure theoreticians. “*Denying the pretension of economic agents to possess adequate knowledge of economic mechanisms, the academic economist claims for himself a monopoly on the total point of view and declares himself capable of transcending the partial, particular viewpoints of particular groups*”²⁸. In this sense, Bourdieu describes neo-classical theory as an ‘imaginary anthropology’ that oscillates between the subjectivism of ‘free, conscious choice’ and a quasi-mechanical objectivism (because there is often only one rational solution to a problem)²⁹ (1990: 46–7). Similarly, neo-classical theory reduces markets to an idealized vision that is far removed from the social reality of empirical markets. The use of mathematics in this construction tends to reinforce this asocial and imaginary aspect. The hegemony of Rational Action Theory in economics, and its success in sociology, are founded on this scholastic bias. But the hegemony and success of Rational Action Theory also stems from the increasing autonomy of the economic field in the sense that this theory can be seen as a mythological formalization of this process. Economic agents are supposed to behave naturally as profit or utility « maximizers » and markets are supposed to adjust (through variations of prices or quantities) as “natural process” without any institutional or social interference. “*The ‘rational-actor’ theory, which seeks the ‘origin’ of acts, strictly economic or not, in an ‘intention’ of ‘consciousness’, is often associated with a narrow conception of the ‘rationality’ of practices, an economism which regards as rational . . . those practices that are consciously oriented by the pursuit of maximum (economic) profit at a minimum (economic)*

²⁷ First of all, Bourdieu, Pierre, *Esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique, précédé de Trois études d’ethnologie kabyle* (Paris/La Haye : Mouton, 1972).

²⁸ Bourdieu, Pierre *Le Sens pratique* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), English translation: *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990) : 28.

²⁹ Ibid : 46-7.

cost.”³⁰. Bourdieu’s criticism is not limited to the “narrowness” of such a vision of rationality : since the beginning of this sociological work, he has rejected the hypothesis of complete consciousness ; he rejects the idea that economic objectives are the most “rational” (such a view is absurd in the literary or the intellectual field; where “commercial” behaviors are stigmatized by the *avant-garde*) ; and, most importantly, he does not think that an *hypothesis* of rationality explains anything. On the contrary, Bourdieu contends that forms and types of rationality have to be explained sociologically. Degrees of knowledge of the issues determine, for example, the “rationality” of responses to an opinion poll, and they are directly related to social factors. The question of the “rationality” of actors is not a question *a priori* but an empirical question in each case study (for example, at each state of a field).

We find in the case of neo-classical theory an example of a belief, close to the *illusio* of the economic field, that is presented as a ‘pure theory’ of this field: similarly, many of the principles of literary analysis reproduces and formalize literary belief(s), especially the autonomy of literary criteria, that isolates texts from social reality. The most radical neo-classical economists try to generalize this economic *illusio* to the whole of social reality, with results that usually contradict those of the other social sciences. 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 (all these particular points are developed in 1992 and 1994³¹).

The appearance of some success for neo-classical theory is due to the fact that, in *specific* sectors of social life (for example, the financial markets, educational enrollments, collective bargaining, etc.), economically strategic behaviors have expanded to such an extent that they can present sufficient regularity to be “deduced” from abstract models without incurring too many obvious errors of prediction: people sometimes behave ‘reasonably’ enough to be ‘represented’ as pure ‘maximizers’ (which they are not). Their decisions become probable from a microeconomic point of view; even if this point of view is an illusion when considered as the product of a universal or natural competence (all these points are discussed in-depth in 1974³²). In this sense, Bourdieu has constantly challenged the point of view adopted by microeconomic reasoning.

The symbolic dimension(s) as the integrating vector between economic and social factors

There is a more direct intellectual line that permits us to reconstruct the particular scientific operations of appropriation/criticism that Bourdieu will develop during the 1958-1966 period : as Lévi-Strauss taught, social reality is fundamentally “symbolic”, and “economic” aspects derive from specific symbolic operations of definition that tend to give autonomy to a particular sphere of reality from more mixed situations. In this sense, Bourdieu tries,

³⁰ Ibid. : 50.

³¹ Bourdieu, Pierre, *Les Règles de l’art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris : Le Seuil, 1992). Bourdieu, Pierre, *Raisons pratiques*, (Paris: Le Seuil, 1994). English translation: *Practical Reasons* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998).

³² Bourdieu, Pierre ‘Avenir de classe et causalité du probable’, *Revue française de sociologie* 15, 1 (1974) : 3–42.

during this period, to rethink the (symbolic) process that gives birth to a social order where “economic capital” (and “economic cosmos” of “capitalism”) leads the movement to de-naturalize this social order by bringing into light its symbolic foundations (A synthesis of these points can be found in Bourdieu’s later writings³³).

In *Sociologie de l’Algérie*³⁴, Bourdieu had already briefly analyzed certain “symbolic exchanges”, which he describes as completely mixed with more “material” exchanges that thereby limit the possibility of capitalist accumulation because they create *duties* in the traditional logic of honor. In *Le partage des bénéfiques*, the authors try to integrate the analysis of economic changes (practiced in the “state of the art” at the INSEE) into a comprehensive picture of more complex social and cultural changes of French society. Economic changes appear in this book as “embedded” in symbolic structures.

I will try to show now that four particular objects, studied in the early 1960s, allow Bourdieu to promote, on an empirical basis, a more general conception of the relation between economy and society, which can be seen as a “radical correction” to economism. In each case, he will accept some aspects of the economic theorization and observations (words, schemes, techniques, facts...), but he will “correct” them with reference to the symbolic dimensions in which they are “embedded” : microeconomics -and econometrics- can be fruitful *if* they are completely re-interpreted in a symbolic frame. The results of this process of correction/integration include the following series of empirical theses developed during the 1958-1966 period, but still challenge common “economic” explanations.

(1) Economic inequalities (revenues, patrimonies, etc.) are embedded in the differentiation of *class ethos*. If one isolates these inequalities from the distribution of other resources and from the logic of *habitus*, it is difficult to understand how they can perpetuate or, on the contrary, reduce or increase in certain historical periods. Economism (whether in its Neoliberal, Keynesian or Marxist versions) often appears as a kind of naïve optimism concerning the possibilities of change, innovation, etc. The reproduction of the economic order depends not only on the transmission of the economic heritage, but also on dispositions, cultural capital, etc., all factors that are denied by operational or technocratic visions of the society.

(2) Demographic changes, such as the evolution in the birth rates, results from familial “choices”, which depend *among other factors* on different systems of embodied value (including religious ones) and on particular relations to the future that are linked to social trajectories : for example, the “cost of a child” is seldom either a subjective or an objective causal factor that figures in the decision to have a child. Microeconomic models can only give formal frames and systems of explicit possible causalities, but they do not offer credible substantive hypotheses here. They have to be

³³ Bourdieu, Pierre *Algérie 60: structures économiques et structures temporelles*. (Paris : Minuit, 1977). Bourdieu, Pierre, *Raisons pratiques* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1994). English translation: *Practical Reasons* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998). Bourdieu Pierre, *Les structures sociales de l’économie* (Paris : Le Seuil, 2000).

³⁴ Bourdieu, Pierre, *Sociologie de l’Algérie* (Paris : PUF, 1958).

“read” through sociological eyes. They may help prevision but give no explanation.

(3) Consumption practices can vary significantly at the same level of revenue or wealth, showing the importance of lifestyles that relate to class living conditions through the mediation of class *habitus*. (This thesis is completely consistent with Halbwachs and the Durkheimians). During the post- World War II period of rapid economic expansion and growth of mass consumer markets “Massification”, household and consumption ~~of~~ depended highly on the quest for symbolic differences in a relational social system, which will be called “social space” in *Distinction*. The quest for differences focuses on the quality and the way of using goods rather than on the purchase or possession of goods (for example TV). These qualitative dimensions of economic practices are *made invisible* by economic *data* and *concepts* (which are the product of the expansion of the economic *illusio*) ; they need to be deconstructed or at least contextualized if one wishes to avoid a structurally biased perception of social reality. (This will later lead Bourdieu to the theme of an “economy of happiness”, which is close to the contemporary critical discussion of “economic indicators” like GDP³⁵).

(4) Educational performance and cultural practices depend more on cultural capital than on economic resources. This finding paves the way for a generalized use of “capital” in the analysis of cultural practices and production. The notion of capital is typically a “non-economistic” economic category, which leads to the apparently redundant notion of “economic capital”. Though seemingly redundant with “economic capital”, the notion of capital is stripped of its typically narrow designation of a form of material or financial property. The transposition of this notion of capital to any specific social field strengthens the pluralistic character of interests, resources, accumulation and profits. The analogy of the “game” and the notion of *illusio* will systematize this pluralistic vision of social space. But if social space is pluralistic, this does not mean that no field tends to dominate the others : in fact, the “economic field”—tends to subordinate all other fields, including the political field and all the fields of cultural production, especially in the 1980-90s³⁶.

This short (and necessarily simplified) study of the emergence of “economic discourse” in Bourdieu’s thought leads to a general conclusion. *Two*

³⁵ Bourdieu, Pierre, *Contre-feux* (Paris: Raisons d’agir, 1998).

³⁶ In *Le partage des bénéfices*, Bourdieu already appears as a strong critic of the Keynesian optimism, which was a dominant ideology in the middle of the 1960s. His criticism is particularly directed against a naïve kind of economism where growth in stability means social optimum. Thirty years later, Bourdieu would develop a very similar criticism of neoliberalism and of economic science as its main theoretical source. Some scholars see this criticism as political or ideological inflexion/conversion ; it can better be described as a rather rare expression (among intellectuals) of theoretical and political continuity and consistency.

distinct moves appear simultaneously between 1958 and 1966 in Bourdieu's relations to economics : first a move into the core of economics, especially into microeconomics, inspired by an attempt to *objectify* social realities, especially in universes resistant to this "objectivation" (like the literary field) ; second, a move outside the scholastic point of view created by economists (and outside their particular political commitments : Marxism, Keynesianism, Neoliberalism...). The "symbolic" dimension of social realities becomes the *tool*, deriving from the Durkheimian tradition, that will help Bourdieu to maintain a consistently radical sociological viewpoint in his effort to generalize an "economic" discourse, which will no longer be purely "economic". Maybe this double move – formal economicization of his analysis of the symbolic order and the symbolic explanation the foundation of economic reality- is one of Bourdieu's most personal "trade secrets" ("secrets de fabrique"), possibly related to his own uniquely "divided" ("clivé") scientific *habitus*³⁷.

³⁷ Bourdieu, Pierre, *Science de la science et réflexivité* (Paris: Raisons d'agir, 2001).