

SOCIOLOGY

KEY ISSUES IN MODERN SOCIOLOGY

'Among the explorers of social life and its dynamics, Luc Boltanski is one of the greatest path-finders and path-blazers alive. The ideas he forms in successive reports of his findings are invariably as novel as the realities he investigates and indefatigably attempts, with great success, to catch in flight.'  
—Zygmunt Bauman, Emeritus Professor, University of Leeds

'Luc Boltanski has been among the most wide-ranging, creative, and influential of recent social scientists. His work has shaped and indeed helped to revive the tradition of pragmatist enquiry in sociology. This collection is the first comprehensive assessment of his work; it is exceptionally good, and it should be of interest to all social theorists and cultural sociologists.' —Craig Calhoun, Director of the London School of Economics and Political Science

'This is a book that is needed to understand the ideas and research dynamics of one of the greatest contemporary sociologists. This impressive collection of essays provides not only an introduction to his work, but also insightful analyses of its reception, critical discussions on its wider significance, and reflexive comments by Luc Boltanski himself, all of which will make this volume a classic.'  
—Ève Chiapello, Research Director, School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS), Paris

'In his rich theoretical and empirical work, Boltanski has given new meaning to the notion of "critique" – away from the pretensions of academic radicals, toward actual human beings and their moral judgements. This impressively wide-ranging collection gives an excellent overview of the controversies about one of the most prominent French sociologists.' —Hans Joas, Humboldt University of Berlin and University of Chicago

What is the relevance of Luc Boltanski's 'pragmatic sociology of critique' to central issues in contemporary social and political analysis? In seeking to respond to this question, this book contains critical commentaries from prominent social theorists attempting to map out the influence and broad scope of Boltanski's oeuvre.

**Simon Susen** is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at City University London.

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and Bryan S. Turner



THE SPIRIT OF LUC BOLTANSKI  
Edited by Simon Susen and Bryan S. Turner

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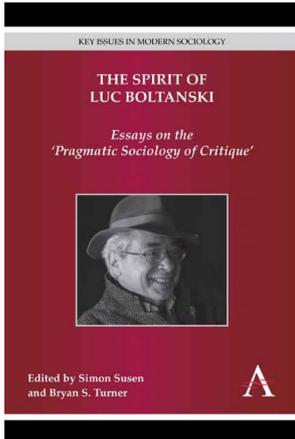
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### The Spirit of Luc Boltanski

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*Edited by Simon Susen and Bryan S. Turner*

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# The Spirit of Luc Boltanski: Chapter Outline

*Simon Susen*

This Introduction contains a brief summary of the key themes, issues, and controversies covered in each of the following chapters.

## **Luc Boltanski and (Post-) Classical Sociology**

In Chapter 1,<sup>1</sup> *Bridget Fowler* provides a comprehensive and critical introduction to Boltanski's work. Anyone who is not, or barely, familiar with Boltanski's key contributions to the contemporary social sciences will find this chapter useful. To start with, Fowler examines Boltanski's writings in relation to *classical sociological thought*. In so doing, she argues that his critical engagement with the concept of domination is firmly situated in the Marxist and Weberian traditions of social analysis, whilst his sustained interest in moral and symbolic representations is symptomatic of the considerable influence that Durkheimian thought has had on his development as a researcher. Attempting to make sense of the milestones of Boltanski's intellectual trajectory, Fowler proposes to distinguish three phases of the French scholar's impactful career: the *initial period* (1970s–80s), shaped mainly by Bourdieu's 'constructivist realism'; the *middle period* (1990s), motivated by a paradigmatic shift towards 'relativist perspectivism'; and the *most recent period* (1999–present), marked by the ambitious effort to develop a pragmatist version of 'critical theory'. According to Fowler, Boltanski has produced his most original – and, probably, most influential – works during this recent stage, permitting him to be widely regarded as one of the most prominent French sociologists of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

## Luc Boltanski and Pragmatism

In Chapter 2,<sup>2</sup> *Louis Quéré and Cédric Terzi* set out to take on the difficult – and, arguably, paradoxical – challenge of assessing the conceptual and methodological merits of Boltanski's 'pragmatic' sociology from a 'pragmatist' perspective. In essence, they affirm that it is misleading to characterize his approach as 'pragmatic', since – from their point of view – it remains trapped in the pitfalls of classical European thought, notably due to its incapacity to overcome the counterproductive conceptual dualisms of mainstream social-scientific analysis. In addition, they accuse Boltanski of drawing too heavily on *linguistic pragmatics* and, more significantly, of endorsing a *Hobbesian anthropology*, founded on an intellectualist and asocial understanding of the human subject, which is embedded in what they describe as an 'authoritarian methodology'.

In Chapter 3,<sup>3</sup> *Tanja Bogusz* explores the extent to which it is justified to conceive of Boltanski as a pragmatist thinker. It is remarkable that he and his followers have hardly ever made explicit, let alone detailed, references to the works of classical American pragmatists (such as Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead). If, however, there is one 'pragmatist' achievement on which Boltanski and his collaborators can pride themselves, it is – as Bogusz points out – the fact that they have *enlarged critical theory by making actors part of it*. It is due to this 'democratization' of social analysis – which is aimed at taking ordinary people seriously, by recognizing the socio-ontological centrality of their moral and critical capacities – that Boltanski deserves not only to be described as a 'pragmatist' scholar but also to be applauded for having presented ample evidence in support of the contention that there is no point in the pursuit of sociology if it fails to do justice to the self-empowering resources of society.

In Chapter 4,<sup>4</sup> *Cyril Lemieux* discusses the main theoretical contributions of Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot's *On Justification*.<sup>5</sup> In Lemieux's eyes, the most important accomplishment of this influential study is to have demonstrated that sociologists need to face up to the fact that *ordinary actors are equipped with critical, moral, and judgemental capacities*. On this account, normative claims to validity are not reducible to mere epiphenomena of strategic action driven by self-interest; rather, they are symptomatic of people's capacity to develop a *reflexive* relation to reality, implying that – whilst immersed in the daily search for truth and justice – they are motivated by *normative* concerns when interacting with other members of society. Insisting on the need to combine empirically grounded research and conceptually refined analysis, Lemieux posits that *On Justification* is a powerful reminder of the fact that everyday disputes are both *materially* and *symbolically* vital to the unfolding of human practices, since they impact not only upon the *substantive realizations*

brought about by purposive agents, but also upon the *interpretive representations* generated by communicative actors. Put differently, processes of justification play a pivotal role in the everyday construction of normatively constituted realms of socialization.

### **Luc Boltanski and Critique**

In Chapter 5,<sup>6</sup> *Simon Susen* provides an in-depth discussion of Luc Boltanski's *On Critique: A Sociology of Emancipation*.<sup>7</sup> On the basis of a detailed textual analysis of what may be regarded as Boltanski's most philosophical study, this contribution offers a fine-grained account of the strengths and weaknesses of his 'pragmatic sociology of critique'. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part examines five significant strengths of *On Critique*: (1) its engagement with the normative tasks of *critical theory*; (2) its insights into the structuring function of *institutions*; (3) its emphasis on the justificatory role of *critique*; (4) its concern with the adaptable nature of *domination*; and (5) its insistence upon the empowering potential of *emancipation*. Following the thematic structure of the previous investigation, the second part reflects upon the flaws and limitations of *On Critique*: (1) its failure to identify solid normative foundations for critical theory; (2) its terminologically imprecise, analytically short-sighted, and insufficiently differentiated conception of institutions; (3) its unsystematic approach to the multilayered relationship between ordinary and scientific forms of critique; (4) its lack of attention to the polycentric constitution of power relations in highly differentiated societies; and (5) its reductive understanding of human emancipation.

In Chapter 6,<sup>8</sup> *Rob Stones* endeavours to unearth both the strengths and the limitations of Luc Boltanski's *On Critique*.<sup>9</sup> In Stones's view, this book deserves to be considered as a major contribution to contemporary debates in social theory, especially because it invites us to take on the challenging task of conceptualizing complex forms of domination. Crucial to this analytically demanding venture is the need to uncover the ineluctable *fragility* that permeates the seemingly most consolidated forms of sociality. Equally significant to a comprehensive understanding of advanced societies are their members' quotidian experiences of *multiplicity*: faced with different 'orders of worth' and 'principles of justification', human actors are obliged to make use of their critical capacity when developing the ability to live with compromise and to cope with the difficulties arising from their exposure to normative diversity. What is also fundamental to the construction of social life, then, is the issue of *testability*: 'regimes of action' are constantly reshaped on the basis of three kinds of 'tests': '*truth tests*', '*reality tests*', and '*existential tests*'. It is, above all, by virtue of 'existential tests' that the '*world of reality*', which is ideologically

and institutionally sustained by normative constructions, can be challenged by the *'reality of the world'*, which is directly experienced by embodied entities immersed in everyday interactions. Stones concludes his discussion by arguing that *On Critique*, despite its invaluable intellectual merits, suffers from serious explanatory shortcomings, notably the following: an unnecessarily high level of abstraction; a tendency to conflate perception and reality; and, perhaps most importantly, a lack of attention to the structural positioning of actors, including the unequal distribution of material and symbolic resources.

In Chapter 7,<sup>10</sup> *Peter Wagner* defends the contention that Boltanski's 'sociology of critical capacity' remains an integral element of the renewal of social theory in the early twenty-first century. According to Wagner, Boltanski's research programme is based on various 'radical steps' in the direction of such a renewal. (1) *Action and justification*: People's ability to give reasons for their actions is essential to the consolidation of civilizational life forms. (2) *Normativity and plurality*: Whilst different interactional orders impose different normative parameters upon those immersed in them, people have to learn to decide which order of justification is the appropriate one in a specific situation. (3) *Capitalism and development*: Confronted with the question of the long-term development of entire social configurations, it is possible to distinguish three 'spirits of capitalism', whose historical impact is reflected in idiosyncratic modes of action and justification. (4) *Critique and change*: The credibility of social theory depends on its time-diagnostic capacities – that is, on its ability to recognize the extent to which both critique and change constitute central components of, rather than obstacles to, complex systems of domination.

In Chapter 8,<sup>11</sup> *Laurent Thévenot* elucidates the main tasks of a 'sociology of engagements' by focusing on five levels of analysis. (1) *'Endorsement' and 'critique'*: The unfolding of social life is characterized by the constant interplay between confirmation and interrogation, taken-for-grantedness and questioning, intuitive immersion and reflexive distance-taking. (2) *'Truth tests' and 'reality tests'*: Both the representational and the empirical organization of reality can be either confirmed by 'truth tests' or challenged by 'reality tests'. The 'hermeneutic contradictions' arising from this tension are indicative of the fragility permeating all forms of sociality. (3) *'Closed eyes' and 'open eyes'*: In every regime of action, people's capacity to switch back and forth between intuitive and reflexive modes of relating to reality lies at the heart of both reproductive and transformative, conformative and deviant, complicit and subversive types of agency. (4) *'Critique from above' and 'critique from below'*: Critique can be formulated not only by scientists, who are equipped with the conceptual and methodological tools necessary to question the validity of common-sense assumptions, but also by ordinary actors, whose reflexive and moral capacities permit them to participate in everyday disputes and contribute to

the discursively mediated development of society. (5) ‘*Sociological art forms*’ and ‘*literary art forms*’: The ability to take a ‘critical’, ‘ironic’, or ‘lyrical’ stance is no less relevant to the construction of everyday life ‘from within’ than it is to its scientific or artistic interpretation ‘from without’.

### **Luc Boltanski and Critical Sociology**

In Chapter 9,<sup>12</sup> *Derek Robbins* considers some of the key dimensions underlying the personal and intellectual relationship between ‘the master’ (Bourdieu) and ‘his disciple’ (Boltanski). Undoubtedly, both of them belong to the selective group of the most influential French sociologists of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. If there is one crucial conviction that Bourdieu and Boltanski shared throughout their careers, it is the belief that, in the social sciences, empirical research and theoretical reflection have to go hand in hand. Seeking to make sense of the tension-laden relationship between the two sociologists, Robbins proposes to distinguish four phases of collaboration between them: (1) 1960–1965, (2) 1965–70, (3) 1970–1972/73, and (4) *beyond 1972/73*. Characterized by the paradoxical interplay between cooperation and competition, the substantial differences between Bourdieu and Boltanski became gradually more pronounced, especially from the early 1970s onwards. Arguably, the most important point of divergence between them concerns their respective conceptions of the epistemic capacities of ordinary people, as opposed to those of social scientists. Yet, with the benefit of hindsight, it appears that – at least in the grand scheme of things – the personal and intellectual discrepancies between the two scholars have been both practically and theoretically fruitful, leaving an unmistakable mark on their works.

In Chapter 10,<sup>13</sup> *Mohamed Nachi* scrutinizes Bourdieu’s and Boltanski’s respective approaches with the prospect of reconciling them. One of the key ambitions of Boltanski’s ‘pragmatic sociology of critique’ is to account for the ‘plurality of action’, notably with regard to the ontological significance of people’s ‘diverse modes of engagement’ *in* and *with* the world. This paradigmatic concern bears striking resemblances to Bourdieu’s ‘critical sociology’, given its emphasis on the pivotal role of social fields in the consolidation of relationally organized realities. In a similar vein, both frameworks aim to overcome the artificial and counterproductive antinomy between *structuralist* and *phenomenological* approaches, insisting that the confluence of power-laden ‘grammars’ and meaning-laden ‘experiences’ constitutes a *sine qua non* for the construction of social life. It seems, however, that the most challenging task to be confronted when seeking to cross-fertilize the works of these two prominent sociologists is to evaluate the validity of their respective conceptions of the epistemological distinction between ‘scientific

knowledge’ and ‘ordinary knowledge’. Bourdieu is right to insist that, as *critical sociologists*, we need to question the fallacies of *doxa* by exposing the illusory character of misperceptions, misconceptions, and misrepresentations based on common sense. At the same time, Boltanski succeeds in making a strong case for the thesis that, as *sociologists of critique*, we need to do justice to the fact that laypersons are capable of engaging in discursive – and, potentially, insightful – processes of reflection and justification, permitting them to set rationally guided and morally defensible parameters for their actions.

In Chapter 11,<sup>14</sup> *Simon Susen* examines the relationship between Bourdieu’s ‘critical sociology’ and Boltanski’s ‘pragmatic sociology of critique’. To be sure, the intellectual connections between these two approaches have been discussed by numerous commentators. Nevertheless, most of their – sympathetic as well as unsympathetic – critics tend to conceive of these two sociological frameworks as diametrically opposed. What is more problematic, however, is that, in the extensive academic writings concerned with contemporary French sociology, one finds little in the way of a *systematic* account capable of identifying the principal similarities and differences between these two influential programmes. The main purpose of this chapter is to fill this gap in the literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of points of *convergence*, points of *divergence*, and points of *integration* between Bourdieu and Boltanski. As argued in this enquiry, the key points of convergence between these two renowned scholars are – paradoxically – their most significant points of divergence, whilst serving as conceptual cornerstones upon which their central sociological insights can be cross-fertilized. In order to demonstrate this, the two approaches are compared, contrasted, and combined in relation to the following concepts: (1) ‘the social’, (2) ‘practice’, (3) ‘critique’, (4) ‘interest’, (5) ‘aporia’, (6) ‘background’, (7) ‘power’, and (8) ‘emancipation’. The chapter draws to a close by formulating eight hypotheses concerning the possibility of gaining valuable insights from cross-fertilizing Bourdieu’s ‘critical sociology’ and Boltanski’s ‘pragmatic sociology of critique’.

### **Luc Boltanski and Political Sociology**

In Chapter 12,<sup>15</sup> *Kate Nash* explores the extent which both the sociology of human rights and the sociology of the state are relevant to Boltanski’s numerous writings. As she remarks, it is striking that, despite the fact that pragmatic sociology conveys a profound concern with questions of justice, Boltanski has not written explicitly on human rights. Yet, owing to its emphasis on the importance of *principles of justice as intrinsic to social life*, pragmatic sociology appears to be an attractive starting point for making sense of issues relating to human rights – with regard to both their *conceptual* status in the social sciences

and their *empirical* role in social life. In his scholarly oeuvre, Boltanski has persuasively demonstrated that *everyday life is normative*, involving disputes over the appropriateness of principles of justice in particular situations. If, however, Boltanski and his collaborators had paid more attention to the sociological significance of human rights, they would have been able to produce a far more accurate account of the ways in which the *development of the state* and the *development of claims for justice* are intimately interrelated. Despite this omission, Nash contends, contemporary studies of human rights can learn a great deal from Boltanski's *pragmatic sociology of plural 'worlds' and 'polities'* – notably, by accepting that the defence of transculturally justifiable principles needs to be anchored in, rather than detached from, ordinary practices. Last but not least, Nash convincingly argues that, instead of creating a counterproductive epistemic antinomy between 'enlightening experts' and 'to-be-enlightened dupes', it is crucial to establish a fruitful *dialogue between sociologists and citizens* by drawing upon the reflexive resources of both methodical enquiry and quotidian forms of sociality.

In Chapter 13,<sup>16</sup> *Paul Blokker* aims to elucidate the role of the concept of 'the political' in the 'pragmatic sociology of critique' by comparing and contrasting Boltanski's key writings with those of Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis. Blokker's analysis is founded on the assumption that there is a *normative dimension* in pragmatic sociology that connects it to (*radical*) *democratic theory*. Particularly promising in this respect is Boltanski and Thévenot's proposal to conceive of social realities in terms of *multiple* regimes of action and justification. Such a pluralistic approach – whilst exposing the reductive presuppositions underpinning monolithic conceptions of human life forms – accounts for the *diversity, heterogeneity, and irreducibility of social practices* in differentiated interactional settings. Lefort's broad notion of 'the political' as well as Castoriadis's project of an 'autonomous society' are useful in this regard, illustrating that there is no radical democracy without the normative accomplishments of ordinary actors, who, on the basis of their quotidian performances, are both factually and morally responsible for the construction of everyday realities. In this chapter, Blokker succeeds not only in making Boltanski's largely implicit engagement with the political constitution of normative arrangements explicit, but also in demonstrating, in a more fundamental sense, that there is no comprehensive conceptualization of 'the social' without the critical consideration of 'the political'.

In Chapter 14,<sup>17</sup> *Mauro Basaure* grapples with the tension-laden relationship between Honneth's 'theory of recognition' and Boltanski's 'pragmatist sociology'. The systematic reconstruction of Honneth's account of 'the struggle for recognition' permits us to identify three closely interrelated analytical axes: (1) the *moral-sociological-explicative axis*, (2) the *historic-philosophical-reconstructive axis*,

and (3) the *political-sociological axis*. The first axis denotes the *moral motives, principles, and values* underlying human practices in general and social struggles in particular. The consolidation of morally codified patterns of action and reflection cannot be dissociated from intersubjective processes of *mutual recognition*. The second axis relates to the *historical interpretation* of processes of moral construction emerging within spatio-temporally situated social conflicts. Moral criteria, even if they are based on normative claims to universal validity, emanate from particular *contexts* and, hence, from historically specific sets of *circumstances*. The third axis captures the historical role of *social struggles*, involving the development of collectives in *antagonistic* positions. Conflicts between individual or collective actors are not only shaped by *normative principles and moral values*, but also driven by *personal or social interests*. Thus, for both critical theorists and pragmatic sociologists, it is crucial to explore (1) the *morally constituted 'why'*, (2) the *historically structured 'when and where'*, and (3) the *politically motivated 'how'* of human practices, in order to understand the normatively specific (i.e. value-laden), spatio-temporally contingent (i.e. context-laden), and ideologically driven (i.e. interest-laden) constitution of social struggles.

In Chapter 15,<sup>18</sup> Irène Eulriet maintains that valuable lessons can be learned from comparing and contrasting Jeffrey Alexander's *The Civil Sphere*<sup>19</sup> and Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot's *On Justification*.<sup>20</sup> These two books can be regarded as major contributions to contemporary studies of public culture in liberal-pluralist societies. (1) In the case of *Alexander*, the ambition to shed light on the structure and dynamics of the *civil sphere* is vital to the possibility of grasping the normative composition of society. Indicative of the normative *ambivalence* built into modernity, both '*civility*' (an attitude based on *rationality, autonomy, and consensus-building*) and '*anti-civility*' (an attitude motivated by the quest for *power, control, and self-interested success*) have shaped the development of Western societies over the previous centuries. (2) In the case of *Boltanski and Thévenot*, processes of *critique, debate, and deliberation* are indispensable to the reason-based consolidation of normative orders. Far from advocating a socio-historical narrative based on binary categories such as 'good' and 'evil', however, the two French scholars make a case for a *multidimensional* framework founded on several '*orders of worth*' or '*cités*', in which actors employ their day-to-day sense of justice. Owing to the interactional centrality of people's quotidian immersion in multiple regimes of engagement and justification, one of the key characteristics of differentiated societies is *normative pluralism*: the diversity of opinions, belief systems, and life styles is a precondition for the consolidation of discursively rich and democratically organized societies. (3) Whatever the presuppositional differences between Alexander, on the one hand, and Boltanski and Thévenot, on the other, they are united by

one fundamental conviction: *without social actors capable of engaging in critical dialogue and discursive processes of justification, there is no point in defending civilizational achievements derived from everyday processes of communication allowing for both individual and collective empowerment through real-world democratization.*

In Chapter 16,<sup>21</sup> *William Outhwaite and David Spence* seek to assess the usefulness of Boltanski's writings to the sociology of contemporary Europe. To this end, they focus on the following issues: the conditions of *European integration*, the possibility of the emergence of a *European state*, the creation of *European citizenship*, the construction of a *European identity*, and – more generally – the constitution of *European society*. Outhwaite and Spence contend that *four broad families of critical social theory* are relevant to sociological studies of contemporary Europe: (1) 'Frankfurt critical theory', (2) 'Foucauldian theories of governmentality', (3) Bourdieu's 'critical sociology', and (4) Boltanski's 'pragmatic sociology of critique'. Drawing on the fourth current, two of Boltanski's most well-known (co-authored) books are particularly important to the thematic focus of Outhwaite and Spence's endeavour: *On Justification: Economies of Worth*<sup>22</sup> and *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.<sup>23</sup> Both works, they assert, are central to understanding that the EU is, essentially, a discursive forum based on *argument and justification*. Hence, it is surprising that Boltanski's approach has not been more widely referred to in the extensive volume of literature devoted to this topic. It is with considerable conceptual skill and empirical sensitivity that Outhwaite and Spence attend to the task of demonstrating that Boltanski's 'pragmatic sociology' offers enriching terminological and methodological tools for obtaining a fine-grained understanding of the social, political, and cultural tensions and conflicts shaping key developments in contemporary Europe.

In Chapter 17,<sup>24</sup> *Bryan S. Turner* suggests that Boltanski's approach comprises a precious sociological framework for examining both the causes and the consequences of the recent and ongoing social and economic crisis, particularly with regard to the experience of *indignation* suffered by members of the marginalized sectors of society. Capitalism – especially in its most advanced variants – constitutes a far more flexible and adjustable economic system than commonly assumed by those subscribing to orthodox Marxist agendas of social and political analysis. Boltanski and Chiapello's *The New Spirit of Capitalism*<sup>25</sup> presents a powerful account of the pivotal role played by processes of justification in attributing legitimacy to a hegemonic socioeconomic system capable of encouraging profound ideological, behavioural, and institutional transformations, which are – ultimately – aimed at its own confirmation. Complex forms of domination, then, have succeeded in incorporating normative processes based on critical discourse into their modes of functioning, thereby converting openness to debate, controversy, and constant assessment

into one of the normative cornerstones of managerial capitalism. At the same time, however, contemporary protest movements – such as Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party – represent empirical examples of indignation and rage, highlighting the fragility that is, inevitably, built into the seemingly most consolidated forms of society. Proposing a provocative interpretation of collective expressions of anger and resentment, Turner affirms that – contrary to conventional versions of the ‘secularization thesis’ – religion is regaining considerable influence in the public domain, as illustrated in the post-secular elements shaping the discourses and practices of modern-day protest movements.

### Luc Boltanski and Contemporary Issues

In Chapter 18,<sup>26</sup> *Bruno Karsenti* provides an in-depth review of one of Luc Boltanski’s most controversial studies: *La condition fœtale : Une sociologie de l’engendrement et de l’avortement*,<sup>27</sup> published originally in French in 2004 and, subsequently, in English – under the title *The Foetal Condition: A Sociology of Engendering and Abortion*<sup>28</sup> – in 2013. In essence, Karsenti seeks to defend the claim that a comprehensive ‘sociology of abortion’ is inconceivable without a critical ‘sociology of procreation’. In this sense, Boltanski’s *La condition fœtale* is a powerful reminder of the fact that, far from being reducible to a binary scheme of entirely separate options, the possibility of *terminating* a pregnancy and the possibility of *going ahead* with it form part of a species-distinctive continuum. More specifically, Boltanski’s analysis directs attention to the fact that *abortion* constitutes a *twofold process*: as a process regarding our ‘natural’ condition, it raises existential questions vis-à-vis the reproduction of physically constituted entities; as a process concerning our ‘social’ condition, it poses multiple challenges arising from the reproduction of culturally constructed actors. According to Karsenti, the critical awareness of the relationship between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ – whose respective boundaries are increasingly blurred – is central to the Boltanskian attempt to reconstruct both the ‘grammatical’ and the ‘experiential’ constitution of abortion and procreation. Faced with what Karsenti characterizes as ‘*the horizon of the irreversible*’, both the option of ending and the option of continuing with a pregnancy have irrevocable consequences. As a species, we cannot choose *not* to choose, but, in principle, we can choose *what* to choose when having to choose between abortion and procreation.

In Chapter 19,<sup>29</sup> *Ilana F. Silber* aims to demonstrate the relevance of Boltanski’s writings to contemporary studies of the gift. Boltanski’s conception of the gift is most clearly illustrated in his seminal study *Love and Justice as Competences*.<sup>30</sup> Given the conflicting presence of *purposive*

mechanisms driven by interestedness, strategy, and utility, on the one hand, and *communicative* processes motivated by the need for intersubjectivity, solidarity, and reciprocity, on the other, *gift exchanges are a tension-laden affair*. As Silber perceptively remarks, it is noteworthy that there is little in the way of a sociological approach to the gift based on the idea of ‘economies of worth’, as developed in Boltanski and Thévenot’s *On Justification*.<sup>31</sup> If any of the six ‘worlds of worth’ identified in this treatise qualifies as appropriate for making sense of gift-exchange dynamics, it is the ‘*world of inspiration*’: in this sphere, the emergence of creativity is contingent upon the experience of receiving the ‘gift’ of being driven by relentless imagination. The main objective of Silber’s analysis, however, is to argue that gift-exchange processes are permeated by *multiple* normative realities, which can be conceived of as interrelated and idiosyncratic ‘worlds of worth’ and ‘worlds of justification’. Thus, rather than reducing the secrets underlying gift exchanges either to an idealistic ‘*hermeneutics of love and recognition*’ or to a fatalistic ‘*hermeneutics of power and suspicion*’, the challenge consists in making a case for a critical but realistic ‘*hermeneutics of contradictions*’ capable of accounting for the multiple competing factors (ranging from trust, authenticity, and truthfulness to suspicion, manipulation, and falsification) that shape social relations.

In Chapter 20,<sup>32</sup> *Steve Fuller* reflects on the usefulness of Boltanski and Thévenot’s conception of the ‘world of worth’ to understanding what he calls the ‘transhuman condition’, whose socio-historical specificity he proposes to explain on the basis of a ‘proactionary sociology’. He announces, somewhat provocatively, that the theoretical framework defended in *On Justification*<sup>33</sup> is symptomatic of a *triumph for economic reasoning within sociology*: although the six ‘polities’ or ‘worlds of worth’ distinguished in this study obtain meaning – and derive value – from different sources, their significance emanates from the same general *accounting principles*. Thus, each ‘world’ or ‘regime of action’ establishes outcome-oriented criteria for ‘*the business of justice*’, based on particular ‘*investment formula*’ and pursued by ‘*Lockean individuals*’, who belong to a ‘common humanity’ and whose lives come to an end with the death of the bodies of their birth. In contrast to this view, Fuller advocates an extended ‘*proactionary*’ understanding of the human condition, epitomized in the rise of the ‘*post-Lockean individual*’. In principle, there are – he argues – no limits to technologically driven processes of ‘human upgrading’, allowing for an ‘*entrepreneurship of the self*’, whose parameters escape traditional assumptions about the limitations of bodily existence, thus marking the beginning of a ‘*transhumanist world of worth*’. In this new era, *Homo sapiens* has been able to transform itself into ‘*Techno sapiens*’, illustrating that ‘biological evolution’ is tantamount to the prehistory of ‘technological evolution’. It appears, then, that in ‘proactionary societies’

the valorization and exchange of ‘biocapital’ in the name of ‘the improvement of the human condition’ has become the norm, rather than the exception. One may wonder, of course, to what extent the plea for ‘a fundamental reorientation in our epistemic horizons’ in the name of the ‘enhancement of the human species’ is little more than a disguised way of legitimizing increasingly complex mechanisms of social exclusion, discrimination, and domination.

In Chapter 21,<sup>34</sup> *Lisa Adkins* makes a case for a ‘pragmatic sociology of the future’. Grappling with recent paradigmatic developments in the social sciences, she contends that the shift from Bourdieu’s ‘dispositionalist sociology’ to Boltanski’s ‘pragmatist sociology’ reflects a transition from a concern with agents’ durably inscribed dispositions to an emphasis on actors’ engagement in the construction of normatively constituted ‘orders of worth’. The defence of a ‘sociology of a *world-in-the-making*’, as opposed to a ‘sociology of an *already-inscribed-world*’, requires a radically processual understanding of value as ‘value creation’ – or, to be exact, as ‘valuation’. Instead of endorsing the *grammar-focused* analysis developed in *On Justification*<sup>35</sup> (which operates mainly with a *synchronic* and, hence, relatively *static* model of situated ‘orders of worth’), Adkins sympathizes with the *action-oriented* enquiry undertaken in *The New Spirit of Capitalism*<sup>36</sup> (which is based on a *diachronic* and, thus, essentially *dynamic* model, stressing the highly flexible, adjustable, and elastic constitution of advanced forms of domination). Ironically, however, it is precisely under the ‘new spirit of capitalism’ that the detrimental consequences of the recent financial crisis have been experienced, above all, by the most marginalized groups of society. The disconcerting feelings of ‘perspectivelessness’ and ‘meaninglessness’ are increasingly common amongst those who perceive their situation as an ‘eternal present’, in which there is no place for the future as a horizon of enriching possibilities. Deprived of the right to *protensive* – that is, both purposive and future-oriented – action, the most disempowered members of society are robbed of the possibility of exercising control over the spatio-temporal conditions shaping their everyday realities. The challenge consists, then, in grasping the extent to which Boltanski’s ‘pragmatic sociology’ paves the way for new, and universally empowering, ways of conceiving of temporality as a potential source of emancipatory performativity.

### **Luc Boltanski in Conversation**

In Chapter 22,<sup>37</sup> *Craig Browne* gives a brief introduction to Chapter 23,<sup>38</sup> which consists of an important interview that he himself conducted with *Luc Boltanski* in 2010. In this tête-à-tête, Browne and Boltanski focus on the controversial *relationship between political philosophy and pragmatic sociology*.

In Chapter 24,<sup>39</sup> *Robin Celikates* discusses the main *commonalities and differences between the ‘sociology of critique’ and ‘critical theory’* with two of their most prominent representatives – namely, *Luc Boltanski* and *Axel Honneth*. This intellectually stimulating conversation, which was originally published in German in 2009, appears here for the first time in English (translation by Simon Susen).

In Chapter 25,<sup>40</sup> *Juliette Rennes* and *Simon Susen* talk to *Luc Boltanski* about various aspects of his personal and professional trajectory, notably with regard to his key intellectual contributions, including – in particular – his attempt to explore the sociological implications of his central thesis concerning ‘*the fragility of reality*’. Originally conducted and published in French in 2010, this thought-provoking interview, which contains crucial insights into the theoretical and practical ambitions of the ‘later Boltanski’, appears here for the first time in English (translation by Simon Susen).

### **Luc Boltanski and His Critics**

In Chapter 26,<sup>41</sup> *Simon Susen* provides a detailed Afterword, which is intended to give the reader a thorough overview of the principal issues examined in the previous chapters.

### **Notes**

- 1 See Fowler (2014).
- 2 See Quéré and Terzi (2014).
- 3 See Bogusz (2014).
- 4 See Lemieux (2014).
- 5 Boltanski and Thévenot (2006 [1991]). See also Boltanski and Thévenot (1991).
- 6 See Susen (2014b [2012]). See also Susen (2012).
- 7 Boltanski (2011 [2009]). See also Boltanski (2009).
- 8 See Stones (2014).
- 9 Boltanski (2011 [2009]). See also Boltanski (2009).
- 10 See Wagner (2014).
- 11 See Thévenot (2014).
- 12 Robbins (2014).
- 13 See Nachi (2014).
- 14 See Susen (2014c [2014]).
- 15 See Nash (2014).
- 16 See Blokker (2014).
- 17 See Basaure (2014).
- 18 See Eulriet (2014).
- 19 See Alexander (2006).
- 20 See Boltanski and Thévenot (2006 [1991]). See also Boltanski and Thévenot (1991).
- 21 See Outhwaite and Spence (2014).
- 22 Boltanski and Thévenot (2006 [1991]). See also Boltanski and Thévenot (1991).

- 23 Boltanski and Chiapello (2005 [1999]). See also Boltanski and Chiapello (1999).  
 24 See Turner (2014).  
 25 Boltanski and Chiapello (2005 [1999]). See also Boltanski and Chiapello (1999).  
 26 See Karsenti (2014 [2005]).  
 27 Boltanski (2004).  
 28 Boltanski (2013 [2004]).  
 29 See Silber (2014).  
 30 Boltanski (2012 [1990]). See also Boltanski (1990).  
 31 Boltanski and Thévenot (2006 [1991]). See also Boltanski and Thévenot (1991).  
 32 See Fuller (2014).  
 33 Boltanski and Thévenot (2006 [1991]). See also Boltanski and Thévenot (1991).  
 34 See Adkins (2014).  
 35 Boltanski and Thévenot (2006 [1991]).  
 36 Boltanski and Chiapello (2005 [1999]).  
 37 See Browne (2014).  
 38 See Boltanski and Browne (2014).  
 39 See Boltanski, Honneth and Celikates (2014 [2009]). See also Boltanski and Honneth (2009).  
 40 See Boltanski, Rennes and Susen (2014 [2010]). See also Boltanski, Rennes and Susen (2010).  
 41 See Susen (2014a).

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