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Is There Such a Thing as a ‘Pragmatic Sociology of Critique’? Reflections on Luc Boltanski’s *On Critique*¹

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(Translated by Simon Susen)

In the contemporary sociological literature, not only in the Francophone² world but also in Germanophone³ and Anglophone⁴ contexts, the work of Luc Boltanski is widely recognized as a major contribution to the social sciences. The value and influence of Boltanski’s writings manifest themselves in the emergence of a new paradigm: the *sociology of critique* or, as it has been recently characterized not only by sympathetic and unsympathetic critics alike but also by the author himself, the *pragmatic sociology of critique*.⁵ It is true that the concept of critique plays a pivotal role in most of Boltanski’s writings.⁶ His recent book *On Critique*⁷ is particularly important in this regard, since it is symptomatic of the author’s attempt to explain both the place and the function that discursive processes occupy within the sociological approach that he has developed over the past decades.

From a terminological point of view, the Boltanskian paradigm is based on three key concepts: ‘sociology’, ‘pragmatic’, and ‘critique’. Given their centrality, it makes sense to reflect on the meaning attached to them in Boltanski’s work.

The first term – ‘*sociology*’ – reminds us of the fact that, whilst the intellectual currents that have influenced Boltanski’s approach are diverse, and although the scope of his writings transcends disciplinary boundaries, his oeuvre is embedded mainly in one specific field of research: empirical sociology. Neighbouring disciplines – such as philosophy, anthropology, history, linguistics, economics, and political science – have certainly inspired the Boltanskian project for some time, just as these disciplines have begun to draw upon Boltanskian insights. To the extent that the epistemological underpinnings of his work are firmly situated in the field of sociological

studies, Boltanski's writings express an unambiguous concern with 'the nature of the social' – that is, with the phenomena and forces that shape, or depend upon, both the constitution and the evolution of human relations. Thus, for Boltanski, the role of critique needs to be studied in terms of its *intersubjective* character: to the extent that the act of criticizing constitutes an integral element of human life, the task of the pragmatic sociologist consists in shedding light on both the *social* nature and the *social* functions of critique.

The second term – '*pragmatic*' – indicates that, even if Boltanski's sociological writings contain strong theoretical dimensions informed by highly refined conceptual tools and philosophical presuppositions, they are based on the conviction that an essential task of sociology consists in studying *human practices*: to the extent that society cannot exist without people's daily accomplishments, sociology needs to engage in the systematic study of their actions. Doing sociology without examining ordinary practices would be tantamount to living in society without immersing oneself in the universe of human actions. Perhaps the most important consequence of this methodological position is to be found in Boltanski's categorical imperative according to which *people need to be taken seriously*. Hence, instead of constructing a praxeological gap between 'laypersons' and 'experts', epitomized in the creation of an epistemological hierarchy between 'illusory knowledge' and 'enlightened knowledge', a chief objective of pragmatic sociology is to deconstruct the fatalistic opposition between 'the doxic world of ordinary people' and 'the scientific world of enlightened thinkers'. For this permits us to reconstruct the socio-ontological unity of human beings, thereby doing justice to the pragmatic force that derives from a set of *anthropological competences*, whose existence transcends the social divisions permeating everyday life. Pragmatic sociology accounts not only for the specificity and plurality of human practices but also, in a more fundamental sense, for the universal role played by quotidian actions, illustrating the fact that we are *all* ordinary people.⁸

The third term – '*critique*' – is vital to the Boltanskian view that the social researcher needs to study the human world as both an objective and a normative realm of interactions. In other words, we have to explore the implications of the fact that all spaces of human sociality are shaped, simultaneously, by the normativity of values and by the objectivity of facts. In essence, critique can be regarded as a reflexive force that permits us to distance ourselves from three worlds of experience: 'the' external world (objective realm), 'our' external world (normative realm), and 'my' internal world (subjective realm). From this perspective, human subjects are conceived of as actors capable of mobilizing their cognitive resources, which permit them to distance themselves, reflexively, from the immediacy of their lifeworlds. Although other concepts – such as 'justification' (*justification*), 'city' (*cit  *), 'order

of worth' (*grandeur*), 'test' (*épreuve*), 'generalization' (*montée en généralité*), 'world' (*monde*), and 'reality' (*réalité*) – also play a pivotal role in Boltanski's oeuvre, and whilst we need to resist the temptation to reduce his approach to a unified, let alone monolithic, programme, it is worth pointing out that the concept of *critique* constitutes a *cornerstone* of Boltanskian analysis. The major significance that Boltanski attributes to this concept is based on the following assumption: the main reason why the social world is shaped by permanent negotiation concerning the validity of established norms is the existence of *people's critical capacities*. Owing to the ineluctable criticizability of social arrangements, nothing is more contingent and more contestable than human relations. Tautologically speaking, nothing is more contingent and more contestable than historical contingency and practical contestability themselves. Therefore, a key challenge for pragmatic sociology consists in deciphering the multiple codes and contents of the most ordinary forms of criticism. If critical capacity constitutes a universal competence of human beings, rather than a professional privilege of social researchers, then the epistemic process of *uncovering* needs to be recognized as an everyday activity performed by ordinary people who are *involved* in the construction of the reality in which they find themselves situated, rather than by experts who seek to explain the world by detaching themselves from it. Put differently, critique exists *always already* amongst the criticized.

In short, the Boltanskian endeavour can be described as a *pragmatic sociology of critique*. As such, it is committed to studying society sociologically, pragmatically, and critically:

- (a) As a *sociological* approach, it is concerned with the systematic investigation of the nature of the social. Hence, it seeks to analyse the modern world, above all, in terms of the constitution and evolution of *social relations*.
- (b) As a *pragmatic* approach, it is concerned with the meticulous examination of the nature of social practices. Highlighting the existential significance of people's quotidian activities, it scrutinizes the construction of the human world by focusing on actors' *concrete and ordinary practices*, including the functional differentiation of their social roles.
- (c) As a *critical* approach, it is concerned with the in-depth exploration of *ordinary people's reflexive practices*. In this sense, it would be fair to assert that what lies at the heart of the Boltanskian project is a profoundly normative preoccupation, which is illustrated by the fact that it draws our attention to the social nature and the social functions of *critique* in general and of ordinary people's *critical capacity* in particular. In brief, Boltanskian thought is based on three cornerstones: the sociological reflection upon human *relations*, the pragmatic interest in human *activities*, and the normative enquiry into the potential of human *critique*.

In light of the above, we may suggest that the most fundamental presupposition underlying Boltanskian thought is the conviction that *society is the ensemble of practical and criticizable relations established between human actors*. Guided by this assumption, the main task of Boltanskian sociology consists in studying the multiple ways in which social relations, everyday practices, and ordinary criticisms are fundamental to the construction of human life forms. Such an endeavour permits us to demonstrate that human beings, owing to their critical capacity, are not only able to reinforce but also able to undermine the legitimacy of different regimes of normativity, which they encounter in their everyday activities.

The main purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the importance of the three aforementioned features by examining one of Boltanski's most recent books: *On Critique*.⁹ To be exact, the central questions that emerge in the light of the detailed examination of this work can be summarized as follows.

- (I) What are the most substantial contributions of *critical theory*¹⁰ to the problematization of social life?
- (II) What are the main functions of *institutions*¹¹ with regard to the construction of social life?
- (III) What role does *critique*¹² play in the legitimization of social life?
- (IV) What is the power of *domination*¹³ in relation to the reproduction of social life?
- (V) What is the potential of *emancipation*¹⁴ with regard to the transformation of social life?

The following five sections are an attempt to respond to these questions. The final section examines some significant *weaknesses and limitations* of Boltanskian thought. In addition, we shall briefly address a sixth question: to what extent does the *reconciliation*¹⁵ between Pierre Bourdieu's 'critical sociology' and Luc Boltanski's 'sociology of critique' permit us to develop an alternative theoretical framework capable of doing justice to the complexity of social life?

I. The Task of Critical Theory: The Problematization of Social Life

Here we shall examine '[t]he structure of *critical theories*',¹⁶ starting from the assumption that, despite the important discrepancies between diverse traditions and approaches associated with critical thought, all critical theories, and notably critical sociologies, share a fundamental concern regarding the concept of *social domination*.¹⁷ What is even more important, however, is the fact that they seek to comprehend the *reality* of social domination; that is, they aim

to identify the causes, symptoms, and consequences of power relations within concrete historical contexts.¹⁸ In order to grasp the complexity of this task, it is necessary to examine the concept of critical theory on various levels.

First, we need to draw a *distinction between the concept of 'power' and the concept of 'domination'*. In the most general sense, the former designates the capacity to do something, whereas the latter describes the capacity to impose oneself upon another entity – that is, upon an individual or collective actor – with the aim of making them do something in a particular way.¹⁹ In German, the meaning of this analytical distinction manifests itself in the semantic difference between the term *Macht* and the term *Herrschaft*: the former concerns, literally, the ability to 'do something' (*machen*); the latter refers to the ability to 'control' (*beherrschen*) the actions undertaken by a person, or by a group of persons, in such a way that the material or symbolic nature of their existence – either in its totality or in relation to a specific behavioural or cognitive aspect – turns out to be determined by an exogenous force. What is crucial within the framework of the present analysis is the fact that the conceptual distinction between 'power' and 'domination' obliges us to reflect upon the paradigmatic difference between Bourdieu's 'critical sociology' and Boltanski's 'pragmatic sociology of critique'.²⁰

From a Boltanskian perspective, '[t]he fact of exercising power or of being subjected to power *does not escape the consciousness of actors*',²¹ in the sense that – and this has major epistemological implications – 'power relations are invariably visible to the eyes of an observer'.²² In light of this perceptibility of power, the sociologist of critique seeks to demonstrate that not only expert observers, on the basis of their clinical and distant objectification of behavioural patterns, but also ordinary actors, on the basis of their ability to call social phenomena and the environment in which they emerge into question, are equipped with the capacity to convert their complicity *with* power into an exercise of reflection *upon* power. Put differently, the need to *mobilize* power cannot be dissociated from the need to *justify* its existence.²³ In Boltanskian terms, it is '[b]ecause it must be both asserted and justified'²⁴ that 'power speaks of power'.²⁵ By contrast, from a Bourdieusian perspective, actors establish a largely *unconscious* relation with power in general and with domination in particular. On this view, power 'is not only not directly observable, but also invariably eludes the consciousness of actors'.²⁶ As a consequence, the two principal tasks of critical sociology consist in *deciphering* the tangible symptoms and consequences of domination and in *uncovering* the underlying causes and mechanisms of power relations. The categorical imperative of Bourdieusian sociology, then, can be synthesized as follows: 'Domination must be unmasked.'²⁷ In light of the invisible and impenetrable constitution of the structural determinants underlying processes of social domination, it is essential to recognize that the

normative ambition to *make judgements* about power cannot be dissociated from the explanatory mission to *uncover* its inner workings. Yet, according to Bourdieu, the normative act of making judgements and the explanatory act of uncovering hidden mechanisms remain an epistemological privilege of expert observers, whose study of the world is guided by scientific tools, which inform their reflexive attitude, rather than of ordinary actors, whose understanding of the world is governed by doxic illusions, which permeate their common sense. It is because it must be both concealed and dissimulated that power never speaks of power.²⁸ Considering not only the analytical distinction between ‘*power*’ and ‘*domination*’, but also the paradigmatic separation between ‘*critical sociology*’ and ‘*sociology of critique*’, as well as the epistemological differentiation between ‘*scientific knowledge*’ and ‘*ordinary knowledge*’, it is vital to reflect upon the ontological status of the intrinsic relation between *morality*, *critique*, and *reflexivity*.²⁹ The path from Dilthey via Husserl to Boltanski is not long, given that all three thinkers insist upon the fact that the ontological difference between the natural world and the cultural world is reflected in the methodological separation between the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) and the social and human sciences (*Sozial- und Geisteswissenschaften*).³⁰

To be precise, the bifurcation between the natural sciences and the social sciences is justified on the basis of the assumption that the human world distinguishes itself from the rest of the universe in that, due to people’s *reflexive capacity*, social reality is not only interpreted but also organized in accordance with the *moral and critical judgements* of its inhabitants.

[H]uman beings are not content to act or react to the actions of others. They review their own actions or those of others in order to make judgements on [*sic*] them, often hinging on the issue of good and evil – that is, *moral judgements*. This *reflexive capacity* means that they also react to the representations given of their properties or actions, including when the latter derive from sociology or critical theories.³¹

According to this perspective, ‘[m]oral activity is a predominantly critical activity’,³² because it requires individuals to take normative positions *on* a collective reality and – which is even more significant – because it requires them to *act* normatively – that is, in relation to the values and convictions existing *within* their shared world. The legitimacy of different mechanisms of socialization is sustained on the basis of multiple processes of justification. The Boltanskian assumption that people’s reflexive and moral capacities are built into the human condition has four important philosophical implications.

The first implication is that, in accordance with the Kantian tradition, it is important to recognize that *the natural world and the social world*³³ are two

fundamentally different spheres of being. This difference is due to the fact that, whereas the former constitutes a physical and objective space composed of an ensemble of things and non-reflexive creatures, the latter represents a cultural and normative space constructed by reflexive entities equipped with moral and critical capacities. In other words, the *ontological difference* between the natural world and the social world emanates from incommensurable features inherent in each of these two realms of existence.

The second implication is that, in accordance with the Diltheyan tradition, it is vital to acknowledge that *the natural sciences and the social sciences*³⁴ are two fundamentally different endeavours. They diverge in that their objects of study are essentially dissimilar: the natural world, which is composed of non-conscious entities, and the cultural world, which is constructed by creatures that are conscious not only of their environment but also of their existence. If the world of human beings is a realm constructed by creatures capable of attributing meaning to their existence, the methods used to explain the explicable, or the inexplicable, within the objective world cannot be the same as the methods employed to comprehend the comprehensible, or the incomprehensible, within the normative world. To the extent that human beings are at the same time objective, normative, and subjective entities, and to the extent that their existence presupposes their simultaneous immersion in natural, social, and personal realms, the *Menschsein* (being-human) is a combination of *Dasein* (being-there), *Miteinandersein* (being-with-one-another), and *Alleinsein* (being-alone). Regardless of the specific disciplinary – that is, philosophical, sociological, anthropological, or psychological – approach we may use in order to analyse the functioning of the human world, we cannot suspend our attachment to these three foundational realms of existence. Notwithstanding the question of how we make sense of our tripartite immersion in the universe, the *methodological difference* between the natural sciences and the social sciences stems from the ontological difference between the natural world and the social world.³⁵

The third implication is that, contrary to the Weberian tradition, it is necessary to accept that the distinction between *facts and values*³⁶ expresses a fluid relation, rather than a clear-cut difference, in the sense that the human world constitutes an existential realm pervaded by both the objective force of factuality and the normative force of validity. Undoubtedly, the separation between facts and values designates a legitimate distinction in that *constative* statements are aimed at representing an *objective* existence, which ‘is there’, whereas *normative* statements refer to a *prescriptive* existence, which ‘should be there’ – that is, which is located within reality as it is deliberately constructed and consciously experienced by human agents. We must not forget, however, that factuality and normativity are inextricably linked. They constitute two cornerstones of all forms of sociality: social facts are impregnated with social

norms, because everything that 'is' within the world of collective construction needs to be consolidated through processes of normalization; at the same time, social norms are impregnated with social facts, because everything that 'should be' within the world of normative actualization needs to be confirmed by processes of objective realization. Hence, the *pragmatic unity* between facts and values is based on the inherent relationship between factuality and normativity, which lies at the heart of all forms of sociality.

The fourth and last implication is that, contrary to the Bourdieusian tradition, it is necessary to question the opposition between *ordinary knowledge* and *scientific knowledge*.³⁷ This epistemological separation enables us to understand two divergent types of knowledge. On the one hand, the *doxic sense* is a mode of interpretation produced through direct and participatory experience of the world; it is constructed in accordance with the way in which the world 'appears' to actors and is 'understood' by them. On the other hand, the *scientific sense* is a mode of interpretation founded on critical and reflexive knowledge about the world; it is developed in accordance with the mode of 'being' of the world and the mode of 'explanation' privileged by experts. In real life, however, the difference between these two forms of knowledge is blurred. We are dealing with a contingent distinction to the extent that the human world constitutes a realm determined – simultaneously – by the force of 'taken-for-grantedness', which is central to the habitual rhythm of everyday interactions, and by the force of 'questioning', which derives from the contemplative spirit of thoughtful reflection. Yet, the doxic knowledge of common sense is impregnated with the critical knowledge of scientific thinking: everything that 'appears' right or wrong to actors is subject to implicit or explicit tests undertaken by actors. Analogously, the critical knowledge of experts is permeated by the doxic knowledge of common sense: everything that 'is' right or correct according to scientific analysis is subject to implicit or explicit preconceptions acquired by people, who are situated within socio-historical horizons. In conclusion, the *epistemological unity* between ordinary knowledge and scientific knowledge is due to the fact that quotidian reflexivity represents an integral component of the mediated construction of human sociality. The first two implications – concerning the *ontological* difference between the natural world and the social world, as well as the *methodological* difference between the natural sciences and the social sciences – demonstrate that Boltanskian thought, in accordance with the Kantian and Diltheyan traditions, is motivated by the conviction that it is essential to shed light on *the distinctiveness of the human condition*. On this view, we need to recognize that human beings raise themselves above nature on the basis of their species-distinctive characteristics, notably their *reflexive capacity*, which permits them to make moral judgements and to negotiate social norms. The last two implications – concerning the *pragmatic* unity between facts and values,

as well as the *epistemological* unity between ordinary knowledge and expert knowledge – illustrate that Boltanskian thought, contrary to the Weberian and Bourdieusian traditions, is based on the assumption that it is crucial to account for *the distinctiveness of human cognitive competences*. According to this perspective, we need to acknowledge that human beings are able to coordinate their actions on the basis of their cognitive faculties, especially their *normative capacity*, which allows them to make critical judgements and to codify their pragmatic contexts of interaction. Put differently, reflexive capacity and normative capacity can be regarded as ontological cornerstones of the Boltanskian anthropology of practice.

Having considered the aforementioned – ontological, methodological, pragmatic, and epistemological – implications, it is possible to turn our attention to three distinctions that are situated at the core of the Boltanskian conception of critique: the distinction between ‘ordinary criticisms’ and ‘metacritical positions’,³⁸ the distinction between ‘simple exteriority’ and ‘complex exteriority’,³⁹ and the distinction between ‘domination’ and ‘exploitation’.⁴⁰

The first distinction, Boltanski claims, ‘is maintained between the partial critiques developed by the actors on the basis of their experiences and the systematic critique of a particular social order’.⁴¹ Hence, we need to differentiate between the criticisms raised by ordinary actors within *practical* contexts and the criticisms formulated by thinkers within *theoretical* frameworks. The former manifest themselves in ‘these socially rooted, contextual forms of criticism’,⁴² which emerge in ordinary situations; the latter are mobilized within ‘theoretical constructions that aim to unmask, in their most general dimensions, oppression, exploitation or domination’.⁴³ In short, we can distinguish between *practical criticisms* and *theoretical criticisms*.

The second distinction concerns the difference between ‘the sociological operation of describing of society’⁴⁴ and ‘the critical operation addressed to a social order’.⁴⁵ The descriptive operation is motivated by the objective representation of things ‘as they are’, thereby constituting a ‘*simple exteriority*’.⁴⁶ The normative operation, by contrast, is impregnated with value judgements and with an interpretation of things ‘as they could be’, thereby alluding to a ‘*complex exteriority*’.⁴⁷ The term ‘exteriority’ suggests that, in both cases, the point of reference is an external reality, which is ‘out there’ and which is composed of ‘constraints that are independent of the observer’s will’.⁴⁸ Yet, whereas the objective description of reality involves a *simplification* of exteriority, the prescriptive critique of reality implies a *complexification* of exteriority. The explorative realization of the second task, a normative undertaking oriented towards a complex exteriority, is impossible without the preliminary accomplishment of the first task, a descriptive act in relation to a simple exteriority. If, in other words, ‘[a] metacritical theory is in fact

necessarily reliant on a descriptive sociology or anthropology',⁴⁹ we are obliged to distinguish between the objective representation of a simple exteriority and the normative problematization of a complex exteriority.

The third distinction concerns a terminological dimension that is not an obvious one in critical thought: the differentiation between '*domination*'⁵⁰ and '*exploitation*'.⁵¹ Metacritical theories that are based on the systematic problematization of a complex exteriority 'are often combined with theories of exploitation'.⁵² To the extent that '[t]he term exploitation has an *economic* orientation',⁵³ the term domination has 'rather (if I can put it like this) a *semantic* one'.⁵⁴ Social domination rarely functions as a set of power relations exclusively determined by material and economic constraints: in most cases, it imposes itself – often in remarkably efficient and invasive ways – through the articulation between '*symbolic forms* and *states of affairs*'.⁵⁵ To the extent that every life form generates its own language games,⁵⁶ every economic mode of production creates its own ideological mode of signification.⁵⁷ The interdependence between 'the material' and 'the symbolic' – within systems of social organization in general and within systems of social domination in particular – demonstrates that 'the economic realm' and 'the semantic realm' constitute two inseparable spheres of human life. To be sure, 'the field of the *determination of what is*'⁵⁸ – that is, of what is possible – depends on its *material and symbolic realization* – that is, of what is constructible. Therefore, critical theory needs to examine both the semantic power of economic dimensions and the economic value of semantic dimensions, in order to make sense of the material and the symbolic dimensions underlying hegemonic regimes of action.

II. The Function of Institutions: The Construction of Social Life

The 'power of institutions'⁵⁹ stems from their omnipresence in social life. At the heart of the Boltanskian conception of institutions lies the distinction between 'metacritical theories'⁶⁰ and 'ordinary critiques'.⁶¹ Developing the Boltanskian terminology further, we can suggest that this conceptual differentiation is based on the analytical distinction between (a) '*metacritical theories*' and '*metacritical practices*', (b) '*theoretical criticisms*' and '*practical criticisms*', and (c) '*transcendental engagements*' and '*immanent engagements*'.

The first level concerns the *epistemological* difference between, on the one hand, critical knowledge developed and defended by *researchers* and, on the other hand, critical knowledge produced and mobilized by *ordinary people*. The former is founded on the objectification of reality by social science – that is, 'from a position of *exteriority*',⁶² epitomized in the role of objectifying experts.

The latter is based on the questioning of reality by those who construct it – that is, it is created ‘from *within* by actors involved in disputes’.⁶³

The second level concerns the *methodological* difference between, on the one hand, *theoretical criticism*, which is articulated by virtue of conceptual and paradigmatic frameworks, and, on the other hand, *practical criticism*, which is firmly situated in the realm of empirical regimes of action. The former is formulated by theoreticians, who aim to provide different models of *explanation* and who ‘unmask and challenge’⁶⁴ the legitimacy of reality. The latter is undertaken ‘by actors involved in disputes’⁶⁵ and is embedded in ‘sequences of critique and justification, of highly variable levels of generality’,⁶⁶ without which the normative construction of society cannot take place.

The third level concerns the *socio-ontological* difference between, on the one hand, *theoretical distancing* on the basis of ‘overarching sociological descriptions and normative stances’⁶⁷ on society, and, on the other hand, *practical immersion* by means of direct experiences and discursive articulations *in* society. The former demonstrates that the sociologists’ *raison d’être* consists in their ability to position themselves *outside* society by distancing themselves from the arrangements of reality. The latter indicates that the critical actors’ *raison d’être* consists in their ability to position themselves *within* society by constructing the conditions of reality.

Thus, in order to shed light on the difference between ‘metacritical theories’ and ‘ordinary criticisms’, it is useful to draw three analytical distinctions: *epistemologically*, between exteriority and interiority; *methodologically*, between explanation and justification; and, *socio-ontologically*, between distancing and immersion. Bourdieusian sociology is strongly associated with the analytical levels of *exteriority*, *explanation*, and *distancing*. By contrast, Boltanskian sociology tends to give priority to the analytical levels of *interiority*, *justification*, and *immersion*.

The Bourdieusian approach aims to defend the alleged superiority of scientific knowledge, as opposed to doxic knowledge, by drawing upon a position of objective *exteriority*. Moreover, its unmasking ambition consists in uncovering the underlying mechanisms of reality and in contributing to the *explanation* of the causal forces that determine both the constitution and the evolution of society. Lastly, it presupposes that the explanation of reality from the vantage point of exteriority enables sociologists to distance themselves from their doxic immersion and submerge themselves in the reflective exercise of critical *distance-taking*, with the aim of objectifying the contradictory constitution of practical reality.

The Boltanskian approach, by contrast, seeks to study the reflexivity underlying processes of ordinary knowledge acquisition, which takes place from a position of normative *interiority*. Furthermore, its reconstructive

ambition consists in understanding the discursive dynamics of multiple regimes of action, which are sustained by different modes of *justification*. Finally, it is motivated by the conviction that the understanding of reality from the point of view of interiority permits sociologists to break with the scientistic illusion of pure objectification and to produce critical knowledge through *immersion* in different regimes of action.

In search of 'institutions',⁶⁸ the Boltanskian perspective centres upon the sociological significance of interiority, justification, and immersion. On this account, social actors exist inevitably *within* institutions and are regularly confronted with the need to *justify* their relation to these institutions, whilst their participation within different regimes of action is unthinkable without their *immersion* within different forms of institution.

Despite the fact that 'the concept of institution is one of the [...] founding concepts'⁶⁹ of sociology, and although the reality of institutions may be regarded as the foundational institution of reality, the pivotal role it plays in the construction of social reality is, according to Boltanski, largely underestimated. The central force of institutions in social life is rooted in their capacity to transform reality into a materially and symbolically structured world. In this sense, 'the institutional' and 'the social' can be conceived of as two equivalent aspects of reality: it is because societies are institutionally consolidated and because institutions are socially naturalized that the reality of the world is structured and the world of reality remains unnoticed. What distinguishes 'social facts' from 'natural facts' is that they are not only 'given' but also 'instituted'.⁷⁰ Social reality is inconceivable without the ensemble of instituted facts.

The reflection on the instituted and instituting constitution of society touches upon a fundamental distinction through which Boltanskian thought aims to make sense of the profound '*uncertainty*'⁷¹ that permeates human life, illustrating that human actors cannot escape the ambiguity of their attachment to a double – that is, both objective and normative – exteriority: human beings are situated, at once, in an external existence 'as it is' and in an external existence 'as it is constructed'. We are, then, faced with a twofold exteriority, whose complexity is captured in Boltanski's distinction between '*world*' and '*reality*'.⁷²

In the most general sense, we can say that the world is 'everything that is the case'⁷³ and reality encompasses 'everything that is constructed'.⁷⁴ Put differently, the world is 'everything that happens *to* people', and reality is 'everything that is constructed *by* people'. The world exists beyond our will and regardless of our intentions, whereas reality exists through our will and because of our intentions. The *Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*,⁷⁵ with whose complexity Schopenhauer grapples in his writings, is the reality of a realized and realizable

world, which lies at the core of Boltanski's reflections. As sociologists, we need to recognize the preponderance of reality *over* the world, which characterizes every society *within* the world. As social entities, we have learned to establish a relation *to* the world by forming relations *with* others – that is, by developing a relation *with* social reality. This does not mean, however, that the world does not exercise power over reality. On the contrary, '[t]he power exercised by the world over reality stems precisely from the fact that the world is subject to incessant changes, which are far from being exclusively "social" in kind',⁷⁶ but which are also 'natural' in the sense that we are embodied beings situated within a physical world. As human beings, we are condemned to search for our place in the world, somewhere between the realm of objectivity and the realm of normativity, but without ever being able to find it.

If we accept that '[a]n institution is a bodiless being to which is delegated the task of stating the whatness of what is',⁷⁷ it appears justified to suggest that it is 'first of all in its *semantic* functions that the institution must be considered'.⁷⁸ Taking into account their semantic functions, it is possible to understand the *double* – that is, simultaneously *material and symbolic* – *power of institutions*. Their symbolic power permits them to determine the vocabulary mobilized by members of society when attributing meaning to reality. Their material power equips them with the capacity to structure the grammars underlying different regimes of action, which set the parameters for specific performative operations. Far from conceiving of this semantic function as an omnipotent force that eliminates the potential autonomy of acting subjects, and far from endorsing a fatalistic view of the world that fails to do justice to the anthropological significance of people's critical and transformative capacities, it is necessary to shift from 'the critique of necessity' to 'the necessity of critique'.⁷⁹ For such a paradigm shift is the first step towards understanding why every society is an ensemble of interminable 'sought-to-be-realized' projects.

III. The Role of Critique: The Legitimization of Social Life

From a Boltanskian point of view, 'the *uncertainty* that permeates social life'⁸⁰ is characterized by the dialectic between two registers of action: a '*practical register*',⁸¹ whose level of reflexivity is rather weak and rudimentary, and a '*metapragmatic register*',⁸² whose level of reflexivity is more elevated and differentiated. The first level is marked by 'a certain tolerance for differences'⁸³ and sustained by the existence of a set of codified arrangements that guarantee the reproduction of society. The second level is characterized by the implicit or explicit reference to the necessity of critique and founded on two metapragmatic forces: confirmation and justification.⁸⁴ Put differently, the socio-ontological dialectic

between the ‘practical register’ and the ‘metapragmatic register’ is crucial to the praxeological interplay between intuitive *immersion* and reflexive *distancing*; and the socio-ontological dialectic between the ‘metapragmatic register of affirmation’ and the ‘metapragmatic register of legitimization’ lies at the centre of the normative rivalry between the immanent force of *confirmation* and the transcendent force of *justification*.

One of Boltanski’s main ambitions is to shed light on ‘the indispensable role played by critique in social life that explains the importance sociology has always accorded it’.⁸⁵ From this angle, critique does not represent a peripheral or ephemeral element of everyday reality. On the contrary, it constitutes a *driving force* of human coexistence, capable of questioning the commonly accepted assumptions without which the normative codification of society would not be possible. Critique, as a transformative force of our socio-ontological condition, is hidden behind two sources of existential ambivalence, which manifest themselves within two ‘*hermeneutic contradictions*’:⁸⁶ the former derives from the fact that institutions ‘are at once necessary and fragile, beneficial and abusive’,⁸⁷ and thus marked by the tensions between solidity and fragility, necessity and impossibility, docility and hostility, positivity and negativity; the latter is due to the tension between ‘semantics and pragmatics’,⁸⁸ which lies at the heart of our socio-ontological condition and which demonstrates that, ultimately, the conversion of the world into reality is inconceivable without ‘the articulation between the bodiless being of the institution and the corporeal being’.⁸⁹ In other words, the possibility of social criticism indicates that, despite their capacity to impose themselves upon and consolidate themselves within reality, institutions can be problematized and transformed by those actors who are prepared to call their legitimacy into question. Moreover, the possibility of social criticism highlights that, whilst institutions are disembodied and seemingly disinterested, the capacity to attribute meaning to corporeal experiences remains a privilege of embodied and interested entities, situated not only in the world but also in reality.

To the extent that we are confronted with ‘a radical separation between the pure will of the bodiless being and the wills embodied in the corporeal person’,⁹⁰ we need to accept that the disembodied intentions of institutions derive from the embodied intentions of persons. A being without a body is a body without being. Institutions succeed in imposing their construction of reality on society by exercising both soft and hidden forms of violence: ‘violence is tacitly present in institutions because they must struggle against the unmasking of [the] hermeneutic contradiction’.⁹¹ An efficient institution, then, is a consolidated assemblage that succeeds in concealing the violent character of its own reality by creating mechanisms of confirmation that escape the critical force of validity tests.

‘Confirmation and critique become meaningful only when conceived in their dialogical relationship.’⁹² The power of critique can be confirmed only by criticizing the power of confirmation, just as the power of confirmation can be criticized only by confirming the power of critique. Regardless of the type of test (*épreuve*) undertaken in order to question the codes established within a given reality, the necessity of critique presupposes the critique of necessity, without which there is no emancipatory transformation of reality. Truth tests (*épreuves de vérité*) are ‘symbolic’ in the sense that, on the basis of interpretations, they aim to understand ‘a universe of signs’⁹³ shared by a community. Reality tests (*épreuves de réalité*) are ‘material’ in the sense that, by means of actions, they seek to uncover ‘the powers concealed’⁹⁴ within society. Existential tests (*épreuves existentielles*) are ‘experienced’ in the sense that they face up to ‘the incompleteness of reality and even its contingency, by drawing examples from the flux of life’⁹⁵ and by exposing manifestations of the fundamental ambiguity pervading all social constructions, which, in their totality, form the ensemble of reality.⁹⁶

IV. The Power of Domination: The Reproduction of Social Life

In order to understand the logic underlying political regimes of domination, it is important to remember that no system of power can bypass the need to incorporate the *hermeneutic contradiction*⁹⁷ resulting from the tension between solidity and fragility inherent in every society.

In effect, [...] no political regime can completely avoid *the risk of critique*, which is in a sense incorporated, in different forms, in [the] hermeneutic contradiction.⁹⁸

Put differently, to the extent that the hermeneutic contradiction is fundamental to every political regime, the transformative force of critique is situated at the heart of every socio-ontological condition. The ‘circulation between confirmation and critique’⁹⁹ – or, if one prefers, ‘the articulation of institutional power and critique’¹⁰⁰ – is a sign of the fact that the search for logical coherence, supposedly underlying our sociological immanence, is a source of metaphysical illusion, driven by the futile attempt to escape from the empirical constraints imposed by our physical condition.

For it is part and parcel of the normal course of social life that it is *only very partially coherent* and yet, despite everything, that it enables the coexistence of beings whose differences and divergences are always stronger than what they can unite around, albeit only sometimes.¹⁰¹

In the face of the ontological uncertainty that permeates the practical constitution of every historical formation, '*the manic quest for coherence*'¹⁰² – not only pursued by experts and researchers, but also by ordinary people in their lifeworlds – can never get rid of *the socio-ontological preponderance of contingency*. Notwithstanding the specificity of the political regimes of domination in which we find ourselves situated, the force of critique stems from the capacity to exploit the contingency that is built into the appearance of coherence, thereby imbuing all forms of immanence with the potential for transcendence. It is only by recognizing that critique occupies a central position in the architecture of the social that it becomes possible to understand that political regimes differ from one another not only in terms of their administrative, territorial, economic, demographic, military, or ideological organization. In addition, the typological specificity of a political regime depends on the place it affords critique in the face of the dialectical interplay between confirmation and justification. In other words, to the extent that 'different political regimes are distinguished by the role they accord critique in the face of the power of institutions',¹⁰³ *every mode of confirmation generates its own mode of justification*. If the mode of *confirmation* succeeds in determining the mode of justification that is put in place in order to ensure its own reproduction, then critique is reduced to playing an *immanent* role whose function is to regulate and correct, rather than to undermine and transform, the social assemblage that constitutes the ensemble of arrangements created by human actors. By contrast, if the mode of *justification* succeeds in determining the mode of confirmation that is established in order to define the limits of a particular realm of socialization, then critique is elevated to playing a *transcendent* role whose function is to invent and realize, rather than to consolidate and legitimize, the social assemblage that provides a coexistential space for the ensemble of projects pursued by human actors. The projective investment and the reflexive engagement within a collective arrangement serve as ontological resources of historical developments determined by the force of critique.

In order to understand the constitution and the functioning of a specific political regime of domination, it is essential to examine its capacity to incorporate the force of critique with the aim of guaranteeing its own legitimacy. Simplifying the complexity of reality, and thus imposing a typological coherence upon socio-ontological contingency, it is – following Boltanski – possible to distinguish two principal forms of social domination: '*simple domination*'¹⁰⁴ and '*complex domination*',¹⁰⁵ or – put differently – '*primitive domination*'¹⁰⁶ and '*managerial domination*'.¹⁰⁷ The former represents a mode of domination in which 'people are partially or wholly deprived of basic liberties'¹⁰⁸ and in which, furthermore, their interactions are marked by 'profound asymmetries',¹⁰⁹ which are 'maintained or created by employing

explicit violence – particularly (but not exclusively) physical violence’.¹¹⁰ The latter, by contrast, constitutes a mode of domination in which subjects are not only entitled but also encouraged to benefit from their basic liberties and manage their lives, without allowing the underlying social asymmetries to be converted into unacceptable and preponderant antagonisms. Open and violent oppression tends to be more costly and less efficient than subtle and managerial regulation.

If complex domination has emerged as the hegemonic model of management and administration in ‘contemporary *democratic-capitalist societies*’,¹¹¹ it is essentially ‘the establishment of a new kind of relationship between institutions and critique and, in a sense, the incorporation of critique into the routines of social life which characterize these systems’.¹¹² In short, in our societies, the widespread presence of critical processes within institutions makes it possible to attribute an unprecedented degree of legitimacy to domination. The more a social system succeeds in giving a voice to critique without running the risk of being undermined, the more critique becomes an affirmative force contributing to, rather than a negative counterforce moving away from, the reproduction of social domination. The *Zeitgeist* that lies at the centre of the new spirit of capitalism¹¹³ is based on the idea of ‘*dominating by change*’,¹¹⁴ thereby changing the very spirit of domination. It is because change is supposed to constitute ‘a source of energy’¹¹⁵ that the political forces cannot dominate without releasing the relentless dynamism of the productive forces. As a consequence, change is not only tolerated but even encouraged by the systems of managerial domination, at least to the extent that it does not jeopardize the fundamental normative parameters and implicit rules of the game. Functioning within the boundaries of this ‘new spirit’, discursive modes of justification are absorbed by effective modes of confirmation. A form of domination ‘that does not preclude change and is even [...] exercised *via the intermediary of change*’¹¹⁶ is a mode of organization that aims to convert transformation into the principal driving force of its own reproduction.

V. The Potential of Emancipation: The Transformation of Social Life

Once we critically consider the constitution and the functioning of different regimes of domination, the question that poses itself is the following: what is the place of emancipation within systems of complex domination? If one admits that social change is not the exclusive privilege of collective forces that insist upon the possibility of emancipation through processes of transformation, and if, moreover, one recognizes that social change – far from being reducible to an accidental development or a historical

deviation – constitutes an integral element and a crucial driving force of political regimes based on managerial domination, then how, and according to what criteria, is it possible to distinguish between transformative processes oriented towards emancipation and reproductive mechanisms that remain trapped in the logic of domination?

Boltanski's answer to this question is at once simple and complex. It is simple because, ultimately, the transformative processes oriented towards emancipation are characterized by the effort to promote the 'critical project of a *reduction in the privileges*'¹¹⁷ of dominant social groups. At the same time, it is extremely complex because no emancipatory process can completely rise above the logic of domination, for behind every discursive process of *justification* lurks the affirmative suspicion of *confirmation*. On this account, every empowering human practice reminds us, simultaneously, of the solid fragility of the justified and of the fragile solidity of the confirmed. Everything that appears justified requires confirmation, since, in principle, its validity can be repudiated. Analogously, everything that appears confirmed requires justification, since, in principle, its legitimacy can be undermined.

Hence, it seems that a 'radical transformation of the relationship between instances of confirmation and critical instances'¹¹⁸ cannot be dissociated from the political challenge to contribute to 'a better distribution of capacities for action':¹¹⁹ irrespective of which anthropological capacity may be considered as the most important one for processes of emancipation – our reflexive, critical, and moral competences or our projective, cooperative, and creative faculties – and regardless of which particular test (*épreuve*) may be conceived of as the most crucial one for processes of justification – truth tests, reality tests, or existential tests¹²⁰ –, 'the *closure* of reality on itself that *discourages* critique'¹²¹ needs to be inverted through the *opening* of society on itself that *stimulates* critique. To the extent that 'institutions are indispensable'¹²² for the immersive and intuitive organization of socialization processes, critique is essential for the reflexive and discursive coordination of different forms of action.

'To recognize the presence of hermeneutic contradiction at the heart of social life would mean not only accepting the *factual character of institutions* – that is to say, the fact that they are *made*',¹²³ but, in addition, facing up to the *normativity of actions* – that is, to the fact that they are *value-laden*. The 'relationship between critical instances and institutional instances'¹²⁴ is central to social life, because the dialectical opening that is brought about by the dynamic interplay between justification and confirmation – and, thus, between problematization and acceptance, as well as between negation and affirmation – is crucial to all forms of socialization.

Critical Reflections: Weaknesses and Limitations

(I) Critical Theory: Given that he conceives of his own approach as a 'pragmatic' one, it comes as no surprise that Boltanski fails to provide solid *normative foundations* for his conception of sociology in general and for his conception of critique in particular. Without a doubt, Boltanski is to be applauded for seeking to locate the normative resources of critical theory in everyday social practices, rather than in the intellectual ivory towers of armchair philosophy. Nonetheless, due to the *contextualist* assumptions underlying his notion of social criticism, his account of normativity remains remarkably vague. He presupposes – and, in his empirical studies, aims to demonstrate – that ordinary actors are equipped with the discursive ability to make judgements about themselves and about their environment. Yet, his anthropological optimism, which suggests that a reflexive engagement with the world is part and parcel of what it means to be human, fails to examine the species-constitutive roots of this 'critical capacity'.

Some commentators claim that, ever since Habermas's announcement of a 'paradigm shift',¹²⁵ critical theory has entered a midlife crisis;¹²⁶ one may add that, without Habermas's 'linguistic turn', critical theory would never have grown up in the first place. Critical theory without normative foundations is tantamount to social practice without access to material and symbolic resources. Unlike Boltanski, Habermas seeks to locate the normative foundations of critical theory in the rational foundations of language. From this perspective, our critical capacity is embedded in our linguistic competence. To be exact, our critical capacity is derived from (a) our *assertive* ability to make representational statements about the world, (b) our *normative* ability to coordinate our actions with other human beings in meaningful and morally justifiable ways, (c) our *expressive* ability to make our thoughts, judgements, and feelings known to others, and (d) our *communicative* ability to reach mutual understanding or, if necessary, discursively substantiated agreements with our interlocutors.

Boltanski's writings, by contrast, are based on the tacit presupposition that our critical capacity is somewhat 'naturally' embedded in our rational faculties.¹²⁷ This unjustified presupposition prevents him from shedding light on the *species-constitutive* resources that allow for the establishment of a reflexive grasp of reality and a discursive engagement with society. We may all agree that human beings, unlike other creatures, are potentially critical entities. Nevertheless, we need to identify the predispositional resources that allow for the development of critical capacity, if we seek to provide defensible normative, rather than metaphysical, grounds on which to justify the very idea of critical theory.

(II) Institutions: Boltanski's conception of institutions is flawed in three respects.

(a) *Terminological vagueness:* Considering that Boltanski attaches great importance to the concept of institution in his study, it is hardly excusable that he fails to provide his readers with a clear and concise definition of this term. Given the absence of such a definition, his account of institutions, although it is theoretically challenging, remains conceptually imprecise and analytically convoluted.

(b) *Discursive justification:* The aforementioned lack of conceptual accuracy and methodical rigour is reflected in the fact that Boltanski fails to acknowledge that some of the – presumably distinctive – characteristics that he attributes to 'institutions', notably their *organizing and bonding functions*, are crucial to other key sociological variables, such as social structures, cultural norms, and ritualized practices. Surely, Boltanski is right to insist that one of the vital anthropological functions of institutions is to guarantee both the material and the symbolic organization of the social world. Yet, he does not face up to the fact that various other – non-institutional – sociological variables *also* enable human agents to confront the intrinsic complexity and uncertainty of their existence and, hence, *also* represent invaluable sources of individual and collective identity, interactional predictability, and ontological security. In other words, he does not succeed in putting his finger on the *indispensable* and *irreplaceable* functions of institutions – that is, on the essential anthropological functions that *only* institutions can fulfil.

(c) *Sociological analysis:* Perhaps most significantly, Boltanski fails to identify evidence-based criteria that permit us to prove the actual existence of institutional realities. Given that, notably in highly differentiated societies, various interactional realms overlap, it is far from obvious what criteria should be used to define the boundaries of an institutional setting. More specifically, what is missing from Boltanski's interpretation of institutions is a critical engagement with the following question: Does the *preponderance* of a particular institutional realm depend primarily on *objective* factors (e.g. structural circumstances), *intersubjective* factors (e.g. relational arrangements), *subjective* factors (e.g. cognitive projections), or on a combination of these elements? Boltanskian sociologists have a major task on their hands when seeking to provide evidence-based parameters for a non-reductive study of institutions. Without such criteria, both philosophical and sociological approaches to institutions remain purely speculative and largely rhetorical. Boltanski's convoluted account of institutions may create an imaginative reality of representation, but it achieves little in the way of a perceptive representation of reality.

(III) Critique: Another problematic aspect of this book is its author's analysis of the nature of critique. To be sure, Boltanski is right to remind us of the fact that the distinction between 'ordinary critique' and 'scientific critique' is not as clear-cut as it may appear at first sight. Challenging the epistemological assumptions underlying the writings of Marxist, Durkheimian, and Bourdieusian thinkers, he makes a convincing case for the view that critique is a socio-ontological capacity of ordinary actors, rather than a professional privilege monopolized by reflexive scientists. It is disconcerting, however, that – despite the central importance that the author attaches to this concept, as is most bluntly conveyed in the book's title – Boltanski does not offer a systematic examination of the relationship between ordinary and scientific forms of critique.

In essence, we can distinguish three possible positions on this matter:

- (a) *Scientific critique is superior to ordinary critique*, because the underlying structural mechanisms and causalities of both the natural world and the social world escape people's common-sense understanding of reality.
- (b) *Ordinary critique is superior to scientific critique*, because the authenticity of subjective and intersubjective experiences, derived from actors' bodily involvement in the natural world and the social world, escapes conceptually sophisticated and methodically detached explanations of reality.
- (c) *Both scientific critique and ordinary critique are legitimate and potentially insightful*; their epistemic value depends on the kind of knowledge one seeks to produce, because the search for cognitive validity always takes place from a particular position in, and in relation to specific aspects of, reality. In other words, the point is not to oppose but to cross-fertilize scientific and ordinary ways of engaging with the world.

It is one of Boltanski's major achievements to have drawn attention to the sociological significance of everyday disputes, notably with regard to their pivotal role in the normative construction, and constant negotiation, of social arrangements. What he has failed to provide, however, is a *systematic account of the epistemological reasons* why scientific knowledge and ordinary knowledge are not as far apart as they may seem at first glance. Let us reflect upon these reasons, in order to illustrate their importance for Boltanski's project.

(a) *The epistemic limitations of scientific knowledge:* In order to defend the epistemic worth of scientific knowledge, one may contend that it contains three constitutive features: first, *positivity*, derived from the reliability of experience-based knowledge; second, *objectivity*, founded on the possibility of value-free knowledge; and, third, *universality*, expressed in the validity of context-transcending knowledge. Arguably, Bourdieu's insistence upon the

scientificity of sociology rests on his confidence in the *positivity*, *objectivity*, and *universality* of compelling knowledge claims. What those who defend this view fail to take into consideration, however, are the roles of *linguisticity*, *subjectivity*, and *relativity* in the normative construction of scientific knowledge. Given that every scientific approach to society is conceivable only as a *linguistically mediated* relation to reality, the reliability of experience-based knowledge is contingent upon the representational capacity of language. Since every scientific explanation rests upon a *subjectively formulated* interpretation of the world, the possibility of epistemic value-freeness is undermined by the omnipresent reality of positionally structured forms of value-ladenness. If every scientific generalization about the world can assert epistemic authority only insofar as it recognizes the *contextually contingent* relativity of all claims to representational accuracy, then the forcefulness of discursive claims to universal validity hinges upon the spatio-temporally constituted arbitrariness of social legitimacy. In short, the epistemic ideal of scientificity cannot rise above the social constraints of linguistically mediated, subjectively mobilized, and contextually anchored forms of normativity.¹²⁸

(b) *The epistemic power of ordinary knowledge:* In order to defend the epistemic worth of ordinary knowledge, we need to do justice to the cognitive capacities of social actors: (i) as representational beings, we are able to produce *descriptive* knowledge; (ii) as analytical beings, we construct *systematic* knowledge; (iii) as reflexive beings, we are capable of developing *explanatory* knowledge; (iv) as moral beings, we generate *normative* knowledge; (v) as rational beings, we participate in the exchange of *discursive* knowledge; (vi) as learning beings, we build on *cumulative* knowledge; and (vii) as projective beings, we can even make assumptions about the future on the basis of *predictive* knowledge. Rather than regarding these cognitive capacities as an epistemic privilege of scientists and experts, we need to recognize that they are built into the human condition.

(c) Since the starting point of Boltanski's entire project is to move away from a clear-cut distinction between 'ordinary knowledge' and 'scientific knowledge', and thereby reject the allegedly fatalistic nature of Bourdieu's critical sociology, it is barely justifiable that he fails to provide a *systematic epistemological framework* on which to base his pragmatic sociology of critique. Put bluntly, there is no comprehensive sociology of critique without an analytical philosophy of epistemic capacities.

(IV) Domination: One of the most insightful aspects of Boltanski's analysis of social domination is the author's insistence upon the *elastic*, *adaptable*, and *integrative* power of advanced capitalist systems. This is not to suggest that Boltanski disregards the dehumanizing, destructive, and exploitative dimensions of capitalism. Rather, this means that, in opposition to one-sided

views of capitalist formations, which conceive of market-driven societies merely as repressive ‘systems of enclosure’, Boltanski takes one of Marx’s principal theoretical concerns seriously: the vigorous, pioneering, and productive nature of capitalism. In fact, considering the rapid development of the productive forces over the past two centuries, one may come to the cynical conclusion that capitalism is capable of mobilizing the purposive, cooperative, creative, and species-constitutive potential of meaningful activity – epitomized in concrete labour – more successfully than any other hitherto existing economic system. The systemic capacity to achieve precisely this has been pertinently examined, by the author himself, in terms of the ‘new spirit of capitalism’.¹²⁹ As convincingly argued by Boltanski, under the normative parameters of this ‘new spirit’, social actors – that is, political and economic elites ‘from above’, as much as ordinary people ‘from below’ – are not only allowed but also expected to mobilize the empowering resources inherent in their critical, reflexive, and productive capacities. The key ingredients of this ‘new spirit’ – such as ‘initiative’, ‘creativity’, ‘imagination’, ‘transparency’, ‘commitment’, ‘openness’, ‘dialogue’, and ‘team work’ – provide capitalist forms of domination not only with systemic elasticity and adaptability, but also with an unprecedented degree of ideological legitimacy. As a consequence, capitalism is now widely perceived as the only – viable and acceptable – game in town – that is, as the hegemonic mode of production almost everywhere in the world.¹³⁰

One may of course question the originality of Boltanski’s explanatory framework by pointing to the fact that, already during the early days of modernity, classical social and economic theorists – notably Smith, Ricardo, Marx, Weber, and Polanyi – characterized capitalism as the most dynamic economic system in the history of humankind. The more significant problem arising from Boltanski’s analysis, however, concerns another issue: his lack of attention to the *polycentric constitution of power relations* in differentiated societies. Despite his emphasis on the dynamic and flexible nature of complex systems of domination, Boltanski downplays the fact that capitalist societies are *internally divided* by sociological determinants, such as class, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, and ability. In Anglo-Saxon sociology, the term ‘intersectionality’ is – rightly or wrongly – used to account for the internal complexity of polycentric social settings and identities. In order to face up to the intricacy of power relations in highly differentiated societies, we need to examine not only the ‘new spirit of capitalism’, but also the continuing presence of other sources of both structural and ideological domination, such as ethnocentrism, racism, sexism, ageism, and ableism. Boltanski’s failure to attribute equal, or at least a similar, amount of importance to other major sources of social power is indicative of the fact that, despite his scepticism

towards determinist approaches in the social sciences, his own conception of domination suffers from residual economic reductionism, according to which we can distinguish between a 'main contradiction' (*Hauptwiderspruch*) and 'subordinate contradictions' (*Nebenwidersprüche*), the latter representing derivative manifestations of the former. It is time to explore the 'new spirits' of other '-isms'.

(V) Emancipation: One of the most promising thematic aspects of *On Critique* is at the same time one of its weakest elements: Boltanski's analysis of human emancipation. Indeed, this issue ties in with another problematic aspect of this book, which may strike Anglo-Saxon readers particularly: the author's tendency to make relatively simple points in an unnecessarily complicated, and at times convoluted, language. This issue is especially obvious when considering Boltanski's questionable, and arguably reductive, account of emancipatory processes. As explained above, the author conceives of emancipatory processes, essentially, as social practices that contribute to 'a reduction in the privileges',¹³¹ 'a better distribution of capacities for action',¹³² and the realization of actors' critical capacities mobilized in order to oppose 'the closure of reality on itself that discourages critique'.¹³³ Unfortunately, this broad conception of emancipation, which is founded on belief in the empowering capacities of ordinary people, is politically so *elastic* that not only anarchists, communists, and socialists but also social democrats, liberals, and even neo-conservatives would be happy to endorse it. Boltanski's nebulous approach to emancipation, which fails to capture the qualitative specificity of universally empowering social practices, is symptomatic of the author's inability to identify viable forms of action and reflection capable of substantially undermining the hegemonic logic underlying systems of social domination. Certainly, Boltanski is right to resist the temptation to develop utopian blueprints. If, however, the normative task of critical theory is reduced to uncovering the 'hermeneutic contradictions' inherent in established power relations without reflecting in detail on the conditions enabling the creation of viable alternatives, then it will remain trapped in the symbolic and material parameters of the historical horizon it seeks to overcome.

Moreover, one may wonder to what extent Boltanski's conception of emancipation remains trapped in a *rationalist* view of the social, which is concerned primarily with actors' cognitive and critical capacities, rather than with their bodily constitution and non-rational ways of engaging with the world. If there is one important lesson that Boltanski can learn from Bourdieu, it is the insight that there can be no comprehensive sociology of emancipation without a critical sociology of the body. The latter escapes the agenda of merely rationalist approaches to individual and social emancipation. Thus, it is ironic

that, although the whole point of Boltanski's pragmatic project is to take ordinary actors and their various self-empowering capacities seriously, it remains caught up in the tradition of mainstream theories of domination in conceiving of the subject's rational and critical capacities as the motor of emancipatory social processes. Boltanski's book is a major contribution to the literature and makes a convincing case for regarding critical theory as a worthwhile project, whose normative foundations are to be located in ordinary processes of action and reflection. If, however, we are willing to accept that emancipatory social practices are not limited to discursive processes of critique and justification, it must be the task of critical theory to break out of the rationalist straitjacket that prevents it from understanding that self-enlightenment is a necessary but insufficient condition for human emancipation.

Finally, despite Boltanski's announcement that one of the chief objectives of this book is to contribute to the reconciliation between 'critical sociology' and the 'pragmatic sociology of critique', it lacks a systematic overview of the key points of *convergence*, *divergence*, and possible *integration* between these two approaches. Undoubtedly, Boltanski's aim to overcome both personal and intellectual differences with his 'academic father', and thereby provide the basis for a constructive dialogue between their respective approaches, is to be welcomed. It is striking, though, that Boltanski's attempt to open such a fruitful conversation between the two accounts remains remarkably *vague* and *unsystematic*. As I have tried to demonstrate in another study,¹³⁴ the two approaches, despite the considerable differences that exist between the respective theoretical frameworks they have developed, are far from incommensurable. An in-depth comparison between Bourdieu and Boltanski illustrates that the two thinkers share various theoretical concerns and, more importantly, that they converge on several normative positions, notably in relation to their critique of social domination and their insistence upon the possibility of human emancipation.¹³⁵

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for having helped me clarify and develop the central arguments underlying the analysis of this text. Finally, I wish to stress that I am particularly indebted to Luc Boltanski; this essay has largely benefitted from the discussions and exchanges that we have had over the past few years.

Notes

- 1 This chapter was originally published as Simon Susen (2012) ‘Une sociologie pragmatique de la critique est-elle possible ? Quelques réflexions sur *De la critique* de Luc Boltanski’, *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, 110(4), pp. 685–728. Printed in English with kind permission from *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* (Institut Supérieur de Philosophie/Université Catholique de Louvain). Translated from French into English by Simon Susen.
- 2 See, for example: Bénatouïl (1999a); Berten (1993); Bidet (2002); Caillé (1988); Corcuff (1996); de Blic (2000); de Blic and Mouchard (2000a); de Blic and Mouchard (2000b); Dodier (1991); Dodier (1993); Gadrey, Hatchuel, Boltanski, and Chiapello (2001); Gautier (2001); Nachi (2006); Negri (1994); Stavo-Debaugé (2011); Thévenot (1990); Thévenot (1992); Thévenot (1998); Thévenot (2006).
- 3 See, for example: Basaure, Reemtsma, and Willig (2009); Bogusz (2010); Boltanski and Honneth (2009); Celikates (2009: esp. 136–157); Dörre, Lessenich, and Rosa (2009); Forst, Hartmann, Jaeggi, and Saar (2009); Hartmann (2009: 526–527); Jaeggi (2009); Jaeggi and Wesche (2009: 14–15); Rehberg (2007); Schmidt (2007).
- 4 See, for example: Baert and Silva (2010 [1998]: 42–48); Basaure (2011a); Basaure (2011b); Bénatouïl (1999b); Blokker (2011); Blokker and Brighenti (2011a); Blokker and Brighenti (2011b); Borghi (2011); Callinicos (2006: 5, 15, 51–72, and 155–156); Chiapello and Fairclough (2002); Delanty (2011); Eulriet (2008); Fabiani (2011); Frère (2004: esp. 92–93 and 97n.4); Honneth (2010); Jagd (2011); Silber (2003); Silber (2011); Stark (2009); Susen (2007: 7, 146n.8, 147n.31, 167n.5, 202n.89, 202n.93, 223–224, 227n.25, 228n.50, 229n.51, 229n.52, 271n.24, 319, 322, and 325); Susen (2011b: 370); Susen (2011c: esp. 447–450, 453–456, and 459–461); Wagner (1999); Wagner (2000); Wagner (2010).
- 5 See especially: Boltanski (1990a); Boltanski (1998); Boltanski (1990b); Boltanski (1999–2000); Boltanski (2009); Boltanski and Thévenot (1991); Boltanski and Thévenot (1999); Boltanski and Thévenot (2000).
- 6 See, for example: Boltanski (1969: esp. 52–56, 83–86, 101–110, and 135–139); Boltanski (1982: esp. 113–119, 298–303, and 485–489); Boltanski (1990a: esp. 15–27 and 37–95); Boltanski (1990b); Boltanski (1993a: esp. 91–116); Boltanski (1993b); Boltanski (1998); Boltanski (1999–2000); Boltanski (2002a); Boltanski (2002b); Boltanski (2003); Boltanski (2004: esp. 215–216, 252–259, 315, 319, and 327–329); Boltanski (2008: esp. 79–95 and 137–178); Boltanski and Chiapello (1999: esp. 50, 58–90, 241–290, 414–419, 423–500, 501–576, 579–629, and 631–640); Boltanski and Claverie (2007: esp. 438–443); Boltanski, Darré, and Schiltz (1984); Boltanski and Honneth (2009); Boltanski, Rennes, and Susen (2010: esp. 152–156 and 159–163); Boltanski and Thévenot (1983); Boltanski and Thévenot (1989); Boltanski and Thévenot (1991: 23–26, 30–33, 39–59, 161–199, 265–290, 291–334, 417–421, and 425–438); Boltanski and Thévenot (1999); Boltanski and Thévenot (2000); Bourdieu and Boltanski (1975); Bourdieu and Boltanski (2008: esp. 9–14, 50–51, and 78–103).
- 7 Boltanski (2011 [2009]). See also Boltanski (2009).

8 It is important to emphasize, however, that Luc Boltanski is not the only Francophone scholar associated with the paradigm of ‘pragmatic sociology’. There are various French-speaking researchers who have had a considerable impact upon the development of this approach, such as Daniel Cefaï and Laurent Thévenot – to mention only two of them. On this point, see, for instance: Cefaï (2003); Cefaï (2007); Cefaï and Joseph (2002); Cefaï and Saturno (2007); Thévenot (1990); Thévenot (1992); Thévenot (1998); Thévenot (2006). On this point, see also: Basaure (2011a); Blokker and Brighenti (2011b); Honneth (2010).

One of the principal reasons why *On Critique* may be regarded as one of the most original works in recent French ‘pragmatic sociology’ is that it illustrates the *paradigmatic specificity* of Boltanski’s approach more clearly than any of his previous studies. This is due to the fact that *On Critique* contains a thorough engagement with three intellectual traditions that, over the past few years, have significantly shaped Boltanski’s intellectual development:

- (a) *critical theory*, mainly with regard to the works of Axel Honneth, in particular, and of the ‘Third Generation’ of the Frankfurt School, in general;
- (b) *critical sociology*, notably in terms of the theoretical perspective developed by Pierre Bourdieu; and
- (c) *post-structuralist theory*, especially in relation to the multidimensional analysis of power proposed by Michel Foucault.

As will become clear in the remainder of this chapter, Boltanski’s recent in-depth engagement with these intellectual traditions is reflected in the key arguments made in *On Critique*. On point (a), see esp. 1–17, 83–115, and 150–160; on point (b), see esp. 18–49; on point (c), see esp. 50–82 and 116–149 (cf. *De la critique*: on point (a), see esp. 15–37, 129–173, and 223–236; on point (b), see esp. 39–82; on point (c), see esp. 83–128 and 175–221).

- 9 Boltanski (2011 [2009]). See also Boltanski (2009).
- 10 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 1–17). [Boltanski (2009: 15–37).]
- 11 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 50–82). [Boltanski (2009: 83–128).]
- 12 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 83–115). [Boltanski (2009: 129–173).]
- 13 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 116–149). [Boltanski (2009: 175–221).]
- 14 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 150–160). [Boltanski (2009: 223–236).]
- 15 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 18–49). [Boltanski (2009: 39–82).]
- 16 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 1; *italics added*). [Boltanski (2009: 15): ‘[I]a structure des *théories critiques*’ (*italics added*).]
- 17 On this point, see Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 1): ‘I shall approach critical sociologies starting from the concept of *social domination* [...]’ (*italics in original*). [Boltanski (2009: 15): ‘J’aborderai les sociologies critiques à partir du concept de *domination sociale* [...]’ (*italics in original*).]
- 18 On the role of the concept of *domination* in critical theory, see, for example: Susen (2007: esp. 18, 57, 110, 112, 116, 127n.22, 143, 169n.40, 190, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 224, 225, 238, 261, 271n.32, 279, 282, and 286); Susen (2008a: esp. 65–80); Susen (2008b: esp. 133–148); Susen (2009a: esp. 81–82, 84–87, 102–103, and 105–110); Susen (2009b: esp. 110–113); Susen (2010c: esp. 110–111 and 112–113).
- 19 See Susen (2007: 125, 241, and 252). See also Susen (2008a: 65–66).
- 20 See Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 1). [See Boltanski (2009: 15).]

- 21 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 1–2; italics added). [Boltanski (2009: 16): ‘[l]e fait d’exercer un pouvoir ou de se soumettre à un pouvoir *n’échappe pas à la conscience des acteurs*’ (italics added).]
- 22 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 2). [Boltanski (2009: 16): ‘les relations de pouvoir sont, le plus souvent, visibles aux yeux d’un observateur’.]
- 23 See *ibid.*
- 24 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 2). [Boltanski (2009: 16): ‘[p]arce qu’il doit à la fois s’affirmer et se justifier’.]
- 25 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 2). [Boltanski (2009: 16): ‘le pouvoir parle du pouvoir’.]
- 26 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 2). [Boltanski (2009: 17): ‘n’est pas directement observable et échappe en outre, le plus souvent, à la conscience des acteurs’.]
- 27 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 2). [Boltanski (2009: 17): ‘La domination doit être dévoilée.’]
- 28 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 2): ‘Domination must be unmasked. It does not speak of itself and is concealed in *systems* whose patent forms of power are merely their most superficial dimension.’ (Italics in original.) [Boltanski (2009: 17): ‘La domination doit être dévoilée. Elle ne parle pas d’elle-même et se dissimule dans des *dispositifs* dont les formes patentes de pouvoir ne constituent que la dimension la plus superficielle.’ (Italics in original.)] On the Bourdieusian conception of power, particularly on the question of the dissimulation of power relations through ‘symbolic power’, see, for instance: Honneth (1984); Jurt (2004); Mauger (2005); Peter (2004); Susen (2007: esp. 133–147, 241, and 252–253); Terray (2003); Thompson (1992); Wacquant (2002).
- 29 See Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 3–4). [See Boltanski (2009: 18–19).] On this point, see also: Boltanski (1990a); Boltanski (1990b); Boltanski (1998); Boltanski and Honneth (2009); Boltanski, Rennes, and Susen (2010); Boltanski and Thévenot (1999); Boltanski and Thévenot (2000).
- 30 See Dilthey (1883), Husserl (1972 [1939]), and Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 3). [See Boltanski (2009: 18).]
- 31 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 3) (‘*moral judgements*’ italicized in the original; ‘*reflexive capacity*’ not italicized in the original). [Boltanski (2009: 18–19): ‘Les êtres humains [...] ne se contentent pas d’agir ou de réagir aux actions des autres. Ils reviennent sur leurs propres actions ou sur celles des autres pour porter sur elles des jugements, souvent indexés à la question du bien et du mal, c’est-à-dire des *jugements moraux*. Cette *capacité réflexive* fait qu’ils réagissent également par rapport aux représentations que l’on donne de leur propriétés ou de leurs actions, y compris quand ces dernières émanent de la sociologie ou des théories critiques.’ (Note: ‘*jugements moraux*’ italicized in the original; ‘*capacité réflexive*’ not italicized in the original.)]
- 32 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 3–4). [Boltanski (2009: 19): ‘[l]’activité morale est avant tout une activité critique’.]
- 33 See Kant (2000 [1788]) and Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 3). [See Boltanski (2009: 18).]
- 34 See Dilthey (1883) and Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 3). [See Boltanski (2009: 18).] See also Husserl (1972 [1939]).
- 35 Arguably, the methodological differences between the natural sciences and the social sciences are epitomized in the divergence between the paradigm of *Erklären* (*expliquer*) and the paradigm of *Verstehen* (*comprendre*). On this point, see, for example: Apel (1971); Apel (1979); Bourdieu (1993); Delanty (1997); Delanty and Strydom (2003); Habermas (1970); Outhwaite (1986 [1975]); Outhwaite (1987); Outhwaite (1998); Outhwaite (2000).
- 36 See Weber (1980 [1922]: 8) and Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 4). [See Boltanski (2009: 19).]

- 37 See Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron (1968: esp. 11–14, 18, 29–31, 36, 47, 51–52, 73, 83, 93, 97, and 103) as well as Boltanski (2009: 18–22). See also Susen (2011a: 49–53, 69, 75–76, and 82).
- 38 See Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 4–6). [See Boltanski (2009: 19–22).]
- 39 See Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 6–8). [See Boltanski (2009: 23–25).]
- 40 See Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 8–9). [See Boltanski (2009: 26–27).]
- 41 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 6). [Boltanski (2009: 22): ‘maintenue entre les critiques morcelées développées par les acteurs à partir de leurs expériences et la critique systématique d’un ordre social déterminé’.]
- 42 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 6). [Boltanski (2009: 22): ‘ces formes de la critique socialement enracinées dans des contextes sociaux’.]
- 43 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 6). [Boltanski (2009: 22): ‘les constructions théoriques visant à dévoiler, dans leurs dimensions les plus générales, l’oppression, l’exploitation ou la domination’.]
- 44 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 6). [Boltanski (2009: 23): ‘l’opération sociologique de description de la société’.]
- 45 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 6). [Boltanski (2009: 23): ‘l’opération critique adressée à un ordre social’.]
- 46 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 6; italics in original). [Boltanski (2009: 23): ‘*extériorité simple*’ (italics in original).]
- 47 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 6; italics in original). [Boltanski (2009: 23): ‘*extériorité complexe*’ (italics in original).]
- 48 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 7). [Boltanski (2009: 24): ‘contraintes indépendantes de la volonté de l’observateur’.]
- 49 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 8). [Boltanski (2009: 25): ‘[u]ne théorie métacritique est en effet nécessairement adossée à une sociologie ou à une anthropologie descriptive’.]
- 50 See Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 8–9). [See Boltanski (2009: 26–27).]
- 51 See Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 8–9). [See Boltanski (2009: 26–27).]
- 52 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 8). [Boltanski (2009: 26): ‘sont souvent articulées à des théories de l’exploitation’.]
- 53 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 8; italics added). [Boltanski (2009: 26): ‘[l]e terme d’exploitation a une orientation *économique*’ (italics added).]
- 54 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 9; italics in original). [Boltanski (2009: 26): ‘plutôt, si l’on peut dire, *sémantique*’ (italics in original).]
- 55 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 9; italics in original). [Boltanski (2009: 26): ‘les *formes symboliques* et les *états de choses*’ (italics in original).] On this point, see also Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 66, 70, 71, 82, 98, 99, 103, 109, and 123).
- 56 See Wittgenstein (1982 [1953]).
- 57 See Marx and Engels (1953 [1845–1847]).
- 58 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 9; italics in original). [Boltanski (2009: 26): ‘le champ de la *détermination de ce qui est*’ (italics in original).]
- 59 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 50). [Boltanski (2009: 83): ‘pouvoir des institutions’.]
- 60 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 50). [Boltanski (2009: 83): ‘théories métacritiques’.]
- 61 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 50). [Boltanski (2009: 83): ‘critiques ordinaires’.]
- 62 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 50; italics added). [Boltanski (2009: 83): ‘depuis une *extériorité*’ (italics added).]
- 63 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 50; italics added). [Boltanski (2009: 83): ‘de l’*intérieur* par des acteurs engagés dans des disputes’ (italics added).]

- 64 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 50). [Boltanski (2009: 83): 'dévoilent et mettent en cause'.]
- 65 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 50). [Boltanski (2009: 83): 'par des acteurs engagés dans des disputes'.]
- 66 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 50; italics added). [Boltanski (2009: 83): 'dans des séquences de critiques et de *justifications*, avec des niveaux très variables de généralité' (italics added).]
- 67 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 50). [Boltanski (2009: 83–84): 'des descriptions sociologiques surplombantes et des prises de position normatives'.]
- 68 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 51). [Boltanski (2009: 85): 'À la recherche des "institutions"'.]
- 69 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 51). [Boltanski (2009: 85): 'le concept d'institution est l'un des concepts fondateurs'.]
- 70 On this point, see *ibid.*
- 71 See Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 57). [See Boltanski (2009: 93).]
- 72 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 57; italics in original). [Boltanski (2009: 93): 'monde'/'réalité' (italics in original).] See also Boltanski (2011 [2009]: xi and 57–61). [See also Boltanski (2009: 13 and 93–98).]
- 73 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 57). [Boltanski (2009: 93): 'tout ce qui arrive'.]
- 74 See *ibid.*
- 75 Schopenhauer (1972 [1819]).
- 76 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 58). [Boltanski (2009: 94): '[l]e pouvoir que le monde exerce sur la réalité tient justement au fait que le monde est l'objet de changements incessants, qui sont loin d'être seulement d'ordre "social"'.]
- 77 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 75). [Boltanski (2009: 117): 'être sans corps à qui est déléguée la tâche de dire ce qu'il en est de ce qui est'.]
- 78 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 75; italics in original). [Boltanski (2009: 117): 'donc d'abord [...] dans ses fonctions *sémantiques* qu'il faut envisager l'institution' (italics in original).]
- 79 See Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 83). [See Boltanski (2009: 129).]
- 80 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 83; italics added). [Boltanski (2009: 129): 'l'*incertitude* qui imprègne la vie sociale' (italics added).]
- 81 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 83). [Boltanski (2009: 129): 'registre pratique'.]
- 82 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 83). [Boltanski (2009: 129): 'registre métapragmatique'.]
- 83 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 83). [Boltanski (2009: 129): 'une certaine tolérance aux écarts'.]
- 84 See *ibid.*
- 85 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 83). [Boltanski (2009: 130): 'le rôle indispensable joué par la critique dans la vie sociale qui explique l'importance que la sociologie n'a cessé de lui accorder'.]
- 86 See Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 83–93). [See Boltanski (2009: 130–143): 'contradictions herméneutiques'.]
- 87 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 84). [Boltanski (2009: 130): 'sont à la fois nécessaires et fragiles, bénéfiques et abusives'.]
- 88 See Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 87). [See Boltanski (2009: 134): 'sémantique et pragmatique'.]
- 89 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 87). [Boltanski (2009: 134): 'l'articulation entre l'être sans corps de l'institution et l'être corporel'.]
- 90 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 96). [Boltanski (2009: 147): 'une séparation radicale entre la volonté pure de l'être sans corps et les volontés incarnées dans la personne corporelle'.]
- 91 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 95). [Boltanski (2009: 145): 'la violence est tacitement présente dans les institutions parce qu'elles doivent lutter contre le dévoilement de la contradiction herméneutique'.]

- 92 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 62). [Boltanski (2009: 152): 'Confirmation et critique doivent donc être considérées comme deux fonctions qui s'entre-définissent mutuellement et n'existent que l'une par l'autre.']
- 93 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 113). [Boltanski (2009: 170): 'un univers de signes'.]
- 94 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 113) ('powers' italicized in original). [Boltanski (2009: 170): 'les puissances cachées' ('*puissances*' italicized in original).]
- 95 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 113) ('incompleteness', 'contingency', and 'flux of life' italicized in original). [Boltanski (2009: 170): 'l'incomplétude de la réalité et même sa contingence en puisant dans le flux de la vie' ('*incomplétude*', 'contingence', and 'flux de la vie' italicized in original).]
- 96 On the paradigmatic centrality of the concept of *épreuve* within French pragmatist thought, see, for instance: Basaure (2011b); Boltanski (1990); Boltanski (1998); Boltanski and Honneth (2009); Boltanski and Thévenot (1991); Boltanski and Thévenot (1999); Cefaï and Joseph (2002); Thévenot (1998).
- 97 See Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 116). See also *ibid.*: 83–93. [See Boltanski (2009: 175). See also *ibid.*: 129–143.]
- 98 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 117; italics added). [Boltanski (2009: 176): 'En effet, [...] aucun régime politique ne peut échapper absolument au *risque de la critique*, qui est en quelque sorte incorporée, sous différentes formes, à la contradiction herméneutique.' (Italics added.)]
- 99 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 117). [Boltanski (2009: 176): 'circulation entre confirmation et critique'.]
- 100 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 119). [Boltanski (2009: 179): 'l'articulation du pouvoir institutionnel et de la critique'.]
- 101 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 117–118; italics added). [Boltanski (2009: 177): 'Car il appartient au cours normal de la vie sociale de n'être *que très partiellement cohérent* et de rendre malgré tout possible la coexistence d'êtres dont les différences et les divergences sont toujours plus fortes que ce autour de quoi ils se rassemblent, ne serait-ce que parfois.' (Italics added.)]
- 102 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 118; italics in original). [Boltanski (2009: 177): '*la recherche maniaque de la cohérence*' (italics in original).]
- 103 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 119). [Boltanski (2009: 179): 'différents régimes politiques se distinguent par le rôle qu'ils accordent à la critique face au pouvoir des institutions'.]
- 104 See Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 124–126). [See Boltanski (2009: 186–190).]
- 105 See Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 127–129). [See Boltanski (2009: 190–193).]
- 106 It should be noted that Boltanski does not use this term in *On Critique*.
- 107 See Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 127–129). [See Boltanski (2009: 190–193).]
- 108 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 124). [Boltanski (2009: 186): 'les personnes sont partiellement ou complètement privées des libertés élémentaires'.]
- 109 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 125). [Boltanski (2009: 186): 'profondes asymétries'.]
- 110 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 124). [Boltanski (2009: 186): 'maintenues ou créées en mettant en œuvre une violence directe, bien que non exclusivement physique'.]
- 111 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 127; italics in original). [Boltanski (2009: 190): 'sociétés *capitalistes-démocratiques* contemporaines' (italics in original).]
- 112 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 127; translation modified). [Boltanski (2009: 191): 'l'instauration d'un nouveau genre de relation entre institutions et critique et, en quelque sorte, l'incorporation de celle-ci aux routines de la vie sociale qui caractérisent ces dispositifs'.] On the role of critique in complex societies, see also Susen (2010a) and Susen (2010b).

- 113 See Boltanski and Chiapello (1999).
- 114 See Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 129; italics in original). [See Boltanski (2009: 193): ‘*dominer par le changement*’ (italics in original).]
- 115 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 129). [Boltanski (2009: 193): ‘source d’énergie’.]
- 116 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 127; italics in original). [Boltanski (2009: 191): ‘qui n’exclue pas le changement et même [...] qui s’exerce *par l’intermédiaire du changement*’ (italics in original).]
- 117 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 154; italics added). [Boltanski (2009: 228): ‘projet critique d’une *diminution des privilèges*’ (italics added).]
- 118 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 155). [Boltanski (2009: 229): ‘transformation radicale de la relation entre instances de confirmation et instances critiques’.]
- 119 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 156). [Boltanski (2009: 231): ‘une meilleure distribution des capacités d’action’.]
- 120 See *ibid.*
- 121 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 156; italics added). [Boltanski (2009: 231): ‘la *clôture* de la réalité sur elle-même qui *décourage* la critique’ (italics added).]
- 122 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 157). [Boltanski (2009: 232): ‘les institutions sont indispensables’ (italics added).]
- 123 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 157) (‘*made*’ italicized in original; ‘*factual character of institutions*’ not italicized in original). [Boltanski (2009: 233): ‘Reconnaître la présence de la contradiction herméneutique au cœur de la vie sociale reviendrait non seulement à admettre la *factualité des institutions*, c’est-à-dire le fait qu’elles sont *faites* [...]’ (‘*faites*’ italicized in original; ‘*factuality des institutions*’ not italicized in original).]
- 124 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 158). [Boltanski (2009: 233): ‘relation entre les instances critiques et les instances institutionnelles’.]
- 125 See, for example: Habermas (1981a); Habermas (1981b); Habermas (1984); Habermas (2001).
- 126 On this point, see, for instance: Bolte (1989); Honneth and Joas (1986); Moritz (1992); Rademacher (1993); Steinhoff (2001).
- 127 To be sure, Boltanski conceives of ‘critical capacity’ as a species-constitutive competence. On this point, see, for example: Boltanski (1990a); Boltanski (1990b); Boltanski (1993); Boltanski (1998); Boltanski (1999–2000); Boltanski (2002); Boltanski (2009); Boltanski and Honneth (2009); Boltanski, Rennes, and Susen (2010); Boltanski and Thévenot (1991); Boltanski and Thévenot (1999); Boltanski and Thévenot (2000). Unlike thinkers such as Habermas, however, Boltanski fails to elucidate the socio-ontological relationship between critical capacity and linguistic rationality.
- 128 On this point, see Susen (2011a: 72–73).
- 129 See Boltanski and Chiapello (1999). On this point, see also, for instance: Bidet (2002); Chiapello and Fairclough (2002); Fairclough (2002); Gadrey, Hatchuel, Boltanski, and Chiapello (2001); Turner (2007).
- 130 On this point, see Susen (2012).
- 131 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 154) (‘reduction in the privileges’ italicized in original). [Boltanski (2009: 228): ‘une *diminution des privilèges*’ (‘*diminution des privilèges*’ italicized in original).]
- 132 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 156). [Boltanski (2009: 231): ‘une meilleure distribution des capacités d’action’.]
- 133 Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 156). [Boltanski (2009: 231): ‘la *clôture* de la réalité sur elle-même qui *décourage* la critique’.]
- 134 Susen (2014).

- 135 It goes beyond the scope of this chapter to offer a detailed analysis of the key points of convergence, divergence, and possible integration between Bourdieu's 'critical sociology' and Boltanski's 'pragmatic sociology of critique'. For a *Grundriß* of the main elements of this project, see Susen (2014).

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