



**Whither Bourdieuan Cultural Capital?**  
At the Crossroads of Sociology and Economics

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Presented at  
37th World Congress of the International Institute of Sociology  
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July 5-9, 2005



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**Abstract**

At the crossroads of sociology and economics, whither Bourdieuan cultural capital? In which direction should Bourdieu's conception of cultural capital move? Two conceptions of cultural capital are examined in this essay: (1) Bourdieu's *economistic* conception developed in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984); and (2) an *economic* conception of cultural capital developed primarily by Throsby's work (1995; 1999; 2001) over the past decade in cultural economics. I argue that Throsby operationalizes his economic conception of cultural capital at the macro level of cultural phenomena while Bourdieu operationalizes his conception of cultural capital at the level of the individual. My ultimate answer to the question "Whither Bourdieuan cultural capital" is that Bourdieuan cultural capital should move *upwards* at the crossroads of sociology and economics. That is to say, Bourdieu's and Throsby's conceptions of cultural capital form a linkable micro-macro dichotomy that is at once sociological and economic.

### Introduction: Bourdieu's Economism

Bourdieu's economism continues to elicit a full range of scholarly attention. Some scholars dislike Bourdieu's economism. For example, Crowther (1994) disdains Bourdieu's reduction of the true Kantian aesthetic experience to mere class-based distinctions of taste: "Rather than see [taste]—falsely—as constituted by class identity, we would ask what is it about the experience which enables it to function in such identity, i.e., why it is able to be regarded as a source of 'symbolic capital'" (pp. 166-167). Likewise, Lamont and Lareau (1988) would prefer to constrain Bourdieu's economism: "Because of these incompatibilities between functions and forms of cultural capital, and because of the confusion with the original model, there is a need to simplify the latter and use the term cultural capital to refer to the performance of a narrower set of functions" (p. 156). Some scholars thus disapprove of Bourdieu's economism.

Other scholars approve of Bourdieu's economism. Fowler (1997), for example, finds comfort in an "equivalence" between Marxian economics and Bourdieu's sociology of culture: "Bourdieu's method is to use Marx's critique in another sphere of production in the bourgeois period, that of cultural goods" (p. 43). Similarly, Beasley-Murray (2000a) insists: "The argument for cultural capital *as* capital crucially underpins his analysis, even if this fact remains undertheorized in Bourdieu's work" (p. 102),<sup>1</sup> and then he attempts to ameliorate Bourdieu's undertheorized economism. Still other scholars might be best described as amused with Bourdieu's economism. Ironically, amid all of Bourdieu's economism, Calhoun (1993) observes: "What Bourdieu's newer approach to capital lacks, then, is an idea of capitalism" (p. 68). This "tantalizing lacuna" Calhoun discovers in Bourdieu's economism moves Guillory (1997) to search for the "strategic value" in such an omission: "The very choice of [the concept of capital] to define the stakes in the 'field' compels us to consider the absence of an account [of capitalism] deliberate" (p. 367). From amusement to

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that all italics that appear in quotations in this paper are italicized in the source, unless specified otherwise.

approval to dislike, Bourdieu's economism—in particular his conception of cultural capital—continues to evoke a complete range of scholarly responses.

Bourdieu's conception of cultural capital stands at the crossroads of sociology and economics. Gesturing to both academic disciplines, Bourdieu seeks to develop a “general economy of practices” (see Bourdieu, 1980) from a sociology of culture perspective. Yet, his explicit attempts to employ economics are peculiar. Capital in modern economics quite unambiguously refers to either the means of production (neoclassical economics) or a process in time (Austrian economics). Bourdieu, however, avoids using the concept of economic capital in any recognizable sense of modern economics. Thus, capital *as such* never seems to appear in Bourdieu. Although Bourdieu's conception of cultural capital stands at the crossroads of sociology and economics, it seems unable to commit to either one.

I have two purposes in this essay. My first purpose is to explore the concept of cultural capital. Again, Bourdieu's main problem is that, despite his penchant for economism, capital as such never seems to appear in Bourdieu. Why does Bourdieu choose to employ a conception of capital if he does not employ it in any accepted sense of modern economics? What does the term “capital” mean to Bourdieu? How precisely does Bourdieuan culture capital differ from economic capital? My second purpose in this essay is to examine ways of augmenting Bourdieu's conception of cultural capital. Is there an alternative conception of cultural capital, one that is not economic but rather truly economic? How does the alternative relate to Bourdieuan cultural capital? Can the two be linked? In short, my dual purpose in this essay is to ask the following general question: Whither Bourdieuan cultural capital? Should Bourdieuan cultural capital choose sociology, economics, or both?

This essay is organized around Beasley-Murray's (2000a) specification of Bourdieu's research goal in the field of cultural production as one of seeking “the determination of the economic *within*

the cultural” (p. 105). I thus begin this essay by discussing an *economic* conception of cultural capital developed primarily by Throsby (1995; 1999; 2001) in cultural economics. A repository of cultural and economic value, Throsbeian cultural capital is economic capital in the neoclassical sense of the means of production but with a penumbra of cultural value. I argue that Throsby operationalizes his economic conception of cultural capital at the macro level of cultural phenomena. In the following section, I then juxtapose Bourdieu’s *economistic* conception of cultural capital with Throsby’s economic concept. To Bourdieu in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984), where he arguably most fully develops the concept, cultural capital might be generally described as “forms of cultural knowledge, competences or dispositions” (Johnson, 1993, p. 7).<sup>2</sup> I argue that Bourdieu operationalizes his conception of cultural capital at the level of the individual. In the last section, I briefly discuss a trio of possible frameworks that might facilitate a micro-macro linkage between Bourdieu’s and Throsby’s concepts of cultural capital to be made in future research. In the conclusion I return to the original question of “Whither Bourdieuan cultural capital?” and answer that Bourdieuan cultural capital should move *upwards* at the crossroads of sociology and economics. That is to say, Bourdieu’s and Throsby’s concepts of cultural capital form a micro-macro dichotomy that is at once sociological and economic.

### **Cultural Economics: Throsby’s Conception of Cultural Capital**

#### Throsby’s Economic Conception of Cultural Capital

Throsby’s conception of cultural capital is explicitly a theory of economic capital. “Cultural capital in an economic sense,” Throsby (2001) writes, “can provide a means of representing culture which enables both tangible and intangible manifestations of culture to be articulated as long-lasting stores of value and providers of benefits for individuals and groups” (p. 44). Serving as a repository

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<sup>2</sup> Complicating matters, Bourdieu himself is not always consistent in his definition of “cultural capital.” Further, he sometimes also uses the term “symbolic capital” synonymously with cultural capital—and sometimes not synonymously. The issue of defining Bourdieu’s cultural capital is further addressed below.

of value, that is, as a stock, and facilitating the flow of cultural services are the two primary functions of Throsbeian cultural capital. “[*Stock*] refers to the quantity of such capital in existence at a given time... This capital stock gives rise over time to a *flow* of services which may be consumed or may be used to produce further goods and services” (Throsby, 2001, p. 46). Throsbeian cultural capital thus serves as the means of cultural production and is thus thoroughly economic capital.

Throsby, however, distinguishes his conception of cultural capital from other forms of economic capital (Throsby, 1995, pp. 202-203; 1999, pp. 3-7; 2001, pp. 43-47). Throsby identifies four different types of capital: *physical capital*, which is the “stock of real goods;” *human capital*, which is the “embodiment of skills and experience in people;” *natural capital*, which is the “stock of renewable and nonrenewable resources provided by nature;” and *cultural capital*, which is the “stock of cultural value embodied in an asset” that influences “human progress generally and economic transactions specifically.” By distinguishing his conception of cultural capital from these other conceptions of economic capital, Throsby puts his conception on a par with them. Throsby in this way legitimates his conception cultural capital as economic capital.

Throsby elaborates on his conception of cultural capital by distinguishing between two types of cultural capital. First, there is *tangible* cultural capital, such as “buildings, structures, sites and locations endowed with cultural significance, and artworks and artifacts existing as private goods, such as paintings, sculptures, and other objects.” Second, there is *intangible* cultural capital, which is the “set of ideas, practices, beliefs, traditions and values which serve to identify and bind together a given group of people... together with the stock of artworks existing in the public domain as public goods.” Each form of capital Throsby identifies exists in an objectified or embodied form. Even intangible cultural capital is reified to a certain extent in the stock of artworks. Much like the intangible and tangible aspects of nature (an analogy Throsby himself repeatedly makes), Throsbeian cultural capital is a stock of objects and embodied ideas and the services that flow from them.

An important distinction in Throsby's conception of cultural capital is between "cultural value and economic value." "Cultural capital gives rise to both cultural and economic value, [while] 'ordinary' capital provides only economic value" (Throsby, 2001, p. 45). In tangible cultural capital, "cultural value may give rise to economic value." For example,

The asset [e.g., heritage building] may have economic value, which derives simply from its physical existence as a building and irrespective of its cultural worth. But the economic value of the asset is likely to be augmented, perhaps significantly so, because of its cultural value. (Throsby, 1999, p. 8)

In contrast to tangible cultural capital, intangible cultural capital cannot be exchanged and thus cannot give rise directly to economic value. Rather, the value of intangible cultural capital flows from it:

The stock of existing music and literature, for example, or the stock of cultural mores and beliefs, or the stock of language, has immense cultural value, but no economic value since they cannot be traded as assets. Rather, the flows of services to which these stocks give rise yield both cultural and economic value. (Throsby, 1999, p. 8)

(Throsby's distinction between cultural value and economic value rather startlingly invokes Marx's distinction between use and exchange value.) The creation of cultural value and economic value together demonstrate the productive function of Throsbeian cultural capital as economic capital.

#### The Macro Level: Cultural Policy and the Stock and Flow of Cultural Capital

Throsby's conception of cultural capital is consistent with many common notions of the existence of cultural objects and artifacts to a particular society. At the founding of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965 in the United States, for example, Henry Hyde referred to cultural property as a "commons," that is, "the 'creative wealth of the past' that now 'exists in the present' and on which we continue to build artistically and intellectually" (quoted in Campbell, 1999, p. 5). Similarly, in 2001, Center for Arts and Culture, an arts policy think-tank in Washington, D.C., conceived of America's culture as "a national resource, the accumulated capital of America's ingenuity and creativity" (CAC, 2001, p. 180). Morato's "culture society" (2003) also seems germane

to Throsby's conception of cultural capital: "In this new cultural configuration, culture represents a significant resource within the general economic and political sphere" (pp. 250-251).

Other commentators link stocks of cultural capital to the concept of nationhood. "Art, architecture, literature, theatre, dance and music, " Radbourne and Fraser " (1996) write, "provide some of the most translatable and permanent media for the expression of national identity" (p. 9). Cultural capital in this usage can contribute to such areas as international prestige, the preservation and reinforcement of cultural identity, education of the young and the "worthy poor," and the preservation of cultural evidence to foster culture (Shubik, 1999). Quinn (1998) notices a similar realization in Great Britain: "In the period of European restoration which took place after World War Two, the notion of 'culture' assumed new significance [for Great Britain] as the 'essence of a society's identity'" (p. 75). Therefore, insofar as Throsby is referring to a pre-existing stock of objects, be they artworks, national heritage, and so on, he is operationalizing his conception of cultural capital at the macro level of cultural policy and other "systems-level" cultural phenomena.

In fact, Throsby has conceptualized a set of cultural policies for the "sustainable development of cultural capital" (Throsby, 1995, 2001). Throsby's set of cultural policies is based on the "whole-systems" approach that he borrows from ecological economics. "We could bring the economy (as defined by economists) and culture (as defined by cultural theorists) together in a single system where interaction and feedback effects were acknowledged, and where in particular the dynamics were made explicit" (Throsby, 1995, p. 200). Sustainable development of cultural capital "marries the ideas of sustainable *economic* development, meaning development that will not slow down or wither away but will be, in some sense, self-perpetuating, and *ecological* sustainability, meaning the preservation and enhancement of a range of environmental values through maintenance of ecosystems in the natural world" (Throsby, 2001, p. 54). Six principles guide

Throsby's set of cultural policies in support of the sustainable development of cultural capital

(Throsby, 2001, pp. 54-57):

1. *Material and non-material wellbeing*: "The production of *material* benefits in the form of direct utility to consumers, deriving from these economics and cultural value sources."
2. *Intergenerational equity and dynamic efficiency*: "Equity of access to cultural capital can be analysed in the same way as equity in the intergenerational distribution of benefits from any other sort of capital."
3. *Intragenerational equity*: "The rights of the present generation to fairness in access to cultural resources and to the benefits flowing from cultural capital, viewed across social classes, income groups, locational categories and so on."
4. *Maintenance of diversity*: "A greater diversity of resources will lead to the creation of more varied and more culturally valuable artistic works in the future."
5. *Precautionary principle*: "Decisions which may lead to irreversible change should be approached with extreme caution and from a strongly risk-averse position, because of imponderability of the consequences of such decisions."
6. *Maintenance of cultural systems and recognition of interdependence*: "No part of any system exists independently of other parts."

This set of cultural policies are designed to avoid "short-term or temporary solutions that do not address fundamental issues, and also a concern with producing self-generating or self-perpetuating characteristics in systems" (Throsby, 1995, p. 201). Thus these policies operate on cultural capital at the macro level of cultural phenomena.

The weakness of Throsby's macro-level conception of cultural capital is that, like many macroeconomic concepts, it neglects individual interaction. We recognize in Throsby's conception the group of artifacts and embodiments that exist in any modern culture, such as historical buildings, works of art, public rituals, and shared beliefs. Throsby's conception of cultural capital in this way conforms to our intuitions and experience of modern culture. The problem, however, lies in Throsby's neglect of the origin and formation of cultural capital. Throsbeian cultural capital exists *exogenously*, that is, as given, already created, always maintained, and perhaps even automatically augmented. But where does cultural capital come from? How is it maintained? How is it acquired

and used in social interactions? Most answers to these questions can only be answered at the level of the individual and social interaction. Only individuals can participate in transactions. Only individuals can create art. Only individuals can experience art. The exogenous treatment of any phenomena is mute to these vital considerations at the level of the individual. And Throsby's conception of cultural of capital as economic capital does not provide answers to these micro-level questions.<sup>3</sup>

### **Sociology of Culture: Bourdieu's Conception of Cultural Capital**

#### Bourdieu's Economistic Conception of Cultural Capital

Bourdieu's general conception of capital is economistic. His conception gestures toward economics, but ultimately it is incompatible with modern neoclassical or Austrian economic notions of capital as the means of production or a process in time, respectively. "Capital," Bourdieu writes in "The Forms of Capital" (1986), "is accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its 'incorporated,' embodied form) which, when appropriated on private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor" (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 241-242). Thus, rather than basing his conception on neoclassical or Austrian economics, Bourdieu's conception of cultural capital most closely approximates a Marxian one.

Marxian capital theory is at least in part based on the labor theory of value. Borrowing from John Locke and Adam Smith, Marx writes in *Capital* (1867/1978): "The value of labour-power is determined, as in the case of every other commodity, by the labour-time necessary for the production, and consequently also the reproduction, of this special article" (p. 339). Capital, then, is

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<sup>3</sup> In prior work, Throsby sees works of art as "cultural goods" endogenously consumed at the level of the individual. For example, he identifies "the endogenization of tastes" in the individual consumption of cultural goods: "The arts can be further distinguished in this theory by their being addictive, in the sense that an increase in an individual's present consumption of the arts will increase her future consumption" (Throsby, 1994, p. 3). The endogenization of tastes thus implies increasing returns to scale with the consumption of cultural goods, increasing value at the individual level that can then contribute to the creation and maintenance of the stock of cultural capital at the system level. Unfortunately, Throsby did not incorporate the endogenization of tastes in his later work on cultural capital and does not develop the theme.

formed from the surplus value that the capitalist owner appropriates from the laborer: “Capital is dead labour, that vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour is sucked” (pp. 362-363). In other words, capitalist accumulation is facilitated by the surplus value capitalists extract from purchased labor-power.

Bourdieu, however, misappropriates this aspect of Marxian capital theory. Beasley-Murray (2000a) keenly observes that Bourdieu is providing not a definition of capital but rather a definition of value.<sup>4</sup> “For Marx, this process whereby capital is *produced* is the production process itself; in contrast, what Bourdieu outlines here is rather a theory of (unequal) *distribution* of capital effected through appropriation” (p. 105). Bourdieu misappropriates Marx in *Capital* by generally defining value, not capital, as the accumulated labor embodied in the social agent. The incomplete Marxian definition of capital Bourdieu offers in “The Forms of Capital” is thus rendered almost useless as a base on which to construct a conceptualization of cultural capital.

Fortunately, Bourdieu does not base his conception of cultural capital on his (mis)conceptualization of capital.<sup>5</sup> Later in “The Forms of Capital” Bourdieu specifies three types of cultural capital:<sup>6</sup> (1) *embodied* cultural capital, which “in the form of what is called culture, cultivation, *Bildung*, presupposes a process of em-bodiment, incorporation” (p. 244); (2) *objectified* cultural capital, which is “defined only in relation with cultural capital in its embodied form;” and (3) *institutionalized* cultural capital, which is academic qualifications (p. 246). According to Holt (1997), Bourdieu’s

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<sup>4</sup> Also see Beasley-Murray (2000b) for an earlier, online draft version of his paper with a more extensive textual analysis of Bourdieu’s and Marx’s differences in conceptualizing capital.

<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, some of Bourdieu’s commentators replicate his misappropriation of Marxian capital theory. Frow (1996), for example, describes Bourdieuan cultural capital as follows: “*knowledge is stored labour which is productive*” (p. 96).

<sup>6</sup> The definitional problems of Bourdieuan cultural capital are manifold. Some commentators distinguish between cultural capital and symbolic capital. Johnson (1993), for example, defines *symbolic capital* as the “degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honour and is founded on a dialectic of knowledge (*connaissance*) and recognition (*reconnaissance*)” and *cultural capital* as “forms of cultural knowledge, competences or dispositions.” (p. 7). Others do not distinguish between cultural and symbolic capital (e.g., Frow, 1995, footnote 12). Still others define cultural capital for Bourdieu: “We propose to define cultural capital as *institutionalized, i.e., widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion*” (Lamont & Lareau, 1988, p. 156). In this essay I attempt to work through only Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital as he expressed in *Distinction* (1984) as “the aesthetic disposition.”

typology of cultural capital allows for both virtual, abstract cultural capital and concrete, particularized cultural capital: “Cultural capital exists both as a single abstracted form that has only a virtual existence, and as many different realized particular forms as the abstracted form becomes instantiated in social life” (p. 96). Further, cultural value also does not seem to be based strictly on labor. For example, Fowler (1997) notes: “Hence Bourdieu argues that the material value only represents the *outer husk* of art. Its *inner kernel* is collective veneration of spirituality and genius” (p. 79). Bourdieu’s typology of cultural capital seems much closer to satisfying Beasley-Murray’s criticism because it implies the distribution more than production with value independent of labor-power.

Nevertheless, Bourdieu’s conception of cultural capital is not an economic definition of capital. Rather, it is an economistic one. It is economistic in that it gestures towards (Marxian) economics, but in no way does it conform to any modern, technical definition of economic capital, be it neoclassical, Austrian, or even Marxian. Apparently, Bourdieu’s conception of cultural capital is uniquely his own. Why does Bourdieu choose to employ a conception of capital if he does not employ it in any accepted sense of modern economics? What does the term “capital” mean to Bourdieu? To answer these questions we must turn generally to Bourdieu’s sociology and specifically to *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984), one of the masterworks of twentieth-century empirical sociology.

### Bourdieu’s Sociology of Culture and Theory of Cultural Production

Bourdieu’s sociology of culture emphasizes the “primacy of relations.” The analytic concepts of field and habitus provide the objective structures that shape the subjectivity of experience. “To think in terms of field is to *think relationally*: In analytic terms, a field may be defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97). The field thus is analyzed in terms of objective relations; more specifically,

a field is a space of power relations. It is “simultaneously a space of conflict and competition...and the power to decree the hierarchy and conversion rates between all forms of authority in the fields of power” (Wacquant, 1992, pp. 17-18). Bourdieu’s theory of practice for the sociology of culture finally “is built on the foundation of the great materialist classifications of social structures” (Fowler, 1996, p. 9).

Bourdieu’s theory of cultural production consists of the triad of the field of cultural production, the habitus, and of course cultural capital. The *field of cultural production* includes “the set of social conditions for the production, circulation and consumption of symbolic goods” (Johnson, 1993, p. 9). Thus the cultural field encompasses the primacy of relations in cultural production: “The field of cultural production is the area *par excellence* of clashes between the dominant factions of the dominant class...” (Bourdieu, 1993b, p. 102). In analyzing these clashes, “the social scientist’s task is...to describe a *state* (long-lasting or temporary) of these struggles and therefore of the frontier delimiting the territory held by the competing agents” (Bourdieu, 1993a, pp. 42-43). Analysis of cultural fields can explore questions as fundamental as What is art? and Who is the artist? “Since fields are objective structures,” Danto (1999) observes, “the question of what is art and who are artists are themselves objective matters, and Bourdieu has sought to put in place the kind of science required for understanding both: it is an historical science of cultural fields” (p. 216).

Habitus, Bourdieu’s other central analytic concept, exists within a field as “structured, structuring dispositions”:

Theory of practice as practice insists, contrary to positivist materialism, that the objects of knowledge are constructed, not passively records, and, contrary to intellectualist idealism, that the principle of this construction is the system of structured, structuring dispositions, the *habitus*, which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 52).

Habitus is dynamic. “Social structure is not typological, but dynamical. This, ultimately, is the powerful message in the phrase ‘structured structuring structures’” (Dyke, 1999, p. 211). Habitus

serves many functions in the logic of practice. Habitus is a repository for history: “[Habitus] ensures the active presence of past experiences” (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 54). Habitus reflects power: “Property and properties—expressions of the habitus perceived through the categories of the habitus—symbolize the differential capacity to appropriate, that is, capital and social power...” (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 140). Habitus approximates ideology: “Bourdieu submits that the correspondence between social and mental structures fulfills crucial political functions. Symbolic systems are not instruments of knowledge; they are also instruments of domination” (Wacquant, 1992, p. 13). In summary, with habitus “Bourdieu wants to re-establish a sociology based on the study of objective as well as subjective possibilities” (Fowler, 1996, p. 9).

It is arguably in *Distinction* where Bourdieu develops his theory of cultural production most elegantly and applies his concepts of the field of cultural production, cultural habitus, and cultural capital most forcefully. Fowler (1994) describes the main idea of *Distinction* as follows: “Elaborating how the ‘good taste’ which privileges form consists of a complex web of identities and oppositions, all molded by class habitus” (p. 144). The field of cultural production in *Distinction* is the location of “competitive struggle,” or “the form of class struggle which the dominated classes allow to be imposed on them when they accept the stakes offered by the dominant classes” (p. 165). Habitus in *Distinction* is “both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgments and the system of classification (*principium divisionis*) of these practices” (p. 170).

Bourdieu employs cultural capital in *Distinction* as “the aesthetic sense as the sense of distinction” as shaped by the cultural habitus. Bourdieu writes:

The aesthetic disposition is one dimension of a distant, self-assured relation to the world and to others which presupposes objective assurance and distance...But it is also a distinctive expression of a privileged position in social space whose distinctive value is objectively established in its relationship to expressions generated from different conditions. (p. 56)

Cultural capital, however, is more than an aesthetic disposition that distinguishes its holder; it is also an instrument of domination (see Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) or, expressed more gently, a device of

elitism: “Bourdieu’s theory [of cultural capital] posits more than an interest in, and appreciation of, culture. For him elites possess considerable artistic knowledge and a distinctive aesthetic outlook that is difficult for others to obtain” (Ostrower, 1998, p. 46). Thus Bourdieu’s conception of cultural capital in *Distinction* is essentially a class-based<sup>7</sup> epistemology of tastes: “To the socially recognized hierarchy of the arts, and within each of them, of genres, schools or periods, corresponds a social hierarchy of consumers. This predisposes tastes to function as markers of class” (pp. 1-2). And the class consumption of cultural capital gives rise to *legitimacy*: “Thus, nothing more rigorously distinguishes the different classes than the disposition objectively demanded by the legitimate consumption of legitimate works” (p. 40). Perhaps “nothing more rigorously distinguishes” Bourdieu’s economistic conception of cultural capital from Throsby’s economic conception of cultural capital.

#### The Micro Level: Individual Acquisition, Conversion, and Reproduction of Cultural Capital

“What differences make a difference?” Dyke (1999, p. 194) asks. What benefits come from “distinction through cultural capital” confer? Or, expressed reflexively, why does Bourdieu choose to employ a conception of capital if he does not employ it in the sense of modern economics? What does the term “capital” mean to Bourdieu? “Bourdieu’s general answer...is that various forms of capital—social, cultural, and economic—make a difference as individuals pursue trajectories and assume positions within a generalized social space” (Dyke, 1999, p. 194). A major theme of *Distinction* might be summarized as demonstrating that the social interactions in the form of individual acquisition, conversion, and reproduction of cultural capital enable individuals to adjust

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that Bourdieu’s and Marx’s notions of class are not the same: “If there exists a form of capital which is specifically symbolic or cultural, the production, exchange, distribution, and consumption of this capital presupposes the division of society into groups that can be called classes. Bourdieu’s sociology assumes such a division, but it does not assume that an economic account of classes is sufficient in itself [as does Marx].” (Guillory, 1993, p. viii)

their position-taking in the social space. Bourdieu's conception of cultural capital is therefore a micro-level theory of social interaction.

First, there are *acquisitions* of cultural capital. Bourdieuan cultural capital is acquired individually at the micro level. Individuals are not naturally endowed with cultural capital; rather, they socially acquire the cultural capital of its habitus as “the product of upbringing and education” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 1) or “domestic transmission and scholarly culture” (Fowler, 1997, p. 47). Artistic competence, the aesthetic disposition, or the individual accumulation of cultural capital “is the result of a long process of inculcation which begins (or not) in the family, often in conformity with its level of economic, academic and cultural capital, and is reinforced by the educational system. It also involves prolonged exposure to works of art” (Johnson, 1993, p. 23). Thus the “two modalities of cultural competence” are “inherited capital,” which comes from individuals' experience within their family, and “acquired capital,” which comes from individual effort in higher education. From these intra-family and extra-familial social interactions individuals acquire cultural capital is the derivative result.

Cultural capital is also instrumentally involved in specific social interactions that Bourdieu calls conversions and reproduction strategies in the social space. On the one hand, *conversions* change capital “held in one form to another, more accessible, more profitable or more legitimate form” and “tends to induce a transformation of asset structure” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 131). Cultural capital is transformed into economic capital such that “the volume and composition of capital give specific form and value to the determinations which the other factors (age, sex, place of residence etc.) impose on practices” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 107).<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, *reproduction strategies* are “the set

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<sup>8</sup> Frow (1995) argues that Bourdieu's conversion argument is “incomplete”: “In the first place because the conversion of capitals can take place only under certain conditions and at certain restricted levels of the market, and in the second place because conversion is not reciprocal (it is possible to convert cultural into economic capital, but not vice versa)” (p. 40). Bourdieu anticipated such a criticism and offers the following rebuttal: “‘Economic’ capital cannot guarantee the specific profits offered by the field—and by the same token the ‘economic’ profits that they will often bring in time—

of outwardly very different practices whereby individuals or families tend, unconsciously or consciously, to maintain or improve their position in the class structure” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 125).

Individually acquired cultural capital thus begins to materialize in social life through conversions and reproduction strategies.

Conversions and reproduction strategies occur along trajectories in social life. *Trajectories* are the “volume and structure of capital, defined synchronically and diachronically,” and result from family influences and reflexively the trajectory itself:

The correlation between a practice and social origin (measured by the father’s position, the real value of which may have suffered a decline concealed by constant nominal value) is the resultant of two effects (which may either reinforce or offset each other): on the one hand, the inclusion effect of directly exerted by the family or the original conditions of existence; on the other hand, the specific effect of social trajectory, that is, the effects of social rise or decline on dispositions and opinions, position of origin being, in this logic, merely the starting point of a trajectory, the reference whereby the slope of the social career is defined (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 111).

The result is a three-dimensional space for the conditions of production of habitus consisting of (1) the volume of capital, (2) composition of capital, and (3) change in these two properties over time (manifested by past and potential trajectory in social space)” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 114). Bourdieu thus attempts to hypostatize cultural capital through the conversion and reproduction strategies of cultural capital along trajectories in the social space.

It now should be evident that Bourdieu never intended that his conception of cultural capital be construed in any technical sense of modern economics. In fact, Bourdieuan cultural capital might not even be economic. Rather, Bourdieu’s conception of cultural capital seems to be reaching back to its etymological roots in the Latin *caput*, which can mean life, existence, rights, or status.<sup>9</sup> As Fowler (1994) observes, Bourdieuan cultural capital is a pre-capitalist notion that does not necessarily relate to the modern sense of economic capital or even Marxian creation of capital

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unless it is reconverted into symbolic capital” (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 148).

<sup>9</sup> Some Ciceronian examples illustrate this meaning of *caput*: (a) *capiti diminui*—to lose *caput*, to suffer a loss of status; *capitis minor*—loss of *caput*, status.

through surplus value (*contra* Beasley-Murray): “For the rest, the major motivation is the acquisition of symbolic capital. This is not unrelated to power or even material class advantages, but it is independent of surplus extraction via market or industrial profit” (p. 136). Therefore, Bourdieuan cultural capital refers to individual power, legitimacy, and distinction in the social space.

Bourdieu, then, is using cultural capital in another Marxian sense: Capital as a social relation. For Marx, “capital is not a thing, but rather a definite set of social relations which belong to a definite historical period in human development, and which give the things enmeshed within these social relations their specific content” (Shaikh, 1990, p. 73). Marxian capital in this sense is the objectification of the relations between the capitalists and laborers, or what Bourdieu terms “objectified cultural capital” in his tripartite typology. Marx writes in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1888/1988) [*sic*]:

In proportion as the bourgeoisie, i.e., capital, is developed, in the same proportion is the proletariat, the modern working class, develop—a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. (p. 60)

Syllogistically, Marx concludes: “Capital, therefore, is not a personal, it is a social power” (p. 68).

Further, just as cultural habitus and cultural capital are intimately related in Bourdieu through conversions and reproduction strategies, class and capital relate to each in Marx’s conceptualization of the capitalist epoch: “The reproduction of any given society in turn requires not only the reproduction of its people, but also of the things they need for their existence, and of the social relations which surround both people and things” (Shaikh, 1990, p. 73). Individual power, legitimacy, domination through social relations—these are the objectification of Bourdieuan cultural capital via a Marxian maieutic. Therefore, Bourdieu’s economistic conception of cultural capital refers not to the means of production or a process in time; rather, it refers to social interaction.

**Micro-Macro Linkages:  
Connecting Bourdieu's and Throsby's Conceptions of Cultural Capital**

Recent theoretical work in sociology has developed micro-macro linkages to bi-directionally connect micro-level phenomena to macro-level phenomena. Previously, reductionism was the most common theoretical move between multi-level phenomena, and it still remains popular.

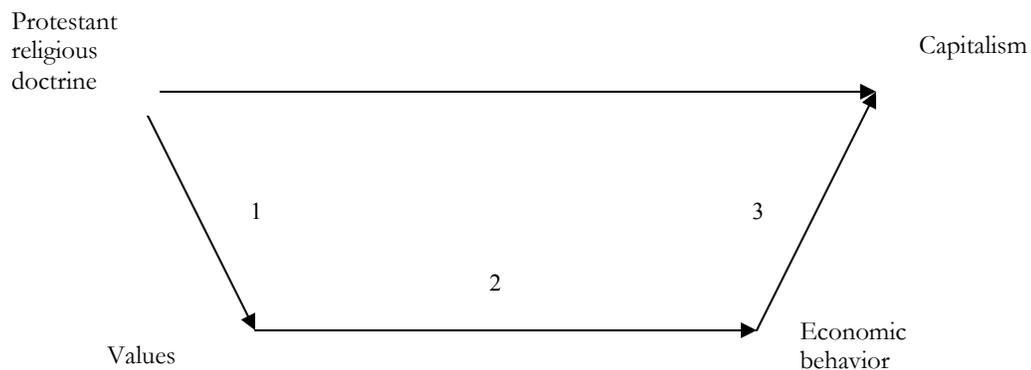
Reductionism, particular *economic* reductionism, has always been controversial. But now, Alexander and Giesen (1987) assert, “the conflict over reduction is replaced by the search for linkage” (p. 3). Unfortunately, micro-macro linkages have not completely replaced reductionism, but they offer a tempting theoretical alternative. And, more to the point, micro-macro linkages might provide a useful theoretical device for connecting Bourdieu's micro-level conception of cultural capital to Throsby's macro-level conception of cultural capital.

Three distinct micro-macro linkages hold particular promise for connecting Throsby's and Bourdieu's conceptions of cultural capital. The first is the micro-macro linkage that emerges from integrating Giddens' theory of structuration (Giddens, 1984) and Collins' “microfoundations of macrosociology” (Collins, 1981, 1987). Both theories attempt to link micro-level social phenomena and interactions to larger macro-level structures. Briefly, Giddens' theory of structuration employs a “duality of structure” in which “the structural properties of social systems exist only in so far as forms of social conduct are reproduced chronically across time and space” (Giddens, 1984, p. xxi). In structuration, “the position between ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ is best reconceptualized as concerning how interaction in contexts of co-presence is structurally implicated in systems of broad time-space distanciation” (Giddens, 1984, p. xxvi). Collins, then, proposes a theory of “multi-level determinism” (Collins, 1987) based on “interaction ritual chains” (Collins, 1981) that fits quite nicely with Giddens' theory. Collins (1987) provides the fascinating case of the development of German Idealism to illustrate the “microfoundations of macrosociology.” (Becker's “art worlds” (1982) might also complement and refine the Giddens-Collins micro-macro linkage specifically in relation

to tangible cultural capital.) Thus the Giddens-Collins micro-macro linkage might be able to facilitate the connection between micro-level social phenomena and interactions, such as Bourdieuan cultural capital, and larger macro-level structures, such as Throsbeian cultural capital.

Another possible micro-macro linkage to connect Bourdieu’s and Throsby’s conceptions of cultural capital is Coleman’s micro-macro interpretation of Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Coleman, 1987, 1994). (Refer to Figure 1 below.) Coleman describes his interpretation as the “internal analysis of system behavior” that is useful for “examining processes internal to the system, involving component parts, or units at a level below that of the system” (Coleman, 1994, p. 2). The kind of behavior Coleman’s model is appropriate for is emergent behavior (i.e., Weberian methodological individualism), not aggregated behavior: “The interaction among individuals is seen to result in emergent phenomena at the system level, that is, phenomena that were neither intended nor predicted by the individuals” (Coleman, 1994, p. 5). Coleman’s model seems particularly promising by framing the Throsbeian macro-level cultural capital as the “emergent phenomena” from the Bourdieuan micro-level cultural capital, thus connecting the two conceptions.

Figure 1: Coleman-Weber model of Protestant religious doctrine determining capitalist economic organization



The last potential micro-macro linkage to connect Throsbeian and Bourdieuan cultural capital can be found in Marx. Attempting this micro-macro linkage in many ways might be the most challenging of the three because the early-Marx/late-Marx bifurcation seems to apply even to his micro-macro linkage. Nonetheless, Alexander and Giesen (1987) observe: “[Marx’s] focus earlier was on emergent properties located at the empirical level of the individual; his focus later is on the emergent properties located at the empirical level of the group, collectivity of the system” (p. 6). Marx, then, moves from an individual unit of analysis in his early work to the human species unit of analysis in his later work (also see Tucker, 1969, p. 11). Nevertheless, Marx bases much of his collective work on “the social nature of man”: “Marx (1) rejected positing society as a separate entity partaking of any reality over and beyond the summation of its individual human components, and yet (2) still insisted upon the specifically *social* nature of man” (McQuarie, 1978, p. 17). The premise of the Marxian “social nature of man” links the individual parts to the whole and thus might provide a sound basis for a micro-macro linkage to connect Throsby’s and Bourdieu’s conceptions of cultural capital.

### **Conclusion**

Bourdieu’s conception of cultural capital inverts Throsby’s. The strength of Throsby’s conception of cultural capital at the macro level of cultural phenomena is his identification of an existing stock of tangible and intangible cultural capital that characterizes any modern culture, such as historical buildings, works of art, public rituals, and shared beliefs. The weakness of Throsby’s conception is its exogeneity. Throsby’s conception of cultural capital does not address questions such as, where does cultural capital come from? How is it maintained? How is it acquired and used in individual interactions? Most of answers to these questions can only be answered at the level of social interaction, which is precisely the strength of Bourdieu’s conception of cultural capital. In Bourdieu’s concept, individuals either inherit or acquire cultural capital and then employ it in

conversions and reproduction strategies to improve their position-takings in the social space. Throsby's conception also strengthens Bourdieu's as the individual use of Bourdieuan cultural capital presumes that a larger, society-wide stock of cultural capital exists to develop the aesthetic disposition on the individual level. If a stock of cultural capital consisting of historical buildings, works of art, public rituals, and shared beliefs did not exist, then individuals could not achieve distinction. Throsby's and Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital thus form a micro-macro dichotomy.

The three constructs of micro-macro linkages presented above are possibilities for linking Bourdieuan micro- and the Throsbeian macro-conceptions of cultural capital. They thus provide a tentative answer to this paper's title: Whither Bourdieuan cultural capital? At the crossroads of sociology and economics, Bourdieuan cultural capital should move *upwards*, which is to say, Bourdieu's micro-level, economistic conception of cultural capital needs to link to Throsby's macro-level, economic conception.

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