



Social Capital: Understanding, Applying, and Measuring

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ABSTRACT

Social capital refers to the extent, nature and quality of social ties that individuals or communities can mobilize in conducting their affairs. Social capital is not a new concept but gained prominence in the policy arena in the late 1980s, when it found its way into many policy programmes for social integration and cohesion in North America and Europe. In recent years, social capital has become a key concept in academic theories and research, and influential as a framework for guiding policy-making that seeks to shape everyday practices in relation to building social integration. A range of related reasons have been put forward for this attention. These include a concern with the excesses of current individualism and nostalgia for a lost cohesive past; the desire to reintroduce a normative and social dimension to understandings of how society works; the impulse to control contemporary liberal societies that are increasingly diverse and undergoing rapid social change; and the way that social capital enables governments to leave aside redistributive economic policies in favour of (less expensive) informal, community-based social relations.

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Introduction

In the past two decades, social capital in its various forms and contexts has emerged as one of the most salient concepts in social sciences. While much excitement has been generated, divergent views, perspectives, and expectations have also raised the serious question: is it a fad or does it have enduring qualities that will herald a new intellectual enterprise? This presentation's purpose is to review social capital as discussed in the literature, identify controversies and debates, consider some critical issues, and propose conceptual and research strategies in building a theory. I will argue that such a theory and the research enterprise must be based on the fundamental understanding that social capital is captured from embedded resources in social networks. Deviations from this understanding in conceptualization and measurement lead to confusion in analyzing causal mechanisms in the macro- and microprocesses. It is precisely these mechanisms and processes, essential for an interactive theory about structure and action, to which social capital promises to make contributions.

The paper will begin by exploring the nature of capital and various theories of capital, so that social capital can be properly perceived and located. It will then identify certain controversies which, unless clarified or resolved, will hinder the development of a theory and the research enterprise. By considering social capital as assets in networks, the paper will discuss some issues in conceptualizations, measurements, and causal mechanisms (the factors leading to inequality of social capital and the returns following investments in social capital). A proposed model will follow. The paper will conclude by calling attention to the rise of a new form of social capital, cybernet works, and briefly suggesting how research on this topic promises to make important contributions to the research enterprise.

The notion of capital can be traced to Marx (1933/1849; 1995/Brewer, 1984). In his conceptualization, capital is part of the surplus value captured by capitalists or the bourgeoisie, who control production means, in the circulations of commodities

and monies between the production and consumption processes. In these circulations, laborers are paid for their labor (commodity) with a wage allowing them to purchase commodities (such as food, shelter, and clothing) to sustain their lives (exchange value). But the commodity processed and produced by the capitalists can be circulated to and sold in the consumption market at a higher price (user value). In this scheme of the capitalist society, capital represents two related but distinct elements. On the one hand, it is part of the surplus value generated and pocketed by the capitalists (and their "misers," presumably the traders and sellers). On the other hand, it represents an investment (in the production and circulation of commodities) on the part of the capitalists, with expected returns in a marketplace. Capital, as part of the surplus value, is a product of a process; whereas capital is also an investment process in which the surplus value is produced and captured. It is also understood that the investment and its produced surplus value are in reference to a return/reproduction of the process of investment and of more surplus values. It is the dominant class that makes the investment and captures the surplus value. Thus, it is a theory based on the exploitative social relations between two classes. I call Marx's theory of capital the classical theory of capital. Subsequent theoretical modifications and refinements have retained the basic elements of capital in the classical theory. Fundamentally, capital remains a surplus value and represents an investment with expected returns. Human capital theory (Johnson, 1960; Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964/1993), for example, also conceives capital as investment (e.g., in education) with certain expected returns (earnings). Individual workers invest in technical skills and knowledge so that they can negotiate with those in control of the production process (firms and their agents) for payment of their labor-skill. This payment has value that may be more than what the purchase of subsisting commodities would require and, thus, contain surplus values which in part can be spent for leisure and lifestyle needs and in part turned into capital. Likewise, cultural

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capital, as described by Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1990 ; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), represents investments on the part of the dominant class in reproducing a set of symbols and meanings, which are misrecognized and internalized by the dominated class as their own . The investment, in this theory, is in the pedagogic actions of the reproduction process, such as education, the purpose of which is to indoctrinate the masses to internalize the values of these symbols and meanings. Cultural capital theory also acknowledges that the masses (the dominated class) can invest and acquire these symbols and meanings, even if they misrecognize them as their own . The inference is that while cultural capital is mostly captured by the dominant class through inter-generation transmissions, even the masses (or at least some of them) may generate returns from such investment and acquisition . However, these theories break significantly from the classical theory . That is, because the laborers, workers or masses can now invest, and thus acquire certain capital of their own (be they skills and knowledge in the case of human capital, or "misrecognized" but nevertheless internalized symbols and meanings), they (or some of them) can now generate surplus values in trading their labor or work in the production and consumption markets . The social relations between classes (capitalists and non-capitalists) become blurred. The image of the social structure is modified from one of dichotomized antagonistic struggle to one of layered or stratified negotiating discourses. I call these the neo-capitalist theories . The distinctive feature of these theories resides in the potential investment and capture of surplus value by the laborers or masses .

Concept of social capital

The term "capital", according to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, refers to "accumulated wealth, especially as used to produce more wealth (p. 115)." It is usually identified with tangible, durable, and alienable objects, such as buildings and machines, whose accumulation can be estimated and whose worth can be assessed (Solow, 2000). As Field says, "in economic thought, the term 'capital' originally meant an accumulated sum of money, which could be invested in the hope of a profitable return in the future (Field, 2003: 12)." Bourdieu has argued that capital exists in three fundamental forms: economic capital that can be directly convertible into money and institutionalized in the form of property rights; cultural capital that may be convertible into economic capital and institutionalized in the form of educational qualification; and social capital, made up of social obligation that can be convertible into economic capital and institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility (Bourdieu, 1986, 243). So different forms of capital are inter-convertible.

The concept of social capital has received considerable attention recently among sociologists, economists, and political scientists. Irrespective of disciplinary focus, there is growing consensus among researchers that three leading figures, Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam, have made great contributions. These three writers have been described as having created "relatively distinct tributaries" in the literature on social capital (Foley & Edwards, 1999: 142). Bourdieu and Coleman emphasize the role of individual and organizational social ties in predicting individual advancement and collective action. By contrast, Putnam has developed the idea of association and civic activities as a basis for social integration and well-being (Edwards, 2001). Despite these differences, all three of these scientists argue that social capital inheres in personal connections and interpersonal interactions, together with the

shared sets of values that are associated with these contacts and relationships.

Lin (2001) refers to these connections as social networks "the social relationships between individual actors, groups, organizations, communities, regions and nations that serve as a resource to produce positive returns (p. 6)." The major composition of network is size (the number of ties that a person has in his personal network) and heterogeneity (the tendency toward similar or diverse actors within a network). The structure of a network refers to the relative density of links among people within it that facilitate the flow of information and the provision of social support to the social structure in which a person or a tie is embedded (Wellman & Frank, 2001).

Bourdieu developed his concept of social capital during the 1970s and 1980s as one of three forms of capital (economic, cultural and social) present in the structure and dynamics of societies. For him, social capital represented an "aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network (Bourdieu, 1986: 248)." He stressed that access to social capital occurred via the development of durable relationships and networks of connections especially those among prestigious groups with considerable stocks of economic and cultural capital. In many ways, his thinking on social capital was deeply influenced by Marxist sociology. He argued that "economic capital is at the root of all other types of capital

(Bourdieu, 1986: 252)" and that it combined with other forms of capital to create and reproduce inequality. For Bourdieu, inequality could be explained by the production and reproduction of capital in obedience to the social hierarchy. His work on social capital remains relatively undeveloped but it was crucial in establishing social capital as a field of study. Sociologist James Coleman's study of social capital has been particularly influential. He incorporated his insights on sociology and economics into a rational choice theory of social capital. Based on his empirical studies of youth and schooling, he defined the concept of social capital as a "variety of entities that all consist of some aspect of social structures and facilitate certain actions of actors—whether personal or corporate actors—within the structure (Coleman 1988)." He highlighted the difference between social capital and human capital. The first, he argued, was relational, embedded in social structure, and had public good characteristics: "Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between persons and among persons (Coleman 1990: 302)." The structure of relations could help establish obligations between social actors, create a trustworthy social environment, open channels for information, and set norms and impose sanctions on forms of social behaviors (Coleman, 1988: 102-104). For Coleman, social structure becomes social capital when an actor effectively uses it to pursue his interests (Coleman 1990: 305).

Both Bourdieu and Coleman focused on individuals and their roles and relationships with other individuals within a network as their primary unit of analysis of social capital. The view that the actions of individuals and groups can be greatly facilitated by membership in specific social networks, specifically by their direct and indirect links to other actors in those networks, is most common among sociologists. In contrast to the view that social capital exists as an external factor, many sociologists and some political scientists believe that social capital arises from the positive interactions that occur between individuals in a network (Lesser, 2000). They consider social capital to be "a feature of the internal linkages that characterize the structures of collective actors and give them cohesiveness

and its associated benefits (Adler & Kwon, 2000:92).” Putnam, Fukuyama, Woolcock, Nahapiet and Ghoshal are examples of such researchers.

Robert Putnam has played a leading role in popularizing the concept of social capital. He began his work on social capital studying institutional performance in Italy where he explored the differences between regional administration in the north and south of the country (Putnam, 1993). After analyzing the evidence of institutional performance and levels of civic engagement, he used the concept of social capital to explain the differences in civic engagement he discovered. He defined it as “features of social organizations, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions (Putnam 1993:167).” After studying American civil society, he modified his definition of social capital to “features of social life—networks, norms, and trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives (Putnam 1995: 664-665).” He identified ‘participants’ instead of ‘society’ as the beneficiaries of social capital. In his book *Bowling Alone*, Putnam (2000) argued that “the core idea of social capital is that social networks have value...social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups (pp. 18-19).” He referred to social capital as “connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (Putnam, 2000: 19).” In addition, to treating social capital as the relations that characterize the structure of social networks, Putnam regarded trust as an essential element of the norms that arise from social networks; therefore social capital had two primary components for him; networks and norms, rather than three components: networks, norms, and trust. Similarly, Fukuyama has analyzed the link between trust, social capital and national economic success. He defined social capital as “the ability of people to work together for common purposes in groups and organizations (Fukuyama, 1995: 10).”

He further expanded the definition of social capital “as the existence of a certain set of informal values or norms shared among members of a group that permit cooperation among them (Fukuyama, 1999, p. 16).” Woolcock (1998) has referred to social capital as “the information, trust, and norms of reciprocity inhering in one’s social networks (p. 153).” Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) have further elaborated the concept and defined it as “the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit. Social capital thus comprises both the network and the assets that may be mobilized through that network (p. 243).

Modeling social capital

To explicitly operationalize the critical elements, we may sharpen the definition of social capital as investment in social relations by individuals through which they gain access to embedded resources to enhance expected returns of instrumental or expressive actions. From this, three processes can be identified for modeling: (1) investment in social capital, (2) access to and mobilization of social capital, and (3) returns of social capital. While the above discussion clarifies social capital's definition, elements, and measurements, it is necessary to discuss briefly the types of outcomes which can be considered as expected returns. I propose two major types of outcomes: (1) returns to instrumental action, and (2) return to expressive action (Lin 1992a; Lin 1986; Lin 1990). Instrumental action is taken to obtain resources not possessed by the actor, whereas expressive action is taken to maintain resources already

possessed by the actor. For instrumental action, we may identify three possible returns: economic return, political return, and social return. Each return can be seen as added capital. Economic return is straightforward. Political return is similarly straightforward, represented by hierarchical positions in a collective. Social gain needs some clarification. I have argued that reputation is an indication of social gain. Reputation can be defined as favorable/unfavorable opinions about an individual in a social network. A critical issue in social exchange where social capital is transacted is that the transaction may be asymmetric: a favor is given by the alter to ego. The ego's action is facilitated, but what is the gain for the alter, the giver of the favor? Unlike economic exchange, where reciprocal and symmetric transactions are expected in the short or long term, social exchange may not entail such expectation. What is expected is that the ego and the alter both acknowledge the asymmetric transactions which create the former's social debt to the latter, who accrued social credit. Social debt must be publicly acknowledged in public for the ego to maintain his/her relationship with the alter. Public recognition in the network spreads the reputation of the alter. The greater the debt, the larger the network, and the stronger the need for the ego and the alter to maintain the relationship, the greater the propensity to spread the word in the network and, thus, the greater the reputation gained by the alter. In this process, the alter is gratified by the reputation, which, along with material resources (such as wealth) and hierarchical positions (such as power) constitutes one of the three returns fundamental in instrumental actions. I have discussed this issue elsewhere (Lin, 1998).

For expressive action, social capital is a means to consolidate resources and to defend against possible resource losses (Lin, 1986; Lin, 1990). The principle is to access and mobilize others who share interest and control of similar resources so that embedded resources can be pooled and shared in order to preserve and protect existing resources. In this process, alters are willing to share their resources with ego because the preservation of the ego and its resources enhances and reinforces the legitimacy of alters' claim to like resources. Three types of return may be specified: physical health, mental health, and life satisfaction. Physical health involves maintenance of physical functional competence and freedom from diseases and injuries. Mental health reflects capability to withstand stresses and maintenance of cognitive and emotional balance. Life satisfaction indicates optimism and satisfaction with various life domains such as family, marriage, work, and community and neighborhood environments.

Oftentimes, returns to instrumental actions and expressive actions reinforce each other. Physical health offers the capacity to handle the enduring work load and responsibility needed to attain economic, political, and social statuses. Likewise, economic, political or social statuses often offer resources to maintain physical health (exercises, diet, and health maintenance). Mental health and life satisfaction are likewise expected to have reciprocal effects with economic, political and social gains. However, factors leading to the instrumental and expressive returns are expected to show differential patterns. As mentioned earlier, it may well be that open networks and relations are more likely to enable access to and use of bridges to reach to resources lacking in one's social circle and to enhance one's chances of gaining resources/instrumental returns. On the other hand, a denser network with more intimate and reciprocal relations among members may increase the likelihood of mobilizing others with shared interests and resources to

defend and protect existing resources/expressive returns Further, exogenous factors such as community and institutional arrangements and prescriptive versus competitive incentives may differentially contribute to the density and openness of networks and relations and the success of instrumental or expressive actions . Having discussed the core elements of social capital, clarified some of the measurement and sampling issues, identified the types of returns, and briefly postulated differential patterns of causal effects, I would like to propose a model as an initial step of theorizing social capital.

The process leading from the first block to the second block describes the formation of inequality of social capital : what structural elements and positional elements in the structure affect opportunities to construct and maintain social capital . It delineates patterns of differential distributions for social resources that are embedded, accessed, or mobilized . It should further demonstrate that there are social forces that determine such differential distributions . Thus, it is incumbent on a theory of social capital to delineate the patterns and determinants of the three ingredients of social capital or the inequality of social capital as collective assets, accessible social resources, and mobilized social resources . Two types of causation forces are of special interest to scholars in the analysis of inequality of social capital : structural and positional variations . A structure may be characterized in many variations, such as diversity in culture and ideology, level of industrialization and technology, level of education, extent of physical and natural resources, economic productivity, etc . Within a structure, individuals may be described as occupying different positions in social, cultural, political, and economic strata. These variations may be hypothesized to affect the richness or poorness of various social ingredients.

Within the second block, there is a process linking two elements of social capital : access to social capital and use of social capital . The process linking the two elements represents the how would an individual be enabled or disabled to mobilize such capital for specific actions? This is where the model, while recognizing structural contributions to social capital, as captured in the inequality process, also emphasizes possible choice action in mobilization .

Third, the theory needs to demonstrate that the three ingredients are inter-connected . Thus, it needs to propose a causal sequence in which embedded resources constrain and enable individual choices and actions. The general expectation is that the better the accessible embedded resources, the better embedded resources can and will be mobilized in purposive actions by an individual. The more intriguing question is why given the same level of accessible embedded resources, some individuals mobilize better resources than others in actions. One contingency may be the network location. One could hypothesize that being a bridge or being closer to a bridge might make a difference: those at or near these locations are better able to mobilize embedded resources. Also, the cognitive recognition that there is a structural advantage of using better embedded resources may make a difference.

Finally, the process linking the second block (social capital) and the third block (outcomes) represents the process where social capital produces returns or yields . Here, the theory should demonstrate how social capital is capital, or how it generates return or gain . That is, it should propose how one or more of the elements of social capital directly or indirectly impact an individual's economic, political and social capital (resources) or her/his physical, mental and life well-beings.

These conceptualizations, as individual components and processes, are not new . Research on the social resources theory (Lin 1999) has verified the proposition that social resources or social capital enhances an individual's attained statuses such as occupational status, authority, and placement in certain industries. Through these attained positions, social capital enhances economic earnings as well. These relationships hold up after family background and education are taken into account . Burt (1997, 1998) and others (Podolny & Baron, 1997) have shown that advances and economic rewards are also enhanced in organizations for individuals at strategic locations in the informal networks . For those closer to structural holes or bridges, and, thus, less structural constraints, they seem to gain better returns, presumably because such locations give these individuals better opportunities to access certain capital in the organization . Research is progressing on how organizations use social capital in recruiting and retaining individuals.

Fernandez and associates (Fernandez & Weinberg, 1997) have shown that referrals increase applications, recruit better qualified candidates, and reduce costs in the screening process .

In Putnam's studies (1993 ; 1995a; 1995b), this is indicated by participation in civic associations (e.g., churches, PTAs, Red Cross) and social groups (bowling leagues) . Coleman (1990) provides examples of diffusion of information and mobilization through social circles among radical Korean students (i.e., network as capital), a mother moving from Detroit to Jerusalem in order to have her child walk to playground or school safely (norm as capital) ; and diamond traders in New York making trades through informal ties and informal agreements (network and trust as capital) . Portes (1998) also specified "consummatory" and instrumental consequences of social capital (see Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993 for the consummatory consequences, solidarity and reciprocal support of social capital for immigrant groups) . The primary focus here is on the development, maintenance, or decline of collective assets .

Conclusion

Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a "credential" which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. These relationships may exist only in the practical state, in material and/or symbolic exchanges which help to maintain them. They may also be socially instituted and guaranteed by the application of a common name (the name of a family, a class, or a tribe or of a school, a party, etc.) and by a whole set of instituting acts designed simultaneously to form and inform those who undergo them; in this case, they are more or less really enacted and so maintained and reinforced, in exchanges.

Being based on indissolubly material and symbolic exchanges, the establishment and maintenance of which presuppose re acknowledgment of proximity, they are also partially irreducible to objective relations of proximity in physical (geographical) space or even in economic and social space. The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected. This means that, although it is relatively irreducible to the economic and cultural

capital possessed by a given agent, or even by the whole set of agents to whom he is connected, social capital is never completely independent of it because the exchanges instituting mutual acknowledgment presuppose the reacknowledgment of a minimum of objective homogeneity, and because it exerts a multiplier effect on the capital he possesses in his own right. The profits which accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible. This does not mean that they are consciously pursued as such, even in the case of groups like select clubs, which are deliberately organized in order to concentrate social capital and so to derive full benefit from the multiplier effect implied in concentration and to secure the profits of membership material profits, such as all the types of services accruing from useful relationships, and symbolic profits, such as those derived from association with a rare, prestigious group.

The existence of a network of connections is not a natural given, or even a social given, constituted once and for all by an initial act of institution, represented, in the case of the family group, by the genealogical definition of kinship relations, which is the characteristic of a social formation. It is the product of an endless effort at institution, of which institution rites—often wrongly described as rites of passage mark the essential moments and which is necessary in order to produce and reproduce lasting, useful relationships that can secure material or symbolic profits (see Bourdieu 1982). In other words, the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term, i.e., at transforming contingent relations, such as those of neighborhood, the workplace, or even kinship, into relationships that are at once necessary and elective, implying durable obligations subjectively felt (feelings of gratitude, respect, friendship, etc.) or institutionally guaranteed (rights). This is done through the alchemy of consecration, the symbolic constitution produced by social institution (institution as a relative—brother, sister, cousin, etc.—or as a knight, an heir, an elder, etc.) and endlessly reproduced in and through the exchange (of gifts, words, women, etc.) which it encourages and which presupposes and produces mutual knowledge and recognition. Exchange transforms the things exchanged into signs of recognition and, through the mutual recognition and the recognition of group membership which it implies, re-produces the group. By the same token, it reaffirms the limits of the group, i.e., the limits beyond which the constitutive exchange—trade, commensality, or marriage—cannot take place. Each member of the group is thus instituted as a custodian of the limits of the group: because the definition of the criteria of entry is at stake in each new entry, he can modify the group by modifying the limits of legitimate exchange through some form of misalliance. It is quite logical that, in most societies, the preparation and conclusion of marriages should be the business of the whole group, and not of the agents directly concerned. Through the introduction of new members into a family, a clan, or a club, the whole definition of the group, i.e., its fines, its boundaries, and its identity, is put at stake, exposed to redefinition, alteration, adulteration. When, as in modern societies, families lose the monopoly of the establishment of exchanges which can lead to lasting relationships, whether socially sanctioned (like marriage) or not, they may continue to control these exchanges, while remaining within the logic of *laissez-faire*, through all the institutions which are designed to favor legitimate exchanges

and exclude illegitimate ones by producing occasions (rallies, cruises, hunts, parties, receptions, etc.), places (smart neighborhoods, select schools, clubs, etc.), or practices (smart sports, parlor games, cultural ceremonies, etc.) which bring together, in a seemingly fortuitous way, individuals as homogeneous as possible in all the pertinent respects in terms of the existence and persistence of the group. The reproduction of social capital presupposes an unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed.

This work, which implies expenditure of time and energy and so, directly or indirectly, of economic capital, is not profitable or even conceivable unless one invests in it a specific competence (knowledge of genealogical relationships and of real connections and skill at using them, etc.) and an acquired disposition to acquire and maintain this competence, which are themselves integral parts of this capital. This is one of the factors which explain why the profitability of this labor of accumulating and maintaining social capital rises in proportion to the size of the capital. Because the social capital accruing from a relationship is that much greater to the extent that the person who is the object of it is richly endowed with capital (mainly social, but also cultural and even economic capital), the possessors of an inherited social capital, symbolized by a great name, are able to transform all circumstantial relationships into lasting connections. They are sought after for their social capital and, because they are well known, are worthy of being known (“I know him well”); they do not need to “make the acquaintance” of all their “acquaintances”; they are known to more people than they know, and their work of sociability, when it is exerted, is highly productive.

Every group has its more or less institutionalized forms of delegation which enable it to concentrate the totality of the social capital, which is the basis of the existence of the group (a family or a nation, of course, but also an association or a party), in the hands of a single agent or a small group of agents and to mandate this plenipotentiary, charged with *plena potestas agendi et loquendi*, to represent the group, to speak and act in its name and so, with the aid of this collectively owned capital, to exercise a power incommensurate with the agent’s personal contribution. Thus, at the most elementary degree of institutionalization, the head of the family, the *pater familias*, the eldest, most senior member, is tacitly recognized as the only person entitled to speak on behalf of the family group in all official circumstances. But whereas in this case, diffuse delegation requires the great to step forward and defend the collective honor when the honor of the weakest members is threatened. The institutionalized delegation, which ensures the concentration of social capital, also has the effect of limiting the consequences of individual lapses by explicitly delimiting responsibilities and authorizing the recognized spokesmen to shield the group as a whole from discredit by expelling or excommunicating the embarrassing individuals. If the internal competition for the monopoly of legitimate representation of the group is not to threaten the conservation and accumulation of the capital which is the basis of the group, the members of the group must regulate the conditions of access to the right to declare oneself a member of the group and, above all, to set oneself up as a representative (delegate, plenipotentiary, spokesman, etc.) of the whole group, thereby committing the social capital of the whole group. The title of nobility is the form par excellence of the institutionalized social capital which guarantees a particular form of social relationship in a lasting way. One of the

paradoxes of delegation is that the mandated agent can exert on (and, up to a point, against) the group the power which the group enables him to concentrate. (This is perhaps especially true in the limiting cases in which the mandated agent creates the group which creates him but which only exists through him.) The mechanisms of delegation and representation (in both the theatrical and the legal senses) which fall into place that much more strongly, no doubt, when the group is large and its members weak as one of the conditions for the concentration of social capital (among other reasons, because it enables numerous, varied, scattered agents to act as one man and to overcome the limitations of space and time) also contain the seeds of an embezzlement or misappropriation of the capital which they assemble.

This embezzlement is latent in the fact that a group as a whole can be represented, in the various meanings of the word, by a subgroup, clearly delimited and perfectly visible to all, known to all, and recognized by all, that of the nobles, the "people who are known," the paradigm of whom is the nobility, and who may speak on behalf of the whole group, represent the whole group, and exercise authority in the name of the whole group. The noble is the group personified. He bears the name of the group to which he gives his name (the metonymy which links the noble to his group is clearly seen, when Shakespeare calls Cleopatra "Egypt" or the King of France "France," just as Racine calls Pyrrhus "Epirus"). It is by him, his name, the difference it proclaims, that the members of his group, the liegemen, and also the land and castles, are known and recognized. Similarly, phenomena such as the "personality cult" or the identification of parties, trade unions, or movements with their leader are latent in the very logic of representation. Everything combines to cause the signifier to take the place of the signified, the spokesmen that of the group he is supposed to express, not least because his distinction, his "outstandingness," his visibility constitute the essential part, if not the essence, of this power, which, being entirely set within the logic of knowledge and acknowledgment, is fundamentally a symbolic power; but also because the representative, the sign, the emblem, may be, and create, the whole reality of groups which receive effective social existence only in and through representation.

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