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PREFACE TO
THE ENGLISH EDITION

1. 1994-2003

Nearly ten years have passed since we organized the work programme that led to the publication of *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme* five years later. So it is perhaps worth offering a brief sketch of some of the features of the period in which this book took shape. The various decisions about theoretical positioning we took in order to tackle recent economic and social changes can in fact be clarified by recalling certain elements of the French intellectual and political context at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s.

The reference to capitalism

A first feature – which, given our subject matter, is not unimportant – was quite simply that virtually no one, with the exception of a few allegedly archaic Marxists (an ‘endangered species’), referred to capitalism any longer. The term was simply struck from the vocabulary of politicians, trade unionists, writers and journalists – not to mention social scientists, who had consigned it to historical oblivion. In this regard, especially striking was the fact that – to take but one example – the discourse of political ecology, originally associated with violent attacks on the ‘power of capital’, seemed to have forgotten the link, still obvious ten years earlier, between the destruction of natural resources and the ‘pursuit of profit at any price’. If anglophone authors, particularly Americans, continued to use the term,¹ no doubt because it was less associated with communism in their intellectual and political culture than it is in ours, sociologists and economists in the old world preferred to forget it. Obviously, this was in startling contrast to the ubiquitous reference to capitalism in the 1960s and 1970s. In order to get a clearer idea of what we were aiming to do, we must go back over the fate of the reference to capitalism in French sociology in the last thirty years.

In the 1960s and 1970s, reference to capitalism was inspired, in various degrees of orthodoxy, by Marxism, which became – especially with the revival occasioned by Althusserianism – a dominant paradigm. This paradigm sometimes presented itself as a ‘return to the original sources’, aimed at restoring

the thought of Marx in all its purity; and sometimes grafted itself on to other traditions and authors – in particular, Durkheim and Weber on the one hand, Freud and Nietzsche on the other. These different ‘schools’ shared a dual ambition whose contradictory character is invariably neither theorized, nor even acknowledged. On the one hand, their aim was to reactivate a positivist conception of the social world and a scientific vision of history (the social world is constituted by ‘structures’, inhabited by ‘laws’, and propelled by ‘forces’ that escape the consciousness of social actors; and history itself follows a course that does not directly depend upon the volition of the human beings subject to it). On the other hand, they sought to remain in the closest possible contact with the social movements that developed in these years and to be their critical vanguard. According to this conception, sociology therefore had to be both scientific and critical.

Now, in our view, this dual orientation comes up against the problem of values and, in particular, moral values and ideals. Because it aims to dig beneath the consciousness of actors and unveil structures, laws and forces that are beyond their control, the scientific approach can deal with moral values and ideals only as ‘ideologies’ – that is to say, in this conception, as a more or less hypocritical cover for relations of force (invariably without explaining why such masks are necessary). Contrariwise, the critical impulse presupposes reference to ideals with which the reality to be criticized can be compared.

The same antinomy recurs at the level of action. Stressing historical structures, laws and forces tends to minimize the role of intentional action. Things are what they are. Yet the critical approach becomes meaningless if one does not believe that it can serve to deflect human beings’ action, and that this action can itself help to change the course of things in the direction of further ‘liberation’. This tension is especially evident in the sociology of domination elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu, which aims to unveil the ‘mechanisms’ through which a universal ‘domination’, presented as an iron law, is exercised, while at the same time seeking to advance the work of individual liberation, conceived as an emancipation from external powers and intervention. But if, in the final analysis, all relations are reducible to conflicts of interest and relations of force, and this is a ‘law’ immanent in the order of the ‘social’, what is the point of unmasking them in the indignant tones of critique, as opposed to registering them with the dispassion of the entomologist studying ant societies?

Confronted with these aporias, and in a context of the waning of protest movements and the decline of Marxism, some 1980s sociology and political science, which we participated in within the framework of the Political and Moral Sociology Group, sought to restart work on the question of action and moral values.² In the realm of action, the issue was to find a language that made it possible to describe people’s actions not as the realization of poten-

tialties inscribed in structures, or as the execution of a ready-made programme (which boils down to denying that such things as actions actually exist), but inasmuch as they presuppose that decisions and risks are taken in the light of the uncertain situations in which people find themselves. In the realm of moral values, it was a question of taking the normative principles and ideals that people claim to adhere to seriously, without reducing them to mere ideological masks or expressions of false consciousness. Finally, the same currents aimed to broach the issue of social order and the way it is ‘achieved’ (an issue that no sociology can avoid), without reducing it a priori to an interplay of forces over which actors have no control.

The prospect of restoring critique was not alien to this enterprise. If one accepts that, if it is to be credible, critique presupposes normative fulcra, then it is necessary, if the critiques developed by actors are to be taken seriously, to model the normative exigencies their critiques point towards. A *critical sociology* indifferent to the values that actors claim to adhere to must therefore be replaced by a *sociology of critique*. It must also be made clear that this move had no intention of putting critique in the dock, but, on the contrary, sought to render its foundations more solid. The detour via a sociology of critique had heuristic intentions, not a political design.

The 1980s sociologies that stressed action and moral values were often directed towards a pragmatic analysis of the actions, justifications and critiques developed by people in concrete situations – bringing out the operations implemented by actors to ‘perform’ or ‘construct’ the ‘social’, reduce the uncertainty of situations, make and consolidate agreements, criticize existing arrangements, and so on. Such analyses have been accused (often by sociologists who remain attached, albeit usually implicitly, to philosophies of history proximate to Marxism) on the one hand of neglecting relations of force, thereby offering an irenic vision of the social world; and on the other of locking themselves into a description of micro-situations amenable to observation, thereby neglecting processes that are realized on a broader canvas, involving a multiplicity of actors, and over the long term.

This applies to references to ‘capitalism’, which disappeared from the sociological currents we have just briefly described. Dethroned from its status of key concept of the 1970s, ‘capitalism’ has been reduced to an inferior terminology – a somewhat indecent swearword – because it implied a Marxist terminology that many sociologists wished to forget, but also because it referred to something too ‘large’, too ‘bulky’ to be immediately observable and describable via the observation of specific situations.

Fifteen years on, we may nevertheless ask whether sociology can really dispense with referring to substantial entities, grasped over the long term, without sacrificing much of the light it is supposed to cast on the present. A sociology that makes do with describing the configuration of various concrete

situations, and the way in which people construct these arrangements, can clearly serve to inspire various sorts of 'repairs' to the social fabric, made on a day-by-day basis by working 'participants' or social 'engineers'. But it does not make it possible to aid the construction of wider collective projects – something that formed part of sociology's mission from the outset.

Abandonment of any reference to capitalism in the 1980s was also accompanied by a kind of astonishment at the changes under way in the economic and social sphere – changes that could nevertheless not be ignored. Lacking a macro-sociological perspective, sociology struggled to construct mediations between a comprehensive 'mutation' (often referred to in an idiom of economic or technological necessity, or even in terms of biological evolutionism) and local transformations affecting the main components of everyday life (working conditions, unemployment, life cycle, income, inequalities, education, emotional and family life, etc.). These links were simply not established or, at any rate, were not organized in such a way as to form a system.

Similar remarks could be made about the term 'social class'. At the heart of European sociology from 1950 to 1980, it had suddenly disappeared, even though new forms of inequality were proliferating during the 1980s. What was particular about these was, if we might put it thus, that they were visible to the naked eye: Europeans discovered with amazement and anxiety that their towns in turn were filling up with the homeless people whose presence in the great American metropolises had shocked them, but without them ever seriously envisaging the possibility that such figures might one day come to populate their own familiar public spaces. This was the context in which a different theme was popularized – 'exclusion' – that was intended, at a theoretical level at least, to reconcile belief in the virtual disappearance of social classes (especially the proletariat), supposedly replaced by a 'large middle class', and the reality of tangible poverty associated with inner-city ghettoization.

These various remarks clarify our endeavour in *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*. We sought to construct a framework that makes it possible to combine approaches in terms of *critical sociology*, referring to supra-individual entities (especially capitalism) with the capacity to affect a large number of people over a long period, and approaches derived from pragmatic sociology, stressing action, the normative exigencies that intentional actions claim to be inspired by, and critical operations in particular, by pursuing the programme of a *sociology of critique*. Feeling the need to return to the issue of capitalism, we did not drop the contributions of pragmatic sociology: this book is presented as an attempt to integrate the two approaches. In particular, we employed the analytical framework presented in *De la justification*,³ which highlights the critical and justificatory operations performed by people in everyday situations, and offers a model of general conventions and forms of equivalence that make it possible to confer legitimacy on justification and critique. But rather than describing critical operations in limited situations

on a case-by-case basis, our objective was to highlight the role played by critique in the dynamic of capitalism, and to construct a model of normative change.

The book focuses on the years 1965 to 1995. This period is especially auspicious for such a project. It was initially marked (1965–75) by an intensive critical movement, coinciding with a crisis of capitalism. Then, in a subsequent phase (1975–90), critique was brought to heel concurrently with a transformation and revival of capitalism. This revival finally led, in the 1990s, to the gradual construction of a new normative fulcrum – a new 'city' in the sense given the term by *De la justification*.

On a more practical level, our intention was on the one hand to paint a picture rendering the changes under way more intelligible, and on the other hand to explain with the same schemas the interpretative deficit, and especially the silence of critique, which seemed to us to be key characteristics of the period we were living through.

Studying critique and being critical

To reconstruct a critical sociology on the basis of the sociology of critique by hybridizing it with the old thematic of capitalism: such was our ambition. So what analytical objects did we select to pursue this project? Starting out from the question posed by the lack of social critique that seemed to us to be characteristic of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, we developed a dual analysis. In the first instance, we analysed the role of critique in the changes in historical capitalism, basing this work on a more general model of normative change whose construction was one of the main theoretical objectives of our work. Second, we sought to deepen (by displacing it to a macro-social level, by comparison with the theoretical framework of *De la justification*) the role played by the coexistence of comparatively incompatible forms of critique in the dynamic relationship between capitalism and critique. Here we encounter the distinction, which constitutes a leitmotif of this book, between social critique (associated with the history of the working-class movement, and stressing exploitation) and what we have called the artistic critique (derived from intellectual and artistic circles, especially nineteenth-century Parisian Bohemia, this takes the dehumanization of the capitalist sphere as its particular target). In so doing, we were not so naive as to be unaware that, in its descriptive aspects, our work was, by force of circumstance, going to acquire a political dimension. Besides, regardless of whether they wish it to be so, is this not true of all enterprises – for example, in the case of nineteenth-century fiction – whose object is to compose a picture of 'society', given that a representation, however 'naturalistic' in intent, is also always an interpretation which, by this very token, opens up the possibility of a judgement?

It is still incumbent on us to clarify the kind of critique we wanted to revitalize, and our position as 'critics' (and not simply 'analysts of critique'). First of all, what is the relationship between sociological analysis and social action? We deliberately limited ourselves when it came to setting out the practical implications of our analyses (what we were bound to say is contained in a twelve-page Postscript). This was in order to avoid both the arrogance of the expert adviser to the Prince and pontifical, and the irresponsibility of armchair revolutionaries (Max Weber denounced 'professorial socialists' in his time) basing their power on a dual, 'scientific' and 'political', legitimacy – something which, as is well known, has led to unprecedented forms of intellectual terrorism in the recent past. But we nevertheless hope that our work will be able to contribute to a renewal of critique – not only its content, but also its forms and aims. Here we took as our model Karl Polanyi and Albert Hirschman, whose works were a constant source of support.

In order to pursue the line we had marked out, the main sacrifice we had to make doubtless involved the radicalism and totalizing designs which, especially for researchers trained in the continental tradition, possess a seductive power that is difficult to resist. In contrast, we strove to dissect the details – for example, those of the new mechanisms of exploitation (thereby following the Lévi-Straussian precept that 'the truth is in the detail'). One consequence of this determination to stick to details, combined with a lack of financial resources to assemble a huge work team (but such gigantic projects often have the deleterious effect of industrializing research), was that we were obliged to restrict ourselves for the most part to the French case. An ideal programme would have allowed for comparison between several countries over the same period and with the same methods. It remains to be pursued.

This is also to say that the forms of critique indicated by our analyses (if they must be characterized, they might be dubbed 'reformist') are not 'revolutionary' – if, as has frequently been the case since the early nineteenth century, by 'revolutionary' is meant a position offering a portrayal of the human condition in the capitalist sphere and, more generally, in contemporary industrial society which is so alien to human destiny or, if you prefer, so 'alienated', that critique's sole possible objective is the creation of a 'new man'.⁵ In particular, we reject one of the implications of this conception, which is that it releases critique from the requirement of developing the normative standpoint that grounds it, inasmuch as it is bound up with the belief that no normative position is attainable in the world as currently constituted, or even really imaginable as long as the revolution remains to be made. Critique alone is then accessible; this has the inestimable advantage that one can subject everything to critique without ever having to disclose one's own normative presuppositions. When it is not simply nihilistic or mundane, such a position ultimately invariably comes down to making 'Science' – whether it be the

Science of history in the sense of dialectical materialism or, today, an absolutist social Science – and, indirectly, those in whom the Revolutionary and the Scientist are conjoined, who are supposed to have the requisite materials in their possession, the final arbiters of human action. And this occurs at the expense of a common sense of justice, which is certainly the most widely shared thing in the world. Here we follow Michael Walzer's analysis in his fine book on social critique in the twentieth century, *The Company of Critics*.

We are confirmed in this position by what our analyses have taught us of capitalism's ability to assimilate critique. There is no ideology, however radical its principles and formulations, that has not eventually proved open to assimilation – and all the more readily the more comprehensive it was, abandoning the prosaic, tedious terrain ('petty-bourgeois' would once have been the term) of everyday conflicts (over working conditions, the defence of jobs, the distribution of value added, schooling, living conditions that make it possible to bear and raise children, etc.), in favour of vast prophetic demands.

In particular, this explains why we have examined so closely the mechanisms that aim to introduce new forms of security and justice into a universe where flexibility, mobility and network forms of organization had become basic reference points – mechanisms proposed by jurists or economists, among others, which were being discussed in the second half of the 1990s. At a theoretical level, analysis of these mechanisms allowed us to give substance to the projective city – a new normative fulcrum that we think is in the process of being formed – while from a more practical standpoint, it enabled us to identify some of the points which critique seemed best placed to latch on to.

We must, however, clear up a misunderstanding whose implications are as much political as theoretical. Our aim in writing this book was never to help establish the 'projective city' or even, as we have been criticized for doing, to seek to offer 'capitalism' a new, immediately available 'city'. Our work was primarily intended to be descriptive, and for the most part we made do with assembling mechanisms proposed by a fairly wide range of authors from different disciplines (management, law, sociology, etc.), which aim to establish tests making it possible to realize the projective city. What might be called our 'personal' position on this point is expressed not in the body of the text, which is given over to description, but in the Postscript. We believe that anything that makes it possible to diminish the insecurity of wage-earners even marginally is better than nothing – first because suffering will thereby be reduced, and we have no time for *la politique du pire*; but also because, as the whole history of the working-class movement has shown, it is when insecurity diminishes that conditions conducive to a revival of critique develop. We are not experts in political strategy. But that is why the option of instituting mechanisms which lead to greater security for wage-earners, even if these mechanisms come to a compromise with demands for flexibility, currently seems to us a pretty reasonable option, on condition that it is accompanied

by theoretical and practical work, based on these mechanisms, preparing for a more vigorous revival of critique.

So we have no qualms about acknowledging that we assign critique a 'reformist' role in the first instance. For, once the metaphysical constructions that sustained the messianic expectation of 'revolution' have been renounced, and, in particular, once anticipations of a 'new man' have been abandoned, how are demands for 'reform' radically different from 'revolutionary' commitment? Reforms can also be radical, and change the existing order of things fairly profoundly. In fact, underlying this whole debate between 'reform' and 'revolution' is a problem that remains largely implicit today: the legitimacy of using violence. It remains implicit because those who, after two world wars and episodes of mass extermination in the fascist and communist countries, still advocate large-scale use of violence are fewer and farther between than in Soré's time. But if support for violence on grounds of revolutionary necessity is rejected, how are reformist movements to be distinguished from revolutionary ones?

How do things stand with critique? Expansion and confusion

At the start of this Preface, we underlined the changed context between the first half of the 1990s and the period we are now living through. It is especially intriguing where critique is concerned.

First of all, since our book was first published in France at the end of 1999, we have witnessed a very rapid revival of critique – certainly more rapid and intense than we could have anticipated when we wrote Chapter 6, devoted to the resurgence of critique after 1995. Especially noteworthy has been the speed with which critiques developed in different countries have converged on a comprehensive critique of globalization, with its high points of Seattle, Genoa or Porto Alegre.

On the other hand, however, we have witnessed virtual stagnation when it comes to establishing mechanisms capable of controlling the new forms of capitalism and reducing their devastating effects. In France, the belated arrival of the euphoria created by the 'new economy', which can be fairly precisely dated to the end of 1999 – or a little more than two years before the collapse of the NASDAQ in April 2002 – certainly played a significant role in the Socialist government's shelving of most of the measures envisaged.⁶ In all likelihood, this played a role in the spectacular failure of the established left at the Presidential elections in April 2002 and the 'protest' vote by a significant section of the electorate for the extreme right or the extra-parliamentary extreme left.

The same could be said of mechanisms intended to have a global impact, whose implementation seems an even more utopian prospect for the moment. In this respect, things have not changed very much compared with the years

when we wrote our book; and the least one can say is that the new spirit of capitalism is taking its time about rectifying itself as regards its ability to offer not only what we call 'stimulation' (which it affords less and less as the new mechanisms become commonplace), but also security and justice.

In retrospect, it might be thought that our work is thus simultaneously rather timid when it comes to a resumption of critique, which has been more rapid than we foresaw; and decidedly over-optimistic about the effects of critique, which for the time being are not immediately obvious, to say the least.

Moreover, the relative absence of a coherent theoretical analysis and precise empirical analyses of the way that capitalism has been reinvigorated over the last thirty years might possibly explain – at least in part – the present paradoxical situation, which is characterized by an undeniable redeployment of critique and a no less patent disarray of that critique. We can detect an initial sign of this disarray in the nostalgia, prevalent among old activists, for the good old days of communism, when the threat posed to the Western democracies by the armies of the countries of actually existing communism was thought to 'give the bosses pause', while some young activists are attracted by archaic forms of revolutionary discourse.

In our opinion, another such sign consists in the temptation to transform a critique of capitalism itself (centred on economic mechanisms, forms of work organization, and profit extraction) into a critique of 'imperialism'. In France, this move has translated into a resurgence of vulgar anti-Americanism. It is always disturbing to see indignation detached from the concrete, often conflated sites it applies to, making way for a consensus in the face of an external enemy, even when it concerns 'globalization' and its 'agents'.

For the time being, it is also difficult to make out what direction the renewal of what we have called the 'artistic critique' might take. If the exhaustion of the forms assumed by this critique in France over the last fifty years (with its marked stress on the revolutionary dimension of individual liberation, especially in sexual matters) is fairly generally acknowledged – certainly more clearly so than five or ten years ago – the issue of which symptoms should be considered in order to identify the currently dominant modes of 'alienation' remains very blurred. This contributes in significant measure to maintaining the confusion between the markers via which, until recently, left- or right-wing political identifications were readily discerned. For example, in the case of recent mobilizations around the *Confédération paysanne*, we have seen a movement defending agriculture against the deprecations of globalization and GMOs, which it has been possible to identify as both 'leftist' and 'reactionary', depending on whether stress is laid on its rather contradictory positions in favour of fair trade at a world level or the protection of traditional French agriculture.

2. REPLIES TO SOME CRITIQUES

Since its publication three and a half years ago, this book has been subject to a certain number of critiques by colleagues at home and abroad. Despite their diversity, certain themes recur in these critiques, perhaps because they highlight the most obvious defects of our work. But in some cases at least, the critiques latch on to points that typify the approach we sought to develop, so that they indicate the connection between our enterprise and other recent theoretical endeavours in the social sciences. This is why it is worth taking them up and briefly noting the responses we think we are in a position to make.

Conventions economics and regulation theory

An initial critique, which is fairly typical of the very lively debates among unorthodox economists in the French intellectual arena, maintains that our position is awkwardly poised between two recent currents in economic analysis: conventions economics, whose development has been very closely related to the efforts we ourselves have made to develop a pragmatic sociology of critique,⁷ and the works of the Regulation School.⁸ An important aspect of our work was indeed the quite deliberate pursuit of a synthesis (reckoned impossible by some) between these two approaches.

From conventions theory we derived the need to clarify the conventions, in the sense of principles of equivalence, that allow for the comparison of persons (and of goods), in so far as they constitute the often largely invisible bedrock of economic relations, but also of the judgements that different actors make about them. For example, transactions rest on different quality conventions. As for production, it is based on different co-ordination conventions. From the spirit (if not the letter) of Regulation theory we took the macro-economic and macro-social orientation, and also the structuralist orientation that underlines the existence of regimes of accumulation – that is to say, translating back into our language, the fact that certain conventions and tests have a strategic position at a given moment in time, and in a particular social formation. These conventions and tests are established, in the sense that they are organized into a system, orchestrated by legal mechanisms, and anchored in organizations. But rather than conferring a quasi-mechanical *modus operandi* on these systems, which tends to hypostatize them, we integrate into our descriptions the interpretations and critiques to which these conventions and tests are subjected by the actors whom they engage.

The underestimation of technological innovations

We have likewise been criticized for not giving technological changes – particularly the new information technologies – and their impact on the

production of wealth the space they warrant. We do not ignore the increased effectiveness and efficiency brought about by the new ways of organizing firms, which have been made possible, especially but not exclusively, by the new information technologies. We even begin our book by registering a regeneration of capitalism. Moreover, the management literature we studied is full of praise for these 'economic' benefits.

But we have tried to pose the problem differently, so as not to isolate an independent variable in the shape of technology. As has been cogently demonstrated in the new sociology of science, technological changes are far from being independent of other dimensions of social existence. If, for example, we follow Bruno Latour's analyses, we see that numerous aspects which might readily be characterized as 'moral' are embedded in technological options. The same could be said of 'consumer demand' and its more or less 'unstable' character. For the process of rapid change in consumer tastes and, consequently, demand, is not unconnected (at least this is the thesis defended in *Le monde esprit du capitalisme*) with demands pertaining to the artistic critique – especially those related to the requirement of 'authenticity' – which translated into a quest for consumption that individualizes its consumer, in contrast to all forms of 'mass' production. To put it in a nutshell, our intention in this work was not to deny the role of technological change in the development of capitalism, which would have been quite absurd, but – in accordance with a Polanyesque way of thinking – to break with a fatalistic vision of technological determinism.

The relationship to Marxism: Beyond the base/superstructure dichotomy

Other queries revolve around whether our book can be regarded as forming part of the vague return of Marxism in the social sciences (in the guise of a 'ghost', to adopt Derrida's term, or the 'spectre' Žižek refers to). Some critics – aligned, one suspects, with the anti-Marxists – have condemned the resurgence in our work of a crypto-Marxism that dare not speak its name. We shall leave them to their fantasies. Others, this time pro-Marxists, have accused us of a 'spiritualist deviation': we allegedly make 'ideas' and 'spiritual tendencies' the motor of history.

More seriously, authors motivated by the best of intentions have sought to make sense of our work by interpreting it with the categories of 'base' and 'superstructure'. Yet the theoretical architecture we sought to put in place – as early as the preliminary work elaborated in *De la justification* – aimed precisely to render such a dichotomy redundant. Our starting point, inspired by Max Weber, Karl Polanyi and Louis Dumont, sought precisely to revive the problematic of the dynamic of capitalism without using these Marxist categories, whose limits had become apparent in the 1970s and which, in particular, do not seem to us to tackle the problem of ideology correctly.⁹ Effecting a marked

separation between ideas and the real world, and ignoring their interconnection, their interwoven, conjoint production, their reciprocal influence, such a conception always prompts a lapse into narrow definitions of ideology as a mask or mirror, constantly posing the question of the chicken and the egg. It prevents researchers from engaging with the complexity and indeterminacy of the production of historical realities in order patiently to untangle its threads.

The sense we give to the term 'ideology'

On the subject of the same critical register, it is worth dwelling, however briefly, on the use we make of the term 'ideology', which has given rise to numerous misunderstandings. As Raymond Boudon explains in his study of the subject,¹⁰ discussions of ideology always revolve around the question of whether it should be defined by reference to the criterion of truth or error. Those who criticize us for rescuing the notion of ideology from the obscurity to which it had been consigned at the end of the 1970s are no exception, since for them ideology is manifestly a set of false ideas – that is to say, ideas which a scientific approach has the capacity to invalidate. Now, we explicitly rejected such a conception. As we state on several occasions, the spirit of capitalism not only legitimates the accumulation process, it also constrains it. We might also say that it can legitimate it only because it constrains it. And this is because we credit people with genuine critical capacities, and critique has an impact on the world. We start out from the principle that people are able by themselves to measure the discrepancy between discourses and what they experience, to the point where capitalism must, in a way, offer – in practice – reasons for accepting its discourse.

To make things clearer still, let us recall that we distinguish between three components in what we term the 'spirit of capitalism', one of which refers to justice and specifies how capitalist mechanisms are geared towards the common good.¹¹ This 'justice' element refers directly to the concept of 'city' and the notion of test, initially developed in *De la justification* and reworked in this book. This model was never intended exclusively for the analysis of discourses, in complete abstraction from any actual implementation of the principles of justice referred to. Thus, operating in tandem with a notion of ideology as deception we find a portrayal of justifications in terms of cities as idle, empty words. So we would have a world of discourses and justifications as so many veils and shams, designed to deceive as many people as possible and conceal the relations of force or underlying structures that determine us; and the real world, which only scientists, whether economists or sociologists, have access to, since they are the only ones who have the privilege of being able to extricate themselves from the social world. This is definitely not our view.

Yet those who have criticized us for accepting the validity of a management literature whose role is 'purely ideological', and which consequently bears

little relation to the changes that have occurred in the organization of work and production, largely rely on a conception of ideology as a mask serving to veil reality. On this point, our position is as follows: we think that a sufficient number of reliable and convergent statistical indicators now exist (supplied in particular by Labour Ministry surveys, which we cite abundantly in Chapter 4) to maintain that the trends recommended in 1990s management literature are widely diffused. It is therefore wrong to consider only the 'ideological' dimension of this literature, without perceiving its practical impact. This does not mean that the changes advocated have all been effected at the same pace, or (especially) that they have been implemented with the same intensity, in the various sectors. Starting out from the management literature allowed us to delineate the ideal type of the new organization of production. (Is not 'mass production' likewise an 'ideal type', whose concrete forms are variously a certified copy?) How far this model is realized in practice (according to sectors, regions, etc.) would itself make an extremely interesting object of study.

A specifically French book?

The same applies to the limited scope of our analyses, restricted to France, which has been regretted by numerous anglophone commentators. Is *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme* yet another of those very French products which (like José Bové's Roquefort) do not travel well, and are a speciality of French intellectuals? Confining ourselves to France, far from being fortuitous, was the result of a deliberate and, to be frank, polemical choice. In reaction against the numerous publications which, in the course of the 1990s, claimed to offer a general survey of globalization, we decided to impose restrictions on ourselves. Because they did not study the tensions at work, and the decisions and policies aimed at overcoming them, at a manageable level, some of these texts virtually presented 'globalization' as the 'inevitable' outcome of 'forces' external to human agency.

We, in contrast, were convinced that understanding the process leading to 'globalization' required a detailed analysis of multiple changes and conflicts which had occurred in seemingly very disparate domains; and that description of these changes could be seriously undertaken only in a fairly limited timespan (five years) and on a small scale (the two of us worked alone, without a large team behind us), at the level of one country – especially because, at country level, the constraints bound up with national histories play a not insignificant role. That said, we are also persuaded that basically rather similar processes have affected the principal industrialized countries in the Western world. Once again, we hope that future work, with a similar methodological approach, will make it possible to enrich a fine-grained vision of the way in which, under the impact of local variables, new constraints have been established that local economic and political actors can, in all good faith, have a

sense of being subjected to from without, as if they were forces that it was difficult – even impossible – for them to oppose.

The place of networks and its interpretation

Other critiques have focused on the role we attributed to networks, and – this is not the same thing – to the references to networks in the managerial literature published at the end of the 1980s. So we have been criticized either – in a realistic spirit analogous to a critique already mentioned – for not taking the role played by the new network-based technologies sufficiently seriously; or, on the contrary, for accepting the validity of a reticular ideology which presents processes of mediation and mediating roles that have always existed as if they were novelties. Our concern was precisely to avoid these equally reductionist interpretations.

With respect to works, often adopting a broadly determinist position, that endeavour to define the social effects of new technologies based on a network architecture, we adopted a position that might be called Durkheimian (though it is also James Beniger's, for example, in his important book *The Control Revolution*). It consists in emphasizing the social conditions and, more particularly, the social conflicts that provoked or encouraged the adoption or development of a particular technology. In this respect, it is striking to see how the critique of close modalities of hierarchical surveillance at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s preceded the full development of technologies allowing for effective remote control in real time by ten or twenty years.

Conversely, to those critics who reprove us for accepting the validity of managerial discourse on networks, we can answer that this critique is anticipated in the book. As we took the trouble to make clear on several occasions, we certainly do not think – and here we follow the work of Fernand Braudel – that networks and the role played by mediators are novel phenomena. What is new, on the other hand, is precisely the societal project, to which much of the book is given over, aiming to make the network a normative model. If you like, it can be said that this involves an 'ideology', but on condition that this term is construed in the sense – indicated above – which emphasizes the fact that 'ideologies', if they are to be successful, must be rooted in organizational, institutional or legal mechanisms which give them a 'real' existence. Other interpretations of our work reckon to have detected in it a sort of hostility to networks articulated from an implicitly centralist and statist position (a critique often addressed by American political scientists which, particularly since Stanley Hoffman's works thirty years ago, has become a kind of commonplace). We are supposedly unaware of the beneficial effects of 'spatially bounded micro-networks'. But we are not certain that we have understood the argument, since in our view it is very difficult to understand what is meant by it from a strictly formal standpoint. As works by French philosophers of

networks like Michel Serres or, in other respects, Gilles Deleuze have shown, one of the basic properties of networks is that they are open. Moreover, an American theoretician of the sociology of networks like Harrison White adopts the same basic premise. The space of the network, constituted by those who compose it, is not the same as a geographical space: it is open, indeterminate and shifting. The difficulty in establishing a scale of justice in networks stems precisely from the fact that it is not always known who is on the inside and who is on the outside; that these contours change constantly; and that the parties to the network only very rarely have an overall view of it, each of them knowing only that section of the network which they frequent. Consequently, attempts to structure networks always involve a minimal formalization of a list of parties to it and the creation, if not of a state, then at least of a regulatory instance accepted by the 'members' – that is to say, of a second overarching level that lays down 'the law'. In the process of so doing, it is clear that the network loses its fluidity, its openness, and thus its reticular character. To note this is not to be a centralizer at heart.

Nevertheless, the issue of the relations between networks and territories deserves a much closer examination than we conducted in the book. For it is clear that networks have real territorial bases, and that territories are not equal when it comes to their capacity to accommodate nodes where wealth, produced by networks extending beyond them, is accumulated. Moreover, regulation, which is organized and conceived in primarily territorial fashion today, is all the more ineffective to the extent that the branches of the network precisely extend beyond these territorial borders.

The same could be said of self-organization within networks, which is frequently presented today as a quasi-'revolutionary' emancipatory force (for example, in the case of the Internet or, to take a more specific example, debates about free software). The self-organization that develops in networks can certainly prove auspicious for innovation and innovators (as Michel Callon's works, which we cite, have indicated). But there is very little chance of it providing acceptable solutions in terms of social justice on its own, precisely because the network does not offer an overarching position allowing for consideration of those who find themselves on its margins, or even disconnected.

The dual ontology of the social world

The questions raised by the way we use the notion of network refer, in the end, to a central aspect of our approach on the theoretical level, which has gone comparatively unremarked – so that it has escaped comment or criticism – but that is nevertheless at the heart of critiques of our work and the responses we are in a position to make. For us, this dimension of our research is pretty fundamental, because it concerns what might be called the ontology

of the social. To put it rapidly and crudely, social theory, especially French social theory (but in this respect French thought has had considerable influence on social science at a global level over the last thirty years), has periodically oscillated between two paradigms that appear to be incompatible. Without being confined to them, these paradigms refer to the two epochs in French sociology we mentioned at the beginning of this Preface, when we recalled the fate of the reference to capitalism over the last thirty years.

The first emphasizes force and the relations of force that are regarded as underlying the institutions, and legal and normative *fulcra*, on which actors claim to base their actions. In this type of paradigm, moral exigencies, modes of justification, and institutional forms are treated as veils concealing reality – that is to say, as an interplay of interests and relations of force – or as simply forgotten and passed over in silence. In both cases, the question as to why human beings in society seem to attach so much importance to normativity if, in fact, it plays no role in determining their actions, has remained unresolved, no satisfactory response having been offered. Models that stress force and relations of force have taken several forms. In the 1960s and 1970s, they were associated with the revival of Marxism through an injection of structuralism. More recently, they have instead been based upon a reticular or rhizomorphic ontology, especially in the form given it by Deleuze on the basis of an original reinterpretation of Spinoza and Nietzsche, whose works only belatedly had specific effects on social theory, so that they were only really important from, let us say, the mid-1980s. This second version has the advantage over the first that it eliminates some of the most unacceptable aspects of ‘classical’ Marxism – in particular, the base/superstructure dichotomy.

By contrast, the second paradigm, which was redeployed at the end of the 1970s and in the 1980s, when the decline of Marxism reopened the field of theoretical reflection, intends to underscore the real social role played by political institutions and political philosophy, by law, morality and, in general, normativity. In particular, it has relied on the *oeuvre* of Habermas Mark 2, but also in France on those of the historian François Furet, who played an important role in the return to political theory, and the philosopher Paul Ricoeur.

What is distinctive about these two paradigms is that they are based on two quite different conceptions (which often remain implicit) of what one might call the metaphysics of the social world. The first, especially in its rhizomorphic forms, is based on an ontology containing only one tier or plane (the ‘plane of immanence’). It knows only singularities or flows, the relationship between which assumes a reticular form and whose movements and relations are governed by a logic of forces. The second, in contrast, is intelligible only on condition that it posits a two-tier space, the first of which is occupied by singular entities – in particular, people – while the second is composed of principles of parity that make it possible to compare singular entities, to constitute them as categories or classes, and to make normative judgements about the

relations between them. It is precisely this two-tier structure that is condemned by the first paradigm as succumbing to the illusion of transcendence.

Neither of these paradigms seems to us to be wholly satisfactory or adequate for explaining the social dynamic. Moreover, that is why, in our opinion, we witness a periodic alternation between them. This is attested today, for example, by a reversion to an ontology of force which, keen to demarcate itself from Marxism, often takes its inspiration from Carl Schmidt – an author whose stand in favour of Nazism long excluded him from the intellectual scene, but who has recently made a comeback in left-wing or ultra-left thought that is as sensational as it is astonishing.

The originality of the model of change we propose is that it seeks to integrate the two paradigms we have just schematically invoked into a single theoretical framework. We have in fact tried to articulate two regimes of action in the social world. We called the first the *regime of categorization*. Set in motion by the impact of critique on the most important tests at a given moment in time, it relies on a two-tier metaphysic and leads to activating principles of equivalence (often by calling them into question), strengthening institutions, producing law, and prompting the deployment of moral justifications, which are expressed in particular in terms of justice. This is the framework in which – in the French case, for example – we interpret the large number of joint agreements, decrees and laws augmenting the mechanisms of security and justice for workers that were signed, issued or voted following the events of May 1968.

But this regime of categorization does not exhaust action on the social. We have also sought to highlight the role performed by a different regime, which we have called the *regime of displacement*. Dispensing with generalization and moral judgement, this regime is deployed on a single plane and generates forms the most satisfactory image of which is afforded by rhizomorphic algorithms. We sought to show how, in the case to hand – the revival of capitalism from the second half of the 1970s – the increasing strictness of tests induced by intensive recourse to instruments from the regime of categorization led a number of actors to turn away from established tests, and to seek new routes to profit by acting in accordance with modalities characteristic of a regime of displacement – that is, in particular, by multiplying networks.

Our theoretical position exposes us to being criticized, or at least ill understood or misunderstood: (1) first of all by those, often inspired by Habermas, who stress the search for forms (if only procedural forms) conducive to coordination on a normative basis, so as to make a convergence of judgements possible; (2) but also by those who stress interests and relations of force from a structuralist standpoint; and finally (3) by those who, likewise abandoning the issue of normativity as if it were groundless, put all the emphasis on the creativity of networks. It is a matter for some concern, although readily

intelligible on a fundamental level, that today we are witnessing a convergence on the last position both by authors who are fascinated by the proliferation and inventiveness of the technological and economic mechanisms currently being deployed before our very eyes (i.e. authors fascinated by the renewal of capitalism) and by authors who want to revive revolutionary activity against capitalism by anchoring it in new theoretical bases and who, rather as the Althusserians used structuralism to revamp the image of Marxism in the 1960s, rely on the ontology of networks to revive it by plugging it into *Lebensphilosophie*.

Some revisions on the issue of 'the lateness of critique'

To conclude, we would like to turn from responding to critiques to formulating an autocritique. It is as follows. Where tests are concerned, we equipped our actors with capacities for both displacement and categorization. Categorization consists in comparing singular events in a particular respect in order to connect them in a series. It is one of the basic operations people perform when they seek to give meaning to the world they live in, by deriving from it major invariants and a certain simplified image of the way it operates. Capacities for categorization are essential for 'tightening up tests'. Contrariwise, displacements refer to people's actions inasmuch as they are not categorized and, more especially, in so far as they do not form part of established, identified and highly categorized tests – a feature which gives them a local, largely invisible character. Circumvention of established tests presupposes the existence of displacements. It would have been logical to distribute these capacities evenly to all our actors. Yet this is not the case because, in the story we tell, for the most part it is capitalism that displaces and critique that categorizes. Accordingly, critique is inevitably always late, for in order to be effective it must analyse the displacements operated by capitalism and order them in a sequence, categorize them in order to reveal them and condemn them as unjust. With this unequal distribution of relative capacities for displacement and categorization, we can see how it is possible to topple over into a clash of the kind 'displacement–capitalism–material world' versus 'categorization–critique–ideal world'.

What is involved is a flaw in our exposition: capacities for categorization and displacement, as anthropological capacities, are obviously uniformly distributed. As for capitalism's capacity for categorization, is not this what was at work in the construction of the first, and then the second, response by employers to the 'crisis of governability' following May 1968 (see Chapter 3)? And is it not precisely what management authors are doing when they seek to outline some of the new world's basic rules? Hence capitalism and its critiques simultaneously, and interactively, take charge of the definition/categorization of the world.

Symmetrically, critique has significant capacities for displacement and inventiveness. The outflanking of the trade unions by their rank and file, and the great difficulties explaining what was occurring experienced by analysts in the 1970s, should be taken up again. If, thirty years later, it seems to us that these events can be understood as the artistic critique descending into the street, it appeared to observers at the time as basically pertaining to the order of displacement – that is to say, one of those moments when no one knows what is happening, or how to characterize it.

Besides being necessary theoretically, this kind of rebalancing of our model would result in giving critique its full due, and would help to check the all too common drift towards reducing critique to the world of ideas and capitalism to the world of things.

On this point, as on many others, *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme* may be read as a research programme rather than a fully finished work; as a summons to future work for the purposes of extending, clarifying or invalidating our suggestions, rather than as a dogmatic, self-sufficient *summa*.

Paris, 27 May 2003

Notes

1. As indicated, for example, by the title of Oliver Williamson's work, *The Economic Institutions of Capitalism*, published in 1985.
2. A research centre at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales and the Centre national de la recherche scientifique, founded by Luc Boltanski in 1985. See François Desse, *L'empire du sens. L'humanisation des sciences humaines* (La Découverte, Paris 1995), for a history of French social science in these years.
3. See Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, *De la justification. Les économies de la grandeur*, Gallimard, Paris 1991.
5. See Luc Boltanski, 'The Left after May 1968 and the Longing for Total Revolution', *Thesis Eleven*, no. 69, May 2002, pp. 1–20.
6. Among the measures that were implemented, mention should be made of the mechanisms of VAE (*Validation des acquis de l'expérience*), which allow people who have accumulated skills in their working lives to obtain equivalent qualifications without having to return to school. These mechanisms can be interpreted as attempts to give practical effect to the promise of employability, which is central in the projective city; firms, for their part, have continued to work on the new management of human resources around the notion of skills.
7. See Olivier Favereau and Emmanuel Lazega, eds, *Conventions and Structures in Economic Organization: Markets, Networks and Hierarchies*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham and Northampton (MA) 2002.
8. See Robert Boyer and Yves Saillard, *Théorie de la régulation. L'état des savoirs*, La Découverte, Paris 1995.
9. See Éric Chiapello, 'Reconciling Two Principal Meanings of the Notion of Ideology: The Example of the "Spirit of Capitalism"', *European Journal of Sociology*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2003, pp. 155–71.
10. *L'idiologie ou l'origine des idées reçues*, Fayard, Paris 1986.
11. The other components involve propositions in terms of security and stimulation.