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Pierre Bourdieu and Richard Nice
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The aristocracy of culture*

PIERRE BOURDIEU
Translation by Richard Nice

Rarely does sociology more resemble social psychoanalysis than when it confronts an object like taste, one of the most vital stakes in the struggles fought in the field of the dominant class and the field of cultural production. This is not only because the judgement of taste is the supreme manifestation of the discernment which, by reconciling reason and sensibility, the pedant who understands without feeling and the man of the world who enjoys without understanding, defines the accomplished individual. Nor is it solely because every rule of propriety designates in advance the project of defining this indefinable essence as a clear manifestation of philistinism—whether it be the academic propriety which, from Riegl and Wolfflin to Elie Faure and Henri Focillon, and from the most scholastic commentators on the classics to the avant-garde semiotists, imposes a formalist reading of the work of art, or the upper-class propriety which treats taste as one of the surest signs of true nobility and cannot conceive of referring taste to anything other than itself.

Here the sociologist finds himself in the area par excellence of the denial of the social. It is not sufficient to overcome the initial self-evident appearances, in other words to relate taste, the uncreated source of all 'creation', to the social conditions of which it is the product, knowing full well that the very same people who strive to repress the clear relation between taste and education, between culture as that which is cultivated and culture as the process of cultivating, will be amazed that anyone should expend so much effort in scientifically proving that self-evident fact. He must also question that relationship, which is only apparently self-explanatory, and unravel the paradox whereby the relationship with educational capital is just as strong in areas which the educational system does not teach. And he must do this without ever being able to appeal unconditionally to the positivistic arbitration of what are called facts. Hidden behind the statistical relationships between educational capital or social origin and this or that type of knowledge or way of applying it, there are relationships between groups maintaining different, and even antagonistic, relations to culture, depending on the conditions in which they acquired their cultural capital and the markets in which they can derive most profit from it. But we have not yet finished with the self-evident. The question itself has to be questioned—in other words, the relation to culture which it tacitly privileges—in order to establish whether a change in the content and form of the question would not be sufficient to transform the relationships observed. There is no way out of the game of culture; and one's only chance of objectifying the true nature of the game is to objectify as fully as possible the very operations which one is obliged to use in order to achieve that objectification. De te fabula narratur. The reminder is meant for the reader as well as the sociologist. Paradoxically, the games of culture are protected against objectification by all the

* Extract from La Distinction, pp. 9–61, Paris: Les Editions de Minuit.
partial objectifications which the actors involved in the game perform on each other: scholarly critics cannot grasp the objective reality of society aesthetes without abandoning their grasp of the true nature of their own activity; and the same is true of the opponents. The same law of mutual lucidity and reflexive blindness governs the antagonism between ‘intellectuals’ and ‘bourgeois’ (or their spokespersons in the field of production). And even when bearing in mind the function which legitimate culture performs in class relations, one is still liable to be led into accepting one or the other of the self-interested representations of culture which ‘intellectuals’ and ‘bourgeois’ endlessly fling at each other. Up to now the sociology of the production and producers of culture has never escaped from the play of opposing images, in which ‘right-wing intellectuals’ and ‘left-wing intellectuals’ (as the current taxonomy puts it) subject their opponents and their strategies to an objectivist reduction which vested interests make that much easier. The objectification is always bound to remain partial, and therefore false, so long as it fails to include the point of view from which it speaks and so fails to construct the game as a whole. Only at the level of the field of positions is it possible to grasp both the generic interests associated with the fact of taking part in the game and the specific interests attached to the different positions, and, through this, the form and content of the self-positionings in which these interests are expressed. Despite the aura of objectivity they like to assume, neither the ‘sociology of the intellectuals’, which is traditionally the business of ‘right-NN’ing intellectuals’, nor the critique of ‘right-wing thought’, the traditional speciality of ‘left-wing intellectuals’, is anything more than a series of symbolic aggressions which take on additional force when they dress themselves up in the impeccable neutrality of science. They tacitly agree in leaving hidden what is essential, namely the structure of objective positions which is the source, inter alia, of the view which the occupants of each position can have of the occupants of the other positions and which determines the specific form and force of each group’s propensity to present and receive a group’s partial truth as if it were a full account of the objective relations between the groups.

* * *

Our inquiry sought to determine how the cultivated disposition and cultural competence that are revealed in the nature of the cultural goods consumed and in the way they are consumed vary according to the category of agents and the area to which they applied, from the most legitimate areas such as painting or music to the most ‘personal’ ones such as clothing, furniture or cookery, and, within the legitimate domains, according to the markets—‘academic’ and ‘non-academic’—on which they may be placed. This led us to establish two basic facts: on the one hand, the very close relationship linking cultural practices (or the corresponding opinions) to educational capital (measured by qualifications) and, secondarily, to social origin (measured by father’s occupation) and, on the other hand, the fact that, at equivalent levels of educational capital, the weight of social origin in the practice- and preference-explaining system increases as one moves away from the most legitimate areas of culture.¹

The more the competences measured are recognized by the school system and the more ‘academic’ the techniques used to measure them, the stronger is the relation

¹ The analyses presented here are based on a survey by questionnaire, carried out in 1963 and 1967–68, on a sample of 1,217 people. Appendix 1 (pp. 587–605 of the French text) gives full information concerning the composition of the sample, the questionnaire, and the main procedures used to analyse it.
between performance and educational qualification. The latter, as a more or less adequate indicator of the number of years of scholastic inculcation, guarantees cultural capital more or less completely depending on whether it is inherited from the family or acquired at school and so it is an unequally adequate indicator of this capital. The strongest correlation between performance and educational capital qua cultural capital recognized and guaranteed by the educational system (which is very unequally responsible for its acquisition) is observed when, with the question on the composers of a series of musical works, the survey takes the form of a very 'scholastic' exercise on knowledge very close to the knowledge taught by the educational system and strongly recognized on the academic market.

Sixty-seven per cent of people with a CEP* or a CAP cannot identify more than two composers (from sixteen works), compared to 45% of those with a BEPC, 19% of those who went to a technical college (petite école) or started higher education and only 7% of those having a qualification equal or superior to a licence. Whereas none of the manual or clerical workers questioned was capable of naming twelve or more of the composers of the sixteen works, 52% of the artistic producers and teachers (and 78% of the teachers in higher education) achieve this score.

The level of non-response to the question on favourite painters or pieces of music is also closely correlated with level of education, with a strong opposition between the dominant class and the working classes, craftsmen and small tradesmen. (However, since in this case whether or not people answer the question doubtless depends as much on their dispositions as on their pure competence, the cultural aspirations of the new petty-bourgeoisie—middle-rank business executives, the medical and social services, secretaries, cultural intermediaries—find an outlet here.) Similarly, listening to the most 'highbrow' radio stations, France-Musique and France-Culture, and to musical or cultural broadcasts, owning a record-player, listening to records (without specifying the type, which minimizes the differences), visiting art-galleries, and the corresponding knowledge of painting—features which are strongly correlated with one another—obey the same logic and, being strongly linked to educational capital, set the classes and class fractions in a clear hierarchy (with a reverse distribution for listening to variety programmes). In the case of activities like practising a plastic art or playing a musical instrument, which presuppose a cultural capital generally acquired outside the educational system and (relatively) independent of the level of academic certification, the correlation with social class, which is again strong, is established via social trajectory (which explains the special position of the new petty-bourgeoisie).

The closer one moves towards the most legitimate areas, such as music or painting, and, within these areas, which can be set in a hierarchy according to their modal degree of legitimacy, towards certain genres or certain works, the more the differences in educational capital are associated with major differences both in knowledge and in preferences. The differences between classical music and modern songs are reproduced within each of these areas by differences (produced in accordance with the same principles) between genres, such as opera and operetta, or quartets and symphonies.

2 The researcher read out a list of sixteen musical works and asked the interviewee to name the composer of each work.

* Scholastic terms and abbreviations: CEP: Certificat d'études primaires, formerly marking completion of primary education; CAP: Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle, the lowest trade certificate; BEPC: Brevet d'études du premier degré, marking completion of first part of secondary schooling; baccalauréat: examination at end of secondary schooling; petite école: minor tertiary technical college; licence: university degree (3-year course); agrégation: competitive examination to recruit top category of secondary teachers; grande école: one of the set of highly selective colleges including Polytechnique, Ecole Normale Superieure, and a number of engineering and business schools.
periods, such as contemporary and classical, between composers, and between works. Thus, among works of music, the Well-Tempered Clavier and the Concerto for the Left Hand (which, as we shall see, are distinguished by the modes of acquisition and consumption which they presuppose), are opposed to the Strauss waltzes and the Sabre Dance, pieces which are devalued either by belonging to a lower genre ('light music') or by their popularization (since the dialectic of distinction and pretension designates as devalued 'middle-brow' art those legitimate works which become 'popularized') just as in the world of song, Brassens and Ferré are opposed to Guéty and Petula Clark, these differences corresponding in each case to differences in educational capital (see Table 1).

Table 1. Preference for songs and music

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class position</th>
<th>Educational qualification</th>
<th>Guéty</th>
<th>P. Clark</th>
<th>Brassens</th>
<th>Ferré</th>
<th>Blue Danube</th>
<th>Sabre Dance</th>
<th>Well-tempered Clavier</th>
<th>Concerto for the Left Hand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working class</td>
<td>without diploma, CEP, CAP</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BECP and further</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>without diploma, CEP, CAP</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BECP and further of which</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BECP, bac</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>études supérieures</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper class</td>
<td>without diploma, CEP, CAP</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BECP and further of which</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BECP, bac</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>higher education of which</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>petite école</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>licence</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>agrég., grande école</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How to read the table: out of 100 individuals belonging to the working class, possessing a CEP, a CAP or no diploma, 33 mention Guéty, 31 Petula Clark among their three favourite singers (from a list of 12 singers), 65 mention the Blue Danube and 28 the Sabre Dance among their three favourite pieces of music (from a list of 16).

Thus, of all the objects offered for consumers' choice, there are none more classifying than legitimate works of art, which, while distinctive in general, enable the production of distinctions ad infinitum by playing on divisions and sub-divisions into genres, periods, styles, authors, etc. Within the universe of particular tastes which can be recreated by successive divisions, it is thus possible, still keeping to the major oppositions, to distinguish three zones of taste which roughly correspond to educational

3 The most perfect manifestation of this effect in the world of legitimate music is the fate of Albinoni's 'famous Adagio' (as the record-sleeves call it), or of so many works of Vivaldi which in less than 20 years have fallen from the prestigious status of musicologists' discoveries to the status of jingles on popular radio stations and petty-bourgeois record-players.

4 In fact, the weight of the secondary factors—composition of the capital, volume of the inherited cultural capital (or social trajectory) age, place of residence—varies with the works. Thus, as one moves towards the works that are least legitimate (at the moment in question) factors such as age become increasingly important; in the case of Rhapsody in Blue or the Hungarian Rhapsody, there is a closer correlation with age than with education, father's occupational category, sex, or place of residence.
levels and social classes (1) **Legitimate taste**, i.e. the taste for legitimate works, here represented by the Well-Tempered Clavier (histogram no. 1), the Art of Fugue or the Concerto for the Left Hand, or, in painting, Brueghel or Goya, which the most self-assured aesthetes can combine with the most legitimate of the arts in the process of legitimation—cinema, jazz or even the song (here, for example, Léo Ferré, Jacques Douai)—increases with educational level and is highest in those fractions of the dominant class that are richest in educational capital. (2) **Middle-brow taste** which brings together the minor works of the major arts, in this case Rhapsody in Blue (histogram no. 2), the Hungarian Rhapsody, or, in painting, Utrillo, Buffet or even Renoir, and the major works of the minor arts, such as Jacques Brel and Gilbert Bécaud in the art of song, is more common in the lower-middle classes (*classes moyennes*) than in the working classes (*classes populaires*) or in the ‘intellectual’ fractions of the dominant class. (3) Finally, **popular taste**, represented here by the choice of works of so-called ‘light’ music or classical music devalued by popularization, such as the Blue Danube (histogram no. 3), La Traviata or *l’Arlesienne*, and especially songs totally devoid of artistic ambition or pretension such as those of Mariano, Guéty or Petula Clark, is most frequent among the working classes and varies in inverse ratio to educational capital (which explains why it is rather more common among industrial and commercial
employers or even senior executives than among primary teachers and cultural intermediaries.  

En-titlement

Knowing the relationship which exists between cultural capital inherited from the family and academic capital, by virtue of the logic of the transmission of cultural capital and the functioning of the educational system, we are unable to impute the strong correlation observed between competence in music or painting (and the practice it presupposes and makes possible) and academic capital solely to the operation of the educational system (still less to the specifically artistic education it is supposed to give, which is clearly almost non-existent). Academic capital is in fact the guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the family and cultural transmission by the school (the efficiency of which depends on the amount of cultural capital directly inherited from the family). Through its value-inculcating and value-imposing operations, the school also helps (to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the initial disposition, i.e. class of origin) to form a general transposable disposition towards legitimate culture which is first acquired with respect to scholastically recognized knowledge and practices but tends to be applied beyond the bounds of the curriculum, taking the form of a 'disinterested' propensity to accumulate experience and knowledge which may not be directly profitable on the academic market.

So there is nothing paradoxical in the fact that in its ends and means the educational system defines the enterprise of legitimate self-teaching which the acquisition of 'general culture' presupposes, an enterprise that is ever more strongly demanded as one rises in the educational hierarchy (between sections, disciplines and specialities, etc., or between levels). The essentially contradictory phrase 'legitimate self-teaching' is intended to indicate the difference in kind between the highly valued 'extra-curricular' culture of the holder of academic qualifications and the illegitimate extra-curricular culture of the autodidact. The reader of Science et Vie who talks about the genetic code or the incest taboo exposes himself to ridicule as soon as he ventures outside the circle of his peers, whereas Lévi-Strauss or Monod can only derive additional prestige from his excursions into the field of music or philosophy. Illegitimate extra-curricular culture, whether it be the knowledge accumulated by the self-taught or 'experience' acquired in and through practice, outside the control of the institution specifically mandated to inculcate it and officially sanction its acquisition, like the art of cooking or herbal medicine, craftsmen's skills or the stand-in's irreplaceable knowledge, is only valorized to the strict extent of its technical efficiency,

5 The three profiles presented here are perfectly typical of those that are found when one draws a graph of the distribution of a whole set of choices characteristic of different class fractions (arranged in a hierarchy, within each class, according to educational capital). The first one (The Well-tempered Clavier) reappears in the case of all the authors or works named above, and also for 'reading philosophical essays' and 'visiting museums', etc.; the second (Rhapsody in Blue) characterizes, in addition to all the works and authors mentioned in the text (plus The Twilight of the Gods), 'photography', 'comfortable, cosy home', etc.; and the third (Blue Danube) is equally valid for 'romantic stories' and 'neat, clean home', etc.

6 The educational system defines non-curricular general culture (la culture 'libre'), negatively at least, by delimiting within the dominant culture the area of what it puts into its syllabuses and controls by its examinations. It has been shown that the most 'scholastic' cultural objects are those taught and required at the lowest levels of schooling (the extreme form of the 'scholastic' being the 'elementary') and that the educational system sets an increasingly high value on 'general' culture and increasingly refuses 'scholastic' measurements of culture (such as direct, closed questions on authors, dates and events) as one moves towards the highest levels of the system.
without any social added-value, and is exposed to legal sanctions (like the illegal practice of medicine) whenever it emerges from the domestic universe to compete with authorized competences.

Thus, it is written into the tacit definition of the academic qualification formally guaranteeing a specific competence (e.g. an engineering diploma) that it really guarantees possession of a 'general culture' whose breadth is proportionate to the prestige of the qualification; and, conversely, that no real guarantee may be sought of what it guarantees formally and really or, to put it another way, of the extent to which it guarantees what it guarantees. This effect of symbolic imposition is most intense in the case of the diplomas consecrating the cultural élite. The qualifications awarded by the French grandes écoles guarantee, without any other guarantee, a competence extending far beyond what they are supposed to guarantee. This is by virtue of a clause which, though tacit, is firstly binding on the qualification-holders themselves, who are called upon really to procure the attributes assigned to them by status.

This process occurs at all stages of schooling, through the manipulation of aspirations and demands—in other words, of self-image and self-esteem—which the educational system carries out by channelling pupils towards prestigious or devalued positions implying or excluding legitimate practice. The effect of 'allocation' i.e. assignment to a section, a discipline (philosophy or geography, mathematics or geology, to take the extremes), or an institution (a grande école that is more or less grande, or a faculty), mainly operates through the social image of the position in question and the prospects objectively inscribed in it, among the foremost of which are a certain type of cultural accumulation and a certain image of cultural accomplishment. The official differences produced by academic classifications tend to produce (or reinforce) real differences by inducing in the classified individuals a collectively recognized and supported belief in the differences, thus producing behaviours that are intended to bring real being into line with official being. Activities as alien to the explicit demands of the institution as keeping a diary, wearing heavy make-up, theatre-going or going dancing, writing poems or playing rugby can thus find themselves inscribed in the position allotted within the institution as a tacit demand constantly underlined by various mediations. Among the most important of these are teachers' conscious or unconscious expectations and peer-group pressure, whose ethical orientation is itself defined by the class values brought into and reinforced by the institution. This allocation effect, and the status assignment it entails, doubtless play a major rôle in the fact that the educational institution succeeds in imposing cultural practices that it does not teach and does not even explicitly demand but which belong to the attributes statutorily attached to the position it assigns, the qualifications it awards and the social positions to which the latter give access.

This logic doubtless helps to explain how the legitimate disposition that is acquired by frequenting a particular class of works, namely the literary and philosophical

7 This legitimate or soon-to-be legitimate culture, in the form of practical and conscious mastery of the means of symbolic appropriation of legitimate or soon-to-be legitimate works, which characterizes the 'cultivated man' (according to the dominant definition at a given moment), is what the questionnaire sought to measure.

8 This effect of status ascription is also largely responsible for the differences observed between the sexes (especially in the working and lower-middle classes) in all the areas which are statutorily assigned to men, such as the legitimate culture (especially the most typically masculine regions of that culture, such as history or science) and, above all, politics.

9 One of the most obvious 'advantages' which strong educational capital gives in intellectual or scientific competition is high self-esteem and high ambition, which may be manifested in the breadth of the problems tackled (more 'theoretical', for example), elevation of style, etc. (see Bourdieu, 1975d).
works recognized by the academic canon, comes to be extended to other, less legitimate works, such as avant-garde literature, or to areas enjoying less academic recognition, such as the cinema. The generalizing tendency is inscribed in the very principle of the disposition to *recognise* legitimate works, a propensity and capacity to recognize their legitimacy and perceive them as worthy of admiration in themselves which is inseparable from the capacity to recognize in them something already known, i.e. the stylistic traits appropriate to characterize them in their singularity ('it's a Rembrandt' or even 'it's the Helmeted Man') or as belonging to a class of works ('it's Impressionist'). This explains why the propensity and capacity to accumulate 'gratuitous' knowledge such as the names of film directors are more closely and exclusively linked to educational capital than is mere cinema-going, which is more dependent on income, place of residence and age.

Cinema-going, measured by the number of films seen among the twenty films mentioned, is lower among the less-educated than the more highly educated, but also lower among provincials (in Lille) than among Parisians, among low-income than among high-income groups, and among old than among young people. And the same relationships are found in the surveys by the Centre d'études des supports de publicité. The proportion who say they have been to the cinema at least once in the previous week (a more reliable indicator of behaviour than a question on cinema-going in the course of the year, for which the tendency to overstate is particularly strong) is rather greater among men than women (7.8% compared to 5.3%), greater in the Paris area (10.9%) than in towns of over 100,000 people (7.7%) or in rural areas (3.6%), greater among senior executives and members of the professions (11.1%) than among junior executives (9.5%), white-collar workers (9.7%), skilled blue-collar workers and foremen (7.3%), semi-skilled workers (6.3%), small employers (5.2%) and farmers (2.6%). But the greatest contrasts are between the youngest (22.4% of the 21-24 year olds had been to the cinema at least once in the previous week) and the oldest (only 3.2% of the 35 to 49 year olds, 1.7% of the 50 to 64 year olds and 1.1% of the over-65s) and between the most and least highly educated (18.2% of those who had been through higher education, 9.5% of those who had had secondary education, and 2.2% of those who had had only primary education or none at all had been to the cinema in the previous week) (cf. Centre d'études des supports de publicité, *Étude sur l'audience du cinéma*, Paris, 1975, XVI).

Knowledge of directors is much more closely linked to cultural capital than is mere cinema-going. Only 5% of the interviewees who had an elementary school diploma could name at least four directors (from a list of twenty films) compared to 10% of holders of the BEPC or the baccalauréat and 22% of those who had had higher education, whereas the proportion in each category who had seen at least four of the twenty films was 22, 33 and 40% respectively. Thus, although film viewing also varies with educational capital (less so, however, than visits to museums and concerts), it seems that differences in consumption are not sufficient to explain the differences in knowledge of directors between holders of different qualifications. This conclusion would probably also hold good for jazz, strip cartoons, detective stories or science fiction, now that these genres have begun to achieve cultural consecration. An

10 At equal levels, knowledge of film directors is considerably stronger in Paris than in Lille, and the further one moves from the most scholastic and most legitimate areas, the greater the gap between the Parisians and the provincials. In order to explain this, it is no doubt necessary to invoke the constant reinforcements the cultivated disposition derives from all that is called the 'cultural atmosphere', i.e. all the incitements provided by a peer group whose social composition and cultural level is defined by its place of residence and also, inextricably associated with this, from the range of cultural goods on offer.
additional proof: while increasing slightly with level of education (from 13% for the least educated to 18% for those with secondary education and 23% for the most qualified), knowledge of actors varies mainly—and considerably—with the number of films seen. This awareness, like knowledge of the slightest events in the lives of TV personalities, presupposes a disposition closer to that required by the acquisition of ordinary knowledge about everyday things and people than to the legitimate disposition. And indeed, these least-educated regular cinema-goers know as many actors’ names as the most highly-educated. By contrast, although, at equivalent levels of education, knowledge of directors increases with number of films seen, in this area assiduous cinema-going does not compensate for absence of educational capital. Forty-five per cent of the CEP-holders who had seen at least four of the films mentioned could not name a single director compared to 27.5% of those with a BEPC or the baccalauréat and 13% of those who had been through higher education.

Such competence is not necessarily acquired by means of the ‘scholastic’ labours in which some ‘cinephiles’ or ‘jazzophiles’ indulge (e.g. transcribing film credits onto catalogue cards). Most often it results from the unintentional learning made possible by a disposition acquired through domestic or scholastic acquisition of legitimate culture. This transposable disposition, armed with a set of perceptual and evaluative schemes that are available for general application, inclines its owner towards other cultural experiences and enables him or her to perceive, classify and memorize them differently. Where some only see ‘a Western starring Burt Lancaster,’ others ‘discover an early John Sturges’ or ‘the latest Peckinpah’. In identifying what is worthy of being seen and the right way to see it they are aided by their whole social group (which guides and reminds them with its ‘have you seen...?’ and ‘you must see...’) and by the whole corporation of critics mandated by the group to produce legitimate classifications and the discourse necessarily accompanying any artistic enjoyment worthy of the name.

It is possible to explain in such terms why cultural practices which schools do not teach and never explicitly demand vary in such close relation to educational qualifications (it being understood, of course, that we are provisionally suspending the distinction between the school’s rôle in the correlation observed and that of the other socializing agencies, in particular the family). But the fact that educational qualifications function as a condition of entry to the universe of legitimate culture cannot be fully explained without taking into account another, still more hidden, effect which

11 Among those who have seen at least four of the films mentioned, 45% of those who have had only primary education are able to name four actors, as against 35% of those who have had secondary education and 47% of those who have had some higher education. Interest in actors is greatest among office workers: on average they name 2.8 actors and one director, whereas the craftsmen and small shopkeepers, skilled workers and foremen name, on average, only 0.8 actors and 0.3 directors. (The secretaries and junior commercial executives, who also know a large number of actors—average 2.4—are more interested in directors—average 1.4—and those in the social and medical services even name more directors—1.7—than actors—1.4). The reading of sensational weeklies (e.g. *Ici Paris*) which give information about the lives of stars is a product of a similar disposition to interest in actors; it is more frequent among women than men (10.8% have read *Ici Paris* in the last week, compared to 9.3% of the men), among skilled workers and foremen (14.5%), semi-skilled workers (13.6%), or office-workers (10.3%) than among junior executives (8.6%) and especially senior executives and members of the professions (3.8%). (CESP 1975, Part I, p. 242).

12 It is among the petty-bourgeoisie endowed with cultural capital that one finds most of the devoted ‘cinephiles’ whose knowledge of directors and actors extends beyond their direct experience of the corresponding films. Thirty-one per cent of the office workers name actors in films they have not seen and 32% of those working in the medical and social services name the directors of films they have not seen. (No craftsman or small shopkeeper is able to do this and only 7% of the skilled workers and foremen name actors in films they have not seen.)
the educational system, again reinforcing the work of the bourgeois family, exerts through the very conditions within which it inculcates. The educational qualification designates certain conditions of existence, those which constitute the precondition for obtaining the qualification and also for the aesthetic disposition, the most rigorously demanded of all the terms of entry which the world of legitimate culture (always tacitly) imposes. Anticipating what will be demonstrated later, we may posit, in broad terms, that it is because they are linked either to a bourgeois origin or to the quasi-bourgeois mode of existence presupposed by prolonged schooling, or (most often) to both of these combined, that educational qualifications come to be seen as a guarantee of the capacity to adopt the aesthetic disposition.

The aesthetic disposition

Any legitimate work tends in fact to impose the norms of its own perception and tacitly defines as the only legitimate mode of perception the one which brings into play a certain disposition and a certain competence. Recognizing this fact does not mean that we are constituting a particular mode of perception as an essence, thereby falling into the illusion which is the basis of recognition of artistic legitimacy. It does mean that we take note of the fact that all agents, whether they like it or not, whether or not they have the means of conforming to them, find themselves objectively measured by those norms. At the same time it becomes possible to establish whether these dispositions and competences are gifts of nature, as the charismatic ideology of the relation to the work of art would have it, or products of learning, and to bring to light the hidden conditions of the miracle of the unequal class distribution of the capacity for inspired encounters with works of art and high culture in general.

Every essentialist analysis of the aesthetic disposition, the only socially accepted 'right' way of approaching the objects socially designated as works of art, i.e. as both demanding and deserving to be approached with a specifically aesthetic intention capable of recognizing and constituting them as works of art, is bound to fail. Refusing to take account of the collective and individual genesis of this product of history which must be endlessly re-produced by education, it is unable to reconstruct its sole raison d'être, i.e. the historical reason which underlies the arbitrary necessity of the institution. If the work of art is indeed, as Panofsky says, that which 'demands to be experienced aesthetically', and if any object, natural or artificial, can be perceived aesthetically, how can one escape the conclusion that it is the aesthetic intention which 'makes' the work of art, or, to transpose a formula of Saussure's, that it is the aesthetic point of view that creates the aesthetic object? To get out of this vicious circle, Panofsky has to endow the work of art with an 'intention', in the Scholastic sense. A purely 'practical' perception contradicts this objective intention, just as an aesthetic perception would in a sense be a practical negation of the objective intention of a signal, a red light for example, which requires a 'practical' response, braking. Thus, within the class of worked-upon objects, themselves defined in opposition to natural objects, the class of art objects would be defined by the fact that it demands to be perceived aesthetically, i.e. in terms of form rather than function. But how can such a definition be made operational? Panofsky himself observes that it is virtually impossible to determine scientifically at what moment a worked-upon object becomes an art object, i.e. at what moment form takes over from function:

If I write to a friend to invite him to dinner, my letter is primarily a communication. But the more I shift the emphasis to the form of my script, the more nearly does it become a work of
calligraphy; and the more I emphasize the form of my language . . . the more nearly does it become a work of literature or poetry (Panofsky 1955, p. 12).

Does this mean that the demarcation line between the world of technical objects and the world of aesthetic objects depends on the 'intention' of the producer of those objects? In fact, this 'intention' is itself the product of the social norms and conventions which combine to define the always uncertain and historically changing frontier between simple technical objects and *objets d'art*:

'Classical taste,' Panofsky observes, 'demanded that private letters, legal speeches and the shields of heroes should be "artistic" . . . while modern taste demands that architecture and ashtrays should be "functional"' (Panofsky 1955, p. 13).

But the apprehension and appreciation of the work also depend on the beholder's intention, which is itself a function of the conventional norms governing the relation to the work of art in a certain historical and social situation and also of the beholder's capacity to conform to those norms, i.e. his or her artistic training. To break out of this circle one only has to observe that the ideal of 'pure' perception of a work of art *qua* work of art is the product of the enunciation and systematization of the principles of specifically aesthetic legitimacy which accompany the constituting of a relatively autonomous artistic field. The aesthetic mode of perception in the 'pure' form which it has now assumed corresponds to a particular state of the mode of artistic production. An art which, like all post-impressionist painting for example, is the product of an artistic intention which asserts the absolute primacy of form over function, of the mode of representation over the object represented, *categorically* demands a purely aesthetic disposition which earlier art demanded only conditionally. The demiurgic ambition of the artist, capable of applying to *any* object the pure intention of artistic research which is an end in itself, calls for unlimited receptiveness on the part of an aesthete capable of applying the specifically aesthetic intention to any object, whether or not it has been produced with aesthetic intention.

This demand is objectified in the art museum; there the aesthetic disposition becomes an institution. Nothing more totally manifests and achieves the autonomizing of aesthetic activity *vis-à-vis* extra-aesthetic interests or functions than the art museum's juxtaposition of works. Though originally subordinated to quite different or even incompatible functions (crucifix and fetish, Pietà and still life), they tacitly demand attention to form rather than function, technique rather than theme, and, being constructed in styles that are mutually exclusive but all equally necessary, they are a practical challenge to the expectation of realistic representation as defined by the arbitrary canons of a familiar aesthetic, and so lead naturally from stylistic relativism to the neutralization of the very function of representation. Objects previously treated as collectors' curios or historical and ethnographic documents have acceded to the status of works of art, thereby materializing the omnipotence of the aesthetic gaze and making it difficult to ignore the fact that—if it is not to be merely an arbitrary and therefore suspect affirmation of this absolute power—artistic contemplation now has to include a degree of erudition which is liable to damage the illusion of immediate illumination which is an essential element of pure pleasure.

**Pure taste and 'barbarous' taste**

In short, never has more been demanded of the spectator, who is now required to reproduce the original operation whereby the artist (with the complicity of his whole work)
intellectual field) produced this new fetish. But never perhaps has he been given so much in return. The naive exhibitionism of ‘conspicuous consumption’, which seeks distinction in the crude display of ill-mastered luxury, is nothing compared to the unique capacity of the pure gaze, a quasi-creative power which sets the aesthete from the common herd by a radical difference which seems to be inscribed in ‘persons’. One only has to read Ortega y Gasset to see the reinforcement the charismatic ideology derives from modern art, which is ‘essentially unpopular, indeed, anti-popular’ and from the ‘curious sociological effect’ it produces by dividing the public into two ‘antagonistic castes’ ‘those who understand and those who do not’. ‘This implies’, Ortega goes on, ‘that some possess an organ of understanding which others have been denied; that these are two distinct varieties of the human species. The new art is not for everyone, like Romantic art, but destined for an especially gifted minority.’ And he ascribes to the ‘humiliation’ and ‘obscure sense of inferiority’ inspired by ‘this art of privilege, sensuous nobility, instinctive aristocracy’, the irritation it arouses in the mass, ‘unworthy of artistic sacraments’:

For a century and a half, the ‘people’, the mass, claimed to be the whole of society. The music of Stravinsky or the plays of Pirandello have the sociological power of obliging them to see themselves as they are, as the ‘common people’, a mere ingredient among others in the social structure, the inert material of the historical process, a secondary factor in the spiritual cosmos. By contrast, the young art helps the ‘best’ to know and recognize one another in the greyness of the multitude and to learn their mission, which is to be few in number and to have to fight against the multitude (Ortega y Gasset, 1976, pp. 15-17).

And to show that the self-legitimating imagination of the ‘happy few’ has no limits, one only has to quote a recent text by Suzanne Langer, who is presented as ‘one of the world’s most influential philosophers’:

In the past, the masses did not have access to art; music, painting, and even books, were pleasures reserved for the rich. It might have been supposed that the poor, the ‘common people’, would have enjoyed them equally, if they had had the chance. But now that everyone can read, go to museums, listen to great music, at least on the radio, the judgement of the masses about these things has become a reality and through this it has become clear that great art is not a direct sensuous pleasure. Otherwise, like cookies or cocktails, it would flatter uneducated taste as much as cultured taste (Langer, 1968, p. 183).

It should not be thought that the relationship of distinction (which may or may not imply the conscious intention of distinguishing oneself from common people) is only an incidental component in the aesthetic disposition. The pure gaze implies a break with the ordinary attitude towards the world which, as such, is a social break. We can agree with Ortega y Gasset when he attributes to modern art—which merely takes to its extreme conclusions an intention implicit in art since the Renaissance—a systematic refusal of all that is ‘human’, by which he means the passions, emotions and feelings which ordinary people put into their ordinary existence and consequently all the themes and objects capable of evoking them:

‘People like a play when they are able to take an interest in the human destinies put before them’, in which ‘they participate as if they were real-life events’ (Ortega y Gasset, 1975, pp. 18–19).

Rejecting the ‘human’ clearly means rejecting what is generic, i.e. common, ‘easy’, and immediately accessible, starting with everything that reduces the aesthetic animal to

13 For a more extensive analysis of the opposition between the specifically aesthetic disposition and the ‘practical’ disposition, and of the collective and individual genesis of the ‘pure’ disposition which genesis-amnesia tends to constitute as ‘natural’, see Bourdieu 1971b and 1975b. For an analysis of the aesthetic illusio and of the collusio which produces it, see ‘The Production of Belief’.

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pure and simple animality, to palpable pleasure or sensual desire. The interest in the content of the representation which leads people to call 'beautiful' the representation of beautiful things, especially those which speak most immediately to the senses and the sensibility, is rejected in favour of the indifference and distance which refuse to subordinate judgment of the representation to the nature of the object represented. It can be seen that it is not so easy to describe the 'pure' gaze without also describing the naive gaze which it defines itself against, and vice versa; and that there is no neutral, impartial, 'pure' description of either of these opposing visions (which does not mean that one has to subscribe to aesthetic relativism, when it is so obvious that the 'popular aesthetic' is defined in relation to 'high' aesthetics and that reference to legitimate art and its negative judgment on 'popular' taste never ceases to haunt popular experience of beauty). Refusal or privation? It is as dangerous to attribute the coherence of a systematic aesthetic to the objectively aesthetic commitments of ordinary people as it is to adopt, albeit unconsciously, the strictly negative conception of ordinary vision which is the basis of every 'high' aesthetic.

The popular 'aesthetic'

Everything takes place as if the popular 'aesthetic' were based on the affirmation of continuity between art and life, which implies the subordination of form to function, or, one might say, on refusing the refusal which is the starting point of the high aesthetic, i.e. the clear-cut separation of ordinary dispositions from the specifically aesthetic disposition. The hostility of the working class and of the middle-class fractions least rich in cultural capital towards every kind of formal experimentation asserts itself both in the theatre and in painting, or, still more clearly because they have less legitimacy, in photography and the cinema. In the theatre as in the cinema, the popular audience delights in plots that proceed logically and chronologically towards a happy end, and 'identifies' better with simply drawn situations and characters than with ambiguous and symbolic figures and actions or the enigmatic problems of the theatre of cruelty, not to mention the suspended animation of Beckettian heroes or the bland absurdities of Pinteresque dialogue. Their reluctance and refusal springs not just from lack of familiarity but from a deep-rooted demand for participation, which formal experiment systematically disappoints, especially when, refusing to offer the 'vulgar' attractions of an art of illusion, the theatrical fiction denounces itself, as in all forms of 'theatre within the theatre'. Pirandello supplies the paradigm here, in plays in which the actors are actors unable to act—*Six Characters in Search of an Author*, *Comme ci (ou comme ça)* or *Ce soir on improvise*—and Genet supplies the formula in the Prologue to *The Blacks*:

We shall have the politeness, which you have taught us, to make communication impossible. The distance initially between us we shall increase, by our splendid gestures, our manners and our insolence, for we are also actors.

The desire to enter into the game, identifying with the characters' joys and sufferings, worrying about their fate, espousing their hopes and ideals, living their life, is based on a form of investment, a sort of deliberate 'naïvety', ingenuousness, good-natured

14 The 'cultivated' spectator's concern with distinction is paralleled by the artist's concern (which grows with the autonomy of the field of production) to assert his autonomy vis-à-vis external demands (of which commissions are the most visible form) and to give priority to form, over which he has full control, rather than function, which leads him, through art for art's sake, i.e. art for artists, to an art of pure form.
credulity (‘we’re here to enjoy ourselves’) which tends to accept formal experiments and specifically artistic effects only to the extent that they can be forgotten and do not get in the way of the substance of the work.

The cultural gulf which associates each class of works with its public means that it is not easy to obtain working-class people’s first-hand judgments on formalist innovations in modern art. However, television, which brings certain performances of ‘high’ art into the home, or certain cultural institutions (such as the Beaubourg Centre or the Maisons de la Culture) which briefly bring a working-class public into contact with high art and sometimes avant-garde works, create what are virtually experimental situations, neither more nor less artificial or unreal than those produced by any survey on legitimate culture in a working-class milieu. One then observes the confusion, sometimes almost a sort of panic mingled with revolt, that is induced by some exhibits—I am thinking of Ben’s heap of coal, on view in Beaubourg shortly after it opened—whose parodic intention, entirely defined in terms of an artistic field and its relatively autonomous history, is seen as a sort of aggression, an affront to common sense and sensible people. Likewise, when formal experimentation insinuates itself into their familiar entertainments (e.g. TV variety shows with special effects, à la Averty), working-class viewers protest, not only because they do not feel the need for these fancy games, but because they sometimes understand that they derive their necessity from the logic of a field of production which excludes them precisely by these games: ‘I don’t like those cut-up things at all, where you see a head, then a nose, then a leg. . . . First you see a singer all drawn out, three metres tall, then the next minute he’s got arms two metres long. Do you find that funny? Oh, I just don’t like it, it’s stupid, I don’t see the point of distorting things’ (baker, Grenoble).

Formal experiment—which, in literature or the theatre, leads to obscurity—is, in the eyes of the working-class public, one sign of what is sometimes felt to be a desire to keep the uninitiated at arm’s length, or, as one respondent said about certain cultural programmes on TV, to speak to other initiates ‘over the heads of the audience’.15 It is part of the paraphernalia which always announces the sacred character, separate and separating, of high culture—the icy solemnity of the great museums, the grandiose luxury of the opera-houses and major theatres, the décors and decorum of concert-halls.16 Everything takes place as if the working-class audience vaguely grasped what is implied in conspicuous formality, both in art and in life, i.e. a sort of censorship of the expressive content, which explodes in the expressiveness of popular language, and, by the same token, a distancing, inherent in the calculated coldness of all formal exploration, a refusal to communicate concealed in the heart of the communication itself, both in an art which takes back and refuses what it seems to deliver, and in

15 A number of surveys confirm this hostility towards any kind of formal experiment. One study found a large number of viewers disconcerted by Les Perses, a stylized production which was difficult to follow because of the absence of dialogue and of a visible plot (Les Téléspectateurs en 1967, Rapport des études de marché de l’ORTF, I, pp. 69 ff.). Another, which compares reactions to the ‘UNICEF gala’, classical in style, and the less traditional ‘Allegro’, establishes that the working-class audience regard unusual camera angles and stylized décor as an impoverishment of reality and often perceive over-exposed shots as technical failures; they applaud what they call ‘atmosphere’, i.e. a certain quality of the relationship between the audience and the performers, and deplore the absence of a compere as a lack of ‘warmth’ (ibid., p. 78).

16 The department store is, in a sense, the poor-man’s gallery: not only because it presents objects which belong to the familiar world, whose use is known, which could be inserted into the everyday décor, which can be named and judged with everyday words (warm/cold; plain/fancy; gaudy/dull; comfortable/austere, etc.); but more especially because, there, people do not feel themselves measured against transcendent norms, i.e. the principles of the life-style of a supposedly higher class, but feel free to judge freely, in the name of the legitimate arbitrariness of tastes and colours.
bourgeois politeness, whose impeccable formalism is a permanent warning against the temptation of familiarity. Conversely, popular entertainment secures the spectator's participation in the show and collective participation in a festivity. If circus or melodrama (which are recreated by some sporting spectacles such as wrestling and, to a lesser extent, boxing and all forms of team games, such as those which have been televised) are more 'popular' than entertainments like dancing or theatre, this is not merely because, being less formalized (as is seen, for example, by comparing acrobatics with dancing) and less euphemized, they offer more direct, more immediate satisfactions. It is also because, through the collective gatherings they give rise to and the array of spectacular delights they offer (I am thinking also of the music-hall, the operetta or the big feature film)—fabulous décors, glittering costumes, exciting music, lively action, enthusiastic actors—like all forms of the comic and especially those working through satire or parody of the 'great' (mimics, chansonniers, etc.), they satisfy the taste for and sense of revelry, the free speaking and hearty laughter which liberate by setting the social world head over heels, overturning conventions and proprieties.

Aesthetic distanciation

This is the very opposite of the detachment of the aesthete, who, as is seen when he appropriates one of the objects of popular taste (e.g. westerns or strip cartoons), introduces a distance, a gap—the measure of his distant distinction—vis-à-vis 'first-degree' perception, by displacing the interest from the 'content', characters, plot, etc., to the form, to the specifically artistic effects which are only appreciated relationally, through a comparison with other works which is incompatible with immersion in the singularity of the work immediately given. Detachment, disinterestedness, indifference, which aesthetic theory has so often presented as the only way to recognize the work of art for what it is, autonomous, selbständig, that one ends up forgetting that they really mean disinvestment, detachment, indifference, in other words the refusal to invest oneself and take things seriously. Worldly-wise readers of Rousseau's Lettre sur les spectacles,17 who have long been aware that there is nothing more naive and vulgar than to invest too much passion in the things of the mind or to expect too much seriousness of them, tending to assume that intellectual creativity is opposed to moral integrity or political consistency, have no answer to Virginia Woolf when she criticizes the novels of Wells, Galsworthy and Bennett because 'they leave a strange feeling of incompleteness and dissatisfaction' and give the feeling that it is essential to 'do something, join an association, or, still more desperate, sign a cheque', in contrast to works like Tristram Shandy or Pride and Prejudice, which, being perfectly 'self-contained', 'in no way inspire the desire to do something, except, of course, to read the book again and understand it better (Woolf, 1948, p. 70).

But the refusal of any sort of involvement through a 'vulgar' surrender to easy seduction and collective enthusiasm, which is, indirectly at least, the origin of the taste for formal experiments and object-less representations, is perhaps most clearly seen in reactions to paintings. Thus we find that the higher the level of education,18

17 Garat, in his Mémoire sur M. Suard, tells us that Rousseau's Discours sur le rétablissement des lettres et des arts provoked 'a sort of terror' in a readership accustomed to take nothing seriously.

18 The capacity to designate unremarkable objects as suitable for being transfigured by the act of artistic promotion performed by photography, the most accessible of the means of artistic production, varies in exactly the same way as knowledge of directors. This is understandable since in both cases we have a relatively scholastic measurement applied to a competence more remote from formal education than the competence implied in the expression of preference in music or painting.
the greater is the proportion of the interviewees who, when asked whether a series of objects would make beautiful photographs, refuse the ordinary objects of popular admiration—a first communion, a sunset or a landscape—as 'vulgar' or 'ugly', or reject them as 'trivial', silly, a bit 'wet', or, in Ortega y Gasset's terms, naively 'human'; and the greater is the proportion who assert the autonomy of the representation with respect to the thing represented by declaring that a beautiful photograph, and a fortiori a beautiful painting, can be made from objects socially designated as meaningless—a metal frame, the bark of a tree, and especially cabbages, a trivial object par excellence—or ugly and repulsive—such as a car crash, a butcher's stall (chosen for the Rembrandt allusion) or a snake (for the Boileau reference)—or misplaced—e.g. a pregnant woman (see Tables 2 and 3).

Since it was not possible to set up a genuine experimental situation, we collected the interviewees' statements about the things they consider 'photographable' and which therefore seem to them capable of being looked at aesthetically (as opposed to things excluded on account of their triviality or ugliness, or for ethical reasons). The capacity to adopt the aesthetic attitude is thus measured by the gap (which, in a field of production which evolves through the dialectic of distinction, is also a time-lag, a backwardness) between what is constituted as an aesthetic object by the individual or group concerned and what is constituted aesthetically in a given state of the field of production by the holders of aesthetic legitimacy.

The following question was put to the interviewees: 'Given the following subjects, is a photographer more likely to make a beautiful, interesting, trivial or ugly photo: a landscape, a car crash, etc.? In the preliminary survey, the interviewees were shown actual photographs, mostly famous ones, of the objects which were merely named in the full-scale survey—pebbles, a pregnant woman, etc. The reactions evoked by the mere idea of the image were entirely consistent with those produced by the image itself (evidence that the value attributed to the image tends to correspond to the value attributed to the thing). Photographs were used partly to avoid the legitimacy-imposing effects of paintings and partly because photography is perceived as a more accessible practice, so that the judgments expressed were likely to be less unreal.

Although the test employed was designed to collect statements of artistic intention rather than to measure the ability to put the intention into practice in doing painting or photography or even in the perception of works of art, it makes it possible to identify the factors which determine the capacity to adopt the posture socially designated as specifically aesthetic. The statistics reveal the relationship between cultural capital and the negative and positive indices (refusal of 'wetness'; the capacity to valorize the trivial) of the aesthetic disposition (or, at least, the capacity to operate the arbitrary classification which, within the universe of worked-upon objects, distinguishes the objects socially designated as deserving and demanding an aesthetic approach which can recognize and constitute them as works of art). In addition, they show that the preferred objects of photography with aesthetic ambitions, e.g. the folk dance, the weaver, or the little girl with her cat—are in an intermediate position. The proportion

19 Factor analysis of judgments on 'photographable' objects reveals an opposition within each class between the fractions richest in cultural capital and poorest in economic capital and the fractions richest in economic capital and poorest in cultural capital. In the case of the dominant class, higher-education teachers and artistic producers (and, secondarily, secondary teachers and the professions) are opposed to industrial and commercial employers; private-sector executives and engineers are in an intermediate position. In the petty-bourgeoisie, the cultural intermediaries, distinctly separated from the closest fractions, the primary teachers, medical services and artistic craftsmen, are opposed to the small shopkeepers or craftsmen and the office workers.
The respondents had to answer the question: ‘Given the following subjects, is a photographer more likely to make a beautiful, interesting, trivial, or ugly photo: a landscape, a car crash, a little girl playing with a cat, a pregnant woman, a still life, a woman suckling a child, a metal frame, tramps quarrelling, cabbages, a sunset over the sea, a weaver at his loom, a folk-dance, a rope, a butcher’s stall, a famous monument, a scrap-yard, a first communion, a wounded man, a snake, an “old master”? ’

Table 2. Aesthetic disposition in relation to academic capital

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No reply or incoherent</th>
<th>Ugly</th>
<th>Trivial</th>
<th>Interesting</th>
<th>Beautiful</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Without diploma, CEP n = 314</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>45</td>
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<td>53</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
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<td>15.5</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25.5</td>
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<td><strong>Folk dancing</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>100</td>
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<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cabbages</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>48.5</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The respondents had to answer this question: ‘Given the following subjects, is a photographer more likely to make a beautiful, interesting, trivial, or ugly photo: a landscape, a car crash, a little girl playing with a cat, a pregnant woman, a still life, a woman suckling a child, a metal frame, tramps quarrelling, cabbages, a sunset over the sea, a weaver at his loom, a folk-dance, a rope, a butcher’s stall, a famous monument, a scrap-yard, a first communion, a wounded man, a snake, an “old master”? ’
Table 3. Aesthetic disposition in relation to class position and educational qualification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pregnant woman</th>
<th>Cabbages</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No reply or</td>
<td>Ugly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>without diploma</td>
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<td>0.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>class</td>
<td>BEPC and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. (n=143)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>without diploma</td>
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<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>class</td>
<td>BEPC and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. (n=935)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>39</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(n=46)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>without diploma</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>class</td>
<td>BEPC and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. (n=432)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>higher edn.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=325)</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snake</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working</td>
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<tr>
<td>without diploma</td>
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<tr>
<td>class</td>
<td>BEPC and</td>
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<td>B. (n=143)</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>class</td>
<td>BEPC and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. (n=335)</td>
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<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(n=46)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upper</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>without diploma</td>
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<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>class</td>
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<td>B. (n=432)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>higher edn.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=325)</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunset over sea</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

It is immediately clear that the category 'BEPC and above' (created for the sake of formal comparability) does not have the same content in the different social classes: the proportion of high qualifications within this category rises with social class. (This essentially explains why the rarest choices—'beautiful' for the cabbages or the snake, 'ugly' or 'trivial' for the sunset—become more numerous as one moves up the social scale. The apparent exception in the case of the pregnant woman is due to the absence of women, who are known to be more likely to accept this subject in this category.)
of respondents who consider that these things can make a beautiful photograph is highest at the levels of the CAP and BEPC, whereas at higher levels they tend to be judged uninteresting or trivial.\textsuperscript{20}

The statistics also show that women are much more likely than men to manifest their repugnance at repugnant, horrible or distasteful objects. Forty-four and a half per cent of them, as against 35\% of the men, consider that there can only be an ugly photograph of a wounded man, and there are similar differences for the butcher's stall (33.5 and 27\%), the snake (30.5 and 21.5\%) or the pregnant woman (45 and 33.5\%) whereas the gap disappears with the still life (6 and 6.5\%) and the cabbages (20.5 and 19\%). The traditional division of labour between the sexes assigns 'human' or 'humanitarian' tasks and feelings to women and more readily allows them effusions and tears, in the name of the opposition between reason and sensibility; men are, \textit{ex officio}, on the side of culture whereas women (like the working class) are cast on the side of nature. Women are therefore less imperatively required to censor and repress 'natural' feelings, as the aesthetic disposition demands (which indicates, incidentally, that, as will be shown subsequently, the refusal of nature, or rather the refusal to surrender to nature, which is the mark of dominant groups—who start with self-control—is the basis of the aesthetic disposition).\textsuperscript{21}

Thus, nothing more rigorously distinguishes the different classes than the disposition objectively demanded by the legitimate consumption of legitimate works, the aptitude for taking a specifically aesthetic point of view on objects already constituted aesthetically—and therefore put forward for the admiration of those who have learned to recognize the signs of the admirable—and the even rarer capacity to constitute aesthetically objects that are ordinary or even 'common' (because they are appropriated, aesthetically or otherwise, by the 'common people') or to apply the principles of a 'pure' aesthetic in the most everyday choices of everyday life, in cooking, dress or decoration, for example.

Statistical enquiry is indispensable in order to establish beyond dispute the social conditions of possibility (which will have to be made more explicit) of the 'pure' disposition. However, because it inevitably looks like a scholastic test intended to measure the respondents against a norm tacitly regarded as absolute, it may fail to capture the meanings which this disposition and the whole attitude to the world expressed in it have for the different social classes. What the logic of the test would lead one to describe as an incapacity (and that is what it is, from the standpoint of the norms defining legitimate perception of works of art) is also a refusal, which stems from the fact that the proportion of respondents who say a first communion can make a beautiful photo declines up to the level of the licence (basic university degree) and then rises up to the highest level. This is because a relatively large proportion of the highest-qualified subjects assert their aesthetic disposition by declaring that any object can be perceived aesthetically. Thus, in the dominant class, the proportion who declare that a sunset can make a beautiful photo is greatest at the lowest educational level, declines at intermediate levels (some higher education, a minor engineering school), and grows strongly again among those who have completed several years of higher education and who tend to consider that anything is suitable for beautiful photography.

20 The proportion of respondents who say a first communion can make a beautiful photo declines up to the level of the licence (basic university degree) and then rises up to the highest level. This is because a relatively large proportion of the highest-qualified subjects assert their aesthetic disposition by declaring that any object can be perceived aesthetically. Thus, in the dominant class, the proportion who declare that a sunset can make a beautiful photo is greatest at the lowest educational level, declines at intermediate levels (some higher education, a minor engineering school), and grows strongly again among those who have completed several years of higher education and who tend to consider that anything is suitable for beautiful photography.

21 Women's revulsion is expressed more overtly, at the expense of aesthetic neutralization, the more completely they are subject to the traditional model of the sexual division of labour, and, in other words, the weaker their cultural capital and the lower their position in the social hierarchy. Women in the new petty-bourgeoisie who, in general, make much greater concessions to affective considerations than the men in the same category (although they are equally likely to say that there can be a beautiful photograph of cabbages), much more rarely accept that a photograph of a pregnant woman can only be ugly than women in any other category (31.5\% of them, as against 70\% of the wives of industrial and commercial employers, 69.5\% of the wives of craftsmen and shopkeepers, 47.5\% of the wives of manual workers, office workers and junior executives). In doing so, they manifest simultaneously their aesthetic pretentions and their desire to be seen as 'liberated' from the ethical taboos imposed on their sex.
from a denunciation of the arbitrary or ostentations gratuitousness of stylistic exercises or purely formalistic experiments. A certain ‘aesthetic’, which maintains that a photograph is justified by the object photographed or by the possible use of the photographic image, is being brought into play when manual workers almost invariably reject photography for photography’s sake (e.g. the photo of pebbles) as useless, perverse or bourgeois: ‘A waste of film’, ‘They must have film to throw away’, ‘I tell you, there are some people who don’t know what to do with their time’, ‘Haven’t they got anything better to do with their time than photograph things like that?’ ‘That’s middle-class photography’.22

An anti-Kantian ‘aesthetic’

It is no accident that, when one sets about reconstructing its logic, the popular ‘aesthetic’ appears as the negative opposite of the Kantian aesthetic and that the popular ethos implicitly answers each proposition of the Analytic of the Beautiful with a thesis contradicting it. In order to apprehend what makes the specificity of aesthetic judgment, Kant ingeniously distinguished ‘that which pleases’ from ‘that which gives pleasure’, and, more generally, strove to separate ‘disinterestedness’, the sole guarantee of the specifically aesthetic quality of contemplation, from ‘the interest of the senses’, which defines ‘the agreeable’, and from ‘the interest of Reason’, which defines ‘the Good’. By contrast, working-class people, who expect every image to fulfil a function, if only that of a sign, refer, often explicitly, to norms of morality or agreeableness, in all their judgments. Thus the photograph of a dead soldier provokes judgments which, whether positive or negative, are always responses to the reality of the thing represented or to the functions the representation could serve, the horror of war or the denunciation of the horrors of war which the photograph is supposed to produce simply by showing that horror.23 Similarly, popular naturalism recognizes beauty in the image of a beautiful thing or, more rarely, in a beautiful image of a beautiful thing: ‘Now, that’s good, it’s almost symmetrical. Besides, she’s a beautiful woman. A beautiful woman always looks good in a photo.’ The Parisian manual worker echoes the plain-speaking of Hippias the Sophist:

I’ll tell him what beauty is and I’m not likely to be refuted by him! ‘The fact is, Socrates, to be frank, a beautiful woman, that’s what beauty is!

This ‘aesthetic’, which subordinates the form and the very existence of the image to its function, is necessarily pluralistic and conditional. The insistence with which the respondents point out the limits and conditions of validity of their judgments, distinguishing, for each photograph, the possible uses or audiences, or, more precisely, the possible use for each audience (‘as a news photo, it’s not bad’, ‘all right, if it’s for

22 It must never be forgotten that the working-class ‘aesthetic’ is a dominated ‘aesthetic’ which is constantly obliged to define itself in terms of the dominant aesthetics. The members of the working class, who can neither ignore the high-art aesthetic which denounces their own ‘aesthetic’, nor abandon their socially conditioned inclinations, but still less proclaim them and legitimate them, often experience their relationship to the aesthetic norms in a twofold and contradictory way. This is seen when some manual workers grant ‘pure’ photographs a purely verbal recognition (this is also the case with many petty-bourgeois and even some bourgeois, who as regards paintings, for example, differ from the working class mainly by what they know is the right thing to say or do or, still better, not to say): ‘It’s beautiful but it would never occur to me to take a thing like that’, ‘Yes, it’s very beautiful, but you have to like it, it’s not my style’.

23 The documents on which these analyses are based will be found in Bourdieu et al. (1965b) pp. 113–114.
showing to kids’) shows that they reject the idea that a photograph can please ‘universally’. ‘A photo of a pregnant woman is all right for me, not for other people’, said a white-collar worker, who has to use his concern for propriety as a way of expressing anxiety about what is ‘showable’ and therefore entitled to demand admiration. Because the image is always judged by reference to the function it fulfils for the person who looks at it or which he thinks it could fulfil for other classes of beholders, aesthetic judgment naturally takes the form of a hypothetical judgment implicitly based on recognition of ‘genres’, the perfection and scope of which are defined by a concept. Almost three-quarters of the judgments expressed begin with an ‘if’, and the effort to recognize culminates in classification into a genre, or, which amounts to the same thing, in the attribution of a social use, the different genres being defined in terms of their use and their users (‘it’s a publicity photo’, ‘it’s a pure document’, ‘it’s a laboratory photo’, ‘it’s a competition photo’, ‘it’s an educational photo’, etc.). And photographs of nudes are almost always received with comments that reduce them to the stereotype of their social function: ‘All right in Pigalle’, ‘it’s the sort of photos they keep under the counter’. It is not surprising that this ‘aesthetic’, which bases appreciation on informative, tangible or moral interest, can only refuse images of the trivial, or, which amounts to the same thing in terms of this logic, the triviality of the image: judgment never gives the image of the object autonomy with respect to the object of the image. Of all the characteristics proper to the image, only colour (which Kant regarded as less pure than form) can prevent rejection of photographs of trivial things. Nothing is more alien to popular consciousness than the idea of an aesthetic pleasure that, to put it in Kantian terms, is independent of the charming of the senses. Thus judgments on the photographs most strongly rejected on grounds of futility (pebbles, bark, wave) almost always end with the reservation that ‘in colour, it might be pretty’; and some respondents even manage to formulate the maxim governing their attitude, when they declare that ‘if the colours are good, a colour photograph is always beautiful’. In short, Kant is indeed referring to popular taste when he writes:

Taste that requires an added element of charm and emotion for its delight, not to speak of adopting this as the measure of its approval, has not yet emerged from barbarism (Kant, 1952, p. 65).

Refusal of the trivial (insignificant) image, which has neither meaning nor interest, or the ambiguous image, means refusing to treat it as finality without purpose, as an image signifying itself, and therefore having no other referent than itself. The value of a photograph is measured by the interest of the information it conveys, and by the clarity with which it fulfils this informative function, in short, its legibility, which itself varies with the legibility of its intention or function, the judgment it provokes being more or less favourable depending on the expressive adequacy of the signifier to the signified. It therefore contains the expectation of the title or caption which, by declaring the signifying intention, makes it possible to judge whether the realization signifies or illustrates it adequately. If formal explorations, in avant-garde theatre or non-figurative painting, or simply in classical music, are disconcerting to working-class people, this is partly because they feel incapable of understanding what these things must signify, insofar as they are signs. Hence the initiated may experience as inadequate and unworthy a satisfaction that cannot be grounded in a meaning transcendent to the object. Not knowing what the ‘intention’ is, they feel incapable of distinguishing a tour de force from clumsiness, telling a ‘sincere’ formal device from
cynical imposture. But formal refinement is also that which, by putting form, i.e. the artist, in the foreground, with his own interests, his technical problems, his effects, his play of references, throws the thing itself into the background and precludes direct communion with the beauty of the world—a beautiful child, a beautiful girl, a beautiful animal or a beautiful landscape. The representation is expected to be a feast for the eyes and, like still life, to 'stir up memories and anticipations of feasts enjoyed and feasts to come'. Nothing is more opposed to celebration of the beauty and joy of the world that is looked for in the work of art, 'a choice which praises', than the devices of cubist or abstract painting, which are perceived and unanimously denounced as aggressions against the thing represented, against the natural order and especially the human form. In short, however perfectly it performs its representative function, the work is only seen as fully justified if the thing represented is worthy of being represented, if the representative function is subordinated to a higher function, such as that of capturing and exalting a reality that is worthy of being made eternal. Such is the basis of the 'barbarous taste' to which the most antithetical forms of the dominant aesthetic always refer negatively and which only recognizes realist representation, in other words a respectful, humble, submissive representation of objects designated by their beauty or their social importance.

Aesthetics, ethics and aestheticism

When confronted with legitimate works of art, people most lacking the specific competence apply to them the perceptual schemes of their own ethos, which structure their everyday perception of everyday existence. These schemes, giving rise to products of an unwilled, unselfconscious systematicity, are opposed to the more or less fully explicit principles of an aesthetic. The result is a systematic 'reduction' of the things of art to the things of life, a bracketing of form in favour of 'human' content, which is barbarism par excellence from the standpoint of the pure aesthetic. Everything takes place as if the emphasis on form could only be achieved by means of a neutralization of any kind of affective or ethical interest in the object of representation which accompanies (without any necessary cause-effect relation) mastery of the means of grasping the distinctive properties which this particular form takes on in its relations with other forms (i.e. through reference to the universe of works of art and its history).

The aestheticism which makes the artistic intention the basis of the 'art of living' implies a sort of moral agnosticism, the perfect antithesis of the ethical disposition which subordinates art to the values of the art of living. The aesthetic intention can only contradict the dispositions of the ethos or the norms of the ethic which, at each moment, define the legitimate objects and modes of representation for the different social classes, excluding from the universe of the 'representable' certain realities and certain ways of representing them. Thus the easiest, and so the most frequent and most spectacular way to 'épater le bourgeois' by proving the extent of one's power to confer aesthetic status is to transgress ever more radically the ethical censorships.

24 The confessions with which workers faced with modern pictures betray their exclusion ('I don't understand what it means' or: 'I like it but I don't understand it') contrast with the knowing silence of the bourgeois, who, though equally disconcerted, at least know that they have to refuse—or, at least, conceal—the naive expectation of expressiveness that is betrayed by the concern to 'understand' ('programme music' and the titles foisted on so many sonatas, concertos and symphonies are sufficient indication that this expectation is not exclusively popular).


26 The populist image of the proletariat as an opaque, dense, hard 'in-itself' the perfect antithesis of the intellectual or aesthete, a self-transparent, insubstantial 'in-itself', has a certain basis here.
(e.g. in matters of sex) which the other classes accept even within the area which the
dominant disposition defines as aesthetic. Or, more subtly, it is done by conferring
aesthetic status on objects or ways of representing them which are excluded by the
dominant aesthetic of the time, or on objects that are given aesthetic status by domi-
nated aesthetics.

One only has to read the index of contents recently published by *Art vivant* (1974),
a "vaguely modern review run by a clique of academics who are vaguely art historians"
(as an avant-garde painter nicely put it), which occupies a sort of neutral point in the
field of avant-garde art criticism between *Flashart* or *Art press* and *Artitude* or *Opus.*
In the list of features and titles one finds: *Africa* (one title: 'Art must be for all'),
*Architecture* (two titles, including 'Architecture without an architect') *Comic Strips* (five
titles, nine pages out of the forty-six in the whole index), *Kids' Art, Kitsch* (three
titles, five pages), *Photography* (two titles, three pages), *Street Art* (fifteen titles,
twenty-three pages, including 'Art in the Street?', 'Art in the Street First Episode',
'Beauty in the Back-streets. You just have to know how to look.' 'A Suburb sets the
Pace'), *Science-Fiction-Utopia* (two titles, three pages), *Underground* (one title)
*Writing-Idograms-Graffiti* (two titles, four pages). The aim of inverting or trans-
gressing which is clearly manifested by this list is necessarily contained within the
limits assigned to it *a contrario* by the aesthetic conventions it denounces and by the
need to secure recognition of the aesthetic nature of the transgression of the limits
(i.e. recognition of its conformity to the norms of the transgressing group). Hence
the almost Markovian logic of the choices, with, for the cinema, Antonioni, Chaplin,
cinémathèque, Eisenstein, eroticism-pornography, Fellini, Godard, Klein, Monroe,
underground, Warhol.

This commitment to symbolic transgression, which is often combined with political
neutrality or revolutionary aestheticism, is the almost perfect antithesis of petit-
bourgeois moralism or of what Sartre used to call the revolutionary's 'seriousness'.
The ethical indifference which the aesthetic disposition implies when it becomes the
basis of the art of living is in fact the root of the ethical aversion to artists (or intel-
lectuals) which manifests itself particularly vehemently among the declining and
threatened fractions of the petty-bourgeois (especially independent craftsmen and
shopkeepers) who tend to express their regressive and repressive dispositions in all
areas of practice (especially in educational matters and *vis-à-vis* students and student
demonstrations), but also among the rising fractions of that class whose striving for
virtue and deep insecurity renders them very receptive to the phantasm of
'pornocracy'.

The pure disposition is so universally recognized as legitimate that no voice is
heard pointing out that the definition of art, and through it the art of living, is an
object of struggle among the classes. Dominated life-styles (*arts de vivre*), which have
practically never received systematic expression, are almost always perceived, even
by their defenders, from the destructive or reductive viewpoint of the dominant
aesthetic, so that their own only options are degradation or self-destructive rehabili-
tation ('popular culture'). This is why we must look to Proudhon28 for a naively
systematic expression of the *petty-bourgeois aesthetic*, which subordinates art to the core
values of the art of living and identifies the cynical perversion of the artist's life-style
as the source of the absolute primacy given to form:

Under the influence of property, the artist, depraved in his reason, dissolute in his morals, venal

27 This is seen clearly in literature and in the theatre (e.g. the American 'new wave' of the 1960s).
28 Dickens could also have been cited.
and without dignity, is the impure image of egoism. The idea of justice and honesty slides over
his heart without taking root, and of all the classes of society, the artist class is the poorest in
strong souls and noble characters (Proudhon, 1939a, p. 226—my italics).
Art for art's sake, as it has been called, not having its legitimacy within itself, being based on
nothing, is nothing. It is debauchery of the heart and dissolution of the mind. Separated from
right and duty, cultivated and pursued as the highest thought of the soul and the supreme
manifestation of humanity, art or the ideal, stripped of the greater part of itself, reduced to
being nothing more than an excitement of fantasy and the senses, is the source of sin, the origin
of all servitude, the poisoned spring from which, according to the Bible, flow all the fornications
and abominations of the earth... Art for art's sake, I say, verse for verse's sake, style for
style's sake, form for form's sake, fantasy for fantasy's sake, all the diseases which like a plague
of lice are gnawing away at our epoch, are vice in all its refinement, the quintessence of evil
(Proudhon, 1939a, p. 71—my italics).
What is condemned is the autonomy of form and the artist's right to the formal
experiments by which he claims mastery of what ought to be merely a matter of
'execution':
I do not wish to argue about nobility, or elegance, or pose, or style, or gesture, or any aspect
of what constitutes the execution of a work of art and is the usual object of traditional criticism
(Proudhon, 1939a, p. 166).
Dependent on demand in the choice of their objects, artists take their revenge in
the execution:
There are church painters, history painters, genre painters (in other words painters of anec-
dotes or farces), portrait painters, landscape painters, animal painters, seascape painters,
painters of Venus, painters of fantasy. One specializes in nudes, another in drapery. Then each
one endeavours to distinguish himself by one of the means which contribute to the execution.
One goes in for sketching; another for colour; this one attends to composition, that one to
perspective, a third to costume or local colour; one shines through sentiment, another through
his idealized or realistic figures; yet another redeems the futility of his subject by the fineness
of his detail. Each strives to have his own trick, his own je ne sais quoi, a personal manner,
and so, with the help of fashion, reputations are made and unmade (Proudhon, 1939b, p. 271).
In contrast to this decadent art cut off from social life, respecting neither God nor
man, an art worthy of the name must be subordinate to science, morality and justice.
It must aim to arouse the moral sense, to inspire feelings of dignity and delicacy, to
idealize reality, to substitute for the thing the ideal of the thing, by painting the true
and not the real. In a word, it must educate. To do so, it must transmit not personal
impressions (like David in The Tennis-Court Oath, or Delacroix) but, like Courbet in
Les Paysans de Flagey, reconstitute the social and historical truth which all may
judge. ('Each of us only has to consult himself to be able, after brief consideration, to
state a judgment on any work of art.')29 And it would be a pity to conclude without
quoting a eulogy of the small detached house which would surely be massively en-
dorsed by the lower-middle and working classes:
I would give the Louvre, the Tuileries, Notre-Dame—and the Vendôme column into the
bargain—to live in my own home, in a little house of my own design, where I would live alone,
in the middle of a little plot of ground, a quarter of an acre or so, where I'd have water, shade,
a lawn, and silence. And if I thought of putting a statue in it, it wouldn't be a Jupiter or an
Apollo—those gentlemen are nothing to me—nor view of London, Rome, Constantinople or
Venice. God preserve me from such places! I'd put there what I lack—mountains, vineyards,
meadows, goats, cows, sheep, reapers and shepherds (Proudhon, 1939a, p. 256).30

29 Proudhon (1939b) p. 49.
30 It is impossible completely to understand the acceptance of the theses of Zdanov, who is very
close to Proudhon in several respects, without taking into account the correspondences between his
'aesthetic' and the working-class or petit-bourgeois ethos of a number of the leaders of the French
Communist Party.
Neutralization and the universe of possibilities

Unlike non-specific perception, the specifically aesthetic perception of a work of art (in which there are of course degrees of accomplishment) is armed with a *pertinence principle* which is socially constituted and acquired. This principle of selection enables it to pick out and retain, from among the elements offered to the eye (e.g. leaves or clouds considered merely as indices or signals invested with a denotative function—'it's a poplar', 'there's going to be a storm'), all the stylistic traits—and only those—which, when relocated in the universe of stylistic possibilities, distinguish a particular manner of treating the elements selected, whether clouds or leaves, i.e. a style as a mode of representation expressing the mode of perception and thought that is proper to a period, a class or class fraction, a group of artists or a particular artist. No stylistic characterization of a work of art is possible without presupposing at least implicit reference to the compossible alternatives, whether simultaneous—to distinguish it from its contemporaries—or successive—to contrast it with earlier or later works by the same or a different artist. Exhibitions devoted to an artist's whole *oeuvre* or to a genre (e.g. the still-life exhibition in Bordeaux in 1978) are the objective realization of the field of *interchangeable* stylistic possibilities which is brought into play when one 'recognizes' the singularities of the characteristic style of a work of art. As Gombrich demonstrates, Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* only takes on its 'full meaning' in terms of a previous idea of Mondrian's work and of the expectations it favours. The 'impression of gay abandon' given by the play of bright, strongly contrasting patches of colour can only arise in a mind familiar with 'an art of straight lines and a few primary colours in carefully balanced rectangles' and capable of perceiving the 'relaxed style of popular music' in the distance from the 'severity' which is expected. And as soon as one imagines this painting attributed to Severini, who tries to express in some of his paintings 'the rhythm of dance music in works of brilliant chaos,' it is clear that, measured by this stylistic yardstick, Mondrian's picture would rather suggest the First Brandenburg Concerto (Gombrich, 1960, p. 313).

The aesthetic disposition, understood as the aptitude for perceiving and deciphering specifically stylistic characteristics, is thus inseparable from specifically artistic competence. The latter may be acquired by explicit learning or simply by regular contact with works of art, especially those assembled in museums and galleries, where the diversity of their original functions is neutralized by their being displayed in a place consecrated to art, so that they invite pure interest in form. This practical mastery enables its possessor to situate each element of a universe of artistic representations in a class defined in relation to the class composed of all the artistic representations consciously or unconsciously excluded. Thus, an awareness of the stylistic features which make up the stylistic *originality* of all the works of a period relative to those of another period, or, within this class, of the works of one school relative to another, or of the works of one artist relative to the works of his school or period, or even of an artist's particular period or work relative to his whole *oeuvre*, is inseparable from an awareness of the stylistic *redundancies*, i.e. the typical treatments of the pictorial matter which define a style. In short, a grasp of the resemblances presupposes implicit or explicit reference to the differences, and vice versa. Attribution is always implicitly based on reference to 'typical works' consciously or unconsciously selected because they present to a particularly high degree the qualities more or less explicitly recognized as pertinent in a given system of classification. Everything suggests that, even among
specialists, the criteria of pertinence which define the stylistic properties of key works generally remain implicit and that the aesthetic taxonomies implicitly mobilized to distinguish, classify and order works of art never have the rigour which aesthetic theories sometimes try to lend them.

In fact, the simple *placing* which the amateur or specialist performs when he undertakes attribution has nothing in common with the genuinely scientific intention of grasping the work's immanent reason and *raison d'être* by reconstructing the perceived situation, the subjectively experienced problematic, which is nothing other than the space of the positions and self-positionings constituting the field, and within which the artistic intention of the artist in question has defined itself, generally by *opposition*. The references which this reconstructing operation deploys have nothing to do with the kinds of semantic echo or affective correspondence which adorn celebratory discourse; they are the indispensable means of constructing the field of thematic or stylistic possibilities in relation to which, objectively and to some extent subjectively, the possibility selected by the artist presented itself. Thus, to understand why the early Romantic painters returned to primitive art, one would have to reconstitute the whole universe of reference of the pupils of David, with their long beards and Greek costumes, who 'outdoing their master's cult of antiquity, wanted to go back to Homer, the Bible and Ossian, and condemned the style of classical antiquity itself as "rococo", "Van Loo" or "Pompadour"' (Benichou, 1973, p. 212).

This would lead one back to the inextricably ethical and aesthetic alternatives—such as the identification of the naive with the pure and the natural—in terms of which their choices were made and which have nothing in common with the transhistorical oppositions beloved of formalist aesthetics.31

But the celebrant's or devotee's intention is not that of understanding and, in the ordinary routine of the cult of the work of art, the play of academic or urbane references has no other function than to bring the work into an interminable circuit of inter-legitimation, so that a reference to Jan Brueghel's *Bouquet of Flowers* lends dignity to Jean-Michel Picart's *Bouquet of Flowers with Parrot* just as, in another context, reference to the latter can, being less common, serve to enhance the former. This play of cultured allusions and analogies endlessly pointing to other analogies, which, like the cardinal oppositions in mythical or ritual systems, never have to justify themselves by stating the basis of the relating which they perform, weaves around the works a complex web of factitious experiences, each answering and reinforcing all the others, which *creates* the enchantment of artistic contemplation. It is the source of the 'idolatry' to which Proust refers, which leads one to find

an actress's robe or a society woman's dress beautiful... not because the cloth is beautiful but because it is the cloth painted by Moreau or described by Balzac (Proust, 1947, p. 173).32

31 For a similar critique of the application of an empty opposition (between 'soft focus' and 'hard focus') to the German Romantic painters, see Gombrich (1969), p. 33.

32 Analogy, functioning as a circular mode of thought, makes it possible to tour the whole area of art and luxury *without ever leaving it*. Thus *Château Margaux* wine can be described with the same words used to describe the *Château*, just as others will evoke Proust apropos of Monet or Franck, which is a good way of talking about neither: 'The house is in the image of the vintage. Noble, austere, even a little solemn. Château Margaux has the air of an ancient temple devoted to the cult of wine... Vineyard or dwelling, Margaux refuses all embellishments. But just as the wine has to be served before it unfolds all its charms, so the residence waits for the visitor to enter before it reveals its own. In each case the same words spring to one's lips: elegance, distinction, delicacy, and that subtle satisfaction given from something which has received the most attentive and indeed loving care for generations. A wine long matured, a house long inhabited: Margaux the vintage and Margaux the château are the product of two equally rare things: *rigour and time* ' (Schlumberger, *Connaissance du Arts*, November 1973, pp. 101-105).
Distance from necessity

To explain the correlation between educational capital and the propensity or at least the aspiration to appreciate a work 'independently of its content', as the culturally most ambitious respondents put it, and more generally the propensity to make the 'gratuitous' and 'disinterested' investments demanded by legitimate works, it is not sufficient to point to the fact that schooling provides the linguistic tools and the references which enable aesthetic experience to be expressed and to be constituted by being expressed. What is in fact affirmed in this relationship is the dependence of the aesthetic disposition on the past and present material conditions of existence which are the precondition of both its constitution and its application and also of the accumulation of a cultural capital (whether or not educationally sanctioned) which can only be acquired by means of a sort of withdrawal from economic necessity. The aesthetic disposition which tends to bracket off the nature and function of the object represented and to exclude any 'naive' reaction—horror at the horrible, desire for the desirable, pious reverence for the sacred—along with all purely ethical responses, in order to concentrate solely upon the mode of representation, the style, perceived and appreciated by comparison with other styles, is one dimension of a total relation to the world and to others, a life-style, in which the effects of particular conditions of existence are expressed in a mis-recognizable form. These conditions of existence, which are the precondition for all learning of legitimate culture, whether implicit and diffuse, as domestic cultural training generally is, or explicit and specific, as in scholastic training, are characterized by the suspension and removal of economic necessity and by objective and subjective distance from practical urgencies, which is the basis of objective and subjective distance from groups subjected to those determinisms.

To be able to play the games of culture with the playful seriousness which Plato demanded, a seriousness without the 'spirit of seriousness', one has to belong to the ranks of those who have been able, not necessarily to make their whole existence a sort of children's game, as artists do, but at least to maintain for a long time, sometimes a whole life-time, a child's relation to the world. (All children start life as baby bourgeois, in a relation of magical power over others and, through them, over the world, but they grow out of it sooner or later). This is clearly seen when, by an accident of social genetics, into the well-policed world of intellectual games there comes one of those people (one thinks of Rousseau or Chernyshevsky) who bring inappropriate stakes and interests into the games of culture; who get so involved in the game that they abandon the margin of neutralizing distance that the illusio demands; who treat intellectual struggles, the object of so many pathetic manifestos, as a simple question of right and wrong, life and death. This is why the logic of the game has already assigned them rôles—eccentric or boor—which they will play despite themselves in the eyes of those who know how to stay within the bounds of the intellectual illusion and who cannot see them any other way.

The aesthetic disposition, a generalized capacity to neutralize ordinary urgencies and to bracket off practical ends, a durable inclination and aptitude for practice without a practical function, can only be constituted within an experience of the world freed from urgency and through the practice of activities which are an end in themselves, such as scholastic exercises or the contemplation of works of art. In other words, it presupposes the distance from the world (of which the 'rôle distance' brought to light by Goffman is a particular case) which is the basis of the bourgeois experience of the world. Contrary to what certain mechanistic theories would suggest, even in its

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most specifically artistic dimension, the pedagogic action of the family and the school operates at least as much through the economic and social conditions which are the precondition of its operation as through the contents which it inculcates. The scholastic world of regulated games and exercises for exercises' sake is, at least in this respect, less remote than it might appear from the 'bourgeois' world and the countless 'disinterested' and 'gratuitous' acts which go to make up its distinctive rarity, such as home maintenance and decoration, occasioning a daily squandering of care, time and labour (often through the intermediary of servants), walking and tourism, movements without any other aim than physical exercise and the symbolic appropriation of a world reduced to the status of a landscape, or ceremonies and receptions, pretext for a display of ritual luxuries, décors, conversations and finery, not to mention, of course, artistic practices and enjoyments. It is not surprising that bourgeois adolescents, who are both economically privileged and (temporarily) excluded from the reality of economic power, sometimes express their distance from the bourgeois world which they cannot really appropriate by a refusal of complicity whose most refined expression is a propensity towards aesthetics and aestheticism. In this respect they share common ground with the women of the bourgeoisie, who, being partially excluded from economic activity, find fulfilment in stage-managing the décor of bourgeois existence, when they are not seeking refuge or revenge in aesthetics.

Economic power is first and foremost a power to keep economic necessity at arm's length. This is why it universally asserts itself by the destruction of riches, conspicuous consumption, squandering, and every form of gratuitous luxury. Thus, whereas the court aristocracy made the whole of life a continuous spectacle, the bourgeoisie has established the opposition between what is paid for and what is free, the interested and the disinterested, in the form of the opposition, which Weber saw as characterizing it, between place of work and place of residence, working days and holidays, the outside (male) and the inside (female), business and sentiment, industry and art, the world of economic necessity and the world of artistic freedom that is snatched, by economic power, from that necessity.

Material or symbolic consumption of works of art constitutes one of the supreme manifestations of ease, in the sense both of leisure and facility. The detachment of the pure gaze cannot be separated from a general disposition towards the 'gratuitous' and the 'disinterested', the paradoxical product of a negative economic conditioning which, through facility and freedom, engenders distance vis-à-vis necessity. At the same time, the aesthetic disposition is defined, objectively and subjectively, in relation to other dispositions. Objective distance from necessity and from those trapped within it combines with a conscious distance which doubles freedom by exhibiting it. As the objective distance from necessity grows, life-style increasingly becomes the product of what Weber calls a 'stylization of life', a systematic commitment which orients and organizes the most diverse practices—the choice of a vintage or a cheese or the decoration of a holiday home in the country. This affirmation of power over a dominated necessity always implies a claim to a legitimate superiority over those who, because they cannot assert the same contempt for contingencies in gratuitous luxury and conspicuous consumption, remain dominated by ordinary interests and urgencies. The

33 For an analysis of the relationship between the scholastic environment (a world apart, exercises which are an end in themselves) and the relation to language which is required in all 'official' situations (see Bourdieu, 1973d; Bourdieu and Boltanski, 1975e).
34 Virtually every treatise written in the classical period explicitly makes the link between ease and elegance of style and elegance of life-style. Consider, for example, the doctrine of sprezzatura, the nonchalance which, according to Castiglione, distinguishes the perfect courtier and the perfect artist.
tastes of freedom can only assert themselves as such in relation to the tastes of necessity, which are thereby brought to the level of the aesthetic and so defined as vulgar. This claim to aristocracy is less likely to be contested than any other, because the relation of the 'pure', 'disinterested' disposition to the conditions which make it possible, i.e. the material conditions of existence which are rarest because most freed from economic necessity, has every chance of passing unnoticed. The most 'classifying' privilege thus has the privilege of appearing to be the most natural one.

The aesthetic sense as the sense of distinction

Thus, the aesthetic disposition is one dimension of a distant, self-assured relation to the world and to others which presupposes objective assurance and distance. It is one manifestation of the system of dispositions produced by the social conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence when they take the paradoxical form of the greatest freedom conceivable, at a given moment, with respect to the constraints of economic necessity. But it is also a distinctive expression of a privileged position in social space whose distinctive value is objectively established in its relationship to expressions generated from different conditions. Like every sort of taste, it unites and separates. Being the product of the conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence, it unites all those who are the product of similar conditions but only by distinguishing them from all others. And it distinguishes in an essential way, since taste is the basis of all that one has—people and things—and of all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others.

Tastes (i.e. manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference. It is no accident that, when they have to be justified, they are asserted purely negatively, by the refusal of other tastes. In matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation; and tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance ('sick-making') of the tastes of others. There is no accounting for tastes: not because 'tous les goûts sont dans la nature', but because each taste feels itself to be natural—and so it almost is, being a habitus—which amounts to rejecting others as unnatural and therefore vicious. Aesthetic intolerance can be terribly violent. Aversion to different life styles is perhaps one of the strongest barriers between the classes: class endogamy is evidence of it. The most intolerable thing for those who regard themselves as the possessors of legitimate culture is the sacrilegious reuniting of tastes which taste dictates shall be separated.

35 Two examples, chosen from among hundreds, but paradigmatic, of explicit use of the scheme 'something other than': 'La Fiancée du pirate is one of those very rare French films that are really satirical, really funny, because it does not resort to the carefully defused, prudently inoffensive comedy one finds in la Grande Vandrouille and le Petit Baigneur. . . . In short, it is something other than the dreary hackwork of boulevard farce' (J. L. Bory, Le Nouvel Observateur, 8 December 1969, my italics). 'Through distance, or at least, though difference, to endeavour to present a text on pictorial modernity other than the hackneyed banalities of a certain style of art criticism. Between verbose aphasis, the textual transcription of pictures, exclamations of recognition, and the works of specialized aesthetics, perhaps marking some of the ways in which conceptual, theoretical work gets to grips with contemporary plastic production' (G. Gassiot-Talabot et al., Figurations 1960/1973, Paris, Union générale des éditions, 1973, p. 7).

36 This essential negativity, which is part of the very logic of the constitution of taste and its change, explains why, as Gombrich points out, 'the terminology of art history was so largely built on words denoting some principle of exclusion. Most movements in art erect some new taboo, some new negative principle, such as the banishing from painting by the impressionists of all 'anecdotal' elements. The positive slogans and shibboleths which we read in artists' or critics' manifestos past or present are usually much less well defined' (Gombrich, 1966, p. 89).
This means that the games of artists and aesthetes and their struggles for the monopoly of artistic legitimacy are less innocent than they seem. At stake in every struggle over art there is also the imposition of an art of living, i.e. the transmutation of an arbitrary way of living into the legitimate way of life which casts every other way of living into arbitrariness. The artist's life-style is always a challenge thrown at the bourgeois life-style, which it seeks to condemn as unreal and even absurd, by a sort of practical demonstration of the emptiness of the values and powers it pursues. The neutralizing relation to the world which defines the aesthetic disposition potentially implies a subversion of the spirit of seriousness required by bourgeois investments. Like the visibly ethical judgments of those who lack the means to make art the basis of their art of living, to see the world and other people through literary reminiscences and pictorial references, the 'pure' and purely aesthetic judgments of the artist and the aesthete spring from the dispositions of an ethos; but because of the legitimacy which they command so long as their relationship to the dispositions and interests of a group defined by strong cultural capital and weak economic capital remains unrecognized, they provide a sort of absolute reference in the necessarily endless play of mutually self-relativizing tastes. By a paradoxical reversal, they thereby help to legitimate the bourgeois claim to 'natural distinction' as difference made absolute.

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This is seen clearly in the case of the theatre, which touches more directly and more overtly on the implicit or explicit principles of the art of living. Especially in the case of comedy, it presupposes common values or interests or, more precisely, a complicity and connivance based on immediate assent to the same self-evident propositions, those of the doxa, the totality of opinions accepted at the level of prereflexive belief. (This explains why the institutions supplying the products, and the products themselves, are more sharply differentiated in the theatre than in any other art.)

For an analysis of 'art for art's sake' as the expression of the artistic life-style, see Bourdieu, 1975b.