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## *Habitus Clivé: Aesthetics and Politics in the Work of Pierre Bourdieu\**

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Toward the end of the sketch for a self-analysis that he wrote shortly before his death, Bourdieu said that his was a divided habitus—a *habitus clivé*—as a consequence of the contradictions he experienced in coming from lowly social origins to achieve high scholarly distinction.<sup>1</sup> This seems entirely plausible. Indeed, in this respect, Bourdieu might be seen as an ideal type for a generation that experienced similar kinds of social and cultural dislocation as the price of educational and occupational advancement. Yet the claim stands in sharp contrast to what Bourdieu had to say elsewhere about the concept of the habitus as a set of regulative principles organizing practices of cultural consumption. For here Bourdieu usually insisted on the *unity* of the habitus. This construction of the habitus is central to the analytical architecture of Bourdieu’s *Distinction*.<sup>2</sup> It constitutes the key conceptual hinge through which analyses at the level of the individual and that of classes are integrated within the social space of lifestyles and through which the operation of cultural capital across different fields is mediated. If, therefore, the unity of the habitus is shown to be unsustainable, other aspects of Bourdieu’s approach in this study are also called into question.

In pursuing this line of inquiry I subject Bourdieu’s concepts to an immanent critique and draw on two other bodies of work for the different kinds of critical purchase these offer on Bourdieu’s concepts and methods. These are, first, Bernard Lahire’s sociology of individuals and the different interpretation this offers of the habitus and, second, Jacques Rancière’s account of the aesthetic as a particular mode of the “distribution of the sensible.” I also contrast the implications of these accounts for the analysis of cultural consumption with Bourdieu’s approach to such questions by exploring some aspects of the data produced by a research inquiry into the relations between cultural capital and social inequality in contemporary Britain.<sup>3</sup> In doing so I shall be particularly concerned with the respects in which Bourdieu’s account of the habitus in *Distinction* is informed by his interpretation of the Kantian aesthetic and the divisions this account establishes between the bourgeois aesthetic ethos of disinterestedness and the working-class culture of the necessary. My contention here

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse* (Paris: Éditions Raisons D’Agir, 2004), 127.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984) (hereafter cited in text and notes as *D*).

<sup>3</sup> I refer here to the project *Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion: A Critical Investigation* (CCSE) funded by the Economic and Social Research Council from 2003 to 2006. This examined the relationships between cultural practices and social differentiation on the basis of a questionnaire applied to a main sample of 1,564 respondents and a minority ethnic boost sample of 227 (Indian, Pakistani, and Afro-Caribbean), as well as an accompanying program of focus group discussions and household interviews. This inquiry was conducted by a team comprised of Tony Bennett (Principal Applicant), Mike Savage, Elizabeth Silva, Alan Warde (Co-Applicants), David Wright, and Modesto Gayo-Cal (Research Fellows). The applicants were jointly responsible for the design of the national survey and the focus groups and household interviews that generated the quantitative and qualitative data for the project. Elizabeth Silva, assisted by David Wright, coordinated the analyses of the qualitative data from the focus groups and household interviews. Mike Savage and Alan Warde, assisted by Modesto Gayo-Cal, coordinated the analyses of the quantitative data produced by the survey. Tony Bennett was responsible for the overall direction and coordination of the project.

will be that Bourdieu's position on this matter seriously disables an adequate understanding of the complex and contradictory ways in which the relationships between practices of cultural consumption and social classes have been affected by the variant forms in which post-Kantian aesthetic discourses have been inscribed within such relationships. I shall also argue that, appearances to the contrary, Bourdieu's own position is best understood as a move *within* the tradition of Western aesthetic discourse, and one which repeats the terms in which this discourse has disqualified the working classes from full political entitlement and capacity.<sup>4</sup>

### The Singular Unity of Class Habitus

I look first at Bourdieu's interpretation of the concept of habitus and the stress he places on its unity. In *Practical Reason*, for example, Bourdieu defines the habitus as a "generative and unifying principle which retranslates the intrinsic and relational characteristics of a position into a unitary lifestyle, that is, a unitary set of choices of persons, goods, practices."<sup>5</sup> And in *Distinction*, writing about the aesthetic disposition as an aspect of the system of dispositions comprising a class habitus, he could not be more emphatic: "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 while 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 all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others" (D 56). There are places where Bourdieu does opt for more elastic interpretations. In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, he commits only to the probabilistic expectation that members of the same class will share the same experiences, stressing that not all the members of a class—or even two of them—will ever do so entirely.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the regularity he prescribes for the habitus in *In Other Words* is one in which "*the habitus goes hand in glove with a vagueness and indeterminacy*"; it has "a generative spontaneity which asserts itself in an improvised confrontation with ever-renewed situations," obeying "a *practical logic*, that of vagueness, of the more-or-less, which defines one's ordinary relation to the world."<sup>7</sup> Bourdieu also usually allows for a tension, in the case of artists and intellectuals, between their class habitus and the habitus associated with their distinctive position in a specific artistic or intellectual field—a position he proposes in his account of the scientific habitus, for example.<sup>8</sup> And in *Pascalian Meditations*, finally, the habitus emerges in an utterly transformed form as full of "mismatches, discordances and misfirings" such that those who occupy contradictory social positions often have "destabilised habitus, torn by contradiction and internal division, generating suffering."<sup>9</sup>

However, these later qualifications and revisions do not alter the fact that, in *Distinction*, Bourdieu argues that the generative schemas of the habitus apply across different fields of

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<sup>4</sup> These aspects of my discussion develop further a vein of criticism begun in Bennett, "The Historical Universal: The Role of Cultural Value in the Historical Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu," *British Journal of Sociology* 56 (2005): 141-64.

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 8.

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 85.

<sup>7</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), 77-78.

<sup>8</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, *Science of Science and Reflexivity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), 160.

consumption through a simple mechanism of transference so as to produce a unified set of dispositions. “The practices of the same agent,” he writes, “and, more generally, the practices of all agents of the same class, owe the stylistic affinity which makes each of them a metaphor of any of the others to the fact that they are the product of transfers of the same schemes of action from one field to another” (*D* 173). His account of the homology between positions in the space of lifestyles means that the principles underlying an individual’s or group’s tastes in the literary field also apply to that person’s or group’s tastes in all other fields. This mechanism, Bourdieu argues, is made manifest in the systematic unity that is to be found across all aspects of an individual’s or group’s tastes:

It is to be found in all the properties—and property—with which individuals and groups surround themselves, houses, furniture, paintings, books, cars, spirits, cigarettes, perfume, clothes, and in the practices in which they manifest their distinction, sports, games, entertainments only because it is in the synthetic unity of the habitus, the unifying, generative principle of all practices. Taste, the propensity and capacity to appropriate (materially or symbolically) a given class of classified, classifying objects or practices, is the generative formula of life-style, a unitary set of distinctive preferences which express the same expressive intention in the specific logic of each of the symbolic sub-spaces, furniture, clothing, language or bodily hexis. (*D* 173)

The possibility of exceptions is largely ruled out through the operation of a mechanism of structural causality through which deviations from the ideal-type of a class habitus are understood as variants of its underlying structure. Exceptions to the rule merely confirm the rule as, Lahire notes, in the case of Bourdieu’s remarks on the phenomenon of “slumming it” according to which, when intellectuals or artists read popular novels, watch Westerns, or read comics, they transform such popular works into props of distinction through distancing or ironic readings governed by the organizing principles of the bourgeois aesthetic habitus.<sup>10</sup>

This account of the habitus comprises a key hinge in the analytical architecture of *Distinction*. It comes immediately after Bourdieu’s account of the organization of the social space of lifestyles, in which cultural practices are placed close to or distant from one another and are connected to particular classes and disconnected from others, depending on where they are placed along the twin axes (of capital volume and the ratio of economic to cultural capital) that govern the organization of that space. This account sets the stage, in the chapters that follow, for his discussion of three distinct and internally unified class habitus: the bourgeois sense of distinction, variants of the “cultural goodwill” of the petit-bourgeois, and the working-class choice of the necessary. The kinds of explanation of the processes of person formation that are elaborated in these chapters are often difficult to pin down, not least because the emphasis that Bourdieu places on the different aspects of the habitus often varies. There are, however, usually three components in play: first, the notion that a person’s habitus is shaped by social position and trajectory; second, the respects in which forms of conduct are shaped by particular institutionalized trainings (the role of art institutions in training the pure gaze, for example); and, third, the role of social position in determining access to particular kinds of institutionalized trainings and discourses. In *Distinction*, however, all of these aspects are subordinated to the operation of class in the construction of the habitus as “the internalised form of class condition and of the conditionings it entails” (*D* 101). The

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<sup>10</sup> Bernard Lahire, *La culture des individus: dissonances culturelles et distinctions de soi* (Paris: Éditions la découverte, 2004), my translation (hereafter cited in text as C).

conditionings a person is subjected to are thus construed as the necessary effect of the class condition that supplies the habitus with a unifying principle: “One must therefore construct the *objective class*, the set of agents who are placed in homogeneous conditions of existence imposing homogenous conditionings and trainings and producing homogeneous systems of dispositions capable of generating similar practices; and who possess a set of common properties, objectified properties, sometimes legally guaranteed (as possessions of goods and power) or properties embodied as class habitus (and, in particular, systems of classificatory schemes)” (D 101).<sup>11</sup>

In Bourdieu’s assessment, the virtue of his concept of habitus is that, by accounting for how the agent (individual or class) acts on the determinations that structure it so as to make the habitus a mobile, structured-yet structuring structure, it overcomes a series of dualities—between inside and outside, structure and agency, body and mind—while simultaneously offering an account of how past moments of the shaping of the habitus are retained in the present. While these virtues are endorsed by some, although usually with reservations, Lahire offers a more full-fronted assault, raising three main objections.<sup>12</sup> First, he shows how, in *Distinction*, the requirement needed to support the view of the habitus as unified—that is, that dispositions should be related to the habitus in a constant manner—is breached by the multitude of different and often conflicting formulations Bourdieu proposes for this purpose. Second, Lahire argues that Bourdieu’s view of the habitus as a “structured and structuring structure” serves as a purely rhetorical means of accounting for the interiorization of exteriority and the exteriorization of interiority. As such, it functions as a barrier to ethnographic and historical analysis of the different ways in which the relations between “inside” and “outside” are organized in different systems and practices of personhood. Third, he disputes Bourdieu’s contentions regarding the necessary unity of the habitus through time—or for the limited forms of discontinuity that result from social trajectory—viewing these as arbitrary assertions that minimize the respects in which changing life circumstances might result in earlier aspects of the habitus being sloughed off as “bad habits.”

These perspectives lead Lahire to propose an alternative view of the habitus as a more-or-less fractious disunity, a congeries of disparately formed dispositions:

Rather than presuppose that the systematic influence of an incorporated past necessarily acts in a coherent manner on the behaviours of individuals in the present . . . sociology must interrogate the extent to which it is or is not activated, is put to work or on hold, through diverse contexts of action, dispositions and incorporated competencies. The *plurality of dispositions and competencies* on the one hand, the *variety of contexts in which they are actualised* on the other are what make sociological sense of the variation of behaviour of the same individual, or of the same

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<sup>11</sup> This aspect of Bourdieu’s approach is made clear in his diagrammatic representation of the relations between habitus, which anchors each habitus in different conditions of existence (D171). These condition the operations of each habitus so that, as a “structured and structuring structure” (D 171), the habitus is only able to rework the conditions that structure it in ways that guarantee the production of a unified life-style that is the expression of those conditions of existence.

<sup>12</sup> Bernard Lahire, “De la théorie de l’habitus à une sociologie psychologique,” in *Le travail sociologique de Pierre Bourdieu: Dettes et critique*, ed. Lahire (Paris: Éditions la découverte, 2001), 121–52, and “From the Habitus to an Individual Heritage of Dispositions: Towards a Sociology at the Level of the Individual,” *Poetics* 31 (2003): 329–55. For an example of an endorsement with reservations of Bourdieu’s account of the habitus, see Nick Crossley, *The Social Body: Habit, Identity, and Desire* (London: SAGE, 2001), chap. 6.

group of individuals, as a function of different fields of practice, the properties of the contexts of action or the more singular circumstances of practice. (C 14)

He also offers, in his account of consonant and dissonant taste profiles, a framework for considering the implications of this rival construction of the habitus for the analysis of cultural consumption data of the kind that Bourdieu examines in *Distinction*. It is to this matter that I therefore now turn.

Lahire's general argument is that jettisoning Bourdieu's a priori assumptions regarding the unity of the habitus requires analytical procedures that are as alert to possible differences and fractures—or dissonances—in the taste profiles of individuals, groups, or classes as they are to shared tastes and practices.<sup>13</sup> Lahire contends that Bourdieu's approach to cultural consumption minimizes the significance of such dissonances because it focuses attention almost exclusively on those aspects of the tastes or patterns of cultural participation that *most distinguish* a particular class from other classes at the expense of other tastes or practices its members share with members of those other classes. The consequence is the construction of ideal-typical class figures which focus disproportionately on activities which, while they might pinpoint the tastes that most specifically distinguish the class concerned in relation to other classes and thus most clearly identify (or dramatize) the relative positioning of classes in social space, are often of quite minor significance in the activities of that class as a whole. Commenting on 1997 French data, Lahire thus notes that while higher-level managers and professionals might be most distinctly different from the working classes in their preferences for opera, classical music, jazz, and classical literature, such activities account for only a tiny fraction of the cultural preferences of these classes. Only 3% of senior managers and professionals identified opera as their preferred music, with 9% doing so for jazz, and 22% for classical music. When compared with the 56% who had never been to either the opera or a jazz concert and the 41% who had never been to a classical music concert, these figures suggest a class fraction with a somewhat distanced relation to legitimate culture rather than one immersed in it (C 160–65).

In the sample for the *Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion* project, 33% of professionals similarly indicated action, thriller, or adventure movies as their favorite film genre, 32% said they would make a point of watching a Steven Spielberg movie compared to 3% for a Pedro Almodóvar film, 45% had read and liked John Grisham's *The Firm* compared to 62% for Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, 44% liked rock music and 33% country and western music compared with 75% who liked classical music, and 41% described landscapes as their favorite genre of painting compared with 21% for impressionism (Table 1). By reverse, working-class respondents showed significant levels of involvement in some aspects of legitimate culture: 22% of semi- and unskilled workers had read Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*; 3% had read Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*; 35% liked classical music; 42% had listened to and liked Vivaldi; and 39% had seen and liked Picasso (Table 2).

To follow Bourdieu in interpreting figures like these would mean focusing our attention on what are often the minority aspects of specific class practices: for example, the contrast between the 21% of professionals who most prefer impressionism versus the 6% of semi- and

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<sup>13</sup> Bourdieu's work is most vulnerable to criticism here by feminist challenges to the centrality he accords class as the source of the unity of the habitus. See, for example, Lisa Adkins, "Reflexivity: Freedom or Habit of Gender?" in *Feminism after Bourdieu*, ed. Lisa Adkins and Beverley Skeggs (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005) and Elizabeth Silva, "Distinction through Visual Art," *Cultural Trends* 15 (2005): 175–92. However, my aim is to show that class will not serve this purpose even discounting the complicating effects of gender or ethnicity.

Table 1. *Aspects of Class Taste: Professionals*

Most preferred action, thriller, adventure films	33%
Would make a point of watching a Steven Spielberg film	32%
Would make a point of watching a Pedro Almodóvar film	3%
Most preferred alternative or art cinema	8%
Had read John Grisham's <i>The Firm</i>	45%
Had read Jane Austen's <i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	62%
Liked rock music	44%
Liked country and western music	33%
Liked classical music, including opera	75%
Most preferred landscapes	41%
Most preferred impressionism	21%

Table 2. *Aspects of Class Taste: Semi-and Unskilled Workers*

Most preferred action, thriller, adventure films	29%
Most preferred alternative or art cinema	2%
Had read Jane Austen's <i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	22%
Had read Flaubert's <i>Madame Bovary</i>	3%
Liked classical music	35%
Had listened to and liked Vivaldi	42%
Had seen and liked Picasso	39%
Most preferred landscapes	44%
Most preferred impressionism	6%

unskilled workers who do so, or the 8% of professionals who most prefer alternative or art cinema to the 2% of semi- and unskilled workers who do so. Yet such a focus would overlook the 33% of professionals who like action, thriller, adventure movies (a higher ratio than for skilled workers at 29%) or the 41% of professionals who preferred landscapes, a figure little short of the 44% of semi- and unskilled workers who expressed the same preference.

The results are equally telling if, in a variant of an exercise Lahire undertakes to assess the extent to which tastes are transferable across different fields (C 175–207), we group the different practices we asked about in our survey into different legitimacies and examine the degree to which tastes are consonant—as Bourdieu's account requires—or dissonant across these. Table 3 allocates the different types of film, television, and art we asked our respondents about to different levels of legitimacy. It does so on the basis of correlation analyses identifying statistically significant connections between different first-preference choices for these genres and the strength of their association with different levels of education.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The allocation of particular genres to different legitimacy categories here is based on the results of correlation analyses identifying statistically significant connections between different choices. A liking for news and current affairs on television thus correlated positively with a liking for costume drama and literary adaptations in the cinema, and negatively with a liking for romance which, in its turn and reflecting the operation of gender, correlated strongly with a liking for soap operas. Across the relations between television and art, a strong liking for Renaissance art correlated negatively with liking soaps whereas a strong liking for portraiture—which is strongly gender driven, in that nearly twice as many women as men prefer portraits—correlated positively with a strong liking for soaps. This is not to suggest that these classifications are without their difficulties, especially for genres that stand at the intersections of hierarchies of genres articulated in relation to class or level of education and those articulated in relation to gender. In the case of film, for example, correlation analysis showed strong connections between preferences for action, thriller, and adventure movies, war films and Westerns on the one hand, and between romance and musicals on the other, as two genres sets differentiated

How far, for the members of our main sample, are tastes consonant across these three fields? Not very much: Only 1.5% have consonant low legitimacy tastes; 20% have consonant medium legitimacy tastes; and 3% have consonant high legitimacy tastes. When all those with consonant profiles across the film, television, and art subfields are combined, those with consonant taste profiles account for 24.5% of the sample, with the rest having dissonant profiles of one kind or another, mainly between low and medium and medium and high combinations which jointly account for 60% of the sample (Table 4).

*Table 3. Legitimacy Classifications of Film, Television, and Visual Art Genres*

**FILM GENRES**

*Low legitimacy:* Musicals, war movies, Westerns, romance, horror, cartoons, Bollywood

*Medium legitimacy:* Action/adventure/thriller, comedy, crime, fantasy, science fiction

*High legitimacy:* Alternative/art cinema, costume drama/literary adaptations, film noir, documentary

**TV GENRES**

*Low legitimacy:* Quizzes/game shows, soaps, reality, variety/chat shows

*Medium legitimacy:* Comedy, sport, police/detective, films, cookery/gardening/DIY

*High legitimacy:* News and current affairs, arts television, natural and history documentaries, drama

**ART GENRES**

*Low legitimacy:* Portraits, none

*Medium legitimacy:* Performance art, still lifes, landscapes, modern art

*High legitimacy:* Impressionism, Renaissance art

When we relate these different profiles to different occupational classes (Table 5), it becomes clear that, for all classes, dissonant taste profiles are more common than consonant ones.

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from each other primarily in terms of gender. Preferences for genres within each of these genre sets also correlated negatively with genres that have a higher cultural legitimacy. This was true of the relations between preferences for war movies and art cinema, for example, and for those between romances and film noir. Yet, in spite of these similarities, I have classified action, thriller and adventure movies as medium legitimacy genres and romances as low legitimacy genres mainly in view of the different ways in which class and gender operate in relation to them: 21% of women expressed their first preference for action, adventure, and thriller movies, and, of these, approximately a third were from the professional and intermediate classes, whereas only five men in total indicated a preference for romances, with two of these located in the intermediate classes and none in the professional class. My differential classification of these two genres thus reflects the greater weight of male in relation to female hierarchies and their role in structuring both women's and men's viewing preferences. It should also be noted that I have interpreted the "none" category in the art subfield as the equivalent of low legitimacy choices in film and television. I have done so in view of the far greater number of respondents who answered "none" in relation to the list of genres given: 137 in contrast to 26 for film and 6 for television. Since 74% of this figure was made up of those with no or lower secondary educational qualifications, I have interpreted this as denoting a situation outside the art field and therefore an inability or reluctance to make judgments within it. It is worth adding that these legitimacy classifications also fit well with available accounts of the organization of the British art field. Brandon Taylor discusses the downward social trajectory of portraiture since the eighteenth century as a consequence of its subordination of artist to patron and of form to referent. Taylor, *Art for the Nation: Exhibitions and the London Public* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1999). M. Grenfell and C. Hardy include Renaissance art and impressionism among what they characterize as a rearguard formation (yesterday's most consecrated art) and the consecrated avant-garde respectively, while classifying examples of what we defined as modern art as an avant-garde still struggling for legitimacy. Grenfell and Hardy, "Field Manoeuvres: Bourdieu and Young British Artists," *Space and Culture* 6 (2003): 19-34.

A case for a simple mechanism of transference operating across fields is difficult to sustain on the basis of these figures. Similar issues arise if we look at the space of lifestyles that, following Bourdieu, we have constructed for the *Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion* project by means of multiple correspondence analysis.<sup>15</sup> Figure 1 summarizes the distribution of those tastes and forms of cultural participation (or nonparticipation) that are the most statistically significant outcomes of this analysis. The positioning of these modalities within this space tells us about the distribution of tastes and practices relative to one another, the degree of interconnection being stronger for modalities that are coadjacent to one another and weakest for practices that are distant from one another. The place of occupational classes relative to one another within this space is shown, alongside other demographic variables, in Figure 2.

It will be useful to look briefly at the practices, likes, and dislikes located in each quadrant of Figure 1 and note the positioning of the classes shown in Figure 2 relative to these.

The lower left quadrant shows a clustering of likes of a kind usually associated with traditional forms of high cultural capital: impressionism, modern literature, opera, visiting museums, art galleries, and stately homes. The high legitimacy genres of film (literary adaptations and costume dramas) and television (news and current affairs and documentaries) also appear here, as does classical music. High culinary tastes (French restaurants) and sports (squash and tennis) are also here. The main dislikes are of horror films, reality television, and fish-and-chip restaurants. The classes these likes and dislikes are most strongly associated with are large employers, higher-level managers, and professionals, but we also find those in higher supervisory and intermediate occupations toward the right hand of this quadrant.

In the top left quadrant we find a more even balance of likes and dislikes, with some indifference in relation to a fairly wide range of items. Likes include rock music, heavy metal, electronic music, urban music (including hip-hop and R&B), modern art, football and rugby, and going to the cinema, pubs, night clubs, and Indian restaurants. The main dislikes are for country and western music and film musicals. Lower-level managers are congregated within this quadrant.

The top right quadrant is most strongly characterized by dislikes or “never do’s,” and particularly for genres or activities that feature positively in the bottom left quadrant: classical music, museums, stately homes, modern literature, and French restaurants, for example. Likings are restricted to soaps on television and horror films, the latter figuring as a dislike in the bottom left quadrant. Those who have never worked, lower-level technicians, and those in routine and semi-routine occupations are located in this sector.

In the bottom right quadrant are a lot of dislikes, too, mostly of genres and activities that are featured positively in the top left quadrant: science fiction, modern art, electronic music, urban music, horror films, and going to the cinema, night clubs, or rock concerts. The main likes are for Westerns and musicals as film choices, country and western music, and fish-and-chip restaurants. Lower-level supervisory workers and small employers are located in this quadrant.

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<sup>15</sup> For a full account of the methods used to construct this space, see Modesto Gayo-Cal, Mike Savage, and Alan Warde, “A Cultural Map of the United Kingdom, 2003,” *Cultural Trends* 15 (2006): 213-38.

Table 4. Consonant/Dissonant Profiles: Film, Television, and Art (percent)

Consonant: high legitimacy	3.0
Dissonant: medium/high combinations	32.0
Consonant: medium legitimacy	20.0
Dissonant: low/medium combinations	28.0
Consonant: low legitimacy	1.5
Dissonant: low/high combinations	3.0
Dissonant: low/medium/high combinations	9.0
Not watch/other	3.5
Total	100.0

Table 5. Consonant and Dissonant Taste Profiles/Occupational Class (percent)

	High Cons	Med/ High	Med Cons	Low/ Med	Low Cons	Low/ High	Low/ High/ Med	Other	Nos
NSEC1	2	58	17	11	1	2	3	6	125
NSEC2	4	35	19	24	1	4	10	3	385
NSEC3	2	38	18	30	2	2	9	2	186
NSEC4	4	37	25	19	0	2	11	3	111
NSEC5	0.5	30	27	24	2	6	7	4	186
NSEC6	3	25	17	38	2	2	11	2	323
NSEC7	0.5	20	23	35	4	4	12	2	202
NSEC8	0	21	18	44	0	3	3	13	39

*Key*

NSEC1: Large employers, higher managers and professionals

NSEC2: Lower professionals, higher technicians, lower managers and higher supervisors

NSEC3: Intermediate occupations

NSEC4: Small employers and own-account workers

NSEC5: Lower supervisory and technical workers

NSEC6: Semi-routine occupations

NSEC7: Routine occupations

NSEC8: Never worked

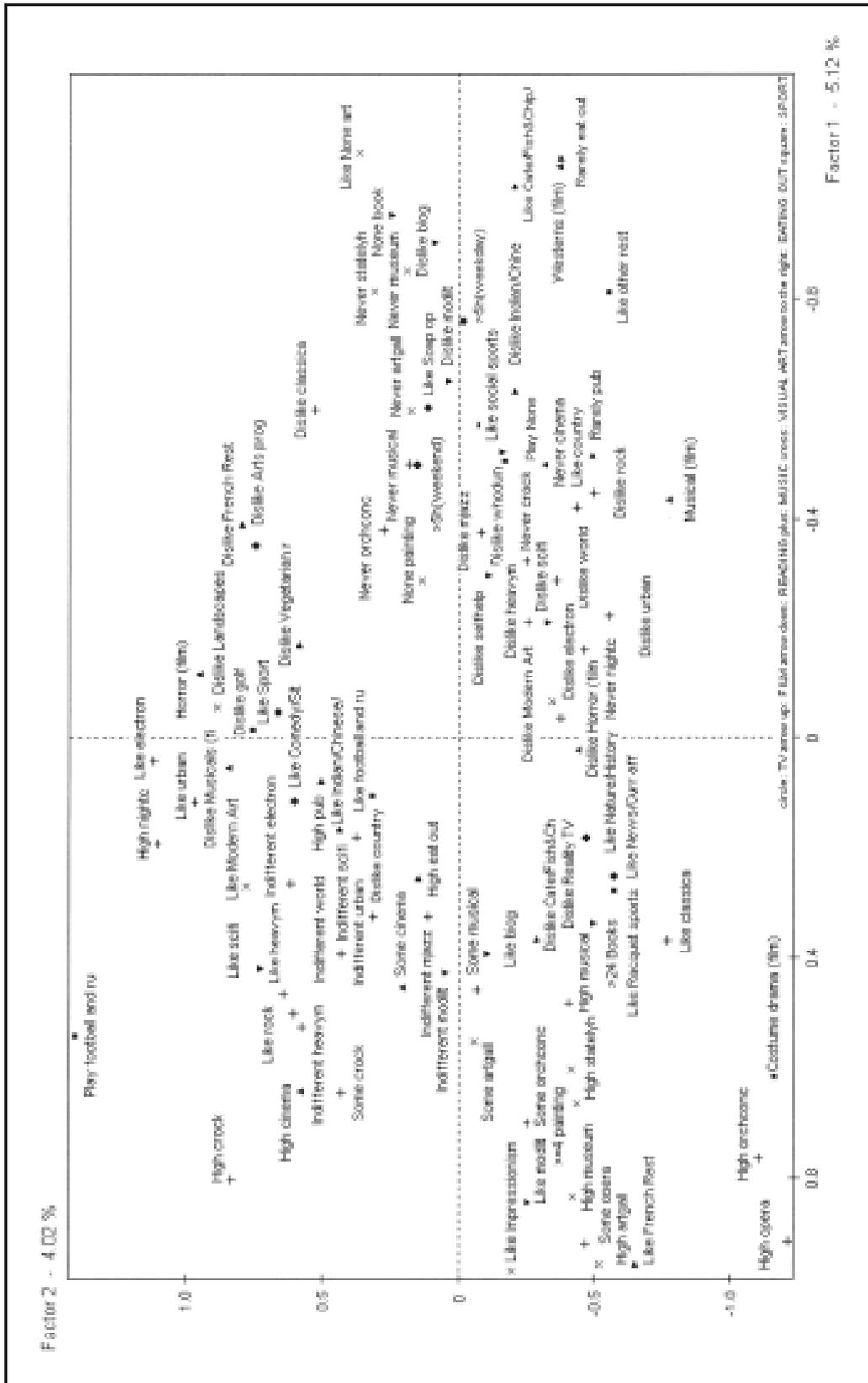


Fig. 1. The space of lifestyles—most active modalities

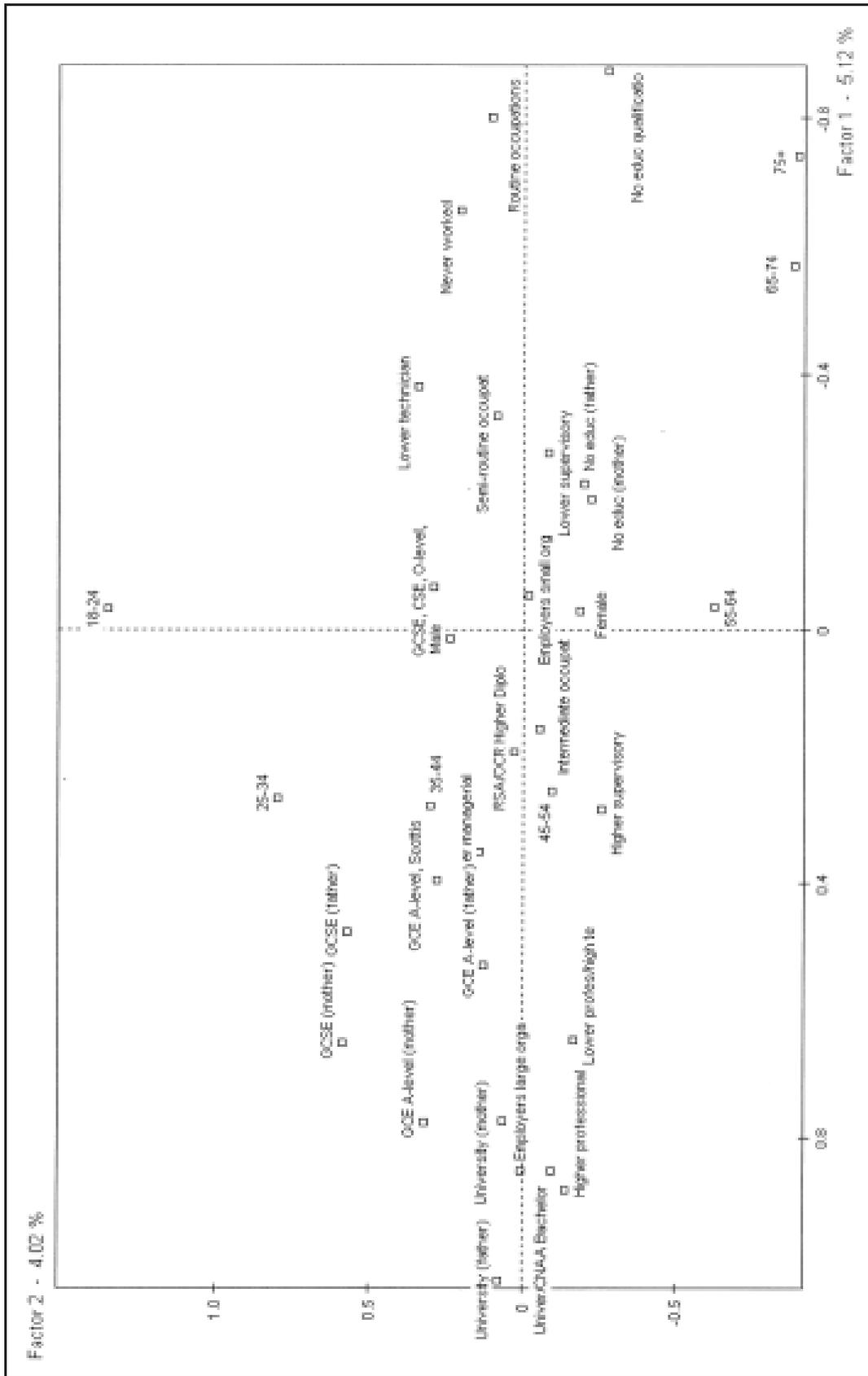


Fig. 2: The distribution of occupational class, level of education, and age

There is here, then, plenty of evidence that different modalities of cultural taste and practice are indeed distinguishable from one another in terms of their distribution within the space of lifestyles and that different tastes are more strongly associated with some class positions than with others. It is, however, important to be clear that such visualizations of the distribution of cultural practices statistically “salami slice” the tastes and practices of individuals and disperse these through the space of lifestyles depending on where the statistical nucleus for each choice or practice is located. We cannot therefore assume that likes and dislikes that are close to each other within this space are necessarily—as the notion of a unified habitus would require—shared aspects of the taste profiles of individuals. If we look at the degree to which tastes are consonant for individuals across modalities relating to three areas of cultural practice—reading, visual art, and leisure activities outside the home—we find significant variations. The degree of consonance between these is highest in the lower right-hand quadrant with 71% of those who dislike modern art also not liking sci fi movies and never going to rock concerts. But if we look at the related trio in the upper right-hand quadrant—not liking any of the types of art we asked about, not reading any books over the past twelve months, and never visiting stately homes—the figure is only 26%. And in the upper left-hand quadrant, the degree of consonance relating to going to the cinema several times a year or more, preferring modern art, and most liking science fiction, fantasy, or horror literary genres is only 20%. Similarly, we find, in the bottom left quadrant, that only 33% of those who like impressionism most and who go to stately homes several times a year or more also like modern literature.

As with modalities of taste, each class position shown in this space is the nucleating center for classes whose individual members’ tastes might be dispersed throughout the four quadrants and have much in common with other classes. These are matters, however, which fall below the threshold of visibility, given that what this figure enables us to see are those aspects of the cultural practices that are most distinctively connected to particular classes relative to others. These are not necessarily the majority aspects of particular class tastes. As we have already seen, higher-level professionals are, statistically, more prone to like landscapes than impressionism for which their preference is highest relative to all other classes. Similarly if, from the upper right-hand quadrant, we group routine and semi-routine workers together with lower supervisory workers and lower technicians as the working class, we find a fair amount of “crossover” traffic to the tastes and practices located in the bottom left quadrant that are most strongly associated with the higher managerial and professional classes. To give some examples: 44% of the working class like to read biographies and autobiographies; 15% like modern literature; 35% like classical music; 13% prefer news and current affairs programs on television; and 31% go to art galleries sometimes.

To generalize the point, Figure 3 plots the result of amalgamating the occupational class positions charted in Figure 2 into three classes: the professional and large employers/upper managerial classes; an intermediate class comprising the lower managerial, higher supervisory, intermediate and small employers groups; and the working classes as already described. The three colored dots indicate the location within the space of the statistical means for each of these classes: gray for the working class (the center of the cloud of individuals encompassed by the blue circumference), maroon for the intermediate class (the center for the cloud of individuals encompassed by the green circumference), and light red for the professional/upper management class (the center for the cloud of individuals encompassed by the red circumference). While these three dots occupy clearly distinct positions in the space, there is clearly considerable overlap in the distribution of their

members, and not just between the intermediate class and the two classes on either side of it; a good deal of space is shared between the working classes and higher-level professionals and managers, too.

It is clear that one thing we are *not* entitled to conclude from such constructions of the social space of lifestyles is that the tastes of either individuals or classes are homologous across different fields in the manner or to the degree that is required to suggest that classes constitute—in their relations to one another—the bases for unified habitus that are expressed, in the form of consonant taste profiles, as unified lifestyles.<sup>16</sup> Yet this is precisely the conclusion Bourdieu reaches in *Distinction*. This is partly a reflection of the ways in which multiple correspondence analysis converts cultural data into binary opposites which do not allow fine-graded distinctions to be taken into account and which, if not guarded against, exaggerate differences at the expense of shared tastes.<sup>17</sup> However, it is also because Bourdieu focuses on those aspects of class practices that are most distinct from one another and discusses each class habitus separately. Shared tastes are interpreted as misleading appearances that are to be discounted as the results of different modes of appropriation arising from different class habitus (bourgeois cultural slumming or the arid scholasticism of the petit-bourgeois). Tastes, practices, and forms of cultural knowledge that might be the sources of dissonance within either individual or class habitus are thus visually and statistically disappeared.

With considerations of this kind in mind, Rancière argues that Bourdieu's procedures have a polarizing logic built into them such that they "produce inevitably what is required by the sociologist: the suppression of intermediaries, of points of meeting and exchange between the people of reproduction and the elite of distinction. ... There must be no mixing, no imitation."<sup>18</sup> This suppression translates for Rancière into a missed opportunity with regard to the kinds of relations that Bourdieu's visualization of fields brings into view. "The fields whose interactions should define the thousand games of social mobility," he writes, "are ever only redoubled mirrors where the simple law of distinction gets pulverised in a thousand reflections" (*P* 194–5). The source of this difficulty, Rancière suggests, lies in Bourdieu's use

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<sup>16</sup> It might seem that the literature on omniverousness initiated by R. A. Peterson and A. Simkus is also concerned with dissonance, at least for the omnivore who is said to "graze" across legitimacy divisions. But this is not so. As Lahire notes in relation to Peterson's work and later studies modelled on it, the omnivore thesis depends on being able to demonstrate omniverousness on the part of individual members of elite groups. However, owing to the nature of the data he works with and the methods of analysis he deploys, all Peterson is able to demonstrate is omniverousness at the group level. But all this establishes is variations between individuals rather than variations within the taste profiles of individuals as the omnivore thesis requires. Work on our own data suggests that "the omnivore" is a mythic construction, which, when considered more closely, breaks down into a number of different omnivore types—a position closer to Lahire's than to Peterson's. See R. A. Peterson, "Understanding Audience Segmentation: From Elite and Mass to Omnivore and Univore," *Poetics* 21 (1992): 243–58; and Peterson and A. Simkus, "How Musical Tastes Mark Occupational Status Groups," in *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*, ed. Michelle Lamont and Marciel Fournier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). See also Alan Warde and David Wright, "Understanding Cultural Omniverousness, or the Myth of the Cultural Omnivore," internal working paper for the CCSE project.

<sup>17</sup> The procedures of correspondence analysis exaggerate the degree of polarization of tastes by converting responses to questions into binary yes/no options even in circumstances where this is not warranted by the phrasing of the question—as, for example, when not expressing a liking for a particular film or television genre is converted, statistically, into not liking it.

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 189 (hereafter cited in text as *P*).

of Kant to construct the cultural field in the form of a polarized opposition between the bourgeois aesthetic ethos of disinterestedness and the working-class taste for the necessary with all of the related antinomies that this division brings in tow. It is to this matter that I therefore now turn.

### The Contradictory Social Inscriptions of Aesthetic Discourse

I begin here with a little noted difference between the postscripts to *Distinction* and Bourdieu's *The Rules of Art*. In the first, Kant's *Critique of Judgment* is explicitly center stage, its advocacy of disinterestedness—of the “purposiveness without purpose” of aesthetic judgment—serving as the very emblem of the denied social relationship that is at the heart of both the processes of purification through which refined taste is distinguished from the vulgar and the barbarous and of the social processes through which the bourgeoisie symbolically marks and legitimates its distinction from the working classes. But Kant is equally present, albeit entirely backstage, in the postscript to *The Rules of Art*, where the commitment of writers, artists, and intellectuals to art as an end in itself, a form of “purposiveness without purpose,” is validated as a means of securing the autonomy of art against the dual encroachments of the market and the state. In developing this argument, Bourdieu urges intellectuals to accept responsibility for a project of historical anamnesis as part of a politics of freedom through which writers, artists, and intellectuals will seek, first, to recover the history of the struggle for a collective universal that is implicated in past struggles for artistic and intellectual autonomy, and, second, to defend that autonomy against the state and market while simultaneously seeking to extend its social reach.<sup>19</sup> In short, he proposes a version of the politics of freedom that is unimaginable without the role that Kant envisaged for aesthetic judgment as itself a practice of freedom whose exercise involved the historical projection of a *sensus communis*.

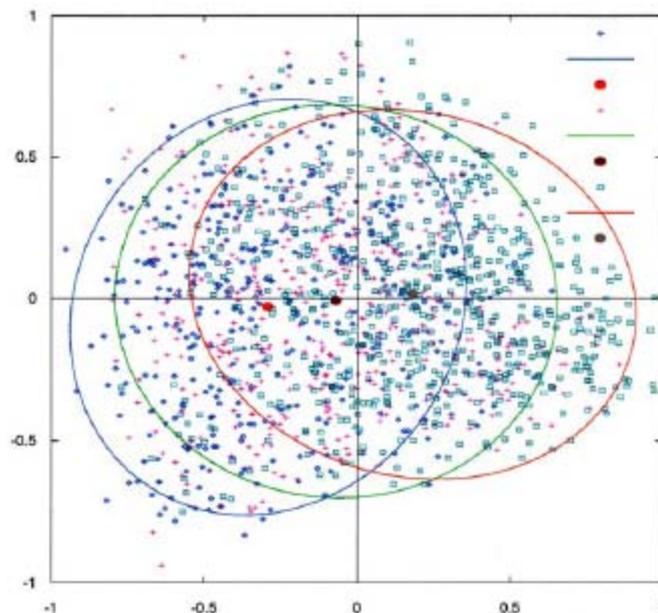


Fig. 3. Overlapping Class Boundaries

<sup>19</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television and Journalism* (London: Pluto, 1998), and Bourdieu and Haans Haacke, *Free Exchange* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995).

I point to this tension between the two postscripts to foreground two quite different “takes” on Kant’s account of disinterestedness: first, as the emblem of Bourdieu’s critique of the respects in which claims to disinterestedness in aesthetic judgment serve as a cover for a class interest in distancing bourgeois taste from the interestedness manifest in working-class taste for the necessary; and second, as the precursor for his concern, evident in such later work as *Pascalian Meditations*, to mobilize a progressive account of art’s autonomy and of a disinterested interest in the universal as an aspect of his struggle for the Enlightenment. It is equally important to note that the stress Bourdieu places on both these aspects of Kantian and post-Kantian aesthetics occludes a third aspect of this legacy in which aesthetics was, and remains, connected to the state through cultural technologies of liberal government. As both Rancière and Jean-Phillippe Uzel have noted, this occlusion is fostered by Bourdieu’s failure to take account of the date of publication of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* (1790) and of the contemporary political and cultural controversies with which it engaged.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, Bourdieu evinces little appreciation of how Kant constructed his account of the aesthetic by writing against, and seeking to mediate the relations between, two earlier traditions of aesthetic theory: first, the role played by the eighteenth-century British civic humanist literature on taste, particularly as represented by Shaftesbury, in relation to the development of market society,<sup>21</sup> and, second, the connections that had been forged between aesthetics and *poliziewissenschaften* in the context of the Prussian state. In his brief sketch of a genealogy of aesthetic theory in *The Rules of Art*, Bourdieu, while including Kant’s relation to the civic humanist tradition, overlooks Kant’s engagement with Christian Wolff (1750)<sup>22</sup>, who, by legitimating the subordination of the lower faculty of judgment to the higher one of reason (and, thereby, of the people to philosopher bureaucrats) had served as the philosophical high priest of the Prussian state.<sup>23</sup> Bourdieu thereby misses the significance of the ways in which Kant refashioned the stress that Shaftesbury had placed on aesthetics as a practice of self-formation to formulate a program for the exercise of aesthetic judgment that would disconnect it from the directive programs of social management of the Prussian state and transform it into a liberal practice of the self that was subsequently, in the *Reichstaat* introduced by the reforms of 1806, connected to the programs of *Bildung*.<sup>24</sup>

Rancière’s conception of the role of aesthetics in effecting a “distribution of the sensible” offers a helpful framework for understanding the consequences of these developments. In this conception aesthetics is placed at the core of politics through the role that the distribution of the sensible (that is, the capacity for sensory perception) plays in establishing a division

<sup>20</sup> See Jacques Rancière, *Malaise dans l’esthétique* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2004), and Jean-Phillipe Uzel, “Kant et la socialité du goût,” *Sociologie et Société* 36 (2004): 1–12.

<sup>21</sup> See John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: “The Body of the Public”* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986); Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Ronald Paulson, *The Beautiful, Novel and Strange: Aesthetics and Heterodoxy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Mary Poovey, “Aesthetics and Political Economy in the Eighteenth Century: The Place of Gender in the Social Constitution of Knowledge,” in *Aesthetics and Ideology*, ed. George Levine (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 79–105; and Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>22</sup> See Christian Wolffe, *The Real Happiness of a People under a Philosophical King* (London: Cooper, 1750).

<sup>23</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), 294–95.

<sup>24</sup> See Howard Caygill, *Art of Judgment* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); Josef Chytrý, *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989); and Paul Guyer, *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

between, on the one hand, those who are deemed to be a part of the community of citizens because their occupations grant them both the time and capacities to care and thus to take responsibility for what the community has in common—that is, to govern as well as be governed—and, on the other, those who are judged to be fit only to be governed because they lack such capacities. The example Rancière cites is Plato’s contention that artisans cannot play an active part in government because they do not have the time to devote themselves to anything other than their occupation. However, the “distribution of the sensible” operates similarly in the relations between liberal and mechanical occupations within the discourse of eighteenth-century civic humanism—in Joshua Reynolds’s theory of painting, for example.<sup>25</sup> In this discourse civic entitlements, just as much as the capacity to appreciate beauty disinterestedly, were restricted to those whose ownership of the land and/or pursuit of liberal occupations both freed them from the possibility of being subjected to the will of others and freed their minds from the routine drudgery of mechanical occupations so as to be able to take a “disinterested” interest in the common good.

What matters from this perspective is less, as in Bourdieu’s account, disinterestedness as a means of establishing a distance in *social space* from those whose horizons are limited to necessity by dint of their occupations than the role of disinterestedness in producing a position in *political space* that confers on those who can exercise command over and control of the self the capacity to direct the conduct of others. I shall return to this point. For now, though, we need to take account of the further distinction Rancière makes between two different regimes for the “distribution of the sensible”—the poetic or representative regime of the arts and the aesthetic regime of the arts—and of the different ways in which these construe the relationships between different ways of doing and making. In the first of these regimes—the “fine art” system of the Classical Age is the case Rancière mentions—art is distinguished from other ways of doing and making, those of mechanical occupations for example, and is organized into hierarchies conceived in terms of the representative capacities of different genres: the dignity of their subject matter, for example. These hierarchies function as analogies for social and political hierarchies and, thereby, as a means for the distribution of unequal civic capacities and entitlements. By contrast, the aesthetic regime of the arts does *not* establish a division between art and other ways of doing and making as such but “is based on distinguishing a sensible mode of being specific to artistic products.”<sup>26</sup> This mode disconnects the sensible from its ordinary associations and connections by subjecting it to the power of a form of thought that renders the sensible foreign or strange to itself. This conception of the aesthetic frees art from any specific rule, such as that of particular artistic hierarchies or genres. Rancière’s contention that the aesthetic regime of the arts aims to effect a redistribution of the sensible to the extent that it promises both a new life for art and a new life for individuals and the community is equally important. For this produces an orientation that is concerned both to secure the autonomy of art and to ground that autonomy “to the extent that it connects it to the hope of ‘changing life.’”<sup>27</sup> In contrast to Bourdieu’s account of the relations between autonomy and heteronomy as opposing principles defined in a relationship of simple antagonism to one another, Rancière argues that the aesthetic regime of the arts generates a series of different “*emplotments*” of the relations between autonomy and heteronomy. Flaubert’s *l’art pour l’art*, the educative mission of museums and libraries,

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<sup>25</sup> See Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting*.

<sup>26</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Continuum, 2004), 2 (hereafter cited in text as *PA*).

<sup>27</sup> Jacques Rancière, “The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes: *Emplotments* of Autonomy and Heteronomy,” *New Left Review* 14 (2002):134 (hereafter cited in text as *AR*).

early industrial workers' search for freedom through literature, Adorno's negative aesthetics, and the commercialization of art as a means of bridging the division between the art of the beautiful and the art of living are all different "emplotments" of the possible courses of action that are generated by the "and" that derives from "the same knot binding together autonomy and heteronomy" but which they operate differently (AR 134).

This framework makes it possible to take account of the multiple and often contradictory social inscriptions of aesthetic practices in the aesthetic regime of the arts. To the extent that it is no longer necessarily attached to a division between different ways of doing and making, art no longer necessarily functions as a means of marking divisions in the order of social occupations. The experience of the autonomy of art at the moment when the orders of the sensible are suspended becomes a moment and space, an opportunity, for free self-shaping that is, in principle, available to all. It becomes, in Schiller's conception, a "specific mode of living in the sensible world that must be developed by 'aesthetic education' in order to train men susceptible to live in a free community" (PA 27). It is therefore easy to see how, as one of its social inscriptions, this conception of the aesthetic came to be connected to the programs of *Bildung* that were concerned, beyond the ethical training of state bureaucrats and the private cultivation of the bourgeois, to translate culture, in its Kantian conception, into programs of public education through which the governed were to be drawn into the orbit of practices of self-government.<sup>28</sup> This is not a role performed by aesthetic discourse in its pure forms. It rather concerns the respects in which—in Linda Dowling's telling observation— aesthetics comes to be vulgarized as, by being connected to programs of government intended to incorporate new constituencies into liberal techniques of self rule, it was connected to socially utilitarian conceptions of art and its function.<sup>29</sup> But this "muddying" of the relations between art and life is precisely what the aesthetic regime of the arts makes possible in its concern to connect art to the task of changing life.

This remains a continuing aspect of the social inscription of aesthetic discourses, one of the ways in which relations of autonomy and heteronomy have been "emplotted" in the aesthetic regime of the arts. Bourdieu's neglect of these considerations means that he ignores what has been and remains a tension within the rhetorics and practices of the public cultural institutions developed in the nineteenth century—art galleries, libraries, concert halls—to the extent that these have operated both as key sites for the operation of practices of distinction while also, and often at the same time, aspiring to function as institutions of civic governance committed to spreading the reach of art.<sup>30</sup> Bourdieu is no doubt right to call attention to the role of the art gallery in producing the pure gaze of aesthetic contemplation. But this needs to be complemented by accounts of the parallel attempts to train the eye of the visitor in a civically utilitarian fashion that also formed—and still do—an important aspect of the practices of public art galleries.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

<sup>29</sup> See Linda Dowling, *The Vulgarization of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> Lawrence Levine offers a more detailed elaboration of this point. *Highbrow/Lowbrow* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 206–10.

<sup>31</sup> See Tony Bennett, "Civic Seeing: Museums and the Organisation of Vision," in *Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. S. MacDonald (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 263–81, and "The Multiplication of Culture's Utility," *Critical Inquiry* 21 (1995): 859–89.

Rancière's sense of the different ways in which the "and" is operated in the knot that binds autonomy and heteronomy together in the aesthetic regime of the arts helps to make sense of the relations between consonant and dissonant profiles discussed in the previous section. The degree of dissonance that we saw here is probably best accounted for in terms of the operation of commercial forms of cultural production in spreading cultural practices across class boundaries in the interests of audience maximization. It is, however, also important to stress the degree to which the kinds of governmental inscription of aesthetic discourses discussed above have also—alongside traditions of working-class self-improvement—led to significant forms of working-class participation in the forms of high culture associated with the institutions of legitimate culture. This is something that Rancière set out to show in a project of historical recovery which, in a revision of cultural forms of *ouvrièrism*, aimed not to give back to forgotten traditions of working-class writing and reading their lost voice but to show how the literary activities of significant cohorts of nineteenth-century workers undermined the distinction associated with the earlier poetic regime of the arts between those who performed useful labor and those who aspired to freedom through the disinterested pursuit of aesthetics.<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Rose similarly shows, for a range of periods from the early nineteenth century to the immediate postwar years, how far, for significant sections of the British working class, literary and musical tastes and practices were shaped both by governmental and commercial initiatives aimed at the diffusion of high culture and by working-class forms of autodidacticism shaped by institutional initiatives connected to the development of the labor movement within which the ethos of disinterestedness—mediated via Matthew Arnold—was much in evidence.<sup>33</sup>

When introducing the working-class aesthetic in *Distinction*, Bourdieu argues that it is "constantly obliged to define itself in terms of the dominant aesthetics" (D 41). Yet, a little later, he suggests that the sole function of the working classes in the system of aesthetic positions is "to serve as a foil, a negative reference point, in relation to which all aesthetics define themselves, by successive negations" (D 57). This is to conduct definitional work in a mirror structure in which the bourgeois and working-class aesthetic dispositions are constructed by serving as each other's antithesis. Yet the five principles that Bourdieu attributes to the working-class aesthetic—the taste for the necessary, carnivalesque excess, settling for the agreeable rather than stretching for the beautiful, confusing the beautiful with the good in the tendency to compound ethical and aesthetic judgments, and a failure to recognize the Kantian separation of content and form—will not serve this purpose when account is taken of muddled histories of the kind outlined above. The confusion of the good and the beautiful is rampant in post-Kantian aesthetics (Ruskin and Morris, for example); studies of subcultures have shown that a preference for form over content is by no means an exclusive feature of Kantian high aesthetics;<sup>34</sup> and not all high modernist aesthetics are premised on the disinterested appreciation of form—there is a strong utilitarian strain in early twentieth-century American modernism, reflecting its Puritan foundations.<sup>35</sup> Let us grant, then, that the antithetical structure informing Bourdieu's conception of the aesthetic is

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<sup>32</sup> I draw here on Andrew Parker's editorial introduction to Rancière's *The Philosopher and His Poor* and Donald Reid's introduction to Rancière's *The Nights of Labor: The Worker's Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1989).

<sup>33</sup> See Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Class* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>34</sup> Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995).

<sup>35</sup> See Eduardo de la Fuente, "Max Weber and Charles Ives: The Puritan as Cultural Modernist," *Journal of Classical Sociology* 4 (2004): 191-214; and Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 146-60.

unsustainable. The question I now turn to concerns the consequences of this for his conception of the working class and its relations to intellectuals.

### **The Culture of the Necessary: Disqualifying the Working Class**

From Rancière's perspective, Bourdieu's analysis in *Distinction* is historically out of step in describing an articulation of culture to classes that conforms to the logic of the earlier poetic or representative regime of the arts in which some ways of doing and making are differentiated from others as art and connected to status groups on the basis of rigid and hierarchically organized divisions of genres. The analytical structure of *Distinction* is similarly informed by the discursive coordinates of the aesthetic traditions that Kant wrote against, in which the link between aesthetic practices and social differentiation forms part of a broader set of practices that qualified some for citizenship while simultaneously disqualifying others. This is evident in eighteenth-century civic humanist aesthetics in which the capacities to judge art and to govern are linked together as products of the freedom from toil and from political interference that the gentry derived from their ownership of land. The pursuit of liberal occupations also facilitated the development of an intellectual capacity to abstract from particulars so as to have regard for the civic good of the whole body politic that found its aesthetic complement in the disinterested appreciation of form. Both of these capacities were denied those in mechanical occupations to the extent that their horizons were judged to be limited to the performance of routine functions.

There are echoes of these earlier positions in *Distinction*, particularly in Bourdieu's approach to the working-class culture of the necessary. This differs from his approach to other habitus. In his discussion of the relations between habitus and the space of lifestyles, Bourdieu identifies two factors structuring the habitus: first, the intrinsic properties that derive from the conditions of existence of the class concerned and, second, the relational properties that each class derives from its position relative to other classes such that the whole system of such differential relations is inscribed within each habitus. However, the balance between these two factors is uneven, since the working class is assigned the role of functioning as a fixed point of reference in relation to which other positions differentiate themselves. The working-class habitus is therefore not itself a site of differentiating activity except purely negatively as, in the very process of rejecting the dominant culture, the working class is thrown back on its own pure class conditioning. Here the unmediated force of necessity speaks to and through the intrinsic conditions of class existence without any question of relationality entering into the matter. This has the further consequence of making the working-class habitus more singularly unified and fixed than those of other classes. As we have seen, Bourdieu allows exceptions to the unity of the habitus where tensions are generated by the contradictory location of individuals or groups across different fields—between the class positions of artists and their positions in the artistic field, for example, or, as in his own *habitus clivé*, where mobility trajectories open up a significant distance between class of origin and class of destination. And in later work, Bourdieu's account of the role of "technical capital" in organizing working-class choice in the housing market suggests a more open and differentiating approach to working-class habitus.<sup>36</sup> For members of the working class in *Distinction*, however, the dire weight of necessity permits not the slightest chink of

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<sup>36</sup> Nicholas Thoburn suggests a helpful qualification to this position by showing how, when Marx does allow the working class to act in its own right, this is only via the production of the *lumpenproletariat* as a position of absolute negation from which the working class can distinguish itself. "Difference in Marx: The Lumpenproletariat and the Proletarian Unnameable," *Economy and Society* 31 (2002): 434-60.

differentiation. They are not players in the field in which the game of distinction takes place; rather, they provide the setting against which that game is played, but only by others. As Rancière puts it: “As for the poor, they do not play. Indeed, their habitus discloses to them only the semblance of a game where the anticipated future is not what is possible but simply the impossible: ‘a social environment’ with ‘its “closed doors,” “dead ends” and “limited prospects”’ where ‘the “art of assessing likelihoods”’ cannot euphemise the virtue of necessity. Only those who are chosen have the possibility of choosing” (*PA* 183). We can see the consequences of this exclusion in the following passages from *Distinction*, which deny the working class, evoked in the form of a proletarian sublime, any capacity for aesthetic judgment of form disconnected from the choice of the necessary.

[N]othing is more alien to working-class women than the typically bourgeois idea of making each object in the home the occasion for an aesthetic choice ... or of involving specifically aesthetic criteria in the choice of a saucepan or cupboards. (*D* 379)

[R]ooms socially designated for “decoration,” the sitting room, dining room or living room ... are decorated in accordance with established conventions, with knick-knacks on the mantelpiece, a forest scene over the sideboard, flowers on the table, without any of these obligatory choices implying decisions or a search for effects. (*D* 379)

Perhaps the most ruthless call to order . . . stems from the closure effect of the homogeneity effect of the directly experienced social world. There is no other possible language, no other life-style, no other form of kinship relation; the universe of possibles is closed. (*D* 381)

In the chapter immediately following his discussion of the choice of the necessary, Bourdieu discusses the working class’s relation to politics. Taking issue with those whom he variously described as populists or class racists practicing an inverted ethnocentrism that credits the common people with an innate knowledge of politics, Bourdieu’s concern is with the processes through which the working classes are politically disqualified, and disqualify themselves, because they are denied access to the appropriate means of forming political opinions and judgments. There is not space here to go into this account beyond noting how Bourdieu sets this topic up by referring to Marx and Engels’s projection of communist society as one in which it is only the generalization of freedom from necessity across all classes which, by making participation in aesthetic practice and judgment possible for all, also allows “everyone sufficient free time to take part in the general affairs of society—*theoretical as well as practical*” (qtd. in *D* 397). Marx and Engels’s position here echoes the ways in which, in civic humanist aesthetics, the connections between aesthetic judgment and the political qualification of the gentry had been defined against the political disqualification of the artisan classes. The difficulty here is that, pending the equalization in the distribution of free time that Marx and Engels anticipate, the working class is disqualified from political agency in their work too. Or rather, as Rancière argues, the proletariat is called on to fulfill a form of political agency (the revolution) which, in its actual forms, the proletariat cannot discharge until it has acquired the capacity to do so. This, however, is not something the proletariat can accomplish itself but must rather receive in the form of a gift by being impregnated by philosophy and thus, in practical terms, being subordinated to the direction of intellectuals.<sup>37</sup> In the meantime, in its actual empirical forms, the proletariat is disqualified from political action unless guided from without by the philosopher.

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<sup>37</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Social Structures of the Economy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005).

In Bourdieu's account, too, the working classes, while possessing formal political rights, remain subject to informal political disqualification owing to their exclusion from the means of forming political opinions and judgment. This, in turn, is an effect of their exclusion from the education system and the consequent limitation of their horizons to a habitus shaped exclusively by the culture of the necessary. Bourdieu's concern, of course, is to identify these informal mechanisms of political disqualification as ones that need to be counteracted by the equalization of educational opportunities as the only means of universalizing the conditions of access to the universal that he sees as a precondition for full and effective citizenship. The difficulties concern what is to happen in the meantime. Bourdieu throws some light on this in his account of the mechanisms that are needed to translate probable classes into actual ones. Probable classes are defined by their relations to one another within the relationally constituted space of positions and are occupied by agents who are "subject to similar conditions of existence and conditioning factors and, as a result, are endowed with similar dispositions which prompt them to develop similar practices."<sup>38</sup> For a probable class to become an actual class such that the way in which its projects potentially divide the space of positions prevails over other potential divisions of that space (those derived from relations of gender or ethnicity, for example) depends on whether or not a political process of class making (he cites E. P. Thompson's work favorably here) is able to produce the class as "a *well-founded* artefact" (WM 8–9) in the same way that Durkheim spoke of religion as a well-founded illusion. But this can only be the result of a process of delegation that is simultaneously one of dispossession: "[A] 'class,' social, sexual, ethnic, or otherwise, exists when there are agents capable of imposing themselves, as authorised to speak and act officially in its place and in its name, upon those who, by recognising themselves in these plenipotentiaries, by recognising them as endowed with full power to speak and act in their name, recognise themselves as members of the class, and in doing so, confer upon it the only form of existence a group can possess" (WM 15).

In Bourdieu's work, from *Distinction* (where it needs a little digging to unearth) to his later writings (where it is quite explicit), the working class's cultural deprivation both requires such delegation and leads to its subordination to a cadre of universal intellectuals. This cadre, by virtue of its interest in the pursuit of disinterestedness, is charged with the responsibility for distilling the universal from the past struggles of artists and intellectuals and of representing it in the present. Yet, as Ben Singer notes, the logic of such a claim to universality requires that this cadre of intellectuals must somehow include the excluded through a relation of "representational substitution" if they are to be able to claim to speak for the interests of humanity in the making. But how then, Singer asks, can this representational substitution "overcome the divisions it decries when the division between representatives and represented is so great that the represented appear totally incapable of representing themselves (because they lack the dispositions and aptitudes, not to mention the socially validated competencies)"? The solution implicit in Bourdieu's work, he argues, is "a pedagogical utopia wherein the logic of substitution is gradually replaced by a logic of representational absorption such that everyone is able to speak the language of the universal."<sup>39</sup> In the meantime, though, the system for disqualifying those who labor from an

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<sup>38</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "What Makes a Social Class? On the Theoretical and Practical Existence of Groups," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 32 (1987): 1-17 (hereafter cited in text as WM).

<sup>39</sup> Brian C. J. Singer, "Méditations Pascaliennes: The *Skholè* and Democracy," *European Journal of Social Theory* 2 (1999): 294.

entitlement to a full place in the polis, that was associated with the poetic regime of the arts, remains in place.

There are good reasons to value Bourdieu's work for the issues it has opened up around the relationships between cultural capital, the education system, and contemporary processes of class formation and differentiation. There are, though, equally good reasons for wanting to detach such concerns from the coordinates supplied by the conception of the relations between aesthetics and politics within which Bourdieu's analyses of cultural consumption are set. This reconsideration involves, as I have tried to show, careful examination not just of Bourdieu's central theoretical categories but also of the procedures—of questionnaire design, techniques of visualization, and the interpretation of statistical data—through which such categories are operationalized in empirical analysis. It also requires a more nuanced account of the relations between aesthetics and the social than Bourdieu's "take" on Kant gives us. Rancière's perspective on the aesthetic regime of the arts, I have suggested, meets this need by the more pluriform set of relations between autonomy and heteronomy that are opened up by its account of the varied organization of the "and" that binds the relations between the life of art and the art of life.

## **CORRECTION**

In *New Literary History*, volume 38, no. 1, in the essay by Tony Bennett, "Habitus Clivé: Aesthetics and Politics in the Work of Pierre Bourdieu," there is a mismatch in figure 3 between the key in that figure and the text referring to it. The relevant text on page 214 should read as follows: The three colored dots indicate the location within the space of the means for each of these classes: gray for the professional/upper management class (the cloud of individuals encompassed by the red circumference), maroon for the intermediate class (the center of the cloud of individuals encompassed by the green circumference), and light red for the working class (the center for the cloud of individuals encompassed by the blue circumference).

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