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## Postscript: Cultural Capital and Inequality: Refining the Policy Calculus

Tony Bennett

It is clear from the papers collected in this issue that marked inequalities characterize the British population's relations to culture, and that these inequalities are strongly connected to some of the main drivers of social stratification more generally. The close relations between both degree and kind of cultural engagement on the one hand and, on the other, occupational class position and level of education, taken, respectively, as rough proxies for economic and cultural capital, are particularly noteworthy in this regard, leaving little room for doubt regarding the regularity of the interconnections between cultural, social and economic inequalities. To return to some of the questions raised in the introduction to this issue and reviewed again in the conclusion to the previous article, there are, though, good reasons for doubting that the vocabulary of social exclusion provides an adequate means of engaging with these. This is not to dispute that there are sections of the population whose degree of cultural disengagement might, as a matter of political convenience, be described in terms of the languages of social exclusion or cultural deprivation. Those in routine and semi-routine occupations, those who have never worked, those with no educational qualifications and the over 65s could all be described in these terms. The issue, rather, concerns the adequacy of the forms of analysis and action that follow in the slipstream of such vocabularies. For by constructing the forms of inequality to which they refer as exceptions, affecting society only at its margins, they suggest that these inequalities are to be addressed through a mixture of integrative mechanisms, some of them material (paid work), many of them moral, through which such groups are to be reconnected to 'the mainstream'. As our study shows, such exclusions are not an exception to rules that operate differently within 'the mainstream', but a particular, albeit extreme, manifestation of the ways in which cultural and economic capital—education and occupational class—also work to produce cultural inequalities within the mainstream.

To this extent, Bourdieu was right in drawing attention to the need for education and cultural policies to work hand-in-hand with one another if culture is ever to be withdrawn from the 'game of distinction' in which, as that game is presently played, it operates as a crucial relay mechanism in the processes through which class divisions are organized and reproduce<sup>1</sup> And, certainly, the Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion (CCSE) data provide a resource for interrogating the relations between education and cultural policies in ways that have not hitherto been possible in Britain. However, this is a task that will have to await another occasion. My concerns here are the more limited ones of exploring how a more refined calculus for the development of cultural policies focused on the relations between cultural capital and inequality might be developed by drawing on two aspects of the work of Bernard Lahire (2003, 2004). There are a number of reasons why Lahire's work is helpful here. It has been developed in a close, but probing, relationship to Bourdieu's work, and has suggested

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<sup>1</sup> I say 'as presently played' to acknowledge the interesting questions John Guillory opens up in imagining a situation in which the game of distinction is played as a way of marking cultural differences which, in being disconnected from social divisions, can be valued as ends in themselves (Guillory, 1993, pp. 325–340).

ways of reading the kinds of cultural consumption statistics that Bourdieu was concerned with which both complement and complicate the conclusions that Bourdieu derived from them. This is especially true of Lahire's critical engagement with Bourdieu's interpretation of the concept of habitus as—at least in *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984), the position of his later work is more complicated<sup>2</sup>—a unified and unifying mechanism that results in a high degree of consistency in the tastes and preferences of individuals across different fields. This consistency, in Bourdieu's analysis, has its roots in the class position which provides the unifying principle for the habitus of class members. The second aspect of Lahire's work I want to comment on concerns his criticism of Bourdieu's tendency to focus on the characteristics—of cultural tastes, knowledge and participation, for example—that are most distinctively associated with, in this case, a particular class when compared to other classes at the price of other, sometimes contradictory, characteristics that might also be exhibited by the members of the class in question. Putting these two points together, Lahire argues that Bourdieu's theoretical predisposition to see individuals as the sites of unified tastes leads him to interpret cultural consumption statistics in ways that minimize, and often make entirely invisible, what Lahire calls 'dissonances' in the taste profiles of individuals: that is, combinations of tastes for cultural pursuits that occupy different positions in the space of lifestyles.

Commenting on 1997 official French data, Lahire (2004) thus notes that while higher-level managers and professionals were most distinctly different from the working classes in their preferences for opera, classical music, jazz and classical literature, such activities accounted for only a tiny fraction of the cultural preferences of these groups. Only 3 per cent of the senior managers and professionals in the survey Lahire analyses identified opera as their preferred music, with 9 per cent doing so for jazz, and 22 per cent for classical music. When compared with the 56 per cent who had never been either to the opera or to a jazz concert and the 41 per cent who had never been to a classical music concert, this suggests a class fraction with a somewhat distanced relation to legitimate culture rather than one immersed in it. In our sample, similarly, while higher-level professionals show the highest rate of overall liking for classical music (31 per cent), more of them (49 per cent) prefer rock music. And if lower professionals and higher technicians are the most likely to have read Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (58 per cent), a central text in the national literary canon, a good portion of these (23 per cent) have also read John Grisham's *The Firm*, a more straightforwardly popular text. Large employers and senior managers are the occupational class most likely to name impressionism as their preferred type of painting, but more of them (47 per cent) prefer the much more popular genre of landscapes. And if landscapes (46 per cent) are the favourite paintings for workers in semi-routine occupations, 13 per cent of these also prefer modern art. Lower technicians, who have the highest rate of preference for country and western music (52 per cent), are also prone to like modern jazz (20 per cent). Higher supervisory workers, who are the most likely to have read Catherine Cookson's *The Solace of Sin* (14%), are just as likely (15%) to have read Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, the book in our survey with the strongest 'literary' associations.

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<sup>2</sup> In *Distinction*, Bourdieu is unequivocal in arguing that the habitus derives its unity from the class to which the individual belongs (see, for example, Bourdieu, 1984, p. 56). In his later work, particularly that focused on the position of writers, artists, intellectuals or scientists located in different fields (the scientific, the academic field etc.), he allowed a degree of tension between the ways in which an individual's habitus might be shaped by their position in such fields and the shaping of their habitus by their class position.

My interest in drawing attention to these considerations here concerns the implications of different ways of representing the distribution of cultural tastes and activities in statistical terms for the ways in which policy options are posed, pursued and assessed. I can, though, in the space of a postscript, do no more than illustrate the implications of looking at the cultural policy implications of cultural capital analysis through the perspective of Lahire's focus on the ways in which individuals' overall 'taste profiles' sometimes combine preferences that belong to the same position in the space of lifestyles, and sometimes preferences that belong to different positions in the space of lifestyles. I do so by looking at how the tastes for the members of our sample are distributed across three fields when considered in the light of the different degrees of legitimacy that can be assigned to different genres within those fields.

In Figure 1, I reproduce the classification of television genres into different legitimacies that I proposed in my discussion of 'distinction on the box' (Bennett, this volume) and summarize the similar classifications for film genres and visual art genres that were arrived at by applying the same forms of correlation analysis that were used to construct these.

**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, nature and history documentaries, drama

**Film Genres**

*Low legitimacy*

Musicals, war, westerns, romance, horror, cartoon, Bollywood

*Medium legitimacy*

Action/adventure/thriller, cartoon, comedy, crime, fantasy, science fiction

*High legitimacy*

Alternative/art cinema, costume drama/literary adaptations, film noir, documentary

**Visual Art Genres**

*Low legitimacy*

Portraits, none

*Medium legitimacy*

Performance art, still lifes, landscapes, modern art

*High legitimacy*

Impressionism, Renaissance art

Figure 1: Film, Television and Art Legitimacies

My interest here is in the extent to which individuals in the sample have tastes that are consonant in terms of their degrees of legitimacy across these three fields. Table 1 addresses these questions. Those with consonant tastes (that is, whose first choice is for a genre of the same level of legitimacy (high, medium, low) across television, film and visual art)<sup>3</sup> account for 24.5 per cent of the sample, with most of these (20 per cent) preferring the medium-

<sup>3</sup> Those who do not have or do not watch television or who did not choose a television or film genre are not included in these figures. However, 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 gave 'none' as an answer in relation to the list of genres given—137 in contrast to 26 for film and six 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 judgements within it.

legitimacy genres. Those with choices spread across low/medium and medium/high combinations are the two largest groups in the sample, and, taken as a whole, those with dissonant taste profiles across these three fields account for 72 per cent of the sample.

**Table 1** Consonant/Dissonant Profiles: Film, TV and Art (Per Cent)

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

What happens when these taste profiles are distributed across occupational class positions and levels of education? Table 2 shows the results of distributing these taste profiles across occupational class positions, using a compressed version of The National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NSEC) class model. What emerge most clearly from Table 2 are the small percentages of all occupational classes with taste profiles that are either consonantly low or consonantly high and, just as important, the relatively low rate of differentiation between these classes with regard to the proportions of their members whose taste profiles are of a consonant medium legitimacy. The divisions that are far more important in numerical terms are those between the medium/high and the low/medium profiles, with the first quite sharply polarized between the high rates for large employers, higher managers and professionals, on the one hand, and those for people in routine and semi-routine occupations, as well as those who have never worked, on the other. The distribution of the low/medium profiles more or less inverts this pattern, with those in semi-routine occupations about three times as likely to have such profiles as the large employers and higher-level managers and professionals.

**Table 2** Consonant and Dissonant Taste Profiles/Occupational Class (Per Cent)

	High cons	Med/high	Med cons	Low/med	Low cons	Low/high	Low/high/med	Other	N
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

Notes: 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.

The situation is similar with respect to education (Table 3). Again, the high and low consonant profiles account for negligible proportions of most levels of educational attainment, peaking at 4 per cent of those with no educational qualifications who have consonant low profiles and 5 per cent of the university qualified with consonant high profiles. There is, however, a greater degree of variance in the range of consonant medium profiles, mainly due to the high rate (33 per cent) of those with A-levels or equivalent qualifications who have such profiles—a factor which reflects the age composition of this group, 46 per cent of whom are under 35.

**Table 3** Consonant and Dissonant Taste Profiles/Level of Education (Per Cent)

	High cons	Med/high	Med cons	Low/med	Low cons	Low/high	Low/high/med	Other	N
No qualifications	1	19	18	36	4	5	11	5	420
GCSE/O-level	2	30	18	34	0.5	2	9	3	371
Further education	1	40	21	22	0.6	2	11	2	168
A-level/higher	4	28	33	24	0	2	7	2	211
Degree	5	49	17	17	1	3	7	2	364

There is a more regular range of variation in relation to low/medium profiles, falling from a high of 36 per cent for those with no qualifications to their lowest ratio of 17 per cent of the university educated. It is the high/medium profile, however that show the widest range of variation of these profiles in relation to the level of education of respondents.

These figures are, to some extent, a function of the fields that have been selected for this exercise. For while tastes in the visual art field are strongly polarized in terms of both education and occupational class (see Silva, this issue), this is less true of film and television (see Bennett, this issue). The distribution of the profiles across other fields might well look different.<sup>4</sup> However, this does not gainsay the value of an analysis couched in terms of taste profiles, particularly from a policy perspective. By drawing attention to the balance of taste profiles within the population, policy aims can be formulated in ways which relate to how cultural capital and economic capital operate across a range of social divisions, rather than focusing exclusively on isolated targets which, typically and often implausibly, aspire to zoom individuals across the space of lifestyles (more people from ‘disadvantaged’ backgrounds going to art galleries or to the theatre). This is not to dispute the value of such aspirations, but merely to contend that more immediately achievable purposes might be served, with more sustainable longer-term outcomes, and with more identifiable consequences for larger percentages of the population, by a policy focus that also sought to increase the ratio of consonant medium taste profiles to low/medium profiles, and of high/medium profiles in relation to consonant medium ones. This would be a productive way of operationalizing the implications of cultural capital theory for cultural policy analysis.

<sup>4</sup> My reason for choosing film, television and visual art is that, as the survey questions relating to these asked respondents to identify the genre they most preferred, each member of the sample can be allocated to a consonant or dissonant profile on the basis of their first-choice preferences across these fields. It is also worth noting that a more complicated analysis taking account of second preferences across these fields did not alter the picture significantly. Similar analyses are not possible in relation to the musical, literary and leisure fields owing to the different structure of the questions, asking for preferences in a Likert scale.

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