



"Distinction" thus has an edge to it that lighter and comic treatments like Fussell's "Class" lack. Taste, Bourdieu argues, is a social weapon. The ability to 'know' what is aesthetically, culturally defined as 'superior' is a way of excluding outsiders, of reminding those without access to cultural and educational capital that they *are* outsiders.

The way Bourdieu introduces foreign concepts (habitus, doxa, logic of practice) is through jumping straight and enthusiastically into his deep thoughts, instead of clearly and logically defining them first.

Accepting these dominant characteristics of taste is, according to Bourdieu, a form of "[symbolic violence](#)." That is, the fact of considering these distinctions between tastes as natural, and believing that they are necessary, denies the dominated classes the possibility of defining their own world, which puts those with less general capital at a disadvantage. Moreover, even when the dominated social classes come to have their own ideas about what it is "good taste" and what is not, the aesthetics of the working class is dominated aesthetic, which it is obliged to always defined in terms of the aesthetics of the ruling class . "

Firstly, a definition of terms. Bourdieu puts all domains of culture on a spectrum, from the "legitimate" to the "personal". The legitimate domains relate to art and what we usually call "high culture". The personal domains involve decisions which have a functional element, and are usually more closely related to domestic life, such as food, furnishings, and clothing.

To examine how we make cultural choices, Bourdieu gathered metrics on two core causative factors:

- Educational capital (qualifications).
- Social origin (father's occupation).

Unsurprisingly, he found both factors have an impact on taste. A typical subject will make choices that correlate with peers of the same educational standing, *and* peers of the same social origins. The two peer sets are of course

slightly different, educational class and economic class are linked but they are not identical, and Bourdieu found that some decisions are more closely linked with education, while others are more closely linked with social status.

In short:

- Choices in "legitimate" domains of culture are linked with education.
- More "personal" choices are linked with social origin.

Bourdieu asked his subjects to rank a list of items based on how nice an image they would make. The responses correlated with education. Those with less education chose images anchored in well established aesthetics: the sunset, the folk dance, and accessible scenes of cultural significance, such as first communion. They shunned the banal (tree bark) and the grotesque (butcher's stall).

Moving into the responses from subjects with more education, many of those choices are reversed. In some cases the educational extremes, the highest and lowest, converge in their responses.

Bourdieu remarks that many responses have a sense of being "the right thing to say" according to class norms. The rejection of the tree bark image reveals a hostility on the part of manual workers towards formalistic art (eg photography for photography's sake) as being useless, perverse, bourgeois, ostentatious...and a waste of time (and back in 1962, also a waste of camera film!)

Education, which offers a bridge to higher social status, also offers a shortcut for those who are not exposed to enough culture to develop an aesthetic through experience.

Bourdieu found that social origin was the dominant influence in personal choices relating to food, furniture, clothing. This does not always mean that richer classes have more expensive tastes, often the opposite.

Controlling for education, subjects from working class backgrounds expressed a relative preference for buying furniture from department stores, decorating their homes in a "clean, tidy" and "easy to maintain" manner, choosing clothes based on "value for money", and cooking meals that are "simple and well presented".

Middle classes expressed a relative preference for buying furniture in specialized shops, decorating their homes in a "cosy" and "warm" manner, choosing clothes that "suit [their] personality", and having "simple and well presented" or "original, exotic, delicate" meals.

### **The Different Approaches to Art**

Bourdieu defines art as anything which has a form more important than its function. Furthermore, the art piece must be intended as an art piece, by both producer and viewer, who in turn are shaped by social norms.

When that status is institutionalised (ie in a museum) all ambiguity of form/function is lost, and artistic questions now have a "right" answer. This forms the basis of the "popular aesthetic", which involves a hostility to all forms of experimentation, caused by lack of familiarity and the need for participation. The popular aesthetic also precludes art forms seen as purposely inaccessible.

Therefore, taste is an important example of [cultural hegemony](#), of how class fractions are determined, not only by the possession of social capital and economic capital, but by the possession of cultural capital, an insidious social mechanism that guarantees the social reproduction and cultural reproduction of the ruling class. On the other hand, because a person is taught their tastes at an early age, and they are deeply internalized, such social conditioning is very difficult to change, and they tend to permanently identify a person as coming from a certain class. social mobility, which in turn impedes social mobility upward. In this way, the cultural tastes of the ruling class tend to dominate the tastes of the other social classes, thus forcing individual men and women of the dominated classes to conform to certain aesthetic preferences, so as not to risk social disapproval of looking like people. crude, vulgar or insipid.