**Preprint**

**EMERGING FORMS OF CULTURAL CAPITAL**

**Annick Prieur & Mike Savage**

**Cite as :**

Annick Prieur & Mike Savage (2013) Emerging forms of cultural capital, *European Societies*, 15:2, 246-267.

**Link:** [**https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14616696.2012.748930**](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14616696.2012.748930)

**Introduction**

Thirty years after *Distinction* was published in French, and almost 50 years after Bourdieu began to deploy the idea, the concept of cultural capital has become one of the most widely used in the social sciences. Although Bourdieu’s analysis was based firmly in the French experience, applications of his work have been extended in the past decade to most European nations, which allow us the prospect of developing a more rigorous comparative analysis of cultural capital across the continent. The aim of our article is therefore to reflect both on how the nature of cultural capital might have been redefined since Bourdieu’s original research, and also to demonstrate significant Europe-wide similarities in what we term ‘emerging’ cultural capital. Our focus here is on research on cultural consumption, as this is directly relevant to studies of cultural capital. A parallel exploration of the changing nature and role of cultural capital in school (cf. Kingston 2001) would also be interesting but is beyond the scope of this article.

In pursuing these issues, we emphasise two points. Firstly, we need to de-couple the analysis of cultural capital from broader debates about Bourdieu’s wider theorisation of culture in general. We can see the emergence of a post-Bourdieu current in cultural sociology where what are perceived to be deficiencies in Bourdieu’s methodological and conceptual framing regarding cultural relations have the indirect effect of taking attention away from his analysis of cultural capital itself (e.g., Bottero and Crossley 2011; Lizardo 2011; Prior 2011). By contrast, we will in the first part of the article discuss how it is possible to recognise, from a Bourdieusian framing, that the meaning of cultural capital may be changing so that it is different to that which he analyses in *Distinction*. We therefore necessarily spend some time arguing for the need to distinguish ‘absolute’ (or fixed) from ‘relative’ (or floating) concepts of cultural capital.

Secondly, we will seek to move beyond a comparative strategy which simply contrasts cultural capital in different nations, as if these are autonomous entities. Taking seriously the critique of ‘methodological nationalism’ (Glick-Schiller 2008) we seek to demonstrate the stakes of cosmopolitan, transnational cultural capital. Our springboard here is Neil Fligstein’s (2008) emphasis on the emergence of a European field in which the well-educated professional and managerial classes are increasingly playing on a continental pitch. In the second part of the paper, where we provide an overview of the different claims about changes that are made in recent empirical studies of cultural consumptions we will detect certain common elements which are consistent with this shift. Drawing on research on current or emerging forms of cultural capital stemming both from studies we have been involved in ourselves (cf. Prieur and Savage 2011) and other European, studies of cultural consumptions,1 we will

emphasise the value of flexible concept of cultural capital which can be seen to have resonances across numerous European domains.

**Part I: Conceptual issues**

The history of ‘cultural capital’

The concept ‘cultural capital’ was originally developed as a tool for explaining how the success of children in school depended on the level of education of their parents. Children of educated parents enjoyed advantages, not only thanks to the practical help they received from their parents, but also due to their intimate familiarity with highbrow culture,

1. This article has emerged out of collaboration in a European network on studies of cultural distinctions and social differentiation - SCUD [(www.soc.aau.dk/scud).](http://www.soc.aau.dk/scud) See the discussion in Prieur and Savage (2011).

such as fine arts and classical music (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979 [1964], 1996 [1970]). To have inherited what was considered as ‘good taste’ was in school recognised by teachers as a ‘cultivated naturalness’ (cf. Bourdieu 1984: 71). The inheritors’ advantages were first coined as ‘capital linguistique’ (Bourdieu and Passeron 1964), but the term was replaced by cultural capital in the 1979 edition (Robbins 2005: 25).

This argument about advantages derived from cultural knowledge, habits and taste was in *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]) extended from the educational system to the whole of society with an analysis of different groups’ lifestyles, tastes, cultural competences and participation, as well as of their attitudes in cultural, moral and political affairs. The concept of cultural capital plays a key role in Bourdieu’s analysis of how social groups acquire status and indulge in practices of domination and exclusion, but the book does not contain any formal definition of the concept. Instead, the concept ranges over as different phenomena as formal education, knowledge about classical music, preferences for modern art, well-filled bookshelves etc. This apparent conceptual elusiveness was most certainly a deliberate choice by Bourdieu, as it permitted to link phenomena that on the surface not seemed to have anything to do with each other, but actually, according to Bourdieu’s reasoning, worked together as forces of social domination (Bourdieu 1986).

Since then, the concept of cultural capital has become part of the sociological lexicon. Most students in sociology, at least in Europe, are introduced to it in an early phase of their studies, and innumerable items of research within the sociology of education, the sociology of culture and related areas and disciplines use the concept. The reasons for this popularity are numerous. Like the idea of social capital which has also circulated widely - especially in the rendering of Coleman and Putnam - it partly reflects the hegemony of economics in which key concepts need to be rendered in economistic terms. Yet, unlike the concept of social capital, cultural capital retains a critical edge (to possess it is not unambiguously a positive thing, even if it would be considered worse not to possess it) which ensures that it attracts to its banner a wide range of critical social scientists and scholars in the humanities who wish to expose powerful forms of domination and inequality in its name.

Over the past three decades the concept has therefore come to play an increasingly important international role in recharging the sociology of stratification and in allowing a rethinking of concepts of class and status in a globalised and ‘informationalised’ world where media proliferate and cultural communication abounds. ‘Cultural class analysis’ is now an increasingly influential paradigm where it competes with more conven- tional ‘employment aggregate’ approaches (Crompton 2008). At the same time, however, there has been an increasing recognition that the nature of cultural capital dissected by Bourdieu in *Distinction* (based on French data collected between 1963 and 1973) may not be that which operates today. Only a small proportion of the French population had television sets in 1970. The very concept of the personal computer (as opposed to the mainframe) was unimaginable. The flowering of youth culture which had opened up in the 1960s and which animated student politics and social movements was a recent phenomenon which had not been critically digested. In the intervening decades social changes associated with neo- liberalism and financialisation have been much discussed by social sciences. Given the scale of technological and social change, it would be remarkable if Bourdieu’s account of cultural capital continued to exist in unchanged form.

It is quite obvious that the forms of highbrow culture that Bourdieu detected as working as cultural capital in France in the 1960s and 1970s do not enjoy the same social recognition 30-40 years later, neither in France nor in other countries. Kandinsky’s paintings and Boulez’ music cannot stand eternally as examples of avant-garde taste. When *Distinction* is read as an analysis of ‘how modern societies are’, it is an easy game to ‘falsify’ Bourdieu’s argument by, for instance, showing that most highly educated do not listen to avant-garde music. It is our conviction that *Distinction* ought rather to be read as a broad orientation for how modern societies may be analysed in order to discern the mechanisms of social differentiation at work.

Our challenge is to elaborate a concept of cultural capital that avoids two main problems: firstly, fixing it to specific features of elite cultural life as it was practiced in France in the 1960s, and secondly allowing the term to float free of any specificity so that it simply becomes a rhetorical flourish (in the way that the concept of social capital, for instance, has done).

As the concept of cultural capital has gained increasing prominence, there has been a persistent trend to reify it through measuring it as a set of specific tastes or attributes. This is especially marked within cultural sociology, where certain survey responses (such as an exclusive liking for classical music, or the opera) can be treated as an indicator of highbrow taste and hence cultural capital (see the discussion in Savage and Gayo 2011). When cultural capital is treated as a fixed entity, it is easy to dismiss Bourdieu’s analysis as obsolete and irrelevant. It is our claim, however, that we need a more subtle approach to the concept.

All Bourdieu’s concepts were relational. The concept of cultural capital needs to be placed in the wider context of Bourdieu’s field analysis in which the very positioning of cultural tastes and propensities is always

contested. Bourdieu and co-workers (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Bourdieu 1996) insisted on that a capital is always linked to a field, which is always in motion. When, for instance, more people get higher education, the value of this form of cultural capital decreases. We can usefully return to the often neglected elements of *Distinction* which sought to elaborate a more dynamic concept of cultural capital, one which does not simply see it as a historical status residue, but which is attentive to its mobile and energetic elements.

While the field concept only was developed later in Bourdieu’s scholarship, he showed in *Distinction* an awareness of the scale of change which was taking place, to the extent that he identifies a key chapter as devoted to ‘the social space and its transformations’. Here, in his account of ‘the cheating of a generation’ he recognises that ‘diploma inflation’ is a force which accentuates concerns to accumulate cultural capital, and also helps change its nature. As more people go to higher education, so the elite positions associated with higher education themselves change. Attendance at university loses its ability to command status in and of itself. He later coined the term the ‘Don Quixote’ effect for those who hold values that have been rendered obsolete in the surrounding society: these are genuine efforts on the part of popular groups to improve their situation (e.g., by making sacrifices so that their children can be supported to go into higher education), but they turn out to be a chimera because higher education itself no longer commands the values that they hoped for. Bourdieu himself thus places cultural innovation itself in the socio- logical frame, seeing it not at face value, but also a form of position taking

from which advantage within the field can be claimed

It can be seen how naïve it is to claim to settle the question of ‘‘social change’’ by locating ‘‘newness’’ or ‘‘innovation’’ in a particular *site* in social space. For some, this site is at the top, for others, at the bottom; and it always, elsewhere in all the ‘‘new’’, ‘‘marginal’’, ‘‘excluded’’ or ‘‘dropped-out’’ groups, for all those sociologists whose chief concern is to bring ‘‘newness’’ into discussion at all costs. (1984: 156)

Yet in fact, these words are hardly heeded in the more recent endeavours to uncover the ‘creative class’ who are held to be central to successful urban spaces (Florida 2002), or the ‘service class’ which Featherstone (1985) and Lash and Urry (1987) see as central to the emergence of post- modern culture (Savage *et al*. 1992).

In the next section, we therefore suggest to draw attention to emergent forms of cultural capital, which, whilst preserving the relational and exclusionary qualities of cultural capital as dissected in *Distinction,* need not simply be understood through the contours of traditional high culture.

**Part II: Changing cultural capital**

Our background for identifying emergent forms of cultural capital is two studies of cultural consumption we have been part of ourselves. Annick Prieur has studied the Danish city Aalborg, which is a city of 162,000 inhabitants (at the time of the survey) in the midst of a rapid transformation from an industrial to a post-industrial economy. From a sample of 1600 persons between 18 and 75 years of age drawn from the city’s population, 1174 persons (73.4%) were interviewed about their lifestyles. The questions covered different area, both different forms of cultural practices (going to museums, watching TV etc.) and preferences (judging different music artists and authors etc.). These data have been subjected to Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA, also termed Geometric Data Analysis or GDA), in order to construct a social space and a space of lifestyles just like Bourdieu did in *Distinction*. On the basis of the background data on different forms of capital, a social space was constructed wherein we plotted lifestyle choices (Prieur, Rosenlund and Skjott-Larsen 2008). The lifestyle variables were also used to construct a space of lifestyles, wherein the background variables were plotted (Prieur and Rosenlund 2010).

The second author of this article, Mike Savage, participated in the UK’s *Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion* project.2 This involved a representative national survey (*N* =1564) of the UK population, 25 focus groups with a wide range of social groups (in different geographical locations, involving ethnic Indians, Pakistanis, Afro-Caribbeans and Whites, groups with heterosexual and homosexual orientations, and from different classes). Forty-four qualitative interviews were also

conducted and a further 13 interviews with social and cultural ‘elites’. The analysis proceeded using MCA (as in the Danish study) where a space of lifestyles was constructed and social and demographic variables were plotted as supplementary variables (see Bennett *et al*. 2009; Le Roux *et al*.

2008). This project constitutes the most systematic study of cultural taste and participation ever conducted in the UK.

The Danish and UK studies share a similar research design making comparisons possible. And indeed some common patterns emerge. Firstly, both in the Danish and the British study, the level of participation distinguishes better between survey respondents than the specific preferences or activities do, as the fundamental division goes between those who appear culturally engaged (across a range of specific tastes and practices) and those who appear to largely abstain. The finding is confirmed in a Finnish study (Kahma and Toikka 2012). There may, however, be a problem in an underreporting of working class activities due to biases in questionnaire design (with not enough categories for the typical working class activities). One should, for instance recognise that TV consumption may be an active and intensely social form of cultural consumption (cf. also the fine distinctions within TV consumption found in France - Lebaron *et al*. 2009).

1. This was an ESRC funded project award no. R000239801. The team comprised Tony Bennett (Principal Applicant), Mike Savage, Elizabeth Silva, Alan Warde (Co- Applicants), and David Wright and Modesto Gayo (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, coordinated the analyses of the quantitative data produced by the survey. Tony Bennett was responsible for the overall direction and coordination of the project. The full results have been reported at length in *Culture, Class, Distinction*, Routledge, 2009.

Secondly, age, gender and/or ethnicity may discriminate better in cultural matters than class does. This claim is found in the British study (Bennett *et al*. 2008), and supported in the Danish (Prieur *et al*. 2008) and the Finnish studies (Purhonen *et al*. 2011). It seems, for instance, that musical taste is strongly structured by age, and reading by gender (all while class structuring within different age groups or genders may prevail). The point we note here is that such arguments, whilst important in their own terms, have usually emphasised the intersections between these forms of inequality and class, and not the irrelevance of class (see e.g., Skeggs 1997; Bennett *et al*. 2008).

We draw on the two studies we have been involved in, alongside other European (and occasionally North American) studies, to explore the changing nature of cultural capital. We have identified five claims about the changing nature of cultural capital that we find particularly important to highlight for discussion, albeit we are not convinced that all these aspects actually have a *social* importance. The five aspects are likely to be interrelated, and in a couple of cases one of them could be the cause of another. The first we will deal with is actually a premise for the following ones.

The decline of traditional highbrow culture

It is now a commonplace to assert that traditional highbrow culture has faded, and/or that it is not as marked in other nations as it was in France at the time when *Distinction* was written. Although this is a commonplace, widely accepted, argument, it is important to explore some nuances to inform our later analysis.

In their overview of educational research, Lareau and Weininger (2003: 579-80) conclude: ‘(.. .) the exclusive respect traditionally accorded to ‘‘highbrow’’ cultural pursuits has largely dissolved, at least in some English-language countries’. Lamont and Lareau (1988) argue that high culture enjoys less recognition in the USA than in France, and that consensus over high status signals may be weaker. In a comparison between the USA and France, Lamont (1992) found that upper-middle- class Americans were much more reluctant to draw class boundaries on the basis of cultural taste than their French counterparts were, and, furthermore, that moral criteria were more important for the drawing of such boundaries. She also argues that the weight accorded to high brow cultural markers may be a French particularity.

Broady (1998) and Danielsen (1998) have earlier suggested that there are egalitarian and anti-elitist currents in Scandinavian countries that inhibit the kind of symbolic dominance in cultural matters that might have existed in France. Prieur, Rosenlund and Skjott-Larsen (2008) clearly support such an interpretation in the Danish case, though with qualifications. Classical high culture does not play an important role in this Danish social space at this moment in time, even if these practices and preferences (like theatre, avant-garde literature, classical music, modern art) are situated exactly where one would expect them to be in the social space: among the highly educated. Yet very few also within this group have these preferences and practices exclusively, and most enjoy other kinds of cultural activities, too. This may also be concluded from Rosenlund’s (2009) earlier studies from Stavanger in Norway, which also were based on survey data and subjected to the same analysis. A study from Finland (Heikkila¨ and Rahkonen 2011), though, shows how Swedish-speaking upper-class women indeed put accent on traditional high culture (theatre, art, design) as markers of distinction.

In the British study, Bennett *et al*. (2009) show that there is little

evidence that snobbish or culturally elitist preferences have much provenance. Evidence on the tastes of the professional-executive class thus demonstrates ‘the more or less total elimination of hints

of snobbishness or expressions of condescension towards other social classes accompanying a greater attachment to popular culture’ (Bennett *et al*. 2009). Added to this comes what they label an inversion of the old and the new ‘with the dynamic and active positions defined in terms of their newness, sometimes linked to the agency of young people and new technological forms’ (173). The classic curriculum may be known, but there is not much interest for it. Similar findings have earlier been reported from Australia (Bennett *et al*. 1999).

Traditional high culture has also lost recognition in France. Lahire (2004) argues, based on a comprehensive set of interviews, that the individualisation process in contemporary France is so strong that it makes no sense to link a particular social group, like the well-educated, to a particular taste, such as highbrow culture.

In a study of cultural consumption and media practices among French teenagers, Pasquier (2005) finds strong differences among the young according to their social origins (as well as in relation to gender) together with a strong pressure to conform to their peers. She holds both findings against the individualisation hypothesis. Against Bourdieu’s argument, however, she emphasises that the character of the most valued cultural forms has changed, also in school. Among these shifts is a decreasing value attributed to classical culture compared to scientific culture (as for example indicated by the

circumstance that the contemporary scientific baccalaureate rates over the *bac* in classic languages and literature). The close affinity with fine arts and classical music of the pupils in a Parisian elite high school will not necessarily be an asset for them, at least not when they simultaneously repudiate contemporary forms of media usage and aesthetic consumption. The media (and peer groups) have challenged the school as a legitimising authority in cultural matters.

We take all this as quite consistent evidence that high-brow culture does not play a very important role in marking class distinctions in many European countries at this moment in time. We would emphasise that this does not mean that class differences in cultural orientations have declined. Indeed, ample studies reveal that these remain strong, but not in terms of differentiating the highbrow middle and upper classes from the lowbrow working classes. In such processes, some social agents will be ahead of the changes, having developed effective reproduction strategies, while others will stick to the evaluation schemes that once gave themselves or their ancestors their privileges but today are in the course of becoming obsolete. The young descendants of the Parisian cultural elite in Pasquier (2005) perfect their violin playing while despising the commercialised youth culture and refusing to ever use a mobile phone. Are they like the aristocrats who became the dancing masters of Europe, as Marx labelled them: a class in descent? Their skills are still valued in school, but may on the labour market be far less convertible than the skills of their peers who spent their spare time on computer games.

**The rise of the cultural omnivore?**

Having stated that the traditional highbrow culture is no longer a characteristic of the well-educated, what - if anything - characterizes this group today? The flowering of a comparative cultural sociology over the past two decades has led to the championing of the cultural omnivore

as an emerging cultural phenomenon. Traces of the cultural omnivore have been detected in many parts of the world, from the USA to Canada, the UK, The Netherlands, Spain and elsewhere.

The concept is originally from Peterson and Kern (1996), who in an American study found a decline in ‘snobbism’ as defined in terms of an exclusive penchant for ‘highbrow’ musical genres (defined as classical music and opera) and a corresponding rise in ‘omnivorousness’, defined as a simultaneous appreciation of both ‘highbrow’ and ‘lowbrow’ genres. Having analysed a large dataset from Great Britain, Chan and Goldthorpe (2005, 2007) maintain that a distinction between cultural omnivores and univores is a strong dividing line today. On those grounds, they contest the idea of symbolic dominance from the culturally privileged (in keeping with Bennett *et al*. 1999, who could find no ‘recognition of the illegitimacy of ‘‘popular’’ values on the part of those who espouse them’ - p. 263). Lizardo (2005) adds nuances to the argument about omnivorousness in a Spanish study by linking this tendency to patterns of geographical identification: respondents with a global identification (contrasted to Spanish and European identification) would be the most omnivorous. The claim is supported or confirmed by other writers such as Bryson (1996), Chan and Goldthorpe, on Scandinavian ground Jæger and Katz-Gerro (2008), and Skarpenes (2007). From Dutch data, van Eijck and Knulst (2005) conclude, however, that while older generations have actually extended their highbrow cultural participation, younger generations increasingly focus on popular culture - so, as an effect of a shift in generations, omnivorousness loses terrain to purely lowbrow culture.

Despite its popularity, and although the concept points usefully towards the need to recognise the existence of hybrid and complex cultural tastes, the cultural omnivore is ultimately an unhelpful way of advancing our understanding of contemporary cultural boundaries (see also Tampubolon 2008). Operationally, it needs to define a priori a state of ‘snobbish high culture’ (measured for instance in terms of a liking for classical music and opera) which is then empirically disputed as a means of demonstrating the existence of the omnivore. Peterson and Kern (1996), for instance, define highbrow taste *a priori* as the liking for both classical music and opera, while C&W, bluegrass, gospel, rock and blues are defined, also a priori, as low brow. This kind of ‘negative argument’ which defines the omnivore in terms of it not conforming to an a priori model is problematic, and might be an artefact of the research instrument. Thus, in some other research designs all the typical choices of the underprivileged classes are lumped together in few categories all while the categorisation scheme is more refined for the culturally privileged classes’ choices. Chan and Goldthorpe (2005), for instance, have only four categories of genres: opera, jazz, classical and pop/rock.

According to an argument related to the omnivorousness-argument, the well-educated would be better characterised by cultural tolerance than by exclusive taste and the symbolic exclusion of forms of popular cultural. Bryson (1996) made her claims about the educated Americans’ higher ‘tolerance’ on the basis of some pretty problematic definitions of tolerance. For instance, a high score for political tolerance was given to people who would not object to letting a person ‘who believes that Blacks are genetically inferior’ or ‘advocates doing away with elections’ teach in a college. She found that the most culturally tolerant in the sense that they enjoyed many different musical genres tended not to approve of gospel and C&W music, which were among the most favoured genres in the general population. She actually concluded that race was traded for class in this taste pattern (p. 895), but did not take this as an opportunity to question her use of the term ‘tolerance’.

We hesitate about the usage of the term ‘tolerance’. Both the Danish (Prieur, Rosenlund and Skjott-Larsen 2008) and British (Bennett *et al*. 2009) studies also conclude that the supposedly omnivores’ tolerant taste has its limits, when confronted with particular items from popular culture. In the Danish study, the culturally privileged appeared to be the least tolerant as they were the ones who most explicitly marked a distaste for some other groups’ tastes. Bennett *et al*. (2009) suggest, however, that eclecticism may be a new form of cultural capital, together with the confident handling of classifications (Chapters 5 and 11). Rather than a sign of its demise, openness to diversity is itself a modality of cultural capital, since it is especially highly valued among those in the higher positions.

On these grounds, we do not think that the existence of ‘omnivorous- ness’ can be taken as proof that cultural capital has lost its importance, It certainly points to important developments in cultural tastes and orientations which indicate the limited purchase of traditional notions of classical high culture. However in our view, these developments can be better theorised as a kind of self-reflexive appropriation of culture which we will term as ‘knowing’ to capture its self conscious capacity to range over cultural forms in an ultimately discriminating way.

A knowing mode of appropriation of culture

Compared to the society analyses by Bourdieu in *Distinction*, the number of possible aesthetic choices has expanded enormously in Western societies today. Mass media’s increased presence in everyday life subjects us all to more information on the range of possible choices, and exposes us to a new and shorter time horizon. What is fashionable today may be ‘so yesterday’

already tomorrow, while signs of vulgarity may just as rapidly become ‘cool’. Cultural production has been through enormous changes, which are of course reflected in the cultural consumption. These changes may imply a certain displacement of how distinction is achieved, with less emphasis on the choices of particular objects and more on the way to relate to these objects. The choice of objects may not correspond too well to the Kantian pure taste dissected by Bourdieu, but the somewhat distanced attitude towards them does. It is thus possible that that the privileged may relate to this proliferation of choices in ‘discerning’ ways which might now mark them out as exclusive.

This argument is compatible with that made by Holt (1997), who argues that the (p. 103) ‘crux of the postmodern condition is the breakdown of the hierarchy distinguishing legitimate ‘‘high’’ culture from mass ‘‘low’’ culture’, as well as the breakdown of the direct relationship between such classifications and class. This implies that the objectified form of cultural capital loses efficacy as a mechanism for exclusionary class boundaries: ‘As popular cultural objects become aestheticised and as elite objects become popularised, the objectified form of cultural capital has in large part been supplanted by the embodied form’. Holt continues ‘In other words, to express distinction through embodied tastes leads cultural elites to emphasise the distinctiveness of consumption practices themselves, apart from the cultural contents to which they are applied’ (pp. 103-4). In order to not be simple followers of fashion, they strive to be updated on the upcoming. Knowledge of particular objects, like restaurants or dishes, is not enough, as they are constantly changing. What is important, is to participate and to have ‘conversational competence in this specialised, esoteric, and dynamic aesthetic’ (p. 104).

Bennett *et al*. (2009) point to a ‘reflexive appropriation’ of culture ‘in a

spirit of openness’ (194) as a middle classes ideal. Of course, all cultural appropriation is reflexive in some sense of the word, but our specific interest is in a particularly distanced and ironic attitude, but also in a particularly verbalised attitude (where the choice of every single item - be it for decoration, for composing a meal, for a personal outfit or other usages - may be explained and accompanied by a long narrative). This involves a ‘knowing’ way of referring to cultural artefacts, which easily slips into ironic references. The Danish study (Prieur and Rosenlund 2010) found some signs that this kind of distanced or ironic attitude is fancied among the culturally privileged, especially the young (with the liking of a satirical TV-program as a particularly significant distinguishing modality). Bennett *et al*. (2009) explore the popularity of ‘crap TV’ amongst young British professionals, in which the ability to identify certain programmes in derogatory terms allowed them to show they ‘knew’ the signifiers of taste, with the result that they could watch

lowbrow programmes without it being seen to categorise them in derogatory ways.

The subtleties implied in the modes of relation to the cultural objects call for qualitative research techniques. Jarness’ (2009) analysis of interviews with Norwegians from the cultural faction of the upper sector of a local social space (Stavanger) reveals how playful and ironic modes of appropriation may work when people with this social profile appropriate cultural products usually considered as popular, or even as ‘bad taste’ or ‘kitsch’. Far from the fall of cultural hierarchies, this ironic and distanced way of appropriating these cultural products betrays a clear sense for distinctions (cf. also Gripsrud 1995 on the reception of *Dynasty* and other soaps).

In a study of French teenagers’ (high school pupils) relations to music and movies Legon (2010) indirectly exposes the shallowness of simple classifications by genres (like those used in most studies drawing conclusions about omnivorousness). While rock is somewhat more coveted among French teenagers from higher classes, and rap among those from more popular classes (Pasquier 2005), Legon (2010) shows the many different ways of consuming, for instance, rap music. While the teenagers from homes with lower education typically have a preference for the most downloaded music pieces, or the ones transmitted by radio or TV, the teenagers from homes with higher education will more often rely on personal advice, and would like to find the good pieces themselves (‘I will not seek to listen to the new rap, the top 10, because, well, I know that’s crap.’). The classical highbrow style as depicted by Bourdieu can be recognised, not only in some fine distinctions concerning the choice of objects (like the least popular within a popular genre), but also in the attention for form and not only for function. The pupils from more educated homes will also more often listen to music without doing anything else, ‘concentrating’ on it, they will more often buy the album, and more often even vinyl records. The pupils from less educated homes, in contrast, will more often not see the point in having the original album if you can burn it for free. The same logic goes for movies. Those from the most educated homes more often emphasise good acting and a story that makes you think, while those from less educated homes range action relatively higher. The former also make a point of seeing a good movie in a theatre/cinema. Legon (2010) also shows that these apparently quite small differences in consumption practices may be sustained by quite harsh classifications of ‘the others’’ taste.

We therefore suggest that the mode of relating to culture may be more important in the games of distinction than the precise choice of cultural objects in themselves. We regard this as an alternative to the

omnivore-hypothesis. Although it registers some of the same concerns, we think it corresponds better to our empirical observations.

**An emerging cosmopolitan cultural capital?**

We will now consider whether this kind of ‘knowing’ appropriation of culture can be linked to a ‘cosmopolitan’ orientation. Here, we pick up on claims regarding the cosmopolitan orientations of professionals and managers (e.g., Calhoun 2003), and in particular the important remarks of Fligstein (2008) on how the European middle classes are key agents in the formation of a distinctively European cultural field (see Gustafson 2009). We emphasise that we are not claiming that the working classes are ‘immobile’ - for in fact they have extensive experience of migration, sometimes forced - but rather that the capacity to stand outside one’s own national frame of reference may today be an important cultural marker.

Here again, Holt’s (1997: 112) arguments are useful. He found that his respondents with high level of cultural capital understood their world as more expansive than those with low level did. Many had lived in other states or countries, and they all travelled regularly. ‘The most powerful expression of cosmopolitan versus local tastes is through perceptions of and desires for the exotic’ - within food as well as entertainment. In Cvetacanin and Popescu’s (2009, 2011) study, based on a survey on cultural consumptions in Serbia followed up with qualitative interviews, the authors identified a main opposition between on the one side three clusters: elite style (classical highbrow), elite omnivores, and (global) urban style, and on the other a cluster around folk style, and another labelled rural omnivores, where the two latter in particular fancy folk music and turbo-folk music - both according to a quite specific Serbian classification of styles. Serbian folk seems to bear a certain mark of nostalgia and national romanticism, while the turbo-folk is a more hard- rock genre with songs in Serbian language, but with visual aesthetics in the spectre from Eurovision song contest to S&M porn. There is a clear link to Serbian nationalism in the fact that the greatest turbo star is the widow of the deceased war lord and suspect of war crimes Erkan Raznatovic. What is interesting - but also scary - is how this opposition in musical taste links to the cleavages in Serbian society between the educated and the uneducated; the urban and the rural or recently urbanised; the more European north and the more oriental south, and between ‘cosmopolitans’ and ‘patriots’. The former label themselves as ‘civilized’ and the others as ‘primitive’, while the latter label themselves as the people and the others as alienated, inauthentic or feminine. The two groups live in completely separate cultural worlds, and the analysis thus reveals a profound cleavage in Serbian society. One might conclude with Bourdieu (at the back of the English translation of *Distinction*): ‘No judgment of taste is innocent’.

A similar opposition between an international vs. a local or national orientation was found also in the Danish study, within areas as diverse as TV-preferences, musical likes and food consumption (Prieur, Rosenlund and Skjott-Larsen 2008), but also in political attitudes (Harrits *et al*. 2010). On one side, there are individuals who orient themselves globally in these matters: They make use of the Internet to seek information and communicate; they have ‘cosmopolitan’ preferences for food and music, and these cultural preferences go together with political attitudes like rejecting that one ought to hire natives before immigrants when jobs are scarce; supporting aid to developing countries; and denying any pride in being Danish or of coming from Aalborg. On the other are people with the opposite attitudes or preferences.

In Finland Kahma and Toikka (2012) also found an opposition between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ culture, where ‘traditional’ seems to cover basically Finnish culture, and Heikkila¨ and Rahkonen (2011) found that the Swedish-speaking upper class regarded continental European habits as sophisticated. The tradition of identifying the foreign as the most refined is a point also in Karadag’s (2009) study of transformations in class formation in Turkey.

This may be quite different in countries like UK or France, where the national culture perhaps is more often seen in opposition to American culture, which is seen as more vulgar. And of course, the cultural elites in Serbia and in Aalborg do not regard the eating of hamburgers or the listening to Britney Spears as particularly cosmopolitan and sophisticated habits, a fact that clearly should draw attention towards which features that are regarded as representing the international orientation. Denmark and Serbia have in common to be rather small countries. In contrast, the British study, just like Bourdieu’s French study, found older elites being predominantly oriented towards their national culture. Savage *et al*. (2010) found, however, a ‘cosmopolitan cultural capital’ circulating amongst younger age groups. They demonstrate that younger professionals show an interest in American cultural forms which marks them out from their older peers who are more attracted to national, British, cultural forms. Here, they were drawn towards ‘quirky’ Anglophone cultural forms, often from North America or Australasia, which they could venerate as non snobbish yet also ‘cultic’. Thus programmes such as *ER*; *The Wire*, *Friends* and such like serve to define a form of contemporary cosmopolitan taste which is also nationally specific. This kind of cosmopolitanism needs therefore to be seen as a distancing from more Eurocentric, ‘highbrow’ orientations towards a more Anglophone orientation.

**Has a scientific culture gained a more legitimate position?**

Bourdieu’s analysis in *Distinction* focuses on the arts and humanities, a taste for which is seen to exemplify cultural capital. He says relatively little about the role of scientific and technical orientations. At the time he wrote, the sciences could largely be seen as embodying the Kantian aesthetic, as a form of scholarly inquiry based on abstraction. However, in the intervening period technical devices and forms have proliferated, notably in the forms of information technology. The nature of educational curricula in universities has changed radically with the expansion of areas of applied and technical study (for instance in business and management). We suggest that these shifts should lead us to understand contemporary cultural capital less through its association with the traditional canon of humanities oriented high culture, but more through an association with scientific expertise, technology, information systems, and more generally the capacities to handle methods of various kinds. Mike Savage (2010) thus argues that in the British case, older gentlemanly models of cultural superiority were challenged after the Second World War by models of technocratic and scientific claims to expertise. These claims, which were themselves bound up with the rise of the social sciences in academic environments, could present themselves as non-snobbish and as repudiat- ing gentlemanly models of knowledge, whilst also embedding within them values of educational attainment and abstract expertise. The explicit repudiation of cultural snobbishness could be associated with the embrace of pluralistic knowledge.

These findings are all associated with the tendency for the culturally privileged to include a wider range of choices in their repertoire than before. A commercialised culture has become very widely shared, particularly through television and the music and the film industry. There is considerable evidence that familiarity with digital communication has become increasingly significant in the daily lives of the educated professional and managerial classes (as the origins of Facebook in the American Ivy League universities suggests).

Here we might note that Bourdieu’s own concept is somewhat too rooted in a particular humanities oriented understanding of what cultural capital involved. This fails to fully recognise how scientific and technical forms of expertise do not entirely conform to such a model and embody different kinds of claims to legitimacy and superiority. Actually, Bourdieu suggested in some of his later works (in Bourdieu and Wacquant, *Reflexive Sociology* (1992, p. 119) but before that in *State Nobility* (1996, p. 368)) that the term cultural capital should be replaced by *informational capital*, which he considered a broader or more general term. This suggestion of his has not received much echo, but we believe the development of information society has proven that the term informational capital may catch some new tendencies better than the concept of cultural capital does. The term *informational capital* would also link more clearly to current processes of conversion to economic, social or symbolic capital (he uses the term in *State Nobility* in a discussion of the domination of banks in the financial field). This point was thus stated before the impact of the internet could be known, but has probably gained validity through this development. Knowledge as such seems perhaps less valuable today, as what is important, is not necessarily to have the information, but to know how to get it. Surprisingly, despite the extensive discussion of the characteristics of ‘information society’ (e.g., Webster 2000; Lash 2002) this concept has not been investigated empirically.

**Conclusion**

We have argued that cultural capital can still be identified today, but that this model diverts in important aspects from the portrayal given of them by Bourdieu. To re-iterate: class inequalities in cultural consumption remain profound - but they have changed their form. For the upper classes today to exhibit the highbrow culture of yesteryear would mark them as ‘out of touch’ and staid. Instead they are more wide ranging and discerning in their cultural practices and this capacity is the contemporary marker of cultural capital.

Therefore, even though we cannot identify ‘highbrow’ culture in the way that it appears in *Distinction,* this does not mean that cultural capital does not exist. To be sure, the identification of distinguishing practices and preferences do not necessarily turn these attributes into cultural capital. For an asset to serve as a capital in a Bourdieusian sense, it should be linked to legitimacy, convertibility and domination, and this link has to be shown (see Savage *et al*. 2005). It is not given that the cultural specificities of the highly educated like the ones here mentioned enjoy any wider recognition as good taste, and it is not given that they may be converted to social or economic capital. Neither is it given that they may be experienced as linked to domination. But all this is possible - it demands, however, more research on the other social classes, on their experiences and attitudes. And it seems quite evident, in any case, that such features may serve in processes of social closure, as people who resemble each other in matters of both social position and cultural positioning practices will tend to lump together: settling in the same neighbourhoods, marrying each other, choosing the same schools for their children etc. For this reason, taste is not innocent.

With this caveat in mind, our examination of research on cultural consumptions leave no doubt that class structured cultural differences prevail, even if classical high culture enjoys a more marginal status than before. The distinguishing preferences and practices have changed in content, and the research has brought a lot of interesting ideas about the new or emerging ways the privileged may distinguish themselves. We have been sceptical of the value of the concept of cultural omnivore to register the transformations that have taken place. Although this correctly points to limitations of the traditional ‘highbrow’ model, we argue that there are some more interesting distinguishing practices linked to a knowing, distanced or verbalised, appropriation of culture and to the so-called cosmopolitan attitudes and preferences.

If we are right in designating these features as important new forms of cultural capital, there is a need to look in greater detail at the way that a ‘knowing mode of appropriation of culture’ and ‘cosmopolitan taste’ can circulate in powerful and pervasive forms through new technological forms, and in various kinds of ‘popular’ culture. This involves placing such practices within a field analytical perspective, which opens for observations of changes, reducing the focus on ‘high culture’ based in the humanities, and being attentive to the deployment of scientific, global, and informational practices.

**References**

Bennett, T., Savage, M., Silva, E.B., Warde, A., Gayo-cal, M., Wright, D. (2008), *Culture, Class, Distinction*, London: Routledge

Bottero, W. and Crossley, N. (2011) ‘Worlds, fields and networks: Becker, Bourdieu and the structures of social relations’, *Cultural Sociology* 5: 99-119.

Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Bourdieu, P. (1996) *State Nobility*, Cambridge: Polity.

Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.-C. (1979) *The Inheritors. French Students and Their Relation to Culture*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.-C. (1996) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, London: Sage.

Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. (1992) *Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Broady, D. (1998) ‘Kapitalbegrebet som uddannelsessociologisk værktøj’, in J. Bjerg (ed.), *Pædagogik, en grundbog til et fag*, Copenhagen: Hans Reitzel.

Bryson, B. (1996) ‘‘‘Anything but heavy metal’’: Symbolic exclusion and musical dislikes’, *American Sociological Review* 61: 884-99.

Calhoun, C. (2003) ‘The class consciousness of frequent travellers: Towards a critique of actually existing cosmopolitanism’, in Vertovic and Cohen (eds), *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism*, Oxford: Oxford Uni-

versity Press.

Chan, T. W. and Goldthorpe, J. H. (2005) ‘Social stratification and cultural consumption: Theatre, dance and cinema attendance’’, *Cultural Trends* 14: 193-212.

Crompton, R. (2008) *Class and Stratification*, Cambridge: Polity.

Cvetacanin, P. and Popescu, M. (2009) ‘Struggles on symbolic bound- aries’, *Paper for SCUD-Meeting*, Manchester, November.

Cvetacanin, P. and Popescu, M. (2011) ‘The art of making Classesin Serbia: Another particular case of the possible’, *Poetics* 39(6): 444-68. Danielsen, A. (1998) ‘Kulturell kapital i Norge’, *Sosiologisk Tidsskrift*

6(1-2).

Featherstone, M. (1985) ‘Postmodernism and consumer culture’, *Theory, Culture and Society* 2(3): 119-31.

Fligstein, N. (2008) *Euroclash*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Florida, R. (2002) *The Rise of the Creative Class* - *And How it’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*, New York, NY: Perseus Book Group.

Glick-Schiller, N. (2008) ‘Beyond methodological ethnicity and towards the city scale: An alternative approach to local and transnational pathways of migrant incorporation’, in L. Pries (ed.), *Rethinking*

*Transnationalism: The Meso-link of Organisations*, Routledge, pp. 40-61. Gripsrud, J. (1995) *The Dynasty Years: Hollywood Television and Critical*

*Media Studies*, London: Routledge.

Gustafson, P. (2009) ‘More cosmopolitan, no less local: The orientations of international travelers’, *European Societies* 11(1): 25-47.

Harrits, G., Prieur, A., Rosenlund, L. and Skjott-Larsen, J (2010) ‘Class and politics in Denmark: Are both old and new politics structured by class?’, *Scandinavian Political Studies* 33: 1-27.

Heikkila¨, R. and Rahkonen, K. (2011) ‘‘‘It is not a matter of taste’’. Cultural capital and taste among the Swedish speaking upper class in Finland’’, *European Societies* 13(1): 143-63.

Holt, D. B. (1997) ‘Distinctions in America? Recovering Bourdieu’s theory of taste from its critics’, *Poetics* 25(2-3): 93-120.

Jæger, M. and Katz-Gerro, T. (2008) ‘The rise of the cultural omnivore 1964-2004’, *Working Paper* 9, SFI, Copenhagen.

Jarness, V. (2009) ‘Every exception has its rule’, *Paper. SCUD-Meeting*, Manchester, November.

Kahma, N. and Toikka, A. (2012) ‘Cultural map of Finland 2007’, *Cultural Trends* 21: 113-31.

Karadag, M. (2009) ‘On cultural capital and taste. Cultural field in a Turkish city in historical perspective’, *European Societies* 11(4): 531-51. Kingston, P. W. (2001) ‘The unfulfilled promise of cultural capital theory’,

*Sociology of Education Extra Issue* 74: 88-99.

Lahire, B. (2004) *La Culture des individus*, Paris: Editions la De´couverte. Lamont, M. (1992) *Money, Morals and Manners. The Culture of the French and the American Upper-Middle Class*, Chicago: University of Chicago

Press.

Lamont, M. and Lareau, A. (1988) ‘Cultural capital: Allusions, gaps and glissandos in recent theoretical developments’, *Sociological Theory* 6: 153-68.

Lareau, A. and Weininger, E. B. (2003) ‘Cultural capital in educational research: A critical assessment’’, *Theory and Society* 32: 567-606.

Lash, S. (2002) *Critique of Information*, London: Sage.

Lash, S. and Urry, J. (1987) *The End of Organised Capitalism*, Cambridge: Polity.

Lebaron, F., et al. (2009) ‘The French space of cultural practices’, *Paper at SCUD-Meeting* in Bergen, April.

Legon, T. (2010) ‘Rapport a` la culture et distinction sociale. Le cas du public lyce´en en musique et cine´ma’, *Conference paper,* thirty years after *Distinction*, Paris, November 4-7.

Le Roux, B., Rouanet, H., Savage, M., Warde, A., ‘Class and cultural division in the UK’, *Sociology*, 42, 6, November 2008, pp. 1049-71 Lizardo, O. (2005) ‘Can cultural capital theory be reconsidered in the light

of world polity institutionalism? Evidence from Spain’, *Poetics* 33: 81-110.

Lizardo, O. (2011) ‘Pierre Bourdieu as a post-cultural theorist’, *Cultural Sociology* 5: 25-44.

Pasquier, D. (2005) *Cultures lyce´ennes. La tyrannie de la majorite´*, Paris: Editions Autrement.

Peterson, R. A. and Kern, R. M. (1996) ‘Changing highbrow taste: From snob to omnivore’, *American Sociological Review* 61: 900-7.

Prieur, A. and Rosenlund, L. (2010) ‘Kulturelle skel’, *Dansk Sociologi* 21:47-77.

Prieur, A., Rosenlund, L. and Skjott-Larsen, J. (2008) ‘Cultural capital today: A case study from Denmark’, *Poetics* 36: 45-71.

Prieur, A. and Savage, M. (2011) ‘Updating cultural capital theory: A discussion based on studies in Denmark and in Britain’, *Poetics* 39: 566-580.

Prior, N. (2011) ‘Critique and renewal in the sociology of music: Bourdieu and beyond’, *Cultural Sociology* 5: 121-38.

Purhonen, S., Gronow, J. and Rakhonen, K. (2011) ‘Highbrow culture in Finland: Knowledge, taste and participation’, *Acta Sociologica* 54(4): 385-402.

Robbins, D. (2005) ‘The Origins, early development and status of Bourdieu’s concept of ‘‘Cultural Capital’’’, *The British Journal of Sociology* 56: 13-30.

Rosenlund, L. (2009) *Exploring the City with Bourdieu*, Saarbru¨ cken: VDM Verlag.

Savage, M. (2010) *Identities and Social Change in Britain Since 1940: The Politics of Method*, Oxford: Clarendon.

Savage, M. and Gayo, M. (2011) ‘Unravelling the omnivore: A field analysis of contemporary musical taste in Denmark and Britain’, *Poetics* 39: 6.

Savage, M., Barlow, J., Fielding, A.J., and Dickens, P., (1992), *Property, Bureaucracy and Culture*, London, Routledge.

Savage, M., Warde, A., Devine, F., (2005), ‘Capitals, assets and resources: Some critical issues’, *British Journal of Sociology*, 56, 1, 31-48.

Savage, M., Wright, D, Gayo-Cal, M., (2010). ‘Cosmopolitan nationalism and the cultural reach of the white British’, *Nations and Nationalism*, October 2010, 16(4): 598-615.

Skarpenes, O. (2007) ‘Den ‘‘legitime kulturens’’ moralske forankring’,

*Tidsskrift for Samfunnsforskning* 48(4): 531-63.

Skeggs, B. (1997) *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*, London: SAGE.

Tampubolon, G. (2008) ‘Distinction in Britain, 2001-2004? Unpacking homology and the ‘aesthetics’ of the popular class’, *European Societies* 10(3): 403-28.

van Eijck, K. and Knulst, W. (2005) ‘No more need for snobbism: Highbrow cultural participation in a taste democracy’, *European Sociological Review* 21: 513-28.

Webster, F. (2000) *Theories of the Information Society*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Weininger, E. B. (2005) ‘Foundations of Pierre Bourdieu’s class analysis’, in E. O. Wright (ed.), *Approaches to Class Analysis*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.