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## **Cultural Capital Today**

*a case study from Denmark*

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## Cultural capital today A case study from Denmark<sup>☆</sup>

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### Abstract

Based on Danish survey data subjected to correspondence analysis, this article aims at carrying out a critical assessment of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social differentiation in advanced societies as a multi-dimensional phenomenon. As his theory goes, capital volume (economic + cultural capital) and capital composition (the relative weight of the two) are the main dimensions of social differentiation, which structure the space of social positions as well as the space of lifestyles. The central discussion of the article concerns the character of cultural capital, and the role it plays in the formation of social divisions. This leads to a discussion of four core questions: first, are there signs of a strong individualism and, correspondingly, a weak social structuring of lifestyles? The study does not find support for this view. Second, does classical highbrow culture play a central role as a marker of distinction? Cultural capital in a contemporary Danish context appears to be less related to traditional highbrow cultural consumption than in Bourdieu's studies in France some decades ago. Third, is there a rise in the omnivorousness and tolerant taste within the cultural elite? This study answers negatively, as those adhering to the preferences that are most typical for the cultural elite tend to simultaneously avoid or mark distance to popular expressions of taste. Fourth, are there traces of new forms of cultural capital? The study uncovers a cleavage between a global orientation or a form of cosmopolitanism or "connectedness", on the one hand, and a local and traditional orientation on the other. The conceptualisation of such differences are questioned, however, as current sociology appears to conceptualise social divisions rather systematically in ways that automatically euphemise the orientation of intellectuals towards the world.

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## 1. Introduction

The concept of cultural capital stems from Pierre Bourdieu. His book *Distinction* (1984 [1979]) constitutes his major contribution to the study of the dynamics of social divisions in contemporary society and their interrelationship with the formation of lifestyles. While class analyses formerly portrayed society as a one-dimensional hierarchy, Bourdieu painted a more complex picture of what he termed the social space, wherein economic and non-economic assets work together or against one another in the formation of social groups. An important revelation in his analysis was the functioning of non-economic assets, termed cultural capital, for how social groups acquire status and indulge in practices of domination and exclusion. The aim of this article is to assess the relevance of his model of the social space for the analysis of another social context at another point in history: a Danish city in the midst of transition to a post-industrial economy.

Innumerable items of research within the sociology of culture have been inspired by *Distinction* and have either provided support for Bourdieu's analysis, added nuances or plainly rejected it. Our claim is that no matter how valuable and well done much of this research is, it has rarely taken Bourdieu's vision of the social space seriously. Cultural and economic capital are typically measured independently of one another (and with a single indicator for each form, usually income and education), or they are collapsed in the analysis, thereby eliding the complex interplay between the forms of capital that are at the core of Bourdieu's theory. He regarded the space of social positions as well as the space of lifestyles as basically structured by capital volume (economic + cultural capital) and capital composition (the relative weight of the two). In order to assess the relevance of Bourdieu's approach, we want to stick to it as faithfully as possible, beginning with the selection of variables and the methodology for analysing them. We find it interesting to follow such an orthodox approach because although *Distinction* must be one of the most – or *the* most – quoted books within the sociology of culture, very few scholars have actually attempted to do so.

Bourdieu was careful not to generalise findings from this analysis of France to other societies, even if he believed his model of the complex interaction of capital forms also would work elsewhere (Bourdieu, 1998). Actually, one of the findings that have generated the most debate in recent research is whether cultural capital in other social contexts does play the role it is attributed in *Distinction*. The book is based on data from French society in the 1960s and 1970s, when France was still an industrial society. In the decades after *Distinction*, France, together with the rest of the western world, has become increasingly post-industrial. In sociology, this major social change is reflected in the form of theoretical and conceptual changes, as within poststructuralist and postmodernist theorising or within theories about reflexive modernisation. One of the consequences of the poststructuralist breakthrough in sociological theorising is that class can no longer be treated as a master category, with a primacy over other social divisions, as in the Marxist tradition. Although Bourdieu's class model is more complex than the Marxist model was, these new waves within sociology have also provoked a questioning of his model of social differentiation. Within the domain of the sociology of cultural consumption, this questioning has been supported by empirical studies apparently revealing a different relation between patterns of consumption and social background than the one Bourdieu claimed to have found.

Our overall objective is to shed light on the following questions: May the approach in *Distinction* provide a grasp on cultural consumption and contemporary forms of social divisions? Is it possible to identify forms of cultural capital resembling those described in *Distinction*? And

if yes, what then are their character and role? In order to provide a theoretical context for the empirically based answers we will give to these questions, we will start with a discussion of the concept of cultural capital (Section 2) – as Bourdieu himself developed it, and as some followers and critics have understood it. Next section (Section 3) is devoted to a review of the critique of the concept as it has emanated in empirical research about cultural consumptions. Thereafter, we will present findings from a recent study from Denmark (Section 4) and discuss whether we can provide empirical support for some of the claims identified in the debate presented in Section 3.

As we have data from only one point in time, we cannot assess changes in any strict sense. Based on the theoretical and empirical argumentations together with the review of the literature (in Sections 2 and 3), however, we may formulate some questions about possible trends or new situations—questions that would invalidate or at least modify the notion that the cultural capital known from *Distinction* would play a prominent role in the social differentiation of a post-industrial society. The questions (to be discussed in Section 5) are the following: (1) Are there signs that a rampant individualism has rendered the idea of a strong structuring of cultural consumption obsolete? (2) Are there signs that there has been a general decline in the value attributed to classical culture? (3) Can social elite groups, who at the time (and place) of *Distinction* had strong distinguishing practices, now be characterised instead as omnivorous and tolerant towards popular tastes? (4) Are there signs of a new value attributed to cosmopolitanism and/or “connectedness” within these social groups, meaning that their assets and orientations could have other characteristics than they had previously? The final section of the article will comment on the sociological conceptualisation of contemporary social divisions.

## 2. Theoretical background: the concept of cultural capital

### 2.1. Cultural capital according to Bourdieu

In their studies of the educational system, Bourdieu and his collaborators initially employed the concept of cultural capital in order to explain the higher success rates for the children of educated parents. These children enjoy an advantage in school, not only thanks to the help they receive from their parents, but also thanks to their intimate familiarity with highbrow culture, such as fine arts and classical music (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979:17): “Not only do the more privileged students derive from their background of origin habits, skills, and attitudes which serve them directly in their scholastic tasks, but they also inherit from it knowledge and know-how, tastes, and a ‘good taste’ whose scholastic profitability is no less certain for being indirect.”

These habits, skills etc. are what have since become coined *cultural capital*. The first French edition of *The Inheritors* (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979 [1964]) refers to “capital linguistique”, a term that is replaced with cultural capital in the 1979 translation (Robbins, 2005:25). In the meantime, cultural capital had turned up as a key concept in another book Bourdieu co-authored together with Passeron, *Reproduction* (1996 [1970]), where the concept was linked to the evaluation criteria imposed on all school pupils, which the pupils from culturally privileged origins comply with more easily. The school not only provides children with new knowledge, but also certifies the forms of knowledge the culturally privileged children have acquired beforehand by giving them high marks for their “cultivated naturalness” (cf. Bourdieu, 1984:71). The school disregards the kind of knowledge the school itself provides as being too “academic”, as bearing “the vulgar mark of effort”, and lacking in “ease and grace” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979:21).

Bourdieu does not endorse an elitist equation between “culture” and “highbrow culture”; nor does he embrace the relativist (or populist) claim that all cultures have the same value. His

concept of culture differs also from the non-normative anthropological concept, which, according to Bourdieu's logic, veils the contributions of culture to practices of domination. Certain cultural forms, which Bourdieu terms "legitimate culture", are predominantly possessed by the highly educated and are recognised as valuable, also by those who do not possess them, who thereby devalue their own cultural forms (symbolic violence). Studies of the educational system unveil the function of cultural capital as a means for symbolic violence in processes of social exclusion.

In *Distinction*, this analysis is extended from the educational system to the whole of society. The book reveals how cultural and economic capital operate both together and opposed to one another in creating complex patterns of social differentiation. Bourdieu (1984:128–29) draws a sociological map of the French social space as a multidimensional system of social positions. This map is pivotal to his reasoning, but actually has unclear origins. The figure, which combines the *space of social position* and the *space of lifestyle*, is not a plane originating from correspondence analysis; rather, it is presented (Bourdieu, 1984:127 pp.) as a kind of summary graph containing results from several such analyses (at least three different surveys carried out by the INSEE in addition to items from surveys undertaken by other data-producing agencies). From these surveys, Bourdieu has selected a total of 12 indicators of economic, cultural and social capital. Apparently, all or at least some of these indicators have been subjected to multiple correspondence analyses (although no documentation is provided), and the results have been summarised in a freehand diagram. Lifestyle variables thereafter appear to have been inserted into the constructed space in the form of supplementary points subsequent to the construction of its two principal axes. The map contains quite a few obvious errors (such as points figuring several times at different positions—errors repeated in later editions and translations). For these reasons, the map has an ambiguous status between empirical representation and theoretical model.

Bourdieu regards the dimension accounting for the largest part of the variation as the primary force of social differentiation and labels it the overall or total *volume of capital* (drawn vertically on the map). Along this dimension, Bourdieu distinguishes between three main classes of social agents according to their possession of economic and cultural capital. These classes are subsequently divided into class fractions according to the second dimension of the map: the *capital composition* or *capital structure* principle (drawn horizontally). This independently operating force of social differentiation refers to the relative amount of the two main forms of capital that the social agents hold, i.e. whether cultural or economic capital is dominant. The third dimension, by order of importance (but not presented in the two-dimensional diagram), is a time-dimension referring to trajectories: the social agents' history of stability or mobility related to the system of social positions.

Bourdieu's model of the social space – his "frame model" (Rouanet et al., 2000) – is completed by a space of lifestyles that is projected onto the space of social positions, like one transparency on top of another (in a preliminary study preceding *Distinction* (Bourdieu and de Saint-martin, 1976), transparencies were actually used). The space of lifestyles consists of answers to questions about knowledge and preferences within music, the arts, reading, food and leisure activities as well as to questions about moral issues and political matters. It also turns out to be structured according to the same principles as the social space is, with the total volume of capital and the composition of capital as the major dimensions. The latter dimension may provide meaning to differences in lifestyles between for instance teachers and businessmen, with similar positions along the capital volume dimension, but opposed positions along the capital composition dimension. The trajectory dimension may make sense of for instance the



observation that those who have acquired all of their cultural capital in school have other dispositions than those who have been soaked in it at home since early infancy.

Although *Distinction* may be read like one long illustration of what cultural capital is, or rather, what it does, the book does not contain any definition of the concept. Just as cultural capital had a series of different meanings in the earlier works on education (cf. Lamont and Lareau, 1988), the concept has a series of different meanings in *Distinction*: formal education, knowledge about classical music, preferences for modern art, well-filled bookshelves etc. One may ask whether it is convenient to have one single term to cover so many different matters. For Bourdieu, however, the value of the concept was without doubt precisely its capacity for linking apparently different phenomena. Bourdieu's concepts were coined for the practical purpose of analysing the social world. He wanted the spotlight to be on the analyses that the concepts facilitated; not on the concepts themselves (after a conference in Oslo in 1995, where a daring student questioned his concepts, Bourdieu stopped the discussion by saying mockingly: "At the seminars with my research group in France, we never talk about habitus, we never talk about fields—those concepts were meant for export!").

In the article *Forms of Capital*, Bourdieu (1986) nevertheless provides an account of the different meanings of cultural capital. It exists in different forms: there is an *embodied* state, or "long lasting dispositions of the mind and the body" (Bourdieu, 1986:243), which refer to the habitus, the taste and the judgmental competences. This form of cultural capital is to a large degree inherited or, more precisely, acquired through an upbringing in a "cultivated home". It may be measured as attitudes, preferences and competences. Secondly, there is an *objectified* state, "in the form of cultural goods" (op. cit.), which could be book collections or musical instruments. These goods will reflect the habitus and may be observed or reported in surveys. Lastly, there is an *institutionalised* state, which first and foremost concerns educational certificates. In most research after *Distinction*, educational certificates have been used as a measure of cultural capital; however, they cannot capture all of the nuances in the concept.

## 2.2. Some conceptual concerns

The metaphor of capital serves to highlight the Marxist idea about capital as accumulated labour and thereby expresses the notion of the social world as "accumulated history" (Bourdieu, 1986:241). The actions of social agents bear traces of their past. According to Kingston (2001:89), the concept of cultural capital points to a resource "that has 'market value' in the struggle for privilege" or, in the words of Lareau and Weininger (2003:567), "one that provides access to scarce rewards, is subject to monopolisation, and, under certain conditions, may be transmitted from one generation to the next." However, the choice of the term capital as well as the connected terms of investment and exchange or conversion of capital invites economic reductionism (cf. Calhoun, 1993). Bourdieu ran the risk deliberately, as he wanted a "barbaric" rupture with an enchanted representation of culture and particularly with the perception of "fine arts" as connected with superiority: the cultural universe is guided by interest just as the economic world is, although misrecognised.

Bourdieu and his collaborators often used the term cultural capital interchangeably with "legitimate culture" (cf. Lamont and Lareau, 1988:157). Competences within non-recognised cultural forms are not recognised as valuable in a market; they are inconvertible. In *Distinction*, the power over the definition of legitimate culture appears to be monopolised by the Parisian academic and artistic elite.

In the 1986 article, the competencies that possibly serve as cultural capital appear to depend upon the social context. This is the argument forwarded by Lareau and Weininger (2003:579), who subsequently refer to cultural capital as a *relative* and not a *universal* entity. To take a stand on this question is crucial for anybody who wants to use the concept in empirical studies. *Distinction* lends strong support to Lareau and Weininger's reading: what is regarded today as expressions of refined taste may be *déclassé* tomorrow; and what is regarded as fashionable in France may be disregarded in Japan, or vice versa (Bourdieu, 1996). For Bourdieu, capital is a relational concept which designs a social force. But this force only exists if it is *perceived* as such, i.e. if people attribute this force to it. As it depends on perception, there can be no universal standards.

Nevertheless, as we read *Distinction*, it also possesses elements of more absolute standards. Here, cultural capital bears the stamps of Kant's ideas of "pure taste" to a certain degree: the eye rates over the other senses; the abstract over the concrete; the form over the function; the rare over the common and easily accessible. That which requires time, effort and historical knowledge, rates over the immediate satisfaction of desires (cf. Fowler, 1997:45 ff.). According to this logic, chess has intrinsic qualities that will always link it more closely to elite culture than bowling ever may, and the reading of avant-garde poetry will always be linked to elite culture, as it demands knowledge about the history of poetry—even if what is avant-garde today may be school curriculum tomorrow. These signs of cultural capital are not true universals, as an advanced society could exist without chess and poetry. They have been *historically* constituted as particular forms of elite culture, but this does not make them culturally arbitrary. We will consequently argue, against Lareau and Weininger (2003), that Bourdieu draws a link between cultural capital and certain forms of highbrow culture (cf. Holt, 1997).

However, whether this link should be maintained in the use of the concept of cultural capital is quite another discussion. A key question in contemporary research, to be explored below, is whether highbrow culture continues to serve as a general standard. In Lamont and Lareau's definition of cultural capital as being (1988:156) "institutionalized, i.e. widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviours, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion", the link to classical highbrow culture is circumvented by references to institutionalisation and status, which to us seems a very appropriate solution.

In the chapter on the dominant class in *Distinction*, Bourdieu demonstrates a clear awareness concerning the shifting status of classical highbrow culture in his portrayal of a new generation of executives and managers committed to "'modernism,' 'dynamism,' and 'cosmopolitanism': embracing new technology and open to foreign culture" (Weininger, 2005). Bourdieu was also fully aware that highbrow culture was losing ground to a commercialised popular culture. He described a phenomenon he labelled *inverted snobbery* (Bourdieu, 2003:71): "Indeed, it is the first time in history that the cheapest products of a popular culture (. . .) are imposing themselves as chic." He mentioned tattoos and the baggy pants that originated from prisons in the US and argued that the "civilisation" (his quotation marks) embodied by jeans, Coca-Cola and McDonald's together with economic power has symbolic power, thanks to a seduction that the victims themselves contribute to. His analysis of popular culture may lack in sophistication, but nevertheless demonstrates a recognition of the shifting structures of evaluation. Bourdieu generally regarded the autonomy of the cultural field as being threatened by the economic field but did not explicate the consequences that this development unavoidably must have for the value and convertibility of cultural capital.

Based on the discussion above, our view is that cultural capital should be seen as an entity embedded in social contexts, and therefore also as an entity in perpetual change. And this is



exactly what makes an empirical assessment of current forms of cultural capital meaningful. Before we present our empirical study, however, we will sum up a number of questions about the existence and character of cultural capital that have emanated from other empirical studies of cultural consumptions.

### 3. Questions to Bourdieu's understanding stemming from empirical research

Findings indicating the strong social structuring of cultural consumption according to economic and educational levels are legio in the empirical research undertaken in the wake of *Distinction*. One of the studies that comes closest to *Distinction* with regard to the analytical approach is Rosenlund's (2000, 2002) study from Norway. Survey data were subjected to correspondence analyses revealing patterns of lifestyles that are structured according to the very same principles: total volume of capital and capital composition as the main dimensions of social differentiation. The latter principle, which is a key element in Bourdieu's work, is more or less absent in the empirical research undertaken in the aftermath of *Distinction*.

For Tony Bennett, John Frow and Michael Emmison (Bennett et al., 1999), *Distinction* serves as the point of departure for a comprehensive examination of cultural tastes in Australia. They find a strong structuring of these tastes; however, they deny that this may be reduced to (op. cit. 99) "a single core structure of which everything else would be the expression." As the authors depart both from Bourdieu's construction of classes and analytical methods, they cannot really comment on his model of capital volume and composition as the main structuring principles.

Articles and working papers from the ongoing project on "Cultural capital and social exclusion" in the UK (Bennett et al., 2005; Savage et al., 2005, special issue of *Cultural Trends* 58/59 2006, particularly Gayo-Cal et al., 2006) are based upon Bourdieu's analysis and have also applied correspondence analysis in combination with other methods but lack measures for capital composition. This means that while they can confirm the clustering of cultural consumption in patterns clearly related to social background, they cannot comment on Bourdieu's model. The patterns they find differ, however, depending on whether one is examining taste (preferences), participation or knowledge, just as there are important differences between the fields under study, such as between music and reading.

As will be seen below, much of the criticism against Bourdieu's model stems from studies of music, and patterns of musical consumption may be structured differently from other aspects of cultural consumption (cf. Peterson, 2005). DiMaggio and Mukhtar (2004) have analysed the patterns of evolution in different forms of arts participation in the US and are not at all convinced that high culture in general is in decline.

The main points of criticism against Bourdieu's theory about the working of cultural capital may be summarised as follows:

*The limited or declining role of highbrow culture.* This is a main point in the studies in the US conducted by Peterson and Kern (1996), who find 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. In an 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." 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*, an argument Bennett et al. (1999) also put forward, as they do not find any “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.

However, Savage et al. (2005) find cultural omnivorousness to be quite limited, as there are still clear and marked patterns of differentiation in taste. There is still a division between cultural omnivores on the one hand, and on the other hand persons who are not entirely univores, but disinterested and disengaged. Indicators for education and class, respectively, follow one another in a correspondence analysis of lifestyle indicators, but Savage et al. do not have the necessary indicators for assessing the importance of the composition of capital for the structuring of patterns of taste. There is, however, *no evidence of any kind of intellectual avant-garde taste* possibly equating to the Kantian aesthetic.

In the analyses of Bennett (2006) of television viewing, of Silva (2006) of visual art, of Warde (2006) of sports, of Wright (2006) of reading, of Savage (2006) of music and of Savage et al. (2005) of diverse aspects of cultural consumption, *age and gender emerge as strong discriminatory factors*. From Dutch data, van Eijck and Knulst (2005) conclude that while older generations have actually extended their highbrow cultural participation, younger generations increasingly focus on popular culture; as an effect of a shift in generations, omnivorousness thus loses terrain to purely lowbrow culture.

The arguments above connect to a critique of *the understanding of popular culture* within Bourdieu’s theorising (Fiske, 1992; Thornton, 1995; Bjurstrøm, 1997). Popular culture is much more autonomous from the legitimate culture than Bourdieu claims; it has its own hierarchies and specific forms of popular cultural or subcultural capital. Frith (1996) argues that the same kind of discriminatory skills are used within low cultural forms as within high cultural forms. According to a related argument, *the well-educated may be better characterised by cultural tolerance* than by exclusive taste and the symbolic exclusion of forms of popular cultural (Bryson, 1996). However, these various arguments leave the possibility that the privileged may relate to popular culture in “snobbish” ways, e.g. by making a point of “recognizing quality” within any cultural form.

Critics further suggest that *other assets, such as social capital, may be more important* as markers of distinction than cultural capital (Erickson, 1996; Bennett et al., 1999). Others ask *whether cultural classifications are used in social practice for the drawing of boundaries*. In a comparison between the US 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 boundaries. She also argues that the weight accorded to highbrow cultural markers may be *a French particularity*. Lamont and Lareau (1988) argue that high culture enjoys less recognition in the US than in France, and that consensus over high status signals may be weaker. This argument is supported by Kingston (2001) and Bennett et al. (1999) regarding Australia. In the same line of thought, Broady (1998) and Danielsen (1998) suggest that there are egalitarian and anti-elitist currents in Scandinavian countries that inhibit symbolic dominance in cultural matters.

However, questions remain about the role of cultural capital; also in France. Since 1990s, several French studies have identified a rupture between social origins and cultural consumption

(cf. the introduction in Pasquier, 2005). Lahire (2004), who embraces the individualisation thesis, offers a pertinent example. He argues that the *individualisation process in contemporary society is so strong* that it gives no meaning to reduce cultural preferences to structures. Patterns possibly exist, but they have a limited value, since even people belonging to the academic elite generally include popular culture in their cultural preferences.

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 and ethnicity) together with a strong pressure to conform to their peers. She holds both findings against the individualisation theory. Against Bourdieu's argument, however, she argues that *the character of the most valued cultural forms is changing*. Among these changes 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). Pupils in a Parisian elite high school, compared to the other schools under study, resemble the "inheritors" described by Bourdieu and Passeron (1979), both in relation to their social origins and their affinity for "highbrow" cultural forms. Their close affinity with fine arts and classical music will not necessarily be an asset for them, however, at least not if they simultaneously repudiate contemporary forms of media usage and aesthetic consumption (and for instance reject mobile phones). The media (and peer groups) have challenged the school as a legitimising authority in cultural matters. *The mechanisms by which cultural forms are attributed value are thus also changing*: less power to the elites and to the school.

Not all of the above-mentioned critical points deeply challenge Bourdieu's arguments, albeit some of them indeed do, perhaps Lahire most. It should be kept in mind that Bourdieu opened both for national differences and temporal changes. Social groups move up and down in the social space, and they gain or lose in size. *Distinction* specifically addresses the new tendencies emerging at the time of its writing. He finds them both among the dominant class and within the intermediate classes. The attributes of the latter actually strikingly resemble those of the so-called omnivores (cf. "From Duty to the Fun Ethic", Bourdieu, 1984:365).

*Distinction* may be read as a frozen image of a society undergoing rapid transformations. The concluding chapter on classes and classifications deals with the ongoing struggles between classes and class fractions, particularly within "the dominant class" (in later scholarship renamed "the field of power", cf. Bourdieu, 1996:267). In these struggles, the "dominated fraction of the dominant class" – the fraction rich in cultural capital – is portrayed as a group on the defensive. A reduced value attributed to traditional forms of cultural capital, and thereby a reduced convertibility, ought to be the expected outcome.

The decline of traditional highbrow culture may be considered to be a symptom of the decline of an entire group. 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 them 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 refusing to ever use a mobile phone and despising the commercialised youth culture. They resemble the aristocratic dancing masters portrayed by Marx: a class in descent. Their skills will be far less convertible than the skills of their peers who spent their spare time on chatting on-line or playing Play Station.

National differences may refer to differences in the value attributed to a particular class and thereby also to its strength—and its closure towards other classes. These differences, important as they are, may be better grasped *within* Bourdieu's conceptual framework than outside of it. In the

Rosenlund (2000, 2002) study of the rapidly changing Norwegian city of Stavanger, he suggests that the capital composition principle of social differentiation actually has emerged and has grown in force over the past few decades. The structure of the space of social positions is transformed. The upper and intermediate classes have grown in size and have become increasingly differentiated according to capital composition. The cultural domain of the space has become more disassociated from the economic domain. The relative loss in economic gains suffered by occupational groups positioned within the cultural domain, such as nurses, social workers, teachers and artists, is a sign of a process of this nature. The analyses presented in *Distinction* then appear to be even more valid than previously, when a simple uni-dimensional class hierarchy could capture the major differences.

In what follows, we will apply the analytical approach presented in *Distinction* and allow the research to be informed by the discussions above, highlighting questions about individualism, elitism and omnivorousness. Do we find social patterning of cultural competencies, practices or preferences corresponding to the distribution of capital or, on the contrary, signs of individualism? Already here, we will anticipate the conclusion on the matter: there are strong relationships between capital indicators and lifestyle variables. The next questions therefore address the character of the differentiation we observe. Do we find patterns homologous with the two dimensions of Bourdieu's social space, i.e. the volume and composition of capital? Furthermore, do we find indications of an exclusively elitist taste or, on the contrary, signs of omnivorousness? Do we find signs of traditional highbrow culture or, on the contrary, signs of new forms of capital?

#### 4. Construction of a social space and a space of lifestyles in Aalborg

##### 4.1. Data and methods

Aalborg is a city of 162,000 inhabitants 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.<sup>1</sup> The data collected have been subjected to a number of analyses in order to reveal hidden structures using multiple correspondence analysis (MCA).<sup>2</sup>

This method may be applied according to two different, but complementary approaches. They are outlined in Lebart et al. (1984), a book that was instrumental in Bourdieu's analytical endeavour (see Bourdieu, 1984:580 n. 2). An MCA of survey-data based on background variables provides the analysts with an abundance of information about the statistical relationships between all analysed variable categories or modalities. An MCA of data of this kind can be used as a "predictive map" (Lebart et al., 1984:100) in a "visualised regression analysis" (ibid 102). Then "dependent" variables are inserted as *supplementary points* into the constructed space (of background variables). The resulting map reveals the interwoven

<sup>1</sup> Of the remaining 326, 204 refused to participate (12.8%), 181 were not reached and 41 could not be interviewed due to illness etc. The interviews were conducted by telephone, as several recent surveys in Denmark based on interviews in the respondents' homes have been blemished by low response rates (cf. Gundelach, 2002; Andersen, 2004), while telephone surveys in the same period have had both a higher response rate and a less distorted dropout (e.g. Togeby, 2004). However, this choice put limitations both on the number of questions (140) and the kind of questions asked.

<sup>2</sup> The method was invented by Jean-Paul Benzécri (1969, 1992), and is presented, among others, by Lebart et al. (1984), Greenacre (1984, 1993), Greenacre and Blasius (1995), Jambu (1991), Jambu and Lebeaux (1983), and LeRoux and Rouanet (2004).



statistical relationships between these supplementary points and all the values of the background variables.

The analysis can also be undertaken in a reversed order, named the “reciprocal approach” (Lebart et al., 1984:108). With variables describing attitudes, opinions and preferences as the active variables in an MCA a map describing the relationships and affinities between these attitudes, opinions and preferences is achieved. Thereby a structure of interrelations between these variables is established, which may thereafter be analysed with the help of background variables inserted as supplementary points. The latter are then conceived as “structuring factors”. This methodology has been elaborated and refined by LeRoux and Rouanet (2004).

In our work we have followed the explicit recommendation of Lebart et al. and utilised both procedures. “Each type of analysis develops a specific point of view” (Lebart et al., 1984:108). Within the scope of this article, however, we can only present one of the analyses, and have opted for the one where the first approach is used.<sup>3</sup>

The local space of social positions was constructed with capital indicators as active elements. This construction was thereafter used as a frame of analysis for a space of lifestyles composed of lifestyle elements (answers to questions about lifestyles) indicating where in the social space these choices are particularly prevalent or rare.

We have reasons to believe that Bourdieu conceived the model of the social space and space of lifestyle (Bourdieu, 1984:128–129) on the basis of results of analyses based on the methodology we have utilised here. However, *Distinction* is silent on the matter. What is clear, though, is that the reciprocal approach was used in the analyses of the taste differentiation within the dominant and the intermediate classes (Bourdieu, 1984:262 and 340). These analyses can be viewed as validations of the model: While the capital volume dimension, the main principle of differentiation in his model, was used to construct the two analysed classes, the analyses of each of the classes disclose that the capital composition dimension is the main principle of differentiation within both classes.

#### 4.2. *Analysed variables and basic results*

Table 1 contains the variables included in the analysis.

Altogether, 10 variables were chosen (informed by Bourdieu’s choices, 1984:126–131); all different indicators of capital. Five variables are indicators of economic capital: possession of shares, bonds, an art collection etc; household income; ownership of a house; ownership and value of a summer house; and idem of car(s), 19 categories in total. The next two variables are indicators of cultural capital: the educational backgrounds of the respondents themselves (seven categories describing level and subject area) and the educational level of the father (five categories), here considered an indicator of inherited cultural capital (including the education of the mother only rendered the construction more age-dependent). Three variables are related to work, consisting of 21 categories altogether: the vocation of the father (a rough indication of the social conditions under which the respondents were brought up); the vocation of the respondents themselves; and their sector of employment (public/private). A report on the construction of the Aalborgian social space, including an overview of the analysed variables, their categories and

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<sup>3</sup> For an analysis where both strategies have been utilised, see Rosenlund and Prieur (2007) and our website <http://www.socsci.aau.dk/compas>. In that analysis we scrutinize Bourdieu’s thesis of homology, and show that a space of lifestyles constructed on the basis of lifestyle variables (the reciprocal approach), is structured according to the very same principles of differentiation as the space of social positions presented in this article.



Table 1  
Variables used for the construction of the Aalborgian social space

	No. of categories
Economic capital	
Possession of shares, bonds, art collection	2
Household income	5
Value of summerhouse	3
Ownership of house	3
Value of car(s)	5
Total	18
Cultural capital	
Respondent's education	7
Father's education	5
Total	12
Work related variables	
Respondent's vocation	15
Father's vocation	4
Type of employment	2
Total	21

frequencies and a detailed account of the interpretation of the axes, may be found on our website <http://www.socsci.aau.dk/compas>.

The final analysis of the chosen variable categories revealed that the two first extracted axes, which are our main concern in the following, together explain 59.1% (37.2% + 21.9%). The third axis explains 14.4% of the total variance. Thus, the solution with three axes altogether explains 73.5% of the total variance (the calculations are based on “modified eigenvalues”, see LeRoux and Rouanet, 2004:200, Greenacre, 1993:145). The graphic results from the analysis are presented in Fig. 1.

#### 4.3. The social space of Aalborg

The first extracted axis clearly reflects the first and most important principle of social differentiation according to Bourdieu: *the volume of capital*. In the graph, it is represented by the horizontal axis. Thus, it is rotated 90° counter clockwise compared to Bourdieu's model in *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984:128–129).<sup>4</sup>

The logic of this first axis is quite evident: it has a hierarchical structure. When moving from the right to the left along this axis, all indicators of both cultural and economic capital are increasing in value. Three lines that join categories belonging to the same variables highlight this feature. The three variables (*father's education*, *household income* and *value of car(s)*) all begin on the right-hand side with their lowest value. Then they all increase monotonously in value when moving leftwards. Hence, the name Bourdieu gave the dimension: *overall volume of capital*. Furthermore, attributes that are associated with low social position are found to the right (*father unskilled worker*, *pensioner* and *education basic level*) and those that are common in

<sup>4</sup> This is a choice of convenience; the software SPAD used in the analyses proposes to show the first principal axis as the x-axis, the second as the y-axis as the default option.

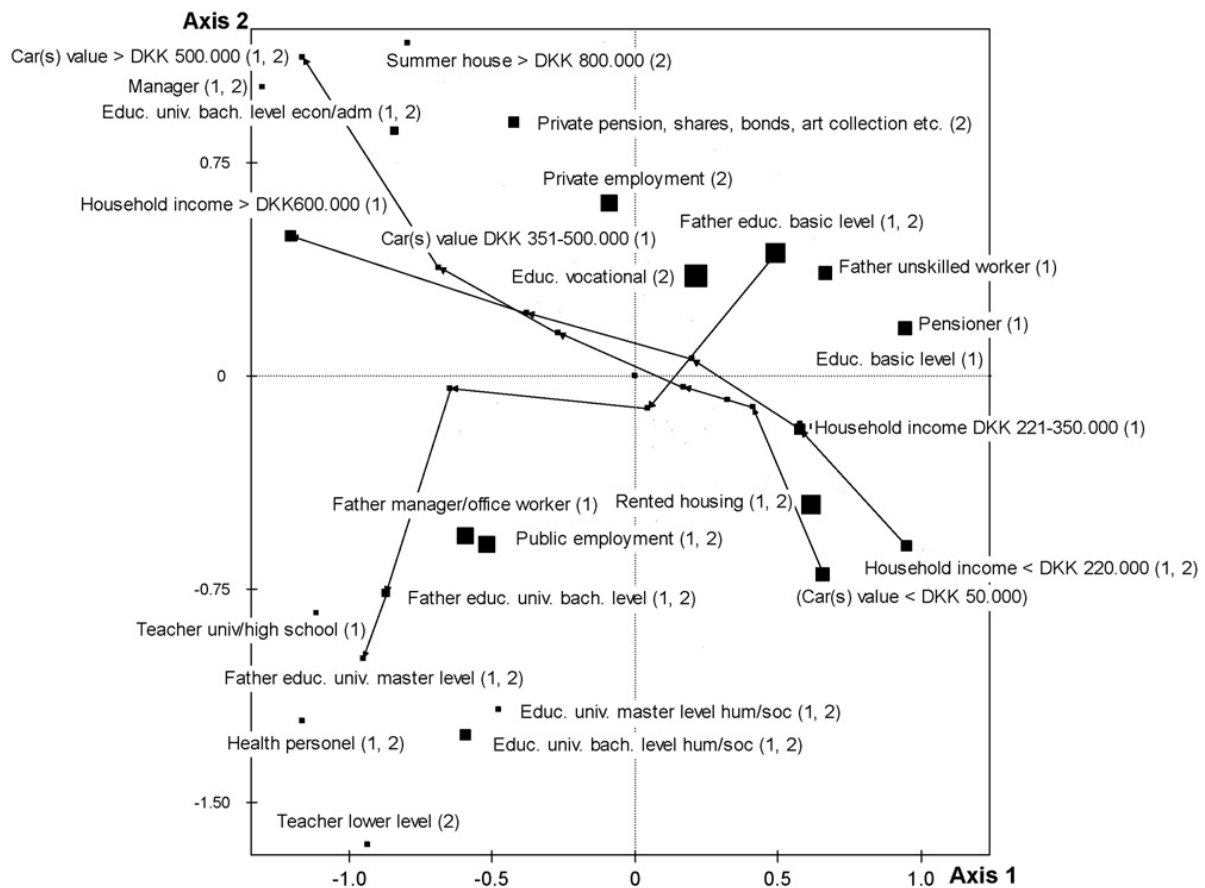


Fig. 1. The social space in Aalborg. (Planes 1–2): categories contributing the most to the first two extracted axes (Ctr-values >2%). Numbers in parentheses (1 or 2, or both) indicate to which axis they contribute. The sizes of the markers are proportionate to the frequencies of the categories they represent.

high social positions are found to the left (*manager, father manager* and *teacher university/high school*).

Closer scrutiny of the results reveals that the *vocation of the respondent* is the most potent factor contributing to this first axis. In total, 22.2% of the variance of it is attributed to this variable. *Household income* is the second most important variable contributing to the first axis (19.8%). The third variable is the *education of the respondent*. This variable has contributed in total by 15.8% to the variance. The fourth variable in order of importance is the *education of the father*. This variable has contributed by 10.1% to the variance of the first axis.

Overall, the three variables related to work have contributed by 35%, the five variables related to economic capital by 40%, and the two variables related to cultural capital by 26% of the variance of the first extracted axis.

The logic of the second axis – the vertical axis – is of a different nature. It reveals a structure dimension, as it opposes indicators of the two forms of capital in an inverse fashion. At the top we find the highest values on the indicators of economic capital (top left: *summer house > DKK 800,000, car(s) value > DKK 500,000, private pension etc*) together with the lowest on cultural capital (top right: *father's education basic level*). At the bottom, we find the opposite: the lowest values on economic capital indicators (bottom right: *household income < DKK 220,000, car(s) value < DKK 50,000*) go together with the highest on cultural capital (bottom left: *father's education university master level, (respondent's) education university master and bachelor level hum/soc*). The dimension has a “two-component” character depicting the “relative weight” of

the two forms of capital. In the top domain of the space, economic capital outweighs cultural capital; in the bottom domain the reverse is true: cultural capital outweighs economic capital. The dimension is indeed similar to the second most important principle of social differentiation in Bourdieu's model of the social space: the *capital composition* dimension.

The printout of parameters from the analysis provides further details. Thus, the variable contributing the most to the second axis among the analysed 10 is the *education of the respondent* (22.5%). The second most important variable is the *vocation of the respondent*, which has contributed by 20.0%. Third in order of importance is a related variable: *type of employment*, which has contributed by 11.2%. Furthermore, *education of the father* has contributed by 9.1%. The indicators of the two forms of capital contribute in equal amounts to the variance of the second axis (economic capital 30%, cultural capital 32%), while the variables related to work take the rest (39%).

The two extracted axes of this analysis fit very well indeed with the model of the social space presented by Bourdieu in *Distinction* depicting the two fundamental principles of social differentiation characterising the “advanced and differentiated society”, where, on each level of the capital volume dimension, there is a “chiasmic” or inverse relationship between the two forms of capital. The third axis, the one explaining 14.4% of the total variance, will not be given further attention here. Interestingly enough, however, this axis is also in harmony with Bourdieu's model, as it adds a diachronic aspect to the solution, it reflects social trajectories, the third dimension of his model. It is strongly influenced by characteristics of the respondents' fathers' and opposes those with fathers in low social positions (*unskilled workers* and *farmers*, and lowest educational certificates) to those with fathers in higher positions. Thus, the third axis reflects the starting points of the trajectories of the respondents, while axis one and two indicates where these trajectories end, the present social positions of the respondents. This axis it is also related to age.<sup>5</sup>

Our dataset contains many indicators of the two forms of capital as well as indicators of social capital (the third major form of capital in Bourdieu's theory). The abundance of indicators has permitted the exploration of other possible solutions. The space construction presented is therefore merely one of several possible solutions—but they all produced similar results. The structure of relations between the analysed categories basically remained the same in all solutions. The two forms of capital appear to be distributed in the population as internally correlated universes of assets but are relatively independent of one another. They are only partly overlapping and therefore only slightly correlated. In Fig. 1, the distribution of economic capital follows the diagonal running from the bottom-right quadrant to the top-left; the distribution of cultural capital follows the other diagonal (from top-right to bottom-left). In order to be revealed in correspondence analysis, the two forms of capital must be comprehensively represented by several variables. Using the respondent's education and/or income as the only indicators for cultural and/or economic capital is far from sufficient. When

<sup>5</sup> In addition to the described features, the constructed space bears a number of important secondary characteristics. The constructed space is related to age: the oldest are situated in the low volume domain to the right, and the youngest (among them many students) are concentrated close to the vertical axis in the lower area, where cultural capital outweighs economic capital. Moreover, the capital composition dimension is related to gender: there are more men positioned in the top half of the graph, where economic capital is dominant, and more women in the lower half, where cultural capital dominates. Ethnic origin is of minor statistical importance for an overall analysis of the social structure in Aalborg, which is why it is overlooked here. These findings probably reveal general traits in advanced societies. Signs of them appear in analyses of data of Norwegian origin (Danielsen, 1998; Hjellbrekke, 2000; Rosenlund, 2000, 2002; Hjellbrekke and Korsnes, 2006); now they appear in a Danish dataset.

the two forms of capital are adequately represented, correspondence analysis may bring this structure to the surface.

A lesson learnt during this process of exploration of possible solutions is that when analysing indicators of the two forms of capital, there are two types of outcomes. In some of the solutions examined, the universe of cultural capital and that of economic capital were caught by one axis each, producing a solution whereby one axis represented the distribution of economic capital and the other the distribution of cultural capital. The other outcome was a volume/composition model, as the one we have presented here. The two types of outcomes are, however, strongly related; the one outcome is the rotated version ( $45^\circ$ ) of the other. We have opted to work on the volume/composition model for theoretical reasons.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4.4. The local space of lifestyles

The next step is to examine the variation of the lifestyle variables according to the space constructed above. The space in Fig. 1 was used as a “predictive map” (Lebart et al., 1984:100 ff.): a framework for the display of the various lifestyles within the domains where they are particularly frequent. Answers to lifestyle questions were projected onto the map as *supplementary* or *illustrative points*. Thus, the lifestyle variables did not contribute to the construction of the space; rather, they were inserted afterwards.

The lifestyle components indicated in the map below (Fig. 2) consist of 77 variable categories derived from questions covering the following areas of lifestyles: use of the city, regular reading of newspapers or magazines, knowledge and preferences in literature and music, preferred TV-programmes and genres, preferences in art, style of housing interior, Internet use, and type of food served for guests. The main principle for selecting the categories to be included in the map was statistical: they are “explained” by at least one of the two dimensions of the space.<sup>7</sup> (72% of the categories have received a *t*-value larger than 5, 19% between 3 and 5, and the remaining 7% have received *t*-values below 3). An overview of the analysed variables and variable categories are presented on our website (<http://www.socsci.aau.dk/compas>).

The space of lifestyles is a system of distinctive signs which have no meaning in themselves, but only in relation to one another. Lifestyle features that frequently occur together will be situated close to each other, while those that are unlikely to occur together will be situated far from one another, in opposite corners of the space. We will here highlight some of the relational patterns in the constructed space of lifestyles (Fig. 2). On the left side, which we here will baptise the west side in order to facilitate the reading, respondents are characterised by high levels of both cultural and economic capital. On the right or east side, respondents are characterised by low levels of capital. The vertical axis separates the fractions with a capital composition dominated by economic assets in the upper region (north) from those with a capital composition dominated

<sup>6</sup> Usually it suffices to balance the number of categories for each form of capital to “rotate” such a “two forms of capital” solution into a volume/composition-solution, such as the one we have presented here. The solution presented is, however; the result of a slightly different procedure. The categories *student* and *no car* have been treated as passive categories. These categories were strongly correlated and gave the solution an unstable character. The influence of the indicators of social capital were also explored but were omitted, as they failed to produce significant contributions (with membership in Lion’s Club and Rotary as the only exception).

<sup>7</sup> The software used in the analyses, SPAD, provides this parameter. Although being alien to the methodology of correspondence analysis – it is based on probability reasoning and simply tests the 0-hypothesis – it functions as a rough tool for establishing whether or not a position of a point is reasonably well explained by the axis.

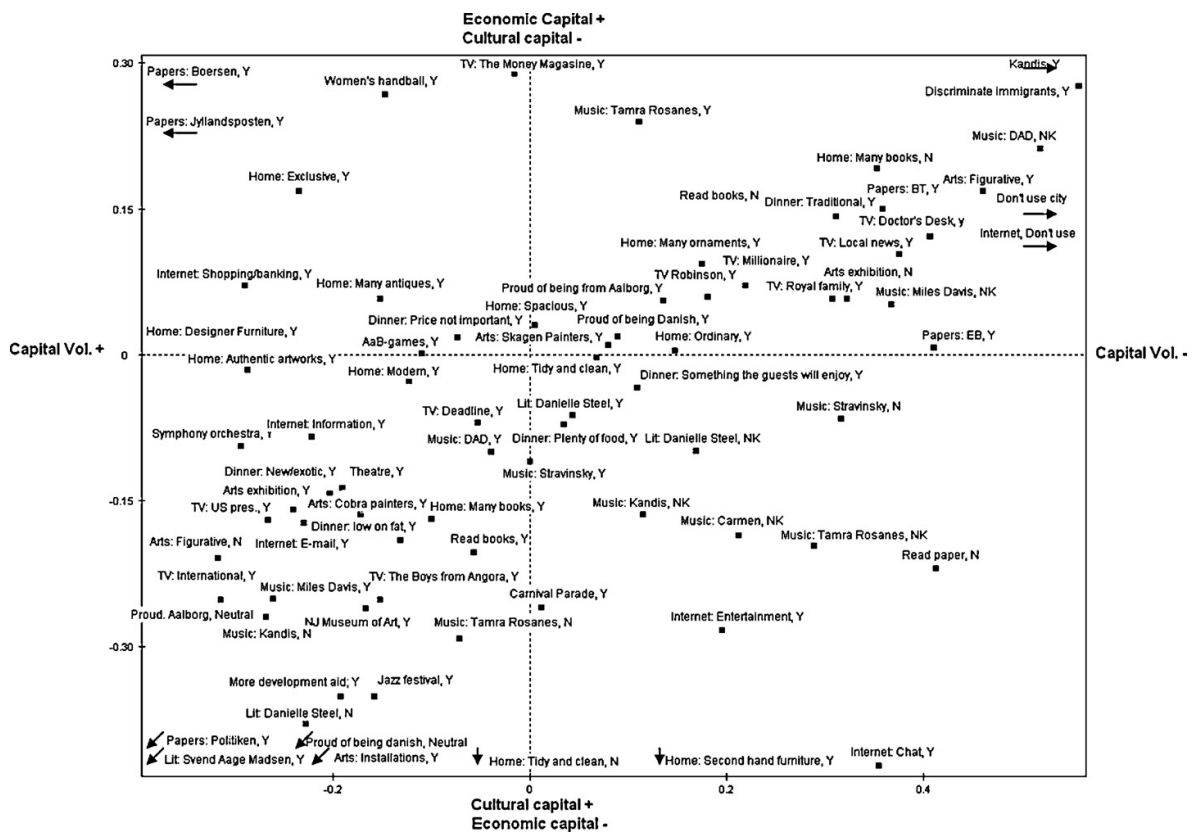


Fig. 2. The space of lifestyles in Aalborg. Lifestyle categories have been added to the social space as illustrative variables.



by cultural capital in the lower region of the map (south). In the following, we will present findings within different lifestyle areas.

*Choice of newspaper* is a strong marker of social position. In this survey, 83% of the respondents indicate that they read a paper regularly. The division along the horizontal axis, reflecting volume of capital, goes between those who are rich in capital<sup>8</sup> (west) reading the “serious” papers characterised by more text, more political analysis and more international issues, versus those with a low capital volume (east) reading *Ekstra Bladet* or *BT* (tabloid papers); or they do not read newspapers at all. Among those respondents positioned on the west side, the division goes between those with high levels of economic capital (north-west) reading *Borsen* (financial news/analysis) or *Jyllandsposten* (conservative/rightwing paper in which the infamous Mohammed cartoons were published in 2005) versus those whose capital assets are dominated by cultural capital (south-west) reading *Politiken* (centre/left paper). One should note, however, that the map does not disclose the “weight” of the categories; how many respondents they represent. There are, in fact, more people within the cultural elite who read *Jyllandsposten* than *Politiken*, however, as more people within the economic elite also read *Jyllandsposten*, the central point for this paper is situated among the latter. Only a small minority reads *Politiken*, but the typical reader is an intellectual.

*Internet use* is also clearly associated with capital volume and to some extent with capital structure. Eighty percent of the respondents indicate that they use the Internet for private matters. *Not using the Internet* is strongly associated with low levels of capital and is situated within the fraction low on cultural assets (north-east). Among other uses of the Internet, *shopping and banking* are the most common within the economic fraction (north-west); *information seeking* and *e-mail* is frequent within the cultural fraction (south-west); while *chat* and *entertainment* are frequent uses in the south/south-east (a corner where many students are situated, as they have considerable cultural capital but little economic capital).

When asked what type of *food* to serve for a dinner with guests, the pattern is reminiscent of the opposition between the taste for luxury and the choices bound by necessity in *Distinction*. On the west side, most clearly within the cultural fraction (south-west), there is a preference for serving something *new or exotic* as well as food which is *low on fat*. Agreement with the statement that *price is not important* is situated up on the economic side. The preference for serving *traditional* Danish food and *plenty of food* are both located at the east side. The respondents were asked whether it was important for them to feel certain that their guests would enjoy what they served them. These more inclusive attitudes towards the guests (“*something the guests will enjoy*”) are found in the east low volume domain, thus opposing the more conspicuous attitude in the west (“*new and exotic*”).

Concerning preferences for television *programs*, those rich on cultural capital on the west side tend to be more interested in international news than in local news; express greater interest in the *US-election* than in news about the *royal family* in Denmark; and appreciate the ironic entertainment of the Danish satire program entitled *The Boys from Angora*. The preferences for various entertainment programs including *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* and *Robinson* are

<sup>8</sup> It would have been much easier writing this if we could stick to the *Distinction* terminology “dominant classes”, “dominated classes” etc. We find the concepts problematic, firstly because we are not sure that “class” is an appropriate term for these groups; and secondly because “domination” is not yet demonstrated in our analysis. Either we can adopt the term “field of power” without a demonstration that it is (a) a field and (b) that it has power. We, therefore, keep to these more clumsy descriptions of groups separated solely on the basis of whether or not they have cultural and/or economic assets. For the sake of simplicity, we will sometimes use terms such as cultural or economic “elite”, albeit not forgetting that these are also loaded terms.

located within the economic corner of the map at the low volume side (north-east). The only program where preferences follow the distribution of economic capital is *The Money Magazine* (financial analysis). A news program offering background information and debate (*Deadline*) was included in order to capture the preferences of the cultural elite, but failed to do so convincingly. According to the audience overviews of the television companies, the reality show *Robinson* was seen by about four times more people than *Deadline* was, while in our survey, *Robinson* comes out with 18% self-reported frequent viewers and *Deadline* with 44%. The over-reporting of *Deadline* compared to *Robinson* may not be due to people lying, but perhaps they do not need to watch *Deadline* so often in order to perceive themselves as people who watch this program, while they possibly watch *Robinson* without considering themselves to be the kind of person who watches *Robinson*. When asked about TV-preferences by an interviewer, they want to make an impression of being cultivated people—a sign that symbolic dominance works. In this case, the taste of the cultural elite appears to be a dominant taste in the sense that it sets a standard for other people and influences their perception of their own practices.

When it comes to the *arts*, the main opposition is constituted between the appreciation of abstract modern art (*Cobra painters*) and *installation art*, on the one hand, and appreciation of the naturalistic and realistic style of expression of the *Skagen Painters* on the other hand. The latter choice goes together with preferences for pictures “where you can see what it represents” (*Arts: figurative*). This opposition clearly follows the distribution of cultural capital and it is in agreement with the one identified by Bourdieu between a preference for the abstract versus the figurative. However, it is worth noting that although the *Skagen Painters* are mostly liked within the popular classes, they are actually well-liked across the social space; and even within the cultural elite they are more fancied than the *Cobra painters* are.

Regarding style of interior and decoration of *the home*, all but one question primarily follow the volume of capital. The economically rich in the north-west are conspicuous with *roomy* houses, *designer furniture* (and *antiques*), and homes described as *exclusive*. Their counterparts are found in the south-east, where homes have *second-hand furniture* or are (closer to the centre) depicted as *ordinary*. Actually, 80% of the respondents describe their homes in this manner. Those less inclined to do so are found in the south-west. This finding may tell more about the respondents themselves than about their homes. It may be seen as a sign of the social structuring of the striving for individuality or of a certain self-perception as unique, as un-ordinary.

Having *many books* appears among the strongest indicators of the intellectual home. *Many ornaments* and *few books* characterise the opposite corner (north-east). *Authentic artwork* and a *modern* style seem linked to a balanced capital structure, though with high capital volume. The only question of this kind with a stronger relation to capital composition than to volume is whether the home is *tidy and clean*. While 93% of the respondents describe their homes as tidy and clean, those who have relatively more cultural than economic capital appear to have (or to perceive themselves as people who have) a less strict regime of domestic order.

When it comes to *uses of the city*, the distribution of indicators follows the capital volume axis. While the capital-rich in the west use the various institutions and facilities in the city, those on the east side are best characterised by their non-use of the city. Attending the *carnival parade* is the only exception from this pattern. Its participators are mostly young people located in the southern area of the space. Attending sporting events (*Women's handball* and *AaB men's football, handball or ice hockey games*) is associated with relatively high levels of economic assets (north/north-west), while all of the cultural institutions (*museum, theatre, symphony orchestra and jazz festival*) are more frequently used by those with relatively more cultural assets (south/south-west). The non-users of all of these facilities of the city are located in the north-east.

The *literature* questions include answer categories reflecting likes and dislikes as well as a lack of knowledge. Regarding reading patterns, we find a tendency similar to the one identified in the use of the city. Seven of the eight authors included in the survey were mainly read by respondents situated within the cultural elite (only two are included in the map). The exception is *Danielle Steel*, who is more frequently read by people on the low volume side (east). Reading *Steel* is actually situated very close to the point representing not knowing who she is. The cultural elite do not read her nor do they want to read her; but they know who she is.

Regarding *musical taste*, the respondents were invited to express their positive or negative appreciation of eight artists, composers or works. The strongest marker of cultural capital turned out to be *Miles Davis* (poor Adorno must be turning in his grave). More surprisingly, though, *Stravinsky*, chosen as a possible marker of highbrow taste, is not particularly associated with the intellectual elite, although somewhat more so with the fractions rich on cultural capital than those rich on economic capital. Furthermore, a hard-rock band named *DAD* not only has a much higher frequency of likes than *Stravinsky*, it is also strongly associated with the intellectual segments of the social space. Beyond the limits of the elite's tolerance, however, we find the Danish light-pop band *Kandis* and the Danish-American C&W singer *Tamra Rosanes*. They are both among the well-liked artists in the north-east. The east side of the map is characterised by higher reporting of “no knowledge” of the artists/composers.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Question 1: individualisation of taste?

Regarding the ideas about individualisation and the blurring of social patterning that are prominent in current sociological inquiry, our findings leave little support for the “strong” individualisation argument presented in Section 3, which we there opposed to a view on the social world as structured by social position. Cultural consumption appears to be highly structured by both economic and cultural capital.

However, they may be less structured than was previously the case—we would not know. And whether individualisation as an *experience* is rampant (what we might term the “weak” individualisation argument) is another question we cannot answer.

Nevertheless, our data includes different logics for differentiation depending on whether we examine knowledge, participation or preferences. In the south-west, we find comprehensive knowledge of all kinds of authors and music artists, while people on the east side are much more likely to indicate ignorance about both music and literature; even ignorance about the favourite choices on the same side of the map (e.g. *Danielle Steel* and *Kandis*). For most of the subjects covered, the preferences also seem to be structured according to both volume and the composition of capital. When it comes to participation, however, the capital volume axis differentiates more. People on the low volume side are much less likely to have an Internet connection; much more likely to state that they do not read literature or only the lowbrow kind; and rarely use the facilities of the city.

Most other studies addressing the findings from *Distinction* have not explicitly taken into account the capital composition principle as a force of social differentiation. Contrary to these studies, we have constructed and explored a model that is as similar as possible, and our conclusion so far is that it works: the observed variations of lifestyles may be meaningfully described with the help of the two principles of social differentiation: volume and the composition of capital.

### 5.2. Question 2: decline of traditional cultural capital?

The cultural elite in Aalborg does not adhere to a classical high culture within any of the fields examined. As shown, more people within this group prefer *Jyllandsposten* over *Politiken*, *Skagen painters* over *Cobra painters* or *installation art*, and so forth. Still, all of the most intellectually challenging choices regarding literature, newspapers, genres of arts, TV-programs and music have their highest frequencies within the lower left corner of the map. So even if the Aalborg cultural elite cannot be portrayed as adherents to Kantian aesthetics, the oppositions stand out between the abstract and the concrete and between the intellectually challenging and the light.

Bringing to mind the earlier theoretical discussion of whether the concept of cultural capital had a universal character or was to be seen as a relative entity, we may conclude that if cultural capital is regarded in the former sense (as classical high culture), it can be found in Aalborg, but is rather marginal. If cultural capital is regarded in the second sense (as an expression of taste in relationships with other expressions of taste), however, it seems to be a very important form of capital.

From our data, we cannot determine whether cultural capital in any of these senses plays a role as *legitimate* culture, meaning that it sets the standards for taste (although our TV-related questions indicated an interesting tendency for under-reporting popular choices and over-reporting intellectual choices). The discussion about legitimacy and domination is beyond the scope of this article and would most probably demand qualitative methods.

Our findings on this point seem to concur with those from the British project on cultural capital and social exclusion, where they do not find any strong elitist taste on different fields of cultural consumption, but the distinctions and principles behind taste choices prevail, as when Savage concludes about musical taste (Savage, 2006): “Classical music emerges as still the most clear marker of ‘educated’ musical taste.”

In Sections 3 and 4 of this article, we have presented arguments in favour of the view that highbrow cultural competencies and tastes have lost in value and, as a consequence, also in their capacity to define “good taste”. We are unable to assess this possible trend with data from only one point in time, but may instead observe several signs of a loss of recognition for and the authority attributed to those representing the arts and humanities. They seem to have lost in terms of social influence (as could be seen in Denmark when the neo-liberals won the elections in 2001 and immediately manifested their power by kicking out “experts” from a wide range of councils and boards). The humanistic faculties appear to systematically lose standing in the universities; and when examining wage development for the population in Aalborg, we could see that the professions that are the most closely connected to classical cultural capital, such as teachers from the primary school to the university, saw their buying power reduced from 1980 to 2000, while almost all other groups have improved their economic situation. We believe that this observation is not particular to Denmark or Aalborg; it can also be seen elsewhere in Europe. These would be signs of a class in descent; signs that the “dominated fraction of the dominant class” is fighting on a sagging front. Classical culture appears to have lost in convertibility, and a more technologically oriented culture seems to be gaining ground.

### 5.3. Question 3: omnivorousness and tolerance?

A common view among critics of Bourdieu’s thesis in *Distinction* is that if he was correct about the highbrow cultural distinctions among the cultural elite in France in the 1960s and 1970s, he is certainly not so now. An elitist taste pattern should gradually have been replaced by a

more tolerant and omnivorous pattern, whereby social agents make lifestyle choices with fewer class-related restraints. As the preferences within the cultural elite's corner of the social space in our study (Fig. 2) are broader than the classical highbrow culture, one may ask whether this class fraction in Aalborg could be characterised as omnivorous or as tolerant. In order to answer this question, we will now take a closer look at some of the arguments presented in Peterson and Kern's widely read study of omnivorousness.

Peterson and Kern (1996) define highbrow culture (in music) – a priori – as classical music and opera; middlebrow is defined as big band music, musicals and easy-listening; while lowbrow consists of another five genres. Thereafter, they identify the “highbrows” as those respondents who chose both classical music and opera as music genres to their liking, with one of them as best-liking. They then compare the number of choices the respondents have made among the non-highbrow genres in 1982 and 1992. The more choices they made, the more omnivorous they were. Their results indicate that the highbrows in 1992 made significantly more choices among the non-highbrow genres than the highbrows made 10 years earlier. Peterson (2005) has also later dealt with the search for stable measures of taste in order to facilitate comparisons over time and space.

In our view, however, such a search is futile: tastes are changing and they depend on social contexts. Rap may be lowbrow at one point in time but not necessarily at another, and the music referred to by the term rap is not the same either. A piece of music such as Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, which Bourdieu uses as an example in *Distinction*, obtains a social meaning when people of a particular kind and at a given point in time declare their appraisal of it. This meaning may shift over time, as when a choice that once was a sign of high distinction becomes too popular (or rather, too popular among the wrong kind of people). Patterns of cultural consumption are signifying practices that may change quite rapidly, all while the structures of social relations they are embedded in do not necessarily change according to the same rhythm.

Our study does not allow for an analysis of taste development over time. It does, however, offer ample opportunities to shed more light on the snob-omnivore distinction. To us, the concept of omnivorousness ought to address *both* that which one chooses and what one rejects; particularly since the concept is often placed in opposition to snobbism. In *Distinction*, the distaste for the lifestyles of other classes and class fractions appear as equally central to distinguishing cultural practices as the preferences for lifestyles that are common among one's equals.<sup>9</sup> In order to identify the “snobs” and “omnivores” and based on the arguments above, we have chosen indicators that do not refer to any kind of a priori assumptions about what highbrow or lowbrow is, but instead indicators that can capture the relational character of the phenomenon, by linking taste with distaste.

The map over the space of lifestyles (Fig. 2) is our point of departure. The lifestyle components it contains are already socially classified, as their positions are based on the social positions of their practitioners/adherents. We define highbrow lifestyle attributes as those that are located at the left in the map. These attributes share in common having been chosen predominantly by people with a high volume of capital; but far from all people with a high volume of capital have chosen them. For instance, one may very well possess a high amount of capital and not approve of installation art, not enjoy Miles Davis, not read *Information* or *Politiken*, not have designer furniture etc. So we label people as highbrows according to their

<sup>9</sup> In her contribution to this debate, Bryson (1996) followed up on this idea. She found that even if musical exclusiveness (expressed in number of genres approved of) decreased with education, the genres whose fans had the least education – gospel, country, rap and heavy metal – were simultaneously those most likely to be rejected by the elite (with such a result one may also wonder why she insisted on characterising the elite as tolerant).



Table 2

Cross tabulation of indices of adherence to highbrow tastes' and of avoidance of lowbrow tastes

		Adherence to highbrow tastes			
		Weak (<7)	Intermediate (8–12)	Strong (13–29)	Total (N)
Avoidance of Lowbrow tastes	Weak (<14)	65.7 (234)	27.2 (118)	8.1 (31)	32.6 (383)
	Intermediate (15–19)	28.1 (100)	45.4 (197)	33.1 (127)	36.1 (424)
	Strong (20–30)	6.2 (22)	27.4 (119)	58.9 (226)	31.3 (367)
Total		30.3 (356)	37.0 (434)	32.7 (384)	100 (1174)

choices; not their positions. On the basis of 29 lifestyle components selected from the left side of the map, we have created an *index of adherence to highbrow culture*, where we simply add how many of these elements the respondents have chosen, ranging from 0 to 29. Along this scale, we have divided the respondents into three groups of almost equal size. The one-third adhering most strongly to highbrow taste is then composed of those selecting 13 or more of these 29 attributes. We label them the Aalborg highbrows.

The next question is how to characterise the highbrows according to the snob-omnivore distinction. We will use the label “omnivore” for those compiling lifestyle attributes by mingling highbrow taste components with those of lowbrow and middlebrow origin. We use the label “snobs” for those clearly avoiding or refusing lowbrow lifestyle attributes. In order to characterise the respondents according to this dimension, we have created an *index of avoidance of lowbrow culture*. This consists of positioning towards 30 lifestyle components located in the low volume area to the right in the map. In order to avoid tautologies, we used an entirely different group of variables than for the first index. This second index was composed of negative choices, such as an expressed dislike for certain authors (Jane Aamund, Danielle Steel) or musical artists (Kandis), or a denial of having many ornaments in their home or of watching reality shows etc. The index ranged from 0 to 30 and was divided into three groups of approximately equal size, resulting in three levels of avoidance of lowbrow culture. The table below depicts the relationship between the two indices (Table 2).

The highbrows are then to be found in the column labelled “strong adherence to highbrow tastes”; 384 persons in total. Of these 384, 58.9% (226) simultaneously express a strong refusal of lowbrow tastes and could therefore merit the label “snobs”. Among the 384 highbrows, 8.1% (31) express a weak refusal of lowbrow tastes. These are the only respondents we feel merit the label “tolerant omnivores”. As they only make up 2.7% of the total population, they are a rare species indeed.

From a sociological perspective, more important is the fact that the two indices are strongly interrelated. Scoring high on adherence to highbrow tastes goes together with the refusal of lowbrow tastes, and vice versa. These results thus provide little support to the theses about the contemporary cultural elite being omnivorous or about snobbism losing ground. A taste for the assets and practices cultivated in the high volume area go strongly together with distastes for assets and practices that are common in the low volume domain.

#### 5.4. Question 4: rise of cosmopolitanism and connectedness?

In his later scholarship, Bourdieu frequently replaced the term cultural capital with informational capital. Informational capital has obviously gained impact in today's knowledge-

based society, connected to IT, communication and globalisation. It is in this context we think we may see important new tendencies.

In the map of lifestyles (Fig. 2), there is a noteworthy opposition between a local or national orientation, on the one hand, and an international orientation on the other. This can be seen within areas as diverse as TV-preferences, musical likes, food consumption and political attitudes. On the west side, we find individuals who orient themselves globally in these matters. They make use of the Internet to seek information and communicate; they dismiss the notion that one ought to hire natives before immigrants when jobs are scarce; they support giving aid to developing countries; and they do not express any pride in being Danish or of coming from Aalborg. These tendencies may be summed up as a dimension of *cosmopolitanism*; as they go together with newspaper reading, Internet use and participation in city life, there is also a dimension of *connectedness*, in both a literal and a figurative sense. As several of these indicators are actually the statistically strongest in the analysis, we will argue that we here see contours of particularly important forms of non-economical assets in contemporary society.

Whether cosmopolitanism is the appropriate term for the tendencies observed is a complex discussion, as there are many interpretations of the concept (see Featherstone, 2002 and the issue of TC&S he introduces there). As Beck (2002) points out with reference to Kant, cosmopolitanism has to do with the principle of including otherness, but now has a number of very banal forms, such as youth cultures or culinary eclecticism. With the increasing globalisation of today, there are technological aspects of a cosmopolitan orientation that may be better covered by the term connectedness (which hooks up with the valorisation of scientific culture at the expense of humanistic culture, probably quite prominent in Aalborg, where a high proportion of the well-educated persons are engineers). Maybe, however, “adherence to a global culture” or “world citizenship”, as Lizardo (2005) puts it, are even more appropriate terms.

These findings fit with Bennett et al. (1999:264), who describe a class of professionals characterised by “receptiveness to the culturally unfamiliar”, and with Holt’s (1997:111–113) “cosmopolitan sensibility” consisting of, among other elements, a desire for the exotic and a racially and economically inclusive attitude among the highest educated.

## 6. A concluding comment on the conceptualisation of contemporary social cleavages

The main conclusion to be derived from our study is that cultural distinctions exist in a contemporary Danish context, albeit they do not have exactly the same character as the ones Bourdieu highlighted in *Distinction*. Our findings about cosmopolitanism and connectedness accord well with Bourdieu’s view if one conceives of cultural capital as a relative and not a universal entity.

The same findings may, however, also be seen to be in line with some of the most influential sociological analyses of the divisions of our time. Just to mention a few: Bauman’s (2001) thesis about “globalization for some, localization for some others”; Urry’s (2003) ideas about how geographic mobility becomes increasingly important for identities and belongings as well as for cleavages; or Lash’s (1994) distinction between the winners and losers of reflexivity in “today’s increasingly class polarized, though decreasingly class-conscious, information societies” (op. cit.: 120). Castells argues that the Information Age is characterised by polarisation between a cosmopolitan elite inhabiting the global “space of flows” of power and wealth and the increasingly disempowered mass of people inhabiting the local “space of places”. Excluded from the networks of power, the latter may often resort to communal resistance built around the

wreckage of tradition in terms of religion, race and the nation state. Hence, in the Network Society ‘... elites are cosmopolitan, people are local’ (Castells, 2000:446).

Scholars who adhere to reflexive modernisation are generally not very empirically oriented. Thanks to sociological sensitivity, they may nevertheless grasp important tendencies of our time. There are obviously internal differences between these conceptualisations and a number of difficulties involved in linking them to Bourdieu’s conceptualisation. It would be beyond the scope of this article to explore these difficulties; our point is simply that Bourdieu’s approach is not necessarily in contradiction with theories on reflexive modernisation. Bourdieu may seem old-fashioned if one reads *Distinction* as a description of contemporary social divisions. If it is read as a toolbox for analyses of social divisions, however, its sociological power remains intact. Bourdieu’s analytical approach may provide useful instruments when attempting to establish empirical support for the ideas about contemporary social cleavages advanced by theorists of reflexive modernisation.

Such cleavages cannot be uncovered through survey data alone, however. The approach presented thus far does not account well for subjective experiences of social boundaries, which remain to be demonstrated in qualitative research (Skjott-Larsen, 2008). A male engineer, originating from a working class family, answers Skjott-Larsen on an interview question about why he does not see his old mates so frequently anymore: “They are a bit farmer-like, stuck, don’t travel, and do not have much ambition about trying something new.” Our guess is that among the principal boundaries that are drawn today in the discursive practices of the elite, we will find oppositions between the stuck and the mobile, the narrow and the open mind, the traditional and the creative, the reflexive and the non-reflexive. The wordings of these oppositions are formulated from the point of view of the elite. From an opposite position, though, the very same oppositions may be related to values such as loyalty, stability, authenticity, having roots, choosing family over career ... Obviously, this would not give a more objective conceptual framework; however, it would make it evident that the choice of concepts expresses values and judgements.

Intellectuals analysing the social world have always had difficulty analysing their own position. The sociology of class analyses is full of classificatory systems in which intellectuals are either placed outside of the class structure, are given a positive role, or, at least, are accorded a euphemistic portrayal. To reinterpret and reword oppositions such as the above mentioned is a necessary aspect of this research as a reflexive defence against creating narcissistic images of the researchers’ own social group, thereby distorting the analysis. The (auto-)portrayal of intellectuals that emerges from our analyses, where we point to their rejection of popular culture, is not as favourable as the portrayals describing them in terms of tolerance and omnivorousness.

One may also ask why reflexive modernisation theory has come out as the “reflexive winner” within the field of contemporary sociological theory. Why is it so well-liked by social scientists and students? Why has the idea that the highly educated are particularly tolerant and omnivorous gained so much influence today within the sociology of consumption? How can it be that a book entitled *The Rise of the Creative Class* (Florida, 2002) sells so well? Could it be because all of the images of the highly educated produced in this literature are so delightfully appealing to the highly educated themselves?

These final comments were intended as a reminder that it is not enough, as a sociologist, to uncover contemporary social divisions; one also has to find an appropriate vocabulary for them. Bourdieu’s vocabulary of capitals has its problems, but it is at least not as ridden by hidden values as the current alternatives at hand.

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