

## CULTURAL CLASSIFICATIONS AND SOCIAL POSITIONS

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“People with high education and with a high occupational prestige practice and prefer more of almost everything. The reason behind this finding lies in the fact that broad spectrum networks require wide repertoires of taste” (DiMaggio, 1987, 444).

In an interview in the newspaper *El País* (2013), the versatile singer Alaska, who has moved between a punk and gothic aesthetic, summarises graphically what has been a historical cultural change of contemporary Spain: “It’s a moment –she states– in which you see chavs with earrings and blings, and waxed eyebrows, the shirt, the muscle and you think: “No, I think he’s not gay, the radar is failing me”. We have triumphed, we have imposed extreme aesthetics that for some time have been of puffs, whores and transvestites” (Alaska, in *El País*).<sup>1</sup> As Alaska asserts, the aesthetics and clothing of excluded and marginal categories became predominant, thanks also to the ability to digest forms of protest in the music and fashion market, which became apparent in 1986 with extraordinary success of the song “A quién le importa” (from the disc *No es pecado*), since it was adopted as emblematic anthem of any marginality and of the Hispanic-American gay movement. Perhaps Catherine Fieschi is right when she postulates that “culture is a tool for emancipation” (2010).<sup>2</sup> In any case, what Alaska and Fieschi show is that there is a close relationship between symbolic forms and social structures. In this relationship, the system or systems of classification of symbolic forms, of cultural practices and preferences, which is never merely a system developed for academic reasons and purposes, plays a decisive role.

This problem –the relationship between classification systems and social organisation– is rooted in the work of Durkheim (1915) and has been for all social sciences (in anthropology, for example, Mary Douglas, 1966, and in sociology, Bourdieu, 1976). The taste or, to put it better, the forms of expression of taste and the regimes it produces, in addition to its aesthetic dimension also operates as a form of personal and group identification, and a way of constructing or symbolising social relations. As DiMaggio maintains in a classic article, *Classification in Art* (1987), four logics are relevant in the artistic classification systems: differentiation, hierarchy, universalisation and ritualisation.

Thus, objects, products, goods, services and cultural practices are classified and at the same time contribute to the social processes of organisation and classification. Practices are always ordered and categorised, although the order is not as explicit as on the shelves of a supermarket or in the showcases of an old museum of natural history and although the labels and criteria of distinction vary frequently.

Something –a song, a book, a movie..., anything– is always socially labelled as beautiful or ugly, rough, coarse, rude or refined, vintage, cool, delicate and exquisite. And not only criteria of aesthetic or moral order operate, but also of gender (male and female) and age (old, traditional, new or innovative) and, above

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<sup>1</sup> [http://elpais.com/elpais/2013/08/22/eps/1377184979\\_677020.html](http://elpais.com/elpais/2013/08/22/eps/1377184979_677020.html)

<sup>2</sup> In John Holden (2010).

all, sociopolitical: vulgar, elegant, distinguished, mass, popular, noble, low, middle and tall, bohemian and cosmopolitan, transgressor or conformist. The phrases that designate the categories and the same categories that articulate these classification schemes are not substantive or eternal. They are built historically and change over time, although they are so despite the defenders of the absolute, universal and timeless canon. And they are manufactured in and through the social practices of the groups that are occupying different positions on the stratification scale.

What logics of classification and stratification operate in the cultural field? What is the relationship between cultural classifications and social positions? For Bourdieu, the reference author in any study on this matter, the relationship would be homologous, that is, there would be a close correspondence or match between social and cultural stratification, between the social classification of people and the symbolic organisation of things, artistic or ordinary;<sup>3</sup> in the nineties, a new paradigm in American sociology known as the theory of omnivory (Peterson et al., 1996) crystallised, according to which the cultural consumption of the upper classes would be formed by a greater variety of goods than that of other groups; a third alternative vision arises within the framework of the theories of individualisation, with the work of Lahire, which shows how in a world where cultural legitimacy is more blurred and there is a greater heterogeneity of supply, individual combinations have more opportunities (2004).<sup>4</sup> In the last fifteen years, and especially in the occasion of the increase in inequalities produced by the Great Recession, there has been an explosion of research projects, whose main feature is undoubtedly that they continue to have the work of Bourdieu as a reference, and especially his most cited book, *Distinction*, the publication of which took place thirty years ago.

Relationships between cultural activities and social positions are complex, variable and ask for multifactorial explanations. And they are so because, when we talk about culture, we must necessarily combine the problem of inequality (asymmetric distribution of goods, resources and services) and that of diversity (plurality of aesthetic and moral universes, preferences and expectations); and when we talk about social positions we have to consider class, status, sex, age, educational level, marital status, ethnicity, etc. To this, the dialectic must be added between the local and the global, in a context of intense globalisation.

In this text, our purpose is to carry out a review and an analysis of the theories that have explored the relationship between social stratification and practices, objects and cultural forms. It is based on the creation of a lexicon related to culture in the formation of bourgeois society; theories of cultural legitimacy, in both the American version (theories of mass culture) and the French one (theory of distinction), are dealt with later; and then the criticisms, revisions and nuances that this conception has received, from many different fronts, but basically focusing on the main concepts of the work of Bourdieu (field, *habitus* and capital), which has been taken as the central reference point. The text closes with a synthesis of the logics that operate in the culture, which are discovered when performing this re-reading.

## **1. The hierarchical and vertical view of culture**

### *1.1. The genesis of the cultural classification schemes*

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<sup>3</sup> See Ariño 2012.

<sup>4</sup> On individualisation see Atkinson, 2010; and Chan, 2011.

Usually it is attributed to Mathew Arnold, as we have seen, the paternity of the humanist definition of culture, which he understands as a process of spiritual and artistic perfection of the human being. When looking at the British society of the time from this perspective, he states shockingly surprised that only a minority (one in ten Englishmen) is cultured, while the rest of its contemporaries are blinded by utilitarianism or denied in the barbarity.

A similar concept and hierarchical classification dualism were formulated long before, in the middle of the seventeenth century by Baltasar Gracián (1601-1658), at a time when, as noted by historian James Amelang, the nobility of blood needed to be relaunched based on a *nobilitas* based on the letters and, therefore, he began to use the term culture to design higher knowledge, refined behaviour and the cultivation of intelligence. Success, the pre-eminence of this word –“culture”– compared to others, was linked, then, to the growing importance of formal education –literacy education and mastery of oneself– in the formation of new leadership classes.<sup>5</sup>

The presence of the terms “cultivating” and “culture” and the “cultivated” and “uncultivated” terms in Gracián’s work is reiterative and shows an unquestionable new conception of this lexicon. A person or a cultured nation is one that has entered into a process of perfection of the abilities and inclinations that nature has provided. Therefore, being uncultivated is equivalent to being dirty, beast, barbarian or vulgar, that is to say, not being cultivated (like Andrenio, the protagonist of *El criticón*, a young man found on a deserted island and raised among wild animals). Culture develops and perfects nature and is synonymous with art and decoration<sup>6</sup> or with knowledge.<sup>7</sup> In *The pocket oracle and art of prudence* (e.o. 1647) he synthesises his ideas, in a couple of occasions: “Nature and art, material and work. There is no beauty without help nor perfection that is not done in barbarity without the enhancement of artifice; helps the bad and refines the good. It usually leaves us, perhaps, nature: let us invoke art. The best natural is uncultivated without it, and half is missing in perfection if culture is missing. Every man knows little without the artifice, and it has to be polished in every order of perfection” (*Complete Works*, 1993: 197).

Culture, for Gracián, as in general for the humanist conception, is a task of personal improvement and a social good (an artifice), the possession ennobles, dignifies, perfects, while its lack places humans in barbarity, among beasts, and its loss reduces them to the level of “ignorants”.

This lexicon, which was coined in the first modernity and was developed through the school institution and the formation of intellectual elites, and its classification dualism (culture-inculture), was developed during the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. As Levine (1988) and Paul DiMaggio (1992) respectively showed in North America at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was still usual to see agents of different social categories jointly enjoying works by Shakespeare or opera. However, a deliberate process produced a change in the status of works of art, cultural practices, and a differentiation of the

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<sup>5</sup> Amelang argues that the ideal of elite culture hid several fundamental principles: a) identify the culture with the knowledge acquired; b) it was publicly and institutionally ratified, through titles; c) linked to the ability to read and write; d) restrictive: limited access (1986: 173).

<sup>6</sup> See in *El Discreto*, e.o. 1646, XVIII (*Obres Completes II*: 157).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 160.

public that would be shaped by the minting of the terms high culture and low culture (highbrow and lowbrow) in the era by the antonym of the bourgeoisie. The public presentation of art, says Levine, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was eclectic, consisted of a great variety of forms, was not hierarchically organised or fragmented as it would be later; there was no drastic distinction between serious art and popular entertainment (1988: 9). But as certain artistic forms were coated with an aura of sacredness and others were stigmatised, there was a social separation. In fact, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the terms *highbrow* and *lowbrow* were considered to constitute an adequate description of cultural categories.<sup>8</sup>

## 1.2. Cultural classification and mass culture

Modernity, at the same time as the enthronement of a homogeneous concept of culture linked to the rise of the nation-state, implies an implicit hierarchical and scalar concept associated with the evolution of its social structures of inequality. And, in this framework, the authentic and true culture is the high culture. *De facto*, many are the texts that will use the capital letters to refer to it. The rest of configurations and lifestyles that are found in social groups, more or less complex according to the composition of the social structure that is contemplated, are either imperfect, failed, frustrated art (as with the so-called popular culture) or pathological and degraded forms (as in mass culture).

The development of the mass media, the extraordinary increase in the symbolic offer, and the increasing mobility of groups and categories, led to the introduction of a middle category (*middlebrow*) or several attempts at analytical refinement. However, although in the years immediately after the Second World War, authors such as Dwight MacDonal (radical critic) and Edward Shils (integrated reformer) tried to overcome the dualist scheme to portray the greater complexity of post-war North American society, their schemes remained hierarchical and legitimised. The former differentiated four categories: highcult or higher culture, midcult, masscult and popular culture. The two historically new phenomena would be the midcult and the masscult. The first one arises with the middle classes, who imitate, and reduce at the same time, the models of the superior culture; the second one is the child of the market and the new media, and it differs from popular art because of its lack of authenticity: it is nothing more than a product manufactured to entertain and distract and, given the absence of any criteria of valuation, it is not art, but anti-art (1979: 59 and 91).

Similar typology appears in Edward Shils, although the assessment of the phenomenon remains radically different. But he also speaks of levels of culture “that are quality levels, measured with aesthetic, intellectual and moral level” (Shils, 1979: 145, e.o. 1961). The three types they identify receive the name of higher or refined culture, mediocre culture and brutal culture. The upper culture provides the criterion of aesthetic valuation for the rest (it is superior in truth and beauty). Among them they differentiate themselves by the degree of elaboration and refinement, by the wealth of the repertoire and by the historical parabola of duration. Within this interpretative scheme, Shils implicitly introduces a new social and cultural category: youth. Not only has the rise of the middle classes

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<sup>8</sup> As seen in the work of Van Wyck Brooks from 1915, *America's Coming of Age*. See Daniel Bell, 1979: 22.

(greater purchasing power and higher educational levels) been produced, but rather the emergence, as a specific category, of youth. This is an unprecedented phenomenon and is “the fundamental point of the mass culture revolution”. This new social category is characterised by its consumer avidity, at the same time as its creative poverty: “An extraordinary amount of popular music, conventional films, periodical press and all kinds of dances take place addressed to the young, who consume it all” (Shils, 1979: 155).

<i>Culture level</i>	<i>Degree of elaboration</i>	<i>Repertoire</i>	<i>Parabola of duration</i>
Higher or refined	Seriousness of the subject, acute penetration, subtlety and abundance of feelings	Big works	Long, accumulates past inheritance
Mediocre	Less original, more imitative	Musical comedy	Short
Brutal	More elemental symbolic elaboration, little depth of penetration, thickened in sensitivity and perception	It includes games and shows and expressive actions with minimal symbolic content	Long, in the sense of heiress of tradition, given its scarce creativity

Although these authors boast of greater analytical refinement and introduce in their classifying scheme the patterns of emerging social categories, they undoubtedly share a vertical view of culture. That is, for them in society there is a gravitational centre, a vertex, which is also a summit, a peak, that defines the patterns and legitimate models of culture, against which the rest are evaluated whether according to their achievements (popular art is a frustrated art), or to their authenticity (the so-called mass culture is not but perversion or pathology, pseudoculture).

### 1.3. *The theory of legitimate culture*

Although the approach of Bourdieu is different and has tried to distance itself, as he himself states in *Anatomie du goût* (1976), of the naive representations of the social world as a scale and of the sociological current that interprets it as a continuum of “Abstract strata”, that conception is also underlying in his work.<sup>9</sup> *The distinction* (1979), which explores with extraordinary breadth the cultural practices and tastes of the French population, has become a reference in the debate on cultural participation. Here we will stress the underlying general theory and its application to French society, in order to show that, despite their protests against it, it is framed in the scalar and monolegitimist paradigm.

For Bourdieu, tastes and lifestyles are the practical manifestation of social differences. The variations in the preferences that exhibit classes or class divisions are organised according to a structure that is homologous to the structure of capital variations: “the units that can be trimmed according to the homogeneity of the Aesthetic dispositions (in the broadest sense of the term) correspond to social units defined by the possession of a heritage characterised both by its volume and its structure”. The space of lifestyles or of art and social positions overlap, and the homology of the two universes “is explained” because their structure “is the product of the same principles” (1976: 14).

Therefore, in the face of the charismatic ideology that considers aesthetic sensibility as an innate feature or gift, and against meritocratic conceptions, which

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<sup>9</sup> See Lebaron, F. and Mauger, G. (eds), 2012; Coulangeon, Ph. and Julien Duval, 2013.

speak of it as a quality or objective competence of universal disposition, Bourdieu proposes a sociological vision: the taste is socially determined and constituted. Research shows that there is a very high statistical correlation between artistic hierarchies and social hierarchies, to the point that preferences are but the practical assertion of an inevitable difference.

But Bourdieu does not reduce his task to noting the *social character* of taste, but to showing that cultural capital operates according to a *distinction logic* that helps to reproduce and subtly perpetuate social differences. Cultural competence, and specifically the aesthetic disposition, which is expressed in a wide variety of manifestations (from clothing, going to celebrations, to artistic practices) is the result of a long process of inculcation that begins in the family, in accordance with their levels of economic, academic and cultural capital, and is reinforced by the educational system. Here lies the object of the work of Bourdieu: to uncover the hidden conditions of this prodigy that generates the uneven distribution between the different social classes of aptitude for the inspired contact with the work of art and, more generally, with the works of the erudite culture (1988: 26).

Bourdieu's analysis of the distribution of cultural resources is based on the combination of four key concepts (field, *habitus*, capital and practice), through which he intends to elaborate theory of social spaces and agents, that overcomes the classic dualisms of voluntarism and determinism. Once, he has referred to this indissoluble interrelation by means of the following formula: (*habitus*) (capital) + field = practice. Although briefly, we must remember the substantive meaning of these concepts.

The practices are the activities that are developed in each field and a field is a sphere of social life that has gained autonomy through history around social relationships, interests and own resources, different from those of other fields; in it, the agents occupy certain positions and develop specific strategies based on the volume, structure and trajectory of the resources they possess. Fields arise because an area of human action is organised according to a specific and irreducible logic (business is business, power for power's sake, art for art's sake, etc.) and makes efficient a type of capital or resources. The relative autonomy of the field is, therefore, based on the specificity of the logic and the resources put into play. Consequently, it can be maintained that each field is simultaneously a significance space, a force field and a terrain of struggle. Field agents have certain powers, they share at least one faith in the logic that is immanent and they struggle to control the specific type of capital that is played in it.

Bourdieu's sociology of culture, provided with this theoretical apparatus, analyses the existing correspondences between certain tastes and practices and the resources of those who are equipped with agents and shows what types of strategies are developed in these conditions. For this reason, the concept of *habitus* is fundamental. In his work *The practical sense*, he defines it as a system of durable dispositions and transferable to other fields, predisposed to function as structural structures, that is to say, as generating principles and organisers of practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to its results without requiring a conscious intention or an express domain of the operations necessary to achieve them. Thus conceived, *habitus* is systematic and transferential, as very different practices (clothing, gastronomy, language, sports, art, ornamental and cosmetics, ultimately everything that expresses the sense of taste) are endowed with harmony or internal coherence; it is practical and automatic, as it does not depend

on discursive or strategic awareness (it is not the result of calculation); it is a group, as it shows the affinity of the lifestyle of those who share the same conditions of existence; and it is distinctive and differentiating, since it is typical of each group and distinguishes it from the rest.<sup>10</sup>

When studying the distribution of aesthetic dispositions or tastes in the interior of the cultural field, according to this interpretative model, Bourdieu represents the homology between tastes and social positions through a spatial scheme in which the vertical axis corresponds to volume of capital and the horizontal axis to its structure or type, differentiating between economic capital and cultural capital. In this way, Bourdieu aims to capture the complexity of the field and to bypass the simplifications of naturalistic (scale) and functionalist views (levels).

However, surprisingly Bourdieu’s grouping of styles or aesthetic universes in France is hierarchical and tripartite, and ultimately monolegitimist. It distinguishes two fundamental poles, to which two basic strategies and three universes correspond, according to the positions given in the distribution of the volume of capital. Inside the field are the holders of capital and the dispossessed; the former adopt conservation strategies to guarantee the legitimacy of their distinction, while the latter, under subordination conditions, will develop subversion strategies; in the middle, there are those who do not feel totally dispossessed, nor do they control the resources of the field, who adopt ambition strategies. As a result of this, three aesthetic universes are formed: the legitimate or distinguished taste, that is, the taste for legitimate works; the medium or pretentious taste, which brings together the minor works of the major arts and the most important works of the minor arts; and, finally, the popular or vulgar taste, “represented by the choice of works of light music or music devalued by popularisation” (Bourdieu, 1988: 13-15).

These styles refer, respectively, to the world’s bourgeois experience, which is an experience freed from urgency, because its position allows it to keep basic needs at a distance; to the experience of the popular classes, which must make a virtue of necessity; and to the experience of the petite bourgeoisie, the principle of operation is based on an ambiguous condition (objectively dominated, but oriented in intention and will to dominant values) that gives rise to claiming strategies (primacy of appearance). In these conditions, only the aesthetics and the dominant taste can be considered autonomous:

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Aesthetics</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>
Distinction	Legitimate and dominant taste	Primacy of the form over the function, of the way of saying about what is called, experimentalism. Art for art, an art for and for artists. Correct and hermetic way of appropriation. Autonomy.
Pretension	Medium taste	Primacy of appearance and adaptation. Search for the highest profitability and breadth of the public. Photography as a prototypical practice: family activity aimed at devoting the exceptional.
Subordination	Popular taste	Pragmatic and functionalist aesthetics. Refuse the gratuity and futility of formal exercises. Choice of the necessary in the dual sense of practical and possible. Subordination

<sup>10</sup> There is a way to write, to walk, a style of painting. The taste is the generating formula that is at the base of the lifestyle. For a criticism of transferability, see Lahire, 2016.

Popular aesthetics (and also the average taste) is defined in relation to the legitimate taste, either because it tries to imitate the bourgeois habits and tastes or because it admits their superiority, although they cannot be achieved (“the grape is not ripe”). “Incapable of being the dominant and unable to build its own space, popular culture would not have autonomous problems” (García Canclini, 2005: 69).

The theory of cultural legitimacy is based on the existence of relationships of cultural domination structured around the cult (high culture) / vulgar (low culture) poles and studies the relations of the subjects with the culture, the forms of cultural classification, their social functions and the effects of domination. It requires the existence of a homologous cultural space in the social space, in which the logic of distinction and legitimacy operate. Consequently, it deals with the unequal distribution of preferences, works, cultural competences and practices; in brief, of the cultural inequalities and the social functions of the dominant culture. In this sense, it is necessary to understand Bourdieu’s assertion that, in terms of cultural consumption, there is a fundamental opposition that depends on the structure of capital, which is established between distinguished consumption (luxury tastes) and vulgar consumption (tastes by necessity), settling in the middle of the pretentious consumptions. Numerous texts could be attributed to referring this implacable dialectic. In different places Bourdieu asserts that the logic of the distinction is inscribed in the cultural field and it is activated, whether it is desired or not, whether conscious of it or not, in each act of consumption, because appropriation requires provisions and competences shaped by the existence conditions.

In fact, as recent authors such as García Canclini, Lahire, Boltanski, Corcouff, Benett et al., Coulangeon or Gayo have pointed out, this conception requires the existence of a single principle of legitimacy in the field of cultural consumption. Bourdieu provides an image of it as an integrated and homogeneous whole. At least, this space would be homogeneous in one sense, as all social groups place value on the same things, they look at the same goal and, as a result, run the same race: dominant class values are the horizon for all the lower classes and everyone shares the same categories of perception, have the same faith in legitimate culture, although not all of them control the same way and in the same degree the means to achieve it. As Lahire affirms, everyone plays the same game, with the same goals and the same rules; players are only distinguished from one another according to the bases they have in their hands (Lahire, 2003 and 2004). Groups that do not have a certain right aspire to appropriate and press the higher classes for it, which in turn develop strategies of distinction in order to maintain their uniqueness and the value of the titles they possess (value objects or scarce practices). Everyone in the groups runs in the same direction and aspires to the same goods, which are determined by the social category that leads the race, but this conflicting dialectic, according to Bourdieu, does nothing but to eternalise the distinctions, since the changes do not affect the conditions difference.

## **2. The challenge to the unique legitimacy thesis**

This common vision of a hierarchical nature, with a vertical differentiation and climbing of cultural levels, has been challenged from different approaches. In substance, the underlying thesis in the majority of the analysis of the last two decades, but especially in the latter, postulates that there has been a historical shift



from a classification scheme based on the vertical opposition between high culture and popular culture, with all the intermediate gradations and nuances that are considered appropriate, to a more complex situation, characterised by the porosity of styles and genres, by the hybridisation of forms and the eclecticism of practices, by the diversity of regimes of action or commitment, for the tolerance to the tastes and an increasing ascent of the omnivority or the multiculturalism.

The criticisms received by the hierarchical and monolegitimist conception have occurred both in English and French literature, but with some exception, Bourdieu's work has been (and still remains) in all cases the principal catalyst. For this reason, after exposing the early apology of cultural pluralism by Herbert Gans (1970), we will focus our exposition of the challenge to the theory of legitimacy based on the key concepts of Bourdieu's work. In this sense, the investigations and revisions could be grouped into three blocks: first, those conceptions that review the theory of the cultural field, because they maintain that there is no single field and that the problem of the difference and that of the hierarchy, although they are interrelated, must be analytically separated; secondly, those that, against the *habitus* consistency, coherence and transferability, underline the emergence of omnivorous, eclectic, hybrid or dissonant subjects; and thirdly, those that question the centrality and exclusivity of the social class as an explanatory factor of the heterogeneity of the practices, in space and in time.

### 2.1. Context transformations

The shift from the hierarchy to the diversity of tastes, according to various authors, is a phenomenon that is based on the transformations experienced by the structure of societies of advanced modernity that have changed the status of culture. We do not intend here to list the different features that are enunciated, but only evoke some of the main ones:

- The progress of schooling, generalising and diversifying at levels, has led to the inclusion of broader social categories, but from a social spectrum with provisions and cultural practices that are different from those precedents; on the other hand, the growing importance of scientific and technical socialisation and careers that prepare for professions derived from the expansion of the Welfare State (teaching, teaching staff, nursing, social education, criminology, etc.) has diversified its own school curriculum.
- At the market level, the progress of the mass media and their development from the logic of commodity has produced an extraordinary expansion of the flow of signs (supply) and a blurring of the borders between genres and styles to promote accessibility.<sup>11</sup> Hence, the importance of entertainment, which is emerging in popular culture, training and education.
- On the other hand, the expansion of the services sector and its great internal diversity has generated a new professional demand and a new type of professional performance, where values and attitudes prevail that were irrelevant in other sectors of the economy.

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<sup>11</sup> Van Eijck, 1999.

- Mobility in a society of organisations and the complexity of relationships (primary, secondary, tertiary, quaternary), promotes eclecticism, cultural diversity, flexibility and openness, tolerance.
- The digital revolution and its accessibility<sup>12</sup> offer alternative routes of socialisation for children, adolescents and young people, with a specific regulatory logic. Consequently, the ways of socialisation are broadened.
- The rise of the new middle classes, with important cultural capital backgrounds.
- The migratory flows and the consequent creation of a context of hyperdiversity, where different styles of acculturation prevail, but above all the legitimacy of assimilationism is questioned.
- Social movements (especially the youth movement and that of women) and identity policies.
- Demographic maturation and aging with the consequent prolongation of life and the availability of time, as well as the vital transition to successive socialisation frameworks.
- Complex and multilevel governance: the rise of regional and global powers.
- The institutionalisation of culture and public policies: democratisation, cultural democracy, development, cultural mediation.
- On the internal level, the critique of the avant-gardes has occurred in the bourgeois and classical culture, which has led them to assert the autonomy of art, but also to formalistic and technical autism and the multiplicity of styles.
- In recent publications, the reference to the economic crisis and austerity policies, with the consequent reduction in supply and cultural consumption.

All these transformations are generating a dissociation between a legitimate model of culture, prevailing during a historical stage, and their social bases. It is not so much a disappearance of the logic of legitimacy, but of its displacement and the parallel recognition of the diversity of logic of culture and the complexity of its interrelations. DiMaggio extracts the implications of these changes when it states that “people with broad spectrum networks develop “tastes” for the widest variety of cultural forms” (1987: 444).

## 2.2. *An early defence of cultural democracy*

In 1970, Herbert Gans published *Popular Culture and High Culture*. In this book, a defence of the culture pejoratively called “mass culture” is posed, contrary to what most theorists and critics held judging it in terms of degradation and lack, because “it reflects and expresses the aesthetic sense and the expectations of many people”. Faced with the hierarchical and critical conception of Shils, his book postulates a neutral view of popular culture and was presented as a descriptive contribution in favour of “cultural democracy” and “cultural pluralism”. Every human being has aesthetic taste; they are receptive to the symbolic expressions that respond to their hopes and fears, and express a desire to use their free time, if

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<sup>12</sup> Vidal Beneyto, 2002 and Castells, 1997 and 2001.

they have it, in a different way to working time. Consequently, every society must provide art, entertainment and information to its members.

For Gans, the distinction between high culture and popular culture presents two serious limitations: it is evaluative rather than descriptive and simplifies the heterogeneity of contemporary North-American society. In contrast, it proposes a much more complex and merely descriptive view of the American “taste cultures” and distinguishes 8 types: high culture, culture of high average taste, culture of low average taste, low taste culture, low almost folkloric culture, “juvenile” culture, black culture and ethnic cultures. The first five are essentially differentiated according to the type of social class that supports them and especially the cultural capital, while other factors, such as age or ethnicity, intervene; the former are structural, while the latter are of a temporary nature, and they deserve a different treatment because they are actually “temporary offsprings” of the precedents.

In 1999, thirty years later, Gans reissued that text with an update. Along with the conviction that the great classification guidelines were in force, the author maintains that there have also been deep transformations. It does not introduce classification news, but it registers notable differences in the public presence and the configuration of the categories: the high culture has lost visibility, while average cultures have grown in volume and complexity (enlargement of the repertoire of interests: decoration, tourism, sports, etc.); folk culture has also regressed and, on the contrary, youth culture has become so omnipresent that it seems to impregnate everything (1999: 156). At the same time, black culture has become more representative, indicating that race has become an important factor in cultural differentiation.

In short, the changes that have occurred can be synthesised with the concepts of convergence, divergence and omnivory. On the one hand, convergence and hybridisation occur, as classic distinctions are erased or blurred; on the other, there is divergence, in the sense of diversification of cultural practices and styles of consumption; and, thirdly, a social category, young people, is strongly consolidated, characterised by eclecticism, since it is the group that has benefited most from the three necessary resources for practice: time, money and school education.

### **3. Diversity of fields, diversity of cultural capitals**

Given the importance of the conception of a unified cultural field and homologous to the social space in the theory of legitimacy, some reviews have focused precisely on the critique of this aspect through the analysis of certain specific spheres or social categories. Among the disciples of Bourdieu, in the early eighties, Griñon and Passeron addressed this issue through the analysis of popular cultures and the applicability of the theory of legitimacy to these cultures; for his part, Michele Lamont in the early nineties did the same with the analysis of the culture of the French and North American bourgeoisies. On the other hand, social anthropology, especially Latin American, has questioned the applicability of this interpretative model for societies in which various types of economic and symbolic production are combined. It may be appropriate, they suggest, for European societies that have an integrated market, but not where the symbolic field is fragmented and composed of elements from different historical formations, as in multi-ethnic societies such as Brazilian, Mesoamerican or Andean societies.

According to the theory of cultural legitimacy and its domination scheme, popular classes do not have an autonomous culture: they adapt to the dominant culture and recognise it, even without being aware of it.<sup>13</sup> Passeron objects that this conception “cannot describe in all its symbolic dimensions what is and what still works as a culture even when it comes to dominated cultures”; it deprives of meaning the practices and traits of popular classes, because it sees no other meaning in them than that which derives from the unequal exchange of domination, and according to it they are only infractions, errors, clumsiness, deprivation of codes, distance or “ashamed or troubled conscience of this distance or of these faults”. Thus, legitimism leads to miserabilism: “it takes stock with a concerned air of all differences as if they were faults, of all othernesses as if they were something of lesser value” (Grignon, C and Passeron, J.-C., 1989: 41). However, Grignon and Passeron defend scientifically convincing that among popular classes there is a repertoire of norms and values, of cultural forms, which are relatively independent of the legitimate culture.

The ruling class is at the top of the social structure. Bourdieu argues that its members share distinctive tastes and lifestyles that act as status markers and facilitate integration into the group. These tastes are defined, in large part, by means of cultivated provisions and the proper domination of high culture. In view of this, Lamont (2012) investigates, based on open interviews, the symbolic borders that operate in the French and American middle classes, both in the centre and in the periphery, and finds three large groups of people according to their classification systems. For some, their classification and hierarchy standards are based on economic success and social position (money as the main indicator of success); for others, they are more important to cultural criteria or intellectual qualities; and for a third group what counts are moral values. These types of schemes are not only concretised and specified in different ways in the American and French bourgeoisie, depending on their structural characteristics and those of their societies, but also have distinctive relationships among them: in France, cultural criteria prevail, because intellectual groups enjoy a certain degree of autonomy in the face of the market, while in the USA economic ones prevail, because the nerve centre of social structure is the market. On the other hand, Lamont considers that Bourdieu has overestimated the cultural and the socioeconomic criteria and has despised the moral one.

The existence of borders and classification schemes is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the production of inequalities; in principle, it does not generate inequality, but diversity (Lamont, 1992: 178). Cultural boundaries lead to inequality more in France than in America; the moral boundaries produce more differentiation than inequality or hierarchy; on the other hand, socioeconomic boundaries straightaway direct people on the basis of social status (1992: 178-179).

Therefore, through the analysis of the classification schemes of the bourgeoisie and its modulations in national and socio-structural frameworks, Lamont questions the idea of the existence of a single field, with a unique and unquestionable hierarchical structure. There are multiple, open, mobile spheres

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<sup>13</sup> It is surprising that no space is dedicated, in the corresponding section, to the variants of the tastes of the popular classes. Bourdieu does not contemplate fractions among the popular classes and, therefore, there is no diversity of tastes inside.

which partly overlap and that maintain relationships of comparison and competition. The specific empirical problem lies in establishing to what extent the culture of the middle class has been disseminated and reaches consensus or at least it is consented.

A similar criticism is found in several authors, among which, without a doubt, that of Bernard Lahire stands out. For Bourdieu, that classical music is the apex of all music, legitimate music par excellence, will be a fact recognised by all classes. In front of it, all other forms of expression will appear hierarchical and as imperfect realisations, depending on their lacks or deficiencies. In society, as a result of social relations there would be a consensus on good taste, since there is correspondence between the class structure and the hierarchy of tastes.

Instead, Lahire considers that this conception, the fact that there is a homogeneous cultural space from the perspective of legitimacy, structured completely by a univocal (legitimate / illegitimate) opposition, that everyone would know and put into practice, to which everyone would grant the same meaning and in which everyone would believe with the same intensity, is unsustainable. This vision of a homogenous social space, where everyone plays the same game with the same objectives and the same rules, does not correspond to reality (2004: 65-66, Bottero, 2005: 153-ss); empirical research shows that even among the ruling class, high culture practices are not predominant (DiMaggio, 1987, and Coulangeon, 2011).

One of the most suggestive approaches to Bourdieu's criticism, and specifically to the concept of field, is Bonnie Erikson (1996). This author has decided to take care of culture, not in free time, but in the world of work in companies: she studies "familiarity" with culture in the private security sector in the Toronto area.<sup>14</sup> Among the direct results of the research, the most excellent is the existence in this field of a variety of cultures rather than a predominant tendency: the high culture does not correlate with the high status, because for the elites in the sector the forms of high culture are a "waste of time" and what is useful for them is the "business culture". On the other hand, inside of this economic sector, as in all, there are relationships of domination, but to maintain its operation, coordination ones are also essential, and that is why they register cultural forms at the service of one function and another. For example, sports are transversal to the social class and facilitate conversation in situations of class asymmetry, but not gender or ethnicity ones. This finding leads Erikson to assert that each cultural form generates different borders and social networks, which support different sets of relevant cultural differences. There is no single cultural hierarchy that correlates with all forms of inequality. But, in addition, the world of work includes multiple sectors and markets, with very diverse cultural distributions and rules of different relevance: in the literary, academic or public sector and in state bureaucracies, the relevance of high culture, but it is not in others.

Later, Erikson has developed these issues in a chapter of a collective book devoted to studying cultural participation in America (Tepper and Ivey, 2007). Insofar as contemporary society involves a multiplication of specialised worlds of work, cultures are also diversified. Those who occupy dominant positions in these occupational worlds need to be competent in the cultural variety, but the mixture that forms this repertoire is different in each field. On the other hand, for those

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<sup>14</sup> Bourdieu, says Erikson, has theorised about the fields, but does not say how many there are or how they identify themselves (1996).

who occupy positions of disadvantage it becomes more difficult to have a relevant cultural capital and cultural inequality grows (Erikson, 2007).

Bellavance (2016) offers a similar approach in a study on the elites of Quebec and the supposed homogeneity of high culture, although surprisingly he does not cite Erikson's work. For him, there are three clear groups in the elite, which we can call managerial, technical and cultural, since the first one includes people dedicated to management and business at the highest levels of the companies, the second one, professionals from the field of science and the third, those who work in the specific field of culture. The tastes or preferences of these groups appear fragmented to the extent that we can talk about the existence of different scales of legitimacy, despite the persistence of the distinction between high and low culture as a standard classification system. Thus, Bellavance finds that other schemes are also operative like new / old, classic / contemporary, pop / folk, local / global. These systems overlap and become tangled up to the point that it is often difficult to say that one of them is predominant.

In recent years, two macro-surveys have been made in England, one of them just in order to replicate and verify the current validity of Bourdieu's theory and the other one to try to establish the class universe of contemporary England. In the book that explains the results of the former (Benett et al.), no special attention is paid to the concept of field, rather, certain "cultural fields" are directly presented, such as music, reading, television and cinema, sports, body care and cooking. In conclusion, it is argued that "there are homologies between fields that are indicative of styles shared by people" but that "does not derive a highly unified and uniform configuration" and a clear existence –recognisable and recognised by all the classes– of a legitimate culture (Bennett et al., 2009: 251-253).

The second, directed by Savage, has had on the one hand an electronic survey supported by the BBC answered by more than 160,000 people and a face-to-face survey. Both have included in the questionnaire, for the first time, elements related to economic, social and cultural capital. Specifically, when analysing data on cultural capital, Savage et al. conclude that "two types" appear: one associated with the tastes of high culture and the other one with what they call "emerging" culture (Savage, 2013: 4; Sauvage and Prieur, 2013; Savage and Cayo Gal, 2011).

The results of these surveys inevitably lead to raise two questions: how many species or forms of cultural capital are there?, and given, according to Bourdieu, that a field is constituted as a result of the practices, strategies and fights for a type of resource, how many cultural fields are there?

Although "cultural capital" is an original expression of Bourdieu and central in his work, the concept is not well defined.<sup>15</sup> Its use is rather metaphorical and at some point it was said that Bourdieu preferred to replace it with "informational capital". When speaking of capital in general, Bourdieu refers to any resource that provides advantages in social life and that in addition can be accumulated and transferred. Capitals are values or properties "that confer the power to the agents in relation to others in specific fields, and that these agents mobilise in order to increase their stock and ensure their transmission" (Benet and Siva, 2011: 430).

And the cultural capital? It consists of cultural competences acquired by the subjects within the family framework and reinforced in educational institutions. What competences Bourdieu speaks about in particular? About the aesthetic

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<sup>15</sup> See Golthorpe, 2007.

dispositions that are based on: showing a disinterested interest for cultural forms (art for art's sake), prevailing form over content (abstraction) and practicing conspicuous consumption. All this is reflected in the construction of the legitimacy of the forms and practices of high culture, the possession of which, supposedly, everybody would want. This stock of competences contributes to the process of organisation and reproduction of class inequality relationships in contemporary societies.

Bourdieu's approach must be placed in a context in which, while the welfare state is being implemented, consisting in the universalisation of certain goods, awareness is generated that access to forms of high culture can also be and must be universalised: democratisation policies.

Later sociology has adopted the concept of cultural capital as a relevant instrument of sociocultural analysis, but at the same time has shown its limits and explored its potentialities. Limits have to do with the historical displacement of the so-called high culture by other forms of distinction and legitimation, as well as its application to contexts of hyperdiversity; potentialities, with the existence in the world of art of multiple hierarchies, overlapped in a complex way, especially when analysed in relation to class, gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, etc. In this regard, Bennett et al. argue that, rather than claiming an essential unit for cultural capital, "we find it more valuable to explore a range of different assets and markets that can be proposed as sources of cultural privilege" (Bennett, 2009: 29). In their research on the British context, they find the following: technical, emotional, subcultural and national capital. Other authors, working on specific fields, have increased the list. Thus, we have migration capital (Erlich and Agulhon, 2012), erotic capital (Hakim, 2011) and cosmopolitan capital (Bühlman et al., 2013; Meuleman and Savage, 2013).<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, not only the existence of diverse cultural fields is claimed, but of the complexity within each field, as a result of the diversity of capitals and of orientations or *ethos*. In these conditions, participation in "artistic and high culture" activities is less important as a sign of social distinction (DiMaggio and Mukhtar, 2004); the most useful cultural resource for the individual that develops social mobility strategies can be non-unconditional adherence and restricted to high culture but familiarity with plural universes (omnivory).

#### **4. The complexity of the *habitus***

If there are several fields and each one is intrinsically complex; if there are several cultures within each field and cultural forms perform different and changing functions, the vision of a strict homology between social structure and cultural tastes vanishes. Not only will there be types of tastes hierarchically arranged according to the high culture / popular (lack of) culture axis, but hybrid combinations of two poles (omnivory, syncretism, eclecticism) and, above all, There are alternative principles of taste organisation, which will be articulated on different axes. This is what the investigations carried out since the beginning of the 1990s have been recorded: the blurring of classification schemes, the existence of a more complex, hybrid or eclectic typology of tastes.

But if this diagnosis of contemporary cultural tastes is correct, then what is called into question is not just the concept of field and the theory of homology

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<sup>16</sup> In *Sociologie et sociétés*, vol. 44, n. 1

<http://www.erudit.org/revue/socsoc/2012/v44/n1/index.html>

between social space and cultural space, but also that of *habitus*, as a mediating factor between one space and another, or more radically, the theory of the subject of Bourdieu. *Habitus*, as we have seen, could be defined as a semantic principle generating perceptions and practices, anchored in the social structure, which gives consistency to the path of the agent. In accordance with this conception, for example, the habitus of the ruling class consists of a distant disposition, embossed or detached from the point of view of the world of necessity (of which the aesthetic disposition is part, focusing more on the way than in the function); this provision leads it to consume high culture and to distance itself from popular culture. And while the logic of distinction induces him to keep himself apart from the rest, the logic of legitimacy makes him the desired goal for all groups: his semantic principle of organisation of practices is the social principle par excellence.

But if there are other combinations of tastes, empirical research must register a more complex type of cultural actors. Four approaches have been developed fundamentally: the first one can be identified as the theory of omnivory and was formulated by Peterson and collaborators and developed recently by Chan and Goldthorpe; the second one is the theory of dissonance, and has its support in Bernard Lahire; the third would be the theory of the common culture of Paul Willis; and the fourth one is the vision of the action regimes of the pragmatic sociology of action (Boltanski, Thévenot, Corcouff and others).

#### *4.1. The theory of omnivory*

The cultural consumption of contemporary society has undergone a shift from a vertical axis founded on the distinction between high culture and popular culture towards a horizontal axis based on the combination of genres and practices classified at different levels. This new ability of the actors to mix different shapes in a single menu (classical music and opera, on the one hand, and rock or folk, on the other, theatre and karaoke attendance; novel reading and sports practice, etc.) is what has been defined as omnivory.

Peterson and his collaborators (Peterson and Simkus, 1992 and Peterson and Kern, 1996) maintain that, although in the USA of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there was an identification of the elite with the high culture, as a strategy to disassociate itself from the guidelines of immigrant communities, in the last decades of the twentieth century we have witnessed a shift towards omnivory: while snobs, exclusive and sophisticated people that maintain a strict adherence to high culture, are rare, the omnivorous taste among the elite has been significantly spread out and their tendency towards eclecticism is higher than that of other social groups. Therefore, omnivory appears as a general tendency of society, but spurred by a particular tendency, that of the elite.

The operative definition of omnivory, after that first formulation, has been subjected to extensive debate, even among the authors who agree to indicate a displacement of the cultural classification axis and a blurring of the preceding schemes. Peterson and Kern in 1996 specified that they measure it based on the number of cultural forms and genres of middle culture or low culture that people interviewed in the high class say can be seen in surveys. Therefore, it does not mean that the omnivorous indiscriminately appreciates anything, but rather “an opening towards the valuation of everything” (1996: 904) and is in this sense in which it is opposed to snobbishness, which is based on rigid rules of distinction and exclusion.



Certainly, nothing allows us to think that omnivory refers to an indiscriminate assessment of a wide variety of practices. Rather, on the contrary, those who mix it do it from elements that a) enjoy a previous social appraisal and b) they have a more or less extensive implantation. On the other hand, it must be suspected that omnivorous perception is still a look that is taken “from above”, that is, from a position of cultural domination and is selective: when it opens up to other forms of culture, choose those practices of popular culture that have been created by marginal groups (black people, young people, isolated rural people, folks), such as blues, jazz, etc., which indicates that their omnivory is governed by romantic aestheticism and who transfer the stylisation of life that is their own, as Weber would say, to this new pattern of behaviour. In our view, omnivory should be defined, therefore, not by what is consumed but by the *mode of consumption* (reflexivity, intellectualisation, stylisation or aesthetisation of the popular) and could quite be understood as an adaptation of the patterns of class distinction to conditions of cultural relativism, where cultural expressions must be interpreted “in their own terms” and not from an ethnocentric and hierarchical logic, such as that governing the taste of the snob. In this sense, Bryson’s approach is interesting: he studies not so much musical preferences but rejections and, in doing so, he argues that the forms most rejected by the elites tend to be preferred by groups of lower social status. He has introduced the concept of multicultural capitalism to refer to the diversity of cultural capital and the fact that openness and tolerance, and not only distinction, are also a source of cultural capital (1996). For our part, we prefer to speak, more broadly, of cultural consumption regime, since a regime includes not only the establishment of a select repertoire of ingredients but the combination of them according to certain rules and their integration into a modality of consumption.

For his part, Bennett et al. have differentiated between affinity towards certain fields of practice and genres, and omnivorous knowledge: the knowledge class or new professional classes, of course, dominate a broad cultural spectrum, but that does not mean they appropriate it (2001). As for Erikson, we have already commented that he prefers to focus on an even more basic dimension, as would be “familiarity” with a certain variety of cultural forms and the knowledge of the rules that make them relevant – useful in a pertinent way – in each context (1999: 219).

Thus, with identical or different lexical and conceptual apparatus, underlining some dimensions or others, several authors have registered the same phenomenon.<sup>17</sup> DiMaggio already spoke in 1987 of the positive association of social status not only with the consumption of high culture but “with almost all kinds of artistic participation” (1987: 444); Erikson made it a disposition to the “cultural variety”, Bennett et al. distinguish between inclusive and restrictive tastes, and there are those who, like Bryson, speak directly of multicultural capital (1996). But, who recently, in a more systematic way, have defended this approach and put it to the test have been Chan and Goldthorpe. In successive works, they have studied music consumption (2005a), attendance to theatre, ballet and cinema (2005b), visual and plastic arts (2006a) and a comparative analysis of several countries (Chan 2010). In their research, most high-class members are not frequent high-culture consumers and those who are do not show a marked trend of rejection of the most popular forms. In the conclusions of the comparative

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<sup>17</sup> For the case of cultural practices in Spain see López Sintas and García-Álvarez, 2002.

research, they affirm that “in the six countries, the most advantaged social groups, defined in terms of education, income, social class or social status, tend to have a wider range of cultural consumption, which includes not only genres of high culture, but also medium culture and low culture. By contrast, the cultural consumption of the less advantaged social groups tends to be restricted to medium or low genres” (2010: 235). The counterpart of the omnivores are not the univores, but the inactive ones (a statistical type that depends a lot on the breadth of activities included in the questionnaire). A new type that emerges is that of the paucivores, who consume a limited range of genres. In conclusion, in advanced societies, the most advantaged social groups tend to be omnivorous rather than exclusivists and may consider as valuable, more than people from popular classes, genres such as comedy / humor more (with Friedman 2016: 337; see also Savage et al., 2013).

<b>Type of omnivority</b>		
<i>Process</i>	<i>Social category</i>	<i>Way of consecration</i>
Indiscriminate consumption	Young consumers	Generational replacement
Permanence throughout the life of the preferences of the social niche of origin	Young sectors of popular and middle classes that ascend	Promotion and rise Acculturation
Revolt against dominant preferences and difficulties of adherence to avant-gardes	Children of social elites that are distanced from tradition	Intraclass generational replacement
Popularisation and trivialisation of the classical repertoire	Popular and middle classes	Hegemony of the market
Selection of popular elements and appropriation by sterilisation	Middle-high classes	Affirmation through a cultural democracy policy
Professional need of contact with several cultural guidelines	Intermediaries and cultural mediators	Increase in the active population of this professional category
Increase in the cultural offer in metropolitan centres	Urban middle classes	Urban taste hegemony

Own source. See also Friedman, 2012.

A second aspect is being the object of intense debate and research and is the characterisation of the agent, group or social category, carrier par excellence of the omnivorous taste in the whole of the social structure. This characterisation is related, on the other hand, with the range of factors that are taken into account to explain this change of tendency. Peterson and collaborators’ studies focused on the US elite and for them the change in status policy was based on five factors: a) elitist exclusion has become more difficult in conditions of universal basic education, of concurrence of the mass media, of increased levels of life and of horizontal and vertical mobility; b) an intergenerational change to values with a postmaterialist orientation in which tolerance has a high recognition; c) to the own internal changes in the world of the art with a loss of the control that exerted the academies and official institutions; d) generational logics, in the sense that now young people values persist in time instead of merely accommodating to the stages of the life cycle, and e) the policy of the status group, in the sense that omnivority is better adapted to a global world governed in part by those that show respect to the cultural expressions of others. While cult snobbism expressed the values of an entrepreneurial class, new administrative and business classes opt for omnivorous

patterns, best suited to the complex conditions and cultural relativity of the contemporary world.

For his part, Bennett et al. have focused on the study of the emerging group called knowledge class; but, above all, Van Eijk was the one who carried out a more circumscribed and precise study, taking as a unit of analysis individuals and not aggregates. This author maintains that the blurring or mixtures of tastes between the elites must be explained as a composition effect: the omnivorous tastes have their main bearer not in the upper classes in a block but in the new ascending, composite middle class of well-educated young people, coming from a broad social base that, in their process of ascending mobility, force the opening of the cultural repertoire.<sup>18</sup> On the one hand, given their lower family backgrounds, they show a lower interest for high culture; on the other, with them ascending social scale typical forms of their origin environment. This effect, in combination with the intergenerational relay of cohorts and the levelling expansion of the cultural offer of the market, would probably explain that an increase in the average educational levels has not led to an increasing interest in high culture. Educational mobility would be driving the group with the highest school capital to develop a more heterogeneous pattern of consumption (1999: 325-326).

In short, omnivory is attributed to the elites and is simultaneously interpreted as a general tendency of society (Peterson); it is especially associated with youth (Gans), with the knowledge class (Bennett et al., 2001), with the middle classes (Bennett et al., 2009) or with newcomers (Van Eijk). But if we talk about different social carriers, it is because attention is actually being paid to different phenomena: the mixture of genres produced by advertising and the market to maximize profits; the multiplication of artistic styles after the crisis of academicism and the criticism of the vanguards; the processes of promotion and social mobility; the generational change; the growing intercultural mobility of certain groups within the elite, etc. Certainly, the historical confluence of all these processes, which are not totally independent, generates a displacement of the classification scheme and, in this sense, the cultural variety, eclecticism, omnivory or inclusiveness, in short, openness and tolerance define cultural patterns better than the logic of distinction. But is it inferred from this that there is no longer anchorage of cultural patterns in the social structure? The nineteenth-century taboo and stigmatisation of popular culture declines, but has the social desirability of high culture for all the world vanished? Do we live in the paradise of undifferentiation and individualisation? These are issues that we will address after the exposition of the remaining revisions of the theory of the subject.

#### *4.2. The theory of dissonance*

The omnivory or combination of disparate elements can be a way of relativising the logic of distinction; a different one is found in the statement that in reality all the subjects develop dissonant tastes and that in society there is no single scale of legitimacy able to order aesthetic preferences. This approach has been developed in the French sociology of cultural practices in the nineties, first in the hands of Olivier Donnat, who in 1994 in his book *Les français face à la culture. De l'exclusion à l'éclecticisme*, it detects the attenuation of the logic of distinction

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<sup>18</sup> Once again it must be acknowledged that DiMaggio had already pointed this out in his 1987 seminal article: for the upper class, culture facilitates mobility; while popular culture provides the material of ordinary sociability (: 444). On popular culture, see Grindstaff, 2008.

and argues that “those who are the most practitioners in a sector are also generally those who participate more actively in others” (1994: 309), and later, more forcefully, with the work of Bernard Lahire, *La culture des individus* (2004). From this proceeds the most frontal challenge to the theory of *habitus*.

Lahire argues, not only against Bourdieu but also against Peterson, that if we analyse the cultural profiles of individuals (that is, intra-individual variations in practices), the predominant situation is that of cultural dissonance to all to social media, not just among the elite. On a personal scale, the statistical norm is in the inconsistency, the contradiction and the plurality of practices.

Lahire uses two complementary sources (on the one hand, data from the 1997 survey on cultural practices in France, on the other, information provided by 80 in-depth interviews), to build cultural profiles with them. When applying statistical analysis to data, distinguishing between a “cultivated” or legitimate pole and another “popular” or unlawful pole, it is observed that most of the respondents are out of the classification; therefore, it is necessary to introduce a category of what is called dissonant or mixed cultural profile. In successive analyses of cultural profiles (legitimate consonant ones, illegitimate consonant ones and dissonant ones) with three, four, five, six or seven variables trigger the result of the majority presence of mixed or dissonant profiles. But, in addition to increasing the number of variables (up to 7), Lahire notes that the 3,000 respondents are distributed in exactly 1,283 different profiles. This double finding (predominance of intra-individual dissonance and the variety of inter-individual profiles) calls into question both the existence of homogeneous and unique frameworks for socialisation with effects of universal legitimacy (field theory) Individuals endowed with a systematic and transferable *habitus* (agent theory).

Cultural dissonance thus becomes the central concept of Lahire, thus understanding the same subject of cultural practices typically described as legitimate and others considered unreasonable, such as, on the one hand, listening to classical music, watch auteur movies, read books of consecrated literature, attend a dance or theatre show, visit museums, exhibitions, art galleries, and, on the other hand, attend rock concerts, watch comic films, horror movies, participate in entertainments such as karaoke, dance or discotheque.

Lahire also studies the distribution of different types of profiles according to the typical classification variables (gender, age, educational level or socio-professional status) and concludes that dissonant cultural profiles are recruited in all social media (although they are clearly more likely in middle and upper classes than in the popular classes); in all educational levels (even though they are more likely among those who, at least, have obtained the bachelor’s degree); and in all age categories (although the probability descends when going to the youngest to the largest). Another point that draws attention, immediately afterwards, is the greater probability for the individuals of the surveyed population of having a consonant “low” cultural profile (with weak legitimacy) than a “high” one (with strong legitimacy).

After this tour, Lahire concludes that, if there is a cultural distance, it is, first of all, a distance that goes through each individual. The intra-individual difference is a transclassist condition, widely shared by the social media as a whole, although particularly pronounced in the most culturally endowed media. The coherence of cultural profiles (or *habitus*) is not the rule, but the statistical exception, regardless of social media or the level of studies considered.

Dissonance is therefore a general and constant phenomenon, but it is particularly favoured in conditions of advanced modernity due to the spectacular increase in the cultural offer, the cultural facilities in the home, and the diversity of socialisation areas that individuals go through during their life cycle. In short, cultural practices and preferences depend on aspects such as the resource patrimony that the subject has (dispositions and competences), the domains or contexts of the practice, the moments of the practice and, therefore, of the forms of cultural socialisation exerted by the family environment of origin, by the worlds of life, diverse social institutions, school, profession, family situation, love or the moment of the life cycle. Consequently, the analysis is forced to take into account a wide variety of factors.

Thus, omnivory and dissonance are phenomena of a different order: while omnivory (as a combination of tastes of high culture and popular culture) seems to invoke horizontal rather than vertical displacements and statistically it will always have a limited scope (given that high-level culture practices are a minority), the dissonance extends itself throughout the social spectrum and does not ignore the persistence of inequality and legitimacy.

#### *4.3. Common culture or average culture?*

The revision of the field and *habitus* concepts implicitly implies a favourable position for multifactorial explanations of the social distribution of tastes, but in no case a defense of their social disassociation, as if they were floating in an idyllic marketplace, opportunities open to everyone equally. As Chan and Golthrope maintain, the analysis reveals the existence of a limited number of types of cultural consumers who are socially differentiated in a systematic way (2006a: 6) and stratified according to education, income and social status (Chan, 2010, 233). The evidence that cultural consumption continues to reflect social inequalities is very strong. DiMaggio and Useem register an undeniable tendency in the US: the structure of the audience of the arts is more elitist than that of the general population and the heart or centre of the audience is more elitist than its periphery. Education and, to a lesser extent, income are good predictors, not only those who consume art but also the intensity of their consumption. The numerous statistics reviewed by these authors do not provide evidence of an advance in the process of extension of practices that overwhelms traditional anchorage niches.

In the same way, those who have recently evaluated the scope and achievements of cultural democratisation policies in France (Olivier Donnat), in Australia (Bennett et al.), In England (Bennett et al., 2009) or in Sweden (Katz – Gerro) and those who study the possibilities of extending cultural participation (Ateca-Amestoy et al., 2017), argue that the balance is problematic: inequalities and distances, all of the dissemination programs launched by different models of public policies, persist. In this regard, the concept of democratisation, which has been operated effectively and pertinently by Sylvie Octobre (2000), is still crucial, and has been applied to the study of French society. For this author, democratisation presupposes two things: increasing the volume of a practice and reducing distances between social categories. With the purpose of delimiting in an operative way, Octobre has dissected the different possibilities existing in the cultural tendencies: renovation of audiences (when there is no change of guarisms, but of subjects), elitisation (the most favoured categories grow), popularisation

(the less favoured categories grow), banalisation (both increase) and disaffection (there is a decline in the public or of certain categories).

The finding that, despite large investments in public policies, the minority nature of so-called legitimate cultural forms is very persistent in time, it serves as a catapult to Paul Willis, author of texts such as *Cultura Viva*, *Cultura común* or *La vida como arte*, to signal the radical heterogeneity between high culture and popular culture, but also to claim the existence of a common culture, based on ordinary creativity or the production of meaning in everyday life, that techniques of information collection do not know how to register. Among the high culture and most of the population there is an insurmountable pit, of course, but it is not an abyss of perversion and degradation, but rather of the path that divides two aesthetic sensibilities, two logics, two forms of creativity, in short, two legitimacy or two different cultures.

For Willis, therefore, there is a plurality of different orders and universes of meaning and value. But, is there not also an intermediate social space between elites and popular classes and a broad range or repertoire of medium-sized cultural forms? If the questions about social stratification and self-determination have long been showing a concentration in the expression middle classes, how is it possible that there are not many average tastes? In this sense, Carter (2016) recovers the concept of middlebrow, traces its historical origin and seeks its presence through the field of literature or to be more precise in the book. This category, despite its inaccuracy, is useful for referring to a constellation of institutions, tastes and practices found in the middle. Now is this characterisation enough? The increase in the cultural offer in the postwar US and democratisation in France in the 1960s was aimed at expanding the canon of high culture to large layers of the population. In this context, medianity was expressed in a series of tensions between potential imperatives: between the universal value of culture and its use to affirm social or personal identities, between the democratisation of access and the maintenance of the established standards, between recognising ordinary readers and promoting literary expertise, between resisting consumerism and using their techniques at the service of culture, between entertainment and culture (Rubin, 1992). As McDonald had pointed out in the sixties, an average culture had reached its age majority defined by its trade mix and claim (1979: 592).

Bourdieu's analytical model detected, of course, this category of a medium culture or art, but Pollentier (2012) has criticised his definition in negative terms and Carter asks himself whether in the digital era is not re-emerging a kind of neo- or post-middlebrow (2016). Several studies show the appearance, in the nineties, of new ways of revitalising reading, of middle-class reading clubs, where the aesthetic experience of reading is fundamental.

#### 4.4. *The theory of action regimes*

Several disciples of Bourdieu, among whom are Passeron, Boltansky and Corcouff, have called into question a sociological vision that is excessively focused on domination,<sup>19</sup> which underestimates, reduces or ignores the critical capabilities of the actors – what they are capable of – and they have been proposed as a task to

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<sup>19</sup> "The extensive use of the notion of domination leads to looking at all relationships between actors in their vertical dimension, from explicit hierarchical relationships, up to the more personal bonds" (Boltansky, 2011: 41).

vindicate, understand, clarify and formalize their “current competencies” in everyday life. As Boltansky says, “the dignity of persons consists on being capable of more things than it is believed” (2001: 127).

This sociology, self-defined as pragmatics of action, has dealt especially with the critical competences of the actors and has progressively expanded to address the plurality of action regimes. Thus, Boltansky addressed with Thévenot, in the first place, the logic of action and dispute regimes, in its double version of violent action and critical action based on the claim of justice in the public arena (1991); later, Boltansky studied peace regimes and especially agape (2001); Thévenot investigated the familiarity regime (2001); and other authors have explored and constructed new regimes: of familiarity, Machiavellian and of ethical interpellation (Corcouff, 2012), and of commitment to the world (Auray, 2007; Auray and Vetel, 2014) or of exploratory commitment, studying the hacker world (Auray, 2010).<sup>20</sup>

According to this vision, the actors are endowed with competencies that allow them to decipher the specific and pertinent logic in each situation, adapt to it and put it into question. The actors are not reduced to their habits, dispositions, routines, customs or traditions, through which the social order is reproduced. They are neither consistent, but plural. The dynamics of the material commitment between an actor and his or her environment is a central issue in the conception of pragmatic regimes.

But what is a regime of action? <sup>21</sup> It is a social device that rules our way of committing ourselves to our environment since it articulates two notions: a) an orientation towards a certain kind of good; and b) a way of accessing reality (Thévenot, 2001). It consists of a modelling of the action or the commitment with the environment in certain situations “through the mental and gestural equipment of people, in the dynamics of adjusting people between them and with things” (Corcouff, 70). The actors, in a situation of uncertainty, build worlds to which objects, institutions and external determinations are apprehended according to the ordinary senses of justice, strength, love, strategy, violence, power, inequality, disobedience, etc. Each of these modalities of commitment to the world refers to specific vocabulary of description and interpretation.

The regimes are social and in them a concept of the common good operates. The authors are plural. The sense of action – justice, love, violence, strategy – of a context may not work in another.

Although these authors have not applied this interpretative framework to the study of cultural practices, the theory of action regimes can be transplanted to a theory of practice and cultural participation regimes, which allows them to adequately situate theories of omnivory and dissonance, which we have previously presented. Thus, for us, a practice regime not only envisages the goods, resources and services that actors consume / produce, but also the modalities that combine them in accordance with certain rules that serve to justify themselves and justify their behaviour patterns before others (Ariño, 2011).

## 5. The multifactorial explanation of cultural practices and preferences

For Bourdieu, the *habitus* are anchored in the social structure and depend on the resources agents are equipped with. These resources are of different types (Bourdieu differentiated four varieties of capital: economic, political, cultural and

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<sup>20</sup> <http://sociologies.revues.org>

<sup>21</sup> See it at <http://gspm.ehess.fr/sommaire.php?id=1195>

symbolic) and each one of them must be seen from different dimensions: volume, type and trajectory. With this approach, he tried to avoid the traps of unifactorial mechanics. However, surprisingly, in practice it has succumbed to a restrictive concept of culture and to a unicausal explanation, where class appears as the only factor that explains the distribution of the diversity of cultural patterns.

The proposal to take into account other factors appears in a wide range of authors. Each one has emphasised in particular some of them, still stressing that practices and cultural tastes are not the result of a “free” choice of individuals and independent of their social positions. Therefore, the question lies more in the proposal of recognition of other factors than in abandoning the explanation of cultural stratification through class. Class counts, although its composition and form of incidence is complex.

For Hall, Neitz and Battani in *Sociology on culture* (2003), class cultures do not subsume all the distinctions of the real world. No identity can be reduced to a single dimension, however important it is. And in particular, in contemporary society along with class, among other factors, gender, ethnicity and belonging to various types of groups, categories or communities also operate. Consequently, there are different possibilities of articulating the relationships between these sources of identity and class in a given context: “At one end, the gender, ethnicity or culture of the status group can provide a complete *alternative* basis of cultural solidarity that transcends (and reduces the importance of) class distinctions. At the other end, the non-classist bases of culture can be fully structured *in classes*” (2003: 56). Neither gender nor ethnicity can be disassociated from class, but its structural interaction fails any hierarchical classical model of the relationship between culture and stratification. In addition, there are other factors from which cultural distinctions are built – age, religion, sexual orientation, community, associative belonging, and diffuse collectivities. Class cannot be detached from the “multicultural” situation of real social life (2003: 63).

For these authors, class and culture are closely connected, but the variety of the second one is not exhausted in the stratification that produces the first one. Faced with the conception that a group or class corresponds to a culture, they show that, under market conditions, cultural resources are accessible to their acquisition and that, therefore, there is no unidirectional relationship. In this sense, they retake the concept of cultural capital to show that actors, in a competitive market, use this capital to reinforce, cross or redefine class boundaries. But beyond Bourdieu, they argue that the uses of culture to affirm the individual distinction overwhelm class, since ethnicity, gender and status can engender their own symbolic forms and cultural merchandise of distinction. In other words, a form of cultural capital and multiple types of group identification.

“Culture is not only a hierarchy of distinctions whose relative value is defined by a dominant class. On the contrary, individuals resort to various sources of distinction in their negotiations on the basis of solidarity, identity and social position that are multiple, overlap and compete with each other. In all this, they can assume culture not only as part of a struggle for status, but for other reasons, including aesthetic pleasure” (2003: 65).

To provide empirical evidence of this dual logic, in which hierarchy and differentiation factors operate, as DiMaggio had already indicated, we provide a map of the musical genres in Catalonia, based on an analysis of correspondences. The result is a bifactorial space whose axes account for almost eighty percent of



the inertia. The model, therefore, has a high explanatory potential. The horizontal axis appears linked to the variables of age and sex, while the vertical is related to those of social class and educational capital.

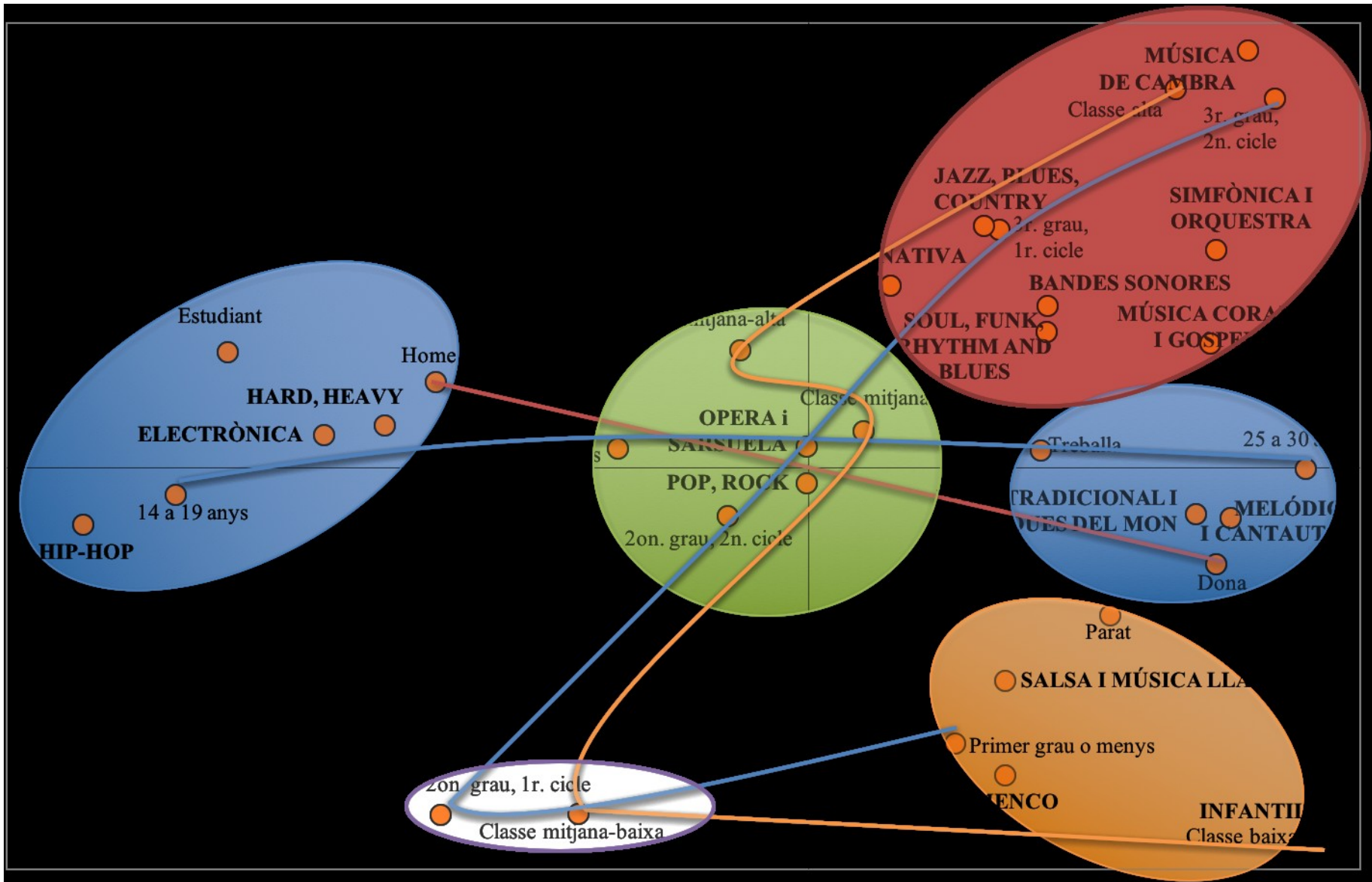
In the left pole of the horizontal axis a social space is linked to the youngest groups (14-19 years) around which also appears the condition of student and male, which indicates that these are the characteristics that differentiate a musical consumption in the general space. The musical genres that are located in this space are hard and heavy, electronic music and hip hop.

On the far right of the horizontal axis, on the other hand, women and older young age groups (25-30 years) are located, as well as, in general, the young working population. For these social profiles, one sees a closer proximity to the melodic and singer song as well as to the traditional folk and the world's music.

The vertical axis joins the social class positions and educational capital in a descending way by tracing an "L". This axis starts its journey in the upper right quadrant, where the highest levels of educational capital and high social class positions are concentrated, then vertically descends and gets into the lower left quadrant, where middle and classes are located, and from there it moves horizontally to the lower right quadrant, where low social classes are located. The type of preferences that are concentrated in the upper right quadrant refers to chamber music, symphonic and orchestral music, soundtracks and jazz, blues and country music.

On the other side of the axis, the lower classes are much closer to musical styles such as flamenco, salsa and Latin music, while the lower middle classes are not distinguished by any specific genre.

At the junction between the axis of the abscissae and of the ordinates a small undifferentiated central space is set up in which pop, rock, opera and zarzuela are located around middle classes, upper middle classes and young people aged 25 to 30 years old. The horizontal axis accounts for 47.7% total inertia, while vertical accounts for 31.7%.



In the light of these data and the authors we have mentioned, the abandonment of the social class or the socioprofessional category cannot be proposed as analytical tools with the capacity to explain the distribution of the practices, the likes, the lifestyles; but to suggest multidimensional approaches that capture the diversity of factors involved. Class counts and the socioprofessional category is an indispensable tool; but addressing the problem of inequality does not prevent, cancel or suppress the issue of diversity.

Certain authors have focused their analysis on emphasising the importance of some specific factors. In this sense, it is worth mentioning here the studies that have explored the impact of social capital or networks and those related to status.

### *5.1. Social or relational capital?*

The first aspect has been addressed, from different perspectives, among others, by Erikson (1996), by Warde et al (2002), by Mark (2003), by Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003) and by Savage et al (2013). Warde et al. argue that interpersonal networks influence taste, but they discover that social capital is a hybrid concept, where the logic of associationism and the logic of friendship do not act in the same direction. For this reason, they propose to go to a more solid tool like the one of the networks. In this sense, Erikson had already shown that those who occupy dominant positions certainly have better cultural resources “but this is not due to their class but to the various networks they have”. For her, cultural forms are updated in the contexts of interaction and in these not only is it important to have a certain variety of cultural resources, but also to know the rules of relevance, but the best way to obtain both resources (cultural variety and sense of relevance) is found in the variety of networks. Hence, the importance of the life trajectory (1996: 224).

Two analysts from non-profit organisations such as Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman (2003) have insisted that general culture is always filtered in organisational contexts. To understand this dynamics they proposed the concept of group style: different groups can use social representations, codes or vocabularies, widely disseminated, to produce different meanings in different contexts, because in them they are developing group styles that intervene and sift the representations collectives. A group style is a set of recurring patterns of interaction that arise from the assumptions of the group over what constitutes the appropriate and good participation in the group context. With this concept, they try to draw attention to the properties of the interaction frames, which are not derived merely from the sum of individual parts or capitals. In fact, in group styles they have different qualities, but not quantities. In the face of the dominant culture, not only conformity or resistance are possible, but also the production of completely new meanings.

### *5.2. Social status*

Although in sociology manuals there is always a place reserved for the Weberian theory of stratification and within it for status, this factor has not enjoyed a significant presence in the empirical analysis. Chan and Goldthorpe have become its main leaders, have operationalised it and applied it, among other aspects, to the analysis of processes of cultural consumption in Britain, defending its specific impact, differentiated from class, and later a comparative analysis of six countries (Chan, 2011).

For them, an order of status is a structure of relationships that expresses superiority, equality or social inferiority among individuals, perceived and in a certain sense accepted, which has a diffuse character and does not reflect their personal qualities but rather some positional or perhaps attached attributes. In modern societies, these hierarchies of status are defined in a rather undecisive way, the expression of it may be concealed and the criteria that govern it are insecure and contestable, but it is no less true that occupations that consist of work with symbols and / or people tend to confer a higher status than those that involve direct work with material objects, while those that consist in working with people and objects – as in the growing service sector – enjoy an intermediate position (2006b: 5).

In particular, Chan and Goldthorpe argue that status is the factor with the greatest explanatory capacity of the patterns and types of cultural consumption detected, which are based on the polarity of omnivorous-univocal tastes. Thus, although members of the professional and managerial class are more likely to be omnivores than the rest of the members of the other classes, the importance of the stratification of status within these is very evident. In the highest ranks of the status scale, professionals are generally placed above managers. And in logical correspondence, the groups that most regularly show the highest proportions of omnivores are senior professionals, teachers and other professionals in the field of education, and specialists who enjoy professional qualifications. On the other hand, other mediums of the transport sector, industry, construction or services, are less likely to be omnivores (2006).

In the comparative analysis of six countries, Chan concludes that cultural consumption: a) is differentiated according to gender, age and sociodemographic variables; and b) is structured according to education, income and social status (233). Therefore, the tastes and practices are structured and stratified. For him, the association between education and income, on the one hand, and cultural consumption, on the other, is clear and consistent; now, as an aspect of lifestyle, cultural consumption is more stratified by social status than by class, it requires having economic resources, relevant cultural capacity and motivations to participate.

In sum, there is a contrast between the stratification of economic opportunities and that of cultural consumption, since the first one fundamentally reflects the positions of the individual in the class structure, understood in terms of employment relationships, while the second one reflects the position in the status order.

Contemporary societies have undergone very profound changes in aspects related to the production and cultural offer (a market of abundant provision of goods, computerisation of homes and access to the Internet), with the qualification of the agents (universalisation of educational systems), availability of economic resources and free time, equipment creation policies and organisation of events, etc. which have produced two breaks: the distinction between high culture and popular culture, on the one hand, and the direct association between high culture and class domination, on the other.

The conclusion that the numerous and extensive research carried out in recent years allows us to derive from this is not the disappearance of classes nor the logic of distinction. As the recent study by Savage et al. shows, classes have been polarised and fragmented; that is, that there has been a concentration of wealth

and an increase in distance with the so-called “precarious class”<sup>22</sup> and a fragmentation in the intermediate strata. To this, it would be necessary to add a change in the nature of inequalities, as a result of the maturation of the educational systems.

On the other hand, although the distribution of cultural patterns is not homologous to the class structure, it does not flee freely on the fringes of the social structure. The logic of distinction now operates in a more clever way: it is not concentrated so much on objects but on forms of appropriation: a reflective commitment with an ethos of openness to variety, which imposes to the popular forms it appropriates one cultist anesthetisation or observes them with the rhetoric of irony.

Since social resources are of different types and there are different sources of identity and meaning production, the explanation of the types of preferences that are observed in the research is necessarily multifactorial. The choices of the subjects, although they are individual and situational, follow certain guidelines. In fact, they are much more restricted than the theoretical space of possibilities allows. Therefore, the sociology of cultural practices has to rigorously deal with the empirical description of the factors that produce regularity and systematicity in the distribution of cultural preferences.

## **6. The art of zither and the logic of culture**

Throughout the course of the theories of cultural classification, we have shown that, due to an accumulation of factors, it is hardly possible to speak today of the central and culminating existence of a high culture model. The image of a cultural field founded on a single centre of legitimacy does not at all respond to the complexity and differentiation of contemporary societies. There are quite different spaces or areas of practice and socialisation, different genres with a remarkable proliferation of consumer styles, many of which claim and appeal to different audiences to legitimise themselves. This approach leads to the introduction of the concept of consumption regime or cultural practice, which refers to the set of elements that define the form of individual ownership of symbolic goods in a unique aesthetic universe and entails a certain combination of genres both like the modalities of its consumption and the system of rules that govern them.

On the other hand, societies, at least contemporary ones, are intrinsically plural in ideals and values. In this regard, we have argued that it is necessary a theory of the subject more open than the one underlying *habitus*; and that the distribution of cultural forms in the social space, which does not follow a strictly hierarchical model based on the logic of distinction, it must have a multifactorial explanation. The logics of distinction and legitimacy must be reinterpreted in the light of other logics.

First of all, a logic of diversity. Max Weber, who, like few, underlined the existence of various social orders, refers to the irretrievably polytheistic character of modern societies: “If there is something that we know well today is the fact that one thing can be holy not only *despite* not being beautiful, but *because* it is not beautiful and to the extent that it is not... and we also know that one thing can be beautiful not only because it is not good, but as long as it is not..., and it is part of the popular knowledge that one thing can be true in spite of not being beautiful,

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<sup>22</sup> On the concentration of richness, see Ariño and Romero (2016).

neither holy, nor good, and to the extent that it is not" (2006: 45). Holiness, beauty, goodness and truth, are articulating principles of different spheres of culture. As Weber says, they have autonomy and independence. Therefore, the logic of plurality or diversity underline the existence of several orders of value, cultural universes, ideals and aesthetic preferences, which are, in principle, irreducible to the logic of social distinction or inequality, and which are irreducible to each other.

Secondly, we must affirm the existence of an autonomous logic of perfection, internal to the cultural field itself, to each genre, to each object, to each subject. This is a topic that has been pointed out in different ways by Durkheim and Simmel, but that has a classic lineage. Aristotle in *Nichomachean Ethics*, when analysing the nature of virtue, uses art as an analogy to understand its logic of perfection: "Virtues do not occur either by nature nor against it, but our being can receive and refine them through custom... So, in the arts, what we manage to do after learning, we apprehend doing it: we become builders, raising houses, and in quote-makers playing this instrument" and then adds: "by playing the zither, some are good and other bad zitherists, and something similar happens to the builders: if they building well they will be good professionals, if they do it wrong, they will be bad ones. If that were not the case, the teachers would be superfluous, since each one would be good or bad by birth". The practice, every practice, is intrinsically oriented by a logic of improvement and perfection, for an ideal, which is independent of other logics.

In this sense, we must also interpret Durkheim's vision, in *The elemental forms of religious life*, of the ascetic ideal which it presents as "a living model that encourages effort". "This – he affirms – is the historical role of the great ascetics... It is necessary for an elite to place the goal so high so the crowd does not place it too low" (Durkheim, 1912).<sup>23</sup> Simmel, on the other hand, emphasised the character of the logic of perfection: a) of the subject, because "no soul is ever what it is at one time, but something else, in it something superior and perfect, unreal but present in some way, is performed. It is not a mentionable ideal, fixed somewhere in the intellectual world, but a release of the forces that rest on it, the development of its most intimate germ, subjected to a formal internal impulse" (1999: 140; and 1911); b) of the objectifications, which also enjoy perfection and autonomous development, transforming in goals what were means for subjective culture (1999: 180; e.o. 1911).

But, of course, there is also the logic of inequality and social distinction. And as noted by a broad tradition of social theorists that goes through Tocqueville or Veblen, before snoopng at Bourdieu, certain cultural forms operate at the service of domination. This is what happens with the classification schemes (cult / uncultivated, civilised / barbarian, cultivated / ignorant, easy / difficult, refined / rude, intellectual / sensual, cult / vulgar, etc. and their postmodern substitutes) that operate as markers of moral superiority and stigmatisation of popular practices. In this sense, Lahire interprets the ascetic ideology essentially as an ethos of symbolic domination based on the aristocracy of the merit of intellectuals and clergymen of all kinds (Lahire, 2004: 666-694). But we have also seen, with Erikson and Bryson, that domination can appeal more effectively to different, remote forms of high culture and that the defence of cultural diversity and

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<sup>23</sup> It is, precisely, Lahire who remembers this text (Lahire, 686-687). See Durkheim, 1985.

multiculturalism may be the new ideology of the dominant classes under conditions of hyperdiversity.

Finally, it should be noted that the logic of diversity that claims the autonomy of the principle of pleasure or aesthetic-erotic and the logical positionality of the distinction, although they are ontologically different and analytically separable, very frequently merges and re-enforces to reality. And this is so, because there is also aesthetic pleasure in the social distinction (the thrill of power), in the accumulation and possession of goods and the privileges and prestige they seek. There is an art of affirming social positions, of personal and group identity, which acts through artistic practices also developed by its own independent logic of perfection and excellence (in domination).

In sum, principles, ideals and values, symbolic forms in general, fulfill multiple social functions and are intertwined, like the face and the reverse, in social relations. They can serve as instruments of fight, domination, government and control, providing a legitimisation service to those who exercise cultural domination. But, in addition, the ideal as a utopia constitutes a dynamic factor of criticism and emancipation. The tension between reality and utopia, put into play by social movements, operates as a challenge to all the attempts to consecrate the dominant order as a natural order of things and allows them to constitute subjectivities that aspire to autonomy and the configuration of democratic societies. If it is true that the ascetic ideal can be a logic of dominance based on a sense of superiority (difference + superiority), it is not less that relativism and positivism can be ideological forms of consecration, in different ways, of the existing and of the existing domains as if they were cultural heritage;<sup>24</sup> and that if there is an ascetic *ethos*, their counterparts are also given, prophetic *ethos* and playful *ethos*.

The tension between creativity and routine, between carefree expression and virtuosity, between entertainment and transgression, between conservation and avant-garde, or even between alienation and emancipation, is inevitable and creative. And virtue can operate as an improvement of praxis, as an exemplary reference or as an emancipation factor. In any case, culture can also be the search for meaning for "good life".

García Lorca stated that he was not doing theatre to entertain, but to have a body-to-body combat with the public, that dragon that could devour the yawns of their frustration; Sloterdijk has recently called for the urgency of "causing the mass that is within us" and "calling to take action against it" to release the difference that closes culture "towards the best" (Sloterdijk, 2001: 99). Perhaps this is the redeemable element of the humanist tradition: culture understood as a utopia that brings to the public and to the subjects in general beyond their own, their everyday facticity, the empire of the present. But, however, this call to take action against the mass that inhabits each one of us can no longer be sacrificed for heterogeneity in the name of abstract universalism. The policies of redistribution or cultural democratisation must be combined with recognition policies. We need universalism capable of sustaining the conditions created by global connectivity and the pluralism that constitutes advanced modernity.

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<sup>24</sup> By the way, the *ethos* of relativistic aestheticism, like pessimism, are "luxury" rhetoric that, just like omnivority, cannot be afforded precisely by those who, in the social order, are in a worse situation.

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