

CRESC

The Routledge Companion to Bourdieu's *Distinction*

Edited by
Philippe Coulangeon and Julien Duval



Centre for Research on
Socio-Cultural Change



The Routledge Companion to Bourdieu's *Distinction*

This edited collection explores the genesis of Bourdieu's classical book *Distinction* and its international career in contemporary social sciences. It includes contributions by sociologists from diverse countries who question the theoretical legacy of this book in various fields and national contexts. Invited authors review and exemplify current controversies concerning the theses promoted in *Distinction* in the sociology of culture, lifestyles, social classes and stratification, with specific attention to the emerging forms of cultural capital, and the logics of distinction that occur in relation to material consumption or bodily practices.

They also illustrate empirically the theoretical contribution of *Distinction* in relation to such notions as field or *habitus*, with a particular focus on the emerging area of 'Distinction studies' and the opportunities offered by geometrical data analysis of social spaces.

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Introduction

Philippe Coulangeon and Julien Duval

Of all Pierre Bourdieu's books, *Distinction*, first published in French in 1979 and translated into English in 1984, remains the most frequently cited work to date.¹ In 1998, *Distinction* ranked sixth in the top 10 most influential sociology books according to International Sociological Association members, alongside books by Max Weber, Robert K. Merton, C. Wright Mills, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, among others. Conceived as a synthesis of earlier research on cultural consumption and social classes, *Distinction* holds a special place in Bourdieu's work: '[it] is to Pierre Bourdieu what *Suicide* was to Emile Durkheim: what Francis Bacon calls an *experimentum crisis*, a "critical experiment" designed to demonstrate, first, the generic potency of the sociological method [...] and, second, the fecundity of a distinctive theoretical schema' (Wacquant, 2001: 114).

Nevertheless, the international fate of the book is surprising, if not paradoxical. Although it is indeed 'very French', as Bourdieu himself noted in the preface of the English-language edition of the book, *Distinction* rapidly reached an international audience. While it relied on a very detailed investigation of cultural taste and lifestyles in France in the 1960s and 1970s, the book is also very complex in its writing and composition, mixing sophisticated analyses, both quantitative and qualitative, with intricate and demanding theoretical considerations. As pointed out in its subtitle ('A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste'), the book promotes a sociological alternative to Kantian aesthetics. But the book cannot be reduced to its contribution to cultural sociology alone. Rather, *Distinction* is today seen as a magnum opus of sociology as a whole that also notably deals with politics and philosophy, challenging traditional conceptions of class and social stratification and promoting innovative concepts, such as social space, fields and distinction.

The aim of the present volume is twofold. First, to provide today's readers of *Distinction* with some contextual elements about the book's genesis and trajectory.

Second, to give an overview of the very active and diverse research areas that still draw on *Distinction's* legacy, both in France and abroad.

The French career of *Distinction*

The genesis of *Distinction* and its reception in France cannot be understood without a brief overview of Bourdieu's trajectory. During the postwar period, the main cleavage between French sociologists was between Marxists and those who imported the empirical sociology theories developed in the United States by Paul Lazarsfeld's entourage. Bourdieu was never a Marxist, nor was he a truly empirical sociologist like Lazarsfeld's followers, partly because he initially trained as a philosopher.² He came to sociology via anthropology. His first empirical studies were conducted in Algeria between 1958 and 1960, and were more influenced by Lévi-Strauss than by the French sociologists of the time. He actually turned to sociology when he came back to France. Then he was recruited by Raymond Aron, who was very influential in French academia. In 1960, Aron founded the *Centre de sociologie européenne* (CSE) and Bourdieu became his assistant. Although their political views varied greatly, since Aron was a quite conservative intellectual, their collaboration played an important role in Bourdieu's career. Aron really valued the surveys Bourdieu conducted in Algeria, and was confident in Bourdieu's ability to successfully implement his project of an empirically grounded and theoretically guided sociology. Bourdieu rapidly became a prominent member of the CSE, and in 1964 Aron supported him when he was recruited by the *École pratique des hautes études* (EPHE), which subsequently became EHESS in 1975.

EPHE was a peculiar institution within the French higher education system. Much more research-oriented than other French universities, EPHE welcomed the most innovative and also atypical social scientists of that time. Some of them, like Bourdieu, did not hold a PhD. Based on a true multidisciplinary conception of social sciences, EPHE, at least in the 1960s and 1970s, was not strictly an academic institution, since most of its members often took part in public debate. Bourdieu's sociology, which has never been restricted to the academic sphere, is certainly in part a product of this institutional context. Most of his books, including *Distinction*, were published by *Les Éditions de Minuit*, a non-academic and politically committed publisher that was quite influential in literary and intellectual fields in the 1960s and 1970s.

In addition, at the time when he wrote *Distinction*, Bourdieu had already created his own research team at the CSE, similar (at least in some respects) to the group that Durkheim formed around *L'Année sociologique*, or the various research teams that Lazarsfeld created at his different institutes for applied research. This research team included people such as Jean-Claude Chamboredon, Luc Boltanski, Yvette Delsaut, Claude Grignon, Jean-Claude Passeron and Monique de Saint Martin. Some of them were former students of the *École normale supérieure*, where Bourdieu held a seminar for many years. Bourdieu had always worked with a diversified group of people with very different profiles and skills. In the 1960s, the group worked on accumulating data and conducting a great number of surveys. By the 1970s, however, the number of surveys declined and the team spent more time working on publication, primarily

in French academic journals (such as *Revue française de sociologie*) and, from 1975, mainly in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*. This journal, founded by Bourdieu and directed by him until his death, played a central role in his work and in its diffusion, and published papers focusing on issues seldom investigated at that time. The journal included contributions by sociologists, anthropologists and historians, and experimented with innovative uses of non-conventional material, such as photographs, newspaper cuttings and even comic strips, which strayed far from the model of more conventional academic journals. Thus *Distinction* benefited from the formal experimentations seen in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*. Moreover, the first drafts of parts of the book were published in the journal in 1976.

All these elements explain the context in which *Distinction* was received in France, especially the fact that the book was not originally read only in academic circles. A few weeks after its publication, Bourdieu was invited to present *Distinction* on TV, and the book was extensively reviewed in several more mainstream magazines and newspapers such as *Le Nouvel Observateur* and *Le Monde*. In the academic field, *Distinction* was generally considered to be a significant book, but it was nonetheless ‘the target of fierce criticism’ (Bourdieu and Chartier, 2010: 8). Two reviews were published in 1980 in *Revue française de sociologie* (Gehin and Herpin, 1980). These reviews emphasized the book’s importance, but minimized its originality and criticized some aspects of its empirical analyses. These reviews also blamed Bourdieu for not complying with academic standards. In particular, as has often been noted since, they pointed to the fact that some authors, such as Thorstein Veblen, Edmond Goblot and Maurice Halbwachs, who probably, although indirectly, had influenced Bourdieu when he was writing *Distinction*, were not mentioned in the book’s index.³ Finally, they also called into question the alleged sociological reductionism of a book in which artworks seemed to be exclusively considered from the socio-genetic point of view of their production and reception. This kind of criticism echoes the comments voiced regarding *Distinction* in public debate and the mainstream media, where *Distinction* has often been associated with a socially reductionist and relativist conception of art and culture, if not ‘a distinguished form of crude Marxism’ (Raynaud, 1980).⁴

More elaborate criticism, which often took the form of a partial refutation or recasting of some of the book’s core hypotheses, appeared a few years later. In 1989, two former close associates of Bourdieu, Claude Grignon and Jean-Claude Passeron, published their book *Le savant et le populaire*, in which they explored what they considered to be bias toward legitimate culture in Bourdieu’s approach to popular culture. In their view, *Distinction* was too exclusive in considering popular culture only in terms of its distance from dominant culture, and failed to properly appreciate its relative autonomy. This critique echoes some methodological comments made by Monique de Saint Martin in this volume regarding the empirical basis of Bourdieu’s views on popular culture (see Chapter 2). But the acknowledgement of the popular culture autonomy does not mean that Grignon and Passeron deny the symbolic domination of popular culture. In the end, their book can be viewed as an attempt to combine Bourdieu’s approach with the theoretical contribution of cultural studies. In fact, Passeron and Bourdieu himself contributed heavily in the 1970s to the introduction

in France of authors such as Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson, Richard Hoggart and Paul Willis.

In another vein, the cultural studies tradition inspired in France a more radical criticism of *Distinction*, mainly anchored in the field of media studies. During recent years, several French scholars (Macé and Maigret, 2005; Glévarec and Pinet, 2012) have called into question the very notion of cultural legitimacy at a time when mass culture and media culture are muddying the boundaries between popular culture and high arts. The blurring of symbolic boundaries at work is strengthened, they argue, by the fact that these industries structurally stimulate diversity—no matter how fake this diversity may be—and continuously support the renewal of cultural norms and fashions. Finally, these authors claim that this process goes hand in hand with the declining power of the school, in which cultural norms increasingly compete with prescriptions of mass culture and the creative industries (Pasquier, 2005). However, the emergence of competing cultural norms is synonymous with neither their equal symbolic power nor the weakening of cultural domination. Those endorsing this critique do not therefore necessarily refute that social inequalities might encompass a cultural dimension, or even that class antagonism might to some extent be a matter of cultural dissymmetry. Their contention is rather that cultural domination, if it exists, is much more difficult to exert in a society where the prescribers of cultural norms are more plentiful than in a society where the dominant classes can quietly rely upon the cultural monopoly of the school, as was the case in France in the 1960s, when the raw empirical data for *Distinction* were collected.

In more recent years, Bernard Lahire's considerations on plural socialization have explored another important facet of *Distinction*'s legacy in France (Lahire, 2004, 2008, 2011 [1998]). Lahire questioned the concept of the *habitus* and its uses (see also Lahire's contribution in Chapter 8 of this volume). What Lahire particularly questioned was the postulated unity of *habitus*: during their life course, people generally experience a plurality of social and cultural environments that most often result in a set of heterogeneous dispositions. As a result, Lahire argued that people's practices, when considered across a wide variety of fields, are seldom as coherent as the concept of *habitus* suggests.

The plurality of dispositions as well as the fragmentation of *habitus* were acknowledged in some of Bourdieu's later works (see also Bennett, 2007). The plurality—and plasticity—of *habitus* can thus be viewed as a promising extension of Bourdieu's theses, rather than a refutation.

It should be noted that Bourdieu, and his closest fellow scholars at the CSE, took very little part in these debates. Since 1982, Bourdieu held a different position (he became a professor at the *Collège de France*) and his main writings dealt with a variety of topics such as academics, higher education, the State, the literary field, journalism and economics. He also published some theoretical and political books, and a collective survey entitled *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu, 1999 [1993]). Of course, some of those works led him to reinvestigate certain aspects of *Distinction*. For instance, in his analyses of the fields of cultural production, he gave new insights into the concept of homology, understood as the correspondence between the space of cultural goods and the space of social positions. He also devoted several issues of his journal to sports,

media and politics, which were already explored (albeit not in depth) in *Distinction*. However, he did not revisit his analysis of cultural practices, and hence *Distinction* should be considered his (perhaps involuntary) definitive contribution on this topic.

International reception of the book

Distinction was received by the international community similarly to how it was received in France. After being translated into English by Richard Nice in 1984, it was soon translated into many other foreign languages and enjoyed great success in a number of countries (see Chapter 3 in this volume by Gisèle Sapiro). Initially, the book's release was most controversial in the Anglo-Saxon world. While some influential American scholars, such as Paul DiMaggio, appeared sympathetic to Bourdieu's thesis (DiMaggio and Useem, 1978; DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985), others, such as Michèle Lamont, challenged its relevance in the American context (Lamont and Lareau, 1988; Lamont, 1992). The central criticism of *Distinction* has to do with its alleged French idiosyncrasies. According to Michèle Lamont, the social power of culture in France has no equivalence in the United States, where elites do not demonstrate the same familiarity with high culture and fine arts as their French counterparts. Conversely, American elites display a greater familiarity with popular culture. These observations opened up further reflections on the eclecticism of tastes, popularised by Richard Peterson (Peterson and Simkus, 1992). Indeed, Peterson argued that a historical shift occurred in the social stratification of cultural consumption according to which 'not only are high-status Americans far more likely than others to consume the fine arts but [...] they are also more likely to be involved in a wide range of low-status activities' (Peterson and Kern, 1996: 900). By contrast, low-status Americans would be characterized by a narrow range of low-status activities. Omnivorousness is thus defined as 'the appreciation of all distinctive leisure activities and creative forms along with the appreciation of classic fine arts' (Peterson, 1992: 252). Since the mid-1990s, Peterson's thesis has given rise to a number of empirical analyses, many of which have been published in *Poetics*, one of the leading academic journals in the field of cultural sociology. The aim of these analyses, mainly based on survey data, has been almost entirely to test whether this emerging paradigm really challenges Bourdieu's theory. On one hand, some argue that the omnivore/univore contrast does not necessarily preclude the highbrow/lowlbrow divide, to the extent that it only highlights the fact that mixing highbrow and lowbrow is becoming, for those who maintain a privileged access to high culture, an emergent form of cultural distinction. Besides, Bourdieu himself mentioned the distinctive power of eclecticism (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]: 329). On the other hand, Peterson's argument might be considered as a real challenge to the homology thesis, understood as an isomorphic relation between the structure of aesthetic preferences and the class structure. But this quite substantialist understanding of the concept of homology is precisely at odds with the emphasis Bourdieu put on its relational understanding. Various chapters of this volume return to these issues.

However, both Lamont's criticism and Peterson's alternative theory have been subject to controversy in the United States and abroad. First, it has been argued that these critical readers of *Distinction* have often misleadingly interpreted it as an

emulative theory of status, in which class hierarchies of tastes and cultural repertoires are anchored in an active status competition. But Bourdieu himself rejected this interpretation of his work, claiming that class differences and hierarchies in taste are unintended consequences of socially differentiated *habitus* and practices. In that sense, the fact that high culture and fine arts are less explicitly valued by the dominant classes in the American context than in the French does not mean that cultural capital is less efficient in the production and reproduction of social inequalities in the United States than it is in France. As underlined by Douglas B. Holt (1997), the structuring impact of cultural capital on social inequalities operates mainly through the unintended process of the self-selection of people sharing the same kind of tastes, values and habits.

According to a second counterargument, the differences observed across time and space in the objectified forms of cultural capital might conceal similar embodied forms (Holt, 1997; Atkinson, 2011).⁵ In that respect, it may be that, formally, different forms of cultural resources—e.g. eclectic vs highbrow, univore vs lowbrow—express the same kind of embodied cultural capital which structures the way people act, consume, talk, etc., rather than what they do, consume and say. This brings to mind, for example, the structuring opposition between the ‘taste for necessity’ and the ‘taste of liberty’ emphasized by Bourdieu when he contrasted the aesthetics of the dominated and the aesthetics of the dominant. Thereby, beyond the changes and differences observed across time and space, *Distinction* would still provide a relevant sociological framework whose scope extends beyond the specifics of 1960s France.

More recently, Omar Lizardo and Sara Skiles extended this reasoning by reconceptualizing the notion of omnivorousness as a generic and transposable form of the aesthetic disposition, consistent with Bourdieu’s original assumptions (Lizardo and Skiles, 2012). They first stated that the aesthetic disposition consists in two distinct capacities. On one hand, the ability to ‘consider, in and for themselves, as form rather than function, not only [...] legitimate works of art, but everything in the world, including cultural objects which are not yet consecrated’ (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]: 3); on the other, the capacity to ‘constitute aesthetically objects that are ordinary or even “common”’ (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]: 40). Their claim was therefore that ‘possession of the capacity to consider form in isolation from function or content should result in a broadening of the potential number of objects that could be found to have aesthetic appeal’ (Lizardo and Skiles, 2012: 268). Finally, many of the contemporary developments in the literature on omnivorousness do not add anything more than Bourdieu himself, when he spoke of ‘the elective eclecticism of aesthetes who use the mixing of genres and the subversion of hierarchies as an opportunity to manifest their all-powerful aesthetic disposition’ (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]: 329).

***Distinction* and class theory**

The international reception of *Distinction* has long focused strictly on its ‘cultural’ dimension, despite the fact that the book also deals with other fields of practice, such as sport, food, and even economics and politics, to which a full chapter is devoted. As a consequence, the continuing debate on the persisting relevance of Bourdieu’s theory of aesthetics and cultural attitudes may somewhat conceal the book’s broader

aim: a great examination of social classes. In fact, *Distinction* is a stepping stone in a long-term rethinking of the problem of social classes. As early as the 1960s, Bourdieu criticized the great sociological traditions on this issue and tried to meld them into a unified (and relational) theory (Bourdieu, 1966, 1980).⁶ This dimension of *Distinction*'s impact is thus manifest in a number of contemporary French ethnographic studies on working-class youth (Mauger, 2006) and the working classes as a whole (Schwartz, 1990; Beaud and Pialoux, 1999). The same holds true for some major studies on the French bourgeoisie (Pinçon-Charlot and Pinçon, 1989; Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot, 1997) as well as on the middle class (Cartier *et al.*, 2008; see also Chapter 5 in this volume).

But this aspect of *Distinction*'s legacy, which is often neglected by its most culture-oriented readers, is also hardly acknowledged in the field of class and social stratification theory. Bourdieu's views on the matter are not fully compatible with Marxist orthodoxy, in that class structure is not uniquely defined by the structuring of the relations of production, but rather by the structure of people's assets (economic capital, cultural capital and social capital). Even more elaborate neo-Marxist conceptions, such as that of Erik Olin Wright, fail to grasp this complexity and remain committed to the predominant role of the relations of production (Wright, 1997). In addition, Bourdieu also criticized Marxism for its objectivism, insisting that the representations of the social world (and, for instance, the very existence of classes) were an issue central to social struggles. Thereby, contrary to what has been often said (Alexander, 1995), Bourdieu cannot be seen as a 'neo-Marxist'.

Bourdieu's approach to the social classes may in fact be closer to Max Weber's conception, except that Weber purposely separated class and *Stand* (status), whereas Bourdieu conflated the two, as he argued in the preface to the English-language edition of the book (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]: XIII–XIV). On the contrary, recent criticisms of *Distinction* by Weberian class sociologists question precisely this conflation (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007). More generally, in *Distinction*, Bourdieu criticized all status-based approaches to the social world, such as that of Lloyd Warner (Warner and Lunt, 1942) and those used in many studies on social mobility which, like all traditional one-dimensional conceptions of the social world, failed to analyse the transversal forms of mobility based on the conversion of one form of capital into another.

To a certain extent, the neo-Durkheimian approach to class backed by David Grusky could appear more sympathetic to Bourdieu, partly because both Bourdieu and Grusky support a realistic inductive conception of class rather than a strictly theoretically driven one (Grusky and Weeden, 2001). However, Grusky remains committed to a strictly categorical approach to stratification, while Bourdieu, with his concept of social space, intends precisely to go beyond the opposition between categorical and continuous approach to social stratification. Indeed, Bourdieu defends a deliberately multi-dimensional conception of the social world based on a concept of social space that allows the role of the variety of capitals to be included. In other words, using his concept of 'social space', he aims to propose a theory that would integrate existing theories without suffering from their flaws. For example, at an important conference a few years after *Distinction*, he explains how his concept of 'social space' and the traditional concept of 'social classes' could be combined: the

proximity between positions in social space is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the genesis of the social classes (Bourdieu, 1985).

The concept of social space falls within the relational way of thinking that Bourdieu promoted. This theoretical space, in which individuals and groups are distributed according to the volume and structure (predominantly economic or predominantly cultural) of their capital, is a set of objective relations. However, it is also a battlefield in which each agent and each group attempts to impose on others the rules of the game that promote their own interests. In such a space, even some dramatic changes, such as the diffusion of some practices previously reserved for the elite, can occur, without any strong transformation of the space's structure, which is left unchanged by nominal transformations.

This conceptualization of social space is a part of the 'field theory' that Bourdieu developed more and more explicitly, beginning in the 1970s. Both field and social space are operationalized using the same statistical technique: multiple correspondence analysis (MCA), which was developed in the 1960s by a team of French mathematicians headed by Jean-Paul Benzecri. MCA is strongly related to Bourdieu's relational approach. Various chapters in this volume rely on this methodology and illustrate its potency. In later years, Bourdieu made a very subtle use of the mathematical and geometric properties of MCA, from which he empirically built the space of social positions and the space of lifestyles, and ultimately gave substance to the concept of homology between these two spaces (Rouanet *et al.*, 2000). Breaking with the variable-oriented statistics that, in the wake of Paul Lazarsfeld, had been dominant in statistical sociology since the 1950s, MCA is a major legacy of *Distinction*. But at the same time, this methodological shift may have adversely affected the book's international diffusion, given that, until recently, the statistical technique was hardly known or used outside France (Le Roux and Rouanet, 2004).

In addition to this pioneering use of MCA, *Distinction* was also innovative in its particular combination of statistical and ethnographical approaches. In fact, Bourdieu had been practising this kind of methodological mix since his early studies in Algeria. According to him, it was the combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies that allowed him to properly understand social mechanisms. In addition, *Distinction* includes formal originalities having to do both with the formulation of the reasoning as well as the restitution of the underlying data. Bourdieu made use of the aforementioned formal innovations, tested in *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*: boxes with long excerpts of interviews, newspaper and magazine cuttings and pictures, etc. Although truly conceived as a scientific piece, *Distinction* was in some respects also written as a literary work, to such an extent that Bourdieu has often been compared with famous French writers such as Balzac and Proust. Bourdieu himself has said that he encountered difficulties in writing *Distinction* and thought that literary devices could, in certain circumstances, help scientific analysis.

In this way, *Distinction* contravened many scholastic conventions, which probably hindered the book's impact in the academic world as well as its international diffusion. All this may explain why the book is so often misunderstood and misrepresented by certain sociologists.⁷ But, conversely, this may also explain why *Distinction* has remained so appealing to many others. As with many of Bourdieu's works, *Distinction*

provides an alternative to the standard practices of the ‘mainstream’ sociology, largely based on the American canons built and disseminated in the postwar period. And perhaps it is not a coincidence that *Distinction* often had a broader and earlier influence in ‘little’ countries than it did in the United States. Indeed, as Yvette Delsaut noted (Delsaut and Rivière, 2002: 181), it may be significant that Bourdieu’s books were often translated into ‘peripheral’ languages before being translated into English. In that sense, the posterity of *Distinction* cannot be separated from the context of international power relationships in the academic field.

Outline of the book

The first part of this book focuses on the historical genesis of *Distinction*, and its French and international career. The opening paper is authored by Monique de Saint Martin, a founding member of the CSE who participated in the lengthy research program that resulted in *Distinction*. Her paper explores what was then a work in progress, the first uses of MCA and the permanent tensions between the theoretical aims and empirical constraints of survey research. In different ways, the two other papers, by Gisèle Sapiro and by Ian Woodward and Michael Emmison, examine the international diffusion of *Distinction* and show how the book was somewhat reformulated by its readers from different disciplines and different countries.

The second part of the book gives an overview of the fate of *Distinction* in contemporary French sociology. All the chapters included in this section highlight to some extent the structural changes that have occurred in France since the 1970s, and their challenging impact on the relevance of the analyses elaborated by Bourdieu in a quite different context. Dealing with the same country but at a different period, these chapters allow for a thorough reappraisal of some of the concepts Bourdieu put forth in *Distinction*, such as ‘new petite bourgeoisie’ (Chapter 6 by Vincent Dubois). All these texts illustrate the diversity of the theoretical and empirical approaches that refer in some way to *Distinction* in contemporary French sociology. Bernard Lahire revisits his previously examined argument regarding the potential non-coherence of *habitus* and non-transferability of dispositions (Chapter 8). Marie Cartier, Isabelle Coutant, Olivier Masclat and Yasmine Siblot (Chapter 5) illustrate the ethnographic approach of social stratification that has flourished in France since the 1990s (Beaud and Weber, 2003). Julien Duval compares *Distinction* and Bourdieu’s later works on fields of cultural production (and their contemporary transformations) to some contemporaneous challenging arguments, such as the ‘omnivore’ thesis (Chapter 7). Finally, Philippe Coulangeon, Yoann Demoli and Ivaylo Petev question the relevance of Bourdieu’s thesis when applied to the field of material goods rather than to the field of cultural consumption (Chapter 9).

The third part of the volume is devoted to the large amount of research that tends to replicate, in other national contexts, the kind of surveys that gave *Distinction* its empirical basis (Chapter 11 by Lennart Rosenlund). Most of the chapters in this section, particularly Chapter 10 by Andreas Melldahl and Mikael Börjesson, show the increasingly sophisticated ways in which MCA is being used in the wake of the ‘geometric data analysis’ promoted by Henry Rouanet and Brigitte Le Roux, who

collaborated on one of Bourdieu's last works (Bourdieu, 1999). These chapters raise the issue of generalizing Bourdieu's tools and findings in a wide variety of contexts. Is the structure of social space posited in *Distinction* universal, or specific to some national contexts and periods? Johs. Hjellbrekke, Vegard Jarness and Olav Korsnes (Chapter 12) and Mauricio Bustamante and Domingo Garcia (Chapter 16) question the relevance of *Distinction*'s framework when it is applied to societies that are more egalitarian than France, or to countries that differ greatly from the West. The confrontation of these international studies also underlines the importance of the reflexive analysis of statistical data, as well as its limits. Chapter 13 by Henk Roose, Koen van Eijck and John Lievens and Chapter 17 by Annick Prieur and Mike Savage review the international debates that exist regarding *Distinction*'s analysis of cultural practices and lifestyles. These international interpretations of *Distinction* also explore emerging topics, such as corpulence and class bodies (Chapter 14 by Dieter Vanderbroeck), that have not received as much attention to date as cultural practices.

Notes

- 1 Based on a count of 37 sociology journals (all in English), *Distinction* was the most cited reference in the 2008–12 period (see <http://nealcaren.web.unc.edu/the-102-most-cited-works-in-sociology-2008-2012/> accessed 29 June 2013). Based on another count of 47 sociology journals ('which have a significant US editorial presence'), *Distinction* was the most cited book in 2012 (<http://scatter.wordpress.com/2012/12/21/cited/> accessed 29 June 2013).
- 2 Regarding the relationship between philosophy and social sciences in France during the postwar period, see Bourdieu and Passeron (1967).
- 3 In this regard, it should be kept in mind that Pierre Bourdieu often emphasized the differences between *Distinction* and Veblen's analyses (see, for instance, Bourdieu, 1998: 9). As for Maurice Halbwachs, it is also worth noting that Bourdieu was one of the promoters of this author's rediscovery in France. Also, it may be useful to note that Bourdieu happened to invite his students to read Goblot's book *La barrière et le niveau* (Goblot, 1925).
- 4 For a more in-depth analysis of *Distinction*'s reception by French journalists and intellectuals, see Coulangeon and Duval (2013).
- 5 Bourdieu established three sub-types of cultural capital: embodied, objectified and institutionalised (Bourdieu, 1986: 47). The embodied cultural capital corresponds to long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body, largely inherited, both consciously and unconsciously, through socialization. The objectified cultural capital consists of cultural goods, such as pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc. The institutionalized cultural capital mainly corresponds to academic credentials or qualifications.
- 6 Loïc Wacquant highlighted the fact that the 'sociology of the realization of categories' that Bourdieu sketched in the 1980s could be, more than *Distinction*, the definitive reformulation by Bourdieu of the problem of social classes (Wacquant, 2013).
- 7 See, for example, Harry Ganzeboom's review in *European Sociological Review* (Ganzeboom, 1987).

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Part I

The genesis and career of *Distinction*

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2

From 'Anatomie du goût' to *La Distinction**

Attempting to construct the
social space. Some markers
for the history of the research

Monique de Saint Martin

The history of *La Distinction* is the history of a lengthy research conducted in a workshop which began around 1962; at that point, a pre-survey was carried out using interviews and observations of photographic practices and taste. It is also the history of a book, published for the first time by the *Éditions de Minuit* in 1979, and its conception, writing and production; considerable thought was given to the layout—one might almost say to the staging—unusual at the time in the social sciences. Finally, it is also the history of its national and international reception, its translations, adaptations and extensions; the translations began as soon as the book was published, doubtless even before, and continued long after.¹ There were numerous commentaries, criticisms and articles in the press and in academic journals as soon as the book came out. Thirty-one years after *La Distinction*, the colloquium held on 4–5 November 2010 invited us to give papers and to discuss and confront the interpretations, arguments and research experiences that frequently followed on from this book. A large number of papers were presented, bearing witness to the impact of the book and the theory underlying it. The history of *La Distinction* is still ongoing.

This chapter focuses mainly on the history of the research and the conditions of its production without, however, losing sight of the history of the book. Bourdieu was fascinated by this research, to which he referred fleetingly, but on several occasions, in the *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse* (Bourdieu, 2008). He directed it from beginning to end, although of course, he did not imagine, conceive, implement, analyze and write everything alone. At different stages and points in time, several researchers, collaborators, students and layout specialists worked in the research workshop.² We should also

mention the researchers, statisticians and others at *l'Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques* (INSEE); and in particular the *Centre de recherche pour l'étude et l'observation des conditions de vie* (CRÉDOC), who advised, discussed and contributed actively at different stages, including Ludovic Lebart and Nicole Tabard; and the readers of the fragments, or different versions, of the texts and manuscripts on which the book is based.

In a research group which is focused on carrying out a research study over 17 years, the team changes; furthermore, the majority of the members were involved in other research studies at the same time. The research group changed over time; but it was never a big project like the one on the *grandes écoles* (Bourdieu, 1989), which was launched shortly after.

The comments that follow and the elements described here refer to a short period, mainly the years 1971–76, as well as to the attempts to construct the social space which are presented in the article ‘Anatomie du goût’ [‘Anatomy of taste’] and then in *La Distinction*. A real historical study which considers the totality of the process and the development of the research remains necessary.³

The composition of the book

La Distinction, ‘a book in many respects unusual’ and ‘totally unexpected’ (Encrevé, 1980) is nevertheless not a book that is really new, nor is it completely original. The composition is new and personal, and demanded a considerable effort to orchestrate. However, the major part of the book is based on earlier publications, which moreover are not all referenced in the text or in the notes.⁴ Various articles and texts are mobilized; these are often re-worked, sometimes cut into pieces and scattered throughout the book to integrate them more appropriately.

The list of articles and books authored or co-authored by Bourdieu that are more or less directly re-used in *La Distinction*, or that have added to it, is indeed long. *Un art moyen. Les usages sociaux de la photographie*, a book published in 1965, supervised by Bourdieu, who co-authored it with Luc Boltanski, Robert Castel and Jean-Claude Chamboredon, in which in particular the part of the survey on taste dealing with photography is analyzed, was the first of these texts. *La Distinction* constitutes the point at which research and articles meet and interact; these include the ‘disposition esthétique’ (Bourdieu, 1971); ‘Les modes d'appropriation des œuvres d'art’ (Bourdieu, 1974); ‘Anatomie du goût’ (Bourdieu and de Saint Martin, 1976); ‘L'économie des biens symboliques’, ‘La production de la croyance’ (Bourdieu, 1977a); ‘La critique sociale du jugement esthétique’ (Bourdieu and de Saint Martin, 1978); and also ‘Les stratégies de reconversion’ (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1973); ‘Questions de politique’ (Bourdieu, 1977b) and ‘Classement, déclassement, reclassement’ (Bourdieu, 1978). It was thus possible for *La Distinction* to be presented as a comprehensive ‘summary of earlier work’ (Ferenczi, 1979), amongst which Thomas Ferenczi also includes *Les Héritiers*, *La Reproduction*, *L'Amour de l'Art* (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1966 [1969]) and ‘Le couturier et sa griffe’ (Bourdieu and Delsaut, 1975).

One of these earlier articles, ‘Anatomie du goût’ (published in 1976 in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, an article in the form of a special issue, over 100 pages long,