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## Finding one's way in social space: a study based on games

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**The sociology of everyday interactions** presupposes that individuals share a common ability (manifested, for example, in situations of symbolic confrontation, challenge, bluff, etc.) to spot the social identity of actors and to manipulate the marks of this identity. This ability, which has rarely been empirically investigated, is, however, often presented as an immediate consequence of the process of socialization, and the question of differences in individual com-

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The translation is by Jill Forbes and Richard Nice.

petence is rarely addressed. Our current research, outlined in this article, was originally aimed at helping to clarify the following questions: What is the relationship between individual mental images and the social process of public or official representation of groups (e.g. by trade unions and professional associations, in collective agreements, by rule-governed professional bodies such as that representing doctors, by governmental statistical institutes, etc.)? To what extent are these images shared, and is the capacity to use them in concrete tasks of identification equal for all? If this capacity varies from one individual to another, are the variations linked solely to unequal degrees of knowledge of the established classification and official labels (e.g. the names of occupations, collective-bargaining classifications and statistical taxonomies [cf. Thévenot, 1983])?

To endeavour to answer these questions, we designed a number of exercises and game situations which required the participants to apply their "social sense". But, in place of the pure experimentalism of the laboratory, we sought to set up modes of objectification which would bear on ordinary social situations, particularly in the choice of material and in devising procedures derived from the forms used in social life (the cases exploited in the exercises corresponded to real people, the procedures were those used in parlour games, collective bargaining, etc.).

Information has so far been gathered in the following way: the exercises were organized in two-day training sessions, attended each time by a group of about fifteen participants, who had previously been informed of the aims of our research. In order to reach a reasonably varied audience, we offered the session to institutions concerned in one way or another with adult education: the marketing division of a major nationalized firm, a nursing college, a management training college for social workers, a group of sales representatives from a multi-national food company, a group of unemployed people on a university re-training course, a group of retired women teachers (from primary and secondary education) belonging to a retirement club, a group from an adult-education course in an IUT\* which specializes in communications studies, a group of INSEE\* interviewers and two groups of people employed to encode INSEE surveys. The contract was as follows: the training session was offered free of charge, but in exchange the observers were allowed to keep and use the participants' scripts and the tape-recordings that were made.<sup>2</sup>

\* See Glossary at end of article.

Each session included three exercises. The first required the participants to construct nomenclatures for (social) "milieux" and then to negotiate how they should be combined into a single nomenclature. In the second exercise (actually performed first),<sup>3</sup> the participants were asked to produce three "typical examples" of "cadres" and "ouvriers" (manual workers). The third and final exercise was a game in which the object was to guess the occupation and social milieu of a real but unknown person, with the help of clues that were supplied to the participants on request.

### The practical creation of social classifications

The aim of the exercise, which involved giving examples to the participants which they were asked to classify so as to produce a social nomenclature, was to explore the mental categories used to think about society. The exercise was specifically designed to allow an analysis of the relation between the ordinary categories used in a practical way to place people in society, and official classifications such as the code of socio-occupational categories that INSEE uses, which produce a homogeneous or standardized picture of the social world for various purposes such as censuses, government department records, social surveys, and so on. Our object, in this exercise, was to test out hypotheses put forward in the course of earlier studies of the encoding of statements about occupational status collected by INSEE. What was interesting about such studies is that they looked at routine, standardized situations in which classification was required, in which agents were told to make use of the stated rules of classification that they had been given, and that were broadly based on the use of a system of rational criteria. By defining the agents' task in such economical and almost labour-saving terms, it was assumed that no overall understanding of what was contained in the questionnaire would be achieved (in other words, no overall appreciation of the person), but that the agents would make piecemeal use of several different criteria. Moreover, such a working method, combining several criteria, exactly corresponds to the way in which social nomenclatures are constructed for academic purposes. Experience showed that in a far from insignificant number of especially complex cases, in which the rules supplied did not allow the agents to carry out their task, the agents acted in a quite different way which might be described as follows:

(1) They took into consideration a great deal of information contained in the questionnaire (instead of confining themselves to the criteria they had been asked to use).

(2) They identified social forms on the basis of this exploration by assimilation to social types that they were already familiar with and which had already been situated within the social nomenclature.

Using these initial observations, we devised an exercise which allowed us to record the procedures involved in classifying in a systematic way. In addition to its academic uses, the exercise is of particular educational interest in that it draws the attention of those who participate to the mechanisms on which the creation of socio-occupational nomenclatures is based, usually implicitly, and the way in which they are used in encoding operations.

The classification exercise was devised in the following way.<sup>4</sup> The participants were divided into teams of two — an arrangement which has the merit of stimulating bargaining and discussion and, therefore, of making explicit some of the classifying principles at work. This is not achieved if the participants work alone (in some cases we recorded all the remarks made during the exercise). Each team is given a package of 65 personal file cards, based on real examples, containing the following information: age, domicile, educational qualifications, age at which full-time education ceased, occupation, status (self-employed, employee, etc.; number of employees in firm, etc.) and, where relevant, level of skill or rank, name and address of employer/place of work.

These cards were made up from census returns chosen so as to represent a fairly broad cross section of occupations and social situations. We tried to mix examples which we thought could be easily placed socially, because they conform to commonly held social images (e.g. "doctor" or "primary teacher") and examples of a more decrystallized status (cf. Lenski, 1954) that we thought would prove difficult for that reason (e.g. that of the "garage hand" (*laveur graisseur dans un garage*) aged 26 who had a university degree (*diplôme d'études supérieures*). The kind of information used and the way it was presented recalled the questionnaires used for statistical purposes (censuses etc.). Such similarities undoubtedly had an effect on the way the exercise was done since they encouraged some rationalization of the process of classification through the use of explicit criteria. Thus everything, in the procedures followed, which ran counter to that logic must be treated as

Example of personal file card

4	1	Nom et Prénoms: VELLIER MAURICE	6	Profession: Ingénieur commercial
	2	Age: 29 ans	7	Etes-vous: — Membre d'une profession libérale — Exploitant agricole, employeur ou travailleur indépendant: artisan, commerçant, industriel, etc. Nombre de salariés: — Salarié
	3	Adresse: 9, Rue Grégoire de Tours Clermont Ferrand		Dans ce cas: qualification, grade ou position hiérarchique Cadre commercial
	4	Diplômes les plus élevés: enseignement général ou supérieur H.E.C.	8	Nom et adresse de l'établissement: MICHELIN Place des Carmes Clermont Ferrand (63)
		enseignement technique et formation professionnelle	9	Activité de cet établissement: Manufacture de pneumatiques
	5	Age fin études: 22 ans		

particularly noteworthy.

What happens is this. The observer tells the participants in the exercise to "divide the cards into piles according to the social categories of the individuals in question". They may make as many different piles as they wish and there is no time limit (usually they take between three quarters of an hour and an hour to complete the task). The definition of what constitutes a category is left deliberately vague and observers refuse to be more specific if questioned by the participants. At the end of this first phase, participants are asked to choose the card they consider most representative, that is the card which "allows other people to understand what the rest of the pile contains", and to place it on top of the pile. Finally, participants are asked to give each pile a name.

The way participants usually go about the task is as follows: they consider the cards one by one in the arbitrary order in which they find them (each set of cards has been shuffled in advance), and place them on the table so as to begin to divide them up in the light of the initial differences which emerge. Next, the participants try to add new cards to each of the piles they have started. The first cards are usually given preferential treatment and are divided according to a few simple distinctions. These may have to do with the usual topography of the social world ("upper", "lower", "middle"), or with essential or important properties attributed to certain occupations ("the land", "the manufacture of material objects", "manual work", "art" . . .), or with divisions that are inspired by statistical criteria ("public sector employee", "private sector employee", "self-employed"), or to do with differences embodied in institutional categories ("teacher", "health worker", "skilled worker").

Thus, two women employed in the marketing division of a large nationalized company, of whom one was a graduate *cadre* and the daughter of a self-taught (*autodidacte*\*) *cadre*, who worked in the same firm, and the other a supervisor with a BEPC\* and the daughter of a clerical worker (*employé*) in the same firm, began the exercise by starting three piles which they set out in a triangle. One pile, on the left, consisted of "manual-type" (*plutôt manuel*) jobs ("later we might take out the students who are doing that kind of work because it's their first job"). Another pile, on the right, consisted of "managerial-type" (*plutôt cadre*) jobs ("later we might separate the graduates from others like shopkeepers"). A third pile which they started between and above the two others, they called "in between" ("supervisor and *cadre*"). This initial taxonomy was by no means clear-cut since the term *cadre* figured in two of the piles.

Its lack of clear definition probably had something to do with the fact that the women themselves were borderline cases, both the group they were with and their colleagues at work being better qualified than them and from more middle class (*bourgeois*) backgrounds. The lack of assurance expressed by "in-between" received political and taxonomic expression in the final stage of their division which resembled, more closely than taxonomies established by other participants in the same session, the principles of classification used by the trade union (the CGT\*) to which one of the women belonged — use of the phrases "health sector" and "education sector", references to "skill" and to the two extremes typifying the working class, the *ouvrier P2 fraiseur*\* and the *femme OS emballeuse*\* (the establishment of these extremes will be further discussed below).

But the task which initially seemed easy, rapidly turned out to be more complicated. The instruction to combine different piles of cards means that some form of coherence will be required, and this could not be met, especially as decrystallized cases had deliberately been included in each package of cards. Difficulties arose when participants had to deal with cards which could be placed in a number of different piles depending on how they were considered:

Here is the example of a team (from the session with female interviewers from INSEE) whose members had right at the beginning started the following piles: "State employees", "*cadres*", "manual workers" (*ouvriers*), "self-employed", "paramedical". With regard to the "State Registered Nurse" (64), they did not know whether to put her in the "self-employed" pile, as a member of the "professions" or in the pile which they initially designated "paramedical". In cases like this, the simplest solution, and the one often adopted to begin with, is to divide the pile, so that "State employees", for example, are separated into two new categories consisting of "highly qualified State employees" and "State employees who have no specific qualifications". But this form of coherence is quickly abandoned because it simply leads to more and more sub-divisions and considerably increases the range of the nomenclature and therefore the problem posed by arbitrating an increasing number of borderline cases. Thus in the case of the "*professeur agrégé*"\* (51), for example, the participants did not wish to place this card in the "highly qualified State employee" category on the grounds that "the teaching profession is different, it's separate", and decided to reorganize their piles so as to create a new category consisting of "teachers". But they encountered a new cognitive conflict with the "primary teacher" (*instituteur*) (57) because of their sensitivity to differences in "qualifications", "degrees", and "level".

When dividing piles becomes too difficult, the solution that is often adopted consists in abandoning any attempt to create a nomenclature based on an unchanging system of criteria, together with any attempt to remain coherent, and to build up piles based on

similarities between cards which belong to categories whose resemblance is vague, fluid and implicit, in such a way that the connexion between the various cards may well vary within any one pile. Thus we observed that as the job of classification proceeded, the identity of each of the piles could vary quite considerably without necessarily entailing a restructuring of the whole system of pile-building as it had initially been conceived along the lines of a small number of basic oppositions or relations (e.g. manual/non-manual work, graduate/non-graduate, etc.) to be found in the first cards that were looked at. Indeed, as each pile gradually grows larger, the process may appear to be one in which memory plays no part and in which the principles for the perception of similarities vary continually.

For example, using the first two cards that are looked at, a pile is created which depends both on the opposition between the public sector and the private sector and on the difference between high qualifications and average qualifications. The third and fourth cards that are looked at are "nurse" and "psychiatric social worker" which, for the time being, are added to the pile that temporarily contains (according to the recording of the participants' conversation) "middle-range public sector workers". But as a result of adding these two cards, the pile takes on a new dimension, that of "health workers", and this gradually takes over the identity of the pile.

Another team initially started a pile of "artist" cards to which they added "photographer" (7). But a few minutes later they decided that a "photographer" is a "craftsman" (*artisan*) and they added several craftsman cards to this pile as though they had forgotten its initial identity.

This suggests that categories are not constituted *a priori* according to some formal identity, but on the basis of chain association by contiguity described by Bruner et al. (1966, pp. 216-230), and that such a mode of category building is not confined to children who do not yet understand the logic on which social class is based or to adults who have little education. The reverse appears to be the case, namely that this is an instance of the working of practical logic<sup>5</sup> which nevertheless does not prevent appeal to class logic of the most academically respectable kind when the experimenter explicitly demands it.

### Legitimate labels and the naming of categories

The method of classification that has just been described accounts

for the participants' difficulties when they are asked to provide a name for each of the piles they have made. This new instruction often leads them to revise all their classifications so as to check the internal coherence of each pile and, sometimes, to modify it by moving cards from one pile to another. Similarly, when they inform observers of the names they have chosen, they often hedge them round with qualifications such as "it's not exactly right but it's more or less that", or "this name doesn't quite cover all the cards but we can't think of anything better", and so on.

Finally, the relation between the names given to the piles and the content of the piles has to be understood in the light of what is known about the way the piles were put together. In a great many cases, perhaps the majority (though statistics are not yet available on this point), it would appear that the names given to the piles are those which are used by official bodies and social scientists or in the nomenclature of official statistics (e.g. *cadres moyens\**, *cadres supérieurs et professions libérales\**, *agents de maîtrise\**, *ouvriers qualifiés\**, etc.), and this tendency would appear to be particularly marked in groups whose members have high educational qualifications. In such groups, it is rare to come across labels that do not figure in the official systems of classification and description. And what is noticeably absent are the names of groups which derive from Marxist terminology relating to social classes, terms such as "proletariat", "bourgeoisie", "petty bourgeoisie", or those which are defined by reference to a system of ethical values, such as "the poor", "the *notables*", "the elite" etc. The euphemistic terms of administrative jargon are almost always chosen in preference to the socially and emotionally charged terms of ordinary speech (e.g. "*cultivateurs*" (farmers) rather than "*paysans*" (peasants) or "*enseignants supérieurs*" (lecturers in higher education) rather than "*intellectuels*" etc.). This phenomenon must be related to the emergence and popularization of an official system for designating social groups whose legitimating principle is derived from the "social sciences". In origin, this is linked to the creation between the wars (1936) and especially since 1945, of an official field of representation of social groups and social classes and of negotiation between classes (pay bargaining, joint planning commissions, semi-institutionalized relations between the State and the trade unions etc.). It is almost as if social agents could make use of a vocabulary that is apparently technical and neutral, which then enables them, in the ordinary course of their daily lives, to talk

about social differences — that is, social classes — in a euphemistic fashion, without seeming to refer to the class struggle. The creation of such a vocabulary for the representation of social classes can be compared to the way in which the vocabulary of psychoanalysis (cf. Moscovici, 1961) gave intellectuals, in particular, a means of talking about sexuality, and indeed their own sexuality, without using “obscene words” or terms which were sexually charged, in a way that was divorced from reality and had no immediate sexual implications.

But of course this also means that any departure from the official nomenclatures, however small it may be, in the taxonomies created by the participants, is extremely significant and expresses an intention to say something or to make a point about the social world and the divisions in it, about what these divisions are and what they ought to be.

It would also appear that departures from the norm are often associated with conflicting ideas participants may have about their own social identity.

For example, in a session with participants who were all unemployed and on a training course, a team made up of two former company directors, both of whom were over fifty, one a graduate and the other with no degree qualifications, created a taxonomy in which “graduate directors” (*dirigeants diplômés*) were distinguished from “self-taught directors” (*dirigeants autodidactes*). In the same session, a technician who had been promoted to the rank of engineer within the company, and had then been sacked and had been unemployed for two years, after a disagreement with the “real” engineers (*ingénieurs\**) who were *Grande Ecole\** graduates, created a nomenclature in which the space given to *cadres* and *ingénieurs* in other taxonomies was practically empty. As if he did not wish to think about or write names which brought back painful memories, he used a system of abstract criteria to designate the various piles, a system which was based on what he saw as an opposition between the education system and skills (i.e. “employees who have very specialized higher educational qualifications” as against “employees who are graduates”, “employees with particular skills,” “employees without particular skills” etc.)

Still in the same session, a team which was made up of two young graduates who were unemployed created a category they called “temporary under-employed” for the card concerning the graduate garage hand (11) which had been included in the package precisely because it was an extreme case of decrystallization (the person in question was a 26-year-old holding a higher degree). This was also the reason why most of the participants considered his case “unrepresentative” and “marginal”.

Although participants generally used a relatively limited and fix-

ed vocabulary to designate social groups (which, as has been seen, is the result of the imposition of the official statistical categories), it is still the case that one label or two associated labels may be used to designate different groups of cards. This was so in the case of the session with social worker team leaders, a fairly homogeneous group in many respects (sex, age, income, qualifications etc., most of the major differences in fact relating to social background and the spouses’ occupations). In the six taxonomies produced by this group of twelve people (working in teams of two) there was one they termed “*cadres moyens et maîtrise*”, or alternatively one category called “*cadres moyens*” and one called “*maîtrise*”\* (or, in the fifth team a “*classes moyennes*”\* category and in the sixth team a “*technicien*” category). When the cards in these different categories were checked, it was apparent that not one was to be found in all six collections of cards. One card was found in five out of six collections (“*chef de service*” (65)), four cards were to be found in four out of the six collections (“*attaché de portefeuille*” (28), “*contremaître*” (40), “*infirmière DE*” (64), “*assistante en psychiatrie sociale*” (2)). Thirteen cards appeared in only one or two collections. Thus it would seem that the relation between labels and the groups they refer to is particularly ill-defined in the intermediate zones of social space. Thus all six teams in this session created a category that they labelled “*cadres supérieurs*” (or “*cadres supérieurs et professions libérales*” or “*cadres supérieurs et ingénieurs*”). In such cases, three cards were to be found in all six collections of cards (these were “*ingénieurs TP*” (45), “*avocat*” (48), “*médecin*” (22)), and three cards were to be found in five out of the six collections of cards (“*recherche scientifique*” (59), “*pharmacien*” (37) and “*professeur agrégé*” (51)). The range of card collections in which any one card may appear would appear to increase in proportion to the fluidity of the characteristics of the occupation designated on the card. Thus “*ingénieur conseil en chauffage central*” (5), for example, whose job description contains a reference to an advanced educational qualification (“*ingénieur*”) and to a professional activity (“*conseil*” (consultant)), but whose educational qualifications go no higher than the BEPC, and who is not self-employed, was, during this same session, placed in the following groups: “*professions*” (*professions libérales*) (twice), “*cadres supérieurs*”, “*cadres moyens*”, “*ingénieurs*”, “*clerical workers*” (*employés*).

TABLE 1

Frequency with which cards were chosen to head piles

Card No.	Occupation <sup>a</sup>	Freq.	English translation of occupational terms <sup>b</sup>
22	médecin	30	doctor
36	PDG (President-Directeur-Général)	29	company chairman (UK) president (USA)
33	cultivateur	21	farmer
42	fraiseur P2	20	skilled milling machine operator
38	ouvrière d'usine emballeuse	18	packer (female)
45	ingénieur T P	17	civil engineer
61	entrepreneur BTP	17	building contractor
51	professeur agrégé	16	lycée/university teacher
24	ébéniste artisan	15	cabinetmaker (craftsman)
48	avocat	15	lawyer
57	instituteur	15	primary teacher
49	femme de ménage (entreprise)	12	office cleaner (female)
4	ingénieur commercial	11	sales engineer
25	hydraulicien <sup>c</sup>	11	hydraulic engineer or technician
12	décorateur	10	interior decorator
40	contremaître	10	foreman
44	électricien	10	electrician
56	cadre commercial	10	sales executive
20	secrétaire comptable	9	accounts clerk
21	négociant en vin	9	wine merchant
66	fleuriste	9	florist
10	vendeur en antiquité	8	antiques salesman
39	ouvrier agricole	8	farm labourer
62	agent de bureau	8	office clerk
11	laveur graisseur	7	garage hand
18	agent SNCF	7	railway employee
19	plongeur	7	dishwasher
34	agent PTT, facteur	7	postman
41	caissière	7	cashier (female)
46	secrétaire de mairie	7	town hall secretary
59	chercheur scientifique	7	research scientist
65	chef de service installation industrielle	7	industrial superintendent
13	dessinateur publicitaire	6	graphic designer (advertising)
17	exploitant forestier	6	forester
30	antiquaire, brocanteur	6	antique/junk shop owner
2	assistante en psychiatrie sociale	5	psychiatric social worker (female)
5	ingénieur conseil chauffage central	5	central heating engineer
8	auxiliaire puéricultrice	5	auxiliary nursery nurse (female)
35	professeur de collège	5	comprehensive school teacher
37	pharmacien	5	pharmacist
53	inspecteur ville <sup>d</sup>	5	urban inspector

TABLE 1 continued

Card No.	Occupation <sup>a</sup>	Freq.	English translation of occupational terms <sup>b</sup>
54	patissier	5	pastry cook (male)
63	monteur dépanneur	5	maintenance man
64	infirmière DE	5	State Registered Nurse (female)
1	bûcheron	4	woodcutter
4	ébéniste vernisseur	4	furniture polisher (male)
43	employée PTT, perforatrice	4	punch card operator, Post Office (female)
47	débitant de boissons	4	innkeeper
60	femme de ménage (particuliers)	4	cleaning lady
6	magasinier automobile	3	garage warehouseman
15	jardinier	3	gardener
16	technicienne en classement	3	filing technician (female)
26	vendeuse fruits et légumes	3	salesgirl (greengrocers)
27	lustreur	3	polisher
50	moniteur-éducateur	3	coach, special teacher (male)
55	attaché à l'information médicale	3	medical information officer
7	photographe	2	photographer
31	aide-cuisinière	2	assistant cook (female)
58	veilleur de nuit	2	nightwatchman

a. The job terms in this list (and on the file cards) are those found on the census returns

b. The "equivalents" offered here are necessarily arbitrary and debatable: the usual difficulties are compounded when one is dealing with job-titles that are points and means of struggle for rights and recognition. (Transl. note)

c. One of the ambiguous terms, imprecise with respect to "level"

d. Very vague term from which type of occupation cannot be determined

### The groups and their typical representatives

Despite the fact that a name given to a particular category, which is usually taken from legitimate statistical and administrative taxonomies (e.g. "*ouvrier qualifié*", "*cadre moyen*" etc.), may well, in different teams, cover groups of occupations which do not match and whose connexions are often very limited, nevertheless the participants do share similar views about certain salient features which allow them to find their way around the social world.

If one looks at the frequency with which certain cards were chosen to figure at the head of the piles (in order, it will be recalled, "to let other people know what is in the pile" without having to use



a name or a label), it is clear that certain individuals whose social properties are committed to cards were chosen more frequently than others to represent social groups, and sometimes even to be a kind of paradigmatic embodiment of social groups.

One example was a group of cards which might *a priori* have been thought to exemplify the relatively similar positions of various kinds of unskilled manual workers and therefore to have been equally likely to be selected to illustrate piles that had been constituted on that principle: "*ouvrière d'usine emballeuse*" (38), "*employée des PTT perforatrice*" (43), "*femme de ménage*" (60), "*magasinier automobile*" (6), "*aide cuisinière*" (31), "*veilleur de nuit*" (68). However, the first was chosen sixteen times<sup>6</sup> to head a pile, and the remainder only two or three times each (cf. Table). Such a regular occurrence suggests that, in the agents' representations of the social world, some positions stand out more than others and are incarnated in social persons who take on a paradigmatic value. It is as if the female packer in a factory were a *better example* than the assistant cook or the unskilled worker, without educational qualifications and with no possessions to his or her name, who is badly paid and who was sometimes described by the participants as being "on the bottom rung" or "at the bottom of the heap". Similar observations might be made about most social groups. Thus the "*fraiseur P2*" (42) is the paradigmatic representative of the skilled worker (chosen twenty times to head a pile as against "*ouvrier pâtissier*" (54) five times, "*monteur dépanneur*" (63) five times and "*ouvrier ébéniste vernisseur*" (4) four times etc.)

Similarly, the "*ingénieur travaux publics*" (45), chosen seventeen times, is a better example of a *cadre* than the "*cadre commercial*" (56) who was chosen ten times, or the "*chef de service d'installation industrielle*" (65) chosen seven times, or the "*ingénieur en chauffage central*" (5) who was chosen five times, etc.

The hypothesis might be advanced that these salient positions in social space are filled by occupations which, over the years, have benefited from an *effort of social representation*. This work of representation has inevitably taken place in the realm of social and mental representations, in the sense that the properties which attach to a position and to those who occupy it are the result of a collective labour of construction, expression and simplification (or, to use Goffman's term; "dramatic accentuation"). But the "representation" in question also belongs to the domain of politics

or trade-unionism, with the creation of organizations which mobilize groups and the appearance of "representatives" or "spokesmen" who are mandated to speak *for* a particular group. Thus it could be shown that the individuals whose cards were chosen by our participants as embodiments of social groups either belong to professions which are highly institutionalized and highly organized ("doctors", "engineers", "company chairmen", etc.) or else, as in the case of manual workers, are in occupations to which there attach social properties that conform to the paradigmatic representation that trade union work around representation has given to their group. Thus the "*fraiseur P2*", whose very name refers back to a traditional and typical kind of industrial activity ("metalworker") and a degree of skill which has been institutionalized by pay bargaining ("P2") is, out of all the cases included here, the best example of a manual worker (*ouvrier*) as traditionally defined, those "skilled (male) industrial workers" who, according to Edmond Maire (General Secretary of the CFDT\* trade union), "dominate the trade union movement" (Maire, 1980, p. 171). As for the "*ouvrière d'usine emballeuse*", her title brings together a reference to the factory ("*usine*"), to a job that is not directly productive ("packer" = "*emballeuse*"), which has no skill and no dignity, and to both the "condition of the working class" and the "condition of women". She too constitutes what, today, has become a paradigmatic example precisely by contrast with the skilled male industrial worker. The case of the female packer distills all the properties attached to so-called "marginal" workers, women and unskilled workers, those who receive no attention from the "traditional" trade union organizations, and whom the more recently developed sections within the trade union movement, and particularly the CFDT (whose spokespersons in fact use this as a means to differentiate themselves from the CGT\*), have undertaken to represent, i.e. to defend with the weapons of trade union and political struggle and by the same token to constitute as typical examples of "the working class today".

Conversely, what one might call bad or untypical examples, cards which were rarely selected to head a pile, consisted either of occupations which are less well known or less frequently represented ("*jardinier*" (5) was chosen three times as opposed to "*cultivateur*" (33) which was chosen twenty-one times), or of occupations which were perceived as being on the borderline between a number of different constituted categories (thus the



"photographe" (7), chosen twice, was not seen as being a real craftsman [*artisan*] in the same way as the "ébéniste" (24) chosen fifteen times, nor as much of an artiste as the "décorateur" (12) who was chosen ten times, nor as much of a technician as the "hydraulicien" (25) who was chosen eleven times, but was not, however, assimilated to the "ordinary" "clerical" or "manual" worker). Alternatively, such cards related to individuals who did not really possess the properties implicitly associated with the name of the profession they presented themselves as belonging to and whose status has, as a result, become decrystallized. One such case was the "technicienne en classement de bureau" (16), chosen three times, who has no degree, left school at fourteen, does an unskilled job and who therefore, despite the fact that she calls herself a "technician", is closer to being a manual worker or unskilled clerical worker.

Thus the variations in the way different individuals and different groups represent the social world seem to be that much greater when they are required to put individuals into categories, or in other words to create discrete groups (separated from each other by clear dividing lines) of examples which are supposedly homogeneous in relation to each other, to which a generic name is given. The task seems to be easier, on the other hand, when what is required is the identification of salient features within a given cognitive space whose different segments need not necessarily be organized or structured in the same way. The job of categorization in fact presupposes an ability to divide social space into discrete categories, and this requires participants to have a homogeneous representation of social space and of its divisions. It is, rather, as if ordinary social sense worked as though it were directed not by reference to a homogeneous social space that is divided up and mapped out in a certain way (which is what academic nomenclature presupposes) such that all social positions can equally easily be placed within it. But instead it works by reference to a social space which is very varied, with some features that stand out and that individuals have a clear enough image of to be able to pick them out in the social landscape, and to identify and classify them, but also with grey areas and positions that are ambiguous or difficult to classify, that is think about, except by assimilation to positions that stand out and are recognised as being the least remote in social space (cf. Bourdieu, 1980a and Centlivre, 1979).

### The stylization of social groups

Organizing categories around typical occupations which are used to envisage different social milieux is a device which is commonly used, as is confirmed by provisional analysis of the findings of the first exercise carried out by the participants at the opening of a session.

This is an exercise in which participants are asked to think of typical examples of various social categories, and it allows the observers to investigate the individuals' ability to generate social forms, by obliging them to combine properties in specific forms that are given paradigmatic value. We hoped that this exercise would contribute to our study of the structure of the mental categories in which social groups are thought about.

The work of Eleanor Rosch (1973, 1977, and also Rosch and Lloyd, 1978) has shown that "popular" or practical taxonomies (i.e. those not given objective reality by means of totalizing or schematic representations such as diagrams, graphs, tables and so on,<sup>7</sup> and not rendered legitimate by a body of specialist workers), unlike academic nomenclatures, were not made up of homogeneous categories or "classes", separated from each other by clear boundaries, nor were they composed (as "componential" analysis, for example, assumes)<sup>8</sup> according to a limited number of criteria. The "semantic categories of ordinary languages" are organised, in these hypotheses, around the best examples of each category, the "clear-cut cases" which are easy to envisage, and these are surrounded by a cluster of less clear-cut cases which make up the rest of the category. It follows, first, that each category has an "internal structure" (it is not made up of equivalent and undifferentiated elements) and, second, that no category has "precisely defined limits". The tasks devised by Rosch to test these hypotheses have up to now related to categories of shapes and colours and to biological and zoological categories. She has, for example, shown that for some people some dogs "are more doggy" than others. Retrievers, for example, are quintessentially doggy because of their floppy ears and feathered tails, and they occupy a central position in the category. Pekinese, on the other hand, are "bad examples".

When we asked participants to give three examples of *cadres* and three examples of manual workers (*ouvriers*) — examples which they could invent if they wished — we gave ourselves the

material with which to create an "imaginary" sample of "typical" representatives or "good examples"<sup>9</sup> of these two categories, and these were examples which we could subsequently compare with samples that had been conceived as "statistically representative" of these two categories (e.g. the samples provided by INSEE). In addition to the exercises devised by Rosch, which simply consisted in placing the names on a list in rank order according to how exemplary they were felt to be, our exercise required participants to use greater skills and, indeed, different skills, because they had to translate into institutionalized and standardized variables (census or statistics), individual forms that they typically associated with the generic name of the category.

The preliminary analysis of the imaginary sample would appear to show that the examples officially included in the *cadre* category are not all "good examples" of *cadres* to quite the same degree.<sup>10</sup> Participants were asked to find examples of "very *cadre cadres*" and to say what their job was, their age, sex, qualifications, monthly income, the name and size of the firm they worked for, where they lived and what kind of car they drove. They were allowed to partially or totally invent their examples — and did so in about half the cases — or to base them on people they knew at work or elsewhere.

By putting together these identikit pictures we were able to constitute an "exemplary" or, perhaps, imaginary sample which does not reproduce any statistical sample of the kind that INSEE produces. The *cadres* chosen or invented as examples are, in general, better qualified than those in the statistical samples (with a particularly heavy representation of HEC\* graduates). They are also more likely to live in Paris, closer to forty years of age (the "prime of life") than to youth or old age. They are extremely likely to be involved in commercial activities, especially those related to marketing or advertising, and unlikely to be on the manufacturing side of their companies. Public sector *cadres* are very rare in the imaginary sample (although participants were not told to limit their choice to the private sector). Small firms and organizations are under represented, while large firms are strongly represented, especially large private sector conglomerates or multinationals with a high profile, such as BSN, Péchiney and, above all, IBM. (The small businesses concerned are often advertising agencies or service or consultancy firms.) Thus there emerges a stylized image of a "top level" *cadre* whose attributes have a particularly strong emblematic value (the HEC graduate, employed by IBM in their

marketing, advertising or data processing divisions, who drives a Mercedes or a BMW etc. recurs time and again and functions as the central component in the representation).

As far as the case analysed here is concerned, it can be shown that the structure of this mental category has been produced by the history of the formation of the group. A study of the history of *cadres*, who openly formed themselves into a social category in France during the struggles of the years 1936-1940 when they acquired their name and their organizations, shows that this "new" group was in fact the result of the merger of several categories who defined themselves by including some and excluding others and thus delimiting the group. The category was constituted by a process of successive assimilations grouped round a central nucleus made up of *ingénieurs* who were graduates of the *Grandes Ecoles* (especially the *Ecole Centrale*), who came from bourgeois backgrounds, and so on. This central nucleus formed a sort of magnet to which others were attracted. The *ingénieurs* coming out of the *Grandes Ecoles* and the top level *cadres* controlled the group's system of representation for a very long time; they controlled, in other words, both how the group was represented at political and trade union level, and the ways in which it was socially and mentally represented. Thus the representation of "authentic" *cadres* was created in these people's image even though the group itself was extremely heterogeneous in terms of its professional and social composition. The group in fact included fractions of both the big and the petty bourgeoisie and contained far more *autodidactes* (about 65 per cent) — who were negatively defined by the fact that they were not graduates — than it did graduates of the most prestigious *Grandes Ecoles* (between 10 and 15 per cent). Thus the *petits cadres*, who were numerically dominant but politically and socially dominated, were represented, in every sense of the word, by those who occupied a central position in this vaguely defined and constantly changing group (cf. Boltanski, 1975).

Thus the exemplary cases which come to mind "spontaneously" when the category is mentioned and who, so to speak, stand out in the social landscape (in such a way that less good examples are defined as belonging to the category by virtue of how closely they do or do not approximate to certain examples), are stylized and schematized representations of agents who occupy a central position in the category. It is, in other words, as though the people questioned, when asked to give content and substance to the term

TABLE 2  
The imaginary and the statistical sample of cadres

Percentages*	Imaginary sample				Statistical sample	
	GROUP A Graduate cadres, big company (N = 48)	GROUP B Unemployed (N = 49)	GROUP C Cadres commerciaux big company (N = 43)	GROUP D Primary & secondary teachers (retired) (N = 52)	ALL GROUPS (N = 192)	Reference sample: INSEE 1970 survey "Formation, qualifi- cation, profession"
Baccalauréat highest educational quali- fication	5	39	20	11	19	56
Graduate of Ecole l'ingénieurs or Ecole de commerce	67	31	40	38	44	26
Nature of job — sales, marketing, finance	66	24	45	16	35	28
Nature of job — production, methods, maintenance	9	13	18	11	11	31
Age: between 35 and 45	71	57	69	58	59	35
Resident in Paris or Paris region	87	90	75	78	80	41
Firm with less than 500 employees	23	28	36	27	26	75

\*Percentages calculated on the total of examples provided by each of the groups.

*cadre* (rather than to give an abstract definition based on certain "criteria"), spontaneously thought of paradigmatic examples and did not think of borderline cases in a category whose limits are, in any case, vague. Good examples of *cadres* are modelled on the stereotypes produced from the work of representation that the group has carried out. In order to explain the choice of these "good examples" and to justify the structure of the mental category, we cannot discuss here the "natural" properties which are linked to the physiological characteristics of instruments of perception (cf. Berlin and Kay, 1969; Kay and McDaniel, 1978). In the case of the *cadres*, the focal point is provided by examples which are a stylized expression of the properties of the people who have succeeded in monopolizing the category's means of social and political representation. Examples that stand out in this way are the product of the conflicts and struggles that surrounded the formation of the group, and of its history which is thus encapsulated in mental structures in sketchy or outline form.

But what distinguishes categories of groups from so-called "natural" categories (such as shapes and colours, or even zoological and botanical categories) cannot simply be explained by recalling that they are the product of history. A more fundamental property gives them a completely original status. Because they are used to classify the native social world, the categories refer to a universe that also belongs to the person who makes use of them and who, when organizing a set of exterior objects, simultaneously determines his own social position in relation to them. Thus these categories are always value-laden and are never received or used in a neutral or passive way. For example, the dominant representation may be familiar, and recognised as dominant, but need not nevertheless be accepted as "accurate", or it may become the object of complex strategies containing a mixture of recognition and refusal, acceptance and rejection. Thus it can be seen that agents are more willing to provide examples of *cadres* that conform to the most official representation of the category when they themselves occupy a dominant position within the category (Group A) or when they are completely outside the category and do not feel personally implicated in the task they are asked to perform (Group D). On the other hand, those who occupy a dominated or vulnerable position in the business field (such as Group B which was made up of unemployed people from industrial or commercial companies) are able both to demonstrate that they are familiar with the dominant

representation, and that they do not accept it. They do this by combining examples that conform to the central positions within the category with examples of *petits cadres*\*, whose positions are marginal, and by presenting the latter as more "typical" or more "representative" than the former. In this way they perform the basic *political* action of using statistical representativeness to challenge political representatives and of refusing those who occupy a position of power within the group the right to speak and act in the group's name or to behave as if they incarnated it.

To be more precise, a full analysis of the responses shows that the examples provided by the participants did not correspond in any mechanical or passive way to a "stereotype" that could have been produced by the right kind of "stimulus". When responses are not "stereotypical" it does not mean that the "stereotype" is unfamiliar, so that this exercise can never be used to "test" the ability to create (and therefore to recognise) basic social forms. It can, in fact, be shown that every response points to a stand that has been taken and that this stand expresses each participant's representation of the category but also his own social position and therefore the way he relates to the dominant representation of the category. This can be seen particularly clearly through an analysis of the structure of the three examples of *cadres* that the participants were asked to provide. At the beginning of the exercise, these were written down in the order they came to mind (the order of writing), and at the end of the exercise participants were instructed to rearrange them, if necessary, according to how exemplary they felt them to be (the order of exemplarity). When we asked participants for these three examples, we gave them the opportunity both to provide illustrations of the dominant representation of *cadres* and to include less paradigmatic examples in their lists — in other words, by suggesting that there might exist a system of differences within the category itself, we were asking them to outline the configurations of a space. David, an unemployed, junior sales executive (*petit cadre commercial*) was one of the participants who took advantage of this opportunity, and showed his familiarity with the category by inventing three examples which were very different, though all were taken from the private sector. The first was a sales manager, aged 35, a non-graduate (*autodidacte*) who earned 6000 F. a month; the second was a mining engineer aged 40 who was a graduate of an *Ecole d'ingénieurs*\* (though not a *Grande Ecole*) (*petit diplôme d'ingénieur*), who earned 8000 F. a month;

the third was a woman of 30 who ran an advertising agency, a graduate of HEC\* who earned 12 000 F. a month. The order of exemplarity and the order of writing were in this case the same: the *cadre autodidacte* was presented as more "typical" than the HEC graduate. But the strategies at work in the production of these examples become even clearer when the most exemplary cases are not written down first.

This was what happened with Marcelle, a social worker team leader, daughter of a manual worker (*ouvrier*) and married to a bank executive (*cadre de banque*). (The results of this session are not included in the table.) She first wrote down the example of an oil executive with a university degree (*diplômé de l'Université*\*) who worked for a big company and earned 20 000 F. a month. Then came a woman executive officer in the Department of Social Security whose highest qualification was the *baccalauréat*\* and who earned 8000 F. a month. Finally, a metallurgist with a university degree (*diplômé de l'Université*) who earned 15 000 F. a month.

The second example, which was of a woman who had the properties Marcelle herself possessed and who was least similar to the dominant representation of the "*cadre*" (because she worked in the public sector, was female, had no higher education and was not well paid), was stated to be the most exemplary, whereas the first example, though it closely resembled the perfect "*cadre*" in social type, was relegated to third place. The social workers participating in the session frequently adopted the strategy of putting public rather than private sector *cadres* into first place (even though they did not immediately think of doing so), and of relegating the most highly paid or commercially oriented to third position. No doubt this represents a moral stand which should be linked to the "disinterestedness" to which most social workers, teachers, and indeed public sector workers in general attach a great deal of importance.

In this last case "exemplary" has a double meaning. The word does not just refer to the paradigmatic cases, but also cases *worthy* of being proposed as examples. Once again, this is an illustration of the differences between the processes of classification applied to objects which are socially neutral, as with the shapes and colours studied by Röscher, and processes of classification applied to social groups which involve the social position and the value system of the person classifying.<sup>11</sup> In Gestalt language, one never asks whether the "right" form is worthy of being "right" or whether it is "right" to organize the world of forms around it.

### The struggles over social classifications

The social interests involved in cognitive operations applied to the social world and its divisions (as opposed to operations on abstract or socially neutral categories) are expressed particularly clearly in the exercise in which a common nomenclature is negotiated on the basis of the taxonomies produced by each team.

The exercise is as follows: each team writes on a paperboard the classification it has constructed in the course of the classifying operation, indicating the occupation considered the most representative of each pile (and not the labels, which are recorded by the observer but not used in the exercise). It was in fact observed, after a first attempt, that a negotiation procedure based on the names of social groups hinders expression of the ordinary modes of categorizing social milieux. As was seen in the pile-naming phase which concludes the classifying exercise, attachment to the name leads to a formal representation of the category. A debate about names, with the formalistic arguments over the correct definition which inevitably accompany it, makes it possible to avoid discussion of the individual cases on each card; this is more risky because it forces each participant to indulge in specific individualized judgements and to return to the personalized expression of everyday rivalries. In the same way, exchanges of arguments between occupational representatives, which are occasioned by the establishment of a new nomenclature of the occupations — of which the exercise described here is in many ways an *in vitro* reproduction — employ the juridical or quasi-juridical procedures of instituting the correct criterion of definition and choosing the true designation. They thus fail to cast light on the difficulties which arise from actual delimitation of the categories, which the exercise is designed to demonstrate, just as it is only in the final clauses of laws governing certain occupations that one finds the conditions of approved membership, i.e. the relation between the name of the category, its definition and the population of individuals who constitute it.

For these reasons, we drew up a procedure for combining the various nomenclatures constructed by the teams which is mainly based on the cases chosen as representative of the different headings. Starting from the shortest nomenclature, represented by the list of typical examples, the participants proceeded by comparison with the more detailed nomenclatures, either assimilating one case to another or adding a new heading in the form of an addi-

tional typical example. The instruction was to arrive at a common classification, a single nomenclature, which would win the agreement of all the participants while conserving as much as possible of the information which each team had wanted to put into the classification it had constructed. Once again, the instruction is contradictory, since a common nomenclature can obviously not maintain all the distinctions contained in each team's classification. "Negotiation" therefore quickly leads to conflicts, which are proportionately sharper in the socially less homogeneous groups. The participants tend in fact to want to make a larger number of subtle distinctions in the areas of social space to which they themselves belong, or to which they feel close, and to suggest fusions and assimilations in areas from which they are remote.

Let us take the example of the session involving the INSEE interviewers, a mainly female, socially heterogeneous population including both women graduates of high social origin, whose husbands have bourgeois occupations, and women with low qualifications whose origins and whose husbands' occupations place them in the lower fractions of the middle classes or the working class. Almost every example of an occupation that was presented gave rise to a conflict which is, in a euphemistic and tacit way, a class conflict, in which the participants who originate from or belong to more bourgeois milieux clash with those of working-class or petty bourgeois origins. What is to be done, for example, with the "cleaning lady" (card no. 60) whom Renée, a graduate, the daughter of a wealthy farmer, married to a psychiatrist, wants to assimilate to the "female packer" (card no. 38)? In the classification exercise, Renée has already manifested her tendency to lump all working-class positions together indiscriminately, by making a large pile (20 cards, including "farm labourer", "chambermaid", "storekeeper", "pastry-cook", "wood-cutter", "railway employee", "clerical worker", etc.) which she defined, for the moment, as "miscellaneous" (*le tout venant*) and designated at the end of the exercise under the euphemistic heading "wage-earners, unskilled workers".

*Martine* (BEPC, daughter of an office worker, married to an offset printing machine operator): "I don't agree...Chambermaid and female factory worker...It's not the same background, it's not the same way of life."

*Renée*: "All right, but in the end it doesn't make much difference."

*Martine*: "I dunno...I'm trying to follow you...All the same, they're two different life-styles, the factory girl gets dirty, she works much harder than a chambermaid working in someone's house."

*Renée*: "A domestic servant doesn't sit around all day. I think they can go together."

*Martine*: "I think it's not the same sort of life at all. Working in a factory and working as somebody's cleaning lady or chambermaid isn't the same sort of thing at all. Now, we put chambermaid with cleaning lady."

*Renée*: "What they have in common, is neither of them needs any qualifications, that's an important factor, after all."

This is only one of many arguments of this sort, in which the participants clash over seemingly "technical" points (such as the relative value of two diplomas) in the course of sometimes interminable exchanges in which what is really, but always tacitly, at stake is nothing other than the representation of the social world and of its division into groups and classes. In these debates, the participants sometimes speak as if they were the representatives or spokespersons of a social group, appointed to defend its specificity, identity and interests in political or union bargaining. At other times, their remarks suggest another language, that of the authorized specialists on the social world, the language of "sociologists". This is especially the case when the struggle involves not the position of a particular occupation within the taxonomy, but the definition of social groups and milieus, i.e. the very meaning of the task they are engaged in. One then sees the emergence of a system of antagonistic positions in which the participants speak as a function of the dispositions and properties of habitus (cf. Bourdieu, 1979) which they derive from their class origin and class position.

For example, in the session involving the INSEE interviewers, there is the case of Denise, who has followed a somewhat downward social trajectory (the daughter of a retired naval officer who subsequently became a painter, she has a typing certificate and is married to an autodidact sales executive). Her discourse is based on the opposition between, on the one hand, "occupation" or "situation" and, on the other hand "milieu", or, to put it another way, between "class" as defined by reference to a determinate position occupied in the socio-occupational structure and "class" in the sense in which someone is said to "have class", defined by reference to another space, that of family relationships in which the name is the main qualifying label. This definition indicates attachment to an earlier state of the representation of social differences, characterized (to put it schematically) by less State intervention in the principle of qualification. This distinction corresponds to different degrees of standardization and anonymization of the properties qualified, ranging from the entitlement criterion which constitutes "estate" or function in professions with regulated access, to personal features such as manners or tastes. (Aristocratic families which had come down in the world and lost their money could thus dissociate the properties a person owed to his origins, objectified in the aristocratic title, and the sometimes demeaning properties of the "bread-and-butter" activity with which he earned his living.) But, in her efforts to illustrate the permanence of "class", Denise encounters the scepticism of Renée, who, being a bourgeois by origin and by marriage, is less inclined to separate "occupation" and "milieu" (and who refers to statistics as a way of "scoring a point" off Denise).

Denise: "From the point of view of their work situation, you can't put the nurse and the doctor on the same level. But from the social point of view, the nurse may be from a better background (*milieu*) even than the doctor. That doesn't

mean anything at all. You find ancient families with fancy long names and they're bank clerks. But they wouldn't so much as have the bank manager to dinner, because... You see, it's a whole question of breeding (*éducation*), that's what background is."

Renée: "You may get a nurse with more breeding than a doctor... But in the end (speaking to the observers), your categories are meant for making samples, that's what it's all about. There are nurses from very modest backgrounds. She (referring to Denise) turns everything upside down. You may find a nurse who is better brought up than a doctor. Of course that can happen. But if you take two thousand doctors and two thousand nurses..."

Denise: "But you can't identify that milieu. You know what social milieu to classify someone in once you (i.e. herself, as an interviewer) have been in their flat and had contact with them. But you mustn't confuse breeding with situations. They are two quite different things. What is social milieu? Social milieu is breeding... You see, when you meet someone, you know at once. The way they open the door, that already tells you something, the way they talk..."

Renée: "Whether or not they kiss your hand" (laughter).

At this point in the discussion, Josiane, who is of working-class origin, unqualified, and married to a railway inspector, intervenes to back up Renée. But Renée refuses this support, precisely because it comes from a woman she regards as socially inferior; changing her strategy and her argument, she shifts alliances and aligns herself, at least in part, with Denise.

Josiane: "If I may say so, I think the situation is a good reflection of the individual."

Denise: "Not at all."

Renée: "It doesn't reflect breeding at all. You find flats with thirty-thousand francs' worth of furniture in the room and it may be in bad taste... A flat reflects the money someone earns, I agree, but it may be in dreadful taste."

Josiane: (her voice expresses annoyance): "I wasn't talking about breeding."

As the exercise proceeds and (as in the discussions after meals) tension rises, increasing the chances of arguments and squabbles, the participants have to be careful that what they say is not identified with their own situation or taken as an *ad hominem* attack or innuendo. To calm the tension, they have to escape into generalizations and this leads them to draw on the available forms of representation of the social world and to reinvent the principal social philosophies, which they gravitate to in accordance with their social trajectories and the properties of their habitus.

To take just one example, during the session involving sales representatives from a large multinational firm, an opposition arises between on the one hand, Pierre and Marc, whose argument is implicitly based on the idea that there exists (to put it schematically) a "social reproduction" and, therefore, "social classes" and, on the other hand, Robert and Gérard, who deny the idea of "social rigidity" and put forward a "fluid", "meritocratic" representation of the social



order. This is no doubt linked to their social trajectory (the sons of manual workers, they see their recently acquired "*cadre*" status as significant mobility) and also, no doubt, to their image of their future (they are younger than Pierre and Marc and have subjectively greater chances of continuing to rise).

*Pierre*: "When you state a qualification and an occupation you're also implying the parents' income and with it a certain comfort and a certain class, it all hangs together. If, you put 'father, roadsweeper' and 'mother, cleaning lady', there'll be a social milieu that, er..."

*Robert*: "That doesn't mean anything, Pierre. The parents may be very working-class and the children very academic."

*Pierre*: "I agree. But, to begin with, it's clear that if the father is bringing in a lot of money, that affects the children's upbringing, living standards, the whole way of life."

*Robert*: "I don't think that's true any more. It was still true a while ago, but now it's much more a linear system..."

*Gérard* intervenes later in the discussion to argue that people with different education levels "can meet each other. They may take to each other or not, that's a question of personalities, but nothing stops them meeting each other."

*Pierre*: "All of us around this table have a family inheritance which affects our culture, even our political reactions or whatever, and you can't deny that a large part of what we are can be traced back to our origin. So even if a man has reached a certain academic level, in his childhood he was immersed in a climate which perhaps wasn't favourable to certain arts or certain types of music."

A discussion follows, around the case of the "sales executive", as to the relative chances of promotion of "autodidacts" and "graduates".

*Marc*: "One of them (the autodidact) ends up more or less where the other (the graduate) begins. He (the graduate) can manipulate knowledge and a way of behaving which aren't necessarily part of the salesman's (i.e. the autodidact's) repertoire."

The negotiation is balanced unstably between the temptation to use the task of classification as a way of settling personal scores, and an escape into generalities. Thus, as the conflicts become more intense and the situation more strained, there often emerges from the group (as in meetings of specialists) a "methodologist", who takes advantage of the collective disarray to seize authority within the group. The other participants, if only by their silence, help to assign him this leadership role, because he reduces an unpleasant tension. He does so by pushing the logic of the collective work of generalization to its extreme, inasmuch as he substitutes an epistemological discourse on the method of classification for categorizing operations which are always liable to get bogged down in particular cases. He indicates the steps that must be followed in order for the discussion to "move forward rationally", setting out a procedure that almost invariably refers to the logic of the classes and the definition of the "criteria" of classification.

This is how we should understand the remarks made, again during the sales representatives' session, by Marc and then, a little later, by Gérard (both of whom have some experience of higher education, which gives them the necessary authority over the group to use the language of method).

*Marc*: "What are we looking for? We're enumerating differences, enumerating parameters, but we still have no objective. What are we trying to pin down?" Later, Gérard proposes a "method":

*Gérard*: "Would it be possible to list somewhere the criteria which led each of us to put people *a priori* in this or that category? We put the lawyer in such-and-such a category for such-and-such a reason. What are the points of convergence and what are the points of divergence?"

But the positions adopted by these amateur sociologists do not have the same rigidity as those taken by specialists in scientific or political representation of the social world (sociologists, trade-unionists, politicians, etc.). Unlike the professionals, they do not have a language strong enough to pitch itself at a general level, so that their discourse is constantly in danger of falling back into individual opinion. Finally, not being set in a field of institutionalized positions, they are not required to maintain unchanging statements of position. The positions stated and the alliances they allow thus vary as a function of less objectified variables, linked to the structure of the group itself ("likes" and "dislikes", "alliances" and "oppositions" between individuals based on a previous shared history, etc.), the effect of which no doubt works in different ways in the course of the exercise, depending on the *situation*, which may be exciting or boring, relaxed or tense, etc.

### Identification and calculation of indices

The final exercise, even more than the previous ones, takes the form of a "parlour game" (*jeu de société*) on "society", since the participants compete to guess information which is hidden from them, and there are one or more winners. The game is played three times. Each "round" followed by a discussion in which each participant in turn explains the tactics he used (this sequence is tape-recorded each time). To play the game, the participants need to mobilize their "social sense", or "sense of the social structure", i.e. their tacit knowledge of the social world, its differences and divisions, its groups and classes, the social markers, emblems, guides to classification used implicitly in the ordinary course of social life.<sup>12</sup>



The game consists of assembling sufficient information about a real person, who is unknown to the participants, to be able to discover the social milieu he or she belongs to and, more precisely, his or her occupation. The information that can be gleaned about this person consists of the answers given to a questionnaire of forty questions. Each participant is given a pack of cards, on which these questions, but not the answers, are written. Only the umpire has cards also containing the answers supplied by the hidden mystery person. Each participant can thus only obtain the information he needs by asking the umpire. To do this, he has to purchase the answer. Each answer has a price (marked on the card), ranging from 1 franc to 40 francs, and each participant has just 100 francs to play with. The answers are sold individually and secretly to each player by the umpire, who charges each purchase to the player's account. When a player thinks he has found the solution, he writes it on a piece of paper and hands it in an envelope to the umpire, who closes his account. On the piece of paper, is indicated the social milieu identified in the classification agreed by the group, and the more precise occupation. The winner is the player who finds the exact occupation while spending as little money as possible. The questionnaire covers six "themes": (a) civil status (sex, age, marital status...), (b) working life, (c) relationships (best friends, relatives, spouse...), (d) standard of living and wealth, (e) cultural activities, (f) ethical attitudes and political opinions.

Within each of these groups, the question differ considerably; some call for answers of a general nature on official characteristics of the individual, whereas others yield indices which have not been subjected to institutional codification. Thus, legally guaranteed properties such as educational qualifications can be distinguished from private or optional properties which are precisely defined by the fact that they do not form part of the official identification of the person (such as "tastes and colours", which, as the French saying goes, "are not matters for argument"). The former are amenable to statistical recording, defined by administrative codes, or determined by law. Their use in an exercise which is similar in form to a statistical survey therefore seems natural to the participants. By contrast, the second set of questions, which are perceived as relating to the most private, individual, even physical aspects of the person, strike them as out of place in this context, as if they were not amenable to standardized questioning.

Some questions are more closed than others, some answers more

wordy than others. For example, a closed question can be used to ask if the person belongs to a professional association (yes/no), or to request a list of the associations he belongs to. In the first case, the information is entirely contained in the formulation and therefore depends on the mode of categorization which has been adopted. In the second case, the information, which has not been pre-coded, provides data about the person which are not reducible to a homogeneous, pre-established system of categories. For example, in reply to the question "How did you spend your last summer holidays?", which includes the item "at a hotel", one of the unknown persons had provided the following answer, which was duly transcribed onto the card supplied to those who bought the question: "At home in Paris and at a hotel (with swimming-pool) in the daytime". This answer drew the participants' attention in a direction which was not that of the question asked. Simply by being intriguing, the sentence was to become one of the salient points around which the participants' effort at interpretation was organized.

Some semi-open questions, while less intriguing, may also give rise to interpretations which closed questions would not permit. Thus, when Claude received, in response to the question on the three best friends, the answer "first salesgirl", he commented: "It must be someone who has had some promotion, otherwise they would just have put 'salesgirl'." He thus constructed a piece of information which had previously escaped everyone's attention, and was the first to do so. He *interpreted* the answer. He gave an objective intentionality, and hence a meaning, to a word, the presence of a word, which "should not" have been there. This exposed him to the charge of "over-interpretation": "that word is there by accident"; "the fact it's there has no particular significance", etc.

The price structure, which charges heavily for the situational variables most linked to occupation (e.g. qualifications, income, nature of the organization, position in the hierarchy, etc.) set up a handicap which was designed to show to what extent the participants would be able to discover the unknown person's occupation by using properties from private life (e.g. books read, favourite records, holidays, hobbies, etc.)

One particularly economical example will help to make clear the aptitudes used. Jean first asks the sex (1 franc) of the mystery person. He is told that it is a

woman. He then asks her age (1 franc) — she is 50 — and her marital status. On the pre-coded card given to him by the umpire the category “single” is ringed, followed by the hand-written words “common-law wife”. He then asks if she owns or rents her accommodation (1 franc). The answer is “she rents it” (his comment: “She rents it? At the age of 50?”). He then buys the place of residence (3 francs). The answer is: “Paris, 7th *arrondissement*”. (He comments: “That’s interesting.” Jean knows the area well; he has friends there and for a time he worked there as a ladies’ hairdresser. He knows it is a wealthy, “bourgeois” district, is familiar with its many luxury shops, etc.). His next question is on her three favourite TV programmes (3 francs): “Number one, serials and *Les Dossiers de l’écran*\* (comment: “It’s a concierge. A common-law wife, with a rented flat, who watches programmes like that, and in the seventh! It’s got to be a concierge.”) Jean then asks the question about her car (3 francs): “Alfa Romeo Sprint, 1979”. He stops playing and formulates his answer, which he hands to the umpire:

“She isn’t a concierge, she must be a successful shopkeeper. Yes, she has to be a shopkeeper to have tastes like that in TV programmes. A hairdresser, or a delicatessen shop, yes, serials, *Les Dossiers de l’écran* and an Alfa Romeo, in the seventh!”

Jean did not hit on the exact occupation of the unknown woman, who is an independent jeweller running her own shop, but he got close to it with an economy of means which makes his performance an exemplary demonstration of successful strategy in this game. Schematically, the qualities of his play can be described as follows:

(1) he plays very economically (spending only 13 francs), i.e. he asks only for private and therefore inexpensive characteristics (behaviour, consumption, etc.), which he uses as if they were signs pointing to more general features of the person to be identified. Thus, he does not buy her educational qualifications (which cost 40 francs) but clearly uses the information about favourite TV programmes as a substitute for this. Such signs cannot be sufficient to infer qualities such as level of schooling, with which they are not absolutely correlated, but combined with other indices, referring indirectly to attributes of another type, they provide pointers to situate the hidden person in a social milieu.

In the case analysed here, the player is mainly guided by twice comparing indicators of “cultural capital” and “economic capital”. He first compares the district, a sign of economic wealth, with the tastes in television (indicators, in his eyes, of cultural poverty). This first comparison initially suggests to him that the person is a “concierge” (i.e. someone poor in a rich neighbourhood, “working-class” in a “bourgeois” neigh-

bourhood, etc.), because he uses the fact that she “still” rents her flat and is a “common-law wife” as indications that she belongs to the working class; this is congruent, in his view, with her cultural tastes as manifested by her choice of TV programmes, which might have seemed incomprehensible in a “real” bourgeois woman in such an area. The second comparison is effected when he learns that her car is an Alfa Romeo, which for him is an undeniable sign of wealth. He can no longer imagine this woman in a working-class milieu. He then spontaneously moves towards categories (shopkeepers, small employers...) which, according to the statistical information on them (which is of course not available to him, and which he may not even know exists), are precisely characterized by a decrystallization between “economic wealth” and “cultural wealth”, between educational level and income level, etc.

(2) He plays cumulatively: a new piece of information does not lead him to abandon the knowledge he has previously built up about the person. For example, the surprise caused by the make of car does not make him start again from zero, forgetting everything he knows about her district, age, marital status and cultural tastes.

(3) He plays without redundancies: by means of a single indicator he arrives at a set of dispositions which statistical analysis shows to be strongly correlated. For example, having asked for her favourite TV programmes, he does not ask for the number of books she reads per year, the title of the last book she read or her favourite records, which would considerably increase his expenditure.

(4) He plays flexibly and shows he is capable of modifying the image he has formed of the hidden person in response to the information he received during the game (shifting from “concierge” to “shopkeeper”).

(5) He knows when to stop. He does not pile up information, and expenditure, to confirm the image he has formed of the hidden person. In other words, he acquires, at minimum cost, sufficient certainty to stop the game and offer an answer.

(6) He is able to mobilize his practical knowledge of the social world, which is linked to his previous social experiences, and to make it sufficiently explicit to be able to use it as a means of decoding the fragments of information he has assembled.

When the indices are perceived in extended order, as is often the case in the first phase of the game, they are mostly regarded as

uncertain, perhaps irrelevant, an unreliable basis for predictions that might have a reasonable chance of success. This is the case, for example, with the make and model of car. Frequently, at the beginning of the exercise, when the participants read the cards showing questions they can choose from, they are heard to comment: "The car doesn't tell you anything" (i.e., anybody can own any car or, in the language of statistical regularities, the distribution of cars by make and model is statistically independent of the distribution of properties in the socio-occupational structure). Again, sometimes the comment is: "Nowadays, that doesn't mean anything." This statement of uncertainty expresses a practical experience of the struggles between groups and classes to appropriate the signs of distinction (cf. Bourdieu, 1979). Another remark is frequently made about the question of holidays: "Winter holidays means nothing nowadays. Everyone does it — what you need to know is how and where." Or again, about a mystery person whose favourite sport is sailing: "Anybody can go sailing, but is it a little yacht or a big one, on a lake or the sea?"

As they play, the participants learn (some much better than others, although in the present state of research we cannot relate these differences to social properties) to increase the value of the indices by considering them not separately, as happens when the series of questions is read for the first time, but with mental cross-references (e.g. "rented accommodation" yes, but "at age 50"), as if they were managing to mobilize their tacit knowledge of the social world in the form of a system of conditional probabilities (cf. Smedslund, 1955; Bruner et al., 1962, esp. Ch. 7).

### Attributing signs and recognizing forms

#### *Opening gambits*

When the game begins, the players know nothing of the social identity of the mystery person, who may, with equal probability, belong to any milieu. If the questions did not have a price-tag, the players would spontaneously ask for information which has a clear, institutional relationship with the occupation (as in the case of occupations which can only be entered with specific educational qualifications) or a quasi-substantial relationship (e.g. the question on the "official name of the establishment" or on the "first job you

had"). The differential price-structure is, as we have seen, precisely intended to encourage the players to use other sorts of indices. The early choices therefore depend to a large extent on the players' willingness to shift the preferences from the most expensive to the cheapest questions, which is itself a function of their attention to these indices.

#### *Middle game*

There is some evidence that once the player has acquired some information, of whatever sort, his subsequent operations are not reducible to a process of analysis and induction (like the procedure of the perfect sleuth in detective stories)<sup>13</sup> which would take account, in a rational way, of the costs and benefits of the information. It would seem that, in a large number of cases at least, the first items of information produce in the player's mind, implicitly and almost unconsciously (though some players mention it explicitly when describing their procedure), a social form and often, no doubt, the substantial, quasi-physical form, of someone they have known. It also seems that these forms, which may be evoked by a minimal index, are emotionally coloured and, to be more precise, negatively so.

The subsequent operations are then chiefly designed to confirm this form, the intensity of which has a considerable effect on the success or failure of the endeavour. When the form is too vivid, the player cannot break free of it, with the result that the new information he acquires is no longer used, or is reinterpreted to fit the previous hypotheses. The player is then incapable of modifying his conception of the hidden person.<sup>14</sup>

#### *Endgame*

However, the constitution of a vivid social form and a precise image of the hidden person (of whom the participants are occasionally even able to give a physical description which is sometimes fairly accurate) does not necessarily lead the players to abandon their investigation, stop the game and present their solution. They often continue to buy information (which ought to increase their chances of getting the "right answer", but reduces their chances of winning

the game, because they are spending more), but they only use this information to confirm their choice.

This final phase resembles a process of stabilization in which what has to be consolidated is not so much the image itself as the player's belief in the validity of the image which he is about to communicate to the umpire. To confirm its validity, but also to reduce the anxiety involved in risking a personal interpretation which might expose him to ridicule, the player is tempted to back up his interpretation with a reasoned explanation based on official variables (qualifications, income, etc). The price-structure of the game penalizes such hesitations and makes it possible to evaluate the price that is set on the explanations legitimated by law or even statistical law as against intuitive interpretation based on hunches.

An example will make clearer what is meant by "vivid social form". The information provided on one of the mystery persons, the jeweller, contained some very discreet indications of gender. Although not asked for in the questionnaire, these gender-relevant indices appeared in the form of additions to two questions. In answer to the question "marital status", the "single" box was ticked, but next to it the words "*en concubinage*"\* were hand-written. The second addition occurred in answer to the multiple-choice question on holidays: "at home in Paris and at a hotel (with swimming-pool) in the daytime". In addition, secondary indices pointed to "femininity" defined as "frivolity". For example, the "jeweller" reads no daily paper and only one weekly magazine, *Jours de France*, which has a "feminine" image (fashion, etc.) and which the players frequently associated with "waiting in a hair-dressing salon".

These indices explain why the mystery person was almost always identified, after the first few questions, as a "woman" (when the question of her sex had not been asked), and as a "young woman" in a "female" occupation, often as a "salesgirl" (*vendeuse*), or, even more precisely, as a female vendor of futile or luxury goods, as if the players were guided in their search by the social image of the "*midinette*".\*

These very general tendencies in interpretation are particularly clear when the players are women, even more so in the case of middle-aged and older women, in occupations which entail commitment to a value-system emphasizing "seriousness" (as opposed to "frivolity") and which are socially defined as involving tasks of ethical control, social control and moralization. In other words, they are most common among the senior social workers and the

retired teachers, although they also manifested themselves in other sessions in which older women from "controlling" professions took part.

This can be briefly illustrated by two examples in which the hidden person was identified as a "model" or "cover-girl". In each case, the oral explanation the players gave included a physical portrait of a "frivolous", "daring" young woman, excessively focused on her "body" and engaged in the business of "seduction". In both cases, the form is so vividly present that the question of age (though it costs only 1 franc) was not even asked, although it was essential in order to confirm the validity of the portrait. The players were therefore surprised to learn, at the end of the game, that the person they were looking for was a 50-year-old lady shopkeeper, a fact that obviously destroyed the form which they had constructed or which, to be more precise, had taken possession of them.

Mireille is a retired primary school teacher, aged 63, the daughter of an officer. She spent 42 francs and asked seven questions: the newspapers read, the occupation of the three best friends, the last summer holidays, the last book read, is the home rented or owned, does the person speak English fluently, the make and model of his/her car. Her answer for the occupation was "model, cover-girl". This is her account, after the game, of the procedure she had followed: "I could have spent even less and asked only three questions — the three questions I asked to begin with. That's to say, what newspapers or magazines do you read. Answer: *Jours de France*: I thought it must be a woman. What are the jobs of your three best friends: jewellery saleswoman, a nurse who runs an agency, jewellery traveller. The third question was: Where do you spend your holidays. The answer was: in Paris at home and at a hotel — in brackets — with a swimming pool in the daytime. With those three questions I formed a mental image of that girl. I saw her as young, very average in level (she presumably means intellectually very average), very pre-occupied with the luxury goods business, with a nurse among her friends who could help her with her beauty care, be her beautician, not afraid to show herself off. After all, I didn't imagine she went to the swimming pool to admire the view or relax. I assumed she went there to swim, perhaps even... (one of the listeners: to pick up men?) Yes, to pick up men. So there you are. I built up a picture of a girl like that. It was quite clear to me, so I thought, why carry on. All the same I hesitated. I asked what book she was reading: *Kramer versus Kramer*. That fitted, too. No problem. She rented her flat, she spoke English only with difficulty, and she drove an Alfa Romeo, so the car was right, too. So I said to myself, there you are, she's a cover-girl. A girl with a good figure and lots of energy. A bit daring, brazen even, early twenties. I had a very clear picture of her like that."

Like Mireille, Josette, a woman of 55, saw the mystery person she had to identify not as a shopkeeper but as a "model" (*mannequin*). She is an officer's

daughter (like Mireille) and a graduate of HEC; for a long time she ran a temporary employment agency. She is now unemployed. She spent 31 francs and asked five questions: about the person's views on strikes ("Are there too many strikes in the public sector?"), the newspapers or magazines read, the last summer holidays, the make and model of car, the occupation of the three best friends (four of these questions — newspapers, friends, holidays and car — were also asked by Mireille). This is the commentary she gave after the game: "I took the question on strikes. I started out with a pre-conceived idea. I said to myself, since we've had a senior executive, now they're going to go to the other end of the scale (i.e. present us with a manual worker). When I saw the person was against strikes, I switched to the cultural level and asked about newspapers. That really had me confused. . . ! I immediately decided it was a woman and one with a rather low intellectual level. I can't imagine a man with a mentality that would be interested in a rag like *Jours de France*, not even a manual worker with no culture. When that is all you read, really, it's very limited. Next I asked about her holidays, thinking that would enlighten me. And once again I couldn't make head or tail of it. I said to myself, she's a . . . well . . . spending the daytime . . . spending her holiday in a hotel, with swimming pool! There are other swimming pools, after all! You'd really have to want to move in those circles. It's got to be someone with no money trying to meet certain sorts of people. Trying to show off. That's how I saw her. Then I got an answer that confirmed me in that view, the fact that she has a 1979 Alfa Romeo Sprint. I said to myself, she's a kept woman. After all, an Alfa Romeo is a really flashy sort of car, the car of someone who moves in luxury circles perhaps without having the means of living up to it. Spending her holidays. . . ! If you have the means to do it, then you take your holidays, I don't know, in Greece! Then I asked questions to try and pin down her elusive personality. I asked about her friends. At that point she rather went up in my esteem, because all the same, I said to myself, she has friends who do some work. It's not entirely what I thought. When I looked at the friends, I didn't pay so much attention to the commercial side, if you see what I mean, the business angle, I saw more the luxury side of jewellery, and I deduced, it was a sort of intuition, she must be a model. Someone who moves in . . . Who needs to keep up an appearance, not just well-groomed but luxurious, without necessarily having the means to live luxuriously. I saw her as fairly young, thirtyish perhaps."

Here we see at work some of the processes which guide the work of identification.<sup>15</sup> Once the form is fixed ("*midinette*", "little woman", "model", etc.), the information is re-interpreted in terms of that form by means of a transformation or an — often very free — "translation". (Thus, in the first example, the friend who is a nurse becomes a "beautician"; in the second, the friends' occupations suggest not "business", "trade", but "luxury".) Again, in the first example we see very clearly how, once the form is vividly established, information is used not to rectify the sketch but to confirm the player's belief in the accuracy of the portrait she has

drawn: Mireille enumerates properties (the last book read, rented accommodation, etc.), merely commenting "that was fine", "that fitted", without feeling the need to make explicit the relationship between this new information and the social form she has constructed by means of the previous information. She is unable to say how, in what respect, this information confirms the image she has built up. For her, it is self-evident.

### The penchant for interpretation

If the competence required by the game were only of the order of knowledge, i.e. either native knowledge of the social world and previous social experience or theoretical knowledge, then variables such as age, membership of the milieu to which the hidden person also belongs, or educational level, might be expected to have positive effects on performance in the game. In fact we find that the executives of the marketing department of a large nationalized firm did not achieve high scores despite being, for the most part, *Grande Ecole* graduates and belonging to the same milieu as the mystery person (a senior executive in industry). Similarly, in a group of female retired teachers, whose educational level is high and homogeneous, the players had to spend a lot to discover this individual's hidden occupation.

A first analysis of the relationship between the amount spent, the number of questions asked and the accuracy of the solutions offered suggests that the ability to play well depends not only on the knowledge accumulated about the social world but also on more general aptitudes for interpretation which no doubt depend at least in part on the agents' capacity to mobilize and use particular signs of social identity.

There are several ways of playing badly (which will be analysed in a subsequent article). One of the most frequently observed ways of refusing the type of interpretative work demanded by the game leads to the asking of a small number of expensive questions ("official" variables). It is particularly common among players who in their professional life occupy strong positions of responsibility or authority (even subordinate authority). The professional role of these institutionally-located men (or women) in fact requires them to base their working relations, particularly with their subordinates, on the qualifications acknowledged by the institutions

employing them, which are written into the rules of management and have a prescriptive character. They are thus inclined to confer a high predictive power on official definitions and not to take account — in the game as in life — of the particular indices used by the best players.

Geneviève, one of the group of retired teachers, is aged 66, is the daughter of a sales manager, and has the *agrégation*\* in English. She spent 100 francs on only four questions and suggested, for the occupation, "*cultivateur*" (peasant farmer). Instead of trying to use personal indices, she started with two questions, at 40 francs each, which she hoped would give direct information as to the occupation: educational qualifications (answer: "none") and whether the person concerned has any subordinates in his work (answer: "none"). She then asked what newspapers or magazines were read (answer: no daily paper, one weekly, *Jours de France*, no monthly magazines) and whether the person had ever been unemployed (answer: "no"). The absence of qualifications and subordinates directed Geneviève towards "the working classes" (she was clearly thinking of an industrial manual worker). Learning the person had never been unemployed, she slightly modified the image she had formed and, having used up all her credit, fixed on the idea of the peasant, who, without being a "wage-earner" or an "industrial worker", possesses the properties which characterize the "working classes" — at least when defined negatively, as the absence of bourgeois or petty bourgeois attributes.

A second example: Joséphine, aged 41, the daughter of an engineer, a graduate of the Paris *Institut des Sciences Politiques*\*, married to a judge. She identified the first hidden person as a "managing director" (rather than as a "senior executive"), and the second as a "traveller in jewellery" (rather than as the proprietor of a jeweller's shop). These errors arise from focusing on certain indices isolated from the whole and associated with a social type, very schematically characterized by a few emblems. (In the first case, the hidden person is a "managing director" because one of the publications he reads is *Time Magazine* and one of his hobbies is sailing; the second person is a female "commercial traveller" (*représentante*) because she has a powerful car — an Alfa Romeo — and because "one of her best friends is a *représentant*").

The interesting feature about such mistakes, which occur frequently, is that they attribute to the hidden person an identity which figures in his/her field of lateral possibles (the "jeweller", who started her working life as a "sales-woman-demonstrator" no doubt had objective chances of becoming a "travelling representative") or a vocational identity inscribed in his/her social trajectory. This is clear in the case of the "senior executive", who is often identified either as a "research scientist" or as a "managing director". He is in fact a chemical engineer, a graduate of the *Ecole Centrale*\*, has an American Ph.D., and did indeed begin his career

at the State research institute, CNRS. He now runs the research laboratory of a large firm, is increasingly concerned with management and sales and hopes, at the peak of his career, to manage one of the subsidiaries of the group he works for.

In the third "round", in which the mystery person was a 56-year-old semi-skilled worker, Joséphine was much wider of the mark since (at a cost of 48 francs) she thought she recognized a "(female) medical social worker for the mentally handicapped". She first asked the question on newspapers and magazines and decided the unknown person was a woman because he/she read no daily paper but listed: "*La Vie catholique, Femme d'aujourd'hui, Télé 7 jours, Historia*" (in fact it is the man's wife who buys them). Joséphine was so sure of the person's sex that she did not ask the question to find out (although it would only have cost her 1 franc). She then asked if the person belonged to any associations (a question which cost 25 francs and was rarely asked). The answer was: "residents' association and a society aiding the handicapped". "At that point," she says, "I immediately pitched into the medical or paramedical area." Convinced that she was on the trail of a woman, and a woman with a "social" or "para-medical" job, she was incapable of using the other information she acquired in order to modify that first impression. She asked for the hobby: "D.I.Y." — "That threw me completely." Then, the three best friends ("dental mechanic, tailor and salesman"): "It was getting more and more confusing. Eventually I decided it was a woman working with the handicapped, a medical social worker for the mentally handicapped."

Here the mistake is based on over-interpretation of certain indices, on which Joséphine concentrates, and which precisely correspond to the properties whereby the hidden person deviates from the stereotype of the "manual worker". An ex-peasant farmer, devoutly Catholic, married to a clerical worker whose cultural level is higher than his own (thus, asked how many books he reads a year, he replies "none, but my wife does"), this semi-skilled worker presents, in his social properties, "feminine" traits and indices of cultural and associative practice which do not correspond to the social image of the "manual worker", defined by a set of "virile" attributes such as physical strength, trade-union or political radicalism, team (and/or "rough") sports, etc.

The best results are scored by the groups whose members have had, for defensive purposes in the course of an unstable working life, to make the ironic use of interpretation which the game demands. Just as the "official" variable, the variable of the strong, serves for prescription, so interpretation with the aid of personal indices can be used as a weapon to break out of the system of official constraints, since it enables one to give a meaning to the ar-



bitrary behaviour of the "bosses" by revealing its hidden intention, i.e. by constructing a model which can be used to help control the relationship. These individual exposure operations are linked to the adoption of a deterministic, reductive view of the social world. This world-view, which tends to explain great effects in terms of small causes, the overt in terms of the hidden, the coherence of behaviours in terms of the cohesion of a secret alliance, is opposed both to the official representation of a world ordered in accordance with transparent, stable principles and to the atomized image of a social world without regularities, composed of free individuals and based on the free-will of the person, which is often associated with occupation of a position of irresponsibility within a dominant group (young people or non-working women in the bourgeoisie, etc.). It is linked to a particular experience of the social world — that of dominated private life, of participation in the world of those whose power and controls one is subjected to. It is often experienced by women (wives, secretaries, etc.) and always has something feminine about it even when experienced by men (for example, no such dispositions were found in a group of manual workers, although they had suffered the consequences of unemployment and *déclassement*). It is the type of experience familiar to the female interviewers (working on short-term contracts, at piece-rates, and often having a second job) and, even more, to the unemployed men being re-trained (often self-taught *petits cadres*), whose common feature is that their professional trajectory has been a "bumpy" one, in which rapid promotion has alternated with sudden loss of status. Finally, within each of the other groups, the individuals who achieve the best scores are generally set apart from the other participants by their greater social fragility. This may be related to a stigma, to career setbacks, or (as in the case of one member of the salesman group), to a personal difficulty in carrying off the virile self-image appropriate to the values of the profession. In all these cases, the best player has no doubt been led by his relative weakness to develop the cunning (as opposed to strength (cf. Detienne and Vernant, 1974)) which makes him a "crafty devil".

### Official classifications

The homogenization of the system of professional titles, of the

names of occupations and, more generally, of social classifications, and above all the creation of official spaces for the representation of occupational groups (whether real ones, like the corporate bodies (*Conseils*), or symbolic ones, like nomenclatures), belong to the series of unifying processes (linguistic, educational, legal, etc.) linked to the formation of the State. Just as the law is "presumed to be known by all", so nowadays, in France, everyone is sufficiently acquainted with the official system of occupational-group representation to be able to use it, whether to reconstruct it from memory, to use it to perform classifications, to argue with other people about its validity, or, when the occasion arises, to situate himself within it. This is remarkable in itself, especially since neither the system, nor the sets of terms in which it is expressed, has so far been the object of explicit transmission in schools. It can be shown<sup>16</sup> that this relatively close correspondence between the most individualized images of social groups and the most general representations of the social structure results from a process of diffuse inculcation which has accompanied the progressive formation in France, since the 1930s, of a mode of political management which, *de facto* if not officially, takes account of the demands of corporatist representation. Since the War (to put it schematically) this mode of government has been characterized by the establishment of new institutions which bring together (e.g. in joint consultative committees, or state planning commissions) senior civil servants, experts, employers' organization representatives, trade-union spokesmen, personalities from the "voluntary sector" (*le mouvement associatif*), etc. This new mode of political representation (whose origins could no doubt be traced back both to the socialist tradition of the labour movement and to the tradition of "social Catholicism" and the corporatism which inspired middle-class organization in the later inter-war period) substitutes for the unqualified citizen of "republican reason", as Claude Nicolet (1982, p. 365) puts it, a qualified man defined not only by the job he does but also by his position on a scale of skills (*qualifications*) and, increasingly, by his place in the distribution of educational qualifications (*titres*).

The prescriptive power of State classifications should not, however, be overestimated. They are not as omnipotent as is sometimes assumed in accounts of "bureaucracy" which see no other alternative, in the face of "Leviathan", than complete passivity or pure rebellion. Individuals know and use official



classifications, but always, at the same time, so as to play with them, to play on them. As we shall try to show in a later article with an analysis of the grammar of mistakes, apparent misclassifications never stem simply from inadequate knowledge of the nomenclatures. They are always simultaneously the expression of the individual's relationship to the political representation of social groups. Thus the versions of general systems of classifications which individuals provide, also manifest, precisely in their singularities, the particular position of the individual and the position he takes vis-à-vis the generic instrument. In short, there is no reason to think that State classifications are the operational instruments of social identification. For example, the ability to reconstruct the generic nomenclatures seems to be independent of the ability to discover a hidden person's occupation; not only is the latter not directly related to knowledge of the official maps of society, but it draws on a penchant for interpretation that is, as we have seen, formed in opposition to the official representations. Equally, however, there is no reason to suppose, in the present state of research, that the penchant for interpretation necessarily generates immediately social forms or, to put it another way, that it is directly linked to the practical equivalent of a sociological competence. While it is true that economy of interpretation depends on the ability to work with a repertoire of coherent (and, no doubt, emotionally charged) forms, and not (or not solely) by combining a system of discrete criteria, the hidden person under investigation may, as the participants' accounts often suggest, be recognized ("I see her...", "I feel that she...", "I can quite imagine him...", etc.) without being identified or, at least, without this identification being directly expressible in social terms. It is the constraint of the game that forces the participants to project the forms they have constructed onto a social space (and this operation often seems to require a specific effort subsequent to the interpretation proper), but there is no reason to suppose that in another game, with other types of constraints, they would not be able to use other projection-spaces equally well or better — the space of personality types, defined in psychological terms, for example.

The fact remains that the participants' frequently-attested ability to project their interpretations onto the official maps of the social world (as they do when they give the mystery person a position in the nomenclature and attach to him the name of an occupation) and to produce a discourse (comparable in some respects, to

"secondary elaboration" in psychoanalysis) which justifies the attribution in social and sometimes quasi-sociological terms, shows that state classifications now play the role of salient points, in Schelling's (1960) sense. They have acquired the power of common-places.

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## Notes

1. Cf., for example, in the case of the formation, in France, of the "cadre" category, the role of the symbolic work of definition and delimitation (in the 1930s), to which academic sociology has made a major contribution, especially since the 1950s. (See Boltanski, 1982)

2. The material from the first ten sessions is now being processed. The tape-recordings and game-sequences have already been transcribed. Systematic statistical analysis will be done at a later stage, when the data have been coded.

3. Since this exercise was designed to generate typical forms, it was thought referable to put it in first place, before any work was done on making explicit the social categories and their representations (cf. Desrosières, Goy and Thevenot, 1983. On the discovery of professional identities according to the social milieu of respondents, see Coxon and Jones, 1978).

4. The procedure that was followed drew on techniques used by anthropologists

of the ethnomethodological school (see, for example, S. Tyler (ed.) 1969).

5. On the functioning of "practical logic" in systems of representations of the social world, see Bourdieu, 1980b.

6. The analysis was applied to nine groups, i.e. 120 individuals teamed in pairs.

7. See Goody (1979) for the effects of schematic (or cartographic) substantiation.

8. See, for example, Goodenough (1956) and Romney, D'Andrade (1964). Criticism of the componentialist view was the starting-point for Rosch's analyses: "The present trend in anthropology to study 'folk' classification has tended to emphasize methods, such as 'componential analysis', which seek to find the minimum basic criterial attributes by which folk use of the terms of a domain can be formally ordered" (p. 142-143) and "psychological and linguistic research has tended to treat categories (whether perceptual or semantic) as though they were internally unstructured — that is, as though they were composed of undifferentiated, equivalent instances — and as though category boundaries were always 'well defined' (Neisser, 1967)." ... whereas "It is the contention of the present paper that most 'real' categories are highly structured internally and do not have well defined boundaries;" (pp. 112, 113).

9. The task of giving "good examples" of members of various social categories (in particular, examples of "cadres") has so far been performed by 135 people (in groups of 12 to 15) which gives a sample of 400 "typical cadres". Since more material is yet to be collected, comparison will be limited to the answers provided by four groups: a group of highly qualified executives working for a large nationalized firm; a group of unemployed people undergoing re-training; a group of sales executives, mostly without higher qualifications, working for a multinational firm; and a group of retired women teachers (primary and secondary school).

10. Since coding of the whole set of material is not yet completed, some properties of the examples of "cadres" provided by the participants in four sessions have been processed manually.

11. Even in more established statistical nomenclatures, which flaunt the neutrality of the natural (Tolosan's activity categories: animal, vegetable, mineral) or the measurable ("levels" of education, measured in years), one can point to similar instances of the taxonomist who enhances the representation of the positions which surround him (senior civil servants) and diminishes that of private-sector executives (cf. Desrosières and Thévenot, 1979).

12. The material provided by this last exercise has not been statistically analysed in its entirety. On the other hand all the "moves" by the players and the recorded commentaries on them have been processed, giving a corpus of some 500 cases. A statistical analysis comparing the different strategies and the properties of the players (qualification, age, sex, occupation, social origin, etc.) will obviously be required in order to test the hypotheses put forward here.

13. For an historical analysis of the mode of reasoning applied since the late 19th century in a new literary genre, the "detective story", see Messac (1929).

14. As George Kelly pointed out, when someone is asked to classify his friends and acquaintances, he tends to group these people in pairs on the basis of their overall similarity or dissimilarity with a third person. If the subject is asked to say in what respect these persons are similar, he may reply, for example, that both remind him of a striking third person in his circle (e.g. "Mary"). The attribute in relation to which the categorization is performed is thus, Kelly says, "degree of Mary-ness"

(Kelly, 1955, p. 139).

15. The work of identification the participants have to perform is close in some respects to ordinary perception of other people (see Heider, 1958) and, in other respects, to "attribution" (see Jones *et al.*, 1971). As Doise (1976, pp. 134-39) has shown, these two dimensions are closely related to the process of categorization.

16. We shall endeavour to demonstrate this in a subsequent article.

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## Glossary \*

agrége:	holder of highest university qualification ( <i>agrégation</i> ), member of top category of secondary teachers
autodidacte:	"self-taught", but in the sense of holding a post as <i>cadre</i> or <i>ingénieur</i> by virtue of experience and promotion rather than a prestigious diploma
baccalauréat:	18-plus school-leaving examination
BEPC:	<i>Brevet d'études du premier cycle</i> , secondary schooling diploma for those who do not proceed to <i>baccalauréat</i>
cadre:	"executive/manager", but cf. this text, <i>passim</i> ; <i>cadre supérieur</i> , "top executive"; <i>cadre moyen</i> or " <i>petit cadre</i> ", "junior" or "minor" executive
CFDT:	<i>Confédération française démocratique du travail</i> , trade-union organization, non-Communist left

\*For the other names of occupations, see Table 1

CGT:	<i>Confédération générale du travail</i> , trade-union organization, close to Communist Party, strongest in traditional industries
classes moyennes:	"middle classes", but tends to be used to designate "lower-middle classes"
diplômé de l'Université:	holder of university (rather than <i>grande école</i> ) degree
Ecole Centrale:	engineering <i>grande école</i>
en concubinage:	"living as man and wife", a status now officially recognized
femme OS emballeuse:	female packer (OS = unskilled factory worker)
HEC:	Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales, a <i>grande école</i> , the top French business school
ingénieur:	holder of an engineering qualification
école d'ingénieurs:	minor engineering school (as opposed to <i>grandes écoles</i> )
INSEE:	the State institute for socio-economic statistics
Institut des Sciences politiques:	Paris political science institute (on a par with the <i>grandes écoles</i> )
IUT:	<i>Institut universitaire de technologie</i> , a higher-education college offering vocational courses
Maîtrise (agents de):	supervisors, foremen
midinette:	19th century term for shop-girl, connoting "flightiness"
ouvrier P2 fraiseur:	skilled metal-worker (P2 indicates a recognized level of skill and remuneration)
ouvriers qualifiés:	skilled workers (generic)
professions libérales:	the independent professions, such as doctors, lawyers, etc.