

Omar Lizardo

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The Question of Culture Consumption and Stratification Revisited

by Omar Lizardo

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Introduction

The key insight of the sociological study of the nexus where culture and stratification meet is that differential access to and engagement with prestigious symbolic goods serves to mark positions endowed with different degrees of what Max Weber [Bourdieu 1987a; Bourdieu 1994, 113-114] referred to as *status honor* [DiMaggio and Useem 1978]. The main theoretical implication of this starting idea is that we can “read off” differences related to the unequal distribution of economic, political and symbolic power from information on consumption practices. Accordingly, we can define collectively valued styles of symbolic appropriation of cultural goods as a form of “cultural capital” because they provide access to other forms of material, social and symbolic resources [Bourdieu 1986].

According to Mohr and DiMaggio [1995, 168], cultural capital refers to “prestigious tastes, objects, or styles validated by centers of cultural authority, which maintain and disseminate standards of value and serve collectively to clarify and periodically revise the cultural currency.” We may in its turn differentiate cultural capital from other forms of cultural competence that are locally valued and help individuals advance in more delimited social settings, what Randall Collins [1975] refers to as “cultural resources” [see also DiMaggio 2000, 39]. When the notion of cultural capital is taken in this sense – there are of course other ways to define the concept; i.e. Lamont and Lareau [1988] – very few analysts deny that there exist widespread and

significant differences in routine access, direct ownership, and embodied ability to “appropriate” collectively valued cultural goods just as nobody denies that these differences are systematically associated to the individual’s current position – and trajectory leading to that position – in various axes of stratification [Chan and Goldthorpe 2007a; Chan and Goldthorpe 2007b; Fridman and Ollivier 2002; Holbrook, Weiss, and Habich 2004; Ollivier 2004; Ollivier and Fridman 2002; Prieur, Rosenlund, and Skjott-Larsen 2008; Savage, Warde, and Devine 2005; Tomlinson 2003].

While the question of *whether* there exists a connection between social stratification and lifestyle differentiation seems to be uncontroversial, the primary issue that continues to bedevil research at the intersection of the sociology of culture and the study of structured inequality, concerns the precise nature of this connection [Ollivier 2004]. In particular, a key question concerns the extent to which homologies between the classificatory hierarchies of lifestyles and the classificatory hierarchies of social position are preserved in contemporary settings [Tomlinson 2003]. This question is particularly important, given the fact that some theorists conceive the bases of social power and prestige in the post-industrial society as having undergone a substantial transformation [Giddens 1991]. This situation faces students of culture and stratification with a host of questions, some of which are easier to begin to answer than others. These include: Can lifestyle options still be “ranked” in meaningful hierarchies? Are there one-to-one correspondences between the hierarchy of lifestyles and structural positions in the power and prestige order? How stable are these hierarchical arrangements? Are the principles of order and ranking of symbolic goods capable of being reproduced and maintained under a regime characterized by the institutionalized commercialization of artistic production?

As a decidedly sociological approach to the consumption of aesthetic goods that is attentive to class and status groups differences has gradually developed in the last few decades (spurred by the pioneering work of Pierre Bourdieu [1968] among other influences), we have seen some progress in conceptual development and theoretical clarification aimed at shedding light on these questions. The most popular – but also most severely criticized – answer is one that posits a simple correspondence between a presumed unidimensional classificatory ranking of cultural goods (or ways of appropriating those goods) and a presumed unidimensional hierarchy of power and prestige, with Bourdieu [1984] sometimes mistakenly thought of as having proposed such a model.¹ This account has been taken to task for its conceptual limitations, such as holding on to a procrustean notion of unidimensionality in both social and

¹ For perceptive critiques of unidimensional understandings of status in modern societies see Grasmick 1976 and Ollivier 2000.

cultural classifications and emphasizing agreement and consensus over this allegedly universal ranking [DiMaggio 1987]. The most fatal flaw in this scheme is that the *empirical* record finds simple “homology” theories wanting, as neither goods, styles of consumption, nor class positions appear to be structured in a simple unidimensional hierarchy [Bourdieu 1985b; Bourdieu 1989; Bourdieu 1991a; DiMaggio 1987; Holt 1997]. In addition, members of privileged positions have been shown to unproblematically cross traditionally established ritual boundaries between the fine, popular and folk arts [DiMaggio 1987; DiMaggio 2000; Peterson 1992; 1997; Peterson and Kern 1996; Peterson and Simkus 1993].

Given the explanatory failure of the simple homology thesis, it is somewhat surprising that there have been few attempts to reconstruct a unifying explanatory account of the same analytic scope and explanatory ambition [see Holt 1998 and Olivier 2004 for some notable exceptions]. This situation is particularly unsatisfactory, given the fact that we have at our disposal much more empirical data on the cultural practices of the populations of denizens of the Euro-American West than ever before [i.e. Peterson 2005].

In this paper, I will attempt to outline a sketch of what such a unifying account might look like. I will do this mainly by addressing what I perceive to be the primary weakness of most of the contemporary theoretical proposals that attempt to relate cultural stratification with other forms of material and class-based positional inequalities: their lack of a long-term historical perspective [for a related effort see Meyer 2000]. In the spirit of DiMaggio [2000] and Bourdieu [1987a; 1987b], I will argue that understanding the cultural stratification system that appears to have coalesced in the richer societies of the contemporary Global North – the reader might note that I will assume that, contrary some fashionable nominalist currents (i.e. Baudrillard), a coherent cultural stratification system does exist today – we must attend to the historical origin and trajectory of the *system of production* of symbolic goods in the West, and how this has interacted with the system of scholastic “production” of *consumers* for such goods [Bourdieu 1996a].

This exercise shows that the intuitive appeal of the homology account even in the wake of its empirical failure in the current context is not only attributable to the fact it once held empirical validity [Peterson 1992],² but it is also related to the fact that the contemporary system of cultural ranking in aesthetic consumption can be read as a (complex and historically contingent) transformation of the previous one. This is a transformation that *partially* preserves the stratification-linked advantages of

² The same can be said older explanatory paradigms centered on the rise of industrial society in social theory [Giddens 1976].

the previous one. It is true that the “artistic classification system” [DiMaggio 1987] that corresponds to the homology argument has been superseded in the post-war context in most Western societies. This has happened mainly due of socio-structural transformations that have affected the institutionalized rules and principles that govern the distribution of power and prestige, by for instance delegating more society-wide authority on rationalized occupational groups over more primordially defined collectivities [Abbott 1981; Meyer and Jepperson 2000]. I will argue however, that the most important of these changes concerns the substantial modifications in the specific mechanisms through which accumulated social, economic and cultural capital is able to be reproduced and bequeathed – that is, converted [Savage, Warde, and Devine 2005] – across generations [Bourdieu 1996b]. I refer to the primary role that the educational system plays in class reproduction, partially superseding the “direct” strategy based on the transfer of material sources, in favor of an indirect strategy which forces most privileged strata to make use of the educational system for purposes of status reproduction.

The Two Forms of Appropriation of the Work of Art

In what follows I develop the concept of an *embodied cultural capital regime*, as the distinctive form of cultural stratification in the contemporary system. To develop this concept I draw on Bourdieu’s [1984, 267-268] important – but largely ignored distinction – of the “two modes” of appropriation of the work of art. Here Bourdieu distinguishes two ways in which symbolic goods can be consumed (“appropriated”) by individuals in modern societies. The first, *direct or exclusive appropriation* refers to the capacity of individuals from class fractions endowed with high levels of cultural and economic capital (and sometimes members of class fractions who only control economic capital), to *purchase* cultural works directly and thus to claim sole ownership over them. The other mode of *indirect or symbolic* appropriation of symbolic goods is distinctive of class fractions that while having comparable levels of cultural capital lack the economic means to directly appropriate prestigious cultural works. This type of appropriation is – contrary to the direct kind – “non-rival” since cultural works may be appropriated symbolically without claiming exclusive ownership over them (i.e. paintings in a museum). Furthermore, a person can possess the capacity to directly appropriate a cultural work without having the capacity to symbolically appropriate it.

In terms of Bourdieu’s [1986] distinction between “objectified” and “embodied” cultural capital the direct mode of appropriation of cultural objects is premised

on an individual's propensity and ability to translate embodied dispositions into objectified cultural capital through the *purchase* of concrete, aesthetically defined "works of art" without any hindrance, while symbolic appropriation rests exclusively on the mobilization of embodied dispositions that allow the person to "decode" the formal structure of the cultural work. This last type of appropriation is particularly likely to be emphasized by expert consumers in highly aestheticized realms in which the "work" is actually an ethereal "performance" with wordless, immaterial classical music having acquired the hegemonic status as the "purest" – and therefore prototypical – form of artistic appreciation of art in this respect [Frith 1998].

The basic argument in what follows is that we can observe an uneven, conjectural, but nevertheless systematic transition in the cultural stratification system of the Euro-American West starting in Renaissance Europe from a regime premised primarily on the differential ability to *own* objectified cultural products – with a contemporaneous "relative democracy" of the ability to appropriate cultural works symbolically – to a cultural stratification regime which devalued the *sole* deployment of the direct appropriation strategy and which emphasizes symbolic appropriation. This emergent regime of cultural stratification was distinctive in that it introduced indirect appropriation as the primary way in which position in the stratification system became linked to lifestyle practices and back to systems of cultural goods production. This regime was distinctive from the one that reigned in Western societies since early modernity in that it is premised on the differential possession and embodied ownership of durable schemes of perception and appreciation.

These cultural-appropriation schemes became increasingly tied to sites of upper-middle class privilege, breaking the relative democracy of embodied dispositions to appropriate cultural works which reigned in the pre-industrial period. I will show that most historical accounts converge in showing that this regime emerged in earnest in the second half of the Nineteenth century. The Twentieth century saw both the emergence and quick dissolution of the cultural stratification system based purely on class standing, as well the institutionalization and diffusion of it through a complex tapestry of institutional fields (higher education, fields of cultural production) all directly or indirectly connected to the market. I will argue that this system survives to this day as the primary definer of cultural works across commercial and non-commercial cultural realms [Frith 1998]. Status is claimed in the modern system through the deployment of what Bourdieu [1984] referred to as an "aesthetic disposition" towards the formal structure of cultural goods, only verifiable (and thus exploitable) in conversation [DiMaggio 1987; Fine 1977], and thus different from the Veblenian logic of "conspicuous" consumption.

This development required a broad swath of novel inter-institutional linkages and intra-institutional transformations [DiMaggio 2000; Savage, Warde, and Devine 2005, 44-45], including the emergence of *autonomous* fields of cultural production in the second-half of the Nineteenth century (in the precise sense in which the notion of autonomy is deployed in Bourdieu's field theory) and the increasing association between the "production of producers" and the "production of consuming publics" to scholastic definition and canonization through the system of higher education [Bourdieu 1984, 226-244]. Finally, projects of state-led expansion of a non-profit field for the formal dissemination and procurement for the arts [DiMaggio 2000], as well as a market for symbolic goods and "popular culture" resulted in the emergence of cross-cutting divisions across these cultural fields. This cross-cutting division both elides and preserves the cultural advantages of persons who command the aesthetic disposition. It does this by partitioning the world of symbolic goods into a field of aesthetically classifiable cultural works according to how closely they are able to match the abstract, flexibly deployable (i.e. "transposable") and increasingly institutionalized "schema of art" invented in late 19th century Europe.

Objectified and Embodied Cultural Capital in Early Modernity

In the early modern period, differences across persons in access to cultural goods were strongly keyed to differences in access to political power and economic means to acquire those goods [Collins 1975]. Thus, renaissance artists were relegated to work mostly by commission, being contracted on a piece-rate basis by rich merchants and courtiers, who were engaged in their own games of social advancement and competitive consumption of objectified symbolic goods [Douglas and Isherwood 1996; McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb 1982]. These contracts contained exacting stipulations as to the subject matter and tone of the work, leaving the creator very little of the creative autonomy and thematic freedom that we come to expect given our conception of the modern artist [Baxandall 1988]. This meant that unequal access to what Bourdieu [1986] refers to as *objectified cultural capital* – i.e. family-owned objects endowed with "patina" [McCracken 1991, 31-43] – became a clear marker of incumbency in dominant positions within the then enlarging economic and state-bureaucratic fields.

The key characteristic of the early modern regime of cultural stratification is that while art *objects* were relatively scarce – partaking of what Walter Benjamin [1968] referred to as "aura" – and therefore unequally distributed by class, *the schemes of perception and appreciation* applicable to those objects, and by implication the stylis-

tic devices used by artists, were drawn from a “cultural repertoire” [Swidler 1986] that was widely *shared* across social groups. From the largely illiterate agricultural laborers and semi-skilled urban craftsmen to the richest merchants and most powerful members of renaissance courts [Baxandall 1988]. In this sense, neither artists nor their rich patrons had at their disposal a set of cultural codes related to the specific appreciation of cultural works that separated them from their less well-off classes. While literacy was the primary marker of cultural distinction in this period this factor did not begin to play a role in segmenting audiences for cultural works until after the European adaptation of the printing press for the production of books of mass appeal [Eisenstein 2005]. Instead, *pictorial* codes dominated both the thematic composition of paintings and even more importantly, the formal decisions related to color and spacing, were constrained by the fact that they were developed with an eye toward the “mass produced” liturgical rituals of the Catholic church.

This implies that the separation of the artist from the audience – and therefore the relative passivity of the modern audience for serious culture – was not yet developed during early modernity. Instead as Conner [2008, 108] has recently noted, during this period a sense of the “essential reciprocity among artist, citizen, arts event, and artistic meaning continued to guide Western culture.” Since

(...) the concept of the artist was as yet unformed, crafts guild workers created their own art-everything from religious cycle plays to cathedrals. They functioned as citizen-artists and both created and interpreted the world of metaphor that surrounded them (...). Even as the force of professionalization began to dominate the arts ecology of the Renaissance, the audience did not see itself in a secondary position in relationship to making meaning.

The reason for the lack of ritual potency of specific schemes of perception of artistic codes to mark social boundaries based on class during this period had to do with the fact that as Baxandall shows the set of visual and geometric – and in the case of liturgical music aural – codes was precisely designed to make up for the fact that the primary “consumer” base of liturgical performances and art objects was illiterate (or semi-literate) and thus there had to be agreement on the “meanings” of the various visual conventions used in the crafting of certain cultural goods such as painting. In this manner the monopolization of literacy on the part of ecclesiastical authorities and a few selected intellectual elites implied a *democratization* of the socio-cognitive means of visual appropriation, because it was through such means that the basic elements of Christian dogma and theodicy were transmitted to the populace [Baxandall 1988]. This went hand in hand with the formal organization of schooling in early modernity which produced cultural habits that “differed not so much according to rank but according to function. Consequently attitudes to life, like many features

of everyday life, differed not much more” across members of different social strata [Aries 1960, quoted in Bourdieu 1967, 351].

According to Baxandall, the general transmission of habits of cultural appreciation occurred primarily in the form of visually codified scenes – i.e. the “annunciation” or the “last supper” – and simple pictorial narratives (i.e. the stages of the cross). This concern to include widely recognized pictorial conventions into the cultural work itself – such as the association between deep aquamarine (the most expensive and rare of pigments) and the central characters in a painting – fed back into the self-perception and external cultural logic related to the figure of the “artist” who was considered more akin to a craftsman, fully immersed in society and expected to partake of its cultural heritage and culture-decoding habits of perception. This contrasts sharply with our contemporary image of the artist – mostly a Nineteenth century invention [Bourdieu 1987b] – which begins with the impressionist rebellion against the hegemonic classics-infused art of the French Academy [White and White 1993]. This schematic notion of the artist is based precisely on a model of professional specialization and an aesthetic of creative innovation in which the artist is supposed to stand *opposed* (and to consciously design new ways to violate) consensually agreed upon habits of perception and appreciation of aesthetic objects [Bourdieu 1985a].

From a Democracy of Embodied Cultural Capital to the Aristocratic Regime

In the above, I have used the work of Baxandall on Fifteenth century Italian painting as illustrative of my general argument for the relative democracy of aesthetic appreciation schemes that was characteristic of the early modern period. I do this because Baxandall’s work is still the most detailed analysis of the *schemes of perception and appreciation* that had to have been operative during the period and his argument does an excellent job of suggesting that these schemes had to have been shared by a broad cross-section of the population (this is in stark contrast to Bourdieu’s findings in *Distinction* of existence of two antithetical schemes for the perception of cultural works in contemporary France). However, it is important to note that in broad strokes the same conclusions can be drawn from other analyses of the structuration of tastes and habits of thought in Late Medieval and Early modern Europe. All of these accounts lead to the same general conclusion: among the broadest cross-section of the population there was little basis of categorical differentiation that could be directly traceable to systematic differences in the schemes of appreciation used to

appropriate cultural works. Instead, lifestyle differences were directly traceable to the differential ability to purchase luxury goods (i.e. direct, not symbolic appropriation).

At the advent of modernity, differences based on other categorical forms of division – language, religion, etc. – operated over a widely shared layer of background of habits of perception and appreciation of cultural works and other forms of folk culture. As Stahl [1975, 49, *italics mine*] notes “[m]edieval society in Europe was semi-literate (...) Written texts existed and were influential; but for most people the only source of information was oral. This oral culture, consisting of sermons and epics, folktales and ballads, *was shared by all ranks of society*.” The first major exception in this regard comes with the end of semi-literacy and the spread of the printing press at the beginning of the Sixteenth century. Literacy had an important impact on the habits of thought of the European population [Eisenstein 2005]. Advent of literacy thus introduces the first major division in aesthetic consumption across classes, separating increasingly literate town dwellers from relatively illiterate rural populations. However, within the population of literate town-dwellers, no major divisions in cultural tastes systematically connected to class would arise until the emergence of the highbrow/lowbrow regime in the second half of the Nineteenth century [Conner 2008; Levine 1988].

It is of course strictly inaccurate to say that there was absolutely no differentiation in embodied schemes of aesthetic appreciation in early modern Europe (whenever there are different class conditions, and whenever the life course is partitioned according to these material class conditions there will be different cognitive schemes used to appropriate objects [Bernstein 1958]). In fact, as most famously noted by Elias [2000], the courtly aristocracy of European absolutist states – the purest example being of course France, but with similar dynamics operative in Elizabethan England [McCracken 1991] – served as the site of a “primitive accumulation” of distinct embodied dispositions towards symbolic goods which were perceived to be and were explicitly elaborated as being “naturally” superior and distinct from that of general populace, a process that had begun even earlier in the Italian Renaissance courts [Sassateli 2007, 21].

This is what Meyer [2000, 37-40] has referred to as the “aristocratic” taste regime. I would argue however, that even though there was an initial elaboration of a cultural logic connecting distinct, habitualized dispositions toward aesthetic appreciation with intellectualized notions of the inherent and superior worth of persons capable of deploying those schemes during this period, the *symbolic potency* of these notions and the *societal penetration* of this aristocratic taste regime remained almost nil outside of the highly circumscribed circle of the Absolutist court (this is not deny

of course that courtly circles served as epicenters of waves of competitive consumption when it came to consumer goods and luxuries during the period [Sassatelli 2007, 26]). Furthermore, we should not fall into the trap of over-estimating the cultural aptitudes of members of the courtier aristocracy. As noted by music historian William Weber [1979, 182], most members of the 18th century aristocracy in Europe were simply not that cultured, especially in the sense that we currently understand that term (i.e. habitually familiar with complex formal characteristics of cultural works and capable of routinely expressing that expertise linguistically).

In DiMaggio's [1987] terms, the aristocratic primitive accumulation of embodied cultural capital, while strong in ritual boundaries remained an artistic classification system with very little differentiation – as most cultural goods production remained informal at this time (outside of the “mass culture” liturgy produced in the Catholic Church) – and almost non-existent society-wide universality. In fact, as noted by most studies of cultural hierarchy formation in Europe and the U.S., while it is certainly correct that beginning in the late Seventeenth century and throughout the Eighteenth-century the aristocracy – aided by the French Enlightenment *philosophes* [Meyer 2000, 38] – developed and refined the notions of cultural worth that would go on to constitute the conceptual backbone of the “highbrow/lowbrow” taste regime. Nevertheless, it was the Nineteenth century bourgeoisie and not the Eighteenth century aristocracy which would go on to radically disrupt the relatively democratic and non-hierarchical system of cultural appreciation and audience participation that predominated among the bulk of the citizenry in European (and later American) societies.

Nineteenth century Bourgeois fractions (and “embourgeoised” members of the aristocracy) did this by building both *intellectual* (mainly by borrowing from the previously intellectualized theories of “aristocratic taste” that naturalized cultural appreciation as the purview of a few select persons) but also *the institutional and infra-structural* foundations for a system of cultural valuation and sacralization of a few select cultural forms, which had previously been part (across different class strata) of the cultural life of most persons [Conner 2008; Levine 1988]. In orchestral music for instance, sacralization took the form of an epochal shift from playing work mostly by contemporaneous authors to playing compositions authored by an increasingly narrow number of “great” dead composers (“classics”) around the middle of the Nineteenth century [Weber 1977, 15]. This occurred in tandem with the “emancipation” of the artist from the restrictive (heteronomous) patronage circuit of the aristocratic court, and the emergence of “autonomous” art, which ironically served to institute even more securely a system of cultural stratification based on

the ability to *perceive* and *decode* formal features of cultural works at a society-wide level.

Thus, during the period extending from early modernity to the industrial-revolution, while objectified cultural capital is distributed unequally and serves as a marker of social class, *embodied cultural capital* is in fact distributed rather equitably and did *not* serve as an accurate marker of class stratification. While literacy was the exception in this regard in the early Renaissance epoch, this state of affairs was bound to be transcended during the course of the next two centuries, resulting in what historians have rightly dubbed the “printing revolution” following the Protestant reformation and the Catholic counter-reformation, with the subsequent spread of literacy across previously excluded class strata [Eisenstein 2005], also serving to reduce the power of the ability to decode texts as a source of inter-group distinction. This meant that while boundaries across social classes were clearly demarcated by access to *objects* of consumer culture and objectified cultural works, there was little differentiation in the *cultural habits* of different classes when it came to the enjoyment of other aesthetic goods such as theater, opera and instrumental performances [DeNora 1991; DiMaggio 1993; Levine 1988].

In this sense, we find that as recently as the early Nineteenth century, *embodied* aesthetic dispositions lacked ritual power as maker of class and status outside of courtly circles. This situation would begin to change throughout the post-Napoleonic period due to one primary factor: the enhancement in overall wealth associated with industrialization and the increased spread of market institutions over other spheres of life during the mature period of Western European industrialization [Veblen 1899/1998]. This led to what historians have dubbed a veritable “consumer revolution” beginning in the leading centers of capital accumulation and industrialization in the West (England, France and the low countries) in the Eighteenth century, where upwardly mobile merchant classes and aspiring middle classes developed what appears to be an insatiable appetite for consumer goods, resulting in an aesthetization of previously “functional” objects among the rising middle classes and the development of an incipient taste for innovative cultural productions and cultural objects [Brewer and Porter 1993; McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb 1982; Mukerji 1983; Schama 1987]. This release of competitive consumption from the restriction of traditional cultural codes [Campbell 1987] mandating a strict adherence between lifestyle and life-station of the *ancien regime* in addition to serving as inspiration for Veblen’s theory of conscious seeking of invidious distinction and status in his “Theory of the Leisure Class” also created the infrastructure necessary for the development of what Bourdieu refers to as a “market for symbolic goods” [Bourdieu 1985a], which radi-

cally transformed the relationship between embodied cultural capital and social class in the second half of the Nineteenth century.

It is instructive in this respect to consider the fact that most historical research on the origins of the “high culture” canon in Europe and the U.S., find no recognizable canon to speak of as late as the mid-Nineteenth century [Weber 1977, 6-7]. Instead, most of what is today considered “high culture” from opera, to public orchestral music performances to Shakespeare’s theatre plays were part of an intensely commodified and relatively non-hierarchical [in terms of audience segmentation] field of commercial art [DiMaggio 1993; Levine 1988]. Thus, most of what today resides in the non-profit field of “serious art” was “mass culture” in the period of Bourgeois ascendance. The fact that commercial entrepreneurs saw this culture as profitable and thus capable of reaching a large audience speaks to how little they expected that audience to be stratified according to their ability to incorporate that culture, let alone be composed of a small segment of literati. It also shows how little distance existed between audience expectations and the codes that governed artistic creation. This will all begin to change at the end of the Nineteenth century.

The rise of an Autonomous Artistic Field

In Nineteenth century Europe the institutional and material conditions were ripe for the development of a new “niche” for cultural and artistic production [Hannan and Freeman 1986;], one that broke free from the previous conception of the artist as a craftsman for hire and which allowed a set of *autonomous principles of aesthetic production and aesthetic perception* to develop [Bourdieu 1987a]. Expanding nationalist projects in the continent in which aesthetic production became redefined as an inherent cultural patrimony – fueled by the incipient cultural and institutional construction of a linguistically and ethnically homogenous nation-state [Anderson 1991] – also played a role in this development (best exemplified in the case of Napoleonic France). Here the invention of the artist as a “high status” occupation in charge of creative and preservative functions close to what Edward Shils referred to as the “center” of society begins to take shape [White and White 1993].

As the field of artistic production begins to acquire a certain degree of “autonomy” from other societal spheres – the market being the most important – the artist becomes removed from society and lifted toward a more dignified social role. Bourdieu [1993, 115] defines the autonomy of a field of cultural production as the “power to define its own criteria for the production and evaluation of its products.” The emergence and institutionalization of mechanisms of autonomy in the artistic

field allows artists to develop principles of perception and appreciation of cultural goods that are *specific* to art as such and which begin to *diverge* from those that are prevalent outside of the artistic field [Bourdieu 1996b, 292-293], a situation radically different than that which Baxandall describes in relation to Renaissance art and which Weber [1977], Levine [1988] and Conner [2008] describe vis a vis the popular arts (i.e. theatre, classical music) that would go on to be redefined as “serious art.” This is evident in the final step toward emancipation in the late Nineteenth century, when the “dealer-critic” system is developed in France and quickly diffused to other European countries [White and White 1993].

Critics become indispensable in providing nascent artistic fields such as poetry, drama and the novel with increased legitimation and “intellectualization” as obtruse, technical pursuits [Bourdieu 1996a]. Criticism also brings structuration to the field by defining an accepted canon of works (providing boundaries as to what counts as “symbolist poetry” for instance) and objectifying a set of taken-for-granted aesthetic and formal devices as acceptable options. This provides producers with a set of “positions” that can come to define specific styles, and also come to define *deviations* from accepted practices, thus institutionalizing artistic fields as sites of a “permanent revolution” of stylistic innovation. This conflict to define the dominant sets of styles comes to recurrently pit the commercially and critically established producers against “heterodox” newcomers with little material or symbolic standing within the field [Bourdieu 1993].

These set of developments served to partially release the artist from being dependent on the state and liberating artistic subjects from having to address substantive themes related to national aggrandizement, religious ritual, and connection to the classical Western cultural tradition. Instead, art begins to move to a period of formal experimentation in media-specific features (such as light and color in painting) that begins to be bound primarily by the considerations related to critical reception and by a logic adequate for a “restricted field of production” [Bourdieu 1983]. Impressionism is critical in this respect, in disconnecting the worth of the work from the subject matter that the work addresses. By being able to nominate paintings featuring commonplace subject matter as worthy of aesthetic consideration, the impressionists inaugurate an era in which the *artist’s vision* becomes sufficient to establish a specific work as art (rather than the portrayal of famous historical events or religious subject matter). Furthermore, this implies that *principles of perception* not immediately obvious in the subject matter portrayed come to define the ability to appropriate a given work as art [Bourdieu 1987a] a situation radically different from that which obtained in the Renaissance. While upper-class patronage does not disappear, it is profoundly transformed from its functioning in the early

modern period, as it is now aimed at those segments of the dominant classes that are able to devote the time and energy necessary to become familiar with the new (and now constantly changing) principles of classification and appreciation of cultural works.

As these principles come to be codified and incorporated into educational curricula and as the history of Western art comes to be reinterpreted so that a canonical lineage can be constructed with the creation of a “fine arts” tradition, educational institutions come to rise in prominence as the primary exponents and disseminators of these increasingly guarded and symbolically scarce systems of cultural appreciation and classification [DiMaggio 2000]. This results in the development of a system of cultural stratification that begins to separate different status groups not only according to their ability to *acquire* cultural works (as had always been the case), but also according to their relative ability to learn, master and manipulate increasingly abstract and formal principles of artistic perception and ranking being developed (and being constantly transformed) in the now autonomous field of artistic production. This is what Bourdieu [1984] refers to as the “*labor of incorporation*” necessary for aesthetic consumption. The key point is that for Bourdieu, rather than being a Kantian “transcendental” these principles are the product of a slow process of historical development, objectification and “institutionalization” [Zucker 1977].

Crucial to the present argument is the fact that the *linkages* of this field with the system of economic and political stratification especially as it pertains to access to formal education becomes increasingly important, especially after the end of the Nineteenth century [Savage, Warde, and Devine 2005]. Within the dominant class the sole ability to simply acquire art *objects* or to support the artist through economic patronage becomes devalued, since now there is an expectation that entrance into the artistic field requires not only monetary capital but also *embodied* cultural capital, that is the ability to recognize artistic value and standards of valuation as these are defined *within* the portion of the artistic field restricted to the production of now increasingly consecrated cultural goods.

This is the period where the grand project of defining an institutional field of “fine arts” culture begins to be pursued by Bourgeois urban elites [DiMaggio 1991; 2000]. This is also the period in which what Levine [1988] has referred to as the “sacralization” of the arts begins in full force. These fields come to have an organizational base in universities, museums, galleries and other elite-supported non-profit institutions designed for the production, dissemination and canonization of cultural works as well as for the training of both artists and consumers on the newly defined principles of cultural valuation [Conner 2008, 113]. This is also the period where some previously considered segments of the folk and popular arts come to

redefined and upscaled as “high” art primarily through the geographic separation of performance centers in the growing urban metropolis and the selective funneling of resources toward organizations that support institution-building projects of Western urban elites.

This period, covering the middle to the late-Nineteenth century and the first quarter of the Twentieth century is the stage in which the “traditional” definition of both the artist as a social type, the artistic career and the production and dissemination of “fine” cultural works through the non-profit institutional network underwritten by the bourgeois upper class, comes to be defined and consolidated [Bourdieu 1987a; DiMaggio 1991]. It is also the period that has provided us with the template of a clear correspondence between consensually acknowledged sources of social rank and an equally consensual ranking of cultural goods which separate those produced by urban professional artists from other folk and popular arts [DiMaggio 1987], privileging the former as possessing more intrinsic work and aesthetic value as this come to be defined in the now institutionalized [and globalized in the rich West] dealer critic-system. Here we see the rise for the first time of a correspondence between *embodied habits of cultural appreciation* related to this newly defined field of “pure” art and position in the stratification system as defined in terms of economic chances.

Embodied Cultural Capital in the Late-modern System

Yet, as soon as this system of cultural valuation was consolidated it was immediately transformed [DiMaggio 2000]. The proximate source of the transformation was both social and technological. The technological impetus came from the concomitant rise of media of mass communication that for the first time produce the ability to reach an audience of national scope. The social transformation was brought about by the very same system of market institutions responsible for the rise of the Bourgeoisie to power. The more important long-run enabler of the transformation consisted in the linkage between the field of restricted of art and the then expanding organizational field of higher education. It was through this organizational matrix that the new socio-cognitive forms of perception and appreciation would be diffused and institutionalized in Western nation-states, reminding us of the importance of organizations as the primary carriers and sustainers of institutionalized cultural patterns [Zucker 1988].

For Bourdieu, linkages between the field of cultural production and higher education institutions are important in two ways. First, the educational system helps in giving order to competitive attempts to establish consensual valuation standards

by “claiming monopoly over the consecration of works of the past” [Bourdieu 1993, 123]. Second, it continually reproduces (and in expanding systems) helps foster a wider culture consumption public thus ensuring “*the reproduction of agents* imbued with the categories of action, expression, conception, imagination, [and] perception, specific to the ‘cultivated disposition’” [Bourdieu 1993, 121, italics added].

While the technological mediation of culture production was already operative in what Anderson [1991] referred to as the “print capitalism” responsible for the emergence of the nation-state as an “imagined community,” the newly acquired capacity to transmit first sound through airwaves and later on visual images in the mid-twentieth century (as well as the development of increasingly reliable means of storage and cultural information) transform the early print capitalism into “audio-visual capitalism” [Appadurai 1990] and provide for the first time the possibility of a complete effacement of local differences in cultural availability subsisting thanks to the geographical segregation of folk and popular cultures [Peterson and DiMaggio 1975].

This is the period when the specter of the “mass society” begins to rear its ugly head, as exemplified in the development of the first “culture-industry” of a global scope centered on the production of Hollywood film [de Grazia 1989]. Along with the radio [Adorno 2001], and the development of a centralized music industry [Peterson 1990]. Technology transformed the meaning of “popular” culture so that it came to resemble and play interactional functions similar to that which folk cultures played in the pre-industrial West [Fine 1977; Levine 1992]. While intellectual elites inveighed against what they invariably perceived as the noxious and corrosive “effects” of this “mass culture” working and middle class individuals across across the Euro-American West proceeded to kindly ignore their advice, as they flocked to the movie theater and placed a radio set in the living room, with the hopes of catching up to the latest fashion trends, and of imbibing the new forms of courtship and social intercourse popularized through the Hollywood star system [de Grazia 1989; Illouz 1998].

The theory of mass society [Kornhouser 1959; MacDonald 1957; Shils 1961/1998] – was a confused and confusing amalgam of pop-sociology, moralistic preaching and thinly veiled elitist anxiety fostered by increasing levels of social mobility and the decline of the bourgeois consensus regarding the ritual separation of “culture” from that which appealed to the a wide-scale audience. The dire pronouncements of mass culture theory were in this way primarily fueled by what was perceived to have been the adaptation of this new system of mass communication for purposes of political control under fascism. According to this “theory,” industrialization and the replacement of market ties for previously uncommodified connections based on blood

and tradition produced a society of alienated, disconnected individuals, a “teeming” mass (or a mob if it dared to take to the streets) ready at any time to throw their irrational allegiance toward any paternalist demagogue that cared to grab the microphone and who promised to deliver them from their sorry existential predicament. Popular culture served as a “narcotic” keeping the masses in check, and doing its best to devalue and debase the best that man had thought and known. Yet, as it turned out it was the *market* and not the nationalist polity which turned out to be the main incubator of popular culture in the post-war era.

As a new generation grew up under conditions of post-war affluence, the boundary between the popular and the fine arts realms began to be *officially* breached. This breach began to be formally recognized by members of the critical apparatus (the line had always been unofficially breached in some form or another throughout the entire period, especially in popular literature [Kammen 1999, 106-107]) – with the emergence of pop art in the 1960s, a development produced through pressures toward permanent innovation based on formal experimentation originating in the field of restricted production of fine arts itself [Bell 1976; Crane 1989]. These set of developments (coupled with the increasing incorporation of artistic innovations into commercial culture) eroded the pre-war attempt to institute a rigid boundary between these two forms of (“large scale” and “restricted”) cultural production.

The blurring of the boundary between the fine arts and popular culture was exacerbated by the fact that urban elites lost their grip on the very institutions that they created to a more cosmopolitan (and itself professionalized and thus partially “autonomous” in Bourdieu’s [1985a] sense) breed of cultural professionals anchored in expanding state-bureaucracies. The allegiance of this new college-educated professional cadre was tied to the state and the various expansionist post-war projects of publicly sponsored cultural democratization (the cultural complement to mass education [Meyer, Ramirez, and Soysal 1992; Thomas and Meyer 1984]); their networks were national (and increasingly of transnational scope) leaving behind the relatively parochial world of upper-class urban elites [DiMaggio 2000]. As the major institutions of cultural dissemination shifted from an institutional logic [Thornton and Ocasio 1999] of class-based patronage and cultural exclusion based on social access and particularistic ties, to one of populist inclusion and democratization of the means of artistic consumption the differentiation of the fine arts from other forms of aesthetic production began to weaken [DiMaggio 2000].

This state-led “democratization” project also implied that the very schemes of perception and appreciation constitutive of the artistic field began to be imparted to a wider segment of the populace through institutions of higher education. This set of dynamics ultimately resulted in new forms of “audience segmentation” for the

popular and fine arts that *could not* be understood under a simple “elite-to-mass” or “fine/popular” model [Peterson 1997]. Instead the capacity to consume cultural goods of all forms, emanating either from delimited urban artworlds oriented toward upscale audiences or centralized popular culture industries with global audiences [Crane 1993], has now become tied to the incorporation of the system of appreciation and classification of cultural forms that is espoused by institutions of higher education [Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu 1996b]. Integration into the contemporary system of cultural consumption by way of being perceived as a capable *discriminator* of all types of cultural goods [Frith 1998], has become one of the primary “institutional” effects of modern educational systems on individuals [Bourdieu 1967; Frank and Meyer 2002; Meyer 1977]. This dynamic acquires renewed salience insofar as previous fields of “mass produced” popular art themselves come to acquire and institute the same schemes of perception, appreciation and historical canonization distinctive of the restricted field of cultural production, in an attempt to legitimize the popular arts as capable of being “fine” arts [Baumann 2001; Johnston and Baumann 2007; Lopes 2002].

Several pieces of evidence are consistent with this dynamic. First, in the post-war era, the field of fine-arts production *has expanded* in the United States in particular and most other rich Western countries in general, *at the same time* as did the global popular culture industry [Cowen 2002], indicating that demand for all forms of cultural product (regardless of the system of production and dissemination) grew concordantly in the post-war period and continues to do so in the present. Thus, the mass culture prognosis of the “end of art” did not come to pass. On the contrary more art (and artists) whether “popular” or “fine” are produced today than ever before [DiMaggio 2000]. This expansion of fine arts production has more recently begun to itself acquire global aspects [Crane 2002]. Imports and exports of fine art products have begun to encompass a non-negligible proportion of transnational cultural trade [UNESCO 2005]. While state-led efforts to “democratize” fine-arts consumption by wresting control of dissemination from urban elites have not completely succeeded [Alexander 1996; Bourdieu and Darbel 1991] *some* democratization has occurred simply through the spread of mass education [DiMaggio 2000].

In addition, there has not only been an expansion of arts consumption audiences, but the role of informal artistic producer itself has become more common among college educated segments of population [Wali, Severson, and Longoni 2002]. However, insofar as the correlation between higher education and fine arts consumption preserves the connection between embodied cultural capital and the ability to incorporate cultural goods produced in autonomous fields, it can be said that the strong legacies of the late-Nineteenth century system of cultural valuation and

cultural stratification continue to be operative under this structural transformation [DiMaggio 1987; Peterson 1992; 1997; Peterson and Kern 1996]. This is so even as the relationship between the *ownership* of cultural works and income has become weaker over-time, as education has replaced income as the primary predictor [Silva 2006; van Eijck and Bargeman 2004].

This means that with the institutionalization of a large-scale consumer society that quickly turns-over distinctions between upscale and downscale material objects [Holt 1998], and with the continued expansion of artistic production by school-trained artists, ownership of goods has become a very weak marker of social status. Instead, the embodied “ownership” – arguably a much stronger form of possession – of socio-cognitive principles of cultural perception and valuation transmitted by institutions of higher education appears as the primary link that connects lifestyle habits and social class [DiMaggio 2000; Holt 1998]. This is precisely the opposite of the situation that prevailed during the early modern period [Baxandall 1988]. Thus, as shown in most empirical research access to what Bourdieu [1996b] called the “scholastic institution” (aided by the middle class home) has become the primary purveyor of the cognitive skills necessary for the consumption and incorporation of symbolic goods.

This is exemplified in the fact that educational attainment (and being a member of occupations for which high levels of ability to manipulate symbols and abstract codes is a requirement) is today the best predictor of *both* embodied *appreciation* of the fine arts and the *acquisition* of artistic objects [Chan and Goldthorpe 2007b; Silva 2006]. In this sense, while the rise of a dominant popular culture industry served to efface the ritual boundary between the popular and fine arts, the system of cultural valuation that privileges the fine arts as a pursuit that is in accordance with the status definition functions of high education has partially survived, even as we enter “late-modernity” [Ollivier 2004]. Socio-cognitive boundaries produced by education, therefore serve to produce homogeneity in habits of cultural perception and appreciation within educated strata [Bourdieu 1967] – partially effacing distinctions tied to nationality, place and space [Frank and Meyer 2002; Meyer 1977], as evidenced by emerging global markets for the fine arts [Crane 2002] and the emergence of a global popular sensibility [During 2005] – even as they exacerbate the differences between those who have access to higher education and those who do not within proximate geographical locations. This becomes even more important as the socio-cognitive principles of appreciation and incorporation of cultural works come to be institutionalized in increasingly global systems of organization and dissemination [Hannerz 1990; Regev 1997; regev 2007].

Discussion

In this paper I have argued that historical changes in the organization of artistic production and the institutional production of *culture-consuming publics* [Bourdieu 1993; Ikegami 2006] have had important repercussions for the creation of the conditions necessary to preserve certain connections between markers of social stratification and lifestyle. In particular I argue with Holt [1998] and Ollivier [2004; Ollivier and Fridman 2002] that a key characteristic of the modern system of cultural stratification is associated not with the ability to own or acquire *cultural objects* but with the ability to *decode* and *incorporate* all manners of aesthetically produced materials and performances [Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998], cutting across previously institutionalized boundaries separating the largely non-profit organizational network of production of the “fine arts” from the for-profit “cultural-industry system” [Hirsch 1972] in charge of disseminating the popular arts through market mechanisms [Crane 1993].

While much attention has been paid to the “deinstitutionalization” of the boundary separating audiences of commercial (“popular”) and non-commercial (“serious”) art in recent research and theory [Peterson 1997; 2005], what has not been adequately realized is the fact that the emergence of an *autonomous* artistic field in the late Nineteenth century had a profound impact in setting the stage for this development. The construction of a set of, abstract, non-content-specific (and thus transposable in Bourdieu’s sense) perceptual schemes for the incorporation of art that were *specific* to artistic goods, radically devalued systems of cultural ranking based solely on the monetary ability to acquire objects. The regime of direct appropriation and ownership of cultural goods had formed the basis of cultural stratification in the emergent consumer society of early industrialism.

The emergence of an embodied cultural capital regime also permanently transformed the aristocratic system of cultural valuation in which the artist’s ability to endow objects with aesthetic worth was subjugated under his or her dependence on a system of patronage controlled by members of a system hereditary privilege restricted by kinship. This turned the tables in favor of instituting a new principle of cultural distinction based on embodied cognitive-emotive dispositions towards aesthetic goods that matched those developed in autonomous fields of cultural production [Bourdieu 1968]. These dispositions were now not the sole purview of persons born with these “natural” abilities (thus breaking the primordialist monopoly of the aristocracy over taste) but required some degree of access to the institutional sectors capable of defining and producing these dispositions (autonomous artistic fields, in-

formal culture-production circles, higher education institutions, media systems controlled by critical gate-keepers).

Thus a sole focus on the “deinstitutionalization” of the high/popular ritual boundary [DiMaggio 1987] can be misleading, if that is interpreted as bringing with it a “democratization” of collectively valued forms of aesthetic sensibility. Instead, what appears to be a process of deinstitutionalization of a previously strong ritual boundary can instead be read as the gradual *transposition* [Bourdieu 1990; Sewell 1992] and *generalization* of the original cognitive scheme developed in the restricted production field of Euro-American modernist art – what Bourdieu [1984] referred to as the “aesthetic disposition” – to an increasingly heterogeneous set of aesthetic products [Frith 1998]. A dynamic that has been fueled both by (among other factors) endogenous pressures toward innovation in the field of cultural production of fine art [Bourdieu 1993], the diffusion of (post)modernist aesthetics through the links that connect culture production communities to the class system by way of higher education institutions and other organizational systems dedicated to the diffusion and consecration of symbolic goods, and the acquisition of the same dynamics of cultural innovation through formal experimentation in protected segments of the commercial arts field [Baumann 2007].

What a focus on “deinstitutionalization” – with the implication that deinstitutionalization entails “entropy” [Zucker 1988] and thus an inability to rank lifestyles in the contemporary system – also occludes is the fact that the “schema of art” developed in the restricted production field of 19th century modernism has not only become *increasingly institutionalized* – meaning taken for granted as definitional of aesthetic worth – as a set of socio-cognitive categories and practices, but also as an ensemble of organizational forms and models for the construction of culture-producing institutional fields [DiMaggio and Powell 1983]. Thus as Bourdieu [1993] and White and White [1993] point out, the autonomization of art, went hand in hand with the creation of organizational forms and roles (the salon, the dealer, the critic, the literary magazine, the independent producer’s awards) which, as they have become institutionalized, have also become objectified and elaborated [Zucker 1977; Zucker 1983] – and thus capable of being transposed to other forms of “popular art” in search of legitimation.

In this respect, the popular arts are “objectively condemned” to define themselves “in relation to legitimate culture; this is so in the field of production as well as of consumption” [Bourdieu 1993, 129]. Thus it is no wonder that an entire “legitimation sequence” based on the original one found in the field of Nineteenth century painting and music can be discerned in Twentieth century film and popular music [Baumann 2001; Lopes 2002]. This is important because the “deinstitutionalization”

of the older “high/popular” boundary has been furthered not only by way of the “popular” crossing into the “artistic” (as in 1960s pop art) but also by way of “popular” culture *formally* moving closer to the institutional forms pioneered by the artistic field. This contributes to the increasing objectification, and endurance of both the organizational and socio-cognitive forms of high art. It also explains the increasing importance of education in predicting the ability to consume both “popular” and “artistic” symbolic goods.

Accordingly, I would suggest that the dependence of the current stratification regime on socio-cognitive tools (embodied cultural and linguistic capital) acquired in the now virtually mandatory – especially for members of culturally and economically privileged class fractions – complex of higher education institutions and reinforced in culturally privileged households systematically preserve a familiar form of status based rank, even in the wake of deep transformations in the logic of the system [Olivier 2004; Regev 2007]. This ranking is no longer “visible” but – like other cultural advantages traceable to middle-class socialization and educational attainment [Illouz 2007; Lareau 2003] – resides in deeply habitualized systems of perception, categorization and action [Bourdieu 1990; Bourdieu 2000] that match the institutional conditions of production of those very same schemes. In this respect the “deinstitutionalization” of the system of cultural valuation that separated the art forms produced in traditional non-profit systems (with direct or indirect – i.e. state mediated – upper class patronage) from the for-profit cultural industries, has occurred in tandem with the increasing *institutionalization* of an abstract (and therefore flexibly deployable) scheme of perception and appreciation of symbolic goods that cuts across for-profit and non-profit culture-delivery systems [Holt 1998]. Popular culture has in this manner become increasingly “intellectualized” [Baumann 2007; Ferguson 1998] at the very same time that the fine arts have become “open” to popular influence.

Implications

This has important implications for sociological theories of culture consumption. It is clear, for instance that neither Veblen-inspired theories of “conspicuous consumption” nor Simmelian “trickle down” theories of cultural diffusion (both developed during the transition from the objectified cultural capital regime of the early consumer society to the newer embodied cultural capital regime) are very useful in explaining contemporary patterns of cultural stratification based on the deployment of embodied aesthetic schemes [Holt 1998; Meyer 2000]. Trickle down theories of fashion [McCracken 1991] are much applicable to the usual diffusion trajectory of

expensive consumer goods that require very little embodied cultural capital to incorporate. It is a commonplace observation in the history of art that new styles “trickle up” (or sideways) rather than down [Lopes 2002; Peterson 1990], a process clearly fueled by the constant dynamics for innovation created in autonomous fields of artistic production [Bourdieu 1983; Crane 1989] and the role of Bohemian communities in mediating between under-privileged cultural innovators and dominant segments of the upper-middle class [Crane 1989; Pels 1998]. Even what used to be referred as “mass culture” is not exempt from this process of “bohemianization” [Wilson 1999].

In this respect theories of embodied cultural capital [Bourdieu 1984; Holt 1998; Illouz 1998; Illouz 2007] are much more applicable to the late-modern situation than are theories based on access to objectified goods. Embodied cultural capital is not “conspicuous” in the same way as objectified cultural capital; it must be exploited in direct face-to-face interaction [DiMaggio 1987], and mobilized as a *linguistic* resource in conversation [Fine 1977]. It is in this manner inextricable from the linguistic capital [Bourdieu 1991b] and the schemas of artistic objectification, historical classification and attribution of authorship acquired in modern schools and systems of critical ranking. This also means however, that embodied cultural capital is more deeply connected to pattern of sociability in the classic Simmelian sense [Simmel 1949], and thus comes to play a clear but increasingly obfuscated – to those who are led by their theories to look for clear signs of class ranking – in processes of status homogeneity in intimate relationships [Illouz 1998].

Because the embodied deployment of the aesthetic disposition by members of culture-producing and culture-consuming communities *requires* the separation of formal from substantive qualities of symbolic goods (this socio-cognitive ability is definitional of the aesthetic disposition [Bourdieu 1984]), cultural objects produced by members of subaltern groups or by for-profit cultural industries can now be routinely “upscaled” if they are correctly incorporated into the “artistic” schema [Frith 1998; Johnston and Baumann 2007]. Thus, it is no longer warranted to draw conclusions as to the ultimate appeal of specific cultural forms simply from knowing their initial origins in a particular social stratum [McCracken 1991]. Its legitimation career and trajectory must also be accounted for. It is also a safe bet that this legitimation career will conform to the highly institutionalized strictures of the artistic schema.

This is a characteristic that is unique to cultural and aesthetic objects (and increasingly aestheticized consumer goods), and which contributes to the (deceiving) impression that there is no longer any correspondence between forms of cultural consumption and social location [Tomlinson 2003]. As I have argued throughout, attentiveness to the historical transformation of the principles of classification of the Western system of cultural valuation shows that this conclusion is not warranted. In

particular, the rise of embodied cultural capital as a key marker of class distinction, means that the bulk of the processes of exploitation of cultural advantages are – as argued by such diverse authors as Bourdieu [1996b], Illouz [2007], Fine [1977], and Collins [2004] – now increasingly connected to access to settings that allow for face-to-face interaction and the opportunity to deploy habitualized dispositions acquired in culturally (rather than economically) privileged environments.

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The Question of Culture Consumption and Stratification Revisited

Abstract: While the question of *whether* there exists a connection between social stratification and lifestyle differentiation seems to be uncontroversial, the primary issue that continues to bedevil research at the intersection of the sociology of culture and the study of structured inequality, concerns the precise nature of this connection. While various answers have been proposed to this question, the current state of the field is one of “ambiguity” as to what is the best way to proceed. In this paper, I use a long-term historical perspective to tackle this question. I argue that understanding the cultural stratification system that appears to have coalesced in the richer societies of the contemporary Global North, we must attend to the historical origin and trajectory of the system of production of symbolic goods in the West, and how this has interacted with the system of scholastic “production” of consumers of such goods. This system can best be described as an embodied cultural capital regime, in which the ability to indirectly decode the formal properties of cultural goods using habitualized schemes of perception and appreciation has replaced the capacity to directly acquire cultural works through purchase as the primary marker of status.

Keywords: *arts consumption, Bourdieu, social stratification, cultural capital, fields of cultural production.*

Omar Lizardo received his PhD from the University of Arizona in 2006 and is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at University of Notre Dame. His primary research interests are the sociology of culture, the sociology of knowledge, sociological theory and world systems theory. In a recently published paper he dealt with the effect of cultural tastes on the composition of social networks (*American Sociological Review*, 2006). He is currently working on an extension and elaboration of contemporary theories of culture consumption geared toward the understanding of transnational patterns of cultural trade. Additional work in progress deals with the question of the role of cultural capital in the creation of social capital and on the instrumental use of social ties.