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Distinction versus Exclusion in Gourmet Food Culture

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Introduction[1]

This article adds to current sociological debates on cultural taste and social distinction. A focal point of these debates is whether or not the broadening of cultural orientation, captured by the concept of "omnivorousness," indicates a leveling of social distinction and, as such, challenges ideas involved in the concept of cultural capital. Omnivorousness has influenced a substantial number of empirical and theoretical contributions, and scholars tend to position themselves on one side of a controversy about the nature and the significations of omnivorous taste. One tradition interprets this as a sign of greater tolerance, and as indicating a narrowing gap between elite culture and popular culture. Work within this tradition rebuts Pierre Bourdieu's [1984] classic work on social distinction and challenges his posited homology between culture and class. Work within the opposite tradition raise doubt about the alleged social change involved in the omnivore thesis and declare support for Bourdieu and the notion of cultural capital (for a comprehensive overview, see Peterson 2005).[2] On closer reading, however, I find that some contributions within the latter tradition draw debatable conclusions on cultural taste and distribution of cultural capital. These contributions also lack discussions around possible impli-

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[2] More recent empirical contributions are published in e.g. *Poetics* volumes 36, 37, and 38.

cations of social distinction and alternative theoretical frameworks for understanding patterns of distinction. One example of work in this category is Johnston and Baumann's [2007] article on gourmet food culture, and I use their assumptions on distinction processes and cultural capital as a basis for my own discussion. Johnston and Baumann look into recent changes within gourmet food culture and ask whether or not the broadening of the repertoire within this cultural realm is a manifestation of social change. They contend that this is not the case, and claim that the broad spectrum of food and the many culinary genres now considered appropriate for elite dining do not entail an erosion of traditional social boundaries. Stratification is not fading away, they assert, and snobbery is not in retreat; it is merely being acted out more subtly.

Johnston and Baumann deserve credit for a convincing and stimulating analysis of contemporary gourmet food culture as this is expressed in gourmet food magazines. They find that journalists valorize a range of options by framing them as exotic and/or authentic, and they argue that these frames (exoticism and authenticity) "resolve a tension between an inclusionary ideology of democratic cultural consumption on the one hand, and an exclusionary ideology of taste and distinction on the other" [Johnston and Baumann 2007, 165]. However, from an analysis of the ways in which journalists tend to frame contemporary gourmet food options Johnston and Baumann draw conclusions 1) on the American upper classes' consumption and gourmet food practices, and 2) on social structure and distribution of cultural capital in the United States [Ibidem, 169-174, 200], both of which go far beyond the reach of their data. It is reasonable to believe that gourmet food writers contribute to the production of culture. They also pick up existing trends, and shape preferences and the perception of some foods as being worthy of attention. Johnston and Baumann seem, however, to suggest a much closer relationship between cultural production and cultural consumption or between culinary journalists' recommendations and their readerships' practices than what is empirically proven – they suggest an almost one-to-one relationship.

In my discussion here I mainly concentrate on the second point mentioned above, i.e. Johnston and Baumann's statements around gourmet food culture and cultural capital. I argue that the authors do not justify that the social gap they assume is present within the culinary field indicates unequal power distribution in society. I then explore the possibility of whether Georg Simmel's conceptualization of social distinction could be fruitful for understanding taste repertoires and distinction processes revealed within this particular cultural field.

A lack of reflection around cultural capital as a phenomenon

Food, as a cultural realm, is underexplored in recent research on social distinction.[3] Bourdieu's [1984] data reveal, however, a rather narrow social gap, and he also points to differences between fractions within the dominant class [e.g., Bourdieu 1984, 185; see also Gartman 1991, 430]. Nevertheless, Johnston and Baumann suggest a sharply socially segmented distribution of taste and knowledge within the culinary field. They hold, for instance, that only people with high status know a variety of ethnic cuisines and have the knowledge necessary for judging food quality and appreciating authentic food, and that this knowledge, in turn, is an indication of high levels of cultural capital. They also hold that readers of gourmet food magazines tend to possess – and to acquire – high levels of cultural capital [Johnston and Baumann 2007, 173-200].[4] Perhaps Bourdieu himself would disagree with the notion of a correspondence between high levels of cultural capital and an interest in lifestyle magazines. Within his study context, this kind of interest was typical of the petit bourgeoisie, or the pretenders, those with a "manifest discrepancy between ambition and possibilities" [Bourdieu 1984, 176], or to rephrase Gartman [1991, 424]; those who "aspires to bourgeois distinction but has neither the capital nor habitus to really achieve it." Bourdieu also demonstrates that cultural elites discriminate against book-learned taste, or a studied approach to style, because this is typical of the petit-bourgeois, people who, quoting Holt [1997, 104], "are quick to learn new recipes from Bon Appétit" (one of the magazines Johnston and Baumann explored).

Aspects such as practices, preferences and knowledge are essential to the definition of cultural capital.[5] In Bourdieu's [1984] work, however, cultural capital is also specified according to capital composition and capital volume, a specification which for him is crucial both for capturing oppositions in the social space and for his argument around cultural capital as a power resource. To perform the function of a power resource cultural capital must be "invested" actively in order to yield social profits [Bourdieu 1984; Lamont and Lareau 1988]. Cultural capital, according to Bourdieu, opens up access to other resources (material, social and symbolic), and can also be converted into other forms of capital (social as well as economic), and used for social and cultural exclusion [Lamont and Lareau 1988, 156]. However, while Bourdieu

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[3] Most studies on taste and social distinction cover cultural expressions such as music, literature, fine arts, or film.

[4] Johnston and Baumann offer information on readers' average head-of-household income which is around $130,000 (p. 177). Comments on readers' level of education are mere speculations (p. 189).

[5] For definitions of cultural capital, see e.g., Lamont and Lareau [1988], Lizardo [2008], Warde and Gayo-Cal [2009] and Weininger [2005].

[1984] demonstrates that some practices offer greater external social rewards than others, Johnston and Baumann, in line with a number of other scholars, are relatively silent on the issue; they say nothing about the ways in which knowledge, in this case on certain gourmet food options and hip dining establishments, can be useful or help people dominate, and also legitimate their domination. Although food in principle is part of material culture, preferences are normally known only within a narrow circle of family, friends and colleagues. Knowledge of the latest trends and attractive eateries is even less visible. Where people dine is of course visible to those who dine at the same places, but culinary preferences in general, or the kind of preferences communicated to others, are often demonstrated in conversations, face-to-face [Andrews 2006; Warde et al. 1999],[6] and face-to-face interactions normally take place within close social circles.

Johnston and Baumann's [2007] silence on the ways in which they see cultural capital working leaves a number of questions unanswered, for instance, the following: Is it reasonable to believe that displaying culinary taste or communicating an interest in gourmet food (omnivore or sophisticated) leads people to form friendships, professional alliances or powerful groups? Does it help strengthen people's relationships? What kind of social advantage does knowledge on a variety of cuisines and food options confer? Does it help the knowledge holder achieve positions, and does it exclude others from attaining the same positions? Does it give people a more secure or comfortable life and help them advance in social settings? If so, how? To phrase it differently: when people lack knowledge on particular "authentic" food options, various ethnic cuisines or artistic chefs, do they miss a potentially tasty meal or risk exclusion from jobs or other resources?

An alternative conceptualization of social distinction

Johnston and Baumann's [2007] arguments concerning various options within current gourmet-food culture and their potential to work as symbolic boundaries are not necessarily off the track. I find, for instance, important resonance between their reported findings and Georg Simmel's [1971][7] elaboration on the social distinction processes involved in fashion. Through a number of examples, Johnston and Baumann reveal that the repertoire of gourmet food has become subjected to fashion,

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[6] It is not unlikely that some people dine at certain restaurants with the purpose of being seen by relevant others, probably to demonstrate status (Warde et al. 1999, 122), but whether these people calculate on social or practical benefits – or experience any kind of benefit – remains unanswered.

[7] Simmel's essay on Fashion was originally published in *International Quarterly* (New York), 10, 1904. The 1971 version is reprinted from *American Journal of Sociology* 62, May 1957.

partly triggered by journalists. Johnston and Baumann explicitly speak of gourmet food writers as culinary trendsetters, or people who continually identify new dishes for their audience and locate options in vogue, and whose role is to identify worthy food choices, set criteria for what can be included as gourmet fashion changes, and determine each season's interesting, unusual and exciting dishes [Johnston and Baumann 2007, 194-195]. The authors also demonstrate the ways in which writers, in their discursive construction of worthy options within the frames of authenticity and/or exoticism, seek inspiration in traditions far from "home", socially, geographically and historically, and how they introduce options that break with the past and disclaim the known [Ibidem, 166-195]. In their analysis, Johnston and Baumann noticeably echo the Swedish sociologist Ann Mari Sellerberg [1982] who drew attention to the *exotic* and the *authentic* as central elements of food fashion in the late 1970s and early 1980s.[8]

Some of the main principles that Johnston and Baumann identify within gourmet food culture are the unfamiliar, the norm-breaking, the authentic, and the exotic. These principles are also core elements of fashion, according to Simmel, and the institution of fashion follows its own logic. As Simmel [1971, 300] puts it, whatever departs from the norm "exercises a peculiar charm upon the man of culture, entirely independent of its material justification." Exceptionality, oddness, extremes and whatever is unusual will appeal to fashion, as will authenticity and old traditions. Democracy, which is central to Johnston and Baumann's argument, is as important a source of inspiration as is foreignness. Because of the dynamic nature of fashion, breaking with the past is also crucial.

Simmel's main concern is the social distinction processes involved in fashion. In exploring this process, he identifies a set of psycho-social counter-tendencies: the need for *union* and the need for *isolation* or *segregation*. Fashion, Simmel says, is the imitation of a given example that satisfies, on the one hand, the demand for social adaptation, and on the other hand, the need for differentiation, the tendency towards dissimilarity and the desire for change and contrast [Simmel 1971, 301-302]. Simmel develops his argument around these two fundamental functions (union and segregation), which he sees as inseparable and reflecting general processes in society throughout history – the conflicts and the compromises, slowly won and quickly lost, between adaptation to society and individual departure from its demands.[9] The two main processes of differentiation and imitation affect different groups of people

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[8] See also Sellerberg [2001].

[9] Simmel's [1971] theory on fashion to some degree overlaps with Veblen's [1979] conceptualization of conspicuous consumption. Campbell [1994] provides a thorough comparison of the two perspectives.

according to Simmel. He claims that the penchant for seeking something new comes from above, while the desire to imitate comes from below. As soon as the lower classes begin to copy upper class style and thereby cross the line of demarcation drawn by the upper classes, the upper classes turn away from this style and adopt a new one, which in turn differentiates them from the masses or the lower classes [Simmel 1971, 299]. However, the variability in taste, as Simmel put it, is captured by and vested in the middle classes. People at the top of the social ladder are the most conservative. Their taste does not change, and Simmel's explanation for this is that the highest classes avoid change because they have nothing to gain by it:

> "[They]… dread every motion and change, not because they have antipathy towards the contents, but simply because it is change and because they regard every modification of the whole as suspicious and dangerous. No change can bring them additional power, and every change can give them something to fear, but nothing to hope for" [Simmel 1971, 317 f].

Simmel's conceptualization of social distinction has partly been rejected as a fruitful model for understanding contemporary consumption patterns mainly because of the trickledown effect that is embedded in his argument and his separation of "higher" and "lower" social circles [Campbell 1994]. Ideas of a trickledown process contradict recent empirical findings which suggest that new trends in consumption (food included) trickle both from below and across [cf. Andrews 2006, Campbell 1994; Sellerberg 1982]. However, while Simmel's model essentially presupposes a vertical demarcation line, I shall argue below, partly based on my own empirical research, that the opposing forces of differentiation and conformity that are essential to Simmel's argument could provide fertile ground for understanding current distinction processes in consumption also in cases where demarcation lines run along a horizontal axis. Simmel [1971, 299] himself argues that his model also captures dynamics between groups with no clear social hierarchies, such as between fractions within the upper classes and neighboring groups in more "primitive" societies. Gronow [1997, 93f] points out that Simmel in his later writings makes it clear that he did not think that the only distinctions making up the dynamics of fashion were class distinctions.

Further elaboration on an alternative perspective

In my empirical work within the culinary field I investigated the attraction to Japanese cuisine, in particular the raw fish menu [Andrews 2006]. The study was mainly concerned with symbolic aspects of various dishes, meals, menus, and rituals, and based on varying sources and approaches such as analysis of ethnographic da-

ta gathered from restaurants and informal conversations, and analysis of restaurant guides, restaurant sections of newspapers, historical literature, and statistical data. Ethnographic data stems from four cities; New York City, Paris, Oslo and Bergen (Norway's two largest cities),[10] while statistical data are drawn from two Norwegian national surveys on eating patterns; preferences and practices [MMI 2002, 2004].

Findings of importance for my argument here are, first, suggestions of a heterogeneous taste profile. This is in line with a number of recent studies within various national contexts which, in opposition to Johnston and Baumann's [2007] claimed support for a vertically ranked taste dichotomy, challenge the traditional elite-mass-model of taste or consumption [e.g., Chan and Goldthorpe 2007; DiMaggio and Mukthar 2004; Emmison 2003; Erickson 1996; Lamont 1994; Peterson and Kern 1996; Purhonen, Gronow, and Rahkonen, 2010; Warde, Martens, and Olsen 1999]. In different ways these authors point to an architectural structure of taste where social hierarchies are less distinct and they propose that no single taste profile is shared by all people in a social group, advantaged or not. Erickson [1996] and Peterson [2005] both stress, that only a minority of "high status" people consume "high status" culture.

In the case of the Japanese cuisine I identified distinctions, both for preferences and practices, which were running along more than one axis. Demarcation lines follow a vertical path as well as a horizontal path between subgroups on the same step of the social ladder (based on levels of education), and cut across generations, gender, marital status and geographical location. The "elite", understood in terms of those at the forefront of the trend were not necessarily economically advantage people, but fractions of the upper-middle class and a crowd of younger people. People from all layers whether upper class, middle class, or lower class, figured as the "masses," which means that the great majority – not only those beneath the "elite" on the social ladder – add up to the "masses." In other words, the "elite" and the "masses" in this case differ from assumptions of hierarchical opposition between the dominant (the elite) and the dominated (the masses). Processes of segregation and union or dissimilarity and similarity seemed to work both within and between "classes." For example, while some upper middle class people strive towards dissimilarity by quickly taking up the raw fish trend, other upper middle class people strive towards similarity in the sense that they try raw fish first when "everyone" else has already had it. However, a third process also appeared, i.e. indications of rejection or resistance. Some - up-

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[10] My data from New York City are from 2004, the issuing year of the gourmet food magazines that Johnston and Baumann studied.

per middle class people included and more women than men - said that they would "never dream of eating raw fish no matter how trendy it is."[11]

Raw fish was introduced in New York City in the late 1970s and had grown in popularity in this city years before it was generally available in any of the Norwegian cities, for instance. Distribution processes seemed to differ somewhat. While this menu item in New York was first offered on the menu of 21 Club a dining venue for upscale consumers [Bestor 2001], a mid-range restaurant was the first to offer it in Bergen. In New York the raw fish menu soon attracted a different crowd from that of 21 Club, gained popularity and then slowly lost some of its attraction as it gradually spread down-marked and became available in remote areas as well as in chain restaurants and supermarkets [Ibidem]. When attraction to a product such as raw fish is copied by new crowds and spreads, the product goes to its doom as a fashion; the particular dish either disappears or merges into the traditional food repertoire [Sellerberg 1982; see also Simmel 1971, 302]. Those who initially embraced raw fish and want to demonstrate distinction, face different options: either move on to new dishes or new cuisines, or mark exclusivity through little details or nuances [Andrews 2006]. Gourmet food journalists cited by Johnston and Baumann [2007, 194] declare, for example, that sashimi definitely is "out," while more rare Japanese dishes have gained appeal as gourmet options.

While in my study, distinction processes seemed to be more or less conscious, Simmel [1971] argues that in fashion distinction processes are both conscious and intentional. Intentionality, in turn, is one of the features on which Simmel's and Bourdieu's notions of social distinction differ. Bourdieu [1984] states that social distance is an unintended outcome of conduct because people are not necessarily aware of the ways in which knowledge and preferences work to legitimate their own position and are hidden strategies for exercising power. He positions his theory in opposition to the emulation perspective, of which Simmel is a proponent, arguing that exclusionary consumption practices typically occur through disinterested pursuit of tastes rather than through strategic maneuvering [Holt 1997, 95-101]. By contrast, Simmel [1971] offers a conception of taste differences that sees strategic maneuvering as quintessential. Some trends, he argues, fill a psycho-social need to differ; therefore the social distance attained through fashion is entirely intended.

Johnston and Baumann [2007, 170] explicitly declare that their study lends support to Bourdieu's perspective on social distinction. Nevertheless, they implicitly indicate the opposite by asserting that social distance within contemporary gourmet

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[11] A number of arguments were given for this stance. I elaborate on some of them in Andrews [2006].

food culture is attained through conscious action, for instance, in their following formulation: "…. providing the cultural consumer *who wishes to signal distinction* both the opportunity to sample from a much broader cultural repertoire and the responsibility to make his or her tastes appear more democratically inclusive" [Ibidem, 200].[12] Johnston and Baumann also explicitly support the view that cultural taste is learned in childhood (a premise that Bourdieu holds for his theoretical reasoning), and that knowledge on culture is embodied or an indication of a "natural giftedness" deeply rooted in habitus. These are characteristics central to Bourdieu's argument; they give rise to specific upper class taste and even predetermine the choices of that class [Gartman 1991, 438]. Johnston and Baumann's data do not justify such an origin of taste and knowledge within current gourmet food culture. Rather, throughout their article the authors point out that, for certain groups of people, it is important to give the impression of being trendy and signal knowledge on which dining places to valorize and which exotic dishes to appreciate. Johnston and Baumann do not justify that the kind of knowledge needed to keep up with the fluctuations they describe within gourmet food culture, is learned in childhood. It is more likely to assume that other factors than family background play a significant role in achieving this kind of knowledge [see also Erickson 1996, 222-241].[13]

The notions "legitimate taste" or "legitimate culture" are other notions closely linked to Bourdieu's [1984] theoretical framework and his concept of cultural capital. In Bourdieu's account, legitimate taste, as opposed to illegitimate or popular taste, tops the hierarchical ranking of cultural taste. It is always the taste of the upper classes, and is used by the upper classes in distinction processes or in the reproduction of their own power and status. For a specific cultural taste to count as legitimate and be consistent with Bourdieu's [1984] definition, it should be recognized broadly across the population and have a certain origin (see above). Johnston and Baumann explicitly define "legitimate taste" with reference to Bourdieu's "legitimate culture" [e.g., Johnston and Baumann 2007, 197]. Nevertheless, the authors use the term "legitimate" mostly with reference to options that are found worth noticing for "trendy" people or those who read gourmet food magazines, a group of people that may differ from those Bourdieu refers to as the upper class [see e.g. Gronow 1997, 25; Holt 1997, 104]. One example that may illustrate such a distinction in taste is an article on Icelandic cuisine in one of the magazines that Johnston and Baumann explored [Johnston and Baumann 2007, 186]. I doubt that a traditional Icelandic dish such as

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[12] Emphasis added.

[13] Bourdieu offers examples of different processes of taste formation [see e.g. Gronow 1997, 24f], which Johnston and Baumann [2007] do not discuss.

kæstur hákarl (rotten shark) ever would appeal to American upper classes in general, or to the ruling elite in Bourdieu's terms, even if food writers should find this dish worth mentioning and as such valorize this option as "legitimate" (authentic and exotic) for a "trendy audience." It is, however, reasonable to believe that people from all social layers appreciate authentic and exotic gourmet options, but far from everyone and not indiscriminately as indicated by, for instance, my study [Andrews 2006] of preferences for raw fish. Writers furnish readers with information on worthy food choices and as such work as arbitrators of "legitimate taste" but not necessarily arbitrators of "legitimate taste" according to Bourdieu's account. Food writers obviously contribute to or define gourmet food fashion and offer inspiration for people who, for various reasons, seek change or distance. Many people easily tire of eccentric, bizarre or fanciful forms, says Simmel [1971, 320-321], and will also, for this reason, look for something new. Fashion varies, but the tempo at which it varies depends on many factors, and as soon as an earlier fashion has been partly forgotten, it may regain favor.[14]

Democracy is a key aspect within contemporary gourmet food culture with which Johnston and Baumann are concerned. The authors argue that even if writers tend to valorize simplicity and downplay the value of formal dining etiquette and Michelin stars, democracy is mainly a surface phenomenon [e.g., Johnston and Baumann 2007, 183 f]. They document fairly well that all omnivore options are not appreciated indiscriminately and that certain options allow food writers to signal distinction. Simmel would probably have said that democracy, in this case, works mainly as an inspiration for fashion. Nevertheless, it is impossible to draw conclusions about effects on social structure in the way Johnston and Baumann do without the backing of empirical data on e.g. practices or preferences. In order for culture produced by journalists to either reproduce or transform social structure, readers must follow these writers' recommendations on what to eat, where to eat, and which chefs are worth noticing. Those who follow journalists' recommendations have the opportunity to mark distance or signal exclusivity, but only through empirical examination can one obtain evidence of it, of the ways in which it happens, and of the kinds of returns readers receive from it or the kinds of social consequences the distance might have. Among issues that are necessary to look into, is whether readers of gourmet food magazines consider themselves and their culinary preferences to be superior to other social groups. Do they use their culinary taste in a struggle for domination, or do they

[14] Peterson [2005, 263] wonders if the omnivore music taste that he and colleagues observed in the 1980s and 1990s has been part of a wave about to turn towards a post-omnivore period for signaling status.

perhaps display exclusivity mainly within their own social circle? My study [Andrews 2006] indicates, for instance, that some of those in the forefront of the trend I investigated "compete in gourmet food competence" with their peers, primarily. Daloz also points to symbolic struggles between elites and he wonders if the countless codes that exist are recognized and appreciated outside each sub-system [e.g. Daloz 2008, 311]. Knowledge on certain gourmet food options might, in other words, work in terms of impression management, or function like chips one could cash in for some kind of social gain, but not necessarily the kind of gain Bourdieu was concerned with. Also, some forms of culture are definitely profitless, as Erickson [1996, 248] argues, and the desire for novelty could be a drive in itself, entirely inner-directed and also independent of imitation or emulation processes [Campbell 1994, 52-61].

Concluding comments

In this paper, I have drawn attention to problems associated with some of the ways in which cultural capital have been used to shed light over gaps in taste repertoires. I have taken Johnston and Baumann's [2007] Bourdieu-inspired assumptions on gourmet food culture as a starting point for my discussion. Bourdieu intended to uncover hidden forms of power and dominance as many scholars note. Subtle forces are at work in power relationships, and symbolic boundaries could be used as a basis for social exclusion. For this reason it is important to study empirically the role of taste in the reproduction of social inequality. It is, however, also important to explore whether all taste differences function as cultural capital, understood in the sense that certain repertoires render certain benefits, and, further, distinguish between taste differences that turns out to have profound consequences for social structure and taste differences that do not have such consequences.

Johnston and Baumann use cultural capital as a conceptual framework to interpret aspects of distinction within contemporary gourmet food culture, but they do not discuss how the expressions they reveal could be activated in social settings and what kind of power they see in play. Seen from my perspective, the authors do not justify that the gourmet food culture they explore turns into cultural capital and works as a power resource. Said differently, Johnston and Baumann have not established that certain patterns of knowledge and practices within gourmet food culture work oppressively, or lead to some groups' domination over others, or that they are an expression of domination. Such a function of gourmet food has yet to be proven empirically. Johnston and Baumann, on the other hand, use the notion "legitimate

taste" mostly with reference to trendy options rather than to options chosen by the "ruling class," in line with Bourdieu's definition of the notion.

I find that some of the differentiation tendencies that Johnston and Baumann uncover are better captured and explained by Simmel's conceptualization of social distinction than captured by the concept of cultural capital. The underlying social dynamics that Simmel points to, offer something different both with regard to the nature of the phenomenon and its consequences. For instance, the ability to generate profit and affect both work opportunities and life chances, which is essential to the nature of cultural capital, is not part of Simmel's postulate. I have argued that the notion of segregation or the psycho-social need to differ, that Simmel describes, captures distinction processes that occur both within and between social groups or classes, and also that struggle for power is not always a driving force. If all kinds of cultural competence and taste that might differ along vertical as well as horizontal lines, are read as differences in cultural capital, then the concept will lose its meaning and explanatory power. All-encompassing concepts tend to become empty concepts.

To move this research field forward I believe it is necessary to study not only how cultural capital is employed as a power resource, but also if possible consequences of aesthetic preferences differ between genres, between food and music, for instance.

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Abstract: This article adds to current sociological debates on cultural taste and social distinction. I particularly discuss the use of cultural capital as an analytical tool for capturing and explaining aspects of distinction within contemporary gourmet food culture, and explore the possibility of whether a different conceptualization of social distinction is more fruitful for understanding some of the patterns that are uncovered. I argue, more generally, that all social gaps in cultural taste cannot be taken as indicators of unequal distribution of power in society, as some Bourdieu-inspired scholars, tend to do.

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