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**Sam Friedman, Mike Savage, Laurie Hanquinet,  
Andrew Miles**

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## Cultural Sociology and New Forms of Distinction

### Abstract

In recent years growing sociological interest in new forms of cultural distinction has led some to argue that the advantages previously conveyed by the consumption of 'high' culture ' or 'omnivorousness' are being overwritten by the possession of what has been termed 'emerging cultural capital'. So far, though, this term has only been discussed in passing within empirical work and remains in need of further analytical specification. This special issue seeks to both critically interrogate and develop this concept by bringing together the work of leading cultural sociologists around four key themes: the role of age and generation in the formation of cultural capital; the power of visual display for distinction; the significance of new elite cultures; and the need for methodological pluralism to apprehend the expressions and mechanisms of distinction. This editorial introduction outlines the descriptive terrain on which the concept of emerging cultural capital has rested until now before exploring the common themes that sit across all five papers in the special issue.

**Keywords:** distinction, cultural capital, elites, age, Bourdieu

### Introduction

Toward the end of his book, *Sincerity* (2013), the independent scholar and essayist R. Jay Magill, Jr. describes an advert for the Berlin-based newspaper, *Berlin Morgenpost*:

The ad shows a hipster wearing a horribly colored pleather jacket walking past an overweight working-class man watering the porch flowers outside his street-level apartment wearing the exact same jacket. A caption accompanies the photograph, reading 'Berlin is where no one really knows whether you are in or out'. This cheeky juxtaposition bespeaks a strange confluence: the proletariat – a word forbidden in America – and the bourgeois hipster are becoming increasingly indiscernible.

Three years on, it seems Magill was the foreteller of a trend - in 'Normcore' style - that has swept the global fashion world<sup>1</sup> (Farrell, 2014; Cochrane, 2014; Nevins, 2015). Normcore describes clothes that are anonymous, cheap, utilitarian, mass-produced and unremarkable; think unbranded jeans, plain sportswear, chunky white socks. 'Normcore is a desire to be

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<sup>1</sup> Normcore was the fashion world's most Googled term in 2014 (Tsjeng, 2015)

blank', argued the New York-based 'trend-forecasting' company K-HOLE, who coined the term in early 2014. 'It's about welcoming the possibility of being recognizable, of looking like other people and seeing that as an opportunity for connection, instead of as evidence that your identity has dissolved' (Duncan, 2014).

Thinking sociologically, it is tempting to see Normcore as representative of a wider democratising shift toward cultural 'omnivorousness'. This now well-worn thesis, originating in work on American music taste (Peterson and Kern 1996) but subsequently supported by more wide-ranging studies throughout the world (DiMaggio and Mukhtar 2004; van Eijck and Knulst 2005; Bennett et al. 2009; Emmison 2003; Sintas and Álvarez 2002) argues that the contemporary privileged middle and upper classes no longer consume only legitimate culture but are better characterised as 'omnivores', happy to graze on both high *and* low culture. Attendant to this eclecticism is also, in some versions of the argument, a more general ethos of cultural 'openness' and 'tolerance' that is seen to invalidate, or at least threaten, Bourdieusian processes of cultural distinction and snobbery (Bennett et al. 2009; Erickson 1996; Warde 2011). In this way, Normcore appears to represent omnivorousness *par excellence*. By embracing the fashion choices of the German working-classes, or America's suburbanites, are the tastemakers of the global fashion industry not providing a definitive rejection of the once-cherished logic of form over function?

Well, on closer inspection, perhaps not. One need not delve too far into the principles of Normcore to see that beneath the surface-level championing of 'connection' and 'the everyday', the movement seems a long way from embracing a true spirit of openness. Indeed, aesthetically, this is arguably form *masquerading* as function. There is a distinctly knowing and self-conscious aura surrounding Normcore, which does not sit easily with claims that the cultural omnivore is constitutive of a pluralist shift in cultural consumption (VICE, 2015). As Lizardo and Skiles (2012) have forcefully argued, such expressions of omnivorousness are actually entirely compatible with a Bourdieusian framework, and simply represent the transposability of the aesthetic disposition to cultural objects not originally produced with an aesthetic intention. So while the young, fashionable Berliner and his working-class neighbour

may share the same objective 'Normcore' taste, their *modes of consumption* arguably remain separated by a powerful aesthetic boundary. To borrow a phrase from Coulangeon (2005), the hipster may be practising a distinctly 'enlightened' form of eclecticism.

We use the example of Normcore here simply to initiate the wider discussion that sits at the heart of this Special Issue. Normcore may prove a fleeting trend but nonetheless it strikes us as symptomatic of wider shifts in the expression of cultural distinction; shifts that, we believe, demand new conceptual repertoires if they are to be properly recognised and understood. The papers in this special issue explore the idea that there are new modes of distinction that, like Normcore, do not necessarily fit either the highbrow model or that of the untheorised omnivore. Instead, they reflect on, in different ways, the power and potency of new modes of cultural display which might generate distinctive stakes and oppositions which we need to understand in distinctive terms.

In assembling these contributions, we press further for the recognition of the role of the aesthetic in contemporary studies of cultural consumption (see Hanquinet and Savage 2015). Bourdieu has been read as being sceptical about the aesthetic possibilities of popular cultural *production* and doubtful of any 'paradigm change' in relations between the sub fields of restricted and mass production. Indeed, some have accused him of espousing a peculiarly static and one-dimensional view of mass culture (Fowler 1997; Shusterman 2000).<sup>2</sup> Yet it is important to remember that, for Bourdieu, the pursuit of distinction was not just a matter of *what* objects are consumed, but also the *way* they are consumed (Holt 1997; Coulangeon and Lemel 2007). As he (1984: 40) famously outlined in *Distinction*:

Nothing more rigorously distinguishes the different classes than the disposition objectively demanded by the legitimate consumption of legitimate works...*and the even rarer capacity to constitute, aesthetically, objects that are ordinary or even 'common'...or to apply the*

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<sup>2</sup> Certainly, during his career he afforded 'low' culture strikingly little empirical attention and in later work even deriding it as alienating (Bourdieu, 1996). Theorists like Fowler (1997) and Shusterman (2000) have thus argued that while Bourdieu brilliantly exposes the 'veiled interests' of high-art, his hostility to popular art demonstrates he was partially 'captured' by dominant ideology himself.

*principles of a pure aesthetic in the most everyday choices of everyday life* (emphasis added).

Bourdieu thus certainly saw the aesthetic disposition as potentially transferable to popular culture, suggesting that, for him, the core tension wasn't to be found so much in the opposition between highbrow and lowbrow culture *per se* but between the possession or otherwise of highbrow *aesthetics*, which constitute a very particular disposition towards the appreciation of different cultural forms (on this see Lizardo and Skiles 2012). However, Bourdieu failed to provide much empirical evidence as to how this aesthetic was *practically* applied to popular realms<sup>3</sup> (Prior 2005). In recent years, though, a number of researchers have sought to explore aesthetic differentiation in previously unexplored fields - probing film, rock music, food, humour, reality television and fashion (Regev 1994; Johnston and Baumann 2009; Entwistle and Rocamora 2006; Skeggs, Thumim, and Wood 2008; Kuipers, 2015; Baumann 2007) as well as more unlikely performances of distinction through 'bad' television watching (McCoy and Scarborough 2014) and salsa music taste (Bachmayer, Wilterdink, and van Venrooij 2014).

We have also extensively explored emerging conceptions of cultural distinction in our own work (Priour and Savage 2013; Hanquinet 2014). Friedman (2014), for example, has demonstrated that in Britain the field of comedy has become an increasingly fertile ground for younger generations of the upper-middle class to express distinction. Here following the work of Holt (1998), he finds that the pursuit of distinction is less about consuming the 'right' comedians (although this is still important) and more about the currency of cultivating a 'good' sense of humour. In this distinct performance of embodied cultural capital, comedy should never be *just funny* or centre purely on the creation of laughter. Instead, for those from culturally privileged backgrounds, a good sense of humour pivots on the ability to employ rarefied readings of comedy – readings that, decisively, foreground aesthetic elements these respondents feel are missed by others. Moreover, armed with their distinctive style of appreciation, these consumers believe they can always 'get' more from almost *any* comedy, whether it be externally legitimate or not.

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<sup>3</sup> One area of popular culture Bourdieu (1984: 26) did examine in this way, however, was cinema.

Other work has explicitly questioned the Bourdieusian notion that Kantian disinterestedness represents the sole logic of the dominant aesthetic. Hanquinet, Roose and Savage (Hanquinet, Roose, and Savage 2014), for example, argue that Bourdieu's notion of disinterestedness relies on an implicitly modernist aesthetic which celebrates detachment and abstraction and is premised on a notion of the avant-garde as drivers of change. Their analysis of museum visitors' aesthetic preferences, however, demonstrates that the dominant aesthetic may have altered in important ways that are historically grounded. Contemporary forms of highbrow distinction, they argue, have integrated new aesthetic criteria (e.g. playfulness, eclecticism, social reflexivity) which symbolize a shift from modernism to postmodernism. Another important touchstone here is the work of Shamus Khan (2012). Examining the character of elite private schooling in the US, Khan argues such institution's aims are no longer concerned with imbuing a Kantian aesthetic of learning and Bildung, but instead inculcate practices focusing on juggling, getting by, game playing and being strategic. For Khan, learning how to master these practices is central to the construction of cultures of 'ease' which mark contemporary elite formation. Whilst, at one level these practices clearly exemplify a certain kind of cultural 'mastery', this takes a different form to being steeped in an historical canon.

Over recent years, this growing interest in new forms and expressions of cultural distinction has led to the claim that there is a distinct form of 'emerging cultural capital' (Priour and Savage 2013; Savage et al 2015). This has gained particular pertinence with the research originating out of the *Great British Class Survey* (GBCS), where the authors (Savage et al, 2015) have deployed the concept to categorise new objects and practices of cultural distinction, especially amongst the younger well educated. However, while the term has a certain descriptive force, it has only been discussed in passing within this GBCS work and remains a loose term; a provisional label in need of further analytical specification (Savage et al. 2013).

The papers of this special issue therefore seek to substantially progress these concerns through exploring three fundamental analytical issues, and one central methodological concern, which underpin the interest in 'emerging cultural capital'. These are, firstly, the role of age and generation; secondly, the provenance of new modes of cultural distinction focusing on physical

appearance, and thirdly the significance of new elite cultures. Methodologically, the papers argue for the need for more sophisticated and especially mixed methods research, repertoires with which to gauge the complex inter-relationship between embodied, institutionalised and objectified forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu 2002).

Before turning in detail to the questions probed by these five papers, it is worth briefly laying out the descriptive terrain on which the concept of emerging cultural capital has rested until now. Firstly, this idea foregrounds the centrality of age and generational divisions in structuring cultural tastes and participation, in ways which indicate that younger people are less attracted to traditional 'highbrow' culture. In many studies using multiple correspondence analysis, such as those by Bennett et al (2009), or by Savage et al (2013), the second axis separating different lifestyles does not distinguish between those with cultural and economic capital ('the capital composition axis') but between older and younger groups, with the former more attracted to highbrow culture, and the younger groups more oriented towards commercial forms of culture, often in areas such as popular music, sport, and information technology. This distinction between 'older' and 'newer' modes of appreciation is also explicated in many studies, including those by Bellevance (2008) and Hanquinet (2015), and although Reeves (2014) reminds us of the difficulty of differentiating age from cohort and period effects, the impact of the life course - in conjunction with history and biography - appears central to the reshaping of cultural capital over time.

Secondly, the concept of emerging cultural capital descriptively points to different modes of distinction. Whereas the traditional aesthetic disposition – notably through the model of the Kantian aesthetic - celebrates withdrawal, distance, and discernment, and classically places audiences in a relatively passive and distant position, 'emerging' cultural capital seems to incorporate a heterarchy of modes of cultural appreciation that jostle for widely-shared legitimacy. While here the Kantian aesthetic undoubtedly remains powerful, particularly among older generations, competition among different modes is now more salient. Some such aesthetic challenges might be seen as coming from the 'bottom up', as in the case of Kitsch (Holliday and Potts 2012), but in general we believe the hegemony of the traditional aesthetic

disposition is being questioned more laterally – by a more sensuous, performative, knowing and socially-engaged aesthetic. But we need to build on descriptive observations – such as the GBCS argument that sports, social media, and socialising are all practices central to ‘emerging cultural capital’ (Savage et al 2013) – in order to better understand how such practices may be implicated in forms of distinction. Are we actually moving away from the pursuit of distinction as a separate and exclusive activity, as emphasised by Bourdieu in *Distinction* (1984), towards a more openly ‘knowing’ expression of cultural aptitude - an aesthetic of engagement and exhibition rather than absorption and introspection? If so, might this be associated with Skeggs’ (2003: 148) claim that a shift has occurred from ‘middle class formation reliant on achieving status through hiding and restricting knowledge to one in which status is achieved through the display of this knowledge and practice: exclusivity to transparency’?

Thirdly, there is the suggestion in the notion of emerging cultural capital that elite culture itself is being remade, especially amongst younger groupings. Whereas Bourdieu was attentive to the development of novel cultural repertoires associated with the ‘new petit bourgeoisie’, these strategies involved taking relatively low status cultural forms and seeking to subject them to the kind of cultivated and discerning set of judgements that echo those found in more consecrated cultural forms. These arguments fed into the claims of Featherstone, Lash and Urry during the 1980s, that new kinds of consumer lifestyle, including those associated with post-modernism could be associated with these trends. Thus Bourdieu’s focus here was on how such strategies were associated with the upward social mobility strategies of aspirant groups, with the implication that the dominant elite groups would continue to resist these incursions. However, the descriptive claim made through the idea of emerging cultural capital is that actually the *content of elite culture* is being remade, even if it might take many decades of generational replacement for these new practices to become definitively dominant.

Finally, the recognition and specification of emerging cultural capital rests on the resolution of a fundamental methodological issue. Quantitative studies by themselves usually lack the kind of detailed questions and narrative formulations which allow an adequate teasing out of the processes by which cultural objects might become consecrated as cultural capital. Both the



Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion study (see Bennett et al 2009) and the GBCS project adopted a mixed methods strategy, deploying qualitative and descriptive approaches alongside quantitative techniques. It is our contention that if cultural sociology is going to continue to push forward in understanding contemporary developments in cultural taste and consumption it must be more expansive and ambitious in its analytical scope.

We thus need to move on from the restricted agenda that has followed Peterson's 1992 'discovery' of the cultural omnivore, which has focused unduly on the quantitative analysis of a narrow and established set of art forms, genres and cultural objects (see for example, Chan and Goldthorpe 2007). This pragmatic focus has revolved around the fact that these are the cultural items which have, historically, tended to be included in most large-scale data sets. However, while such an approach may be superficially understandable in these terms, it is, simultaneously, one that is both intellectually restrictive and fundamentally revealing of the system of distinction that it has helped to reinforce. Thus, the coding of 'culture' to a partial set of indicators from a limited range of traditional, officially authorised or 'legitimate' forms reifies the idea that everyday forms of participation (along with those who practice them) are, by extension, not cultural at all (Miles and Sullivan, 2012).

Instead we need to place the formation of people's cultural capital relationally, according to their position in a larger network of cultural items and practices that provides them with meaning (see more generally, Hanquinet and Savage 2015). In this respect, the domination of survey-based approaches in cultural research has, as Miles (2013) shows, obscured the ways in which the contest over cultural value is fundamentally rooted in the everyday realm. Here, it is important to remember that, in *Distinction*, Bourdieu's analysis ranged across seemingly endless cultural fields, each of which were equally important to the arguments that he eventually put forward. We believe this spirit of empirical and methodological ambition and originality must be renewed if we are to continue to understand the relationship between cultural taste and social stratification, and this requires us to move beyond safe and conventional research methods to embrace more sophisticated and ambitious research repertoires.

The papers of this issue thus seek to move beyond a descriptive account of certain cultural activities as 'emerging cultural capital', towards a more extensive probing of the four key issues outlined above, which will allow us to better elaborate debates about the remaking of cultural capital. We therefore move the debate on from the view that simply describing differing cultural preferences and orientations of younger respondents is enough to warrant defining a form of emerging cultural capital. The three analytical issues we have identified – linked to the call for a more embracing and ambitious methodological canvass - allow us to more adequately reflect on whether new cultural orientations may be associated with wider forms of legitimacy and symbolic power. We now turn to consider how the papers address this new formulation.

### **1. Age, generation and cultural capital**

The power of age divisions has come to feature prominently in debates concerning cultural capital and the development of possible 'emerging' forms. Three key themes have surfaced in this literature. Firstly, it is argued that there is a notably different relationship to history and the cultural canon. High culture is classically oriented towards iconic works from the past, even when, as with the avant-garde, these are a platform to launch new and novel forms against. The historical canon is thus a benchmark against which excellence is measured, even amongst those who innovate. By contrast, it is argued that emerging cultural capital celebrates the new and contemporary for their own sake, and has much less interest in past canonical objects. It is thus the stakes tied up in new and emergent forms which excite and energise, and more particularly the capacity to riff off a range of genres and reference points which is highly prized. Secondly, there is an enduring awareness of how different age groups express different kinds of cultural distinction – in terms of *modus operandi* and the legitimacy of objects – as new generations of the culturally privileged eclipse their parental incumbents. A third related, but less explored issue is how cultural distinction operates in a given society where there are *horizontal* struggles between high-status groups belonging to different age groups.

These vital issues are each addressed in the collection here. Lizardo and Skiles in their paper examining patterns of cultural disliking (what they call 'symbolic exclusion') between older and younger 'high-status Americans' provide a very systematic account of the relationship between age and cultural preferences, focusing on musical tastes recorded in the General Social Survey of 1993 and again in 2012. What is especially important about this paper is their suggestion that there is an age-specific dynamic at work in the formation of cultural capital, since newcomers have to differentiate themselves from the cultural preferences of their elders. They thus point to generational changes in the main objects of symbolic exclusion in the American music field, most prominently highlighting the increasing acceptance of previously disliked genres such as heavy metal and rap. The authors link this to a broader morphological trend towards a 'refusal to refuse' among younger generations of the privileged who appear significantly more open to musical diversity than older generations. However, significantly, the authors are hesitant about conflating this finding with other assertions of greater overall cultural tolerance. Instead, they note that it is as likely to indicate that the symbolic exclusion that does exist today – here they highlight country and religious music, in particular - has simply 'acquired more symbolic (and substantial) value'.

We can also see powerful evidence in Lizardo and Skiles that the status of older forms of music are declining, and that more contemporary forms are becoming dominant. Rap and hip hop, which used to be shunned, are now more popular amongst young Americans than opera, blue grass, country and gospel. Similarly, high status newcomers are more likely to refuse classical and jazz. The same intensity of 'new' cultural forms is found in the other papers. Hedegard shows how Brazillian elites are predisposed towards newer modes of musical taste and also question European sources of high culture in favour of more Americanised modes.

Mears' analysis of gender dynamics in elite parties shows powerfully how older men deploy younger women as part of their positional strategies to show their prominence and dominance. Very specific age differences amongst the women have considerable symbolic power for the elite men she studies, with younger women being more prestigious than older ones. She thus demonstrates how age divisions are not only descriptively significant but are themselves one of

the stakes around which battles for distinction amongst elite men form. The same point arises from Kuipers account that the age of respondents affects preferences for male, as well as female faces. The implication is that the stakes of age and generation may also be linked to the more extrovert nature of 'emerging cultural capital', in which physical appearances may take on a greater role than under the Kantian aesthetic, and in which bodily deportment associated with youth counts for more.

## **2: The power of visual display and distinction**

These reflections lead onto our second analytical focus on the possibly enhanced role of external appearance in more 'extrovert' forms of cultural capital. We might think of this shift in terms of Bourdieu's discussion of 'objectified' cultural capital, in which it is the visual aesthetic of people, objects, artefacts, rather than what is held to be their 'inner meaning' which becomes more significant. Bourdieu, famously, noted that it was those with the highest levels of cultural capital who were most likely to find superficially unattractive pictures (such as a car crash) appealing. But the papers in this special issue suggest that this may be less the case with 'emerging cultural capital'. This is certainly the claim of Kuipers' paper, which is based upon a major ERC-funded project on the cross-national 'sociology of beauty'. Here she combines innovative q-methodology and open interviews to examine both objective taste and wider repertoires of evaluation of physical 'looks' in four European countries. Questioning the common-sensical notion that conceptions of beauty are relatively homogenous, Kuipers finds a clear relationship between social position and beauty tastes in all four countries. This relationship is weakest in terms of male bodies and faces where, she notes, aestheticisation remains a 'relatively new and rare phenomenon'. In contrast, evaluations of female faces are highly marked and may be an emerging field for younger generations of privileged men and woman to communicate their cultural distinction. More specifically, she notes that 'younger, educated, metropolitan informants prefer a beauty that is 'interesting or 'original', reflecting a Bourdieusian 'aesthetic disposition''. While Kuipers acknowledges that these findings require 'further research', her analysis provides suggestive evidence that embodied cultural capital may be increasingly *transmissible*. In particular, new generations may be transposing aesthetic styles

inculcated in relation to traditional legitimate culture onto to cultural fields previously ignored by cultural sociology. The power of visual and aesthetic aspects is also evident in the papers by Hedegard and Mears, as we have discussed above.

### **3: New elite tastes**

Bourdieu saw elites as established and inheritor groups, not attracted to new and arriviste forms of cultural practice. Recent research, most notably that of Piketty (2014), has emphasised that global economic change and the accumulation of capital in the last 30 years has initiated a dramatic reassertion of a wealth elite. While enquiry has mostly focused on the spiralling economic resources of this new class formation, relatively little is known about the cultural tastes and lifestyles that distinguish this group. While Bourdieu's model of social space presumes that the skewed nature of this group's capital composition would lead to showy, conspicuous cultural consumption, recent quantitative work on the British 'elite' (Savage et al, 2013) emphasises that this group tend to combine high levels of both economic and highbrow cultural capital. The papers here suggest that economic elites have a more dynamic orientation to cultural appreciation which appears not easily defined by the either the 'Kantian aesthetic' model, or that of 'conspicuous and lavish display'.

Ashley Mears contribution to this Special Issue, 'Distinction is Ridiculous', is of particular value here. Mears, a renowned ethnographer, gained unparalleled access to the ever-growing global VIP party circuit for 18 months between 2011-2013. Her article draws on this rich ethnographic data to highlight the intricate games of distinction within this exclusive VIP 'scene'. Mears begins by describing the conspicuous consumption that takes place within the exclusive nightclubs which cater to this VIP elite. Tellingly, these modes of distinction are not on public display, but operate within the exclusive confines of those who gain entry. In some respects, we might see this as a return of a 'court society', dominated by the ritual interaction of those privileged enough to gain access. But the interior world of the VIP club – superficially – is very different to that of courtly ritual. The largely young male patrons, or 'whales' as the most wealthy are known within the scene, display their status to one another via elaborate displays

of wealth (mainly through purchasing and often wasting expensive alcohol) and by surrounding themselves with women rich in 'bodily capital'. As Mears carefully points out, though, this performance of distinction is highly orchestrated, with a whole party infrastructure devoted to recruiting attractive 'girls' to the clubs, stage-managing the layout of the club, and publicly celebrating the most lavish displays of wealth (at some clubs, Mears notes, DJs stop the music to announce big purchases). However, interestingly, Mears goes on to explain that what appears to be a purely economically-driven expression of cultural distinction is more complex in reality. In particular, she explores how women and men profit unequally from the embodied 'girl capital' integral to generating a VIP environment. While women receive only modest and short-term economic gains for cashing in their bodily capital, men are able to profit much more effectively – appropriating women's bodies to signal their elite distinction and using it to generate further social and economic capital.

New elite cultures also break from national and Eurocentric tastes. Some have detected (Prieur and Savage, 2013), for example, a 'cosmopolitan cultural capital' in many nations, whereby cultural capital is intimately connected with a 'cosmopolitan' orientation that is outward-looking and able to stand outside any one national frame, culturally. Prieur and Savage (2013) show that this international vs national cultural orientation, which are associated with social class cleavages, can be found in a number of European countries, including Serbia, Denmark and Finland . However, the conception or application of 'cosmopolitan cultural capital' has also been applied in subtly different ways in different national contexts. It is also notable that the literature in this area is dominated by work on Europe, North America and Australasia. In this way, Hedegard's paper on the taste culture of Brazilian elites fills a conspicuous gap. Drawing on a content and frame analysis of an elite Brazilian cultural magazine, *BRAVO!*, and a well-known broadsheet, *O Globo*, Hedegard illustrates how these tastemaking media sources help to valorize particular modes of cultural consumption among Brazilian elites. Significantly, though, Hedegard finds that Brazilian elites incorporate a very particular 'transnational repertoire' of cultural tastes that is different to their equivalents in other national contexts. Brazilian elite cultural repertoires, for example, are strongly orientated around legitimizing a particular white, educated and wealthy lifestyle that attempts to 'create a symbolic connection between

Brazilian elites and their counterparts in the US and Europe, while simultaneously marking a boundary of exclusion between *these* Brazilians and other Brazilians'. What is particularly interesting about distinction in the Brazilian case, however, is that it differs in important ways from Western developments highlighted in Jarness and Mears' paper. While Brazilian elites do display a penchant for both highbrow and popular cultural forms, they are unconcerned with cultivating particular esoteric styles of appreciation to distinguish their consumption of popular forms. Instead, these popular forms tend to be Western brands such as Apple and Starbucks, which in a domestic Brazilian context can be reframed as high-status and incorporated into an elite lifestyle. While this may have something to do with the particular elite fraction Hedegard investigates, which appears richer in economic than cultural capital, it nonetheless demonstrates how the relative value and rarity of different cultural objects varies significantly in different national contexts.

#### **4: The need for methodological pluralism**

In studies of cultural capital there has been a persistent tendency to reify the concept as an asset contained within specific cultural tastes and practices. This logic is often derived from Bourdieu's empirical findings in *Distinction*, where he argued that the legitimacy and perceived interpretative 'difficulty' of traditional French highbrow culture (classical music, opera, theatre, ballet, visual art) endowed these tastes with a distinct stratificatory power - as 'objects' of cultural capital. Subsequently, much quantitative research in cultural sociology has fixated on measuring patterns of taste for these hallowed objects and uses subsequent findings to definitively support or refute the power of cultural capital. Yet, as Vegard Jarness illustrates in his article, to treat cultural capital as a fixed entity only residing in the high arts is to operationalise a dangerously short-sighted understanding of Bourdieu's concept. In Bourdieu's (1986) famous essay on 'the forms of capital' he did indeed identify 'objectified cultural capital' as an asset residing in particular artefacts, but at the same time he very clearly stated that cultural capital also existed in both institutionalized forms, such as educational credentials, and perhaps most importantly as an embodied resource. The most significant manifestation of this embodied cultural capital, he went on to argue, was the operation of a particular 'disinterested

aesthetic disposition' that was premised on a refusal of easy or facile taste and where true artistic beauty can only be experienced if one separates oneself from any physical, emotional or functional investment in an art work. Thus, it becomes important to deploy methods which allow us to adequately grasp the complex interplay between objectified, institutionalised and embodied modes of cultural capital.

While we are not advocating abandoning quantitative analysis – which we see as essential in our own work – we do believe, like Jarness, that such work should ideally be carried out in conjunction with qualitative enquiry. The advantage of this kind of data, aptly demonstrated by Jarness' paper, is that it allows for an examination of not just *what* culture people consume, but *how* they consume; their style of appreciation. Considering the increasing complexity of the cultural field, Jarness shows convincingly that it is only by looking at this *modality of consumption* that one is able to discern the real contemporary power of cultural capital - as a resource most recognised and most effectively *cached in* via the embodied performance of distinction.

Drawing on in-depth interviews in Stavanger, Norway, Jarness identifies four distinct types of taste orientation – intellectual, luxurious, educational and practical – and then locates these orientations in Bourdieusian social space by examining the capital profiles of those in each group. Characterising the taste orientations, he further explains that a propensity to enjoy goods non-instrumentally is associated with higher volumes of capital and *via versa*. Another key dimension of Jarness' work is to show, like Friedman (2014), that social groups that appear to share common tastes for the same cultural objects can distinguish themselves by employing contrasting *styles of appreciation*. It is not what you enjoy, but how you enjoy which is telling.

Innovative methodological modes are evident in all the other papers. Lizardo and Skiles, for example, use unusually sophisticated techniques to differentiate age, cohort and generational effects that allow for a much better appreciation of the temporal dynamics of musical appreciation than that found elsewhere in quantitative cultural sociology. Hedegard uses frame analysis to develop repertoires to map visual analyses to the study of cultural capital, in a way



which is entirely necessary given our comments about of the enhanced role of the visual in 'emerging cultural capital'. Mears shows how detailed ethnographic work can be used to provide subtle readings of cultural capital in social interaction which would not be evident in survey responses. And finally, Kuipers develops new mixed methods approaches, linking qualitative in depth interviews with regression models. Together, these papers collectively show the essential requirement to broaden and develop methodological repertoires away from standard survey analysis towards more ambitious mixed methods and qualitative approaches.

## 5. Conclusion

The five papers here have probed new empirical avenues for understanding the contemporary expression of cultural distinction. Some explore distinction in particular cultural fields, such as music and beauty, and some within nationally-specific class fractions, such as Brazil, Norway and the U.S. Of course each paper still leaves some important questions unanswered. It is not given, for example, that the attempts of dominant groups to exercise distinction in these cases is necessarily successful, in the sense of an effective deployment or 'cashing in' of cultural capital. Similarly, the papers are not enough in themselves to determine whether 'emerging cultural capital' can fully be seen as a capital. For a cultural taste or practice to serve as a capital in a Bourdieusian sense, it is necessary to illustrate that it contains widespread legitimacy. It must be, as Lamont and Lareau (1986) famously noted, a 'widely shared status signal'. Equally, it is important to demonstrate that it is an asset that can be *converted* into other forms of capital and that it is linked to processes of *domination* (Savage, Warde, and Devine 2005). These are pivotally important aspects to consider if one is to faithfully operationalize the term cultural capital and require extensive, long-term longitudinal research that locates particular cultural tastes or practices within a fully realised field analytical perspective (see, for example, Bauman, 2002 on film, Hanquinet on Belgian art tastes or Friedman, 2014 on British comedy taste).

Our more modest hope here, however, is that the five papers presented in this issue will act as a useful *platform* for future researchers who wish to address the ever-changing ways in which the dominant attempt to distinguish themselves culturally. By systematically exploring issues of

age, the visual aesthetic and elites, each paper challenges existing repertoires in cultural sociology and points towards the need to dig in more imaginative methodological and analytical directions to capture contemporary modes of cultural distinction.

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