

From:

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## Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception\*

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Any art perception involves a conscious or unconscious deciphering operation.

1.1 An act of deciphering *unrecognized as such*, immediate and adequate 'comprehension', is possible and effective only in the special case in which the cultural code which makes the act of deciphering possible is immediately and completely mastered by the observer (in the form of cultivated ability or inclination) and merges with the cultural code which has rendered the work perceived possible.

Erwin Panofsky observes that in Rogier van der Weyden's painting *The Three Magi* we immediately perceive the representation of an apparition' that of a child in whom we recognize 'the Infant Jesus'. How do we know that this is an apparition? The halo of golden rays surrounding the child would not in itself be sufficient proof, because it is also found in representations of the nativity in which the Infant Jesus is 'real'. We come to this conclusion because the child is hovering in mid-air without visible support, and we do so although the representation would scarcely have been different had the child been sitting on a pillow (as in the case of the model which Rogier van der Weyden probably used). But one can think of hundreds of pictures in which human beings, animals or inanimate objects appear to be hovering in mid-air, contrary to the law of gravity, yet without giving the impression of being apparitions. For instance, in a miniature of the *Gospels of Otto III*, in the Staatshibliothek, Munich, a whole town is represented in the middle of an empty space, while the persons taking part in the action are standing on the ground. This actually is a real town, where the resurrection of the young people shown in the foreground took place. If, in a split second and almost automatically, we recognize the aerial figure as an apparition, whereas we see nothing miraculous about the city floating in the air, it

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is because ‘we are reading “what we see” according to the manner in which the objects and events are expressed by forms under varying historical conditions’; more precisely, when we decipher a miniature of c.1000 AD, we unconsciously assume that the empty space serves merely as an abstract, unreal background instead of forming part of an apparently natural, three-dimensional space, in which the supernatural and the miraculous can appear as such, as in Rogier van der Weyden’s painting.<sup>1</sup>

Since they unconsciously obey the rules which govern a particular representation of space when they decipher a picture constructed according to these rules, the educated or competent beholders of our societies can immediately apprehend as a ‘supernatural vision’ an element which, by reference to another system of representations in which the regions of space would be in some way ‘juxtaposed’ or ‘aggregated’ instead of being integrated into a single representation, might appear ‘natural’ or ‘real’. ‘The perspective concept’, says Panofsky, ‘makes it impossible for religious art to enter the realm of *magic* . . . but opens to it a completely new realm, that of the “visionary” in which the miracle becomes an experience immediately perceived by the beholder, because supernatural events burst into the apparently natural visible space which is familiar to him, and thus enable him truly to penetrate into the essence of the supernatural.’<sup>2</sup>

The question of the conditions that make it possible to experience the work of art (and, in a more general way, all cultural objects) as at once endowed with meaning is totally excluded from the experience itself, because the recapturing of the work’s objective meaning (which may have nothing to do with the author’s intention) is completely adequate and immediately effected in the case – and only in the case – where the culture that the originator puts into the work is identical with the culture or, more accurately, the *artistic competence* which the beholder brings to the deciphering of the work. In this case, everything is a matter of course and the question of the meaning, of the deciphering of the meaning and of the conditions of this deciphering does not arise.

1.2 Whenever these specific conditions are not fulfilled, misunderstanding is inevitable: the illusion of immediate comprehension leads to an illusory comprehension based on a mistaken code.<sup>3</sup> In the absence of the perception that

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<sup>1</sup> E. Panofsky, ‘Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art’, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), pp. 33-5.

<sup>2</sup> E. Panofsky, ‘Die Perspektive als symbolische Form’, *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg: Vorträge 1924-25*, pp. 257ff.

<sup>3</sup> Of all misunderstandings involving the code, the most pernicious is perhaps the ‘humanist’ misunderstanding, which, through negation, or rather,

the works are coded, and coded in another code, one unconsciously applies the code which is good for everyday perception, for the deciphering of familiar objects, to works in a foreign tradition. There is no perception which does not involve an unconscious code and it is essential to dismiss the myth of the ‘fresh eye’, considered a virtue attributed to naïveté and innocence. One of the reasons why the less educated beholders in our societies are so strongly inclined to demand a realistic representation is that, being devoid of specific categories of perception, they cannot apply any other code to works of scholarly culture than that which enables them to apprehend as meaningful objects of their everyday environment. Minimum, and apparently immediate, comprehension, accessible to the simplest observers and enabling them to recognize a house or a tree, still presupposes partial (unconscious) agreement between artist and beholder concerning categories that define the representation of the real that a historic society holds to be ‘realistic’ (see note 4).

1.3 The spontaneous theory of art perception is founded on the experience of familiarity and immediate comprehension – an unrecognized special case.

1.3.1 Educated people are at home with scholarly culture. They are consequently carried towards that kind of ethnocentrism which may be called class-centrism and which consists in considering as natural (in other words, both as a matter of course and based on nature) a way of perceiving which is but one among other possible ways and which is acquired through education that may be diffuse or specific, conscious or unconscious, institutionalized or non-institutionalized. ‘When, for instance, a man wears a pair of spectacles which are so close to him physically that they are “sitting on his nose”, they are environmentally more remote from him than the picture on the opposite wall. Their proximity is normally so weakly perceived as to go unnoticed.’ Taking Heidegger’s analysis metaphorically, it can be said that the illusion of the ‘fresh eye’ as a ‘naked eye’ is an attribute of those who wear the spectacles of culture and who do not see that which enables them to see, any more than they see what they would not see if they were deprived of what enables them to see.<sup>4</sup>

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‘neutralization’, in the phenomenological sense, of everything which contributes to the specificity of the cultures arbitrarily integrated into the pantheon of ‘universal culture’, tends to represent the Greek or the Roman as a particularly successful achievement of ‘human nature’ in its universality.

<sup>4</sup> This is the same ethnocentrism which tends to take as realistic a representation of the real which owes the fact that it appears ‘objective’ not to its concordance with the actual reality of things (because this ‘reality’ is never perceptible except through socially conditioned forms of apprehension) but to its conformity with rules which define its syntax in its social usage with a social definition of the objective vision of the world; in applying the stamp of realism to certain

1.3.2 Conversely, faced with scholarly culture, the least sophisticated are in a position identical with that of ethnologists who find themselves in a foreign society and present, for instance, at a ritual to which they do not hold the key. The disorientation and cultural blindness of the less-educated beholders are an objective reminder of the objective truth that art perception is a mediate deciphering operation. Since the information presented by the works exhibited exceeds the deciphering capabilities of the beholder, he perceives them as devoid of signification – or, to be more precise, of structuration and organization – because he cannot ‘decode’ them, i.e. reduce them to an intelligible form.

1.3.3 Scientific knowledge is distinguished from naïve experience (whether this is shown by disconcertment or by immediate comprehension) in that it involves an awareness of the conditions permitting adequate perception. The object of the science of the work of art is that which renders possible both this science and the immediate comprehension of the work of art, that is, culture. It therefore includes, implicitly at least, the science of the difference between scientific knowledge and naïve perception. ‘The naïve “beholder” differs from the art historian in that the latter is conscious of the situation.’<sup>5</sup> Needless to say, there would probably be some difficulty in subsuming all the genuine art historians under the concept Panofsky defines in an excessively normative fashion.

## 2

Any deciphering operation requires a more or less complex code which has been more or less completely mastered.

2.1 The work of art (like any cultural object) may disclose significations at different levels according to the deciphering grid applied to it; the lower-level significations, that is to say the most superficial, remain partial and mutilated, and therefore erroneous, as long as the higher-level significations which encompass and transfigure them are lacking.

2.1.1 According to Panofsky, the most naïve beholder first of all distinguishes ‘the primary or natural subject matter or meaning which we can apprehend from our practical experience’, or, in other words, ‘the phenomenal meaning which can be subdivided into factual and expressional’. This apprehension depends on ‘demonstrative concepts’ which only identify and grasp

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representations of the ‘real’ (in photography, for instance) society merely confirms its belief in the tautological assurance that a picture of the real, in accordance with its representation of objectivity, is truly objective.

<sup>5</sup> Panofsky, ‘The History of Art as Humanistic Discipline’, *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, p. 17.

the sensible qualities of the work (this is the case when a peach is described as velvety or lace as misty' or the emotional experience that these qualities arouse in the beholder (when colours are spoken of as harsh or gay). To reach 'the secondary subject matter which presupposes a familiarity with specific themes or concepts as transmitted through literary sources' and which may be called the 'sphere of the meaning of the signified' [*région du sens du signifié*], we must have 'appropriately characterizing concepts' which go beyond the simple designation of sensible qualities and, grasping the stylistic characteristics of the work of art, constitute a genuine 'interpretation' of it. Within this secondary stratum, Panofsky distinguishes, on the one hand, 'the secondary or conventional meaning, the world of specific themes or concepts manifested in images, stories and allegories' (when, for instance, a group of persons seated around a table according to a certain arrangement represents the Last Supper), the deciphering of which falls to iconography; and, on the other hand, 'the intrinsic meaning or content', which the iconological interpretation can recapture only if the iconographical meanings and methods of composition are treated as 'cultural symbols', as expressions of the culture of an age, a nation or a class, and if an effort is made to bring out the fundamental principles which support the choice and presentation of the motifs as well as the production and interpretation of the images, stories and allegories and which give a meaning even to the formal composition and to the technical processes'.<sup>6</sup> The meaning grasped by the primary act of deciphering is totally different according to whether it constitutes the whole of the experience of the work of art or becomes part of a unitary experience, embodying the higher levels of meaning. Thus, it is only starting from an iconographical interpretation that the formal arrangements and technical methods and, through them, the formal and expressive qualities, assume their full meaning and that the insufficiencies of a pre-iconographic or pre-iconological interpretation are revealed at the same time. In an adequate knowledge of the work, the different levels are articulated in a hierarchical system in which the embodying form becomes embodied in its turn, and the signified in its turn becomes significant.

2.1.2 Uninitiated perception, reduced to the grasping of primary significations, is a mutilated perception. Contrasted with what might be called – to borrow a phrase from Nietzsche – 'the dogma of the immaculate perception', foundation of the Romantic representation of artistic experience, the

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<sup>6</sup> These quotations are taken from two articles published in German: 'Über das Verhältnis der Kunstgeschichte zur Kunsttheorie', *Zeitschrift für Aesthetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, 18 (1925), pp. 129ff; and 'Zum Problem der Beschreibung und Inhaltsdeutung von Werken der bildenden Kunst', *Logos*, 21 (1932), pp. 103. The articles were republished, with a few amendments, in 'Iconography and Iconology', pp. 26-54.

‘comprehension’ of the ‘expressive’ and, as one might say, ‘physiognomical’ qualities of the work is only an inferior and mutilated form of the aesthetic experience, because, not being supported, controlled and corrected by knowledge of the style, types and cultural symptoms’, it uses a code which is neither adequate nor specific. It can probably be agreed that inward experience as a capacity for emotional response to the connotation (as opposed to denotation) of the work of art is one of the keys to art experience. But Raymond Ruyer very discerningly contrasts the significance, which he defines as ‘epicritic’, and the *expressivity*, which he describes as ‘protopathic, that is to say more primitive, more blurred, of the lower level, linked with the diencephalon, whereas the signification is linked with the cerebral cortex’.

2.1.3 Through sociological observation it is possible to reveal, effectively realized, forms of perception corresponding to the different levels which theoretical analysis frames by an abstract distinction. Any cultural asset, from cookery to dodecaphonic music by way of the Western movie, can be an object for apprehension ranging from the simple, actual sensation to scholarly appreciation. The ideology of the ‘fresh eye’ overlooks the fact that the sensation or affection stimulated by the work of art does not have the same ‘value’ when it constitutes the whole of the aesthetic experience as when it forms part of an adequate experience of the work of art. One may therefore distinguish, through abstraction, two extremes and opposite forms of aesthetic pleasure, separated by all the intermediate degrees, the *enjoyment* which accompanies aesthetic perception reduced to simple *aisthesis*, and the *delight* procured by scholarly savouring, presupposing, as a necessary but insufficient condition, adequate deciphering. Like painting, perception of painting is a mental thing, at least when it conforms to the norms of perception immanent in the work of art or, in other words, when the beholder’s aesthetic intention is identified with the objective intention of the work (which must not be identified with the artist’s intention).

2.1.4 The most uninitiated perception is always inclined to go beyond the level of sensations and affections, that is to say *aisthesis* pure and simple: the assimilatory interpretation which tends to apply to an unknown and foreign universe the available schemes of interpretation, that is, those which enable the familiar universe to be apprehended as having meaning, becomes essential as a means of restoring the unity of an integrated perception. Those for whom the works of scholarly culture speak a foreign language are condemned to take into their perception and their appreciation of the work of art some extrinsic categories and values – those which organize their day-to-day perception and guide their practical judgement. The aesthetics of the different social classes are therefore, with certain exceptions, only one dimension of their ethics (or better, of their ethos): thus, the aesthetic preferences of the lower middle class appear as a systematic expression of an ascetic disposition which is also expressed in other spheres of their existence.

2.2 The work of art considered as a symbolic good (and not as an economic asset, which it may also be) only exists as such for a person who has the means to appropriate it, or in other words, to decipher it.<sup>7</sup>

2.2.1 The degree of an agent's art competence is measured by the degree to which he or she masters the set of instruments for the appropriation of the work of art, available at a given time, that is to say, the interpretation schemes which are the prerequisite for the appropriation of art capital or, in other words, the prerequisite for the deciphering of works of art offered to a given society at a given moment.

2.2.1.1 Art competence can be provisionally defined as the preliminary knowledge of the possible divisions into complementary classes of a universe of representations. A mastery of this kind of system of classification enables each element of the universe to be placed in a class necessarily determined in relation to another class, itself constituted by all the art representations consciously or unconsciously taken into consideration which do not belong to the class in question. The style proper to a period and to a social group is none other than such a class defined in relation to all the works of the same universe which it excludes and which are complementary to it. The *recognition* (or, as the art historians say when using the vocabulary of logic, the *attribution*) proceeds by *successive elimination* of the possibilities to which the class is – negatively – related and to which the possibility which has become a reality in the work

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<sup>7</sup> The laws governing the reception of works of art are a special case of the laws of cultural diffusion: whatever may be the nature of the message – religious prophecy, political speech, publicity image, technical object – reception depends on the categories of perception, thought and action of those who receive it. In a differentiated society, a close relationship is therefore established between the nature and quality of the information transmitted and the structure of the public, its 'readability' and its effectiveness being all the greater when it meets as directly as possible the expectations, implicit or explicit, which the receivers owe chiefly to their family upbringing and social circumstances (and also, in the matter of scholarly culture at least, to their school education) and which the diffuse pressure of the reference group maintains, sustains and reinforces by constant recourse to the norm. It is on the basis of this connection between the level of transmission of the message and the structure of the public, treated as a reception level indicator, that it has been possible to construct the mathematical model of museum-going (see P. Bourdieu and A. Darbel, with D. Schnapper, *L'amour de l'art, Les musées d'art et leur public* (Paris, Minuit, 1966), pp. 99ff; published in English as *The Love of Art: European Museums and their Public*, trans. C. Beattie and N. Merriman (Cambridge: Polity; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990)).

concerned belongs. It is immediately evident that the uncertainty concerning the different characteristics likely to be attributed to the work under consideration (authors, schools, periods, styles, subjects, etc.) can be removed by employing different codes, functioning as classification systems; it may be a case of a properly artistic code which, by permitting the deciphering of specifically stylistic characteristics, enables the work concerned to be assigned to the class formed by the whole of the works of a period, a society, a school or an author ('that's a Cézanne'), or a code from everyday life which, in the form of previous knowledge of the possible divisions into complementary classes of the universe of signifiers and of the universe of signifieds, and of the correlations between the divisions of the one and the divisions of the other, enables the particular representation, treated as a sign, to be assigned to a class of signifiers and consequently makes it possible to know, by means of the correlations with the universe of signifieds, that the corresponding signified belongs to a certain class of signifieds ('that's a forest').<sup>8</sup> In the first case the beholder is paying attention to the manner of treating the leaves or the clouds, that is to say to the stylistic indications, locating the possibility realized, characteristic of one class of works, by reference to the universe of stylistic possibilities; in the other case, she is treating the leaves or the clouds as indications or signals associated, according to the logic set forth above, with significations transcendent to the representation itself ('that's a poplar', 'that's a storm').

2.2.1.2 Artistic competence is therefore defined as the previous knowledge of the strictly artistic principles of division which enable a representation to be located, through the classification of the stylistic indications which it contains, among the possibilities of representation constituting the universe of art and not among the possibilities of representation constituting the universe of everyday objects or the universe of signs, which would amount to treating it as a mere monument, i.e. as a mere means of communication used to transmit a transcendent signification. The perception of the work of art in a truly aesthetic manner, that is, as a signifier which signifies nothing other than itself, does not consist of considering it 'without connecting it with anything other than itself, either emotionally or intellectually', in short of giving oneself up to the work apprehended in its irreducible singularity, but rather of noting its *distinctive stylistic features* by relating it to the ensemble of the works forming the class to which it belongs, and to these works only. On the contrary, the taste of the working classes is determined, after the manner of what Kant describes in his *Critique of Judgement* as 'barbarous taste', by the refusal or the impossibility

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<sup>8</sup> To show that such a sequence really is the logic of the transmission of messages in everyday life, it suffices to quote the following exchange heard in a bar: 'A beer.' 'Draught or bottled?' 'Draught.' 'Mild or bitter?' 'Bitter.' 'Domestic or imported?' 'Domestic.'



(one should say the impossibility-refusal) of operating the distinction between ‘what is liked’ and ‘what pleases’ and, more generally, between ‘disinterestedness’, the only guarantee of the aesthetic quality of contemplation, and ‘the interest of the senses’ which defines ‘the agreeable’ or ‘the interest of reason’: it requires that every image shall fulfil a function, if only that of a sign. This ‘functionalist’ representation of the work of art is based on the refusal of gratuitousness, the idolatry of work or the placing of value on what is ‘instructive’ (as opposed to what is ‘interesting’) and also on the impossibility of placing each individual work in the universe of representations, in the absence of strictly stylistic principles of classification.<sup>9</sup> It follows that a work of art which they expect to express unambiguously a signification transcendental to the signifier is all the more disconcerting to the most uninitiated in that, like the non-figurative arts, it does away more completely with the narrative and descriptive function.

2.2.1.3 The degree of artistic competence depends not only on the degree to which the available system of classification is mastered, but also on the degree of complexity or subtlety of this system of classification, and it is therefore measurable by the ability to operate a fairly large number of successive divisions in the universe of representations and thus to determine rather fine classes. For anyone familiar only with the principle of division into Romanesque art and Gothic art, all Gothic cathedrals fall into the same class and, for that reason, remain *indistinct*, whereas greater competence makes it possible to perceive differences between the styles of the ‘early’, ‘middle’ and ‘late’ periods, or even to recognize, within each of these styles, the works of a school or even of an architect. Thus, the apprehension of the features which constitute the *peculiarity* of the works of one period compared with those of another period or, within this class of the works of one school or group of artists compared with another, or again, of the works of one author compared with other works of his or her school or period, or even a particular work of an author compared with his work as a whole – such apprehension is indissociable from that of *redundancies*, that is, from the grasping of typical treatments of the pictorial matter which determine a style: in short, the grasping of resemblances presupposes implicit or explicit reference to the differences, and vice versa.

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<sup>9</sup> More than through opinions expressed on works of scholarly culture, paintings and sculptures, for example, which, by their high degree of legitimacy, are capable of imposing judgements inspired by the search for conformity, it is through photographic production and judgements on photographic images that the principles of the ‘popular taste’ are expressed (see P. Bourdieu, *Un art moyen, Essai sur les usages sociaux de la photographie* (Paris: Minuit, 1965), pp. 113-34; published in English as *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art*, trans. S. Whiteside (Cambridge: Polity; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990)).

2.3 The art code as a system of possible principles of division into complementary classes of the universe of representations offered to a particular society at a given time is in the nature of a social institution.

2.3.1 Being an historically constituted system, founded on social reality, this set of instruments of perception whereby a particular society, at a given time, appropriates artistic goods (and, more generally, cultural goods) does not depend on individual wills and consciousnesses and forces itself upon individuals, often without their knowledge, defining the distinctions they can make and those which escape them. Every period arranges artistic representations as a whole according to an institutional system of classification of its own, bringing together works which other periods separated, or distinguishing between works which other periods placed together, and individuals have difficulty in imagining differences other than those which the available system of classification allows them to imagine. ‘Suppose’, writes Longhi, ‘that the French naturalists and impressionists, between 1860 and 1880, had not signed their works and that they had not had at their side, like heralds, critics and journalists as intelligent as Geoffroy or Duret. Imagine them forgotten, as the result of a reversal of taste and a long period of decline in erudite research, forgotten for a hundred or a hundred and fifty years. What would happen first of all, when attention was again focused on them? It is easy to foresee that, in the first phase, analysis would begin by distinguishing several entities in these mute materials, which would be more symbolic than historical. The first would bear the symbolic name of Manet, who would absorb part of Renoir’s youthful production, and even, I fear, a few works of Gervex, without counting all those of Gonzalès, Morizot and the young Monet. As to Monet in later years – he also having become a symbol – he would engulf almost the whole of Sisley, a good share of Renoir, and worse still, a few dozen works of Boudin, several of Lebourand, several of Lépine. It is by no means impossible that a few of Pissarro’s works and even, unflattering recompense’ more than one of Guillaumin, might in such a case be attributed to Cézanne.<sup>10</sup>

Still more convincing than this kind of imaginary variation, Berne Joffroy’s historical study on the successive representations of the work of Caravaggio shows that the public image that the individuals of a specified period form of a work is, properly speaking, the product of the instruments of perception, historically constituted, and therefore historically changing, which are supplied to them by the society to which they belong: ‘I know well what is said about attribution disputes: that they have nothing to do with art, that they are petty and that art is great . . . The idea that we form of an artist depends on the works

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<sup>10</sup> R. Longhi, quoted by Berne Joffroy, *Le dossier Caravage* (Paris: Minuit, 1959), pp. 100-1.

attributed to him and, whether we would or not, this general idea of him colours our view of each of his works.’<sup>11</sup> Thus, the history of the instruments for perception of the work is the essential complement of the history of the instruments for production of the work, to the extent that every work is, so to speak, made twice, by the originator and by the beholder, or rather, by the society to which the beholder belongs.

2.3.2 The modal readability of a work of art (for a given society in a given period) varies according to the divergence between the code which the work under consideration objectively requires and the code as an historically constituted institution; the readability of a work of art for a particular individual varies according to the divergence between the more or less complex and subtle code required by the work, and the competence of the individual, as defined by the degree to which the social code, itself more or less complex and subtle, is mastered. Thus, as Boris de Schloezer observes, each period has its melodic schemes which cause the individuals to apprehend immediately the structure of the successions of sounds in conformity with these schemes: ‘Nowadays we need some instruction to appreciate the Gregorian chant, and many medieval monodies seem no less baffling than a melodic phrase of Alban Berg. But when a melody enters easily into frameworks to which we are accustomed, there is no longer any need to reconstruct it, its unity is there and the phrase reaches us as a whole, so to speak, in the manner of a chord. In this case, it is capable of acting magically, again like a chord, or a gong stroke; if on the other hand it is a melody whose structure is no longer in conformity with the schemes sanctioned by tradition – the tradition of the Italian opera, that of Wagner or the popular song – the synthesis is sometimes difficult to make.’<sup>12</sup>

2.3.3 Since the works forming the art capital of a given society at a given time call for codes of varying complexity and subtlety, and are therefore likely to be acquired more or less easily and more or less rapidly by institutionalized or non-institutionalized training, they are characterized by different levels of emission, so that the previous proposition (2.3.2) can be reformulated in the following terms: the readability of a work of art for a particular individual

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<sup>11</sup> Joffroy, *Le dossier Caravage*, p. 9. A systematic study should be made of the relationship between the transformation of the instruments of perception and the transformation of the instruments of art production, because the evolution of the public image of past works is indissociably linked with the evolution of art. As Lionello Venturi remarks, it was by starting with Michelangelo that Vasari discovered Giotto, and by starting with Caracci and Poussin that Belloni rethought Raphael.

<sup>12</sup> B. de Schloezer, ‘Introduction à J. S. Bach’, *Essai d’esthétique musicale* (Paris: Nouvelle revue française, 1947), p. 37.

depends on the *divergence between the level of emission*,<sup>13</sup> defined as the degree of intrinsic complexity and subtlety, of the code required for the work, and the *level of reception*, defined as the degree to which this individual masters the social code, which may be more or less adequate to the code required for the work. Individuals possess a definite and limited capacity for apprehending the ‘information’ suggested by the work, a capacity which depends on their knowledge of the generic code for the type of message concerned, be it the painting as a whole, or the painting of a particular period, school or author. When the message exceeds the possibilities of apprehension or, to be more precise, when the code of the work exceeds in subtlety and complexity the code of the beholders, the latter lose interest in what appears to them to be a medley without rhyme or reason, or a completely unnecessary set of sounds or colours. In other words, when placed before a message which is too rich, or ‘overwhelming’, as the theory of information expresses it, they feel completely ‘out of their depth’ (cf. 1.3.2 above).

2.3.4 It follows that to increase the readability of a work of art (or of a collection of works of art such as those exhibited in a museum) and to reduce the misunderstanding which results from the divergence, it is possible either to lower the level of emission or to raise the level of reception. The only way of lowering the level of emission of a work is to provide, together with the work, the code according to which the work is coded, in a discourse (verbal or graphic), the code of which is already mastered (partially or completely) by the receiver, or which continuously delivers the code for deciphering, in accordance with the model of perfectly rational pedagogic communication. Incidentally, it is obvious that any action tending to lower the level of emission helps in fact to raise the level of reception.

2.3.5 In each period, the rules defining the readability of contemporary art are but a special application of the general law of readability. The readability of a contemporary work varies primarily according to the relationship which the creators maintain, in a given period, in a given society, with the code of the previous period. It is thus possible to distinguish, very roughly, *classical periods*, in which a style reaches its own perfection and which the creators exploit to the point of achieving and perhaps exhausting the possibilities provided by an

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<sup>13</sup> Needless to say, the level of emission cannot be defined absolutely, because the same work may express significations of different levels according to the interpretive grid applied to it (cf. 2.1.1): just as the Western movie may be the subject of the naïve attachment of simple aesthesis (cf. 2.1.3) or of scholarly reading, coupled with a knowledge of the traditions and rules of the genre, so the same pictorial work offers significations of different levels and may, for instance, satisfy an interest in anecdotes or the informative content (especially historical) or retain attention by its formal qualities alone.

inherited art of inventing, and *periods of rupture*, in which a new art of inventing is invented, in which a new generative grammar of forms is engendered, out of joint with the aesthetic traditions of a time or an environment. The divergence between the social code and the code required for the works has clearly every chance of being less in classical periods than in periods of rupture, infinitely less, especially, than in the *periods of continued rupture*, such as the one we are now living through. The transformation of the instruments of art production necessarily precedes the transformation of the instruments of art perception and the transformation of the modes of perception cannot but operate slowly, because it is a matter of uprooting a type of art competence (the product of the internalization of a social code, so deeply implanted in habits and memories that it functions at a subconscious level) and of substituting another for it, by a new process of internalization, necessarily long and difficult.<sup>14</sup> In periods of rupture, the inertia inherent in art competences (or, if preferred, in habitus) means that the works produced by means of art production instruments of a new type are bound to be perceived, for a certain time, by means of old instruments of perception, precisely those against which they have been created. Educated people, who belong to culture at least as much as culture belongs to them, are always given to applying inherited categories to the works of their period and to ignoring, for the same reason, the irreducible novelty of works which carry with them the very categories of their own perception (as opposed to works which can be called academic, in a very broad sense, and which only put into operation a code, or, rather, a habitus which already exists). Everything opposes the devotees of culture, sworn to the worship of the consecrated works of defunct prophets, as also the priests of culture, devoted, like the teachers, to the organization of this worship, to the cultural prophets, that is to say the creators who upset the routine of ritualized fervour, while they become in their turn the object of the routine worship of new priests and new devotees. If it is true, as Franz Boas says, that ‘the thought of what we call the educated classes is controlled essentially by those ideals which have been transmitted to us by past generations’,<sup>15</sup> the fact remains that the absence of any art competence is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the adequate perception of innovative works or, with stronger reason, for the production of such works. Naïveté of the artistic gaze can here be only the supreme form of sophistication. The fact of being devoid of keys is in no way favourable to the understanding of works which require only that all the old keys be rejected so as to wait for the work itself to deliver the key for its own deciphering. As we have seen, this is the very attitude that the most

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<sup>14</sup> This holds good for any cultural training, art form, scientific theory or political theory, the former habitus being able to survive a revolution of social codes and even of the social conditions for the production of these codes for a long time.

<sup>15</sup> F. Boas, *Anthropology and Modern Life* (New York: Norton, 1962), p. 196.

uninitiated, confronted by scholarly art, are least inclined to take up (cf. 2.2.1.2). The ideology according to which the most modern forms of non-figurative art are more directly accessible to the innocence of childhood or of ignorance than to the competence acquired by a training which is considered as deforming, like that of the school, is not only refuted by the facts;<sup>16</sup> although the most innovative forms of art only yield their message first to a few virtuosi (whose avant-garde positions are always explained partly by the position they occupy in the intellectual field and, more generally, in the social structure),<sup>17</sup> the fact is that they demand a capacity for breaking with all the codes, beginning obviously with the code of everyday life, and that this capacity is acquired through association with works demanding different codes and through an experience of the history of art as a succession of ruptures with established codes. In short, an ability to hold all the available codes in abeyance so as to rely entirely on the work itself, and what at first sight is the most unusual quality in it, presupposes an accomplished mastery of the code of the codes, which governs adequate application of the different social codes objectively required for the available works as a whole at a given moment.

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Since the work of art only exists as such to the extent that it is perceived, or, in other words, deciphered, it goes without saying that the satisfactions attached to this perception – whether it be a matter of purely aesthetic enjoyment or of more indirect gratification, such as the *effect of distinction* (cf. 3.3) – are only accessible to those who are disposed to appropriate them because they *attribute a value* to them, it being understood that they can do this only if they have the means to appropriate them. Consequently, the need to appropriate goods which, like cultural goods, only exist as such for those who have received the means to appropriate them from their family environment and school, can appear only in those who can satisfy it, and it can be satisfied as soon as it appears.

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<sup>16</sup> A study of the characteristics of visitors to European museums shows that the museums which offer modern works of art have the highest level of emission, and therefore the most educated visitors (see Bourdieu and Darbel, *L'amour de l'art*).

<sup>17</sup> See P. Bourdieu, 'Champ intellectuel et projet créateur', *Les temps modernes* (November 1966), pp. 865-905; published in English as 'Intellectual Field and Creative Project', trans. S. France, *Social Science Information*, 8:2 (1968); also in Michael F. D. Young, ed., *Knowledge and Control* (London: Collier Macmillan, 1971), pp. 161-88.

3.1 It follows on the one hand that, unlike ‘primary’ needs, the ‘cultural need’ as a cultivated need increases in proportion as it is satisfied, because each new appropriation tends to strengthen the mastery of the instruments of appropriation (cf. 3.2.1) and, consequently, the satisfactions attached to a new appropriation; on the other hand, it also follows that the awareness of deprivation decreases in proportion as the deprivation increases, individuals who are most completely dispossessed of the means of appropriating works of art being the most completely dispossessed of the awareness of this dispossession.

3.2 The disposition to appropriate cultural goods is the product of general or specific education, institutionalized or not, which creates (or cultivates) art competence as a mastery of the instruments for appropriation of these goods, and which creates the ‘cultural need’ by giving the means to satisfy it.

3.2.1 The repeated perception of works of a certain style encourages the unconscious internalization of the rules that govern the production of these works. Like rules of grammar, these rules are not apprehended as such, and are still less explicitly formulated and capable of being formulated: for instance, lovers of classical music may have neither awareness nor knowledge of the laws obeyed by the sound-making art to which they are accustomed, but their auditive education is such that, having heard a dominant chord, they are induced urgently to await the tonic which seems to him the ‘natural’ resolution of this chord, and they have difficulty in apprehending the internal coherence of music founded on other principles. The unconscious mastery of the instruments of appropriation which are the basis of familiarity with cultural works is acquired by slow familiarization, a long succession of ‘little perceptions’, in the sense in which Leibniz uses the expression. Connoisseurship is an ‘art’ which, like the art of thinking or the art of living, cannot be imparted entirely in the form of precepts or instruction, and apprenticeship to it presupposes the equivalent of prolonged contact between disciple and initiate in traditional education, i.e. repeated contact with the work (or with works of the same class). And, just as students or disciples can *unconsciously* absorb the rules of the art – including those which are not explicitly known to the initiates themselves – by giving themselves up to it, excluding analysis and the selection of elements of exemplary conduct, so art-lovers can, by abandoning themselves in some way to the work, internalize the principles and rules of its construction without there ever being brought to their consciousness and formulated as such. This constitutes the difference between the art theorist and the connoisseur, who is usually incapable of explicating the principles on which his judgements are based (cf. 1.3.3). In this field as in others (learning the grammar of one’s native tongue, for instance), school education tends to encourage the conscious reflection of patterns of thought, perception or expression which have already been mastered unconsciously by formulating explicitly the principles of the creative grammar, for example, the laws of

harmony and counterpoint or the rules of pictorial composition, and by providing the verbal and conceptual material essential for naming differences previously experienced in a purely intuitive way. The danger of academicism is obviously inherent in any rationalized teaching which tends to mint, within one doctrinal body, precepts, prescriptions and formulae, explicitly described and taught, more often negative than positive, which a traditional education imparts in the form of a habitus, directly apprehended *uno intuitu*, as a global style not susceptible to analytical breakdown.

3.2.2. Familiarization by repeated perceptions is the privileged mode of acquiring the means of appropriating works of art because the work of art always appears as a concrete individuality which never allows itself to be deduced from principles and rules defining a style. As is seen from the facts in the case of the musical work, the most exact and best informed discursive translations cannot take the place of the execution, as a *hic et nunc* realization of the individual form, which is irreducible to any formula; the conscious or unconscious mastery of the principles and rules of the production of this form enables its coherence and necessity to be apprehended by a symmetrical reconstruction of the creator's construction but, far from reducing the individual work to the general nature of a type, it renders possible the perception and appreciation of the originality of each actualization or, rather, of each execution, in relation to the principles and rules according to which it was produced. Although the work of art always procures the twofold feeling of the unparalleled and the inevitable, the most inventive, most improvised and the most original solutions can always be understood, *post festum*, in terms of the schemes of thought, perception and action (rules of composition, theoretical problems, etc.) which have given rise to the technical or aesthetic questions to which this work corresponds, at the same time as they guide the creator in the search for a solution irreducible to schemes and, thereby, unpredictable yet none the less in accordance, *a posteriori*, with the rules of a grammar of forms. The ultimate truth of the style of a period, a school or an author is not contained as a seed in an original inspiration, but is defined and redefined continuously as a signification in a state of flux which constructs itself in accordance with itself and in reaction against itself; it is in the continued exchange between questions which exist only for and through a mind armed with schemes of a specific type and more or less innovative solutions, obtained through the application of the same schemes, but capable of transforming the initial scheme, that this unity of style and of meaning emerges which, at least after the event, may appear to have preceded the works heralding the final outcome and which transforms, retrospectively, the different moments of the temporal series into simple preparatory outlines. If the evolution of a style (of a period, a school or an author) does not appear either as the autonomous development of an essence which is unique and always identical with itself, or as a continuous creation of unpredictable novelty, but as a progression which



excludes neither leaps forward nor turnings back, it is because the creator's habitus as a system of schemes constantly guides choices which, though not deliberate, are none the less systematic and, without being arranged and organized expressly in relation to a final goal, are none the less bearers of a kind of finality which will be revealed only *post festum*. The auto-constitution of a system of works united by a set of significant relationships is accomplished in and through the association of contingency and meaning which is unceasingly made, unmade and remade according to principles which are all the more constant because they are completely unconscious, in and through the permanent transmutation which introduces the accidents of the history of techniques into the history of style while making them meaningful in and through the invention of obstacles and difficulties which are as if evoked on behalf of the very principles of their solution and of which the short-term counter-finality may conceal a higher finality.

3.2.3 Even when the educational institution makes little provision for art training proper (as is the case in France and many other countries), even when, therefore, it gives neither specific encouragement to cultural activities nor a body of concepts specifically adapted to the plastic arts, it tends on the one hand to inspire a certain *familiarity* – conferring a feeling of belonging to the cultivated class – with the world of art, in which people feel at home and among themselves as the appointed addressees of works which do not deliver their message to the first-comer; and on the other to inculcate (at least in France and in the majority of European countries, at the level of secondary education) a *cultivated disposition* as a durable and generalized attitude which implies recognition of the value of works of art and the ability to appropriate them by means of generic categories.<sup>18</sup> Although it deals almost exclusively with literary works, in-school learning tends to create on the one hand a transposable inclination to admire works approved by the school and a duty to admire and to love certain works or, rather, certain classes of works which gradually seem to become linked to a certain educational and social status; and, on the other hand, an equally generalized and transposable aptitude for categorizing by authors, by genres, by schools and by periods, for the handling of educational categories of literary analysis and for the mastery of the code which governs the use of the different codes (cf. 2.3.5), giving at least a tendency to acquire equivalent categories in other fields and to store away the typical knowledge which, even though extrinsic and anecdotal, makes possible at

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<sup>18</sup> School instruction always fulfils a function of legitimation, if only by giving its blessing to works which it sets up as worthy of being admired, and thus helps to define the hierarchy of cultural goods valid in a particular society at a given time. Concerning the hierarchy of cultural goods and degrees of legitimacy, see Bourdieu, *Un art moyen*, pp. 134-8.

least an elementary form of apprehension, however inadequate it may be.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the first degree of strictly pictorial competence shows itself in the mastery of an arsenal of words making it possible to name differences and to apprehend them while naming them: these are the proper names of famous painters – da Vinci, Picasso, Van Gogh – which function as generic categories, because one can say about any painting or non-figurative object ‘that suggests Picasso’, or, about any work recalling nearly or distantly the manner of the Florentine painter, ‘that looks like a da Vinci’; there are also broad categories, like ‘the Impressionists’ (a school commonly considered to include Gauguin, Cézanne and Degas), ‘the Dutch School’, ‘the Renaissance’. It is particularly significant that the proportion of subjects who think in terms of schools very clearly grows as the level of education rises and that, more generally, generic knowledge which is required for the perception of differences and consequently for memorizing – proper names and historical, technical or aesthetic concepts – becomes increasingly specific as we go towards the more educated beholders, so that the most adequate perception differs only from the least adequate in so far as the specificity, richness and subtlety of the categories employed are concerned. By no means contradicting these arguments is the fact that the less educated visitors to museums – who tend to prefer the most famous paintings and those sanctioned by school teaching, whereas modern painters who have the least chance of being mentioned in schools are quoted only by those with the highest educational qualifications – live in large cities. To be able to form discerning or so-called ‘personal’ opinions is again a result of the education received: the ability to go beyond school constraints is the privilege of those who have sufficiently assimilated school education to make their own the free attitude towards scholastic culture taught by a school so deeply impregnated with the values of the ruling classes that it accepts the fashionable depreciation of school instruction. The contrast between accepted, stereotyped and, as Max Weber would say, ‘routinized’ culture, and genuine culture, freed from school discourse, has meaning only for an infinitely small minority of educated people for whom culture is second nature, endowed with all the appearances of talent, and the full assimilation of school culture is a prerequisite for going beyond it towards this ‘free culture’ – free, that is to say,

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<sup>19</sup> L. S. Vygotsky has established experimentally the validity of the general laws governing the transfer of training in the field of educational aptitudes: ‘The psychological prerequisites for instruction in different school subjects are to a large extent the same: instruction in a given subject influences the development of the higher functions far beyond the confines of that particular subject; the main psychic functions involved in studying various subjects are interdependent – their common bases are consciousness and deliberate mastery, the principal contribution of the school years’ (L. S. Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, trans. E. Hanfmann and G. Vakar (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1962), p. 102).

from its school origins – which the bourgeois class and its school regard as the value of values (cf. 3.3).

But the best proof that the general principles for the transfer of training also hold for school training lies in the fact that the practices of one single individual and, *a fortiori*, of individuals belonging to one social category or having a specific level of education, tend to constitute a system, so that a certain type of practice in any field of culture very probably implies a corresponding type of practice in all the other fields; thus, frequent visits to museums are almost necessarily associated with an equal amount of theatre-going and, to a lesser degree, attendance at concerts. Similarly, everything seems to indicate that knowledge and preferences tend to form into constellations that are strictly linked to the level of education, so that a typical structure of preferences in painting is most likely to be linked to a structure of preferences of the same type in music or literature.<sup>20</sup>

3.2.4 Owing to the particular status of the work of art and the specific logic of the training which it implies, art education which is reduced to a discourse (historical, aesthetic or other) on the works is necessarily at a secondary level;<sup>21</sup> like the teaching of the native tongue, literary or art education (that is to say ‘the humanities’ of traditional education) necessarily presupposes, without ever, or hardly ever, being organized in the light of this principle, that individuals are endowed with a previously acquired competence and with a whole capital of experience unequally distributed among the various social classes (visits to museums or monuments, attending concerts, lectures, etc.).

3.2.4.1 In the absence of a methodical and systematic effort, involving the mobilization of all available means from the earliest years of school onwards, to procure for all those attending school a direct contact with the works or, at least, an approximate substitute for that experience (by showing reproductions or reading texts, organizing visits to museums or playing records, etc.), art education can be of full benefit only to those who owe the competence acquired

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<sup>20</sup> A criticism of the ideology of the ‘unevennesses’ of taste and knowledge in the different art fields (music, painting, etc.) and of the widespread myth of the ‘cultural breakthrough’ (according to which, for instance, an individual would be able, in the absence of any pictorial culture, to produce works of art in photography), all representations which combine to strengthen the ideology of the gift, will be found in Bourdieu, *Un art moyen*, part 1.

<sup>21</sup> This is true, in fact, of any education. Taking the native tongue, for instance, it is known that logical structures, more or less complex according to the complexity of the language used in the family circle, and acquired unconsciously, provide an unequal predisposition to the deciphering and handling of structures involved in a mathematical demonstration as well as in the comprehension of a work of art.

by slow and imperceptible familiarization to their family milieu, because it does not explicitly give to all what it implicitly demands from all. While it is true that only the school can give the continuous and prolonged, methodical and uniform training capable of *mass production*, if I may use that expression, of competent individuals, provided with schemes of perception, thought and expression which are prerequisites for the appropriation of cultural goods, and endowed with that generalized and permanent inclination to appropriate them which is the mark of devotion to culture, the fact remains that the effectiveness of this formative action is directly dependent upon the degree to which those undergoing it fulfil the preliminary conditions for adequate reception: the influence of school activity is all the stronger and more lasting when it is carried on for a longer time (as is shown by the fact that the decrease of cultural activity with age is less marked when the duration of schooling was longer), when those upon whom it is exercised have greater previous competence, acquired through early and direct contact with works (which is well known to be more frequent always as one goes higher up the social scale<sup>22</sup>) and finally when a propitious cultural atmosphere sustains and relays its effectiveness.<sup>23</sup> Thus, humanities students who have received a homogeneous and homogenizing training for a number of years, and who have been constantly selected according to the degree to which they conform to school requirements, remain separated by systematic differences, both in their pursuit of cultural activities and in their cultural preferences, depending upon whether they come from a more or less cultivated milieu and for how long this has been so; their knowledge of the theatre (measured according to the average number of plays that they have seen on the stage) or of painting is greater if their father or grandfather (or, *a fortiori*, both of them) belongs to a higher occupational category; and, furthermore, if one of these variables (the

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<sup>22</sup> See Bourdieu and Darbel, *L'amour de l'art*, p. 90.

<sup>23</sup> Belonging to a social group characterized by a high rate of practice helps to maintain, sustain and strengthen the cultivated disposition; but the diffuse pressures and encouragements of the reference group are more keenly felt when the disposition to receive them (linked with art competence) is greater. (On the effect of exhibitions and tourism, more strongly inserted into collective rhythms than the ordinary visit to the museums, and consequently more likely to recall the diffuse norms of practice to those who have the highest cultural ambitions, that is to say to those who belong or who aspire to belong to the cultivated class, see Bourdieu and Darbel, *L'amour de l'art*, pp. 51 and 115-19.) Thus, for instance, if the majority of students display a kind of cultural bulimia, it is because the stimulation to practise exerted by the reference group is, in this case, particularly strong, and also – above all – because admittance to higher education marks their entrance into the cultivated world, and therefore their access to the right, and what amounts to the same thing, to the duty, to appropriate culture.

category of the father or of the grandfather) has a fixed value, the other tends, by itself, to hierarchize the scores.<sup>24</sup> Because of the slowness of the acculturation process, subtle differences linked with the length of time that they have been in contact with culture thus continue to separate individuals who are apparently equal with regard to social success and even educational success. Cultural nobility also has its quarterings.

3.2.4.2 Only an institution like the school, the specific function of which is methodically to develop or create the dispositions which produce an educated person and which lay the foundations, quantitatively and consequently qualitatively, of a constant and intense pursuit of culture, could offset (at least partially) the initial disadvantage of those who do not receive from their family circle the encouragement to undertake cultural activities and the competence presupposed in any discourse on works, on the condition – and only on the condition – that it employs every available means to break down the endless series of cumulative processes to which any cultural education is condemned. For if the apprehension of a work of art depends, in its intensity, its modality and its very existence, on the beholders' mastery of the generic and specific code of the work, i.e. on their competence, which they owe partly to school training, the same thing applies to the pedagogic communication which is responsible, among its other functions, for transmitting the code of works of scholarly culture (and also the code according to which it effects this transmission). Thus the intensity and modality of the communication are here again a function of culture (as a system of schemes of perception, expression and historically constituted and socially conditioned thinking) which the receiver owes to his or her family milieu and which is more or less close to scholarly culture and the linguistic and cultural models according to which the school effects the transmission of this culture. Considering that the direct experience of works of scholarly culture and the institutionally organized acquisition of culture which is a prerequisite for adequate experience of such works are subject to the same laws (cf. 2.3.2, 2.3.3 and 2.3.4), it is obvious how difficult it is to break the sequence of the cumulative effects which cause cultural capital to attract cultural capital. In fact, the school has only to give free play to the objective machinery of cultural diffusion without working systematically to give to all, in and through the pedagogical message itself, what is given to some through family inheritance – that is, the instruments which condition the adequate reception of the school message – for it to redouble and consecrate by its approval the socially conditioned inequalities of cultural competence, by treating them as natural inequalities or, in other words, as inequalities of gifts or natural talents.

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<sup>24</sup> See P. Bourdieu and J. C. Passeron, *Les étudiants et leurs études* (Paris, The Hague: Mouton, 1964), pp. 96-7 (Cahiers du Centre de Sociologie Européenne, no. 1).

3.3 Charismatic ideology is based on parenthesizing the relationship, evident as soon as it is revealed, between art competence and education, which alone is capable of creating both the disposition to recognize a value in cultural goods and the competence which gives a meaning to this disposition by making it possible to appropriate such goods. Since their art competence is the product of an imperceptible familiarization and an automatic transferring of aptitudes, members of the privileged classes are naturally inclined to regard as a gift of nature a cultural heritage which is transmitted by a process of unconscious training. But, in addition, the contradictions and ambiguities of the relationship which the most cultured among them maintain with their culture are both encouraged and permitted by the paradox which defines the 'realization' of culture as *becoming natural*. Culture is thus achieved only by negating itself as such, that is, as artificial and artificially acquired, so as to become second nature, a habitus, a possession turned into being; the virtuosi of the judgement of taste seem to reach an experience of aesthetic grace so completely freed from the constraints of culture and so little marked by the long, patient training of which it is the product that any reminder of the conditions and the social conditioning which have rendered it possible seems to be at once obvious and scandalous (cf. 1.3.1). It follows that the most experienced connoisseurs are the natural champions of charismatic ideology, which attributes to the work of art a magical power of conversion capable of awakening the potentialities latent in a few of the elect, and which contrasts authentic experience of a work of art as an 'affection' of the heart or immediate enlightenment of the intuition with the laborious proceedings and cold comments of the intelligence, ignoring the social and cultural conditions underlying such an experience, and at the same time treating as a birthright the virtuosity acquired through long familiarization or through the exercises of a methodical training; silence concerning the social prerequisites for the appropriation of culture or, to be more exact, for the acquisition of art competence in the sense of mastery of all the means for the specific appropriation of works of art is a self-seeking silence because it is what makes it possible to legitimize a social privilege by pretending that it is a gift of nature.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> It is the same autonomization of 'needs' or 'propensities' in relation to the social conditions underlying their production which leads some people to describe as 'cultural needs' the opinions or the preferences actually expressed and actually established by surveys of cultural opinion or accomplishment and, in the absence of a statement or a denunciation of the cause, to sanction the division of society into those who feel 'cultural needs' and those who are deprived of this deprivation.

To remember that culture is not what one is but what one has, or rather, what one has become; to remember the social conditions which render possible aesthetic experience and the existence of those beings – art lovers or ‘people of taste’ – for whom it is possible; to remember that the work of art is given only to those who have received the means to acquire the means to appropriate it and who could not seek to possess it if they did not already possess it, in and through the possession of means of possession as an actual possibility of effecting the taking of possession; to remember, finally, that only a few have the real possibility of benefitting from the theoretical possibility, generously offered to all, of taking advantage of the works exhibited in museums – all this is to bring to light the hidden force of the effects of the majority of culture’s social uses.

The parenthesizing of the social conditions which render possible culture and culture become nature, cultivated nature, having all the appearances of grace or a gift and yet acquired, so therefore ‘deserved’, is the precedent condition of charismatic ideology which makes it possible to confer on culture and in particular on ‘love of art’ the all-important place which they occupy in bourgeois ‘sociodicy’. The bourgeoisie find naturally in culture as cultivated nature and culture that has become nature the only possible principle for the legitimation of their privilege. Being unable to invoke the right of birth (which their class, through the ages, has refused to the aristocracy) or nature which, according to ‘democratic’ ideology, represents universality, i.e. the ground on which all distinctions are abolished, or the aesthetic virtues which enabled the first generation of bourgeois to invoke their merit, they can resort to cultivated nature and culture become nature, to what is sometimes called ‘class’, through a kind of tell-tale slip, to ‘education’, in the sense of a product of education which seems to owe nothing to education,<sup>26</sup> to distinction, grace which is merit and merit which is grace, an unacquired merit which justifies unmerited acquisitions, that is to say, inheritance. To enable culture to fulfil its primary ideological function of class co-optation and legitimation of this mode of selection, it is necessary and sufficient that the link between culture and education, which is simultaneously obvious and hidden, be forgotten, disguised and denied. The unnatural idea of inborn culture, of a gift of culture, bestowed on certain people by nature, is inseparable from blindness to the functions of the institution which ensures the profitability of the cultural heritage and legitimizes its transmission while concealing that it fulfils this function. The school in fact is the institution which, through its outwardly irreproachable verdicts, transforms socially conditioned inequalities in regard to culture into inequalities of success, interpreted as

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<sup>26</sup> It was understood thus by a very cultivated old man who declared during a conversation: ‘Education, Sir, is inborn.’

inequalities of gifts which are also inequalities of merit.<sup>27</sup> Plato records, towards the end of *The Republic*, that the souls who are to begin another life must themselves choose their lot among ‘patterns of life’ of all kinds and that, when the choice has been made, they must drink of the water of the river Lethe before returning to earth. The function which Plato attributes to the water of forgetfulness falls, in our societies, on the university which, in its impartiality, though pretending to recognize students as equal in rights and duties, divided only by inequalities of gifts and of merit, in fact confers on individuals degrees judged according to their cultural heritage, and therefore according to their social status.

By symbolically shifting the essence of what sets them apart from other classes from the economic field to that of culture, or rather, by adding to strictly economic differences, namely those created by the simple possession of material goods, differences created by the possession of symbolic goods such as works of art, or by the pursuit of symbolic distinctions in the manner of using such goods (economic or symbolic), in short, by turning into a fact of nature everything which determines their ‘value’, or to take the word in the linguistic sense, their *distinction* – a mark of difference which, according to the Littré, sets people apart from the common herd ‘by the characteristics of elegance, nobility and good form’- the privileged members of bourgeois society replace the difference between two cultures, historic products of social conditions, by the essential difference between two natures, a naturally cultivated nature and a naturally natural nature.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the sacralization of culture and art fulfils a vital function by contributing to the consecration of the social order: to enable educated people to believe in barbarism and persuade the barbarians within the gates of their own barbarity, all they must and need do is to manage to conceal themselves and to conceal the social conditions which render possible not only culture as a second nature in which society recognizes human excellence or ‘good form’ as the ‘realization’ in a habitus of the aesthetics of the ruling classes, but also the legitimized dominance (or, if you like, the legitimacy) of a particular definition of culture. And in order that the ideological circle may be completely closed, all they have to do is to find in an essentialist representation of the bipartition of society into barbarians and civilized people the justification of their right to

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<sup>27</sup> See P. Bourdieu, ‘L’école conservatrice’, *Revue française de sociologie*, 7 (1966), pp.325-47, and esp. pp. 346-7.

<sup>28</sup> It is impossible to show here that the dialectics of divulgence and distinction are one of the driving forces for the change of patterns of artistic consumption, the distinguished classes being constantly driven by the divulgence of their distinctive qualities to seek elements of distinction in new forms of symbolic consumption (cf. Bourdieu, *Un art moyen*, pp. 73ff, and ‘Condition de classe et position de classe’, *Archives européennes de sociologie*, 7 (1966), pp. 201-23).



conditions which produce the possession of culture and the dispossession of culture, a state of 'nature' destined to appear based on the nature of the men who are condemned to it.

If such is the function of culture and if it is love of art which really determines the choice that separates, as by an invisible and insuperable barrier, those who have from those who have not received this grace, it can be seen that museums betray, in the smallest details of their morphology and their organization, their true function, which is to strengthen the feeling of belonging in some and the feeling of exclusion in others.<sup>29</sup> Everything, in these civic temples in which bourgeois society deposits its most sacred possessions, that is, the relics inherited from a past which is not its own, in these holy places of art, in which the chosen few come to nurture a faith of virtuosi while conformists and bogus devotees come and perform a class ritual, old palaces or great historic homes to which the nineteenth century added imposing edifices, built often in the Greco-Roman style of civic sanctuaries, everything combines to indicate that the world of art is as contrary to the world of everyday life as the sacred is to the profane. The prohibition against touching the objects, the religious silence which is forced upon visitors, the puritan asceticism of the facilities, always scarce and uncomfortable, the almost systematic refusal of any instruction, the grandiose solemnity of the decoration and the decorum, colonnades, vast galleries, decorated ceilings, monumental staircases both outside and inside, everything seems done to remind people that the transition from the profane world to the sacred world presupposes, as Durkheim says, 'a genuine metamorphosis', a radical spiritual change, that the bringing together of the worlds 'is always, in itself, a delicate operation which calls for precaution and a more or less complicated initiation', that 'it is not even possible unless the profane lose their specific characteristics, unless they themselves become sacred to some extent and to some degree'.<sup>30</sup> Although the work of art, owing to its sacred character, calls

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<sup>29</sup> It is not infrequent that working-class visitors explicitly express the feeling of exclusion which, in any case, is evident in their whole behaviour. Thus, they sometimes see in the absence of any indication which might facilitate the visit—arrows showing the direction to follow, explanatory panels, etc. — the signs of a deliberate intention to exclude the uninitiated. The provision of teaching and didactic aids would not, in fact, really make up for the lack of schooling, but it would at least proclaim the right not to know, the right to be there in ignorance, the right of the ignorant to be there, a right which everything in the presentation of works and in the organization of the museum combines to challenge, as this remark overheard in the Chateau of Versailles testifies: 'This chateau was not made for the people, and it has not changed.'

<sup>30</sup> E. Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, 6th edn (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960), pp. 55-6. The holding of a Danish

for particular dispositions or predispositions, it brings in return its consecration to those who satisfy its demands, to the small elite who are self-chosen by their aptitude to respond to its appeal.

The museum gives to all, as a public legacy, the monuments of a splendid past, instruments of the sumptuous glorification of the great figures of bygone ages, but this is false generosity, because free entrance is also optional entrance, reserved for those who, endowed with the ability to appropriate the works, have the privilege of using this freedom and who find themselves consequently legitimized in their privilege, that is, in the possession of the means of appropriating cultural goods or, to borrow an expression of Max Weber, in the *monopoly* of the handling of cultural goods and of the institutional signs of cultural salvation (awarded by the school). Being the keystone of a system which can function only by concealing its true function, the charismatic representation of art experience never fulfils its function of mystifying so well as when it resorts to a 'democratic' language:<sup>31</sup> to claim that works of art have power to awaken the grace of aesthetic enlightenment in anyone, however culturally uninitiated he or she may be, to presume in all cases to ascribe to the unfathomable accidents of grace or to the arbitrary bestowal of 'gifts' aptitudes which are always the product of unevenly distributed education, and therefore to treat inherited aptitudes as personal virtues which are both natural and meritorious. Charismatic ideology would not be so strong if it were not the only outwardly irreproachable means of justifying the right of the heirs to the inheritance without being

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exhibition showing modern furniture and utensils in the old ceramic rooms of the Lille museum brought about such a 'conversion' in the visitors as can be summarized in the following contrasts, the very ones which exist between a department store and a museum: noise/silence; touch/see; quick, haphazard exploration, in no particular order/leisurely, methodical inspection, according to a fixed arrangement; freedom/ constraint; economic assessment of works which may be purchased/aesthetic appreciation of 'priceless' works. However, despite these differences, bound up with the things exhibited, the solemnizing (and distancing) effect of the museum no less continued to be felt, contrary to expectations, for the structure of the, public at the Danish exhibition was more 'aristocratic' (in respect of level of education) than the ordinary public of the museum. The mere fact that works are consecrated by being exhibited in a consecrated place is sufficient, in itself, profoundly to change their signification and, more precisely, to raise the level of their emission; were they presented in a more familiar place, a large emporium for instance, they would be more accessible (cf. Bourdieu and Darbel, *L'amour de l'art*, pp. 73-4 and 118).

<sup>31</sup> For this reason care should be taken not to attach undue importance to the differences of pure form between the expressions 'aristocratic' and 'democratic', 'patrician' and 'paternalistic' in this ideology.

inconsistent with the ideal of formal democracy, and if, in this particular case, it did not aim at establishing in nature the sole right of the bourgeoisie to appropriate art treasures to itself, to appropriate them to itself *symbolically*, that is to say, in the only legitimate manner, in a society which pretends to yield to all, 'democratically', the relics of an aristocratic past.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> In the field of education, the ideology of the gift fulfils the same functions of camouflage: it enables an institution, such as literary education in France, which provides an 'awakening education', to borrow from Max Weber, assuming between the teacher and the pupil a community of values and culture which occurs only when the system is dealing with its own heirs to conceal its real function, namely, that of confirming and consequently legitimizing the right of the heirs to the cultural inheritance.