

The Symbolic Production of Culture in Discourses on  
Fashion in *Le Monde* and *The Guardian* : A Critical  
Application of the Work of Bourdieu

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## *Abstract*

By way of a textual analysis of the reports on high fashion shows of the French newspaper *Le Monde* and the British newspaper *The Guardian*, this study is a reflection on Bourdieu's sociology of culture.

Drawing on Bourdieu's notion of symbolic production, I comment on the construction of fashion as popular culture in *The Guardian* and as high culture in *Le Monde*. The investigation of the versions of culture constructed by the two newspapers allows me to reflect on the theoretical framework Bourdieu has developed in his discussion of the field of culture and the traditional opposition between the high and the popular which structures it.

Bourdieu's sociology is a product of a specific field of production, the French: like many French researchers, he shows little interest in mass culture - his sociology of the field of fashion is a case in point -, and privileges culture as high culture. Popular culture - working class culture - is not acknowledged as a culture *per se*.

Many of Bourdieu's concepts, such as 'cultural capital' or 'symbolic production' can usefully be applied to an analysis of the field of popular culture, but this is a step he does not take. If adequate to understand certain cultural experiences and discourses, Bourdieu's model is inadequate to understand others, but proves to be a rigid theoretical model which fails to account for the complexity and diversity of the field of popular culture, and ultimately fails to break with the cultural doxa.

Finally, although Bourdieu insists that sociologists should pay attention to the discourses of symbolic production of culture, he himself fails to engage with them, focusing on their field production rather than on the meanings they convey. In contrast, this study is concerned with the meanings created in the process of symbolic production of fashion.

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## INTRODUCTION

‘Fashion is not art. Fashion is frivolous and unimportant’  
(Michael Boodro, quoted in Kim 1998: 54)

‘The great designers [like Balenciaga] really let the cloth speak - in the same way that Morris Louis lets the paint speak’  
(Richard Martin, quoted in Kim 1998: 57)

‘In general, the aesthetics of fashion do not admit the spiritual, metaphysical or contemplative modes’  
(Radford 1998: 155)

‘Fashion design is not art. I don’t think it should be considered an art, or I an artist. I am not making clothes to have them displayed in a museum’  
(Issey Miyake, quoted in Radford 1998: 155)

These quotes come from two papers which appeared in the journal *Fashion Theory*; the first two, from Sung Bok Kim’s ‘Is Fashion Art?’ (1998), the other two from Robert Radford’s ‘Dangerous Liaison: Art, Fashion and Individualism’ (1998). Whilst Bok Kim’s paper is an attempt to show that fashion *is* art and that ‘like any other artistic endeavor, is a worthy component of the aesthetic domain’ (58), Radford argues that fashion and art must be distinguished and that ‘there is a general danger’, as the title of the paper also makes it clear, ‘of category slippage’ (153) which ‘threatens to bankrupt art of its long-hoarded asset of the status attached to its cultural weight of seriousness’ (160), a seriousness stained by fashion’s ‘frivolity’ (160).

This debate - which could be dubbed ‘is fashion high culture or low culture?’ - illustrates the issue of the importance of discourses on fashion as sites where different versions of fashion are constructed, diverse meanings and values attributed to it, and ultimately where different notions of culture are conveyed through the conceptual distinctions made between high and low cultural forms. These are discourses involved in the creation of the ‘immaterial contents’ (Boselli 1998: 21) of fashion, its symbolic forms.

As Bourdieu (1993a) argues, the material production of cultural objects is only one side of their production. Another side is symbolic production, 'the production of the value of the work or, which amounts to the same thing, of belief in the value of the work' (37). Artworks are produced not by their direct creators only but also by 'institutions of consecration' (133), which through their discourses on cultural objects contribute to the creation of their symbolic value.

Different institutions - magazines, academic journals, museums, education - Bourdieu also notes, participate in this process of symbolic production, a production which is also that of the 'universe of belief' (15) which is attached to cultural artefacts. It is with the discourse of such institutions, 'specialists in symbolic production' (Featherstone 1994: 10), that the present thesis is concerned, in an analysis of the reports on high fashion shows of the British newspaper *The Guardian* and the French newspaper *Le Monde* over the year 1996. In both newspapers a symbolic value of fashion is constructed and articulated around different beliefs: the belief in fashion as popular culture in *The Guardian* and the belief in fashion as high culture in *Le Monde*, beliefs which are 'part of the full reality' (Bourdieu 1993a: 36) of fashion.

My engagement with the work of Bourdieu, however, is not limited to his notion of symbolic production and an analysis of this process as it takes place in two newspapers. Central to my thesis, rather, is a discussion of his work on the field of culture, and my analysis of reports on high fashion in *Le Monde* and *The Guardian* provides a platform for this discussion. The investigation of the versions of popular culture and high culture constructed by the two newspapers allows me to reflect on the theoretical framework Bourdieu has developed to understand the field of culture and the traditional opposition between the high and the popular which structures it.

However, Bourdieu is concerned only with the symbolic production of high culture and does not address that of popular culture. Such a standpoint is, I will argue, symptomatic of his sociology as a whole, where little room has been made for the analysis of popular culture other than as working class culture, a culture strictly dominated by high culture. In that respect Bourdieu's approach to the notion of popular culture is also typical of that of many French researchers, who, compared with British ones, have shown little interest in the study of popular culture as contemporary mass

culture, as will be shown in Part I. For Bourdieu culture means high culture, a definition which still pervades the French academic field.

Moreover, though Bourdieu insists on the central role played by discourses in the process of symbolic production, he actually pays little attention to the discourses themselves. This is because he reduces them, in the same way that he reduces other texts such as paintings, high fashion garments or literary writings, to an objectification of the field structure to which they belong and of the strategies of distinction of their consumers and producers. Little insight is actually gained into the values and meanings invested in the discourses of symbolic production, values and meanings I unravel in my analysis of *Le Monde's* and *The Guardian's* fashion reports.

Thus my work is informed by Bourdieuan sociology at three different levels: first, Bourdieu's notion of symbolic production provided the original impetus: to study this process as it takes place in the field of fashion, and more specifically in the fashion reports of two newspapers. This process has generally been neglected by students of fashion. Most analyses of fashion focus on its material production – the fashion industry and the fashion trade (see, for example, Green 1997; Phizacklea 1990; Ross 1997) - or on its material consumption (see, for example, Hebdige 1988; Steele 1996). Many students have also tried to explain fashion as a general phenomenon, a process whose logic they have tried to understand (see, for example, Craik 1995; Davis 1994). In all these studies little attention is paid to the production of the symbolic value of fashion. Secondly, my work is also a critical reflection on Bourdieu's views on high culture and popular culture, and thirdly it addresses his methodological approach to the field of culture.

This thesis is divided into three parts. Part I is a map of the debate on popular culture and high culture in French and British academic discourses. It concentrates on the main concepts and ideas common to both the French and the British academic fields but which have been apprehended differently by the researchers from the two traditions.

As Elias argues 'words like the English and French "civilization" or the German *Kultur* appear completely clear in the internal usage of the society to which they belong. But the way in which a piece of the world is bound up in them, the manner in which they include certain areas and exclude others as a matter of course, the hidden evaluations which they implicitly bring with them, all this makes them difficult to define for any

outsider' (1994: 4). In this passage, 'civilization' or 'Kultur' could be replaced by 'popular culture' whose 'hidden evaluations' internal to the French and British academic fields I try to unravel.

Moreover, as Zev Barbu observes, 'not only is there an alarmingly wide range of "operational" definitions, but the very meaning of the term "popular" differs so greatly from author to author, from context to context, indeed from language to language, that no amount of sociological imagination is great enough to construct a complete picture' (1976: 39). The picture I have attempted to give must be seen as the product of a *comparative* analysis in which my discussion of the French academic field is enlightened by my knowledge of the British academic field and vice versa. It is a picture which reaches across two different and differentiated fields, produced through a specific and situated angle or point of view, which aims to capture the most significant contrasts between these fields, their particularisms and characteristics, *when studied in each other's light*. The topics I concentrate on are those which emerge from a comparative perspective. Had I studied the two traditions in isolation, different themes and issues might have emerged. Thus there are probably some British and French authors who do not appear in my discussion and whose work could point towards further specificities of one of the fields in isolation from the other. The texts I have selected are those which have both exercised a certain influence in their respective academic fields and which best reveal the major ways both traditions have, compared with each other, approached the notion of popular culture.

Moreover, the issue arose as to what count as British or French texts. In this thesis I often refer to the expressions 'French academics' and 'British academics' but also 'French academia/academic field' and 'British academia/academic field'. Whilst I understand the former commonsensically as including scholars grounded in French or British academia, generally though not necessarily of French or British nationality, the latter is more widely encompassing and has more fluid boundaries but might also be more pertinent as a unit of analysis. Though in my discussion of the British tradition, for instance, I have tried to stick to the work of British scholars, there are texts I refer to which are not the product, strictly speaking, of British researchers or of British academia but whose impact on the tradition of research of culture in this country has been

considerable. Examples are the work of the Dutch Ang (1996) and the American Radway (1991). Similarly, the influence of French intellectuals such as Barthes or Althusser, for example, and their interpretation within their context of appropriation, cannot be ignored in discussions of British cultural theory (see, for instance, Basnett 1997; Tudor 1999; Turner 1996) nor can that of Hoggart in France (see, for instance, Cuche 1996; Grignon et Passeron 1989; Rigby 1994), as will be further developed in Part I. I therefore use the notions of British and French academic fields as reflexive tools which allow me to capture the characteristics of the two academic traditions, although I am aware that in the process of invoking nationhood I am contributing to the construction of the very object I am analysing. Thus when I talk about British academia or French academia as two single units, this is to enable clearer reflections on the objects I am also creating. These expressions do not, however, refer to a homogeneous but rather to a diversified whole, whose diversity might very well contradict totalising notions of Britishness or Frenchness, a diversity that my research will, I hope, have underlined. However, beyond this diversity within each academic field there are also traits which are common to and cut across different strands of analysis of cultural practices and artefacts, and I have tried to bring these out. These traits also participate in the identification of what I refer to as French and British discourses on popular culture; the “peculiarities of the British” (McRobbie 1998: 10) but also those of the French in studies of popular culture.

In Chapter 1, after an analysis of the use in French and British academia of the concept of culture, I discuss the work of those cultural commentators who value culture as high culture and popular culture as folk culture, arguing that such an approach is still pervasive in the French academic field. In Chapter 2, I look at the position of French and British researchers on the issue of popular culture as working class culture. I also comment on their discussion of commercial mass culture, and compare French and British academic discourses on postmodern culture. In Chapter 3, I focus on the issue of popular culture as ordinary culture to show how this concept has been appropriated differently in the French and the British academic fields. Whilst in the former it is a banal transparent everyday culture situated outside of commercial culture that has been the object of most studies, in the latter, especially amongst students of subculture, a spectacular culture has tended to be privileged. Though it has been argued that this

privileging has often led to ‘an abrupt theoretical dichotomy’ (Muggleton 2000: 21) between subcultures and commercial cultures, where the former would stand as authentic types of culture and the latter as debased forms of culture, commercial cultures have nevertheless generally been more embraced by British academics than by French. Thus Part I offers a picture of British and French academic discourses on popular culture, a picture in the light of which Bourdieu’s sociology of culture and my own reading of this sociology should be read, as I argue in Part II. It also allows me to comment on the notions of popular culture and high culture and the diversity of meanings and values attributed to them, meanings and values I further discuss in my analysis of *The Guardian* and *Le Monde*.

In Part II, I turn to the work of Bourdieu, looking at his discussion of high culture and popular culture, and more specifically his analysis of the field of fashion, further investigating some of the issue I dealt with in Part I, but also foregrounding some of the main insights gained in my empirical analysis.

In Chapter 4, I show that Bourdieu’s work is very much informed by the definition of culture as high culture and, in that respect, does not radically break with the French social sciences tradition of conceptualisation of culture discussed in Part I. Whilst he usefully draws attention to the social conditions of existence of a Kantian aesthetic, thus unravelling the process of naturalisation of social inequalities that an adherence to this aesthetic often masks, he nevertheless fails to break with it and therefore denies to popular culture any legitimate aesthetic, or even any reality, to the extent of arguing that popular culture is ‘a properly intellectual myth’ (1995b: 269). Moreover, though he rightly insists on the symbolic power of high culture in France, Bourdieu also, more problematically, tends to universalise a model - the one he developed through his study of French society and culture - whose empirical limits he fails to address.

In Chapter 5, I argue that his analysis of the French field of haute couture is typical of his account of high culture and popular culture. It is mainly in *Le Couturier et sa Griffe* (1975), *Haute Couture and Haute Culture* (1995c) and in *Distinction* (1996a) that Bourdieu discusses fashion. However, a discussion of mass fashion is absent from these texts, whilst popular, that is working class, fashion, is theorised as limited to functional use only, motivated by a ‘taste for necessity’ (1996a: 374). The consumption

of high fashion on the other hand, like that of culture, which means high culture in Bourdieu's work, is inscribed, according to him, in a bourgeois dialectic of distinction and pretension. Drawing on these points, I argue that Bourdieu's is an instrumentalist account of the consumption of fashion, which fails to address the issue of the actual experience of fashion *for itself*, a material culture which cannot be reduced to a signifier of class distinction and social status only. In this chapter, I also look at Bourdieu's theory of symbolic production, drawing attention to the limits of his conceptualisation of such a process.

Finally, in Chapter 6 and pursuing the idea introduced in the preceding chapter of the instrumentalism of Bourdieu's sociology, I comment on the issue of his reduction of texts and practices to field positionality, to argue that in his work texts are treated as if they were transparent, are emptied of content and reduced to an objectification of the field in which they belong, whilst practices are theorised as the expression only of their authors' and consumers' quests for social differentiation. Bourdieu's theory of practice is 'a theory of the determination of practice' (Alexander 2000: 48), rather than a theory concerned with the complexities and specificities of practices *per se*. In this chapter, I particularly look at his analysis of modernist art, of the work of Flaubert and at his response to criticisms of his work. His discussion of the fashion discourse [*le discours de mode*' (Bourdieu 1975: 27)] will serve as a further illustration of his neglect of the content of texts.

In Part III, after an account of the research process, I report on my empirical analysis of fashion reports in *Le Monde* and *The Guardian*. I look at the process of construction of notions of culture through discourses on fashion in both newspapers, also pointing out some of the limits and insights of Bourdieu's discussion of high culture and popular culture.

In chapter 7, I discuss my engagement with the work of Bourdieu, reflect on how my position as a French person educated in French academia but living in London and studying for a PhD in a British institution has informed my work. I comment on the issue of the point of view of the researcher, insisting, with Bourdieu, on the need to produce an objectified account of one's position in the research process. In this chapter, I also address the issue of readers' relations to texts.

In Chapter 8, I argue that, whilst in *Le Monde* high fashion is depicted as a modernist art where the designer is the creator of sublime works of art, in *The Guardian* designers are not the artists of modernity but ‘social stars’ (Wilson 1987: 178) who belong to the fashion reports like characters to a narrative, here the fashion story as popular entertainment. In both newspapers cultural references are made that are only intelligible when read in the light of different cultural capitals. Whilst in *Le Monde* it is a high cultural capital which is required to relate to the fashion constructed there, in *The Guardian* it is a popular one, a type of capital Bourdieu neglects.

Chapter 9 takes up the issue of the relation of the readers to high fashion. In *Le Monde*, the high fashion dress is likened to a work of art, the genius creation of the fashion author. It is addressed to the soul, an object to be consumed spiritually by the readers as aesthetes, and set apart from bodily enjoyment. In *The Guardian*, readers are evoked through the depiction of fashion as an object of physical consumption. It is not limited to extraordinary fashion only but is also a commodity to be worn, ultimately addressed, whether *tel quel* or in its high street version, to the readers’ body in the practice of their everyday life. Thus whereas *Le Monde*’s reports are framed by a Kantian aesthetic, the aesthetic Bourdieu argues is the dominant one, *The Guardian* relates to another type of aesthetic, a more pragmatic one, grounded in the body as the mediator of the sensual experience of fashion but also as the site of everyday creativity and artistic fashioning, a dimension Bourdieu fails to address.

Thus *Le Monde*’s high fashion is likened to the art of modernity and it is modernism which, as I will argue in Chapter 10, informs the French newspaper’s account of fashion shows in contrast with *The Guardian*’s postmodern take on the topic, a take which does not easily fit with Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of the functioning of the field of culture. Whilst *Le Monde* laments what it sees as the lost glory of high fashion - the crisis of French high fashion being depicted as a sign of the crisis of French culture - perverted by the new designers’ quest for money rather than art for art’s sake, *The Guardian* celebrates the success of the British fashion avantgardes, the ‘new wave’ (09-10) of the ‘fashion scene’ (28-02) no longer dominated by Paris fashion. Moreover, whereas *Le Monde* adheres to the traditional hierarchy between high and popular culture, in *The Guardian* this hierarchy is flattened out through an ironic and playful engagement

with the topic of high fashion. However, distinctions between high and low forms of culture are not altogether ignored by *The Guardian's* reports, rather they reappear in the newspaper's discourse on high popular culture and low popular culture. The field of popular culture is credited with an autonomy and diversity which Bourdieu's highly polarised field of culture does not accommodate.

Finally, Part III shows that *Le Monde's* and *The Guardian's* discourses on fashion fit in with the traditions I map out in Part I, an idea I discuss in the conclusion.

#### **Note**

All translations from *Le Monde* and from texts appearing in French in the Bibliography are mine.

*Part I*

*The Notion of Popular Culture in French and British*

*Academic Discourses*

## Chapter 1

### ON THE NOTION OF CULTURE

In Chapter 1, after an analysis of the genesis of the word 'culture' in France and in the UK, I show that in both countries the definition of culture as high culture has at some time been a pervasive feature of academic discourses. Although British researchers have tended to depart from such an approach, this is less true of many French researchers, for whom culture is high culture, the true culture of an intellectual elite. For both academic traditions, alongside this 'true culture' is another, which in the cultural hierarchy of students of culture has often been privileged - popular culture as folk culture, a traditional and organic culture. In contrast, at the lower end of this hierarchy is contemporary mass culture, to which I turn in Chapter 2.

#### **1. The Universal and the Particular in French and British Discourses on Culture**

It is in the eighteenth century that, in France and the UK, the figurative meaning of the word 'culture' imposes itself (see Bénétou 1975: 26; Williams 1988: 87). Culture becomes related to the faculty of developing a certain knowledge and disposition of things such as literature, art or sciences. This notion of culture departs from its older dominant definition, the cultivation of land, to refer to the cultivated spirit and the state of the cultivated individual. It can also only be the property of human beings, a notion fundamental to the universalism and humanism of the thinkers of the Enlightenment (Cuche 1996: 9). It is culture which allows individual betterment, the progress of human beings, and the evolution towards enlightened knowledge.

Alongside the notion of culture is that of civilisation, which, Elias (1996) observes, was first found in the work of the French physiocrat Marquis de Mirabeau in 1757 in his *L'Ami des Hommes ou Traité de la Population*. Whereas culture refers to individuals' intellectual progress, civilisation refers to their refined social manners and the idea of collective progress. It is a definition which was shared by both France and the UK (Williams 1988: 58). Along with the *homme civilisé*, the French *honnête homme* or the British gentleman (Eagleton 2000: 9), it stands in opposition to barbarism and the

savage (Eagleton 2000; Elias 1996; Williams 1988). Civilisation must be extended to all human beings so as to reverse, as Mirabeau puts it, ‘the cycle from barbarism to decadence through civilization and wealth’ (quoted in Elias 1996: 37).

In France, the model of the *honnête homme*, the historian Roger Chartier observes, is an ideal which was created in the late sixteenth century and which links intellectual asceticism with the concern for disinterest (2000: 25). It is a model which fosters an elite culture and which, he argues, still informs French society. Chartier also explains how the court society of the *Ancien Régime* was in France designed by the monarchy not only to control the nobility and civilise its manners, but also to normalise behaviour in the popular *milieux*. The category of the popular was invented, synonymous with ignorance and the irrational, the local and the rural, with ‘aesthetic and moral shapelessness, now opposed to legitimate culture as its inverse, written, learned, ordered by reason; a culture which incarnates the centralism and universalism of the message of the monarchy’ (14). Such a message also rejected regionalisms in favour of the idea of integration to national unity, an idea which, Chartier stresses, is still in place today, which explains why particular cultures, whether they be regional cultures, working class culture, youth culture, women’s culture or the culture of immigrants, ‘have met in France more obstacles for their development than in neighbouring countries’ (21).

In the nineteenth century in France as in the UK, ‘culture’ still refers to the intellectual progress of individuals, but it also becomes linked to the collectivity and takes a wider dimension, moving closer to the notion of civilisation. In France it retains, like ‘civilisation’, a strong unitary and universalist definition. Beyond national cultures, there is still the culture of human beings, all encompassing, that towards which all individuals from all nations should be tending (Bénéton 1975: 32). ‘Before French culture, German culture, Italian culture, there is human culture’ the French historian Ernest Renan (1887c: 301) argued in his famous 1882 speech ‘*Qu’est-ce qu’une Nation?*’ [What is a Nation?], also stressing, ‘reason, justice, truth, beauty are the same for all’ (297). ‘The great men of the Renaissance’ he adds, ‘were neither French nor Italian nor German’ but individuals who had mastered ‘the secret of the true education of human spirit, to which they were devoted in their body and soul’ (301). Here ‘culture’, like ‘civilisation’, is inclusive; it does not countenance particularisms, which are thus played

down. These particularisms are, however, central to British authors, as will be discussed later.

The French universalist approach to the notions of culture and civilisation, Elias (1996) also shows, contrasts with the German understanding of the concept of Kultur, particularist and nationalist. And it is through their use of the very words 'Kultur' in Germany and '*civilisation*' in France - rather than '*culture*', the better to mark a distance from its German literal translation - that both countries asserted their difference from each other:

to Germany, which pretends to defend culture (as it defines it), France answers by presenting itself as the champion of civilisation. This explains the relative decline, at the beginning of the twentieth century in France of the usage of '*culture*' in its collective usage, French nationalist ideology having to clearly differentiate itself, even in its vocabulary, from its German rival. (Cuche 1996: 14-15)

If in their early French and British everyday usage, the terms 'culture' and 'civilisation' meant the same thing, their appropriation by the the social sciences signals a distinction between the two countries, itself the expression of what Williams claims, talking about their many different uses, are 'alternative views of the activities, relationships and processes which this complex word[s] indicates' (1988: 92). In the British social sciences, Jenks (1997: 10) argues, 'culture' tends 'to have been most usefully applied as a concept of differentiation within a collectivity rather than a way of gathering', thus reflecting a "pluralist" view of culture'. This view contrasts with the universalism of the discourse of French social scientists, two views which have informed and still inform the respective discussions on popular culture of both countries, as will be seen throughout Part I.

In the French social sciences, the concept of culture appears late compared to the UK, which had developed a stronger tradition of ethnology and anthropology, and where Tylor's extension of the definition of culture to the whole of the individual's social life became influential (Cuche 1996) (however Tylor also stuck to the universalist vision of culture, that towards which different societies are tending, primitive culture being, in his work, an early stage of culture, the culture of civilised societies). As Lévi-Strauss argues,

‘the concept of culture originated in England, since it was Tylor who first defined it as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”’ (1993: 356). But, Williams points out, if in its modern sense this anthropological definition of culture is common in the English language, ‘it is distinctly subordinate to the senses of art and learning, or of a general process of human development, in Italian and French’ (1988: 91).

This is why, whereas British anthropologists used the word ‘culture’ at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the French used the term ‘civilisation’. The work of Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (1871), for example, was translated as *La Civilisation Primitive* (1876) and Ruth Benedict’s *Patterns of Culture* became in its 1950 translation *Echantillons de Civilisations* (see Bénétou 1975: 144n3, 117n14). To think cultural otherness, the term ‘culture’ was used in the UK, a word to which ideas of difference and variety have thus slowly been attached, whereas in France ‘culture’ ‘by about 1890-1920 had come to mean the exercising of the intellectual faculties, or the “working” of the mind’ (Ringer 1992: 146) only. ‘Civilisation’ was favoured when thinking cultural difference. But it is a difference ultimately denied by the strong ‘normative quality’ (Williams 1988: 60) attached to this concept; difference is acknowledged the better to be absorbed and effaced through a ‘civilizing process’ (Elias 1996) whose direction and pattern is led by the *French* civilisation.

If in British anthropology similar civilising aspirations have also informed the use of the words ‘culture’ and ‘civilisation’, the work of anthropologists like Malinowski introduced a shift away from the notion of evolution which had informed discourses on culture (Jenks 1997: 35). ‘Culture’ was no longer seen in terms of progress from a barbaric to a civilised state but as a set of various collective practices in different places and times. Malinowski, who drew on Tylor’s anthropological definition of culture as a whole way of life, no longer defined culture in terms of the universal, but in terms of historical particularisms. He emphasized the idea of ‘the plurality of cultures as being isolated, discrete, independently functioning, integrally organized totalities’ (35). This ‘swing to relativism’ (34) of some British anthropologists at the turn of the twentieth

century, Jenks notes, has led to the preference in modern British academia for the issues of pluralism and difference.

The ideological context of nineteenth century France, Cuche (1996: 23) argues, did not allow the pluralist and descriptive concept of culture. The prevalence of the abstract universalism of the Enlightenment in social thought maintained the conceptualisation of cultural plurality only in reference to *the* civilisation, meaning the French civilisation. Such an abstract universalism contrasts with British anthropologists' attention to local particularisms and 'felt experience' (Leach 1982: 30) as a way of understanding cultural difference.

Malinowski, for example, Leach argues, 'became highly fluent in the vernacular' (1982: 26). His direct influence, he adds, 'was to shift the bias of interest away from conjectural history to the techniques of field research' (26). His work represented a departure from universal models of interpretation to empiricism (Jenks 1997: 35). It is this same attention to context and lived particularisms which was to inform many British discourses on culture, such as Leavis', as discussed in the next section - Mulhern, for instance, argues that Leavis 'rejected "abstraction" in the name of the "particularity" and "concreteness" of "life"' (1979: 297). As Jenks observes, Malinowski's attention to field work rather than abstract theorising, grand theory, is a model which re-appeared as an 'avant-garde model for methodology' (1997: 35) in 1980s British sociology and cultural studies.

In France, the work of Marcel Mauss, influenced by Durkheim's ideas, introduces a shift in French social sciences' approach to the notion of civilisation by talking about 'diversity of civilisations' (Mauss 1974). He condemns the universalism of most thinkers and asserts the idea of the plurality of civilisations. But in his work, 'civilisation' is still attached to Durkheim's epistemology of a unitary approach to cultural facts (Bénéton 1975: 127) and expresses the project of going beyond differences rather than focusing on local cultural particularisms: 'phenomena of civilisation', Mauss notes, 'are essentially international, extranational. They can be defined in opposition to the specific social phenomena of such and such society' (1974: 460).

Thus Cuche argues that it is only in the 1930s that French social scientists started to part with the dominant model of evolutionism, through the development of field

ethnology in the work of Michel Leiris (1981 [1934]) on Africa and the work of Marcel Mauss (1974). It is only then that ethnology, for a long time only a subordinate branch of sociology - culture was perceived as the field of research of ethnology, whereas sociology was concerned not with culture, but society - started to gain some autonomy. Then also, as Cuche also stresses, a lengthy and direct experience of various different cultures encouraged the appearance of the concept of culture in the social sciences, and a shift away from the 'restricted elitist sense' (1996: 23) usually attached to it towards the understanding of the notion of culture as plural which the emergence of cultural relativism allowed. But this movement was slow to take off and the normative approach to cultural difference informed by evolutionism lasted well into the 1950s, as the choice of the word 'civilisation' rather than 'culture' in the translation of Benedict's book illustrates. The representation of the French nation as a unitary nation as well as the universalising of the French model, Cuche points out, partly explains the long absence in the French social sciences of reflection on cultural difference.

Thus, Grignon and Passeron (1989) - like Cuche - argue that French social sciences really had to wait until the 1950s with the work of Lévi-Strauss to see the idea of cultural relativism seriously discussed and opposed to the evolutionist model, a discussion which, they stress, 'had been one of the topics of Anglo-Saxon anthropology for a long time' (19). Culture, Lévi-Strauss notes, is

a fragment of humanity which, from the point of view of the research at hand and of the scale on which the latter is carried out, presents significant discontinuities in relation to the rest of humanity. If our aim is to ascertain significant discontinuities between, let us say, North America and Europe, then we are dealing with two different cultures; but should we become concerned with significant discontinuities between New York and Chicago, we would be allowed to speak of these two groups as different cultural 'units'.[...] Accordingly, the same set of individuals may be considered to be parts of many different cultural contexts: universal, continental, national, regional, local, etc., as well as familial, occupational, religious, political, etc. (1993: 295)

This idea of cultural diversity allowed researchers to look at 'different cultural contexts' *within* France and from the 1950s onwards studies of popular cultural practices become more frequent in anthropology, ethnography, history, and sociology. However, this is a

popular culture defined mainly in terms of the ordinary culture of the working class and ordinary folk practices. All three concepts, the 'ordinary', 'working class' and 'folklore', constitute the dominant analytical framework used by French theorists to look at popular culture, a culture they often distinguish from contemporary commercial culture, as will be developed throughout the first part of this thesis. In France the study of contemporary popular culture as a mass culture which might well cut across class is, compared to the UK, a neglected field of enquiry. Within French academic discourse, a discourse still very much informed by a universalist and humanist definition of culture, culture often remains perceived as the activity of the mind, the attribute of cultivated individuals, the beholders of culture as high culture, as discussed in the next section, the latter being the model of reference for a universal culture. Otherness and difference are ignored in favour of the defense of a universal culture synonymous with elite culture whose particularism has been universalised as the ideal towards which all individuals should tend, as is made explicit in the work of Benda, for instance, or more recently that of Fumaroli, Dollot or Finkelkraut. I return to these authors shortly.

In this context, an understanding of the notion of culture as plural and diversified, made of a variety of experiences and forms, is ignored in favour of an 'abstract universalism' (Bourdieu 1997c: 86) which actually promotes particular intellectual and spiritual values, those commonly attached to the experience of high culture, which ends up having 'the monopoly of the universal' (86). The analyses of other cultures, which might encompass the research of contemporary popular cultural practices and artefacts such as a variety of people's consumption of popular media, listening to rock music, or clubbing, become heretical analyses, inimical to the French universalist notion of culture, which, it could be argued with Bourdieu, has exercised a 'symbolic violence' (see, for example, Bourdieu 1999a, 1999b) over the French academic field. These are analyses which, for a few decades now, have become a legitimate part of the study of culture in Britain, as will be further developed in chapters 2 and 3.

Finally, As Williams shows in *Culture and Society* (1993), there is, in the UK, a 'tradition' (vi) of debate around the notion of culture, which he traces from the nineteenth century on. It is a tradition that his work consecrated, and further developed, paving the way for more discussions on the topic of culture, particularly in the field of British

cultural studies. But in France there is no such early tradition and no works similar to that of Williams to initiate one.

Williams (1993) also observed that it is because the Industrial Revolution started in the UK that the changes it brought onto society were most accurately perceived there first, and thus discussed as a response to the emergence of the new mass culture of industrial society. The topics of popular culture and mass culture entered critical discussions, while Arnold's definition of culture, to which I return in the next section, gave the tradition, Williams stresses, 'a single watchword and a name' (114). A crucial moment for the discussion of the concept of culture had already taken place with Coleridge, who had introduced a distinction between civilisation and culture in which the former referred to nineteenth century industrial society (Williams 1993), a distinction which was to inform the work of authors like Leavis and Arnold in the UK.

In France scholarly discourses on culture in the context of the new industrial society emerged later than in the UK, most visibly with Benda's *The Treason of the Intellectuals* (1969 [1928]), discussed below, but especially after the Second World War in the work of Lefebvre, the situationists and Morin (see Chapter 2). Moreover, Mulhern (1979: 33) observes that in 1920s and 1930s UK, while, in a period of social and political crisis, the social sciences were silent, literary criticism emerged as the dominant intellectual field. Thus, as Hall (1996a: 20) also notes, it is mainly amongst scholars coming from English departments and through the tradition of literary criticism and a 'new' social history (that, for instance, of Thompson) rather than sociology that the discussion and critical redefinition of the concept of culture took place. Sociology was not inclined to reflect on these kinds of questions. Rather, it was influenced by American sociology, a sociology which, Hall argues, only dealt with culture through a very bleak approach to the mass society/mass culture debate, whereas British academics from English departments adopted a more positive approach to mass culture.

A significant break in the discussion of the notion of culture took place with Williams' work - to which I return in Chapter 2 - and his use in the 1950s of the anthropological definition of culture, outside of anthropology, in literary studies and cultural studies, to look at the cultures of contemporary western industrialized societies.

This shift marked a departure from the early culturalist tradition and its definition of culture as high culture discussed in the next section.

The creation of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (BCCCS) in 1964 also signals the beginning, in the UK, of the institutionalization of cultural studies and more particularly of the legitimization of the study of popular culture. Cultural studies, as the journal of that name commented, was ‘dedicated to the notion that the study of cultural processes, and especially of popular culture, is important, complex and both theoretically and politically rewarding’ (quoted in Turner 1996: 1). The BCCCS and other centres were devoted to the analysis of texts which were outside of the canons of most university departments. Everyday life and mass culture were the focus of interest, and the project of studying contemporary popular culture found its place in academic research.

But before I return in the next chapters to this issue I would like to come back to a definition of culture which has informed both British and French discourses on culture - the idea that culture means high culture.

## **2. High Culture and Folk Culture**

### **2.1. Culture is High culture: Arnold, Leavis, Benda**

Arnold and Leavis were two of the most prominent members, alongside Eliot, of what became known as the culturalist tradition, a tradition continued, though with fundamental modifications, by Williams and E.P. Thompson, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Culturalism in its early form refers to the intellectual tradition whose understanding of culture is opposed to utilitarian and individualist approaches (Milner 1995: 14). Culture for this tradition is seen as ‘an organic whole and [...] as a repository of values superior to those of the material civilisation’ (14). This civilisation is for cultural commentators such as Arnold the epitome of anarchy, hence the title of his book *Culture and Anarchy* (1980 [1869]).

Culture, Arnold writes, is ‘a *pursuit* of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world’ (233, my emphasis). Thus for Arnold, culture is no simple accumulation of knowledge but a process, or as Ringer puts it, ‘the *pursuit* of perfection, rather than [...]’

perfection itself' (1992: 108). In that respect, Ringer also observes, Arnold's definition of culture is close to the German concept 'bildung' meaning 'education in the large sense of self-development or "cultivation"' (95). It is through *being* rather than *doing* that such a process must be enacted, the former being identified with progress in what Arnold calls 'sweetness and light' (1980: 99) - 'beauty is sweetness and intelligence is light' (115) - whereas the latter refers to the individualist quest for worldly achievements rather than 'inward perfection' (143), a quest Arnold condemns as being characteristic of modern civilisation, the outcome of a culture of anarchy. And for Arnold, it is the culture of the new working class which epitomizes this anarchic culture, the product of modern society and industrialisation, whose devastating effects - social fragmentation and insecurity - can be opposed by 'great men of culture' (112) only. These great men are 'the true apostles of equality' (112), the defenders of a culture which should 'do away with classes' (112) since 'so far as a man has genius he tends to take himself out of the category of class altogether, and to become a simple man' (130).

Thus for Arnold, culture is beyond class, or rather it unites all classes to its cause. Within each class, there are individuals with a 'best self' (134) - Arnold calls them 'aliens' (146) - opposed to the 'ordinary self' (143), who are ready to pursue perfection and to raise themselves above their class. This best-self will be awakened by poetry, education and criticism. Those people who, beyond class, have been able to develop their best self will be found in the State, whose function is to perfect individuals. This is why Arnold praises the French Renan for his strong defense of the central role of the French state in the educational sphere. For Renan, as for Arnold, governing is 'an aristocratic work' (Renan, quoted in Arnold 1980: 275) which ensures the supremacy of culture and instruction, which Renan also argues must be of a superior order.

Popular instruction, if not paired with a 'higher and scientific instruction' (Arnold 1980: 241), leads to society's loss of intelligence, as in the United States, which, Renan notes, having 'created a considerable popular instruction without any serious higher instruction, will long have to expiate this fault by their intellectual mediocrity, their vulgarity of manners, their superficial spirit, their lack of intelligence' (quoted in Arnold 1980: 241). Arnold agrees with Renan, who has 'in view what we ourselves mean by culture' (Arnold 1980: 241), and has understood that 'America, instead of surpassing us

all, falls short' (242), an idea which has been generally shared by mass cultural theorists, who see the United States and its mass culture as the repository of a low, debased culture (Chambers 1993: 37; Bennett 1986a: 11). It is a view which also informs the discourse of *Le Monde* on high fashion (see Chapter 10).

For Leavis, whose work and ideas were influenced by Arnold, culture is also the preserve of an elite minority, the 'few who are capable of unprompted, first-hand judgement' (1965: 143) and is counterposed in modern times to civilisation as epitomised by the title of his pamphlet *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (1965).

The route to individual enlightenment, according to Leavis, is the study and mastery of English, the reading of canonical texts such as those of Shakespeare (see, for instance, Leavis 1952). Only a literary culture can pave the way to a better life, elevate the mind and save it from the damages inflicted on society by industrial civilisation. Such a view informed the journal of literary criticism *Scrutiny* - Leavis was on the editorial board -, a tribune for the criticism of mass culture, and the praise of literary criticism, for literature according to the *Scrutiny* group, 'was the prime depository of "human values", of "the inherited wisdom of the race"' (Mulhern 1979: 109).

Mulhern draws a parallel between Leavis' discourse and that of the French Julien Benda, stressing, however, that whilst Benda assumed that philosophy had to be the central concern of intellectuals and the means through which a higher spiritual order would be attained, it is literary criticism which was given a priority by Leavis. 'Philosophy', alongside 'theory', Samson (1992) also observes, are even contemptuous terms in Leavis' repertoire. They connote 'an arid intellectualism and reductive, oversimplifying thought processes. The implicit claim is that each situation requires for its understanding a fresh engagement of the whole being' (35). And here lies another and more fundamental difference between Leavis and Benda - their relation to abstraction and the idea of the universal. Whereas the former valued experience, the 'vitalizing recourse to the concrete' (Leavis 1952: 111) and the idea of *English* culture, the latter favoured an abstract universal culture, that of a cultivated elite.

'My whole effort', Leavis wrote, 'was to work in terms of concrete judgements and particular analyses' (1952: 215), an epistemology which recalls that of British

empiricists (Milner 1993: 15, see also Tudor 1999: 39). And it is experience which is at its centre: for Leavis, as Tudor puts it,

theoretical statements can only be arrived at (if they should be advanced at all) after the fact: only when the critic has done the work of concrete textual analysis might there be a place for theory [...] The skilled observer (critic) examines and explores the concrete material (poetry) and lays bare its 'essential order'. And then the readers are invited to 'interrogate their experience' so that they might agree that yes, indeed, the critic has revealed that all-important coherence. (1999: 38-39)

Like F.R. Leavis and his wife Q.D. Leavis, Benda (1969 [1928]) contends that high culture has lost its role of spiritual leader. It has been deserted by people who prefer the facile consumption of mass culture and have lost the ability to engage with high culture. As Q.D. Leavis notes, 'the critical minority to whose sole charge modern literature has now fallen is isolated, disowned by the general public and threatened with extinction' (quoted in Strinati 1997: 16). But the situation, Benda argues, has been worsened by the fact that intellectuals themselves - the clerks - have abandoned high culture to the embrace of reality and the practical rather than pure abstract and disinterested metaphysical thinking (1969: 37). The modern clerk is now led by 'political passions', which epitomize his desire 'to situate himself *in real life*' (34). However, Benda adds, 'to want real life is to want (a) to possess some material advantages, and (b) to be conscious of oneself as an individual' (35). This goes against the noble project of 'every life which pursues only spiritual advantage or sincerely asserts itself in the universal' (35) and which as a result 'situates itself *outside the real*' (35). This project should be embraced by the true clerk, a clerk who is not led by '*realist* passions' (35) such as political ones. Thus the true clerks, for Benda, are those who do not pursue 'practical aims, all those who seek their joy in the practice of an art or a science or metaphysical speculation, in short in the possession of non-material advantages, and hence in a certain manner say: "My kingdom is not of this world"' (43). This retreat from the world contrasts with the social and historical concerns of Leavis and his 'this-worldly strategy for cultural renovation' (Milner 1995: 30), and in that respect, Benda's defense of intellectuals' 'purely disinterested activity of the mind' (1969: 44) can be opposed to Leavis' views on

literary criticism, whose application is social and educational. Leavis and the *Scrutiny* members conceived of their project as practical (Samson 1992: 36), dedicated to raising the critical faculty of a wide public in its reading of a broad range of texts from literary material to advertisements. As the subtitle of Leavis and Thompson's book *Culture and Environment* (1962) makes clear, 'the training of critical awareness' is at the center of their concern.

Thus both Benda and Leavis condemn the poverty of modern newspapers: for the former, the new preponderance of political passions is 'the work of the cheap daily political newspaper [...] to which they [men] abandon themselves with all the expansion of their hearts every morning as soon as they awake' (Benda 1969: 10). Benda prefers, however, a withdrawal from the reality of poor journalism whilst Leavis wishes to offer a practical way to resist and oppose this poverty: the creation of discriminating readers through the training of critical reading. For Leavis, the tools of literary analysis can be applied to all texts, and not just those of high culture. This is why, as Barker observes, even though Leavis' and Arnold's work is elitist, 'they can also be said to have opened up the terrain of popular culture for study by bringing to bear on it the tools and concepts of "art and literature"' (2000: 36, see also Tudor 1999: 37).

When 'the "clerks" began to play the game of political passions', Benda (1969: 45) also notes, they started to 'denounce the feeling of universalism [...] for the profit of the nation' (91). They decided to fight for the defense of their own particular work as the expression of a national mind rather than for the defense of the universal (spiritual) values of culture. Racine and La Bruyère for instance, as true clerks, Benda argues in a statement reminiscent of Renan's and his defense of 'human culture' discussed earlier, 'never dreamed of setting their works before themselves and before the world as a manifestation of the French mind' (62). True to the French definition of culture as universal, Benda condemns contemporary intellectuals as traitors, who value the particular over the universal. His discourse is also symptomatic of the underlying tensions between France and Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century (see Elias 1996), expressed in the latter's defense of a particular *Kultur*, German *Kultur*, opposed to the French universalist *culture*, as discussed earlier. The modern Germanic world, Benda argues, shows itself incapable of devoting itself to the 'moral supremacy

conferred on the cult of the spiritual and on the feeling of the universal' (195). For Benda, culture stands beyond national particularisms, which is why he denounces 'this desire of the "clerk" to feel himself determined by his race and to remain fixed to his native soil' (65).

But it is this very 'native soil' which is at the source of Leavis' defense of *The Great Tradition* (1993) of English novelists and poets as a way to preserve English culture against the devastation of industrial civilisation (Samson 1992: 8). Leavis was not interested in all literary texts, but only in English ones. For him, studying Proust and Kafka, for instance, 'would be misdirection. There is nothing relevant there' (Leavis, quoted in Williams 1984: 117), whereas for Benda 'the true "clerk"' is Fresnel, Baudelaire but also Schiller or Spinoza who 'never imbibed national patriotism' and 'never diverted from single-hearted adoration of the Beautiful and the Divine' (1969: 159).

Thus Milner points to Leavis' 'often quite virulent English cultural nationalism' (1993: 35), a nationalism which, Samson (1992: 49) argues, reflects the importance he attaches to physical place and roots. This 'rootedness' is, for Leavis, she also stresses, 'a necessary condition for a living, vital society' (49) that is, an organic community, a notion to which I return in the next section.

However divergent their views were on the topic of universalism, Leavis and Benda both agreed that it is intellectuals, men of culture, who are to be spiritual leaders in those times of 'darkness' (Benda 1969: 198), a position also shared in France, as Ringer (1992: 81) observes, by writers such as Stendhal, Flaubert and Baudelaire. All three, Ringer notes, were attentive 'to an aristocratic ideal in their writings, an ideal of spiritual excellence that shaped the vocation of the French *hommes de lettres*' (81) and through which they wanted to distinguish themselves from what they saw as the ordinary taste of the middle classes, the poor taste of the bourgeois and philistine. As Prochasson puts it, 'Flaubert and Proust had already taught us that in France cultural capital is at least as precious as capital *tout court*' (2000: 184). I will return to the notion of cultural capital as conceptualised by Bourdieu in Parts II and III.

Thus in their writings, the *hommes de lettre*, that is, the *hommes civilisés* and the men of spirit and good manners, Ringer observes, revealed a 'disenchanted view of

bourgeois society' (1992: 84), advocating spiritual development and the salvation of intellectuals from this society. And, in a pattern inherited from the *Ancien Régime*, it is high culture - often a literary culture (see Parkhurst Clark 1991; Chartier 2000) - which allows the *hommes civilisés* to distinguish themselves from the masses. This 'model of distinction', Burguière (2000: 147) argues, is still pervasive in today's France.

Finally, for the defenders of culture as high culture I have discussed, whether British or French, the spiritual presides over the physical, in a Kantian opposition between mind and body I return to in Part II. Culture is likened to mental work, a practice exclusive of the body, whose fleshliness and sensuality are denied any experiential value. In *Le Monde's* discourse on fashion for example, the mind and not the body is involved with the high art of fashion (see Part III). The material body, its texture and its physical appropriation of matter and the environment, is also absent from the work of Bourdieu. This is an approach which stands in contrast with that of *The Guardian* in its construction of fashion as popular culture, an everyday culture to which the body is central.

## 2.2. Folk Culture: A Good Popular Culture

There is, in the texts I have just looked at, a sense of nostalgia for a past society destroyed by contemporary civilisation and its mass culture, the latter being the object of contempt for many French and British students of culture, as will be discussed in the next chapter. For Leavis and Thompson (1962 [1933]), for instance, the traditional culture of the people and their local communities has been destroyed. Folk culture, a culture of craft and authenticity, has been soiled by the machine-produced commodities of mass production. What has been lost, they argue

is the organic community with the living culture it embodied. Folk-songs, folk dances, Cotswald cottages and handicraft products are signs of something more: an art of life, a way of living, ordered and patterned, involving social arts, codes of intercourse and a responsive adjustment, growing out of immemorial experience, to the natural environment of the year. (1-2)

Leavis' and Thompson's popular culture is a folk culture distinct from mass culture. It is a culture of tradition shared by an organic community, and it is this notion of the organic

which stands as the ideal towards which society should tend. Organicism, as Slater writes, 'implies wholeness, naturalness and integration. Modernity is about alienation, mechanism, analytical and social separation' (1997: 67). It is in popular culture as folk culture that a sense of organicism is found which corresponds to a 'golden age' of history, a 'golden age' regularly invoked by students of culture but in reference to ever changing times and for the defense of *their* sense of what a 'good' popular culture is, as will be seen in the next two chapters .

As Samson (1992) argues, for Leavis, as for the *Scrutiny* group, all that has survived of the organic community is its past literature and tradition. But 'this literature is not so much *evidence* of a past culture as a part of that culture itself, embodying its values and a whole way of life' (40). Thus for Leavis, popular culture and the high culture of the literary tradition constitute a whole, a continuity, which is the sole guarantor of a healthy culture. Popular culture and its organic community are the necessary associates of 'sophisticated' culture (Milner 1995: 30). This association contrasts with the fracture which in industrial civilisation separates the two cultures, and where society no longer has any roots (Samson 1992: 39).

However, in spite of his praise of popular culture, it is still elite culture which Leavis privileges and the rich experience of literary texts (Milner 1995: 30; Samson 1992: 58-59; Eagleton 1997: 74-75), and though Leavis and Thompson lamented the disappearing of an 'organic community', it does not mean, as Mulhern (1979: 59) argues, that they wanted to revert to earlier times: the 'organic community' stood as a myth, the repository of the values - social and cultural uniformity - which the new industrial civilisation was said to have destroyed, it worked as a rhetorical tool in the critique of the current and future state of modern civilisation (see also Samson 1992: 53). It was used as a device to point at the flaws of contemporary industrial society; a model to be followed.

Whilst such a model is absent from the writing of Benda - the only model to follow is that of philosophy and the ideal of disinterested intellectual experiences - the nostalgia for the past and the equating of popular culture with a folk culture is an approach favoured today by many French students of culture, alongside the understanding of popular culture as working class culture and as ordinary culture. Popular practices are identified as practices which belong to the past and are rooted in

local traditions, and historical approaches are often privileged, as in Muchembled's *Culture Populaire et Culture des Elites dans la France Moderne* (1991) or Roche's *Le Peuple de Paris* (1998) (see also Cuisenier 1975; Mandrou 1999).

These texts figure among many others - such as those of Certeau, Giard and Mayol, to whom I return in Chapter 3 - which all represent French popular culture as a culture of tradition and folklore. These historical analyses fix the field of popular culture in past times, removed from contemporary experiences, in what McGuigan calls in reference to the study of folklore generally, 'a lost world of folk-song, oral story-telling, festive ritual and the rest' (1993: 10), and can thus function 'as a retreat from contemporary forms of identity, pleasure and expression' (11). Thus Ory notes that in French, the concept of popular culture since its origins

has had a great difficulty in detaching itself from the ruralist and archaistic postulate which had given rise to it. This idea can be illustrated by the slow pace at which, for the last 20 years, researchers in 'art and popular traditions' have been developing an ethnology which would no longer favour the rural world. (1989: 104)

Martine Segalen also stresses that French ethnology of France is a product of the tradition of folklore. It is still known as the 'daughter of folklore' (1989: 9). Within such a tradition, '*le populaire*' [the popular] is synonymous with '*le folklorique*' [that which belongs to folklore]. Thus when Jean Cuisenier's book *L'Art Populaire en France* (1975) was translated into English in 1977, it became not *French Popular Art* but *French Folk Art* (see Rigby 1991: 9).

Similarly, in his 1996 revised edition of *Culture Individuelle et Culture de Masse*, Louis Dolot, for example, defines popular culture as 'an instinctive culture, spontaneous, transmitted rather than taught, which concerns the deep strata of a population which has remained very close to its land. Folklore is one of its most visible expressions' (79). The French author nonetheless clearly asserts his preference for the idea of culture as high culture, in accordance with the humanist and universalist understanding of the concept of culture, and for him, as for Arnold or Benda, 'true culture' (103) is a 'disinterested quest' for spiritual and intellectual perfection (66).

In both French and British discourses on culture, then, two cultures have often been looked at as 'good' cultures, the popular culture of past traditions and local communities, and high culture, the culture of a social elite. However, today, in the British academic discourse culture as high culture has lost its central position to make way for the analysis of a wide variety of cultural practices, as will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. In France on the other hand, the notion of culture as high culture still pervades the discourse of many French academics.

### 2.3. France and 'La Culture Cultivée'

In *Aux Sources de la Culture Française*, Gauthier distinguishes two definitions of the concept 'culture': one inspired by Anglo-Saxon anthropology which

includes all that which participates in an ensemble of representations, images, symbols, myths, rules of social organisation, practices of everyday life interiorised by the members of a same group. Another definition - which is actually a French particularity - sees culture as the set of products of the mind. Thus the Ministry of Culture, so named since Malraux, reunites more or less the same activities which in the Fourth Republic used to belong to the department of Art and Literature. Add cinema (but not TV, an interesting prejudice), and a few scientific activities, and we get an idea of what Edgar Morin used to call pleasantly 'cultivated culture' [*la culture cultivée*], that is the dominant representation of culture: what one needs to master to be cultivated. (1997: 114)

It is this '*culture cultivée*' (Morin 1982: 20) which is favoured by many French intellectuals. The French sociologist Philippe Yonnet even talks about 'the French ideology of Great Culture' (1985: 195) which has 'extended and crystalised itself over a wide range of the population to the point where it has reached an almost total domination of its field' (197). It has been conveyed by a wide range of institutions ranging from education through the discourses of teachers and lecturers to the government or the French state radio *France Culture* (197). This explains, according to him, the reasons for the rejection, until recently, of American rock, and the success of *la chanson française* [French songs] often called *la chanson d'auteur* [author's songs] or *la chanson à texte* meaning songs with a text, that is with literary lyrics, in implied opposition to rock or pop's empty lyrics. Even though American rock has now become as popular as French

songs if not more so, Yonnet insists that this does not signify the final death of 'the Great Culture' and its 'elective syndrome. The latter has stepped back the better to jump, with more arrogance, as soon as it sees the possibility to set distinctions amongst mass consumptions' (198).

Marc Fumaroli, professor at the elite institution the *Collège de France* (members have included Bergson, Mauss, Foucault, Barthes, Lévi-Strauss, and today Bourdieu ) is one of the most ardent defenders of the notion of culture as high culture. In *L'Etat Culturel* he condemns the idea of

a series of 'cultures', under the generic name Culture [...]. And this culture of dissolution and context seeks to replace French civilisation, whether it be in its singularity, which deeply links the nation to its permanent substance, or in its spiritual universality, which from the top links it to the products of the human spirit. (1991: 33)

Jean-Louis Harouel in *Culture et Contre-Cultures*, a book 'highly praised by the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences' (publisher's specification), writes that 'true culture is of course culture in its noble and classical sense [...]. Culture in its noble sense of the word carries the idea of the formation and the edification of the mind, its openness to the world, the health of its soul. This is the humanist conception of culture' (1998: 21). Dollot (1996) also draws on this universalist and humanist definition of culture as high culture. There are two types of culture, he argues - a 'high culture' (67) and a 'basic culture' (67). The former is the culture of the 'great scholars, writers and artists, but also of the great spirits [...]. It is an elite culture, a refined culture, a summit' (67). The latter is an elementary type of culture constituted by a minimum amount of knowledge and 'which gives all men the means to "earn their life", but not, contrary to the demands of the new generations, to "live his life"' (67). However, he continues, this culture is wrongly called culture. It is not really a culture, but what Dollot calls 'instruction or education' (67). In contrast, 'true culture' (103) is high culture only, an idea shared by Finkielkraut, whose book *La Défaite de la Pensée* (1987) laments the loss of 'Culture' (154), the 'great creations of humanity' (153) and what he argues is the abusive labelling as cultural of activities that have nothing to do with Culture.

For Dollot, as for Finkelkraut, 'true culture' (1996: 103) is 'disinterested quest, concern for authenticity, aspiration towards the universal [...] Everything in it tends towards a superior form of life in which some see the accomplishment of their destiny and others the premisses of the beyond' (73). This quote points to the influence of Arnold on Dollot, who often refers to him, for instance on the topic of class and culture. For Dollot, the elite consists of those who make the effort always to perfect themselves, an effort which, he argues in line with Arnold, has nothing to do with class. This is an idea which stands in contrast with that of Bourdieu, for whom the notion of class is central to the discussion of culture, as will be developed in Part II. But for Dollot, the elite is an *intellectual* elite, classless, a social group in its own right, whose privilege is to ensure the permanence of 'true culture'.

The idea that culture is 'the preserve of dominant social groups' is, Rigby (1991: 7) observes, common in France. "*Les cultivés*", "*les intellectuels*", "*les esthètes*" are presented as the sole possessors of Culture, which in turn 'is seen as an inherited possession' a sort of 'private hunting ground', that of 'the fashionable social and cultural world of Paris [*le tout Paris de la culture*", "*la culture mondaine*]", but also sometimes the overlapping worlds of the fashionable Parisian intelligentsia and the University' with the 'professors and their bourgeois, humanist, universalist Culture'.

Central to this conception of culture as the preserve of an intellectual elite is the debate on the role and position of *les intellectuels* in France (see, for instance, Debray 1979; Julliard 1997; Ory et Sirinelli 1986). This debate is a recurring one. Intellectuals are seen, as discussed earlier in relation to Benda, as central to French life. They are the owners of Culture, its defenders and representatives, and in that respect culture becomes the Culture of intellectuals. It is intellectuals who, in France, as Burguière puts it, 'have been, until today, the police officers of this filtering and ennoblement of the cultural pressure exercised over the masses' (2000: 146). Sartre will most famously be, according to Bourdieu (1993a: 63, 1993c: 210), the perfect epitome of the French intellectual.

Alongside the definition of culture as *la culture cultivée* is the idea that it is France which is the best representative of high culture. Rigby observes that this idea is signified in the expression '*le rayonnement de la culture française*', which he translated by 'the influence of French culture' (1991: 8). But while it does indeed refer to the place

that French culture holds (or should hold), it literally means ‘the radiance of French culture’, implying the idea of light (enlightenment), aura, brilliance: that is, it is France which brings light to the world, or, as discussed earlier, which civilises it.

This is the reason why, Finkielkraut (1987: 130) argues, drawing on the now familiar themes of universalism and humanism, Emmanuel Lévinas chose to study in France: its ideal of ‘universal literature and philosophy’ appealed to him. In France ‘attachment to cultural forms seems to equal attachment to the land’ (Lévinas, quoted in Finkielkraut 1987: 130). In the work of Finkielkraut, the line separating the defense of a universal culture from that of its French version is thin, French culture standing as the best representative of the former in an approach which narrows down the universal to the particularisms of one specific country and within this country to one particular group of individuals who, to borrow Bourdieu’s expression again, ends up appearing to have ‘the monopoly of the universal’ (1997c: 86).

In her study of *Literary France* (1991), Priscilla Parkhurst Clark notes how it is the *Académie Française* which has best embodied the idea of intellectual culture as *French* intellectual culture. The *Académie*’s role ‘is to act as guardian of useful prejudices, to resist rather than to create, and to resist in the name of a certain intellectual conception of literature and of culture’ (101). She goes on to quote Ernest Renan, who in 1860 wrote that “‘The French genius” [...] is certainly the most complete, the most measured, and the most able to create a form of intellectual culture which must be acknowledged by all’ (Renan, quoted in Parkhurst Clark 1991: 246n12, my translation).

Culture for Renan means ‘intellectual culture’ (1887a: 204), a rational culture gained through ‘intellectual gymnastics, exercises practiced for a long time under the supervision of experienced masters’ (202). It is the preserve of elevated spiritual experiences, and it is France, and especially Paris, which are its best representatives. They are the ‘essential organs of modern genius and European conscience’ (1887b: 49), the examples modern societies should follow in order to progress or simply survive since, as Renan notes, ‘the least cultivated race will ineluctably be suppressed, or [...] left behind by the most cultivated race’ (1887a: 204-205). ‘The major strength of today’, he also argues, is ‘the culture of the mind’, which allows nations to defeat ‘barbarism’ (203).

The persistence in France of this definition of culture - Dollot's culture as high culture, a 'true culture' or Morin's '*culture cultivée*' - helps explain the low valuation of other cultures in French academia, such as working class culture and contemporary mass culture, and the lack of interest of many academics in these topics, especially when compared with the British academic field, an issue I now turn to in chapters 2 and 3.

## **CHALLENGING HIGH CULTURE: WORKING CLASS CULTURE AND MASS CULTURE**

In this chapter I discuss the idea that in early studies of popular culture in the UK the working class was a privileged site of analysis, an approach still favoured by many French researchers, for whom 'popular' means 'working class'. Contemporary British students of culture have moved away from such an approach to look at other analytical categories such as gender and ethnicity, categories still often foreign to discussions of culture in French academia. Popular culture in the UK is no longer restricted to a specific segment of the population only, the working class, but extended to mass contemporary practices which cut across class, such as clubbing, fashion or listening to pop music. Works on these subjects are now widely available in the British academic field, whilst in the French they remain comparatively little investigated.

In the UK the expressions 'popular culture' and 'mass culture' are often collapsed into a single category, and one no longer simply dismissed as a debased form of culture, as in early discussions on the subject. In France, however, 'mass culture' is still often connotative of bad culture, a culture of inferior value to high culture. Postmodern theorists argue that this distinction has collapsed. But whereas in France Baudrillard and Lyotard condemn this situation, many British students of postmodernity have pointed out the rich potentialities it offers. Finally, in this chapter I also address the issue of the influence and appropriation of French theory by British students of culture.

### **1. Popular Culture and the Working Class**

#### **1.1. Popular Culture as Working Class Culture**

In *The Long Revolution* (1973 [1961]), Williams gives three definitions to the word 'culture'. Firstly, 'the "ideal", in which culture is a state or process of human perfection, in terms of certain absolute or universal values' (57). Secondly, 'the "documentary", in which culture is the body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which, in a detailed

way, human thought and experience are variously recorded' (57). Thirdly, 'the "social" definition of culture, in which culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour' (57). It is the third definition, culture as a 'way of life', which was to become paramount in the study of culture in the UK. Already discussed in *Culture and Society* (1993 [1958]), where Williams writes that 'culture is not only a body of intellectual and imaginative work; it is also and essentially a whole way of life' (325), it introduced a shift, as Hall notes, from its restricted 'literary-moral' (1996a: 19) meaning to an anthropological definition, but also to a historical conceptualisation of cultural experiences and practices. It became a 'materialist definition of culture' (27), which, however, distanced itself from the determinism of Marx's base/superstructure model through a consideration of the intricate relations between the latter and the former. Culture was also granted an autonomy absent in the work of Marx.

For Williams, as Couldry observes, cultural texts, whether high or popular, should always be seen 'as part of a shared practice of making meanings involving everyone in a particular culture' (2000: 23-24). Williams, contrary to Arnold and Leavis, does not assume high culture to be of superior value to popular culture. Rather, students of culture, he argues, should 'bring all cultural work within the same world of discourse' (1968: 133). Within this framework, the 'way of life' of the working class is also defined as culture, and the popular cultural artefacts it consumes no longer attributed a low position in the hierarchy of cultural values. Williams, himself of working class origin, wished to offer positive accounts of the lived experience of the working class, an approach which contrasted with those of Leavis and Arnold.

This project was shared by two other British cultural analysts, Thompson and Hoggart, whose early work (see Thompson 1980 [1963]; Hoggart 1992 [1957]) is often said to be, alongside Williams (1993 [1958]), at the origin of cultural studies (see, for example, Basnett 1996; Turner 1996). However, as Tudor (1999) observes, the attribution of the origin of cultural studies to these three authors alone is misleading. Cultural studies did not emerge out of the work of one or two people only, but is the product of a tradition of discussion of the fate of high culture in contemporary society which, as discussed in Chapter 1, already informed the work of Arnold and Leavis. But by defending the

richness of a culture which was not that of the social elite - working class culture - all three authors opposed the elitism of Arnold and Leavis.

In Williams' and Hoggart's work, for instance, the Leavisite tradition of analysis of texts and concern for their socio-historical context was pursued (Hall 1996a: 18; Mulhern 1979; Chambers 1993: 203-205 ), but with the major difference that it was now applied to the cultural texts consumed by the working class and with the aim of revealing their 'full rich life' (Hoggart 1992: 132) rather than stressing their so-called negative characteristics. Williams and Hoggart, like Thompson, rethought the categories which had until then informed cultural theory (Tudor 1999: 21), to reassess the values of popular culture. Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy* (1992), for instance, is an account of the rich meanings attached to the popular artefacts consumed by 1920s and 1930s working class such as popular songs and popular fictions.

At the forefront of Williams' and Thompson's epistemology is the idea of experience; the lived experience common to working class members, 'embodied in real people and in real context' (Thompson 1980: 8-9). Class becomes understandable in terms of the Marxian notion of production; that is, identity is created through the agent's experience and appropriation of the materials of life (Gelder 1997: 84), agency being a central theme of Thompson's and Williams' work, and of culturalism generally, with its humanist stress on social agents' active role in the making of their own history (Tudor 1999: 116), a position which contrasts, in the 1970s, with that of some British cultural theorists with their appropriation of French structuralism, as will be developed later. Thompson's work, as Morag Shiach also observes, initiated a host of research into popular culture by social historians interested in analysing nineteenth century working class life as a space of 'alternative values and beliefs' (1998: 336).

Thus, the study of popular culture as working class culture became a privileged approach of early British cultural theorists who wanted to break with the elitism of the Leavisite tradition. Popular culture meant that which is not high culture, the elite culture of the dominant classes standing in opposition to the cultural practices and artefacts popular amongst the dominated people, that is, the working class. Moreover, the concept of class was often discussed in relation to the idea of resistance; popular culture is a culture which can resist dominant culture, as discussed in the seminal *Resistance*

*Through Rituals*, edited by Hall and Jefferson (1998 [1975]). However, Williams (1982) will later bring a nuance to this notion of resistance, distinguishing between dominant, residual and emergent cultures, the latter two being able to take the form of alternative or oppositional cultures, knowing that 'in certain societies it is possible to find areas of social life in which quite real alternatives are at least left alone' (40).

Dominated cultures are not always engaged in a relation of resistance to dominant culture, they also offer an alternative to it, an idea which also informs the work of the French Grignon and Passeron whose book *Le Savant et le Populaire* (1989) is one of the major French analyses of popular culture as working class culture. Passeron, a former collaborator of Bourdieu, offers here, with Grignon, a response to those writings, including Bourdieu's, where they see the notion of culture as too deterministic and as not leaving enough room for the self-expression of the members of the working class. Though in France studies of popular culture, mostly historical, had already been published, this text is significant - especially when read in the light of British studies of popular culture as working class culture - since their authors still feel the need in 1989 to assert that working class culture *is* a culture, a fact rarely acknowledged by French researchers like Bourdieu, as will be shown in Chapter 4. As early as 1970, as Rigby (1991: 125) observes, Passeron, in the introduction to his French translation of Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy* had noted the reluctance shown by many French intellectuals to give some sympathetic accounts of working class culture. The qualities of Hoggart's work, Passeron argues,

may lie in an original audacity, doubtless sociologically more possible in Great Britain than in France, where the relation of intellectuals to the working class, including those who come from this class or from the lower strata of the petite-bourgeoisie, is more controlled by the rules of good taste and good tone and thereby more 'intellectualised', or, it must be said, more shameful. (1970: 24)

Passeron praised the work of Hoggart for what he saw as a positive account of popular culture as working class culture, a type of account which, he and Grignon observe, is still rare in 1980s French academia, where cultural analysts, as Prochasson puts it, seem to be

concerned with defining popular culture negatively only, 'as what it is not or what it should be' (2000: 183). The work of Bourdieu, I will argue in Part II, is a case in point.

Whilst in the late 1960s and early 1970s Hoggart's influence started to fade in the UK - surely at least in part because his analysis of popular culture was hostile to contemporary mass culture - in France this influence rose after the 1970 translation of *The Uses of Literacy*, which was seen as a liberating model to follow (Rigby 1997: 7). At the same time the work of the French Barthes and Althusser became very influential in British studies of culture, a point I return to later. Grignon and Passeron (but see also Cathus 1998; Chartier 2000; Verret 1996) had been so impressed by the work of Hoggart that in Grignon's 1991 introduction to his translation of Hoggart's *33 Newport Street*, as Rigby (1994: 12) suggests, the British cultural theorist is still epitomised as the modern democratic intellectual (see Grignon 1991a).

Thus, it is a positive approach to working class culture that Grignon and Passeron want to develop in *Le Savant et le Populaire*. In this book, they limit - like early British researchers of popular culture - the field of popular culture to working class culture, itself divided into two subsegments: '*la paysannerie*' and '*la classe ouvrière*' [peasantry and the working class proper] (1989: 120-122). They stress that popular culture is neither a culture completely autonomous from dominant culture nor a culture purely dominated. It can be looked at from both perspectives, that is, as an autonomous culture *and* as a heteronomous one. Thus, rather than talking about popular culture as alternative culture - Williams' concept - Grignon and Passeron refer to the notion of autonomy, a notion which allows them to show 'that the most dominated groups have a culture' (Grignon 1991b: 35).

The authors insist that even though working class culture is always a dominated culture, sociologists would fail adequately to understand it if they cannot see that symbolic productivity is not the sole preserve of high culture, but also takes place in processes of popular cultural consumption and production when popular culture 'forgets its domination by "others"' (Grignon et Passeron 1989: 92). Nothing stops the researcher putting forward the hypothesis, they continue, 'that the unconsciousness of social relations is as productive of meaning as the consciousness of these relations' (92). Popular cultures must also be looked at as cultures 'at rest' (90), since they are not

always ‘standing permanently to attention in front of cultural legitimacy’ (90), whether it be in a position of deference or resistance to it. People do not continuously experience themselves as dominated. It is not just when they resist this domination but also when they forget it that their cultural practices can be analysed. For Grignon and Passeron the notion of domination is often mainly the worry of intellectuals (92-93). This is certainly true of Bourdieu, who, however, does not conceive of popular culture as resistant culture, or even as a culture *tout court* (see Part II).

Thus popular culture has been looked at as working class culture both in the work of the French Grignon and Passeron and in early British studies of culture and in both countries its analysis has allowed researchers to challenge cultural elitism. In the UK, however, an analysis of popular culture in terms of class alone is no longer privileged. Other notions, such as gender or ethnicity, have been brought into critical discussions of popular culture, which has widened the theoretical framework in which analyses of popular cultural practices have been inscribed.

### 1.2. Moving away from a Class Analysis of Popular Culture

There has been a shift, in the UK, away from a definition of popular culture as the particular culture of a specific class (the popular class, that is, the working class) towards popular culture as the culture of a certain people (women and ethnic groups for example) and as the cultural artefacts consumed across classes and represented by the texts of mass culture.

Hall (1997), for example, talks about ‘black popular culture’, the culture of a people in a position of subordination to elite high culture, and ‘a site of alternative traditions’ (469). Black popular culture is the culture of the black community, informed by ‘the black experience (the historical experience of black people in the diaspora), of the black aesthetic (the distinctive cultural repertoires out of which popular representations are made), and of the black counter-narratives we have struggled to voice’ (471). It is a space of resistance to white dominant culture. Hall also distinguishes between two different popular cultures, a mainstream and a black popular culture, ‘excluded from the cultural mainstream’ (471). The distinction Hall makes illustrates the idea that popular culture is not homogeneous, an undivided block distinct from high culture. Rather, it is

varied, hierarchally divided into high and low types of popular culture, which draws attention to the point that hierarchies are not specific to the distinction between high culture and popular culture, an idea I return to in the next chapter and in Part II.

In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1997 [1979]) Hebdige articulates the notions of class and race through an analysis of fashion, music and dance. He shows how 'in the whole rhetoric of style [...] we find the dialogue between black and white most subtly and comprehensively recorded, albeit in code' (45). However, Hebdige, as Sparks (1997) argues, has been more preoccupied with 'reading the style' (92) of subcultures than analysing it as an expression the class position of their beholders. His later work, he stresses, shows less and less concern for the issue of class determination.

Hebdige's analysis is symptomatic of a movement which affected the direction followed by researchers from the BCCCS in the late 1970s and in the 1980s. Both their empirical and theoretical work became less centred around the notion of class (Tudor 1999: 125), and popular culture was no longer associated with working class culture only, but with a set of texts - generally deemed by mass cultural theorists as less worthy of interest than those of high culture - central to the construction of the cultural experiences of different social groups, or central to the representation of such groups. Morley (1997: 8) gives a brief picture of some of the studies of popular culture which in the field of media studies, for example, and from the 1970s onwards have taken place in the UK. Such studies have, for instance, looked at the production and consumption of popular television shows, as in the work of Hobson (1982) on *Crossroads* where she also pays attention to the issue of gender and popular culture. They have also been concerned with racial stereotypes in the media, as in the work of Cohen and Gardner (1982), or the ideological construction of British history in popular television drama such as *Days of Hope* in the work of McCabe (1981) and McArthur (1981). Research on popular culture moved from a study of the culture of the popular classes, to an analysis of a wide variety of texts or practices - those of mass culture, like 'dance music [...] film or television series, a fashion look' (Couldry 2000: 63) - in relation to specific concepts such as ethnicity or gender, which may or may not be discussed in terms of the experience of the working class.

In France, on the other hand, the concept of ethnicity has been slow to enter academic discussions of culture. The French sociologist Boucher (1998: 351) notes that to account for the changes which have been taking place in contemporary society, Anglo-Saxon social sciences, which, in contrast with the French, he stresses, acknowledge ethnic difference, have equipped themselves with the concept of ethnicity, a concept which has only just started to appear in French academia. Such a reluctance to incorporate the notion of ethnicity into cultural debates must be seen in the light of my discussion of the French social sciences tradition, a tradition whose universalism, as I argue in Chapter 1, does not admit of the idea of cultural difference. It also informs French constitutional laws, which, Boucher observes, refuse to differentiate citizens along the lines of race, origins and religion: 'Ethnicity is considered to be part of the American model' (351).

The French social sciences tradition is, according to Lapierre, informed by 'the Jacobin ideology of our republic' which 'in the name of the unity of the nation State, has always denied the ethnic diversity of the French population' (quoted in Boucher 1998: 350). This model, as discussed in Chapter 1, was already in place in the *Ancien Régime*. Lapierre's point of view is reminiscent of that of Dominique Schnapper who argues that French sociology is a 'republican sociology' (1998: 396) informed by the ideology of the nation and what she calls the republican 'paradigm of integration' (102), which does not accommodate the existence and expression of particular communities or minorities. This is why, she stresses, French sociologists' reflection and understanding of ethnic minorities is so far little developed in comparison with British sociologists' work on the topic (24-26).

On the issue of gender, in the UK, as Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber (1998) have observed, most early studies of popular culture were studies of *male* working class culture. Women were absent from such studies, silenced by the voice of the male researcher. Though McRobbie and Garber still looked at the cultural experience of working class members, they also argued that gender is a 'crucial dimension' (210) at play in the mapping of cultural practices. In a more recent essay on popular culture and femininity McRobbie argues 'that the search for the fundamental class meaning underpinning [youth culture and pop culture] no longer constitutes the rationale for their

cultural analysis' (1996d: 156). 'We can also afford to be more speculative' she continues, 'more open to reflecting on meanings other than those of class' (156). Paying attention to gender fits in with this project, one shared by many British cultural theorists (see, for example, Gamman and Marshment 1994; Geraghty 1999; Kaplan 1986; Whelehan 2000).

Such studies have no equivalent in the French academic field. Armand and Michèle Mattelart (1991: 144), for instance, referring to the insights gained in the study of popular culture by feminist researchers who have appropriated this topic as a space for a political reflexion on everyday life and active subjectivity, suggest that they are the product of *Anglo-Saxon* feminists, whose work has been fully acknowledged by the Anglo-Saxon strand of critical theories of culture. In France, however, they stress, the situation is different (84). There the epistemology of the theories of social reproduction, to which I return later, have not accomodated this feminist approach.

Echoing the remarks of the French sociologists quoted above, Michèle Richman also points out the

clear trend in France [...] towards the reaffirmation of republican principles consonant with a national culture whose humanistic traditions are touted as transcending local diversity. This context helps to explain French ambivalence toward the proliferation of women's studies and minority programmes within the United States under the banner of Cultural Studies. (1995: 32)

These republican principles are only a continuation of the model of court society discussed in Chapter 1, and its ideal of cultural centralisation and universalism, an ideal which the study of the popular cultures of different people, by drawing attention to cultural differences, would undermine. Thus little room has been made in France for an approach to popular culture in terms of gender or ethnicity, or for a decentering of the notion of class in discussions of popular culture, a culture which generally remains defined as that of the working class.

The French dictionary *Le Petit Robert*, for instance, gives the following definition of the word '*populaire*' [popular]: 'that which is created, used by the people and is not often a practice of the bourgeoisie and cultivated people' (1986). The '*peuple*' [the

people] is 'a group of human beings living in a society in a particular territory and who share certain customs and institutions' but is also 'the working class [...], workers, peasants'. *Le Petit Larousse* defines '*le peuple*' as 'the mass of those who do not have any privileges, who live by their work only, in opposition to the possessing classes, to the bourgeoisie' (1994, my emphasis). In both dictionaries, the people and the popular are defined in terms of class - and lack of culture and/or privileges - the working class. It is a definition which still pervades many French writings on popular culture, such as that of Grignon and Passeron or Bourdieu (see Part II).

Though *Le Petit Larousse* defines popular culture as the culture of the working class and the peasantry, Alain Morel and Anne-Marie Thiesse note that this expression has been increasingly restricted to working class culture only: 'today popular culture no longer refers to a culture of the land, produced by a thousand-year-old peasantry in the process of marginalisation, but more to a culture of work, and in fact specifically to industrial work' (1989: 147). Many studies have been conducted which deal with 'the language of work, strikes and memories of unions' (147). However, these studies like those of Larrue (1965) or Verret (1996), for example, do not pay attention to contemporary commercial culture, a culture often denigrated by French researchers, an idea I return to shortly and in the next chapter.

Thus, in their introduction to a special issue of the French journal *Politix* on popular culture, Annie Collovald and Frederic Sawicki write: 'let us first specify that if we are *forced* to focus on working class people, it is not due to any prejudices as to what the popular consists of. Rather, we are only recording a social construction, so successful that *it has imposed itself as an obvious fact*' (1991: 7, my emphasis). The people is the working class. This is, according to Collovald and Sawicki, an accepted construction. It has become an obvious fact, an idea so evident that it does not call for a revision. Such an approach epitomizes the theoretical standpoint of many French students of popular culture, including Bourdieu. Their work does not look at contemporary popular artefacts which cut across class, such as TV programmes or pop music - an approach now common in British academia - but it focuses on one particular aspect of popular culture defined entirely according to a limited segment of the population, the working class. Thus there is in French a whole set of expressions using the term '*populaire*' to express the idea of

'belonging to the working class' such as the very common '*milieu populaire*', '*couche populaire*' [working class stratum], or '*origine populaire*' [working class origins].

This approach to popular culture in terms of the notion of class alone, and more specifically the working class, stands in contrast with that of British researchers who, like Strinati, conceive of popular culture as 'diverse because it is open to diverse uses and interpretations by different groups in society' (1997: 40) and because 'popular culture itself has to be seen as a diverse and varied set of genres, texts, images and representations which can be found across a range of different media' (40). This popular culture is indistinguishable from mass culture, and both expressions, as will be discussed later in this chapter, are often used interchangeably by British researchers. However, although they have shown more willingness than French researchers to embrace contemporary commercial culture, in both countries mass culture has often been depicted as a debased culture.

## **2. Despised Mass Culture**

F.R. Leavis is very critical of mass culture. His discourse, like that of earlier opponents to mass culture such as Arnold, was a reaction against the new technologies introduced by the industrial revolution, and which made available on a mass scale mass produced goods such as the popular press or popular novels. This mass culture came to represent, for the early culturalist tradition, the epitome of debased culture.

In *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (1965), Leavis presents culture and mass culture as opposed terms. Whereas the former, and especially literary criticism as discussed in Chapter 1, is said to be contributing to the integration of society, to its cohesion and growth, the latter would bring fragmentation and disruption. The automobile for instance, an emblem of mass culture, 'has in a few years, radically affected religion, broken up the family, and revolutionised social custom' (146). It is not a revolution which has perfected society; rather it has been 'accompanied by a process of levelling-down' (148) dominated by bad taste. Films, a creation of mass production, are for Leavis, a perfect illustration of this phenomenon. They are now, he argues 'the main form of recreation in the civilized world; and they involve surrender, under conditions of hypnotic receptivity, to the cheapest emotional appeals, appeals the more insidious

because they are associated with a compellingly vivid illusion of actual life' (149). Consumers of mass produced artefacts are passive, insidiously rendered lethargic by the power of the hypnotic film image to which they can only offer a 'cheap response' (156). The film audience is shown unreal depictions of life, it is fooled by the producers of mass commodities, who only look for financial profit. Consumers are the victims of a mass production which is imposed on them, whereas traditional popular culture spontaneously emanates from the members of the organic community.

Thus, in contrast to the nostalgic vision of pre-industrial societies as integrated folk communities, stands the vision of industrial societies as fragmented. Industrialisation, urbanisation, and massification become synonymous with alienation, atomization and standardization. Citizens have been deprived of their humanity and turned into exploited consumers, the products of a dehumanised and dehumanising mode of production, which serves the interests of the capitalists' quest for profit with no concern for tradition and authenticity. Hollywood film companies represent, according to Leavis, an example of the product of such a quest. The world of the disinterested inspired artist or that of the craftman stand in opposition to the market, which compromises their creativity. Such ideas still inform *Le Monde's* discourse on fashion, but also Bourdieu's discussion of mass culture and high culture, as will be developed in Parts II and III.

Money, for mass cultural theorists, is seen as defining the social relations of modern society, thus replacing the organic relations of traditional communities. This, Slater (1997: 69) points out, is the principal idea behind the 'culture' against modernity debate; the idea that legitimacy is no longer provided by tradition or birth but by financial power. The traditional order, the organic community, has been broken down by money. This is why Arnold, before Leavis, was adamant in his condemnation of the pursuit of wealth. Financial wealth, he argued, does not make one great, it is only 'machinery' and as such must be condemned (1980: 97).

In Hoggart (1992), contemporary mass culture also stands for the culture of commerce and money. But whereas Leavis and Arnold make no distinction between mass culture and working class culture, which they see as one and the same thing, the low culture of low social groups, Hoggart draws a line between them - mass culture as contemporary popular culture, an alienating culture defined by the quest for profit, and an

old traditional popular culture, the genuine culture of 1920s and 1930s working class, its golden age.

Turner argues that some 'residue of nostalgic organicism' (1996: 53) can also be found in Williams' *The Long Revolution* (1973 [1961]), with its constant appeal for a 'common culture', classless and based on cooperation. Williams' working class culture is, according to Turner, the site of a true organic popular spirit. However, unlike Hoggart, Williams questions the assumptions hidden behind the notion of mass. Though he notes in *The Long Revolution* (1973: 212) that mass culture is not consumed by the working class only, he observed in *Culture and Society* that 'in practice, in our society and in this context, [the masses] can hardly be other than the working people' (1993 [1958]: 299). For many students of culture, like Leavis, Arnold or in France more recently, Bourdieu, the working class, the people, and the masses are one and the same thing. The mass for those authors is seen as a dispossessed and alienated mob onto which a debilitating culture is imposed and who do not have the cultural means to defend themselves, unlike discerning intellectuals. As Williams points out, the term 'masses' has been used as 'a new word for mob and the traditional characteristics of the mob were retained in its significance: gullibility, fickleness, herd-prejudice, lowness of taste and habit. The masses, on this evidence, formed the perpetual threat to culture. Mass-thinking, mass-suggestion, mass prejudice would threaten to swamp considered individual thinking and feeling' (1993: 298). These ideas are shared by the French Gustave Le Bon, who, in *The Crowd: Study of the Popular Mind* (1922 [1895]), argues that the mass 'is always intellectually inferior to the isolated individual' (37), whilst 'civilisations as yet have only been created and directed by a small intellectual aristocracy, never by crowds. Crowds are only powerful for destruction' (19)

However, Williams has also famously pointed out that 'there are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses' (1993: 300). 'The masses are always the others' (299) and there is always a point when for someone else *I am* part of the masses. This massing of people amounts to a crystallisation of the Other and of difference, a stigmatisation of what is perceived as a potential threat to an established order. The masses and their mass culture represent, in the work of Leavis, Arnold or Le Bon, a danger to society and the high culture of its intellectual aristocracy.

The contempt of British cultural analysts such as Arnold, Leavis or Hoggart for mass culture continued in the work of later analysts. It is still present, for instance, in the work of 1970s Marxist structuralists influenced by Althusser, as will be developed in the next section. However, it will also be seen that in the 1980s many British researchers rejected Althusserianism to offer more positive accounts of agents' engagements with contemporary popular culture. On the whole, a contemptuous approach to mass culture found, in the embrace of many British students of commercial culture and its mass produced commodities, a strong and solid counter position not matched in the French academic field.

In France it is probably in literature that the fear and rejection of mass culture and of the new contemporary society in which it was born was first most visible. *A Rebours* (1978), by Huysmans, published in 1884, is an example of such literature (Williams 1991). Of Des Esseintes, the main character of his book, Huysmans says that he

could detect such inveterate stupidity, such hatred of his own ideas, such contempt for literature and for art, for all the things he adored, implanted and rooted in these mean merchant's minds, exclusively preoccupied with swindles and money and accessible only to that low distraction of mediocre minds, politics, that he would go home furious and shut himself up with his books. (1978: 82)

Compared with Folantin, the hero of his former novel *A Vaut-l'Eau*, Des Esseintes is

more cultured, more refined, more wealthy than the first, and [...] has discovered in artificiality a specific for the disgust inspired by the worries of life and the American manners of his time. I imagined him winging his way to the land of dreams, seeking refuge in extravagant illusions, living alone and apart, far from the present-day world, in an atmosphere suggestive of more cordial epochs and less odious surroundings. (Huysmans, quoted in Baldick 1984: 7)

Here, as in the work of Arnold and Renan, American society and its manners, that is its culture, stand as the epitome for a debased form of society.

In *L'Esprit du Temps* (1982 [1962]), Morin wants to question this spite for mass culture. He regularly emphasizes the fact that 'the mass' is 'various social strata, ages and

sexes' (49), and thus separates this notion from the working class only. However, his book quickly turns out to be a condemnation of mass culture, and the repertoire of words used to describe it is most revealing. He notes, for example, that 'the soul is the new Africa which is being *quadrillé* by cinema' (13), *quadrillage* meaning in French, a military or police operation which aims to control an area and population as tightly as possible through a strict organisation of space. As Rigby (1991: 36) says in reference to the use of the word by Certeau (1990), it conveys the idea that modern society is regimented, controlled by a strong and powerful structure where agents are left with no room for creative expression.

Morin also notes that a second colonisation and a second industrialisation are taking place where the former is a colonisation of the soul, and the latter an 'industrialisation of the mind' (1982: 13) corresponding to the entrance of culture into 'the industrial and commercial circuit' (14). Technique has now penetrated 'the inner domain of man, filling it with cultural merchandise' (14). Morin's book is also subtitled *Névrose* in reference to the psychological disorder of the same name, a disorder which, he argues, affects the consumers of contemporary commercial culture. Thus mass culture, which is said to produce the same consequences as 'pep pills' (175), is a culture of 'repression of failure' (176). 'It covers up the terrifying calls of sexuality' and 'runs away from failure' (176). Mass culture is a culture of denial and repression and ultimately of frustration and psychological disruption. The tone of Morin's study *Les Stars* (1972 [1957]) is equally patronizing, a fact he himself acknowledges in the preface to the third edition, where he says that he finds 'a bit too much sarcasm' (7) in his book.

Morin is not alone in using words connotative of mental illness, aggressive invasion and danger. A similar repertoire is shared by Leavis in the quotes I have discussed, and it informs most critical condemnations of mass culture. In France, the depiction of mass culture as a purely alienating culture, for example, finds a clear illustration in the Situationists' analysis of the 'society of the spectacle' (Debord 1987 [1967]). Passivity, emptiness and manipulation are, as in Leavis' analysis of cinema, the key features of the mass spectacle: 'the more the spectator contemplates' Debord for instance notes, 'the less he lives; the more he accepts recognizing himself in the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires' (30).

Similar ideas inform Lefebvre's *Everyday life in the Modern World* (1971 [1968]). According to the author, mass culture kills creativity and turns the members of society into passive spectators, the lethargic victims of mass production. Modern everyday life is the life of the masses and everyday culture is mass culture, in a society which shows 'no concern for the more refined or "cultural" needs of the individual' (52). It is a society marked by an 'internal split' which has led to the 'decaying' of culture: 'secluded in their ivory towers we have subtle intellectuality, complex literary word-play [...]; down below sprawl the vulgarizations, puns in poor taste, rough and bawdy games, the culture of the masses' (57). It is the culture of 'the harassed crowds [...] sprinting through the Uffizi and the Palazzo dei Dogi, or stagnating like huge puddles under the downpour of descriptive words (the guides' enlightening information), yet seeing nothing, quite incapable of seeing anything, of doing anything but consume the commodities offered to them at a high price' (134). Mass culture is opposed to 'advanced culture' (134). It is the culture of consumer society, in which 'man's awareness of his own alienation is repressed, or even suppressed' (78) by a 'persuasive ideology of consumption' (78).

Capitalist institutions have dismantled traditional everyday life. They have reorganised and 'programmed' (64) it to serve their own interest, but as a result, and in contrast with 'former ages' (63), 'the sense of a *loss of substance* prevails' (63) a loss more visible since World War II. Everyday life has become an "object" of social organization' (59) in today's 'bureaucratic society of controlled consumption' (60). The whole of society is rigidly organised, even the language of 'the new-town dweller [is] the language of wisdom, an organized wisdom claiming ever more organization' (122). Here the notion of organization is clearly linked to contemporary mass society, it is a notion which, Williams (1993: 263) has observed, has often been contrasted to the term 'organic'; whereas 'organical' was originally synonymous with 'mechanical', both terms became opposed in the nineteenth century. Morin, for example, also distinguishes 'modern organisation' (1982: 90) from folk culture.

The Situationists' apocalyptic analysis of mass culture, as well as that of Lefebvre and Morin is not, in France, restricted to these authors only, and can be found in the work of many French academics, most famously perhaps in that of Baudrillard. In *The*

*Consumer Society* (1998a [1970]: 25), for instance, commodities are depicted as threatening beings. They are part 'of a proliferating vegetation, a jungle in which the new wild man of modern times has difficulty recovering the reflexes of civilization' (25). Commodities such as fashionable clothes force themselves upon people like malicious beings, they charm them and, in an assertion which recalls Leavis on films, 'establish inertial constraints in the consumer' (27). Commodities fascinate and seduce consumers, they are a 'destroyer of intensities, an accelerator of inertia' (1999 [1981]: 92).

Shopping malls are for Baudrillard the perfect illustration of the phenomenon of mass consumption. They are, like Parly 2 (a famous mall in France), 'the heart of consumption as total organization of everyday life, total homogenization' (1998a: 29). The *Forum des Halles* in Paris, another major mall, is a form devoid of meaning, 'a funeral home' (1999: 93). Death, for Baudrillard, is everywhere in mass culture, and Debord's death of the consumer - 'the more he contemplates, the less he lives' - is recognisable in Baudrillard's 'dead labour' (1998b [1976]: 88) which, 'watching over living labour, all the while devouring it', is responsible for 'the fascination exerted by industrial machinery and techniques'.

Such a contempt for mass culture is a trait which, in France as compared to the UK, and as will be further developed in the next section and in Chapter 3, still informs many recent discussions of contemporary culture. In their work on fashion for instance, Waquet and Laporte (1999: 10), describing what they call the five stages of fashion, note that the last, 'generalisation', is when 'the masses appropriate the bastardized forms of the original idea'. A 'banalisation and distortion' of the 'initial idea' takes place which 'signals its death. It has been turned into a product which no longer differentiates, since everybody has adopted it'. The mass is clearly depicted here as an undifferentiated and indiscriminating mob of consumers who buy impoverished and deformed products, poor emanations of the original ideas and creations. Mass fashion is likened to a debased fashion, motivated by commercial aspirations alone. Contemporary society, they add, is 'hyper-mediatised and tightly controlled in grids of marketing and communication policies' (12). Here, Morin's notion of grid-making can be found in the authors' use of the word *quadrillée* in the French text. Again, then, connotations of military control and surveillance are implied.

Identical connotations are present in Finkelkraut's dismissal of mass culture when he talks about 'the smiling *aggression* of ambient music and publicity; the *forced recruitment* of the masses' and 'the individual captured by everything and nothing in the Disneyland of culture' (1987: 167, 168). Activities of the mind are endangered by mass culture, they are reduced to 'cheap rubbish (or, as one says in America, *entertainment*). And a life of thought slowly gives way to the terrible and pathetic encounter with the fanatic and the zombie' (170).

The notion of danger is also a recurring theme in the recent work of Dolot (1996) on mass culture, a culture which, unlike traditional popular culture, he argues, is not an authentic and creative culture. The masses, he points out, run the risk of 'indoctrination of different kinds, of levelling' (41). He continues, 'the industrialisation of culture must at all cost be avoided', adding, 'another major risk to culture must be avoided: that it sink to the simple material level from the intellectual and spiritual level where it should remain' (43). The market, for Dolot also corrupts 'the products of the mind because of the quest for profitability' (66). Mass culture is a threat to Culture. Calling it a culture is, Jean-Louis Harouel (1998) recently argued, an abuse. Rather, he stresses, mass culture is 'the most powerful obstacle in the way of culture today' (9). It must be resisted because, as Fumaroli puts it, it 'is humiliating and [...] makes people stupid' (1991: 26).

Thus commercial mass culture has often been depicted as a debased culture which imposes itself on the masses. This is a position still well inscribed in French academia, as the texts discussed above show. French cultural analysts' approach to popular culture as ordinary culture, discussed in the next chapter, and Bourdieu's account of mass culture, discussed in Part II, share a similar set of values. But many British students of culture have departed from this position, first with Williams' culturalism and then in the 1980s with the 'rise of the reader' (Tudor 1999:165), issues to which I now turn.

### **3. French Structuralism and Its British Appropriation**

In the UK, contempt for mass culture has not been the preserve of the conservative elite. It reappears, though perhaps in a more sophisticated manner, in the work of many 1970s leftist students of culture who had often been influenced by French structuralist thinkers, including Barthes and Althusser.

In *Mythologies* (1973), Barthes developed Saussure's ideas of a science, semiotics, 'which studies the role of signs as part of social life' (Saussure 1993: 15), now applied to all signifying practices. The whole of culture can be analysed through semiotics. An advertisement for a pasta make and 'The Face of Garbo' are sites where meaning is encoded and can therefore be decoded. Barthes's project was new in its endeavour to analyse not only high culture but also mass culture, thus shaking, it seems, the strict boundaries between the two. Popular culture was accorded a complexity previously little discussed. However, this project was led by the desire to unravel the dominant meanings and ideologies hidden behind the texts of popular culture rather than the desire to stress the richness of popular culture and give it the same value as high culture. Barthes' semiotic analysis was a tool that he sharpened against popular cultural artefacts, chosen as a pretext, a site among other sites such as Balzac's *Sarrasine* in *S/Z* (1970), for the practice of semiotics. What Barthes wanted to show was the process through which institutions legitimate their hold on society by embedding bourgeois ideology within the slightest element of our daily life, such as fashion magazines. Thus, in *The Fashion System* (1990) he is dismissive of fashion, talking about its 'bon ton' (261), and of the fashion readers - women - as passive and gullible. Barthes saw in contemporary popular culture, a culture of alienation and falsehood controlled by a petit-bourgeois ideology, and *Mythologies* is marked by the endeavour to denounce mass culture's all-pervasive participation in the bourgeois domination of social life (Emberley 1998: 139-140; Miller 1987: 145).

Some British researchers drawing on Barthes, like Judith Williamson (1991 [1978]), for example, have also sought to unravel the dominant ideology conveyed by popular culture, exposing the insidious power of mass culture. However, this project, though not isolated - it was also that of cultural analysts influenced by Althusserianism, as will be developed later - figures alongside the appropriation by other researchers of Barthes' semiotics to produce *positive* accounts of the rich texts of popular culture. Hebdige (1995), for instance (see also, for a recent appropriation of Barthes' semiotics, Jobling 1999), shows how punks construct their style and identity by appropriating a diversity of signs and using them to connote a particular meaning, subversive of the dominant culture. They detach the swastika from its "official" textuality' (Frow 1995:

3), shifting its role as a signifier of fascism to that of their alienated position in British society, also producing a threatening image of this position (Billington *et al* 1991: 39).

In France, Barthes' condemnation of mass culture was more generally part of what the French sociologist Philippe Yonnet (1985: 9) argues is a specific 'state of mind' [*état d'esprit*] which became dominant in French sociology from 1964-1965, and is based on the assumption that agents' lives are entirely inscribed in 'the empire of the false'. In this light, social thought conceives of society 'as a whole manipulated by apparatuses of celebration' such as mass culture. Sociology becomes 'a systematic apparatus of discredit', which sees in massification a further move towards decadence.

Touraine, who shares Yonnet's standpoint, summarizes what is effectively the same *état d'esprit* as 'let's forget about values, projects, negotiations [...] to discover beyond actors the infernal machine which sucks up and excludes, controls and reproduces' (1997: 28). Such a discourse, Touraine argues, became in French academia the dominant ideology of the 1970s and is still influential. It has left little room for advances in research on agents' experience of popular culture such as those generated by Anglo-Saxon feminist studies, as mentioned earlier with reference to Armand and Michèle Mattelart. French academics focused on determinism and the passive subject, looking at issues of domination and reproduction rather than resistance and change. Bourdieu's work, although it aims to distance itself from the structuralist paradigm of Lévi-Strauss with a 'constructivist structuralism' (Bourdieu 1996c: 11n21), which seeks to bypass the limits imposed both by subjectivist hermeneutics and the objectivism of structuralism (see, for example, Bourdieu 1994: 8-22), participates in this approach, so does the work of Foucault of the time (see, for instance, Foucault 1975) as well as that of Lefebvre, Morin or Baudrillard. Touraine calls such a sociology and its structuralist base, a 'sociology of suspicion [...] whose power was stronger in France than anywhere else' (1997: 30). There, actors are said to be totally dominated by the system, and sociologists seek to discover 'a logic which imposes itself onto actors and which renders illusory their interactions and discourses' (31). This sociology, Wieviorka (1997: 50) observes, also insisting on its persisting influence in France, is concerned mainly with criticising order.

The work of another French intellectual who highly influenced British studies of culture, Althusser, shares this *état d'esprit*. Althusser offers a reinterpretation of Marx's

base and superstructure model (see Dosse 1992a: 339-359). Marx argues that social class is fundamental in the production of ideology. It is the ruling class which produces the ruling ideology. But whereas for Marx culture is strictly determined by economy, Althusser argued that some entities have a certain autonomy, even if it is framed by a superstructure. Culture is not dependent on economic relations only, but is the result of the confrontation of many forces which all compete in the making of society (see Billington *et al.* 1991; Strinati 1995; Turner 1996). Althusser does not see ideologies simply as deceptive ideas, but 'as providing the frameworks of understanding through which men interpret, make sense of, experience and "live" the material conditions in which they find themselves' (Hall 1996a: 32).

In 1970s UK, Althusserian approaches to popular culture mark a departure from Williams' and Thompson's culturalism. Whereas the latter emphasized the expressive role of the agent, his/her centrality as a subject in cultural processes, as discussed earlier, Althusserian thought shifts the understanding of culture towards the dominant role of structures in the shaping of individual's consciousness. With Althusserianism, humanism is buried. The agent is the 'effect of structure' (Barker 2000: 56), deprived of his/her subjectivity, denied any creative or self-constituting capacities (see Best and Kellner 1991: 19; Dosse 1992a: 357-358).

Drawing also on semiotics and the work of Gramsci, whom I return to shortly, McRobbie (2000), analyses the ideology of the teenager magazine *Jackie* in terms of its construction of a sense of femininity in which girls, through a 'romantic individualism', are pushed to consent to the unequal social division of the sexes and their future role as a mother and wife. Although in her conclusion McRobbie stresses that it would also be important to analyse how teenagers respond to the ideology conveyed in *Jackie*, her reflection is still very much centred on the positioning of the subject within and by the text, through the dominant ideology it constructs and reproduces.

Though in the 1970s, this structuralist view was common amongst British students of mass culture, most famously perhaps amongst those who published in the film journal *Screen* (see Tudor 1999: 84-101; Turner 1996: 98-102), the culturalist epistemology with its interest in active agency was still influential, constituting one of what Hall (1981) has called the 'two paradigms' of British cultural studies (see also

Milner 1995: 92-94), structuralism having been most vehemently condemned by Thompson in *The Poverty of Theory* (1995 [1978]).

Another thinker whose influence on British cultural studies has been considerable is the Italian Gramsci, whose theory of hegemony allowed researchers in the 1970s to move away from Althusserian determinism and towards accounts of the active role of social agency in cultural processes (Hall 1996a: 35-36). For Gramsci, it is only through a 'combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent' (1998: 210), that a particular group can exercise its power over another. The relation between dominant and dominated classes is not one of domination but of struggle for hegemony, that is, as Bennett observes, 'for moral, cultural, intellectual and, thereby, political leadership over the whole of society' (1986b: xiv). Culture is a site of conflict structured by the ruling class' attempt to win hegemony and the agent's resistance to it. For instance, the authors of *Resistance through Rituals* (Hall and Jefferson 1998) looked at the opposition of working class youth to the dominant order drawing on the Gramscian notion of hegemony. Thus although Althusser's notion of ideology has strongly influenced the work of British cultural theorists, it makes sense, Tudor (1999: 120) argues, that Gramsci's thought, with the room it makes for active agency, has found favour in British cultural studies, given its culturalist tradition.

This concern for active agency became more pronounced in the 1980s when, as Tudor puts it, 'the theoretical pendulum [swung] away from top-down, dominant ideology models' (167). The issue was no longer that of the pervasive influence of mass culture over the passive and passified subject, but rather of how agents actively engage with mass culture, or even use mass produced commodities as resources to create their identity and make sense of the social world. Commodities are no longer despised as a threat to the agent, as in the work of Baudrillard, rather they participate in his/her making, an idea I come back to in the next chapter. McRobbie's (1999) return to the topic of girls' magazines, where she comments on the interest in feminist critiques in the issue of women's pleasure and on the return of the reader in studies of popular culture, bears witness to this concern for readers' active experience of the texts of mass culture. So does the work, for instance, of Willis (1978, 1996) and Buckingham (1987), and of Radway

(1991) and Ang (1996) who, though they are not British, have had a great impact in the UK.

The turn to the subject which took place in 1980s UK - though already present in the early work of Williams and Thompson and the culturalist tradition - is also a feature of French social sciences. There, opposed to the sociology of systems mentioned earlier and its strong structuralist influence, was, and still is, another, where actors are reintroduced - a 'sociology of action' (Touraine 1988: 47) as in the work of Touraine (1988) or Crozier and Friedberg (1977, see also Touraine 1997: 34; Ansart 1990: 64-76). The work of Certeau, which I return to in Chapter 3, also stands out for its focus on the creative role of the consumer.

However, French sociology of action has been mostly concerned with 'the return of the actor' (Touraine 1988) as member of the working class, and this actor's strategies of change and control have been studied mainly in the contexts of industrial and administrative organisations, unions and the work place (Wieviorka 1997: 50-54), whilst, and in contrast with the UK, the return of the subject remains little analysed in relation to contemporary commercial culture. Thus in *Jeux Modes et Masses* (1985), Yonnet mocks French academics for their unwillingness to look at contemporary popular culture. He notes that horse betting, for instance - a widespread practice in France which had nonetheless never been looked at before him - is, for French sociologists 'not cultural': 'it does not produce interesting linguistic structures and structural analysis has not condescended to apply its analytical framework to it' (24).

Yonnet's remarks highlight the *état d'esprit* of many French academics on the topic of contemporary popular culture. Tradition, folklore and working class culture are 'noble' enough to be analysed, and rich in history and insight, whereas commercial mass culture is not worthy of attention and often ends up being depicted as a debased form of culture. Yonnet goes on to argue that the surge of mass practices in France after WWII corresponds to 'a rather brutal introduction of modernity in a society which is definitely antimodern' (367). But this introduction, he stresses, has not found any representatives either in the artistic and literary fields or in the human sciences: it 'has been extraordinarily visible but inexpressible, [...] incredibly underground, the unmentionable

bypassing of a taboo limit. As if the success of this transgression was dependent on the silence it was met with' (367).

Finally, in France, as in the UK, poststructuralism also marks a departure from and criticism of the determinism of structuralist thought. But if in France poststructuralism emerged in opposition to the long tradition of French structuralism, in the UK there already existed, as Milner (1993: 113) observes, an equally long tradition of the epistemologically opposed culturalism. And it is in the context of these distinct traditions that much of British studies of culture has focused on experience and the subject as opposed to structures as in French social sciences. It is a subject for which little room has still been made in French poststructuralism (Milner 1995). As Foucault himself stresses, his genealogy calls for a 'form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges ... without having to make reference to a subject' (Foucault, quoted in Milner 1995: 91). Similarly, in spite of his poststructuralist celebration of the death of the author and of the correlative birth of the reader's text, the unfixed meanings of the texts Barthes analyses do not change with the reader's reading, but are part of the text itself, still a product of the text rather than of the active and creative reading of the readers, as in the case of *S/Z* (1970) read independently of them, beyond them. Moreover, the poststructural departure from the determinism of structuralism has been little concerned, like the sociology of action, with contemporary popular culture. With French poststructuralism, popular culture remains the Other of culture (Huyssen 1988: ix; Mathy 2000: 44).

Culture, however, some authors have argued, as I discuss next, can no longer be understood along the lines of the traditional distinctions between high culture and popular culture. These distinctions have collapsed in a world which is said to have become postmodern.

#### **4. The End of High and Low**

##### **4.1. On the Collapse of the Traditional Cultural Hierarchy**

In British academic discourses on culture, the expression 'popular culture', Nowell-Smith points out, had often been used as 'the good term', whereas 'mass culture' smacked of elitism and was avoided by populists' (1987: 82). Thus the distinctive use of one or the

other term was not so much linked with the actual identification of the cultural artefacts or experiences discussed, but with the social and cultural assumptions made in their analysis. The objects could be the same, but it was the point of view on their cultural significance which differed. Frith for instance, in a comment which recalls that of Nowell-Smith, talks about 'positive mass consumption', an expression 'which became - and remains - the pithiest current definition of "popular" - as against mass-culture' (1998b: 13). Here, popular culture is a positive mass culture. But, in France, there is still a very pervasive semantic gap when it comes to referring to mass culture or contemporary popular culture in a non-dismissive way. Since popular culture generally refers to the culture of the working class, the everyday life of its members, and to folk culture or to ordinary practices as distinct from commercial culture, and since mass culture still has a pejorative meaning, there is no French expression that actually translates the British (or Anglo-Saxon) 'good term' 'popular culture' when referring to contemporary commercial popular culture.

In contrast, in the UK the expressions 'popular culture' and 'mass culture' have generally been collapsed into a single category, both terms often being used interchangeably (see, for example, Bigsby 1976; Eagleton 1997: 29-30; Hall 1997: 465; Morley 1997: 34-35). As Strinati puts it: 'popular culture is commercial culture, mass produced for a mass market' (1997: 10), an approach which McGuigan calls 'the now banal insight that popular culture is produced industrially, distributed and consumed according to commercial imperatives in a capitalist economy' (1993: 47).

It is this popular culture, a commercial culture, which, being 'the scene, *par excellence*, of commodification', Hall argues, 'has historically become the dominant form of global culture' (1997: 469). This newly acquired dominance is what, according to Schwartz, has undermined the role of high culture 'as a determining field of force, just as the pessimists of the 1930s had feared' (1989: 254). High culture has not disappeared, but its superior position has been eroded, 'its authenticity no longer able to secure universal respect, its place taken - across classes - by mainstream pop music, TV soaps, the blockbuster movie, and so on' (254). This change in the cultural life of the country has been registered - but also produced - by the centrality accorded to popular culture by British students of culture. In their discourse, traditional cultural values appear both

empirically and analytically superseded as if the theoretical distinction between high and low culture and the elitism which often emerges from it, though never legitimate, were even less sustainable in the face of contemporary culture.

Nowell-Smith (1987: 80), for instance, points out that popular culture has become so central to British cultural life that the separation usually drawn between high culture and popular culture is now questioned. Thus, he argues, in the UK in the present situation many cultures overlap and coexist and high and popular cultures are no longer divided from each other. He even suggests that one could argue that culture is 'multiply divided' (83), with popular culture, a term he implies might be outmoded in this new context, dominant. Similarly, Chambers argues that 'it is popular culture - its tastes, practices and aesthetics - that today dominates the urban scene, offering sense where traditional culture can usually only see nonsense' (1993: 196). It is such an erosion of the traditional cultural hierarchy that Bourdieu fails to problematize when he insists on the role of high culture as the sole structuring force of the field of culture. The decentering of this field away from high culture and towards popular culture also informs the discourse of *The Guardian* on fashion. I return to these issues in Parts II and IV.

Thus high culture, for some British theorists, is no longer the dominant culture. The traditional hierarchy between high culture and popular culture has been shaken by the increasingly central role of the latter in British life. This hierarchy, and the distinction traditionally made between the two cultures, has been further weakened by the fact that high culture, contrary to the modernist claim (see Gablik 1986), cannot unproblematically be separated from commercial culture; rather, it concerns a wide and diversified field structured by market forces (see, for example, Allen 1983). Furthermore popular genres such as films, as Eagleton (2000) stresses, have further contributed to the erosion of the boundary set between high culture and popular culture by offering to vast audiences 'an impressive array of masterpieces' (52).

The idea that a distinction between high and popular culture is no longer sustainable is often linked to the idea that today's world is a postmodern world, in which modernist elitism no longer rules (Bertens 1995: 34). Whilst modernism 'differentiated art and life' (216), celebrating art as an autonomous space where inspired authors - 'the artist as a genius' (Bürger 1992: 16) - create unique and original works of art destined for

the disinterested gaze of the aesthete, with postmodernism, popular culture is no longer marginalised. Rather postmodern culture bridges the space between high and low cultures, the elite and the mass, specialists and non-specialists (Jencks 1992: 12).

However, whereas in British academia many cultural theorists have celebrated postmodern culture, French researchers have been more reluctant to embrace it, and this applies to two of the main references in discussions on the postmodern, the French Lyotard and Baudrillard.

#### 4. 2. Baudrillard and Lyotard

In the French magazine *Sciences Humaines*, the subtitle of an article devoted to the question 'are we postmodern?' reads: 'have our societies entered a new era? That is what some British sociologists are saying'. Here, the discourse on postmodernity is given a British identity: 'a real "postmodern" school', the author adds, 'has been developed amongst English sociologists' (Herpin 1997: 21). Thus, though two French names - Baudrillard and Lyotard - often recur in debates on postmodern culture (see, for example, Bauman 1997; Connor 1997; Muggleton 2000; Smart 1994), these authors are also among the rare French academics who have had anything to say on the subject. Bourdieu, for example, dismisses postmodernism as the "radical chic" creation of fashionable intellectuals (1998a: 42), or rather 'half-intellectuals - like the postmodernists - who invent emotive quarrels and false problems which waste everybody's time' (1996c: 57n104). The visibility of Baudrillard and Lyotard masks the quasi absence, in France, of debate on the issue of culture and postmodernity, a debate much more active in English-speaking countries (see, for example, Best and Kellner 1991: 28), including the UK, than in France. Maffesoli, one of the rare French researchers who has inscribed his work in a reflection on postmodern culture, observes that discussions on this topic, once initiated in France by Baudrillard and Lyotard, has not been carried on either by other students of culture or by these authors themselves, who did not wish, he argues, to see their name associated with the issue of postmodernism (Maffesoli 1999), which, in contrast with many British authors to whom I return to shortly, they do not celebrate.

Baudrillard (1998a), for instance, points to the collapse of the modernist distinction between high and popular culture, a collapse due to the rise of mass

production, which now dictates all spheres of cultural activities. 'With the "Unlimited Multiple"', he writes, 'art moves into the industrial era' (106). It is no longer distinguishable from mass culture, because it has also been commodified, massified and thus emptied of exclusivity, voided of its aura. Thus, he argues, multiplied, artworks are downgraded. The distant boundaries of the sacred art for art's sake space of modernist high art and its inspired artists (see Freitag 1996: 48) no longer offer works of art protection, high art now sharing popular magazines' lowest common denominator: the mass. However, Baudrillard also adds, 'it is pointless and absurd to compare High Culture and Mass-Media Culture and to contrast their value. The one has a complex syntax, the other is a combinatory of elements which can always be broken down into stimulus-response and question-and-answer patterns' (1998a: 105). In theory there is a distinction but in practice the distinction has collapsed in the standardized practices of mass consumption and mass production, which have turned the unique artwork into 'the Multiple' (106), no longer distinguishable from 'the pair of stockings and the garden chair' (107). The subject, according to Baudrillard, is also a victim of mass culture, swallowed into the repetition of its image, as if standardized; it 'is also gone' (1999: 97).

Baudrillard's postmodernism does not stand in opposition to the criteria of high arts, as in the postmodernism developed by some British theorists discussed below. He does not condemn the modernist opposition between high culture and popular culture. Rather he laments, in a modernist stance, the downgrading of *Culture* and the disappearing of high values by absorption within the mass. He never questions the grounds of modernist elitism. When he concludes that art is now a commodity, it is not to outline the invalidity and arbitrariness of the modernist criteria for a distinction between high art - the allegedly non-commercial - and contemporary popular culture - the commercial; it is rather to deplore what he sees as the lost purity of the world of art now given over to commodification. Baudrillard's is an apocalyptic vision of contemporary society. His idea of postmodernity is not celebratory, it is not an ode to the end of an arbitrary distinction between high and low culture; it is rather a bleak account of the disintegration of old values, the death of modernity and the correlative death of the unique work of art and of the artist, the arising of a vacuous new order. As Bauman notes, 'Baudrillard writes of what is not there, what went missing, what is no more, what lost its

substance, ground or foundation' (1997: 149). He compares Baudrillard's world to that of Rabelais' *Gargantua*, but where Rabelais' world is full of life, energy, colour and light, Baudrillard comes back from his world 'shattered and full of disgust - he has found there a social body which he could only describe as *mammaire, cellulaire, glandulaire*, in a state of advanced degeneracy, necrosis and decay' (152).

Though not as bleak, Lyotard's discourse on postmodern culture bears some resemblance to that of Baudrillard. The idea of commodification, for instance, is also at the centre of his analysis of postmodernity. Eclecticism, Lyotard writes,

is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: you listen to reggae, you watch a western, you eat McDonald's at midday and local cuisine at night, you wear Paris perfume in Tokyo and dress retro in Hong Kong, knowledge is the stuff of TV game shows.[...] Together, artist, gallery owner, critic and public indulge one another in Anything Goes - it's time to relax. But this realism of Anything Goes is the realism of money: in the absence of aesthetic criteria it is still possible and useful to measure the value of works of art by the profits they realise. This realism accomodates every tendency just as capitalism accomodates every 'need' - so long as these tendencies and needs have buying power. As for taste, there is no need to be choosy when you are speculating or amusing yourself. Artistic and literary investigation is doubly threatened: by 'cultural politics' on one side, by the art and book market on the other. (1992 [1986]: 17)

As in Baudrillard, Culture is now ruled by money. Taste and aesthetic criteria are gone, deemed incompatible with the logic of the market. Lyotard dismisses the potentials of a plurality of choices - 'anything goes' - which he sees as a mere response to one's quest for amusement and foreign to the aesthetic realm. Lyotard, like Baudrillard, sticks to a modernist approach to the relation between culture and money seen as two poles apart. And like Baudrillard, what Lyotard describes is a disrupted world where tastelessness reigns, not a world characterized by a new order which would signal the emergence of rich possibilities, possibilites which, in the British academic field more than in the French, have been celebrated - as McRobbie notes: 'postmodernism certainly appeared in the UK like a breath of fresh air' (1996b: 15).

#### 4.3. Celebrating Postmodernism

Whereas modernism was a culture of elitism and hierarchy (Jencks 1992), postmodernism offers to close the gap between high and low cultures, elite and mass cultures. Postmodernism opposes the traditional ideas of modernism, and pop epitomizes such an opposition. As, Huyssen notes, 'pop in the broadest sense was the context in which a notion of the postmodern first took shape, and from the beginning until today, the most significant trends within postmodernism have challenged modernism's relentless hostility to mass culture' (1992: 47).

Because within modernism the popular had been marginalized, its new valorisation went hand in hand with a criticism of the foundations of modernism (Bertens 1995: 100), such as the condemnation of mass culture. Modernist mass cultural critics feared that mass culture would contaminate and downgrade high culture, and reacted with deep pessimism to the commodification of culture, as discussed earlier in this chapter. In contrast, postmodern theorists show more optimism (Strinati 1997: 225). And whereas Baudrillard or Lyotard do not seem to share the postmodernist challenge to modernism's 'hostility to mass culture', it is a task which has been taken on more willingly in British academia.

Hebdige, for example, refers to the contrast between French and British theorists, which clearly emerged during a symposium at the I.C.A. in London in 1985:

When Native speakers [gave] papers which stressed the enabling potentialities of the new 'user friendly' communication technologies and the gradual deregulation of the airwaves, and which celebrated popular culture-as-postmodern-bricolage-and-play [they] were confronted with the Gallic antipopulism of Lyotard, who declared a marked preference for the fine arts, idealist aesthetics and the European avant garde tradition, and demonstrated in comments made in response to the papers in the session on Popular Culture and Posmodernism a deep, abiding suspicion for the blandishments and commodified simplicities of 'mass culture'. (1994: 184)

Bauman (1997) also outlines the 'positivity' of postmodernism. Modernity, he argues, is a dis-encharmed world in which the subject has become lost and depersonalised in the universal. 'It is against such a disenchanted world', he notes, 'that the postmodern re-enchantment is aimed' (xi), through a reconsideration of the position of individuals in society and the return of the subject. It is on this return of the subject that the French theorist Maffesoli (1990, 1996) focuses, in a work which stands out in the French academic field for its endeavour to inscribe itself in a discussion on culture and postmodernism. However, in contrast with the work of his compatriots Baudrillard and Lyotard and in an approach more familiar to the British academic field than to the French, Maffesoli concentrates on outlining the positive characteristics of postmodernity such as its 'strong social vitalism' (1990: 11). New social links have emerged, he argues, which privilege proximity and the everyday through an attachment to day-to-day creativity. In the quotidian and the banal, art which no longer rests on a distinction between a distant high culture and the everyday is created. Postmodernism signals the advent of the 'total work of art' (12) in which the local, the present and the ordinary have moved centre stage in what could be called, drawing on Bauman, a re-enchantment of the everyday.

It is a re-enchantment made possible, according to Lash (1990), by a process of de-differentiation. Whereas modernism aimed to create differences between a variety of cultural fields like high and popular culture, postmodernism cancels out these differences. Compared to Lash's postmodernism, Baudrillard's is a postmodernism of un-differentiation rather than one of de-differentiation, an un-differentiation of culture, which becomes 'a single nebula whose simple elements are indecipherable, whose truth is indecipherable' (Baudrillard 1999: 32).

Muggleton (1998) also notes that in the field of fashion this de-differentiation might have initiated the merging of high fashion, high street and street styles. It also signals 'a contemporary use of fashion which pays no heed to the once firm and established divisions between high, mainstream and low' (173). Modernist high culture is an oppressive, dominant culture with which postmodern culture no longer complies. Popular fashion is thus given a legitimate voice, and it is the 1970s, Wilson (1998) argues, which mark the end of 'the era of *haute couture*' (393). Such an era, she also

notes, 'would then appear, retrospectively, as "modernist": the great designers saw themselves as unique artists, and the evolution of fashion has its own internal aesthetic dynamic' (393). But with the rise of mass fashion and the multiplication of ready-to-wear styles, fashion, she says, is no longer dictated by haute couture, which now looks to street fashion and mass fashion for ideas. Whereas in modernity, popular fashion was dismissed as standardized and uncreative, as in the work of Waquet and Laporte (1999) discussed earlier in this chapter, in postmodernity it is highly valued, whilst high fashion is desacralised. Creativity and aestheticism re-enter the sphere of everyday life through the consumption of popular culture, a consumption which, some authors have argued, as I show next, is a form of production.

## Chapter 3

### **POPULAR CULTURE AS EVERYDAY CULTURE: HOW ORDINARY ?**

In Chapter 3 the notions of the everyday and the ordinary are discussed in relation to the idea of popular culture. In both France and the UK the everyday has been theorised as a space in which consumers turn into producers and creatively engage with the resources of ordinary life. In France - where in recent years popular culture as ordinary culture has slowly emerged as a field of investigation of *le quotidien* - it is on a transparent and banal everyday that researchers have focused, in contrast with the UK where many analyses, mostly of subcultures, have privileged the study of spectacular cultures.

Although amongst these studies a distinction has often been made between subcultures and commercial culture, British cultural analysts have embraced the latter more than the French, highlighting the central role of commodities in the making of agents' identities and in their experience and construction of everyday life, whilst French researchers of popular culture as ordinary culture have often situated popular culture outside of contemporary commercial culture.

Thus in the French and the British academic fields different forms of everyday popular culture have been privileged. The distinction between high and low forms of culture reappears in the discourse of researchers, but this time not between traditional high culture and popular culture, as analysed mainly in chapters 1 and 2, but between a high and a low type of popular culture. These popular cultural hierarchies were already at play in the work of Leavis and Hoggart. In the work of the former, a 'good' organic popular culture was distinguished from modern popular culture. For the latter, the golden age of working class culture (the 1920s) was opposed to its debased form (the 1950s). I return to such hierarchies in this chapter to discuss them in the light of more recent discourses of French and British researchers, but also in the light of the discourses of agents whose cultural practices these researchers have analysed.

## 1. Popular Culture and Everyday Life

### 1. 1. On Ordinary People

In Chapter 2, I pointed to the anthropological shift which took place in the UK in discourses on culture with the work of Williams and his 'materialist definition of culture' (Hall 1996a: 27). Culture could no longer be reduced to its 'ideal analysis' (Williams 1973: 57), the practices and production of an elite group, the aristocracy of culture; it also referred to the experiences of ordinary people, the values and meanings they invested in their everyday behaviour. This is why, Williams observed, 'culture is ordinary' (1989: 3), an idea which has been essential to the approach of popular culture defined as the culture of ordinary people. As Nowell-Smith (1987: 80) observes, popular culture tends to be defined in terms of 'the life of ordinary people' and as not being part of culture proper, and as such it encompasses forms such as 'rock music, television, Hollywood movies' and leisure activities which 'could include anything from holiday camps to post-punk fashions'. Popular culture would thus be an ordinary culture in contrast to a traditional high culture, a 'conventional list of "high art"' including for example, as Willis notes, 'classical music, ballet, opera, drama, poetry, literature, the visual and plastic arts' (1996: 2, see also Zolberg 1997: 143-144).

Popular culture, Hall also stresses, 'always has its base in the experiences, the pleasures, the memories, the traditions of the people. It has connections with local hopes and local aspirations, local tragedies and local scenarios that are the *everyday practices* and *everyday experiences* of *ordinary folks*' (1997: 469, my emphasis). In that respect, popular culture, he continues, drawing on Bakhtin, is linked with "'the vulgar" - the popular, the informal, the underside, the grotesque' (469), which is why it has been opposed to high culture. But who are these ordinary folks Hall mentions?

Added to the slipperiness of the term 'people' is that of the term 'ordinary', two terms often used in conjunction, as if to reinforce each other in their opposition to words such as 'elite' or 'high'. The ordinary folk - what Hoggart calls 'the little man' (1992: 181) - it is assumed, is a member of the people; the people is a mass of ordinary folks. In this grouping together against a common opponent, the people and the ordinary refer to the same thing - that which is not part of the experience of an elite. They are also both vague, which allows the articulation of different discourses on the popular. As Frow

observes, 'it is not just that the content of the concept of "the people" is historically variable, but that it depends for all its force on a deliberate vagueness of reference' (1995: 74). This vagueness allows the 'ordinary' and 'the people' to be constantly appropriated by researchers to convey different social and cultural values and construct a particular view of their significance. Like 'the mass' - as discussed in the last chapter, the mass and the popular are often used to refer to the same idea - 'the people' is an empty signifier constantly invested with new meanings. Its 'vagueness' reappears in the concomitant use of the term 'ordinary', which, as discussed throughout this chapter, often encompasses different realities, suggesting that the 'ordinary', like the 'popular', is also 'one of those things at stake in the struggle between intellectuals' (Bourdieu 1994: 150).

Thus, the idea of the ordinariness of culture has been central to British analyses of popular culture. Couldry (2000: 26) argues that it is an important concept, since it conceives of culture as materially based and cultural production as a process which involves all social agents, and not just a restricted elite: 'culture, in this sense, matters to everyone; it concerns our shared life together'. The culturalist influence is here visible - culture is a lived experience - in the same way that it is visible in the work of many other British researchers whose studies bear the traces of Williams' approach. Willis, for instance, referring to Arnold (1980), notes that culture 'is not simply about a relationship with what is called "art", or with "the best which has been thought and said" or with the restricted or the refined. I see cultural experience essentially as shared material experience.[...] It comes from direct involvement with the everyday world' (1978: 2). It is in order to study this involvement that in *Common Culture* (1996) Willis looks at 'everyday "ordinary" culture' (5), a culture, he stresses, consisting of popular cultural forms such as pop music. Willis is interested in studying how young people are active makers of their own day-to-day life.

Whereas Willis analyses the ordinary everyday life of young people, thus implying that young people *do* have an everyday life, Lefebvre (1971) denies this possibility. For him, everyday life is made of 'careers, wives, children, time-tables, private lives, working-lives, leisure, dwellings in one place or another, etc.' (74), and adolescents and students 'have never known everyday life' (73). Yet although they have not experienced it, they are still the victims of its main manifestation, mass culture, for

Lefebvre an alienating culture. The situation, he adds, is even worse for working class kids, who are not as aware of 'being exploited and enslaved' (91) in everyday life - that is through mass culture - as they are in the realm of work. Consumption is used as a 'make believe' (91) which hides the reality of their exploitation both at work and in day-to-day life: young people do not possess an everyday life, rather they are possessed by it. Moreover, whereas in the work of Lefebvre, everyday ordinary life is the site *par excellence* of alienation and passivity, in the work of Willis, as will be discussed in the next section, it is the very realm of creativity.

If the notion of the ordinary has been central to British discourses on popular culture, it has also, in France, informed much research on popular culture, such as those of the *groupe des Annales* including the historian Marc Bloch. Bloch decided to look at the history of the Western world through popular objects and popular practices rather than as represented by the documents of a cultivated elite (see Aguirre Rojas 2000). He looked at material civilisation, a direction followed by Fernand Braudel in *Civilisation Matérielle, Economie et Capitalisme* (1979), where he analyses pre-industrial cultural patterns through the everyday material culture of ordinary people.

Whereas these researchers tended to focus on popular culture at a particular period of time - pre-modern Europe - Michel de Certeau concentrates on the present. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988) he looks at popular culture as ordinary culture, that is, the experiences of 'everyman and nobody' (1), the practices of 'the ordinary man' (xxii). Certeau's popular culture is the ordinary culture of ordinary people, made in the routine of one's daily life, and the ordinary man is that man who in literature is 'called *Everyman* (a name that betrays the absence of a name), this anti-hero is thus also *Nobody*, *Nemo*, just as the French *Chacun* becomes *Personne*, or the German *Jedermann* *Niemand*' (1988: 2). Moreover, the ordinary man, Certeau adds 'acts out the text itself, in and by the text' (2). Ordinary people are the subjects through which popular culture - the text - is acted out. This is why, Certeau writes, 'the approach to culture begins when the ordinary man *becomes* the narrator, when it is he who defines the (common) place of discourse and the (anonymous) space of its development' (5). The 'ordinary man' is as much the author of the text as its direct writer, he is a creator of everyday life, an issue I return to in the next sections.

It is also because in France the expression 'popular culture' still has a strong class connotation, as discussed in the last chapter, that Certeau has asserted his preference for the expression 'ordinary culture' over 'popular culture'. He notes that he prefers to give the "ways of doing" and "everyday practices" he studies, 'the name of "ordinary culture" to avoid the accepted expression "popular culture" in which the word "popular" carries too many ideological connotations' (quoted in Rigby 1991: 26). For Certeau popular culture is a process, a practice of ordinary life shared by everyone and not just the working class.

Although in France, Certeau's approach marks a significant move in studies of popular culture, Luce Giard (1994), a collaborator, with Pierre Mayol, of Certeau, wonders why their work (see, for instance, Certeau, Giard and Mayol 1994), though influential, has been so little credited there. Her hypothesis is that, because they were not part of any already existing school of thought, they had no institutional identity. They also borrowed from a wide range of disciplines, a practice for which, she argues, they had to pay a price. However, she also notes that their work became popular in Anglo-Saxon countries and more specifically in the field of cultural studies - 'that mixed subject, unheard of' (Giard 1994: xi) in France. Moreover, whereas in France, Giard continues, true culture was supposed to be that of the cultivated mind of the superior being, Certeau developed the notion that culture also belongs to the ordinary individual, an idea which was 'transgressive' of the dominant thought which made of culture, *la culture cultivée*: 'it was transgressive, as it had been in another way in May 1968, to believe in the imagination, the liberty of "the man without qualities"' (x).

The French ethnologist Jean Cuisenier (1995) also draws on the concept of the ordinary. For him an authentic and 'true popular tradition' (118) no longer exists. The new cultural practices can no longer be called popular culture; rather they constitute 'ordinary social practices' (116). These practices are at the centre of Michel Maffesoli's work, which, he stresses (1999), is informed by the idea of culture as ordinary. Maffesoli, however, also insists that his research stands outside of the traditional French academic field because of his interest in a version of culture generally neglected by researchers (Maffesoli 1999). His work, he observes, is marginalised by the academic establishment. It is 'much questioned' [*controversé*] and resisted because deemed 'frivolous', centred

not on the idea of culture as high culture but on 'a culture of proximity, of everyday life' (Maffesoli 1999), an ordinary culture of the quotidian. His work, he says, is not taken seriously, not least because he wants to take the dialogue with postmodernism further, a dialogue which, he observes, has been abandoned in France, postmodernism being often perceived as intellectual fashion. Bourdieu's dismissal of postmodernism, mentioned in the preceding chapter, is an illustration of this.

Thus both French and British researchers have looked at popular culture as ordinary culture. It is a culture, it has been argued, as I will discuss next, which allows for the day-to-day creativity of individuals, a creativity which, according to Certeau, is a production in its own right and which, British researchers have shown, draws on the resources offered by commercial culture.

### 1. 2. Creativity in Everyday Life

In *Hiding in the Light* (1994) Hebdige notes that, through the consumption of commodities acquired through their 'surplus cash' and spent during their leisure time, the youth after WWII could afford goods which allowed them to construct their own 'immaculate identities untouched by the soiled and compromised imaginaries of the parent culture' (30). Commodities, Hebdige argues, and contrary to Baudrillard's account of their enslaving and alienating role, were central to young people's articulation of identity. They allowed them to formulate their opposition to the parent culture and make visible in everyday life their resistance to it (see also Hall and Jefferson 1998). Commodities are the ordinary tools through which ordinary people construct and shape their day-to-day life, through 'a new interplay between commerce, consumption and everyday habits and taste' (Chambers 1993: 33).

Such an articulation of meanings and identities through the consumption of commodities is made possible, according to Fiske (1998), by the fact that popular cultural artefacts are not just standardized products and the fabrication of capitalist economy. It is not sufficient to describe commodities in financial terms alone. Essential to their popularity is a 'parallel economy - the cultural' (506) wherein it 'is not wealth but meanings, pleasures and social identities' (506) which circulate and are exchanged.

This is why the mods were able to turn consumerism, Chambers argues, into the 'language of style' (1993: 7). They imposed their presence on the objects they consumed, hence showing that the products of mass culture such as clothes, records or drugs, for instance, 'could be transformed and moulded by the particular realities of *this* time and *this* place' (7). For the Mods, commodities 'were no longer merely items of everyday consumption, but sanctified artefacts, centres of the concentrated gaze, of the art discourse' (10). This contrasts with Baudrillard's and Lefebvre's approach.

Not only are the ordinary commodities of mass culture the sites of investment and of the construction of meaningful values, they also show the fact that high culture is not the only realm where such values emerge. As Willis (1996: 1) observes, though high art is not part of most young people's everyday life, their quotidian existence is filled with a wide range of signs with which they actively engage to define and assert their presence in the world. It is not just within the extraordinary space of high art that individuals can express a sense of creativity, but also within the ordinary space of day-to-day life. Hippy and biker cultures for instance, Willis (1978) has shown, have revealed 'the unsuspected power of commodities and of a minutely articulated ideology in everyday life' (171). Agents are actively engaged with the everyday through what Willis (1996) calls 'symbolic creativity' and its 'grounded aesthetics', that is, 'the creative element in process whereby meanings are attributed to symbols and practices and where symbols and practices are selected, reselected, highlighted and recomposed to resonate further appropriated and particularized meanings. Such dynamics are emotional as well as cognitive' (21). Ordinary people are consumers turned authors since, as Fiske (1989b: 28) stresses, commodities are not inherently meaningful; rather it is the ways of consuming them which is productive of their meanings.

Such an idea is reminiscent of Certeau's 'consumer production', a type of production which 'does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its *ways of using* the products imposed by a dominant economic order' (1988: xii-xiii). Popular cultures are for Certeau active 'arts of making', 'poetic ways of "making do (*bricolage*)"' (xv), they are everyday creative practices, but also and above all ways of subverting and resisting the dominant order. And it is because the notion of resistance is central to Certeau's work that it stands out in French academia, where many researchers

have been more interested in commenting on the power of the system than on active agency, as discussed in Chapter 2. Gardiner even sees Certeau as ‘one of the least pessimistic and most politically astute of contemporary French thinkers’ (2000: 168).

Central to Certeau’s theorizing is the idea of *bricolage* (see Certeau 1988) - a notion first used by Lévi-Strauss in relation to cultural facts (Cuche 1996: 72) - which he contrasts to technical invention based on scientific knowledge. The *bricoleur/se* creates new objects or meanings by putting together a limited stock of diverse elements imposed onto agents by the dominant order. It is because these pre-constrained elements are re-created by their users, re-invented by them, that resistance is possible.

*Bricolage* is a notion which has been appropriated by many British researchers in their analyses of popular culture, such as Hebdige, who talks about ‘style as bricolage’ (1995: 102). The teddy boy’s fashion, for example, is a bricolage of Edwardian style. The mods, he argues, were also ‘*bricoleurs* when they appropriated another range of commodities by placing them in a symbolic ensemble which served to erase or subvert their original straight meanings’ (104). It is through the *bricolage* of everyday objects that consumers create their own style and oppose the dominant order. They are not ‘fashion victims’, a passive mass whose conduct is dictated to them by a dominating fashion industry. Rather, they participate in the making of fashion as active users of its commodities and as authors and resistant *bricoleurs* of their own identity.

However, whilst some cultural theorists have stressed that researchers’ interest in resistant popular cultures has often resulted in the creation of ‘an abrupt theoretical dichotomy’ (Muggleton 2000: 21) between, on the one hand, resistant popular cultures as ‘good’ popular cultures and, on the other hand, commercially incorporated cultures as ‘bad’ passive ones, as will be developed later in this chapter, others have argued that to conceptualise one’s engagement with popular culture in terms of resistance only is to neglect the variety of meanings and values invested in it.

The French Yonnet, for example, whose work stands out in French academia for its endeavour to offer a positive analysis of mass culture, has focused on the creativity involved in the ordinary practice of horse betting. This creativity is not informed by a desire to resist a dominant order but is simply necessary to the practice of the game itself, ‘an informed game, requiring memory, seeking singularities, handling comparisons’

(1985: 33). Moreover, as Frow (1995) argues, there is now a ‘non-class-specific “popular” grouping [...] that is not structured by its opposition to a “power block”’ (25) and is part ‘of mass audiences which are inclusive rather than exclusive’ (24). Frith (1992), for instance, observes that the practice of pop music cannot be seen in terms of issues of opposition or protest only, but carries ‘wider cultural messages’ (177) linked to the idea of pleasure, self-expression and aesthetic commitment. This is why everyday life is a space where histories unfold, Chambers notes, ‘histories of choice, taste and pleasure; the story of our social, sensual and sensitized “I”s’ (1993: 71), histories which cannot be reduced to that of resistance only. These histories are also absent from Bourdieu’s account of cultural consumption, as will be discussed in Part II. Thus Chambers talks about ‘an urban commercial culture of pleasure’ (32), which can no longer be deemed false, an outlook very unlike that of Baudrillard for example, but rather constitutes ‘the stuff of everyday sense where the pleasure, the meaning and the interest in listening to music, wearing fashions, going to the cinema, watching television, takes effect’ (71). I will have the opportunity to come back to this issue later but for now I would like to stress that in Chambers’ remarks can be seen an important difference between French and British academics: the latter show a willingness to embrace commercial culture lacking in the former. Even Certeau, who celebrates the consumer and everyday creativity, an approach itself unusual in the French academic field, is reluctant to celebrate consumer culture and the commodities on which it feeds, as will be developed later. If both French and British researchers have looked at everyday creativity, the latter have certainly been more interested than the former in the role of commodities in this process, and in the issue of pleasurable consumption.

Featherstone (1994) also draws on the notion of pleasure in his discussion of mass culture and ordinary life. Everyday creative practices, he argues, contribute to the aestheticization of everyday life, a process which refers ‘to the project of turning life into a work of art’ (66). It informed, for instance, the life ethic of Oscar Wilde. Here, the dandy is the epitome of the process of aestheticization, which, through the careful selection and arrangement of dress, allows him to reach perfection not only in spiritual life but in ordinary life too. But this aesthetic of the ordinary, Featherstone stresses, must

be linked to the advent of mass consumption which brought about the emergence of new tastes and the quest, paramount for consumer culture, for distinctive lifestyles (67).

Thus, following Featherstone, essential to the process of the aestheticization of day-to-day life is mass culture, whose ordinariness is filled not with empty signs and artifice only, leading to the disappearance of meaning and the reign of empty surface, as it does for Baudrillard, but with a new definition of what should constitute the everyday, a repositioning of signs and criteria formerly reserved to high art. And it is through the pleasurable consumption of the new resources of mass culture that such a project is attained. Benjamin's flâneur, for instance, Featherstone also observes, is an early illustration of the postmodern consumer, who enjoys the pleasures offered by mass culture, its 'aesthetic [...] and playful potential' (24). For Benjamin, Featherstone adds, the mass produced commodities enabled creativity to be freed from its exclusive position within art and to penetrate the everyday. Thus, whereas in modernist high culture it was only consecrated works of art which allowed aesthetic enjoyment, in postmodernist culture, Featherstone stresses, mass culture also does so. And though such an 'embrace of consumer capitalism' has led, McGuigan (1993: 39) argues, to a drift in British cultural studies towards 'uncritical populism', an idea I return to later, it has also allowed opposition to the pessimism and elitism of mass culturalists.

Muggleton (1998) and Wilson (1992) have also pointed to individuals' playful relation to mass produced commodities such as fashion, drawing attention to its consumption as an involvement of 'oneself in aesthetic play' informed by 'hedonism, pleasure and spectacle' (Muggleton 1998: 171), which allows us to become actors, 'to lend a theatrical and playacting aspect to the hallucinatory experience of the contemporary world' (Wilson 1992: 8). Through the everyday consumption of fashion, ordinary people become not only creators but also performers of a theatrical representation staged in the ordinary space of everyday life, which becomes the site of day-to-day aestheticization and of the creating and performing of one's ever changing identity. Such a discourse on the ordinary consumer turned producer but also performer of fashion informs *The Guardian's* reports on fashion shows, as will be developed in Part III.

### 1.3. The Spectacular and the Transparent

Popular culture - 'the stuff of everyone's daily life' as Calhoun puts it (1990: 502) - is, Bigsby notes, 'so much a part of our daily existence that it is all but invisible' (1976: vii). However, if 'invisible' seems to be the most appropriate way of describing the popular culture as ordinary culture analysed by French analysts like Certeau, it seems less applicable to the type of everyday popular cultures studied by many British researchers.

Chambers (1993) observes that ordinary practices can be turned into opportunities for the disruption of this same ordinariness and of the quiet pace of everyday life: one's appropriation of everyday commodities can create 'the distinctive and the personalized. Sometimes the result will stand out, disturb and shock the more predictable logic of everyday life' (11). It is precisely on this process of distinction and personalisation through spectacular styles that many British studies of popular culture, mainly studies of subcultures (see, for example, Clarke 1998a, 1998b; Cohen 1997; Hebdige 1995; Jefferson 1998; Willis 1996), have focused, whilst 'people's engagement with 'ordinary' material culture (everyday clothes, household goods, and so on) and their dreams of material prosperity', Couldry (2000: 53) recently argued, have been neglected. British cultural analysts have shown a preference, he continues, for 'more exciting, more conventionally "cultural" interests (music, films, books, the leading edge of fashion)' (53).

This contrasts with the study in France, of un-distinctive, invisible and transparent popular practices such as in Kaufmann's *La Trame Conjugale* (1992, see also Deneffe 1992; Desjeux, Monjaret et Taponnier 1998; Garabuau-Moussaoui et Desjeux 2000) or Augé's *Non-Lieux* (1992), a reflection on the anonymous places of an individual who is 'alone but similar to others' (127), the 'ordinary man' (53); reminiscent of Certeau's 'anonymous hero' (1988: i). In that respect, these approaches are in line with the republican paradigm informing the French social sciences, as discussed in the previous chapter, a paradigm which promotes attention to processes of integration and unification rather than creative distinction. The French Alain Morel and Anne-Marie Thiesse (1989), for instance, have argued that though, in France, the study of popular culture has generally been concerned with working class culture, a new type of reflection has recently emerged which is interested in 'ordinary practices' (149), that is, in 'banal

cultural practices' (150). Such an approach is not concerned with investigating differences or distinctive specificities. Rather it is interested in 'the most general characteristics of a popular culture, a culture which would be that of late twentieth Century urban France' (150). Similarly, Maffesoli (1990: 24), who conflates the popular and the everyday, insists that his sociology is interested in 'the small things of the banal', that is, in reference to a source Certeau (1988: 1) also cites, Musil's book *The Man Without Qualities* (1995), 'life without quality' (Maffesoli 1990: 91).

It is this banal and un-spectacular everyday life which is the focus of Certeau, who distinguishes a 'spectacular and clamorous production' from 'an entirely different type of production, called "consumption"' (1988: 31). This consumption, he continues, is 'characterized by its ruses, its fragmentation (the result of circumstances), its *poaching*, its *clandestine* nature, its tireless but *quiet* activity, in short by its *quasi-invisibility*, since it shows itself not in its own products (where would it place them?) but in an art of using those imposed in it' (31, my emphasis). Here the emphasis is placed on the invisibility of ordinary popular culture, its silence, the way it blends into society whilst also *quietly* disrupting it. It is a culture of poaching, which expresses itself in a hidden way and draws on subtle 'tactics' (29) to remain invisible; there are, for example, inconspicuous ways of 'reading as poaching', of 'walking in the city' (90) or of 'using the constraining order' (30) of places such as the office, all of them expressions, within the space of everyday life, of the creativity of agents, an idea Bourdieu fails to address, as will be discussed in Part II.

Thus, whereas Hebdige draws on the idea of bricolage to point to the visible and distinctive ways of doing it, a visual bricolage assembling different items of clothing and symbolic goods, and resulting in spectacular styles - Hebdige talks about a 'culture of conspicuous consumption' (1995: 103) - bricolage in the work of Certeau is anonymous and clandestine, barely traceable. It only 'insinuates' (Certeau 1988: xiii) itself in ordinary life, whilst Hebdige's punks impose their presence onto the urban landscape. Their bricolage is ultimately addressed to society's gaze, whilst in the work of Certeau it tries to elude it. Certeau talks, for example, about 'microbe-like operations' (xiv) which are informed by an aesthetic of tricks and practices or gestures such as reading, walking, talking and believing. These operations are not informed by an aesthetic grounded in the

consumption of commodities. Thus where Certeau's aesthetic 'does not manifest itself through its own products' (xii- xiii), Hebdige's does. Punks, for instance, Hebdige argues, combined articles from different periods, creating

a chaos of quiffs and leather jackets, brothel creepers and winkle pickers, drainpipes and vivid socks, bum freezers and bovver boots - all kept 'in place' and 'out of time' by the spectacular adhesives: the safety pins and plastic clothes pegs, the bondage straps and bits of string which attracted so much horrified and fascinated attention. (1995: 26)

There, as in the work of Willis, studies of the spectacular way of practising quotidian acts like fashioning oneself or listening to music highlight the everyday as a space where the ordinary can be made less so, where one's ordinariness can be transcended so as to allow the ordinary man to become, not Certeau's Nemo, everyman and nobody, but someone. And it is through a spectacular popular culture that the no one in Nemo comes out of its invisibility and is turned into someone. The everyday is the very realm where the ordinary and the extraordinary both complement and feed each other in a daily association, a routinisation of the extraordinary which is also a deroutinisation of the ordinary, as illustrated for instance by *The Guardian's* account of fashion, an idea I return to in Part III. The everyday becomes the ground where the ordinary and the extraordinary intertwine in a process of distinction and differentiation.

Thus both French and British researchers have privileged specific forms of popular culture, a banal and transparent one for the former and a spectacular one for the latter. In the process of appropriation of the notion of popular culture, distinctions are made which are expressive of different cultural values. Hierarchies reappear which are no longer organised around the traditional high culture/popular culture dichotomy, but around distinctions between high popular culture and low popular culture. I now turn to such hierarchies as they occur not only in the discourse of analysts but also in that of the agents whose culture they research.

## **2. Popular Cultural Hierarchies**

### **2. 1. Special Popular Cultures versus Ordinary Mainstream Cultures**

In 'The Cultural Study of Popular Music' (1992), Frith refers to research conducted amongst young rock and pop musicians in Liverpool. He notes that they saw themselves 'as romantic artists, doing something personal and new, setting their work against the commercial formulas of the charts (holding such music, indeed in a positively Adornoesque contempt)' (174). The contempt for specific popular forms of entertainment, in the tradition of mass culture theorists, has moved from the field of high culture, to join that of popular culture. Within this field, criteria of evaluation based on a distinction between a high form and low form of popular culture structure judgements on cultural forms and experiences. The hierarchies are no longer between high and popular culture, but between different popular cultures. This is why Frith argues that in most research on popular culture the aesthetic discrimination essential to cultural consumption and the judgments it involves are ignored. 'Most populist writers', he notes, 'draw the wrong conclusion; what needs challenging is not the notion of the superior, but the claim that it is the exclusive property of the "high". To deny the significance of value judgments in popular culture (to ignore popular taste hierarchies) is, if nothing else, hypocritical' (1998a: 573).

Willis' (1978) study of the bikers' culture highlights such hierarchies between high and low forms of popular culture, hierarchies which structure ordinary practices like the choice of dress and music. For the bikers he interviewed, their everyday outfit is to be distinguished from that of conventional motor-cyclists. It is perceived as special in the sense that it is not designed to be technically efficient, to allow bikers to go as fast as possible; rather it is put together so as to let them fully experience the physicality of the world, embrace and feel its texture: 'the bikeboys allow no disjunction whatsoever between the fact and the experience of speed' (55). Everyday clothes, in their relation to the body, become a central vector of experience.

The choice of specific items of clothing and specific ways of wearing them allows bikers to differentiate their style *and* their take on the physical and social world from that of the mainstream. In their choice of sports outfit, 'rules and conventions were ignored. Old sweaters and jeans were often worn instead of neat sports clothing' (29). This choice,

Willis stresses, has nothing to do with poverty, but with the decision not to conform to artificial definitions of masculinity imposed from the outside.

The attitude of the hippies that Willis also interviewed toward their clothing style manifests a similar opposition to mainstream fashion. Through a meticulous bricolage of different items of clothing whose original meaning was subverted, the hippies marked themselves out from ‘the *pomp* and *self-seriousness* of the “straights”’ (100). Within hippy communities the idea of personal authenticity was paramount to their mode of experience of the social world, and extreme and flamboyant styles were acknowledged as a manifestation of such an authenticity (101). Similarly, Willis shows how the bikers’ choice of music reflects their interest in what they perceive as authentic pop music, that is rock’n’roll before the death of Buddy Holly; the “golden” (63) age of rock’n’roll. As Frith also argues, ‘rock criticism is driven by the need to differentiate: music is good because it is different, different from the run of “mainstream” pop, different in the special intensity of feelings it brings about’ (1998b: 69).

Consumers of popular culture, Willis thus shows, have their own nostalgic vision of the past, of the tradition and ‘valued originals’ (1978: 63) of their culture, of what constitutes its ‘ideal creations’ (64). A golden age of culture so dear to cultural theorists like Leavis or Hoggart, for example, also informs agents’ engagement with contemporary popular culture. As Strinati puts it, the ‘sense of a decline from a past when things were better is by no means unique to mass culture theory’ (1997: 44). But for the latter, tradition, history and authenticity are concepts strictly limited to high culture only, which, being the only culture allowed roots and a consistent past, is deemed more valuable than what is perceived as an artificial and empty contemporary popular culture. However, high culture and popular culture are not fixed and easily identifiable entities. They are themselves the constructs of agents who, depending on their position in social space, produce their own sense of the mainstream - the mass - and their own sense of the margin. There is not one scale alone along which cultural value is fixed, but a multitude of scales whose systems of measurement are context dependent and made sense of through a wide variety of cultural capitals. My analysis of the discourse of *The Guardian* and *Le Monde* supports this idea, an idea neglected by Bourdieu, who fails to see that ‘the

terms “high” and “low” represent a division that is operative within *all* cultural domains’ (Frow 1995: 25, my emphasis), as will be discussed in parts II and III.

Finally, it is not just the respondents interviewed by researchers who set hierarchies between genres of popular culture, but researchers themselves, who also construct popular culture, at the same time as they analyse it. I have already discussed in a previous chapter Leavis’ version of a good popular culture, an organic one, and Hoggart’s ‘golden age’ of popular culture as 1920s and 1930s working class culture. I now turn to more recent discussions on high and low popular cultures which have informed the work of both French and British cultural analysts.

## 2. 2. High Popular Cultures and Low Popular Cultures: the Point of View of the Researcher

### 2. 2. 1. Mainstream Commercial Culture: A Silenced Majority

In *British Low Culture* (1998), Leon Hunt insists that his book is not about ‘popular’ culture but about ‘low’ culture, a distinction he makes to draw attention to the series of hierarchies which have informed the judgement of cultural theorists on the ‘popular’: ‘the “low” can be distinguished as a doubly marginalised district within the popular and as an ostensibly irrecoverable textual community’ (8). Though Hunt is still interested, like many subculturalists, in discussing style (the look of 1970s glam rock stars and the safari suit man, for instance) rather than a transparent inconspicuous ordinary culture, the ‘popular mainstream’, he suggests, has been set aside and marginalized, an idea which recalls Certeau’s argument that today, marginality ‘is no longer limited to minority groups, but is rather massive and pervasive’ (1988: xvii). Marginality, he adds, ‘is becoming universal. A marginal group has become a silent majority’ (xvii). It is this very ‘silent majority’ which, Hebdige (1995: 18) argues, subcultural styles want to offend, through an interruption of ‘the process of “normalization”’ (18).

However, where Certeau’s ‘marginality of the majority’ (1988: xvii) is that of the consumers of culture, as opposed to its direct producers, Hunt is referring to an opposition between mainstream popular culture and the spectacular popular culture of subcultural groups discussed earlier, groups which have turned in the work of many students of subcultures into ‘an elite few’ (Clarke 1997: 180). Thus instead of looking at

the style of the Teds, Punks or Mods, Hunt analyses 1970s Zoot suits. Because they were, according to him, a mainstream popular fashion, they have been ignored and hence marginalised by researchers, who have turned towards the more spectacular but also less common, therefore less vulgar, styles of subcultures. A distinction has been drawn between the 'innovative style' of subculturalists and the 'incorporated fashion' of the mass (Muggleton 2000: 24, see also Miller 1987: 173). The mainstream and subcultures end up opposed to each other, as in, for instance, the work of Hebdige (1995). 'The reaction against the privileging of high culture' has thus led, Frow argues, 'to a kind of inversion, in which certain elite popular cultural forms have been privileged, while other forms [...] are not' (1995: 6). This idea recalls Couldry's contention, as discussed earlier, that British cultural theorists have tended to neglect the analysis of banal ordinary material culture.

A low popular culture, then, has been distinguished from a high contemporary popular culture, generally subcultures, perceived as true and authentic. Whereas the former epitomizes the victorious commercial standardisation of popular culture and the homogeneisation of its consumers, the latter embodies a resistance to this process, positioning itself outside of commerce and mainstream mass society. Thus British students of subcultures, it has been argued (Clarke 1997; McRobbie 1996c; Muggleton 2000; Thornton 1997), have tended to ignore the issue of the commercial within the subcultural - an issue I return to shortly - in studies in which authentic and resistant subcultures have been opposed to commerce and the media through discourses informed by notions of contamination, exploitation or, as McRobbie observes, 'the Marcusian notion of recuperation' (1996c: 144) of the subcultures by mass culture. Mass culture is positioned as the Other of subcultures, which resist the commercial mainstream to remain unsoiled and pure.

Such a distinction between a noble popular and a vulgar one also informs the work of French students of popular culture such as Certeau and more recently Boucher. Boucher's book *Rap* (1998), like Bazin's *La Culture Hip-Hop* (1995) and Cathus's *L'Âme-Sueur* (1998), stands out in the French academic field for offering an in depth analysis of a topic - contemporary popular culture - which is often neglected by French researchers, unlike the British.

In the preface to *Rap*, Bazin argues that - in an affirmation certainly more true of the French academic field than the British - social research is marked by 'a great, if not total ignorance of the processes and movements which inform' popular forms (1998: 12). However, the contempt French researchers have shown for commercial popular culture, as discussed in Chapter 2, still informs the authors' work. In a passage reminiscent of Baudrillard's society of the simulacra, Boucher, for instance, talks about 'the rule of the game of the star system, of the society of illusion, that of the media, political and financial markets' (1998: 71). This society is not, he notes, that of hip-hop. For him, rap is a good popular culture because it is not commercial, and is outside of the mass media, an approach shared by Olivier Cathus, who stresses that 'the popular is precisely that which escapes mass culture' (1998: 32). It comes from 'the base' (33) and is opposed to the 'passivity' (31) which mass culture and the mass media induce.

The 'popular' Boucher is concerned with is that of the popular classes, a culture born in the '*quartier populaire*' [working class areas] (1998: 168): 'rappers, even when they begin to be famous, want to stay near the base, to be close to the street. Rap is a popular music' (161). In contrast, he adds, 'to reach a greater audience is an asset which allows much but which can also lock rap into the market of mass consumption, where consensus, mediocrity and quantity are valued over quality' (72). 'Cultural industries', he stresses, 'instead of building personal liberty, fabricate anti-subjects' (27). Rap is good as long as it stays truly popular, that is, made by and for the popular classes, and as long as it is not addressed to and made for a wider mass audience. Here again a whole section of rap, commercially successful and often praised by the media, like that of the French MC Solaar, NTM, or Massila Sound System, is excluded by the researcher who positions them outside of good popular culture and within a bad commercial mass. The nature of the experience of such mainstream rap, the significance its authors and consumers attribute to it are implicitly denied any legitimacy and seen as not worthy of being studied and accounted for. True genuine popular rap, Boucher argues, drawing on Debord's terminology, is resistant to the commercial mass of a 'society of spectacle and illusion' (106). It is to be distinguished from, for example, the mainstream rap of IAM, who 'by participating in popular shows which generate stupidity and ignorance rather than culture [...] ridicule hip-hop' (134). The audience for commercial culture is silenced, and

ultimately, its varied and complex voice cannot be heard as a counter to the unproblematized accounts of the so-called alienating role of mass culture and its subjugating products.

Popular culture has been divided by cultural theorists, who have relegated all cultures which are not perceived as authentic, resistant, or unsoiled by commerce, Grossberg (1998) argues, to 'a cultural mainstream in which they are "contained" by the existing structures of power'. In the light of this divide, Grossberg stresses his desire

to defend popular culture not only against those who are hostile to any of its forms (by measuring it against 'legitimated' culture), but more importantly, against those who are hostile to the largest part of popular culture because they champion those marginal trends or appropriations for its own sake or for the sake of the critic's own cherished assumptions. I do not see popular culture in opposition to legitimate culture (it is even possible that 'high' culture is someone's popular culture). Nor do I see a 'co-opted' mainstream against a resistant margin. Instead, I see a complex range of possibilities for the differentially articulated effects of cultural practices. (202)

Thus cultural analysts like McRobbie (1996c) and Thornton (1997), for example, have looked at how both commerce and a sense of authenticity inform the practice of popular culture, thus contradicting the sometimes romantic separation students of subcultures have erected between commercial culture and a genuine popular culture, a romanticism reminiscent of that of theorists of high culture such as Bourdieu, as will be discussed in Parts II and III.

McRobbie, for instance, argues that though 'entrepreneurial dynamic has rarely been acknowledged in most subcultural analysis' (1996c: 144, see also Frith 1997 for an account of the commerce versus art distinction drawn in discourses on popular culture), it is a dynamic which has been essential to many subcultures, evident in second-hand dressing and the financing of counter-cultures such as the hippy culture, which went through 'great efforts [...] to disguise the role which money played' (144) for them. Rather than endorsing the model of an opposition between an authentic popular culture and a commercial culture, McRobbie draws attention to the interface between the two.

Similarly, Thornton rejects the idea of the strict separation between mass culture and subculture alongside the notions of resistance and opposition of the latter to the former. She notes that

popular ideologies about dance crowds are riddled with implied statuses, refined echelons and subcultural capitals. Rather than subverting dominant cultural patterns in the manner attributed to classic subcultures, these clubber and raver ideologies offer 'alternatives' in the strict sense of the word, namely other social spaces and cultural hierarchies to put in their stead. (1997:115)

Clubbers, she argues, are not resistant to dominant culture; rather they simply evolve in a different space, an alternative one - an idea which recalls Williams', discussed in Chapter 2 - which is not positioned in a relation of antagonism to mainstream culture. On the contrary, rather than opposing commercial culture, clubbers incorporate it within their field to construct and define their practices, which is why, she also stresses, a variety of media and businesses are essential to 'the authentication of cultural practices' (8).

But for Certeau (1988), popular culture stands in opposition to commercial culture and consumers are conceived in terms of resistance only. His study of the everyday is a selective account of what constitutes ordinary life, focused on heroic consumers who subvert the dominant order. Certeau does not address the issue of everyday non-oppositional embrace of commercial culture, not least because the products of consumer culture are left outside of his model of consumption.

### 2. 2. 2. Certeau's Consumers: The Empty Handed Heroes of Contemporary Folk Culture

Certeau's consumer always appears empty handed, with no object to consume; indeed the materiality and symbolic value of the object never seem to have a role to play in the way it is consumed. Certeau's is a celebration of the consumer but not of consumer culture and its potential richness, as in Featherstone discussed earlier. The French author celebrates one half only of the relation of consumption, the consumer, whilst remaining silent on the other half, the commodity, whose textuality, significance and meaning are evaded. In the British academic field, many researchers have acknowledged this textuality of the products of commercial culture. Advertising, for instance, Chambers

(1993: 35) argues, has widened the possibilities for new identities and pleasures open to individuals through consumption. This is an idea echoed by McRobbie, who notes that the mass media and their new technologies provide 'a basis for the production of new meanings, new cultural expressions' (1996b: 19). This is why McRobbie praises the 'energy and vitality [...] self-confidence and openness to the world rather than a retreat from it' (1999: 46) of commercial magazines such as *Just Seventeen*. Similarly, many British feminist scholars have responded enthusiastically to British soaps like *Widows* or *Coronation Street* for instance, as they offered novel representations of women, not least as strong and independent (Geraghty 1996: 312).

Even 'resistant' analysts like Fiske (1989b) have pointed to the central role in society of the texts of mass culture in constructing agents' social position and identity. Jeans, for example, he argues, are 'a resource bank of potential meanings' (5). Fiske draws on the work of Certeau and insists like him on the idea of resistance, but unlike him, he shows that this resistance passes through the use of *the products* of commercial culture, the appropriation, as in the work of Hebdige and Willis discussed earlier, of *the commodities* of mass culture whose role in the making of one's everyday culture is thus acknowledged. Resistant subcultures, Chambers points out, 'adapted their styles from consumer objects, [...] their cultural insubordination was allied to' consumerism (1993: 53, my emphasis, see also Willis 1996: 17-21). As McGuigan (1993: 92) notes, the Birmingham researchers of the 1970s centred their studies on class struggle and social relations of production but did not neglect the formative role of commercial culture in identity.

But in Certeau's work the texts of mass culture are ignored and unproblematically assumed to have no significance in themselves - they can only be resisted. Value is created through use only, and not through the use of *commodities already loaded with meanings*, symbolically significant and central to the making of one's identity. As Gardiner observes, without however expanding on his comment, Certeau pays little attention to 'the "seductive", integrative qualities of (post)modern consumerism' (2000: 179).

In Certeau's work popular culture and mass culture end up as separate spheres, opposed and antagonistic. Whereas the latter dominates life, the former is to be found in

‘a fabulous utopian space’ (Certeau 1988: 23), ‘in *the interstices* of dominant structures and institutions’ (Morley 1996: 289, my emphasis) in which mass culture can be resisted. In *L’Invention du Quotidien 2*, for example, Certeau and Giard note that ‘ordinary life has been constituted as a vast land given to the colonisation of the media’ (1994: 354). The ordinary is positioned as separate from mass culture, as if they were foreign and incompatible notions, to the point that the latter is said to have, as in Morin’s (1983) work, colonised the former; that is, invaded it and destroyed its original authenticity. In another book, *La Culture au Pluriel* (1993), Certeau frequently refers to ‘the society of the spectacle’, in a reference to Debord’s eponymous work which depicts mass culture as a purely alienating culture. Also, and as Rigby (1991: 36) points out, in his writing Certeau frequently uses the term ‘quadrillage’ to refer to mass culture (see for instance, Certeau 1990) a word which, as discussed in the last chapter, implies notions of control and standardisation.

Thus Certeau and Giard insist that mass culture and popular culture must be distinguished: ‘ordinary culture and mass culture’, they note

are not equivalent, they follow different problematics. [...] Mass culture tends towards homogenisation, the law of production and diffusion on a large scale, even if it hides behind superficial variations, the fiction of ‘new products’. Ordinary culture hides a fundamental diversity of situations, of interests and contexts, under the apparent repetition of the objects it uses. (1994: 360)

This clear split between everyday culture and mass culture badly accommodates some further distinctions that the authors make between the ordinary and the mass. For them dressing is part of popular culture, it is an ordinary practice. However, nowadays the clothes on offer are mostly the ready-to-wear products of mass production. Dressing is an ordinary practice largely inseparable from mass culture, whether in the form of mass produced clothes themselves, or through the reading of fashion magazines, which are likely to have some influence on the everyday practice of dressing. Dress in the work of Certeau and Giard is positioned outside of history, unaffected by mass culture and its products, an ever changing and unstable *fashion*, whose stereotypical connotations of fickleness and superficiality are thus evaded through the use of the less threatening and

more legitimating a-historical word 'dress'. Certeau and Giard have constructed, in this case, an artificial barrier between the ordinary and the mass which has probably more to do with their romantic vision of popular culture than with the reality of day-to-day ordinary practices.

Thus, in the end Certeau focuses on experiences which have informed culture well before the advent of mass production. They are 'ancestral' practices such as walking and cooking, which he detaches from their historical and social context, conceptualised as timeless and hence unaffected by the changes brought upon society by mass production, whose reality and existence are hidden from Certeau's analysis of popular culture. He himself notes that his concern is with 'an operational logic whose models may go as far back as the age-old ruses of fishes and insects that disguise or transform themselves in order to survive, and which has in any case been concealed by the form of rationality currently dominant in Western culture' (1988: xi). Traditional popular culture remains the ultimate point of reference, an idea illustrated by the parallel he often draws between everyday consumption and the 'ways and customs' (1988: 30) of traditional societies, such as hunting ('ways and customs' is the translation of '*us et coutumes*' (1990: 52), an expression referring to traditional practices, to, as Certeau himself puts it, the 'operational models of popular culture' (1988: 25), meaning here, folk culture). It is as compared to traditional practices that everyday consumption is made interesting and legitimized, a legitimation which operates in the field of traditional folk culture and not in that of mass culture. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* Certeau is interested in showing the survival in modern society of 'ancient ruses' (39), the persistence of tradition, as with the case of *la perruque* - 'the worker's own work disguised as work for his employer' (25) -, which 'reintroduces "popular" techniques of other times and other places into the industrial space (that is, into the Present order)' (26). Much of the thinking on popular culture of Certeau, Giard and Mayol, as Rigby (1991: 30) points out, is concerned with the need for tradition. It is focused on the presence in the contemporary world of a new folk culture and so the expression 'popular culture' in their writing can be read as synonymous with folk culture (26). In that respect also, it can be seen that in their work a certain type of contemporary popular culture - ordinary culture - ends up opposed to and split from another type of contemporary popular culture - mass culture - which they dismiss.

Hierarchies are again set by these cultural theorists, not between traditional high culture and popular culture though, but between popular culture and mass culture, as in the work of some British subculturalists or the more recent work of some French researchers discussed earlier, and where popular culture is here a sort of a-historical folk culture. The popular is again appropriated to convey specific cultural values, those which inform the researchers' analytical framework. Distinctions are always made between high and low forms of culture, the words 'high' and 'low' being attached to ever changing referents.

However, Certeau's work still stands apart in the French academic field for his departure from the traditional definition of culture as high culture in favour of an anthropological one which pays attention to the everyday creativity of agents. Gardiner observes of Certeau's work that it is 'a powerful corrective to Foucault's highly pessimistic and one-dimensional analysis of our present-day "disciplinary society"' (2000: 179). It is no less a corrective to Bourdieu's model of ineluctable reproduction of the dominant social order, where little room is made for pleasure and playfulness, let alone for resistance (see Part II).

### 2. 2. 3. Working Class Culture and Historical Dress

The distinction Certeau and his collaborators make between a good popular culture - ordinary culture - and a bad one - mass culture - also informs the work of Grignon and Passeron. They draw on Lévi-Strauss' work to underline the tendencies certain researchers have of labelling cultures which are different from theirs 'barbaric'. 'Whenever we are led to qualify a human culture as inert or stationary', Lévi-Strauss notes in *Race et Histoire* (1987),

we must ask ourselves if this apparent lack of change is not the result of our ignorance of its true interests, conscious or unconscious, and if, having different criteria from ours, this culture is not a victim of the same illusion about us. In other words, we would appear to each other as devoid of interest, simply because we do not resemble each other. (45-46)

In this text, Lévi-Strauss refers to ethnocentrism and the devaluation of other nations' culture. He does not look at the diversity of cultures *within* a nation and the value judgment attached to them through the labels 'high' and 'low', but Grignon and Passeron

draw on his comment to 'rehabilitate' a certain version, or rather definition, of popular culture; that is, working class culture. They do not, however, extend their analysis to contemporary commercial popular culture, that is, mass culture, which is thus excluded from their project of cultural legitimisation. The distinction between high and low cultures has been questioned, through the analysis of a low culture - working class culture - which is however not too low, unlike contemporary mass culture, so as to deserve the attention of academics. As Yonnet notes in reference to the mass practice of horse betting:

Firstly, sociologists do not bet on horses and this lack of knowledge constitutes a serious handicap. [...] Secondly, horse betting is one of the rare cultural practices to be completely devoid of social or intellectual prestige. The Ameridian potlatch is noble, every academic will tell you so, but horse betting is vulgar. It is not cultural. (1985: 24)

Working class culture is Grignon and Passeron's Ameridian potlatch. It is this strange other removed from their daily experience and which acquires a sort of charismatic distance, Benjamin's (1992) aura, which subjugates the observer.

This same auratic distance is given to fashion when it is analysed in the context of former centuries rather than present times, allowing researchers once more to draw a line between the popular cultural objects and practices which do not deserve their attention, and those which do, here past rather than present fashion. Perrot (1981, 1984), Roche (1989) and Natta (1996) are among the rare French analysts of fashion. They show a deep knowledge of the dress of past centuries, but their effort systematically stops at the turn of the twentieth century or at best skims over contemporary fashion. In *Les Dessus et Les Dessous de la Bourgeoisie* (1981), Perrot, for instance, who informs the readers that he wants to analyse 'the truly social dimension of dress' (7), concentrates on the nineteenth century in a brilliant account of the bourgeois consumption of dress: contemporary fashion is not considered. In *Le Corps Féminin* (1984), he looks at the history of the female body in eighteenth and nineteenth century France, offering an analysis of its relation to clothes, but once again it is a body dressed with the aura of historical insight. As Certeau notes of Louvet and Rétif's novels, 'the thickness of history here replaces

geographical distance' (1993: 48), which, to borrow a remark Pinto made about ethnology, offers 'the guarantees of an ennobling distance from the object' (1998: 24).

In *La Mode* (1996), Marie-Christine Natta looks at the representation of fashion in literary texts such as those of Balzac, Barbey d'Aurevilly, Montesquieu, or Gautier. These are the texts of high literature, a literature consecrated by time and history, used in this context to rehabilitate fashion as a field of enquiry. Fashion, as in Certeau's work, is thus repositioned outside of contemporary practices, it is abstracted from its mass component. It is a study of fashion before it entered mass consumption, before the production of dress became industrialized and clothes mass produced commodities.

These approaches are typical of the position of French students of fashion, who favour the history of past fashions - or more precisely the history of dress rather than fashion - over the study of contemporary popular fashion, which, compared with the British academic field (see, for instance, Hebdige 1994, 1995; McRobbie 1996c, 1999; Nixon 1994; Polhemus 1996, 1997; Wilson 1987, 1998) has been the subject of very little interest. The readiness of many British researchers to study contemporary popular fashion is itself a manifestation of their wider interest in popular commercial culture, whilst the lack of similar studies in the French academic field is revealing of many French researchers' contempt for commercial and mass culture. Bourdieu, for instance, in his work on fashion, focuses on high fashion only. Popular fashion is not addressed, except as working class fashion, a fashion which, he argues, is not motivated by aesthetic criteria. In this instance fashion is thus reduced to a more anonymous and neutral 'dress' which covers the body rather than adorns it. I return to these issues in Part II.

However, it has been argued that the enthusiasm of many British cultural analysts for popular culture has also led to an excessive populism. Whereas there was a time when only high culture was deemed worthy of interest and popular culture considered uninteresting and barbaric, it now seems that for certain academics, popular culture has replaced high culture in the hierarchy of cultural values. This is what Jim McGuigan calls 'cultural populism': 'the intellectual assumption, made by some students of popular culture, that the symbolic experiences and practices of ordinary people are more important analytically and politically than Culture with a capital C' (1993: 4). The order of things is simply reversed and the idea remains that there is a culture, popular culture,

which is richer than another one, high culture. 'A populist sentiment', he adds, resides 'at the heart of British cultural studies' (13) and manifests itself in an 'unqualified enthusiasm for anything remotely "popular"' (39, see also Schudson 1998: 501). This populist sentiment has led many researchers of popular culture to idealize the people and commercial culture and overlook the political economy of popular culture. This increased interest in consumerism, McRobbie (1996a) also argues, has tended to overshadow the non-pleasurable dimensions of consumption and the fact that consumerism is not just about resistance and leisure or pleasure but also takes place 'in the sphere of necessary reproduction' (32). The popular becomes the object of an uncritical celebration of the resistant consumers or of their pleasurable readings and appropriations of texts, but the encoded closures of these texts are ignored. As Morley observes, 'the power of viewers to reinterpret meanings is hardly equivalent to the discursive power of centralized media institutions to construct the texts which the viewer then interprets, and to imagine otherwise is simply foolish' (1996: 291, see also Milner 1995: 152-153). In that respect, the work of Certeau and his collaborators also figures amongst this populist reading of the power of the resistant consumers, a reading which, as in the work of many British theorists, can quickly fall into a romantic view of the power of the people (see also Frow 1991: 58).

But whilst populism seems to be, following McGuigan, a trait common to many British students of popular culture, it is an adjective which, if relevant to the work of Certeau, is much less so to that of most French cultural theorists. Miserabilism - the tendency to 'enumerate sadly all differences as so many insufficiencies, all othernesses as so many states of lack of humanity' (Grignon et Passeron 1989: 36-37) - is maybe a more adequate term, one which, alongside its close relative, elitism, certainly applies to the work of Bourdieu, as I discuss in the following chapter.

*Part II*

*Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture*

In part I I looked at two traditions of analysis of popular culture, the British and the French. In part II I turn to the discourse of one particular member of the latter, Pierre Bourdieu. Before that, however, I would like to comment on a few points concerning my own reading of Bourdieu's sociology.

Bourdieu (1999d) draws attention to the two types of fields which must be distinguished in the consideration of the international circulation of ideas. These are the 'field of reception' of a particular work and its 'field of production'. In part II I will argue that Bourdieu's sociology is very much a product of a particular field of production, the French. Like many French academics, he has paid little attention to contemporary mass culture, which he derides as alienating. He privileges culture as high culture and defends cultural universalism.

My own critique of Bourdieu, however, is made from a field of reception - the British tradition of cultural theory - different from the field of production of his work. It arises from a different perspective. This situation cannot but be reflected in the substance of my discussion of Bourdieu's approach to popular culture, which I have interpreted 'in accordance with the structure of the field of reception' (Bourdieu 1999d : 221) and the categories of thought at work in this field. As Bourdieu notes, 'the sense and function of a foreign work is determined not simply by the field of origin, but in at least equal proportion by the field of reception' (222).

The British analyses of popular culture I have studied over the last four or five years have informed my reading of Bourdieu's work. I have reflected on this work via these studies, whose frequent concern with re-evaluating popular culture I share, and whose conceptual framework I have appropriated. This is why, if Part I provides a picture of the field of production of Bourdieu's work, the French tradition, it also provides a picture of the field of reception, the British tradition, from which this work has been read and discussed in the present thesis.

## LOCATING CULTURE

Although Bourdieu insists that ‘one cannot fully understand cultural practices unless “culture”, in the restricted, normative sense of ordinary usage, is brought back into “culture” in the anthropological sense, and the elaborated taste for the most refined objects is reconnected with the elementary taste for the flavours of food’ (1996a: 1), culture, in his work, rarely refers to its anthropological definition, as will be argued throughout this chapter. Rather, it is generally synonymous with high culture only, in its ‘narrower and more classic sense referring to “cultural oeuvres”, that is, to the socially valorised symbolic productions which belong to the domain of arts and letters’ (Cuche 1996: 81). In that respect Bourdieu does not fundamentally depart from the French tradition I looked at in Part I, and in his work, as in the work of many French researchers, little room has been made for the analysis of commercial popular culture, a culture he dismisses, as I will show drawing on his discussions of music and television.

In his writing, the popular is the attribute of a specific segment of the population, a dominated one (see, for example, 1996a: 384, 1995a: 4, 1999b: 102): the working class. In the French edition of *Distinction* (1979) for instance, the expression Bourdieu uses is ‘*les classes populaires*’, which in the English translation (1996a) Richard Nice has rightly translated as ‘the working classes’ - a class whose members are the consumers of mass culture (see Bourdieu 1996a: 386). For Bourdieu, as for many cultural theorists, as discussed in Part I, the mass, the people and the working class are one and the same thing.

Bourdieu uses the expression ‘working class’ both in the singular form (390) and the plural (382). The working class(es) include the ‘peasant class’ (384) - farm workers and farmers (136) - and ‘the industrial working class’ (384) - unskilled, semi-skilled, skilled workers, and foremen (136). He does not actually use the expression ‘popular culture’, rather he uses the adjective ‘popular’ in conjunction with notions such as ‘aesthetic’ (see, for example 1996d: 84 or 1996a: 32), ‘taste’ (see, for example, 1996a: 16), or ‘speech’ (1999b: 90) denying at the same time the existence and reality of a

‘popular aesthetic’, an issue developed in this chapter. Popular culture, according to Bourdieu, cannot really be called a culture; the expression is a contradiction in terms.

Cultural hierarchies, he argues, are structured by the dominance of high cultural values and the Kantian aesthetic. It is a model whose social conditions of existence he unravels, but which he also does not essentially question, as I will argue throughout this chapter, failing to break with the doxic view - ‘an uncontested acceptance of the daily lifeworld’ (Bourdieu 1996c: 73) - of the superior value of high culture over popular culture, and he thus ends up reproducing the very discourse whose arbitrariness he had set out to unveil. Accounting for the significance of popular culture in today’s society might have helped him break with the cultural doxa, as might a cross cultural analysis. However, although Bourdieu has conducted little comparative research, he has extended the validity of his analysis beyond the French national boundaries, thereby showing a tendency towards universalisation which has not gone unchallenged. Thus, in this chapter, I will also look at authors who have drawn attention to the ‘Frenchness’ of his analysis and the cultural specificity of some of the conceptual tools he uses, such as the notion of cultural capital, which has been appropriated by British analysts. I will also point to the limits of his purely class analysis of cultural consumption and practices.

## **1. On Popular (Non-)Culture**

### **1. 1. Contemporary Popular Culture**

In Bourdieu’s work, contemporary popular culture remains a neglected field of enquiry. As Fowler observes, ‘a detailed feel for the nature of popular culture within urban modernity’ (1997: 160) is missing from his work. ‘There is’, she adds, ‘very little exploration of popular genres themselves in contemporary societies’ (162). By ‘popular’ here, Fowler means ‘working class’, and she focuses on one type of popular culture, popular writing. In this chapter, I will argue, however, that Bourdieu has neglected popular culture not only as working class culture, but also as contemporary mass cultural forms and practices, not necessarily restricted to one class segment of the population. While I will be returning to the former later, I would for now like to show that his neglect of the latter can be illustrated by his writings on music and television, and, as will be developed in the next chapter, by his discussion of fashion.

Cultural practices and consumption patterns, Bourdieu argues, vary according to class belonging (1996a: 13). There are 'three zones of tastes' related to social classes; the 'legitimate taste', the 'middle-brow taste', and the 'popular taste', the taste 'more frequent among the working classes' (16). To illustrate this idea, Bourdieu uses the example of taste in music as the best indicator of class belonging. But by music, he implies classical music only, so-called high music, which, he argues, calls for interiority and deep spiritual relation. Music, he notes, is 'the pure art by excellence' (1995d: 103), which appeals to the soul and not the body. Rock and pop being very much associated with bodily enjoyment - as Willis (1978: 77-78) argues, rock'n'roll 'allows the return of the body in music' after it had been forced out by the classical European tradition - are thus excluded from Bourdieu's discourse, which thereby reproduces a classic distinction between mind and body as in the Kantian aesthetic tradition I discuss later.

Music, Bourdieu also writes, is 'the most radical and most absolute form of the negation of the world, and especially of the social world, which the bourgeois ethos tends to demand of all forms of art' (1996a: 19). Here music means bourgeois music, that is, in Bourdieu's work, classical music, a high form of culture which for him is the preserve of the bourgeoisie only, and its 'legitimate taste' (Bourdieu 1996a). Thus concerts, he continues, are 'predisposed to become one of the great bourgeois celebrations' (1995d: 104), unlike, Bourdieu omits to say, rock concerts which have often sought to oppose bourgeois order. In his essay 'Music Lovers: Origin and Evolution of the Species' (1995d), it is a very limited species that Bourdieu looks at: the lovers of music as high music, which 'says nothing and has *nothing to say*' (103). Popular musics like blues or rock which are very much inscribed in the social world, unlike high music's 'negation of the world' and which *have* something to say - rock music, for instance, Shusterman points out, carries 'covert messages [...] complex levels of meaning (somatic as well as discursive)' allowing the expression of 'protests and pride' (2000: 188) - are excluded from Bourdieu's considerations. Thus in a special issue of his journal *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* entitled *Musique et Musicien* (1995), the only music looked at is high music. Published since 1974, this journal has so far not looked at pop music, an omission which probably has a lot to do with Bourdieu's dismissal of mass culture.

In *Distinction*, for example, he writes, in an account which owes more to *a priori* judgement than empirical research, that ‘it is not only in music or sport that ordinary people are *reduced to* the role of the “fan”, the militant “supporter” *locked in* a passionate, even chauvinistic, but *passive* and *spurious* participation which is *merely an illusory* compensation for *dispossession* by experts’ (1996a: 386, my emphasis). He also talks about “mass market” cultural products - music whose *simple, repetitive* structures invite a *passive, absent* participation, *prefabricated* entertainments which the new engineers of cultural mass production design for television viewers’ (386, my emphasis).

In these quotes the adjectives in italics could easily be found in the writing of mass culture theorists such as those of the Frankfurt School. Bourdieu’s use of the word ‘prefabricated’ for instance, Wilson (1988: 57) observes, recalls Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1989). Bourdieu’s work on popular music - ‘passive’, ‘illusory’, ‘spurious’ - she adds (58), echoes the latter’s on movies, and in the writing of these authors, mass culture is more akin to ‘mass deception’ (see Adorno and Horkheimer 1989: 120-167) than culture *per se*. Bourdieu is unable to avoid contempt for what he sees as the petite-bourgeoisie and the working classes’ passive participation in culture (Wilson 1988: 57). His work, Wilson argues, has not benefited from American studies of mass culture, which, like many British ones, as discussed in Part I, have tried to rid themselves of the traditional elitist prejudices of mass cultural theorists by paying attention to agents’ engagement with mass culture. Complexities and contradictions have been unravelled (see also, for instance, on the topic of music Frith 1998b; Small 1998) that Bourdieu in his writing on music fails to theorise.

Moreover, whilst Shusterman (2000) has focused on the this-worldliness of rock music, as discussed above, just as with the high music privileged by Bourdieu, Simon Frith has argued that one can ‘be taken out of oneself (and one’s society)’ (1998b: 251) while listening to pop music. Pop fans, he continues ‘have an aesthetic mode of listening. Pop fans too believe that music derives its value “from its inner private soul”’ (252). Elitist accounts of popular music are all informed by the same error: ‘the condescending assumption that popular listening describes a quite different sort of experience’ (252). Such a condescending approach also informs Bourdieu’s writing on television, another

topic of mass culture which was largely ignored by him until very recently with the publication of *On Television and Journalism* (1998e).

Nicholas Garnham (1995: 187), one of the founding editors, with James Curran, of the journal *Media, Culture and Society*, has expressed his surprise at Bourdieu's neglect of the topic of television, especially given its cultural importance nowadays. This neglect is the more surprising since Bourdieu was himself, from the very beginning (1979), on the editorial advisory board of the journal. It is also puzzling, Garnham notes, for the reason that 'much of the debate around the question of the dominant ideology and its formation and function in contemporary capitalist societies has been conducted within US and UK social science in terms of the mass media in general and television in particular' (1995: 188, see also Dant 1999: 21). Garnham could find an answer to his astonishment in the very fact mentioned in the quote: in the Anglo-Saxon world debates on the role of TV and mass media are being conducted, whilst the French intellectual tradition has tended to neglect the study of popular cultural forms including the media, as I discussed in Part I (see also Buxton 1990: 162; Lazar 1991: 7; Prochasson 2000: 187 on the topic of media studies in France).

Lemieux (1999) distinguishes three stages in the evolution of Bourdieu's discourse on the media. First the 1960s, during which Bourdieu does not show much interest in this topic but still condemns, in an article published in *Les Temps Modernes* in 1963 and co-written with Passeron, the attitude of what he then called the '*massmédilogues*' (his pejorative coinage for researchers of the mass media) such as Morin and Barthes who, as discussed in Part I, insisted on the passivity of mass audiences. Bourdieu argued at that time that there is no such thing as a mass of people vulnerable to the message of the media, since it can actually be resisted and read differently. He condemned 'abstract *massmédiologie*' (Bourdieu, quoted in Lemieux 1999: 207) and its lack of empiricism. At the time though, he shows no interest in conducting such empirical studies and he largely ignores the topic. In the 1970s and 1980s, though the mass media are still peripheral to the concerns of Bourdieu and his collaborators, his interest in the topic, Lemieux notes, grows. Bourdieu's discourse, however, in line with the French social sciences' *état d'esprit* that I looked at in Chapter 2, is now focused on issues of reproduction and domination; the media are depicted as

'instruments for the reproduction of social domination' never 'as instruments of emancipation' (Lemieux 1999: 210). Finally, it is only in the 1990s, Lemieux stresses, that Bourdieu shows a specific interest for the media with the publication of his first book devoted entirely to the topic, *On Television and Journalism* (1998e).

This book, however, clearly illustrates Bourdieu's unconditional dismissal of mass culture. Television for instance, Bourdieu notes, 'poses a serious danger for all the various areas of cultural production - for art, for literature, for sciences, for philosophy, and for law' (10). Here, cultural production means *high* cultural production, the noble production of the elite, whereas, it can be inferred, popular culture is a lower form of human creation. Bourdieu once more focuses on culture as high culture, the culture which is at the centre of his own interest, that is 'the cultural productions that I consider (and I'm not alone here, at least I hope not) the highest human products - maths, poetry, literature, philosophy' (27). Bourdieu's position on the idea of the superior value of high culture is here boldly stated, and the traditional opposition between high culture and popular culture reproduced rather than questioned.

Thus he sees television as an entirely pernicious medium which leaves no room for active agency. As he puts it, he does not believe in agents' 'ability to spin out elaborate "readings" of the "ironic metatextual" messages' (9) of those working in advertising and television, such as journalists, who, he stresses, 'can *impose* on the whole of society their vision of the world' (47, my emphasis). 'Anyone who thinks otherwise', he continues, 'has simply surrendered to a populist version of the most perverse forms of academic pedantry' (9). For Bourdieu, the media slowly sap the assets of a whole civilisation and impede 'the progress of the universal' (66), that of 'the highest human creations' (65) such as abstract art, poetry, classical music, philosophy, all chosen in *Distinction* as indexes of cultural capital, meaning high cultural capital, as I will discuss later. A parallel between Bourdieu's views and those of Adorno's can again be made in what appears to be their bleak and pessimistic vision of the future of democracy and Culture - as Bourdieu more recently again warns: 'culture is in danger' (2001: 75) - threatened by a totalitarian, alienating and inauthentic media (Lemieux 1999: 214).

## 1.2. What Popular Culture is Not: a Culture

Within the working class, Bourdieu argues, are found 'the most *culturally deprived* people' (1996e: 315, my emphasis). The claim that there are people who are deprived of culture has for many years now been opposed by many cultural analysts, not least in the British academic field, as discussed in Part I, and its validity would be contradicted if Bourdieu really were to adhere to an anthropological understanding of the notion of culture. And it is because in his work culture means high culture, a culture the working class lacks knowledge of, that for Bourdieu this class is culturally deprived. The step of turning individuals who are not knowledgeable in a specific form of culture - high culture, a 'legitimate culture' (1996a: 323) - into individuals without culture *tout court* is a great one, but Bourdieu takes it with extraordinary ease.

This legitimate culture, for Bourdieu, is behind the cultural practices of the working class, since these practices can only be understood by reference to high culture, that is in a negative relation of deprivation - a notion I return to later - and pale imitation of the goods consumed by the bourgeoisie. Thus the working class, Bourdieu argues, has a lifestyle which 'is characterized by the presence of *numerous cheap substitutes* for these rare goods, "sparkling white wine" for champagne, *imitation* leather for real leather, *reproductions* for paintings, indices of a *dispossession* at the second power, which accepts the definition of the goods worthy of being possessed' (1996a: 386, my emphasis). The working class for Bourdieu has no original culture of its own and is constantly dominated by the cultural choices of the dominant class. Thus,

if there is no popular art in the sense of an art of the urban working class, it is perhaps because this class knows no other hierarchies than the purely negative ones which are measured by distance from the absolute poverty and insecurity of the sub-proletariat, and remains fundamentally defined by the relation of dispossessed to possessor which links it to the bourgeoisie in culture as in other areas. (1996a: 395)

The cultural practices of the working class are always enacted 'by default' (394). They are 'purely negative' (394) practices, subordinated to the dominant values of the dominant class. There is no such thing as popular culture; rather there are the cultural practices of the working class which, defined in relation to high culture only, that is

bourgeois culture, do not constitute a culture of their own. When Bourdieu (1996d) looks at how manual workers relate to photography, for instance, it is always in relation to high cultural values that the practice of these workers is evaluated. It is as if Bourdieu always pointed at *what is not* in the photographic experience of the working class rather than at *what is*. The practices Bourdieu analyses end up characterized by a void due to the lack of high culture. They are practices dictated by frustrations, enacted by default, rather than positively expressed. Photography, Bourdieu thus notes, '*continually* confronts its practitioners with the question of its own legitimacy', it '*condemns* its practitioners to create a *substitute* for the sense of cultural legitimacy which is given to the priests of all the legitimate arts' (1993a: 131, my emphasis). However, even if photographic practitioners were looking for recognition, they do not necessarily spend all their time doing so. They very probably forget the question of legitimisation to focus on the activity itself in isolation from a constant reference to the legitimate arts. This situation of forgetting, the French Passeron and Grignon (1989) argue, must also be looked at, as seen in Chapter 2, but Bourdieu fails to do so.

Little insight is actually gained into agents' engagement with photography. Both the working class' and the middle class' relation to it are reduced to a single trait, a functional dimension only - collecting snapshots for the former and the desire 'to ennoble themselves culturally' (1996d: 9) for the latter - whilst the upper class is said to simply reject photography as too popular and not distinguished enough. Thus photography, Bourdieu argues, like any 'ordinary practice is *necessarily* ritualistic and ceremonial, and therefore stereotyped as much in its choice of objects as in its expressive techniques: as an institutional piety, it is *only* carried out in consecrated circumstances and places and associated with the solemnization of the solemn and the consecration of the sacred' (38-39, my emphasis). Here the emphasis is again on photography as a constrained practice, on its limitations, as expressed by the use of the words 'necessarily' and 'only', words which recur across his writing on the working classes ('only' is the translation of '*ne...que*' (see Bourdieu 1965: 63 for the French text), which the French sociologist constantly uses. It is an expression which disqualifies the properties it is attached to and relegates them to a negligible position denied any real weight or proper significance, as when he notes that '*le populisme n'est jamais que l'inversion d'un éthnocentrisme*'

(1979: 435) ['populism is never anything other than an inverted ethnocentrism'] (1996a: 374)). No room is made for the poetic and disruptive ways of making do with the resources of everyday life, which Certeau argues, as discussed in Chapter 3, are part of consumers' tactics in the conduct of ordinary life. Bourdieu still concentrates, as Certeau notes of his work on the Kabyle house (see Bourdieu 1997d), on 'his speciality'; that is, the idea of 'the "reproduction" of the social hierarchies and the repetition of their ideologies' (Certeau 1988: 52) enacted through unconscious practices. This is why, Certeau notes, in Bourdieu's study, and the comment can be applied to Bourdieu's account of photographic practice, 'a passive and nocturnal actor is substituted for the sly multiplicity of strategies' (58), strategies I come back to in the next chapter and in Part III, in relation to fashion.

Thus for Bourdieu popular cultural practices do not constitute the ground for an autonomous field of popular culture. They are *only* dominated by high cultural values, and in contrast with the 'most culturally deprived' members of the working class, it is the members of the bourgeoisie who set these values and are the possessors of culture as high culture, 'that present incarnation of the sacred' (1996a: xiii). This conflation of the notions of high culture and culture in Bourdieu's work reproduces the arbitrary superior position of high culture, an arbitrariness he seeks to unravel whilst at the same time paradoxically endorsing its effects; culture is high culture. This paradox can further be illustrated by the words he uses in his accounts of the working class. I have already mentioned his use of the adverbs 'only' and 'necessary', the latter being a key term in his analysis, in the idea of the 'taste for necessity' (1996a: 374), to which I return in the next chapter. 'Deprivation' is another word he frequently uses (in French '*dépossession*', see for instance Bourdieu 1979: 450-452). As Frow observes:

the concept of 'deprivation' is itself unsatisfactory because it accepts as given the norms of high culture. Cultural disadvantage is, in fact, operative only *on the ground of high culture*. Bourdieu assumes that the legitimacy of this ground is still imposed on the dominated classes; but it may well be the case, particularly since the massive growth of a television culture in which working-class people tend to be fully competent, that it has become largely irrelevant. (Bourdieu never seeks to *establish* the case for the legitimacy of high culture; he simply assumes it - and he pays little attention to television). (1987: 65, see also Rigby 1991: 112-113)

The competence Frow mentions, which could be called a popular cultural one, constitutes the ground for a popular cultural capital, a type of capital I discuss in Part III, but also one Bourdieu has failed to consider, as will be developed later in this chapter.

Thus for Bourdieu, there is no such thing as popular culture, as a positive or autonomous culture. The expression itself is, he argues, a contradiction in terms: ‘the question isn’t whether *for me* there is or is not “popular culture”, but whether there is in reality something that resembles what people who talk about “popular culture” think they are referring to. And to that question my answer is “no” (1995a: 4, see also 1994: 150-155). There is no popular culture but only a set of practices and representations which are

only the scattered fragments of an old erudite culture (such as folk medicine), [...] and not the counter-culture [those who believe in the existence of a ‘popular culture’] call for, a culture truly raised in opposition to the dominant culture and consciously claimed as a symbol of status or a declaration of separate existence. (1996a: 395)

Popular practices and representations are here those of folk culture, or what remains of it. These are not the practices and representations of contemporary urban culture looked at by many British cultural analysts as seen in Part I, and which are not necessarily resistant to a dominant order, nor are they those of Certeau’s ordinary everyday culture of the consumers turned producers, a culture *The Guardian* refers to in its construction of high fashion as popular fashion (see Part III).

It is precisely because the working class is a dispossessed class dominated by the bourgeoisie that, for Bourdieu, they participate in the reproduction and legitimation of the values of the latter; to relate to the social world, ‘the dominated apply categories constructed from the point of view of the dominant to relations of domination, making them appear natural’ (1998b: 41). Bourdieu calls this phenomenon ‘symbolic violence’ (see, for instance, Bourdieu 1993b, 1996c), a violence which allows the values of the dominant class to be imposed on the dominated classes, with their unconscious and ‘tacit complicity’ (1998e: 17). It is through the ‘destructive or reductive viewpoint of the dominant aesthetic’ (1996a: 48) that working class agents perceive their dominated lifestyle, and it would be easy, Bourdieu also argues, to enumerate the features of this lifestyle, which ‘through the sense of incompetence, failure or cultural unworthiness,

imply a form of recognition of the dominant values' (386). Thus in Bourdieu as in Adorno, as Wilson (1988: 58) observes, the choices the working classes make are not really choices. Rather, they are the outcome of the system's capacity to make dominated agents unconsciously act in accordance with its dominant values. 'The dominated seldom escape the antinomy of domination' (Bourdieu 1996c: 82), a fact which, Bourdieu argues, populist attempts to celebrate or canonize 'popular culture' often forget. Here is another idea dear to Bourdieu: that of the consecration of popular culture and the struggle for its legitimation.

'Popular culture', according to him, is a strategic invention of populist analysts, who, engaged in the struggle for the definition of legitimate culture, *only* wish to create for themselves a position in the intellectual field by contesting the dominant position of high culture: 'what is at stake in the struggles about the meaning of the social world is power over the classificatory schemes and systems which are the basis of the representations of the groups and therefore of their mobilization and demobilization' (1996a: 479, see also 1994: 150-155, 1996c: 82-83). However, as I argue in Chapter 6, this is a highly reductive approach which empties critical debates of their content and reduces them to the game of symbolic competition.

The position of cultural analysts within the field of intellectual production is, according to Bourdieu, directly related to the positions of these analysts on the issue of cultural hierarchy. It is the dominated cultural analysts who will tend to produce works for the legitimation of the dominated culture: 'most of the types of discourse which have been or are produced in support of the "people" come from producers occupying dominated positions in the field of production [...] the more-or-less idealized "people" is often a refuge against failure or exclusion' (1994: 151).

However, Bourdieu adds, if researchers disagree on the definition of culture and on what constitutes legitimate culture, they agree on the principle of debating the issue; they agree on disagreeing. As Bourdieu notes:

culture is a stake which, like all social stakes, simultaneously presupposes and demands that one take part in the game and be taken in by it [...]. The value of culture, the supreme fetish, is generated in the initial investment implied by the mere fact of entering the game, joining in the collective

belief in the value of the game which makes the game and endlessly remakes the competition for the stakes. The opposition between the 'authentic' and the 'imitation', 'true' culture and 'popularization', which maintains the game by maintaining belief in the absolute value of the stake, conceals a collusion that is no less indispensable to the production and reproduction of the illusion, the fundamental recognition of the cultural game and its stakes. (1996a: 250)

It is this fundamental recognition which constitutes the doxa (see, for instance, Bourdieu 1996c, 1997a) of the cultural game; that is, the tacit agreement on the legitimacy of the stakes, issues and concepts fought over in a struggle between the orthodox defenders of the existing order and its heterodox opponents, a doxa which, on the topic of aesthetics, Bourdieu however fails to break away from, thus further contributing to the legitimation of culture as high culture, an issue I now turn to.

## **2. On the Popular Aesthetic**

### **2. 1. Bourdieu and the Kantian Aesthetic**

In *Distinction* (1996a) as in *Photography* (1996d), Bourdieu wants to show that it is the Kantian aesthetic which organizes judgements on cultural objects. These judgements are split between a set of dichotomies at the basis of Kant's opposition between a pure aesthetic, that of the dominant class, as will further be discussed in the next section, and a popular one, that of the working class, 'which is the exact opposite of the Kantian aesthetic' (1996a: 5). Bourdieu gives a concise summary of what this aesthetic encompasses:

Kant, in order to apprehend in its pure state the irreducible specificity of aesthetic judgment, strove to distinguish 'that which pleases' from 'that which gratifies' and, more generally, to separate 'disinterestedness', the sole guarantee of the specifically aesthetic quality of contemplation, from the 'interest of the senses' which defines 'the agreeable', and from the 'interest of Reason' which defines 'the Good'. By contrast, working class people, who expect every image explicitly to fulfil a function, if only that of a sign, refer, often explicitly, to norms of morality or agreeableness in all their judgements. Whether praising or blaming, their appreciation refers to a system of norms whose principle is always ethical. (1996d: 85-86)

The dominant aesthetic is informed by the notions of form, mind, distance and disinterest, whereas it is the ideas of content, the body, immediacy and interest which inform the working class' engagement with cultural objects. In *Distinction* (1996a: 200-201), Bourdieu illustrates this with the example of the consumption of food by the bourgeoisie and the working class. Whereas the former is highly concerned with the 'form and appearance' (200) of food, the latter is *only* interested, according to Bourdieu, in its content, its substance rather than its appearance, which is the domain of the aesthete. Working class and bourgeoisie, he stresses, are opposed to each other like 'being to seeming' (200).

Thus, 'nothing is more alien to popular consciousness than the idea of an aesthetic pleasure that, to put it in Kantian terms, is independent of the charming of the senses' (42). The popular taste asks for 'an added element of charm and emotion for its delight' (42), the delight, according to Bourdieu, of facile pleasure, the pleasure of the senses, opposed to an aesthetic and 'pure pleasure', a 'pleasure purified of pleasure' (6). The bourgeoisie, in contrast, expects works of art to appeal not to its senses but to its mind, and 'conceives its relation to the populace in terms of the relationship of the soul to the body' (19). It is distinguished by a 'taste of reflection' (6) - as opposed to a 'taste of sense' - which for Kant, as noted by Bourdieu, is a guarantee of 'moral excellence', the only route to 'the capacity for sublimation which defines the truly human man' (6) and therefore 'help to legitimate the bourgeois claim to "natural distinction"' (57).

In the pure aesthetic, the body and more exactly its physicality is denied. Carnal enjoyment is banned, and so is the body's fleshliness. However, on this topic, the distinction between Kant's ideas and Bourdieu's own becomes blurred in what ultimately appears to be Bourdieu's endorsement of Kant's privileging of the spiritual over the physical. Thus although Bourdieu notes that 'music is a "bodily thing"' (1995d: 105), for instance, and that 'the most "mystical", the most "spiritual" of the arts is perhaps simply the most corporeal' (105), the material body is actually left, by Bourdieu, 'outside of' the aesthetic realm, as it is in his discussion of fashion consumption, as will be developed in the next chapter. The body he talks about is a body exempted from movement, not alive in its fleshly materiality, but fixed and turned into some sort of spiritualised body, an ethereal entity that music 'ravishes, moves, stirs, carries away' (105) as it would the mind

of the listener. The body Bourdieu describes is not a body in action, made of matter, of flesh, but a body consisting only of emotions. It is a body which has transcended its own substance, unlike the body described by Shusterman (2000: 184), that offers an 'energetic and kinesthetic response' to rock, a 'funky' engagement with it, that is, in the African meaning of the word, a 'positive sweat', which, to borrow Willis' comment on the beat in rock'n'roll, 'establishes the ascendancy of the body over the mind' (1978: 78). This contrasts with the distant and dispassionate inner-bodily contemplation which Bourdieu argues is characteristic of music, that is high music. Here Bourdieu conforms to the Kantian aesthetic by neglecting all somatic responses to music, responses not noble enough, it seems, to be aesthetically legitimate, contrary to postmodern accounts of aesthetic consumption, a point I return to shortly.

Moreover, Bourdieu notes, the body's transcendence of its own substance and the state of pure spiritual engagement with cultural objects can only be achieved through a distance from the material world, a distance, he argues, unknown to the working class' experience of cultural forms. The popular class' relationship to photography, for example, is one of 'immediate attachment' (1996d: 58). It is 'simple, direct and, perhaps, comfortable' (59). It 'is first-order pleasure obtained from a work that recreates a reality which is delectable in itself, and which can be perceived immediately, without study or effort' (59). It is against this "'first-degree" perception' (1996a: 34) that, Bourdieu stresses, the bourgeois distanciation of pure aesthetic contemplation asserts itself.

## 2. 2. Bourdieu's Difference from Kant's Position

However, although 'in the last instance' Bourdieu adheres to Kant's dichotomies and rejects the validity of the concept of the popular aesthetic, thus reproducing the discourse of legitimation of Kant's pure aesthetic as the sole aesthetic, an issue I come back to in the next section, his analysis differs from Kant's on two major points. Firstly, according to Bourdieu everything can be subject to aesthetic judgement; secondly, this judgement must be socially and historically situated. As expressed by Bourdieu: 'we may concede that Kant's aesthetics is true, but only as a phenomenology of the aesthetic experience of those who are the product of *schöle*, leisure, distance from economic necessity, and practical urgency' (1996c: 88). This is why

the sociologist does not intend to refute Kant's phrase that 'the beautiful is that which pleases without concept', but rather he or she sets out to define the social conditions which make possible both this experience and the people for whom it is possible (art lovers or 'people of taste') and thence to determine the limits within which it can exist. (1997b: 109)

Bourdieu's project is not fundamentally to question the legitimacy of Kant's aesthetics; rather, it aims to unravel the social conditions of its existence.

'Any cultural asset', Bourdieu notes, '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' (1993a: 220). However, one is left with the issue of the original motivation of judgements, an issue Bourdieu raises through the metaphor "'is she pretty because I love her, or do I love her because she is pretty?'" (1996e: 286). To get away from this vicious circle the researcher has to conduct an analysis of the social conditions of production of taste.

For Bourdieu, and unlike Kant, aesthetic experience cannot be explained as an independent expression of the mind, an autonomous and universal spiritual life, but as a socially and historically constituted disposition. This is why tastes, Bourdieu writes, are 'markers of "class"' (1996a: 1). The contemplative distance valued by the aesthete is nothing but a distance from financial needs, made possible by the privileged social position of the agent: 'the aesthetic disposition is one dimension of a distant, self-assured relation to the world and to others which presupposes objective assurance and distance' (56).

This 'objective assurance and distance' can only be achieved through the possession of economic capital, which keeps the aesthete at 'distance from necessity' (53). It allows one to have, in Virginia Woolf's words, 'a room of one's own' (1945), the space, literally and metaphorically, to develop one's aesthetic relation to artworks. It also 'neutralize[s] ordinary urgencies and ... bracket[s] off practical ends' (1996a: 54).

It is because the working class lacks economic capital that, Bourdieu argues, its taste is a 'taste for necessity' (374) which seeks in all cultural objects "'value for money'" (378). It is a taste which condemns them to like *only* what they can *afford* to like, an issue I return to in the next chapter. In contrast, the bourgeoisie's tastes are 'tastes

of luxury (or freedom)' (177) enabled not only by one's possession of economic capital but also by that of cultural capital; that is, the set of cultural resources, whether embodied in bodily manners for instance, objectified, such as in books or works of art, or institutionalised, in diplomas, which allows one to gain social power and distinction (see, for instance, Bourdieu 1996c: 119, 1997a: 124-125). Cultural capital, Bourdieu argues, is acquired through education and regular and early contact with legitimate culture, for instance artworks (1996a: 70-71, 1997b: 36), and it is this 'long individual history [...] of prolonged exposure to the work of art' (1996e: 289) that allows one's aesthetic engagement with it.

It is not only because the working class lacks economic capital but also because it lacks cultural capital that it cannot entertain an aesthetic relation to artworks:

today the most culturally deprived people seem to lean towards a taste described as 'realist' because, unlike lovers of art, they do not possess in a *practical state* the *specific categories* stemming from the autonomization of the field of production (which permit differences in manner and style to be perceived in an immediate manner) and so can apply to works of art only the practical schemas they use in daily experience. (315)

By lack of cultural capital Bourdieu means lack of high cultural capital, the only possible cultural capital since for him culture means high culture. However, British cultural theorists like Simon Frith, have, although drawing on the notion of cultural capital, applied it to the consumption of contemporary popular cultural forms. This is a break with Bourdieu's way of thinking, and makes its limitations clear, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Thus because, for the French sociologist, the working class has no cultural capital, it cannot develop an aesthetic taste for cultural objects, and, in the same way that for him there is no popular culture, nor is there any popular aesthetic. There is a point in *Photography*, for instance, where Bourdieu appears to hint at the possibility of a working class aesthetic: he refers to 'the "aesthetic" which finds expression in [the judgements of manual and clerical workers]' and which 'derives its specific characteristics from the fact that it is seen, at least in a confused way, as one aesthetic among others' (1996d: 84). The idea of a popular aesthetic seems to find some room in this quote. However, Bourdieu

also writes that ‘absent from the act of looking at photographs, properly aesthetic consideration is entirely alien to photographic practice’ (59) as experienced by the working classes, a practice which, ‘unable to free itself from the functions [supplying pictures which permit recognition] to which it owes its existence, [...] cannot create its own goals and fulfil the specific intentions of an autonomous aesthetic’ (32).

The use of the word ‘properly’ in the above quote brings the reader back to the Kantian model which, in Bourdieu’s work, sets the norms for cultural judgement. The aesthetic of the popular class is not really an aesthetic proper, an idea which can also be illustrated by Bourdieu’s use, throughout *Photography* and *Distinction*, of scare quotes around the word aesthetic when discussed in relation to the popular class as in the quotation in the last paragraph, or around the expression ‘popular aesthetic’, as in the title of a section of *Distinction* (1996a: 32, see also Shusterman 2000: 172). The popular aesthetic, Bourdieu is saying, cannot be considered a real aesthetic, a positive one. Rather it is, like the cultural practices of the working class discussed earlier, a ‘purely negative’ (1996a: 395) and dominated aesthetic, ‘constantly obliged to define itself in terms of the dominant aesthetic’ (41), the aesthetic which, Bourdieu stresses, is ‘universally recognized as legitimate’ (48).

And this is where I disagree with what could be called ‘optimist’ readings of Bourdieu’s notion of the popular aesthetic (see, for instance, Ang 1996; McGuigan 1993; Rigby 1991: 107). Such readings fail to see that Bourdieu does not actually, as Wolff claims, ‘wish[es] to replace traditional, Kantian aesthetics with a “popular” aesthetic’ (1993a: 36) or as Garnham and Williams claim ‘clearly see[s] his work as part of an essentially political effort to legitimize this implicit aesthetic’ (1980: 219). Similarly, Ang’s (1996) appropriation of Bourdieu’s notion of popular aesthetic to acknowledge and defend the mode of experience of popular cultural forms such as *Dallas*, is oblivious to the fact that it is a step Bourdieu does not himself take. Though it might look, as I argue above, as if Bourdieu wants to legitimise a popular aesthetic, it is simply not the case.

### 2.3. Bourdieu and the Doxa

It is precisely because Bourdieu does not question the legitimacy of the Kantian aesthetic that he fails to see in the popular aesthetic an aesthetic *per se*. Bourdieu’s ideas remain

inscribed in the doxa, that is, the set of preconceptions which structure intellectual thinking (see, for instance, Bourdieu 1996c), in this case the categories - those of the Kantian aesthetic - which have informed researchers' discussions of aesthetic judgement. The doxic view of the social world, Bourdieu says, grants the intellectual game 'a recognition that escapes questioning' (1996c: 98), the questioning necessary to the full understanding of the social world. Here Bourdieu acknowledges the influence on his work of Bachelard, who outlines the need for a reflexive analysis of the assumptions which inform the process of scientific construction (see Bourdieu 1996c).

However, in spite of his insistence on the primary importance of a reflexive sociology for advances in sociological thought, Bourdieu does not follow the rules he has set himself when looking at the dichotomies which inform the Kantian aesthetic. Although he shifts the context of analysis of such dichotomies from Kant's transcendental and universal ground to a social one, he does not question their essential validity and indeed ends up reinforcing them (see Shusterman 2000: 199 on the form/content distinction). As a result, he reproduces the doxa rather than operating an 'epistemological rupture' - 'the bracketing of ordinary pre-constructions [...], a rupture with modes of thinking, concepts, and methods that have every appearance of *common sense*' (Bourdieu 1996c: 251) - with the Kantian aesthetic, a rupture which he nevertheless insists is necessary to scientific rigour.

In contrast, postmodern thinkers have operated this epistemological break with doxic views of aesthetics. Kantian dichotomies are no longer respected; their very logic is questioned. Featherstone (1994), for instance, refers to a postmodern aesthetic of the body, as defended by Susan Sontag, who suggests 'that the art object should not be a text, but another sensory object in the world' (38). The body re-enters aesthetic experience with an 'emphasis upon sensation, on the primary immediacy of the figural as opposed to the discursive' (38). Such a view is reminiscent of Shusterman's 'arguments for the body's crucial role as a site of aesthetic experience and artistic fashioning' (2000: xiii). It is an approach which contrasts with that of Bourdieu. In his work, in accordance with the values of the Kantian aesthetic, the body is central to the working class' experience of cultural objects, not to the experience of the bourgeoisie, a centrality Bourdieu discusses only to deny the aesthetic it conveys any claim to legitimacy, as observed earlier.

In contrast, Shusterman argues for ‘the emancipatory enlargement of the aesthetic’ (2000: xv), which would ‘secure the freedom’ of concepts such as ‘art’ and ‘aesthetic’, which Bourdieu ‘concedes to high culture’s exclusive possession’ (172). Freeing these concepts from ‘monopolistic domination’ (172) would help defend ‘an *alternative* aesthetic’ (195, my emphasis), one where life would take centre stage. Chambers, for instance, draws attention to the pleasures and the aesthetic involved in the consumption of popular culture, which ‘are no longer tied to an abstract morality injected from “outside”, but to *the knowledge of inhabiting* the signs of the contemporary world’ (1993: 212, my emphasis).

Featherstone also questions the modernist ethic of distance from the work of art, a distance which is supposed to be the sole guarantee of aesthetic practice. Thus he argues for ‘de-distantiation or instantiation - that is, the pleasure from immersion into the objects of contemplation’ (1994: 71). The body is at the centre of the aesthetic experience of cultural forms, whether high or popular, consumption is bodily consumption, and contemplation immersed rather than distant, a sensual experience in dialogue with matter. Bourdieu, in his discussion of fashion, also fails to look at this sensual dialogue with artefacts, as will be developed in the next chapter.

Unlike Bourdieu, the French philosopher Jean-Marie Schaeffer (1996a) questions the validity of Kantian epistemology. Kant’s ideal of aesthetic disinterest in the work of art, he argues, is a myth which contributes to the misunderstanding of ‘aesthetic conduct’ [*la conduite esthétique*]. He writes that

to establish the specificity of the aesthetic conduct, he [Kant] felt he had to oppose it to both practical experience and cognitive attitude: wherein the thesis of aesthetic disinterest (opposed to practical interest) and that of finality without specific end. [...] Both theses come from a mythification of the aesthetic problematic: the aesthetic relation *is* a cognitive relation, since it is a form of attention to the world; and it *is* interested, since giving ourselves over to this attention, we want it to be satisfying. (16)

In other words, and to borrow an expression that Bourdieu uses, albeit to reach a different conclusion: there is an ‘interest in disinterestedness’ (1996a: 317), the interest in a satisfying experience of artworks (the interest Bourdieu refers to is for high symbolic

status, a rather reductive view of one's engagement with cultural forms, as will be discussed in Chapter 6).

Schaeffer notes that it is wrong to oppose aesthetic conduct to experiences based on practical interest, since 'all conduct is based on an interest, and all interest (including cognitive interest) is ultimately practical, in the sense that it has a vital function' (1996a: 136). For Schaeffer, the inescapability of interest means that aesthetic conduct should not be severed from its involvement with material life. This is precisely what Bourdieu does. Thus, in a way which recalls Featherstone's model of de-distantiation, and Shusterman's defense of an aesthetic 'where life is given centrality' (2000: 195), Schaeffer argues for an 'integrationist conception of the aesthetic relation' which would account for the aesthetic "engagement" in life [...] rather than a segregationist one (1996a: 136), split from the practical world. These approaches offer a departure from Bourdieu's thinking.

Thus although Bourdieu offers an incisive critique of the social conditions of existence of the Kantian aesthetic, he nevertheless fails to question the assumptions and categories of thought around which this aesthetic is articulated, thus participating in reproducing the Kantian discourse. Had Bourdieu succeeded in breaking with the doxa, he would have been able to further unravel the arbitrariness of the cultural inequalities he has set out to expose.

#### 2.4. Miserabilism and Romanticism

Finally, through the oppositions he sets up between the popular class' engagement with cultural forms and that of the bourgeoisie, Bourdieu ends up falling into a romantic vision of the people, as in the discourse of many students of popular culture discussed in Part I.

In *Distinction* Bourdieu talks about 'all the realistic choices' the working class makes, and which 'reduce practices or objects to their technical function' (1996a: 379). Such realistic practices, he argues, are opposed to the hypocritical ones of the dominant class:

the popular realism which inclines working people to reduce practices to the reality of their function, to do what they do, and be what they are ('that's the way I am'), without 'kidding themselves' ('that's the way it

is'), and the practical materialism which inclines them to censor the expression of feelings or to divert emotion into violence or oaths, are the near perfect antithesis of the aesthetic disavowal which, by a sort of essential hypocrisy (seen, for example, in the opposition between pornography and eroticism) masks the interest in function by the primacy given to form, so that what people do, they do as if they were not doing it. (200)

It is because the cultural capital of the dominant class is a privilege which appears as natural that this class can pretend that its aesthetic is legitimate (56). The bourgeoisie plays a hypocritical game motivated by an 'interest in disinterestedness' (317), the interest both in distinguishing itself from the working class and in further strengthening the symbolic violence it exercises over it.

But whereas the bourgeoisie hides behind a hypocritical assertion of the legitimacy of its taste, the working classes do not 'kid themselves', they 'do what they do', and are thus in the full reality of 'being' rather than 'seeming', as seen earlier. This is why for Bourdieu, the working classes are hostile to 'every kind of formal experimentation' (1996a: 32, see also 1996d: 57-58). Their investment with cultural forms is one of 'deliberate "naivety", ingenuousness, good-natured credulity' (1996a: 33). They favour 'a deep-rooted demand for participation' (32) over 'formal refinement' (33), which manifests itself, Bourdieu argues, in 'what we *can* appreciate, the body rather than words, substance rather than form, an honest face rather than a smooth tongue' (465).

The working class' engagement to the world appears, in Bourdieu's work, as more direct, realist and honest than that of the bourgeoisie. It is as if working class' experiences were more authentic and more natural than those of the bourgeoisie, a view which is not without the influence of a certain romanticism (Frow 1987: 64; Miller 1987: 156). This romanticism is even more pronounced in that the honest and realist popular that Bourdieu is concerned with is, as in Certeau's definition of ordinary culture as good popular culture discussed in Chapter 3, situated outside of mass culture. As Frow observes (although it should be noted that Bourdieu himself does not believe in the existence of a popular culture, as argued earlier), 'Bourdieu sets up a very conventional

opposition - as though of the authentic to the inauthentic - of popular culture to a “mass market” culture’ (1987: 62).

The honest practices Bourdieu is referring to are not those involving the consumption of contemporary popular cultural forms, but practices such as working class speech (see esp. Bourdieu 1999b), and working class people’s relation to food or art (Bourdieu 1996a). All these are practices which existed well before the advent of mass culture, a mass culture which, as discussed earlier, Bourdieu has little researched whilst at the same time deriding it as alienating and passifying. In the work of both Certeau (or for that matter Boucher, Hoggart and many others, as argued in Part I) and Bourdieu, a good popular is distinguished from a bad popular - “mass market” cultural products’, the ‘prefabricated entertainments’ (Bourdieu 1996a: 386) of popular music and television, as argued in this chapter.

Bourdieu’s depiction of the working class, the French sociologist Jeannine Verdès-Leroux (1998) argues, is a distorted one. As she puts it, not without irony given Bourdieu’s position on commercial culture, ‘the criticism against him and which I agree with is not to say that he diminishes or exalts the working class, rather it is to say that he does not describe it the way it is; he paints a representation which makes one think about commercial novels of the last century’ (114). Gartman, in contrast with Verdès-Leroux, does argue that Bourdieu’s depiction of the working class oscillates between degradation and exaltation - what Grignon and Passeron (1989), in their analysis of a variety of literary and sociological texts, also call miserabilism and populism. With the former, workers are degraded ‘to the level of an unreflective, animal existence. Workers are “natural” creatures who, because they are reduced to sheer physical labor by the class system, develop a taste for base and animal pleasure’ (Gartman 1991: 440). With the latter, this same animality is praised, and ‘workers play the role of Rousseau-like noble savages, who are unsullied by the game of cultural distinction played by the bourgeoisie and its “petite” pretenders’ (440). And it is tempting to turn Bourdieu’s attack on certain versions of populism against himself:

We could say of certain populist exaltations of ‘popular culture’ that they are the ‘pastorals’ of our epoch. As the pastoral according to Empson, they offer a sham inversion of dominant values and produce the fiction of a

unity of the social world, thereby confirming the dominated in their subordination and the dominant in their superordination. As an inverted celebration of the principles that undergird social hierarchies; the pastoral confers upon the dominated a nobility based on their adjustment to their condition and on their submission to the established order (think about the cult of *argot* or slang and, more generally, of 'popular language', of the *passéiste* extolling of the peasants of old). (1996c: 83)

Drawing on Bourdieu's own argument, it can be argued that what Gartman thinks is Bourdieu's exaltation of the working class is nothing but a populism which is ultimately akin, as Bourdieu himself implies without however extending this remark to his own work, to a certain form of elitism not untainted with miserabilism, whereby the dominant are confirmed in their domination and the dominated stigmatised in their subordination. The established order is not disturbed and once again dominant models of thought remain unchallenged; the normative doxa is respected.

### **3. Bourdieu in a Comparative Perspective**

#### **3. 1. The Role of High Culture**

The study of other societies, Taussig notes, does not only provide us 'with some critical leverage with which to assess and understand the sacrosanct and unconscious assumptions that are built into and emerge from our social forms' (quoted in LiPuma 1995: 22); cross-cultural analysis also allows researchers to rid themselves of the restrictions imposed by 'national categories of thought' (Bourdieu 1999d: 227) which are unconsciously enacted during the research process. Because these categories exist as embodied knowledge in the habitus of researchers - this habitus 'as a system of more or less well assimilated and more or less well transposable schemes of thought is nothing other than the internalization of the principles of the theory of sociological knowledge' (Bourdieu 1991: 5) - it is necessary to reflect on them to break with their self-evidence (see Bourdieu 1999d: 227). As LiPuma observes, 'the issue is whether these categories can, in their present form be applied to all societies or whether the categories themselves are culturally specific' (1995: 26). Here one can, for example, think about the notion of popular culture which in French academia, as seen in Part I, does not simply become *culture populaire*, but *culture populaire as constructed by the French academic field*.

Similarly, the English 'culture' cannot simply be translated into the French '*culture*'. Theoretical categories are field specific (see, for instance, Bourdieu 1999d). In that respect, and beyond a simple issue of language, the category 'popular culture' is culturally specific to the UK, and '*culture populaire*' is culturally specific to France. However, as Calhoun notes, Bourdieu is 'unclear as to how historically and comparatively specific his conceptual frameworks and analytic strategies are meant to be' (1995: 66). He has conducted little comparative analysis which could 'indicate how - or indeed, whether - he would make critical distinctions among epochs or types of societies or cultures' (66).

Thus not only does Bourdieu's work fail to break with the very doxic view he wants to expose, as discussed earlier, it is also biased by the limits of his empirical analysis, whose conclusions he too readily universalises. Bourdieu, it has been argued, gives high culture an importance which is very specific to French culture, and even to Parisian intellectual culture, an idea I now turn to.

In the preface to the English edition of *Distinction* Bourdieu notes that his book underlines

the particularity of the French tradition, namely, the persistence, through different epochs and political regimes, of the aristocratic model of 'court society', personified by a Parisian *haute bourgeoisie* which, combining all forms of prestige and all the titles of economic and cultural nobility, has no counterpart elsewhere, at least for the arrogance of its cultural judgements. (1996a: xi)

The aristocratic model of court society is one which privileges culture as high culture, as discussed in Part I. There, I also argue that this approach still pervades the discourse of many French academics. This model, Bourdieu points out, is also specific to France.

However, he also tends to obscure this particularism and never explicitly analyses it. There is no comparison in his work on culture between the Parisian and the wider French society, nor is his account of the French context contrasted with foreign ones. His analysis of the role of high culture and of cultural consumption takes the form of a general law to become, as Bourdieu himself argues, 'valid beyond the particular French case, and no doubt, for every stratified society' (1996a: xii). 'The Parisian version of the

art of living', he suggests, 'has never ceased to exert a sort of fascination in the "Anglo-Saxon" world, even beyond the circle of snobs and socialites, thereby attaining a kind of universality' (xi). This universality seems to be more the product of Bourdieu's preconceptions and his own tendency towards universalisation than the conclusion of empirically grounded research. Lamont, for instance, commenting on the limits of Bourdieu's empirical work, argues that in *Distinction*, he 'tends to generalize about the culture that prevails in the intellectual milieu in which he lives - arguing that it pervades the French population at large' (1992: 186, see also Jenkins 1996: 148; Shusterman 2000: 197), whilst at the same time neglecting categories other than culture on which agents draw to define their identity. Lamont uses the notion of boundary which, though she never specifically defines it, is effectively what agents rely on to define themselves as against others. There are moral, socioeconomic and cultural boundaries, but Bourdieu only focuses on the latter, she argues, neglecting moral boundaries in his analysis of cultural consumption. Whilst high culture is likely to be more valued in French intellectual society than it is in France as a whole, the specificity of Bourdieu's model can be made more salient through comparison with research conducted in other countries. Thus, drawing on her empirical analysis of the values of French and American members of the upper-middle classes, Lamont notes that the cultural boundary is less privileged in the US than in France, moral boundaries, for instance, often being favoured by Americans to distinguish themselves (see also Gartman 1991: 431; Halle 1992: 133-134). The French intellectual subculture, she stresses, is 'more cohesive' (1992: 90) than the American.

Also, French and American cultural boundaries have different formal structures: French boundaries are more stable, more universal and more hierarchical, while American boundaries are weaker. Having a broader cultural repertoire than the French, Americans are more culturally tolerant and show more cultural laissez-faire, as the distinctions they make between 'good' and 'bad' tastes are less specific, more blurred, and less stable. (90)

A similar study would have to be conducted in the UK to assess the importance of high culture in British society. However, if it may be true that in Britain high culture remains

highly valued, it might nevertheless also be true that popular culture, as seen in Part I, has become valued, as evidenced by the legitimacy it has acquired in the academic field. My analysis of the discourse on fashion in *The Guardian* also points towards a confirmation of this hypothesis.

Thus, although Bourdieu justifiably points to the power of high culture in France, not only does he fail to distance himself from this same power in privileging culture as high culture, but he also fails to look at the empirical limits of a model that he tends to universalise. In the end, and as Fowler argues in reference to working class culture - though it is a comment equally true of mass cultural forms and experiences - in the work of Bourdieu, 'there is no possibility of canonising existing popular culture' (1997: 157). She also adds:

but this is not because Bourdieu rules out a priori such a possibility. It is more likely to be due to the better-entrenched 'nobility of culture' in France than in Britain or America. To this extent it could be argued that in his cultural theory Bourdieu has been partially 'captured' by dominant ideology himself. Bourdieu's classification of the cultural field - like Goldmann's before him - leans too much on the values of the priestly or mandarin strata. (157, see also Shusterman 2000: 172)

However, and this is where I depart from Fowler, it is precisely because Bourdieu is 'captured' by the French social sciences' pervasive understanding of the notion of culture as high culture that he is not capable of conceiving of popular culture as a culture *per se*. He ends up ruling out this possibility *a priori* because he 'leans too much' on high cultural values. To borrow Bourdieu's own concepts, his intellectual habitus is very much the product of the French intellectual field. In Bourdieu's work, culture is equated with high culture not just because he simply expresses what he claims is the dominant model in French society, but also, and more problematically, because Bourdieu himself, like many French intellectuals, endorses this definition, having failed to break with doxic categories of thought. That in France the 'nobility of culture' is more entrenched than in countries such as the UK or the US should not be incompatible, contrary to what Fowler implies, with a researcher's endeavour to offer positive analyses of popular culture and

the project to question the legitimacy of the traditional opposition between high culture and popular culture; that is, challenge the cultural doxa.

Thus though Bourdieu mentions the idea that 'certain works of middle-brow art [such as westerns] may present formal characteristics predisposing them to enter into legitimate culture' (1993a: 127), he is unable to theorise the implications of such a legitimisation, attached as he is - both subjectively as a lover of high culture and objectively as an agent whose habitus is itself the product of French education - to high culture and the traditional cultural hierarchy. But if certain mass produced artefacts can become culturally legitimate, the question remains as to the implications of such a change on the structure of the field of culture and the established dominance of traditional high culture, a question which Bourdieu does not address.

### 3. 2. Cultural Capitals

Because Bourdieu does not look at popular culture as a source of cultural status, his analysis of the field of culture ends up being biased. Only high culture is acknowledged as a legitimate source of cultural distinction, and high cultural capital is the only cultural capital considered.

However, if Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital' - meaning high cultural capital - works well in societies like France where the influence of high culture is important, it might not work in more culturally varied societies with less tradition of high culture (Swartz 1997: 289), and where popular culture has moved centre stage. In the UK, for example, popular culture has entered the departments of many universities, as seen in Part I. As McGuigan puts it, in the UK 'nobody is going to be shocked in the Senior Common Room or in the Student Union Bar if you talk about the textual playfulness and popular appeal of the latest Madonna film: it's probably already on the curriculum' (1993: 83). In that respect the British educational system contrasts with education as analysed by Bourdieu (see, for instance, 1985, 1998d); that is, as a field informed by the naturalization of the supremacy of high culture as sole legitimate culture, the preserve of the dominant class, rich in high culture, whose position is thus reproduced. If true of the French educational system, where culture is often equated with high culture, as discussed in Part I, Bourdieu's analysis might be less accurate when read

in the light of British education and more specifically the field of cultural studies, where popular culture has been legitimised and, in the process, cultural and social inequalities exposed and challenged. As Morag Shiach argues, ‘uncomfortably for cultural studies, it is not clear that this [Bourdieu’s] analysis can accommodate the desire of cultural studies to see itself as apart from strategies of mystification and social stratification’ (1993: 215). Bourdieu’s appears as a ‘totalising analysis of the function of all cultural discourses within educational institutions’ (215). This leaves little room for alternative discourses and alternative cultural hierarchies such as those defended by British cultural studies. As Margaret Archer points out, though Bourdieu’s theory of education aims to outline universal laws of functioning of cultural transmission, it ‘is in fact covertly dependent upon the structure of French education - and consequently cannot be universalized’ (1993: 225). Thus Bourdieu has missed the diversity of educational systems, a diversity that a comparative and historical analysis could have revealed.

Bourdieu’s readiness to universalise the particular has also been commented upon by Lemieux (1999). He draws attention to Bourdieu’s ‘new adopted position’ (1999: 214); his growing tendency to make his views on television public, denouncing what he thinks are its dangers - it restrains public debate and damages creation and reflection. However, Lemieux also observes that this new position encompasses a ‘propensity to universalise’ Bourdieu’s own interest - his attachment to high culture - and equate it with the ‘general interest’ (214).

Bourdieu takes this position most strongly, perhaps, in his paper ‘*Questions aux Vrais Maîtres du Monde*’ [Questions to the Real Masters of the World] (1999c) published in *Le Monde*. There, Bourdieu argues for the defense of the universal values of ‘the highest works of humanity, art, literature and even science’ (3) and for their autonomy, an autonomy which, Bourdieu argues, will save culture from vanishing, since ‘when, as Ernst Gombrich said, the “ecological conditions of art” are destroyed, art and culture quickly die’ (2). Thus though he denounces some agents’ and institutions’ tendency to declare their own private interest universal, Bourdieu, in his appeal for a universal (high) culture, as Lahire (1999c: 12n7, see also Lane 2000: 190) also observes, simultaneously but also paradoxically defends the very high cultural legitimacy which he claims is always the arbitrary preserve of a social elite. Bourdieu’s plea for a universal culture ill

accommodates his criticism of Kantian aesthetics, which, he argues, as discussed in this chapter, is not natural and universal but socially and historically grounded. Only distance from the material constraints of everyday life - the possession of economic capital - and an early and regular encounter with high culture allow one to engage with artworks, a distance which, Bourdieu argues, working class people with their lack of economic capital can never experience. Bourdieu, however, neglects this when it comes to his own defense of the universal, thus reproducing the very discourse which he argues contributes to perpetuating cultural and social inequalities. Moreover, Bourdieu's sociology, with its defence of the universal, also appears very much inscribed in French sociology, a republican sociology, as discussed in Chapter 2. It is similarly informed by a universalism which pays little attention to the notions of ethnicity and gender (see also Lane 2000: 200), an issue I return to in the next section.

Finally, because Bourdieu (see, for instance, 1985, 1998d) overemphasises the role of education as an instance of socialisation and cultural structuring, he fails to account for the role of other sites in the production of knowledge, sites which have shaken the hegemony of high culture and its related capital. There are spaces such as the media, the fashion industry or the music industry, for instance, in which popular culture might well be valued as much if not more than high culture. Other forms of cultural capital have emerged, the product of acquaintance with popular cultural forms, which also allow entrance to university and the culture industry. Thus Thornton, drawing on Bourdieu's work, shows that the notion of cultural capital is not the preserve of high culture alone. She talks about subcultural capital as being paramount to the making of clubculture:

Bourdieu elaborates many subcategories of capital which operate within particular fields such as 'linguistic', 'academic', 'intellectual', 'information' and 'artistic' capital. One characterization that unifies these capitals is that they are all at play within Bourdieu's own field, within his social world of players with high volumes of institutionalized cultural capital. However, it is possible to observe subspecies of capital operating within other less privileged domains. In thinking through Bourdieu's theories in relation to the terrain of youth culture, I've come to conceive of 'hipness' as a form of subcultural capital. (1997: 11)

In the field of clubculture, a variety of signs circulate which cannot be read unless one possesses the right subcultural capital, itself a specific form of popular cultural capital, a concept Simon Frith (1998b) draws on in his discussions of popular music. 'There is such a thing', he notes, 'as a popular cultural capital' (9). The use of 'accumulated knowledge and discriminatory skill' (9) is not, he stresses, the preserve of the possessors of high cultural capital only. Such use also informs the practice and consumption of popular culture, low culture generating its own capital. This capital allows one to make distinctions between popular cultural forms, distinctions I discussed in Chapter 3. The high-low hierarchy no longer opposes, as in Bourdieu's work, traditional high culture and working class or contemporary mass culture only, but rather a variety of popular cultural forms. *The Guardian* also draws on the 'accumulated knowledge' of popular culture to construct high fashion as popular culture, itself a discriminatory and elite culture, as will be developed in Part III.

'The exercise of taste and aesthetic discrimination', Friths says, 'is as important in popular as in high culture, but is more difficult to talk about' (11). This begs the question for whom is it more difficult? And the answer must be: for academics, and particularly French academics who, like Bourdieu, were trained and educated in this institution of consecration of high culture which is the French university, and who do not have the right cultural capital to relate to, study and understand popular cultures.

High cultural capital is not necessarily, and in all countries, the privileged type of capital. Popular cultural capital, in the US (see Halle 1992; Lamont 1992) and in the UK - whether it be in academia or in the culture industries, as mentioned earlier, and as suggested by my analysis of *The Guardian*'s discourse on fashion as popular culture (see Part III) - has become increasingly valued. It is also a capital, as Frith (1998b) and Willis (1978) have shown, which involves the mastery of the history and tradition of the specific field wherein it is enacted, as well as the ability to understand the complexity of the values it encompasses. These are complexities Bourdieu fails to theorise in a model which leaves no room for acknowledgement of the multiplicity of forms of cultural capital.

Finally, it is a model which, focused as it is on patterns of consumption neatly articulated around the notion of class only, fails to discuss the variety of types of engagement with cultural forms.

3. 3. Bourdieu's Model of Class Consumption: a 'Special Case of What is Possible' (Bachelard, quoted in Bourdieu 1998c: 2)

Bourdieu, as seen earlier, relates cultural practices and tastes in cultural objects to class. Whilst the working class privileges a simple and immediate engagement with cultural forms, the bourgeois taste, a taste for high culture, is informed by a disinterested and contemplative aesthetic (1996a).

However, Garnham notes that in the UK, as far as watching television, for example, is concerned,

the link between class and patterns of consumption across all program types is very weak to nonexistent. Contrary to popular myth, as for instance the detailed work of Barwise and Ehrenberg has shown, there is no evidence that members of the dominant fraction of the dominant class watch demanding, minority, 'cultural programs', whereas the popular classes watch less demanding, lowest-common-denominator pap. (1995: 188)

Here Garnham invokes 'the dominant fraction of the dominant class', a distinction Bourdieu makes (see 1993a: 164-165): within the dominant class there are two subclasses, the dominant section of the whole class, and its dominated section. The former comprises owners of high economic capital and of comparatively low cultural capital; the latter consists of intellectuals, rich in high cultural capital but poor in economic capital.

However, if it is true that intellectuals are more likely than the popular class to consume high culture, it is also true that not all members of the dominant class show a systematic and strong interest in consecrated high culture; a distinction which, as Garnham observes, Bourdieu does not make clear. There is no evidence that, as far as watching television is concerned, the bourgeoisie's consumption of culture is essentially different from that of the working class.

What Bourdieu describes are very fixed, uniform and non-problematic practices, which do not overlap and are always structured by the cultural values and the aesthetic of the dominant class only. They are predictable and clearly assigned to class as the main conceptual tool for their understanding. The concept of ethnicity, for example, does not appear in his accounts of cultural consumption. In that respect, his work is typical of the French academic field, where, as seen in Part I, this concept has been absent from critical discussions, in contrast with Anglo-Saxon cultural analysis. J.R Hall, for example, argues that, contrary to Bourdieu's ideas, 'aesthetic value may not be defined solely from the outside' (1992: 263). That is, the aesthetic of the working class is not necessarily dominated by that of the dominant class. Ethnic belonging, for instance, can participate in the construction of an internal aesthetic valued by certain social groups. Hall gives the example of research conducted amongst the working class members of an American-Italian community who define their high standards according to purely internal considerations like respect for craft and know-how, considerations which have nothing to do with those of so-called consecrated high culture, but are related to the specific values of the ethnic group considered. By the standards set by this community 'many middle- and upper-class people will seem bumbling, inept, and alienated from the material conditions of their lives' (264). Similarly, Lopes argues that Bourdieu's insistence on social class leads him to ignore 'the significance of non-economic social group dynamics. In particular, the case of jazz shows the fundamental importance of race distinction and race subordination in the American cultural field' (Lopes 2000: 167, see also Peterson and Simkus 1992: 159).

By systematically equating cultural consumption with class consumption Bourdieu ends up leaving aside contradictory cultural practices which might question the validity of his analysis. As Hall notes, 'there may coexist multiple and incongruous values and distinctions that cannot be reduced to one another' (1992: 264).

Moreover, one might listen to Ligeti and Madonna, read Borges and fashion magazines, love Francis Bacon as well as *Friends*. Who exclusively listens to Xenakis, reads Joyce or Pynchon, and watches Bresson or Godard without also moving from the field of elite consumption to that of mass consumption? Probably very few individuals. But in Bourdieu's work the products agents consume in different fields can only ever be

homologous to each other in the cultural hierarchy of their respective field. The dominant class never seems to consume anything other than legitimate high culture, whilst the popular class, in contrast with Crane's claim that 'classic high culture remains popular' (1992: 63), never seems to care for consecrated high culture. No room is made for an in-depth analytical and empirical discussion of agents' engagement with cultural practices or cultural artefacts which, whether high or popular, cut across classes. Gartman, for instance, talks about a 'common mass culture' (1991: 430). He observes, drawing on research conducted in America and which he contrasts with Bourdieu's (1996a) work, that 'although the upper class clearly has more knowledge of and participation in high culture [...] its members also participate in the popular culture, often at levels commensurate with the lower classes' (Gartman 1991: 430). This, again, goes against Bourdieu's universalist assumptions.

Thus in his work the complexity and variability of patterns of cultural consumption is unproblematically solved along the lines of class belonging in a universalising model which ultimately amounts to his embrace of the so-called superiority of traditional high culture. For all the rich insights it offers on, among other things, the social conditions of the judgement of taste, Bourdieu's sociology of culture is not without limits, limits that this chapter has attempted to frame. A comparative reading of *The Guardian* and *Le Monde* and an analysis of Bourdieu's discussion of fashion both also point to these limits. Before returning to the former in Part III, I would first like to comment on the latter.

## THE FIELD OF FASHION: A CASE STUDY OF BOURDIEU'S SOCIOLOGY OF CULTURE

In the last chapter, I discussed Bourdieu's analysis of cultural practices and his understanding of the concept of culture. Many notions have appeared - 'struggle', 'capital', 'position', 'legitimation', for example - which are at the centre of his theoretical framework. Common to all these concepts is another - field - to which all the others are related. Fields are 'structured spaces of positions' which 'have invariant laws of functioning' (Bourdieu 1995e: 72).

As Bourdieu himself specifies in the introduction to his essay 'Haute Couture and Haute Culture' (1995c), whenever he is talking about high couture, he could equally be talking about high culture, and the concepts he uses when looking at the field of the one can be used to analyse the field of the other. His argument, he notes,

is based on the structural homology between the field of production of one particular category of luxury goods, namely fashion garments, and the field of production of that other category of luxury goods, the goods of legitimate culture such as music, poetry, philosophy and so on. It follows that when I speak of *haute couture* I shall never cease to be speaking of *haute culture*. (132)

My discussion of Bourdieu's analysis of the field of fashion must be seen as a case study of his sociology of the field of culture.

In the last chapter, I argued that mass culture is, in his work, a neglected field of enquiry. Similarly, here, after a discussion of some of the main concepts which inform Bourdieu's sociology of the field of fashion, I will show that he fails to account for the significance of mass fashion in this field. He focuses rather on the subfield of high fashion, omitting to conceptualise its complex and varied relations to the subfield of mass fashion. I will then turn to Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic production' (1993a: 37) of culture, whose relevance to the field of popular culture he fails to theorise. Finally, I will comment on his account of the consumption of fashion, pointing to the limits of his

analysis, which is entirely couched in terms of a dialectic of distinction-pretension, excluding the working class with its 'taste for necessity' (1996a: 374).

## **1. Fields of Fashion**

### **1. 1. Defining the Field of Fashion**

In *Le Couturier et sa Griffe* (1975), Bourdieu and Delsaut look at the structure of the French field of high fashion, a field which includes both haute couture and the *prêt à porter* of the *couturiers* and *créateurs*, also called *stylistes*. This field, like all fields, they argue, is defined by the unequal distribution of specific capital amongst the different couture houses, 'specific' meaning that 'this capital is effective *in relation to* a particular field, and therefore within the limits of that field' (Bourdieu 1995e: 73). Though Bourdieu and Delsaut do not themselves use the expression, the specific capital at play in the field of high fashion could be called fashion capital, a capital which 'consists essentially of familiarity with a certain milieu and of the quality conferred by the simple fact of belonging to it' (1975: 16). The designers who left famous couture houses to create their own companies like Saint Laurent are endowed with an 'initial capital of specific authority' (16), which they owe to their former stay in an established couture house such as that of Christian Dior, whose capital is both symbolic and economic; it is a capital of tradition, prestige, legitimacy and high turnover.

As in the field of high culture, members of the field of high fashion - Bourdieu also calls them 'players' (1995c: 133) - occupy different positions. In the dominant position 'are the designers who possess in the highest degree the power to define objects as rare by means of their signature, their label, those whose label has the highest price' (133), that is, those whose fashion capital is high. They are opposed to those who are less endowed with specific capital, the 'pretenders' (Bourdieu 1975: 12).

New designers and dominant designers are located in the two opposite sides of the field. Here Bourdieu and Delsaut, drawing on an analogy with the field of politics, argue that the field of high fashion has a left and a right wing (7). On the left are the newcomers, such as Paco Rabanne and Ungaro, on the right are the old consecrated *couturiers* such as Balmain and Dior. There is also a centre, occupied by designers like Saint Laurent. Linked to these positions is an opposition between geographical spaces as

‘reified social space[s]’ (Bourdieu 1993b: 160), an idea I return to in Part III: whereas Balmain and Dior are located on Paris’ right bank - the old bourgeois area - Paco Rabanne and Ungaro can be found on the left bank - the avantgarde bank. Left and right wings are also characterised by opposed strategies of struggle; subversion in the case of the newcomers and conservation in that of the dominant *couturiers*. Thus the strategies followed by the institutions of production and diffusion of high fashion in their struggle against each other to win the dominant positions depend on their position in the field of high fashion (Bourdieu 1975: 7). Struggle is another invariant of fields. Their structure

is a *state* of the power relations among the agents or institutions engaged in the struggle, or, to put it another way, a state of the distribution of the specific capital which has been accumulated in the course of previous struggles and which orients subsequent strategies. This structure, which governs the strategies aimed at transforming it, is itself always at stake. (Bourdieu 1995e: 73)

Pretenders want to subvert and devalue the specific capital set by the established *couturiers*. Their strategy is to define and set new values for the legitimation of a new specific capital, that is, Bourdieu and Delsaut note, ‘for the exclusive power to constitute and impose the symbols of legitimate distinction on the subject of clothes’ (1975: 15). The values attached to fashion are also produced through the discourses on fashion of different institutions and agents, which all participate in the ‘symbolic production’ (Bourdieu 1993a: 37) of fashion, an idea I return to in the next section and which I illustrate in my empirical analysis of *Le Monde*’s and *The Guardian*’s discourses on fashion shows.

Thus it is ‘the definition of the legitimate hierarchizing principles’ (Bourdieu 1996a: 316) that is at stake between the players of the field. Whilst in the literary field the definition of the writer is one of the main stakes over which members fight (see Bourdieu 1993a), in the field of high fashion it is the definition of the designer which is struggled over, a designer defined, as the artist of modernity in *Le Monde*, for instance, and as an avantgarde fashion star in *The Guardian*, as will be developed in Part III.

Thus the boundaries of the field of fashion are a permanent object of struggle and it is the struggles between the newcomers - the pretenders - and ‘the possessors of

legitimacy' (Bourdieu 1995c: 134) - the established designers - which 'are at the basis of the changes which occur in the field of haute couture' (135). New entrants 'as in boxing, the challenger, 'decide the direction of the game' [*font le jeu*]' (Bourdieu 1975: 9). They try to unsettle dominant couturiers, who in contrast 'play safe' (9). Here the analogy with the language of games, as in sport, is explicit. It is a language used by *The Guardian* when mentioning British newcomers in the field of fashion, as I show in Chapter 8.

### 1. 2. Subfield of Large-Scale Production and Subfield of Restricted Production

The field of cultural production, Bourdieu (1993a: 53) also argues, is divided into the subfield of large scale production and the subfield of restricted production. The latter is an autonomous field where cultural goods - high cultural ones such as art, literature or high fashion - are produced by and for producers, and addressed to a limited audience, aesthetes, who, according to Bourdieu, as discussed in the last chapter, favour a disinterested distanciation from the material world. In this subfield, the pursuit of financial profit is rejected; 'art for art's sake' is the dominant value (127). It is an 'economic world reversed, a game in which the losers win' (169); that is, win artistic legitimacy rather than commercial success. The subfield of restricted production is also itself divided into 'the consecrated avant garde and the avant garde, the established figure and the newcomers, i.e. between artistic generations' (53). The field of large scale production, on the other hand, a 'discredited' (39) field, Bourdieu argues, produces for a wide audience, and 'involves what we sometimes refer to as "mass" or "popular" culture' (16). It is dependent on the laws of the market and is structured by its producers' quest for commercial success.

The two subfields are organised around 'a dualist structure' (Bourdieu 1996e: 113) based on opposite criteria, which are internal to the functioning of each field and different from the criteria at play in the other field (Bourdieu 1993a: 115). It is on this idea of opposition that Bourdieu's work focuses, at the cost, however, of failing to discuss the situations when this clear cut distinction between the two subfields is blurred. Contradictions and complexities are not investigated. The two subfields, Bourdieu notes, 'coexist' (128). They never overlap, witness the series of black and white contrasts he makes between them: whilst the subfield of large scale production is characterised by its

producers' 'search for effect [...] on the public' (127), in the subfield of restricted production, he notes, the 'cult of form for its own sake' is favoured (127). In the former 'the cynicism of submission to the market' reigns, whilst in the latter it is 'the idealism of devotion to art' (128). 'Profane' goods are produced in the former, 'sacred' ones in the latter (129). 'Worldly success' (101) and 'the widest possible public' (126) is what producers from the subfield of large scale production seek, in contrast with the quest for 'spiritual consecration' (101) of the producers belonging to the subfield of restricted production, a field for 'privileged clients and competitors' (115). These are the dominant principles and categories which, Bourdieu argues, structure the field of culture.

Conciliation is excluded, the mixing of interest - what Allen calls *The Romance of Commerce and Culture* (1983) - and the crossing over of criteria are not examined. The assumptions on which these oppositions are based are left unchallenged, in contrast with postmodern takes on the topic, as discussed in Chapter 2, a postmodernism Bourdieu dismisses as intellectual fad. And once again, rather than operating the epistemological break with doxic thought, which he says is central to the advance of knowledge, Bourdieu ends up adhering to the doxa; that is, he does not question what he says are dominant 'preconceptions or "prenotions"' (Bourdieu 1991: 13) which shape cultural practices, in this case the preconceptions attached to the dichotomies art/commerce, high culture/mass culture. The cultural doxa is exposed but it is not questioned.

Money and art, however, cannot simply and systematically be opposed to each other (see, for instance, Allen 1983). This opposition in Bourdieu's work and his defence of the autonomy of art, discussed in Chapter 4, shows a 'romantic understanding of the relationship between art and money' (Brown and Szeman 2000: 8). Their intricate relationship is not discussed. Mass culture - the subfield of large scale production and consumption - is conceived as clearly distinct from high culture and ends up being given little theoretical and empirical attention. It is at best derided as alienating, as discussed in Chapter 4.

A similar approach informs Bourdieu's work on fashion. It is not fashion which he analyses but the subfield of restricted production of fashion, that is, high fashion, a fashion consumed, he argues, by the dominant class only. Very few passages in the whole of his work are devoted to the subfield of popular fashion, whether as contemporary mass

fashion or working class fashion. In *Distinction*, however, Bourdieu, contrasting high fashion with fashion - the 'popularization' of high fashion - notes that the two 'only exist through each other, and it is the relation, or rather, the objective collaboration of their respective production apparatuses and clients which produces the value of culture and the need to possess it' (1996a: 250). But in *Le Couturier et sa Griffes* (1975) and *Haute Couture and Haute Culture* (1995c), Bourdieu neglects to define the subfield of restricted production of high fashion *in its relation* to the subfield of popular fashion, that is, the subfield of large-scale production of fashion, and thus fails to look at how they 'exist through each other'. The nature of their relation is not discussed, high fashion appears as a field totally separated from mass fashion with no overlapping between the two.

There are, however, many instances in the field of contemporary fashion where mass fashion and high fashion, rather than being clearly distinct, as in Bourdieu's model, are intricately related. The relation is complex, and autonomy and dependence are both at play between them, whilst the boundaries between high fashion and popular fashion can be fuzzy. As the French sociologist Martine Elzingre (1996) argues, if luxury fashion in its early days was the concern of a narrow public, it has become increasingly addressed to a wide market. Consuming high fashion, she stresses, does not consist solely in buying high fashion clothes, but it also concerns consuming images of luxury fashion, to the point where high fashion has become 'an art which carries along popular fervour' (46). However, it is not only the diffusion of fashion images which contributes to this popularisation - a popularisation *Le Monde* deplures, as will be discussed in Chapter 10 - but discourses on fashion themselves, such as that of *The Guardian*, which turns elite high fashion shows into popular entertainment, as discussed in Part III.

In her discussion of the field of art Zolberg argues that Becker's (1982) sociological analysis of the art institution 'misses out on violations of art world (and art work) boundaries' (1997: 189). This comment could equally be applied to Bourdieu's approach to the field of culture (see also Fowler 1994: 149 on modernist art works) and more specifically his approach to the field of fashion. In Becker's work, artworlds are separated from each other, with no crossing over, in the same way that Bourdieu's subfields of culture are discrete entities. However, Zolberg notes, in practice, artists, musicians and writers often cross over art world barriers: 'Commonly transgressed is the

line dividing “popular” and “serious”, as, for example, when classically trained musicians become jazz players and composers, or when “fine” artists create works intended for commercial purposes, and vice versa (Andy Warhol; Keith Haring; Alexander Calder, among others)’ (189). Similarly, there are many fashion designers who have transgressed the line between high fashion and popular fashion by designing collections for the mass market, such as in the UK Ribeiro for Dorothy Perkins, and Jasper Conran or John Rocha for Debenhams. In France a similar practice took off in 1970 with the collaboration between designers like Ungaro, Ricci, and Saint Laurent among others, and the magazine *Elle*, which allowed readers to obtain clothes designed by *couturiers*, at low prices. The collaboration quickly attracted many established as well as new *couturiers* (Grumbach 1993: 144).

And here Bourdieu’s analogy with sport encounters some limits; players in the field of fashion, unlike players in the field of sport, do move between fields. They are not ascribed one specific position or role, but participate in many simultaneous games whose rules might be different, though not necessarily incompatible. In Bourdieu’s work, the fashion players situated in the subfield of high fashion are circumscribed by this field, their positions structured by this field alone and their relations only to other high fashion players. The variety of movements a player might make across fields, the determination of these movements by the subfield of mass fashion, are left unaccounted for.

The boundary between high fashion and popular fashion, however, is often thin and porous, which draws attention to the relations existing between them, relations Bourdieu fails to theorise. As in the field of art Zolberg (1997) discusses, themes and techniques ‘may be “borrowed” and recombined in other contexts, and for other ends’ (190), and this illustrates the constant movements which exist between high and popular fashion and the transgression of the boundary between the two; the influence of street styles on high fashion is a case in point (see Polhemus 1997).

Moreover, high fashion labels embody two dimensions: the mass as well as the elite; high fashion *and* popular fashion. Within one single name - the label - the two subfields of fashion are united. The uniqueness of high fashion is reproduced in thousands while at the same time keeping its auratic appeal. Entwistle, for instance, draws attention to the designer fashion labels which, through ‘ready-to-wear’ collections,

have been made available to a wider market, thus 'extending the kudos of *couture* to an unprecedented number of people' (2000: 134). High fashion can also be consumed via the multitude of 'derived products' (Grumbach 1993: 105) such as bags, hosiery, and tee-shirts, which all carry the high fashion label and with it the values of exclusivity and luxury it encapsulates. Labels such as Armani or Calvin Klein - and the same has been true of Dior for more than 50 years now (see Grumbach 1993) - can be purchased by both 'young urban professionals [...] as well as by working class children who might not own the real thing but a good replica bought at a market stall' (Entwistle 2000: 134). What matters here is the access to 'the kudos of *couture*'; the idea that one way or another, *couture*'s prestige is shared through cheaper versions, copies, and the diversity of affordable products which carry the name of designers, thereby being invested with the high symbolic value of *couture*, a *couture* which thus reaches a mass market.

The label, Bourdieu argues, operates a process of transsubstantiation of the material object to which it is applied, which then takes on the high value attached to the name (1975: 21). The label does not change the materiality of the product, but its social characteristic (23). It is 'the perceptible manifestation - like the signature of a painter - of a transfer of symbolic value' (22). Bourdieu, however, fails to theorise the implications of such a process for the clear cut distinction which emerges in his work between the subfield of high fashion and that of mass fashion. But these are two subfields which, within the label, become merged into one single field, that of mass high fashion. And because he does not elaborate on this, Bourdieu ends up neglecting the issue of the entrance of the sub-field of high fashion into the sub-field of mass fashion and of the bypassing of the separation between the two, a bypassing which Jobling (1999) illustrates in his analysis of the magazine *The Face*.

Jobling points to the magazine's emphasis on 'music, club culture and more notably, the idea of street style as a way of mixing, for example, army surplus store items with the accoutrements of high fashion' (35). 'The avowed aim of [the founder of *The Face*]', he stresses, 'was to emulate the look and production values of the glossy fashion magazines while breaking away from their more hidebound and exclusive convention of lionising *haute couture*' (35). In that respect the fashion produced by *The Face* - for Bourdieu such an institution is as much a producer of fashion as the designer, an issue I

develop next - is situated neither in mass fashion nor in high fashion but in a space made up of both: 'thus in the October 1982 issue the leading editorial portrayed the magazine as a kind of chrysalis, and underscored its transitional status by tentatively inquiring whether *The Face* was "a downmarket arts journal, or an upmarket music magazine"' (36). Bourdieu's theory of the field of culture fails to account for such a transitional status.

In this section, I have looked at some of the main characteristics of the field of fashion. The players I have discussed are its direct producers, such as designers. However, these producers are, Bourdieu argues, only one type of producer amongst many others. The production of fashion involves a variety of instances, whose functions go beyond the material production of fashion to include its symbolic production. It is a production which relies on the work of institutions and agents of consecration, as I will now discuss.

### 1.3. The Symbolic Production of Fashion: A Process of Transsubstantiation

The material production of cultural objects, Bourdieu argues, is only one side of their production. Another side is symbolic production:

given that works of art exist as symbolic objects only if they are known and recognized, that is, socially instituted as works of art and received by spectators capable of knowing and recognizing them as such, the sociology of art and literature has to take as its object not only the material production but also the symbolic production of the work, i.e. the production of the value of the work or, which amounts to the same thing, of belief in the value of the work. (1993a: 37)

Symbolic objects are artefacts in which beliefs are invested, and the role of the sociologist, Bourdieu stresses, is to unravel the ideologies hidden behind them, such as the "charismatic" ideology' (1993a: 76) of the creators as sole authors of their work. This ideology is the result of symbolic production, a type of production which aims at 'ensuring the ontologic promotion and the transsubstantiation' (1975: 28) of the product of material creation. The creation of the fashion label is an example, as discussed earlier, of such a process of transsubstantiation (23).

An analysis of the symbolic production of culture as it takes place in discourses on a cultural object, for instance, will allow the researcher to understand this process of transubstantiation. As Bourdieu argues, 'a rigorous science of art must [...] take into account everything which helps to constitute the work as such, not least the discourses of direct or disguised celebration which are among the social conditions of production of the work of art *qua* object of belief' (1993a: 35). These discourses collude with each other to participate in the production of the symbolic value of cultural products. This is why, Bourdieu argues, 'the life of the artist, the cut ear of Van Gogh and the suicide of Modigliani are as much part of the work of these painters as their canvases which owe them a part of their value' (1975: 28).

Thus the artwork, Bourdieu also points out, is made 'a hundred times, by all those who are interested in it, who find a material or symbolic profit in reading it, classifying it, deciphering it, commenting on it, combating it, knowing it, possessing it' (1993a: 111), amongst which are a variety of institutions - Bourdieu also calls them 'institutions of diffusion or consecration' (133) - whose role is to institute reality. There are many instances of consecration, such as museums and academies, which 'by their symbolic sanctions [...] consecrate a certain type of work and a certain type of cultivated person' (121). The same is true of newspapers such as *The Guardian* and *Le Monde*, as will be developed in Part III.

Moreover, Bourdieu also argues, it is not just one institution or just one critique which makes the work of art, but the field of production itself, that is the system of relations which exist between all the agents and institutions of consecration which compete for 'the monopoly of the power to consecrate' (1993a: 78), a struggle through which the value of artworks is generated. The value of a cultural object has to be sought in the structure of the field itself, and the discourse of a specific institution of consecration of fashion - and *Le Monde* and *The Guardian* are cases in point - is only 'a particular case of all the operations of transference of symbolic capital [...] through which an agent, or more exactly, an institution acting through the intermediary of a nominated agent, invests a product with value' (1975: 23).

Thus, for Bourdieu, fields are organised around the specific forms of belief as to what constitute cultural works and their value, beliefs which are also at work in the field

of fashion. For example, it has been said that in the UK 'fashion is a "popular thing", rather than an "elite" thing' (McRobbie 1998: 8), and the 'more informal style and culture of British fashion design stands in stark contrast to the stuffy and conservative world' (79) of French *haute couture*. But whilst Bourdieu focuses on the process of production of beliefs in the values of high culture, he fails to account for its relevance to popular culture and the production of popular cultural values. In *The Guardian*, for instance, beliefs in fashion as popular culture are constructed and conveyed - thereby contributing to the idea that in the UK fashion is a 'popular thing' - in contrast with *Le Monde*'s valuation of fashion as a high art, 'an elite thing', ideas I return to in Part III.

In both newspapers, stories are told that, in the same way as that of Van Gogh, participate in the transsubstantiation of the material world of fashion to create beliefs in the value of fashion as high culture in *Le Monde*, but also as popular culture in *The Guardian*, a popular culture whose making and consecration by agents and institutions Bourdieu fails to analyse. All these stories shape discourses on fashion and with them fashion itself. The fabrication of fashion becomes not just the fabrication of the material object known as the fashion dress, but, as Bourdieu would argue, the fabrication of ideas about fashion - about the designers, the clothes, the consumers - the creation of beliefs which give it meaning as high culture in *Le Monde*, and as popular culture in *The Guardian*. In the French newspaper, as I will show in Part III, they are stories set in the fashion theatre and its dream world of imaginary beings directed by the fashion artist. In the British newspaper, they are stories which unfold around the catwalk or on the fashion pitch and whose main characters are celebrities: models, pop stars, and actors, all performers of the fashion show as popular entertainment.

These stars are also 'agents of legitimation' and 'instances of consecration' (Bourdieu 1993a: 121) of culture. However, they are not agents of legitimation of high culture, the sole type of legitimation Bourdieu is concerned with, but of popular culture. They are its agents of 'diffusion' and 'consecration' (121) - a term Bourdieu also considers in relation to high culture only - whose names *The Guardian* draws on and thereby further consecrates, hence also further consecrating popular culture, in the same way that *Le Monde* draws on the name of painters and poets to construct and consecrate fashion as high culture (see Part III). Bourdieu does not, however, elaborate on the

diversity of values and meanings created in the process of symbolic production of fashion - as if cultural value meant only high cultural value, just as cultural capital means high cultural capital - focused as he is on analysing the structure of the field of high fashion and its functioning, rather than the values at play in the discourses which unfold there, a point I develop in the next chapter.

## **2. The Consumption of Fashion**

### **2.1. Bourgeois Consumption of Fashion**

Producers and consumers of high fashion, Bourdieu (1975) argues, are spontaneously adjusted to each other. This spontaneous adjustment is the result of an homology between the position of designers in the field of fashion and the position of consumers in 'the field of class relations' (Bourdieu 1993a: 38). It is an 'adjustment to demand [which] is not the product of conscious design but the result of a structural correspondence' (97). Thus, to the dominant position of a designer within the field of fashion corresponds the dominant position of consumers within the field of class relations. The old consecrated *couturiers* are structurally adjusted to the old bourgeoisie, whereas the new designers are structurally adjusted to the new bourgeoisie (Bourdieu 1975: 30).

In the same way that there is an homology between the field of producers and the field of consumers, Bourdieu argues that there is an homology between classes of products and classes of consumers. It is because a cultural object is the objectification - a term I return to in the next chapter - of an already existing taste, the taste of the producer, homologous to that of his/her homologous consumer, that it is spontaneously adjusted to the demand. This already existing taste - 'a constituted taste' - is a 'taste which has been raised from the vague semi-existence of half-formulated or unformulated experience, implicit or even unconscious desire, to the full reality of the finished product, by a process of objectification which, in present circumstances, is almost always the work of professionals' (Bourdieu 1996a: 231). The objectified relationship between objects and consumers - the constituted taste - is mediated by 'that sense of the homology between goods and groups which defines tastes' (232). The choices consumers make in following their taste is a result of the identification of those goods whose field position is homologous to the position in the field of class of the consumer. These choices are

‘assisted by institutions - shops, theatres (left- or right-bank), critics, newspapers, magazines - which are themselves defined by their position in a field and which are chosen on the same principles’ (232). Thus there is an homology between types of products and types of consumers. In the field of fashion for example, Bourdieu notes that the creations of Balmain and Dior - the consecrated high fashion products of the consecrated *couturiers* - correspond to ‘the women of a venerable age from the highest and most established fractions of the high bourgeoisie’ (1975: 7), whilst avantgarde fashion is consumed by the new bourgeoisie.

However, Miller draws attention to ‘the failure of any simple correspondance theory [, which] should alert us to the complexity of this articulation between production and consumption’ (1987: 169). The relation between consumption and production is a complex interactive process, not simply one of structural homology between autonomous fields resulting in the unconscious adjustment of demand and offer as in Bourdieu’s model. Hebdige’s (1994) article on the ‘history of the motor scooter’ (83), as suggested by Miller (1987), offers a comprehensive alternative to this model. ‘There can be no absolute symmetry’, Hebdige notes, ‘between the “moments” of design/production and consumption/use’ (1994: 80). Italian companies developed the scooter as a feminine answer to the motorbike, constructing it as a gendered object both materially - it allowed women to wear skirts - but also symbolically, to borrow Bourdieu’s notion - through visual representations showing women rather than men riding it. It was, however, appropriated differently by British youth such as the Mods, who used it to construct and express the values of their social groups. As Miller notes, ‘elements of intention’ (1987: 170) are reintroduced in Hebdige’s analysis. This contrasts with Bourdieu’s model of automatic structural correspondance between consumption and production. Not only the intention of the producer is reintroduced, but also that of the consumer, a consumer who in Bourdieu’s work has no opportunity to become a creative agent.

All patterns of consumption cannot be exhausted in the notion of homology which Bourdieu draws on to establish a structural link between production and consumption, and this points to the limits of this notion (see also Lahire 1999a: 51). It does not allow consideration of the diversity of appropriations of the same product, within one class, and also across classes, and in that respect, Bourdieu shows little consideration for the

insights of reception studies such as have been conducted in the British academic field. The homology which Bourdieu says exists between consumers and goods cannot account for the consumption of non-avantgarde objects by the new bourgeoisie. It is very unlikely that all the members of the new bourgeoisie consume avantgarde fashion and that avantgarde goods are consumed by the new bourgeoisie only. Consumers of high fashion are also consumers of mass fashion, whilst, as argued earlier, high fashion also enters mass markets through the transsubstantiating label.

Moreover, which avantgarde is Bourdieu talking about? In *Le Couturier*, the only avantgardes Bourdieu refers to are the designers. He thereby paradoxically participates in the consecration of the creators as the sole authors of their work by limiting the avantgarde to direct producers of goods only, a consecration which on the other hand he wants to unravel. What about fashions that started outside of their direct network of production or diffusion and fashions that are not launched within the subfield of high fashion? I am thinking of fashions which originate in youth groups or ethnic groups and are then appropriated by high fashion. Magazines and newspapers regularly talk about such styles; the example of trainers or combat trousers are only two amongst many possible illustrations, also well documented by Polhemus (1997). The avantgarde in these cases is to be found amongst those groups whose members are unlikely all to be from the new bourgeoisie. Thus, more empirical work would be needed to ground Bourdieu's notion of homology and the relation between class and goods.

Yet more problematically, it can be seen that Bourdieu ends up adhering to a very restrictive definition of production and consumption. He fails to put these categories into question (Kondo 1997: 110), and again sticks to, rather than breaking away from, doxic categories of thought. He conceptualizes the processes of production and consumption only as separate. This is an approach which contrasts with that of many British cultural theorists such as Hebdige (1994, 1995) and Willis (1978, 1996) or, in France, Certeau (1988), authors who emphasize the creativity of the consumers turned producers, as discussed in Chapter 3. Production and consumption in Bourdieu's work appear as two blocks which refract each other and whose parts neatly correspond to each other in an unproblematized system of homologies in which no room is made for the consumer-author. He ends up giving a mechanical account of the relationship between the

consumption and production of fashion, a relation which, Bourdieu says, as mentioned earlier, is objectified in the 'finished product' (1996a: 231) of cultural production.

It is also a relationship he conceptualises only in terms of class. As Miller observes, the notion of objectification Bourdieu draws on 'consists mainly in the external sedimentation and subsequent reproduction of class interests' (1987: 156). The objectification in cultural forms of the homologies which Bourdieu says exist between consumers, producers and products is nothing but an objectification of processes of social class divisions. Bourdieu theorises these divisions around the ideas of class pretension, distinction and necessity, hence leaving little room for the analysis of the diversity of projects involved in consumption, such as, for instance, the quest for pleasure, and the forming of the self, issues I now turn to.

## 2. 2. Pretension and Distinction: A Bourgeois Dialectic

Bourdieu distinguishes between a consumption informed by the quest for distinction and one informed by pretension. Whereas the former concerns the bourgeoisie, the latter refers to the consumption pattern of the petite bourgeoisie. The relation between distinction and pretension is a relation between 'antagonistic and complementary dispositions' (1975: 35), which are also bourgeois and petit-bourgeois dispositions.

*Haute couture*, for instance, is used by the bourgeoisie as a means of asserting its difference from pretenders, that is, petit-bourgeois. It 'provides the dominant class with the symbolic signs of "class" which are, as one says, *de rigueur* in all exclusive ceremonies of the bourgeoisie's self-worship, which is the celebration of its own distinction' (29). Fashion shows, Bourdieu notes, are part of such bourgeois ceremonies (32). The petite bourgeoisie, on the other hand, is characterized by its pretension to be part of the high bourgeoisie: '*committed* to the symbolic [ ... ] the petit-bourgeois is haunted by the appearance he offers to others and the judgement they make of it' (Bourdieu 1996a: 253). He is a 'man of appearances, haunted by the look of others and endlessly occupied with being seen in a good light' (253). As for the working classes, they 'do not have this concern with their being-for-others' (253), an issue I return to later.

The 'dialectic of pretension and distinction', Bourdieu argues, a dialectic of competition, is a constant of both the field of production and the field of consumption

(1995c: 135-136). In the field of fashion, for example, 'fashion is the latest fashion, the latest difference. An emblem of class (in all senses) withers once it loses its distinctive power. When the miniskirt reaches the mining villages of northern France, it's time to start all over again' (135). The reduction of the price of the fashion products corresponds to a degradation over time of their distinctive value, that is, to the 'fading away of their power of distinction' (Bourdieu 1975: 18), and it is because, according to Bourdieu, the value of a product is relational and not substantial that it can carry on exercising a distinctive power for a group lower in the social hierarchy than the group for which it no longer has this power. Fashion thrives on 'the series of secondary uses of the *déclassé* to achieve *classement*' (18, Bourdieu's use of the word *déclassé* and *classement* is a pun, *déclassé* meaning at the same time that which is no longer classified but also that which no longer has any class. Similarly, *classement*, he suggests (see Bourdieu 1996a: 466-484) refers to classification but also to the idea of obtaining class.)

However, Bourdieu's model of emulation alone cannot account for preferences in fashion. Slater, for instance, argues that emulation theories assume 'a rather mechanical view of hierarchies and the processes that maintain them and ignore the extent to which consumption styles can emerge from the internal resources and social experiences of a subordinated social group and from their opposition (indeed, class struggle) to higher ranks' (1997: 158). I have already mentioned in the preceding section the fashion styles created by ethnic and youth groups and which have trickled *up* the catwalk. As Miller (1987: 155) argues, the rise in contemporary society of material culture 'as a mode of cultural form' has resulted in 'its ability to multiply and keep apart a plethora of hierarchies and diverse spheres'. This situation does not sit easily with models of emulation, such as Bourdieu's dialectic of distinction and pretension.

To reduce fashion consumption to status distinction and social differentiation is to miss the variety and complexity of people's engagement with the objects of material culture such as dress. Bourdieu's dialectic of distinction-pretension recalls Veblen's (1994) theory of 'conspicuous consumption', and like it, reduces objects to signifiers of difference. For both theorists high cultural goods are meaningless and useless except as tokens of distinction, weapons in the game of symbolic competition. Bourdieu's approach ends up being 'an economic model' (Miller 1987: 155, see also Swingewood 1998:

110). It fails to account for the multitude of projects involved in cultural practices such as the consumption of fashion, practices which, Lash and Urry argue, and this contrasts with Bourdieu's utilitarian model (Joppke 2000: 24), are 'more personality specific rather than specific to social positions' (Lash and Urry 1996: 58).

Moreover, the physicality of the fashion object is lost in his account of class consumption, and the issue of the embodiment of fashion is neglected. By contrast, my discussion of the reports of *The Guardian*, developed in Part III, underlines the importance of the materiality of clothes, a materiality through which the aesthetic of de-distantiation, discussed in the previous chapter, is enacted, and which brings together material objects and the body. But in the work of Bourdieu, the body appears as a mere carrier of clothes as expressions of distinction or pretension, as if body and clothes were two separate entities whose convergence never creates a meaningful whole.

The physical body, a body that feels and experiences the material world, is discussed only in relation to working class consumption, as if physical engagement with cultural forms was a preserve of this class only, while the bourgeois use their body as a substanceless form, a tool for class distinction. It is a body that shows but never feels. Bourdieu depicts the working class body as a mechanical entity in its near animality, as discussed in Chapter 4, driven by a functional relation to objects, a quest for the simple satisfaction of bodily functions. There is no room in his work to consider sensual experience of cultural forms as an experience that cuts across class, in which the body, as argued earlier, becomes a legitimate site of aesthetic experience.

Thus, in Bourdieu's work body and clothes never seem complementary in their materiality: clothes as actualised by the body rather than clothes simply carried by it, like a flag - Marx wrote 'a garment becomes a real garment only in the act of being worn' (quoted in Wolff 1993b: 95) - and the body brought to life in its appropriation of clothes, given a specific but ever changing identity, as discussed in Chapter 3. It is a complementarity underlined by *The Guardian* in a sentence such as 'the beauty of the style is not only that it looks great, it also hides a multitude of sins' (27-04). Bodies and dress are to be understood in relation to each other if one is to make sense of how 'fashion *operates on* the body', a 'lived experiential body that is articulated through practices of dress' (Entwistle 2000: 4, my emphasis, see also Dant 1999: 86). These are

situated practices which are not just strategies of distinction or pretension but also tactics in Certeau's (1988) sense of the word - improvised punctual techniques of being in and adapting oneself to a concrete everyday space in a poetic manner - as will be further illustrated in Part III. But in the work of Bourdieu, bodies are detached from the temporality of everyday situations and, like clothes, they have lost their materiality or content. The French sociologist overlooks this content in all texts, whether they are works of art, discourses on works of art, clothes or bodies, and the texts are seen simply as field objectifications, while agents - as consumers or producers - appear as 'disembodied transmission points, through which the field of forces passes' (Crowther 1994: 164), issues I return to in the next chapter.

As Dant observes, 'things are not just representations, but also have a physical presence in the world which has material consequences' (1999: 1-2, see also Miller 1987: 105). This dimension is missing from Bourdieu's work, however, which does not account for the dual role of objects as both symbols - and therefore indices and tools of class distinction - and also material artefacts consumed for this materiality and its specificity by a body which, being more than a mere vector of status, is also what Willis (1996: 11) calls 'a site of somatic knowledge' and feelings.

Even in *Le Monde*, where high fashion is constructed as high culture, those fashion shows which Bourdieu argues are part of the ceremonies of distinction of the bourgeoisie appear to be about more than class distinction. They are also about their value as a source of contemplation, about the *particularity* of the experience of fashion as a site of aesthetic satisfaction, which cannot be reduced to a pure positional move. The contemplation of clothes becomes an instance of what Hunter calls, in relation to the work of art, an "occasion" for the *practice* of aesthetic problematization', 'a convenient site' for agents to construct themselves as 'subjects of aesthetic experience' (1992: 351-353). It allows them to work on their self and the affirmation and actualisation of its experience; like Hunter's work of art, it is one of the 'means by which individuals invent themselves' (359) by fashioning their identity as an intellectual. This process, articulated through the contemplation of dress during fashion shows, might well result in further class distinction, but cannot be reduced to this quest, which might only be a by-product of the moment of aesthetic experience. As Shusterman notes, cultural practices are

conducted towards achieving ‘goods internal to the practice (e.g. the capturing of a likeness in portraiture), even though external goods (like profit and fame) may also be desired as by-products’ (2000: 42). This also means that the traditional opposition between means and ends must be bypassed, since ‘what functions as a means [can] also be freely chosen and enjoyed as an end’ (50), an opposition Bourdieu does not break away from.

Attending shows and wearing high fashion clothes for social distinction does not signify that these experiences are not valued in their own right. There is an ‘*experienced* value’ of an ‘*experiencing* subject’ (Shusterman 2000: 47, my emphasis), and Bourdieu’s instrumentalist approach to the consumption of fashion fails to address this. As Lipovetsky argues, rejecting a class analysis of fashion, fashion is ‘a practice of pleasure. [It] is not merely a mark of social distinction, it is also an enhancement, a pleasure for the eye’ (1994: 48), and it is this pleasure for the eye which *Le Monde* constructs as crucial to the experience of high fashion. Colours, cuts, fabrics, the magicality of the shows, their fictional dimension and theatricality, the dreamworld they create, are the pleasing components of the aesthetic experience, as will be shown in Part III. They are among those elements which have to do with ‘how the “purely visual” is itself pleasing, or successful’ (Wolff 1993a: 23), and which an analysis in terms of social distinction alone cannot elucidate. As Danto puts it ‘there are autonomous experiences with art, which does not entail that art itself is autonomous’ (1999: 217). In the French newspaper, contemplating fashion is a visual and intellectual pleasure which, although, as in the Kantian aesthetic Bourdieu discusses, it focuses on form, is nonetheless still a pleasure, central to the experience of contemplation, an idea which *Le Monde*’s frequent reference to the notion of pleasure exemplifies, as will be illustrated in Part III. It is not an aesthetic pleasure which, as in Bourdieu’s *Distinction*, recedes into the background of an experience reduced to social distinction, a pleasure ‘denied’ (1996a: 490), but a claimed and acknowledged one. Bourdieu, however, has little to say about this pleasure, not least because he focuses on analysing the determination of practices (J.C. Alexander 2000: 48) rather than on practices *per se*.

### 2.3. Working Class Consumption of Fashion: 'The Taste for Necessity'

According to Bourdieu the decisions the working classes make in the field of consumption are 'pragmatic' (1996a: 376) and 'realistic' (200), informed by an attention to function rather than form, as discussed Chapter 4. The working classes, he argues, 'make [...] a functionalist use of clothing' (200). What matters to them is 'what will last' (200) and can satisfy their functional concern for substance rather than appearance, an attitude which contrasts with the pretension of the middle class and what Bourdieu says are the hypocritical practices of the dominant class.

The working classes' taste is a 'taste for necessity' (374) imposed by necessity. It is a taste which defines and is defined by the working class habitus - the habitus being the set of internalised classificatory schemes which shape agents' actions (see Bourdieu 1996a: 101) - and which dominates all spheres of their consumption. It 'is also the principle of all the choices of daily existence and of an art of living which rejects specifically aesthetic intentions as aberrations' (376), gratuitous and futile. Thus the working classes can only like what they can *afford* to like, as in the choice of

the 'value for money' clothes which economic necessity assigns to them in any case. The doubly prudent choice of a garment that is both 'simple' ('versatile', 'all-purpose'), and 'good value for money', i.e. cheap and long lasting, no doubt presents itself as the most reasonable strategy, given, on the one hand, the economic and cultural capital (not to mention time) that can be invested in buying clothes and, on the other hand, the symbolic profits that can be expected from such an investment (at least at work - unlike clerical workers, for example). (377-378)

Such an account contrasts with that of Angela Partington, whose study *Popular Fashion and Working Class Affluence* (1992) points to this class' attention to formal creativity rather than strict substantial realism. She shows how some working class women appropriated, in the 1950s, Dior's New Look, to create a new fashion with their own means, however limited. A working class aesthetic was deployed to develop a new style through the consumption of an already existing one, its *bricolage*. The consumption she discussed is not marked by a taste for necessity, and is not simply emulation or pretension either. It is an act of re-creation or production in the sense developed by Certeau, as discussed in Chapter 3, part of an aesthetic of tricks and the multiple tactics of

appropriation of everyday materials for the creation of less ordinary ones, such as a *version* of the Dior New Look. There is no trace in Partington's work of a working class taste for necessity, a taste for clothes which are merely functional, necessarily taken as such and uncreatively consumed. The working classes she looks at do not 'reject specifically aesthetic intentions as aberrations', contrary to what Bourdieu argues. Rather, their 'popular fashion mixed the glamorous and the practical, fused function and meaning (objectification and identification), by incorporating elements from styles which designers assumed would take their meaning from the clear distinctions between them' (Partington 1992: 159).

The correlations Bourdieu draws between class and the consumption of fashion cannot account for the centrality of fashion in the life of working class women, who might, like Carolyn Steedman in her youth (Kondo 1997: 112), see make up and clothes as 'the material stepping-stones of [their] escape' (Steedman 1997: 15) from ordinary life. Moreover, Bourdieu argues that the working class' taste for necessity exists in an embodied form, in the way working class women relate to their body. They are, he notes,

doubly dominated [...]. They do not value themselves sufficiently (and they do indeed have a low value on the labour market, unlike bourgeois women, with their skilled labour-power and cultivated bodies) to grant themselves a care and attention which always imply a certain indulgence and to devote to their bodies the incessant care, concern and attention that are needed to achieve and maintain health, slimness and beauty. (1996a: 380)

In Partington's (1992) study, however, working class women do think that their body is worth adorning. The styles they created for themselves, she shows, allow them to negotiate the distinction between "housewife" (functional woman) and sex object (decorative woman)' (1992: 159), which they simultaneously were.

In the fieldwork he conducted in Birmingham and Wolverhampton, Willis also notes that even if the contemporary economic situation restricted the fashion consumption of young working class members, they still managed 'to dress stylishly and to express their identities through the clothes they wear [...] and make the most out of slender resources, buying secondhand clothes or saving up to buy particular items of

clothing' (1996: 86). Functionality is not the sole criteria informing the choice of dress of working class members. A sense of aesthetic is at play, not a functional one, as in Bourdieu's work, but an aesthetic of being in and experiencing the physical world for its own sake, which might even go against practical considerations, as in the bikers' choice of outfit discussed in Chapter 3. There I drew attention to Willis' observation that the way bikers wear their jacket fully open whilst riding has nothing to do with protection and technical efficiency. Rather, it is meant to allow them to feel 'the full brunt of [the jacket's] movement in the natural physical world' (1978: 56). It is a particular way of wearing an outfit, which permits the desired mediation between the bikers' body and the natural environment, a tactic which also draws attention to the materiality of dress, its physical significance, a dimension which, as discussed earlier, Bourdieu fails to conceptualise.

Thus working class consumption cannot unproblematically be said to be informed by a 'taste for necessity', a notion Grignon and Passeron (1989) question. Bourdieu's account of working class consumption, they argue, is that of a non-choice disguised by him as choice:

analyses which oppose the 'tastes for necessity' (on the part of the popular classes) to the 'tastes for liberty' (on the part of the dominant classes) must always pretend to reintroduce a bit of liberty in the necessity to recognise that the taste for necessity is not a taste at all, but a mechanical response to a system of constraints, or more exactly to a system of limitations reducing the possibilities of choice to nothing. (139)

But, they continue, a choice cannot at the same time both be and not be a choice. Either agents are in a position to choose between different goods, or they are not if only one product is made available to them. Thus they argue, for instance, drawing on Bourdieu's example of the working class' (necessary) taste for beans, that either working class members have a choice, within their fixed budget, between potatoes and beans, or they do not and can only eat beans, in which case it is spurious 'to bring in a possible "taste" for beans to explain that they eat beans, since, stuck as they are between biological necessity (it is that or dying of hunger) and the limits of their purse (it is that or nothing), they are anyway forced to eat beans' (139). They conclude, referring to Flaubert's work, that the

beans of *Distinction* bear some strong resemblance to the spinach of the *Dictionnaire des Idées Reçues* in which, with reference to the word spinach, one reads: ‘Never miss the famous sentence of Prudhomme: “I don’t like it, which suits me well, because if I liked it, I would eat it, and I cannot stand it.” (Some will find that perfectly logical and will not laugh)’ (Flaubert 1994: 36).

Moreover, there are in Bourdieu’s more recent work some elements which can be used to oppose his bleak view of working class consumption. In *La Misère du Monde* (1993b: 84) he shows in the interview he conducted with young poor people from the Paris’ suburbs how they find it impossible to stay outside of the logic of consumption, even if it means stealing. These young people do not have the taste for necessity, which, according to Bourdieu, should be part of their habitus. As he notes, everywhere around them are incentives to consume, to desire more than what they can afford. The young people Bourdieu interviews, far from being satisfied with the types of clothes they can afford, want those they cannot afford, an expensive leather jacket for instance, and acquire them through stealing so as to distinguish themselves from their peers. They have this taste for distinction which, Bourdieu, however, argues, is characteristic of bourgeois consumption. But in the work of the French sociologist, as Lahire observes, ‘adhesion to practice is such that all doubts are erased. One does not resist, one is not attracted to other desires, worked on by other drives’ (1999b: 132, see also Jenkins 1996: 97; Miller 1987: 155 ). Bourdieu’s is a restricted vision of individuals understood as unified beings rather than as plural ones, the carriers of a multitude of complex and often contradictory dispositions, constitutive of a heterogeneous and divided habitus.

The habitus, as mentioned earlier, is a set of dispositions which allow agents to make sense of the social world. It consists of a ‘set of historical relations “deposited” within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action’ (Bourdieu 1996c: 16). But in contemporary society, there are so many instances of socialisation which offer so many varied lifestyles - an ‘heterogeneity of the lived’ (Dubet, quoted in Corcuff 1999: 111) - that there is a multitude of discrepancies *within* and not just *between* habituses, products of ‘the tensions of experience’ (Corcuff 1999: 111). An individual’s habitus might very well be fragmented,

resulting in what Lahire for instance calls ‘multi-socialised’ and ‘multi-determined’ individuals (1999b: 149).

But in Bourdieu’s work, agents appear as uni-dimensional entities structured entirely by their class habitus, mere instances of embodied class positions, whose practices are reduced to the expression of class differentiation, to positional moves motivated by distinct class strategies of consumption. Such a focus on positionality and strategy is central to Bourdieu’s account of cultural practices. However, and as I argue in the next chapter, it is an approach which ends up reducing textuality to positionality.

## **BOURDIEU'S FIELD ANALYSIS: ON RELATIONS OF DIFFERENCE AND SUBSTANTIAL DIFFERENCE**

Bourdieu's concept of field aims to overcome the opposition between the external and internal analysis of cultural objects (see, for instance, Bourdieu 1994). He elaborated this notion at a time when researchers in France were split between the two dominant intellectual traditions of the time, structuralism and Marxism (Pinto 1998). With the former 'one seemed to be pushed to privilege products which possessed an internal coherence allowing them to substract themselves from external determinisms' (91). The latter consisted in characterising 'these products through the social functions they fulfill, most notably ideological functions of justifications of the interests of the dominant classes' (91). But both approaches have drawbacks. With the former, researchers tended to neglect the roles of agents in their relation to cultural products, which became independent of their social and historical contexts of production. With the latter, because researchers focused on social interests only, they ended up lacking an understanding of the actual products they studied. Thus certain analyses looked at the content of texts, independently of their context, whereas other analyses privileged an approach in terms of class relations and notions of power.

It is to escape the opposition between these two approaches, 'to bypass the opposition between internal reading and external analysis without losing any of the benefits and exigencies of these two approaches which are traditionally perceived as irreconciliable' (Bourdieu 1996e: 205) that Bourdieu opted for the notion of field as a methodological tool. It reminds the researcher of 'the existence of social microcosms, separate and autonomous spaces, in which works are generated' (158). A formal analysis of texts cannot be separated from an analysis of the position and dispositions of its producers. However, Bourdieu often focuses on the latter rather than the former and ends up reducing textuality to positionality. Analyses of texts appear to be secondary to his analyses of their field construction.

By 'text' here, I am referring to a broad term that encompasses a variety of cultural forms. In these I include the things of material culture (see, for example, Miller 1987), that is *physical* things, whose very *materiality* is significant to the agents who experience them, as discussed in the last chapter in reference to fashion. In combination with the idea of the text as material object - the material and the cultural being always interwoven in the interaction between agents and objects (see Lury 1999; Miller 1987) -, I also understand texts as networks of meanings activated by the reader, whether they be linguistic texts such as books or fashion reports, or any other cultural objects or events, such as paintings or fashion shows. None of these texts can be reduced to signifiers of distinction, simple tools in the game of status competition.

Thus, in this chapter, I will argue that in Bourdieu's work texts are as if transparent, stripped of the very particularity of their textuality, which is reduced to a reflection and objectification of the structure of the field to which they belong, and the expression of their authors' strategies of distinction. Bourdieu's is a reductive model - a reduction to the notion of the field. It misses the complexity of meanings invested in texts, which end up as simple means for satisfying agents' positional moves, agents whose practices are themselves often reduced to mechanical strategies of differentiation and objectifications of field positionality, as I showed in the case of the consumption of fashion in the last chapter. In that respect Bourdieu's neglect of the textuality of fashion objects and fashion shows and the reduction of the experience of them to field positionality and strategies of distinction or pretension, as discussed in the last chapter, is symptomatic of his approach to cultural artefacts and cultural processes as a whole, as I will first show drawing on his writing on the fields of visual art and literature, and on his response to academic criticisms of his work. I will then discuss these issues in the light of Bourdieu's account of the fashion discourse.

### **1. Texts: An Objectification of the Structure of the Field**

For Bourdieu, 'few works do not bear within them the imprint of the system of positions in relation to which their originality is defined' (1993a: 118), and it is on this imprint that he concentrates, unravelling the structure of the field in which works are produced rather than the meanings these works convey. Works of art are thus read as a direct reflection,

an objectification, of the position of these works and of their direct producers in the field of cultural production. The content of the text is exhausted in the formal representation of its position in the field of cultural production.

For example, Bourdieu (1993a, 1996e) argues that Manet was revolutionary because he rejected the canons of both bourgeois art and realist social art, and his paintings are a formal expression of this positioning. Bourdieu looks for little else in Manet's work and in the end reduces the significance of the work of the painter to its formal dimension and its characteristic as a window onto the structure of the field in which it has been produced. However, Fowler takes issue with Bourdieu's claim that Manet is revolutionary through formal innovation only. She suggests that he is revolutionary also 'in the choice of subject and its meaning' (1997: 108).

Texts certainly are the products of specific fields of production. They certainly are caught in a network of intertextuality and their producers inscribed in a complex system of position and position taking. But the analyst should not reduce the content of texts to an expression of this. Cultural works when studied internally reveal more than the structure of the field to which they belong. Fowler, for instance, focuses on content to show that impressionism up to the mid 1870s

depicted the new spaces and types of urban modernity. It demythologised the spectacle of leisure and liberated consumption from its traditional centres. In so doing, it showed the tensions as well as the freedoms of the new social strata of the Second Empire. Its visual codes detected the first traces of the split, later to be so pronounced within the modern personality, between the *consuming self* and the *producing self*. (104)

Manet was not more interested in the search for new formal means of representation, Fowler points out, than in *social meanings* (107).

Bourdieu, however, because he restricts the relevance of the paintings to their objectification of the field of art of the time, fails to discuss such social meanings. The content of Manet's paintings is reduced to formal innovation only, to an objective expression of the field to which they belong. Bourdieu's analysis of the content of Manet's works, like his analysis of discourses on fashion, and his analyses of texts and practices in general, as I will argue throughout this chapter, fail to address the issue of the

meanings of cultural forms and practices. Bourdieu's work focuses on an elaborate and complex analysis of field production - positions and position-takings are traced, struggles analysed, and the structure of the field unraveled - but no room is left for a discussion of the meanings which are actually produced and conveyed in the field analysed. His analysis of Flaubert's work is illustrative of this.

Pinto (1998) distinguishes two phases in Bourdieu's sociology of Flaubert's writing. During the first, which corresponds to the essay 'Flaubert's Point of View' reproduced in *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993a), Bourdieu looks at the work of the French writer from the outside in terms of positions, position-taking and structure. At the time, Bourdieu was not interested in a textual analysis of Flaubert's work (see also Robbins 2000). This type of analysis came later, in the second phase, which corresponds to the publication of *The Rules of Art* (1996e). There Bourdieu argues that fictions can often say more about the social world than sociological writing (32). However, Pinto omits to elaborate on the type of textual analysis which Bourdieu undertakes. It is an analysis that, rather than being concerned with commenting on the themes, values and meanings conveyed in Flaubert's writing, is still focused on uncovering the structure of the field it is located in.

In Flaubert's *L'Education Sentimentale*, as in the other artworks Bourdieu has analysed such as Manet's paintings, content is again read as an objectification of the field and the position of the author within it: 'In the obsessive chiasmic structure (dual characters, crossed trajectories and so on) and in the very structure of the relationship between Frédéric and the other main characters of *Sentimental Education*', Bourdieu notes, 'Flaubert objectified the structure of the relationship that tied him, as a writer, to the political field: or, which comes down to the same thing, to the positions in the literary field homologous to those in the political field' (1993a: 207). 'The structure of the social space in which the adventures of Frédéric unfold', Bourdieu also argues, 'proves to be at the same time the structure of the social space in which its author himself was situated' (1996e: 3).

Thus *L'Education Sentimentale* offers 'a sociology of Flaubert' (3). Bourdieu presents the writer as a 'medium' of social and psychological structures 'which then achieve objectification, passing through him and his work on inductive words,

“conductive bodies” but also more or less opaque screens’ (4). The field has now entered the novel, and within it Bourdieu looks for a reproduction of the social and literary spaces rather than the values, concepts, meanings and ideas which unfold in the text and are produced there beyond issues of field objectification.

Moreover, Bourdieu leaves no room in *L’Education Sentimentale* for the idea of the construction or *creation* of a sense of reality, as opposed to the *reflection* of what would amount, for Bourdieu, to *the* existing reality. There is no discrepancy between the social world as depicted by Flaubert, and a ‘real’ social world: *Sentimental Education*, Bourdieu notes, ‘reconstitutes in an extraordinarily exact manner the structure of the social world in which it was produced and even the mental structures, fashioned by these social structures, form the generative principle of the work in which these structures are revealed’ (31-32).

However, artworks do not just reflect the social world, they also *re-present* it, an issue sociologists often fail to address (Wolff 1993a). Drawing on Tony Bennett, Wolff argues that ‘the analysis of texts must include an account of their “literariness” (to use a formalist term); it must investigate the way in which, and the literary devices through which, texts *transform* and *represent* thought and ideology’ (89, my emphasis). Texts offer a construction of society, their version of the social world, through the specific choice of subjects, styles, registers in the process of *re-presentation*. Cultural forms are not a mere unmediated reflection of the social world, a direct expression of its organisation. Rather, ‘they *re-present* it in the codes and processes of signification’ (Wolff 1992: 707).

Re-presentation takes place in the process of symbolic production, the symbolic production of fashion for instance, an issue I return to in the next section and as I will show in Part III. Bourdieu, however, fails to discuss the product of such re-presentation, which he restricts to a direct expression of the structure of the field it is produced in. The process of symbolic production ends up reduced to that of symbolic reproduction, in the literal sense of the term, rather than *re-production*, an act productive of a new product. Texts are robbed of their potentialities as creative sites of symbolic production. Thus the best that can be found in the content of artworks such as *L’Education Sentimentale*, as read by Bourdieu, is a reflection *of*, more than *on*, the social world. Formal, or more

precisely structural, analysis is favoured at the expense of an interrogation of the values, ideas, themes, and meanings of Flaubert's book. Bourdieu's ambition to bypass the opposition between internal and external reading ultimately fails. Texts are only the by-products of the field to which they belong, its epiphenomena, and it is only for their quality as windows onto social structure that Bourdieu shows interest in them.

In an approach which contrasts with that of Bourdieu, Bowler argues 'first, for the autonomy of artistic works and practices as objects of inquiry in their own right; second for the importance of attention to questions of meaning' (1994: 248). The specificity and the distinctiveness of artworks, she notes, must be investigated. In their sociological analysis of cultural forms researchers should look at 'questions of genre, form, content, narrative, representation, aesthetic convention and intertextuality - questions which can only be addressed by direct engagement with the work of art' (252). These are questions Bourdieu does not address, leaving aside the issue of the specificity and distinctiveness of practices and texts - whether they be artworks, cultural artefacts such as dress, as I argued in Chapter 5, or also intellectual discourses and fashion discourses, as I will show later.

Bourdieu is not concerned with practices and cultural forms as objects of enquiry in their own right, whether they belong to the field of high culture or popular culture. In both cases, their particularity is not interrogated. High cultural texts and practices, on the one hand, can simply be desacralised as markers of class distinction only: their value is not substantial but differential; it allows participation in the game of class differentiation. Popular cultural texts and experiences on the other hand, can be dismissed as empty and devoid of any significance. His unconditional denial of the values of popular cultural forms is left unquestioned. Paying attention to the specificity of popular cultural texts and practices, to the meanings invested in them, however, as British cultural analysts have done, as discussed in Part I, looking at what is, rather than what is not, would have been a first step towards a bypassing of the traditional hierarchy between high and popular culture which frames Bourdieu's cultural theory.

## **2. Texts: An Objectification of Agents' Strategies of Distinction**

In Bourdieu's work, not only are cultural forms a reflection of the structure of the field in which they are situated, they also are the reflection of their producers' strategies of

distinction, an objectification of their position and position taking. I have already looked, in Chapter 5, at Bourdieu's account of fashion consumption as a dialectic of distinction and pretension objectified in the clothes that the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois consume. Fashion, in this model, is perceived solely as a tool for the satisfaction of agents' interest in strategies of class differentiation. The bourgeois consumption of high art is, like the consumption of high fashion, reduced to the pursuit of 'the possession of symbolic goods' (Bourdieu 1996a: 110) for the satisfaction of 'symbolic distinctions' (111), which ensure 'the consecration of the social order' (111). And this, according to Bourdieu, is the 'vital function' (111) of the love of art, 'the function of culture' (112), 'the true function of museums' (112).

Similarly, authors' investment in art, like fashion designers' relation to their creations, is characterized by their quest for distinction from existing styles, and the content of the works of art is an expression of such strategy, it is exhausted in it. The artist's creative process is reduced to the struggle for the conservation or transformation of the structure of the field, a game, as in the game of fashion, between dominant producers and pretenders, objectified in the 'stylistic strategy' (Bourdieu 1996e: 234) of artists. Thus 'the properly stylistic or thematic interest of this or that choice, and all pure stakes (meaning purely internal ones) of properly aesthetic experimentation (or, elsewhere, scientific research), *mask*, even in the eyes of those who make choices, the material or symbolic profits which are associated with them' (237). In the same way that the true function of high cultural consumption is to gain symbolic status for the reproduction of the existing order, the veritable function of high cultural production is the quest for symbolic profit. Bourdieu's functionalist approach to the engagement with high art, like his approach to high fashion, reduces the multiplicity and complexity of patterns of consumption and production to the game of distinction. Texts are deprived of their substantive significance, their cultural function reduced to an objectified strategy of differentiation.

Crowther (1994: 167, but see also Fowler 1994: 145) opposes this view in his discussion of avantgardism. The work of avantgarde artists such as Kandinsky and Malevitch, he argues, is the expression of a critical investigation of ways of adequately addressing types and dimensions of experience which differ from those traditionally

looked at by art practitioners. Their work has a critical function. Avantgarde artists are not simply individuals striving for distinction and whose products are pure formal and technical objectifications of this striving. The field of art cannot be reduced to a space of structural relations of differences between positions, a 'space of possibles' (Bourdieu 1993a: 176). This structural approach fails to account for 'the substantial differences of visions' (Crowther 1994: 167) which are the very basis of different positions and strategies of position taking.

Bourdieu, however, neglects these *substantial* differences when he concentrates on the *relation* of difference and the idea of the pursuit of prestige and consecration, the struggle for a high symbolic capital. As in Veblen's work, cultural objects and practices are 'intrinsically honourable' (Veblen 1994: 19) only as long as they confer honour on their possessors. Cultural processes are reduced to moves, positions and position-takings, trajectories, relational movements and situations within a field. Difference, as Crowther notes commenting on Bourdieu's analysis of the field of art, is seen as entirely formal (1994: 163). Bourdieu is interested in the process of affirmation of difference rather than in 'the level of particularity which makes difference *real*' (163). His is a totalizing account which does not make any room for ambivalences and contradictions in the social and cultural significances of texts, as Shiach (1993: 217) observes of his account of modernism, but the comment is equally true of all the texts and practices Bourdieu discusses.

This is why, in contrast with Bourdieu's work on modernism and the avantgarde, Williams' (1997), Shiach (1993) suggests, is more exhaustive. It 'seeks to identify more precisely what is at stake in the texts and images of particular modernist artists' (Shiach 1993: 218), and points to the complexity and diversity existing within the categories 'modernism' and 'avantgarde', categories which in the work of Bourdieu appear as unproblematical (see also Wilson 1988: 54). Williams' discussion of the language and style of modernist artists allows him to underline the 'wide range of practices [...] the many complications, overlaps and uncertainties' (Williams 1997: 76) of modernism. But Bourdieu misses these complications, just as he misses the complexities and diversity of the texts and practices of mass culture, not least because of the absence, in his work, of an analysis of their substantial specificity. Mass culture is conceived as an unproblematical

category with no internal variety, devoid of its own hierarchies and history. The distinctions which unfold there are left unaccounted for, in the same way that Bourdieu fails to reflect on the variety of distinctions which unfold in discourses on fashion, an issue I return to in the next section and in Part III.

High culture, like other cultural goods, is not consumed or produced only as a means of asserting one's position, as Bourdieu himself implies when he publically calls for the defense, as discussed in Chapter 4, of 'the conditions necessary for the production and diffusion of the highest human creations' (Bourdieu 1998e: 65). Here Bourdieu surely presents himself as a defender of the value of high art, a value 'above and beyond the uses to which [it] may be put in reproducing social classes' (Brown and Szeman 2000: 8). He thus allows himself a position beyond the game of distinction, a position he denies others, whose conduct he always reduces to strategical moves. Bourdieu is like those 'highly educated individuals' Zolberg talks about, and who 'share a high regard for great art that conflicts with their commitment to demystifying it' (1997: 13).

Moreover, in Bourdieu's work it is high culture only, as discussed in Chapter 4, which allows cultural distinction. There is no such thing as popular cultural capital; cultural capital means high cultural capital. The game of cultural distinction is inscribed in the field of high culture only and the texts of high culture are valued only as tokens of distinction. But if consumption and production of mass culture do not allow one to increase one's cultural capital, and distinguish oneself in a game led by the rules of high culture, what is their significance? What is the relevance of mass culture if it cannot be a means towards distinction? Because Bourdieu does not give adequate attention to texts as substantial and significant conveyors of experiences, experiences which are about more than positionality or status competition, his work does not offer an answer to these questions.

Finally, a discussion of Bourdieu's response to criticisms of his work will serve as an illustration of his neglect of the content of texts and of the consequences attached to this neglect. Such criticisms, he argues, are 'naïve readings' or 'misunderstandings' (1995b: 272-273). They 'reveal a high degree of misapprehension, which can go as far as total incomprehension' (1994: 106). Criticisms are systematically referred to the position of those who made them - Bourdieu calls them 'competitors' who 'often have a hidden

interest in not understanding, or even in preventing understanding from taking place in others' (1999d: 221, see also Bourdieu 1995b: 269-270) - in the intellectual field to which they belong, thus eluding a discussion of their content. Content is reduced, like the content of works of art, to an 'objectification of a relationship of distinction' (Bourdieu 1996a: 227).

Thus Bourdieu argues that his critics systematically misread him (1996c: 79).  
They only

uncover apparent contradictions that would vanish if they replaced each of the theses or hypotheses in question back in the movement, or even better, in the progress of my work; if more precisely, they strove to reproduce the evolution (or the chain) of thought that led me to change progressively without for that ever effecting a resounding 'self-critique'. (1995b: 264)

If one is to criticise his ideas, Bourdieu is saying, it is first necessary to go through a structural reading of his work. Commenting on the thoughts exchanged between intellectuals becomes a very ambitious task which necessitates a systematic analysis of the field they are formulated in, the position of their authors in this field, the strategies of other members of the field, the position takings, and trajectories which take place there, before one is allowed to actually address the substance of the ideas. Instead of their dissenting with him on specific points, and as Robbins (2000: 122) also notes, Bourdieu ultimately expects his critics to play *his* game, that is, to adhere to his approach to texts in terms of field production. They are required to concentrate on the structural positioning of the texts and ideas discussed, thus further postponing an analysis of the ideas sustained within the texts. If critics were to follow this approach, their engagement with the content of Bourdieu's writing would, like his own engagement with cultural forms, very likely fail to find the space to address the very values and meaning of the ideas which are at stake there: 'the researcher is exhausted by the time he/she reaches the doors of the discursive palace' (Lahire 1999a: 48).

This is exactly the case with Bourdieu's (1996b) account of the famous Barthes-Picard debate which took place in France in the early 1960s over the reading of Racinian tragedy (for a brief account of this debate see, for instance, Lane 2000: 71-80). There Bourdieu concentrates on the position of both writers in the French intellectual field, their

strategies of distinction and the structural specificities of the 1960s French university field, their discourse being a reflection of their situation within this field. The nature of the confrontation between Barthes and Picard is reduced to its social dimension (Dosse 1992b: 91). Little attention is paid to their intellectual arguments, the pertinence or value of their discourse and their relevance for intellectual thought. The comment Shiach makes on Bourdieu's reading of the cultural discourses of educational institutions can be extended to his reading of all critical analyses: 'we all seem to be playing the game of distinction, even as we seek to develop theoretical or methodological challenges to dominant literary modes of analysis' (1993: 215).

It is surely such a reductive approach which has led Bourdieu to assert that cultural studies, 'this "discipline" [which] does not exist in the French university and intellectual fields', is a 'mongrel domain' fabricated 'wholesale' and 'which owes its international dissemination (which is the whole of its existence) to a successful publishing policy' (1999a: 47). This is again to reduce the content of a theoretical debate to a purely strategic move, a simple marketing intervention, and it precludes any engagement with the ideas discussed in cultural studies.

However, not only is Bourdieu's approach reductive, but it finally fails to account for the validity of intellectual thought. In his work critical ideas appear as arbitrary. Lemieux (1999) points out the conflict of this approach with Bourdieu's (1998e) own call for the defense of democracy, threatened by television, and of 'the conditions necessary for the production and diffusion of the highest human creations'. This call, he argues, imagining Bourdieu's own reasoning, amounts to the following:

because of the determinisms which weigh on my trajectory, I find myself attached to a certain democratic ideal and this leads me to use my theory critically. But one would be equally justified, with another trajectory and another position, to have other attachments (the oligarchic ideal for example) and to thereby use my theory differently (cynically for example). All this is only a question of perspective and point of view, that is, in the end, a question of position and trajectory. (1999: 219)

Bourdieu's approach falls back into a certain relativism. Relational thinking is privileged at the cost of an interrogation of the different terms of the relation; no attention is given

to the substance of differences. The richness of the content of critical discourses is lost in the endeavour to explain all texts as strategic positioning. Critical ideas in Bourdieu's work emerge as the simple outcome of their author's trajectory, the objectification of the determinism which weighs on the dispositions and positions of intellectuals, never the product of convictions which can be argued for or against. However, some positions are more sustainable than others, some ideas and situations more justified than others. These questions, as suggested by Lemieux (1999: 220, but see also Harker *et al.* 1990: 205), are at the centre of Boltansky and Thevenot's book *De la Justification* (1991), 'the question of the fair, the just, or the correct' (163) [*La question du juste, de la justice ou de la justesse*'] concerning the different positions involved in critical debates.

They conduct a statistical and stylistic analysis of a series of letters of denunciation sent to French dailies, to show that different criticisms, beyond issues of trajectory, interest and position, have different chances of being received as more justified than others. They refuse to see texts as simply 'arbitrary channels for people's symbolic investments, for whom they would represent nothing else than a means to express their belonging to groups, or, what, in this logic amounts to the same thing, to manifest their distinction' (30-31). Though Bourdieu is not mentioned, his name can be read between these lines.

Thus in Bourdieu's work, the discourses of agents are emptied of their substance, reduced to a few formal qualities which are only expressive of the game of symbolic competition, a game Bourdieu focuses on at the expense of a discussion of the values and meanings it involves. This reductive approach is not restricted to discourses only. It also informs Bourdieu's account of cultural production and consumption, an account which fails to address the issue of the substantive significance of these processes, just as the objects involved in them are denied any substantive meaning, as discussed earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 5. Lahire's (1999a) characterisation of Bourdieu's approach to literary texts can be extended to his sociology as a whole: Bourdieu has not succeeded in 'grasping, in its specificity, the order of productions' (43).

Because in his studies of the fields of art and literature, as in his studies of the intellectual field and the field of fashion, Bourdieu focuses on the position of producers, their strategies of position taking and their struggles for the definition of artistic, literary,

intellectual or fashion capital, he fails to look at the specificity of the works produced and consumed: 'what interests Bourdieu is the genesis, "the mode of generation of practices"; not, as in Foucault, what they produce, but what produces them' (Certeau 1988: 58).

I would now like to return to the field of fashion, and more specifically to Bourdieu's account of the fashion discourse to further discuss the points I have raised in this chapter.

### 3. *Le Discours de Mode*

In their analysis of the field of high fashion in *Le Couturier et sa Griffe* (1975), Bourdieu and Delsaut refer to 'the fashion discourse' [*le discours de mode*] (23), the discourse of fashion insiders, the members of the field of fashion such as designers and fashion journalists. The adjectives designers use to describe their products, for instance, are an illustration of the homology between their aesthetic position and their position in the field of fashion. Thus the language of 'exclusivity, authenticity and refinement' (12) of the dominant designers is opposed to the rigorous and audacious language of avantgarde designers. The former is the language of 'sobriety, elegance, balance and harmony' (12) whereas the latter is that of 'liberty, youth and fantasy' (12). Such words, Bourdieu and Delsaut argue, drawing on Austin's (1971) notion of performative utterances, have, as in magic, the power to do things, and it is in the field of fashion that such a power is, according to the French sociologist, the most accomplished. The power of these words 'contributes the more effectively to the valuing of the products praised since they seem to report the value whilst they are in fact producing it' (23). And that is where Bourdieu and Delsaut distinguish their approach to the fashion discourse from that of Barthes. Because Barthes' semiotic analysis concentrates solely on an internal reading of the fashion discourse, it leaves aside, they argue, 'the question of the function of the fashion discourse in the process of the production of fashion goods' (23).

In *The Fashion System* (1990) Barthes is not concerned with the content of the texts but with their form (Dosse 1992a: 99; Jobling 1999; Milner 1995: 85). Drawing on Saussure's linguistic analysis he wants to find a grammar of 'written clothing' (Barthes 1990: Chap. 1), the description of fashion in fashion magazines. The intelligibility of the texts pertains to the texts themselves rather than to the readers and their ability to activate

them. What interests Barthes is to understand the 'vestimentary code' (Barthes 1990: Part I) rather than the meanings and values of written clothing, which are briefly discussed in a short second part only, 'The Rhetorical System'. In that respect the 'what' of the fashion discourse which is missing from Bourdieu's analysis - an issue I return to shortly - is also largely absent from Barthes' work, where answers to 'how' - how does the vestimentary code work? - are favoured.

Both Barthes and Bourdieu are interested in the system of words which are interposed between the object and its user, what the former calls a 'veil' (1990: xi) and the latter a 'screen' (1995c: 138), and for Barthes, as for Bourdieu, fashion exists not only through clothes but also through discourses on them. But whereas Bourdieu and Delsaut look at the system as only one part of a wider system of production, the field, and therefore external to the discourse itself, Barthes focuses on the internal system, its linguistic structure. And this is why Barthes, Bourdieu and Delsaut argue, fails to understand the function of the fashion discourse and its relevance as a specific instance of the structure of the field in which it is situated (1975: 23).

The oppositions between designers, their styles and their lifestyles objectified in the discourses of these same designers, Bourdieu and Delsaut point out, also inform the different styles of discourses of the different fashion magazines, discourses which are, according to Bourdieu 'the privileged site for the affirmation of differences' (1996d: 63). These differences also oppose the readers of those magazines. The higher a specific magazine is in the hierarchy of magazines, the more sober its descriptive style, corresponding to the high social position of its readers.

However, only a few lines of *Le Couturier et sa Griffe* are actually devoted to the discourse of fashion magazines, and only to point to their strategy of distinction or pretension, a strategy objectified in discourses that are read as the exact reflection of these magazines' positions in the French field of fashion magazines. The opposition between dominant producers and pretenders, they argue,

can be found again in the style of discourses of celebration, whose rethoric is the more soberly descriptive for being addressed to a socially more elevated public: the fashion articles of the most luxurious magazines (*Vogue*, *Jardin des Modes*), like advertisements in luxury magazines, only show or describe, evoke or suggest (for example the reference to art

always remains allusive), whereas less classy magazines more directly addressed to the new bourgeoisie who produces them, like *Marie Claire* and *Elle*, are very direct because the pretension to distinction can only deliver the objective truth of pretension and distinction. (1975: 12)

The articles Bourdieu and Delsaut talk about in reference to luxurious magazines are like *Le Monde*'s, where an allusive and evocative style is used to report on fashion shows. It is the discourse of dominant institutions, which sees 'art in the refusal of a studied and flash style, i.e. in double negation, litote, understatement, "balance" and "refinement"' (12). However, not all dominant institutions draw on such a style. *The Guardian*, whose position in the field of British newspapers corresponds to that of *Le Monde* in the field of French newspapers, as will be further developed in the next chapter, is also a dominant institution of consecration. But the consecration which takes place there is not that of high culture, the only consecration Bourdieu is concerned with, but popular culture: there, art is not seen 'in the refusal of a studied and flash style', but rather the opposite. A cool colloquial language of mockery and irony is used to consecrate fashion as popular culture, as will be illustrated in Part III.

Moreover, here Bourdieu and Delsaut, like Barthes, are concerned with a discussion of the formal characteristics of the fashion discourse, in this particular case read as a formal expression of different field positions. Though they insist on the importance of discourses as 'the privileged site for the affirmation of differences', as observed earlier, they do not analyse the meanings constitutive of the very specificity and distinctiveness of these differences. Again what interests Bourdieu and Delsaut is the issue of the process of formal affirmation of difference, rather than the *substance* of the differences being affirmed. The object of their comments is *the idea* of the different constructions of sentences and of the different choices of words; like Barthes, they fail to discuss the different values that such constructions and choices convey.

A similar approach informs Bourdieu's analysis of newspaper reviews. In *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993a), Bourdieu looks at 'what the papers say' (87) about a theatre play, *Le Tournant*, by Françoise Dorin. These reviews show that 'the space of judgements on the theatre is homologous with the space of the newspapers for which they are produced and which disseminate them and also with the space of the theatres and

plays about which they are formulated' (89). 'What the papers say' is in the end an exact expression of this set of homologies which the researcher can simply read off the texts. The papers' discourses act as a refractor of the field structure, a formal objectification of its characteristics. In this field as in other fields, values and beliefs are reduced to the transparent expression of the relation of difference which exists between positions. Little insight is finally gained into what papers actually say in the formal process of expressing different field positions. Similarly, when Bourdieu and Delsaut insist that fashion journalists' discourses are an 'arbitrary imposition of value' (1975: 26), no analysis is conducted as to what values are being imposed through these discourses. It is these values which I discuss in my analysis of *Le Monde* and *The Guardian*'s discourses on fashion.

Thus although, as seen in the previous chapter, he mentions that the discourses of institutions of consecration such as newspapers 'consecrate a certain type of work and a certain type of cultivated person' (1993a: 121), Bourdieu nevertheless fails to consider the variety of 'type[s] of work', and of 'cultivated person[s]', which these institutions consecrate, the former too often being equated only with high culture and the latter with owners of high cultural capital. Because Bourdieu is concerned with showing the dominance of high culture and with unravelling the process of legitimisation of high culture, it is as if the values created in discourses of consecration could only be those of high culture.

For Bourdieu, as Johnson notes, fields are structured by 'a particular form of belief concerning what constitutes a cultural (e.g. literary artistic) work and its aesthetic or social value' (1993: 9). However, Johnson omits to say, the question of this 'what' - of what it really is that constitutes a cultural work and its value - is little researched, assumed more than critically discussed and analysed. The aesthetic value is assumed to be informed necessarily by the Kantian aesthetic. By focusing on a structural account of different discourses rather than on an analysis of the 'what' constitutive of their differences, Bourdieu is trapped into a field reductionism which does not allow him fully to penetrate discourses, such as, in the field of fashion, the '*discours de mode*'. Likewise, cultural objects appear as little more than windows onto the field, whilst artists are reduced to transparent conveyors of its organisation, their practice limited to a process of

objectification of the field structure and of the strategy of distinction of their consumers and producers.

Moreover, and as Lahire (1999a: 43) suggests, to say that literary works are what institutions consider as such - as discussed in the last chapter, for Bourdieu, institutions of consecration institute reality - is a useful reminder of the idea that reality is socially constructed (see Berger and Luckmann 1991). It does not however, 'answer the question as to *what characterises these different constructions* of the real' (Lahire 1999a: 43, my emphasis). Similarly, to say that fashion is what institutions symbolically create as such does not allow one to find out what the specificities of the different constructions of fashion are, specificities I address in my analysis of the symbolic production of fashion in *Le Monde* and *The Guardian* in Part III.

Bourdieu helps us to understand the *role* of discourses on fashion in the field of fashion, but not the discourses themselves, the type of fashion they symbolically produce, the values they attribute to fashion, the way they render it meaningful, and significant. A parallel with Lucien Goldmann's distinction between the explanation of a text and its understanding can be made. Whilst explanation 'consists in situating the plays in the wider structures in which they originate and which they express' (Wolff 1993b: 103-104), understanding refers to the interpretation of texts 'in terms of their content and structural composition'. Bourdieu allows us to explain texts, but not to understand them. In contrast I will be concerned with understanding *what* takes place in the discourses of symbolic production of fashion in *Le Monde* and *The Guardian*.

Bourdieu's theory of the field does not offer cultural analysts the space to enter fully into the texts they study, to spend time with them in their own right. Bourdieu misses the sort of insights provided by in-depth analyses of the different discourses which, if they reflect different structural positions, also convey, as Bourdieu himself argues, different values, values whose characteristics he nevertheless leaves aside, hence denying difference an expressive and legitimate voice.

In his analysis of reviews of Lamming's fiction, Griswold notes that meaning is a

two-stage fabrication: part comes from what reviewers find significant, part from what they think their readers will find significant [...] A reviewer tries to indicate 'what is going on' or 'what happens' in the book,

and, in doing so, he or she is both answering questions about the book's meaning for himself or herself and trying to make the book meaningful to the assumed audience. (1987: 1082)

This is equally true of reports on high fashion, which, as I show in my analysis, does not mean the same thing for French and British journalists, who experience it and construct it differently, so as to render them meaningful to their readers. But whilst Bourdieu would focus on the structural relation of difference, I concentrate on the substance of the elements of the difference and on the meanings involved in the two-stage fabrication Griswold talks about.

Thus where Bourdieu, in his brief account of the discourse of *Vogue* and *Elle* is concerned with a formal analysis of the language of the magazines as expressive of structural differences, I investigate the two poles of the difference, in this case *Le Monde* and *The Guardian*, to uncover the 'what' of the meanings and values which are conveyed through formal difference and unfold in the *substantial* differences of points of view. I look at what Crowther calls, as mentioned earlier, 'the level of particularity which makes difference *real*'. Rather than showing that different discourses reflect different *points* of view, I aim to show *what* different discourses convey through different points of view.

To come back to the example of *Vogue* and *Elle*, the questions I would be asking are: what are the ideas that the different choices of repertoire of these magazines express? Are they ideas on the body, for instance, on femininity, or, as in *Le Monde* and *The Guardian* as analysed in my work, on culture? And if so, what are the implications that the different ideas these magazines convey about a particular subject can have for theories of femininity, or of the body or culture? Are Bourdieu's arguments on these issues contradicted or strengthened? In my analysis of *Le Monde* and *The Guardian* I argue that the values which discourses on fashion consecrate are complex and varied, pointing towards the limits of Bourdieu's analysis of the notions of high culture and popular culture.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout Part II, in references to Bourdieu's work, I often draw on expressions like 'he fails to', 'he has neglected', 'he ignores', 'he reduces', etc. Captured in these expressions is a central aspect of my critique of Bourdieu. Like him, I share a concern for the symbolic violence which the unacknowledged arbitrariness of high cultural values has exercised over cultural practices and tastes. Unlike him, however, I do believe that there is such a thing as popular culture, and that this popular culture encompasses a wide variety of rich and complex experiences and artefacts, as I try to show in Part III. And this is where one of the main limits of Bourdieu's sociology resides: the failure to account for these, the failure to go far enough in critiquing the cultural arbitrary, which results in his failure to break with the normative doxa. The cultural tastes and practices Bourdieu accounts for are only, to borrow again an expression dear to him, a 'special case of what is possible' (Bachelard, quoted in Bourdieu 1998c: 2), a dimension he tends to forget. Even if dominant and widely shared - they inform *Le Monde's* discourse on fashion, for example - they are not exclusive of other cultural experiences where high culture is not the sole cultural reference and popular culture is highly valued, as in *The Guardian*.

There are in Bourdieu's work many concepts, such as distinction, cultural capital, and symbolic production, which he restricts to the field of high culture only and the traditional views of culture such as those found in *Le Monde*, but which are relevant to the field of popular culture too. Thus though I draw on his sociology to account for *Le Monde's* discourse on culture, I also draw on it to account for *The Guardian's*, where popular culture is highly valued. Bourdieu does not make any room in his sociology for re-valuing popular culture, but the space can be made in spite of him, and ultimately turned against him: the conceptual tools he has developed exclusively to demonstrate the pervasiveness of high cultural values can also be used to understand processes of popular cultural valuing, hence showing the limits of his dominant culture thesis.

Thus, it is not so much his concepts I am critical of, as the way he puts them to use, confining them to one case only of empirical reality - high cultural discourses - hence failing to show either their relevance to other situations or simply the inadequacy

of such concepts to explain certain occurrences. For Bourdieu's sociology is a well-oiled and rigid system which does not allow for irregularities and contradictions, for a departure from what he says are the dominant social and cultural rules : popular culture is always and only a dominated culture, cultural tastes and experiences are always structured by a reference to high culture, production and consumption are clearly distinct from each other and neatly articulated in a systematic play of homology exclusive of overlaps between classes of products or consumers. The clear cut separation he sets between subfield of large scale production and subfield of restricted production, for example, is also a case in point, being relevant to *Le Monde's* discourse, but not to the *The Guardian's*, as I show in Part III.

This does not mean that Bourdieu's sociology is to be rejected wholesale, that it is never adequate to account for cultural tastes and practices. Rather, it means that it is not always adequate, and when studying popular culture, for instance, must be adapted to become so, in spite of his discourse on the popular. There is a gap in his work when it comes to accounting for cultural experiences and discourses which do not fit with the cultural patterns he says are the dominant ones. This gap can be filled either by applying some of Bourdieu's own concepts to the situation at hand, as when for example the notion of cultural capital is extended to popular culture, or by pointing to the inadequacy of some of his ideas to specific cultural experiences and discourses, as with the distinctions he makes between subfields of cultural production. This also means that Bourdieu has ultimately failed to question dominant models of thought : popular culture in his work, as in the dominant discourse he accounts for, is not acknowledged as a culture *per se*; high culture for him is not ultimately arbitrary and the cultural doxa is left unchallenged.

Thus, there are many ways in which my analysis of *Le Monde* and *The Guardian* could be said to be both Bourdieuan and not Bourdieuan. In the first place, I certainly draw on Bourdieu's notion of symbolic production to look at the discursive creation of notions of fashion and culture. I do this, however, by paying attention to discourses in a way foreign to Bourdieu's methodology, as I have argued in Chapter 6: I spend time with the discourses of symbolic production in their own right - commenting on the meanings and values which unfold there - rather than as transparent windows onto the field they

belong in. At the same time I draw on many of Bourdieu's analytical tools to enter these discourses, though I extend them to a discussion of popular cultural experiences and artefacts, which he does not do. I rely on some of his concepts and analyses, but I also comment on their limits. Bourdieu's sociology is invaluable in its project to lift the veil off the cultural arbitrary, but it is a shame that it does not go far enough in this endeavour and that he ultimately gets caught in this veil.

*Part III*

*Case Study: High Fashion and Pop Fashion in Le  
Monde and The Guardian*

## THE RESEARCH PROCESS

I had already been living in London for almost a year, after having spent most of my life in France, being French, when I decided to do a PhD in sociology. My interest in the topic was prompted by my position as a Parisian Londoner interested in fashion, a position I return to later. There were, I thought, major differences in the way fashion was talked about and constructed in both countries, and especially in the newspapers I was then most familiar with, *Le Monde* and *Libération* in France, *The Independent* and *The Guardian* in the UK. Bourdieu's idea of symbolic production, which I had studied in France, became very relevant. These newspapers were examples of the 'institutions of diffusion and consecration' (1993a: 133) Bourdieu talks about, as discussed in the last chapter, and which 'consecrate a certain type of work and a certain type of cultivated person' (121). Whereas in the French newspapers, but especially in *Le Monde*, this type seemed to have to do with the idea of high culture, in the British papers it seemed to be linked with notions of popular culture. I decided that I would conduct my research along these lines: the analysis, drawing on Bourdieu's notion of symbolic production, of the construction of fashion as high culture in *Le Monde* and as popular culture in *The Guardian*.

However, this was to be only one aspect of my empirical work. Sticking to Bourdieu's sociology, I had planned to look at *Le Monde* and *The Guardian* as 'particular case[s]' only, as mentioned in Chapter 5, 'of all the operations of transfer of symbolic capital through which an agent, or more exactly an institution acting through the intermediary of an agent with due mandate, invests a product with value' (Bourdieu 1975: 23). After I unravelled the values and meanings attached to fashion in *Le Monde* and *The Guardian*, I intended to show how such meanings colluded with those conveyed and constructed by other institutions of consecration - museums and style magazines, for instance, sites I come back to in the conclusion - to produce fashion as high culture in France and as popular culture in the UK.

However, I soon realised that the task I had set myself would well exceed the limits of the PhD, not least because many issues arose to do with the sociology of Bourdieu, which I was studying in more depth at the same time that I was conducting my textual analysis. The material I had collected and analysed allowed me to comment on some central points of Bourdieu's work on the field of culture. I decided to abandon the idea of further field research to recentre my PhD on a discussion of these. My involvement with this work thus shifted from an interest in a specific idea - symbolic production - which motivated the initial orientation of my project, to a more systematic engagement with the theoretical and conceptual apparatus developed by Bourdieu in his analysis of the field of culture. This shift is also symptomatic of a change in my intellectual relation to his work: from a rather strict adhesion to its theoretical and methodological stance to a more critical and often dissenting position. The texts I collected in *Le Monde* and *The Guardian*, rather than being the first step towards more field analysis, became a platform for a comment on some of the limits of Bourdieu's sociology, and more specifically his discussion of high culture and popular culture, and his methodology.

As discussed in Part II, though Bourdieu insists that discourses are central to the process of the symbolic production of culture, he himself pays little attention to these discourses, at best reducing them to a transparent window onto the field to which they belong, and to being the product of agents' strategies of distinction. Moreover, and as I also point out in Part II, Bourdieu is interested only in the process of construction of high culture, but my empirical analysis showed that the idea of the consecration of a 'certain type of work' and a 'certain type of cultivated person' is relevant to the field of popular culture too. Different products emerged from the discourses of the two newspapers I researched, differences related to different notions of culture. I therefore decided to do what Bourdieu does not himself do; that is, to spend some time with the discourses which participate in the process of symbolic production to see what the differences involved consist of and how they are articulated. And it is because I looked at the substantial differences behind formal difference, to come back to an idea developed in the last chapter, that I was able to gain insight into some of the strengths, but also some of the limits, of Bourdieu's sociology of culture.

In my research, I was thus less interested in showing that the different points of view of the newspapers reflect their positions in their respective fields - an approach Bourdieu would favour - than in looking at what these points of view involve, and what they ultimately imply for Bourdieu's sociology. I do not, however, think that these two approaches are contradictory or exclusive, rather I believe they are complementary. But it is beyond the scope of this thesis to conduct both a textual analysis *and* a field analysis of the sort Bourdieu conducts.

Before I further elaborate on the issue of my reading of *Le Monde* and *The Guardian*, I would like to comment on the choice of these two newspapers as sites of analysis.

### **1. Collecting the Data**

I chose *Le Monde* and *The Guardian* for the following reasons: firstly, I was already familiar, as a reader, with their discourses - it is this familiarity which triggered my interest in their construction of notions of culture; secondly, they have a similar position in the field of newspapers of their respective countries; thirdly on a very practical plane, these were two newspapers I could have easy access to. Of *The Independent* and *The Guardian*, only the latter was available on CD-ROM at the London Institute where I was already working, whilst *Le Monde* was the only French newspaper also available on CD-ROM at the French Institute. I could have looked at other sites such as Paris *Musée de la Mode* and the V&A but again, being now based in London, the former was not a convenient material to work with.

In both the London Institute and The French Institute, the CD-ROMs were available up to 1996, the year I decided to concentrate on. Having moved to London at the beginning of that year, it was the discourse of that particular period I was most familiar with and out of which my hypothesis arose - that in *Le Monde* fashion is constructed as high culture, in *The Guardian* as popular culture - a hypothesis I decided to investigate in a sample of 35 articles selected at random from each newspaper.

Working on a particular topic common to both newspapers would, I felt allow me to better see the differences and specificities of the notions of culture they construct and convey. The French newspaper devotes very little space to fashion compared to *The*

*Guardian*, (the other French newspaper I had contemplated selecting, *Libération*, devotes even less space to the topic, which is another reason why *Le Monde* appeared as an appropriate choice for a comparison with *The Guardian*). Most fashion articles in *Le Monde* are reports on high fashion shows, the theme around which I decided to narrow down my selection of articles: This also left my selection fairly open. As will be illustrated in the coming chapters, there are different ways of using the shows as, literally, a *pre-text* for the newspapers to construct and convey their version of fashion, whether it be reporting on the shows to actually comment, for instance, on the wearability of fashion and inform consumers on ‘the look to see and be seen in’ (27-04) in *The Guardian*, or discuss the issue of a cultural crisis in France, in *Le Monde*. The 35 articles for each paper were picked at random after having entered in the library computers of The London Institute and *L’Institut Français* key words such as ‘collection’, ‘fashion show’, ‘high fashion’ for *The Guardian* and ‘collection’, ‘défilé’ [fashion show], ‘haute couture’ for *Le Monde*.

The fact that I was familiar with both newspapers and that they were both easily accessible certainly influenced my decision to choose them, more important, though, is the fact that they occupy the same position in the journalistic field of their respective country. Both *Le Monde* - created in 1944 - and *The Guardian* - created in 1821 as the *Manchester Guardian*, renamed *The Guardian* in 1959 - are what are commonly referred to as quality dailies [*journaux de qualité*], *Le Monde* alongside *Le Figaro* and *Libération* in France (see also Thogmartin 1998), and *The Guardian*, alongside *The Independent*, *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Financial Times* in the UK (see McNair 1999: 12-14). They have a similar circulation of about 398,000 for *The Guardian* and 389,000 for *Le Monde*, over 1999.

They are both addressed to what they call in their media pack ‘a readership of decision makers’, ‘of a high intellectual level’ and ‘young’ as *Le Monde* (2000) puts it, or a reader who ‘is typically young, upmarket and professional’, ‘well-educated and highly motivated’ in *The Guardian*’s (2000) words. 33.3% of the readers of *Le Monde* are less than 35 years old, and 35% for *The Guardian*. Both also have a comparable percentage of female readers: 44.1% for *Le Monde* and 46% for *The Guardian*. They are popular amongst intellectuals (see audience profile in the media pack of each newspaper, see also

Taylor 1993 for *The Guardian*, and Thogmartin 1998; Eveno 1996 for *Le Monde*). Both have a good reputation of quality journalism; Griffiths (1992: 281) talks about the 'distinguished journalism' of *The Guardian* while in France *Le Monde* has a strong reputation as an elite newspaper, an idea I return to in Chapter 8 (see also Thogmartin 1998: 204-205).

Finally, though *Le Monde* does not officially claim any political allegiance, in France this newspaper is certainly known as left wing newspaper. As Jean Planchais, former journalist of *Le Monde*, observes, 'the editorial staff, intellectually at least, leans toward' the left (quoted in Thogmartin 1998: 219). *The Guardian* is also known as a left-of-centre newspaper (see also Taylor 1993; Wilson 1996: 22).

## **2. The Reading Process**

As mentioned earlier, I have from the very beginning of my PhD been interested in the terms of the differences between the discourses of *Le Monde* and *The Guardian*. And it was the fact that I was reading both newspapers that helped me to apprehend the particularities of the discourse of each: I had read the French newspaper for a long time - and was thus accustomed and therefore perhaps blind to the nature of its high cultural discourse - before I started reading *The Guardian*, which then made the specificity of *Le Monde* more obvious. Reciprocally, the specificity of *The Guardian* was made visible in comparison with the discourse of the French newspaper. As Lamont suggests, 'the comparative method' rests on 'the assumption that cultural differences - the shock of otherness - will make valued cultural traits salient' (1992: 2).

However, because of my position as a French person living in a foreign country and thus susceptible to the 'shock of otherness', the comparative analysis I conduct in the next chapters had already been taking place *de facto*, if in a much less detailed manner, before I started formalising it and researching it more systematically for the purpose of the PhD. As I mentioned earlier, the initial idea for this PhD emerged from my everyday reading of the material at hand.

My views on the cultural characteristics of French and British societies are informed by my position as a member of these two societies; that is, they are informed by my point of view, meaning literally, as Bourdieu (2000) observes, the view taken from a

certain point. Through this point of view, my understanding of events or texts is systematically inscribed in a comparative intellectual framework, which heightens sensitivity to different 'valued cultural traits' such as those found in *Le Monde* and *The Guardian*. In the process of my understanding of texts which are culturally *other*, those of *The Guardian* for instance, I am, as a subject, 'drawn into an "event" of meaning' (Weinsheimer and Marshall 1989: xiv) - the event of understanding being, as Gadamer argues, 'a dialogue between interpreter and text (or text analogue)' (1989: 321) -, which constantly forces me to reflect on *known* texts, those of *Le Monde*, thus modifying my apprehension of them. This modified apprehension also informs my understanding of the *other* texts I engage with. The latter become familiar through their comparison with known texts, which in turn become other when compared to the now more familiar texts. Both reader and texts are caught in an endless process of interaction or co-production within a 'reading formation' (Bennett and Woollacott, quoted in Couldry 2000: 82), here the comparative reading.

I read *Le Monde* via my reading of *The Guardian*, and vice versa. Had I read one without ever having read the other, other themes and issues would have emerged, the product of other inter-textual associations, inter-textuality being understood here as 'the relations between texts established in specific conditions of reading and production' (Couldry 2000: 89n9). As Griswold also notes, 'the meanings attributed to any cultural object are fabrications, woven from the symbolic capacities of the object itself *and from the perceptual apparatus of those who experience the object*' (1987: 1079, my emphasis), and who, in the process of experiencing it, give it a particular shape, in the same way as they are shaped by it.

Thus although I conducted separate analyses of *Le Monde* on the one hand, and of *The Guardian* on the other, looking for the specificities of the French newspaper's discourse, and those of the British, I conducted them synchronically and my reading of one set of texts was constantly informed by my reading of the other. The themes I extracted from *Le Monde* were determined by those I extracted from *The Guardian* and must be seen as *de facto* crossing over the strict limits of one set of texts or the other. Hence, points of comparison were implicitly created between *Le Monde's* and *The Guardian's* reports in the process of my reading them as independent units, which

simultaneously cancelled out this state of isolation, as if through an extension of the frontiers of each set of texts now all caught in the common web - the inter-textuality - of the discourse on fashion shows. The themes around which I articulate my next chapters, such as, for instance, the designer, the body, the actual event of the fashion show or the mode of address of the readers, are such points of comparison which allow me to comment on the specificity of the discourse of each newspaper.

Moreover, the present work is also certainly a by-product of my particular position between two academic fields. Coming from a tradition, the French, which, as I discuss in parts I and II, is still often elitist - a tradition which I have incorporated, and which, as Bourdieu (1996b, see also Bourdieu 2000) would argue, is constitutive of my academic disposition, a sort of 'academic unconscious' (Bourdieu 2000) - the otherness of the British academic field - popular culture as a legitimate field of enquiry - appeared to me very distinctively. However, this otherness also allowed me to better reflect on the specificities of French academia, and more specifically on the particularism of Bourdieu's sociology. Hence, it is this movement to and fro between two traditions I share - the movement linked to my 'educational trajectory' (Bourdieu 2000) - and whose texts are part of my cultural capital, which ultimately informed my understanding of Bourdieu's work and my reading of the discourses of *Le Monde* and *The Guardian*. This movement is also constitutive of what Gadamer calls *Erfahrung* [experience] as 'an ongoing integrative process in which what we encounter widens our horizon, but only by overturning an existing perspective, which we can then perceive as erroneous or at least narrow' (Weinsheimer and Marshall 1989: xiii).

In that respect in Part I I use the comparative method - a movement between the texts of two different traditions triggered by my position as a member of them both - as an 'intellectual trick' (Robbins 1991: 76), a tool for sociological analysis, which better allows me to comment on the limits of Bourdieu's work. Likewise, the dialogue I institute, through a comparative analysis, between the texts of *Le Monde* and those of *The Guardian*, enables me to further discuss this work.

It is in the light of my reading of *Le Monde*, then, that I read *The Guardian* and vice versa. The themes that arose make sense only in this context. I 'activated' (Watson 1997: 88) the texts *via* a comparative perspective which allowed me to unravel their

richness. However, though readers can animate texts - as discussed in Chapter 3, they can appropriate them for different projects - texts are not, as Watson notes, without 'their own active structuring effect' (88). Readers, he continues, do not read texts 'in just any way they wish' (88). There are within texts, 'instructions' which, he argues in a statement reminiscent of Hall's (1996b) encoding/decoding model, 'yield strongly preferred readings' (88). Though a text allows a diversity of readings, its meaning being often complex or even contradictory (Wolff 1993a: 64), the reading is not endlessly open and unconstrained but is also determined by the text itself, which 'is not without its own structure' (Morley 1996: 282-283). Although my reading is not *the* right reading, it is nevertheless *a* right reading. I interpret the texts, activate them within the limits of the texts themselves. I activate the popular versus high culture dimension, notions which I read as encoded in a specific structure. In the coming chapters, I discuss this structure, that is, the 'signifying mechanisms which promote certain meanings' (282) - headlines, modes of address to the readers, repertoire, and themes, for instance - as well as the meanings thereby promoted.

The themes and ideas I have chosen to discuss, then, are not pre-established categories I set according to my own perception of what a fashion show or high fashion are about, but topics and themes which emerge from my reading of these texts. The attention I pay to the discourse on, for instance, the designers, the clothes, or the significance of fashion for London or Paris is a product of the topics and meanings woven into the texts and which as a reader I 'activate' following 'the 'directive closures' encoded in the message' (Morley 1996: 282-283). I thus became particularly interested in, to paraphrase Griswold, 'the subjects, topics, themes, and images that the [journalists] evoked in order to give their readers a sense of what [the fashion shows and high fashion] were about' (1987: 1096), knowing that I had inferred from a routine reading, as I mentioned earlier, that in *Le Monde* fashion shows are about high art and in *The Guardian* about popular culture. And it is by looking, for example, at the type of artist and the 'type of work' (Bourdieu 1993a: 121) these newspapers favour, but also the 'type of cultivated person' (121) they are addressed to, that I was able to get an answer to the 'what' of the reports; that is, the 'what' of the symbolic value of the fashion being produced through discourses. Thus, 'a dialectical, back-and-forth process' takes place, as

Watson observes, through which on the one hand 'the text makes available various interpretative schemata', and on the other hand these schemata are activated by the reader, who brings 'his/her interpretive work into alignment' (1997: 90). However, this process is also mediated, just as it itself mediates it, by the movement or dialogue I have initiated between the two sets of texts through a comparative point of view.

'Textual analysis', as Crisci observes, 'is not a pre-defined and clear-cut set of theoretical principles and techniques that only awaits application to the study of meanings' (1997: 21-22), and I did not rely on a specific technique of analysis of the texts I have selected. I focused on the themes and ideas central to each newspaper but which are handled differently and which I comment on through different points of comparison, as discussed earlier. I paid attention to what *is* in the texts, but also, to what *is not* in the text, the absence in one paper of certain ideas or topics being made more conspicuous by its presence in the other. The cultural value attributed to fashion in both newspapers is conveyed and constructed both through the account of certain aspects or dimensions of the fashion shows - what constitutes their newsworthiness, a point I return to in Chapter 8 - and through the decision to not report on some of its dimensions, as when, for example, *Le Monde*, in contrast with *The Guardian*, does not comment on the stars present at the shows. Meaning is created not only within the utterances spelled out in the text, but also in the interstices of these utterances, where the excluded statements reside, which make the uttered ones significant. And throughout the reading process, reflecting on the former helps one grasp the specificity of the latter.

## Chapter 8

### THE FASHION SHOW: MODERNIST ART AND POPULAR CULTURE

This chapter looks at how the event of the fashion show is constructed in *Le Monde* and *The Guardian*, and the significance attributed to it. Whilst in the French newspaper fashion as a high art is celebrated, it is fashion as popular culture which the British newspaper consecrates, as I will also argue throughout chapters 9 and 10, and this is a type of consecration Bourdieu's discussion of symbolic production fails to accommodate. In *Le Monde*, high fashion is depicted as a modernist art where the designer is the creator of sublime works of art, whereas in *The Guardian*, high fashion shows are turned into a popular entertainment like the sports competition or the reading of celebrity magazines, and its characters are not *Le Monde*'s artists of modernity, but fashion stars; designers, models, actors and singers. These fashion stars serve to personalise the articles on fashion shows and give them their newsworthiness by turning them into popular entertainment. Personalisation through the naming of popular celebrities does not take place in *Le Monde* since, stars being what Morin calls 'serial goods' (1972: 101), they are the product of mass culture, a type of culture which does not fit in the French newspaper's elitist tradition. In *The Guardian* and *Le Monde*, different types of pleasure are involved in the spectacle of high fashion, whether it be the pleasure of participation and identification with the British newspaper's popular show or the distant contemplation of the French newspaper's fashion theatre. These are pleasures Bourdieu fails to analyse, reducing as he does all experiences of fashion to social class differentiation, as discussed in Part II.

Different notions of culture are thus conveyed in *Le Monde* and *The Guardian*'s texts. These notions are further articulated by the newspapers' choice of signifiers, like the words 'vision' in *Le Monde*, and a name such as 'Patsy Kensit' in *The Guardian*. These signifiers are like Barthes' (1973) myths, which give texts a specific inflexion, an inflexion towards high fashion shows as popular culture in *The Guardian*, and towards high fashion shows as high art in *Le Monde*.

Finally, in the two newspapers, there are cultural references which, to be made sense of, depend on the readers' possession of different cultural capitals. Whilst in *Le Monde* a high cultural capital is required to relate to the fashion constructed, in *The Guardian* it is a popular one, a type of capital Bourdieu neglects.

### 1. Modernist Artists and Stars

On March 16 1996, fashion shows are taking place in Paris. *The Guardian* writes, 'with big names such as Vivienne Westwood, Jean-Paul Gaultier, Chanel and Saint Laurent all still to come, this looks set to be one of the most exciting Paris fashion weeks for years'. Whilst in October of the same year, the British newspaper reports that 'big-name American designer Tommy Hilfiger [...] brought to town both his current menswear and womenswear collections' (02-10).

Throughout the shows, names are on display, like that of 'Antonio Berardi [who] first made the headlines in 1995' (21-09). Designers are depicted as the actors of the 'fashion scene' (28-02). They are the 'new social stars' (Wilson 1987: 178) who 'make the headlines' in the same way that celebrities do and who, like them, belong to 'the *Nouvel Olympe* of mass culture' where 'princes, kings and queens [...] the new "idols" of rock and pop music' all merge (Morin 1972: 155).

Thus *The Guardian* writes that, in Paris, 'Arnault appears determined to keep the names of both Dior and Givenchy in the limelight' (09-10), whilst 'the first big name to show [...] was Issey Miyake' (20-03) and 'Saint Laurent is one of the only remaining French-born designers that continues to make the headlines' (16-10). Designers are 'big names', fashion stars like Galliano whose collection led to 'a standing ovation and [...] scenes in which the designer was mobbed' (22-01); 'it was a triumphant end to a week that opened amid massive media attention' (26-01).

But whereas in *The Guardian*, designers are depicted as rock stars, high fashion in *Le Monde* is a high art performed by the designer as an artist, in French, a *créateur*, the translation for designer. *Créateur*, as Bourdieu and Delsaut note, conveys the notion of charisma, 'always its own foundation in itself' (1975: 19). The *créateur* is the individual in charge of 'the act of creation', who operates a 'sort of ontological promotion' (19) of

the objects s/he produces, leading to the transcending of their materiality, what Bourdieu and Delsaut also call their 'transsubstantiation' (28).

In French *Le Créateur* also refers to God, the supreme being with the gift of creation, a status *Le Monde* attributes to certain designers, such as Italian ones, the 'new gods of designers'<sup>1</sup> (02-05). The fashion *créateur* is a gifted individual, an artist whose dresses are promoted to the rank of high art. The French newspaper talks, for example, about 'the poetry of John Galliano'<sup>2</sup> and of 'his dress out of a painting by Winterhalter'<sup>3</sup> (23-01). The designer is not just a dress maker, he is a poet, a painter like Dries Van Noten, who 'paints with the colours of an orientalist'<sup>4</sup> (09-07) or a 'drawer' ['*dessinateur*'] (29-01) like Lacroix, whose clothes are 'similar to sketches in space'<sup>5</sup> (29-01).

High fashion designers are given a responsibility that goes far beyond the making of dress; 'they carry through their collections a vision of the world'<sup>6</sup> (29-02), 'a story of the next century whose copyright is the preserve of fashion'<sup>7</sup> (13-03). Paco Rabanne, for instance, is a 'bricoleur visionary'<sup>8</sup> (26-01) who, like Norbert Forstman, masters 'the art of the invisible'<sup>9</sup> (22-01). In *Le Monde*, designers are artists whose activity is not part of the routine of everyday life, but rather transcends it. They are not involved with the materialism of existence, rather they offer 'the world' a vision. They are the individual subjects whose position, as in modernist art (see Freitag 1996; Schaeffer 1996b), becomes universalized. Issey Miyake, for instance, is praised for his ability to 'give fashion a universal language'<sup>10</sup> (12-03), a language which conveys the feelings, 'the illuminated pleasures and the anxieties of the world'<sup>11</sup> (04-05) but also 'the boredom of the world'<sup>12</sup> (22-03) and 'the dreams and fears of childhood, the cruel tales of a humanity

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<sup>1</sup> 'nouveaux dieux des stylistes'

<sup>2</sup> 'la poésie de John Galliano'

<sup>3</sup> 'ses robes surgies d'un tableau de Winterhalter'.

<sup>4</sup> 'brosse avec les couleurs d'une orientaliste'

<sup>5</sup> 'pareilles à des croquis dans l'espace'

<sup>6</sup> 'ils portent à travers leur collections une vision du monde'

<sup>7</sup> 'un récit du prochain siècle dont la mode se réserve les droits d'auteurs'

<sup>8</sup> 'visionnaire bricoleur'

<sup>9</sup> 'l'art de l'invisible'

<sup>10</sup> 'redonner un langage universel à la mode'

<sup>11</sup> 'les plaisirs illuminés et les angoisses du monde'

<sup>12</sup> 'l'ennui du monde'

where everyone is a wolf for everyone else'<sup>13</sup> (29-01). High fashion in *Le Monde* has reached a spiritual state. Like the art of modernity Gablik discusses, it has become 'an independent world of pure creation which [has] its own essentially spiritual essence' (1986: 21). High fashion designers are the universal artists of modernity, elevated, like for example Colonna, Westwood or Fred Sathal, to the rank of 'author[s]'<sup>14</sup> (08-10), and who express themselves as well as the sensibilities of the world - as Gablik also observes, the modernist artist 'saw himself as a kind of priest who divined the interior soul, or spirit' (1986: 21). *Le Monde's* fashion designers belong to an elevated space separated from everyday practical life, and in which, no longer 'homo faber' but 'homo significans' (Burgin 1986: 153), they are devoted to the 'exaltation of the mind'<sup>15</sup> (18-01) and the expression of humanity's emotions.

Thus whilst in *The Guardian* designers remain attached to day-to-day life and the events that characterize it - we hear about Rocha's father, 'a retired accountant', and his 'girlfriend who was studying fashion' (28-02), about Clements and Ribeiro, who 'met at Central Saint Martins in the late eighties [...] and married in 1992' (21-09) - in *Le Monde* designers of high fashion are above humanity and the commonness of the everyday. Endowed with supernatural power, they are not depicted as participating in the routine of ordinary life, but rather as bringing magic to it through the quality of their work. For in *Le Monde*, the activity of the *créateur* verges on that of the magician: Christian Lacroix, for example, the French newspaper notes, 'asserts himself as an illusionist. Here, he is the creator of dreams, of sudden apparitions, as if coming out of a fantastic ball, where Domergue and Boldini draw in the shade, the fairies of the night'<sup>16</sup> (29-01). Mugler's 'magical lash of a whip'<sup>17</sup> turns his models into 'the birds of a magical night'<sup>18</sup> (22-03). Galliano's collection is 'full of apparitions and dreams'<sup>19</sup> (19-03) while Bertrand Maréchal 'liberates all the magic of his dresses'<sup>20</sup> (19-10). Because they are magicians,

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<sup>13</sup> 'les rêves et les peurs de l'enfance, les contes cruels d'une humanité où chacun est un loup pour l'aure'

<sup>14</sup> 'la mode d' "auteur"'

<sup>15</sup> 'l'exaltation de l'esprit'

<sup>16</sup> 'Cristian Lacroix s'affirme comme un illusioniste. Le voici créateur de songes, d'apparitions surgies d'un bal fantasque, où Domergue et Boldini croquent dans l'ombre les fées de la nuit'

<sup>17</sup> 'coup de fouet magique'

<sup>18</sup> 'les oiseaux d'une nuit magique'

<sup>19</sup> 'pleine d'apparitions et de songes'

<sup>20</sup> 'libère toute la magie de ses robes'

designers can impose an invisible gap between themselves and the public. As Benjamin writes, the magician ‘maintains the natural distance between the patient and himself; though he reduces it very slightly by the laying on of hands, he greatly increases it by virtue of his authority’ (1992: 227). Distance is imposed between the ordinary member of real life and fashion designers, who because of their magical power evolve in a space removed from the experience of the everyday, a space which, as in Bourdieu’s Kantian aesthetic discussed in Part II, grants them the ‘aesthetic distancing’ necessary to ‘the detachment of the aesthete’ (Bourdieu 1996a: 34).

This distance, in the case of the designer as depicted by *The Guardian*, that is the designer as fashion celebrity, is bridged by the condition of being a star itself, whose position is de-distantiated - a concept I return to in the next chapters - from that of the readers. The star, Edgar Morin writes, combines ‘the exceptional with the ordinary, the ideal with the everyday’ (quoted in Dyer 1998: 22), and it is on this everydayness that the readers can draw in order to penetrate the intimacy and the elitism of the collection. It is because ‘fantasy is always revealed to us in some of the terms of the familiar’ (Gaines 1990: 19) that the readers can make it theirs, in the ordinary pursuit of the extraordinary. ‘After all’, as Frith and Savage put it, ‘one of the defining qualities of being ordinary [...] is wanting to be extraordinary’ (1998: 16), an observation which echoes Morin’s idea that ‘to be acknowledged as human being is first to be acknowledged the right to imitate gods’ (1972: 34), in this case, the modern gods of the *Nouvel Olympe* which is mass culture and its popular stars.

The space of everyday life is structured both by the extra-ordinary and the ordinary, by proximity and distance, which feed each other in a play of inter-relation. It is this mixing of experiences within the realm of daily life, the complexities and contradictions of experience, which Bourdieu fails to address in his analysis of people’s engagement with cultural texts, in which distance and proximity, the sublime and the banal, the everyday and the extra-ordinary never seem compatible, ‘just as the sacred [opposes itself] to the profane’ (Bourdieu 1997b: 112). But through celebrities, the sacred and the profane merge, the extra-ordinary and the ordinary become one and the same world, and it is through this paradox, the paradox of the ‘stars-as-ordinary and the stars-as-special’ (Dyer 1998: 43) that *The Guardian*’s readers are given the possibility of

bridging the gap between their day-to-day life and the extra-ordinary space of elite fashion, that same extra-ordinary space kept apart and isolated from real life by the artist-designer of *Le Monde*. Stars, as Morin (1972: 26) points out, have become profane beings. It is an evolution which ‘stimulates and multiplies the contact points between stars and mortals’ (36), who can now find in their idols some familiar traits. Stars, whilst at the same time remaining other to our existence, have become ‘*assimilable*’ (34) into our life, which thus transcends both the ordinary and the extra-ordinary in a combination of the ideal and the everyday.

But in the French newspaper, the fashion show, more than just being a showing of clothes, becomes the cultural event of the encounter with high culture, an artistic manifestation like, for example, theatre. Inaugurating the shows, *Le Monde* writes, ‘the curtain rose in a room of the French stadium turned into a small theatre of fashion for a melodramatic retrospective of Parisian elegance’<sup>21</sup> (23-01). Fiction appears on the stage of the catwalk, transformed into ‘a stage decorated with a bed for a princess and a pea’<sup>22</sup> (23-01). With Galliano, the French newspaper also notes, ‘technique is never a disguise. Aquarellist of travel, Galliano blows on citations and they take wing, he imposes himself as the absolute director of this pleasure named *couture*’<sup>23</sup> (16-03).

Here, high fashion becomes a *pleasurable* encounter with high art: ‘It is with a real happiness’, *Le Monde* observes, ‘that we meet [the muses of Bertrand Maréchal] again in the intimacy of the Hotel Costes’<sup>24</sup> (13-03) whilst ‘Christian Lacroix concludes the haute couture fashion shows in joy [...]. Joy is here, and fills the room to the last outfit’<sup>25</sup> (29-01). The colours, the cut and the material of the clothes on show are the sources of this pleasure, as in Tsumura’s collection, ‘sculpted in space’<sup>26</sup> (13-03) and where the audience can contemplate ‘all the metamorphoses of a fabric, in turn soft, gummy, “thermo-contracted”, crispy like paper, natural, artificial like this “fake wood”

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<sup>21</sup> ‘le rideau s’est levé dans une salle du stade français transformé en petit théâtre de la mode à l’occasion d’une retrospective mélo des élégances parisiennes’

<sup>22</sup> ‘une avant-scène garnie d’un lit de princesse au petit pois’

<sup>23</sup> ‘la technique n’est jamais déguisement. Aquarelliste du voyage, John Galliano souffle sur les citations, elles s’envolent, s’imposant ici comme le metteur en scène absolu de ce plaisir nommé couture’

<sup>24</sup> ‘c’est avec un vrai bonheur que l’on retrouve [les muses de Bertrand Maréchal] dans l’intimité de l’Hotel Costes’

<sup>25</sup> ‘Christian Lacroix conclut dans la joie les défilés de haute couture [...]. La joie est là, qui emplit la salle jusqu’au dernier modèle’

<sup>26</sup> ‘sculptée dans l’espace’

print. Beyond sometimes improbable forms, an intention, an energy emerge, which evoke the futurist games of Fortunato Depero<sup>27</sup> (13-03). *Le Monde* journalists praise ‘the working of the cut, [and] drapings’<sup>28</sup> (13-03) of high fashion outfits. What is being valued here is not, *pace* Bourdieu, the distant consumption of high fashion simply as a means towards an end, social differentiation, but this consumption as an end in its own right; a source of visual enjoyment, a high art destined to the satisfaction of one’s gaze. During Lacroix’s collection, for instance, the French newspaper writes, ‘the public finds happiness’<sup>29</sup> (16-03). It is this happiness, the pleasurable contemplation of high fashion, which Bourdieu omits to analyse when he reduces all consumption of high fashion to an act of distinction, as discussed in Part II.

Thus, in the French newspaper, pleasure is to be had from the contemplation of high fashion as works of art displayed on a theatre stage, a ‘theatre of fashion’<sup>30</sup> (23-01) like the Ircam [*Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique*] turned into a ‘fantastic kingdom’<sup>31</sup> for Tsumura’s show of ‘colourful fictions’<sup>32</sup> (13-03). At Galliano’s show, the stage is peopled with ‘erratic beauties who appeared like mirages in the desert [...] They become the heroins of this fantastic ride’<sup>33</sup> (23-01), whilst Maréchal

sprays drops of fake diamonds, like a perfume, so as to keep for these invented princesses the luxury of a part: an incognito tunic made of crepe and black velvet for a real-false runaway Persian queen, a tight pink satin evening dress like sewn draperie in which she will hide her rubies<sup>34</sup>. (13-03)

High fashion, likened to theatre, is again transposed into a world removed from real experience; the world of fictional representation. The fashion show is depicted as a

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<sup>27</sup> ‘toutes les métamorphoses d’un tissu, tour à tour mou, gommeux, “thermo-contracté”, craquant comme du papier, naturel, artificiel comme cet imprimé “faux bois”. Au delà des formes parfois improbables, une intention, une énergie se dégagent, évoquant les jeux futuristes de Fortunato Depero’

<sup>28</sup> ‘le travail de la coupe, [et] les drapés’

<sup>29</sup> ‘le public trouve son bonheur’

<sup>30</sup> ‘théâtre de la mode’

<sup>31</sup> ‘royaume fantastique’

<sup>32</sup> ‘fictions colorées’

<sup>33</sup> ‘[de] belles désaxées apparues comme des mirages dans le désert [...]. Elles deviennent les héroïnes de cette chevauchée fantastique’

<sup>34</sup> ‘vaporise des gouttes de faux diamants, comme un parfum, manière de réserver à ses princesses inventées le luxe d’un rôle: ensemble tunique incognito de crêpe et velours noir pour vraie-fausse shahbanou en fugue, fourreau de satin rose comme un drap cousu dans lequel elle cachera ses rubis’

theatre play or a fairy tale, where ‘each representation is a story, a tale incarnated by divine beings, Juliette, Dominique, Debra, the black dahlia’<sup>35</sup> (13-03). Lacroix, for instance, ‘moving away from the anecdotal and the citations which freeze him, stages with his dresses sensations more than images’<sup>36</sup> (04-05) whilst ‘Rei Kawakubo (Comme des Garçons) recreates the mystery of “first nights” with a very private presentation’<sup>37</sup> (08-10) and ‘with Saint-Laurent, generously applauded, the black brightens up with spangles, à la recherche of a lost world. On the podium, models act the divinities’<sup>38</sup> (19-03). ‘Favouring more intimate presentations’, the French newspaper also notes, ‘fashion creators have recreated the scenery and the atmosphere of a city where pretty, weird strangers stop over on the path of Nathalie Barney or Zelda Fitzgerald’<sup>39</sup> (19-10).

The catwalk is turned by *Le Monde* into a theatre stage with the designer as theatre director, the author of the fashion representation. It is akin to the stage Daniel Bounoux talks about when he writes: ‘the stage is not a lifeless simulacrum but a superior existence, an island of order and sovereign game’ (1996: 15). With the theatre of fashion, high fashion is once again set apart from real life and ordinary experience. It acquires a ‘superior existence’ through a Kantian’s ‘refusal of any sort of involvement, any “vulgar” surrender’ (Bourdieu 1996a: 35) to everyday life: on the fashion stage, *Le Monde* writes, ‘dresses [...] naturally recover their aura’<sup>40</sup> (06-07, my emphasis).

In *The Guardian*, the catwalk is the pitch where fashion designers as players compete for the top position as in a sports event or on a battlefield. ‘Foreigners storm Paris catwalk’ (16-03), ‘dogfight fear, catwalk hope’ (28-02) the newspaper writes. The catwalk is here a literal illustration of Bourdieu’s field of fashion, a field which, he notes, in an analogy with sport, as discussed in Part II, is a site of games between players who struggle for the title of the dominant designer. Fashion players, through the language

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<sup>35</sup> ‘chaque passage est une histoire, un conte incarné par des divines, Juliette, Dominique, Debra, le lys noir’

<sup>36</sup> ‘s’ éloignant de l’anecdote et des citations qui le figent, il met en scène dans ses robes des sensations plus que des images’

<sup>37</sup> ‘Rei Kawakubo (Comme des Garçons) recrée le mystère des “premières” avec un présentation très privée’

<sup>38</sup> ‘avec Saint-Laurent largement applaudi, le noir s’allume de paillettes, à la recherche d’un monde perdu. Sur les podiums, les mannequins jouent les divines’

<sup>39</sup> ‘préférant des présentations plus intimistes, les créateurs de mode ont recréé les décors et les atmosphères d’une ville où font escale de jolies étrangères désaxées’

<sup>40</sup> ‘retrouvent naturellement leur aura’

metaphoric of the sports competition, as in Bourdieu's work, are depicted in terms of sportsmen: 'Rocha [is] on strong form' (29-02). Designers change team: 'the Brazilian-born Ocimar Versolato has taken over at Lanvin, Cerruti has given Narciso Rodriguez, formerly of Calvin Klein, the reins and Paris is buzzing with rumours that Helmut Lang, who is Australian-born, has been approached by Balenciaga' (16-03). Designers, like sport stars who carry the flag of their sponsors, are 'hot tickets [like] Antonio Berardi (ex-John Galliano) who caused a stir last season and is being sponsored this season by Clements Ribeiro and Copperwheat Blundell' (28-02).

The spectacle offered by the fashion show in *The Guardian* is not *Le Monde's* theatre but a performance similar to a football match. It is not a superior and transcendental representation linked to a dream world of fairy tales and magical narratives but the more common event of the sports competition. The fashion show is shifted from its position of high art and elite practice to the widely shared sports event. It is moved from the sub-field of restricted production and consumption to the sub-field of large-scale production and consumption in a bypassing of the boundary between the two, a bypassing Bourdieu's clear cut distinction between subfields, as looked at in Part II, fails to accommodate. I return to this issue in Chapter 10.

In *The Guardian*, fashion shows become as entertaining as the encounter between opposed teams represented by star designers. It is Galliano *for* Dior, McQueen *for* Givenchy. The readers are like supporters who follow the performance of 'our bright young talent' (02-10), 'British fashion's rising stars' (21-09), the 'debut' (28-02) of Anthony Cuthbertson, the comeback of Jasper Conran who is 'on magnificent form' (28-02), and the 'triumphant return to London Fashion Week' of John Rocha (28-02). The stake is raised when, through their designers, countries are also part of the competition. We hear about a 'British first at Givenchy' (22-01) and we learn, concerning the planning of the shows, that 'Milan and Paris unilaterally extended their dates and squeezed London out of the international schedule. In a counter move, the British Fashion Council (BFC) moved London forward by two weeks' (28-02). Here, it is through sports that high fashion is made intelligible and *pleasurable*, a pleasure also found in the enjoyment of the show as a gathering of pop stars, who become the main characters of the fashion stories I discuss in the next section. Whilst in *Le Monde*, this pleasure originates in the

distant contemplation of high fashion as high art, in *The Guardian* it is prompted by passionate engagement with the fashion competition, or communion with the celebrities. It is also a pleasure born out of the actual sensual engagement with the fashion objects, a point I develop in the next chapter. All these are types of pleasures which the experience of fashion engenders, but whose 'depths, varieties and uses' (Shusterman 2000: xii) Bourdieu ignores, reducing as he does the consumption of fashion to a dialectic of distinction and pretension, whilst failing to account for the diversity of projects involved in agents' engagement with cultural forms, as argued in Part II.

## **2. Newsworthiness**

The depiction of the fashion designers, then, helps both newspapers to link fashion shows to high culture or popular culture. The orientation of the reports towards some specific aspect of the event also contributes to this, and the newsworthiness of the show is constructed through the selection of the specific information given to the readers.

The presence of celebrities attending the collections is a regular feature of *The Guardian*. During London Fashion Week, 'journalists, photographers and television from all over the world, celebrities including Tina Turner, Joan Collins and Paloma Picasso [were] all determined not to miss out on this slice of fashion history' (22-01). 'Mother of three Jerry Hall returned to the catwalk strutting her stuff in finest Jagger form while Rachel Williams, the Amazonian presenter of the *Girlie Show*, decided to show just how sexy Westwood could be by baring her breast on the catwalk' (12-10).

Celebrities attend fashion shows. They are part of the audience and they sometimes model the clothes. They are famous bodies which add glamorous prestige to the dress they look at or wear. It is that same glamorous prestige that newspapers such as *The Guardian* choose to privilege when they insert in their reports the names of the stars present. The article shifts from talking about the clothes to talking about the celebrities, and the naming of stars renders the event worthy of interest. The value found in what Douglas and Isherwood call 'the enjoyment of the sharing of names' turns the show into the pleasing experience of fashion: 'goods are endowed with value by the agreement of fellow consumers [...] Enjoyment of physical consumption is only a part of the service yielded by goods: the other part is the enjoyment of sharing names' (1996: 51). In the

same way that, following Bourdieu, as developed in Chapter 5, material production is one aspect only of the production of cultural artefacts, material consumption is one side only of the consumption process. The other side is the symbolic consumption of goods. But whereas Bourdieu limits this to status competition, Douglas and Isherwood emphasize the enjoyment, that is, the pleasure provided by symbolic consumption, a dimension which Bourdieu fails to discuss.

Interest in the celebrities becomes as important if not more so than interest in the clothes themselves. The presence of stars at the shows, for *The Guardian*, constitutes the newsworthiness of the collection. Famous names are high value news, they perform a role of ‘personalization’ (Fowler 1998) of the event reported, a personalisation in the direction of the sensational and the glamorous. The application of this personalisation, Roger Fowler says, also ‘varies a good deal from paper to paper (thus underlining its artificiality), being most striking in the popular press’ (15). He also adds ‘most commentators on the media, including myself, regard personalization as dangerous. The obsession with person and the media’s use of them as symbols, avoid serious discussion and explanation of underlying social and economic factors’ (15-16).

It is surely to avoid this ‘danger’ that *Le Monde* declines to name the fashionable people present at the shows. The French newspaper does not find any value in the personal and the anecdotal. In its avoidance of the naming of stars, it remains true to its reputation for being, in France, the intellectual newspaper, devoted to the serious discussions expected by its readers, as illustrated by the outraged reaction of many of them when, in 1998, *Le Monde* published a lengthy interview of the French rock singer Johnny Hallyday. The newspaper writes as an answer to these readers:

By giving Johnny Hallyday a lengthy space [...] has *Le Monde* given up to demagoguery and given a priority to its commercial worries over its editorial exigencies? That is what some of our readers believe, who informed us of their virulent reprobation, or for some, of their intention of ceasing to read our newspaper<sup>41</sup>. (19-01-1998)

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<sup>41</sup> ‘en donnant longuement la parole à Johnny Hallyday [...] *Le Monde* a-t-il cédé à la démagogie et donné la priorité à ses préoccupations commerciales sur ses exigences rédactionnelles? C’est ce que prétendent certains de nos lecteurs, qui nous ont fait part de leur véhémence réprobation, voire, pour quelques-uns, de leur décision de renoncer à la lecture de notre journal’

The life of the popular French singer is not ‘serious’ enough to feature in *Le Monde*, whose readers ‘are getting worried, like Bernard Dubuc from Paris, of “this progressive transformation of *Le Monde*”, which is said to be seeking to break with its image of “newspaper for an elite”<sup>42</sup> (19-01-1998). If progressive transformation there is, it is still within the limits of an elitism which *Le Monde*, reassuring its readers, says it does not want to avoid: the decision to publish an article on Hallyday ‘does not come from a desire to escape “elitism”: *Le Monde* approaches this domain [Hallyday] in its own way, without concession to a facile interest’<sup>43</sup> (19-01-1998). The depiction of high fashion as high art - that is to say above the superficiality of the life of celebrities - remains within the limits of this elitism.

But in *The Guardian* we hear about ‘the rich and famous’, just as in the pages of the popular media: Dolce and Gabbana ‘have made clothes for stars as diverse as Madonna and Tom Cruise [...] Yesterday’s show, a high point at Milan fashion week, was delayed for 45 minutes by Woody Allen and his adopted daughter, Soon Yi, who were escorted by an army of security guards’ (07-03). ‘Armani appeals to the rich and hip’, it is a ‘brand of sleek, relaxed glamour [which] has become synonymous with Wall Street brokers and big bucks LA film studio executives, with Armani scooping the Oscars last year by dressing nearly every movie actress of note at the awards’ (09-03).

High fashion here is of less interest than the stories going on around the catwalk, and the fashion show becomes an opportunity - a *pre-text* - to convey the gossip of showbusiness. ‘Fashion rivalry hots up’ (26-01) a headline goes. ‘This year’s gossip’, *The Guardian* also writes, ‘has centred on the fact that Chalayan has not received further sponsorship from Vodka company Absolut’ (25-09). It is the stars who are the main characters of these fashion stories, such as the ‘success story’ of the designers (as well as that of ‘reversal of fortune’), the story of ‘the rich and famous’ and those of struggles and competitions. Clements and Ribeiros’ ‘biography is the stuff dreams are made of’ (21-09), the British newspaper notes, and ‘it is equally incredible, considering the terrifying speed at which fashion chews people up and spits them out, that he [Hussein Chalayan]

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<sup>42</sup> ‘s’inquiètent, comme Bernard Dubuc, de Paris, de “cette progressive transformation *du Monde*”, qui chercherait à rompre avec son image de “journal d’une élite”

<sup>43</sup> ‘ne répond pas [...] au souci d’échapper à l’élitisme’: *Le Monde* aborde [ce] domaine à sa façon, qui est sans concession à la facilité’

has stayed in the course' (25-09). Both Clements and Ribeiro and Chalayan 'made it'. They are similar to the many stars who reach the top position of their field and about whom the readers can hear in publications such as *Hello* and *Here*. High fashion is removed from its 'dizzy height' (25-09) to permeate the day-to-day life of the readers.

In her comment on catwalk shows, E. Tseëlon notes that

the temple of fashion though is not open to everyone and only a carefully scrutinised set of fashion editors, photographers, buyers, distinguished clients and celebrities are allowed into the inner sanctuary. Access to such an event and the seating plan draw a political map of social success and a complex web of interests. The cycle of competition, prestige, ingratiating and intrigue that is set in motion by each event testifies to its ceremonial qualities and signifying function - *which are not confined to the fashion world alone*. (1995: 134, my emphasis)

It is precisely because ceremonial qualities and signifying function such as intrigues and competition - the stories narrated by *The Guardian* - are not confined to the fashion world that, by drawing on them, the British newspaper manages to reposition high fashion within the context of more popular experiences, that is, within the field of popular culture. Celebrities and their fashion life thereby become closer to the readers, more familiar to them, an attribute which, Edgar Morin (1972: 33) argues, as discussed earlier, defines the modern star. This star is now more human and has become a link between the ordinary and the extra-ordinary, 'the new mediator between the world of fantastic dreams and the down-to-earth world' (34).

In *The Guardian*, designers are, alongside actors and singers, performers who entertain an audience, and their performance is rewarded in terms of financial success, like 'the phenomenally lucrative Red of Dead label' (01-03) or Armani, 'the biggest selling designer in the world' (09-03). Being 'rich and famous' are two attributes of the successful designer: 'Italian designer Gianfranco Ferré yesterday stepped down from his multi-million dollar post to concentrate, as he put it, on his eponymous collection' (09-10). The quest for money is part of the logic of the field of high fashion, in a merging of the sub-field of restricted production - the creative field in the work of Bourdieu - and the sub-field of large scale production - the commercial field - two fields which, in the work

of the French sociologist, however, are opposed, but which, in *The Guardian*, do not seem irreconcilable, as will be further developed in Chapter 10.

Fame and money are two recurrent themes in *The Guardian* writing on fashion shows. It is certainly true that they are very much part of the reality of the fashion field; pop stars do go to the collections and famous fashion designers do make large amounts of money. However, the choice of whether to report this or not is open. To do so is a determining factor in the way high fashion is depicted. As Hall writes, 'the media do not simply and transparently report events which are "naturally" newsworthy in themselves. "News" is the end product of a complex process which begins with a systematic sorting and selecting of events and topics according to a socially constructed set of categories' (quoted in Fowler 1998: 12). *The Guardian* reports on the participation of certain people - singers, actors, famous models and other celebrities - according to the socially constructed category 'popular stars'. Brought into fashion reports, stars are the 'already signifying image[s]' (Fowler 1998: 88) of popular culture, images which for the French newspaper in its construction of high fashion as high culture, do not have any value.

It is because stars are 'the very prototype of grand scale capitalism [...] a merchandise destined for mass consumption' (Laemme, quoted in Fowler 1998: 13) that *Le Monde* ignores them in its articles on fashion. The star, Morin notes 'is a total merchandise', the epitome of

grand capitalism: the enormous investments, the industrial techniques of rationalisation and standardisation of the system effectively make of the star a merchandise destined to mass consumption. The star has all the virtues of standard products adapted to the world market, like chewing-gum, fridges, washing powder, shavers, etc. The massive diffusion is ensured by the big multipliers of the modern world: press, radio and film, of course. (1972: 100)

Stars as merchandise are incompatible with the art of modernism, destined for the privileged members of high culture, and for whom 'a work of art is a gift, not a commodity' (Hyde, quoted in Gablik 1986: 9). In the French newspaper the news value of the report is found in the depiction of the artists and their creations - the interest in 'art for art's sake' - and not in accounts of the presence of the star-commodity. *Le Monde's*

high fashion designers belong, like the artists of modernity (see Gablik 1986; Bourdieu 1996e), to an autonomous world of pure art whose members, artists, reject capitalism. It is a world which, *Le Monde* argues, as will be developed in Chapter 10, should be ruled by a disinterested aesthetic and not the pursuit of commercial gain. Thus, whereas in *The Guardian*, interest in the shows is to be found in the presence of celebrities as markers of the 'shared experience' (Douglas and Isherwood 1996) of popular entertainment, in *Le Monde* the artists and their art are the essential purveyors of the value of the fashion show, which, likened to high art, becomes intrinsically significant.

### **3. The Making of Fields of Culture**

How to depict the designers and whether to personalise the reports or not are options open to the newspapers in their accounts of fashion shows. Notions of high culture or popular culture emerge from these choices, and they are reinforced, as will be discussed in this section, by the choice of signifiers.

The notion of 'vision' is a recurrent theme in *Le Monde*. Designers, as seen earlier, are said 'to carry through their collections a vision of the world'<sup>44</sup> (29-01). The readers also learn that 'a true feminist vision of fashion can only lament the absence of desire, of ideal it conveys'<sup>45</sup> (12-03). They hear about Bertrand Maréchal's 'visions of a best of all worlds'<sup>46</sup> (13-03), and the 'lack of world vision'<sup>47</sup> (29-01) of many high fashion designers. Armani's collection, *Le Monde* also notes, is a 'visionary chronicle of the new modern times'<sup>48</sup> (06-07).

'Vision' works to convey a particular idea, or to borrow Barthes' (1973) terminology, to 'signify' a particular 'concept'. This term is an empty signifier, a form which the journalists can fill with a new meaning to create that 'type of discourse' which the myth is. It serves the discourse of the French newspaper, whose 'intention' (134) is to orientate our reading of the fashion shows towards the idea of high art. It represents the superior power of the designer as a superior artist. As Barthes notes 'myth has in fact a

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<sup>44</sup> 'offrent à travers leurs collections une vision du monde'

<sup>45</sup> 'une vraie vision féministe de la mode ne peut que déplorer l'absence de désir, d'idéal dont celle-ci est le vecteur'

<sup>46</sup> 'visions de meilleur des mondes'

<sup>47</sup> 'un manque de vision du monde'

<sup>48</sup> 'chronique visionnaire des nouveaux temps modernes'

double function: it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us' (1973: 126). 'Vision' points out the supernatural role of the designer/artist and it makes us understand high fashion as a superior art. The role of the visionary is like a myth used to fuel the authority of fashion as art. It is part of a language 'appropriated' (129) to fabricate the idea of the artist as transcendent being and a magician whose power goes beyond the boundaries of real life. The fashion 'visionary'<sup>49</sup> (26-01) can foresee the future, s/he is not bound to real time and current day-to-day events, s/he is 'a creator of prophecies'<sup>50</sup> (26-01) who, contrary to those designers who offer 'a more and more anonymous and reductive vision of the universe'<sup>51</sup> (29-01), can, like Mugler, 'widen the space of his own imaginary world'<sup>52</sup> (26-01) and represent, like Paco Rabanne, 'the bricoleur visionary'<sup>53</sup>, 'the golden age of the world'<sup>54</sup> (26-01). The myth of the visionary is used to orientate the discourse of *Le Monde* in a particular direction. As Barthes says, 'it [the myth] is an inflexion' (1973: 140), and it is this particular inflexion that orientates the discourse of *Le Monde* towards notions of high culture. It is used to magnify the high position of high fashion and the superior role of the fashion artist. It serves to create the myth of fashion as high art.

When the British newspaper writes 'John Rocha is back in town (with Patsy Kensit stepping out on his catwalk)' (28-02), the mention of the actress Patsy Kensit - in 1996 she was the London equivalent of Baby Jane Holzer, Tom Wolfe's early 1960s 'New York's 'Girl of the Year' [...] a living embodiment of almost pure 'pop' sensation, a kind of corn-haired essence of the new styles of life' (1981: 13) - is meaningful only in so far as her name and the report of her presence at the shows signify something specific. The particular event 'Patsy Kensit stepping out on his catwalk', its 'richness' - the movement of the actress onto the catwalk - has been 'put [...] at a distance: its newly acquired penury calls for a signification to fill it' (Barthes 1973: 127). The sentence, the form, now acquires a new meaning - popular stars were present at the show - and ultimately it is the concept of the popular which emerges. Patsy Kensit's 'presence is

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<sup>49</sup> 'visionnaire'

<sup>50</sup> 'un créateur de prophécies'

<sup>51</sup> 'une vision de plus en plus anonyme et réductrice de l'univers'

<sup>52</sup> 'semble agrandir l'espace de son propre imaginaire'

<sup>53</sup> 'ce visionnaire bricoleur'

<sup>54</sup> 'l'âge d'or du monde'

tamed, put at a distance, made almost transparent; it recedes a little, it becomes the accomplice of a concept which comes to it fully armed' (128) and so comes to signify fashion as popular culture. Like Baby Jane Holzer for Wolfe, Patsy Kensit 'is a very profound symbol' (1981: 13).

Pop stars here are used as a short cut towards embracing the wider field of popular culture and its heroes, what John Hartley calls 'frock pops' (1996: 178). They are 'celebrities whose showy message clings to them like a frock - often *as* a frock - in short they're the "frox populi": visualizations of certain knowledges, truths and values, and every time they appear, their image, action, "look" and performance become the idiom of popular pedagogy' (1996: 178-180).

Celebrities are also part of the 'repertoire of commodities supplied by the culture industries (film, television, music, publishing, sporting, etc.)' (Storey 1998: xv) and out of which 'people make popular culture' (xv). And it is from a similar set of commodities that *The Guardian* makes popular culture. Joined to the 'presence' of the stars, they participate in the fabrication of fashion as popular culture.

A series of headlines reads: 'Fashion: Get shirty' (27-04), 'Fashion: London calling' (21-09), 'Parallel Lines' (17-01), 'Fashion: the new model army' (08-06). All these headlines are direct references to popular culture. They respectively refer to: the film adaptation of Elmore Leonard's thriller *Get Shorty*, the Clash's song 'London Calling', the title of an album by the band Blondie and the British pop band New Model Army. As Watson (1997: 85) observes, newspaper headlines have 'impetus', and are active in three ways: attracting attention, eliciting the desire to read, and directing the reader to a particular interpretation of the contents, providing them with an "instructed reading" of the story' that follows. In *The Guardian*, before the article has even begun, the tone is set, the instruction clearly given. The reader should not expect to hear about the high fashion-high art of *Le Monde*. Popular culture is the subject, and it is in this field that high fashion is inscribed. The collections are introduced to the readers via references to diverse elements of popular culture, and it is through this mediation that they enter the text. The fashion show becomes readable through its links with popular culture, it is informed by them.

One journalist describes a collection as ‘more *Dynasty* than *Trainspotting* chic’ (02-10), another one writes that Betty Jackson’s clothes were clothes that ‘a younger Bianca Jagger would be proud to wear’ (28-09). The fashion show becomes identifiable and understandable in terms of its relation to famous people or popular entertainment such as the TV serial *Dynasty* and the film *Trainspotting*, and high fashion is positioned alongside these artefacts of popular culture. *The Guardian*’s reports do what is the trademark of style magazines such as *The Face*, *I.D.*, or more recently the significantly entitled *Pop* magazine, as well as the Sunday newspapers style supplements: they construct fashion as part of the field of popular culture alongside music, cinema and design. Fashion is constructed as a subfield of popular culture in relation to other popular cultural subfields, as part of the wider field of popular culture whose space they equally share.

Moreover, because in style magazines these subfields overlap in a permanent interplay of references, their creators and users can only engage with them if they exercise what Radford (1998: 153) calls ‘the navigating skills required at the edges of category boundaries’ and which involve ‘risking forays across borders of established genres’. Similarly, to make sense of what *The Guardian* is saying about high fashion shows, one has to be knowledgeable in, that is, one has to have ventured into, other popular cultural fields. Such a navigation between fields, Radford adds, requires ‘a skilled aesthetic of fine distinctions’. However, these are not the distinctions Bourdieu looks at, those allowed by the possession of high cultural capital only, as discussed in Part II, but popular cultural distinctions, a type of distinction he fails to account for. I return to this point in the next section.

In *Le Monde*, by contrast, high fashion belongs to the same world as that of the painters Boldini and Domergue (29-01). It is peopled with ‘divine beings’<sup>55</sup> (13-03) and fairy princesses<sup>56</sup> (23-01). Dresses are as if drawn by Degas (16-03) or Winterhalter (23-01). In this world, there is no room for popular stars and soap operas, the products of Huyssen’s (1988) ‘Other’, mass culture, separated from high culture by the great divide of incompatible cultural references. In the French newspaper, fashion is made

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<sup>55</sup> ‘chaque passage est une histoire, un conte incarnés par ses divines’

<sup>56</sup> ‘comme sorti d’un conte, et de cette avant-scène garnie d’un lit de princesse au petit pois, le mannequin s’avance’

understandable through high art references only, references which, Bourdieu (1996a: 53) notes, 'bring the work into an interminable circuit of inter-legitimation'. They 'lend dignity' to the object depicted, here high fashion, in a play of analogies, 'which *creates* the enchantment of artistic contemplation.[...] Analogy, functioning as a circular mode of thought, makes it possible to tour the whole area of art and luxury *without ever leaving it*' (53).

Analogies, Bourdieu says, contribute to legitimate cultural objects as high culture. He does not however, true to the high cultural focus of his sociology, consider such analogies as they take place in the field of popular culture to legitimate cultural artefacts not as high culture only but as popular culture. In the above quotes from *The Guardian*, a play of analogy also takes place, but whose register is part of popular culture, to create not Bourdieu's 'enchantment of artistic contemplation' but Hartley's (1996: 180) 'idiom of popular pedagogy' whose 'truths and values' can only be made sense of by those readers who possess the right popular cultural capital, as I will now discuss.

#### **4. Cultural Capitals**

Thus, in *Le Monde* and in *The Guardian*, fashion is made understandable and communicable through different references. Both newspapers use specific concepts to articulate their reports on fashion shows and convey their notions of fashion, 'a certain knowledge of reality' (Barthes 1973: 128). And in the same way that these concepts are appropriated by the journalists, they must also be appropriated by the readership to whom they are addressed. Hall notes:

In setting out, each day, to signify the world in terms of its most problematic events, the newspapers must always infer what is already known, as a present or absent structure. 'What is already known' is not a set of neutral facts. It is a set of commonse constructions and ideological interpretations about the world, which holds the society together at the level of everyday beliefs. (1982: 236)

'What is already known', this 'certain knowledge or reality' is what allows the readers to enter the texts which are offered to them, and it is only by drawing on their cultural capital that they will succeed in deciphering them. High fashion in *Le Monde* becomes

assimilated to high art only in so far as Degas, Boldini and Winterhalter can be identified as elements of high culture. The French newspaper draws on the assumption that Degas and Winterhalter are part of the cultural capital of its readers, about whom a set of ideas are tacitly assumed: they are high brow intellectuals in the tradition of *Le Monde*, which in the field of French newspapers occupies the high position of an elite newspaper, as mentioned in the last chapter. Readers are expected to make use of their disposition for high culture to relate to the reports and read high fashion as high art.

*Le Monde* also writes:

Haute couture is unique in the sense that with it everything is nuance. By dint of technique, the image disappears to open the way to dream. Like in the art of sweets, magic is born of millimeters and grams. At Lacroix [...] as in *pâtisserie*, the trend is for aromas of colour, for the art of succulence, where desert like dress is *jouissance*<sup>57</sup>. (29-01)

Here the fashion journalist takes on the voice of modernist criticism, which, as Burgin observes, ‘characteristically seizes its “objects” in a language which draws equally upon geometry and gastronomy in recommending them, from palette to palate, to the fine taste of a discriminating consumer’ (1986: 25). The fashion show becomes a place where observers can, as in a museum, exercise their ‘fine tastes’ in the contemplation of the creations of fashion artists like Christian Lacroix, whose fashion show ‘was a moment of grace [...] with the first dress one is possessed by an apparition [...] colours shiver in the alambic of dreams’<sup>58</sup> (13-07).

Fine taste, a pure taste, and discrimination are recurring terms in modernist discourses of aesthetic engagement and on aesthetic engagement with high art (see Bourdieu 1996a; Gablik 1986). These notions inform the construction of the idea of artists as superior beings, separated from the material world and preoccupied with the refinement of their art, itself destined to the delicate taste of the contemplative aesthete, to whom I return in the next chapter. Cultural commentators who condemn mass culture

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<sup>57</sup> ‘la haute couture a ceci d’unique qu’avec elle tout est nuance, qu’à force de technique l’image s’efface pour laisser place au rêve. Comme dans l’art du sucré, la magie se féconde au millimètre et au gramme. Chez Lacroix [...] ainsi qu’en pâtisserie, la tendance est aux arômes de couleur, à l’art de la succulence, là où le dessert comme la robe est jouissance’

<sup>58</sup> ‘le défilé de Christian Lacroix ‘fut un moment de grâce [...] Au premier passage, on est comme possédé par une apparition [...] les couleurs bouillonnent dans l’alambic des rêves’

have drawn on these notions to oppose popular culture to high culture and depict it as vulgar and uniform, uneducated and tasteless, as discussed in Part I. For them, as for Bourdieu, there is no room in the field of popular culture for concepts such as ‘cultivated tastes’, ‘diversity’ and ‘distinction’ as if popular culture and cultural capital were two incompatible concepts. However, these are not the prerogatives of high art. They are very much part, in *The Guardian*, of the construction of a popular culture, that of the British newspaper and its educated readers, a hip popular culture which at times becomes an elite one, as I will also argue in Chapter 9.

Thus, whereas *Le Monde*’s readers must draw on their knowledge of high art for a meaningful reading of its fashion reports, it is the readers’ experience of popular culture which is invoked in *The Guardian* to render its articles relevant. Bianca Jagger and Patsy Kensit will signify popular culture, and in this process will become meaningful, only if the reader already knows who they are. A collection ‘more Dynasty than Trainspotting chic’ makes sense only if the readers have a certain knowledge of those films. When *The Guardian* talks about ‘models with Grace Kelly hair-dos’ (07-03) no clear image will emerge in the readers’ mind if they have no knowledge of Grace Kelly’s physical appearance. Relevance is not inherent in texts but is brought into them by the readers, who, as discussed in the previous chapter, activate them. They acquire a particular signification only once they have been filtered by the cultural capital of the reader. As Fiske notes, ‘relevance requires connections between the text and the social experience of the reader that precedes it: reading is not merely a decipherment of signs, but the bringing to bear upon the text of previously existing knowledge. Reading is a cultural practice, not a set of skills’ (1989a: 186).

Moreover, in *The Guardian*, it is not just one popular culture which is talked about. Music, cinema, and television all appear in the reports on fashion shows, and within these fields, a diversity of genre is referred to. Punk music, pop and rock are used to illustrate the articles. American (*Get Shorty*), and trendy British films (*Trainspotting*) are also mentioned. In February 96, *The Guardian* writes that during Rocha’s show ‘DJ Princess Julia mixed the soundtracks on the catwalk’ (29-02). In another article, it tells us that ‘when [Dolce and Gabbana] first hit the big time, their favourite model was actress Isabella Rossellini’ (07-03), and in another one we hear that ‘Tommy Hilfiger, designer

of heavily-logoed sports and casual wear - as worn by everyone from Bill Clinton to Snoop Doggy Dog - is showing his womenswear here for the first time' (23-09).

DJ Princess Julia, Isabella Rossellini, and Snoop Doggy Dog all signify popular culture, and all through their particularity and difference contribute to the construction of diversity in popular culture. The readers can only make sense of the above quotes if the references used are part of their popular cultural capital. It is very likely that a large number of people do not have any knowledge of Snoop Doggy Dog, DJ Princess Julia or *Trainspotting*. Only those 'in the know' can draw on this information to picture the events reported, whilst those who do not know the names mentioned might see them and *recognize* them as signals of supreme trendiness for the very reason that they are unknown to them. Thus, these popular cultural references, whether actually part of the popular cultural capital of the readers or signals just recognized as markers of hipness, empty signifiers filled with this meaning, act as tickets of membership to the in-crowd. Readers, to be part of it, have to play the 'game of culture' (Bourdieu 1996a: 12). They have to 'to go in for bluff or imposture' or 'for the distance and casualness which show true familiarity' (330) with popular culture. They will thus become 'certified holders of cultural competence' (330). But whereas the only game Bourdieu acknowledges is the game of high culture, the game which takes place in *The Guardian* is that of popular culture. The cultural competence involved is a popular cultural competence and the cultural capital a popular one. Those who do not own this capital, or are not willing 'to go in for bluff', are excluded from it. Popular culture here is not an all inclusive, undifferentiated culture that brings all people together. It is a specific one, which relies on rules made to convey the selective notions of hipness and trendiness reserved to the elite of the fashion crowd and to the readers of *The Guardian*; readers about whom the British newspapers notes that they are 'stylish and discerning' (media pack: 2000).

In Part II I argued that Bourdieu conceptualises the notion of cultural capital in relation to field of legitimate high culture only. There I also commented on the fact that in contrast with Bourdieu, Thornton (1997) draws attention to other types of capitals, which operate within fields which are not as privileged as the ones Bourdieu focuses on. Hipness, Thornton argues, is one of these other capitals, situated outside of traditional high culture, but a capital nonetheless. She stresses that discrimination, diversity and

cultural capital are essential to the construction of the particular field of popular culture which is club culture. *The Guardian* draws on a similar discriminating, hip and knowledgeable popular culture to render the fashion shows meaningful to its readers.

Moreover, Bourdieu insists, as I also show in Part II, on the 'social conditions of cultural practice' (1997b) such as the time and the education necessary to 'the love of art' (1997b), its knowledge and appreciation being linked with the mastering of its history (see also, for instance, Bourdieu 1996a, 1997b). He notes that the objects of high art are 'esoteric [...] because their complex structure continually implies tacit reference to the entire history of previous structures, and is accessible only to those who possess practical or theoretical mastery of a refined code, of successive codes, and of the code to these codes' (1993a: 120). This is not true of high culture alone. As McRobbie points out, 'mainstream fashion has a lot to thank youth subcultures for. It can gesture back in time knowing that its readers have been well educated, through the media, in postwar pop culture history' (1996c: 146). It is on this history of popular culture - its accumulated knowledge - that *The Guardian* draws in its reports on high fashion, a history foreign to the theoretical framework Bourdieu has developed. This history also, to borrow from Chambers, 'forces a self-conscious reassessment in the recognition of what passes for contemporary knowledge' (1993: 194), and Bourdieu has not so far made this reassessment.

Consumers of popular culture, then, also need time and education to understand, appropriate and appreciate it. Popular culture encompasses a vast range of forms and genres, all with their own history. They are not unrelated to other constituents of the field of popular culture. Rather, they acquire their meaning and value in their relations with each other, in the complex play of cross references, and these dimensions are all neglected by Bourdieu, who conceives of such ideas as applied to the field of high culture only. As Frow writes, but unlike Bourdieu not restricting his discussion to high culture:

meanings are not given in texts but are constructed in the relations between texts. The value of the image of a sunset cannot be read off from a photograph, but involves rather the position of this image within the system of similar images - a system that possesses a certain statistical frequency and density, a certain sociocultural value. Having a specific competence in this case would mean being able to make an educated guess

(literally) about the extent to which the image is culturally saturated and so informationally redundant, a guess about its place within a complex intertextual system. (1995: 37)

In both *Le Monde* and *The Guardian*, an 'educated guess' is required from the readers to make sense of the reports. A 'specific competence', that is a cultural capital, is needed, not in the field of high culture only, as suggested by Bourdieu, but in that of popular culture too. Commenting on the aesthetic experience, Bourdieu talks about 'the specifically artistic effects which are only appreciated relationally, through a comparison with other works' (1996a: 34), an intertextuality which, in his work, appears as the privilege of high culture. However, as Shusterman (2000: 199) notes, intertextuality does inform popular cultural works. Many of them 'self-consciously allude to and quote from each other to produce a variety of aesthetic effects, including a complex formal texture of implied art-historical relations' (199). A similar intertextuality is at play in *The Guardian* for its construction of high fashion as popular culture.

Finally, in *Le Couturier et sa Griffes* (1975) Bourdieu and Delsaut note that

the references to noble and legitimate arts, painting, sculpture, and literature, which provide the description of clothes with most of its ennobling metaphors and the evocation of the aristocratic life they are supposed to symbolise with many of its themes, are as many homages that the 'minor art' gives to the major arts. (16)

According to Bourdieu and Delsaut, it is because the field of fashion is a dominated field in the hierarchy of culture that its members draw on high cultural references, which allows them to legitimize it as a noble culture. If this is true of *Le Monde*, a newspaper whose views on culture seem to correspond to those of Bourdieu, it is not true of *The Guardian*. There, it is popular cultural references which are used. The ennobling of fashion through high cultural references is not an issue, instead, as will be further discussed later, high fashion as high culture is mocked and desacralized. Fashion in *The Guardian* becomes legitimated through popular culture, a field which has acquired its own history and nobility, and it is as popular culture that it is consecrated, a type of consecration Bourdieu fails to analyse.

The French and British newspapers, then, draw on a diversity of elements and references inscribed in high culture for the former, and in popular culture for the latter, to establish distinctive spaces of fashion open to ‘discriminating’ readers only. Different notions of culture emerge from the newspapers’ discourses on designers. A variety of cultural references are brought into the texts to shape the representation of fashion and inscribe it in high or popular culture, a fashion addressed to *Le Monde*’s aesthetes and *The Guardian*’s consumers, notions I turn to next.

## READERS: AESTHETES AND CONSUMERS

This chapter takes up the issue of the relation of the readers to high fashion. In *Le Monde*, the high fashion dress is likened to a work of art, the genius creation of the fashion author. It is addressed to the soul, an object to be consumed spiritually by the readers as aesthetes, and set apart from bodily enjoyment. In *The Guardian*, in contrast, readers are evoked through the depiction of fashion as an object of physical consumption. It is not synonymous with extra-ordinary fashion only but is also a commodity to be worn, ultimately addressed, whether *tel quel* or in its high street version, to the readers' body in the practice of their everyday life. Thus whereas *Le Monde's* reports are framed by a Kantian aesthetic, the aesthetic Bourdieu argues is the dominant one, *The Guardian* relates to another type of aesthetic, a more pragmatic one, grounded in the body as the mediator of a sensual experience of fashion but also, a dimension Bourdieu fails to address, as the site of everyday creativity and 'artistic fashioning' (Shusterman 2000: xiii). If *Le Monde's* contemplators of high fashions as a high art are likened to the aesthetes of modernity, *The Guardian's* consumers of the fashion dress also become, through their 'uses' (Certeau 1988) of fashionable clothes, aesthetes, but of the ordinary, engaged in the project of the aestheticization of everyday life. The fashion-costume of the fashion consumers changes as they take their place daily in 'the various games of the *Theatrum mundi*' (Maffesoli 1996: 76). Finally, it is also through their choice of language, their selection of a specific register and of a particular mode of address to the readers, that *Le Monde* and *The Guardian* define the fields of high culture and popular culture.

### 1. The Work of Art and the Object of Everyday Consumption

In the French newspaper, creating a collection is depicted as an act of high precision and high specialisation. The activity of the designer is as accurate and impressive as the work of a surgeon. 'Work on a piece of clothing' for instance, *Le Monde* writes, 'is like an act

of advanced surgery'<sup>1</sup> (22-01) and, to master it, the creator must acquire the '*savoir-faire*' [know-how] (22-01) specific to his/her *métier* [craft], these being two notions central to *Le Monde*'s depiction of high fashion.

*Métier*, is defined in the French dictionary *Le Petit Larousse* as 'know-how, technical skill, the result of experience and lengthy practice'<sup>2</sup> (1995). The notion implies the ideas of hard work, precise knowledge, respect, tradition and mastery. It is also the work of craftsmen, whose activity, as Bourdieu notes, quoting Sewell, is situated at 'the intersection of the domain of manual effort or labor with the domain of art or intelligence' (Sewell, quoted in Bourdieu 1996c: 220). Thus backstage, during the shows, 'irons are permanently plugged in. The eye on the uneven pleat, the décolleté to round off, the sleeve to adjust, one irons, one pricks, one folds, the gabardine, "nervous and dry", is tamed, the iron caresses the muslin or the crepe and its capricious tendency to "melt"<sup>3</sup> (22-01). Fabrics, if once wild and unruly - they can be nervous, dry and even capricious - are mastered by 'the hand'<sup>4</sup> (22-01) of designers. They are controlled - 'tamed' - and given shape. From natural wildness, they are turned, in the same way as the raw material of sculptures, into art forms, which, however, magically transcend their texture, that of the fabric they are made of, to attain a natural existence, as will be developed shortly. A high fashion dress, *Le Monde* also notes, 'must be worked on like a watercolour. Each movement matters. One cannot erase nor come back on it. It is important to mould quickly. Otherwise it dries and fades'<sup>5</sup> (29-01). To avoid this, technique must be mastered so that 'the soul of a *métier*'<sup>6</sup> (29-01), 'the primary legitimacy of a *métier*'<sup>7</sup> (25-03), can be respected.

Thus in the French newspaper, not only is high fashion a high art, but it is also a *métier* informed by the artful and intelligent mastery of traditional knowledge, a knowledge that can only be acquired through experience. And this is why, though John

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<sup>1</sup> 'le travail sur un vêtement équivaut à un acte de haute chirurgie'

<sup>2</sup> 'savoir faire, habileté technique résultant de l'expérience, d'une longue pratique'

<sup>3</sup> 'les fers sont branchés en permanence. L'oeil sur le pli qui louche, le décolleté à arrondir, la manche tailleur à régler, on repasse, on picote, on roule, on dompte la gabardine 'nerveuse et sèche', on caresse au fer la mousseline ou le crêpe et sa capricieuse tendance à 'fondre'

<sup>4</sup> 'cette intimité de la main et de son modèle'

<sup>5</sup> 'doit être travaillée comme une aquarelle. Chaque geste compte. On ne peut ni effacer, ni revenir dessus. Il faut modeler très vite. Sinon elle sèche et se fane'

<sup>6</sup> 'l'âme d'un métier'

<sup>7</sup> 'la légitimité première d'un métier'

Galliano is, according to *Le Monde*, very good in his position as designer for Givenchy, he is not good enough, since ‘an understanding with the ateliers cannot be achieved within a single day’<sup>8</sup> (23-01). He is not, unlike Armani, an ‘*homme de métier*’ [a real craftsman] (06-07). Tradition, as in the words of the modernist poet T.S. Eliot, ‘cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it with great labour’ (1973: 61). It is also because this tradition is not being respected by contemporary designers that, as will be discussed in the next chapter, French high fashion is, according to *Le Monde*, in crisis: ‘this *métier* is condemned in the long term’<sup>9</sup> (25-03).

Designers, then, must assimilate high fashion’s know-how before they can achieve the full realisation of their art and surpass the more humble position of craftsmen. The *créateur* in *Le Monde* is altogether the craftsman with his *métier* and a tradition to keep alive, as well as the artist-author who conveys ‘sublimated artisanal traditions’ (Freitag 1996: 50). Walter Van Beirendonck, for example, is described as being ‘the artisan of a better world, rather than a cold maker of the best of all worlds’<sup>10</sup> (29-01).

High fashion designers belong to the modern art talked about by Lyotard, where ‘the essence of art is thought to be the expression of individual genius aided by the skills of an artisanal elite’ (1992: 15). The French newspaper, through the use of the analogy of the *métier* and the notion of tradition it evokes, inscribes high fashion in modernity, ‘the historical tendency of an art practice towards complete self-referential autonomy, to be achieved by scrupulous attention to all that is specific to that practice: its own tradition and materialism, its own difference from other art practices’ (Burgin 1986: 30). Like modernist art, high fashion, the French newspaper is saying, has its own tradition, its own rules which can only be taught and assimilated through extensive experience in the world of high fashion. This world, as Willis notes, ‘like high art and classical music, [...] has its own autonomous, elite tradition which explains itself according to the creative innovations of individual “great men”’ (1996: 84).

In this autonomous world, the object of fashion - the dress - is as if magically fabricated by the *créateurs* and their ‘mode d’auteur’ (08-01). It emanates from them, almost *tel quel* - *Le Monde* quotes a head seamstress backstage who says that ‘a

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<sup>8</sup> ‘une complicité avec les ateliers ne se crée pas en un jour’

<sup>9</sup> ‘ce métier est condamné à long terme’

<sup>10</sup> ‘il est d’abord l’artisan d’un monde meilleur, plutôt qu’un froid concepteur du meilleur des mondes’

successful dress must give the impression of not having been touched'<sup>11</sup> (22-01) - to occupy the near immaterial position of a unique work of art and transcend the everyday material world.

In all the reports of the French newspaper, clothes are discussed in lengthy metaphors that extract them from their position of potential objects of physical consumption, trivial commodities aimed at the satisfaction of the senses, and the gratification of those emotions which in the Kantian tradition belong to an inferior realm. In contrast, *The Guardian* notes that 'emotions seem the only response to a week of collections so diverse that there is no way of judging them other than on pure gut reaction' (20-03). In *Le Monde* high fashion clothes as products to be physically consumed, embodied, are not the concern of the journalists. Here, the high fashion dress transcends its position of object to be worn in a material life, to become an object of contemplation aimed only at the gaze of the fashion consumer turned aesthete. Fashion, as discussed in Part II, becomes an opportunity for 'problematizing the intellectual conduct' (Hunter 1992: 349) of the individual who contemplates the clothes on show. It is, as with the work of art Hunter discusses, 'a convenient site for individuals to begin to relate to themselves as subjects of aesthetic experience' (351).

Thus one collection, *Le Monde* writes, has 'an incredible palette of orange, turquoise, absinthe green, bright, artificial colours mixed with subdued tones, mushroom, barley, rosewood, "rainy sky" or pink and the smoke of deeply moving Degas dress like a tulle pastel drawing'<sup>12</sup> (16-03). Dresses become 'sketches'<sup>13</sup> (29-01), 'poetry'<sup>14</sup> (23-01) 'colourful fictions'<sup>15</sup> (13-03). Like in the romantic tradition of art, designers as 'artists "express themselves" by means of beautiful shapes and colors' (Burgin 1986: 157).

But the fashion artist, who is a magician too, is also able, through his know-how, to abstract clothes from their very condition - manmade products in fabric - to give them, as though in the hands of the ultimate *Créateur*, God, the gift of life: with Saint Laurent,

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<sup>11</sup> 'une robe réussie ne doit pas donner l'impression d'avoir été touchée'

<sup>12</sup> 'Une incroyable palette d'orange, de turquoise, de vert absynthe, vifs artificiels mélangés à des tons sourds, champignon, orge, bois de rose, 'ciel de pluie' ou rose et fumée d'une émouvante robe Degas comme un pastel de tulle'.

<sup>13</sup> 'des esquisses'

<sup>14</sup> 'la poésie de John Galliano'

<sup>15</sup> 'fictions colorées'

for instance, ‘a skirt moves naturally’<sup>16</sup> (26-01), ‘the muslim breathes in movement’<sup>17</sup> (26-01), whilst Lapidus’ dresses are like ‘butterflies with frozen, bluish wings’<sup>18</sup> (29-01). A high fashion dress, *Le Monde* also stresses, as mentioned earlier, must be worked on very carefully ‘otherwise it dries and fades’ (29-01)

In the same way that the designers transcend their human position, fashion objects in *Le Monde*, surpass their status as artefacts. They transcend the status of artificial things to arise out of the natural order of the world which they epitomize. They are as if naturally unique, untamed by mechanical reproduction, only approached by the magical hand of the *créateur*. They possess the ‘one element’ of the work of art talked about by Benjamin, that is, ‘its unique existence at the place where it happens to be’ (1992: 214). This uniqueness and originality contributes to the creation of the aura of the fashion object as work of art, an aura which is ‘the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be’ (216).

Thus the fashion work of art is perpetually separated from individuals by its auratic distance. High fashion becomes its own justification, with no reference to an outside field. It works in a closed circuit, freed from trivial considerations, as a pure autonomous art, a self referential one, as in the art of high modernity (Bourdieu 1996a: 3), an issue I further develop in the next chapter. High fashion clothes are like those autonomous works of art Frow talks about, and which have become ‘self-purposive’ as opposed to commodities which are bound to economic necessity:

The terms in which the emancipation and universalization of the category of art come to be cast are those of a distinction between works founded in freedom and internal necessity, on the one hand, and in unfreedom and external (economic) necessity on the other. The serially produced commodity differs in essence from the self-purposive work of art, which is constituted by the singularity of its origin, and the commodity is by definition excluded from the domain of art. (1995: 18)

*The Guardian*, on the other hand, does not free high fashion from external necessities; rather it specifically raises the issue of its physical consumption and the pleasurable

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<sup>16</sup> ‘une jupe naturellement mouvante’

<sup>17</sup> ‘la mousseline respire dans le mouvement’

<sup>18</sup> ‘papillons aux ailes bleuâtres et glacées’

experience of its embodiment. This is also how the British newspaper positions fashion in the field of popular culture, a culture Hebdige defines as: 'a set of generally available artefacts: films, records, clothes. TV programmes, modes of transport, etc.' (1994: 47).

General 'availability' is, according to Hebdige, a characteristic of popular culture. This similar availability is frequently referred to when *The Guardian* asks about high fashion: 'Who would dare approach a woman in a gown of raven black and blue printed with feathers and hooked beaks?' (01-03). 'It is sometimes tempting, when staring at the Paris collections', *The Guardian* also notes, 'to ask, what the hell is all this for?' (20-03). Here it is no longer the fashion stars who are talked about, it is not fashion as a 'scene', (28-02) where celebrities are the actual attraction of the show, but fashion as a material object of consumption, that is the fashion garment, which contrasts with the dress as butterfly, watercolour, or 'sketches' (29-01) of *Le Monde's* 'dessinateur' [drawer] (29-01). In the British newspaper the account of the 'fashion pack' (06-11) and its stars makes way for a discourse on the actual clothes present at the shows. Fashion is no longer depicted as a space peopled with celebrities, but as a material product - clothes - to be bought and worn in 'real life' (17-01). Fashion on the catwalk is 'extravagant', 'extraordinary', 'breathtaking' (26-01), 'marvellous', 'revolutionary' (28-02), 'provocative', and 'glitzy' (02-10), but in 'real life' it must be 'neat', 'versatile' (27-04) 'easy to wear', 'comfortable' and 'sophisticated' (28-02), such as Betty Jackson's and Nicole Fahri's collections, which are made of the type of 'clothes that people will pay good money for' (28-02). It is a fashion which must 'respect current trends without bowing down to them completely' (28-09). It must be wearable, and made available to the individual through the practicality of clothes on offer, such as the shirt-dress, popular on the catwalks - 'it's not often that something as easy to wear and versatile as the shirt-dress makes the catwalk', *The Guardian* notes, but 'it is the look to see and be seen in [...]. The look was everywhere at the spring/summer collections' (27-04) -, and which 'remains adaptable once you wear it - and only as straight-laced and formal as you want it to be' (27-04).

As Lefebvre notes, 'the world is divided into the world of everyday life (real, empirical, practical) and the world of metaphor' (1971: 11). It is to this 'real, empirical, practical' everyday life that the second set of adjectives in the above quotes refer, a real

life which, as Lefebvre also observes, 'represents reality in relation to ideality' (12), the ideality of the extra-ordinary life of fashion stars.

## **2. Spaces of Fashion: the Spirit and the Situated Body**

In the British newspaper, the bodies found in 'real life' (17-01) are invoked when reference to wearable clothes is made. These are 'real bodies' to be understood in opposition to the quasi-unreality of stars and their 'heavenly bodies' (Dyer 1987), which, like those of models such as the 'three young British wannabe-Supers, the Gucci girls (as they are known, following the new, ultra-hip Gucci campaign in which they star)' (28-02), 'stalked the runway in super-skinny trousers' (07-03), and whose near immateriality transcends the down-to-earthness of 'real life' people who are 'mere mortal[s]' (18-09).

Thus, one journalist praises Sarnes' collection, where 'the subtle variations in cut and colour meant that there was something for women of all ages [, and ] for those who would rather not bare all, organza palazzo pants and long-line cardigans were a manageable alternative' (02-11). In another report readers are told that 'if you're worried about your legs, wear a slinky, full-length version.[...] If your arms are bugbear, go for long, narrow sleeves [...] finer, floral-print cotton will keep you cool' (27-04), whilst Armani's collection is full of 'body-skimming jackets' (07-03).

High fashion here is seen as an object to be embodied to adorn the real body of 'real life' people. It is not limited to the 'fashion life' (07-03) set on and around the catwalk, this fashion made into a popular show through the depiction of stars and their stories in the setting of the collections, but it is also made meaningful through its bodily consumption. It is no longer a spectacle, but part of the everyday practice of *The Guardian's* readers, and it is this everyday practice, this ultimate embodiment of fashion, which eventually makes designers successful. As *The Guardian* writes, 'this is, I think, the secret of his success: Rocha designs garments in stunning fabrics, with strikingly simple lines, which are above all easy to wear' (28-02). With many designers, 'although a pair of trousers looks fabulous, the cut is too sharp to sit down', designers for whom 'such questions seem never to have occurred' in contrast with 'Rocha's willingness to listen to what women say about his clothes' (28-02). Fashion is thus sanctioned by the women of 'real life', the 'women from all walks of life' (17-01) linked together by their

physical involvement with fashion, and who share an interest in it not just as a spectacular entertainment, but also as a practice which is directly addressed to their body. Thus Helmut Lang is praised for being 'the single most important influence on the way women (and indeed men) actually dress' (16-10).

In the British newspaper high fashion is also set in the framework of everyday life, punctuated by the daily practices of its readers; working, shopping and going out. Reference to this everyday life, to the real world of the ordinary existence of *The Guardian* readers, also inscribes fashion in the field of popular culture, the type of culture Shusterman refers to when he notes that "popular" usage is contrasted to "high" usage in being closer to ordinary experience' (2000: 314). Thus *The Guardian* writes that 'today, thanks to the shirt dress, dressing has never been so simple [...] at the office, button it up to the neck and down to the hem; in the evening unbutton to the thigh or create a plunging décolleté' (27-04).

On the catwalk, high fashion often 'looks fantastic', but 'off the catwalk, however, wearing designer pick and mix is not as easy as it looks' (18-09), and the question remains: 'can a mere mortal really carry it off?' (18-09). This is why high fashion, to be successful, also has to come off the stage. In *The Guardian*, clothes should not be designed for the almost incorporeal and ideal body of stars and models only, they should be accessible to the people who will acquire them 'away from the catwalk... [in] second hand shops, the high street' (18-09). What matters is 'high street accessibility' (25-09). High fashion is valuable insofar as it can be made available to consumers and become popular when it 'hits the street' (16-10).

Here, high fashion moves from one setting to another, it moves 'on the catwalk [and] away from the catwalk' (18-09) to reach the street, whilst in *Le Monde*, it remains on the fashion stage, as part of a theatrical representation, an idea I return to shortly. In *The Guardian* it steps down from its extra-ordinary position to join the less distant space of the high street, which becomes the new theatre of fashion. The world is thus depicted as Sennett's 'theatrum mundi' (1993: 266), where society and theatre, the street and the stage, but also actors and spectators, are no longer distinct from each other: if on the stage it is the designers, the models and the stars who are the performers of fashion, on the

street, the main performers are the people, Certeau's 'common hero[es]' (1988: i), who perform fashion and aestheticize everyday life, as will be discussed in the next section.

The Street, as Polhemus notes, 'is both the stage upon which [such] drama unfolds and the bottom line metaphor for all that is presumed to be real and happening in our world today' (1997: 6). And this notion of the street is central to the definition of fashion 'away from the catwalk' (10-02) and as part of daily life. It is an illustration of what Bourdieu calls 'effects of place', whereby 'social space is translated into physical space' (1993b: 160). The expression 'away from the catwalk' becomes understandable in the light of what Bourdieu says are the 'displacements and the movements of the body' (163), which correspond to 'practical hierarchisations of the regions of space' (163). The extra-ordinary, high, temporary position *on* the catwalk, becomes significant in its opposition to the permanent, ordinary one of day-to-day spaces *off* the catwalk, in the office and at home.

Fashion off the catwalk takes place on the stage of ordinary life. It is something that must 'work for real life' (17-01), 'at the office', 'mid-morning', and 'in the evening...[at] home' (27-04). Removed from the 'dizzy heights' (25-09) of the 'world' of fashion, 'high street accessibility' (25-09) is, for *The Guardian*, what 'real life' people are looking for. Fashion is not the isolated and spiritual practice favoured by *Le Monde*. It is not limited to the spectacular display of the catwalk stage, it also evolves in the proximity of everyday life and the 'particular realities of *this* time and *this* place' which, Chambers (1993: 7) argues, are so central to the experience of popular culture.

Everyday fashion is local as opposed to the fashion 'world', which is international and moves, like a 'fashion caravan' (09-03), from one capital to another. Whilst the high fashion stage is stretched across London, Paris, Milan and New York and knows no boundaries of time and place, fashion in the space of ordinary life is practiced in the context of timed activities, whether it be 'to do the supermarket shop' (16-10), 'to pick the kids up from school' (14-08) or for 'evening rendezvous' (07-03)

But in *Le Monde*, where consuming bodies are ignored, fashion is isolated in the experience of the supreme. It is a high art which defeats time and space, like Galliano's collection, which 'covers the world and its centuries'<sup>19</sup> (16-03). The fashion work of art

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<sup>19</sup> 'parcourt le monde et les siècles'

becomes eternal and universal and the aesthetic practice of high fashion is abstracted from the contingencies of the ordinary. It is, as Bourdieu writes of the pure aesthetic, 'rooted in an ethic, or rather, an ethos of elective distance from the necessities of the natural world' (1996a: 5).

In the French newspaper, the readers are positioned as modernist aesthetes. Their enjoyment of high fashion remains purely contemplative, above material consumption. High fashion shows are depicted as theatre plays, a high theatre similar to the one Daniel Bounoux talks about, and whose

transcendence does not humiliate but creates, following Artaud, a 'sublime breath of air'. The spectator is not crushed in a passive heap, but he too becomes active, it is a mere matter of shading in the observation: the body obviously does not move but the mind? What does one know about the movements of affects, about cyclones beneath the skull. (1996: 15)

True to a modernist approach to art, the French commentator underlines the 'transcendence', the 'sublime' and the spiritual involved in the reception of the theatre play, a play which is addressed to a contemplating audience - in *Le Monde*, the distant and intellectual appreciators of the author's creation of the high fashion art. The theatre of fashion is turned into the opportunity for a spiritual experience that transcends the material body. As Bounoux says 'the body obviously does not move but the mind?'. The fashion shows procure for the audience that same aesthetic experience Bourdieu says is characteristic of classical music, as discussed in Chapter 4, and in a similar way, the show is understood as a 'pure art by excellence' (Bourdieu 1995d: 103, 1996a: 19).

But, as in Bourdieu's work, in *Le Monde*, bodies in relation to the high art of fashion are denied any central role, any sensual tie to high fashion. They are silenced, superseded by the activities of the mind. Thus, whilst Eric Bergère's collection is 'for young aesthetes'<sup>20</sup> (09-07), 'strewn with shadows, with torments and with apparitions, [Christian Lacroix's] Winter 1995 collection had revealed a new him'<sup>21</sup> (04-05). Paco Rabanne, the French newspaper also writes, 'seems to broaden his own imaginary world.

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<sup>20</sup> 'pour jeunes esthètes'

<sup>21</sup> 'tapisée d'ombres, de tourments, d'apparitions, sa collection noire de l'hiver 1995 avait révélé un autre lui-même'

[...] He has the merit of offering a bit of invisibility with his dresses of ulterior life'<sup>22</sup> (26-01), and during Saint Laurent's show 'something soft and deep emanates'<sup>23</sup> (19-03). Another journalist writes that the young designer Liliya Pustovit 'offers diaphanous dresses and tunics, layered one on top of the other like notes of a meditative music'<sup>24</sup> (02-05).

Meditation and feelings as strong as torments are inspired by the shows, which in *Le Monde's* accounts, detach themselves from the *praxis* of life to attain a superior spiritual and emotional order, correlatively to which, as with the elite art of modernity, there is a 'crystallization of a distinctive sphere of experience, i.e. the aesthetic' (Bürger 1996: 23). The engagement with high fashion is likened to a pure aesthetic experience, and as such, it is positioned in a space removed from the world of material experiences. Freed from the constraints of material concerns, it enters the space of aesthetic autonomy as a 'free space within society' (Bürger 1996: 11).

As with the theatre described by Daniel Bournoux, during the contemplation of the fashion presented at the shows, 'through sight and sound, the world affects me without directly touching me, I remain completely free, I can abstract myself from the physical chain and hover over the material crowd, involve my passions without compromising myself' (1996: 17). Such a depiction is reminiscent of Kant's aesthete, for whom, Bourdieu notes, 'disinterestedness [is] the sole guarantor of the specifically aesthetic quality of contemplation' (1996a: 3); only a 'pure gaze' can be applied to art, this same 'pure gaze' *Le Monde* applies to the fashion product as work of art.

In the French newspaper also, the fashion aesthetes are those who rise above the 'physical chain' and the 'material crowd'. They can free themselves from their material body, which, superseded by the mind, does not physically experience fashion. As Bourdieu writes, true to his adhesion to the Kantian aesthetic as discussed in Part II,

works produced by the field of restricted production are 'pure', 'abstract' and 'esoteric'. They are 'pure' because they demand of the receiver a

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<sup>22</sup> 'semble agrandir l'espace de son propre imaginaire. [...] Il a le mérite d'offrir avec ses robes de vie ultérieure un peu d'invisibilité'

<sup>23</sup> 'quelque chose de doux et de profond se dégage'

<sup>24</sup> 'Offre des tuniques et robes diaphanes, enfilées l'une sur l'autre comme les notes d'une musique méditative'

specifically aesthetic disposition in accordance with the principles of their production. They are 'abstract' because they call for a multiplicity of specific approaches, in contrast with the undifferentiated art of primitive societies, which is unified within an immediately accessible spectacle involving music, dance, theatre and song. (1993a: 120)

In *Le Monde*, 'in accordance with the principles' of creation of fashion, the readers are expected to use their specific 'aesthetic disposition' to apprehend fashion, which is not 'immediately accessible'. In the French newspaper the fashion dress is a work of art, and it must be treated as such. It is made to be looked at, contemplated, experienced spiritually and detached from bodily enjoyment.

*Le Monde*, like Bourdieu, complies with a specific definition of the aesthetic experience, the Kantian one. An aesthetic relation to fashion is also invoked by *The Guardian*; it does not, however, suggest the Kantian tradition, but rather a more 'pragmatist aesthetics' (Shusterman 2000), an issue I now turn to.

### **3. The Aestheticization of Everyday Life**

Whereas *Le Monde*, like Bourdieu, restricts the aesthetic experience to a spiritual and intellectual one, distant from the sensorial experiencing of the material object of pure gaze, *The Guardian* favours a different type of aesthetic, a pragmatic alternative to the traditional Kantian aesthetic. Whilst the latter is based on a distinction between mind and body, the former insists on the 'body's crucial role as a site of aesthetic experience and artistic fashioning' (Shusterman 2000: xiii), as discussed in Part II. And this body is central to *The Guardian*, which talks about a collection which 'looked a joy to wear' (02-11) and writes that 'the first real shiver of desire was felt at Helmut Lang' (20-03).

Here pleasure comes from both the contemplation of the collection and the idea of wearing it. Both the spectacle and the embodiment of fashion are depicted as a source of enjoyment. 'De-distantiation' from the fashion object, literally, as mentioned in Part II, 'the pleasure from immersion into the object of contemplation' (Featherstone 1994: 71), is constitutive of the engagement with fashion, a pleasure Bourdieu fails to consider except as a working class type of relation with cultural forms, but which he does not credit with any legitimacy. In his work, in accordance with the Kantian model, aesthetic pleasure is 'an ascetic, empty pleasure' (Bourdieu 1996a: 491) distinct from a vulgar

sensual pleasure (*jouissance*), as if looking and feeling (considered in its physical rather than emotional sense) could only work in separate and irreconcilable realms. But in *The Guardian* they do not. Looking and the idea of wearing what is being looked at, are complementary components of the de-distantiated experience of fashion. These are components which feed each other, as if the fact that something looked good was synonymous with it feeling good too. 'If it's short that pleases', the British newspapers notes, 'then the bum-skimming skirts that flitted through most of the collections in Milan should delight' (07-03). Yamamoto's clothes, however, 'are not clothes that will please everyone for they are demanding to wear' (20-03).

The distant pleasure of contemplating the clothes on show is fed by the anticipatory pleasure of wearing them, a pleasure nurtured in the body's very fleshliness, its physicality and sensuality. As *The Guardian* puts it, fashion 'must bypass the brain if it is to succeed. It must make our hearts beat faster, or why bother?' (20-03). But in *Le Monde*, only the fashion-work-of-art in its non-functionality, its isolation from any potential use, is allowed the capacity to generate pleasure, a distant and intellectualised one, which, contrary to *The Guardian's* fashion, does not bypass the brain, but the body, to reach the mind.

In *The Guardian*, the embodiment of fashion also contributes to the stylization of the day-to-day existence - Shusterman talks about the 'ethical art of fashioning one's life' (2000: 59) - of the pragmatist aesthetes, Featherstone's (1994) heroes of consumer culture: 'Rather than unreflexively adopting a lifestyle, through tradition and habit', Featherstone notes, 'the new heroes of consumer culture make lifestyle a life project and display their individuality and sense of style in the particularity of the assemblage of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and bodily dispositions they design together into a lifestyle' (86). These heroes of consumer culture are performers of everyday life, the actors of the 'theatrum mundi', where social life is couched in aesthetic terms and where all men are considered artists, since 'all men can act' (Sennett 1993: 266). *The Guardian's* consumers of fashion are as much aesthetes as *Le Monde's* contemplators of the high art of fashion. The act of consumption itself constitutes an aesthetic practice, a practice which often relies on 'an esthetics of "tricks"'

(artists' operations)' (Certeau 1988: 26), the tricks of those who 'experiment' (17-01) with fashion.

This 'aesthetics of tricks' is to be found in the consumers' use of the fashion garment, which allows them to become the designers of their own life. *The Guardian* exhorts its readers to 'trust your instincts' (18-09) and to 'care about fashion without being slaves to it' (28-09). Dress 'with the courage of your convictions' (18-09), the British newspapers also advise, so as to 'convey your own taste', to show that 'you've acquired your personal styling statement over time rather than gone to Anna Molinari and bought it' (18-09). *The Guardian* fashion aesthetes are like Certeau's consumers, who through their 'way of thinking invested in a way of acting' (1988: xv), *bricole* their own look - one journalist observes: 'the look may be new to the catwalk, but it's not new to anyone who has ever ineptly experimented with' it (17-01) - and can thus be likened to artists. What matters here are the 'ways of using' (Certeau 1988: xii) fashion to create one's own fashion, as in 'the evening' when, with the shirt dress, you can 'create a plunging décolleté' (27-04). The body becomes this 'raw material and tool' which, Willis (1996: 11) argues, is central to 'symbolic creativity', an everyday creativity Bourdieu ignores.

*The Guardian's* consumers adorn their bodies in an act of creation which is not the preserve only of the direct producer of the fashion object, the product of *Le Monde's* 'auteur fashion'<sup>25</sup> (08-10). If in the French newspaper, the only producers of fashion are the designers, in a clear cut distinction between consumption and production, as in the work of Bourdieu, in the British newspaper consumers as users of fashion are also its producers, those who contribute to the aestheticization of daily life in the bodily experience of fashion, as opposed to *Le Monde's* spiritual engagement with the fashion work of art. *The Guardian's* readers are simultaneously spectators of a popular entertainment - fashion as popular show - and consumers of fashion, a consumption which, as with Certeau's discussed in Chapter 3, is a type of production, but which, in distinction to Certeau's, is not silent and almost invisible, but *does* 'manifest itself through [...] ways of using' (1988: xii) the products of consumer culture.

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<sup>25</sup> 'mode d'auteur'

Thus, it is by choosing a particular mode of relation between fashion and the readers that both newspapers map the field of culture. In *Le Monde*, fashion is depicted as a high art only contemplated by the ‘pure gaze’ of the aesthete of modernity. Here, fashion and high culture become one and the same thing. In *The Guardian*, the reports on the clothes presented during the shows open the way to addressing the issue of fashion in everyday life. It is discussed as a popular practice, a popular art form involving consumers as aesthetes engaged in the aestheticization of day-to-day existence through an ‘embodied, pragmatist aesthetic’ (Shusterman 2000: xiii). The language used to depict fashion, the choice of registers and the mode of address to the readers, as I show next, also participate in the definition of fashion as high culture or popular culture.

#### **4. Addressing the Readers**

Bourdieu notes that when critics pronounce their judgement on a work not only do they express their ideas, they also pronounce their right to do so. They thereby participate in ‘a struggle for the monopoly of legitimate discourse about the work of art, and consequently in the production of the value of the work of art’ (Bourdieu 1993a: 35), a value which, however, he fails to discuss, as argued in Part II. This is why, Bourdieu writes, ‘there is a whole dimension of authorized language, its rhetoric, syntax, vocabulary and even pronunciation, which exists purely to underline the authority of its author and the trust he demands’ (1999b: 76). In the process of asserting this authority, values and meanings are constructed and expressed which reflect different views of the role of the journalists, whether it be as modernist critics of high art in *Le Monde*, or ‘in the know’ informants of high fashion as pop fashion in *The Guardian* - consumers, like their readers, of popular culture and experts on trendy lifestyles.

I pointed out earlier, that in the field of high art, what Bourdieu calls the field of restricted production, works of art are “‘pure”, “abstract” and “esoteric”” (Bourdieu 1993a: 120). *Le Monde*’s discourse on high fashion as high culture is in keeping with this sense of abstraction. High fashion is made esoteric by the French newspaper. Clothes are merely suggested, evoked only through metaphors. Very often, no actual direct information on the clothes presented at the shows can be gained; there are only ideas, impressions, but no straightforward description: For instance, *Le Monde* writes that in

their collections ‘Fred Sathal and Jean Colonna tell their childhood fears in an adult world, here an anaemic white, there, in the black of a joyless street, witnesses of a “no present” generation which, between spleen and dreams of beauty, look for an emergency exit. Under the veils, pain’<sup>26</sup> (19-10). With Lapidus ‘suspended in the air, and as though to entice curiosity, to make [the audience] guess a presence, dresses look like drawings, purple thoughts, wisteria, sweet peas’<sup>27</sup> (29-01). ‘Lee Young has offered a fashion show in the colours of nature and Buddhist temples, quiet mornings of silk and ramie’<sup>28</sup> (13-07) while Helmut Lang’s show was ‘a cult fashion show on the verge of nothingness’<sup>29</sup> consisting of ‘tight little pullovers for studio spiders’<sup>30</sup> and of ‘sparkles melted in the darkness of a joyless city’<sup>31</sup> (16-03).

High fashion is constructed as an object which cannot be easily described but only apprehended through a set of convoluted metaphors, as if no words were exact enough to render the emotions it stirs, as if talking about it were impossible, as difficult as describing some extreme, ineffable feelings. Fashion journalists recreate the obscurity and complexity of the object observed, its intensity, through an equally obscure and intense language. For them, the work under scrutiny requires deep spiritual involvement, an experience they have to convey to their readers. The journalists assert their role as connoisseurs of the high art of fashion through a communion with the fashion artists and their work. They are conforming to what Burgin says is the commonsense view of the task of modernist criticism, a criticism which ‘shows a critic in confrontation, or communion, with an artwork’ (1986: 142). The critic expresses

his or her thoughts or feelings about the work, and a judgement of the value of the work, to an audience assumed to be the same audience as for the artwork under review. In the common sense view the artwork has itself

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<sup>26</sup> ‘Fred Sathal et Jean Colonna racontent leurs peurs d’enfant dans le monde des adultes, ici, un blanc anémique, là, dans le noir d’une rue sans joie, témoins d’une génération ‘no present’ qui, entre spleen et rêves de beauté, cherche une issue de secours. Sous les voiles, la déchirure’

<sup>27</sup> ‘suspendues dans l’air, et, comme pour piquer la curiosité, lui faire deviner une présence, les robes ressemblent à des esquisses, pensées mauves, glycines, pois de senteur, papillons aux ailes bleuâtres et glacées’.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Lee Young a offert un défilé aux couleurs de la nature et des temples bouddhiques, matins calmes de soie et de ramie’

<sup>29</sup> ‘défilé-culte au bord du rien’

<sup>30</sup> ‘petits pulls collants pour araignées de studio’

<sup>31</sup> ‘brillances fondues dans les ténèbres d’une ville sans joie’

originated in the thoughts and feelings of the artist [...] and is itself an attempt to communicate to this same audience. (142)

The language *Le Monde* draws on to depict the designers and their work helps to inscribe them in a space removed from any grounded knowledge. They belong to a spiritual realm of ideas incarnated in the dresses on show, whose substance is almost immaterial, like a Saint Laurent dress whose colour is ‘Orient Express evenings sparkled with light, like love notes’<sup>32</sup> (13-07) or Ungaro’s ‘trousers which are mere breaths’<sup>33</sup> (13-07) and Lanvin’s ‘evaporated dresses of lunar and opal colours’<sup>34</sup> (19-10). With Saint Laurent, *Le Monde* also notes, ‘it looks like dresses have been blown rather than cut or sewn, daughters of secrets and love’<sup>35</sup> (26-01). The journalists create the screen Bourdieu talks about in *Haute Couture and Haute Culture* (1995c). It is a screen that covers the object referred to, high fashion, to engender a greater ‘belief’ in the symbolic value of high fashion, thus contributing to ‘the ideology of creation’ (138). It is the belief in the fashion dress as a work of art designed to please the intellect that the journalists want to convey to their readers. The object of fashion as a material product destined for bodies becomes misrecognizable; it is believed to be an object of high art addressed solely to the aesthete’s pure gaze.

The language used by the fashion journalists in *Le Monde* further isolates high fashion from the praxis of real life, it constructs it as an unreachable object distant from the observer, an immaterial object consisting of superior feelings, as in the collection of Isabelle Ballu, which, the French newspaper notes, ‘évoque le spleen des enfants du siècle’ [evokes the blues of the children of the century] (22-03). The word ‘spleen’ is strongly evocative of Baudelaire’s *Le Spleen de Paris* and ‘Spleen et Idéal’ from *Les Fleurs du Mal* while the expression ‘enfants du siècle’ recalls Musset’s *La Confession d’un Enfant du Siècle*. These Romantic authors are both staples of French school curricula, and through reference to their work, the designer’s creations, in the French newspaper, are likened to the lyric poetry of French Romanticism.

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<sup>32</sup> ‘soirs d’Orient Express pailletés de lumière, comme des notes d’amour’

<sup>33</sup> ‘souffles de pantalons’

<sup>34</sup> ‘des robes évaporées couleur de lune et d’opale’

<sup>35</sup> ‘on a l’impression que les robes ont été soufflées plutôt que coupées, cousues, filles du secret et de l’amour’

I argued in the last chapter that *The Guardian* articulates its reports on fashion shows like narratives whose characters are celebrities. These fashion stories are also narrated in a language closer to colloquial talk than to *Le Monde*'s lyric criticism. One journalist talks about Debbie Harry's 'rock chick' hairstyle popular on the catwalk: 'Imagine Pepe Le Pew goes to Vidal Sassoon and you begin to get the picture' (17-01), another one starts a report on a Dolce & Gabbana show with the following:

Lots and lots of cuteness at Dolce & Gabbana's second line, D&G, which kicks off the Milan season. A flock of models, daisies stuck in mussed-up blonde topknots, spun up and down the catwalk on long, stalk like legs clad in white lacy tights, like so many Goldie Hawns on speed. (07-03)

The readers are also told that the shirt dress is 'a witty take on this season's hottest number' (29-02) and that a collection is 'drop dead sexy' (07-03). One journalist mentions the 'big bucks LA film studio executives' (09-03).

This language is opposed to *Le Monde*'s esoteric, abstract register of high art. *The Guardian* uses a spoken, not a literary language, and it often relies on slang. It is the vernacular language of popular culture distinct from that of consecrated high culture. This language also draws on hip, cool terminology, and though used in everyday spoken forms, it is not one which figures among everybody's repertoire. Rather it is the language of *The Guardian*'s readers, which the British newspaper in its media pack notes live in the 'up and coming areas of major cities'. These readers 'can afford to be extravagant... [they] enjoy *splashing out* on a meal' (Guardian's media pack, my emphasis). They are 'urban professionals' who are 'affluent and extravagant' and who 'are also more likely to have gone to pop or jazz concerts in the last 3 months than any other quality press readers' (Guardian's media pack).

*The Guardian*'s language is one particular way of addressing the popular, one particular way of relating to it. It indexes the notion of trendiness, that of the 'in the know' readers of *The Guardian*, the possessors, as seen in the last chapter, of popular cultural capital. It is a language which establishes boundaries between those who share it and those who do not, thus creating an 'elective distance' (Bourdieu 1996a: 5) between the 'in the know' readers and the Others. This elective distance, *pace* Bourdieu, is not the

preserve of legitimate high culture only, and, for one to be elected as a member of the 'in the know' circle, it must be overcome through the mastering of the 'elaborated code' (Bernstein 1973) of the fashionable crowd.

Here popular culture becomes an elitist culture relying on its own codes - hip language and popular cultural references - rather than on those of traditional high culture, to assert its distinction not only from a mainstream culture - the culture, in the British newspapers, of those Others who do not live in the up and coming areas where *The Guardian* readers are said to be living - but also from high culture.

However, alongside the hip *Guardian* readers are also the less fashionable ones, those who respect 'current trends without bowing down to them completely' (28-09). Those worried about 'clothes that are easy to wear' (28-09) and 'simple lines' (28-02) 'for women who care about fashion without being slaves to it' (28-09). Fashion as popular culture is not consumed by a homogenous crowd. Rather, it is appropriated by a variety of people, a diversity consisting of 'professional women' (09-03), 'women of all ages' (02-11) and 'trendy clubbers and teenagers' (17-01). Popular culture as depicted by *The Guardian* is a network of varied and diversified everydayness whose ordinariness, through the creative practice of fashion, can be made less so, as discussed earlier.

Moreover, the British newspaper often addresses its readers directly, frequently using the personal pronouns 'I', 'you', 'we', bringing the readers closer to the event depicted. These are pronouns *Le Monde* never draws on, always keeping its readers at a distance, the distance imposed onto the audience by the auratic work of art, 'however close it may be' (Benjamin 1992: 216) to the contemplating aesthete. The pronouns 'they' and 'we' can be understood through their opposition. 'They' are distant from 'us'. This distance, this binary opposition between spaces of experience informs *Le Monde's* approach to fashion. The French newspaper, as I argued earlier, excludes bodies from the practice of fashion. The readers themselves are not allowed total immersion in the events depicted. They are never addressed directly. The only participants of fashion are these distant 'they', 'he' and 'she', the 'others' - that is not 'us' - from whom 'we' are kept apart by an 'elective distance' (Bourdieu 1996a: 5).

But in *The Guardian*, 'we' follow the performance of 'our young designers' (23-09, my emphasis), of 'our bright young talent[s]' (02-10, my emphasis) and 'we should

be optimistic' (23-09, my emphasis) about their future. 'We' are given some advice about what to wear: 'Slip on something spangly because you like it ... by all means buy a sparkly camisole with orange and lime diamante detailing' (18-09).

Here, the fashion report is used to educate those who are not already 'in the know', but who are exhorted to react actively to the information provided, as this information concerns 'you', and as such should not be received passively. *The Guardian's* readers should, like the prototype reader described in the newspaper media pack, be 'active, sociable and outgoing'. They are asked to be directly involved in the events represented whilst *The Guardian's* journalists, like the cultural intermediaries Featherstone discusses drawing on Bourdieu (1996a), show their engagement 'in the production of popular pedagogies and guides to living and lifestyle' (1994: 35). Such guides will eventually allow 'us' to personalise and shape our life. They will also help 'us' to be included in the in-crowd *au fait* with the 'fashion universe' (28-02) and attain, through the increase of our popular cultural capital, the status of the 'in the know' readers.

*The Guardian's* use of 'we' is also reminiscent of the 'exclusive first-person plural favoured by women's magazines' (Whelehan 2000: 145). This further positions the newspaper's discourse alongside popular lifestyle guides such as fashion magazines, which, as Entwistle observes, are sites where "'fashion" - as an abstract idea and aesthetic discourse - and "fashion" - as the actual clothing made available for purchase each season - connects with everyday dress' (2000: 237).

This connection is also allowed by what Hartley (1996: 107) says is the characteristic of 'a semiotic space' he calls 'Wedom', in which journalism exists. It is 'the quotidian sphere of popular culture', where 'texts of an alien semiotics (literally, culturally or politically foreign)' can be translated 'into "our" language, the language of central, ordered, stratified, regular, mythic common sense' (107). Through the appropriation of the pronoun 'we', the alien semiotics of the 'fashion scene' (28-02) - which *The Guardian* also tellingly calls 'planet fashion' (16-10) - is translated into 'our' language of everyday life, 'ordered' and made sense of in the context of popular culture.

Finally, by using 'we', the journalists also position themselves alongside their readers, whose voices are echoed through that of the reporters, the one and the other

melting into a single voice which no longer differentiates between the position of the informed journalist and that of the readers in need of information. As Freud notes, 'the ordinary man is the speaker. He is the point in the discourse where the scientist and the common man come together - the return of the other (every one and no one) into the place which had been so artfully set apart from him' (quoted in Certeau 1988: xxii). Because in the British newspaper the journalist and the reader 'come together', the ordinary people become the speakers, for whom high fashion shows are no longer the 'other', 'set apart from' them, but are directly experienced by them, or rather 'us'.

## MODERNIST FASHION AND POSTMODERNIST FASHION

*Le Monde's* high fashion is likened to the art of modernity and modernism informs the French newspaper's account of fashion shows, in contrast with *The Guardian's* postmodern take on the topic, as I will argue in Chapter 10, a take which does not easily fit in with Bourdieu's conceptualisation of the functioning of the field of culture.

Whereas in *Le Monde*, fashion is a work of art sacralised by the journalists, in *The Guardian*, irony and mockery are used to desacralise it. Material consumption is not depicted as foreign to the experience of high fashion, and commercial success is the ultimate sign of great design. This same commercial dimension is condemned by *Le Monde*, and depicted as leading to the downfall of high fashion. It is denounced as responsible for the crisis of French fashion and as ultimately contributing to the degeneration of the whole of French culture. New times have come, which, *Le Monde* argues, are threatening the foundation of French high fashion. These new times are similar to Baudrillard's postmodernity discussed in Chapter 2, where all values are dead and where the commercial and technology reign supreme. However, whilst *Le Monde* laments the crisis of French fashion, *The Guardian* celebrates the victory of the British avantgarde, a postmodern one which has become the new tradition, the 'new wave' (09-10) of the 'fashion scene' (28-02), no longer dominated by Paris fashion.

The relation between high culture and popular culture is negotiated in different terms in *The Guardian* and in *Le Monde*. Whereas, true to the spirit of modernist criticism, *Le Monde* strictly opposes high fashion and popular fashion, the boundary between the two becomes less definable in *The Guardian*. In the French newspaper high fashion is a self-referential field, completely autonomous, and threatened by its representation, *en masse*, in the media. In *The Guardian*, it moves between the space of elite practice - being part of the actual audience of the fashion show - to that of popular practice - allowed by the massification of the fashion show as reconstructed in the press and so made widely available in the form of popular entertainment.

## 1. Desacralisation

*The Guardian* separates fashion from elite culture by frequently showing a certain distance towards the issue of fashion as high art. It also often distances itself from the fashion scene through mockery. One journalist writes that Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo 'transform fashion into art...' an assertion whose seriousness is immediately superseded by a sudden clash of style. The journalist adds '... and push it, kicking and screaming, into the future' (16-10). The language used is sometimes poetic, but in such cases, always counterbalanced by ironic remarks which remove the poetry from its auratic superiority and bring the reader back to a more ordinary world. 'The most extravagantly beautiful gold brocade evening coat with a sugar-sweet rose-print lining and an overblown wedding dress in ivory silk will no doubt inspire proposals from single fashion editors the world over' (16-10). The seriousness of the first part of the quote is opposed to the playfulness of the second one as if to say: 'let's be serious, but not too serious'. Here, the issue of the use of fashion is again being raised, a use that must be pleasurable in its sensual address to the body, but also as a playful spectacle like Chanel's show, which was 'fresh and enormously good fun' (15-10).

In *The Guardian*, the praxis of fashion is a response to the individual's quest for hedonistic experience, a quest which, according to the Canadian sociologist Boisvert (1997: 111), is typical of postmodernity. Concern for raising 'the level of satisfaction of well-being and personal pleasures' as well as the claim to have 'the right to fully enjoy life the way [individuals] want' are, he argues, central to the postmodernist perspective, a perspective 'directly inscribed in the path of hedonism'.

*The Guardian* asserts this right to a playful and hedonistic relation to fashion. Dressing the body is an enjoyable game and high fashion is no longer the totem of modernity, to be venerated and sacralised; rather, in the postmodern world of the British newspaper, it is talked about lightly and playfully. The aesthetic invoked here is not the high Kantian one, but an aesthetic of the senses, as discussed earlier, and similar to Willis' 'grounded aesthetics', which works 'through the senses, through sensual heightening, through joy, pleasure and desire, through "fun" and the "festive"' (1996: 23).

*The Guardian*'s distancing from high fashion is further accentuated by the ironic tone which is often used to talk about the 'fashion establishment' (03-04). One reporter writes, concerning a present (of the Hushpuppy make) given at a show:

The furry signature mutt brought a little warmth to even the most cold-hearted fashion editors. 'AAAAH', we all cried fashionably enough. [...] Bizarrely, the Donna Karan show opened with a man making his way down the dimly lit catwalk blowing on a massive didgeridoo.[...] 'PSST', the fashion editor of one British broadsheet said to another. 'How d'ya spell didgeridoo?' With great difficulty is the answer. (06-11)

One journalist comments on the press releases of Valentino's show:

Here are the trousers that 'neither arouse fear nor claim to be the emblem of aggressiveness nor philosophical-psychological confidence, but instead offer renewal'. Anyone under the illusion that trousers were just something to fling on of a morning in an attempt to spare the world the sight of their knickers should be ashamed. (25-01)

Irony and playfulness remove high fashion from its 'dizzy heights' (25-09). Art and artistic seriousness are deprived of their aura by a detached and relaxed reporting of the events used to demystify the fashion scene. It is the language of the cool and bemused observer who stays in touch with reality and prefers to have 'good fun' (15-10) with fashion than to take it too seriously. An elite approach to high fashion is thus rejected in favour of a more populist one which draws on irony and coolness to assert itself, but which at the same time, as discussed earlier, re-establishes a sense of distinction and elitist boundaries through the adoption of a hip language and the popular cultural references of those 'in the know'. In *The Guardian*, the traditional cultural hierarchy, which, as in Bourdieu's work, privileges traditional high culture in opposition to a contemporary popular culture that is perceived as debased, is reorganised in favour of a transfer of hierarchies within subfields rather than across subfields, out of which a high popular culture emerges, the culture of the 'active, sociable and outgoing' readers of *The Guardian* (media pack). It is a culture which endorses a particular version of the popular, informed by the idea of de-sacralisation of the traditional space of high culture, together with the ideas of hip elitism and light playfulness. It is a culture where traditionally

opposed notions are now mixed, a culture at the same time high and low, or maybe, to borrow Seabrook's expression, 'neither high nor low, and not in the middle', but 'outside the old taste hierarchy altogether' (2000: 12). It is a culture similar to what Lash called, talking about Sontag in 1960s New York and her views on art, a 'funky... downtown culture' as opposed to 'a serious and moral "uptown" high modernist culture' (1990: 179). This 'funky' approach to high fashion contributes to the de-auraticization of high fashion as high art.

When talking about 'funky downtown culture', Lash was referring to postmodernism, a notion through which the *The Guardian's* populism can be addressed. The ironic, playful and transgressive character of postmodernism is often referred to by theoreticians of postmodern culture (see Connor 1997; Featherstone 1994; Jencks 1992; Lash 1990), a postmodernism which originated, according to Huysen (1992: 47-52), with the American populist trend of the 1960s and its celebration of popular cultural forms.

Lash also writes that 'postmodern architecture exemplifies de-differentiation in that [...] an "auratic" style is replaced by a populist and playful one' (1990: 36). Playfulness and the breaking down of the aura of fashion as high art are recurrent aspects of *The Guardian's* reports, which favour a populist approach to the fashion shows, and in that respect these articles can be placed alongside other postmodern texts. In the British newspaper, fashion has acquired the new fluency Angela McRobbie talks about in *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*:

as more column inches are given over to fashion in the daily and weekly quality newspapers (adding a dash of colour to the black and white format and catering for the 'new' women readers at the same time) fashion learns to talk about itself with a new fluency, it can even mock itself. (1996c: 146)

In comparison, *Le Monde's* discourse, as discussed in the last chapter, remains inscribed in the abstract language of modernism and its high aesthetic, and the journalists appear as modernist critics, who feed the high position of high culture and contribute to the legitimization of high fashion as a superior, autonomous art.

However, high fashion as a pure object contemplated by modernist aesthetes is, according to *Le Monde*, becoming history. Today's high fashion is depicted as being in crisis; it is an institution no longer immune to outside forces as in the time of its privileged position of autonomous high art.

## **2. Crise de la Mode: the Death of Creativity and the Advent of Marketing**

The *créateurs*, I argued in Chapter 8, are represented as prophets, who, through their *métier*, can express the sensibilities of the world, and transcend the present by foreseeing the future. They are superior beings with a gift for vision. But, according to *Le Monde*, the fashion shows of January 1996 showed that, with the exception of one or two creators and 'apart from formal prowess, a lack of engagement is visible everywhere, which reveals a lack of world vision'<sup>1</sup> (29-01).

Today's French high fashion is described as being deprived of its role of spiritual leader intellectually involved in the world and capable of expressing and predicting it. It is no longer ahead of its time, but is stuck in the past, incapable of adapting itself to new times and concerned with material issues only. In a subheading, *Le Monde* gives its verdict: 'In a too static world, very rare were the designers who managed to adapt their references to the classics as well as to adapt their art to the image of their time'<sup>2</sup> (29-01). True to its modernist approach to fashion, *Le Monde* laments the disappearing of the author of the work of art, and the lack of constant renewal, this 'tradition of the new' (Rosenberg 1962) so dear to modernist theorists, for whom 'the creation of novelty itself may become routinized' (Zolberg 1997: 130). Fashion becomes static, and progress, one of the keywords of modernity, is not achieved; high fashion can no longer be.

Only a few designers, according to *Le Monde*, succeed, like Yves Saint Laurent, in 'coming back to the source and rediscovering the soul of a *métier*'<sup>3</sup> (29-01). They are the ones who can maintain high fashion in its modernity in so far as 'modernism saw tradition in terms of a perpetual and progressive evolution in which there was never any

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<sup>1</sup> 'au-delà des prouesses formelle, une absence de parti pris est sensible partout ailleurs, révélatrice d'un manque de vision du monde'

<sup>2</sup> 'dans un monde trop figé, dans les rares ont été les couturiers aussi ont su adapter références classiques, leur art à l'image de leur époque'

<sup>3</sup> 'retrouver à la source l'âme d'une métier'

question of regressing to earlier, historically superseded, stages' (Burgin 1986: 45). Even a successful designer like Galliano at Givenchy does not succeed in fulfilling the tradition of renewal of high fashion; he is 'on the edge of parody'<sup>4</sup> (23-01), and many collections are derided as simple copies of original designs from former years, 'a caricature linked to the past'<sup>5</sup> (08-10), a mere 'patchwork of images'<sup>6</sup> found in old magazines (23-01), a 'light version'<sup>7</sup> (29-01) of past creations.

Thus *Le Monde* tells us that the 'hyper activity' of fashion shows - 'from the 7 to the 17 October: 86 fashion shows and 43 presentations on invitation will take place in 10 days'<sup>8</sup> (08-10) - 'barely conceals the crisis the French fashion industry is going through'<sup>9</sup> (08-10). Today's modernity is, for the French newspaper, responsible for this crisis. It is a modernity led by high technology, American culture, and commercial competition, resulting in the loss of fashion's 'memory' (12-03). 'It seems more and more as if technique has taken over desire and imagination'<sup>10</sup> (29-01), *Le Monde* stresses. 'The word "internet" has become the taboo of fashion: it provokes retraction and suspicion, isolating Paris once more in its splendor, against the commercial and media offensive of Milan and New York'<sup>11</sup> (25-03). Technology is perceived as the element which deprives high fashion of its aura; as in Benjamin's 'Age of Mechanical Reproduction', it dissociates the fashion work of art from its traditional mode of production and propagation, renders it common, no longer unique and different (1992: 211). One journalist writes that some creators' initiative to show their fashion show on the internet 'marks the end of an era: these glamorous events are no longer reserved for a few hundred privileged people. Given over to larger numbers, fashion shows risk losing their

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<sup>4</sup> 'au bord de la parodie'

<sup>5</sup> 'une image caricaturale liée au passé'

<sup>6</sup> 'un patchwork d'images trouvées [...] dans L'Art et la Mode [...] des Vogue américains des années 50'

<sup>7</sup> 'version allégée'

<sup>8</sup> 'du 7 au 17 octobre: 86 défilés et 43 présentations sur invitation auront lieu en dix jours'

<sup>9</sup> 'dissimule mal la crise traversée par l'industrie de la mode en France'

<sup>10</sup> 'on a de plus en plus l'impression que la technique prend le relais du désir et de l'imagination, d'un manque de parti pris'

<sup>11</sup> 'le mot internet est devenu le nouveau mot tabou de la mode: il suscite des réactions de repli et de méfiance, isolant encore une fois Paris dans sa splendeur, face à l'offensive commercialo-médiatique de Milan et de New York'

magic'<sup>12</sup> (05-08). Once original, pure and unique, high fashion might become banal and vulgar. Through its showing on the internet, for example, it is downgraded from the smaller, the elite, to the 'larger numbers', the people; that is, mass cultural theorists would argue, as discussed in Part I, from the good and the superior to the bad and the inferior. For the journalist of *Le Monde*, high fashion should remain isolated in its high position, protected from the assault of the masses, rather than 'abandoned to the voracity of internet users'<sup>13</sup> (05-10). As the French newspaper notes, quoting Pierre Cardin: 'only rarity will save this *métier*'<sup>14</sup> (25-03).

The institution of high fashion, the establishment, is shaken up by new technologies as well as by new practices, such as those of other countries like America, 'which imposes its standards once more: the clean, the beige, the irreproachable. [...] Oscar de la Renta [...] presented a historically correct collection'<sup>15</sup> (29-01). These qualities do not fit the standards of profusion of colours which *Le Monde* glorifies in French collections such as Saint Laurent's, where dresses are 'of all colours, purples, buttercups, Esfahan blues'<sup>16</sup> (26-01), or Maréchal's, which consists of 'the purple, the oranges, and the reds' (19-10) and Lacroix's, whose creations are 'a whirl of light and colours caught in full flight, tulle dew, silky orchids, electrified by the acid notes of the turquoise, the Chartreuse green, the flame orange, which give these lunar dresses the sparkle of a Technicolor twilight'<sup>17</sup> (29-01), a palette varied enough to render accurately the complexity of the creators' mind and allow them to fulfill their role as 'drawers' (29-01), painters (23-01) or 'aquarellists' (16-03).

American fashion is denied the right to be called creative fashion or work of art, a right that is allowed to some creations of French high fashion. For *Le Monde*, French high fashion is turned into the academy of fashion, in the sense that 'what defines an

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<sup>12</sup> 'ces initiatives marquent la fin d'une époque: ces évènements mondains ne sont plus réservés à quelques centaines de privilégiés réunis dans les salons de grands hotels parisiens. Livrés au plus grand nombre, les défilés risquent de perdre de leur magie'

<sup>13</sup> 'livré en pâture aux internautes'

<sup>14</sup> 'seule la rareté sauvera ce métier'

<sup>15</sup> 'l'Amérique [...] impose une nouvelle fois ses modèles: le propre, le beige, l'irréprochable. [...] Oscar de la Renta [...] a offert une collection historically correct'

<sup>16</sup> 'de toutes les couleurs, les violets, les boutons d'or, les bleus Ispahan'

<sup>17</sup> 'un tourbillon de lumière et de couleurs saisies en plein vol, rosées de tulle, orchidées de soie, électrisées par les notes acides des turquoise, vert Chartreuse, orange flamme, donnant à ces robes de lune l'éclat d'un crépuscule en Technicolor'

academy is that it knows a success when it sees one, the criteria are already in place - success is then defined in terms of conformity to established criteria and proficiency in the execution of the exercise' (Burgin 1986: 44). The clean and the beige, by not corresponding to the criteria set by the academy of high fashion called into existence by *Le Monde*, can only fail to satisfy its members, such as fashion journalists.

The theme of American imperialism is used by the newspaper to reinforce the idea of the crisis of fashion. High fashion is threatened by American culture, which is often represented and condemned in the French media as a commercial culture, that is, as the enemy of French highbrow intellectuals, such as those typified by the readers of *Le Monde* (see also Kuisel 1996; Mathy 2000, for accounts of the 'French Resistance' (Mathy 2000) to American culture). It becomes stained by commercial interest, flawed by new criteria, such as those of the Americans, which go against the ideal of the autonomy of high fashion. 'The art of the finish so dear to Christian Dior', *Le Monde* notes, 'seems very little compared to this amazing pressure that turns the businessman into the new judge of taste and transforms designers into the sales reps of their make'<sup>18</sup> (22-01). Commerce and art are depicted as contradictory principles, and high fashion as high art becomes a victim of this contradiction. In *Le Monde*, to borrow a quote from Bourdieu (1993a), 'the opposition between the "commercial" and the "non-commercial" reappears everywhere. It is the generative principle of most judgements which, in the theatre, cinema, painting or literature, claim to establish the frontier between what is and what is not art' (82). As such, today's high fashion, when permeated by commercial issues can no longer, for *Le Monde*, pretend to be a high art. A new order guided by commercial quest and technology has replaced the old one. It is the new order depicted by Baudrillard, as discussed in Part I, a postmodern order where traditional values have lost their validity. They are in crisis, which signals the death of the society of modernity. In *Le Monde* the crisis of high fashion illustrates this death, a death which also signifies, as will be discussed later, the death of French culture.

High fashion is thus, for the journalist of the French newspaper, 'marked this year by a serious crisis of identity and the lassitude of the great creators'<sup>19</sup> (08-10), forced by

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<sup>18</sup> 'L'art du fini, du parfait, cher à Christian Dior, semble bien peu de choses à côté de cette formidable pression qui a fait du gestionnaire un nouvel arbitre du goût, et du couturier le VRP de sa griffe'

<sup>19</sup> 'marqué cette année par une grave crise d'identité et la lassitude des grands couturiers'

American fashion, commercial interests, and modern ready-to-wear to abandon its quest for creativity and perfection. But Italian and American fashions are 'often the efficient, as well as light, parodies of a history already written in the 1960s and the 1970s'<sup>20</sup> (22-01). Fashion for *Le Monde* has to continue in smooth continuity with the past, but it should not copy it; it should renew it, as did modernist art, 'which develops out of the past without gap or break, and wherever it ends up it will never stop being intelligible in terms of the continuity of art' (Greenberg, quoted in Krauss 1997: 1).

*Le Monde* refers to the continuity of high fashion with the frequent use of the term 'memory' [*mémoire*]: 'one looks in vain for the identity of couture houses, now forced by their finance managers into a war with no real strategy, which blurs the memory and the future of a *métier* which now relies on the media'<sup>21</sup> (13-07). Thus, according to *Le Monde*, the continuity of high fashion, its memory, is broken by commercial competition and the media. Collections are mere copies of the past, its parody. They are simulacra of memory, a memory lost in a marketing quest and the competition for financial profit: 'some creators, the blood sucked out of them by the vampires of Italo-American marketing and the success of Prada, Gucci, Calvin Klein, Donna Karan, end up their first victims'<sup>22</sup> (19-10). High fashion now 'benefits the kings of marketing and image who have been triumphing since the beginning of the 1990s, in the name of an efficient minimalism in black and white'<sup>23</sup> (12-03). The quest for profit is condemned, and creativity and financial interest are depicted as antinomic, as in the modernist ethos according to which money and artistic ambition are incompatible. *Le Monde* condemns this quest as being guilty of the destruction of high fashion. Molénac's collection for Grès, for instance, the French newspaper writes, is 'impersonal', a victim of 'the businessmen of fashion [who] are today fabricating, with massive gold contracts, teams of mercenaries in the service of the big designer labels'<sup>24</sup> (19-03). Thus in *Le Monde*

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<sup>20</sup> 'souvent les parodies efficaces et 'light' d'une histoire déjà écrite dans les années 60-70'

<sup>21</sup> 'On cherche en vain l'identité des maisons, désormais engagées par leurs financiers dans une guerre sans véritable stratégie, qui brouille la mémoire et l'avenir d'un métier suspendu aux coups médiatiques'

<sup>22</sup> 'certains créateurs, vampirisés par le 'marketing italo-américain' et les succès de Prada, Gucci, Calvin Klein, Donna Karan, finissent par devenir leur première victime'

<sup>23</sup> 'profite aux rois du marketing et de l'image qui triomphent depuis le début des années 90, au nom d'un minimalisme efficace en noir et blanc'

<sup>24</sup> 'les financiers de la mode [qui] sont aujourd'hui en train de fabriquer, à coups de contrats en or massif, des écuries de mercenaires au service des grandes griffes couture'

numerous articles evoke yesterday's high fashion with a sort of nostalgia for its past glory; a glory which, according to the French newspaper, is now lost, as illustrated by Yves Saint Laurent's collection, which is described as 'the dreams of a lost world'<sup>25</sup> (19-03).

But in *The Guardian*, the designer's quest for financial success is not condemned. There is no denial, no silencing of the issue of money. The readers hear about Galliano, who 'since appointed by Givenchy last summer [...] has not only dominated fashion headlines (he is the first British designer to head a couture house) but also significantly boosted sales worldwide' (16-03). The designer is an artist who should also be looking for commercial success, as it is a sign that the clothes seen on the catwalk can actually be worn in everyday life. One journalist writes, 'the fact that for the first time there will be an American presence at the show is a gauge of potential commercial as well as creative success' (23-09) while another stresses, quoting a buyer on London's new generation of designers, 'these are ideas-based clothes, you can talk about them. People like that. Ideas actually make garments more saleable' (25-09).

In *The Guardian*, creativity and money are reconciled as constitutive elements of the field of high fashion, not antinomic entities, the separate parts of Bourdieu's field of cultural production as 'economic world reversed' (1993a). It is a field where the clear cut distinction he makes between the sub-field of large scale production - linked only to money - and the sub-field of restricted production - whose interest is in artistic creativity alone, 'a universe sustained by denial of the economy' (50) - no longer holds true. *The Guardian's* depiction of high fashion is in opposition to Bourdieu's romantic vision of the link which exists between art and money, as argued in Part II, a romanticism on which *Le Monde* also draws to construct high fashion as an autonomous high art unconcerned with commercial quest.

In the *British* newspaper, the market is a motor of the field, a necessary and acknowledged component of high fashion: London is 'a centre for innovation and ideas [...] taken seriously commercially too' (02-10), and the appointment of Galliano at Dior and McQueen at Givenchy 'will doubtless prove to be worth its weight in gold' (16-10). McQueen's 'collection was not only beautiful but also [his] most commercial yet' (02-

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<sup>25</sup> 'les rêves d'un monde perdu'

10), and Ghost, 'whose business has survived', show with their successful 'bias-cut dresses' which 'come out in all variations imaginable' that 'if you find a winning formula you should stick to it' (02-11).

In *The Guardian* then, the pole of money is not perceived as opposed to the pole of art, contrary to the art discourse of modernism. It is part of the reality of popular culture and the commodification of cultural objects. By acknowledging the role of the commercial in high fashion, *The Guardian* positions the designers outside of the space of academic art. The reader is reminded that the resulting product of the activity of the designers is a commodity, whose place is also in the field of popular culture, and its status as commodity is not antinomic to the idea of creativity.

### **3. The French Modernist Crisis and the British Avantgarde**

While *Le Monde* laments the 'very profound crisis'<sup>26</sup> (25-03) of high fashion, in the British newspaper fashion is given a rather optimistic future: 'London Fashion Week opens today in a triumph of hope over experience' (28-02), and in September 96 it offers 'more excitement than ever' (21-09). In March of the same year the close relative of *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, starts its report on the London, Milan and Paris collections by noting that 'apart from the odd *crise de la mode*, the autumn/winter 96 collections were full of commercial fashion propositions' (24-03, my emphasis). The notion of crisis here is taken less dramatically than in the French newspaper, and the ironic use of the French language suggests this so-called crisis is some French particularity, a feature which is in essence French.

In *The Guardian*, British designers are depicted as a new generation taking over Paris fashion. One journalist writes about Dior that 'the French luxury label (and billion-dollar fragrance spin-offs) is losing ground to the new wave' (09-10), which is the reason why 'Paris awaits the new master of Dior'; that is, 'British designer John Galliano' (09-10). 'Britons', the newspaper stresses, have 'become cocks of the Paris catwalk' (15-10). In this new wave are British avantgarde designers whose quality lies in their originality: Galliano is 'a designer of great mercurial brilliance but untrammelled extravagance' (22-01), whose shows are 'dazzlingly eclectic' (16-10), McQueen is 'the agitator' (28-02),

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<sup>26</sup> 'crise très profonde'

the ‘maverick of British fashion’ (02-10). He is ‘spooky’ (14-08). Clements and Ribeiro are ‘at the forefront of directional British design’ (21-09), and Chalayan is one of ‘London’s more avant-garde designers’, one of ‘our more experimental designers’, who has made many ‘voyages into subcultural styles’ whilst at the same time giving some ‘nods to high-street accessibility’ (25-09). All these designers are artists, but they are not the artists of modernity, they are not academic. They are extravagant maverick agitators. They are the designers of the avantgarde, who draw on ‘shock tactics’ (02-10) and make ‘the audience gasp’ (02-10), and whose collections are inspired by the street - ‘normally the melting pot of the avant-garde’ (25-01) - like Berardi’s, whose tailoring was ‘sprayed with graffiti’(02-10) or Rocha’s, whose ‘influences are wide-ranging, from Celtic symbols to Motown music to what people wear on the streets’ (28-02).

Avantgardism is a recurring theme in *The Guardian*, and British fashion becomes closely associated with this notion. London is said to be ‘the breeding ground of the avant-garde’ (29-02), it is the ‘centre of ideas and futuristic innovation’ (14-08). Jean-Paul Gaultier’s avantgardism has more to do, according to the newspaper, with London than with the Frenchness of the designer. He ‘keep[s] coming back for inspiration’ to London’s Portobello and the ‘eclectic look’ sold there, a look which ‘is distinctively London’ and which has now ‘gone international’ after having been first seen on the catwalk in the ‘original styling’ of the British designers McQueen, Chalayan and Gaster (18-09).

In *The Guardian*, British avantgarde designers are talked about in terms that are reminiscent of the historical avantgarde (see Bürger 1996). In a similar way, they seek inspiration outside the academic and draw on the everyday to create their art. They are not isolated in the closed space of high fashion as high art. Rather, they position themselves, through their subversiveness, against fashion academicism. But at the same time *The Guardian*’s avantgarde differs from the historical avantgarde in the sense that it has itself become, like the postmodern avantgarde studied by Huyssen (1988: 161), a tradition. The historical avantgarde, on the other hand, was the ‘embodiment of anti-tradition’ (161). As the British newspaper notes, ‘London has *always* been seen as a centre for innovation and ideas’ (02-10, my emphasis), it ‘*remains* the breeding ground for the avantgarde’ (29-02, my emphasis). Here, avantgardism is depicted as an

established characteristic, a tradition. With the British postmodern avantgarde, as with the postmodern art discussed by Gablik, 'overturning conventions has become a routine' (1986: 11).

Galliano's eclecticism, Chalayan's, Berardi's and Rocha's 'nods' to street style and popular culture - like Owen Gaster's collection with a 'twist', influenced, *The Guardian* stresses, by 'his Ford Capri' and 'robots' (21-09) - also recall McRobbie's (1996b: 21) 'egalitarian avant-garde', a postmodern avantgarde which, she also argues, 'no longer is an avantgarde proper' since it is not forms which are privileged but 'a cross-refencing between forms', the invocation of a variety of texts through their creative associations.

Thus, while London is depicted by *The Guardian* as 'the ideas centre of the fashion universe' (28-02), in *Le Monde*, Paris - and with it France - is said to be threatened with the loss of its cultural identity. The crisis of high fashion is not just a crisis of fashion, it is also that of French culture. The French newspaper notes: 'it would be a shame if because of the competition for profitability, this treasure of memory that is Parisian haute couture, envied by the world, were sacrificed'<sup>27</sup> (22-01). It is a memory fueled by a French history of high culture, from high fashion to haute cuisine and the high arts, that same history shared by the readers of *Le Monde*, whose interest in fashion might lie in this memory only, in the reverence for one definition of French culture, in the respect for an established order. But now, according to the French newspaper, 'the thread of memory has been cut'<sup>28</sup> (12-03), and French high fashion is in danger of dying. 'Lacroix couture house reveals the tensions of a capital which has never had a press as bad as this season. A Paris too divided to resist the attacks made by American newspapers'<sup>29</sup> (25-03). The March high fashion collections show that 'creation is in decline'<sup>30</sup> (12-03). Thus whilst in *The Guardian* London is portrayed, thanks to its fashion, as triumphant, in *Le Monde*, Paris - that is France - is ill, and this illness is epitomized by the state of today's high fashion. 'Since Yves Saint Laurent or Agnès B.', The French newspaper writes, 'no French *créateurs* have been able to impose a tangible

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<sup>27</sup> 'il serait dommage que dans une course à la rentabilité, la haute couture parisienne sacrifie ce trésor de mémoire que *Le Monde* lui envie'

<sup>28</sup> 'le fil de la mémoire s'est coupé'

<sup>29</sup> 'la maison Christian Lacroix révèle les tensions d'une capitale qui n'a jamais eu aussi mauvaise presse que cette saison. Un Paris trop divisé pour résister aux attaques lancées par les journaux américains'

<sup>30</sup> 'la création est en déclin'

image of the French woman, whose fantasy, charm and sense of freedom has always been celebrated<sup>31</sup> (12-03). This is a ‘cultural decline’<sup>32</sup> (12-03) which ‘coincides with a broader decline, a loss of influence, notably in Asia, where French fashion, like gastronomy, is no longer special’<sup>33</sup> (08-10). Is French high fashion, *Le Monde* asks, ‘about to become, like French cinema, a “cultural exception”’<sup>34</sup> (22-01). The newspaper is here trading on a theme dear to many French cultural commentators - ‘French cultural exception’ - which is the idea that French ‘works of the mind’, to be able to survive, must be protected from ‘the intransigence of American businessmen’ and granted ‘a special character distinct from all the goods and services normally exchanged on a market’ (Rigaud 1995: 13). French high fashion, *Le Monde* is saying, threatened by American marketing, as discussed earlier, will soon need to be accorded a special status if it is to continue to exist.

But who is threatened, Paris or France? France through Paris, because for *Le Monde*, when Paris culture is in crisis, French culture itself becomes fragile. One journalist writes: ‘subject to the dictates of its shy businessmen, the world of luxury is becoming provincial. It deprives the greatest of the insolence of their intellectual engagement. One waits for a product to be successful before inundating the market with standardized copies’<sup>35</sup> (12-03). This quote clearly illustrates the idea that the high, the pure and the true art, can only be found in Paris, superior to *la province*, which is synonymous with the low, the impure, the standardized, that same ‘larger number’ mentioned earlier and feared as a sign of the degradation of high fashion. ‘The world of luxury is becoming provincial’ has to be translated as ‘high fashion is becoming vulgar’, with the tacit assumption that provincial equals vulgar. Like the designer Colonna quoted by the newspaper, *Le Monde* readers should feel distressed about what, due to a loss of fashion identity, is inflicted on Paris: ‘Jean Colonna washes away tears of nostalgia: “I

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<sup>31</sup> ‘depuis Yves Saint Laurent ou Agnès b., aucun créateur français n’a pu imposer une image tangible de la femme française, dont les observateurs ont toujours célébré la fantaisie, le charme, et le sens de la liberté’

<sup>32</sup> ‘déclin culturel’

<sup>33</sup> ‘cette situation coïncide avec un déclin plus vaste, une perte d’influence, notamment en Asie, où la mode française, comme la gastronomie, n’est plus singulière’

<sup>34</sup> ‘en passe de devenir, comme le cinéma français, une “exception culturelle”?’

<sup>35</sup> ‘soumis aux diktats de ses commerciaux frileux, le monde du luxe se provincialise faisant perdre aux plus grands l’insolence de leur parti-pris. On attend qu’un produit soit réellement un succès, pour inonder le marché de copies de gamme’

tried to imagine that Paris was still a real city: not a plate warmer, not a place dedicated to tourists and money”<sup>36</sup> (25-03).

Here Paris, for *Le Monde*, is the high point of what Bourdieu calls a ‘reified social space’, a social space which is ‘physically realised or objectified’ (1993b: 161). Whereas the French capital is ‘a sort of spontaneous symbolisation’ (160) of high culture, the provinces stand for the mass and vulgarity. *La Capitale* is, in France, Bourdieu argues, ‘the place of the capital [...] where the positive poles of all fields [...] are concentrated: thus it can only be conceived adequately in relation to the provinces (and the “provincial”), which is nothing but the privation (stritly relative) of *la capitale* and the capital’ (162), an idea *Le Monde* certainly adheres to.

This opposition between Paris and the province is also found, Bourdieu notes, in movements through space, and is translated into everyday language in expressions such as ‘going up to Paris’, which implies that Paris is in a high position compared to the low one of the provinces. Reified social oppositions such as capital/provinces ‘tend to reproduce themselves in minds and language in the shape of oppositions which are constitutive of a principle of vision and division, that is in the shape of categories of perception and appreciation or mental structures (Parisian/provincial, chic/not chic, etc.)’ (162). These same oppositions linked to the Paris/provinces dichotomy have inspired many authors like Flaubert (*Madame Bovary*) and Balzac (*La Muse du Département*) or film directors like Vigo and his *Atalante*. They still inform the discourse of *Le Monde*, which, to argue that high fashion is in crisis, stresses, as discussed earlier, that it is ‘becoming provincial’.

In the texts of these writers and directors, as in the French newspaper, Paris is an object of fantasy, a dreamworld to which *les provinciaux* aspire, the incarnation of a superior realm of existence. As Lemert notes in reference to the common French expression ‘*le tout Paris*’ - literally ‘all of Paris’ but an expression which refers to Paris cultural elite - ‘in France, *tout Paris* is *tout*’ (1981: 5).

Finally, *The Observer*’s nod to *la crise de la mode*, mentioned at the beginning of this section, like *The Guardian*’s celebration of the British avantgarde in contrast with *Le*

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<sup>36</sup> ‘Jean Colonna essuie les larmes de la nostalgie: ‘J’ai essayé d’imaginer que Paris était encore une vraie ville: pas un chauffe-plats, ni un lieu voué aux touristes et à l’argent’

*Monde*'s lamentation of the arrival on the fashion scene of un-academic designers, draws attention to the transnational dimension of the field of fashion. Designers, like fashion journalists, do not just belong to purely internal signifying systems. They are caught in a network of transnational relationships where the meanings they invest in fashion arise from a system of national differences. These meanings are themselves part of 'the international struggle for the domination in cultural matters [...], this struggle inevitably finds its roots in the struggles within each national camp, in struggle where the dominant national definition and foreign definition are themselves involved' (Bourdieu 1999d: 227).

#### **4. The Newspapers' Point of View: Negotiating the Relation between High Fashion and Popular Fashion**

*Le Monde*'s reports on fashion shows establish a clear gap between high culture and mass culture by way of implicit dichotomies around notions of high and low space, which can be illustrated by the following table:

<b>High Space (Paris)</b>	<b>Low Space (The Provinces)</b>
high fashion and art (high culture)	ready-to-wear and mass culture
the non-commercial and the pure	the commercial and the impure
the elite and the individual	the vulgar and the mass
the aesthetic	the material
the extra-ordinary	the ordinary

*Le Monde*'s fashion journalists comment on what they say is the crisis of fashion in a discourse informed by this separation between spaces of experience. The journalists themselves occupy a specific position within the field of culture they differentiate; the high position of the elite journalists of *Le Monde* as elite newspaper. The so-called crisis of high fashion is addressed from within this position only, in a sort of self-reflexivity true to modernism and the modernist tendency towards 'self-absorption' and self-referentiality (Connor 1992: 92). This reflexivity does not question the basis of a principle of differentiation between spheres of experience, a principle that could itself be considered in the analysis of the crisis of fashion as one of the differentiated elements.

High fashion as a superior institution to be detached from ordinary life is examined from the inside of high culture only, with no consideration for the basis on which this separation is grounded. The legitimacy of the fashion establishment is not reflected upon. Only the forms of the fashion products are analysed. Their position and function within the wider field of fashion, apprehended from the space of everyday life, is not of interest to the journalists. The crisis issue is considered as purely internal, the lack of creativity of the fashion 'auteur' (25-03) victimized by commerce, whilst the organisation of the whole field of fashion itself, its structure and functioning, is not questioned. Everyday mass fashion is not presented as a possible answer to the crisis of high fashion, a fashion unadapted to the style of consumption and the lifestyle of today's consumers but not conceptualised as such by *Le Monde*.

New forms of consumption of high fashion have appeared, through the internet, for example, as mentioned in *Le Monde* (05-08). This could generate a rethinking of the organisation of the fashion establishment and of its isolation from daily experience. As Benjamin notes, 'the mass is a matrix from which all traditional behaviour toward works of art issues today in a new form [...]. The greatly increased mass of participants has produced a change in the mode of participation' (1992: 232). This changing mode of participation should inform the analysis of today's high fashion. Its relevance is to be found not in its materiality only as a product to be physically consumed, but also in its immateriality, as an image, a spectacle also destined for a mass audience, as argued in Chapter 5 and in Part III. The unique high fashion dress has been massified, it has become, to borrow Baudrillard's expression, an 'Unlimited Multiple' (1998a: 106).

Moreover, not only does the fashion show enter a mass market, through its diffusion on the internet, for instance, it is also brought into the field of popular culture in its re-construction as popular culture, in a newspaper like *The Guardian*. It is shifted to the field of mass culture, Bourdieu's field of large-scale production. In the British newspaper, the fashion show, initially limited to a few people, the product of the sub-field of restricted production, becomes popular through its transformation into a new show, like a sports competition or snapshots from the lives of stars. Fashion thereby moves from 'the field of restricted production' to that of 'large scale production' (Bourdieu 1993a), not because the specific fashion product shown at the show - the

garment - is made directly accessible to the mass market, but because the fashion show itself, an elite experience restricted to a limited audience, is turned into a popular event through its linking with popular culture, and addressed to “the public at large” (Bourdieu 1993a: 115). The two poles which in the work of Bourdieu are kept apart, the elite and the popular, are brought together in *The Guardian*'s reconstruction of the fashion show as popular culture. The fashion show as depicted by *The Guardian* is simultaneously part of both Bourdieu's sub-fields; the product of the sub-field of restricted production *consumed as* popular culture.

Thus the clear cut distinction Bourdieu posits, as argued in Chapter 5, between sub-fields and their homologous fields of consumption, becomes blurred in the field of fashion as depicted by *The Guardian*. There is an in-between space, the representation of fashion, where fashion shifts from one sub-field to the other and transforms itself into a product whose two distinct features - the elite event actually experienced by very few people and the popular show as reconstructed by *The Guardian* - become two sides of the same coin: the fashion show as re-constructed by the British newspaper. As Barthes wrote: ‘The description of the garment of fashion (and no longer its production) is therefore a social fact, so that even if the garment of fashion remained purely imaginary (without affecting real clothing), it would constitute an incontestable element of mass culture, like pulp fiction, comics, and movies’ (1990: 9). It is the *description* of the fashion show that operates what Lash calls a ‘massification of elite culture’ (1990: 20). And the field of popular culture becomes inseparable from that of high fashion, a dimension foreign to Bourdieu's account of the field of culture in which the sub-field of restricted production and subfield of large scale production are always neatly distinct and never seem to overlap.

It is precisely because high fashion shows are produced for a restricted audience, an audience of ‘producers of cultural goods’ (Bourdieu 1993a: 115) - in the field of restricted production ‘producers produce for other producers’ (39) - like journalists and celebrities, that they become interesting as popular shows, the shows which narrate the stories of the extra-ordinary members of this restricted audience, name them and share them with the readers whose ordinary concern, as seen in Chapter 8, is also to want to be extra-ordinary. The fashion show's *raison d'être* is to be consumed by a limited

audience, 'privileged clients' (Bourdieu 1993a: 115), but to be of interest to a larger one. It is as a product of the field of restricted production that it becomes meaningful as a product of the field of large scale production.

The profusion of magazines and newspapers which report on fashion shows illustrates that high fashion can be consumed in its mediated state as a popular form. In that respect it could be argued that high fashion has found a new legitimacy, that of spectacular show or popular entertainment consumed through the media. What is seen as a crisis for the journalists of *Le Monde* in respect to high fashion as an elite experience could be seen as a positive development for the lay public, which is then able to experience the fashion show in a manner different from the one traditionally practised by the fashion establishment. This massification of high fashion is part of the postmodern world described by Maffesoli in *Au Creux des Apparences* (1990), an 'imaginal world' (110) where communion is no longer rooted in space, and is mediated through the sharing of emotions and desires.

Therefore, the principal question to ask is not whether high fashion is in crisis or not, but what criteria are used to inform the notion of crisis, and whether these criteria are not themselves subject to crisis. As Bourdieu (1991) stresses, though failing to apply this rule to his own sociology, as argued in Part II, it is only by questioning existing categories of thought that one can contribute to advances in knowledge. In their comments on the fashion shows, the journalists operate in the context of the self-reflexivity of the field of fashion, looking only at the form of the clothes on display during the collections, whilst an accurate apprehension of the position of high fashion, and with it of the structure of the whole field of fashion, can only, following postmodernist theory, be gained from self-criticism.

According to postmodernists, it is necessary to revise our way of apprehending the world because our culture and our society have changed. They conclude that refusing this hypothesis condemns many intellectuals to defend no other hypothesis than that of the generalised crisis. The latter is considered, then, by postmodernists, as a failure of traditional theories' understanding of the new being-in-the-world. (Boisvert 1997: 73, see also Connor 1997: 108).

Whereas *Le Monde*'s discourse originates from the position of modernist high culture, *The Guardian* chooses to report on fashion shows from within the space of popular culture as mediated by the British newspaper's 'in the know' journalists. The popular culture present in *The Guardian* is apprehended through popular cultural references and a de-distantiated aesthetic, thus offering a view of the relation between high and popular culture different from that of Bourdieu. Popular culture is given an autonomy Bourdieu refuses to acknowledge, either in his conceptualisation of popular culture as the (non)culture of the working class - a culture, as discussed in Part II, 'which is constantly obliged to define itself in terms of the dominant aesthetics' (1996a: 41) - or popular culture as mass culture, an alienating and empty culture, imposed on the masses by the dominant class, and 'which is merely an illusory compensation for dispossession by experts' (386).

When *The Guardian* positions the fashion shows and high fashion in popular culture, this also means that it is not positioning them in the field of high culture as *Le Monde* does. The British newspaper privileges a particular interpretation of the event, it offers its readers a preferred reading which is best understood in contrast to other possible readings such as that of the French newspaper. The preference *The Guardian* gives to popular culture can be seen in the light of McGuigan's definition of cultural populism, as seen in Part I: 'the assumption made by some students of popular culture, that the symbolic experiences and practices of ordinary people are more important analytically and politically than Culture with a capital C' (1993: 4). In *The Guardian*'s reports on fashion shows, popular culture is favoured over high culture, the popular is privileged over 'Culture with a capital C' and it is in this sense that *The Guardian*'s approach to culture can be deemed populist.

However, this populism does not, as in McGuigan's definition, say that popular culture is *more* important than Culture with a big C, rather it implies that the latter is not *that* important, or more worthy of interest than the former, and nor is it an 'academic populism', analysing popular culture from the position of high culture only, as derided by Bourdieu, though it also informs his romantic vision of the popular classes as argued in Chapter 4. It is a populism which approaches popular culture from the position of *popular culture*, a populism informed by *popular cultural references* because it is those which

also constitute the cultural capital of their beholders, 'the styles and tastes and values that define [the] world' (Frank 1997: ix) of *The Guardian's* journalists and their readers. As argued in Chapter 4, there exist cultural capitals proper to the field of popular culture, and it is such capitals that the readers need to master to understand popular texts. In *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* Angela McRobbie reminds us that high culture is not always useful for the understanding of popular texts, as in the case of 1960s Pop, when 'high theory was simply not equipped to deal with multilayered pop' (1996b: 14).

Thus, contrary to Bourdieu's argument, high culture is not the only space from which cultural practices and artefacts can be read (see also Laermans 1992: 259 on the fields of pop music and detective-story writing). The field of popular culture has acquired a new autonomy, independent of the field of high culture, an idea taken up by Bill Schwartz, who is worth quoting at length:

we are coming to a time when the model which describes popular culture in a relation of antagonism to a high or elite culture is, in some senses, ceasing to be serviceable. The reason for this has precisely to do with the dynamics of popular culture as a capitalist culture. For the great commodification of popular culture which coincided with what is variously described as mass society, monopoly capitalism, or the modernist epoch has had the effect, in subsequent decades, of eroding high culture as a determining field of force, just as the pessimists of the 1930s had feared. This is not to say that high culture has disappeared. It is merely to note that it is no longer able to exert the same force throughout the social formation, its authenticity no longer being able to secure universal respect, its place taken across classes - by mainstream pop music, TV soaps, the blockbuster movie, and so on. Capital accumulation has never exhibited much respect for traditions inherited from previous formations, and this applies to traditional intellectuals as much as anything else. (quoted in Frow 1995: 86)

## CONCLUSION

In *The Fashion System*, Barthes asks ‘why does fashion utter clothing so abundantly? Why does it interpose, between the object and its user, such a luxury of words (not to mention images), such a network of meaning?’ (1990: xi), because, it could be replied with Bourdieu and Delsaut (1975), fashion needs this abundance of words. It is these which ensure its symbolic production, that is, ‘the ontologic promotion and the transsubstantiation’ (28) of the product of material creation.

But where Bourdieu concentrates on an analysis of the field positionality of fashion discourses, I have looked at the diversity of values and meanings invested in fashion discourses, which has allowed me to comment on Bourdieu’s sociology of culture. Because Bourdieu reduces texts to transparent windows onto the field to which they belong, he fails to comment on the variety of cultural products and producers which such texts symbolically produce. Bourdieu notes that ‘the question to ask is not what the artist creates, but who creates the artist’ (1995f: 147). He provides illuminating answers to the latter, but the question remains as to what type of artist, and correlatively, as to what type of cultural objects, are being created in the discourses of those who symbolically create them. While in *Le Monde* it is fashion as a high art which is being produced, in *The Guardian* it is fashion as popular culture. The process of symbolic production is as central to the field of high culture as it is to the field of popular culture, a dimension Bourdieu, however, fails to discuss. Caught in the doxic view of the field of culture whereby high culture is highly valued and popular culture derided as simply dominated and lacking autonomy, Bourdieu is unable to detach himself from *a priori* assumptions concerning popular culture. His reduction of texts and practices to transparent conveyors of strategies of class differentiation and field positionality can only fail to challenge these assumptions. The complexity and variety of cultural forms but also of engagements with them, whether they belong to the field of high culture or to the field of popular culture, is unaccounted for, and in the end, the traditional opposition between these two fields is reproduced rather than questioned. Bourdieu’s sociology ultimately appears as very much the product of French sociology, a republican sociology where ‘culture’ is equated with high culture, whose universal values are to be defended, and

where little attention, or indeed respect, is paid to other cultures. Bourdieu universalises his particular interests, his love of art, in a move which brings to mind his criticism, discussed in Chapter 1, of high culture as having ‘the monopoly of the universal’ (Bourdieu 1997c: 86). The ‘symbolic violence’ (see, for example, Bourdieu 1999a, 1999b) which high culture has exercised over the French academic field is not absent from Bourdieu’s own discourse. However, for all its limits, Bourdieu’s work provides the researcher with strong analytical tools such as cultural capital or symbolic production, which, although he restricts them to the field of high culture only, are relevant to the field of popular culture, as I have shown in my analysis of the fashion discourse of *Le Monde* and *The Guardian*.

Moreover, though I did not undertake the field analysis I first thought I would conduct, as discussed in Chapter 7, this remains a possible avenue for future work. As I also mentioned there, I do not see in-depth textual analysis and field analysis as exclusive of each other. Rather, they can complement each other. The discourse on fashion I analyse in both newspapers must be seen as one particular link in the chain of production of the symbolic value of fashion in each country, but it could be shown that a similar discourse of celebration of high fashion as high culture in *Le Monde* and of high fashion as popular culture in *The Guardian* can be found in other sites, respectively in France and the UK, sites which all collude to create a version of fashion.

Before I decided to refocus my work on an in-depth analysis of discourses of fashion as a platform for an interrogation of Bourdieu’s sociology of culture, I had started gathering data from the following French institutions: *Le Musée de la Mode et du Textile* in *Le Louvre* (itself a significant geographical positioning in Paris) and *La Fédération Française de la Couture du Prêt-à-Porter des Couturiers et des Créateurs de Mode*. These institutions are specific to the French field of fashion, and a preliminary analysis showed that in both, some of the themes and issues discussed in relation to *Le Monde* are at play. The most striking example, perhaps, comes from *Le Musée de la Mode et du Textile*, whose promotional brochure depicts a small group of people gathered, at a distance, round a dress which they contemplate pensively as they would a painting. The main caption reads ‘a memory for fashion’, followed by, ‘the museum of fashion and

textile: a prestigious place where the works of art of the great *créateurs*, treasures from past and present collections blossom in a space designed for them’.

Specific to the British field of fashion in distinction from the French are institutions like Top Shop, *The Face*, and TV programmes such as, at the time I started this thesis, *Style Challenge* and *The Clothes Show*, and more recently, *She’s Gotta Have It*. In all these sites, which do not have any French equivalent, fashion is constructed as popular culture. In France, only the cable channel Paris Première has a time slot devoted to fashion, and more precisely, and perhaps more significantly, to Paris high fashion shows. Similarly Fashion TV, available on cable television since 1997, focuses on fashion shows, and especially Paris Haute Couture shows. In contrast, *Style Challenge* and *She’s Gotta Have It*, for instance, are very much concerned with the ordinary, which, the programmes imply, with the help of the right make-up and dress can be made less so. The emphasis is put on high street fashion and the affordable versions of high fashion, which can help transcend the ordinary bodies of, for example, the *Style Challenge* contestants, who, for a brief moment of celebrity-like life, are able to act the models on a catwalk.

All the institutions mentioned above are possible sites of investigation for a further analysis of the symbolic production of fashion as high culture in France and popular culture in the UK. However, more empirical work is needed which would articulate the discourse of these institutions to argue that, and show how, along the lines I discuss in Part III, fashion is created as a high art in France and as popular culture in the UK.

Moreover, my choice of textual analysis as a means towards both looking at the process of symbolic production and commenting on Bourdieu’s work does not signify that I value cultural production over cultural consumption and attribute an inferior status to the latter. Analyses of the process of reception allow invaluable insights into the significance of cultural artefacts and practices, and another possible avenue for further work is a study of the reception of *Le Monde*’s and *The Guardian*’s reports on fashion by their respective readers.

Finally, the fact that popular culture is highly valued in *The Guardian*’s fashion reports, whereas it is high culture that is valued in *Le Monde*’s draws attention to the

correlation which exists between one type of discourse on culture, that of academics and another type, that of fashion journalists. This correlation is itself a testimony to the existence of national models of thought - what Bourdieu also calls 'profound intellectual nationalisms' (1999d : 227) - and more specifically of national models of conceptualisation of culture inscribed in language, a sort of 'national cultural unconscious' (227). I am well aware that I have looked at this in two specific cases only, one represented by two academic fields, the other by two newspapers targeted at the middle to upper middle class, and whose readers include academics. I have not shown that in France high culture is highly valued, but rather that it is valued amongst French academia and in *Le Monde*. Similarly, I have not shown that in the UK popular culture has acquired a high cultural value, but that it has done so amongst British academia and in *The Guardian*. But it could be argued that the French and British models of thought I have looked at are not confined to the academic fields and newspapers I have discussed, and that in the UK popular culture has a legitimacy and currency unknown in France, where high culture is still more highly valued than in the UK. More empirical work would be needed to verify the validity and extent of this claim beyond the cases I have looked at.

Thus the discourses of *Le Monde* and *The Guardian* fit the tradition I mapped out in Part I. That journalists and academics share common structures and categories of thought can be partly explained by the fact that these categories are the product of specific educational systems which contribute to their production, circulation and reproduction (see Bourdieu 1998d, 1999d : 227), not least through the education of all citizens, and more specifically through the training of intellectuals such as academics and journalists. Different academic traditions, such as the ones I look at in Part I, produce different types of intellectuals endowed with different cultural habituses and dispositions, which find their expression in the discourses of these intellectuals, whether they be journalists or academics. These discourses feed off 'categories of perception and interpretation' (Bourdieu 1995b: 263) which belong to 'national categories of thought' (Bourdieu 1999d : 227) - the categories 'through which we think the differences between the products of such categories' (227) - in the same way that they contribute to the reproduction of these categories.

It is not a simple coincidence that the values and meanings attached to culture in one academic tradition should find an echo in the discourse of journalists, and especially journalists who are addressing themselves to a readership a large proportion of which includes academics, since their conceptual framework - the analytical resources they draw on to make sense of cultural artefacts and experiences - is itself shaped by the academic tradition these journalists are a product of.

The claim that in France high culture is still more highly valued than in the UK should not amount, however, as it does in Bourdieu's work, to rejecting the significance and value of popular culture. Thus if more work is needed to test the hypothesis of the privileging of high culture over popular culture in France, more important, perhaps, is the production, in French academia, of works on contemporary popular culture. This would help offer a constructive response to the many discourses which are simply, but also often *a priori*, dismissive of the topic, hence helping to oppose the symbolic violence they have exercised over French culture and society, and more specifically over the French academic field.

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