

# **The Politics of the Omnivores**

## **Elite Culture, Popular Culture, and Libertarianism**

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# The Politics of the Omnivores

## Elite Culture, Popular Culture, and Libertarianism

*Dick Houtman and Peter Achterberg*

### 1. Introduction

Distinguishing the *amount* of capital from the *composition* of capital, Pierre Bourdieu (1984) rejects the customary one-dimensional model of social stratification in favor of a two-dimensional one. Separate economic and cultural hierarchies are distinguished, strongly correlated at the lower end of the stratification order, but only relatively weakly higher up. Bourdieu's distinction between economic and cultural capital has in the meantime proven to be useful in explaining political values. Economic progressiveness / conservatism and authoritarianism / libertarianism,<sup>1</sup> distinguished by political sociologists since at least the 1950s (Lipset, 1959) and virtually independent of one another among the public at large,<sup>2</sup> prove to be radically differently related to both types of capital.

Economic progressiveness / conservatism stems from the strength of one's labor market position ('class' in an economic sense or 'economic capital' in Bourdieu's terms). This relationship can be interpreted in terms of traditional class analysis: those with a weak labor market position have a class interest in economic redistribution, whereas those with a strong labor market position, have an economic class interest in rejecting this type of economic redistribution. The other type of political values, authoritarianism / libertarianism, can however not be explained through this same class logic. It is not economically defined class interests that are decisive here, but rather cultural capital: having ample cultural capital at one's disposal goes hand in hand with libertarian rather than authoritarian political values.

Lipset's vital distinction between two types of political values thus needs to be supplemented by an equally significant distinction between economic capital and cultural capital. After all, whereas it is typically held that a working-class position gives rise to economic progressiveness on the one hand and authoritarianism on the other (e.g., Lipset 1959, 1981), this claim obscures that both types of values have quite different sources. Whereas a large amount of economic capital leads to economic conservatism, libertarianism stems from a

large amount of cultural capital (Houtman, 2001, 2003, 2004).

Those findings throw a new light onto the problem of why members of the middle class increasingly vote for leftist parties and members of the working class for rightist parties, effectively undermining the traditional alignment of the working class with the left and the middle class with the right in the process (e.g., Nieuwbeerta, 1995). This increasing ‘reverse’ alignment does not stem from economic voting motivations (economic progressiveness versus conservatism) derived from economic capital (or ‘class’ in an economic sense), but from cultural voting motivations (authoritarianism versus libertarianism) connected to cultural capital (Achterberg and Houtman, forthcoming). Due to cultural changes in late-modern societies cultural issues have become more politically salient, serving to increase the impact of cultural-capital-driven authoritarianism / libertarianism on voting behavior (Achterberg, 2004, forthcoming).

In the current paper, we interrogate the link between cultural taste and authoritarianism in more detail to increase theoretical understanding. For reasons to be discussed below, we broaden our previous perspective in two ways. First, we no longer restrict ourselves to the study of the political corollaries of ‘cultural capital’ (affinity with ‘highbrow’ or ‘elite’ culture), but compare those to those of affinity with ‘lowbrow’ or ‘popular’ culture. Second, we also study those of so-called ‘cultural omnivorousness’, i.e., the tendency to combine highbrow and lowbrow cultural taste. We first elaborate on our theoretical considerations for doing so in section 2. We then present our measurements and findings in sections 3 and 4, respectively, and finally summarize our conclusions in section 5.

## **2. Elite Culture, Popular Culture, and the Rise of the Cultural Omnivore**

### *2.1. Introduction*

We feel that the measure for cultural capital that we have used in previous studies validly taps affinity with highbrow or elite culture, as distinguished from lowbrow or popular culture. As a consequence, we are also confident that our previous research convincingly demonstrates that what is typically referred to as ‘working-class authoritarianism’, effectively stems from a limited amount of cultural capital rather than from a weak labor market position. Yet, it is insufficiently clear how this link between cultural capital and libertarianism needs to be interpreted theoretically. This is largely because it is not at all clear what low scores on our

previous measure of cultural capital stand for. Whereas we are confident that high scores indicate affinity with elite culture, low scores may indicate affinity with popular culture, cultural inactivity/disinterest, or a mixture of both. In an attempt to increase theoretical understanding, then, this paper draws on recent developments in the sociology of arts and culture to study the political corollaries of lowbrow or popular cultural participation alongside those of highbrow or elite cultural participation.

## *2.2. Elite Culture and Popular Culture*

Bourdieu assumes that participation in elite culture excludes participation in popular culture, and *vice versa*. He thus assumes a one-dimensional cultural space, ranging from elite culture to popular culture, and conceives of the display of knowledge of and interest in high culture as a means *par excellence* for those with a high social status to set themselves apart from lower-status groups: ‘The most intolerable thing for those who regard themselves as the possessors of legitimate [“highbrow”] culture is the sacrilegious reuniting of tastes which taste dictates shall be separated’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 56-7). This conceptualization of cultural stratification is basically similar to that in mid-twentieth century theories of mass society: ‘at the top (...) an educated and discerning elite with well-refined tastes and at the bottom an ignorant and stimulus-seeking mass’ (Peterson, 1992: 244).

Those at the top, or so those theories assume, can be characterized as ‘snobs’:

‘The term “snob” applied to such people is of course pejorative. It is, nonetheless, a fair characterization of the attitude of those at the upper end of the status hierarchy because of their moralistic contempt for and distancing from all cultural manifestations that do not exactly fit with what is taken to be proper’ (Peterson, 1992: 245).

If this image of cultural stratification is correct, it is not necessary to study the political implications of popular culture alongside those of elite culture. After all, if high culture gives rise to libertarianism, then obviously its opposite, popular culture, can only give rise to authoritarianism. Indeed, the idea that indiscriminating and stimulus-seeking popular masses are susceptible to socially conservative or even right-wing extremist political ideas and populist political leaders is a recurrent theme in mid-twentieth century studies of mass society. According to Gans (1974), however, those ideas about ‘mass culture’ derive more from prejudices and misconceptions among those theorists than from systematic studies of working-class life in the USA (see also Van Zoonen 2003).

To the extent that the libertarianism of the cultural elite, recorded in our previous research, can be interpreted in terms of the type of cultural stratification that is assumed by mid-twentieth century mass theorists and Bourdieu alike, we should thus be able to confirm two hypotheses. Higher levels of affinity with and/or participation in elite culture are then expected to lead to higher levels of libertarianism (hypothesis 1a), whereas higher levels of affinity with and/or participation in popular culture are expected to lead to lower levels of libertarianism (hypothesis 1b).

### *2.3. Enter the Cultural Omnivore*

The aforementioned image of a one-dimensional cultural hierarchy, ranging from high to low, assumed by Bourdieu's theory of distinction and status cultures and by theories of mass society, has been extensively criticized by Peterson. High-status persons, Peterson has demonstrated, are today far from being 'snobs': they are rather 'omnivorous' in their cultural tastes (Peterson, 1992; Peterson and Simkus, 1992; Peterson and Kern, 1996). Those findings strikingly contradict Bourdieu's assumptions about cultural capital as a mode of social distinction, typical of high-status groups. Rather than rejecting the 'sacrilegious reuniting of tastes which taste dictates shall be separated', high-status groups freely combine highbrow and lowbrow genres.<sup>3</sup> More than that: restricting oneself to a limited number of musical genres is typical of low-status groups to mark 'status boundaries between taste groups defined by age, gender, race, region, religion, lifestyle, etc.' (Peterson, 1992: 254; see also: Bryson, 1997: 141-156). Findings such as those only reinforce doubts published elsewhere (Houtman, 2003: 154-157) that Bourdieu's theoretical framework needs to be bought into to satisfactorily account for the link between cultural capital and libertarianism. Indeed, 'Bourdieu's notion that a high status implies snobbery and, thereby, a consistent aversion to popular culture, has been inadequate for decades, at least outside France' (Van Eijck, 2001: 1164).

Empirical studies from the United States (Peterson and Kern, 1996, Peterson and Simkus 1992), Flanders (Belgium) (Vander Stichele and Laermans, 2004), and the Netherlands (Van den Broek et al., 1999; De Haan en Knulst, 2000; De Haan, 2001; Van Eijck, 2001) demonstrate three things. First, cultural omnivorousness is more typical of the young than of the elderly.<sup>4</sup> Second, this age difference denotes a process of social change rather than change that takes place during individual life cycles. So, people are not omnivorous because they are young, but because they have been born more recently. Third, omnivorousness is more typical of the highly educated than of the poorly educated (see, besides the literature cited above, also

Van Rees et al., 1999). The latter pattern is typically interpreted in terms of ‘high status’, but net of education, there are hardly differences with respect to occupational status and/or income, as Van Eijck (2001: 1180) rightly notes. As such, this common interpretation strongly resembles that in research into authoritarianism / libertarianism, in which education’s effects are also typically interpreted in terms of class or status, even as occupation and income play no role at all.

The findings of research into omnivorousness are, in short, very similar to those of research into authoritarianism / libertarianism: libertarianism, like omnivorousness, is typical of the young and the highly educated (Houtman, 2003). This has led Bryson (1996) to a highly relevant competitive test of Bourdieu’s theory of status distinction on the one hand and a theory of how and why a high level of education produces libertarianism on the other, focusing on the relationships between level of education, breadth of cultural taste, and authoritarianism / libertarianism. Like Peterson’s work, Bryson’s demonstrates that those with high levels of education (income and occupational prestige are inconsequential in her analysis, too) are not characterized by ‘distinction’, as Bourdieu claims, but rather by rejecting less musical genres than those with low levels of education. Indeed, with  $-0.32$ , the negative relationship between education and musical exclusiveness is stronger than any other statistical relationship in Bryson’s paper. Moreover, a substantial part of this relationship proves attributable to the libertarianism of the highly educated (Bryson, 1996).

To the best of our knowledge, Bryson’s is the only example of a paper that systematically addresses the relationship between cultural omnivorousness and authoritarianism / libertarianism. Her findings suggest that cultural omnivorousness and libertarianism are two closely related phenomena that are both typical of the highly educated. Unfortunately, however, her analysis does not permit conclusions about the relative libertarianism of ‘cultural snobs’ and ‘cultural omnivores’. This is so, because she does not conceptualize and measure ‘breadth in musical taste’ as combining highbrow and lowbrow genres, but simply as the number of the 18 used musical genres that are rejected by the respondent (see also Van Eijck, 2001, about this omission). This ambiguity in Bryson’s analysis is borne out by her finding that precisely the genres that are most popular among the poorly educated (i.e., gospel, country, rap, and heavy metal) are most likely to be rejected by those who are most ‘musically tolerant’. In short, although Bryson’s findings may well indicate that cultural omnivores are more libertarian than cultural snobs, her analysis does not permit this conclusion. Inspired by her analysis, we therefore test the hypothesis that cultural

omnivores, being more ‘inclusive’ in their taste than cultural snobs, are even more libertarian than snobs (hypothesis 2).

### **3. Data and Measurement**

#### *3.1. Data*

We analyze data that have been collected by Braster and Zwanenburg in 1997 among young people, aged 15 through 24. A mailed questionnaire produced a response rate of 36%. This is disappointingly low, but unfortunately quite common in the Netherlands nowadays. For more information about sampling and data collection, the reader is referred to Braster and Zwanenburg (1998).

Although the substantial non-response rate implies that findings need to be handled with care and are in need of replication, there are nevertheless three good reasons to test our hypotheses by means of those data. First, given the increase of cultural omnivorousness during the last few decades, a sample of young people is more useful than a cross-section of the population, because cultural omnivorousness is strongest among this age cohort. Second, this particular data set contains a wealth of information about cultural participation, in both its highbrow and lowbrow varieties, as well as political values and judgments that can be used to measure authoritarianism versus libertarianism. Finally, if elite and popular cultural participation prove unexpectedly strongly and negatively related, the high number of respondents (about 2,000) still guarantees a sufficiently high number of cultural omnivores to test our hypothesis on the political corollaries of omnivorousness.

#### *3.2. Authoritarianism / libertarianism*

*Authoritarianism / libertarianism* has been operationalized by means of three different measures. Two of those, a short version of Adorno et al.’s F-scale for authoritarianism (1950) and Inglehart’s (1977) index for postmaterialism, have previously been used for similar purposes (Houtman, 2003). Added to those two is a third scale, that taps the tendency to maintain a social distance *vis-a-vis* members of ‘non-mainstream’ or ‘deviant’ groups or categories such as Jehovah’s witnesses, Moroccan juveniles or gypsies. Respondents have been asked whether they would consider it a problem if members of each of those groups or categories would be their neighbors. We refer to the resulting scale as measuring ‘social

exclusionism’.

*F- scale* – The F-scale for authoritarianism has a reliability (Cronbach’s Alpha) of 0.69. Some typical items included in this scale are: ‘Young people sometimes have rebellious ideas but as they grow older they ought to grow out of them and adjust to reality’, ‘Our social problems would be largely solved if we could only somehow remove criminal and anti-social elements from society’, ‘What we need are fewer laws and agencies and more courageous, tireless leaders who people can have faith in’, and ‘People with bad manners, habits and upbringing can hardly be expected to know how to associate with decent people’. Scores have been assigned as factor scores to 2,041 respondents.

*Social exclusionism* – Social exclusionism has been measured by asking respondents whether (yes) or not (no) they would have a problem if their neighbors would be members of nine strategically selected groups or categories (examples are Jehovah’s witnesses, Moroccan juveniles, and gypsies). Table 1 demonstrates that one common dimension of social exclusionism underlies the nine answers (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.80$ ). Scale scores have been computed as factor scores for 2,087 respondents.

*Table 1. Factor analysis of acceptance or rejection of nine groups or categories as neighbors (N=2,087).*

Groups or categories	% chosen	Loading
Jehovah’s Witnesses	33.3	0.39
Moroccan juveniles	30.4	0.78
Gypsies	24.0	0.68
AIDS patients	3.6	0.37
Muslims	18.0	0.81
Asylum seekers	28.2	0.75
Hare Krishnas	23.3	0.58
Homosexuals	6.7	0.35
Surinamese juveniles	17.1	0.79
Eigenvalue		3.66
R <sup>2</sup>		0.41
Cronbach’s $\alpha$		0.80

*Postmaterialism-index* – The four political goals that are used to construct this index have been presented to the respondents: 1) ‘Giving the people more say in important government decisions’, 2) ‘Protecting free speech’, 3) ‘Maintaining order in the nation,’ and 4) ‘Fighting



rising prices'. According to Inglehart's logic, the first two indicate 'postmaterialism' (i.e., an emphasis on individual liberty and self-expression) and the final two indicate 'materialism' (i.e., an emphasis on material security). Following conventional routine, respondents have been asked which of those four goals they personally find most important, which one comes second, and which one is considered least important. Answers to those three questions produce a ranking of all four items, making it possible to code respondents into four categories: 1) materialists (those who rank the two materialist goals first and second), 2) mixed materialists (those who rank one of the two materialist goal first and a postmaterialist one second), 3) mixed postmaterialists (those who rank one of the two postmaterialist goals first and a materialist one second), and 4) postmaterialists (those who rank the two postmaterialist goals first and second). A total of 2,087 respondents have valid scores for postmaterialism.

*Authoritarianism / libertarianism* – Finally, the F-scale, Inglehart's index for postmaterialism, and the social exclusionism scale prove to be quite strongly related among themselves. A factor analysis produces a first dimension that explains 50% of the common variance (factor loadings: F-scale: -0.75, postmaterialism: 0.63, social exclusionism: -0.73 ). The three scales have been combined into a measure of authoritarianism / libertarianism by saving the factor scores for the 2,031 respondents with three valid scores. High scores indicate strong libertarianism.

### *3.3. Elite Culture and Popular Culture*

Whereas most studies of cultural taste rely on musical preferences or dislikes (e.g., Peterson, 1992; Peterson and Simkus, 1992; Peterson and Kern, 1996; Bryson, 1996, 1997; Van Eijck, 2001), the data permit us to measure cultural taste more extensively. We have measured affinity with highbrow and lowbrow culture by means of six questions, each of which lists a number of activities or genres and asks respondents to indicate which of those they like or are involved in. Those questions refer to 1) types of books read, 2) types of cultural activities one is interested in, 3) television channels liked, 4) leisure-time activities one is involved in, 5) ingredients that are necessary for a successful holiday, and 6) musical genres one is interested in. Activities or genres that have been chosen by a respondent are coded 2; non-chosen activities or genres have been coded 1.

All six questions have been factor analyzed separately, producing separate highbrow and lowbrow factors (see the appendix for details). In five cases there is one highbrow and one lowbrow factor. For musical taste we obtain one highbrow and two popular factors, one for

typically ‘white’ popular music (‘dance’) and one for typically ‘black’ popular music (‘rap’).

Table 2 below contains the results of a second-order factor analysis of the thirteen scales that have been constructed by means of those six factor analyses. Not surprisingly after the foregoing, we find, once again, separate highbrow and lowbrow factors. All of the six highbrow factors from the separate factor analyses discussed above load on the second-order highbrow factor. Six of the seven lowbrow factors load on the second-order lowbrow factor. The single exception is ‘lowbrow reading’, which loads on neither of the two factors.

*Table 2. Factor analysis of thirteen scales for highbrow and lowbrow culture (Varimax rotation, N=2,087).*

Highbrow and lowbrow culture scales	Factor 1	Factor 2
Highbrow reading	0.73	0.03
Highbrow cultural activities	0.53	0.07
Highbrow television channels	0.46	0.20
Highbrow music	0.62	-0.22
Highbrow leisure-time activities	0.81	-0.21
Highbrow holiday activities	0.64	0.04
Lowbrow reading	0.05	0.18
Lowbrow holiday activities	-0.11	0.56
Lowbrow leisure-time activities	-0.33	0.66
Lowbrow music (rap)	0.19	0.42
Lowbrow music (dance)	-0.14	0.40
Lowbrow cultural activities	0.23	0.76
Lowbrow television channels	-0.03	0.66
Eigenvalue	2.69	2.27
$R^2$	0.21	0.17

The key finding here, of course, is that neither the six separate factor analyses, nor this second-order one, produces a single factor with opposed loadings for highbrow and lowbrow preferences. This finding is not caused by our decision to use Varimax rotation. This can be seen from the fact that the variances explained by the first factors are typically not much higher than those explained by the second factors (see appendix and table 2 above). This finding therefore confirms Peterson’s critique of Bourdieu’s theory: there is no such thing as a one-dimensional cultural space in which highbrow taste stands opposed to lowbrow taste.

Factor scores for the second-order solution are saved as scales for affinity with elite culture and popular culture, respectively. Omnivorousness can then be operationalized as the multiplication of highbrow taste and lowbrow taste, to be included in the analysis as an interaction term. If omnivores are more (less) libertarian than snobs, this interaction term should have a positive (negative) effect on libertarianism, over and above the effects of affinity with elite culture and affinity with popular culture.

### *3.4. Controls: age, education, and religiosity*

As explained above, omnivorousness is typical of the young and educated. Because libertarianism is typical of the same categories (e.g., Inglehart, 1977; Houtman, 2003), relationships between cultural participation and libertarianism need to be controlled for age and level of education. Of course, in our sample age effects are hardly to be expected, since it consists of young people only. Nevertheless, respondents aged 15 through 19 have been coded low (1) and respondents aged 20 through 24 high (2). Level of education has been measured as one's current school level (if still a student) or completed level of education (if no longer a student), recoded into four levels: 1) Low (elementary school, VMBO, MAVO), 2) Medium low (MBO, HAVO), 3) Medium high (VWO), and 4) High (HBO, WO). Finally, religiosity is also controlled for, because it is known to be associated with lower levels of libertarianism. It has been measured by asking the respondent whether (2) or not (1) he or she regards himself or herself as belonging to a religious denomination.

## **4. Results**

Our hypotheses can now simply be tested by means of a multiple regression analysis, explaining the combined measure of authoritarianism / libertarianism from elite cultural participation, popular cultural participation, and omnivorousness, controlling for level of education, religiosity and age.

The results, reported in table 3 below, are clear enough. Hypothesis 1a is confirmed: Higher levels of affinity with elite culture lead to higher levels of libertarianism. This is not a surprising finding, of course, because our previous research has already demonstrated this relationship. Hypothesis 1b is rejected however: Higher levels of affinity with popular culture do not lead to lower levels of libertarianism. To be sure: Affinity with popular culture does not

lead to higher levels of libertarianism either; it is simply unrelated to authoritarianism / libertarianism. This is an important finding, because this second hypothesis is derived from the idea that the libertarianism of the cultural elite can be interpreted in terms of a cultural stratification with elite culture and popular culture as hierarchically ordered tastes. After all, if this were true, one would not only expected higher levels of libertarianism among the cultural elite, but also lower ones among those who participate in popular culture. The fact that this is not what we find, thus suggests that the relationship between cultural capital and libertarianism cannot be interpreted in terms of cultural stratification and status distinction.

*Table 3. Authoritarianism / libertarianism explained by highbrow and lowbrow cultural participation and cultural omnivorousness, controlled for age, education, and religiosity (regression analysis, betas, N=1,934).*

	Model 1	Model 2
Lowbrow cultural participation	0.01	0.00
Highbrow cultural participation	0.27***	0.23***
Omnivorousness (interaction term: lowbrow x highbrow)	-0.03	-0.02
Low level of education		-0.29***
Medium-low level of education		-0.14**
Medium-high level of education		-0.07
High level of education (= reference category)		ref. cat.
Religious (1=no/2=yes)		-0.06**
Age (15-19=1/20-24=2)		-0.06*
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.07	0.10

\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001.

Hypothesis 2 is also rejected. Cultural omnivores, who are more ‘inclusive’ in their taste than cultural snobs, are nevertheless not more libertarian than the latter. This is an equally important finding, because it demonstrates that libertarianism cannot be attributed to a tendency to combine a wide range of radically different cultural genres and activities, as Bryson’s analysis suggests. After all, those who combine high levels of affinity with highbrow culture with high levels of affinity with lowbrow culture are not more libertarian than those who can be characterized as ‘cultural snobs’. It is, in short, only affinity with highbrow culture that is related to libertarianism.

## 5. Conclusion and debate

In this paper we have attempted to advance our theoretical understanding of the link between cultural capital (affinity with and participation in highbrow or elite culture) and libertarianism. Our findings reveal, first, that this cannot be attributed to the elite status of highbrow culture. If it could, we would after all expect affinity with and participation in low-status popular culture to have a reverse effect on libertarianism, i.e., decreasing rather than increasing it. But this is not what we find. Affinity with lowbrow culture is simply unrelated to authoritarianism / libertarianism. Our second conclusion is that the so-called ‘cultural omnivorousness’ of those with a high level of cultural capital, contrary to what Bryson’s analysis suggests, also fails to account for their libertarianism. After all, cultural omnivores are not more libertarian than cultural snobs.

We can only conclude, then, that a Weberian ‘elective affinity’ exists between, on the one hand, highbrow culture, and on the other, a tendency to accept a wide range of different lifestyles as legitimate. The latter tendency boils down to emphasizing the liberty of individuals to be(have) as they wish and, consequently, to rejecting belief in a ‘meta-social’ foundation that would allow one to hierarchically order those different lifestyles in terms of more or less ‘deviant’ or ‘morally reprehensible’. This tendency, in brief, constitutes a sort of ‘moral relativism’, which has gradually replaced ‘absolute truths, revealed by God’ (Inglehart, 1997: 88). This sort of moral relativism has become increasingly widespread as a consequence of a process of ‘postmodernization’ (Inglehart, 1997), ‘detraditionalization’ (Heelas, 1995) or ‘reflexive modernization’ (Beck et al. 1994). But why would affinity with highbrow culture be so strongly related with this libertarian moral relativism?

In traditional societies, art is intimately bound up with other societal domains such as religion, politics and the economy. It is used for decorating places of religious worship (shrines, temples, churches, etcetera) and religious ceremonial utensils (holy scriptures, ceremonial dresses and paraphernalia, etcetera), as well as for decorating equipment that is used in agriculture, crafts, hunting, and warfare (tools, weapons, means of transport, etcetera) (Wilson, 1982). Under conditions of (late-)modernity, however, art has become increasingly separated from those other institutional domains. As a consequence, it has become thrown back upon itself and has as such become subject to its own institutional logic (Bell, 1976). Dutch

sociologist of art and culture Bevers (1985: 58) characterizes this logic of the modern art world in terms of a ‘routinization’ or ‘institutionalization’ of ‘a state of permanent reflection’:

‘Reflection, begun when art was experiencing a revolutionary development [the rise of modern abstract art, DH/PA], has since lost its instrumental function and has become a goal in itself. Modern art is no longer problematical, but the framing of the problem has become part of art itself: art has become reflexive art. (...) More than religion and science, reflexive art is focused on itself and more sensitive to subjectivist tendencies in culture’ (Our translation from Dutch, DH/PA).

It seems not too far-fetched to assume that it is precisely this state of permanent reflection in modern art that erodes not only the customary boundaries of ‘real’ art, but also seriously erodes the possibility to believe in any ‘objective’ or ‘pre-given’ meaning in a more general sense. It is perhaps hardly surprising, then, that in late modernity affinity with highbrow culture goes hand in hand with a libertarian moral relativism. It is, after all, precisely this type of solidly founded meaning that is rejected by those who stand out as libertarians.

## Notes

1. *Economic progressiveness* and *economic conservatism* refer to the extent to which people are for or against the state imposing restrictions on the inequality generated by a free market. *Authoritarianism / libertarianism* entails the extent to which people believe deviations from traditional values and norms are acceptable. As regards economic conservatism / progressiveness, people who are in favor of economic redistribution by the state are defined as progressive and people who prefer a distribution based on the free market are defined as conservative. As regards the dichotomy between authoritarianism and libertarianism, people who feel individuals should be free to live their lives as they wish are defined as libertarian and people who believe deviations from traditional values and norms are unacceptable are defined as authoritarian.
2. Hence, knowing people’s ideas about the desirability of a more equal income distribution (economic progressiveness / conservatism) does not make it possible to predict how authoritarian or libertarian. See the references to the relevant literature in Houtman (2003, chapter 1) as well as his own findings (ibid.: chapter 4).
3. It is not clear whether those findings indicate that in the past a one-dimensional image of cultural stratification did make sense in most western countries or that such an image is a particular characteristic of French society. See Calhoun (1993) about the latter possibility and Lamont (1992) for evidence that it is more typical of France than of the United States. We won’t go into this question further here.
4. For an exception to this general rule, see Van Rees et al. (1999), where the omnivores prove somewhat older than the other categories. We do not consider this an important anomalous finding for three reasons, however. First, the four latent classes (constructed by means of a latent cluster analysis of reading in leisure time) raise a number of questions, especially the circumstance that the omnivorous class is disturbingly small (4%) and the non-reading class (neither highbrow nor lowbrow) disturbingly

large (67%), leaving a cluster of 'lowbrow readers' (13%) and a cluster of 'highbrow readers' (15%). Second, the age effect seems quite small (see table 3 on p. 359). Third, this paper offers a merely statistical exercise without a serious attempt to test theoretically derived hypotheses and/or theoretically interpret the findings (especially this anomalous age effect, of course).

## Appendix

*Table 4. Factor analysis of reading ten types of books (N=2,087).*

Type of literature read	Factor 1	Factor 2
Books about history	0.61	0.06
Books about cultures	0.61	-0.03
Dutch literature	0.61	0.17
Foreign literature	0.62	0.23
Poetry	0.57	-0.05
	0.61	-0.09
Books on art		
Spy novels	0.02	0.75
Detectives	-0.03	0.76
Adventure novels	0.03	0.71
Science fiction	0.08	0.46
Eigenvalue	2.21	1.94
R <sup>2</sup>	0.23	0.19

*Table 5. Factor analysis of visiting thirteen types of performances (N=2,087).*

Type of performance visited	Factor 1	Factor 2
Classical music concert	0.68	-0.21
Opera	0.57	0.03
Operetta	0.44	0.07
Jazz	0.43	0.19
Ballet	0.48	0.27
Museum with old masters	0.68	0.08
Museum for modern art	0.57	0.18
Discotheque	-0.28	0.45
Musical	0.17	0.57
Comedy	0.10	0.49
Cabaret	0.24	0.47
Modern dance	0.21	0.52
Pop concert	-0.06	0.60
Eigenvalue	2.41	1.82
R <sup>2</sup>	0.19	0.14



*Table 6. Factor analysis of watching nine television channels (N=2,087).*

Television station watched	Factor 1	Factor 2
Discovery	0.02	0.59
CNN	0.09	0.64
Euronet	0.10	0.40
BBC	-0.06	0.62
VPRO	-0.27	0.47
Veronica	0.74	-0.04
RTL4	0.68	-0.20
RTL5	0.58	0.13
SBS6	0.78	0.05
TMF	0.59	0.05
Eigenvalue	2.39	1.58
R <sup>2</sup>	0.24	0.16

*Table 7. Factor analysis of eleven types of leisure activities (N=2,087).*

Leisure activities	Factor 1	Factor 2
Acting	0.34	0.15
Writing or writing poetry	0.42	0.00
Listening to music at home	0.32	0.15
Visiting music festivals	0.52	0.23
Making music oneself	0.71	-0.29
Making music with others	0.70	-0.27
Watching television	-0.18	0.44
Visiting a cinema	0.12	0.53
Shopping	0.04	0.46
Visiting a discotheque	0.03	0.64
Visiting a bar	0.14	0.59
Eigenvalue	1.73	1.70
R <sup>2</sup>	0.16	0.15

*Table 8. Factor analysis of seven types of holiday activities (N=2,087).*

Preferred holiday activities	Factor 1	Factor 2
Culture	-0.13	0.78
Museums	-0.11	0.70
Nature	-0.17	0.63
Beach	0.89	0.05
Sun	0.73	0.03
Sea	0.87	0.12
Romance	0.42	0.28
Eigenvalue	2.30	1.60
R <sup>2</sup>	0.33	0.23

*Table 9. Factor analysis of liking nine musical genres (N=2,087).*

Musical genre	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Opera	0.03	0.03	0.65
Classical music	-0.03	-0.14	0.72
Baroque	-0.02	-0.02	0.77
House	0.01	0.82	-0.04
Rave	0.05	0.75	-0.02
Dance	0.06	0.63	-0.05
Rap	0.85	0.12	-0.05
Hip hop	0.86	0.06	-0.06
Soul	0.56	-0.03	0.06
Eigenvalue	1.77	1.67	1.55
R <sup>2</sup>	0.20	0.19	0.17

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