BOOK REVIEW

BOURDIEU'S LINGERING AFTERTASTE

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The Persistence of Taste: Art, Museums and Everyday Life after Bourdieu

Edited by Malcolm Quinn, Dave Beech, Michael Lehnert, Carol Tulloch, and Stephen

Wilson (Routledge, 2018)

In an environment where education, culture, and the arts are valued in increasingly instrumental terms, Bourdieu's sociological critique of how taste transforms social hierarchy into cultural capital still offers a vital theoretical framework for arts scholars, professionals, and practitioners. This book introduces a range of academic, artistic, and curatorial approaches to cultural value by asking how these practices conduct an analysis of taste "After Bourdieu." By framing Bourdieu in this reflexive way, the editors draw out the richness of his influence, while also exposing the productive contradictions in the diverse ways his work is invoked across disciplines and fields. This editorial strategy is so effective because each paper contributes a new perspective to what Quinn describes as the "socially distributed practice of taste" (p. 16), testing the possibility of free choice between ostensibly autonomous individual taste and the reproduction of normative cultural values. The book's four sections ask how practices of taste transform social structure into cultural

capital across contexts including art, the museum, Japanese case studies, and the home and everyday life.

Introduced by Dave Beech, the first section explores how Bourdieu's writing continues to provide a key conceptual framework for art theory, history, and criticism. Contributors to this section all share a broad critique of Bourdieu's reference to a limited set of art forms and social structures. Beech's own contribution highlights the limitations of Bourdieu's "non-revolutionary philosophy" where taste is a given status conferred by social position rather than accessed through education. These "bourgeois practices of taste" fixate on uselessness and universalize "nobility" to the upper middle classes, including Bourdieu's own class fraction as a sociologist. Beech's selection of essays in this section mirrors and extends this critique to Bourdieu's fixation on a specific set of artforms by showing how core features of his theory of taste such as "cultural capital" and "distinction" underplay art's own practices of taste and self-critical discourse. Denise Gigante's description of the tastemaking practices of three literary connoisseurs and their private libraries shows how Bourdieu's notions of high and low culture are hard to apply to transgressive practices of taste that combine these normative categories in unusual ways. Peter Osborne shows how Bourdieu's theory of taste lacks an account of the shifting status of the image, the archive, and the "work" of art that could explain the ontological ambiguities of "postconceptual" art practices that are conspicuously missing from Bourdieu's later work. Drawing on related currents in critical theory and studies of authorship and participation, Mark Hutchinson shows how theories of taste based on immutable categories of art and consumption cannot account for the performative dimensions of anti-art and what he calls the "anti-spectator." Finally, Ken Wilder's call for the extension of "reception aesthetics" from literature to art suggests that Bourdieu's rejection of

Kantian aesthetics precludes the imaginative engagement and perspectival shifts required by contemporary configurations of art's production and reception.

The second section explores museum practices, framed by Michael Lehnert's outline of the role and function of institutional "tastemaking." His approach to analysis "After Bourdieu" shifts from the legitimating social functions of museums to the global market in taste and cultural diplomacy. The essays in this section trace this shift from tastemaking within the museum to the museum's location in a global network of tastemaking by inviting a range of perspectives and insiders' accounts, from gallery professionals to empirical and methodological sociological studies. Penelope Curtis's and Paul Goodwin's contributions bookend this section with accounts from very different positions within the museum's institutional hierarchy, respectively a gallery director (in Lehnert's terms, a museum "thought leader" [p. 107]) and a jobbing curator. For Curtis, taste remains an ineffable, floating signifier within an executive summary of the overarching "museum narrative." For Goodwin, the curator's responsibility is to use their connoisseurship and their institutional practice to resist, de-center, and reflect on the dominant norms of taste and power tacitly embedded within these institutional narratives, aiming towards curating a "post-taste museum." The three empirical accounts of museum visitors' tastemaking practices here, however, suggest a radical disjunct between museum professionals' and museum visitors' analyses of taste. Dirk vom Lehn's ethnomethodological video analysis of gallery-goers interactions and experiences "at the exhibit-face" shows that, like food or wine, "art tasting" is a social activity that requires visitors to arrange themselves in front of the artwork, where issues of taste or evaluation of the artwork are subsumed by the apparently mundane process of remarking on the artwork's information labels. Addressing Bourdieu's methodology more directly, Laurie Hanquinet identifies the modernist aesthetic theory implicit in his theory of taste, and then updates it with an

expanded definition of cultural capital and “highbrow” culture that incorporates historical, national, and social contexts. Tony Bennett and Modesto Gayo expand, more directly, on Bourdieu’s methods with an exemplary use of multiple correspondence analysis to explore the results of a survey of Australian gallery visitors’ cultural participation and preferences in relation to their age group, education, and class position.

One frequent criticism of the persistence of Bourdieu’s analysis of taste is that his methodology and models, to some extent, depend on the stability and continued relevance of the cultural and scholarly norms of the French academy at the time. This makes the Japanese case studies in the third section of the book especially useful for exploring the broader cultural, historical, and methodological issues involved in framing a generalized analysis of taste. The art historical accounts through which Stephen Wilson introduces this section suggest an awkward fit between the social production of these artworks and Bourdieu’s theories of taste, distinction, cultural capital, and any coherent notion of a “Japanese habitus” (p. 196). As Aizawa (2014), quoted by Wilson, explains, many of these theoretical constructs were lost in their original translation in the 1990s, when Japan’s economic and social conditions mitigated against an analysis of taste based on distinct class stratifications. The challenge of a trans-historical and trans-cultural mapping of Bourdieu’s analysis is further highlighted by Toshio Watanabe’s essay on the so-called “Knickers Incident” of 1901, where the Japanese government of the time was forced to modernize and clarify obscenity laws in response to the publication of Western-style nude paintings. Sharon Kinsella’s essay and interview with Wilson underlines how the historical repression of class consciousness in Japan precludes an easy transposition of Bourdieu’s theories onto an analysis of Japanese taste “After Bourdieu.” This is compounded by the way Western and Japanese classical tastes are combined, and the theatrical assimilation of class-coded messages

along with what Kinsella calls a “gendered habitus” in Japanese culture. For example, Yuko Hasegawa’s chapter on grotesquely gendered expressions in the work of three Japanese artists argues that these viscerally legible images illustrate a paradoxically “normative deviance” underpinning Japanese attitudes to the body as an object, which “surpass the need for Bourdieu and his cultural literacy” (p. 250) to decode class-bound notions of taste.

Carol Tulloch’s section on the home and everyday life reflects on intimate practices of taste “After Bourdieu” by extending the range of analysis to encompass mundane objects and activities that would otherwise be consigned to Bourdieu’s (1984:380) lowly “taste of necessity.” Michael McMillan’s and Carol Tulloch’s contributions unpick the contextual, historical, and stylistic richness of Caribbean domestic life in Britain, and how, as McMillan puts it, “migrant aesthetics in the home responds to the ‘everyday’ of the diasporic black subject” (p. 303). In Tulloch’s case, her family’s “Jamaican migrant taste and consequent habitus” (p. 267) is exemplified by the use of a set of champagne glasses: a “glamorous necessity” for the construction of migrant belonging. Ben Highmore outlines an analysis of taste that extends into everyday life beyond the usual range of variables and legitimated “culture” and proposes synthesizing Bourdieu’s analysis with an historically-grounded phenomenology of taste. This appeal to sensoriality re-introduces questions about aesthetic autonomy that Bourdieu rejects in his critique of aesthetic judgement. Maxine Leeds Craig and Susan B. Kaiser offer an illustrated analysis of yoga pants and baggy tracksuits as a boundary object between Bourdieu’s work and broader sociological approaches to fashion. Their focus on fashion highlights how theories of taste intersect with the moral imperatives of public performance versus domestic interiority. Curator Gill Saunders and artist Sonia Boyce discuss this internal dimension of taste in relation to wallpaper design—an object that furnishes the home-maker’s identity, nationality, and psychology as, quite literally, a background to their

everyday experiences. Finally, Penny Sparkle sketches the historical transformations of the home and its tacitly gendered construction within Bourdieu's theories of taste. She argues that theories of taste "After Bourdieu" must dispense with the modernist "absence" of taste as an aesthetic standard and recognize multifarious practices and identities.

The diversity of objects, contexts, and practices of taste described in this collection demonstrate the limitations of Bourdieu's practical methods and sociological positionality to account for popular culture and complex cultural hybridity (Friedman et al. 2015; Prior 2005). However, most of the authors embrace the foundations and central themes of Bourdieu's work in their own, updated, analyses of taste. For practitioners and scholars of taste in the cultural industries and the arts, this book offers a valuable insight into how socio-demographic and trans-historical factors are rendered through practices of taste. After nearly forty years, Bourdieu's analysis still challenges us to ask how our ostensibly autonomous choices reflect normative social values, and how those values reflexively shape normative standards of taste in a way that delimits the notion of aesthetic autonomy. Quinn's concluding remarks suggest that the curatorial ascendancy of algorithms might reveal the constraints of Bourdieu's analysis of taste as a forced choice of "necessary virtue" (Burawoy 2018) highlighted by this collection. However, the practices of taste described in this book, aside from the few essays that place an emphasis on the phenomenological experience of art, do not propose major revisions to Bourdieu's core methodological innovations. Critical revisions of Bourdieu's theory within cognitive science, linguistic anthropology, and ethnomethodology (Hanks 2005; Duranti 2015:187-208) have challenged his assumptions about social action and human behavior, and the way the concept of "cultural capital" is often incorporated, uncritically, into social theory (Robbins 2005). However, few of the essays in this collection challenge Bourdieu's fundamental analysis of taste in terms of

its foundational operationalization: that levels of education and patterns of consumption index forms of cultural capital. Instead, *The Persistence of Taste* successfully dismantles Bourdieu's modernist aesthetic/social theory (Hanquinet, Roose, and Savage 2014), by showing how it depends on the idea that modernist abstraction equates to acculturated tastes. This collection is so engaging because it expands Bourdieu's analysis of taste to new practices of taste and tastemaking in the increasingly fragmented cultural contexts of art, museums, and everyday life. Bourdieu's operational definitions, however, at least in this book, remain the most persistent aspect of his analysis of taste.

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