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## CULTURAL CAPITAL AND PEDAGOGIC COMMUNICATION

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*Serpentine:* 'When I think to you, the thought, *so far as it finds corresponding ideas and suitable words in your mind*, is reflected in your mind. My thought clothes itself in words in your mind, which words you seem to hear – and naturally enough in your own language and your habitual phrases. Very probably the members of your party are hearing what I am saying to you, each with his own individual difference of vocabulary and phrasing.'

*Barnstaple:* 'And that is why (. . .) when you soar into ideas of which we haven't even a shadow in our minds, we just hear nothing at all.'

H. G. Wells,

*Men Like Gods*

The task of the teaching profession is thus to maintain and promote this order in people's thinking, which is just as necessary as order in the streets and in the provinces.

G. Gusdorf,

*Pourquoi des professeurs?*

When we first started our research, we began with the intention of treating the pedagogic relation as a simple relation of communication and measuring its efficiency. More precisely, we sought to determine the social and scholastic factors in the success of pedagogic communication by analysing the variations in the efficiency of the communication relative to the social and scholastic characteristics of the receivers.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to the indices generally used to measure the output of an educational system, the informational efficiency of pedagogic communication is no doubt one of the surest indices of the specific productivity of pedagogic work, especially when, as is the case in Arts Faculties, this work tends to be reduced to the manipulation of words. Analysis of the variations in the efficiency of the action of inculcation which is performed principally in and through the relation of communication thus leads to the primary principle underlying the inequalities in the academic attainment of children from the different

social classes. Indeed, one can put forward the hypothesis that the specific productivity of all pedagogic work other than the pedagogic work accomplished by the family is a function of the distance between the habitus it tends to inculcate (in this context, scholarly mastery of scholarly language) and the habitus inculcated by all previous forms of pedagogic work and, ultimately, by the family (i.e. in this case, practical mastery of the mother tongue).

#### UNEQUAL SELECTION AND UNEQUAL SELECTEDNESS

If, as often happens, it is forgotten that the categories defined within a student population by criteria such as social origin, sex, or some characteristic of their school record have been unequally selected in the course of their previous schooling, it is impossible to account fully for all the variations which these criteria bring out.<sup>2</sup> For example, the scores obtained in a language test are not simply the performance of students characterized by their previous training, their social origin and their sex, or even by all these criteria considered together, but are the performance of the category which, precisely because it is endowed with the whole set of these characteristics, has not undergone elimination to the same extent as a category defined by other characteristics. In other words, it is a version of the *pars pro toto* fallacy to suppose that one can directly and exclusively grasp even the intersecting influence of factors such as social origin or sex within synchronic relations which, in the case of a population defined by certain past that is itself defined by the continuous action of these factors over time, take on their full significance only when reinstated in the process of the educational *career*. We have here chosen to adopt a deductive method of exposition because only a theoretical model such as one which interrelates the two systems of relations subsumed under the two concepts *linguistic capital* and *degree of selection* is capable of bringing

to light the system of facts which it constructs as such by setting up a systematic relationship between them. In complete contrast to the 'pointilliste' verification which applies fragmentary experimentation to a discontinuous series of piecemeal hypotheses, the systematic verification set out below seeks to give experimentation its full power of disproof by confronting the results of theoretical calculation with the findings of empirical measurement.

Given that they have had to achieve a successful acculturation in order to meet the irreducible minimum of academic requirements as regards language, the working-class and middle-class<sup>3</sup> students who reach higher education have necessarily undergone more stringent selection, precisely in terms of the criterion of linguistic competence, since examiners are generally obliged, as much in the *agrégation* as in the *baccalauréat*, to lower their standards as far as knowledge and know-how are concerned, but hold fast to their requirements as regards form.<sup>4</sup> The influence of linguistic capital, particularly manifest in the first years of schooling when the understanding and use of language are the major points of leverage for teachers' assessments, never ceases to be felt: style is always taken into account, implicitly or explicitly, at every level of the educational system and, to a varying extent, in all university careers, even scientific ones. Moreover, language is not simply an instrument of communication: it also provides, together with a richer or poorer vocabulary, a more or less complex system of categories, so that the capacity to decipher and manipulate complex structures, whether logical or aesthetic, depends partly on the complexity of the language transmitted by the family. It follows logically that the educational mortality rate can only increase as one moves towards the classes most distant from scholarly language, but also that, in a school population constituted by selection, unequal selectedness tends to reduce progressively and even to cancel out the effects of unequal selection. And in fact, only differential selection according to social origin, and in particular the over-selection of working-class students, can provide a systematic explanation for the variations in linguistic competence relative to social origin and particularly the cancelling out

or inversion of the direct relation (observable at lower levels of the school system) between the possession of cultural capital (identifiable by the father's occupation) and degree of success.

Given that the advantage of students of upper-class origin is more and more marked as one moves away from the realms of the culture directly taught and wholly administered by the School and as one passes, for example, from classical drama to avant-garde theatre or from school literature to jazz, it is clear why, in the case of behaviour like the academic use of academic language, the differences tend to be extremely attenuated or even reversed. The highly selected working-class students in fact score at least as well in this area as the less selected upper-class students and better than the middle-class students, who are equally ill-endowed with linguistic or cultural capital but less strongly selected (table 2).<sup>4</sup>

TABLE 1

		Linguistic capital	Degree of selection	Linguistic competence
Working classes	Paris	-	+ + →	+
	Provinces	- -	+ →	-
Middle classes	Paris	-	+ →	0
	Provinces	- -	0 →	- -
Upper classes	Paris	+ +	- - →	0
	Provinces	+	- →	0

The relative degrees of selection are expressed in terms of + and -, giving an approximate indication of the various subgroups' chances of university entrance (see Appendix).

Similarly, while Parisian students, whatever their social background, score better results than provincial students, it is among students of working-class origin that the residence-related difference is most marked (91 percent as against 46 percent with a mark of 12 or over, compared with 65 and 59 percent for the upper classes), with working-class students achieving the best results in Paris, followed by middle-class and upper-class students (table 2). To understand this set of relations it must be borne in mind that on the one hand

TABLE 2

		Whole of France			
Paris	Upper classes	%	41	59	42.5
	Middle classes	%	60	40	55
	Working classes	%	54	46	54
	Upper classes	%	35	65	35
	Middle classes	%	31	69	31
	Working classes	%	9	91	9
Provinces	Upper classes	%	41	59	42.5
	Middle classes	%	60	40	55
	Working classes	%	54	46	54
	Upper classes	%	35	65	35
	Middle classes	%	31	69	31
	Working classes	%	9	91	9

The percentages are calculated within each column; the italic figures indicate the strongest tendencies in each line, within each of the three populations (Paris, the provinces, and the whole country).

<sup>4</sup>In France most marks are given out of 20; 10 is the 'pass mark', 12 is 'fair' (trans.).

residence in Paris is associated with linguistic and cultural advantages, and on the other hand that the degree of selection associated with living in Paris cannot be defined independently of class membership, if only by virtue of the hierarchical and centralized structure of the university system and, more generally, of the power apparatuses.<sup>6</sup> If the importance of the linguistic capital transmitted by the different family backgrounds and the degree of selection implied by university entrance, in Paris and the provinces, for the different social categories, are defined in terms of their relative value (+, 0 or -), it can be seen that it is sufficient to combine these values in order to account for the hierarchy of results in the language exercise (cf. tables 1 and 2). This model thus gives a systematic account of the empirically observed variations, that is to say, for example, the position of working-class Parisian students (+) as compared with upper-class Parisian students (0) and as compared with provincial working-class students (-), or the relative position of middle class students, who, both in Paris (0) and in the provinces (- -), score less well than working-class students.

It also follows from these analyses that if the proportion of working-class students entering university were significantly increased, those students' degree of relative selection would, as it declined, less and less offset the educational handicaps related to the unequal social-class distribution of linguistic and cultural capital. So we would see the reappearance of the direct correlation between academic performance and social-class background which, in higher education, is fully observed only in those areas least directly controlled by the school system, whereas in secondary education it already manifests itself in the most scholastic results.

Similarly, to understand why a test measuring very diverse language skills yields a constant superiority of the men over the women it has to be remembered that the female students' situation contrasts sharply with that of the male students in a systematic way — that is, by an apparent paradox, in different ways in the university system as a whole, in the Arts Faculties, and in each particular type of course and school career. Since we know that female students are twice as likely as male students to enrol in Arts courses (in 1962, they had a 52.8 percent chance as against 23 percent) and that, compared with the men, for

whom the other faculties open their doors more widely, women Arts students, precisely because of this relegation, are less strongly selected than the male students in the same faculty, it is understandable that their performance should be weaker. Here again, the explanatory model which relates the scores of the two categories to their respective degrees of selection is capable, provided it is applied systematically, of accounting for all the facts multivariate analysis would leave unexplained, short of resorting to a fictitious and tautological explanation by 'natural inequalities between the sexes'.

Given that the female-student group is composed differently from the male-student group as regards social origin, subjects studied and previous school history (for example, 36 percent of the men have had the most classical secondary schooling as against 19.5 percent of the women), and given that these characteristics are all linked, unequally, to unequal degrees of success, one might expect straightforward multivariate analysis to reveal other effective relations behind the apparent relation between sex and test scores, by successively neutralizing the action of the different variables, i.e. by studying separately the action of the principal variable in the different sub-groups distinguished by other variables within the principal group. But how can the superiority of the male students then be explained without invoking natural inequality, since the gap cannot be imputed to the differences which separate the two categories as regards knowledge of Greek and Latin, type of secondary school, type of faculty course, and social origin?

The disparities between the men and the women run the same way in the various social-origin categories and are of roughly the same magnitude within these categories (table 5). They remain whatever the type of secondary school attended, except that the difference is slightly greater among *ex-collège* [private school] pupils, where 62 percent of the boys and 35 percent of the girls score better than 12/20, as against 70 and 54 percent in the case of former *lycée* pupils.

In order to explain both the disparity constantly observed between the male and female students in Arts faculties and its absence in the control group of *lycée* pupils, it is sufficient to know that the degrees of selection characteristic of the men and the women are not the same in the two cases: since the sex ratio in secondary education is very close to the sex ratio in the corres-

ponding age groups, it can be assumed that boys and girls are there equally selected – which is not the case in Arts Faculties. If female students manifest more rarely than male students the aptitude for handling the language of ideas (which is demanded to very different degrees in the different disciplines), this is primarily because the objective mechanisms which channel girls preferentially towards the Arts Faculties and, within them, towards certain specialities (such as modern languages, art history or French) owe part of their effectivity to a social definition of the 'feminine' qualities which they help to form; in other words, to the internalization of the external necessity imposed by this definition of feminine studies. In order for a destiny, which is the objective product of the social relations defining the female condition at a given moment in time, to be transmuted into a vocation, it is necessary and sufficient that girls (and all those around them, not least their families) should be unconsciously guided by the prejudice – particularly acute and thriving in France on account of the continuity between salon culture and university culture – that there is an elective affinity between so-called 'feminine' qualities and 'literary' qualities such as sensitivity to the imponderable nuances of sentiment or a taste for the imprecise preciosities of style. Thus the apparently most deliberate or most inspired 'choices' still take into account (albeit unconsciously) the system of objective probabilities which condemns women to professions requiring a 'feminine' disposition (e.g. 'welfare' work) or which predisposes them to accept and even unconsciously demand those types of work requiring a 'feminine' relation to the job.

Even the apparent exception can be understood in terms of the model. Whereas men who have done neither Latin nor Greek, or only Latin, score better than similarly-trained women, among the classicists the women perform better than the men: 64 percent of the women, and 58.5 percent of the men, score more than the median mark (cf. table 3). This reversal of the usual difference between the sexes is explained by the fact that, since girls are less likely than boys to receive this training, those girls who do are more rigorously selected than similarly-trained boys. In the same way, because the significance of each relationship is a function of the structure in which it belongs, the most classical training (Greek and Latin) is not automatically linked to better performance: whereas the women who have done Greek and Latin score better than those who have done only Latin and those who have had a 'modern' schooling, the opposite is true of the men. Everything leads one to think that this is yet another effect of differential selection: while faculty entrance is almost as inevitable for boys as for girls when they have done Greek and Latin, boys who come from the 'modern' section and for whom Arts studies represent a less probable option are more selected than other male students.

TABLE 3

	Neither Greek nor Latin		Latin		Latin and Greek				Overall	
	Boys (%)	Girls (%)	Boys (%)	Girls (%)	Boys (%)	Girls (%)	Boys (%)	Girls (%)	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
Less than 12/20	34	60	39	58.5	41.5	36	38	54	38	54
12/20 and over	66	40	61	41.5	58.5	64	62	46	62	46

The percentages are calculated within each column. In each line the italic figures emphasize the stronger tendency within each of the three groups defined by their secondary schooling.

If one again defines in terms of relative value the linguistic capital attached to a given social origin and the degree of selection implied for students of each social class and each sex first by university entrance and then by entering an Arts Faculty, it is clear that one only has to combine these values in order to account for the hierarchy of the results obtained by each sub-group in a definition test (cf. tables 4 and 5). Thus for example, it follows from the model (represented in table 4) that middle-class women students must have the lowest degree of linguistic competence (— —) since, like the men of the same classes, they are as disadvantaged with respect to linguistic capital as male and female working-class students but less rigorously selected when entering higher education, and are also less selected than men from their own social class in Arts Faculties; and this is indeed the category which, with only 35 percent of its members above the median of the distribution of the whole experimental group, obtains the weakest scores in the definition exercise. In the same way, male upper-class students, who are in no way distinguished from female upper-class students with respect to linguistic capital and degree of selection at university entrance, and who in the Arts Faculties are more highly selected than the girls by virtue of the relegation of the girls to these faculties, ought to attain the highest level of success (+ +); and this is borne out by table 5, with 67 percent of them scoring more than the median for the whole group. For each sub-category the same correspondence is confirmed between the position designated by the theoretical model and the position allotted by empirical measurement.

The same theoretical model enables us to understand why the most constant and also the most powerful relations are, at the level of higher education, those which link the degrees of linguistic competence to the characteristics of the previous academic record. It is principally through the medium of the initial streamings (type of secondary school and first year — *sixième* — section) that social origin predetermines educational destiny, i.e. both the chain of subsequent school-career choices and the resulting differential chances of success or failure. It follows from this, first, that the structure of the population of selection-survivors is

TABLE 4

	Linguistic capital		Degree of selection		Linguistic competence
	University entrance	Arts Faculty	University entrance	Arts Faculty	
Working classes	Boys	—	+	+	+
	Girls	—	+	+	—
Middle classes	Boys	—	0	—	0
	Girls	—	0	—	—
Upper classes	Boys	+	—	+	—
	Girls	+	—	—	+

For a given social class an equal distribution of linguistic capital is assumed between the sexes. The relative degree of selection expressed in terms of + and — are the approximate reflection of the probabilities of university entrance and the conditional probabilities of entering the Arts Faculty (taking university entrance for granted) which characterize the different sub-groups.

TABLE 5

	Working classes		Middle classes		Upper classes		Overall	
	Boys (%)	Girls (%)	Boys (%)	Girls (%)	Boys (%)	Girls (%)	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
Less than 12/20	35.5	53.5	43	60.5	33	47	38	54
12/20 and above	64.5	46.5	57	39.5	67	53	62	46

constantly changing even with respect to the criterion governing elimination, which has the effect of progressively weakening the direct relation between social origin and linguistic competence (or any other index of scholastic success). Secondly, at every stage in their school career, individuals of the same social class who survive in the system exhibit less and less the career characteristics which have eliminated the other members of their category, depending on the severity of the selection to which their class is subject and the level of education at which the synchronic cross-section is taken.<sup>7</sup> It is clear that measurement of the linguistic competences of a student population at the level of higher education can only grasp the relation between social origin and academic success in the form of the relation between success and the academic characteristics which are nothing other than the *retrans-lation* into the specific logic of the school system of the chances initially linked to a determinate social situation. And in fact, whereas a significant relation between variables such as social origin or sex and success in the language test is found only in those exercises closest to the traditional techniques of school assessment, educational career characteristics such as the secondary school section or indices of previous success (such as examination grades) are more strongly linked than all other criteria to language test performance, whatever the type of exercise.

In order to explain the relation ascertained between the type of training received in secondary school and the aptitude for language handling, without crediting the classical languages with the miraculous virtues ascribed to them by the champions of the 'humanities', it is sufficient to observe that this relation masks the whole system of relations between differential selection and the social and scholastic factors of that selection. Given the mechanisms which at present govern recruitment into the different sections, the choice of Greek (when Latin has been done in *sixième*) is restricted to those pupils most closely matching scholastic requirements, whether recruited from among the few representatives of the working classes, who are already heavily over-selected (first in being *lycéens* and then in having done Latin), or from among the children of well-off families, who decisively consolidate their advantage by investing their cultural capital in the sections most likely to secure it the highest and most durable academic profitability.

There are other reasons to cast doubt on the virtues which pedagogic conservatism imputes to classical education. How can one explain, for example, why only the full classical training (Greek and Latin) is associated, whatever the exercise, with the best performance, whereas knowledge of Latin alone here seems to give no advantage as compared with the 'modern' stream. The exercises best suited to measure the capacity for mental gymnastics which the learning of Latin is supposed to develop in fact reveal no significant inequality between the 'Latinists' and the others.<sup>8</sup> If students who have done Latin and Greek are distinguished by their verbal ease, this is because they have selected themselves (or been selected) by reference to an image of the hierarchy of the sections of secondary education which gives pride of place to classical studies and because they have had to put up an exceptional performance in the early years of their secondary schooling in order to lay claim to entry into a section which the system reserves for its elite and which attracts to itself the teachers most likely to turn these good pupils into the very best pupils.<sup>9</sup> Given that the students who have done Greek and Latin have the best success rate in all the exercises in the test, that this rate is itself linked to a high rate of previous academic success, and that the students who have done classics have obtained the best rates of success in previous examinations, it may be concluded that the alumni of the classical sections, selected by and for their rhetorical ease, are the least distant from the ideally adequate student whom the teacher presupposes by the level of his discourse and which examinations demand and engender by this very demand.

If it is true that the disadvantage attached to social origin is primarily mediated by educational channelling and streaming (*orientations*) – with the degrees of differential selection they imply for the different categories of students – it is clear why the sons of senior executives should come out top in the sub-group of students who have had a modern training whereas the working-class students come top in the sub-group of Latinists because they doubtless owe the fact of having done Latin to a particularity of their family background and because, coming from a class for which this route is more improbable, they have had to manifest exceptional qualities in order to be channelled in this direction and to persist in it!<sup>10</sup> (table 6). There remains one final difficulty, which the model again enables us to resolve: in the sub-group defined by the most classical training, the working-class students obtain results inferior to those of the upper-class students (61.5 percent as against 73.5 percent); in fact, in this sub-group, although they are over-selected to an even greater extent than in the sub-group of Latinists (a difference which appears in their results: 61.5 percent compared with 52 percent), the working-class students are competing against the fraction of privileged students who have made the most profitable academic use of their linguistic and cultural capital.

TABLE 6

	Neither Greek nor Latin			Latin			Latin and Greek			Whole group		
	Working Classes (%)	Middle Classes (%)	Upper Classes (%)	Working Classes (%)	Middle Classes (%)	Upper Classes (%)	Working Classes (%)	Middle Classes (%)	Upper Classes (%)	Working Classes (%)	Middle Classes (%)	Upper Classes (%)
	Less than 12/20	52	54	39	48	38	52	38.5	53	26.5	46	55
12/20 and over	48	46	61	52	43	48	61.5	45	72.5	54	45	57.5

Similarly, the existence of considerable variations in the degree of linguistic competence between one discipline and another cannot be regarded as proof of the intrinsic, irreducible efficacy of this or that intellectual training, without ignoring the fact that the student population of a discipline is the product of a series of selections whose rigour varies as a function of the relations between the social factors determining the different academic trajectories and the system of the different types of studies objectively possible within a given educational system at a given time. For anyone tempted to attribute the superiority of the pupils in the *classes préparatoires* over those in *propédeutique*,<sup>11</sup> or the superiority of philosophy students over sociology students, to some inherent quality of the teaching or its recipients, one need only point out that the sons of senior executives who come out decisively on top in the group composed of students of philosophy, a discipline very highly rated in the traditional system of the humanities, have the lowest scores within the group of students of sociology, a discipline predisposed to serve as a prestigious refuge for the academically least endowed of the privileged students who therefore find themselves under-selected in comparison with fellow students from other backgrounds. And it can be seen that, to explain all the relations between academic discipline, social origin and performance (table 7), it is sufficient to posit that the relative under-selection (as compared, here, with philosophy) characterizing a subject like sociology, which, promising high intellectual prestige for minimum academic input, occupies a paradoxical place in the system of disciplines, is proportionately greater for more privileged social classes.<sup>12</sup>

If all the variations observed can be interpreted in terms of a single principle having different effects depending on the structure of the complete system of relations within which and through which it operates, this is because these variations express, not a sum of partial relations, but a structure in which the complete system of relations governs the meaning of each of them. Thus, in this case at least, multivariate analysis would be likely to lead to a vicious circle or to reification of abstract relations, if the structural method did not restore

TABLE 7

	Philosophy			Sociology			Non-Specialist ("Licence line")			Overall		
	Working Class (%)	Middle Class (%)	Upper Class (%)	Working Class (%)	Middle Class (%)	Upper Class (%)	Working Class (%)	Middle Class (%)	Upper Class (%)	Working Class (%)	Middle Class (%)	Upper Class (%)
	Less than 12/20	25.5	34.5	20	33.5	46	53	60	66	51	46	35
12/20 and over	74.5	65.5	80	66.5	54	47	40	34	49	54	45	57.5

to the logical classes distinguished by the criteria their full existence as social groups defined by the ensemble of the relations which unite them and by the totality of the relationships they maintain with their past, and, through the intermediary of their past, with their present situation.

The only way to escape fictitious explanations containing nothing beyond the very relationship they presume to explain (explanation in terms of the unequal distribution of natural aptitudes between the sexes, or the intrinsic virtues of a particular discipline, Latin for some, sociology for others) is to refrain from treating as substantial, isolable properties variations which must be understood as elements in a *structure* and moments in a *process*. It is essential to carry out this two-fold interrelation here, because on the one hand, the educational process of differential elimination according to social class (leading, at every moment, to a determinate distribution of competences within the various categories of survivors) is the product of the continuous action of the factors which define the positions of the different classes with regard to the school system, i.e. *cultural capital* and *class ethos*; and on the other hand, because these factors are converted and cashed, at every stage of the school career, into a particular constellation of relay factors, different in structure for each category considered (social class or sex) (cf. figure 1 at end of Book II). It is the system of factors, acting as a system, which exerts the indivisible action of a *structural causality* on behaviour and attitudes and hence on success and elimination, so that it would be absurd to try to isolate the influence of any one factor, or, a fortiori, to credit it with a uniform, univocal influence at the different moments of the process or in the different structures of factors.

It is therefore necessary to construct the theoretical model of the various possible organizations of all the factors capable of acting, if only by their absence, at the various moments of the educational career of children in the various categories, in order to be able to inquire systematically into the discontinuously observed or measured effects of the systematic action of a particular constellation of factors. For

example, to understand the pattern of the *baccalauréat* results in a given section and a given subject, obtained by pupils of different sex and from different backgrounds, or more generally, to grasp the specific form and the efficacy of factors such as linguistic capital or ethos at a given level of education, each of these elements has to be related to the system in which it belongs and which represents at the moment in question the retranslation and relaying of the primary determinisms linked to social origin.

Social origin, with the initial family education and experience it entails, must therefore not be considered as a factor capable of directly determining practices, attitudes and opinions at every moment in a biography, since the constraints that are linked to social origin work only through the particular systems of factors in which they are actualized in a structure that is different each time. Thus, when one autonomizes a certain state of the structure (i.e. a certain constellation of factors acting on practices at a certain moment), by dissociating it from the complete system of its transformations (i.e. from the constructed form of the *genesis* of careers), it is impossible to discover, at the basis of all these retranslations and restructurings, the characteristics appertaining to class origin and class membership.

If there is a need for an explicit warning against such a dissociation, it is because the techniques sociologists generally use to establish and measure relations implicitly contain a philosophy that is at once analytical and instantaneist. When the sociologist fails to see that by means of a synchronic cross-section, multivariate analysis obtains a system of relations defined by conjunctural equilibrium, and that factor analysis eliminates all reference to the genesis of the ensemble of synchronic relations it is dealing with, he is liable to forget that, unlike strictly logical structures, the structures sociology deals with are the product of transformations which, unfolding in time, cannot be considered as reversible except by a logical abstraction, a sociological absurdity, since they express the successive states of a process that is aetiologically irreversible.

It is necessary to take into account the ensemble of the social

characteristics which define the initial situation of children from the different classes, in order to understand the different probabilities which the various educational destinies have for them, and the significance, for individuals in a given category, of their finding themselves in a situation of greater or lesser probability for their category (e.g. in the case of a manual worker's son, the highly improbable fact of studying Latin, or the highly probable fact of having to take a job in order to continue higher education). It is therefore impossible to take any one of the characteristics defining an individual (or a category) at any one point in his career as the ultimate explanatory principle of all his characteristics. For example, when seeking to explain the relation found in higher education between academic success and paid employment which, though unequally frequent in the different social classes, can be regarded as having an equally disadvantageous effect whatever the social category, we are not entitled to conclude that by this stage social origin has ceased to exert any influence, since it is not, sociologically, a matter of indifference whether one takes as the point of departure for one's explanation the unequal likelihood of extra-curricular work among the different categories of students or the unequal likelihood of finding students from the different social backgrounds among those who have to take a job. A fortiori, we cannot reconstitute the different experiences corresponding to the situations defined by the overlapping of several criteria (e.g. the experience of the peasant's son who enters a small seminary rather than a teacher-training college or who becomes a philosophy teacher rather than a surveyor) by taking as the starting point for this reconstruction the experience defined by any single one of these criteria. Experiences which analysis is able to distinguish and specify only in terms of the intersection of logically permutable criteria cannot be integrated into the unity of a systematic biography unless they are reconstructed on the basis of the original class situation, the point from which all possible views unfold and on which no view is possible.

### FROM THE LOGIC OF THE SYSTEM TO THE LOGIC OF ITS TRANSFORMATIONS

Just as we have had to go beyond a purely synchronic grasp of the relations which are established at a given level of education between the social or academic characteristics of the different groups and their degrees of success, in order to construct the diachronic model of careers and biographies, so too, in order to escape the illusion inherent in a strictly functionalist analysis of the educational system, we must re-insert the state of the system grasped by our survey into the history of its transformations. The analysis of the differential reception of the pedagogic message presented here makes it possible to explain the effects which the transformations of its public exert on pedagogic communication, and to define by extrapolation the social characteristics of the publics corresponding to the two limiting states of the traditional system – what might be called the *organic* state, in which the system deals with a public perfectly matching its implicit demands, and what might be called the *critical* state, in which, with the changing social make-up of the system's clientele, misunderstanding would eventually become intolerable – the state actually observed corresponding to an intermediate phase.

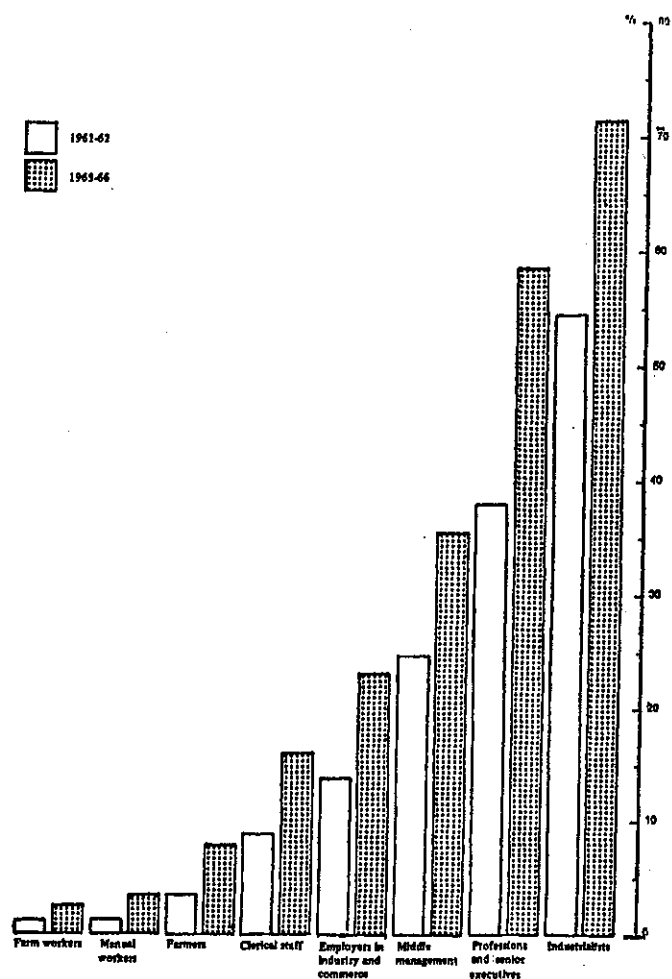
Knowing on the one hand the relations between the social or scholastic characteristics of the different categories of receivers and the different degrees of linguistic competence, and on the other hand the evolution of the relative weight of the categories characterized by different levels of reception, we can construct a model making it possible to explain, and, to some extent, predict, the transformations of the pedagogic relationship. It is immediately clear that the transformations of the system of relations between the educational system and the class structure, which are expressed, for example, in the evolution of the rates of enrolment of the various social classes, lead to a transformation (in accordance with the principles which govern it) of the system of relations between the levels of reception and the categories of

receivers, that is, of the educational system considered as a communication system. The capacity for reception characteristic of receivers of a given category is a function at once of that category's *linguistic capital* (which we may suppose constant for the period in question) and the *degree of selection* of the survivors in that category, as objectively measured by the rate of elimination of that category from the educational system. Analysis of the variations over time of the relative weight of the categories of receivers thus enables one to detect and explain sociologically a tendency towards a continuous fall in the *mode* of distribution of the receivers' linguistic competences, together with an increased *dispersion* of this distribution. Owing to the increased rate of enrolment of all social classes, the corrective effect of over-selection acts less and less on the reception level of the categories with the weakest linguistic heritage (as can already be seen in the case of students of middle-class origin), whereas the drop-out rate of the linguistically most favoured categories is so low that the mode of these categories tends to decline steadily while the dispersion of their reception levels increases.

Concretely, the specifically pedagogic aspect of the present crisis of the educational system, i.e. the dislocations and breakdowns which affect it as a communication system, cannot be understood without taking into account on the one hand the system of relations between the competences or attitudes of the different categories of students and their social and academic characteristics, and on the other hand the evolution of the system of relations between the school system and the social classes as objectively grasped by the statistics of the probabilities of university entrance and the conditional probabilities of entry into the various faculties. Between 1961-62 and 1965-66, a period of growth in higher education, often interpreted as a democratization of admissions, the structure of the distribution of educational opportunities relative to social class did indeed shift upwards, but it remained virtually unchanged in shape (cf. figure 2 and Appendix). In other words, the increased enrolment of 18-20 year olds was distributed among the different social classes in proportions roughly equal to those defining

FIGURE 2

The trend of educational opportunities by social class between 1961-62 and 1965-66 (probability of entry to higher education).



the previous distribution of opportunities.<sup>13</sup> To explain and understand the changes in the distribution of competences and attitudes, it is sufficient to observe that, for example, the sons of industrialists, who, in 1961-62 had a 52.8 percent chance of faculty enrolment, had a 74 percent chance in 1965-66, so that for this category, which proportionally is even more strongly represented in the *classes préparatoires* and the *grandes écoles* than in the faculties, the likelihood of higher education is around 80 percent.<sup>14</sup> If the principles derived from analysis of the synchronic relations are applied to this process, it can be seen that as this category advances towards quasi-total enrolment, it tends to acquire all the characteristics, in particular the competences and attitudes, associated with the academic under-selection of a category.

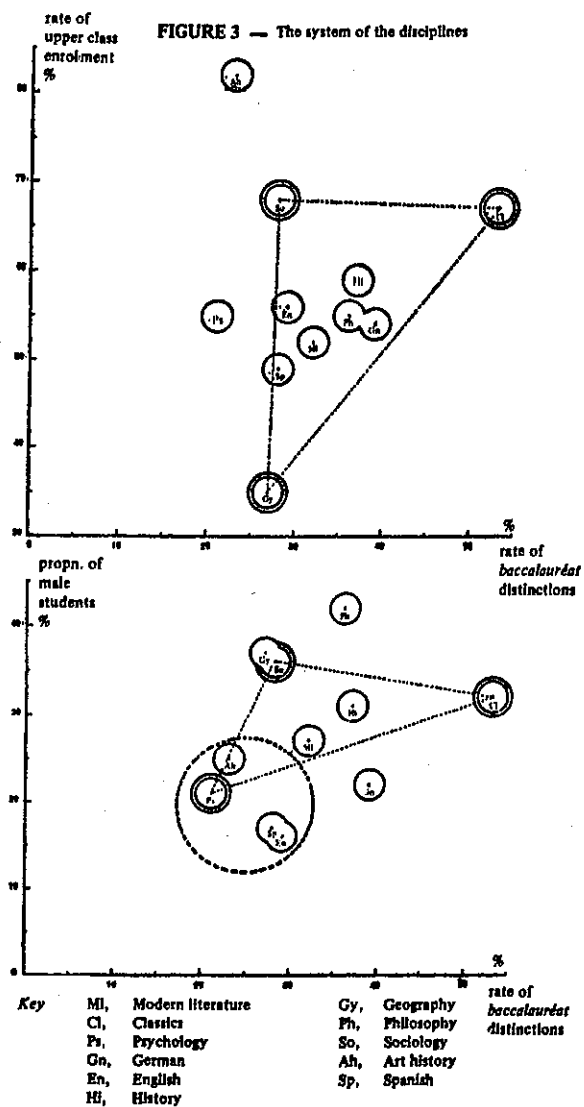
More generally the interrelating, for a given category, of linguistic and cultural capital (or the scholastic capital which is its transformed form at a given moment in the path through education) with the degree of relative selection the category derives from being represented in a given proportion at a given level of education and in a given type of course, would enable one to explain the differences which appear, at every moment in the history of the system, from one faculty to another and, within the same faculty, from one discipline to another, between the degrees and types of linguistic misunderstanding. Only by reference to the system of circular relations between the dominant representation of the hierarchy of disciplines and the social and scholastic characteristics of their public (which are themselves defined by the relation between the positional value of the different disciplines and the probability of the different trajectories for the different categories) can one give its true sociological meaning to the diminished value of disciplines which, like chemistry or the natural sciences in the Science Faculties or geography in Arts Faculties, admit the higher proportion of working-class students and the highest proportion of students whose secondary education was in the 'modern' sections or in second-order establishments, which are in any case the most probable routes for working-class students.

With this model it is also possible to account for the apparently paradoxical situation of a discipline like sociology, which is distinguished from the lowest-rated Arts disciplines by the social characteristics of its clientele, though it resembles them in terms of academic characteristics (cf figure 3). If, in Paris, sociology enrolls the highest proportion of upper-class students (68 percent as against 55 percent for Arts subjects as a whole), while disciplines like modern literature or geography, though close in terms of academic requirements as measured by previous performance, have the highest rates of working- or middle-class enrolment (48 and 65 percent, respectively, compared with 45 percent for Arts as a whole), the explanation is that under-selected upper-class students are able to find a substitute for their class ambitions in a subject which combines the advantages of a soft option with the glamour of fashion and which, unlike the courses leading to a teaching degree, does not sully the intellectual project with the vulgarity of vocational training.<sup>15</sup>

But one cannot fully account for the variations in the degree of linguistic harmony between the transmitters and the receivers without also integrating into the model of the transformations of the pedagogic relation the variations in the transmission level linked to the social and academic characteristics of the transmitters, i.e. the effects of the rapid expansion of the teaching profession and also the transformations the pedagogic message undergoes when, with the advent of disciplines like psychology and sociology, it betrays the divorce or forced marriage between the requirements of scientific discourse and the canons governing the traditional relation to language. The need for hurried recruitment, from age groups both less numerous and less schooled, of the teachers required to take more or less adequate charge of a public whose sharp expansion resulted from the conjunction, after 1965, of the general rise in enrolment rates with the increased post-war fertility rate, was bound to favour a systematic upward drift of teachers trained for a different task in the previous phase of the system. In such circumstances it might, at first sight, be supposed that the falling level of reception was automatically offset by the falling level of trans-

mission, since the probability of acceding to higher positions in the academic hierarchy has steadily risen for a given level of university consecration. In reality, quite apart from the fact that everything inclined the teachers recruited in accordance with the traditional norms to make use of linguistic misunderstanding as a way of avoiding the pedagogic problems posed by the quantitative and qualitative transformation of their public, the newly recruited teachers, anxious to show themselves worthy of their 'high-speed promotion', doubtless found themselves more inclined to adopt the outward signs of traditional mastery than to make the effort to adjust their teaching to the real competences of their public. In an institution where the reference group remains that of the teachers most authorized to speak 'magisterially', and where the hyperbolically refined hierarchy of appellations, subtle signs of status and degrees of power, is recalled on countless occasions, the lecturers and assistant lecturers, those most directly and continuously confronted with the needs of the students, have to take greater risks in order technically to satisfy those needs. Their attempts to abandon the traditional relation to language are particularly liable to be seen as 'elementary' because the whole logic of the system tends to make them appear as so many signs of their authors' incapacity to meet the legitimate definition of the role.

Thus, analysis of the transformations of the pedagogic relation confirms that every transformation of the educational system takes place in accordance with a logic in which the structure and function proper to the system continue to be expressed. The disconcerting multiplication of practices and statements which marks the acute phase of the crisis of the University must not incline one to the illusion of creative actors or acts springing forth *ex nihilo*: in the apparently freest declarations of position there is still expressed the structural efficacy of the system of factors which specifies the class determinisms for a category of agents, whether students or teachers, defined by its position in the educational system. On the other hand, to invoke the direct, mechanical efficacy of immediately visible factors, such as the rapid increase in student numbers, would be to forget that the economic,



Whatever social or academic criteria are applied, the position of sociology remains eccentric. Since every discipline, and more generally every educational institution, can be characterized by its position in the academic hierarchy (indicated by the level of previous academic attainment, the modal age of the corresponding population, and the university status of the teachers) and by its position in a social hierarchy (indicated by the class membership and rate of feminization of the corresponding publics and the social value of the outlets), it can be seen that disciplines with a high degree of *crystallization of their positional indices* in the two hierarchies can easily be ranked in a hierarchy running from the most consecrated disciplines, such as classics in Arts Faculties, with a high proportion of privileged-class students and previously highly successful students, to disciplines such as geography, whose low status is better understood when one sees that they combine weak indices in both dimensions.

Thus the model proposed enables one to characterize all the disciplines considered, since the academic criterion and the social criterion are sufficient to distinguish non-crystallized and crystallized disciplines and to establish a hierarchy among the latter. If a final criterion — sex ratio — is then introduced, disciplines occupying the same position in the academic and social dimensions, like sociology and art history, geography and Spanish, or philosophy and German, are seen to form particular configurations, each separated by sociologically pertinent distinctions (with the exception of English and psychology). The principle of the homologous oppositions between these disciplines is to be found in the division of labour between the sexes, which consigns women to the tasks of social relations (modern languages) or society relations (art history).

To understand the phenomenon as a whole, it is necessary to think of the system of the disciplines (and more generally, the system of education) as a field structured by a centrifugal force inversely proportionate to the degree of academic success and a centripetal force proportionate to the inertia which an individual (more precisely, a category of individuals) is capable of counterposing to failure and elimination, depending on the ambitions socially defined as appropriate to his/her sex and class, i.e. depending on the modality proper to his/her sex and class ethos.

TABLE 8  
Disciplines crystallized in the two hierarchies (academic and social)

	High Classes		Middle		Low		Disciplines not crystallized			
	History	Philosophy	German	Modern Literature	English	Psychology	Spanish	Geography	Sociology	Art history
Academic hierarchy (rate of distinctions)	+	0	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Social hierarchy (proportion of upper classes)	+	+	0	0	0	0	-	-	+	+
Proportion of male students	+	+	+	-	0	-	-	+	+	-

In order to situate each discipline in the three hierarchies considered here, the following conventions have been adopted: (1) for the rate of distinctions, (-) 20-30%, (0) 30-40%, (+) 40-50% and above; (2) for the proportion of students from the upper classes, (-) 35-50%, (0) 50-60%, (+) 60-70% and above; (3) for the proportion of male students, (-) 15-25%, (0) 25-30%, (+) 30-40% and above.

TABLE 9

Rate of distinctions (%)	53	37	36	39	32	29	21	28	27	28	23
Percentage of upper classes	67	60	55	54	52	56	55	49	35	68	82
Percentage of male students	32	31	41	22	27	16	17	17	37	38	25
Statistical reference values (%)											

demographic or political events which pose the educational system question alien to its logic can only affect it in accordance with its logic:<sup>16</sup> at the same time as it destructures or restructures itself under their influence, it subjects them to a conversion conferring a specific form and weight on their efficacy. A situation of nascent crisis is an opportunity to discern the hidden presuppositions of a traditional system and the mechanisms capable of perpetuating it when the prerequisites of its functioning are no longer completely fulfilled. It is when the perfect attunement between the educational system and its chosen public begins to break down that the 'pre-established harmony' which upheld the system so perfectly as to exclude all inquiry into its basis is revealed. The misunderstanding which pervades pedagogic communication remains tolerable only so long as the school system is able to eliminate those who do not meet its implicit requirements and manages to obtain from the others the complicity it needs in order to function. Because we are dealing with an institution which can fulfil its essential function of inculcation only so long as a minimum of adequacy is maintained between the pedagogic message and the receivers' capacity to decode it, it is necessary to grasp the specifically pedagogic effects of the expansion of the public and scale of the institution, in order to discover, at the moment of the crisis arising from the breaking of that equilibrium, that the contents transmitted and the institutionalized modes of transmission were objectively adapted to a public defined at least as much by its social recruitment as by its small number. An educational system based on a traditional type of pedagogy can fulfil its function of inculcation only so long as it addresses itself to students equipped with the linguistic and cultural capital – and the capacity to invest it profitably – which the system presupposes and consecrates without ever expressly demanding it and without methodically transmitting it. It follows that, for such a system, the real test is not so much the number as the social quality of its public.<sup>17</sup> To the extent that it disappoints the unforeseen and untimely expectations of the categories of students who no longer bring into the institution the means of meeting its expectations, the educational system betrays the

fact that it tacitly demanded a public which could be satisfied with the institution because it satisfied the institution's demands from the outset: perhaps the Sorbonne has only ever been fully satisfactory for those who had no need of its services, like the *normaliens* of the *belle époque* who still fulfilled its secret law when elegantly denying it their seal of approval. In addressing a public ideally defined by the capacity – which they do not give – to receive what they do give, teachers unconsciously express the objective truth of a system which, in its heyday, enjoyed a public made to measure and which, in the phase of nascent disequilibrium, still provides its teachers with the technical and ideological means of concealing from themselves the growing distance between their real public and their putative public. When, by the loftiness of their discourse, they presuppose a public whose capacities for reception are distributed in a J-curve, i.e. in which the greatest number of listeners correspond to the speaker's maximum demands, teachers betray their nostalgia for the pedagogic paradise of traditional education where they could dispense with any pedagogic scruple whatever.<sup>18</sup>

To refuse to credit the growth of the public with an action working mechanically and directly, i.e. independently of the structure of the educational system, does not mean granting this system the privilege of an absolute autonomy which would enable it to encounter only those problems engendered by the logic of its functioning and its transformations. In other words, by virtue of its power of retranslation (correlative with its relative autonomy), the educational system cannot feel the effects of morphological changes and the social changes to which they correspond, except in the form of pedagogic difficulties, even if its agents are unable to pose for themselves in specifically pedagogic terms the pedagogic problems that are objectively posed for the system. It is in fact sociological analysis which formulates the difficulties arising from numerical growth as pedagogic problems, in treating the pedagogic relation as a relation of communication whose form and efficiency are a function of the correspondence between socially conditioned transmission levels and reception levels. Thus, it is in the discrepancy

between the educational system's implicit demands and the reality of its public that one can read both the conservative function of traditional pedagogy – i.e. non-pedagogy – and the principles of an explicit pedagogy which may be objectively demanded by the system without being automatically demanded in teachers' practice, because it expresses the contradiction of the system and contradicts its fundamental principles.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, empiricist interpretation of the relations observed which, under the appearance of fidelity to the real, would have limited itself to the apparent object, i.e. to a student population defined independently of its relation to the population eliminated, would have denied itself the possibility of systematically explaining the empirical variations. In order to escape the trap which the educational system sets in offering for observation only a population of survivors, we have had to extract from this preconstructed object the true object of research, i.e. the principles by which the school system selects a population whose pertinent properties, as it moves through the system, are increasingly the effect of the system's own action of training, channelling and eliminating. Analysis of the social and academic characteristics of the receivers of a pedagogic message is therefore meaningful only if it leads to the construction of the system of relations between, on one side, the school system conceived as an institution for the reproduction of legitimate culture, determining *inter alia* the legitimate mode of imposition and inculcation of academic culture, and, on the other side, the social classes, characterized, with respect to the efficiency of pedagogic communication, by unequal distances from academic culture and different dispositions to recognize and acquire it. There would be no end to an enumeration of the impeccable and irreproachable omissions to which the sociology of education is condemned when it studies separately the school population and the organization of the institution or its system of values, as if it were dealing with two substantial realities whose characteristics pre-existed their interrelation, committing itself by these unconscious autonomizations to fall back in the last resort on an explanation in terms of simple entities such the pupils' cultural

'aspirations' or parental 'motivation'. Only by constructing the system of relations between the educational system and the structure of the relations between the social classes can one genuinely escape these reifying abstractions and produce relational concepts, such as probability of enrolment, disposition towards school, distance from academic culture, or degree of selection, which integrate into the unity of an explanatory theory properties linked to class membership (such as ethos and cultural capital) and pertinent properties of school organization, such as, for example, the hierarchy of values implied by the hierarchy of establishments, sections, disciplines, diplomas or practices. Doubtless this interrelation is still only partial: insofar as it deals only with the pertinent features of class membership defined in its synchronic and diachronic relations with the school system treated *only* as a system of communication, this theoretical construction tends to treat the relations between the educational system and the social classes as simple relations of communication. But this methodological abstraction is also the precondition for grasping the most specific and best hidden aspects of those relations. It is through the particular manner in which it performs its technical function of communication that a given school system additionally fulfils its social function of conservation and its ideological function of legitimation.

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#### NOTES

1. A presentation of the instruments and main results of the inquiry on which the analyses which follow are based, can be found in P. Bourdieu, J.-C. Passeron and M. de Saint-Martin, 1965, 2. Seeking to grasp the variations in the aptitudes of the different categories of Arts students for the comprehension and use of language, we made use of different types of exercises so as to explore at once the different domains of linguistic competence, from the most scholastic to the most 'free', and the different levels of linguistic behaviour, from the compre-

hension of words in context to the most active form of word manipulation, that demanded by the formulation of definitions.

2. The fallacy of ignoring the properties which a population produced by a series of selections owes to this process would be less frequent if it did not express one of the most deep-rooted tendencies of spontaneous epistemology, namely the propensity towards a realist, static representation of the categories of analysis, and if it did not, moreover, find encouragement and ratification in mechanical use of multivariate analysis, which freezes a given state of a system of relations. To put an end to some of the objections aroused by those of our analyses which are based on systematically taking into account the effect of relative selection, we would doubtless have to go to the trouble of dismantling, in accordance with the analytical requirements of the methodological canon, the logical springs of the illusion which would merit a place in the catalogue of methodological errors under the typically methodological name of the 'multivariate fallacy'. If we abstain from the grim delights of that academic exercise, it is because a refutation which, even by way of a pastiche, adopted the outward signs of the methodological panoply would set yet another seal of approval on the dissociation of practice from reflection on practice which defines the methodological temptation; above all we refrain because sociology offers tasks less sterile than the full-scale denunciation of errors which would be less resistant to logical refutation if they were less necessary sociologically.

3. The names of the social classes have been translated as follows: *classes supérieures*, upper classes; *classes moyennes*, middle classes; *classes populaires*, working classes [trans.].

4. As examiners never tire of saying, 'the essential thing is that it should be well written'. Referring to the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* entrance examination, Celestin Bouglé wrote: 'It is clearly understood that, even in the history dissertation, which presupposes a certain amount of factual knowledge, the examiners must above all assess the qualities of composition and exposition' (*Humanisme, sociologie, philosophie, Remarques sur la conception française de la culture générale*, Travaux de l'Ecole normale supérieure, Hermann et Cie, 1938, p. 21). The *agrégation* and CAPES examiners' reports abound in such affirmations.

5. By contrast with the working classes, for whom over-selection is still the rule, craftsmen and private traders have benefited more from the broadening of the social base of university admissions (their representation rising from 3.8 percent in 1939 to 12.5 percent in 1959). This is doubtless an effect of the relative improvement in their standard of living, and is connected with the extension to that category of the middle-class attitude to education. So it is not surprising that, being severely selected but coming from backgrounds culturally no less disadvantaged, students from these categories should come off worst in all the tests: 40.5 percent of them score more than 12/20 in the definition test,

compared to 57 percent for the sons of senior executives, who score better results than students in all categories when they come from lycées and score the weakest results when they come from private secondary collèges, the sons of craftsmen and tradesmen remain in bottom place whether they have been to State or private schools.

6. Multivariate analysis shows that when allowance is made for the action of the other positive factors, the Parisian students still perform better than the provincials, and do so in each of the sub-groups. In Paris 79 percent of the students who have had the most classical secondary schooling, 67 percent of those who have come through the 'modern' section and 65 percent of those who have done Latin, score more than 12 in the definition test, as against 54, 45.5 and 42 percent, respectively, for the provincial students. It is also found that men and women alike, philosophers and sociologists alike, ex-lycée students and ex-collège [private school] students alike, all score better results in Paris than in the provinces.

7. The characteristics associated with elimination or survival in the system are not randomly distributed amongst individuals of the same class, but are themselves liable to be linked to social or cultural criteria differentiating sub-groups within a class. For example, student sons of manual workers are distinguished by a large number of secondary characteristics (social ones, such as the mother's educational level or the grandfather's occupation, and scholastic ones, such as their secondary school section) from female students in their age group belonging to the same social class. More precisely, the higher the educational level they reach, or, at a given level, the higher they are situated in the hierarchy of disciplines or establishments, the greater the number of these compensatory characteristics they exhibit. By the same token, at a given level of attainment, girls always exhibit more of these compensatory characteristics than boys from the same social class.

8. Another indication that knowledge of Greek and Latin does not in itself give any academic advantage is the fact that ex-lycée pupils, proportionately fewer of whom have done Greek and Latin than ex-private school pupils (25.8 percent as against 31 percent), nonetheless attain higher scores. Moreover, the group of ex-lycéens who have done neither Greek nor Latin perform better than those students who have done Greek and Latin but in private schools.

9. The pre-eminence of the classical sections was, not so long ago, still such that one could scarcely speak of 'guidance' [*orientation*] since the successive choices at the various crossroads of the school career were determined quasi-automatically by the degree of success measured according to a single, undisputed scale of values and since entry into the 'modern' section was perceived by everyone, including those concerned, as a relegation and a failure.

10. Whatever their secondary training, middle-class students regularly have the

weakest results (more than half of the test group scoring less than 12 in all cases).

11. *Propédeutique*: (1948-66) an intermediate one-year course between secondary schooling and the faculties; for the *classes préparatoires*, see Glossary (trans.).

12. The 'theories' sociologists invoke to explain the variations in student political attitudes according to their discipline would perhaps less often ignore the system of diachronic and synchronic relations concealed by membership in a discipline if the links between an intellectual training and political practice did not tend to appear immediately, especially to intellectuals and teachers who have a vested interest in believing and propagating belief in the omnipotence of ideas, as *the* explanatory relation par excellence. Few analyses of student movements written by sociologists and sociology teachers fail to attribute the 'revolutionary' dispositions of sociology students to the beneficent or malignant power of sociology teaching.

13. A similar pattern of development of educational opportunity, combining increased enrolment of all social classes with stability of the structure of disparities between the classes, can be observed in most European countries (Britain, Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden) and even in the USA (see OECD, *Development of Secondary Education: Trends and Implications*, 1969, pp. 78-80).

14. See below (Chapter 3) for a description of the mechanisms of deferred elimination which, despite increased working-class participation in secondary education, tend to perpetuate the gaps between the classes at the level of higher education.

15. If the language test (in which the 'sociologists' obtain systematically weaker results than the 'philosophers') were not sufficient proof that, at least in Paris, sociology is the privileged arena for the easiest form of upper-class student dilettantism, a reading of the statistics makes clear the paradoxical position this discipline occupies within the Arts Faculties. Thus, while in terms of the academic capital it requires, sociology is opposed to philosophy as modern literature is opposed to classics, its intake is socially higher than that of philosophy (68 percent upper-class students, as against 55 percent), whereas classics has a socially higher intake than modern literature, which, together with geography, is the most probable destination for working-class students from the 'modern' sections of secondary education (67 percent compared with 52 percent).

16. Explanation of the crisis in terms of the mechanical effects of morphological determinisms is doubtless so frequent only because it reactivates the metaphorical schemes of spontaneous sociology, such as the scheme which conceives the relation between an institution and its public as a relation between container and contained, with 'mass pressure' causing the structures to 'crack', especially when 'worm-eaten'.

17. While it is necessary to treat the educational system as a communication

system in order to grasp the specific logic of the traditional pedagogic relation and, therefore, of its breakdown, the model constructed by means of the methodological autonomization of the educational system must not be credited with the power to explain the totality of the social aspects of the crisis of the system, in particular everything that affects its function of reproducing the structure of relations between the social classes.

18. Once the variations in the structure of the distribution of competences are taken into account, the question of the optimizing of the pedagogic relationship can no longer be evaded. A public whose competences are distributed in a bell-shaped curve calls for pedagogic choices of different types depending on whether the transformations which affect it over the course of time are expressed in a displacement of the mode or a variation of the dispersion. A lowering of the mode requires the transmitter simply to lower the level of transmission, whether by a controlled increase in redundancy or by a systematic effort to deliver the code of the message in full within the message, through definition or exemplification. On the other hand, increased dispersion of competences tends, beyond a certain threshold, to pose problems which cannot be resolved simply by adjusting the transmission level, as is shown by the situation in certain scientific disciplines, where the growing dispersion of reception levels cannot so easily be masked by an agreement to misunderstand as it can in Arts Faculties.

19. This product of an analysis of the school system which the system's own evolution makes possible, i.e. a pedagogy explicitly aiming to secure the optimum adjustment between transmission level and reception level (each defined by both mode and dispersion), owes nothing to any ethical adhesion to a trans-historical, trans-cultural ideal of educational justice or any belief in a universal idea of rationality. If the implementation of the principles of this pedagogy cannot be taken for granted, this is because it would imply the institutionalization of a continuous testing of reception by both teachers and taught; and, more generally, because it would require all the social characteristics of the communication to be taken into account, in particular the unconscious presuppositions which teachers and taught owe to their social background and academic training. It would, for example, be a mistake to attribute virtues or vices to this or that technique of transmission or assessment (lectures or non-directive teaching, the dissertation or the multiple-choice test), since it is only in the complete system of relations between the content of the message, its place in the learning process, the functions of the training, the external demands bearing on the communication (urgency or leisure), and the morphological, social and academic characteristics of the public or the teaching corps, that the specifically pedagogic productivity of a technique can be defined.

## 2

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## THE LITERATE TRADITION AND SOCIAL CONSERVATION

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Our magistrates have understood this mystery. Their scarlet robes, the ermine in which they swaddle themselves, the palaces where they preside, all this august apparel was most necessary; and if doctors had no cassocks and scholars no four-cornered caps, no spreading, four-pieced robes, they would never have fooled the world, which cannot resist such authentic display. Only men of war have not disguised themselves in this way, because their role is indeed more essential: they establish themselves by force, the others with airs and graces.

Pascal,  
*Pensées*

The *skeptron* is passed to the orator before he begins his speech so that he may speak with authority (. . .). It is an attribute of the person who brings a message, a sacred personage whose mission is to transmit the message of authority.

E. Benveniste,  
*Indo-European Language and Society*

In highlighting the extent of the wastage of information which occurs in teacher-student communication, our intention of treating the pedagogic relation as a simple communicative relation so as to measure its informational efficiency brings out a contradiction forcing us to challenge the inquiry that has given rise to it.<sup>1</sup> Could the informative efficiency of pedagogic communication be so low if the pedagogic relation were reducible to a simple relation of communication? To put it another way, what are the particular conditions such that the relation of pedagogic communication can perpetuate itself even when the in-