APPENDIX

The Changing Structure of Higher Education Opportunities: Redistribution or Translation?

The 'democratization' of university admissions is one of those questions so closely integrated into an ideological problematic predetermining, if not the possible answers, at least the possible readings of those answers, that we hesitate to give so much as the appearance of intervening, even with scientific reasons, in a debate where scientific reason has so little place. It is amusing to note, for example, that those who were the first to proclaim the advent of 'democratization' without a scrap of statistical evidence or on the basis of hasty, tendentious comparison of simple percentages of the representatives of each social category in the student body,[1] are today eager to denounce as the effect of an ideological obsession any attempt to measure scientifically the changing structure of the chances of access to the various levels and types of education relative to social origin. For a full appreciation of this paradox, one needs to know that measurement of the evolution of educational opportunity over a sufficiently long period has only been possible since the Bureau Universitaire de Statistique began publishing statistical series broken down into relatively pertinent categories.[2] As opposed to simple manipulation of the levels of representation of the various categories of students within the whole student body (implicitly treated as an empire within an empire), construction of the objective probabilities of enrolment attached to the different social categories

requires us to relate the proportion of selection-survivors in each category to their category of origin as a whole. It therefore provides one of the most effective ways of empirically grasping the system of relations, at a given moment in time, between the education system and the structure of the social classes, and of measuring its transformation over a period of time.[3]

This construction is, at all events, the only means of avoiding the errors which result from autonomizing a population of survivors who owe their essential characteristics much less to the *social composition* of the group they constitute than to their objective relations with the category of which they are the scholastic representatives, relations which are expressed, for example, in the differential selection rates according to social class and sex.[4] More generally, it is only by systematically applying the *relational mode of thought* that one can avoid the error of seeing substantial attributes in the properties attached to a category, having failed to observe that the adequate significance of each of the terms of a relation (e.g. that between political positions and field of study) can only be fully established within the system of the relations which they cover and conceal. Consider, for example, the 'sociologists" literature on the role of sociologists in May 1968, or the naiveties that are inspired by the relatively high proportion of working-class students in Science Faculties, when this fact is not seen in relation to the privileged classes' quasi-monopoly on the major scientific grandes écoles, i.e. when the problem of social recruitment is not posed at the level of the whole system of science courses.

Vigilance against the temptation of treating the elements independently of the relations which constitute them into a system is particularly necessary when comparing different periods. Thus, to grasp the social significance of the different social categories' share in the different faculties or disciplines, one has to take into account the *position* this or that faculty or discipline occupies at a given time within the system of faculties or disciplines. Otherwise one succumbs to the illusions of monographic history which, implicitly arguing from the identity of the names to the substantial unity through time of the

corresponding institutions or features, is bound to compare the incomparable and to fail to compare elements which, though incomparable when apprehended in and for themselves, constitute the true terms of comparison because they occupy homologous positions in two successive states of the system of educational institutions.[5]

For the benefit of those who conclude from the growth in the total number of students in higher education that there has been a 'democratization' of faculty intake, it must be pointed out that this morphological phenomenon may correspond to a perpetuation of the status quo or even, in certain cases, to a decline in the representation of the disadvantaged classes[6] as well as to a broadening of the social base of admission. An increase in the rate of schooling of a particular age group can in fact take place to the almost exclusive advantage of the social categories who were already the most schooled, or, at least, in proportion to the previous distribution of inequalities in schooling. More generally, expanded enrolment is the resultant of factors of several different orders: while, in France, the increased number of students reflects (at least since 1964) both the greater strength of the cohorts (following the post-1946 rise in birth rates) and the rise in the enrolment rate of the 18-plus age group, the distribution of this overall rate among the enrolment rates of the different socio-occupational categories is likely to have changed much less than the constant rise in the overall rate of higher education enrolment would lead one to suppose.

More precisely, in order to get a numerical approximation to the structure of the socially conditioned chances of university entrance, and especially in order to analyse the evolution of this structure over time, it is desirable to interrelate the whole membership of a socially defined category of students with the whole membership of the cohort of young people of the same age endowed with the same social characteristics. An increase in the proportion of students from a particular social category may reflect not the increased likelihood of adolescents from that category entering higher education, but a simple change in the numerical weight of that category in the active population. This is why calculation of the probability of higher education

entry according to socio-occupational category of origin, sex, or any other criterion provides the most accurate formulation of the order of magnitude of the inequality of socially conditioned educational opportunities and their range.

The table of the likelihood of access to higher education (table 10) revealed, in 1961-62, considerable disparities between the different social categories. Thus, a farm worker's son had a 1.2 percent chance of entering higher education, and the son of an industrialist a better than even chance. This measure of the range of inequalities shows that at that time the educational system tended purely and simply to eliminate working-class youngsters from access to university education.

Between 1962 and 1966, the chances of access to higher education rose for all social categories. But if 'democratization' is taken to mean what it always implicitly suggests, namely the process of equalization of educational opportunities for children from the different social categories (perfect equality of opportunity presupposing that all subcategories should have a rate of opportunity equal to the overall rate of enrolment for that age group), then the empirically ascertained increase in the chances of all categories does not in itself constitute a sign of 'democratization'.

Furthermore, in order to be sociologically rigorous, analysis of the evolution of the structure of chances presupposes that one should also take into account the social significance of the evolution of that structure as a whole. Restricting ourselves to the extreme cases, we observe that the chances of access to higher education for workers' sons more than doubled over this period, whereas the chances of senior executives' sons were multiplied by only 1.6; but it is obvious that the doubling of a very low rate of probability does not have the same significance or the same social effects as the doubling of a rate thirty times greater. For an accurate assessment of the social consequences of these numerical changes which, as the graph shows, amount to an *upward translation*[7] of the structure of the educational chances of the different social classes (see figure 2, p. 92), one would strictly speaking have to be able to establish the *thresholds* which, in the different

TABLE 10
Trend of Educational Opportunities According to Social Origin and Sex
Between 1961-62 and 1965-66

Father's socio-occupational group	Objective chances (probability of access)		Conditional probability											
			Science		Arts		Law		Medicine		Pharmacy			
Year	1961-62	1965-66	1961-62	1965-66	1961-62	1965-66	1961-62	1965-66	1961-62	1965-66	1961-62	1965-66		
Farm workers														
M	1.2	3.0	44.0	53.3	36.9	26.4	15.5	16.3	3.6	3.3	0	0.5		
F	1.0	2.3	26.6	33.7	65.6	55.4	7.8	8.6	0	3.3	0	1.2		
Combined	*1.1*	*2.7*	*34.7*	*45.0*	*50.0*	*38.0*	*12.5*	*12.0*	*2.8*	*3.3*	*0*	*0.8*		
Farmers														
M	3.8	8.5	44.6	45.0	27.2	24.4	18.8	20.3	7.4	7.9	2.0	2.2		
F	3.0	6.7	27.5	31.8	51.8	48.5	12.9	10.9	2.9	3.9	4.9	4.6		
Combined	*3.4*	*8.0*	*37.0*	*39.2*	*38.1*	*35.0*	*16.2*	*16.1*	*5.6*	*6.2*	*3.1*	*3.3*		
Manual workers														
M	1.5	3.9	52.5	50.0	27.5	24.8	14.4	17.8	5.0	6.6	0.6	0.6		
F	1.2	2.9	29.3	31.0	56.0	54.4	10.4	10.2	2.6	2.7	1.7	1.4		
Combined	*1.3*	*3.4*	*42.8*	*41.7*	*39.9*	*37.0*	*12.3*	*14.6*	*3.6*	*4.9*	*1.4*	*0.9*		
Office workers														
M	10.0	17.9	46.0	37.7	17.6	21.6	24.6	26.7	10.1	11.8	1.6	1.7		
F	7.8	14.3	30.4	22.3	44.0	53.4	16.0	14.3	6.1	5.7	3.5	4.0		
Combined	*9.0*	*16.2*	*39.4*	*31.1*	*28.6*	*35.5*	*21.1*	*21.5*	*8.6*	*9.2*	*2.3*	*2.7*		
Employers in industry and commerce														
M	14.6	25.0	40.3	37.2	24.9	17.1	20.5	26.6	11.0	15.4	3.3	3.3		
F	13.3	21.2	21.8	22.4	55.7	47.4	11.7	15.7	4.8	7.6	6.0	6.7		
Combined	*13.9*	*23.2*	*31.8*	*30.5*	*39.1*	*30.6*	*16.4*	*21.6*	*8.1*	*12.0*	*4.6*	*4.8*		
of which Industrialists														
M	52.8	74.0	28.5	34.3	25.2	11.6	22.0	32.3	20.0	17.8	3.9	4.0		
F	56.9	68.6	13.2	18.4	57.8	42.5	11.2	19.8	10.8	9.8	6.8	9.2		
Combined	*54.4*	*71.5*	*21.1*	*26.6*	*41.1*	*26.0*	*17.0*	*26.5*	*15.5*	*14.0*	*5.3*	*6.4*		
Middle management														
M	24.7	38.2	38.3	41.2	30.2	21.0	21.0	23.2	8.5	12.6	2.0	1.6		
F	25.4	31.4	22.2	25.5	61.9	52.6	9.1	11.3	3.4	6.4	3.4	3.9		
Combined	*24.9*	*35.4*	*30.5*	*34.0*	*45.6*	*37.2*	*15.2*	*18.0*	*6.0*	*9.8*	*2.7*	*2.7*		
Professions and senior executives														
M	38.7	61.0	40.0	35.7	19.3	13.7	21.8	26.8	14.7	20.1	4.2	3.5		
F	36.9	51.2	25.7	22.8	48.6	43.5	11.6	15.0	6.5	11.1	7.6	7.4		
Combined	*38.0*	*58.7*	*33.3*	*30.0*	*33.2*	*27.0*	*16.9*	*21.5*	*10.8*	*16.2*	*5.8*	*5.2*		

regions of the scale of probabilities, are likely to produce significant changes in the agents' systems of aspirations We know that to different objective probabilities correspond different sets of attitudes towards school and school-assisted social mobility. Even when they are not the object of conscious estimation, educational chances, which may be presented to intuitive perception in the group belonged to (neighbourhood or peer group), e.g. in the concrete shape of the number of known individuals who are still at school or already working at a given age, help to fix the social image of university education which is in a sense objectively inscribed in a determinate type of social condition. Depending on whether access to higher education is collectively felt, even in a diffuse way, as an impossible, possible, probable, normal or banal future, everything in the conduct of the families and the children (particularly their conduct and performance at school) will vary, because behaviour tends to be governed by what it is 'reasonable' to expect. Because quantitatively different levels of the rates of collective opportunity express themselves in *qualitatively* different experiences, a social category's collective chances constitute, through the process of internalization of the category's objective destiny, one of the mechanisms through which that objective destiny is realized.

Thus, rising from 52.8 to 74 percent, the likelihood of university entry for the sons of industrialists was multiplied by only 1.4; but the rate thereby attained (74 percent) places them at a point on the scale of probability to which there can only correspond an experience of the quasi-certainty of higher education, with the new advantages and new contradictions associated with that experience. It has to be borne in mind that a large number of industrialists' sons are enrolled in the classes préparatoires and the grandes écoles (hence are not counted in the figures used to calculate the rate); and allowance also has to be made for the fee-paying schools not included in these statistics but mainly frequented by members of this category. Thus it can be assumed that virtually all the sons of industrialists capable of attending courses are in fact in education well beyond the age of eighteen, and that the first signs of a class *over-enrolment* are beginning to appear.

In short, through the general increase in rates of probability of access to university, the evolution of the structure of educational opportunities between 1962 and 1966 consecrated the cultural privileges of the upper classes. Indeed, for three categories (sons and daughters of industrialists, sons of senior executives), the chances of access were equal to or greater than 60 percent, not counting the students in the grandes écoles. For a senior executive's son in 1961-62, continued education after the baccalauréat was a probable future; in 1965-66 it was a typical future. By contrast, the increase in the probabilities of access for working-class children has not been sufficient to lift them decisively out of the region of objective chances where the experience of resignation is shaped, or, exceptionally, the experience of the 'wonderboy', miraculously saved by the School. The fact that a manual worker's son has a 3.9 percent chance of going to university, instead of 1.5 percent, is not sufficient to modify the image of higher education as an unlikely, if not 'unreasonable' future, and one that is, so to speak, unlooked for. As for the middle classes, it is probable that certain fractions (especially primary-school teachers and junior Civil Servants) have reached a threshold where higher education tends to appear as a normal possibility and where the image of education ending with the baccalauréat is tending to fade.

In other words, the conception of education so long accepted by the upper classes, in which the baccalauréat is simply a ticket to higher education (stated negatively in the formula, 'the *bac* means nothing') is tending to spread to the level of the middle classes: the image which formerly induced many to withdraw from education after the baccalauréat, especially the sons of middle-rank managerial staff and above all the sons of clerical workers, who confined their ambitions to overcoming the barrier that had held back their fathers' careers ('you can't do anything without the *bac*'), is tending to give way to the opposite image ('the *bac* gets you nowhere nowadays'), a conception founded, moreover, on real and realistic experience, given that the baccalauréat which has become the sine qua non for access to many jobs which the previous generation was able to reach 'by the back

door', i.e. very often after primary education, is no longer sufficient to ensure automatic accession to higher executive positions. One sees in this case how what is, to a large extent, merely a translation of aspirations can be experienced by the individuals concerned as a radical change or, as those observers who refuse to mince their words would say, a 'mutation'.

But inequality in the chances of university entrance still only very partially expresses the socially conditioned educational inequalities. The table of conditional probabilities shows that male and female students of different origin are far from evenly distributed among the various disciplines. If social origin or sex acted as a differential sieve only for higher education, and if, on entering university, unequally selected contingents had equal chances of entering the different courses – in short, if the distribution of students among the various faculties depended only on individual 'vocations' and 'tastes' (considered as natural propensities unaffected by social determinisms) – then for a hundred students of a given origin, we should expect to find a distribution of conditional probabilities which, in each social category, purely and simply reflected the different disciplines' share of the total number of students, i.e. Arts 31.5, Science 32.4, Law 16.5, Medicine 15.6 and Pharmacy 4 percent in 1961-62 and, in the same order, 34.4, 31.4, 19.9, 10.7 and 3.5 percent in 1965-66. Compared with the random distribution which would result from the 'free play of natural faculties', the actual distribution exhibits a systematic distortion due, by and large, to the fact that students of less well-to-do origin gravitate towards the Arts and Science Faculties and students from the wealthier classes towards the Faculties of Law and Medicine. Indeed, this *social specialization* of the faculties tended to become more pronounced between 1961-62 and 1965-66.

In 1961-62, working-class students mainly went in for Arts or Science whereas a higher proportion of upper-class students took up Law or Medicine: 84.7 percent of the children of farm labourers, 75.1 percent of the children of farmers, and 82.7 percent of the children of manual workers were enrolled in Arts or Science; this was the case for

only 66.5 percent of the children of senior executives, and 62.2 percent of the children of industrialists (who were strongly represented in the scientific grandes écoles). In short, the lower a student's social origin, the more his access to higher education had to be paid for by a *restriction on choice*, even to the extent of the more or less compulsory *relegation* of the least favoured categories into Arts or Science. The evolution of conditional probability rates between 1962 and 1966 shows that the distribution remained virtually unchanged, with the different social categories ranged in the same hierarchy with respect to the 'choice' of Arts or Science subjects. The higher proportion of law students in the overall number is reflected for all socio-occupational categories in a decline in the conditional likelihood of studying Arts or Science subjects but this decline is particularly marked in the case of the higher categories. Whereas in 1966 the farm workers' children had an 83 percent chance of enrolling in Arts or Science, the farmers' children 74.2 percent (0.9 percent less than in 1962) and the manual workers' children 79.3 percent (3.4 percent less), the children of senior executives now had only a 57 percent chance (9.5 percent less) and the industrialists' children 52.6 percent (9.6 percent less); thus the gap between the workers' children and the senior executives' children widened during this period from 15 to 22 percent.

If we look more closely at the figures for male students we find a decline in the likelihood of entering the Arts Faculty for all categories (except the sons of clerical workers) but the decline is much greater in the upper classes than in the working and middle classes. The rate of probability for workers' sons fell from 27.5 to 24.8 percent but for senior executives' sons from 19.7 to 13.7 percent and for industrialist's sons from 25.2 to 11.6 percent.

We know that access to secondary education was extended to new fractions of the working classes only at the cost of relegation into establishments or sections (e.g. the 'modern' stream) objectively situated at the bottom of the academic hierarchy, a relegation which channels them almost inevitably into the Science Faculties, as opposed not only to the other faculties but also to the scientific grandes écoles.[6]

And so it is not surprising that one finds an increased conditional probability for working-class students of enrolling in science, whereas upper-class students more frequently take up Law or Medicine. Thus the probability of Arts enrolment for farmworkers' sons decreased by 10.5 percent over this period, while the probability of their enrolling in Science rose by 9.3 percent. For senior executives' sons, on the other hand, the probability of Arts enrolment fell at the same time as the probability of Science enrolment (by 5.6 and 4.3 percent, respectively), while the probability of their doing Law or Medicine rose by 5 and 5.4 percent.

In general, for students from the working and middle classes (farm labourers, farmers, manual workers, clerical staff and middle management) the conditional probability of studying Law remained much the same; the highest increase was only 2.8 percent, for the middle-management category. But the chances increased considerably for the children of senior executives (4.6 percent), and especially for the children of industrialists. The same is true of Medicine: the chances of entry remained static or increased very slightly for working-class students but rose by 5.6 percent for upper-class students.

It may be concluded that the slight improvement in working-class children's chances of entering university has in a sense been offset by a strengthening of the mechanism tending to relegate the survivors into certain faculties (and this in spite of the reforms intended to 'rationalize' the organization of studies in the Faculties of Law and Medicine, which were put into effect during the period of this survey).

The principle of statistics interpretation that is implied and required in calculating the conditional probabilities relative to the different faculties only has to be applied to other internal differentiations of the educational system (e.g. those separating the disciplines within the same faculty [see figure 3, p. 96, and table 9, p. 98], and especially those opposing the grandes écoles, themselves rigorously hierarchized, to the system of faculties), in order to give one the means of grasping in the statistics measuring the evolution of the structure of the chances of access to a given level and type of education, what is perhaps the fundamental

law of the transformation of the relations between the educational system and the structure of the social classes. An approach which takes as its unit the individual student, ignoring the position that the establishment or course receiving him occupies in the overt or hidden hierarchy of the academic institution, misses the doubling-up of privilege stemming from the fact that the categories with the best chances of entering a given level of education are also the categories with the best chances of entering the establishments, sections or subjects conferring the best chances of subsequent success, both academic and social. Furthermore, such an approach cannot show that the translation of the structure of the probabilities of access to an educational system capable of exploiting pre-existing differentiations or creating new ones is necessarily accompanied by a continuous redefinition of the criteria of the academic and social rarity of academic credentials.[9] This systematic bias leads one to underestimate the educational system's capacity to neutralize the effects of a translation of the structure of opportunity, by means of a ramifying differentiation which conceals its own hierarchical structure, in other words, its capacity to set up in place of the black-and-white oppositions between admission and exclusion which characterized an earlier state of the system, the artfully contrived and shrewdly dissimulated gradations which run from full recognition of academic citizenship to the different shades of relegation.[10]

NOTES

1. These percentages are generally taken directly, without any thought for method, from statistics established in terms of categories disparate in time or space and referring to ill-defined or changing sub-sets of the student population. Thus, in an extreme case, one finds an article which settles the question of the democratization of education (reduced, by a play on words, to the question of

the social composition of the student body) on the basis of statistics which, for the sake of establishing chronological series, have to combine junior, middle and senior executives in a category termed 'civilian and military functionaries'; this breakdown is all the more casual in that it purports to back up an 'analysis' seeking to show the transition from a 'bourgeois intake' to an 'average intake'.

2. In 1963 we had to be content with calculating, for a single year the likelihood of entry to higher education and the conditional likelihood of entry to the different faculties in relation to social origin and sex (a calculation never previously made in this form). This was because until 1958 the statistics for the student body, by socio-occupational category of origin, by sex and by faculty, which were available for previous periods grouped together in the same category all civilian and military functionaries, regardless of rank. See P. Bourdieu and J.-C. Passeron, 1964, 1, pp. 15 ff. (table of probabilities) and pp. 139 ff. (note on the method used to construct the table).

3. Thus, as soon as the trend of the proportion of middle-class students in the student body is compared with the trend of the relative proportion of the middle classes in the French working population, it is immediately clear how much fiction there is in analyses which tend to interpret the slightly increasing weight of this category of students (identified by the father's occupation *at the time of university enrolment*) as an indication of the increased share of these classes in the benefits of higher education. Between 1962 and 1968 it was, in fact, precisely the most numerous and most representative categories of the middle classes which expanded most in the working population, i.e. + 34.2 percent for middle management as a whole (+ 67 percent for teachers and literary and scientific occupations) and + 26.4 percent for clerical staff, as against, for example, + 4 percent for employers in industry and commerce (– 1.9 percent for industrialists proper). *Economie et statistique*, no. 2, June 1969, p. 43.

4. For other examples, see above, Chapter 3, pp. 159-61.

5. Thus, for example, because the system of grandes écoles cannot be conceived outside the relations which link it to the other institutions of higher education, and because any particular school cannot be conceived outside its relations with the other schools, i.e. in abstraction from the position if occupies at a given moment in time within the system of the grandes écoles, a social history of the Ecole Polytechnique or the Ecole Normale Supérieure (more precisely, a history of the social backgrounds, the careers, or even the political and religious attitudes of their students) which ignored the position of each within the grandes écoles system, and therefore, everything stemming from their *positional value* in the structure of relations between the grandes écoles system and the power system, if only by virtue of the establishment of the Ecole Nationale d'Administration, would be quite as fallacious as a history of Saint-Cyr [the military college] which remained at the level of idiography and failed to notice that other

schools (e.g. the Agronomy Schools) are tending to take the place of Saint-Cyr in the system of functions fulfilled by the system of grandes écoles.

6. This hypothesis is not ruled out – at least for a particular type of education – even in an expanding school system and in a situation of economic growth. An indication of such a tendency is perhaps to be seen in the trend of Medical Faculty admissions.

7. 'Translation' – in the mathematical sense: a change of place without change of shape (trans.).

8. See M. de Saint Martin, 1968, 2.

9. The statistics on income relative to age on terminating education show that the economic profitability of an extra year's study rises sharply after the age-bracket approximately coinciding with the average age of entry to higher education, i.e. at an educational level from which the working classes are more or less totally eliminated. There is every reason to think that this threshold must have steadily risen as access to a given level of education lost its scarcity value because of the transposition of the structure of chances.

10. In this context, to leave out the grandes écoles – whose intake has tended to rise socially since the beginning of this century, the proportion of upper class students at the ENS increasing, for example, from 49 percent between 1904 and 1910 (or 1924-30) to 65.9 percent in 1966 on the Arts side, and from 36 percent between 1904 and 1910, to 49.6 percent between 1924 and 1930 and 67.6 percent in 1966 on the Science side – is to make a mistake out of all proportion to the numerical weight of their clientele, since these institutions, carrying the highest positional value in the educational system and even in the system of its relations with the power apparatus, are the virtual monopoly of the privileged classes.