Disputing about taste: Practices and perceptions of cultural hierarchy in the Netherlands

van den Haak, M.A.

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During the early stages of studying at the University of Amsterdam, I already became interested in the sociology of cultural taste, embodied by Pierre Bourdieu. Although I do not remember exactly what sparked this interest, it were certainly the lectures by Nico Wilterdink that I attended during my third year that greatly enlarged it and that made me switch from Urban to Cultural Sociology. Eventually, Nico would act as the supervisor of my Master’s thesis on film education for secondary school pupils. I was delighted when, a few years later, he agreed to help me with my application for a PhD position. We asked Giselinde Kuipers, at the time working at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, to join the team, and she happily accepted. We submitted the research proposal to NWO late 2005.

Nico and Giselinde formed an excellent supervision couple during all stages of my research. Their encouragements and patience made me persevere with the highly structured sample when response rates were low, and their critical feedback significantly improved the manuscript. They both took the time to read my draft chapters very carefully and to discuss them at great length, which is not self-evident. During our – always pleasant – conversations, they complemented each other perfectly. Nico excelled in close reading, which resulted in many detailed comments on specific sentences or on the exact meaning of Bourdieu. I am grateful that he continued his supervision after his retirement. Giselinde focused more on the nature and structure of the main argument and on the broader interpretations of empirical findings. Furthermore, she actively encouraged me in broadening my academic network. I hope to keep benefiting from their knowledge and ideas in future projects.

While working on my PhD proposal in my spare time and awaiting the result of my grant application, I had some wonderful years working part-time at the secretariat of the Walborg (GGZ Buitenamstel). I want to honour my former colleagues by using their first names as the pseudonyms for my respondents. Naturally, any resemblance between respondents and ex-colleagues is purely coincidental.

I sincerely want to thank the ninety anonymous respondents. I am very grateful to everyone who was willing to receive me in their homes (or, in some cases, to meet at other places) for one or two hours and to tell me all about their cultural taste. With all of them, I had enjoyable conversations. I regret that those who indicated that they wanted to hear about the results had to wait for a much longer time than I estimated. I would also like to thank the five acquaintances with whom I conducted pilot interviews to test the questionnaire. Furthermore, I want to thank all my relatives, friends and colleagues who helped me find respondents in the final stage of the data collection, when I had to fill in the last empty spaces in the quota sample.
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Lately, a newspaper quoted a PhD who recently obtained his doctorate, who could not imagine writing a dissertation while being single, without anyone to comfort you or to listen to your angry fits about academic practices. Well, I can tell you. That is what office mates are for! For a long time, I was lucky to share an office with Ana Miškovska Kajevska and Anick Vollebergh. I not only shared the hard times with them, but also – mostly – a lot of fun. Ana, thank you for your often explicit love, wisdom, enthusiasm and, of course, your humour and (loud) laughs. Anick, I still miss our daily conversations on whichever subject and our brainstorm on each other’s findings. I hope to continue seeing both of you in the future, wherever in the world you are. I am very grateful you want to act as paranymphs at my defence.

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