

1. A response to “Positionality, Collaboration and Participatory Politics”

Reading Bourdieu at McDonalds: A sketch in two sentences.

The 2010 reissue of the massive sociological tome, *Distinction*, complete with data collected from the original surveys Bourdieu and his team conducted throughout France in the 1960s and with footnotesⁱ rendered in bold as separate paragraphs in the text, is at once a strong argument for the class-based distribution of “embodied cultural capital” (63) as the determinant of, and the ability to distinguish, social classes, and itself a cultural artifact, a work full of references to Kant and Debussy, and with sentences like this one that, while obtuse and impenetrable, contain logical and valid apprehensions of fact, that act as an “ideal weapon in strategies of distinction” (59) insofar as the reader, when perusing the volume in public, sends out a signal to everyone who can see the cover that they are engaged in a process of employing a “symbolic good” (59) as a weapon of auto-didactic “cultural transmission” (15) which has the effect of positioning the observer as “a foil, a negative reference point, in relation to which all aesthetics define themselves, by successive negations.” (50).

ⁱ **The McDonalds at the corner of Bathurst and Dundas in Toronto is an establishment that undeniable serves the cheapest coffee in the *quartier* and also serves food that can be considered amongst “the heaviest, grossest and most fattening” (174) of the choices people make about their breakfast, even assuming, as Bourdieu does, that they are not exercising “absolute freedom of choice,” but a “forced choice” (173) based on their financial positions, yet is also a site where my fellow restaurant-goers “explicitly challenge the legitimate art of living,” which is “most recognized at the highest levels of the social hierarchy,” as a “new ethic of sobriety for the sake of slimness,” (175) a political act of resistance that nonetheless does nothing to ease my discomfort at reading such a pretentious book, here, in public.**