Emerging Elitism on Facebook:
An Investigation into Social Distinction among the Young

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Abstract

This research paper presents an empirical investigation into the taste practices of young individuals on Facebook. This includes an examination of Pierre Bourdieu's main thesis of social distinction as outlined in La distinction *and its applicability to contemporary times. The argument is developed that a Kantian aesthetic functions as a guiding principle for practices of "legitimate" taste, thereby confirming mechanisms of social distinction in a Bourdieusian sense. This paper further argues that the principle of* Kantian aesthetics *applies particularly to displays of cosmopolitan aesthetics among young, well-educated individuals on Facebook. In this way, it is argued that mechanisms of legitimacy, convertibility, and domination were identified during the field observation, supporting the contemporariness of cultural capital in a digital field and Bourdieu's thesis of social distinction.*

Keywords: social distinction, Kantian aesthetic, cultural capital, cosmopolitan taste

Aufkommender Elitismus auf Facebook:
Eine Untersuchung Sozialer Abgrenzung bei jungen Leuten

Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Untersuchung präsentiert eine empirische Untersuchung zu Geschmackspraktiken junger Menschen auf Facebook. Dies beinhaltet eine Untersuchung von Pierre Bourdieus These zur sozialen Abgrenzung, dargelegt in seinem Buch Die Feinen Unterschiede *und dessen Anwendbarkeit in der heutigen Zeit. Es wird argumentiert, dass eine* kantische Ästhetik *als Leitprinzip für Praktiken „legitimen" Geschmacks fungiert und damit Mechanismen der sozialen Distinktion im Bourdieusi'schen Sinne bestätigt. Das Papier argumentiert weiter, dass das Prinzip der kantischen Ästhetik insbesondere für die Darstellung kosmopolitischer Ästhetik unter jungen, gut ausgebildeten Menschen auf Facebook gilt. Auf diese Weise wird argumentiert, dass während der Feldbeobachtung Mechanismen der Legitimität, Konvertierbarkeit und Dominanz identifiziert wurden, welche die Zeitgenossenschaft des kulturellen Kapitals in einem digitalen Feld und Bourdieus These der sozialen Distinktion unterstützen.*

Schlagwörter: soziale Abgrenzung, kantische Ästhetik, kulturelles Kapital, kosmopolitischer Geschmack

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1. Introduction: Social Class and Taste

Recently, topics of social inequality have reentered the public debate in Western countries. The subject's topicality is underscored by the popularity of literature dealing with social inequality. These include the best-sellers *Returning to Reims* by Didier Eribon (2009), *Die Abstiegsgesellschaft* by Oliver Nachtwey (2016), or the influential book *Capital in the 21st Century* by Thomas Piketty (2012). In addition, the issue of social inequality is often linked to an increasing populism in the Western world and used as an explanation for its emergence. Growing inequality, so the claim, has led to a significant portion of society being left behind who then moved into the arms of populists. However, such unified explanations quickly dissipate when one raises questions about how, for whom, and by what means inequality has actually increased: disparate income distribution, stagnant development of real wages with increasing productivity, unequal access to education or means of production. None of these variables seems to satisfactorily capture the dimension of social inequality. On the contrary, they leave room for a euphemistic description of developments.

Therefore, in addition to quantifiable explanations, a cultural analysis of the phenomena of social inequality seems promising. This is why I have examined in what ways inequality is marked and thus created and maintained on a cultural level. With this approach, I draw on Bourdieu's concepts of "social distinction" and "cultural capital." In order to have an impact on people, inequality must first be made recognizable, that is, marked, and brought into a hierarchical order. The mechanisms of these marking processes are described in detail by Bourdieu in his book *Distinction* (1979), in which he introduces a cultural dimension to the understanding of social hierarchy that deviates from the traditional, materialistic custom (Savage 2000: 8).

Bourdieu argues that inherited cultural capital is crucial to the positioning of an individual in the social hierarchy. A simplified example of these mechanisms is illustrated by the portrayal of a child who is accustomed to classical music at home and who can contribute in a differentiated manner to music lessons at school. However, a key issue for understanding social inequalities is to understand the extent to which Bourdieu's mechanisms of social distinction are still relevant at a time when access to education and cultural goods has become more permeable.

Toward the end of the 20th century, *Distinction* was increasingly "criticised for being historically outdated" (Hjellbrekke et al. 2015: 187). The function of taste was seen as being too exclusively linked to mechanisms of social elitism and challenged for portraying a "sociological reductionism" (Goblot/Halbwachs quoted in Coulangeon/Duval 2015: 3). It is argued that Bourdieu is unable to sufficiently address the influences on culture from recent social changes in the sphere of education, globalization, and digitization (Holt quoted in Prieur/Savage 2015: 308). Culture, according to the overarching argument, has become emancipated from its functionalist role of creating social classes and has increasingly come to reflect diversified and individualistic lifestyles. This notion of culture is often claimed to apply particularly to the lifestyles of younger generations, who have benefited from the expansion of the education system and grown up with the culturally egalitarian technologies of the internet (Duval 2015: 106). Significant to this trend of argumentation has been the work of Richard Peterson, who introduced the concept of "cultural omnivorousness" to the debate about class and taste practices (Peterson 1992: 243). This concept is derived from the observation that "the occupational groups at the top are […] likely to be high on liking […] non-elite forms" of music tastes (ibid.: 249). This finding has been interpreted as a challenge to the work in *Distinction*, as accordingly "the high status groups should be exclusive in their taste and not even like the non-elite music forms" (ibid.: 248).

In times when economic inequality in Western societies has regained the proportions of the late 19th century (Piketty 2014: 418), the question emerges whether culture in the form of taste practices has indeed become sufficiently emancipated from its elitist function to be justifiably omitted from playing a role in mechanisms of social hierarchization. The goal of this paper is to answer this question. Therefore, my research question is: How can the taste practices of young adults on Facebook be understood to perpetuate mechanisms of social distinction in a Bourdieusian sense? To this end, I will analyze the compositions of Facebook profiles of individuals with different levels of education in order to investigate any interconnection between education, taste practices, and cultural capital.

As a consequence, the structure of this paper will be to first provide a theoretical context for the research question at hand. This includes both an overview of

recent research aiming to apply Bourdieu's theories to current forms of cultural practices (1.1), as well as a summary of Bourdieu's main concepts constituting cultural capital (1.2 and 1.3). Second, the choice of Facebook as a field and the method adopted will be explained. This includes a presentation of related ethical challenges (2.1), the procedure developed for identifying the material for analysis (2.2), and subsequently the analysis of the material (2.3). The third chapter then discusses the research findings by offering a critical reflection on the degree of significance of the analysis (3.1), as well as a concluding outlook for further research (3.2).

1.1 Existing Research: Where to Search for Cultural Capital?

This work contributes to recent research focusing on sociodemographic factors and aspects of class in an online context. The work of Reiss and Tsvetkova (2019) demonstrated a continuing value of Bourdieu's theory for empirically investigating the interconnection of class and taste practices. By adopting quantitative methods, they showed observers were able to assess strangers' level of education by looking at their Facebook profile pictures. In comparable fashion, the scholar Lindell (2017) used MCA data analysis to highlight the relevance of class aspects for the formation of distinct digital news repertoires, thereby challenging "the psychological and individualistic bias in contemporary research on news media use" (1). While such research is capable of making representative statements, their focus is limited to particular aspects of lifestyle. A number of scholars concerned with digital inequality have argued for a stronger focus on the *ways* in which people engage with digital technology in order to mobilize Bourdieu's theories toward a more general understanding of lifestyles (Selwyn 2004; van Deursen/van Dijk 2014).

Although not explicitly concerned with digital culture, recent research in the field of cultural class analysis is distinguished precisely by a shift away from a focus on *objects* of taste preferences toward a focus on *modes* of relating to such objects. The scholars Prieur and Savage (2015) argue for the contemporariness of Bourdieu's work and propose the concept of "emerging cultural capital." Here, the concept describes "a link between this kind of 'knowing' appropriation of culture and a certain 'cosmopolitan' orientation" (Prieur/Savage 2015: 310). By focusing

on modes of cultural practices, they claim to "witness […] a sophisticated use of what Bourdieu […] named strategies of condescension," thereby opposing Peterson's thesis of omnivorousness "as there is absolutely not an 'anything goes' attitude about […] cultural choices" (ibid.: 310, 309). When focusing on modes of expression within the context of digital culture, the concept of "second-level divide" appears valuable. The main premise of this approach is that even if two structurally segregated groups of internet users have equal access to online resources—thereby having overcome the "first-level divide"—their *use* of the technology will be different according to their skills with respect to the medium at hand (Mihelj et al. 2019: 1470). The second-level divide thus points to the cultural dimension for mechanisms of social inequality and hence emphasizes the need for qualitative research to account for this.

Some scholars in the field of new media analysis have mobilized Bourdieu's social class concepts in such qualitative manners. Often, such research has demonstrated the predictability and value of Bourdieu's theories for analyzing digital cultural practices (Reiss/Tsvetkova 2019). At the same time, such research appears to apply Bourdieu's concepts with a variety that risks conveying a consistent understanding of the dynamics accounting for social inequality. The scholar Lambert (2015) has adopted ethnographic methods to investigate practices of "social capital" on Facebook. While the participants of the study were dominantly "White, well educated and middle class" (ibid.: 7), Lambert observed how social capital was formed by negotiating intimacy according to "what they believe are the norms of appropriate public intimacy" (ibid.: 10). In detecting a normative consistency among the participants' idea of intimacy, Lindell points to skills for forming social capital online that are distributed unevenly in society. As a consequence, he proposes the term "intimacy capital" as a concept (ibid.: 1). In highlighting the performative aspects within online communication, Lindell's observations resonate with the observations presented in this paper. However, the proposal to conceptualize a new form of "capital" in a Bourdieusian sense appears misleading. In point of fact, the aspect of performance is already well accounted for by Bourdieu's original concept of "cultural capital." This argument is further elaborated in chapter 2.3.2.

While Lambert misses an appropriate applicability of the concept of "cultural capital," Nissenbaum

and Shifman (2015) appear to overstretch its applicability. With a grounded analysis, the authors explore "the workings of memes as cultural capital in web-based communities" (ibid.: 1). In having identified the functionality of memes for marking a person's status in online communities, the authors claim to have identified aspects of legitimacy and cultural capital at play. While it is plausible for memes to function as cultural capital in general, Nissenbaum and Shifman's conclusion appears to fall short as they do not account for the functioning of memes beyond the scope of a specific online community. The convertibility of cultural capital into other forms of capital and its "wider recognition as good taste," however, is a crucial component to Bourdieu's formation of social class (Prieur/Savage 2015: 316).

A significant amount of the research dedicated to dealing with social inequalities appears to struggle with the transference of Bourdieu's concepts from the 1960s to the continuously diversifying lifestyles of the present. Therefore, going forward, a clear understanding of the concept of "cultural capital" is essential. As Bourdieu himself famously never provided a definition of the concept, it is up for debate what mechanisms depict the core of social distinction. In this paper, the argument is developed that the *Kantian aesthetic* stands at the center of formation processes of cultural capital and thereby presents a guiding principle for practices of social distinction. Clarifying the principle of the Kantian aesthetic can thus guide future research in pinpointing cultural mechanisms of social segregation. Bourdieu himself draws regularly on the Kantian aesthetic in his argumentation but does not emphasize its centrality explicitly. However, as this paper attempts to show, the Kantian aesthetic describes in a precise manner the underlying principle of the formation of social classes. The reason for this is that the Kantian aesthetic contains a metaphysical ideal that is inherently elastic and not bound to material characteristics. As such, it serves as a principle of distinction for the most privileged social group within a space constituted of relative relations: the *social space*.

1.2 Bourdieu's Notion of Culture and Class

The structure of social space is understood by Bourdieu to be continuous. It is constituted by the relative distribution of resources in society and lacks in itself any clear boundaries. Consequently, social classes

"do not emerge 'automatically' from this space […] [but] have to be made, they have to be constructed as social groups" (Flemmen 2013: 328). Bourdieu argues that what is needed for the formation of social classes are cultural practices of entitlement to establish the social domination of certain groups over others (Savage 2015: 46). Central to these practices of entitlement is the acquisition of cultural capital, which is understood as "distinctive forms of knowledge and ability," presenting "legitimate ways" to practice (Bennett 1984/2010: xviii). The term is instructive as it describes mechanisms of convertibility and domination traditionally reserved for economic capital. At the center of cultural capital stands "personal" taste, meaning that its formation is heavily determined by the conditions in which people acquire their tastes (Bourdieu 1979/2010: 4). Bourdieu thus points to "the very close relationship linking cultural practices […] to educational capital […] and […] social origin" and develops the argument that children's success in school and university depends significantly on the taste practices acquired by their family (ibid.: 5).

The way cultural capital perpetuates mechanisms of social reproduction is by means of social distinction. Central to these mechanisms is the power to define what constitutes legitimate taste and what does not. This power is confined only to a privileged minority of people at the top end of the social spectrum:

"It goes without saying that the social classes are not equally inclined and prepared to enter this game of refusal and counter-refusal; and that the strategies aimed at transforming the basic dispositions of a life-style into a system of aesthetic principles […] are in fact reserved for members of the dominant class, indeed the very top bourgeoisie." (Bourdieu 1979/2002: 57)

Crucial to understanding social distinction is therefore the circumstance that the dominant class continuously *defines* and *redefines* legitimate practices of taste according to characteristics that only they themselves possess the means to fulfill (ibid.: 258).

1.3 The Kantian Aesthetic

According to Bourdieu, characteristics of legitimate taste follow a common principle by resembling the ideal of a *Kantian aesthetic*. This ideal is characterized by linking a lack of necessity with a higher morality. Accordingly, legitimate taste practices stand in opposition to characteristics of "ordinary urgencies" (Bourdieu 1979/2002: 54): "The pure aesthetic is rooted in

an ethic, or rather, an ethos of elective distance from the necessities of the natural and social world" (ibid.: 5). Hence, detachment obtains the quality of virtue and is synonymously understood with the capacity of the "pure gaze" (ibid.: 21). According to Kant, the pure gaze describes an "acquired disposition" to differentiate and appreciate "'that which pleases' from 'that which gratifies', and, more generally, […] to separate […] 'the interest of the senses', which defines the 'agreeable', […] from 'the interest of Reason', which defines 'the Good'" (ibid.: 466, 41). Hence, Kant's principle of pure taste can be described as "nothing other than a refusal, a disgust—a disgust for objects which impose enjoyment and a disgust for the crude, vulgar taste which revels in this imposed enjoyment" (ibid.: 488). This disgust is directed at popular taste. The severity of this disgust is exemplified when Kant writes that "taste 'that requires an added element of charm and emotion for its delight […], has not yet emerged from barbarism'" (Kant 1790/1952: 65 quoted in Bourdieu 1979/2002: 42).

In this way, legitimate taste becomes a measure for judging "moral excellence and a measure of the capacity for sublimation which defines the truly human man" (Bourdieu 1979/2002: 6). It is by connecting this moral dimension of taste preferences with conditions of negative economic necessities—"a life of ease"—that cultural capital supports social hierarchization and mechanisms of social domination (ibid.: 5).

Bourdieu argues that the function of the Kantian aesthetic as a guiding principle becomes most apparent in the appreciation of paintings and photographs. He describes how people from the higher social spectrum, when observing pieces of art, "introduce[…] a distance, a gap […] vis-à-vis 'first-degree' perception, by displacing the interest from the content […] to the form" (Bourdieu 1979/2002: 34). Consequently, the higher the level of an individual's education "the greater is the proportion of respondents who assert the autonomy of the representation with respect to the thing represented" (ibid.: 35). By contrast, the judgments of "working-class people, who expect every image to fulfill a function, […] are always responses to the reality of the thing represented or to the functions the representation could serve" (ibid.: 41). In this way the judgment by socially lower positioned people gives content priority over form, reflecting a certain aesthetic that sees the value of a photograph as justified by the object photographed or by the possible use of the photographic image (ibid.: 41). With regard

to the Kantian aesthetic, this is seen as confirming a lower degree of personality due to its "form of investment, a sort of deliberate 'naivety', ingenuousness, good-natured credulity" (33). In this way, the difference between object and form-oriented appreciation attains conformity with the polarity between pragmatic necessity and seamless detachment of the Kantian aesthetic.

As I will present in this paper, the Kantian aesthetic proves to be a predictive principle for taste practices of highly educated people and people who aspire to be so. My observations indicate that the compositions of the Facebook profiles of individuals who are presumed to be higher educated differ significantly from the profiles of individuals presumed to be lower educated. Further, my findings accordingly show that these differences are based on an orientation of highly educated individuals in line with the Kantian aesthetic. On this spectrum, my observations have led to a differentiation between displays of abstract *connectedness* and pragmatic *belongingness*. As I will argue, this opposition correlates with research by the scholars Prieur and Savage, who identified a division among young adults between *cosmopolitan* and *local* taste preferences with regard to their levels of education. I will conclude that my observations support an understanding of taste practices on Facebook as cultural capital due to their conformity with characteristics of *legitimacy, convertibility,* and *domination.*

2. Facebook as a Field of Taste Practices

The value of Facebook as a field for investigation derives from two major characteristics. First, Facebook supports a variety of cultural practices and forms of engagement, ranging from contents including music, videos, pictures, news articles, and gifs, information regarding education, place of living, relationship status, and events, to taste preferences about users' favorite bands, movies, TV series, artists, public figures, companies, organizations, groups, etc. Secondly, Facebook is one of the most popular social network site among the younger generations, so that in 2016, 70% of people aged between 14 and 29 stated that they used Facebook weekly (Frees/Koch 2016: 435). The former characteristic offers a dense network of taste practices that—materialized in text—are valuable for analysis. Consequently, it is the density of those practices and the complexity with which they are interlinked that requires a combination of metho-

dological approaches. As cultural researcher Kaspar Maase (2019) points out, when dealing with elements of popular culture, one needs a large and diverse tool-box, as the cultural practices are simply too complex and valuable to allow large portions of them to fall through the grids of purposeful generalization (19). In accordance with this plea, Reiss and Tsvetkova (2019) argue that a multimodal analysis appears promising for empirical research on digital inequality as it is able to "produce a more realistic and complex evaluation than the isolated examination of pictures we did" (16). Consequently, this paper combines principles from netnography (Kozinets 2002, 2010) and grounded theory (Glaser 1998) with an analysis according to objective hermeneutics (Wernet 2009).

Netnographic reasoning allowed me to gain access to the field of Facebook and move purposefully through the network, identifying posting practices in relation to cultural capital. As the analysis of this paper is focused on posting practices of people with different levels of education, the observations were conducted within the network site of Facebook. This has the advantage that the analysis does not rely on subject testimonies. As the "very salience of class struggles over distinction […] explains why it is so difficult to […] be explicitly named" (Savage 2000: 107), an unmediated confrontation with cultural practices of taste appears appropriate.

The grounded analysis of the contrasting groups was further contextualized by assessments from semi-structured observation, aiming to identify repeated patterns (Kozinets 2002). According to this method, categories appear inductively in the process of comparative analysis. At the same time, existing theoretical concepts of research in the field of cultural class analysis influenced the interpretation of the observed material. This aspect was incorporated into the research in accordance with the constant comparative methodology process (Nissenbaum/Shifman 2015; Fram 2013).

As social action is constituted along social rules, the process of observation also describes a recourse to my own knowledge of the rules, on account of my own engagement with Facebook over a period of some years. This principle is a prerequisite for an analysis according to objective hermeneutics (Wernet 2009: 13). Objective hermeneutics understands a world structured by meaning to be constituted by language and thus materialized in text (ibid.: 11). Accordingly, texts of any kind are understood as protocols of social reality, meaning that a textual analysis can give insights into subtle mechanisms of social behavior (ibid.: 93). Objective hermeneutic methods are also known to evaluate very small amounts of material in great depth. However, a strict elaboration of this principle would limit the comprehensibility of the empirical material, which is why examples of the observations are presented to support an understanding of the analysis.

2.1 Ethical Challenges

Anonymously analyzing personal profiles on the internet gives rise to ethical concerns of privacy. These derive from the "persistent and searchable nature of networked publics […], [allowing one] to trace a digital conversation back to its source" (Boyd 2008: 86). As a consequence, I decide to follow Boyd's example and treat all collected data "as sensitive material" by anonymizing "all identifying information" (ibid.).

In addition to privacy concerns, the potential reinforcement of social hierarchies through descriptions of cultural distinctions is a general ethical issue in social class analyses. Savage points out that conceptual knowledge about social hierarchization "is not a neutral tool which unravels the social structure, but in fact is bound up with the very construction of class categories and the 'symbolic' violence which is done in their name" (2015: 362). Especially the description of cultural practices related to people at the lower end of the spectrum threatens to support forms of stigmatization and to reinforce those hierarchies in even subtler forms (ibid.: 388). While there is no simple solution to this problem, I deem it important to be sensitive to these issues in the process of conducting research.

2.2 Developed Procedure

My procedure for selecting individual profiles is characterized by a reversed approach to investigating structural differences related to cultural practices. Instead of departing from data on structural inequalities, moving toward correlating forms of taste practices, I depart from taste practices and move toward the identification of structural differences in education. In doing so I rely on indicators for levels of education, which I identify as *markers* for educational capital. This approach contains the danger of circular reasoning and requires reflection about the value of significance derived from the chosen markers, which will be offered in chapter 3.1.

The marker for educational capital consists of Facebook pages that are "liked" or "followed" and allow me to reason with probabilistic significance about the level of education held by the individual from the associated profile. By investigating the stated taste preferences from profiles from my own list of "friends," their "friends," and "friends" of their "friends," I identified the page of the "German National Academic Foundation [own translation from the German]"[1] as the most suitable marker for higher education. It provides a large number of associated profiles, and by promoting "the higher education of young people, whose high scientific or artistic talent and personality lead them to expect special achievements at the service of the general public [Ger]," an explicit connection is drawn between educational capital, aesthetics, and virtue of personality.

Facebook does not provide a list of profiles who have "liked" and thereby affiliated themselves with a page. However, it does provide a list of profiles that have interacted with specific posts by clicking on the "Like," "Love," "Haha," "Wow," "Sad," or "Angry" buttons underneath. My sample for investigation derives from three posts on the page that document participatory activities within the frame of the foundation. From this information I assume a close association of selected profiles with the German National Academic Foundation. Combined, the three chosen posts list 121 profiles of people who have either clicked "Like," "Love," or "Wow" under one of the posts. The analysis of a profile requires low privacy settings for unassociated observation. Of the 121 profiles, I identified 9 (5 female and 4 male displayed) profiles with low privacy settings that conform with my other criteria, as defined below.

As Facebook does not provide reliable information on people's age, I have relied on my judgement of profile pictures and overall profile compositions to assess users' age. I excluded teenagers from my field observation and thereby focused on an estimated age range of early 20s to early 30s. In addition, I confined my interest of subjects to a German national context. In order to minimize the influence of additional determinants, I discarded profiles from individuals with indications of a recent migration background.

Another difficulty that arises is that markers for lower educational capital cannot be identified with

the same degree of logical inference as for higher educational capital. Drawing on Bourdieu's principle of social distinction, I therefore identified markers of lower educational capital on the basis of opposing characteristics to my findings from profiles with high educational capital. These markers consist of three statement pictures, which will be presented in chapter 2.3.2. From these statement pictures I chose 14 (7 female and 7 male displayed) profiles that contain valid biographical displays of lower education, such as statements about attended schools, pictures of school graduations, or job engagements. These characteristics need to be seen as indications and present no claim to actuality.

2.3 Presentation and Analysis of Research Findings

2.3.1 Cosmopolitan Aesthetics of Connectedness

The 9 profiles that were analyzed are associated with the page "German National Academic Foundation [Ger]" and depict decisive conformity to the Kantian aesthetic. While the main theme of their content varies slightly among individual profiles, their general use follows a common principle of abstract *connectedness*. The portrayal of these qualities is complemented by a distinct emphasis on effortlessness and reflexive detachment, which underlines a sense of naturalness in a *cosmopolitan* world. In this way political information, opinions, and personal achievements are presented and portrayed to complement and coincide with one another.

In light of the recent federal election in Germany, the most prevalent theme in recent posts consists of a strong concern for democratic values. One finds various personal statements such as:

• Even the sloth says, "Go vote!" #fdgo #democracy #sloth against the afD #done [Ger]

• Sexism and xenophobia united in a single post? Only the AfD can do that. Have the courage, go vote! [Ger]

• Democracy is a privilege, not a matter of course. If you don't fight for it and take care of it, you lose it [Ger]

These quotes articulate a concern for democratic values in view of the success of the right-wing populist party AfD. In accordance with a stance against the AfD, a frequent stance *for* the European Union was articu-

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1   Such translations are henceforth marked by the abbreviation: [Ger].

lated and *against* other isolating political movements, such as Brexit and Trump's nationalistic policy. These posts portray a form of activism for democratic ideals and multilateral politics.

Exemplary of this activism is one post in which an individual requests that others participate in a survey they assisted in conducting in order to "help […] crowdsource ideas for our common Europe!" The posts reads:

The European idea of peace and cooperation is losing ground by the day. We refuse to watch the ship go down without a fight and therefore we are asking YOU what we should do about it.

Two elements of this post are characteristic of this group: First and most prevalent is a strong articulation of activism, conveyed through war metaphors: "losing ground," "fight," and "sinking ship." In addition, the broad usage of the first person plural underlines the particular role that the authors of the surveys believe they hold. The use of the first person plural appears six times in this post, one of which refers to the audience of the post, namely when referring to "our common Europe." The other five times, the first person plural is confined to the group of the authors themselves. This implies a division between the authors and the readers in terms of degree of responsibility and engagement: "we are asking YOU what *we* should do."

Second, and more closely connected to the interest of this research, the reference to Europe as an "idea" is instructive. It is this abstracted notion of Europe as an idea that is "losing ground" and not the everyday experienced Europe. As it is the idea of Europe and the idea of democracy that are worth fighting for, it is also to be understood that the fight is to take place on the grounds of ideas. This is revealing, as an abstract conception of Europe does not appear to follow pragmatic reasons but seems to have a validation in itself. Accordingly, it is the conception of Europe *as* an idea which enables it to transcend one's individual sphere of life; and it is the active adherence to such a transcendental component that explains the conception of fighting for a greater cause. Such validation for abstraction, in particular concerning societal matters, resonates with the Kantian aesthetic when Kant praises

"'the interest indirectly attached to the beautiful by the inclination towards society' that is produced by the process of Civilization, although this 'refined inclination' giving no satisfaction of enjoyment is as close as possible to pure pleasure" (Kant 1790/1952: 21 quoted in Bourdieu 1979/2002: 492).

This analysis is underlined by a variety of other posting practices, such that a validation of societal matters supports an *abstract connectedness* with the world.

Accordingly, the observed individuals use their profiles as a means to distribute diverse information with respect to societal and political coherences. This can range from "informing content of federal bills aiming to increase network regulations," coverage of "insights into the life and motives of members of IS," to the "violation of European law in Poland regarding the deforestation of national parks." Besides strictly informative content, articles are posted that discuss "sexism at work" or "gun ownership in the US." These examples show an awareness of, and concern for, a variety of social issues not immediately connected to the individual's range of experience and national or cultural context. It is indicative that this information does not possess immediate pragmatic value for the reader, which allows me to conclude that the value of these posts is not determined by its content. Instead, its value appears to derive from its ability to be incorporated into broader aspects of societal dynamics.

This observation bears parallels with Bourdieu's observation of people from the higher social spectrum, assessing the quality of photographs by "introducing a distance, a gap […] by displacing the interest from the 'content' […] to the form, to the […] artistic effects which are only appreciated relationally, through a comparison with other works" (1979/2002: 34). Introducing a gap through a reflexive exercise over the value of the informative content, appears crucial for posting practices, so that one often finds additional explanatory comments:

• Today the thing I was thinking about the most [Ger]

• A 20 year old movie […] – but the message couldn't be more current…

• different ethnic groups, different religions, one war, one message – Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina [Ger]

Such practices underline not only the importance of reflection, but also the establishment of a distance to the value of the informational content. This allows me to reason that the content itself must not establish the value of a piece of information, as doing so would violate the Kantian aesthetic.

In this way, the sense of *intellectual* connectedness is related to aspects of personal interests. Such interconnection is further reinforced through displays of geographical mobility. It is common to observe pictures from places abroad with statements such as:

- Impressions from the beautiful four months I spent on Cuba.
- Today Dracula Castle, then to Bucharest and then "into the wild" [Ger]
- Heading to New York - looking forward to taking a lot of pictures there! :)

These comments not only reveal information about the variety of geographical locations visited, but they also highlight that the respective individuals have no traditional touristic ambitions in those locations. Instead, a more meaningful and activity-orientated motivation is presented to explain the affinity to these destinations, ranging from memories of their study time abroad to personally set challenges. On not one profile is there a touristic photo to be found that depicts motives of simple leisure, which allows me to conclude that doing so would be regarded as inappropriate. In the latter post, the motivation to go to New York appears indeed to be a touristic one. It is therefore noteworthy that the individual highlights their motivation to take "a lot of pictures there." Such practices stand in accordance with the Kantian aesthetic that emphasizes the importance of "separat[ing] […] 'the interest of the senses', which defines the 'agreeable', […] from 'the interest of Reason', which defines 'the Good'" (Kant 1790/1952: 41). Practicing simple leisure appears to be equated with an *interest of the senses,* so that emphasizing meaningfulness in one's ambitions becomes indicative of a detached modus operandi, which in turn may serve as a marker for pursuing the *interest of reason.*

However, this observation appears to conflict with a traditional Bourdieusian practice of display, according to which "the scholastic point of view stands in opposition to the hurly burly of daily life and allows distance and abstraction from it" (Prieur/Savage 2015: 315). The authors Prieur and Savage argue that a reversal of this opposition is indicative of our contemporary times so that "Substantial 'leisure' is now embedded in mundane practices" and associated "with the world of manual, physical work" (ibid.). Consequently, they argue that in order to

claim distinction, one needs to be able to differentiate oneself not only from the daily grind of physical labour […], but also from the 'undiscriminating' use of leisure pursuits […] by those with too much time on their hands […] [so that] today being busy, as opposed to idle, appears as more characteristic of the classes rich in cultural and economic capital. (ibid.)

Such a reading exemplifies the relative nature of cultural capital and raises questions about the specific characteristics relevant for displaying busyness. Although an analysis of this aspect extends the scope of this research, it is worth mentioning that Prieur and Savage suggest that the validation of busyness is a characteristic of a neoliberal meritocratic ethos (2015).

My observations indicate that not only does intellectual connectedness revolve around aspects of societal significance, but so too does geographical connectedness. This principle is furthermore extended to aspects of personal engagement. Details about personal engagements are frequently presented on these profiles. The significance of an individual's engagement is highlighted in different ways. One way is to strengthen one's association with influential organizations and/or individuals. One post depicts a newly received intern identification card for the World Health Organization. Another individual emphasizes their political engagement in the political party FDP by posting profile pictures with its leader Christian Lindner. Another approach to highlighting the significance of personal engagement is by referring to the degree of responsibility linked to it:

Guys, I need your help! For a seminar series on innovative / unconventional approaches to economic challenges I am looking for women and non-white or workingclass speakers. Please let me know all the brilliant female economists (professors, award-winners etc.) that you can think of!

The apparent functional motivation for sharing information is very telling in these examples. In the foreground stands an aspiration to communicate pragmatic necessity, appreciation, or sympathy. The prestigious entity of the information seems to have, if any, only a secondary priority. This casual revealing of the significance of one's personal activities is further exemplified by an individual who posts:

GIANT OPPORTUNITY! Definitely apply—until 20 December! Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions! [Ger]

In this post, the individual offers guidance for applicants interested in a prestigious project. Information about their own engagement and experience in this project presents itself as a side note, made out of necessity. The post is phrased in a casual way, so as to suggest that anyone can apply, thereby relativizing the selective requirements implied in an application. The prestigious information element is not highlighted in any of the posts, nor is the effort mentioned that is required for its attainment. This leads me to presume that doing so would be classified as inappropriate. To

continue this argument, it is important to envision that the way one reveals information about one's success is indeed a case of practicing taste. This becomes clear when questioning the "naturalness" of the observed practices *ex negativo,* by replacing certain elements of a text with contrasting examples (Wernet 2009: 92).

In this way, one can imagine how an expression of pride and an explicit highlighting of the hard work invested in one's achievements would be regarded as bragging, vulgar behavior or as snobbery. The absence of such elements—and thus, the consistency of the posts—can be explained by their compliance to the Kantian aesthetic. As for matters of taste and cultural capital, what "is at stake is indeed 'personality,'" the "aesthetic disposition […] can only be constituted within an experience of the world freed from urgency and through the practice of activities which are an end in themselves" (Bourdieu 1979/2002: 281, 54). Highlighting the prestigious element of one's achievements would violate the notion that the respective activity is an end in itself; and highlighting the amount of effort involved in one's activities would additionally violate the notion of being freed from urgencies. In addition, this reasoning corroborates Savage when he argues that "People in higher class positions usually distance themselves from any suspicion of snobbery" (Savage 2015: 121). In turn, it complements the notion that the "new currency of 'cool' is an explicit rejection of snobbery and a celebration of diversity" (ibid.: 114).

Hence, diversity itself appears to receive a prestigious quality that is displayed with similar ease and casualty. An illustrative example of this is the casual portrayal of language competences. At times this competence is presented as a necessary means for communication. One individual posts a comment in English asking for support in finding accommodation:

> Dear Berlin-people [sic], I will be moving to Berlin and need accommodation as of June. Maybe until September, maybe longer. If you have any ideas, tipps [sic], spare couches, please let me know. Appreciated!

This post reaffirms previously observed patterns. Other than the apparent, namely that the individual is mobile and fluent in English, the post also clarifies firstly, that the individual knows people from different national backgrounds who do not speak German and secondly, that the circle of friends who do speak German are also fluent in English. At other times, the ease of language competences is displayed in more casual contexts through short phrases or interjections:

- à Londres!
- Porco demonio…
- Flight booked!

The casual context of the use of different languages highlights the ease and naturalness with which they are spoken. At times it is considered as eloquent and funny and at other times as competent and necessary to communicate in a different language.

This aspect conveys an element of naturalness in moving in a diverse world and thereby complements the previously described attributions of knowledgeability of, and connectedness to, spheres that extend traditional local boundaries. As "the capacity to stand outside one's own national frame of reference may itself be an important cultural marker," these observations stand in agreement with Prieur and Savage when they argue for a "link between this kind of knowing appropriation of culture and a certain 'cosmopolitan' orientation" (2015: 310). Here, the term cosmopolitan describes an ideational

> *"'belonging to all parts of the world, not restricted to any country or its inhabitants'—and might be chosen by the elite to complacently designate themselves as more broad-minded than those without such an orientation"* (ibid.: 313).

Cosmopolitan taste preferences are also reflected in the users' sense of humor. One individual added a description to a profile picture of themselves in which they are depicted carrying a tightly strapped hiking backpack and a rain cover over it, saying:

> *It's official, I really am German*

With this comment, the respective individual communicates their awareness of their national frame of reference while simultaneously distancing themselves from it in an ironic fashion. This comment therefore exhibits a sense of self-irony and reflexivity which displays "the capacity to pass judgements on one's own national frame of reference […], rather than take that national frame as a cultural given" (Prieur/Savage 2015: 310). It accordingly underlines the individual's "ease and grace in moving between different genres, playing with classifications and typologies, which [is what] might count as cultural capital today" (Savage 2015: 52). In this way, the reflexive element of cosmopolitan taste practices corresponds to the Kantian aesthetic and validates its practice as legitimate taste.

According to Savage, in current times preferences of taste are only as telling for cultural capital as the manner in which they are performed, so that he proposes the concept of "emerging cultural capital" to increa-

singly apply to younger generations with cosmopolitan taste orientations (2015: 93, 125). This reaffirmation of Bourdieu's original term is justified on the basis of its principle of "relational oppositions" (ibid.: 314). Since in "matters of taste […] all determination is negation," it is essential to identify the "negative reference point, in relation to which […] [cosmopolitan aesthetics] define themselves" in order to reach further conclusions (Bourdieu 1979/2002: 56, 57).

2.3.2 Negative Markers of Cosmopolitanism: Local Practices of Belongingness

As mentioned in chapter 2.2, markers for lower educational capital cannot be identified with the same degree of logical inference as for higher educational capital. Therefore, I identified markers for lower educational capital on the basis of opposing characteristics to the observed profiles with high educational capital. In doing so I identified the three following statement pictures as markers:

• If you got a free flight, where would you fly to? [Ger; written on top of an animated picture of an airplane flying above pink clouds]

• A healthy I-don't-give-a-fuck attitude is very important these days! [Ger; placed over a picture from the 1960s of a young nurse innocently looking into the camera while giving the finger]

• I DON'T GIVE A SHIT WHAT YOU THINK BECAUSE I'M PROUD OF WHAT I HAVE! BECAUSE I'VE WORKED HARD FOR IT AND HAVEN'T BENT OVER OR KISSED ASSES [Ger; with "proud" highlighted in red, with a young, male cartoon figure emerging from flames and black smoke]

These three statements fundamentally conflict with the characteristics of geographical connectedness, societal engagement, and effortlessness in achieving success observed in the previous group of highly educated individuals. Besides these opposing qualities, engaging in games of make-believe about airplane tickets and expressing pride in the amount of one's hard-earned possessions, is an indicator of precarious economic circumstances. The page from which I derived these pictures[2] posts a number of similar statements on a daily basis, in which the overarching theme revolves around a non-specific yet explicit dissatisfaction with society as such. I identified 14 (7 male and 7

female portrayed) profiles from the equivalent lists of "Like," "Love," "Haha," "Wow," "Sad," or "Angry" that corresponded to my criteria, after having investigated 238 profiles from a list of 2,739 potential profiles.

Most telling for the selected group of profiles is their overall conformity with characteristics from the three statement pictures, which I identified as markers. All observed profiles did indeed display characteristics of low geographical mobility, a local-centric constellation of social networking, and effort in achieving success. Thus, norms of behavior and an ideal of the common good underline taking responsibility for one's immediate range of influence. Together, these characteristics form a guiding principle of pragmatic *belongingness*. The following observations provide evidence of these characteristics.

One apparent observation is that most profiles that display hobbies or passions revolve primarily around one dominant and sometimes two or three additional themes. These range from hobbies such as fishing, horseback riding, or bodybuilding to interests in Viking crafts and cosplay. Such practices conform with Peterson's concept of "univore" taste preferences, as people on the lower social spectrum "tend to be actively involved in just one […] aesthetic tradition[…]" (1992: 254). However, more telling than the monocentric taste preference is that aspects of personal leisure and interests are portrayed in the first place. This practice stands in opposition to the highly educated group, where no leisure activities or interests were displayed that did not relate to larger societal significance. Furthermore, the profiles from the group with lower educational capital often contain information about the users' personal and daily sphere of significance, such as a picture of an individual stroking their cat, commenting:

relaxed, letting its belly be ruffled… [Ger]

or a collection of photos with the comment:

A beautiful group with lovely people and sweet doggies [Ger]

Other posts contain more exceptional experiences such as:

What a night! all three apartment cats ran away because Ben our dog has diarrhea and has opened all doors to the yard. Don't we have good animals. All back again <3 [Ger]

These posts were considered to entail worthy information for disclosure, precisely because they captured personal matters of daily experiences. The purpose of posting hence appears to follow a principle of relating

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2   Not disclosed for privacy reasons and concerns about potential stigmatization.

to others by offering representative insights into one's life.

Similar to profiles with high educational capital, informative posts are a regular sight among profiles with lower educational capital. Consequently, relatability and confinement to the individual's sphere of experience can further be considered a guiding posting principle. In contrast to the highly educated group, the relevance of informatory posts derives from their geographical and/or personal immediacy to an individual. One user shared articles such as:

- *Environmental aid: driving ban for Bielefeld unavoidable [Ger]*
- *Fire by lightning strike – blue light report […] more information from your region [Ger]*
- *A serious accident occurred around 8 p.m. on the St2356 between Mehring and Burgkirchen [Ger]*

What is revealing about these posts is that they all contain potentially impactful information on the respective individual and/or their respective social network that might also be affected by the information. Compared with the educated group, this observation complies with research on news preferences related to class structures in Sweden. In this study, the researcher Lindell concludes that "People occupying subordinate positions in society are more likely to shy away from the dominant normative order connected to news" and in doing so suggests that their habitus supports the formation of news repertoires (2017: 15). However, of more significance for the analysis in this paper is the appearance of the conformity of working-class people to the modes of appreciating art, as described by Bourdieu. It appears that informative posts are judged by the same principle as "the image [of art] is […] judged by the reference to the function it fulfils for the person who looks at it or which he thinks it could fulfil for other […] beholders" (Bourdieu 1979/2002: 42). It appears that the value of an informative post is measured in the same way as the value of a photograph: by the interest in the information it conveys.

Apart from reaffirming the guiding principle of immediate relatability, this observation provides indications of a local-centric social network in which the majority of the user's Facebook contacts are likely to share an interest in information relating to geographical proximity. This interpretation is reaffirmed by a pronounced frequency of posts with tracing information such as:

- *+Witness call+++Police ask for help after two attempted sexual offences in Schwerin [Ger]*

- *Wettesingen—15-year-old Lucy S. missing—Police ask citizens for help [Ger]*
- *My dears… My most beautiful and expensive birthday present ever. Please share, as often as possible!! In front of the house […]. Must have happened today, Sept 29, 17, between 9:45 a.m. and 10:15 p.m. Witnesses sought… quite urgently [Ger]*

The latter post depicts a photo of a damaged car hood. A crucial point about this post is that it has been shared from a profile that the respective individual does not have in their friends list. With these posts, a different perspective of responsibility emerges in comparison to profiles with high educational capital. Responsibility appears to revolve around a notion of immediate implication and indicates an understanding of the common good to present action-taking within one's explicit range of influence. This perspective is further underlined by frequent video posts that praise inspiring examples of people helping one another in their immediate surroundings. These observations agree with Savage's findings of people's cultural engagement on the lower social spectrum to "likely […] be more informal, more neighborhood- and kinship-based" (2015: 106).

Such notions of responsibility underline the importance of belongingness and are further highlighted by posts that revolve around aspects of loyalty. This can be observed explicitly in posts of statement pictures such as:
- I DON'T HAVE ANY FRIENDS, I HAVE FAMILY! [Ger]
- No matter what happens, we go through thick & thin… [Ger]
- FRIENDS DON'T ASK WHY YOU'RE CRYING. BEST FRIENDS ALREADY HAVE THE SHOVEL READY TO BURY THE ASSHOLE WHO MADE YOU CRY! [Ger]

These phrases communicate an ideal of community in which continuity and loyalty are valued. This aspect finds further expression in the value of close social relationships in posts such as:
- I love you […] Thank you for your unconditional love. [Ger]
- Watching the super talent [TV-Show] with sweetheart :). Already have stomachache from laughing [Ger]
- Hope Easter will be like Dec 9–Feb 18. Have a lot to tell! Dear Sis! [Ger]

These posts complement Lambert's study in which he observed his interviewees—who were "White, well educated and middle class"—describe posts with emotional content as "'gross', 'awkward' and 'weird'" (2015: 7, 10). Similarly, they disparage couples who are "'lovey dovey'

and 'gushy'" (ibid.: 10). The element of disgust conveyed by such testimonies supports the analysis of this paper, in that withholding from sharing leisure activities and personal information does indeed convey taste practices and thus can be accounted for by the concept of cultural capital. In this way, the following statement from Lambert's study can be argued to complement the observation of the previous group, presented in chapter 2.3.1:

- *I find it nauseating to get statements like 'X has just said goodbye to her sister and is already sad'. I don't need to know, you know. I think just keep that inside, the over- emoting in a public space to people who genuinely don't care, and I would be one that genuinely doesn't care. (Bret)*

- *A few friends decided to be horrifically loving toward one another and comment on their previous posts in the most overly loving manner possible on each other's walls. Unfortunately for the 700 or so people connected to these two, the entire thing appeared on our walls! (Penny)*

- *It's about eating and drinking and, yeah, what you're consuming on a day-to-day basis which is something everyone does but they don't feel the need to share that with everyone via a Facebook update. (Odette) (ibid.)*

Lambert correctly links the normative component of ways of communicating on Facebook to the habitus of his subjects. However, while Lambert emphasizes the performativity of Facebook posts, he fails to recognize the aesthetic component in his observations, which is articulated by elements of disgust. As

> *"Kant's principle of pure taste is nothing other than a refusal, a disgust—a disgust for objects which impose enjoyment and a disgust for the crude, vulgar taste which revels in this imposed enjoyment" (Bourdieu 1979/2002: 488),*

I argue that Lambert's observations account for an interconnection between social capital and cultural capital, rather than for an independent concept of "intimacy capital" (Lambert 2015: 1).

Next to posts valuing continuity and reliability in social relations, other posts indicate a perceived concern for these values:

Maybe I'm old-fashioned, but loyalty still means something to me. [Ger]

This post conforms with numerous other posts conveying a discomfort about wider social dynamics:

- *Angela Merkel said: "Every person in Germany earns an average of €3,000." I ask myself: "Am I not a person or am I not in Germany?" [Ger]*

- *One thing the refugee crisis has clearly shown…* WE WOULD HAVE ALWAYS HAD ENOUGH MONEY FOR THE POOREST!!! [Ger]

These posts address conditions of financial insecurity and express a frustration over the government's endurance. Tolerating structurally precarious circumstances seems to disrupt the ideal of responsibility for the immediacy of social realities, which in turn explains the provoked sense of frustration and injustice. While there appears to be a correlation between these forms of dissatisfaction and current political developments, which seems promising for further investigation, my focus is another. Telling for my research are the contained expressions of struggle and effort, which is a characteristic absent from highly educated individuals' profiles. It is common to find posts from individuals of lower education expressing exertion from coping with life. The most explicit statement is contained in a post stating:

I HATE IT WHEN PEOPLE TELL ME "YOU ARE SO LUCKY!" "FUCK NO, I'M NOT" "I WORK MY BUTT OFF EVERY DAY TO REACH MY GOALS!" [Ger]

However, most of the posts expressing arduous aspects in life are presented in a humorous way and thereby support the aspect of relatability. Statement pictures are shared regularly with phrases such as:

- IN THE NEXT LIFE I'LL DO SOMETHING WITHOUT AN ALARM CLOCK. [Ger]

- *Parents: "So, how'd the exam go?" Me: "It's more important that we're all healthy" [Ger]*

These posts openly display notions of effort and struggle as part of the lives of the respective individuals. Consequently, an attempt to relate to and encourage others in their struggle can be observed, which further underlines the principle of responsibility, relatability, and belongingness.

Similar to these displays of difficulties in life, portrayals of leisure activities can frequently be observed. The relation between leisure activities and the arduous aspects of life is exemplified by a post depicting the face of an excited office employee with the caption:

The moment work is over and you can finally get smashed. [Ger]

Here a division of life into a sphere of duties and a sphere of free time can be observed, which is absent in the profiles of highly educated people. This aspect depicts a violation of the Kantian aesthetic, as it conflicts with an "aesthetic disposition […] [that is] constituted within an experience of the world freed from urgency and through

the practice of activities which are an end in themselves" (Bourdieu 1979/2002: 54), and thus serves as a negative reference point for social distinction. Displays of leisure are shared in great variety throughout the profiles and contain precisely those characteristics condemned by the subjects in Lambert's study:

- Lying in the sun with bae   [Ger]
- is eating ice pops with her Anna   [Ger]
- going to the weekly market and enjoying the remaining sunrays at the pool [Ger]

These observations conform with Savage's findings. When interviewing people from the lower social spectrum, Savage observed that

"as they talked about these activities which they enjoyed, it was […] important to them to place them within a social context, in which they associated these cultural events with experiences with family or friends" (2015: 348).

The presented observations of profiles from individuals with lower educational capital describe an orientation of cultural practices along an immediacy of relevance, in terms of geographical and experiential proximity, thereby expressing the ideal of *belongingness* to a *local*-centric social network. Compared with the observed practices from individuals with high educational capital, this description corresponds to the findings of Sjott-Larsen, who observed that when aspects of "life-style choices related to local versus international orientations […], a clear opposition in attitudes and lifestyle appeared running along the opposition between high and low levels of cultural capital" (quoted in Prieur/Savage 2015: 311). Considering the display of *connectedness* among profiles from highly educated individuals, "implicit oppositions drawn of […] the immobile against the mobile, with the association that geographical immobility is a form of cultural limitation," appear to be at play (ibid.). It is in this sense that a local-centric lifestyle can function as a negative reference point in relation to which cosmopolitan aesthetics are defined, indicating mechanisms of social distinction according to which people "with a high level of cultural capital understood their world as more expansive than those with a lower level" (Hold quoted in Prieur/Savage 2015: 310). These interpretations support the statement made by the scholar Calhoun, who argues that the "Cosmopolitan discourse […] encourages the equation of the global with the modern and the national or local with the backwardly traditional" (quoted in Prieur/Savage 2015: 314). In light of the conformity of my findings with

existing research, it is important, however, to point out the challenge that it "is not given that the cultural specificities of the highly educated […] enjoy any wider recognition as good taste, and it is not given that they may be converted to social or economic capital," meaning that further analysis is required (Prieur/Savage 2015: 316).

3. Discussion of the Research Findings

Taking into account the objection from Prieur and Savage regarding the necessity to show the wider recognition of educated individuals' taste practices, the conformity to the Kantian aesthetic is instructive. My observations demonstrate that taste practices from the highly educated group conform with notions of detachment, ease, and societal meaningfulness. Especially informative posts from this group are telling, as they address wider social issues and lack functional and pragmatic characteristics. Informative posts are valued not by their *function* but by their *form* as an informative source in itself. This attribute correlates with Bourdieu's different modes of appreciating art, whereby people from the lower social spectrum fail to fulfill the Kantian ideal of aesthetic by being unable to value an artwork beyond its functional value.

Moreover, the relevance of the Kantian aesthetic as a guiding principle of judgment is indicated by the portrayal of ease. By restraining from displays of effort, highly educated individuals demonstrate a lack of necessity and a consequential capacity of detachment, indicative of the "pure gaze." This form of detachment and ease was present in a variety of cultural practices, such as humor, communication competences, and high forms of achievement. Both the nature of informative posts and the display of ease suggest a correlation with the Kantian ideal of morality and personality. By conforming to the Kantian aesthetic, I therefore argue that taste practices of the observed individuals with higher educational capital find wider recognition, thereby receiving the status of "legitimate" taste.

However, Prieur and Savage further point out that for "an asset to serve as a capital in a Bourdieusian sense, it should be linked to legitimacy, convertibility and domination" (2015: 316). The aspect of convertibility is implied by the modus operandi of the German National Academic Foundation, which demonstrates that such a conversion does indeed take place. The foundation displays mechanisms according to which taste and personality are placed in a hierarchical rela-

tion to each other. Next to an ideational promotion, which includes a "targeted networking of scholarship holders [Ger]," and hence describes an explicit form of social capital, the foundation supports students with economical capital of up to €945 per month (studien-stiftung.de). More telling, however, is that the foundation explicitly promotes "personalit[ies] [that] lead them to expect special achievements at the service of the general public [Ger]" (ibid.). As for matters of taste and cultural capital, what "is at stake is indeed 'personality'" (Bourdieu 1979/2002: 281); it seems apparent that the taste practices of the observed members of the foundation have been a determining factor in their access to it. As this describes explicit mechanisms of convertibility, my observations support an interpretation of taste practices from members of the foundation serving as cultural capital and perpetuating mechanisms of social distinction. Consequently, the aspects of legitimacy and convertibility are supported, which according to Bourdieu forms cultural mechanisms of domination.

3.1 Reflection on the Research Findings

At this point a reflection on the significance of my findings is required, which includes a discussion of the danger of circular reasoning on the one hand, and on the other an analysis of the expressiveness of the sample observed. As my observations lack external measures of validation about the actual amount of educational capital at play, my findings are confined to suggestive statements. One can argue that it is not surprising, and therefore not particularly informative, that one finds characteristics of high achievement and geographical and cultural mobility among profiles in association with the German National Academic Foundation, as the foundation by definition promotes precisely these elements. The consequence would be that my findings might be more indicative of the taste practices of this specific group than of the taste practices of highly educated individuals in general. Similarly, one might object that it is not significant to find statement pictures displaying frustration and effort among profiles linked to a page that specifically offers such content. Such objections are integral to the confined approach adopted in this paper and require additional data with regard to people's levels of education.

However, a differentiation of my findings is instructive to evaluate their degree of significance. The differences in cultural practices that I observed in both of the groups, are twofold. One revolves around *structurally* related differences and the other around differences in *modes* of expression. Structurally related differences reflect variations between the groups pertaining to aspects such as language competences, mobility, and forms of engagements, and are susceptible to circular reasoning by the method adopted. Therefore, I deem the differences in the *modes* of presenting structurally related taste practices as more significant to my research question. There is no preconceived reason to assume differences in the *ways* of relating to aspects of leisure and effort between the two groups—and similarly no reason to assume substantial differences in their posting practices of informative content. Yet my observations have identified just such differences, according to which the group with presumed high educational capital portrays ease when engaging with skill-requiring activities, while the group of individuals with presumed lower educational capital openly displays aspects of effort in the processes of achievement. Furthermore, while the former group evaluates informative posts via their value as an informational source in itself, the latter group evaluates informative posts with regard to their immediate functionality. My findings thus suggest that it is not only the engagement in specific activities that might count as cultural capital and as a criterion for personality today, but also the *way* they are practiced and displayed. It is this difference and its consistent accordance with the Kantian aesthetic that I assess to be significant for evaluating mechanisms of social distinction. Since judgments on personality "involve not only the virtues with which the different fractions of the dominant class identify […], but, as Chevalier de Mere so well puts it, 'the manners of practising them, which are themselves kinds of virtues'" (Bourdieu 1979/2002: 70).

However, one might go on to object that the observed profiles might not even be representative of members of the foundation, meaning that the respective practices are not at all characteristic of legitimate taste practices in general. Such criticism arises from the fact that only profiles with low privacy settings were taken into account for the research, which in itself might be an untypical characteristic for members of the foundation and thus might arguably be a violation of the Kantian aesthetic in the first place. Accordingly, one might object that displays of personal achievement and linguistic and geographical savoir vivre might actually describe the posting practices of individuals from the lower social spectrum aspiring upward mobility. Conse-

quently, the observations presented in this paper might have identified practices of "hypercorrection" and status uncertainty, rather than a distinct knowledgeability of legitimate taste practices. Such objections appear valid in light of the confined approach adopted in this paper and require additional data with regard to people's levels of education. However, it is worth pointing out that such objections do not contradict the analysis of this paper.

The most important aspect for reaching clarification on this issue is the relative nature with which social classes are constituted. Taste practices, which constitute social classes by "drawing discrete unit out of invisible continuity," are not firmly established practices (Bourdieu 1979/2002: 479). Instead, they are continuously contested practices in a "game of refusal and counter-refusal" (ibid.: 57). The reproductive effect of social classes is not reinforced by passing on legitimate taste practices from one generation to another. Inheritance of cultural capital is formed by the circumstance that

"the strategies aimed at transforming the basic dispositions of a life-style into a system of aesthetic principles […] are in fact reserved for members of the dominant class, indeed the very top bourgeoisie" (ibid.).

It is hence the case that the very top bourgeoisie is disproportionately capable of competing for the affirmation of their own cultural practices as legitimate taste; and in doing so, the reproduction of social hierarchies is maintained. As groups from the lower social spectrum do not possess the means to establish their own cultural practices as legitimate practices, upward mobility is attempted by adopting the taste practices of the established legitimate status. As Bourdieu writes, it is

among the youngest members of the occupations […], especially among those who originate from [the] working class […], that one finds the most developed form of […] devotion to culture associated with the ambition to pursue further accumulation of cultural capital […]. (Bourdieu 1979/1996: 351)

In this way, the possibility of having observed practices of hypercorrection does not contradict Bourdieu's thesis of social distinction, but instead reaffirms it.[3] Accordingly, it is reasonable to argue that the practices observed in this paper are strongly oriented along ideals of legitimate taste. Whether or not the practices observed are indications of already establis-

hed or of currently attempted legitimate taste practices, is up for debate. In either case, the strong contrast between the posting practices of the two groups needs explanation, which is why I argue that mechanisms of social distinction do so adequately. It is in understanding mechanisms of social distinction as being relative in nature, variable in expression, and consistent in their accordance with the Kantian aesthetic that their "power can be challenged" (Savage 2015: 50).

3.2 Conclusion and Outlook

According to this interpretation, a renewed understanding of cultural capital is revealed, which is no longer defined by clearly set markers. Instead, cultural capital is constituted by a multifaceted knowledge of the cosmopolitan lifestyle. The reason for this is the interpretability of cosmopolitan aesthetics in accordance with the Kantian aesthetic. The function of cultural capital is explained by the previously described qualities of reflexivity, global connectedness, and displays of ease, which are ascribed to the cosmopolitan as attributes of higher personality. With such a perspective we gain a clearer understanding of the inheritance of cultural privileges. Foundations, prestigious study programs, and jobs not only promote international exchange and thus the emergence of a cosmopolitan lifestyle, but they also demand it. In order to acquire a cosmopolitan taste as a young person, privileged access to resources is required, which, for instance, allows them to gain experiences abroad, either during or after school. Hence, the moment cosmopolitan aesthetics become convertible into social and economic capital, such as in applications for study programs, jobs, or scholarships, they obtain the form of cultural capital.

The fact that such a conversion takes place and is subject to mechanisms according to which taste and personality are placed in a hierarchical relation to each other, has been shown by the modus operandi of the German National Academic Foundation. In view of the observations described here, the argument is presented that a cosmopolitan lifestyle serves as a normative guideline for the classification of personalities and their eligibility for access to resources in the form of social, economic, and cultural capital. Such a reading reinforces the argument that cosmopolitan aesthetics function as cultural capital, and that mechanisms of social distinction derive from the coherent and yet adaptive principle of the Kantian aesthetic: a principle that only the very top bourgeoisie is able to

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3   For a detailed description of the phenomenon of hypercorrection in relation to upward social mobility, see also *Returning to Reims* by Didier Eribon (2009).

effectively construe according to their taste preferences. However, my research approach has also shown itself to be incomplete, which is why I consider a complementation by quantitative methods to be promising for gaining further insights into the interconnection between educational capital, taste practices, and forms of cultural capital. Further, the approach adopted fails to take aspects of publicness into consideration, which appears relevant for social media culture. The scholars Alexander, Blank, and Hale (2018) have analyzed user comments on TripAdvisor in accordance with aspects of social classes. They claim to have found "evidence of an online space where cultural hierarchies have little relevance" (ibid.: 15). Hence, further research is needed that explicitly incorporates the effect of publicness on aspects of social distinction. In doing so, I suggest considering the aspect of anonymity in research on social distinction. As the posting practices on TripAdvisor are conducted anonymously, the evaluation of individuals with regard to one's own personality is arguably ineffective. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the practice of social distinction has indeed "little relevance" (ibid.) under anonymous circumstances.

Nevertheless, I believe I have shown the potential of a multi-method approach for contributing to debates in cultural class analysis. It appears well suited to investigating implicit taste practices in a variety of research questions. Throughout my research, hints for patterns of taste practices in relation to gender and ethnicity emerged, which also seems promising for further investigation.

My hope is that this paper supports an understanding of the alien social group and their aesthetic choices and is able to contribute to converging social dynamics. I adhere to Bourdieu's request for exploring social inequality: "Do not deplore, do not laugh, do not hate—understand" (Bourdieu 1993/1999: 1).

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