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## EXCLUSION AND SELECTION

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The examination is nothing but the bureaucratic baptism of knowledge, the official recognition of the transubstantiation of profane knowledge into sacred knowledge.

Marx

*Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*

To explain the importance of the role the French educational system assigns to the examination, it is first necessary to break with the explanations offered by spontaneous sociology, which imputes the most salient features of the system to the unexplained legacy of a national tradition or the inexplicable action of the congenital conservatism of academics. But the question is not at an end when, by recourse to the comparative method and to history, one has accounted for the characteristics and internal functions of the examination within a particular system of education: it is only by making a second break, this time with the illusion of the neutrality and independence of the school system with respect to the structure of class relations, that it becomes possible to question research into examinations so as to discover what examinations hide and what research into examinations only helps to hide by distracting inquiry from the elimination which takes place without examination.

## THE EXAMINATION WITHIN THE STRUCTURE AND HISTORY OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

It is all too obvious that, at least in present-day France, examinations dominate university life, that is to say, not only the representations and practices of the agents but also the organization and functioning of the institution. Commentators have often enough described the anxiety engendered by the total, harsh and partly unpredictable verdicts of the traditional tests, or the dislocated rhythm inherent in a system of organizing school work which, in its most anomic forms, tends to acknowledge no other incentive than the imminence of an absolute deadline. In fact the examination is not only the clearest expression of academic values and of the educational system's implicit choices: in imposing as worthy of university sanction a social definition of knowledge and the way to show it, it provides one of the most efficacious tools for the enterprise of inculcating the dominant culture and the value of that culture. As much as or more than through the constraints of curriculum and syllabus, the acquisition of legitimate culture and the legitimate relation to culture is regulated by the customary law which is constituted in the jurisprudence of examinations and which owes its main characteristics to the situation in which it is formulated.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, for example, the French-style dissertation defines and diffuses rules of writing and composition whose authority extends into the most diverse areas, since one can find the stamp of these school manufacturing devices in products as different as an administrative report, a doctoral thesis or a literary essay. To get a complete idea of the characteristics of this mode of written communication, which presupposes the examiner as the sole reader, one would only have to compare it with the *disputatio*, a debate between peers, conducted in the presence of the masters and a whole audience, through which the medieval university inculcated a method of thought applicable to any form of intellectual and even artistic production; or the *pa-ku-wen*, the 'eight legged-essay' which constituted the decisive test in the com-

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petitions of the Ming and early Ch'ing periods and was the school of formal refinement for poet and learned painter, or with the British university essay, whose rules are not so different from those of the literary genre of the same name and in which the subject must be approached with wit and a light touch, unlike the French-style dissertation which must start with an introduction setting out the problem 'with brio and brilliance', but in a style free from all familiarity or personal comment. It would be seen that the different types of academic test, which are always, at the same time, institutionalized models of communication, provide the prototype for the pedagogic message and, more generally, for any message of a certain intellectual ambition (lectures, reports, political speeches, press conferences, etc.).<sup>2</sup> Thus, the schemes of expression and thought which are too hastily put down to national character' or 'schools of thought' may well derive from the models organized by a training directed towards a particular type of academic test:<sup>3</sup> for example the forms of mind associated with the French grandes écoles can be related to the forms of the entrance competitions and, more precisely, to the models of composition, style and even articulation, delivery or diction, which define in each case the accomplished form of presentation or elocution. More generally, it is clear that, as Renan showed, a selection procedure such as the *concours* reinforces the primacy which the whole tradition of the French University gives to qualities of form:

It is most regrettable that the *concours* should be the only means of entering the teaching profession and that practical skill, combined with adequate knowledge, cannot give access to it. Those men most experienced in educating, who bring to their difficult task not brilliant faculties but a solid mind with a little slowness and timidity, will in public examinations always be placed after young men who know how to amuse their audience and their judges and who, though their glib tongues will get them out of trouble, have neither patience nor firmness enough to teach well.<sup>4</sup>

If it is true that examinations always express, inculcate and consecrate the values linked to a certain organization of the educational system, a certain structure of the intellectual field and, through these

mediations, the dominant culture, it is clear why questions as insignificant at first sight as the number of baccalauréat sessions per year, the breadth of the syllabuses or the marking procedures should give rise to passionate polemics, not to mention the indignant resistance encountered by any challenging of institutions which crystallize as many values as the agrégation, the dissertation, the teaching of Latin, or the grandes écoles.

When one sets out to describe the most marked effects of the preponderance of examinations in intellectual practices and institutional organization, the French system offers the most perfect examples and, because it constitutes a limiting case, raises with particular force the question of the (internal and external) factors that can explain the historical or national variations in the functional weight of the examination within the educational system. Consequently, there is no alternative to using the comparative method when one wants to separate out what derives from external demands and what derives from the way they are responded to, or what, in the case of a given system, derives from the generic tendencies every educational system owes to its essential function of inculcation, to the particular traditions of a university history, and to its social functions, which are never completely reducible to the technical function of communication and producing skills.

If it is true that, as Durkheim observed, the advent of the examination – unknown to Antiquity, which saw only independent or even competing schools and teachers – presupposes the existence of a university institution, i.e. an organized corps of professional teachers providing for its own perpetuation;<sup>5</sup> and if it is also true, as Weber argued, that a system of hierarchized examinations consecrating a specific skill and giving access to specialized careers appeared, in modern Europe, only in conjunction with the growing demand from bureaucratic organizations for hierarchized, interchangeable individuals to correspond to the hierarchy of posts offered;<sup>6</sup> and if it is true that a system of examinations ensuring formal equality for all before identical tests (the pure form of which is the national concours) and guarantee-

ing identically qualified individuals equal chances of entering the profession satisfies the petty-bourgeois ideal of formal equity — then there seem to be grounds for seeing no more than a particular manifestation of a general tendency of modern societies in the proliferation of examinations, the broadening of their social range and the growth of their functional weight within the educational system. But this analysis accounts only for the most general aspects of educational history (explaining for example, why social upgrading independent of educational level tends to decline as a society becomes more industrialized and bureaucratized<sup>7</sup>) and fails to grasp that which the functioning and function of examinations owe, in their specific form, to the inherent logic of the educational system. By virtue of the particular inertia which characterizes it, especially when invested with the traditional function of conserving and transmitting a culture inherited from the past and when provided with specific means of self-reproduction, the school system is able to subject external demands to a systematic *retranslation* (systematic because effected in accordance with the principles which define it as a system). This is where the prerequisite stated by Durkheim takes on its full significance. Weber, who, in his sociology of religion, makes allowance for the tendencies proper to the sacerdotal corps, fails to take account (probably because he considers the educational system from an external point of view, i.e. from the point of view of the requirements of a bureaucratic organization) of what an educational system owes to the transhistorical and historical characteristics of a body of professional educators. Everything in fact suggests that the force of tradition weighs particularly heavily in an institution which, as Durkheim remarked, is more directly dependent on its own past because of the particular form of its relative autonomy.

To be convinced that the French system which, of all the educational systems of Europe, gives the greatest weight to examinations, defines itself less than it appears to in relation to the demands of economy, it is sufficient to observe that, in a system like that of classical China, which aimed primarily to train the functionaries of a prebendal bureaucracy, most of the features of the French system of

selection could be paralleled.<sup>8</sup> If the Confucian tradition managed to impose its literary ideal so completely, it did so because no educational system has ever been more totally identified with its function of selection than the mandarin system, which was more concerned with organizing and codifying its competitions than with setting up schools and training teachers. And perhaps also because the hierarchy of academic achievement has never more rigorously determined the other social hierarchies than in a society where the official 'remained throughout his life under the control of the school':<sup>9</sup> the three major degrees (in which, as Weber points out, French translators immediately saw the equivalent of the *baccalauréat*, *licence* and *doctorat*)

were considerably augmented by intermediary, repetitive and preliminary examinations (. . .) For the first degree alone there were ten types of examinations. The question usually put to a stranger of unknown rank was how many examinations he had passed. Thus, in spite of the ancestor cult, how many ancestors one had was not decisive for social rank. The very reverse held: it depended upon one's official rank whether one was allowed to have an ancestral temple (or a mere table of ancestors, which was the case with illiterates). How many ancestors one was permitted to mention was determined by official rank. Even the rank of a city god in the Pantheon depended upon the rank of the city's mandarin.<sup>10</sup>

Thus systems as different as those of modern France and classical China owe their common orientations to the fact that both treat a demand for *social selection* (in one case the demand of a traditional bureaucracy, in the other that of a capitalist economy) as an opportunity for fully expressing the peculiarly professorial tendency to maximize the social value of the human qualities and vocational qualifications which those systems produce, assess and consecrate.<sup>11</sup>

But for a full explanation of how the French system has been able to take advantage, more successfully than any other system, of the opportunities which the demand for social and technical selection characteristic of modern societies gave it in order to realize the potentialities of its own logic, we must also take into account the particular past of the educational institution, whose relative autonomy is objectively ex-

pressed in its capacity at each moment in history to retranslate and reinterpret external demands in terms of the norms inherited from a relatively autonomous history. If, unlike the mandarin system, the French system is not able to enforce recognition of the hierarchy of academic values as the official principle of every social hierarchy and every hierarchy of values, it nonetheless succeeds in competing with the other principles of hierarchization, especially when its action of inculcating the value of academic hierarchies is exerted on categories socially disposed to recognize the institution's pedagogic authority. Although the adherence individuals give to school hierarchies and to the scholastic cult of hierarchy is always related to the rank the School gives them in its hierarchies, it depends primarily, on the one hand, on the value system they owe to their social class of origin (the value accorded to the School within this system being, itself, a function of the degree to which that class's interests are linked to the School) and, on the other hand, on the degree to which their market value and social position depend on educational guarantees. This is why the school system is most successful in imposing recognition of the value of itself and its classifications when its action is applied to social classes or class fractions who are unable to counterpose to it any rival principle of hierarchy. This is one of the mechanisms which enable the academic institution to attract students from the middle classes or the intellectual fraction of the big bourgeoisie into the teaching profession, diverting them from aspiring to rise in other hierarchies, e.g. of money or power, and thus from cashing their academic credentials into economic and social profit like students from the big bourgeoisie of business or power, who are better placed to relativize academic judgements.<sup>1 2</sup>

Thus, protest against the material and social conditions of teachers, or bitter, self-righteous denunciation of the compromises and corruptions of unscrupulous politicians and businessmen, doubtless expresses, in the mode of moral indignation, the revolt of the subordinate and middle-rank executives of education against a society incapable of fully honouring its debts towards the School, i.e. towards those who owe everything to the School, including the conviction that the School

ought to be the principle of every economic and social hierarchy. Among the senior executives of the University, the Jacobin Utopia of a social order in which everyone would be rewarded according to merit, i.e. according to his School rank, cohabits with the aristocratic pretension to recognize no other values than those of the institution which alone fully recognizes their value and the pedagogocratic ambition of subjecting all acts of civil and political life to the moral magisterium of the University.<sup>13</sup>

It can be seen how the French system has been able to find in the external demand for mass-produced, guaranteed, interchangeable 'products' the opportunity to perpetuate — while making it serve another social function related to the interests and ideals of other social classes — the tradition of competition for competition's sake, inherited from the eighteenth-century Jesuit colleges which made emulation the favoured tool of an education designed for aristocratic youth.<sup>14</sup> The French University always tends to go beyond the technical function of the competitive examination and to solemnly draw up, within the quota of candidates it is asked to elect, hierarchies based on the imponderables of derisory quarter points. Derisory no doubt, but decisive: consider the weight the academic world attaches in its assessments — often fraught with professional consequences — to the rank attained in the entrance examinations taken in late adolescence, or even to the title of '*cacique*' or '*major*', first in a hierarchy itself situated in a hierarchy of hierarchies, that of the *grandes écoles* and the major concours. Max Weber observed that if one set aside the Confucian tradition of the literary gentleman, the technical definition of the official posts of the imperial administration did not explain how the mandarin examinations were able give such prominence to poetry; similarly, in order to understand how a simple demand for vocational selection, imposed by the need to choose the most suitable persons to fill a limited number of specialized posts, could have served as a pretext for the typically French religion of classification, it is necessary to relate academic culture to the social universe in which it was formed, that is to say, to the protected, self-enclosed microcosm in which, through the methodical, enveloping organization of competition and



the establishment of scholastic hierarchies which were as prevalent in play as in work, the Jesuits fashioned a *homo hierarchicus*, transposing the aristocratic cult of 'glory' into the order of social success, literary prowess and scholastic triumph.

But explanation in terms of survival explains nothing unless one explains why the survival survives by establishing the functions it performs in the present functioning of the educational system and by showing the historical conditions authorizing or favouring the manifestation of the generic tendencies the system owes to its essential function. When seeking to explain the French system's very special capacity to decree and impose hierarchies, even beyond the specifically academic spheres of activity and sometimes against the most patent demands it is supposed to answer, one cannot fail to observe that in its teaching and examining it still today gives pride of place to the self-perpetuation and self-protection of the teaching corps, functions which were served in a more open fashion by the examinations of the medieval University, all defined in terms of entry into the corps or into the course of study giving access to it, the baccalauréat (a lower form of the *inceptio*), the *licentia docendi*, and the *maîtrise*, marked by the *inceptio*, a ceremony of induction into the corporation with the rank of *maître*.<sup>15</sup> It is sufficient to observe that most countries' university systems have broken more fully with the medieval tradition than have the French system and some others, e.g. those of Austria, Spain or Italy, which similarly underwent the educational influence of the Jesuits, in order to grasp the role played by the eighteenth-century colleges. Endowed by the Jesuits with particularly effective means of imposing the academic cult of hierarchy and inculcating an autarkic culture cut off from life, the French educational system was able to develop its generic tendency towards autonomization to the point of subordinating its whole functioning to the demands of self-perpetuation.<sup>16</sup> This tendency towards autonomization found the social conditions for its full realization in that it fell in with the interests of the petty bourgeoisie and the intellectual fractions of the bourgeoisie, who found in the Jacobin ideology of formal equality of

opportunity new strength for their exacerbated impatience with all forms of 'favouritism' and 'nepotism'; and also in that it was able to take advantage of the centralized structure of the State bureaucracy which, in calling forth a proliferation of national, externally marked, anonymous examinations and competitions, gave the school institution the perfect opportunity to secure recognition of its monopoly in the production and imposition of a unitary hierarchy or, at least, hierarchies reducible to the same principle.<sup>17</sup>

In the French system, the concours is the fully realized form of the examination (which university practice always tends to treat as a competition) and the competition for the recruitment of secondary school teachers, the agrégation, constitutes, together with those advance recruitment competitions, the *Concours Général* and the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* entrance examination, the archetypal triad in which the University acknowledges its authentic self and of which all other competitions and examinations are but variously distant emanations and more or less deformed copies.<sup>18</sup> The ambition of the teaching corps to impose universal recognition of university credentials, and in particular the absolute supremacy of that supreme credential, the agrégation, is most clearly seen in the action of the pressure groups of which the *Société des agrégés* is merely the least clandestine expression, and which have succeeded in securing a de facto recognition of this strictly scholastic title out of all proportion to its de jure definition. The vocational profitability of the titles of *agrégé* and ex-student of the ENS is manifested in the very many cases in which they are used as unofficial criteria for co-option: 15 percent of the holders of Arts Faculty professorships or *maître de conférences* posts (not to mention the *assistants* and *maîtres-assistants*, making up 48 percent of the university staff) do not have the doctorat, the degree theoretically required, whereas they are virtually all *agrégés* and 23 percent of them are *normaliens*. If homo academicus par excellence is the *normalien-agrégé-docteur*, i.e. the actual or potential Sorbonne professor, this is because he combines all the titles defining the rarity which the University produces, promotes and protects. Nor is it an accident that in

the agrégation, as if carried away by its tendency to reinterpret external demand, the University institution can even go so far as to deny the very content of that demand: not uncommonly the agrégation jury, faced with the eternal threat of 'declining standards', sets the imperative of 'quality' over the necessity, felt as a profane interference, of filling all the vacant posts, and sets up, so to speak, through comparison with previous years, a competition between competitions that will yield the yardstick, or rather, the essence of the agrégé – even if this means refusing the means, elsewhere demanded, of perpetuating the real University, in the name of the exigencies of the self-perpetuation of the ideal University.<sup>19</sup>

To understand fully the functional significance of the agrégation, one would have to reinstate this institution in the system of transformations which examinations, or more precisely the system they constitute, have undergone: if it is true that, in an academic system dominated by the imperative of self-perpetuation, the degree par excellence corresponds to the examination which gives access qua master to the order of teaching most representative of the profession, i.e. secondary education, it follows that, in each historical conjuncture, it is the examination best placed to symbolize that function which holds, both in reality and in ideology, the positional value of examination par excellence, that is to say, successively in the history of the University, the doctorat, the licence and now the agrégation, which, despite the apparent pre-eminence of the doctorat, owes to its relationship with secondary education and its character as a recruitment competition not only its ideological force but also its weight in the organization of careers and more generally in the functioning of the University.<sup>20</sup> Everything takes place as if the school system had made use of the new possibilities offered by each new state of the system of examinations, resulting from the duplication of an existing examination, in order to express the same objective meaning.

To regard the present state of the University as the contingent outcome of a succession of disparate, discontinuous events in which only retrospective illusion could create the impression of a pre-

established harmony between the system and the legacy of history, would be to ignore what is implied in the relative autonomy of the educational system. The evolution of the school system depends not only on the strength of external constraints but also on the coherence of its structures, that is, both the resistance it can counterpose to events and its power to select and reinterpret accidents and influences in accordance with a logic whose general principles are laid down as soon as the function of inculcating a culture inherited from the past is taken in hand by a specialized institution served by a body of specialists. Thus the history of a relatively autonomous system presents itself as the history of the systematizations to which the system subjects the constraints and innovations it encounters, in accordance with the norms which define it as a system.<sup>2 1</sup>

### **EXAMINATION AND UNEXAMINED EXCLUSION**

We have had to grant the educational system the autonomy it asserts and manages to maintain in the face of external demands, in order to understand the characteristics of its functioning that it derives from its essential function. But were we to take its declarations of independence too literally, we should be in danger of losing sight of its external functions and particularly the social functions which academic selection and hierarchization always additionally perform, even when they seem to be exclusively obeying the logic, and even the pathology, proper to the educational system. Thus, for example, the apparently purely academic cult of hierarchy always contributes to the defence and legitimation of social hierarchies, because academic hierarchies, whether of degrees and diplomas or establishments and disciplines, always owe something to the social hierarchies which they tend to re-produce (in both senses). So it has to be asked whether the freedom the educational system is given to enforce its own standards and its own hierarchies, at

the expense for example of the most evident demands of the economic system, is not the quid pro quo of the hidden services it renders to certain classes by concealing social selection under the guise of technical selection and legitimating the reproduction of the social hierarchies by transmuting them into academic hierarchies.

Indeed, one begins to suspect that the functions of the examination are not reducible to the services it performs for the institution, still less to the satisfactions it gives the teaching staff, as soon as one observes that most of those excluded from studying at the various levels of education eliminate themselves before being examined, and that the proportion of those whose elimination is thus masked by the selection overtly carried out differs according to social class. In every country, the inequalities between the classes are incomparably greater when measured by the *probabilities of candidature* (calculated on the basis of the proportion of children in each social class who reach a given educational level, after equivalent previous achievement) than when measured by the *probabilities of passing*.<sup>22</sup> Thus, previous performances being equal, pupils of working-class origin are more likely to 'eliminate themselves' from secondary education by declining to enter it than to eliminate themselves once they have entered, and a fortiori more likely not to enter than to be eliminated from it by the explicit sanction of examination failure.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, those who do not eliminate themselves at the moment of moving from one stage to another are more likely to enter those branches (establishments or sections) from which there is least chance of entering the next level of education; so that when the examination seems to eliminate them, it most often merely ratifies that other form of advance self-elimination which relegation to a second-order branch, a deferred elimination, in fact amounts to.

The opposition between the 'passed' and the 'failed' is the source of a false perspective on the educational system as a selecting agency. Based on a candidate's experience (actual or potential, direct or mediate, past or present), this opposition between the two sub-sets separated by selection in the examination from within the set of

candidates hides the relation between this set and its complement (i.e. the set of non-candidates), thereby ruling out any inquiry into the hidden criteria of the election of those from whom the examination ostensibly makes its selection. A good deal of research on the educational system as an agency of continuous selection (drop-out) simply takes over this opposition from spontaneous sociology when it takes for its object the relation between those entering a stage of schooling and those successfully completing it, neglecting to examine the relation between those who leave one stage and those who enter the next one. To apprehend the latter relation it is sufficient to look at the whole process of selection from the point of view which, if the system did not impose its own point of view on them, would be that of the social classes condemned to immediate or deferred self-elimination. What makes this reversal of the problematic difficult is that it requires something more and other than a simple logical conversion: if the question of examination failure rates holds the limelight (consider the reactions to a change in the baccalauréat pass rate), it does so because those who have the means to pose this question belong to the social classes for whom the risk of elimination can only come from the examination.

There are several ways of missing the sociological significance of the differential educational mortality rate of the different social classes. Technocratic research, which is only interested in the problem inasmuch as the abandonment of a course by a proportion of the pupils who enter it has a manifest economic cost, immediately reduces it to a false problem of exploiting 'abandoned reserves of intelligence'; such research can even grasp the numerical relation between those completing each stage and those entering the next, and see the weight and social range of the self-elimination of the disadvantaged classes, without going beyond negative explanation in terms of 'lack of motivation'. In the absence of analysis of what the resigned withdrawal of the members of the working classes from the School owes to the functioning and functions of the educational system as an agency of selection, elimination and concealment of elimination under selection, all that techno-

cratic research is able to see in the statistics of educational opportunity which highlight the unequal representation of the different social classes in the different stages and types of education, is the manifestation of an isolated relationship between scholastic performance, taken at face value, and the series of advantages or disadvantages deriving from social origin. In short, if one fails to take as one's explanatory principle the system of relations between the structure of class relations and the school system, one is condemned to the ideological options which subtend the seemingly most neutral scientific choices. Thus some writers reduce educational inequalities to social inequalities, ignoring the specific form they take in the logic of the educational system, while others tend to treat the School as an empire within an empire, whether, like the docimologists,<sup>24</sup> they reduce the problem of equality before the examination to that of normalizing the distribution of marks or equalizing their variance, or whether, like some social psychologists, they identify the 'democratization' of education with the 'democratization' of the teacher-pupil relation, or whether, like so many hasty critics, they reduce the conservative function of the University to the conservatism of academics.

Seeking to explain why the fraction of the school population which eliminates itself before entering the secondary stage or during that stage is not randomly distributed among the different social classes, one is condemned to an explanation in terms of characteristics which remain individual, even when imputed equally to all individuals in a category, so long as one fails to see that they befall the social class *as such* only in and through its relation to the school system. Even when it seems to be imposed by the strength of a 'vocation' or the discovery of inability, each individual act of choice by which a child excludes himself from access to a stage of education or resigns himself to relegation to a devalorized type of course takes account of the ensemble of the objective relations (which pre-existed this choice and will outlast it) between his social class and the educational system, since a scholastic future is of greater or lesser probability for a given individual only insofar as it constitutes the objective and collective future of his class or

category. This is why the structure of the objective chances of social upgrading according to class of origin and, more precisely, the structure of the chances of upgrading through education, conditions agents' dispositions towards education and towards upgrading through education – dispositions which in turn play a determining role in defining the likelihood of entering education, adhering to its norms and succeeding in it, hence the likelihood of social upgrading.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the objective probability of entering this or that stage of education that is attached to a class is not just an expression of the unequal representation of the different classes in the stage of education considered, a simple mathematical device merely enabling one to evaluate the magnitude of the inequalities more precisely or more eloquently; rather, it is a theoretical construction providing one of the most powerful principles of explanation of these inequalities. The subjective expectation which leads an individual to drop out depends directly on the conditions determining the objective chances of success proper to his category, so that it must be counted among the mechanisms which contribute to the actualization of objective probabilities.<sup>26</sup> The concept of subjective expectation, conceived as the product of the internalization of objective conditions through a process governed by the whole system of objective relations within which it takes place, has the theoretical function of designating the intersection of the different systems of relations – those linking the educational system to the class structure and also those set up between the system of these objective relations and the system of dispositions (ethos) which characterizes each social agent (individual or group), inasmuch as when agents make up their minds, they always, albeit unwittingly, make reference to the system of the objective relations which make up their situation. Explanation in terms of the relationship between subjective expectation and objective probability, i.e. in terms of the system of the relations between two systems of relations, is able to account, on the basis of the same principle, not only for the educational mortality of the working classes or the survival of a fraction of those classes, together with the particular modality of the survivors' attitude towards the system, but also for the variation in



the attitudes of pupils from the different social classes towards work or success, depending on the degree of probability and improbability of their continuing into a given stage of education. Similarly, if the rate of working-class enrolment varies, from region to region, with the rate of enrolment of the other classes, and if urban residence, with the consequent social heterogeneity of acquaintance groups, is associated with a higher rate of working-class enrolment, this is because the subjective expectation of these classes is never independent of the objective probability characteristic of the acquaintance group (allowing for the reference groups or aspiration groups it contains), a fact which helps to increase the educational chances of the working classes, at least insofar as the gap between the objective probabilities attached to the reference or aspiration group and the objective class probabilities is not such as to discourage any identification or even reinforce the acceptance of exclusion ('That's not for the likes of us').<sup>27</sup>

Thus, to give a full account of the selection process which takes place either within the educational system or by reference to the system, we must take into account not only the explicit judgements of the academic tribunal, but also the convictions by default or suspended sentences which the working classes inflict on themselves by eliminating themselves from the outset or by condemning themselves to eventual elimination when they enter the branches which carry the poorest chances of escaping a negative verdict on examination. By an apparent paradox, university science courses, in which success seems at first sight to depend less directly on the possession of inherited cultural capital and which constitute the inevitable culmination of the sections admitting the highest proportion of working-class children on entry to secondary education, do not have a significantly more democratic intake than other types of faculty course.<sup>28</sup> In reality, not only is the relation to language and culture continuously taken into account throughout secondary education and even (doubtless to a lesser extent and at any rate less overtly) in higher education, not only are logical and symbolic mastery of abstract operations and, more precisely, mastery of the laws of transformation of complex structures, a function

of the type of practical mastery of language and the type of language acquired in the home -- but the organization and functioning of the school system continuously and through multiple codes retranslate inequalities in social level into inequalities in academic level. Given that, at every stage, the educational system establishes among the disciplines or subjects a de facto hierarchy which runs, in Science Faculties for example, from pure mathematics to the natural sciences (or, in Arts Faculties, from literature and philosophy to geography), i.e. from those intellectual activities perceived as the most abstract to the most concrete; given that this hierarchy is retranslated, at the level of school organization, into the hierarchy of types of secondary school (from the lycée down to the *Collège d'Enseignement Technique*, through the *Collège d'Enseignement Général* and the *Collège d'Enseignement Secondaire*) and the hierarchy of sections (from classical to technical); given that this hierarchy of schools and sections is closely connected, through the mediation of the correspondence between the hierarchy of degrees and the hierarchy of schools, with the hierarchy of the teachers' social origins; and given, finally, that the different branches and different schools attract pupils of different social classes very unequally, in accordance with their previous academic success and the class-differentiated social definitions of the types of course and types of schools -- it can be seen why the different types of curriculum give very unequal chances of entering higher education. It follows that working-class children pay the price of their access to secondary education by relegation into institutions and school careers which entice them with the false pretences of apparent homogeneity only to ensnare them in a truncated educational destiny.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, the combination of the educational chances of the different classes and the chances of subsequent success attached to the different sections and types of schools constitutes a mechanism of deferred selection which transmutes a social inequality into a specifically educational inequality, i.e. an inequality of 'level' or success, concealing and academically consecrating an inequality of chances of access to the highest levels of education.<sup>30</sup>

It may be objected that democratization of secondary education intake tends to reduce the role of self-elimination since the probability of working-class children entering secondary education has significantly increased over the last few years. But one has to set against this the statistics of admission to higher education according to school or section of origin, which indicate a social and educational opposition between the 'noble' sections of the 'noble' secondary establishments and second-order secondary education, perpetuating in a better concealed form the old cleavage between the lycée and extended primary education.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, in reducing the role of self-elimination at the end of primary schooling, in favour of deferred elimination or elimination by examination alone, the educational system fulfils its conservative function yet more successfully, if it is true that, to perform this function, it must disguise chances of entry as chances of success. Those who invoke 'the interest of society' to deplore the economic cost of 'educational wastage' contradict themselves in failing to take into account the profit accruing from it, namely the advantage the social order derives from spacing out and so concealing the elimination of the working classes.

It is clear why, in order to carry out in full this function of social conservation, the school system must present the 'moment of truth' of the examination as its own objective reality: the elimination, subject solely to the norms of educational equity, which it undertakes and conducts with formal irreproachability, conceals the performance of the function of the school system by masking, behind the opposition between the passed and the failed, the relation between the candidates and those whom the system has de facto excluded from the ranks of the candidates, and so concealing the links between the school system and the structure of class relations. Like the spontaneous sociology which understands the system as the system asks to be understood, a number of would-be scientific analyses, which allow the same autonomization to be foisted upon them and adopt the *véry* logic of the examination, consider only those who are in the system at a given moment, excluding those who have been excluded from it. But the

relationship of each of those remaining in the system to his whole social class of origin dominates and informs his relationship to the system: his behaviour, aptitudes, and dispositions towards school bear the stamp of his whole academic past, because they owe their characteristics to the degree of probability or improbability of his still being within the system, at that stage and in that branch. Thus, mechanical use of multivariate analysis might lead one to deny the influence of social origin on academic success, at least in higher education, on the grounds, for example, that the primary relation between social origin and success disappears when each of the two categories of students defined by a 'classical' or 'modern' secondary training is considered separately.<sup>32</sup>

But that would be to ignore the specific logic by which social advantages and disadvantages are progressively retranslated, through successive selections, into educational advantages or disadvantages and, more concretely, it would be to neglect the specifically educational characteristics, such as type of school, section entered in sixième, etc. which relay the influence of social origin. One only has to compare the examination success rate of students combining the most improbable characteristics for their class of origin, e.g. working-class students from a big Paris lycée having done Greek and Latin and having the best previous results (if indeed this is not a blank category), with the success rate of students endowed with the same educational characteristics but belonging to a social class for which these characteristics are the most probable ones (students from the Parisian bourgeoisie, for example), to observe the disappearance or even reversal of the relation which prevails in most cases between position in the social hierarchy and academic success.<sup>33</sup> But this finding remains meaningless and even a source of absurdities until the relation ascertained is reinstated in the complete system of the relations and of their transformations in the course of the successive selections which have led to the *compounding of improbabilities* which bestows its exceptional success on a group characterized by a cumulation of successive over-selections.

Analysis — even multivariate analysis — of the relations observed at a given point in time between the characteristics of categories of a

student body which is the product of a series of selections taking into account these same characteristics or, to put it another way, is the product of a series of 'draws' biased with respect to the variables considered (primarily social origin, sex and place of residence) grasps only misleading relations unless one is careful to reintroduce not only the unequal degrees of selectedness capable of hiding the inequalities of selection, but also the differential dispositions which differential selections produce in those selected.

A purely synchronic approach inevitably sees a set of absolute probabilities, redefined *ex nihilo* at each stage of education, in what is in fact a series of conditional probabilities throughout which the initial probability (of which perhaps the best indicator at present is the probability of entering secondary education in this or that section according to social origin) has been progressively specified and limited.

By the same token, such an approach is unable to give a full account of the dispositions characteristic of the different categories of students. 'Attitudes' such as bourgeois students' dilettantism, self-assurance and irreverent ease, or working-class students' tense application and educational realism can only be understood as a function of the probability or improbability of occupying the position occupied which defines the objective structure of the subjective experience of the 'wonderboy' or the 'inheritor'.<sup>34</sup> In short, what offers itself to be grasped, at every point on the curve, is the slope of the curve; in other words, the whole curve.<sup>35</sup> If it is true that the relation an individual maintains with the School and with the culture it transmits is more or less 'effortless', 'brilliant', 'natural', 'laboured', 'tense' or 'dramatic', according to the probability of his survival in the system, and if it is also the case that in their verdicts the School and 'society' take as much account of the relation to culture as of culture, then it is clear how much remains unintelligible until one goes to the principle underlying the production of the most durable academic and social differences, the *habitus* – the generative, unifying principle of conducts and opinions which is also their explanatory principle, since at every moment of an educational or intellectual biography it tends to reproduce the system of objective conditions of which it is the product.

Thus an analysis of the functions of the examination which seeks to break with spontaneous sociology, i.e. with the misleading images the educational system tends to offer of its own functioning and functions, must lead one to discard purely docimological inquiry, which continues to serve the hidden functions of the examination, in favour of the systematic study of the mechanisms of elimination as a privileged locus in which to apprehend the relations between the functioning of the educational system and the perpetuation of the structure of class relations. Nothing is better designed than the examination to inspire universal recognition of the legitimacy of academic verdicts and of the social hierarchies they legitimate, since it leads the self-eliminated to count themselves among those who fail, while enabling those elected from among a small number of eligible candidates to see in their election the proof of a merit or 'gift' which would have caused them to be preferred to all comers in any circumstances. Only when the examination is seen to have the function of concealing the elimination which takes place without examination, can it be fully understood why so many features of its operation as an overt selecting procedure still obey the logic governing the elimination which it conceals.

When one knows how much examiners' judgements owe to implicit norms which retranslate and specify the values of the dominant classes in terms of the logic proper to the educational system, it is clear that candidates are handicapped in proportion to the distance between these values and those of their class of origin.<sup>36</sup> Class bias is strongest in those tests which throw the examiner onto the implicit, diffuse criteria of the traditional art of grading, such as the dissertation or the oral, an occasion for passing total judgements, armed with the unconscious criteria of social perception on total persons, whose moral and intellectual qualities are grasped through the infinitesimals of style or manners, accent or elocution, posture or mimicry, even clothing and cosmetics; not to mention orals like those of the *École Nationale d'Administration* or the literature *agrégation*, where the examiners almost explicitly insist on the right to implicit criteria, whether bourgeois ease and distinction or university tone and breeding.<sup>37</sup> Proust

remarks that 'on the telephone you discover the inflections of a voice which you could not distinguish until it was dissociated from the face in which you objectified its expression'. In the same way, only experimental decomposition of the examiner's syncretic judgement can reveal all that a judgement formulated in the context of an examination owes to the system of social marks which constitutes the objective basis of the examiner's sense of the candidate's 'presence' or 'insignificance'.

But it should not be supposed that formal rationalization of the criteria and techniques of judgement would suffice to free the examination from its social functions: that is what the docimologists seem to ignore when, fascinated by the two-fold inconsistency of examiners unable to agree with one other because they are unable to agree with themselves on the criteria of judgement, they forget that different judges could, theoretically, agree on judgements that were identically biased because based on the same implicit criteria, if they had in common all the social and academic characteristics determining their grading. In drawing attention to the haven of irrationality which examinations represent, the docimologists bring to light the discrepancy between the ideology of equity and the reality of selection processes but, failing to inquire into the social functions of such 'irrational' procedures, they are liable to make further contributions to the exercise of these functions by diffusing the belief that a rationalization of grading would suffice to harness examinations to the service of the declared functions of the School and the examination.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, in order for the examination to fulfil to perfection its function of legitimating the cultural heritage and, through it, the established order, it would be sufficient for the Jacobin confidence that so many French academics have in national, anonymous competition to be extended to measurement techniques which have in their favour all the outward signs of scientificity and neutrality. Nothing would better serve this function of *sociodicy*<sup>39</sup> than formally irreproachable tests which could claim to measure, at a given point in time, the subjects' aptitude to occupy vocational posts, while forgetting that this aptitude, however early it is tested, is the product of a socially qualified teaching

and learning. and that the most predictive measurements are precisely the least neutral ones socially. In fact, nothing less than the neo-Paretian Utopia of a society protected against the 'circulation of the elites' and the 'revolt of the masses' can be read between the lines of some descriptions which present tests as the privileged tool and guarantee of American democracy qua meritocracy:

One conceivable consequence of a greater reliance on tested ability as a criterion for the assignment of educational or occupational status is a more rigid class structure based on ability. The contribution of inheritance to ability and the extensive use of objective selection tests may accentuate the position of the individual born to parents of low ability. The fact that individuals tend to choose marriage partners from the same social stratum makes it likely that over time it will become more, rather than less, difficult for an individual to improve his social position over that of his parents.<sup>40</sup>

And when these utopists describe the 'demoralizing' effects such a system of selection would inevitably have on the members of the 'lower classes', who, like the 'deltas' in *Brave New World*, would be obliged to acknowledge that they are the lowest of the low and happy to be so, perhaps the only reason why they over-estimate the capacity of tests to grasp natural abilities is that they under-estimate the ability of the School to accredit the natural character of abilities or inabilities.

### **TECHNICAL SELECTION AND SOCIAL SELECTION**

Thus it may be that an educational system is more capable of concealing its *social function* of legitimating class differences behind its *technical function* of producing qualifications, the less able it is to ignore the incompressible demands of the labour market. Doubtless modern societies are more and more successful in getting the School to produce, and guarantee as such, more and more skilled individuals, i.e. agents better and better qualified for the demands of the economy; but



this restriction of the autonomy imparted to the educational system is no doubt more apparent than real, insofar as the raising of the minimum level of technical qualification required for occupational purposes does not, ipso facto, entail a reduction of the gap between the technical qualification guaranteed by the examination and the social quality which it bestows by what might be called its *certification effect*.

A system of education consistent with the norms of technocratic ideology can, at least as successfully as a traditional system, confer on the academic scarcity which it produces or decrees by means of the diploma a social scarcity relatively independent of the skills demanded by the post to which the diploma gives legitimate access: it is this alone which explains why so many professional posts can be occupied, on different terms and with unequal remuneration, by individuals who (assuming the hypothesis most favourable to the reliability of the diploma) differ only in the degree to which they have been consecrated by school and university. Every organization has its 'stand-ins', condemned to a subordinate position by their lack of academic qualifications although their technical competence makes them indispensable, and everyone is familiar with the competition which exists between categories separated in the administrative hierarchy by their educational label although they perform the same technical tasks (such as engineers from different schools or the numerous categories of secondary teachers). If the principle of 'equal pay for equal work' can serve to justify hierarchies which, if it were taken literally, it would seem to contradict, this is because the value of a professional production is always socially perceived as related to the value of the producer and the latter in turn is seen as a function of the academic value of his qualifications. In short, the diploma tends to prevent the relation between the diploma and occupational status from being related to the more uncertain relation between capacity and status; if this connection were made, it would raise the question of the relation between capacity and the diploma and so lead to a questioning of the reliability of the diploma, i.e. of everything that is legitimated by recognition of the reliability of diplomas. Modern bureaucracies are in fact defending the

very principles on which their organization and hierarchies are based when they appear to contradict their most visible interests in failing to test the technical content of their agents' academic qualifications, because they could not submit individuals certified by the diploma to tests liable to endanger them, without also endangering the legitimacy of the diploma and of all the hierarchies it legitimates. Equally it is to the necessity of masking the gap between the technical skills actually guaranteed by the diploma and the social profitability of its certification effect that the ideology of 'general culture' corresponds, its primary function perhaps being to make it impossible, *de facto* and *de jure*, for the 'cultivated man' ever to be called upon to supply technical proof of his culture. It is understandable that the classes who objectively monopolize a relation to culture defined as indefinable (because it can be objectively defined only by this *de facto* monopoly) are predisposed to extract the maximum profit from the certification effect and have every interest in defending the ideology of disinterested culture which legitimates this effect by dissimulating it.<sup>41</sup> By the same token, one sees the social functions of the ostentatious squandering of teaching and learning which defines the mode of acquisition of those aptitudes worthy of belonging to general culture, whether it be the acquisition of the classical languages, conceived as a necessarily slow initiation into the ethical and logical virtues of 'humanism' or complacent drilling in every sort of formalism, literary, aesthetic, logical or mathematical.

If every selecting operation always has the indissolubly two-fold effect of regulating technical qualifications by reference to the demands of the labour market and of creating social grades by reference to the structure of class relations which the educational system helps to perpetuate, if, in short, the School has both a technical function of producing and attesting capacities and a social function of conserving power and privileges, it can be seen that modern societies furnish the educational system with vastly increased opportunities to exercise its power of transmuting social advantages into academic advantages, themselves convertible into social advantages, because they allow it to

present academic, hence implicitly social, requirements as technical prerequisites for the exercise of an occupation.<sup>42</sup> Thus, when Max Weber associated rationalization of selection and recruitment procedures with the development of the great modern bureaucracies and their ever growing demand for experts trained for specific tasks, he overestimated the autonomy of the technical functions of both the educational system and the bureaucratic system relative to their social functions. In reality, the top ranks of the French Civil Service have perhaps never before so totally recognized and consecrated the most general and even the most diffuse dispositions, at any rate those most resistant to rational formulation and codification, and never before so completely subordinated specialists, experts and technicians to the specialists-on-general-matters graduating from the most prestigious grandes écoles.<sup>43</sup>

In ever more completely delegating the power of selection to the academic institution, the privileged classes are able to appear to be surrendering to a perfectly neutral authority the power of transmitting power from one generation to another, and thus to be renouncing the arbitrary privilege of the hereditary transmission of privileges. But through its formally irreproachable verdicts, which always objectively serve the dominant classes since they never sacrifice the technical interests of those classes except to the advantage of their social interests, the School is better able than ever, at all events in the only way conceivable in a society wedded to democratic ideologies, to contribute to the reproduction of the established order, since it succeeds better than ever in concealing the function it performs. The mobility of individuals, far from being incompatible with reproduction of the structure of class relations, can help to conserve that structure, by guaranteeing social stability through the controlled selection of a limited number of individuals – modified in and for individual upgrading – and so giving credibility to the ideology of social mobility whose most accomplished expression is the school ideology of “*l’Ecole libératrice*”, the school as a liberating force.<sup>44</sup>

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 NOTES
 

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1. Examiners' reports on the concours for the agrégation or entry to the grandes écoles therefore constitute exemplary documents for anyone seeking the criteria by which the teaching corps trains and selects those it considers worthy of perpetuating it: these sermons for the academic seminary set out the grounds for verdicts betraying, in their murky clarity, the values which guide the examiners' choices and on which the candidates' training has to be patterned.

2. The effects of scholastic programming can be found in the most unexpected areas: when the French Public Opinion Institute (IFOP) asks its interviewees to say 'whether the progress of modern science in the field of atomic energy will do humanity more harm than good or more good than harm', what is the opinion poll but a national examination resurrecting a question put a thousand times in a thousand scarcely different forms to school-leaving certificate, baccalauréat or Concours Général candidates, 'the moral value of scientific progress'? And do not the alternatives offered in the preceding of the replies (more good than harm; more harm than good; as much good as harm) evoke the reach-me-down dialectic of three-point dissertations in which, after a laborious forcing of arguments for and against, a triumphant synthesis climbs onto the fence and faces both ways?

3. A more extended analysis of the *function of intellectual and moral integration* which every educational system fulfils by inculcating common forms of expression which are also common principles of organization of thought, can be found in P. Bourdieu, 1967, 2.

4. E. Renan, 'L'instruction publique en France jugée par les Allemands', *Questions contemporaines*, p. 266.

5. E. Durkheim, *L'évolution pédagogique en France*, Paris, Alcan, 1938, p. 161.

6. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans., ed. and introd. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, London, Kegan Paul, 1947, pp. 240 ff.

7. In the US, for example, statistics show a continuous increase in the proportion of members of the ruling categories who are graduates, and graduates of the best universities, a tendency which has become more marked in recent years. W. L. Warner and J. C. Abegglen (*Big Business Leaders in America*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1955, pp. 47-55) have shown that 'in 1928, 32% of the big business leaders were college graduates; in 1952, 57%' (p. 47). In France, a survey of a representative sample of personalities who had achieved fame in the most diverse fields showed that 85 percent of them were graduates, a further 10 percent having completed secondary education (A. Girard, *La réussite sociale en France, ses caractéristiques, ses lois, ses effets*, Paris, Institut Nationale d'Études

Démographiques, P.U.F., 1961, pp. 233-59). A recent survey of the leaders of large industrial organizations established that 89 percent of French managing directors are graduates, as against 85 percent for the Belgians, 78 percent for the Germans and Italians, 55 percent for the Dutch and 40 percent for the British ('Portrait-robot du P.D.G. européen', *L'expansion*, Nov. 1969, pp. 133-43). Research is needed to see whether, in most French careers particularly those in administration, the growth and codification of the advantages attached to degrees and diplomas have led to a decline in internal promotion, i.e. an increasing rarity of senior executives promoted from the ranks and trained 'on the job'; the opposition between the 'back door' and the 'front door', which roughly corresponds, in an administrative organization, to the opposition between the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie, may well have been intensified as a result.

8. Confucian education tended to impose the traditional ideal of the 'literary man': 'Puns, euphemisms, allusions to classical quotations, and a refined and purely literary intellectuality were considered the conversational ideal of the genteel man. All politics of the day were excluded from such conversation. It may appear strange to us that this sublimated "salon" cultivation [*"Salon"-Bildung*], tied to the classics, should enable a man to administer large territories. And in fact, one did not manage the administration with mere poetry even in China. But the Chinese prebendary official proved his status quality, that is, his charisma, through the canonical correctness of his literary forms. Therefore, considerable weight was placed on these forms in official communications' (M. Weber, 'The Chinese Literati', in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, p. 437).

9. *Ibid.*, p. 434.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 423.

11. Because the State gave it the means to enforce the overt supremacy of its specific hierarchies, the mandarin system constitutes a privileged case: here the School manifested in a codified law and a proclaimed ideology a tendency towards the autonomization of academic values which is elsewhere expressed only in a customary law and through multiple reinterpretations and rationalizations. Even the function of scholastic legitimation of hereditary cultural privileges took in this case a juridical form: this system, which claimed to accord the right to office solely on the basis of personal merit, attested by examination, explicitly reserved a privileged right of candidature for the sons of high-ranking officials.

12. It is in this light that one should interpret the statistics of entry to schools such as the *École Normale Supérieure* or the *École Nationale d'Administration* by the candidates' social category of origin and previous academic success. Our survey of the students of all the grandes écoles shows, *inter alia*, that while the ENS and the ENA both, and to much the same degree, have a much less democratic intake than the faculties, since only 5.8 and 2.9 percent, respectively, of their students are working-class (as against, for example, 22.7 percent in the

Arts Faculties and 17.1 percent in the Law Faculties), on closer analysis the -preponderant - category of privileged-class students (66.8 percent at the ENS and 72.8 percent at the ENA) exhibit characteristic differences: sons of teachers make up 18.4 percent of the ENS intake, as against 9 percent at the ENA; sons of Civil Servants make up 10 percent at the ENA, compared with 4.5 percent at the ENS . . . Moreover, the academic records of the students at the two schools testify that the University is more successful in orienting pupils towards the studies which most epitomize it (e.g. the ENS), the more clear-cut their previous academic success has been (as measured by the number of baccalauréat distinctions) - for a more extended analysis, see P. Bourdieu et al., *Le système des grandes écoles et la reproduction des classes dominantes*, in preparation.

13. Although it suggests only some of the relations linking the characteristics of teachers' practice and ideology to their social origin, class membership and position in the academic institution and the intellectual field, this analysis, like the one presented below (Chapter 4, pp. 200-03), should suffice to warn the reader against the temptation of taking the earlier descriptions of French teachers' professional practice for analyses of essences (Chapter 2).

14. See E. Durkheim, *L'évolution pédagogique*, II, pp. 69-117, followed up by G. Snyders, *La pédagogie en France au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècles*, Paris, P.U.F., 1965.

15. The resistance to any attempt to dissociate the certificate sanctioning completion of one stage of schooling from the right to enter the next stems, as can be seen in the polemics over the baccalauréat, from a conception of the school career as a unilinear trajectory culminating, in its accomplished form, in the agrégation. Indignant refusal to award 'cheap' certificates, which has recently tended to draw on the technocratic language of adapting the University to the employment market, can readily ally itself with the traditionalist ideology which would extend the criteria of the specifically academic guarantee to every certificate of proficiency, in order to safeguard the means of creating and controlling the conditions of academic 'rarity'. The pre-eminence of the royal road is such that all academic careers, and a number of professional careers which do not follow it all the way through, can only be defined in terms of lack. Such a system is thus particularly prone to produce 'failures', condemned by the University which has condemned them to maintain an ambivalent relation to it.

16. The teaching of the Jesuits should doubtless be seen as the source of most of the systematic differences which distinguish the intellectual 'temperament' of the Catholic countries marked by its influence from that of the Protestant countries. As Renan points out, 'the French University has too much imitated the Jesuits, with their insipid harangues and Latin verses; it recalls too much the rhetors of declining Rome. The great French fault of perorating, the tendency to make everything degenerate into declamation, is kept up by the stubborn in-

sistence by a part of the University on disdaining the content of knowledge and valuing only style and talent' (E. Renan, *Questions contemporaines*, p. 79). Those who directly attribute the dominant characteristics of a nation's intellectual production to the values of the dominant religion, e.g. an interest in the experimental sciences or philological scholarship to Protestantism, or the taste for belles-lettres to Catholicism, omit to analyse the specifically pedagogic effect of the retranslation performed by a determinate type of school organization. When Renan sees in the 'pseudo-humanist' teaching of the Jesuits, and in the 'literary mind' it encourages, one of the fundamental features of the mode of thought and expression of French intellectuals, he brings out the consequences for French intellectual life of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which halted the scientific movement that had got under way in the first half of the seventeenth century and 'put an end to historical criticism': 'With the literary mind alone encouraged, there ensued a certain frivolity. Holland and Germany, partly thanks to our exiles, built up a near monopoly of scholarship. It was decided then that France would be above all a nation of men of wit, a nation writing well, talking wonderfully, but inferior in knowledge of things and exposed to all the blunders that are only avoided with breadth of knowledge and maturity of judgement' (*ibid.*).

17. In the field of education, too, the centralizing action of the Revolution and the Empire continued and completed a tendency which had already begun under the Monarchy. Beside the *Concours Général*, which, set up in the eighteenth century, extended onto a national scale the competition taking place in each Jesuit college and consecrated the humanist ideal of belles-lettres, the *agrégation*, re-established by *décret* in 1808, was first organized in 1776, in a form and with a significance very close to those it has today. If such facts and more generally everything relating to the educational system's own history are almost always ignored, this is because they would belie the common representation which, reducing university centralization to an aspect of bureaucratic centralization, would have it that the French system owes its most significant characteristics to Napoleonic centralization.

If one forgets all that the educational system owes to its essential function of inculcation, one fails to recognize the specifically pedagogic foundations and functions of standardization of the message and of the instruments of its transmission (a pedagogic homogenization which is to be found in the administratively most decentralized systems, such as, for example, the British system). More subtly, one is prevented from grasping the specifically pedagogic function and effect of carefully cultivated distance from the university bureaucracy, which are an integral part of all pedagogic practice, particularly of French-style traditional pedagogy. Thus, for example, the flaunted, factitious liberties taken with the official syllabuses, or the ostentatious disavowal of the administration and its

rules, and more generally all the tricks which consist in deriving charismatic effects from contempt for the non-teaching staff, are authorized and favoured by the institution only because they help to affirm and impose the pedagogic authority required for the performance of inculcation, as well as giving teachers an economical way of illustrating the cultivated relation to culture.

18. 'I remember I once said to the future General de Charry, when I gave him back an exercise: "That's a script worthy of the agrégation"' (R. Blanchard, *Je découvre l'Université* Paris, Fayard, 1963, p. 135).

19. The concern to maintain and manifest the absolute autonomy of academic hierarchies is expressed through innumerable indices, whether in the tendency to attribute an absolute value to the marks awarded (with the use of decimals, taken to absurd lengths) or in the constant tendency to compare marks, averages, the best scripts and the worst, from one year to another. For example: in the *Rapport de l'agrégation de grammaire féminine* for 1959, after a table of the number of posts offered, the number of candidates eligible [to take the oral, having passed the written examination] and the number of candidates finally admitted, from 1955 to 1959 (in which it is seen that the number of successful candidates is almost always only half as great as the number of posts available), and the average marks, worked out to two decimal places, of the last eligible and first and last successful candidates, one reads (p. 3):

This year's vintage was not exactly uplifting (. . .) The 1959 competition did not fail to bring in some scripts savouring of knowledge or culture; but the figures themselves bespeak a falling-off which can only be regarded with alarm (. . .) The averages of the last eligible and last admitted have never been so low since 1955 (. . .). The lengthening of the lists (of candidates admitted), forced on us by the present unfortunate circumstances, appeared to us to be justified solely in terms of the recruiting crisis which mainland France is not alone in suffering (. . .). There is reason to fear that the inexorable law of supply and demand will bring about a decline in standards so grave as to jeopardize the very spirit of secondary education.

Countless similar texts could be quoted, in which every word is laden with the whole university ideology.

20. This 'national peculiarity' was highlighted by Durkheim: by the forms of organization it imposed and the spirit it diffused, secondary education has from the very beginning 'more or less absorbed the other levels of education and taken up almost all the space' (Durkheim, *L'évolution pédagogique*, I, pp. 23-24, 137, and *passim*).

21. This analysis of the French system does not pretend to do more than bring to light a particular structure of internal and external factors which is



capable of explaining, in the particular case, the weight and modalities of the examination. Further research would have to show how, in other national histories of the university system, different configurations of factors define different tendencies or equilibriums.

22. Although academic performance and rate of sixième entry are closely dependent on social class, the overall inequality in sixième entry rates derives more from inequality of sixième entry at equal levels of performance than from inequality of academic performance (see P. Clerc, 'Nouvelles données sur l'orientation scolaire au moment de l'entrée en sixième' (II), *Population*, Oct.-Dec., 1964, p. 871). Similarly, statistics on the transition from one stage of education to the next in relation to social origin and academic performance show that in the US and Great Britain it is not, strictly speaking, the School that is responsible for elimination (see R. J. Havighurst and B. L. Neugarten, *Society and Education*, Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 2nd edn, 1962, pp. 230-35).

23. See R. Ruiter, *The Past and Future Inflow of Students into the Upper Levels of Education in the Netherlands*, OECD, DSA/EIP/63; J. Floud, 'Social Class Factors in Educational Achievement', in *Ability and Educational Opportunity*, ed. A. H. Halsey, OECD, 1961; T. Husen, 'Educational Structure and the Development of Ability', *ibid.*, table (p. 125) showing the percentage of non-applicants to pre-university school in Sweden, by school marks and social origin.

24. Docimology: the science of examinations (trans.).

25. In the terms used here, subjective expectation and objective probability are contrasted as the standpoint of the agent and the standpoint of science, which constructs objective regularities by means of methodical observation. By our recourse to this sociological distinction (which has nothing in common with the distinction some statisticians make between a priori and a posteriori probabilities), we seek to indicate here that objective regularities are internalized in the form of subjective expectations and that the latter are expressed in objective behaviours which contribute towards the realization of objective probabilities. Hence, depending on the point of view adopted – that of explaining practices in terms of structures or that of forecasting the reproduction of structures in terms of practices – we are led to privilege in this dialectic either the first relation or the second.

26. For an analysis of the process of internalization through which the chances objectively contained in conditions of existence are transmuted into subjective expectations or despondency, and, more generally, of the mechanisms referred to above, see P. Bourdieu, 1966, 2; 1974, 1.

27. To be persuaded that this apparently abstract schema covers the most concrete experiences, one can read in *Elmstown's Youth* an educational biography which shows how membership of a peer group can, to a certain extent at least, falsify assessment of the chances linked to class membership (see A. E.

Hollingshead, *Elmstown's Youth*, New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1949, pp. 169-71).

28. See M. de Saint-Martin, 1968, 2: 1971, 2.

29. In France in 1961-62, manual workers sons made up 20.3 percent of the sixième intake into the lycées (a term covering schools of very different standards) and 38.5 percent of the intake of the Collèges d'Enseignement Générale, whereas the sons of senior executives and members of the professions (also strongly represented in private schools) made up 14.9 percent of the lycée intake and only 2.1 percent of the CEG intake (see *Informations statistiques*, Paris, Ministère de l'Education Nationale, Jan. 1964). Elimination from both lycée and CEG before completion of the course accentuates the under-representation of the working classes; furthermore, the difference of standard between the two types of school is such that, for those who might wish to continue their studies beyond the *brevet* [certificate of secondary technical education], access and adaptation to a *classe de seconde* [fifth form] in a lycée, an institution differing in its teaching staff, mentality and social intake, are both unlikely and difficult to accomplish.

30. The specific influence of the subjective expectation linked to the objective probability of success which is attached to a particular curriculum or type of school can be seen in the 'demoralizing' effect of entering a devalored curriculum or type of school: it has been observed in Britain that children who scored equally well at age 11 had better scores at age 15 if they went to grammar schools, whatever their social origin, and worse if they went to secondary modern schools (Robbins Report, Appendix I, Pt II, p. 50 – Great Britain: Committee on Higher Education, *Higher Education Report of the Committee Appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins*, 1961-63, London, HMSO, 1963).

31. There have been many descriptions of how the diversification of its institutions of higher education enables the American school system to 'cool out' those who, failing to meet the standards of 'real schooling', are quietly directed towards 'dumping grounds' which the institution and its agents are able to present as leading to 'alternative achievements' (B. R. Clark, 'The "Cooling-Out" Function in Higher Education', in *Education, Economy and Society*, eds. J. Floud and C. A. Anderson, New York, Free Press, 1961). In the same way, the French University is tending more and more to use the implicit, interlocking hierarchies which underpin the whole educational system to secure the 'progressive withdrawal' of the students it relegates into channels for 'rejects'.

32. On the 'multivariate fallacy' see above, Chapter 1, p. 103, note 2.

33. A study of the social and educational characteristics of Concours Général prizewinners supplies an exemplary illustration of these analyses. See P. Bourdieu and M. de Saint Martin, 1970, 1.

34. The 'wonderboy' (*le miraculé*) – i.e. the working-class child who succeeds 'against all the odds'; cf., perhaps, in Britain, the 'scholarship boy'. For 'the inheritor', cf. Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964, 1, (trans.).

35. Clearly one should not credit the subjects with an absolute lucidity as to the truth of their experience: their practices can be adjusted to their position in the system without being directly governed by anything other than the reinterpretation, offered by the system, of the objective conditions of their presence in the system. Thus, while the educational attitudes of the 'miraculously' successful working-class pupil appear as objectively (but indirectly) governed by his objective class chances, his conscious representations and his discourse may have as their guiding principle the magical image of the permanent miracle, merited by an effort of the will.

36. By way of a limiting case, the competitive examinations in medicine starkly reveal features observed elsewhere – the primacy given to the function of selection, conceived as class co-option; the role of rhetoric (not only verbal but also gestural and, so to speak, postural); the artificial creation of castes irreversibly separated by different educational backgrounds (see H. Jamous, *Contribution à une sociologie de la décision*, Paris, CSE, 1967, pp. 86-103).

37. A host of examples could be cited to show how examiners transform the most technical tests into an ethical ordeal: 'I see the examination, especially the viva, as bearing on extremely complex qualities. When taste, probity and modesty are appreciated all at once, what you have is one personality seeking to understand another' (C. Bouglé, *3rd Conference on Examinations*, pp. 32-44). 'A competition such as ours is not merely a technical challenge; it is also a test of morality, of intellectual probity' (*Agrégation de grammaire masculine*, 1957, p. 14). 'The text having been thoroughly understood and the translation prepared by analysis, in order to transform it into Greek it is then necessary to bring into play at once moral qualities and technical knowledge. The moral qualities, which may include courage, enthusiasm and so on, are concentrated in the virtue of probity. There are duties towards the text. One must submit oneself to it and not cheat' (*Agrégation de grammaire masculine*, 1963, p. 20-21). There is no end to the repertoire of adjectives used to account for technical faults in the language of moral depravity: 'smug complacency', 'dishonesty', 'culpable negligence', 'cowardliness', 'intellectual laziness', 'crafty prudence', 'unacceptable impudence', 'shameless nullity', etc.

38. Just as, failing to take account of the social characteristics of the examiners and the examinees, the docimologists have never thought to test the correlation between similar marking patterns and the social and academic characteristics of the group of examiners, so too, because they have not seen that the spontaneous docimology of teachers has its logic and its social functions, they can only fall back on puzzled indignation at the cool response their rational preaching gets from the teaching profession.