The Blurring of Distinctions

Media Use and the Progressive Cultural Lifestyle

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In the 1970s the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu introduced the concept of cultural distinction, in ambition to describe how lifestyle practices contribute to the reproduction of sociocultural hierarchies. In several analyses – many of them put together in his *magnum opus, Distinction* (1979/1984) – Bourdieu points to the interplay between social position, cultural taste and the, as they may seem, trivial practices within people's everyday lives. Since then, these ideas have been highly valuable within culturally oriented media studies. The kinds of media content people use and the way they use it, cannot be explained by simply referring to personal wants and needs – as was often the case in traditional uses and gratification studies (cf. Blumler and Katz, 1974) – but must be considered as components of people's overall lifestyles. And these lifestyles are in their turn structured within the broader context of sociocultural and material circumstances.

However, the social and cultural transitions within late modernity (cf. Giddens, 1991) make it necessary to put certain aspects of Bourdieu's theories in question. This does not mean neglecting the very concept of cultural distinction, but to analyze how it works in contemporary western societies, where it has become difficult to distinguish one single cultural hierarchy (cf. Fiske, 1992; Boëthius, 1995; Thornton, 1995; Frith, 1996). In this article – which is based on a qualitative interview study made in two different parts of Gothenburg, Sweden[1] – we will argue that it among the possessors of cultural capital is possible to discern a new, *progressive* cultural lifestyle – a lifestyle that combines the use of high culture and popular culture. This lifestyle – which primarily must be seen as an ideal type – partly stands in contradiction to the styles of

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media use that traditionally has been dominant within cultural status groups. This becomes obvious for example in relation to television viewing, which isn't marked by the same restraint as is usually the case among people with large amounts of cultural capital.

It is already at this point important to mention how this lifestyle relates to the postmodern descriptions of fragmentary, floating identities (cf. Lasch, 1984; Bauman, 1996) and to the 'new cultural intermediaries', described already by Bourdieu (1979/1984: 318ff.) himself and later on by for example Featherstone (1991: 90ff.). In contrast to postmodernist ideas of fragmentary identities, we argue that any theory about identity creation must take as its point of departure the individual's aim of sustaining a sense of ontological security through the routinization of everyday life (Giddens, 1991). Hence we oppose the ideas that the psychological aim of identity work within contemporary western societies is to avoid stability.

Compared to the description of 'new cultural intermediaries', the concept of 'progressive cultural lifestyle' refers to a group of people who possesses larger amounts of cultural capital, but less economic capital. Both groups are blurring the line between high and popular culture, but while this in the former case is due to a professional interest, the 'progressive cultural lifestyle' is conditioned by the combination of cultural capital and a general openness towards different kinds of cultural content. Although one of course could argue that also 'the new cultural intermediaries' express a progressive cultural lifestyle, our main point is to make another distinction – a distinction *within* the group of culturally privileged people.

Hence, when we speak of 'the progressive cultural lifestyle', we do not refer to 'the new cultural intermediaries'. Instead the progressive cultural

lifestyle is to be contrasted with a *conservative* cultural lifestyle, which, interestingly, has very much in common with the characteristics of the prestigious cultural elite that Bourdieu described in France in the 1960s and 1970s. We consider this group of people 'conservative', since they express a clear intention not to get involved in the popular cultural arena, which in their eyes doesn't display the 'right' cultural values. Instead their preferences are oriented towards traditional high culture, and their styles of use are characterized by concentration, planning and a stress on cognitive use value.

In this connection it is important to emphasize that neither the term 'conservative', nor the term 'progressive', is to be understood in an ideological or political manner. The concepts are chosen solely to highlight two different value orientations within the 'higher' strata – speaking in terms of cultural capital – of the cultural audience. To prefer classical music or high art does not necessarily correspond with conservative political values, no more than a person who likes both *Men in Black* and Bartok must be positioned to the left on a political scale. Using the word 'progressive' in relation to cultural practices like media use has two main reasons: Firstly, it corresponds very well to Bourdieu's own ideas about the dynamics within the cultural field. Cultural classifications and orientations of taste are not stable, since people continuously have the ambition to distinguish themselves from certain people, as well as expressing community with others. Secondly, the term 'progressive cultural lifestyle' indicates a further transition within the patterns of cultural practices; the blurred distinction between popular and high culture, which implicates that we in certain respects also have to rethink the very meaning of cultural capital. Hence, the term progressive does not only refer to a transition within the preexisting cultural field, but also to a break with the traditional hierarchic model.

Media Use, Cultural Identity and Cultural Distinction

The concept of cultural identity has become increasingly important in analyses dealing with the complex interplay between individuals and society (cf. Hall and du Gay, 1996). This is partly due to important sociocultural changes that have taken place during the last century. As traditional society, based on collective communities, dissolved during the industrialization process, individual identity came to be less fixed. While people's identities in traditional societies hardly were put into question, rooted as they were in stable social settings, the modernization process led to a greater freedom for – or pressure on – the individual to make her own life choices and thereby construct her own identity (cf. Beck, 1992). Since these processes of individualization and differentiation have accelerated, people's identity work is now often considered as a life long reflexive project. The late modern individual is to a great extent forced to reflect upon his or her own identity, to try to interpret it in the eyes of the social environment, and to continuously rewrite the narrative of the self (cf. Giddens, 1991: 76; Hall, 1992: 277).

This does not mean that the nature of the human psyche has been transformed, but that the context of living has become more complex and less predictable. Daily life today is surrounded by images and alternatives concerning what to do and who to be – an environment to which the media and the commodity industry both tribute. At the same time people themselves have become more socially and geographically mobile. To create what Giddens (1991: 44ff.) calls ontological security, i. e. a kind of confidence in the continuous personal existence, takes more than ever before. It is necessary to establish a range of everyday routines which can contribute to a sense of control over the ambivalent late modern life. This means creating a lifestyle.

Hence we have two important and interconnected arguments for why the concept of cultural identity has come to the fore: First, people's identities are no longer seen as predetermined and stable entities, but as the objects of continuous, reflexive (re-)creation. Secondly, the sociocultural environment of today is far more differentiated and fleeting than in premodern society, including phenomena like globalization, migration and mediazation. Taken together, these two arguments highlight the fact that people's sense of cultural belonging, of their cultural identity, no more is self-evident. Neither does it have to be locally fixed, since the expansion of the commodity industry and the development of new information technologies together have contributed to the global diffusion of expressive and materialized lifestyles. The communities on which cultural identity is based have to some extent lost their locally or nationally fixed character (cf. Meyrowitz, 1985; Thompson, 1994; Morley and Robins, 1995).

Within this context media use has an interesting and ambiguous function. On the one hand, it is to be seen as a component of an individual's total lifestyle, i.e. a practice which is influenced by the values and interests of everyday life. Both media pref-

erences and the ways in which different media are consumed, are components as well as expressions of the lifestyle. In this view the lifestyle contributes to the selectivity of the media use, and thereby also to the reproduction, or *conservation*, of preexisting values and interests. On the other hand, media use also involves a potential of lifestyle change – a *progressive* potential. Through the media content people are faced with a vast range of lifestyle related alternatives which in one way or another must be the subject of consideration. Thus, media use – in relation to both lifestyle and cultural identity – functions at the same time as a means of change and a means of reproduction.

What is necessary to take into account at this point, is that the late modern individual is not 'free' in the first place; it is possible to discern restrictive forces on at least two different levels. Firstly, the development of 'individual' lifestyles always takes place in a socially structured context where factors like social class, gender and ethnicity play important roles. This means that the actual amount of lifestyle choices that the individual is faced with is limited. To understand the ways in which people's lifestyles are influenced by positional factors, Bourdieu's (1979/1984) theory of habitus is a good help. Habitus is the system of dispositions that guides a certain individual towards a certain lifestyle, and towards a certain cultural taste. Some people are 'born to live' with economic and cultural privileges, while others are more or less predestined to a life without these privileges – thus winding up with less prestigious lifestyles.

Habitus is conditioned by the individual's position in the so called 'social space' – a position which in turn is defined by the extent to which the individual is in possession of cultural and economic capital. While the cultural elite – well educated cultural workers, artists, professors, etc. – possesses a large amount of cultural capital, the economic elite – for instance industrial leaders – possesses a large amount of economic capital. At the same time individuals, as well as entire class fractions, are in continuous motion within the social space. There are struggles about status positions and there are struggles about cultural tastes. To express a certain kind of taste is to distinguish one's own social position from the positions of people with lower status – to establish a distinction. In this connection people's lifestyles and cultural tastes are not only products of habitus, but can also be used as tools for its transformation or preservation. This leads us back to our previous point about the ambiguous role of people's media use.

A second objection against the notion that individuals are able to make totally free choices, concerns the importance of social and material circumstances within the household. Due to the media ethnographic studies that have been carried out in the last one or two decades, an increased understanding of how media use in part is to be seen as an extension of preexisting microsocial patterns has successively developed. This concerns for example the ways in which decisions about media use are made, what people do while using the media, and how children's media use is, perhaps, regulated (cf. Lull, 1990; Moores, 1993, 1996; Morley, 1986, 1992). In short, the household must be viewed as a social milieu which is held together by a dominant set of values and norms, but also as a place where compromises and conflicts between competing interests often are prevalent. The domestic life of an individual is a lifestyle sector – borrowing Giddens' (1991: 83) concept – where both space and time are organized in particularly close interaction with other people. Members of a family may for example lead totally different lives outside the home, but within the domestic lifestyle sector a mutual adjustment must take place – also concerning media use.

To conclude, our point of departure is that media use – consisting of both *preferences* and *styles of use* – on a fundamental level is an individual practice, i.e. a component of the individual's identity creating lifestyle. Media use both shapes and is shaped by the overall lifestyle. However, at the same time, this individuality is limited due to people's positions in social space and to the microsocial structures of the domestic context. It is at the meeting point between individual freedom and sociostructural forces that both the concept of cultural identity and the concept of cultural distinction operate.

Transitions within the Cultural Field

Bourdieu's sociology of culture is based upon a distinction and a great gap between high, or legitimate, culture and popular culture. This view is however contested by many contemporary scholars, advocating a less static cultural field where the hierarchy is not that explicit as it used to be. These two points of view are though not completely incompatible, since Bourdieu himself consider the cultural field as a battleground where transitions continuously take place.

The concept of autonomy is central in Bourdieu's theories of cultural distinctions. It is from this autonomy the legitimization of high culture originates. The autonomy implies that judgements of, for

example, art do not follow the same norms, rules or rationality that are at stake within the political and economical field – or everyday life. Appreciation of high culture thus requires cultural skills appropriated through early access to legitimate culture or higher education. The competence which the cultural capital confers to its owner is an implicit – in the way that its owner often takes it for granted, forgetting the acquisition – competence of judging aesthetics, an ability to detach oneself from everyday life: 'The pure aesthetic is rooted in an ethic, or rather, an ethos of elective distance from the necessities of the natural and social world…'(Bordieu, 1979/1984: 5).

The groups who do not possess cultural capital, i e. lack the implicit cultural competence, judge high culture within the same approach as other phenomena in their daily lives, which implies a subordination of aspects of form to function. Without the 'code', i e. cultural capital, it is rather difficult to appreciate high culture. These unprivileged groups find more pleasure in popular culture – the non-legitimated culture – where aspects of function rather than form are more salient. The similarities, according to judgements, to everyday life and its subordination to the economic power means thus that popular culture does not possess the same autonomy as a field as high culture (Bourdieu, 1979/1984).

As mentioned, there are scholars who mean that we are in the middle of a process of reduced tensions in the cultural field. According to Featherstone (1991: 66ff), we are experiencing an aestheticization of everyday life, due to, amongst other things, mass media and the commodity industry which are acting – through a flow of images and symbols – as a link between art and daily routines. The process of blurring of cultural boundaries is also emphasized by many researchers within postmodern theory (cf. Hebdige, 1988; Fiske, 1989). When popular culture and high culture appear in the same media-channels to a greater extent than before (TV, for example), it becomes clear that the concept of cultural capital – as used in the analysis of the practices of people in France in the 1960s and 1970s – is not totally sufficient for a 'cultural mapping' of the everyday life in the 1990s.

There is thus a need for a theory that clarifies the position of popular culture in relation to cultural capital. In this vein, there are researchers who have applied Bourdieu's concept of capital on popular culture, investigating, for example, the relation between mainstream and subcultures (cf. Fiske, 1992; Thornton, 1995; Frith 1996). Bjurström (1997), a Swedish scholar, has in his dissertation studied the cultural tastes among youth within a Swedish urban context. He claims, in conformity with Bourdieu, that the absence of autonomy of the popular cultural field makes it impossible to apply the concept of capital directly to popular culture. The cultural value of legitimate culture is, for example, something that everybody, more or less, is aware of, which is hard to say about the objects of desire in a subculture (ibid: 478). This, however, does not deny the existence of hierarchies within non-autonomous fields. Bjurström exemplifies with clothes, where haute couture signifies something completely different than jeans, for example (ibid: 184f). Although taste for popular culture – or popular culture in itself – can not be considered as cultural capital, Bjurstström's empirical work shows that there is a relation between them, for example the distinction between mainstream and subculture (ibid: 479ff).

Two Different Contexts of Living[2]

The empirical study presented in this article is part of the research project *Cultural Identities in Transition (CIT),* pursued at the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Göteborg University, and funded by The Swedish Research Council of the Humanities and the Social Sciences. The purpose of CIT is to analyse how contemporary cultural identities are created within the context of late modern society – specifically focusing on the different functions of media use. As explained above, in times of mediazation and increasing geographic and social mobility questions of cultural identity have become important to study. During 1997 and 1998 both qualitative and quantitative research has been carried out. This article presents some results from the first round of qualitative interviews, made in Gothenburg – the second largest city of Sweden, with about 500.000 inhabitants.

Compared to Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, Gothenburg has traditionally been charactarized by ship yards and industrial production. While Volvo (the car producer) is still the most important employer of Gothenburg, the ship yards have lost their strong position. Today Gothenburg is a gentrified city, which means that several former working class areas close to the centre have been transformed into more prestigious districts of living. Since many picturesque quarters have been expensively restored, a great share of the working class inhabitants has been forced to live in the suburbs, while people with economic and cultural capital have moved in (cf. O'Connor and Wynne, 1996).

During May and June 1997 we made 14 qualitative interviews – seven in the inner city of Gothenburg and seven in the affluent western suburbs. The main objective of these interviews was to gain a broad understanding of the complex interplay between people's media practices and their cultural identities. The respondents were in a relatively free manner asked questions about media preferences, styles of media use, and about the reasons for using media in certain ways. In line with the theoretical perspective outlined above, considerable attention was also paid to people's other lifestyle practices, to their social background and current social position, and to the character of the microsocial context. All interviews were carried out in the respondents' homes – a complementary way to get an insight into the social and material context in which media use takes place.

It is worth empasizing that we do not make any claim to present statistically generalizable results from only 14 interviews. However, even if this study is situated in the micro-contexts of everyday life, we also try to relate people's lifestyle practices to the conditioning macro-structural forces. One important disadvantage of previously conducted qualitative audience studies is that they too often have ignored the context of the micro context – the fact that people do not wind up randomly in a certain domestic environment (Reimer, 1997).

By picking two separate districts, we may be able to distinguish between different contexts of living, between different levels of access to the metropolitan cultural life, and, to a great extent, also between different social classes. Our assumption is that these two districts will present two different pictures of the relationship between media use and cultural identity – and that our results therefore will contribute to a further understanding of how cultural capital is gained and expressed within different contexts of life.

When we decided to make the inner city of Gothenburg a separate area of investigation, our intention was to capture the district which was most likely to present genuine urban lifestyles. This does not mean that our aim was to *construct* a selection of respondents which consists exclusively of typically late modern and culturally active people. We rather picked that part of Gothenburg where we considered the conditions for metropolitan life to be most at hand. One important criterion was that geographical distances should not be any obstacle to full access to the range of activities that a big city can offer – activities which can be incorporated into

people's lifestyles and thus constitute a complement to media use as an identity creating activity. According to this intention, we decided to give our definition of 'the city' rather narrow limits.

People in the inner city district are neither significantly rich, nor significantly poor. In 1994 the average personal income was 141.000 SEK in Centrum and 145.000 SEK in Linnéstaden (the two areas of study), which is to be compared to the total average income of 138.000 SEK in Gothenburg as a whole. Notable is that both Centrum and Linnéstaden present a large share of highly educated people – something that indicates that the inner city district population might be in possession of cultural rather than economic capital. To say that the seven respondents selected from the inner city of Gothenburg are quite representative for the population as a whole, would not be a dishonest description – though of course not using the term 'representative' in a statistical manner. Among the respondents there are people between 26 and 55 years of age. There are three women and four men, including two mothers and four fathers. One is divorced and two has remarried – though no one lives totally alone. There are people with high, as well as people with low levels of education. There are people with very different kinds of professions – though none unemployed.[3]

An overview of the demographic data concerning the western suburbs Askim and Älvsborg shows two things: (1) Älvsborg and Askim are very similar in all respects; (2) the two suburbs take a top position in social status in Gothenburg. The average income of the whole of Gothenburg was 138.000 SEK in 1994. The corresponding numbers for Askim and Älvsborg were 194.000 and 193.000, which were the highest in Gothenburg. While the average number of people per household in the whole of Gothenburg in 1990 was 1.91, it was 2.72 in the chosen suburbs. Although the higher average, this does not mean that people live in more confined spaces; typical for the suburbs is the absence of blocks of flats. Instead almost everyone lives in houses or terrace houses.

The respondents from the western suburbs constitute a quite homogeneous group of people. The differences in background are limited. Almost everyone comes from a middle class or upper middle class family. Two of the women interviewed have attended private schools. There are also similarities in their living conditions; all of them live together with their spouses in houses or terrace houses; they are aged between 34 and 48; all but one respondent

have children. Four out of seven have small children under 10 years. The group consists of three men and four women. If one tries to locate these respondents in the social space of Bourdieu (1979/1984), one finds most of them on a quite high position. Even though the range of professions is wide, there is one common character in these households: at least one of the partners has a profession with prestige. For example, there is a secretary whose husband has his own company and a housewife who is married to a teacher at the university. As a group, the lifestyles of the respondents in the western suburbs are characterized by preferences in leisure activities typical of high social positions; sailing, playing golf, high culture, travelling abroad – *no* charter flights.

The Media Situation in Gothenburg

As we in the following section will discuss how different media preferences are distributed among our respondents, a brief description of the existing media landscape is needed. Three characteristics have to be mentioned: First, the newspaper situation in Gothenburg is marked by the vast dominance of *Göteborgs-Posten* [The Gothenburg Post] – the local morning paper, which is almost completely dominating the local market. In most other Swedish cities there are two competing local newspapers. This implies that the choice of local newspaper hardly can create any distinctions among the Gothenburg inhabitants; instead distinctions are established through the – often complementary – use of nationally distributed morning papers, based in Stockholm.

Second, the radio market in Sweden has been deregulated during the 1990s, giving birth to several commercial local radio stations. In Gothenburg there were in 1997 four such stations; *City 107*, *Energy*, *Megapol* and *RIX*. These channels complement the four national public service channels P1, P2, P3 and P4, which are all free from advertising.

Third, since the 1980s the TV-situation has also been considerably changed. This is partly due to the expansion of cable-TV and privately owned satellite dishes, which give access to a great number of international TV-channels. Additionally, since the Swedish market has been deregulated, a couple of Swedish commercial TV-channels have been launched. The three most important are TV3, TV4 and Kanal 5. While TV4 – just like the two public service channels SVT1 and SVT2 – is nationally accessible through broadcasting, the other two are accessible only via cable or a satellite dish.

Media Preferences: Taste and Distaste

In general, our respondents seem to be quite conscious media users. The kind of media forms and contents which in large survey studies have proved to be especially connected to the lower social classes – for example evening papers, game shows and soap operas on TV, action films etc. (cf. Reimer, 1994) – are all media forms which among our respondents have not often been emphasized as important lifestyle practices. As a matter of fact, our study shows an almost remarkable absence of heavy TV-habits. TV-news is however a programme that everybody usually watches although some critical voices concerning the superficial way the news are presented are heard. The critique comes mainly from those who possess large amounts of cultural capital. Although they watch the news, they prefer other media to get updated about the world; newspapers and/or the news-channel of the radio, which represent media with a more nuanced and deeper treatment of the news items (cf. Sparks, 1992). Their relationship to news is one of reflection, as expressed through the critical stand towards TV-news; some put in question the selection of news or the lack of background to the issues. This is contrasted by the answer from another respondent asked to tell her meaning about the news: 'News are news, it is nothing to say about them. If one doesn't like them there are other TV-channels.'

The critique against TV-news from the possessors of cultural capital is mild compared to their views on the rest of the TV-programmes, however. This is expressed not only in opinion, but also in their restricted watching. For example, among our respondents in the western suburbs who live in houses – not including terrace houses – there is no one who has – or expresses a wish to have – a satellite dish. We mentioned earlier how the total repertoire of TV today consists of a mix of high and low culture. This has led to a very selective use among the possessors of cultural capital; culture programmes and news documentaries are items often mentioned as preferences – programmes which most frequently are to be found in the Swedish public service channels SVT1 and SVT2. In the same way they avoid most of the popular culture on TV. As one respondent puts it:

> I panic at Friday night shows on TV, when millions of families are supposed to sit passively and watch a few people being active. That's not natural.

It is clear that in this case we are talking about a real *dislike*. This is important to emphasize, as it should be differentiated from someone who just chooses not to watch the programmes in question. The distinction is once again based in the degree to which one reflect about the aim of the programme and, at the same time, the role of the audience. Several of the respondents with large amounts of cultural capital stress the 'anaesthetic' function of TV. This is however not the case for all of them. One of the respondents – young, living in the inner city, well educated, with a large cultural competence – mentions the advantages of TV, not just as an enriching tool, but also with a function of relaxation. This sounds like a statement from someone with less cultural capital, but in consideration to this person's background and other media use – reading several newspapers with a big interest in the cultural pages, frequent use of Internet, interest in certain high culture – it does not fit the traditional picture. Instead we can talk a distinction even among those who have large amounts of capital – a distinction that is expressed through an open and unprejudiced attitude towards modern forms of media and media content. This distinction will be further developed in the section of 'Styles of media use'.

The selective TV-watching among the respondents with large amounts of cultural capital can be seen as a component of a lifestyle within which all activities must have a certain kind of use value. For most of these people the relaxing function, which also some of the other respondents stress, is not enough; besides that, the media use should also be enriching. A female architect from the western suburbs puts it like this:

> Sometimes it's nice to watch something light...well, not too light then. It should give you something, like a good film or so.

The quotation shows that even when this woman looks for relaxation or amusement, she does not give up the desire for knowledge. This association of amusement and enriching qualities is a distinctive mark – irrespective of media form – for everybody with large amounts of cultural capital. It can be exemplified with what the earlier mentioned, well-educated young man who lives in the inner city, says about personal functions of media:

> Partly I use the Internet for amusement. [...] We have been checking out whether there is anything relevant about the place where we are travelling this summer, and that kind of amusement. […] On weekends I often buy

> Dagens Nyheter [the biggest morning paper in Sweden] as a kind of amusement, to read the cultural pages or something like that.

In a similar fashion an older woman working at the university really enjoys taking part of the cultural pages in the newspaper. Further, she reads more newspapers at her job and then with an extra attention to the culture content. It could be argued that the preferences of the possessors of cultural capital are an expression of their profession. But, as most of the practices are carried out during their free time and with a pronounced aim of pleasure, we nevertheless claim that this is an expression of blurred boundaries – between relaxation and enrichment; pleasure and information gathering; work and leisure time.

A common preference in this matter, among those who possess large amounts of cultural capital, is the news and culture radio channel of the Swedish public service company, P1. An interesting point to make here is its captiveness. Traditionally, the captiveness of a media form is a common issue within popular culture theory (cf. the concept of flow by Williams, 1975; Moores, 1988). Among our respondents we have two (both from the western suburbs) who say they easily get captured by interesting content in P1. This means, sitting 'stuck' in the car in spite of arrival, or spending two to three hours in the morning in front of the radio. The difference from the concept of flow is that the latter points to the form aspect of television broadcasting, in especially commercial channels, as the 'capturing tool', while the captiveness of P1 is a pure issue of content, that attracts certain people.

The strong attraction to the enriching content of the news and culture radio channel of the two possessors of cultural capital above, is also expressed by the fact that they both have been in personal contact with the radio channel in the aim of getting print-outs of radio programmes, print-outs which they use for debating or to influence other people. This shows not only a big interest, but also a closeness to the political and/or cultural elite – a closeness that is a common character for all respondents with large amounts of cultural capital. As a group they have become familiar to the public debate through comprehensive education or professional experiences and are 'speaking the same language' as the most important cultural and social opinion leaders. In this way media comes to work as a reproducer of values.

Age is an important factor when it comes to the formation of lifestyles – and media use as well. But

instead of discussing the correlation between media preferences and age, we find it more relevant to concentrate upon media preferences in different *phases of life* (cf. Giddens, 1991: 75f.) – and how the expression of social position intervenes with it. The majority of our respondents are parents, many of them with children under 10. This parental phase is a very important time in life. Among our respondents we have seen how parental identity takes over and becomes the dominating one. This is visible in the way the respondents stress the children in all contexts and how they talk about 'what they would like to do, if not...'. Parental identity also affects media use, which is particularly obvious in preferences.

In general, parental identity reduces the access to – and the importance of – the practices within the public sphere. This is obvious when the respondents, sometimes unconsciously, talk about what they used to do in the public sphere instead of what they do now. The identity they had before they got children is partially changed into a parental identity. Many of the respondents are conscious about that it is a temporary phase of life; talking about that they will return to the public practices when the children have grown up. The increased significance of the private sphere creates a dependency on the 'private' media as well, which creates distinctions between the two contexts of living. The parents in the western suburbs have a common character in how they all have made up strict rules about what the children are allowed to watch. They have very determined opinions about the programmes, like these quotations from two different mothers exemplify:

> Some of the programmes for children are not suitable for children. Sometimes you get shocked about what they call children programmes. Then I have to put the TV-set off.

> I'm glad we haven't got a satellite dish, especially when thinking of the children. There are so many violent programmes for children nowadays.

As a consequence, one of these families have TV-free Sundays which instead is a 'reading day'. This expresses an awareness of the low prestige of TV-watching (cf. Hedinsson, 1981) and, not least important, a care to pass over their own values to their children. These opinions were quite general for the parents in the western suburbs – almost irrespective of amount of cultural capital. Such rules, or the function of TV as a supervising tool (cf. Lull 1990:

41ff.), are not present in the homes of the parents in the inner city. The parents in the western suburbs who furthermore are representatives of cultural capital have a common feature according to their own media use. The parental identity of course restricts their media use, but only through *reduced time* for TV, radio, newspapers etc. – their preferences are still the same as before they became parents. In contrast, we have a 33 year old woman from the city who says that after becoming a mother she does not listen to the classical music channel P2 any longer, because she is 'not into that world anymore'. Instead, when she is at home alone, she uses P3 (a channel which in day time combines pop music and small talk) as a form of relaxation. Television is used similarly. When the children have gone to sleep, the TV usually goes on:

> The TV always goes on, you can say… It is… if there is anything good, any series, Emergency Room on Mondays… a typical example… or if there is any good film. I want to relax then. […] We both put on the TV and sit in the sofa, and for me it has been like 'mmm… how nice to switch on the TV… mmm… to sit down in the sofa and look through the channels…'

We interpret this distinction among parents' media preferences as due to a difference in social position. A large amount of cultural capital creates more stable media preferences – preferences, which are deeply anchored in the social position and therefore not affected by changes in life circumstances. The socially homogenous life environment in the western suburbs obviously contributes to this kind of cultural stability.

Styles of Media Use

Not surprisingly, people's ways of using the media are in part due to their preferences. Naturally a person who doesn't have an interest in the morning paper does not incorporate it as an important component of his or her daily routines. However, preferences are not the only, and perhaps not even the most important, factor which throws light on the media audience's styles of use. Just as we noted in the previous section, there are several circumstances in a person's total life situation that must be taken into the picture. Concepts like social position (i. e. the amount of economic and cultural capital) and current phase of life must be mentioned also in the context of *how* individuals use the media, as well as in the context of *what* they use. Consequently –

since the character of people's media practices is formed in a complex interplay between individual preferences, sociocultural values and more practical circumstances – the expressions of cultural distinction are not self evident.

One topic worth discussing is the level of planning and concentration that people ascribe to their media use. We can here identify two poles: one where the concentration level is high, because of the use of intellectually demanding media content in a highly individual context of living, and one where the concentration level is considerably lower, due to an orientation towards relaxation, which furthermore takes place in a family context which requires compromises. Once more it is useful to pick the respondents with large amounts of cultural capital as examples of the same type, and distinguish their behaviour from how most other respondents use the domestic media. In connection to the morning rituals, people with much cultural capital usually emphasize the morning paper's central position. This means reading it through, in some cases for one hour or more. It also means *not* listening to the radio at the same time. Hence the activity of newspaper reading has very clear demarcations. To be fully satisfying it requires concentration, and therefore it has a space and time of its own. A female university teacher living in the inner city of Gothenburg also explains that she has never learned to use the radio as a background medium, because she always prefer to be fully concentrated in what she is doing. 'If I am listening, then I'm listening', she says.

In other households the morning routines are considerably different. A 37 year old male DJ, living in the inner city district, explains how the atmosphere around the breakfast table easily get too dense of 'information':

> If I'm at home, then I read the paper. It's somehow holy… […] P3 honestly has got out of hand. I'm speaking strictly musically. When it's nine o'clock in the morning I'm not responsive to Oasis or that kind of stuff, Skunk Anansie or any other strange English screaming band. […] And then we have our own little radio [referring to their two-year old son], so it's usually high life here in the mornings.

Notable is that this respondent on the one hand mentions the morning paper as 'holy', but on the other hand doesn't give it as much attention as for example the before mentioned university teacher. In fact, he tries to read the paper while at the same time listening to the radio (that plays music he doesn't

really like), talking to his girlfriend (who is reading another section of the paper) and taking care of their little son. In short, this example presents a situation in which an absence of cultural capital together with a presence of a demanding family situation give shape to a quite fragmentary style of media use.

If we turn to the evening rituals, there is a quite similar split between highly selective and focused media users and more distracted or restrained ones. Primarily we are in this context speaking about television. Watching at least one of the evening news programmes is a daily routine for most of the respondents. But except for that common feature, people are using the TV in very different manners. People on higher social positions, especially those positioned in the cultural sphere, describe their TV-use as highly selective – that means planned in advance – and focused upon single programs. Even though watching the news also for those people is a routine, most of them turn the TV-set off afterwards, or leave the TV-room.

> *Female university teacher, the city:* [About zapping] The youngsters do it, but I haven't really got used to that behaviour. I only watch precisely those programmes which I have, so to speak, marked that I want to see.

> *Housewife, the western suburbs:* We have the TV-set in a very small room on the second floor. It's not very comfortable so you don't sit there more than necessary.

In other words, they do not get captured, or do not expose themselves to *the risk* of getting captured. As we described in the previous section, it is obvious that television, compared to other media, is connected with low cultural status among these groups – especially among the respondents living in the affluent western suburbs. Instead they mention the importance of reading books. While others read during travels or a couple of pages in bed, the cultural workers do not start reading a book without knowing that they have time to finish it soon. A male musician, living in the western suburbs, describes the capturing capacity of books this way:

> If I have been out playing somewhere, I usually stay for a chat afterwards. That is not the case if I am in the middle of a book. Then I rush home to get some extra time for reading.

The cultural preference in books has almost the character of a natural *need*; book reading is an activity that has to be done, an act of spontaneity. This condition is especially interesting if we at the same

time keep in mind this group's very distanced, although concentrated, use of television. While book reading is passionate and intensive, the dominating cultural values prevent people from ascribing the same affective features to TV-viewing. And probably this experience also is a natural one, since cultural preferences and competences through socialization get incorporated in people's lifestyles almost as inherited capacities – as in the case of Bourdieu's studies of the visitors at art exhibitions: People with large amounts of cultural capital did not themselves make any reflections concerning the nature of their skills, while unfamiliar visitors claimed that the pieces of art were difficult to understand (Bourdieu and Darbel, 1969/1991).

So, the other way around, is the cultural elite's restricted and concentrated use of television to be considered as a lack of cultural competence – i. e. a lack of popular cultural competence? This may hold true if we (1) restrict our definition of the cultural elite to include only those people who possess cultural capital in Bourdieu's traditional sense, and (2) complement the concept of cultural competence with the concept of technological competence. The first restriction is due to the fact that late modernity – as we have argued earlier in this text – as one of its features includes a blurred distinction between high culture and popular culture. Since it is no longer possible to identify one single cultural hierarchy, but many different (cf. Fiske, 1992; Frith, 1996; Thornton, 1995), it is necessary to distinguish between a 'conservative' and a 'progressive' cultural lifestyle. Even if these two lifestyles must be seen as ideal types, and not as in reality mutually exclusive entities, they contribute to a clearer picture of what media use once was, and what it has become. While the first one is represented by people with traditional high cultural values, who use both television and radio very restrictively and focused, the latter is represented by (often younger) people, whose styles of media use are characterized by a greater dynamic – even if they in essential parts share the same prestigeous cultural preferences. The progressive cultural lifestyle does not only blur the line between high culture and popular culture; it also incorporates phenomena like 'zapping', 'time shifting' and 'secondary use' as components of the overall style of use.

Also the second restriction is in part due to a cultural gap between younger and older generations. As studies have shown (cf. Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971; Murdoch et al, 1992; Wheelock, 1992), new domestic technologies are usually adopted earlier among younger people than among older. In the case of information technologies this condition is also reflected in how the media, when incorporated in the domestic life, is used. For example, the use of remote controls and the habit of doing other things while 'watching' TV are characteristic components of youthful styles of use. This means that the difference between the conservative and the progressive cultural lifestyle partly is a matter of technological competence rather than cultural competence. Younger people are in general more familiar with new information technologies than older – especially young people with higher education, who use computers and the Internet every day at work or in connection to their education.

Speaking of styles of use, it is also important to discuss what we may call 'media related talk' (cf. Morley, 1986: 155) – i. e. what media content people discuss, when and with whom. While Morley's study *Family Television* primarily included English working class respondents and moreover focused only on television, we have the opportunity to outline a broader picture, especially describing the characteristics of people with large amounts of cultural capital. For this reason, in our context of study, the differences between men and women do not seem as important as the distinctions related to the media users' social positions. Once more it is necessary to point out the respondents within the cultural sphere as a less homogenous group than it may seem on the surface. The more conservative possessors of cultural capital very seldom discuss TV-programmes, especially not entertainment. Some of these respondents even feel a bit left out when colleagues talk about soap operas. Instead the most common items of discussion seem to be news, books, cinema and theatre. Most of them have a friend with whom they talk about books and the cultural debates in more detail.

> *Female architect, the western suburbs*: I find it very interesting to compare my understanding of a book with someone else's. I think the understanding depends on which 'tentacles' you have out. Sometimes when you discuss a book, the view of another person influences your own view. At the same time it teaches you something about the other person.
>
> *Female university teacher, the city:* For example, if I've been watching an interesting literature programme and think that it was very good, then it may happen that I call a friend and we discuss it […] It may also be some debate article from time to time, about the school system or so, that we talks about at

work. Or if someone you know has written an article or so.

For these respondents it should be out of the question to discuss for example soap operas or talk shows, primarily for the simple reason that they don't watch it. People who express a progressive cultural life style, on the other hand – since they combine a preference in high culture with popular culture – also include a broader range of topics within their repertoire of talk. For example, this means discussing both popular music and the cultural pages in the morning paper.

The Rise of a New Cultural Audience?

Since our discussion so far mainly has concentrated upon the expressions of cultural capital, one may ask how fruitful it is to choose respondents from two different contexts of living. Are there any 'significant' differences between these two areas? The answer is clearly yes, especially due to the following three results: First, it is obvious – and furthermore expected – that the respondents of the affluent western suburbs in general are in possession of more cultural (and economic) capital. Secondly, the same respondents show a more homogeneous pattern of lifestyles. Thirdly, among those respondents who possess large amounts of cultural capital, it seems as if the inner city context provides larger opportunities for the development of progressive cultural lifestyles, while the conservative cultural lifestyles are easier reproduced in the affluent suburbs. These three observations are in good accordance with each other and also with the statistical facts concerning the two districts' demographic features that we previously presented.

The reasons for why progressive cultural lifestyles, which in contemporary society contribute to the blurring of preexisting cultural boundaries, are most likely to be found in metropolitan areas, are on a theoretical level to be found in what Berger et al (1974) calls the 'pluralization of life-worlds'. This concept refers to the developments within modernity that have lead to the differentiation and segmentation of the individual's context of living. Today the local communities are not as homogeneous as in pre-modern societies, nor are people bound to live and work within the same environment. Today people continuously alternate between different sociospatial settings, and continuously have to adjust their identities to be able to 'fit in'. Also Giddens (1991: 83) points out these transitions of people's life environments as an important reason for the pluralization of choice within the individual's lifestyle.

If we compare the inner city district of Gothenburg with the western suburbs, the latter must be considered the more homogeneous and stable social milieu. To get a house in this area requires a good amount of money, which hardly is to be gained until a certain phase of life. Thus, when people enter this area they are already settled in society's upper stratum. The inner city district is more heterogeneous in most demographic respects, and furthermore offers a wide range of leisure activities within a narrow area – restaurants, cinemas, theatres, department stores, sports arenas etc. A reasonable conclusion is that the pluralization of life-worlds rather is to be found in this milieu than in high status suburbs or in rural areas. The city life gives the culturally skilled individual greater opportunities to make his or her own choices concerning cultural practices – opportunities that aren't necessarily restricted by dominating cultural values in the social environment. However, this doesn't mean that a progressive cultural lifestyle is more likely to be developed than any other lifestyle; but rather that the diversified range of choices makes this kind of development possible. The individual must actively participate in the various social and cultural encounters of everyday life – including encounters with other people and their life-worlds, as well as institutions of leisure activities.

Our argument so far is that the milieu of the city creates good conditions for the development of progressive cultural lifestyles – without being deterministic. There are nevertheless other requirements that need to be fulfilled before such a development can take place – requirements more related to the individual: First, *position in the social space*. The progressive cultural lifestyle is based on a large amount of cultural capital and indicates an appreciation of high culture practices. In this way, to a certain extent, it shares the same cultural values as the conservative variant. Secondly, to be able to take part of all the metropolitan activities, the life circumstances have to be suitable, which is especially obvious when it comes to *phase of life*. It is mainly three matters that deserve consideration in this context; the family situation, technological skills and the temporal implication, which all, without being deterministic, point in the same direction – being young facilitates a progressive cultural lifestyle. To be young means that it is less probable that one has reached the parental phase which, on different levels, restrains the access to the public sphere. To be young also implies a greater likelihood of having

technological skills, implying larger access to new media. Finally, to be young means a reduced temporal and spatial distance to the youth culture; temporal, in the sense that the adolescence is relatively close behind; spatially, through the various cultural encounters in the city life. This relative closeness to the youth culture means more contact with essential aspects of the contemporary popular culture.

These two main factors, together with the significance of living in the city, can be seen as presuppositions for the development of a progressive cultural lifestyle. It is important to stress however, that the lifestyle in question is formed through the interplay between these three factors – no one solely creates it. This means that even if society has changed in late modernity, with an increased freedom for the individual as a consequence, social position still matters as a determining factor. However, since the progressive cultural lifestyle could be seen as very fragmentary, with its character of blurred boundaries – cultural, as well as spatial and temporal – it also corresponds in many respects to what some theorists have interpreted as a 'postmodern' identity (cf. Bauman, 1996; Featherstone, 1991: ch.7; Gibbins and Reimer, 1995; Lash, 1990; O'Connor and Wynne, 1996). Bauman, one representative of the postmodern theory, expresses it this way:

> [...] if the *modern* 'problem of identity' was how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable, the *postmodern* 'problem of identity' is primarily how to avoid fixation and keep the options open (Bauman, 1996: 18).

But we argue against such an interpretation, foremost because the fragmentary character of the progressive cultural lifestyle can be explained by contextual circumstances (see above) – caused by contemporary societal changes, not by individual ones. We do not think that the fragmentary character of the progressive cultural lifestyle is an expression of an aim to 'avoid fixation'. Instead, it seems more reasonable to refer to Giddens' discussion concerning the routinization of everyday life and the search for ontological security.

> The discipline of routine helps to constitute a 'formed framework' for existence by cultivating a sense of 'being', and its separation from 'non-being', which is elemental to ontological security (Giddens, 1991: 39).

It is important to stress that there is no substantial contradiction between an on the surface floating or fragmentary identity and a routinized lifestyle. The discrepancy is due to the ways in which people manage to adapt to the complexity of the late modern life environment. Since the pluralization of lifeworlds for the individual also means a pluralization and differentiation of lifestyle sectors, the establishment of ontological security must take place within more dynamic processes. The more complex and contradictory the life situation is, the more efforts must be given to the creation of a routinized lifestyle. This statement differs fundamentally from the postmodern perspective, since it puts emphasis on the individual's aim and ability to control her own life situation. Adaptation through routines is quite something else than an *aim* to avoid fixation. The absence of fixation is rather an *expression* of the dynamic identity creating process, than a goal in itself.

In many respects our standpoint concurs with the cultural sociological theories developed by for example Bourdieu (1979/1984: 318ff.) and Featherstone (1991: 90ff.) – theories which connect the rise of new cultural audiences to the rise of new middle classes (cf. also O'Connor and Wynne, 1996: 76ff.; Slater, 1997: 203ff.). These classes are to an important extent based on the emergence of 'new cultural intermediaries', i. e. people who in different ways work with the production and distribution of symbolic goods. New occupational positions within the service sector and within media, marketing, PR and so on, have to some extent replaced the commodity producing jobs of industrial capitalism. These groups do not possess elite positions within social space, but are through their occupations both trying to adopt the cultural tastes of the elite and to legitimate more popular forms of culture. As Featherstone puts it:

> The new petite bourgeoisie, therefore, identifies with the intellectuals' lifestyle and acts as intermediaries in transmitting the intellectuals' ideas to a wider audience. They also act as cultural entrepreneurs in their own right in seeking to legitimate the intellectualization of new areas of expertise such as popular music, fashion, design, holidays, sport, popular culture, etc. which increasingly are subjected to serious analysis (Featherstone, 1991: 91).

Due to this intermediary function, the lifestyles of these new class fractions are very dynamic and problematic to give a distinct description of. Just as in the case of the progressive cultural lifestyle, popular and high culture is woven together into specific patterns of cultural practices. This means that

even if the particular lifestyles are difficult to map out, the very creation of lifestyles is considered very important within this group.

However, what distinguishes 'the cultural intermediaries', or 'the new petite bourgeoisie', from those people in our analysis who represent progressive cultural lifestyles, is that the former class fraction is based on, and requires, a combination of cultural and economic capital. What we have found is rather that this connection isn't a necessary condition for the blurring of distinctions between high culture and popular culture. The same blurring may also be found among people who are relatively poor in economic respect – people whose life situations on the other hand are characterised by a self-oriented life phase or/and an urban context of living. While they do not occupy a culturally mediating function, they lead their everyday lives within circumstances that continuously provide opportunities for the exceeding of traditional cultural boundaries.

One may ask; what are the consequences of this new progressive cultural lifestyle, and what will happen in the nearest future? It is here possible to identify two different paths of development: On the one hand, in modern times, in times of urbanization, we experience a concentration to the cities, not only of people and labour, but also of education (universities) and culture institutions. This points in the direction of a similar concentration of progressive cultural lifestyles to the inner cities as well. On the other hand, the new digital media (the Internet) promotes a geographical independence, which in turn favours appearance of progressive cultural lifestyles even outside the inner cities.

Starting with the second point, it has become more usual to perform work from home, indicating a new geographical independence. This means that any progressive cultural lifestyle in the countryside that will come, would appear without the social encounters offered by the inner city, as they would be replaced by digital encounters. Although this is theoretically possible, we doubt such a development ñ mostly because of the interactivity of the Internet. Replacing the city encounters with digital ones demands that individuals search for them. And since the encounters of the progressive cultural lifestyle are not taking place randomly, but are anchored in social position, the progressive cultural lifestyle will not expand outside the cities unless the level of education will rise there. Furthermore, according to several Swedish investigations, education has shown to be one of the most important factors for the use of the Internet, which strengthens this point even more.

With the above in mind, we think that the progressive cultural lifestyle is primarily a phenomenon related to cities – though not necessarily inner cities – because of the concentration of skills on different levels (culture, education, white collar companies). A new digital media such as the Internet may in the future contribute to the spread of this lifestyle to greater parts of the cities than the inner cities – which now almost seem to be its geographical boundaries – depending on the social structure of the part of town in question.

Another question that necessarily has to be addressed concerns the importance, or meaning, of the progressive cultural lifestyle: Is it a phenomenon that only has an academic interest or is it a rise of a new cultural audience? We think that – just like the 'new cultural intermediaries' – this is a group that will not become a majority, since, as we have seen, there is a range of criteria that have to be fulfilled before its appearance. These criteria are hardly going to change, and therefore it will always be a limited amount of people who are able to lead this life. This does not mean that our findings are just of academic interest; even if the group is limited, it is important. This derives from, on the one hand, its closeness to the cultural elite and, on the other hand, their pioneering integration of new digital media in their everyday lives. These two factors give the progressive cultural lifestyle the character of 'sub-elite'.

To be able in more detail to outline the boundaries and internal dynamics of the progressive cultural lifestyles, there is obviously a great need for further studies. Primarily there is a need for sociological investigations dealing with the relations between the 'new cultural intermediaries' and people expressing a corresponding cultural progressiveness, but lacking the professional and economic interest in this blurred distinction – people like those present in our study.

Conclusions

In our study we have paid attention to the matter of social position in relation to media use. As point of departure we have used Bourdieus (1979/1984) concept of cultural capital, which describes the relation between social position and cultural taste. Beside the traditional distinction caused by amount of cultural capital – implying that those people who possess large amounts have learned to understand and appreciate high cultural content – our contribution to forthcoming audience studies is a second level of distinction. This is a distinction *among*

those with large amounts of cultural capital – a distinction between a progressive and a conservative cultural lifestyle. These two lifestyles differ in media preferences as well as in styles of media use: The conservative cultural lifestyle expresses through media preferences a loyalty towards traditional high culture, which is combined with a very concentrated, selective and rational style of media use. The progressive cultural lifestyle is more eclectic; it blurs the boundaries through an orientation towards both high culture practices and popular culture practices. In addition, its style of media use has a greater variation through blurring the line between a 'prestigious' (concentrated and enrichment oriented) and a 'less prestigious' (fragmented and relaxation oriented) style.

Many theorists within contemporary cultural theory have described groups similar to the progressive cultural lifestyle. For example, Featherstone (1991) – with reference to Bourdieu – traces the rise of postmodern identities to the development of new class fractions, occupied with the production and distribution of symbolic goods, which is called 'new cultural intermediaries'. Other theorists (cf. O'Connor and Wynne, 1996) also stress that the development of these new identities are closely related to the occurred gentrification in many post-industrial cities. In spite of, in many respects, good correspondence between these descriptions and our, the progressive cultural lifestyle should be regarded as characteristic of culturally privileged people, while the 'new cultural intermediaries' is an economically privileged group. It is also worth noting that even if we have identified a progressive cultural lifestyle, it is not a common way to lead one's life. None the less, these individuals are important, since they in many ways are the pioneers within a new media-landscape.

Notes

1. Further information concerning the research context is found within the section 'Two Different Contexts of Living'.
2. All statistics within this section comes from *Statistical Yearbook Gothenburg 1996*.
3. Children, i. e. people without a household of their own, and old age pensioners are excluded from the study.

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