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Consumer Culture and Social Relations: White Middle Class Nostalgia

by

Keith C. Hampson (B.A. Honours)

**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in Canadian Studies**

**Carleton University
OTTAWA, Canada
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White Middle Class Nostalgia"

submitted by Keith Hampson, Hons. B.A.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

This thesis examines the nature of the middle class subject's relationship to consumer culture. It seeks to illustrate the ways in which a specific social class may utilize cultural production as a means of maintaining or augmenting social status. The social class is defined using Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of habitus and trajectory. The nostalgic qualities of the two cultural products, *Martha Stewart* and *J. Crew*, are presented as possible vehicles for strategic social practice. These and other similar texts may be utilized by the social class as a means of reparation in response to their declining trajectory. Theories of consumer culture are examined towards developing analytical strategies well suited to the Canadian middle class. Particular attention is paid to the theorization of those factors that shape and limit a subject's interpretation of cultural texts, as well as the capacity to compete in symbolic struggle.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation for the effort and encouragement provided by my supervisor, Professor John Shepherd of Carleton University's School for Studies in Art and Culture. Professor Shepherd provided an example of ideal academic mentorship I hope to one day duplicate. I would also like to thank the School of Canadian Studies for creating a flexible and supportive research environment. Finally, thanks go to my wife Anne for her kind love and friendship.

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Introduction

I worked it in to look like that.
It's my '50 Mission' cap.

The Tragically Hip
50 Mission Cap (1992)

The use of commodities as "repositories of stored information" (Leiss, Jhally and Kline, 1990: 292) is a means through which social agents are able to communicate tastes, social position and associations in a socially recognized manner (Williamson, 1986). Subjects actively employ this medium to situate themselves in the social landscape. The nature of these processes and their impact on social relations is the general focus of this thesis.

An examination of the theoretical developments in the areas of popular culture, consumption and strategic social practice constitutes the first half of the thesis. Particular attention will be paid to how the meanings and values of cultural texts are contested and to what ends these values are utilized in social life. The significant space devoted to theory, reflects the belief that cultural analysis is limited in its ability to 'prove' the reasoning behind specific cultural practices. Well examined theory, however, provides a platform from which insight can be generated into the relations and logics that shape cultural life. Because theory is subject to change in accordance with its practitioners and context, the historical evolution of relevant theories will be presented so

as to better situate the arguments made for both the theoretical and case segments of the paper.

To illustrate the theoretical problems presented, a case study will be introduced in the latter half of the essay. The selection of this particular case was motivated by a personal interest in the cultural practices of men and women of my own age bracket, socio-economic background and race (roughly, white middle class), and how this group has demonstrated an investment in cultural goods and practices saturated in nostalgic, upper-middle class Wasp iconography. It will be argued that these practices reflect the interrupted 'trajectory' of this particular habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). During the last thirty years the relative privilege of this habitus has declined in both economic and cultural terms within the Canadian setting. Subsequently, there is a significant degree of contrast between the social origins (and resultant expectations) of this class fraction and their current status. The response to the threatened status position may be manifested in a number of areas; this essay, however, is primarily concerned with responses within the arena of consumer culture.

This paper addresses the strategic management of commodity-signs which may be utilized by this class fraction to celebrate and potentially reinforce their social status. Moreover, these processes will be examined as a potential manifestation or reflection of broader systemic politics and structural conditions (Grossberg, 1988) and, notably, as potential sources of 'containment and resistance' (Hall, 1981b) for these larger systems, relations and institutions.

Popular culture serves as the raw material or tools of consumer culture. The definition of popular culture to be employed for this essay are those products and practices - films, vacations, architecture, home decor, advertising, etc. - which due to advanced production technologies, large distribution systems and low costs, are widely available to the Canadian public. This sphere of culture has a relatively short history as a focus of critical analysis. Prior to the 1970's, mass produced commodities and practices were largely ignored by academia (Mukerji and Schudson, 1991). The very reason for popular culture's earlier exclusion from research - its popularity with the 'masses' - is now a key motivation behind its current interest (Bennett, 1986). Popular culture is increasingly understood as an 'authentic' form of culture and of social and political value, and thus deserving of scholarly attention. The study of the cultural industries and processes is now a rapidly expanding and diversifying field of inquiry (Nelson, Grossberg and Treichler, 1992).

Since its emergence cultural studies has targeted the practices and materials of 'everyday life'. This focus places analytical emphasis on the site of consumption and the micro-political strategies of consumer culture. The approach to popular culture through consumption is particularly relevant to the study of Canadian culture, due to the country's long history of importing foreign cultural goods and ideas (Audley, 1983; Vipond, 1989). This level of importation is often at the expense of Canadian production and, many have argued, of the development of

Canadian cultural identity (McLarty, 1988). Following Fiske (1989a; 1989b), this paper operates from the assumption that 'popular' culture are those experiences and meanings created through an interaction between cultural production and the social subject. Consumers actively manipulate and utilize the texts of cultural production in order to create their own popular culture. In this sense, these imported materials constitute 'our' (Canadian) popular culture. Limiting analysis to domestically produced material denies the empirical reality of Canadian popular culture consumers. Moreover, addressing popular culture at the site of consumption, rather than solely through production, may be the first step towards countering the problems caused by the heavy importation of foreign cultural material.

The subtle, often unspoken, and seemingly natural processes of everyday culture do not provide research with easily examined 'content'. The methodology to be employed for this essay combines a number of strategies. The methodology includes: an examination of the social position of the subjects, including their economic status, educational backgrounds, early life conditions, and racial identity (the influences selected follow the lead of Bourdieu as applied in *Distinction* (1984), and give special consideration to the factor of class trajectory); a textual analysis of two cultural productions which may be representative of, and serve as sites of investment for, the social and political attitudes of the identified audience; a limited number of interviews which have been conducted with subjects who fall within the habitus,

and who have demonstrated consumption patterns consistent with the cultural productions examined.

Section I

Democracy, Social Mobility and the Development of Consumer Culture

Consumer culture is commonly thought of as a phenomenon limited to the postwar period of western industrialized nations (Laermans, 1993). However, as early as the mid-nineteenth century, some Western nations demonstrated many of the qualities now associated with contemporary consumer culture (Williams, 1982). In this early stage hedonistic, 'lifestyle' consumer practices were limited to a small number of economic and cultural elites. By the twentieth century related advances in technologies and wages increased the percentage of society that could afford the cost and leisure time to participate. Innovations in mass production technologies and improved transport systems made relatively cheap goods available to a wider range of classes. Rapidly developing mass media systems distributed the information - both cultural and practical - about these new goods and services (Schudson, 1984). These changes, in conjunction with the increased social mobility and urbanization of the modern subject, radically altered cultural life (Berman, 1982).

Prior to the twentieth century, class, community and religious associations provided relatively consistent and universally recognized sources of status and identity (Leiss, Kline and Jhally, 1990). The weakening of these social anchors set individuals afloat, creating the need for new sources of meaning and identity

which were appropriate for the increasingly industrialized, urban culture. The symbolic qualities held in commodities (commodity-signs) have subsequently filled a larger role as a mode of communication between individuals and groups (Schudson, 1984; Wernick, 1991). Critics have argued that the integration of commodities into cultural processes has continued to intensify (Jameson, 1984). The merging forces of consumer demand and the growing capacities of the cultural industries has served to integrate commodity value within culture to an unprecedented depth. Williamson suggests that in "our peculiar but familiar customs of consumer capitalism, our emotions are directed towards objects, rather than actions" (Williamson, 1986:12). This degree of integration allows commodities to assume an increasingly wide range of cultural associations and illusions (Baudrillard, 1981). Notions of romance, beauty and communality, for example, are routinely defined in the language of commodity relations, in the form of functionally mundane goods such as soap, cars and home-furnishings (Goldman, 1987; Featherstone, 1991).

A critical question of consumer culture's emergence is its role in defining power relations; specifically, whether the processes involved merely offer false promises of abundance, luxury, unlimited leisure, happiness, or whether they contain a genuinely progressive moment, which if fostered, could amount to substantive political and social empowerment (Featherstone, 1983). Before the 1970's the vast majority of critics from both the Left and Right political spectrums argued that the onset of mass culture had reduced and leveled the quality of life (Starker, 1989;

Mukerji and Schudson. 1991; Nava, 1991) (see for example. Hoggart, 1958; Bell, 1960; Grant, 1960). The two ideas commonly held in these arguments I wish to address are one, that consumer society acts to erode traditional (and superior) cultural life, and two, that it serves as a new and insidious form of social control, nullifying qualitative social change (Kellner, 1983). However, recognition of the positive pleasures and empowerment available through participation in consumer society is crucial if analysis is to address the qualities which ultimately give the arena its power to shape social life. In particular, it is important to examine how the investment in symbolic goods, previously restricted to a small elite, may serve to offer subjects a seemingly democratic outlet and a means of individual and collective identity. Featherstone (1982) considers how modern consumption practices may have been experienced from the perspective of the early consumer subject:

The discrediting of traditional values should not therefore, be seen negatively as resulting in the loss of community and brotherhood - the romantic side of *Gemeinschaft* - but as involving a reasonable critique of dogmatic authority, arbitrary structures of prejudice and patriarchal domination. For individual family members to earn an independent income and be accorded the equality of independent consumers in the marketplace offered tangible freedoms, however limited and restricted they might turn out to be. (Featherstone, 1982: 175)

Similarly, Ewen (1976; 1982; 1988) has addressed contemporary consumption's relationship with the values of democracy, social mobility, freedom, and individualism. The cultural industries,

particularly advertising, have exploited these strongly held values as a means of encouraging consumer demand. The expanding market of mass produced consumer goods provided the raw material with which this democratic impulse can be exercised. Citizens are encouraged to take an active role in a 'democracy through consumption' (Ewen, 1988).

This development constituted the flowering of a provocative, if somewhat passive, definition of democracy. The revolutionary conception of democracy that had flourished during the eighteenth century has been predicated on the notion of an active citizenry, shaping their world for the common good, rejecting the symbols and prerogatives of elite power in favor of social equality and natural rights. The new consumer democracy, which was propelled by the mass production and marketing of stylish goods, was founded on the idea that symbols and prerogatives of elites could now be made available on a mass scale. (Ewen, 1988:32)

Ewen argues convincingly that the integration of these values into the ideology of consumerism has supported the continued strengthening and proliferation of contemporary consumer culture. The freedom promised through this system, Ewen argues, offer only a 'parody' of the desire for individual empowerment (Ewen, 1976).

The possibility of empowerment available through consumer culture is a highly contested question in cultural studies. To address this concern requires the examination of the theorization of the consumer subject. Specifically, what role does the consumer play in the determination of the value and meaning of cultural texts. The following section seeks to trace the theoretical

developments in this area, towards the development of a theory appropriate to consumer culture.

Agency and Determination

Historically, cultural studies has made power relations a key focus of analysis (Nelson, Treichler, Grossberg, 1992; Blundell, Shepherd, Taylor, 1993). Both the conclusions drawn and the questions posed by cultural studies have changed significantly. Theoretical conceptions of the audience for popular culture have swung between emphases on determination and reader/consumer agency (Scholle, 1991). A proper balance between the polarities of determination and agency, and containment and resistance is required in order to facilitate effective analysis. In the following section I will address how the social subject's relationship to popular culture has been theorized and propose a suitable balance between these emphases.

Mass Culture Theory

Theories which stress the subject's capacity to determine meaning is often presented as a correction to a broadly defined 'mass culture' theory (see for example, Bennett, 1986; Fiske, 1989a). This approach - regularly associated with the work of the Frankfurt School - stresses the power of production to create social meaning and shape cultural life (see for example, Horkheimer, 1941; Marcuse, 1941; Marcuse, 1964; Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972, 1984). Cultural texts are the economic and ideological product of the ruling classes: "Every commodity

reproduces the ideology of the system that produced it: a commodity is ideology made material." (Fiske, 1989a:14). A subject's capacity to evade this manipulation is considered minimal (Nava, 1991). Tony Bennett (1986) writes of this conceptualization of the audience:

The whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry. Such a culture produces the people in its own image - a totally homogeneous mass of individuals, alike even in their pseudo-individuality, and lacking any roots in any otherness, in any socially located vision of the world, which has been tailored to suit the requirements of the culture industry. (Bennett, 1986: 17)

The development of this theoretical perspective coincided with, and can be seen as inspired by, the proliferation of mass produced popular art forms, such as film, magazines and popular literature. It was argued that these new forms of culture would standardize cultural life, reducing distinctions between 'high/low', and 'good/bad'. Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* (1964), suggested that the people have come to "recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment" (Marcuse, 1964: 9). In political terms, 'mass' culture acts to eliminate meaningful social conflict by integrating subordinate subjects into a one-dimensional consumer-based social order (Marcuse, 1964). The alluring texts produced by the cultural industries (Hollywood films, advertisements) act to blind the subject to the conflict of interests between the subordinate subject and the bourgeoisie, which in turn discourages the class consciousness necessary for an

effective proletarian solidarity. Popular culture serves as a new means of social control through its capacity to centralize and appropriate the diverse interests, pleasures and practices of the subordinate classes (Nava, 1991). This argument is dependent upon the idea that cultural forms available to the consuming public are by and large consistently representative of particular class formations and ideologies. The conflict at the cultural level, then, parallels the fundamental class structure of capitalist society (Bennett, 1986).

Althusserian Ideology

Althusserian concepts of ideology have been utilized by critics interested in how media strategies situated subjects in ideology. Most prominent in the 1970's, this position developed models of analysis utilizing analytical tactics such as semiotics, structuralism, psychoanalysis and Marxism (Fiske, 1987b). Ideology in Althusserian theory acts as an 'overdetermining' influence, orchestrating a 'network of determinations' beyond the merely economic, over the subject's conception of reality (Althusser, 1971). Media and other Ideological State Apparatuses, reproduce a 'common sense' within social agents, while appearing to operate autonomously. The appropriation of Althusserian theory for the analysis of media and consumer culture has emphasized the cultural text as a central factor in the determination of meaning. The concept of 'signification' serves as a replacement for the 'myth' of objective representation. Events and cultural texts are

signified according to ideology, which works to organize and determine the value of images and concepts. The key questions for media analysis are then: how are particular phenomena signified and how does a particular voice obtain the power required to signify events.

Although Althusserian theory can be employed to theorize diverse degrees of reproductive power, its application in media theory has often de-emphasized the level of resistance available through the consumer subject (Turner, 1990). Ideology woven into texts transcends and overrides a subject's individual properties (Fiske, 1987b). The reader's position in relation to the text is understood only by reference to universal, primary psychoanalytical processes. The concept of the 'individual' is an impossibility. In its place is a socially produced self, or 'subjectivity'. These emphases encourage a textual determinism in analysis, which neglects the potential polysemic properties of cultural texts (Turner, 1990). Morley (1980) has suggested that the Althusserian definition of ideology reduces the subject to "the status of a mere personification of a given structure, 'spoken' by the discourses which cross the space of this subjectivity" (Morley, 1986:43). The subject is conceived of only in relation to the text, the multitude of discourses and social relations to which social agents are subject are not given their due. This, Morley argues "serves to isolate the encounter of text and reader from any social and historical structures and from other texts" (Morley, 1980b: 163).

Since the early 1980s, Althusserian concepts of ideology and subjectivity have been modified or wholly rejected by most critics working within cultural studies (Hall, 1982). Stuart Hall (1985) raises two important points concerning Althusser's work in relation to media and consumer culture. First, Hall rejects the notion that ideology is solely the product of the dominant classes; there is little room in Althusser's model for counter ideologies produced from subordinate class positions. Ideology, Hall suggests, should be conceptualized as the means by which *all* people make sense of their experience, rather than as a totalizing force. Second, an Althusserian model of reproduction does not provide an explanation of, or allowance for, the existence of oppositional voices in civil society such as the mass media.

Mediated Culture

Critics within English cultural studies of the late 1970s led a shift of analytical focus from production and the text as all determining, to the mediating influence of culture. The consideration of the active mediation of cultural value is a critical advance for the analysis of popular culture (Johnson, 1986) and is of particular relevance to the study of consumer culture as it shifts the weight of analysis to the site of consumption. This move was consistent with the 'turn to Gramsci' (Bennett, 1986). From a Gramscian perspective, Althusserian theory can appear overly deterministic as it does not adequately account for the possibility of social transformation. Ideology, rather than a totalizing force, is

theorized as a contested terrain. The meanings and values produced through popular culture are a key source of opposition to this hegemonic power: "an arena of consent and resistance" (Hall, 1982: 228). Gramsci's theory of hegemony conceptualizes power as the result of a negotiated consent of the subordinate cultures with the 'ruling bloc' (Gramsci, 1988). Hall (1982) writes of Gramscian power:

Hegemony implied that the dominance of certain formations was secured, not by ideological compulsion, but by cultural leadership. It circumscribed all those processes by means of which a dominant class alliance or ruling bloc, which has effectively secured mastery over the primary economic processes in society, extends and expands its mastery over society in such a way that it can transform and re-fashion its ways of life, its mores and conceptualization, its very form and level of culture and civilization in a direction which, while not directly paying immediate profits to the narrow interests of any particular class, favours the development and expansion of the dominant social and productive system of life as a whole . . . (Hall, 1982: 85)

The recognition of the mediation of cultural production was mirrored in what has been termed 'reader-oriented criticism' (Allen, 1987). Developed in the 1960s, but not fully surfacing fully until the late 1970s and early 1980s, this stream of analysis rejected the assumption that popular culture texts contained within them a single, discoverable meaning which could be exposed through archeological-style analysis. Social meanings created from cultural forms are, instead, the product of an interaction with the reader and context. Stuart Hall's influential article *Encoding/Decoding* (1981) was representative of this

approach. This article directed consideration towards how texts, rather than being uniformly interpreted, are instead ambiguous, polysemic constructions. The various positions individuals hold in relation to the media, and to dominant society generally, are reflected in the heterogeneous interpretations derived from media messages. Hall cites a social agent's class and social position as key factors in determining this interpretation. Reader response was either, 'oppositional', 'negotiated' or 'preferred'. Oppositional readings acknowledge the position of the text but then ultimately reject it as it conflicts with the reader's own position. Negotiated readings, the most common of the three, involve the subject's acceptance of certain aspects of the text, and the rejection of those aspects unsuitable to the reader's unique social position and experience. Preferred readings occur when the reader fully accepts the position and logic presented through the text. Morley's (1980a; 1986) work with the television audience further emphasized the ambiguity of texts by pointing out the diverse and inconsistent ways in which television programming is interpreted. Social class alone cannot adequately account for the manner of interpretation. Instead, identity, cultural and political backgrounds, together with the viewing context, all serve to contribute to the meanings derived from a single text.

Ethnographies and Political Expression

The potential resistance available at the site of reading/consumption was effectively illustrated in a series of

English ethnographies (Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Willis, 1977; Hebdige, 1979; Chambers, 1986). These particular works examined the ways in which subjects made sense of, and communicated difference within specific cultural environments (Turner, 1990). It sought to identify the ways in which sub-cultures, ethnic minorities and other subordinate groups or classes resist the imposition and unification of meanings, values and politics (Blundell, Shepherd and Taylor, 1993). Particular attention was paid to social collectives formed around shared consumption patterns (Hebdige, 1979; Chambers, 1986). Popular culture and institutions (schools, for example) serve as the raw materials and social spaces with which subjects create, redefine and communicate their positions in these settings. This manipulation of the raw material of culture are acts of creativity which can reflect the social and political orientation of the consumer (Hebdige, 1979).

Iain Chambers' work *Popular Culture: The Metropolitan Experience*, is a useful example (1986). This research focused on the mods and punks of London. These urban youth rejected the inherited 'official' national culture imposed on them, and "instead rendered consumption into a precise and imaginative conquest of their circumstances" (Chambers, 1986:8). Chambers interprets this practice as part of the larger attack on the formal, institutionalized art and aesthetics of the 1960's. The resultant 'pop art' stole the "commercial iconography of popular experiences" (Chambers, 1986: 8) produced by capital and subverted their original meanings by 'putting them in quotations'. Chambers interprets

this process as a significant and empowering political expression. In contrast to the rigid, distant forms of British heritage, these American-inspired popular culture forms offered these youth "a more democratic prospect for appropriating and transforming everyday life" (Chambers, 1986:13).

Fiske and 'Popular Culture'

Turner (1990) writes that the "latter half of the 1980s was marked by a proliferation of interest in the ways in which ideologies fail to determine, fail to interpellate the subject, fail to prefer readings" (Turner, 1990: 216). The emphasis on the consumer's capacity to determine meaning and value over and above the influence of cultural production and objective conditions may be no more strongly proposed than in the work of Fiske. Fiske's influential critiques on television (1987), and on popular culture generally (1987, 1989a, 1989b, 1992), continues the emphasis on reader agency, but accentuates the potential for oppositional readings and its political significance. Fiske wholly rejects the conception of the audience as passive recipients of ideology. In this model, cultural texts are the raw materials from which the subordinate classes actively create their own popular culture.

Fiske shifts the focus of cultural analysis from texts and artifacts (production), to social practices (consumption). Texts are secondary to the purposes the consumers have for them. Although Fiske contextualizes a reader's interpretation of texts as limited to

within dominant class structures - a 'limited polysemy' - in the end, the balance of power lies with the reader (Fiske, 1989a). The cultural industries can only "produce a repertoire of texts and cultural resources for the various formations of the people to use or reject in the ongoing process of producing their 'folk' culture" (Fiske, 1989a: 24).

Fiske presents popular culture as a highly charged political arena. Indeed, the term 'popular', as it is employed, refers to those practices, pleasures or meanings created by the audience that resist and are outside the forces of ideology (Turner, 1990): "Popular culture in elaborated societies is the culture of the subordinate who resent their subordination, who refuse to consent to their positions or to contribute to a consensus that maintains it" (Fiske, 1989a: 169). There can be no popular dominant culture, as popular culture is "formed always in reaction to, and never as part of, the forces of domination" (Fiske, 1989a: 43). These popular readings are a form of micro-resistance against the dominant, official culture, serving to "redistribute power socially toward the disempowered" (Fiske, 1989a:168). Fiske draws extensively from Michel de Certeau (1984), who identifies the micro-tactics employed by subordinate classes as small victories over, or behind the back of their superiors. This involves tactics such as avoiding work on the shop floor; stealing stationery from the office; or pushing the limits on the dress standards set by a subject's school.

Beneath Fiske's work lies a relatively simple dichotomy of dominant-subordinate power relations. Broadly defined, this

framework argues that dominant interests attempt to unify the diverse popular culture for ideological and commercial purposes (Scholte, 1991). Subordinate classes seek, on the other hand, to gain the upper hand by either reworking the 'original' or preferred meanings of texts for their own uses, or forcing capital to produce texts that speak to the subject pleasures and needs of the audience. In the vast majority of cases, however, Fiske finds that the texts represent and support the dominant ideology (Fiske, 1987a). The production-consumption relationship mimics the class relationship between the producers (dominant) and consumers (subordinate). This framework both explains and gives political significance to the practices of the masses, but most significantly it emphasizes the 'bottom-up' quality and direction of popular practices. The antagonistic relationship between these polarized positions serves as the foundation from which the subversive popular culture, theorized by Fiske, arises.

Elements of postmodern theory have been applied towards the analysis of the consumer's relationship to cultural texts (Featherstone, 1991). Particular attention has been paid to the rapid 'over' production of commodities and signs and how this condition may serve to weaken the resilience of the values attributed to any one commodity or text. The cultural system is "over-heated, producing an inflationary spiral of signs which cannot be adequately assimilated or regulated in the social system" (Turner, 1988: 75):

... the consumer society becomes essentially cultural as social life becomes deregulated and social relationships become more variable and less structured by stable norms. The overproduction of signs and reproduction of images and simulations leads to a loss of stable meaning and an aestheticization of reality in which the masses become fascinated by the endless flow of bizarre juxtapositions which takes the viewer beyond stable sense. (Featherstone, 1991: 15)

Commodities are no longer thought to permanently or universally signify material conditions or social positions; their meanings exist only in reference to each other as part of a code. Culture in this environment becomes an increasingly autonomous practice detached from the economic and political structures of contemporary capitalism (Bell, 1976; Baudrillard, 1983). From the perspective of social agents this condition entails the loss of fixed status groups in which the adoption of styles of life are no longer traceable to specific social positions (Turner, 1988). Subjects are thus no longer able to accurately map themselves or others in a social hierarchy due to the destruction of rigid classificatory systems, and agents are relatively free to transcend class and other limitations to which they have been previously categorized (Featherstone, 1991).

Critics have identified a new degree of freedom and possibilities in this environment for the postmodern consumer (Dyer, 1987; Penley, 1989; Featherstone, 1991). Subjects play with the sign and values available within consumer culture to create pleasurable and advantageous identities and associations. Richard Dyer investigated the celebrity of Judy Garland as it relates to

segments of the English Gay community. The Garland persona and her tragic story provide a site in which the subjects of this community are able to create value:

Looking at, listening to Garland may get us inside how gay men have lived their experience and situation, have made sense of them. We feel that in the intangible and the ineffable - the warmth of the voice, the wryness of the humour, the edgy vigour of the stance - but they mean a lot because they are made expressive of what it has been to be gay in the past half century. (Dyer, 1987: 194)

The relationship between the consumer and cultural production suggested in the above case demonstrates the extent to which the theorization of the reader/consumer has shifted towards an emphasis on the reader's agency and purposes. The consumer's active and critical relationship to cultural production serves to maintain the diversity of the audience and cultural life. The political significance of this capacity, however, may be overstated. Scholle (1991) and Tetzlaff (1991) argue that the source of social control in consumer culture is not through the unification of ideas and values held in cultural texts - as assumed in Fiskian theory - but rather through the containment of diversity on the consumer model. Cultural pluralism, heralded as a sign of empowerment, does not threaten the dominant social and economic order as long as this pluralism continues to operate within the consumer context: "Consensus is no longer won, it is no longer needed" (Scholle, 1991: 84). Blundell, Shepherd, and Taylor (1993) have argued that capital no longer requires a "substantive ideology, rhetoric or narrative to sustain and reproduce itself" (Blundell,

Shepherd and Taylor, 1993: 7). The meanings and values of cultural texts are no longer needed to maintain ideologies supportive of capital. Blundell, Shepherd and Taylor (1993) write: "There is a sense in which it is no longer important to transnational capital what people buy as long as they do buy" (1993: 7). Pluralism and difference, rather than being in opposition to dominant interests, can be seen as a fundamental aspect of social control in a consumer society. Consumer choice and the differentiation it makes possible (indeed encourages), serves not to liberate the masses, but to 'divide and conquer' (Tetzlaff, 1991) by encouraging a lack of collectivity within a set of safe, market-based consumer practices. Moreover, the polysemy of readings identified by reader-oriented criticism may only be adding to the proliferation of cultural values that the cultural industries produce (Baudrillard, 1980). The meanings created by social agents, however radical or seemingly oppositional to 'mainstream' values, are ultimately contained within processes and institutional frameworks serving dominant/economic interests (Tetzlaff, 1991). The fragmentation and diversity of the postmodern environment may instead, represent an integration of the values of individualism and hedonism into mainstream consumer culture (Featherstone, 1991).

Despite this issue, the recognition of the active role of the consumer subject is of great value. Firstly, a subject's social position and background are recognized as influences on the interpretation of cultural texts, including properties such as race,

gender, ethnicity, and class. Further, texts do not contain 'contents' with universally recognized values. Rather, texts are polysemic and ultimately dependent upon the unique properties and purposes the consumer brings to the interaction with the text. Secondly, theory has moved towards acknowledging the political aspects of cultural practice. Practice is shaped by individual and collective strategies for celebrating particular attitudes and identities. Thirdly, the investigation of everyday culture recognizes the significance of this sphere and the dialectical relationship between culture and structural forces. Day to day cultural experiences shape, educate and limit a subject's capacity to advance in 'real' (economic, educational, occupational) terms.

The theorization of reader agency can be problematic, however, in those cases when consumer interpretation and practice is not rigorously examined in relation to the resources and opportunities available to the subject. This is particularly evident in the work of Fiske (1987, 1989a, 1989b, 1992). Analysis of cultural practice suggests a sovereignty from structural factors and social origins beyond what, I propose, is accurate. The agency identified in Fiske's work, while a useful correction to previous overemphasis on the determining power of production and ideology - does not adequately account for these factors.

Bourdieu's work in cultural practice, particularly *Distinction* (1984) may enable theory to identify the dialectic of cultural practice and social position. Bourdieu's theory of practice enables analysis to address the different capacities of consumer subjects

to utilize consumer culture, and in doing so, exposes the inequities within consumer culture that originate from unequal resources. The following section seeks to demonstrate in what ways elements of Bourdieu's theory of practice, and its focus on objective conditions of existence, can be utilized to these ends.

Section II

Bourdieu and the Structuring of Agency

This thesis examines the processes of defining social and political differences through the strategic management of mass produced goods and signs (commodity-signs), and the role this practice has in structuring relations between groups and classes. Two developments directly related to these processes have made the measurement of strategic cultural practice problematic. Firstly, the theorization of popular culture has moved towards recognizing the role of agency at the site of the consumer/subject (Allen, 1987). I am particularly concerned with theorizations in which the degree of agency is conceptualized as operating over and above the influence of social context, subject background (education, income), and the cultural 'content' of the material. Secondly, the weakened stability and universality of the social values expressed through these commodity-signs has put into question the capacity of commodities to serve as strategic markers for the expression of cultural difference. The over-production of popular culture forms has blurred the relatively fixed value of symbolic values which create lines of distinction between classes and cultures. These two developments suggest that a subject's relationship to popular culture is far from rigidly regulated by structural factors and objective conditions. How, then, can theory expose and identify the economic and class foundations that structure practice, while simultaneously not ignoring reader agency or the changing quality of symbolic goods?

Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977; 1984) is grounded in the notion that cultural practice is the outcome of a mediated set of objective conditions. Bourdieu's work has been interpreted by some critics as representing a relatively closed social system, as it suggests that cultural practice is largely restricted to class position and that the value of strategic practice leading to social reform is limited (Codd, 1990; Garnham, 1993; Hall, 1992; Lash, 1993). Garnham (1993) questions Bourdieu's analysis:

If this accurately describes the process of cognition, are we not all caught in an ineluctably determined fate? If our classificatory schemas are implicit, unconscious, and arbitrary, what room is there for willed purchase on the social world - in a word, for a political project? This implies either perpetual stasis or the search for the sources of social and political change in areas outside any possibility of human control. (Garnham, 1993: 179)

I propose that the differences in interpretations of the determinations of cultural practice are largely due to the contrary methods of analysis and theoretical assumptions brought to the research. I will attempt to show how key concepts and methods demonstrated in Bourdieu's work *Distinction* (1984) can be utilized by cultural studies to expose the structural foundations shaping practice of everyday culture, without forfeiting the important theoretical advances cited in the earlier section. I will begin with a review of Bourdieu's concepts relevant to these purposes.

Bourdieu's Cultural Economy of Goods

Marx's theory of class focused on the substantive, economic foundations of social practice. This emphasis directed attention away from the symbolic struggles that perpetuate class divisions (Wilkes, 1990). In Bourdieu's theory of practice, culture is a central element of the economy and not separate from economic conditions. Bourdieu examines the 'marketplace' of cultural goods and practices and how it acts to manage power relations between groups. Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984) attacks the notion that aesthetic judgments and consumer practices are innocent and natural phenomenon, independent of political and economic relations (Garnham and Williams, 1986). Employing both philosophical and socio-empirical methodologies, Bourdieu demonstrates how consumer practices serve as a means of reinforcing and naturalizing cultural distinctions which support more direct forms of power. Bourdieu writes that "the purity and disinterestedness of the exercise of aesthetic taste and intellectual judgment, are not only central weapons in the exercise of that symbolic power which is the main defense of the socio-economic status-quo, but were developed historically to fill that role" (Bourdieu, 1984: 423). Tastes and intellectual judgments are tactical weapons which serve to protect and augment social and economic power of dominant interests along class lines. The construction of 'good' taste, and the social distinctions they create, are a "violence perpetrated on the weak by the strong,

recognition of which is required before it can be overcome" (Volberg, 1992: 512).

Cultural classifications of commodities and practices are not merely reflections of knowledge, but also forms of power. Symbolic capital is conceptualized by Bourdieu as a "disguised form of physical 'economic' capital" (Bourdieu, 1977: 183). Symbolic power conceals the fact that it originates in unequal material conditions. Cultural practices - such as those examined in *Distinction* - act to legitimize definitions of common sense that maintain unequal power relations. The successful struggle over symbolic values confers upon the individual or group the capacity to transcend individual values and judgments and to 'officially' represent the social world in self-beneficial ways. Authority over symbolic hierarchies makes possible the imposition of a consensus of meaning and value over aspects of the social world. The arbitrary lines drawn, 'classificatory schemes', are both the stake in the symbolic struggle between groups, and its outcome. The adherence to these classifications defines victory for those groups whose interests are met through the particular classifications as they act to define the social world in their best interest. Possibly the most effective form of classification is located within the legal system. The representations of legal-illegal serve to establish power relations across society within a highly potent realm.

At a time when the theoretical category of class is in retreat (Garnham, 1993; Frow, 1993), Bourdieu argues that consumption practice patterns - both the acquisitions made and the manner of

their use - are, in the end, class-based. Distinctions made by social agents (good/bad, refined/vulgar, etc.) are shaped, although not wholly determined, by the objective conditions of existence in which subjects are situated (social origin, education, class trajectory). The capacity to recognize and construct these advantageous classifications is structured by a subject's resources. These resources are conceptualized in the form of 'capital' - cultural, symbolic and economic. The variety and volume of capital accumulated by a social agent through practice and inheritance determines the status of a social agent in a given setting:

... agents are distributed in the overall social space, in the first dimension in accordance with the overall volume of the capital that they possess in different kinds, and in the second dimension, in accordance with the structure of their capital, that is, in accordance with the relative weight of the different kinds of capital, economic, cultural in the total volume of their capital. (Bourdieu, 1990:128)

The unequal distribution of resources (capital) across societies produce opportunities for privileged classes to successfully maintain and reinforce cultural distinctions, which in turn support more direct forms of power. Conversely, less privileged objective conditions reduce the practical opportunities for subordinate classes to participate successfully in symbolic struggle.

The social class distinctions stemming from economic inequities are conceptualized within the 'habitus' as differing dispositions and abilities towards cultural objects and practices (Garnham, 1986: 427). The habitus mediates the dialectical relationship

between structural conditions and agency. It is both a source for the generation of practices, as well as a cognitive filter through which classifications and evaluations are made; a process of the "internalization of externality, and the externalization of internality" (Bourdieu, 1977:72). The absorption of these conditions is through both explicit and implicit teaching, and act to shape agents on both conscious and unconscious levels. The dispositions generated by the habitus are not mechanistic impulses, but the general 'tendencies' (Wilkes, 1990) of practice and perceptions shaped by our social origins and experience. The critical significance of this model is the limitations it suggests of a subject's capacity to compete in various fields of cultural practice:

Social divisions become principles of divisions, organizing the image of the social world. Objective limits become a sense of limits, a practical anticipation of objective limits acquired by experience of objective limits. . . Dominated agents, who assess the value of their position and their characteristics by applying a system of schemes of perception and appreciation which is the embodiment of the objective laws whereby their value is objectively constituted, tend to attribute to themselves what the distribution attributes to them, refusing what they are refused. (Bourdieu, 1984: 471)

Bourdieu's theory addresses how social subjects of privileged social origins seek out practices and manners of display which accentuate the lack of necessity and gratuitous comfort stemming from their social origin.

The objects endowed with the greatest distinctive power are those which most clearly attest the quality of the appropriation, and therefore the quality of their owner, because their possession requires time and

capacities which, requiring long investment of time, like pictorial or musical culture, cannot be acquired in haste or by proxy, and which therefore appear as the surest indications of the quality of the person. (Bourdieu: 1984: 281)

Agents seek to keep track of the social and cultural value of commodities in order to use them in socially appropriate manners. This is particularly the case with aspiring groups (typically the middle class) who have adopted a learning mode towards consumption for the cultivation of a lifestyle (Bourdieu, 1984; Featherstone, 1991).

Bourdieu: a Focus on Practice

I would like now to offer two specific ways in which Bourdieu's theory of practice can be utilized to aid cultural studies in the analysis of the structural foundations of popular cultural practice. As this is particularly difficult with respect to widely available cultural texts, I will employ the medium of television as my example. (97% of Canadian homes having at least one television set and view an average of 24.2 hours per week. Vipond, 1989).

Garnham (1993) points out that the medium of television received little attention in Bourdieu's *Distinction* despite its centrality as a cultural practice in Europe (over twenty hours a week viewing time). Garnham implies that this omission was due to the fact that it would discredit the key aspect of Bourdieu's theory which stresses a correlation between class position and cultural practice, as the consumption patterns of television

programming have been demonstrated to cross class and cultural lines (Morley, 1980a; Garnham, 1993). This is a valid criticism of *Distinction*: television and popular goods in general are underrepresented in this analysis. Further, it is productive to point out the difficulty of addressing the strategic element of cultural practice with respect to forms which are either widely available and/or are polysemic in quality.

Garnham's argument, however, also points out, unintentionally, the difference in approach to the analysis of cultural practice between the two critics. Garnham is referring to the *selection* and *interpretation* of a popular culture medium. In this respect, television appears to contradict Bourdieu. Programming interpretation and selection are often not consistent with social class positions. Bourdieu, in contrast, focuses on how consumers use (practice) cultural texts to demarcate differences. This moves analysis beyond the insights available through the analysis of only selection and interpretation, by including consideration of how subjects use cultural practices to classify themselves and other individuals in terms of social status and identity. Bourdieu questions how practices are utilized by agents; how people classify and become classified by the practices and forms with which they are associated. What is the possible feedback of cultural practice on an individual's social standing (Volberg, 1992)?

In the case of television, the application of a Bourdieuan analysis would involve examining how subjects choose to identify with specific television programs; the manner in which the cultural texts are consumed; the aspects of the texts that are

emphasized in social interaction, and the ways in which knowledge of the cultural texts are demonstrated and measured. The differences uncovered through such an analysis can be understood in terms of the subjects objective conditions of existence and may thus, be consistent with influences of social classes. The application of this approach to television viewing would uncover differences across cultural and class lines, and consequently, conflict with Garnham's argument. The consumption of television, despite being a widely available and polysemic medium, can be addressed more effectively in terms of social position, if it is approached as a social activity, one employed as a means of communicating differences and position.

This approach was illustrated in Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984) analysis of film (which shares with television a relatively high level of access and a polysemic quality). Bourdieu found variations of the more subtle uses of the film text across social classes. For example, the knowledge (and interest in demonstrating this knowledge) of film directors, genres and other superfluous information was much more common in higher class fractions. It is through differences such as these that subjects act to demarcate positions in relation to others, and by doing so, also classify themselves.

For research to address strategic cultural practice, with its increased rate of change, leveled degrees of access, and its often more subtlety expressed differences, theory must examine how subjects distinguish themselves through their ability to select *and* use goods in culturally validated ways. In this new field of

contestation differences are often not apparent through acquisition (what is consumed) but through the manner of display (how it is consumed). The cultural knowledge utilized as markers and demonstrated through consumption practices results from an individual's internalization of their objective conditions of existence (social origin, education, family), in conjunction with agency and disposition. It is through the incorporation of these aspects of social practice into analysis that research can make the invaluable link between class position and cultural practice.

Fields and Social Spaces

A second potential benefit of Bourdieu's theory of practice is its capacity to address and identify the localized and diverse nature of everyday strategic practice. Bourdieu's methodology - a disciplined historical analysis - examines the conditions which structure social practice, while locating them within the demands and opportunities of specific social fields. The detailed examination of the unequal access to forms of capital, as well as the demands of specific social fields in which these resources are competitively employed, exposes the local nature of restrictions on cultural practice, and by extension, more accurately addresses the economic and political foundation of practice.

Consequently, Bourdieu's model suggests a complex, multidirectional system of strategic practice practiced at all class levels. This encourages research to avoid overstating and oversimplifying the oppositional nature of practice, and as such,

contrasts with theory which emphasizes the 'bottom-up' (Turner, 1990) nature of practice in response to the top-down pressure of dominant culture and interests. Without examining how these practices are shaped - and in many cases restricted - by unequal levels of resources and fields of contestation, research allows itself to confer upon such practices a level and variety of opposition that is often overstated and non-specific.

By employing Bourdieu's concept of 'fields' and social 'spaces', analysis can address the interface of internalized cultural competencies, practical opportunities and social context. Each field has several inter-related factors which impact on the social subject's capacity within a particular field. These include: the social agent's active within the field and the capacities they bring to it (e.g. academics, actors); the accumulated history of the field; and the forms of capital required for success in the field. Bourdieu also addresses the manner in which subjects position themselves in relation to each other within these settings; how they distinguish themselves for self-benefit; which values, practices and commodities hold the greatest weight within the particular settings. Each field demands a unique amalgamation of capital at each historical conjuncture, and yields 'profits' accordingly. Within the field of scholarship, for example, specific forms of cultural capital have greater value than others. These resources may include: publishing history, the status of respective alma maters, and so forth. These same resources will carry less weight within a different field, such as high finance, where value is attributed to different forms of capital.

The localized nature of practice is also reinforced by the demand for 'loyalty' to class borders. Subjects of particular class fractions may require certain social codes to be followed by others (language, morality, aesthetics) as a requirement for social acceptance and its subsequent benefits. Bourdieu provides the example of working class discourse concerning the arts: the "favorite subjects of bourgeois conversation, exhibitions, theatre, concerts or even cinema, are excluded, *de facto* and *de jure*, from working class conversation, in which they could only express the pretension to distinguish oneself" (Bourdieu, 1984: 381). This loyalty - a product of class-based knowledges - discourages efforts by subjects to demonstrate aspirations beyond their class position, which may in turn contain classes within their present positions and reproduce the social order.

In summary, each subject will actively manipulate cultural resources according to their unique evaluation of the possibilities and expected rewards within a field. Each field of symbolic struggle will require the possession of different forms and levels of capital. Two factors encourage strategies of consumer practice to be located at the inter-group or inter-class level. One, a social subject's competencies (specific configuration of resources) will be best suited to the immediate, local site of contestation, and two, the local field of struggle will, in the majority of cases, provide the greatest rewards for the subject's efforts.

This theorization is markedly different and more complex than the theorization which emphasizes the bottom-up or top-down of cultural practice. Instead, practice is 'localized', according to the

needs, values, opportunities of the subject, which stem from diverse objective conditions of existence. By focusing on concrete and local conditions and the forces creating these conditions, consumer practices will generally prove to be less oppositional to dominant culture and ideologies, as well as less suggestive of a dominant-subordinate political consciousness. Analysis that addresses these cultural processes in relation to the conditions which structure practice, opens the door to examining the political and economic nature of these processes, both in terms of what shapes practices as well as the effects on social relations generally.

Bourdieu: A Few Modifications

Before concluding with Bourdieu, I would like to propose three inter-related modifications to Bourdieu's theory of cultural practice with the objective of enhancing its appropriateness for the Canadian setting, as well as for the unique qualities of the latest stage of capitalism (Jameson, 1984).

Distinction (1984) is concerned with deconstructing the mythology of the natural superiority of the upper classes in cultural matters. However, this argument may place too great a weight on the authority and dominance held by high culture and its 'legitimate' practitioners. Within the Canadian setting, this hierarchy may be less formidable. Bourdieu's model may overstate the breadth of cultural authority that high culture holds over the larger society, and simultaneously underestimate the

capacity of middle-class (Bourdieu, 1984) fractions to compete in symbolic struggle according to their own set of rules.

Bourdieu argues (1984) that *all* class levels are subject to the authority of legitimate culture: "declarations of indifference are exceptional, and hostile rejection even rarer" (Bourdieu, 1984: 318). The working class "aesthetic is a dominated aesthetic which is constantly obliged to define itself in terms of the dominant aesthetics" (Bourdieu, 1984: 41). The middle class for their part, attempt to mimic the practices and acquisitions of the upper class as a means of illustrating their capacity to ascend the class hierarchy in a "desperate effort to defy the gravity of the social field" (Bourdieu, 1984: 370).

There are three factors which suggest that this emphasis on the high culture's power over the lower class levels may be overstated. First, Garnham (1993) cites the changing relationship between cultural production and capital interests as a key quality of late-capitalism. The cultural industries have grown considerably as a percentage of the total economy during the twentieth century, and particularly since the Second World War. In 1985, 307,000 Canadians were employed within the cultural industries and contributed approximately nine billion (\$Cdn.) to the national economy, a proportion of the total economy comparable to the Canadian mines and metals industries. These figures actually underestimate the total economic value of cultural production and consumption, as the Canadian cultural industries actually operate at a deficit level due to a high level of imports, particularly from the U.S. (Rotstein, 1988; Vipond, 1989). The

significance of this development is that it involves the collapsing of interests between those of the dominant class and the expansion of popular culture. Capital must cater to and aid the development of mass culture if it is to reproduce its economic status. Consequently, production of popular culture (held by dominant interests) eats away at the authority of high culture by continually and progressively appropriating the cultural symbols of high culture - 'the iconography of prestige' (Ewen, 1988: 30) - for consumption by the mass market. Jameson (1984) has argued that the erosion of the borders between 'high' and 'low' culture is a fundamental feature of postmodern cultural productions:

... the effacement in them of the older (essentially high-modernist) frontier between high culture and so called mass or commercial culture, and the emergence of new kinds of texts infused with the forms, categories and contexts of that very Culture Industry so passionately denounced by all the ideologues of the modern, from Leavis and the American New Criticism all the way to Adorno and Frankfurt School. (Jameson, 1984: 54-55)

This process disrupts the symbolic hierarchy of the dominant classes. Thus, "the dominant fraction cannot safely leave the cultural field to be shaped by the interstatus group competition between subsets of the dominated fraction, since the reproduction of their economic capital now depends directly upon both the costs of production and the size of the markets for symbolic goods" (Garnham, 1993: 189). This organization of interests undercuts the 'structural separation' of the dominant and dominated which is supported by symbolic goods.

Secondly, the expanding cultural industries have produced a great volume and diversity of cultural objects for consumption. Popular culture is able to offer a complex, multilevel site of investment and contestation for a significant percentage of Canadian society. The commercial imperative - the drive behind popular culture's explosion - has invaded an increasing number of areas including the traditional areas of high culture (Wernick, 1991). People raised in this environment with the resources to participate, are accustomed to using popular culture as markers of cultural value and social position. Subsequently, popular culture has developed to the point that it is no longer dominated by high culture definitions of cultural value. Popular culture has its own hierarchies that operate according to its own codes; codes which have a significant degree of autonomy from high culture.

Third, Erickson (1991), has questioned the suitability of Bourdieu's emphasis on the authority of high culture given the differences between French and Canadian society. Likewise, Lamont and Lareau (1988) and Lamont (1989; 1992) have addressed this question with respect to the United States. The authors share the concern that within the North American cultural environment high status culture may be less clearly defined and consequently less essential to the reproduction of social status. Erickson (1991) suggests that North America enjoys a greater level of social mobility, political and cultural fragmentation, and ethnic diversity than France. These differences stem from differing educational institutions; hiring policies in private and public organizations; in addition to the historical roots of the

cultures, in particular Canada's immigrant-based development. Further, French society may place greater importance on the maintenance of high culture, possibly as a defence against the 'Disneyization' of its culture. The level of social mobility within each nation may represent different levels of support for the maintenance of high culture's symbolic authority.

While it is clear that a small cultural elite have been successful at maintaining a fluid cultural sensibility demonstrably different from the masses, and secondly, that popular culture draws from the vocabulary of elite/high culture in the form of styling, terminology, etc., the strength of high culture's authority in the Canadian setting may limit its ability to define the broader cultural playing field.

Section III

In the following section of the thesis I will attempt to integrate the theoretical arguments discussed in the previous sections with an analysis of a particular audience. A social class will be defined using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and trajectory. This precedes a textual analysis of two cultural products, which, I propose that may be of particular relevance to this audience. Interview responses will be presented as a means of illustrating the relationship between these texts and the audience in question.

Consumer Culture and the Middle Class

Fundamental changes brought about by the development of the market economy and competitive capitalism have encouraged dominant class fractions to return to the manipulation of symbolic systems as a mode of domination (Bourdieu, 1977; Garnham and Williams, 1986). While Bourdieu has emphasized this tendency within the bourgeoisie, the utilization of the cultural field as a means of enhancing status may also be relevant within sectors of the middle class for whom such methods of contestation are both available and appear to be an effective means of augmenting status. The acquisition of symbolic power serves as a vehicle for reinforcing or augmenting a group's relative social standing and can serve as a means of managing relations between groups and

classes (Wilkes, 1990). Taste exercised through consumption practices is a key form of this power. Success in this sphere confers upon the individual or group the capacity to transcend individual values and to define the symbolic order of the social world in ways that are self-beneficial (Harker, Mahar and Wilkes, 1990). The middle classes may be particularly well-suited to the opportunities offered through strategic consumer practices. The marketed promises of abundance, freedom and self-expression, address the entrenched -class desires for social mobility, individualism and progress (Featherstone, 1982). In this section I will address the key concepts and theoretical arguments concerning consumer culture that are of particular relevance to the Canadian middle-class. This precedes an examination of a specific middle-class habitus in the next chapter.

The cultural practices of the middle classes can be understood, in part, as an attempt to position themselves advantageously between dominant and subordinate classes, cultures and interests (Abercrombie and Urry, 1983; Bourdieu, 1984). The occupations common to the middle class and the means of accreditation from which they their draw support (university education, for example) are by and large within the institutions and other occupation-related systems that are supportive of the dominant capitalist class (Frow, 1993). This relationship encourages the middle class to accept many of the logics, institutional guidelines and rationales supportive of these systems (Frow, 1993). This striving to match upper class characteristics is matched by an equal desire to create

distance between their status in society and that of the lower classes and advancing middle classes (Bourdieu, 1984). The social status of the middle-class subject is often measured by their location or distance between the lower-upper polarities.

Knowledge has emerged as a productive resource (Frow, 1993; see also, Jameson, 1984). The role of knowledge in the growing service industries - both technical and cultural - has provided avenues through which the middle class may support its status. Frow (1993) defines the two interests of the class as: one, the extension of a "cultural and technological hegemony over the working class" and an anti-capitalist radicalism which would logically lead to a kind of 'technocratic socialism': a society in which the bourgeoisie has been replaced by bureaucrats, planners and experts of various sorts. Compared to other forms of capital, knowledge is less objectively definable; the control of the value of this relatively fluid resource is achieved through the monopolization of institutions and processes through which knowledges are classified, most notably education, but also through tastes and lifestyles.

The emphasis on cultural information as a key resource in class struggles may be well suited to the occupations and resources of the middle classes (Frow, 1993; Bonner and du Guy, 1992; Featherstone, 1991; Betz, 1992). This class sector constitutes a significant percentage of the labour force in the growing knowledge-based service industries. The raw material of this sector and class - information - stresses the importance of educational accretion and knowledge generally.

The shift from manual (manufacturing) to mental ('unproductive') labour, and from less to more highly trained labour (Abercrombie and Urry, 1983) is statistically well founded. The service class, of which knowledge-related labour is a significant element, has grown within Western industrialized nations in terms of the percentage of workers within these fields and the funds generated. As a percentage of the Canadian economy the service sector has grown considerably during the twentieth century (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1986). In 1911 the service sector accounted for a mere 32% of the economy; rising to 40% by 1941, and to 62% by 1981. By contrast, the manufacturer of primary goods has dropped as a percentage of the economy during this same period from 39% to 5%.

There is some evidence that this shift towards knowledge within the occupations and institutions of the middle class is mirrored in the emphasis on cultural content within the cultural products targeted to this class. Douglas and Isherwood (1980) have argued that the informational element of consumer goods rises as one goes up the class scale. Those in the middle and upper-classes increasingly use the cultural information about consumer goods and practices to include other like-minded people and exclude others. Through content analysis Leiss (1983) identified the decreasing role of function-related information in promotional appeals. During the twentieth century, advertising has moved increasingly away from function, utility-based appeals to an emphasis on emotional, lifestyle based persuasion. Further, Leiss, Kline and Jhally (1986/90) analyzed the formats of

advertising from the 1920s to the 1980s. Since the 1960s, advertisements have relied heavily upon the 'lifestyle format'. This most recent approach bridges two previous formats: the 'product image' format: products are given extra-ordinary value through symbolism; the 'personalized' format: the product is forged to human qualities and personality types. The task of the lifestyle format is to situate the product and its potential owner within a desirable social context (i.e. the consumer wishes to be associated with, and experience, a particular lifestyle).

Analysis of middle-class consumption competencies has largely focused on the new *petite bourgeoisie* (Bourdieu, 1984; Featherstone, 1991; Bonner and du Guy, 1992). This growing service class fraction have an investment orientation to life (Bonner and du Guy, 1992). The new *petite bourgeoisie* occupations involve the production and dissemination of symbolic goods and services, in such areas as marketing, public relations and journalism. While this class sector may at times demonstrate the most spectacular consumption practices, my own interest is with the everyday, common practices found among the broader middle-class audience. Moreover, this consumption orientation towards life and status may be more broadly employed than the current research focus on cultural intermediaries would suggest. Burnett and Bush (1986: 77) suggested that although only 14% of the baby-boom generation fall under the classification of 'Yuppies', nearly fifty percent of the same generation are 'psychographic Yuppies'. That is, individuals who think according

to the stereotype of Yuppies: selfish, narcissistic, calculating hedonists: the perfect consumers. The pervasiveness of mass culture production in the lives of the middle class has created an audience for popular cultural consumption which possesses a heightened sophistication enabling them to read and strategically demarcate differences within the popular culture arena (Nava, 1992). Schudson (1984) suggests that middle-class subjects learn from an early age how to navigate through and utilize the myriad of commodity-signs of popular culture in order to construct an appropriate lifestyle image. Similarly, Clarke (1991) argues that subjects raised in this environment have the knowledge and familiarity with popular culture codes and conventions, and the economic and cultural space within which to play with them.

In accordance with this reverence for, and utilization of consumer culture, the middle classes are often the most ardent consumers of the 'lifestyle'-marketed goods and services (Featherstone, 1991; Bonner and du Guy, 1992). Production offers its audience commodities wrapped in imagery that addresses the needs and desires of this audience (Ewen, 1988; Wernick, 1992). Much of the production marketed to the middle class draw from the symbolic terrain of the upper-class, high culture lifestyles. These texts hold contradictory properties: the objects are widely accessible, but attempt to refer to a social and economic exclusivity. The contradiction must not be acknowledged for this 'bluff' of exclusivity to be successful. The elements of elite culture which the middle classes appropriate are, typically; those that, given the class's relatively low economic capital, are financially

accessible; those which are most easy to mimic (clothing, for example); and those which are relatively overt, or socially demonstrative.

The middle class are particularly well-suited to the logic and content of the cultural industries. Their intermediate position in the class structure, combined with the hope of 'moving up', encourages the participation in the arena of consumer culture. Moreover, the strong relationship to the resource of information provides an avenue and an inclination for its application in the competition over status. The following section examines the habitus of a specific fraction within the middle class.

Habitus: A Case

While it would be inaccurate to assume that all social agents subject to similar social and economic pressures will respond in a collective, coherent manner, it would also be inaccurate to ignore the structuring effects of these conditions and how they may be manifested in cultural dispositions and practices. Bourdieu's (1984) concept of the 'habitus' and 'trajectory' can be utilized to address the influence of social origin and experiences that are unique to a specific set of social subjects. From these conditions it is possible to infer subsequent 'effects' as they are played out in cultural practice. This section of the paper sets out to define the habitus of a middle class fraction by addressing a selected set of economic and social characteristics. The objective properties of this social class include: at least one year of university-education, male or female, middle-class origins; second generation English Canadians (or greater), Caucasian, of European ancestry, and born between 1960 and 1970.

It is important to note that I anticipate some level of variation of trajectories between women and men. However, while gender may play a significant role in determining trajectory and opportunities, I do not expect that this factor alone will override the influence of other factors unique to this habitus.

Historically, this social class has enjoyed a privileged status within Canadian society, in cultural, political and economic terms.

However, due to a number of changes to the economic and cultural order of Canadian society, certain aspects of this status have been arrested, and others may possibly be in decline. The potential responses to these changes in the form of cultural consumption practices will be addressed in a textual analysis to follow this section. Presently, however, I would like to address some of the more relevant conditions of existence - social origins and experiences - that constitute this habitus and, I propose, may structure the relationship of the group to cultural goods and practices.

To review: Bourdieu's concept of habitus serves as a means of mediating a dialectical relationship between structuring forces and subject agency. The habitus is the product of a social agent's inherited place in society (particularly early social conditioning), as well as the agent's subsequent life experience. This 'social baggage' (Volberg, 1992) serves the dual function of generating a set of practices, as well as shaping the perception and appreciation of the social world and the agent's place within it. The origins and experiences mediated through the habitus are conceptualized as 'dispositions'. The value of the concept of dispositions is its relative stability: dispositions are generative, rather than simply a set of pre-set and permanent attitudes, practices and interests. These tendencies, in turn, account for specific social practices (Garnham and Williams, 1986).

To account for the changes to a social agent's status within a particular social space - and the subject's perception of these

changes - Bourdieu employs the concept of 'trajectory'. The value of a subject's resources (capital) rises or falls according to its relative value in specific settings. Each social setting ('field') demands and rewards, particular capital configurations. The direction of a social agent's trajectory in relation to a space plays a key role in determining the value and meaning of a cultural practice. Bourdieu's work in *Distinction* (1984) drew broad conclusions about the nature of social practice influenced by class trajectory. Although the emphasis was placed on politics 'proper', the insights offered may be also useful in relation to the political aspects of strategic consumption practice. The findings suggest that class fractions whose level of resources are in decline and are unable to reproduce the properties of their ascendants are more likely to support reactionary, nostalgic and traditional forms of society. By doing so, the descending social class hopes to lessen and potentially slow the decline of their own status. By contrast, agents whose capital is increasing in value are "generally inclined towards social optimism and . . . are turned towards the future, novelty, movement, innovation, progress" (Bourdieu, 1984: 454-5).

Analysis of middle-class culture has paid considerable attention to the relationship of this class to the development of the service sector. Several critics have suggested that the expansion of this sector provides a vehicle for the maintenance or expansion of the status of the middle class, particularly for those well-suited through education and social conditioning to take advantage of

such opportunities (Featherstone, 1991; Betz, 1992; Frow, 1993). Although the development of this sector is a key factor shaping the cultural and economic condition of the service class, the focus on this economic factor as an influence on class trajectory may be both too general and incomplete. Due to the fact that the service industry doubled as a percentage of the total economy during the twentieth century and now constitutes two-thirds of the Canadian economy, it would be inappropriate to assume that all subjects who hold occupations related to this sector will have benefited from the rise of its exchange-value. Indeed, the economic status of Canadians has been reduced for all but a small percentage at the top of the economic scale. Moreover, the middle class must be addressed as a coalition of class fractions, rather than as a singular entity (Abercrombie and Urry, 1983). Although there are similarities due to the structural position of the class fractions, and relatively alike conditions of existence (education, levels of wealth), there are variances within this amalgamation which requires research to address more specific influences and subjectivities.

The middle class have not fared well under the restructuring of economies of the 1980s and 90s. Since the late 1970s the Canadian economy has stopped growing at the rate that characterized much of the Western post-World War Two economy. During the 1970s, household income rose by 28%. In the 1980s, this increase fell to 8% (Statistics Canada, 1994). Changes to the tax structure and the increased number of jobs within the service industries have encouraged an income polarization. After tax

income increased from the years 1984 to 1989 for households earning less than \$24,800 per annum and for those earning more than \$115,000. Net incomes within the middle range, however, decreased (Chisholm, Van Dusen, Walmsley and Wolff, 1989). Males within the above classification experienced a drop of earnings of 12% during the 1980s (Statistics Canada, 1994). The rapid rise in the number of women in the work force created an increase in the percentage of dual-income households (a 100% increase from 1969 to 1989), which may have somewhat countered the decline (Statistics Canada, 1994).

Trade policy changes and the pressures from the globalization of economic trade has reduced Canada's ability to compete. The manufacturing sector in particular has fallen behind emerging regions, such as the Far East and Pacific Rim, and to a lesser extent, the U.S. The restructuring required by this new level of productivity, and newly implemented trade agreements such as the CUFTA and NAFTA, have aggravated this economic decline. The effects of the slowed growth has been felt across class lines in employment levels and wages paid (Grinspun, 1993; United Nations Monthly Bulletin of Statistics, July 1993).

To accurately address the status of these subjects within this broad occupational sector, as well as their own perception of this status of subjects, it is useful to look beyond the economic conditions that shape this habitus. Matters of gender, race, ethnicity and cultural authority should also be considered when addressing the status of this class fraction (Hall, 1992). These

cultural factors play a strong role in determining a white middle-class subject's perception of his or her trajectory. This may be particularly relevant with respect to the class fraction in question. Inglehart (1990) suggests that Western children born and raised in the affluence of post World War Two tend to be less concerned with material forms of power and affluence and more with lifestyle decisions and 'post-materialist' concerns. Origins that include high levels of education, urban environments, secular orientations, service industry jobs and economic security tend to produce this substantial investment in 'quality of life' concerns.

Firstly, the status of this fraction in racial terms is undergoing rapid change in the multicultural Canadian environment. Caucasians constitute an increasingly small percentage of the total Canadian population, particularly within large urban centers (Ministry of Treasury, Economic and Intergovernmental Affairs, 1976; Byrm, 1989). Contrary to the country's self-image as a compassionate haven for the world's emigrating peoples (Palmer, 1993), Canada has a history of jealously guarded its right to be selective with respect to the 'type' of immigrant it will admit (Kalbach, 1971). Prior to changes to the Immigration Act of 1967, the majority of Canadian citizens were of British and U.S. origin, and typically Caucasian (Kalbach, 1971; Harney, 1989). This policy change reduced the discrimination (largely racial) possible through immigration, and had the effect - in combination with other immigration factors - of increasing the number of non-white, non-European immigrants entering Canada (Palmer, 1993).

Immigration from Asian and Caribbean nations constitute the majority of Canadian immigrants in the 1990s.

Secondly, since the 1960s non-Caucasians Canadians have entered and influenced Canadian middle-class culture. While integration into the more privileged levels of Canadian society is still slow for many of these peoples, the general progression of non-white groups has dramatically improved in economic and educational terms. Gordon and Darroch (1980) examined patterns of occupational achievement among Canadians by ethnicity. The mean index of occupational dissimilarity for Canadian ethnic groups decreased from about 27% in 1931 to 19% in 1951, and then to 14% in 1961 (Darroch, 1979). (This figure continued to decrease through to 1971, but due to the larger number of occupations used in the formulation, the figure is misleading for these purposes.) Kalbach, Lanphier, Rhyne, and Richmond (1983) found that ethnic immigrants tended to overcome status hurdles by the second (Canadian) generation. Despite some variations (with the Jewish sector doing especially well), the second generation of ethnic-immigrant group have achieved levels of education, occupation and income above expectations. Individuals of non-white status now constitute an increased percentage of the middle-class in Canada.

University education is a key vehicle of class mobility (Tyree, Semyonov, and Hodge, 1979). The Canadian government's large investment into postsecondary education during the 1960's and 70's, and the open admission policy of many of its schools has made this opportunity readily available to many Canadians. The

number of Canadians who have completed university degrees has increased dramatically since the early 1960's. As of 1961, only 2.8% of Canadians held university degrees. By 1977 this had risen to 7.3%, and is forecast at 12.1% for the year 2000 (Picot, 1980). Rich (1976) compared the class origins of university students in Canada with that of other nations. Approximately one-quarter of university students at the time of the study were the product of working class origins. Canada compares favorably to other developed nations: West Germany (former) 5%; France 8%; Sweden 14%; and Great Britain 25%. Further, in a study of the social mobility of 24 nations, Canada ranked second and the U.S. fourth (Tyree, Semyonov, and Hodge, 1979).

Most significant for my purposes, these improvements for many of the emerging cultural, racial and class fractions are in contrast to the trajectory of average citizens of British ancestry, particularly among males. Kalbach, Lanphier, Rhyne, and Richmond (1983) found that during the 1970's - despite a general increase in wages and educational levels - second generation males of British ancestry had a decreased representation within high status, professional-managerial occupations. Similarly, Herberg (1981) found that the substantial improvement in average levels of education among many non-British ethnic minorities was countered by a relative decline in the rank order of male and female citizens of British heritage. These declines in relative terms have been greatest for males, due to the rising occupational success among females (Kalbach, Lanphier, Rhyne, and Richmond, 1983).

The third point concerns the role of culture and symbolic goods in the process of reproducing social relations. The over-production of cultural goods and signs in contemporary Western societies may have weakened the permanence and universality of a commodity's economic, political or cultural value (Featherstone, 1991). The implication of such a condition is that we are moving towards a society in which the adoption of styles of life (manifest in choice of clothes, leisure activities, consumer goods, bodily dispositions) which are fixed to specific groups has been surpassed (Featherstone, 1987). The dilution of relatively clear symbols surrounding class distinctions undermines a vehicle through which class order is maintained. Further, the social sphere has witnessed an increasing fragmentation, albeit inconsistent, during the last two or three decades. Collins (1989) suggests that contemporary culture no longer has a single ruling center, but instead, holds multiple centers. Within arenas such as universities and media, alternative representations of truth, morality and value have begun to infiltrate and dismantle ruling class definitions. This fragmentation may suggest a reduction of class differences at the cultural level, and potentially, a more democratic distribution of cultural authority (Featherstone, 1987).

Although these two conditions offer the means for a class to appropriate and contest the symbolic territory of previously restricted spheres (high culture, for example), they could, conversely, serve to threaten the symbolic order upon which a class bases its cultural power. It is this latter possibility that may

be most threatening to the class fraction in question. The white middle class may be the classification most adversely affected by this cultural fragmentation. The cultural authority held by the white middle class has been extraordinarily strong, particularly within popular culture. Representations of family, morality, sexuality, among others, were once primarily produced by and for the white middle class. By contrast, the representations and cultural authority of minorities - Blacks, Native Canadians and Asians, for example - have improved both in terms of quantity and quality. Although the predominance of the white middle class has not by any means been reversed, it has weakened considerably during the last twenty years.

To reiterate, the focus here is not merely on the objective status of this fraction - in these terms, the class remains privileged - but on the class's trajectory: changes to the fraction's status and their perception of this change. This is a central influence determining dispositions and practice. Accordingly, I have addressed the changing conditions to which this class has been subject. During the 1960s and 70s - the period of early conditioning emphasized in Bourdieu habitus theory - most Western industrialized nations were experiencing fast economic growth and liberalization of a legal, political and cultural nature. This growth provided a comparatively high level of occupational, educational and cultural opportunities, and an ascending trajectory for well-situated social agents (Betz, 1992). Although there are foreseen variations of trajectory (particularly with respect to gender), this broad set of

conditions may have provided an unusually optimistic and empowering environment for this generation of white middle class subjects. Such an environment is significant when contrasted to current conditions and understood with the theoretical context of the habitus. This age group is the first of the post war generations not to reach adulthood in conjunction with a rapid increase in standard of living. Rather than an expansion of opportunity, this group is faced with rising standards for university admission and lower, at times negligible job prospects upon graduation. The reduced opportunity contrasts sharply with the class fraction's rising trajectory of their early social origins. Moreover, changes to the cultural status may be of more significance to this habitus than those of an economic nature due to the emphasis placed on cultural, lifestyle concerns (Inglehart, 1992).

The possible responses by the white middle class to these conditions in the form of cultural practice is the subject of the following chapter. I will present two cultural productions which I argue, address these changing conditions and provide a means of reparation to the interrupted trajectory of the class fraction.

Cultural Production and Sites of Investment

This section will address the two cultural products, *Martha Stewart* and *J. Crew*. An analysis of these texts will be done in order to examine some of the ways in which these materials may reflect and address the unique interests, strategic needs and history of the habitus described in the previous section. These cultural values and symbols promoted through the productions can be utilized as a means of recourse for the interrupted trajectory of the social fraction. The specific ways in which the habitus may interpret and utilize these cultural texts will be examined in the following sections.

Martha Stewart Living is a U.S.A.-based operation that produces a wide range of products under its title. These include: a bimonthly magazine, video, a 'classical music dining' compact-disc, books (a current total of eight), a line of home related products (distributed through KMart in Canada), and a syndicated half-hour television program. Each product is widely available across Canada. The various productions offer advice for their audience regarding issues such as, home decor, gardening, cooking, as well as less tangible matters such as entertaining tactics, proper participation at auctions and gift giving. The namesake of the operation, *Martha Stewart*, acts as a combination spokesperson and role model. Photographs of this attractive fortyish woman are interspersed throughout the magazine and books. As well, she acts as host of

the television series. The second case to be examined, *J. Crew*, is a Virginia, U.S.A.-based mail-order operation which manufacture and promotes a line of clothing for adult men and women. The goods are promoted and sold through the distribution of high-quality colour catalogues, which are themselves promoted through advertising within mass market consumer magazines.

These two productions draw from the iconography commonly associated with the upper-middle class Wasp, with the vast majority of the images and products referring to this subculture's (often mythological) heritage. This nostalgic and suburban Wasp imagery has been recognized and critiqued within the commercial cultural industries. *J. Crew* is described as offering a "classic preppy" (Harper's Bazaar, Nov. 1989: 76) look, that has succeeded at "catering to Americans' fantasies about the well-bred, aristocratic look" (Forbes, Dec., 1989: 140). *Martha Stewart* delivers a "Wasp" aesthetic (Working Woman, 1992) and the namesake has an "aura of flawless upper-middle class domesticity" (Newsweek, Nov., 1990: 74).

In addition to the similar aesthetic and lifestyle qualities, these productions share three other characteristics which make them a useful focus for research. One, the goods and practices promoted are applied within the 'everyday life' of Canadian culture. It is the stratification processes through the materials of everyday life, as opposed to the more formally regulated, institution-based processes such as education or governmental politics, that are the focus of this analysis. Two, the value of these goods is strongly influenced by cultural, rather than function and cost factors. Items

that serve similar functional purposes can be purchased relatively inexpensively. This characteristic allows the analysis to address an instance of stratification that is strongly shaped by culturally-grounded logics and efforts. Three, the importance to the productions of the cultural aspect demands of the producers that they construct and promote these cultural qualities through advertising. The resultant promotional material provides research with a physical focus for analysis.

Martha Stewart

The majority of material produced under the *Martha Stewart* title is of an overt 'how-to' nature. The advice provided is in the form of descriptions and demonstrations of a particular consumption lifestyle, and often in the form of explicit 'steps' (guides to dinner presentation, for example). The primary aesthetic theme celebrated is of old and antique 'country style' commodities. This is evident, for example, in the descriptions and illustrations of furniture and other home-decor related objects. Illustration A, taken from the article *Mission Furniture*, describes the long history and beauty of 'Mission' furniture, "a forgotten American style" (Feb./Mar., 1994: 40). The references to the past are largely restricted to early American styling ('Colonial'). The remainder are drawn from a variety of periods of American history, the majority of these representations drawn from the period of 1850 to 1930. This source of styling is reinforced by references throughout the various media to American regions, periods and histories. The

accuracy of this classification is questionable given the blending, evolving nature of style development. Classifications made by cultural intermediaries are often broad and oriented to marketing purposes. Diverse styles of Italian or Danish commodity-designs, for example, are reduced to single 'looks' that can facilitate the marketing of goods under these titles. The classification made here relies on the definition provided by the text in *Martha Stewart*.

Notably, the promotion of antiques in *Martha Stewart* is not limited to cultural objects actually produced in the past, that is, to actual antiques, but also to objects that are treated so as to appear aged. Techniques are taught through the various media on how to recreate the aged, 'weathered' look in relatively new objects. One example of this practice and logic is within the publication, *New Old Home* (1992). This glossy and highly stylized book (\$55.00 Canadian) provides instruction for remodeling an entire house and property so as to create the impression that the property is far older than in actuality. This involves efforts such as erecting an entirely new exterior, treating the walls and trims with stains which mimic aged wood, and replacing new styles of appliances (bathroom fixtures, for example) with styles representative of the past. These and other techniques are offered as methods for recreating a convincing 'history' for the home, and through association, potentially for the homeowner.

The emphasis on an aged appearance in the goods is also evident in the article *Blinds and Shades* (February/March 1994). However, in this case the aged look is combined with a second

significant aspect of the *Martha Stewart* productions: the relegation of the functional or utilitarian quality of the objects to a secondary status. The article describes various styles of window coverings. The varieties shown are without the typical function-related features of popular modern blinds and shades (see Illustration B). The product models presented are more difficult and costly to clean, more difficult to operate, and less durable than comparable modern models. Indeed, the objects and practices presented within *Martha Stewart* are generally more time consuming, less mobile, require greater maintenance, and less suitable to smaller contemporary homes. Related to this quality is the minimalist, stripped-down style of many of the objects promoted. Excessive style characteristics are absent, replaced by an emphasis on simplicity, and a celebration of 'the basics' (see Illustration C). Table legs, for example, are without patterns, or intricate detail. This aesthetic quality is at times pushed to the point of austerity. Together, these two features may be interpreted as contrasts to contemporary design and functional advances.

J. Crew

The representation of the past is also a key element of the *J. Crew* productions. The clothing, imagery and text of the *J. Crew* catalogues draw extensively from iconography representative of the white middle class of the 1950s and early 60s. This is evident in the styles of clothing promoted which mimic the styles of this

period. These include: chino's, grey flannel trousers, madras walking shorts, 'barn jackets', 1950s-style basketball sneakers, 'schoolboy' sunglasses, knee-length surfers shorts, and 'traditional' button-down oxford-cloth shirts. Many of the fabrics used were especially popular during the 1950s and early 60s: Aztec prints, seersucker cottons, and plaids. The props and settings used in the promotion of these items support the association with this Wasp aesthetic and historical period. This includes the use of automobiles, residential housing styles, and industrial buildings associated with this period. The vast majority of these images are placed within rural or suburban settings (See Illustration D).

Like *Martha Stewart*, *J. Crew* promotes products which are treated so as to appear older. In this case, *J. Crew* alters its own products rather than providing technical instruction for creating this impression. Shirts and trousers are manufactured so that the edges and seams of the objects are frayed so as to appear like "five year old favorites" (*J. Crew*, Spring, 1994: 30). This treatment gives the aged quality to the clothing, but also acts to reduce the life of the clothing material and, subsequently suggests a reduced emphasis on the commodity's utilitarian value (See Illustration E).

The objects in *J. Crew* are notable for their simplicity of styling. The colours are predominately solid (non-patterned fabric) neutrals ("true, uncomplicated colors"). There are few superfluous details such as extra pockets, epaulets, and company logos: "There's no logo on this baby, though everyone will know where you got it" (Summer, 1994: 29). This plain styling is reinforced through the accompanying text. T-shirts, for example, are

described as an example of "minimalism". The following excerpt which describes workout gear illustrates the purposeful celebration of the aesthetic of simplicity, and significantly, the advantageous social distinction the consumption of this style orientation provides the wearer:

Though a guy's easygoing, she (or he) may do a serious workout. And some prefer to sweat in the sort of stuff longest put to such use, in the no-frills tradition of the classic men's singlet seen on guys over the year swinging a pickaxe, jockeying a jackhammer. And for all that utility, sexier than the neon-lit, logo bedecked video workout wear *others* might require . . . (Spring, 1994: 38-39) (my italics)

Potential Sources of Cultural Value

I would like to now propose a set of possible cultural values that the above commodities and images may offer to the audience in question. As was argued earlier in this thesis, social agents will bring unique needs and experiences to the interpretation and use of cultural texts. The meaning and value of cultural texts is not predetermined at the site of production. Production's task thus, is to identify and cater to the tastes, attitudes and values of the audience, and to provide a suitable 'vocabulary' of objects and practices through which social subjects may communicate effectively and advantageously (Blundell, Shepherd, and Taylor, 1993). Thus, while subjects will not necessarily invest in these goods in a consistent or collective manner, it is my contention that these goods accurately address, and offer sites of investment for, a set of dispositions that stem from the habitus's unique social class

position and its experiences. In such cases of 'preferred readings' (Hall, 1981a), the cultural value obtained through the consumption of the text can be strategically employed for purposes of social status enhancements.

The investment in cultural objects that are representative of the past can serve as a means of demarcating cultural and political differences. The appropriation of these symbols as social markers sets the consumer apart from other consumers and lifestyles in a highly demonstrative area of everyday life. This differentiation may be accomplished through these commodities in a number of ways. First, the deliberate and overt reduction of the functional or utilitarian value of a cultural object may represent a desired social image for the social subject, by reflecting the consumers indifference to practical needs. The increased time and/or cost inferred by the consumption of goods reflects the consumer's position in relation to wealth and poverty. The resource of time, the product of class and economic status, is represented through the association with these products and practices. The consumption of time illustrates the consumers possession and appreciation of the capital to be indifferent to this resource. In the *J. Crew* materials the promotion of weathered clothing (which limits the life of the product) may, for example, serve to symbolize the consumer's indifference to functional/cost factors, and the economic resources that allow such a relationship to consumption to exist. The reduced functional value in the examined materials of *Martha Stewart* and *J. Crew* may be offered

to the middle-class consumer as an opportunity to reflect this relationship to necessity, and subsequently serve as a means of positioning the subject between the upper classes - for whom such gratuitous relationship to culture is a more accurate material reality - and the lower, for whom necessity makes such practices practically difficult.

Strategic social distinctions may also be generated through the consumption of *J. Crew* and *Martha Stewart* by way of the manner in which the objects and practices are treated. These cultural texts are treated with a reverence that belies their mundane, everyday value. An article in the *Martha Stewart* magazine (June, 1994), for example, describes the value of collecting enamel kitchen ware - "a modest kitchen classic" - and recommends the display of these objects in a manner typically reserved for art or heirlooms. Similarly, in *J. Crew* the attention to detail promoted is suggestive of the purposes of this consumption strategy, as is inferred in this text:

Nuance is often best discerned in the everyday - like the dress shirt. Nuance in fabric. Hue and striping. Stitching. Fusings in collar and cuff. Buttons. Only a few sense such distinctions, in truth. But those who do, many dote on the *J. Crew* shirt. And perhaps not a single one takes starch. Hang loose. That's the idea around here. (*J. Crew*, 1994)

These two processes can be theorized within Bourdieu's theory of practice. Bourdieu (1984) argues that the consumption practices that most clearly serve the purposes of creating distinctions are

those that socially demonstrate the attributes that are required for such distinctions. The dispositions stemming from these conditions reflect a comfortable and relatively secure position in society. The commodities with the greatest potential symbolic value are those which most clearly represent the nature of the appropriation, and through association, the quality of their owner. This is because their possession requires time and capacities which, requiring long investment of time, "cannot be acquired in haste or by proxy"(Bourdieu: 1984: 281). These practices accentuate the lack of necessity and gratuitous comfort of the class position which is their social origin. The superior material conditions of privileged classes provide the opportunity for these class fractions to relate to objects in a manner divorced from practical necessity:

The aesthetic disposition, a generalized capacity to neutralize ordinary urgencies and to bracket off practical ends, a durable inclination and aptitude for practice without a practical function, can only be constituted within an experience of the world freed from urgency and through the practice of activities which are an end in themselves, such as scholastic exercises or the contemplation of works of art. (Bourdieu, 1984: 54)

In contrast to the aesthetic disposition are the dispositions common to the working class, what Bourdieu terms the 'choice of the necessary'. The aesthetic orientation of the working class is a product of limited financial means and educational opportunities. These objective material conditions impose "a taste for necessity which implies a form of adaptation to and consequently acceptance of the necessary, a resignation to the inevitable"

(Bourdieu: 1984: 372). The practical alignment with objective opportunities embedded in dispositions of the class habitus guides the agent towards rejecting what is not available: "refusing what they are refused ('That's not for the likes of us')" (Bourdieu: 1984: 471).

Bourdieu suggests that the capacity to relate to cultural objects in this manner - the 'aesthetic disposition' - is limited to the upper class bourgeois culture. However, this capacity may also be found at the upper-middle and occasionally middle-class levels and experienced through the investment in the texts of *Martha Stewart* and *J. Crew*. Although most members of the Canadian middle class are without the financial means to demonstrate a freedom from economic and practical necessity, and thus unable to demonstrate a gratuitous lifestyle that reflects this economic privilege (and the knowledge to appreciate it), I suggest that the *symptoms* of the aesthetic disposition can be appropriated and employed strategically by subjects of less privileged social classes.

The knowledge required to demonstrate this relationship to cultural objects may not be entirely restricted to those individuals who can 'afford', on an economic level, such indifference to practical needs. The 'weathered' clothing in *J. Crew* and the deliberately reduced functional quality of goods in *Martha Stewart* can represent this indifference to practical needs. The middle classes can express their indifference to functional/economic circumstance through the acquisition of these relatively inexpensive and widely available commodities. The

cultural industries recognize the interest among the middle-class audience to invest in the symbols of the gratuitous lifestyle and market their goods appropriately. As one media source wrote regarding *Martha Stewart* productions: "Mass wants class, and Martha has leveraged that beautifully" (Hitchens, 1993: 82). The appropriation of the external quality of this gratuitous relationship to commodities can thus serve as status enhancing practice for the middle-class subject.

A second way in which the cultural products of *Martha Stewart* and *J. Crew* may provide suitable cultural values for this audience is through its representations of Wasp heritage. This representation can provide a vehicle through which this habitus may celebrate and strategically support this social identity. The link between the consumption of popular culture and the demonstration of social and political identities of particular audiences has been made elsewhere within cultural studies with respect to a variety of social collectives. These include: mods and punks (Chambers, 1986); young women (Nava, 1992), teddy boys (Hebdige, 1979), working class boys (Willis, 1977), and hippies and motor bike boys (Willis, 1978). "These cultures make their points - not through words - but through concrete transformation of objects, style, thought and consciousness" (Willis, 1978: 171). The celebration and tactical investment in the symbolic value of commodities and practices can serve as expressions of cultural and political positions.

For the audience in question the appeal of the nostalgic, upper-middle class, Wasp iconography promoted is grounded in the association to previous social formations and power relations that provided a comparatively high level of status for this social class. The styling of the goods, text and imagery in *Martha Stewart* and *J. Crew* refer to periods and social formations in which the cultural and economic authority of the white middle-class went relatively unchallenged.

Pigment dyeing imparts a suitably old fashioned aura - It's over a hundred years since Oxford and Cambridge crews took to such shirts at Henley-on-Thames. (*J. Crew*, Summer, 1994: 7)

Through the acquisition and associations with these representations the class fraction seeks - consciously or unconsciously - to celebrate and promote this particular cultural identity as a means of empowering their current status. These symbols of the Wasp heritage and authority serve as social resources that are strategically utilized. By 'going back' to these symbolic roots offered up in the promotions and goods of *J. Crew* and *Martha Stewart*, the social class struggles to counter the realignment of privilege and status that has emerged during their particular lifetimes. Bourdieu's work in France identified a pattern of responses from similarly declining trajectories, although the class fractions and changing social and economic conditions are not easily transferable to the Canadian social formation. However, it is interesting to note that the general response to this decline, identified in Bourdieu's field research, was of a growing

conservatism, support for past conditions and relations and a desire to return to 'fundamentals' in education, family, media, etc.

The analysis of popular culture as a means of political empowerment has emphasized this tactic within subordinate classes, especially spectacular youth sub-cultures and working class subjects (Willis, 1978; Hebdige, 1979; Chambers, 1986). Although the practices and tastes of the middle class are critiqued, the emphasis is often on the active, playful, and hedonistic relationship this class sector has to popular culture, rather than its political, tactical utilization of the cultural arena. This analysis suggests instead that the middle class, like these subordinate cultures, utilize popular culture as a strategic vehicle for empowerment. The construction and reproduction of the social order is not limited to the oppositional tactics of the subordinate classes against the status quo, and the subsequent resistance to these changes by the ruling dominant class. Conflict within social formations involve tactics and positioning by all contestants within a particular field of struggle. The investment in the signs of Wasp culture then, can be compared to the investment in the iconography of African culture demonstrated by some Canadians of African heritage. The iconography utilized by each group offers socially recognized symbols of their own cultural history (real and imagined); each can serve as a source of pride, and each can serve as a means of political and cultural empowerment. This investment in nostalgia is an example of how popular culture is actively deployed as a strategic tool for the accumulation of status, not merely by those without traditional sources of power

(education, income), but also by the relatively privileged middle classes.

The investment in the symbols from the past presented in the texts may also, simultaneously, represent an interest in creating an association with history itself, that is, in the value of 'having a history'. Jameson (1984) argues that in this latest stage of capitalism the rapid production of new commodities, coupled with the exploitation of symbols to promote these goods, may have weakened the permanence and depth of cultural meanings associated with cultural objects and practices. Indeed, the success of consumer marketing is dependent upon the industry's capacity to promote the rise and fall of consumer tastes; a planned obsolescence in order to maximize sales (Kellner, 1983). The consumers manipulation of these symbols and commodities may further add to the impermanence of cultural values.

The instability of symbols within this environment may act to increase the value of representations which are interpreted by consumers as in contrast to this development. Kroker (1985) suggests that the disappearance of "the real, leads to a nostalgia for the real: a fascination with and desperate search for real people, real values, real sex" (Kroker, 1985: 80). Similarly, the loss of historical depth to cultural representations may yield an enhanced value for commodities which represent tradition and history. Through association with cultural objects which represent tradition or history the consumer can be positively associated with this value.

This cultural value may be of particular relevance and appeal to the class fraction in question. Within Canada, Caucasian Canadians of European descent retain a naturalized, although mythological identification with Canadian history (i.e. 'real Canadians'), despite the current multicultural character of the country. Those individuals who identify with this social position, and interpret a threat to its status, may draw from the examined iconography and its associations in order to represent their association with the valued historical depth.

For as long as I can remember, I have loved the rich beauty, the architectural diversity and detail, the unique positioning of the plots, and most of all the history.
(*Martha Stewart, New Old Home*, 1992: 1)

The nostalgic, 'back to basics' symbols of *Martha Stewart* and *J. Crew* taken from North American history offer the consumer an opportunity to invest in symbols which denote tradition, authenticity and history of the consumer. This consumption serves to strike a social contrast with 'new Canadians' (recent immigrants), as well as those Canadians who as a result of race or cultural differences are forever identified as new Canadians despite their own history within the country. The expression of 'having history' in the Canadian context, and in relation to the class fraction in question, may represent a strategic attempt to demarcate a distinction between themselves and growing and strengthening social classes that are perceived as threatening to the status of white middle class Canadians.

I have attempted in this section to propose a set of potential values that may be available for the middle class fraction through

an investment in the examined texts. In the following chapter the results of interviews with subjects of this class fraction who have demonstrated an appreciation of the examined cultural objects and practices will be presented.

Interviews

A set of seven oral interviews were conducted during the months of February, March and April 1994. The selection of interview subjects was based on; a) the subject's membership in the social, economic and racial classification described in the introduction to this paper and; b) the subject's demonstrated use of 'lifestyle' commodities and practices that I consider to be consistent with the practices and commodities addressed in the above textual analysis. Although a few of the subjects had actually purchased the specific goods utilized in the case study, this was not a prerequisite for selection. Broadly, the purpose of the interviews was to gain an understanding of the subject's general political orientation and, if possible, to find a relationship between these attitudes and this particular audience's investment in nostalgic goods and practices.

There were five related areas targeted by the interview: a) to determine how the subject conceptualized their own social position, status and trajectory; b) to examine how the subjects utilized commodities as a mode of communication; c) to investigate the meanings and values the subjects may have for the type of goods and practices examined in the case study; d) to gain an understanding of the social and political perspectives of the subjects; e) to examine the subject's tastes and opinions regarding both popular and high culture.

To this end subjects were asked a series of questions concerning issues related to cultural practice and their own social,

economic and cultural positions. In addition to the solicitation of the subject's opinions of popular and high culture materials (examples often provided), views were sought regarding matters commonly held to be not related to cultural practice, such as education, immigration and family. As a means of addressing the subject's perspective on the more abstract matters (for example, concepts of community), questions were centered on specific institutions or practices. Responses to concrete matters of this kind appeared to be more easily articulated by the subject and can be analyzed as manifestations of attitudes and dispositions.

The interviews lasted an average of one hour. The questions posed to the participants were prepared in advance. The actual content covered during the interview, however, was influenced by the subject's own particular interests. Subjects were told of the general focus of the paper, but not of the preliminary thesis. Although the ideas presented through the interview responses were largely via the tone and nuance of speech and body non-verbal signs (body language, for example), quotes from the respondents will be offered in those cases where they may help illustrate the ideas presented. The limited number of subjects interviewed, and the subjective nature of this area of research suggests that the findings drawn from the interviews should be interpreted as only illustrative.

The interviews carried out have, by and large, served to support the thesis of the case study. This thesis argues that the consumption of goods and practices which draws from white

middle-class iconography is *matched* by a nostalgia for related social conditions and status hierarchies, and thus may reflect a desire or intention to recreate this status through cultural practices. It is, however, beyond the capacity of this research to conclude that the investment in these commodity-signs is produced strictly for these reasons.

Several authors in this essay have stressed the middle class's strong relationship to consumer culture. Bourdieu (1984) argues that although all class levels show interest in understanding and using commodities; indifference within the middle class to these processes is particularly rare. Clarke (1990) and Nava (1991) suggest that people of the generation examined are particularly accustomed to mapping themselves and others in terms of popular culture consumption. The subjects interviewed found it both appropriate and 'normal' that cultural objects and practices hold value above and beyond their practical, utilitarian values; this despite the fact that the subjects simultaneously demonstrated considerable self-consciousness of such a relationship to products; that is the subjects demonstrated a belief that to attribute cultural values to commodities is 'superficial'. Moreover, the cultural values the subjects associated with cultural practices were then just as easily attributed to the consumer of goods. Two interview subjects, for example, suggested that the use of rap-style clothing was a deliberate representation of aggressive and violent social attitudes. (Male, 26, courier) " . . . giving us some sort of attitude, [it's] a total farce . . . they're just trying to look tough. Right."

Significantly, subjects did not perceive their own cultural practices to be expressing cultural identities or social messages to the same degree, or with the same level of intentionality. Instead, personal practices - tastes in clothing, furniture preferences, etc. - were presented as virtually free of any social or political basis or motivation; the cultural objects do not 'speak' for the subject, as they do for other individuals. One subject (male, 28, lawyer), referring to his manner of dress stated: "I just wear what I always have. I don't think about it really." It was only through interview questions about the cultural practices of others that this connection between consumer practice and cultural values was expressed. This desire to appear free of any political or cultural intentions in cultural practice was also evident in the responses to the two texts, *Martha Stewart* and *J. Crew*. (All but one subject was familiar with at least one of two products.) The interviewed subjects offered opinions of the cultural texts that generally supported the textual analysis. Moreover, the texts were interpreted in such a way as to suggest their suitability to the subject's tastes and lifestyles. Subjects frequently commented on the 'simple', and 'authentic' nature of the material. Nevertheless, even those subjects who had previously consumed one or more of these products hesitated to expand on the particular qualities that they found appealing or why appropriate for the individual. Again, evaluations of value and meaning of the texts were most forthcoming when in regards to other subjects. This was particularly the case with respect to the males, and is likely the

result of a need to project a distance from 'feminine' matters of taste, shopping, etc.

Interview responses implied that these values attributed to cultural practices are widely, if not universally, socially recognized. Subjects displayed a confidence in their own ability to correctly interpret the meanings and social value of practices and commodities. Rarely did subjects feel incapable of providing interpretations of cultural practices. This capacity to read others appeared to be at its greatest with respect to the more spectacular varieties of youth clothing styles and the practices of groups closely aligned with their own socio-economic positions (i.e. white middle class).

The use of popular culture by middle-class subjects presented in the theoretical sections of this paper, and supported by the interviews, suggests a complementary relationship to consumer culture (Schudson, 1984; Nava, 1991). This may reflect (and be the product of) a more comfortable status within the Canadian social and economic system. To appreciate the distinctive quality of this relationship, the quality of responses can be compared to earlier studies of subordinate subcultures. Studies focusing on the political nature of popular culture illustrated the degree to which subjects may rework, even deconstruct, the meanings of the symbolic materials produced by increasingly centralized capital industries (Hebdige, 1979; Chambers, 1986). The middle-class subjects interviewed, by contrast, appeared less antagonistic and more accepting of the ideas and commodities offered by industry.

Several of the subjects interviewed for example, thought the ideas held in promotional campaigns and product offerings were interesting, even provocative. There was generally little skepticism towards production or marketing efforts. Although criticisms were made regarding specific ads, products and companies, these were targeted towards the particular ideas or functional value of the commodities, rather than at the idea that commodities could or should represent these cultural values in the first instance. Conversely, goods or ads which appealed to the subjects were admired. Describing a recent series of television advertisements for a Canadian bank, a subject (male, 28, lifeguard-student) offered: "Really different. Pretty dangerous actually . . . for a bank. I like them."

Despite this synchronous relationship, subjects did not passively adopt the goods and concepts promoted by industry. Rather, the construction of meaning and identity through consumption for the subjects appeared to be largely via the active selection and critical evaluation of cultural texts. This ability was presented by the subjects as a mark of cultural sophistication and a means by which social distinctions can be constructed. Several subjects noted the lack of critical ability in others, suggesting that other consumers simply buy into whatever is promoted. (Woman, married, 28, lower management, real estate) "There are only a few places I like to go. You have to know where to look . . . " Another subject (male, 26, entry level insurance industry), referring to tastes in music stated: "I'm not into . . . most of the big, popular stuff. I like early, older . . . Stones, Van Morrison, Neil Young." The

same subject defined currently popular music as "music for the masses" (elevator music). By contrast, the subjects saw themselves as having a fully conscious, critical and active relationship to cultural production.

This may suggest that the critical element of the middle class consumer is located in the subject's capacity to accurately read cultural texts and use them appropriately, rather than in the capacity to contest or subvert the 'original' value of texts. The respondents desire to appear sophisticated produces a contradiction. On the one hand, subjects interpret the practices of other groups and individuals as deliberate, conscious and ideological: 'others' attempt to speak through their tastes, but the subjects interviewed 'just are'.) However, the subjects also claim to bring a greater sophistication to their selection and utilization of popular culture which reflects a very conscious, active approach to consumer practice. These responses suggest that being free of the influence and trends of popular culture is perceived as a desirable social quality. This ideal may encourage subjects to portray themselves in this manner to other subjects.

This thesis has suggested that symbolic hierarchies exist within popular culture which are adhered to, contested, and utilized by social agents according to the demands of a particular field. These hierarchies exist despite the increased access to cultural goods and practices across class levels, and despite the weakening of stable, universally recognized social values for these cultural goods and practices. The interviews undertaken supported this argument.

This was suggested in two ways. First, commodities were measured and categorized by the interview subjects according to their social value: how the commodity added to or decreased social status. Often the social value of a commodity was offered by the subject even when not queried, although not all product types were interpreted in this manner to the same extent. The more socially demonstrative or 'public' the type of good (clothing, cars), the greater the emphasis generally placed on the commodity's social value. Tastes regarding practices that are consumed privately (television programming, for example) did not produce the same degree of choice justification from the respondents. Second, the subjects often appeared to be concerned with providing the 'best' or most appropriate answers to questions concerning their tastes. These responses may suggest that despite the breakdown of stable symbolic hierarchies the subjects recognized and attempted to adhere to a symbolic hierarchy.

Although a symbolic order appeared to be respected, for many of the subjects, the traditional areas of high culture - dance, classical music, fine art - played only a peripheral role in determining this order. Popular culture was infrequently evaluated in relation to high culture standards. Subjects did not appear to be concerned that popular culture was 'only popular culture'. A subject referring to classical music clearly stated: "No. I don't know anything about. I don't really like it." The evaluation of 'legitimate' cultural goods and practices versus non-legitimate was largely *within* popular culture. The more positive responses towards traditional areas of high culture came primarily from the

female subjects. However, after inquiry it was discovered that the consumption of these high culture materials was highly irregular, suggesting that the interest in these forms may be, at least in part, motivated by social rather than taste-based factors.

This paper has also questioned the degree of emphasis placed on the 'bottom-up' nature of cultural practice. Practice is in relation to the pressures of competing groups situated higher, lower and similarly in the class structure. This process was reflected in the interview responses. Subjects showed a significant level of interest in mimicking the practices and attitudes of upper-class fractions, which may be intended as a means of associating with or obtaining this social position. But the subjects also sought to create distance between their own status and those of lower placed classes. Indeed, criticism appeared to be strongest and most quick towards individuals whose positions attempted to mimic the subject's own practices and identity. For example, the neighbourhood in which all of these subjects live is frequented by tourists each summer weekend, many coming from Toronto's poorer neighbourhoods. Three of the interviewed subjects made deprecating comments about these people with respect to their behavior, style of address, ethnicity, etc. A subject stated: (female, 24, medical student): "I avoid Queen (the street) on the weekends. Body builders . . . and bimbos. They're all looking for an audience." Further, subjects sought to situate themselves advantageously in relation to similarly placed (middle class) subjects. The criticism of these other middle class fractions involved finer distinctions, but

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were equally intense and possibly constituted the greatest amount of effort. The *Distinction* analysis allows and accounts for this multidirectional complexity. Strategic social practice has the dual intention of pulling a class fraction upwards, and of maintaining the distance or differences with lower positioned classes. Subjects make these efforts according to the practical opportunities and demands of specific fields.

As stated earlier, the selection of interview subjects was based, in part, on the subjects acquisition of goods and participation in practices consistent with the nostalgic, 'Wasp' imagery illustrated in the two examined texts. This was displayed, primarily, through clothing and home-decor products and in this way, were easily compared with the texts of *Martha Stewart* and *J. Crew*. The nostalgia aesthetic demonstrated in cultural practice was matched by highly conservative views on a number of social and political issues in several areas of life.

I suggest that this perspective - reflected in both cultural practice and through the subject's political and cultural perspectives - is the result of the group's interrupted trajectory. The contrast between the highly empowering social and economic origins of this fraction and the current conditions may have produced a nostalgia for the levels of status, authority and opportunity imagined in these past periods. Although the elements of the past cited as appealing by the subjects were often (necessarily) inaccurate 'memories', this level and type of nostalgia is significant among young and relatively affluent

individuals. However, it is important to note at this point that the female subjects interviewed demonstrated a significantly less positive view of the past when related to matters of career and marriage roles for women. This perception is supported by the changes to the objective conditions (salary increases, education levels) of women during this historical period. Surprisingly however, the female subjects showed a remarkable similarity to the males with respect to a number of issues. These qualities are discussed below.

Four of the interview subjects cited immigration levels as a key factor in lowering the quality of life. In every case, the subjects argued that immigration rates should be lessened. With respect to education, subjects showed considerable concern, particularly among those who planned on having children. Private or catholic schools were considered superior to public, despite the fact that all of the respondents had attended public schools. Every participant cited the relaxed discipline of parents as a key factor behind youth related problems. The subjects demonstrated various levels of racism, ranging from what can be termed 'polite' racism to blatant dismissal and criticism of non-Caucasian and new Canadians. These attitudes were often put in the context of humour. Government policies such as quotas were criticized as examples of the relative ease and favour minority groups enjoy.

These views on education, immigration, family, and community life can, no doubt, be found within other socio-economic classifications in Canada. The uniqueness and significance of these attitudes, however, stems from the knowledge held by the

subjects, and is manifested through the manner in which these views were offered. The subjects presented these views in such a way as to reflect their strong knowledge of the issues. Responses concerning race and immigration matters, for example, demonstrated that they 'knew better'. This consciousness of the incorrectness of their views was further suggested through the almost confessional tone of some of the responses. There appeared to be a strong understanding that these conservative views were not socially acceptable. This manner of presentation reflects, I suggest, the contrast between the subjects past and present; between their social origin and present attitudes.

Although the interviewed subjects were often conscious of the conservative and nostalgic quality of their perspectives, this was only with respect to certain areas (particularly the family, immigration and education). Notably, this consciousness was virtually nonexistent with respect to consumer practice: subjects did not perceive a link between their consumer tastes and their social and political attitudes. Shepherd and Giles (1989) have identified the lack of connection between political and culture life as a central quality of Canadian society. This discrepancy underlines the difficulty of identifying and measuring the political quality of everyday culture. Moreover, it may also reflect the unconscious and ideological level at which everyday culture operates, and consequently, how cultural practice may conceal the more honest and/or unpopular attitudes and perspectives within a culture, as is the case in this study.

Conclusion

By focusing on this specific case it was my hope to illustrate the possible relationship between a set of cultural products and practices, and the social and political values of the examined habitus. More broadly however, I have attempted to suggest that consumer culture is an important element of middle-class lifestyles and that the consumption of popular culture is a key vehicle through which subjects seek to demarcate social distinctions for status enhancing purposes.

The theoretical elements of this thesis have proposed a number of relations and processes related to the middle class and consumer culture. Central to this is the theorization of popular culture as a site of contestation - "an arena of containment and resistance" (Hall, 1981b: 239) - through which social agents and groups attempt to establish and maintain beneficial distinctions. The goods and practices produced by the cultural industries supply the raw material utilized in this struggle over meaning and value. The highly political nature of these processes was possibly most effectively illustrated through ethnographic research (see for example, Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Willis, 1978; Chambers, 1986). The unique properties and perspectives of social agents are articulated through the imaginative management of consumer practices.

The middle class subject may be particularly well suited and conducive to participating in this process. Middle-class consumers raised among the signs and logics of consumer culture in

contemporary Canada are familiar and integrated into the logic of competitive consumer practice. The integration of the values of democracy, pleasure and self-esteem into consumer culture is an alluring and effective attraction for the middle class subject (Ewen, 1976, 1982, 1988; Featherstone, 1991).

Subjects may utilize this sphere of cultural life to combat threats to their social status, as in the case presented. The investments in the goods and practices dipped in the iconography of upper-middle class Wasp heritage may be inspired by the declining trajectory and authority of the examined habitus. The current, seemingly innocent interest in nostalgia - "reusable traditions" (Huyssen, 1984: 357) - embodied in terms such as 'tradition', 'back to basics', 'authenticity' or 'our history' may instead, be a reflection of the threatened status of the white middle class. These cultural practices may act at once to accommodate and hide the intolerant attitudes of this habitus.

Bourdieu's theory of practice provides effective analytical tactics for linking cultural practice to the influences of structural factors, particularly through the concepts of habitus and trajectory. Employing these conceptual tools towards the analysis of popular culture enables theory to examine how social practice is shaped and limited by a subject's available resources as well as the particular demands of a social space. Where Bourdieu's contribution may falter is with respect to the theorization of the subject - text relationship. It is here that the advances in cultural studies may be most beneficial. Reader-oriented criticism within

cultural studies (Morley, 1980; Hall, 1981, for example) has rigorously addressed the point of interaction between text and reader; meaning does not 'exist' until the unique properties of the reader and social context interact with the cultural text. In contrast, the value of specific commodities in Bourdieu's field work (*Distinction*) appear to be almost predetermined. All readings then, regardless of the subject's social position and properties, are treated as 'preferred readings' (Hall, 1981a). This theorization (or lack of) may act to support Bourdieu's account of high culture dominance and authority by assuming the meaning and value of cultural texts are given.

Further, the emphasis in Bourdieu's research on cultural differences stemming from economically grounded inequities, may be at the expense of other critical factors. It may be useful to give greater consideration to the factors of race, ethnicity and gender as influences on consumer culture processes. Although the interview subjects - both male and female - were remarkably consistent with respect to a number of areas of cultural life, gender did play a significant role in specific contexts. Identifying these situations and allowing for the influence of class *and* other factors (i.e. gender) may make Bourdieu's framework more adaptable to a greater variety of cultural practices, audiences and locations.

Illustration A

Illustration B

Illustration C

Illustration D

Illustration E

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cultural studies (Morley, 1980; Hall, 1981, for example) has rigorously addressed the point of interaction between text and reader; meaning does not 'exist' until the unique properties of the reader and social context interact with the cultural text. In contrast, the value of specific commodities in Bourdieu's field work (*Distinction*) appear to be almost predetermined. All readings then, regardless of the subject's social position and properties, are treated as 'preferred readings' (Hall, 1981a). This theorization (or lack of) may act to support Bourdieu's account of high culture dominance and authority by assuming the meaning and value of cultural texts are given.

Further, the emphasis in Bourdieu's research on cultural differences stemming from economically grounded inequities, may be at the expense of other critical factors. It may be useful to give greater consideration to the factors of race, ethnicity and gender as influences on consumer culture processes. Although the interview subjects - both male and female - were remarkably consistent with respect to a number of areas of cultural life, gender did play a significant role in specific contexts. Identifying these situations and allowing for the influence of class *and* other factors (i.e. gender) may make Bourdieu's framework more adaptable to a greater variety of cultural practices, audiences and locations.