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Note: so I wrote this in Spring of 2020, and it is now a year later in 2021. Over that year I did a lot of changing and learning, so there's probably things in this text I would find (in modern parlance) a little cringe. I'm not re-reading it to identify and remove them, I can't remember what I said. Let this be an artefact to past-me's foolishness, but if you get something from this, then good for past-me and for you!

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In his 1984 book "Distinction" Bourdieu talks about how taste is a mechanism to establish class difference; the ruling class get to judge what's tasteful or tasteless, and they do so to perpetuate their own values, securing their position as most culturally valuable, the people "being and doing" correctly.

You develop 'good taste' by accessing high culture. How do you do that? The ruling class are the gatekeepers of high culture, access requires cash and connections, investing in education so you can understand the culture correctly. When things get more accessible, they slip down the cultural ladder. The original painting is worth more, economically and culturally, than the reprint. Tracy Emin grimaces politely as she calls Grayson Perry "popular with the masses."

Good taste is coded as more legitimate, valuable, moral - in shaming those with less/no access to high culture, the ruling class assert their difference and superiority at the expense of the working class. In the same way the capitalists get rich by stealing our surplus value (boss makes a dollar, you make a dime), they gain cultural capital by drawing lines around culture, categorising good taste around what only they can access, and then trashing the culture the working-class generate for ourselves; often, tools for our survival. When working-class cultural capital is devalued, it's harder to convert it into actual capital. Opera isn't higher brow than hip-hop because it's inherently smarter, more moral, and Better Art - it's high culture because only the upper class can afford to experience it and only the upper class have been trained to belong in that social space.

Bourdieu explains how in social encounters, you establish your value at the expense of someone else. You demonstrate that you're better. In the social spaces of the upper class this is done with a careful set of codes of dress and conduct, learnt by already being part of the crowd, and failure to comply signals inadequacy. Bourdieu also observed a correlation between taste and space. Distanced contemplation = good taste. Immediate pleasure = bad taste. But in a capitalist system, access to the time and energy to distantly contemplate is a premium; history is written by those who get to sit on their arse all day. In this there's also colonial histories; hip-hop has its origins in Black struggle, and much of contemporary Black culture can be traced back to African tradition. The classing of taste relates to the distinction of 'civilised'

and 'uncivilised' people. Devaluing the cultural traditions of both colonised people and the European working-class is a strategy to create distinction and justify exploitation.

In response to this classing of taste, there's an impulse to flip things the other way: the ballet is cancelled, street dance is ****inherently**** more radical. Fuck contemplation! Hedonism as praxis! But this ain't it. In the same way that we should be working towards the elimination of the class system, we should be working towards the de-classifying of all art, unifying access and eliminating the false hierarchy of culture - NOT just turning it upside-down and calling it a day. We can critique the racist and capitalist ideology embedded in high brow artforms, but there's no need to throw the baby out with the bath water.

Tl;dr: Taste is defined by the ruling class, good taste and high culture are specifically designed around economic exclusivity. The ruling class denigrates the taste of the working-class - defined by lack of access to cultural capital and creative means of survival - to assert and justify their dominance. Taste is a classed construct, and to judge someone's taste is an act of symbolic violence.