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Philippe COULANGEON

## Reading and Television-Watching: Changes in the Cultural Role of the School in the Age of Mass Education\*

### ABSTRACT

What are the cultural effects of generalized access to upper secondary education, which became effective in France in the 1980s and 1990s? Data on reading and television-watching suggest that reading is in decline, a decline concentrated among high school and higher education graduates, and that television occupies a greater place in the lives of generations who attended school in the 1980s and 1990s than in those of the preceding generations. These two developments result from a complex combination of the “net” and structural effects of mass education. Mass education has slowed the decline of reading and mitigated the increase in television-watching: the proportional weight in the population at large of categories most likely to read heavily and least likely to be intensive TV watchers –*i.e.*, high school and higher education graduates– has grown, as reading and television-watching levels among the highest educated have gradually, over the generations, come to resemble those for the less educated. This combined development may be interpreted in two ways that are not necessarily mutually exclusive: 1) both the decline of reading and the increase in television-watching reflect a change in the cultural function of education, a change in turn due to changes in teaching methods and curriculum content reinforced by the sharp rise in influence of the mass media; but 2) these changes also reflect morphological changes in the world of upper secondary and higher education students: with the generalizing of access to the *baccalauréat* [French high school-leaving degree], the proportion of “inheritors” has considerably fallen. The changes can therefore be read persuasively both as a sign that schooling in France has lost some of its cultural authority and that cultural gaps within the generations who experienced mass education have narrowed.

In France and most other western countries that have experienced it, the development of mass secondary education is one of the most abundantly analyzed contemporary social changes (Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993). Whereas sociologists of mass education have been particularly interested in analyzing the factors involved in generalized access to secondary education, its impact on the relationship between training and employment, and social mobility trends (Boudon, 1973; Baudelot and Glaude, 1989; Thélot and Vallet, 2000;

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Duru-Bellat, 2006), researchers have much less systematically envisioned the effects of the generally higher educational attainment level on changes in lifestyle. It is in fact likely that the effects of mass schooling on consumption modes, family and marital norms, political attitudes, together with health-related behavior and mores, are as great as the effects on access to employment and social mobility. And the increased length of education has also surely affected attitudes and practices in the area of culture. We can reasonably expect to find two types of changes: 1) structural changes linked to changes in the population structure by education level, the expectation being increased demand for cultural goods and services; 2) changes in the cultural role of the school that pertain to the changes in the social morphology of secondary-school educated populations and teaching methods that accompanied generalized access to secondary education.

We can also expect that the cultural impact of mass education will have affected both high culture –closer, in principle, to the academic world– and mass culture –further from school culture but more fully diffused among new generations of high school students. This dual impact is considered here by examining changes in two extremely general indicators: number of books read per year and number of hours spent watching television per week. Based on data from three French Ministry of Culture surveys on cultural practices of the French, conducted in 1981, 1988 and 1997, and one Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques survey on cultural and sports practices of the French, conducted in 2003 in the framework of the variable section of INSEE's ongoing survey of French household living conditions (EPCV), this analysis works first and foremost to specify the structural effects of mass education and the effects of changes in the cultural role of the school strictly speaking. It then brings to light the generational component in the changes observed.

### **Cultural effects of schooling in the age of mass education**

The period 1981 to 2003 was characterized in France by an unprecedented increase in the number and proportion of *bacheliers* [high school graduates who have passed the *baccalauréat* leaving exam]. In 1980, slightly under 25% of a generation attained the *baccalauréat* level; by the last years of the twentieth century the percentage had risen to 60% (Chauvel, 1998a). This spectacular rise was concentrated mainly in the years 1985-1995, termed the “second massification” of secondary education, with reference to the first, in the 1960s, where the numbers were much lower. The second massification caused new tensions on the job market: generations graduating from the school system from the mid-1980s onward experienced greater job insecurity and got lower pay than their less-educated elders (Chauvel, 1998b; Baudelot and Estabiet, 2000). The changes induced by mass schooling also impacted on the area of mores, lifestyles, and cultural attitudes and habits. In this last area, we generally expect that a more educated population –one therefore subject to

the influence of school culture for a much longer period than in the past— will show greater familiarity with the highbrow cultural world and greater distance from popular culture and distractions.

### *Cultural practices and schooling experience*

The relationship between culture and education –manifested empirically in many ways, including effect of cultural environment on scholastic performance and impact of educational attainment on orientation and intensity of cultural practices– is an ambivalent one. The correlations brought to light between scholastic performance indicators and cultural practice indicators may indeed be read in two diametrically opposed ways, depending on whether we take into account the impact on scholastic performance of cultural resources and activities immediately available to pupils outside the school environment, primarily in the family –this is what most sociologists of education do– or, conversely, the discriminating effect of education attainment level on access to culture and cultural practice intensity –this is what most sociologists of culture do.

#### *The effect of cultural capital on scholastic performance: reproduction or mobility?*

Sociologists of education have amply pointed out the impact on scholastic performance of cultural experiences in the framework of family socialization (DiMaggio, 1982; Jonsson, 1987; Farkas, Grobe, Sheehan and Shuan, 1990; Katsilis and Rubinson, 1990; Crook, 1997; De Graaf, De Graaf and Kraaykamp, 2000), but this has given rise to diverging interpretations. One type of interpretation, in the wake of sociology of social reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970), considers the effect of cultural inheritance in terms of symbolic domination and a kind of complicity between “inheritors” and the academic powers-that-be. This approach imputes inequalities in student achievement to the proximity between the symbolic world of the “dominant” classes and the type of knowledge and know-how approved and rewarded by the school institution, as is particularly the case when it comes to language proficiency and discursive aptitudes. The unequal distribution of these skills is determined early in life; consequently, children socialized in a milieu rich in cultural resources and experiences are better adjusted to school culture from the outset and perform better on tests implicitly modeled on the culture they have inherited. Cultural capital inherited in the framework of family socialization thus appears a social reproduction instrument serving “the dominant”. In contrast, children from working-class backgrounds where free time is still very likely to be spent in practices generally alien to the world of school culture –sports, cards, gardening, home improvement, but also and above all television-watching– are inevitable losers in the schooling game.

Support for this “social reproduction” thesis has not been unanimous. For some authors, cultural capital cannot be reduced to “passive” expression of a social inheritance, and above all, school is not necessarily conceived as a place where this inheritance is sanctioned, either positively or negatively. The cultural experiences individuals accumulate, whether on their own initiative or that of their family, can be inscribed in educational mobility trajectories (DiMaggio, 1982; Kalmijn and Kraaykamp, 1996; Tavan, 2003). Individuals are not passively ranked in terms of the cultural resources they have inherited, and cultural investments realized in the context of family socialization can be the source of a scholastic performance differential. Like the “social reproduction thesis”, this alternative interpretation of the effect of cultural resources on scholastic performance involves analyzing cultural capital as a means of actualizing family-acquired cultural resources in the exercises and tests of school life (De Graaf, De Graaf and Kraaykamp, 2000), but this is not an analysis of “symbolic domination” relations among social groups. Close to human capital theory (Becker, 1983), this perspective ties the effect of cultural capital on scholastic performance to cognitive abilities constructed in the framework of cultural practices and attitudes in student’s family environment. Emphasis is on how the degree to which reading is practiced in the family environment conditions development of a taste and ability for abstraction (De Graaf, 1986). The impact of reading on scholastic performance is subject to debate, however. A significant proportion of “good” French middle school students do not read much, and students who read a great deal are not all necessarily “good” (Baudelot, Cartier and Detrez, 1999).

Conversely, the amount of time children and teenagers spend in other activities, particularly television-watching, a figure which rises inversely with parents’ income, educational attainment and social status, is sometimes perceived as a factor that disrupts acquisition of school knowledge. Still, when family social characteristics are controlled for, there does not seem to be conclusive evidence that television-watching has a negative effect on scholastic performance (Williams, Haertel, Haertel and Walberg, 1982; Gortmaker, Salter, Walker and Dietz, 1990; MacBeth, 1996; Caille and Monfort, 1999).

Above and beyond their divergences, these different theoretical models share the fact that they attribute a preponderant role to cultural capital in forming and transmitting scholastic inequality. However, despite the consensus it seems to have won, this position is not necessarily accurate. Contemporary analysis of scholastic inequality tends to emphasize the impact of factors concealed by the undoubtedly excessive attention given to the effect of strictly cultural resources. Recent studies have brought to the fore the impact of inequalities in household income and housing conditions on primary and secondary school student scholastic performance (Goux and Maurin, 2000), and these material factors are very likely to be reinforced in the context of mass schooling, which has put an end to the relative social homogeneity of the school population.

*Socialization and learning: the duality of the educational attainment effect on cultural practices*

Of all socio-demographic characteristics, educational attainment is the one with the strongest and most meaningful predictive impact on nature and frequency of cultural practices (Ganzeboom, 1982). The educational attainment effect is widely recognized by institutional actors in the world of arts and culture; here the school is generally perceived as a valued partner in shaping cultural dispositions and attitudes. Specifically, it seems likely that variation in intensity of reading as a function of educational level reflects in part the effect of how long the individual was inculcated with specifically scholastic “literary” reading taste categories, though the empirical robustness of this relation is sometimes challenged (Gaddy, 1986). School inculcation of attitudes toward culture may once again be interpreted in terms of the human capital theory (Becker, 1983). If we follow this interpretation, we will expect consumption of cultural goods and services to increase with length of exposure to these products, and this is precisely why certain economists think that cultural consumption has features in common with addiction; that is, it follows an increasing utility function, contrary to ordinary consumption goods but quite similar to addictive practices, such as alcohol, drugs, and tobacco (Becker and Stigler, 1977). In this sense, the above interpretation of the education effect seems differentially applicable by cultural area. Whereas it seems to apply quite well to reading, a habit strongly encouraged in the school milieu, it applies less well to cultural areas that in French schools tend to be marginal; *e.g.*, music, fine arts and film.

The social function of contemporary schooling cannot be reduced to transmission of school knowledge, however. The school experience combines learning processes with socialization mechanisms that bring into play the effect of peer influence in shaping children’s, teenagers’ and young adults’ cultural norms. The “teaching” that goes on in school is not accurately described by the classic student-teacher relationship (Durkheim, [1925] 1992); in fact norms, dispositions and attitudes, get shaped in a game with three players: student, teacher, peer group (Barrère and Martuccelli, 1998, 2000). Secondary school and higher education students’ cultural habits depend to a large extent on the social properties of the educative community they are socialized in; that is, the social and cultural characteristics of both the student and teaching bodies. We can expect all these students to conform first and foremost to the cultural expectations of the dominant groups in the school environment (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1964, 1970).

The opposite approach is one in terms of “status-seeking” socialization (Ganzeboom, 1982). Here, the development of cultural attitudes is understood as a result of actors’ strategic behavior. The influence of the school environment is thought of in terms of incentives to adopt behavior that individual subjects perceive as conforming to the cultural habits that correspond to their educational attainment and to the social status that their educational degrees allow them to lay claim to. In choosing their practices, individuals mobilize

the surrounding cultural resources that they perceive to be the most relevant for realizing their aspirations (DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985).

Clearly, the phenomenon of mass secondary education affects both the cognitive and socializing components of the school experience. In France, it is contemporary with a redefining of the implicit hierarchy of disciplines, a redefinition in which the classic humanities have undergone a relative decline and science and technology a promotion (Prost, 1986, 2004). And it is also likely to have disrupted the shared cultural understanding traditionally linking teachers and their students, and “complicity” due to the erstwhile relative social homogeneity of the teacher and secondary school student bodies.

### ***The cultural consequences of mass schooling***

Secondary schooling expanded in France in the 1960s, at the same time as media diffusion and distribution of cultural industry products. Mass schooling, then, developed in a context in which cultural supply was undergoing radical change. This in turn put “school culture” norms to the test of changed attitudes, attitudinal changes associated with the reign of mass culture.

#### *Mass schooling and the democratization of high culture: an uncertain relationship*

The cultural effects attributed to increased length of education are often put forward as a positive acquisition (Terrail, 1997, 2002; Poullaouec, 2004) from a process whose social consequences remain highly controversial for other authors (Dubet and Duru-Bellat, 2000; Beaud, 2002). The benefits of mass education in terms of civic and cultural development are reputed to counterbalance the perverse effects of degree inflation (Boudon, 1973; Duru-Bellat, 2006) that explain why the generations that experienced mass schooling are also those that found it harder to get a job and accede to the upward social mobility possibilities traditionally offered by the school (Chauvel, 1998b; Baudelot and Estabiet, 2000). We would expect, then, that diffusion of high culture (reading, museum-going, theater-going, etc.) would benefit from the fact of students’ prolonged education.

The cultural virtues of mass schooling are themselves a focus of lively debate. The effects of longer education differ by social milieu. Diffusion of the long-schooling norm, while consubstantial with the bourgeois lifestyle, has disrupted traditional types of cultural transmission and social reproduction in the working-class world (Schwartz, 1989; Beaud and Pialoux, 1999). In addition to the social disillusion caused by mass schooling, that phenomenon has also in some cases created cultural tensions between older and younger working-class generations (Beaud, 2002). Furthermore, by mitigating the shared understanding that used to unite students and pupils in a

social environment that in France remained homogeneous due to segregation of the various disciplinary courses of study from each other, mass secondary education has modified the frames of school experience, and this is due to changes in the social classes that middle school and high school students come from, though there is no indication that the social classes that secondary school teachers come from has changed in France since the late 1960s (Vallet and Degenne, 2000); the middle and upper classes are sharply overrepresented among teachers, as are the children of teachers. This increase in the social and cultural distance between teachers and their students alters not only conditions for transmitting knowledge, but also the socializing function of the school (Dubet and Martuccelli, 1996). Culturally, it suggests that it is no longer reasonable to trust that prolonging schooling through to the *baccalauréat* degree will mechanically work to diffuse high culture.

The fact that obstacles to the cultural acculturation of pupils from working-class backgrounds have coincided with mixed results for the policy of democratizing high culture has brought with it an alternative approach involving recognition and legitimation of repertoires and practices that fall *outside* the area of learned culture (Urfalino, 1996; Dubois, 1999), an approach that echoes in the area of culture current thinking in the field of education on adapting knowledge and methods to new school populations. The debate between “democratizing high culture” and “cultural democratization” (Santerre, 2000) thus reduplicates, in the field of cultural policy, the disagreement in the field of education policy between partisans of innovation in teaching and proponents of “knowledge”. In this debate, the media and cultural industries, particularly television, are often designated as vectors of cultural prescriptions that are in competition with school prescriptions. From this perspective, uncertainty about the cultural effects of generalizing secondary education also reflects the effect of changes in the characteristics of the cultural “supply”, the sources of that supply and the hierarchies associated with it.

### *School culture and mass culture*

The social differentiation of cultural attitudes has been studied in France since the late 1960s in terms of the theory of cultural legitimacy (Bourdieu, Darbel and Schnapper, 1966; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1964, 1970; Bourdieu, 1979). This theory establishes a tight correspondence between the social position system and the system of tastes and practices; the distinguishing features of the lifestyles of the different social groups are thought of primarily in terms of the distance between observed practices or expressed preferences and “learned” or “legitimate” culture. According to this thesis, because the school as institution annoints the “arbitrary cultural choice” of the dominant with the unction of academic legitimacy, it helps maintain the established cultural hierarchies and reproduce the existing social order (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970).



Since the late 1980s this approach to the question has been widely criticized, primarily in France (Grignon and Passeron, 1989; Lahire, 2004) and the United States (DiMaggio, 1987; Lamont, 1992; Peterson, 1997). These reevaluations point up the limited normative power of upper-class cultural attitudes and call into question the unity attributed to the culture of the dominant classes in the sociology of Bourdieu. This argument, put forward as early as the 1960s in American sociology (Wilensky, 1964), is at the center of contemporary theses about cultural norm pluralism and eclecticism of tastes (Donnat, 1994; Lahire, 2004), thinking that emphasizes the blurred borders between the world of learned culture and popular or mass culture. In a context where the cultural role of the school is caught between competing prescriptions from the family, the media, and forms of youth sociability, we can expect that the range of cultural tastes and practices of graduates will not be as centered on the world of high culture; that it will be more fully suffused by the influence of the media and mass culture.

Measuring the impact of education level on cultural practices is still a delicate exercise, however, because of the close correlation between students' cultural habits and those of their family, on the one hand, their cultural habits and scholastic performance, on the other. In this regard, the relationship between education level and orientation of cultural practices may well conceal the real effect of students' social origins. In other words, in matters of cultural habits, we probably abusively attribute to the school what in fact should be attributed to the direct influence of parents and to students' family surroundings. In this respect, the now supposedly weaker connection between education level and proximity to high culture is probably partially due to the increasing heterogeneity of the social composition of student populations in the context of mass education. This is why it is worthwhile to control whenever possible for social origin when examining the education effect. Unfortunately, this variable was only provided in the first three surveys considered here, those from 1981, 1988 and 1997, not in the last, 2003, survey (see below). But from one of my earlier studies (Coulangeon, 2003) it is clear that the specific effect of education itself, once respondent's social origin has been controlled for, is much more pronounced and robust than suggested by the overly pessimistic "social reproduction" theses.

Since I could not explore in detail the changes that occurred in the cultural practices of "second massification" generations on the basis of the available survey data, the following analysis is restricted to two practices: reading and television-watching. These practices are considered emblematic of two contrasting cultural repertoires that we may reasonably think have not been equally affected by the expansion of secondary schooling. Moreover, given the impossibility of controlling for effect of respondents' social origin on observed reading and television-watching behavior, since this variable, measured by father's occupation on respondent's fifteenth birthday, was only included in the first three surveys, the import of the results presented here is necessarily limited.

## The structural effect of mass schooling on reading and television-watching habits in France, 1981-2003

Surveys of French people's cultural practices include two types of indicators on reading and television-watching: frequency and intensity (number of books read or owned; time spent watching television) and practice "content", individual tastes and preferences. For the first of these types, the information takes fairly similar forms from one survey to the other; this is not the case for the second type. The nomenclature used for types of reading and literary genres together with the repertoire of television uses and television program categories changed greatly from one survey to the next; these changes in cultural "supply" or offerings make it a delicate matter to study qualitative changes in these practices. For this reason I chose to restrict the analysis to number of books read per year and amount of time spent watching television per week (see Box 1).

### BOX 1. – *Ministry of Culture surveys on French people's cultural practices (1981, 1988, 1997) and INSEE's EPCV survey (2003)*

The analyses presented in this article are based on data from surveys on French people's cultural practices conducted by the Ministry of Culture in 1981, 1988 and 1997 and on a "cultural and sports practices" survey, the variable part of INSEE's *Enquête Permanente sur les Conditions de Vie des Ménages (EPCV)* [ongoing survey on household living conditions] done in 2003. The first survey of this type, conducted by the Ministry of Culture in 1973, used a much smaller sample (1,987 persons) than the later ones; it was not included here. The next three surveys used samples of comparable size (respectively 3,984, 4,997, and 4,353) and relatively similar questionnaires. INSEE's 2003 survey used a sample of 5,626 persons and a shorter, less detailed questionnaire on the nature of cultural practices. All surveys bore on cultural leisure activities of the French in the areas of reading, television, radio, music, theater and live performance, museums and film; also amateur artistic practices. The first three included "semi-leisure" activities (home improvement, gardening); the last was on sports. Overall, when we get down to detailed information such as types of music listened to, books read, films preferred, television programs watched, it is hard to constitute sufficiently stable indicators from one survey to the next since the genre nomenclatures are not at all stable. We may reasonably assume not only that questionnaires were conceived differently from survey to survey but also that respondent representations varied greatly from one period to the next. In music, for example, the terms "jazz" or "rock" did not necessarily have the same meaning in the minds of 2003 survey respondents as they did for those questioned in the 1981 survey. The same is true for television, where offerings have become much more diverse since the early 1980s. The present study is limited to extremely simple indicators because they raise less of a problem of stability, despite the different ways of formulating questions across the surveys. Whereas the Ministry of Culture surveys did not specify whether or not *bandes dessinées* [strip cartoon books] should be counted among books read in the year preceding the survey, the 2003 INSEE survey counted this type of reading material separately. This makes it extremely hard to compare number of books read from one survey to the other. But even when *bandes dessinées* are added to number of books read around 2003, the average number of books does not exceed the number for the preceding years. What is particularly significant here, however, is not so much the absolute change in average number of books but rather relative changes by education level. We can hypothesize that the comparability bias due to differences in the way the 2003 survey was formulated will indifferently affect respondents by education level; it is therefore still reasonable to compare relative trends.

**Reading and television-watching in the age of mass schooling**

Reading and television-watching do not occupy the same place in French people’s leisure activities. In each of the four surveys studied, a significant number of persons questioned say they did not read a single book, but only a tiny minority of French people say they never watch television. While the opposition between readers and non-readers makes sense in itself, for television-watching the relevant criterion is variations in intensity. Three indicators were considered: change in 1) proportion of non-readers, 2) proportion of heavy readers (at least 25 books a year) and 3) proportion of heavy television-watchers (more than 20 hours a week). The analysis focuses on all persons aged 15 or over who are not in high school. <sup>(1)</sup>

*Erosion of reading most perceptible among persons with higher educational degrees*

From 1981 to 1997, the proportion of French people saying they had not read a book in the course of the year fell considerably, from 30% to 23%, but it increased at the end of the period –to 33% in 2003 (Table 1). This abrupt rise can be partially imputed to the 2003 change in indicator definition: as indicated above, the book count for this survey explicitly excluded *bandes dessinées*. Still, we cannot preclude the possibility that the erosion in reading noted for the end of the period corresponds to a real trend, even though it was surely amplified by the change in indicator definition. <sup>(2)</sup> The proportion of heavy readers (at least 25 books a year), however, appears relatively stable.

TABLE 1. – *Change in proportions of non-readers and heavy readers by educational degree (1981-2003)*

		1981 (%)	1988 (%)	1997 (%)	2003 (%)	Variation 1981-2003 (odds ratio) <sup>a</sup>
< Bac	< 1 book	36	32	30	44	1.4
	at least 25 books	11	13	10	10	0.9
Bac and above	< 1 book	7	7	7	12	1.8
	at least 25 books	26	30	28	21	0.8
All	< 1 book	30	27	23	33	1.1
	at least 25 books	14	16	15	14	1.0

(a) The odds ratios express variation relative to the proportions listed in the table from 1981 to 2003 independently of “departure” and “arrival” values. For the first line, for example, the odds ratio is calculated as follows:  $44/(100-44) \times (100-36)/36 = 1.4$ , meaning that in 2003 non-graduates were 1.4 times more likely than in 1981 not to have read a book (rather than to have read one). An odds ratio above 1 indicates a positive variation; an odds ratio below 1, a negative variation; an odds ratio of 1, no variation.

Source: Pratiques culturelles des Français (1981, 1988, 1997), EPCV (2003).

(1) High school students were not included in the frame of this study. This may have caused a bias given that the only 15-18-year-olds considered in it are non-graduates.

(2) We should not underestimate the impact

of this definition change: while the 2003 questionnaire explicitly excluded *bandes dessinées*, the preceding questionnaires did not explicitly include them.

These overall trends look quite different when *bacheliers* (and holders of higher degrees) are distinguished from non-graduates. Though regardless of survey year 4 to 5 times fewer *bacheliers* and higher education graduates say they did not read a book in the past year and more than twice as many say they are heavy readers, graduates also account for an increasing proportion of non-readers, and there was a much sharper decline in the proportion of heavy readers among them than among non-graduates, particularly between the last two surveys, as shown by the odds ratios in Table 1.

The trends apprehended at the level of the overall population might be thought to result in part from the combined effect of a change in individual behavior and the structural change in distribution of the population by educational attainment level. The increase in number of *bacheliers* –the impact of which is particularly felt in the adult population chosen as the frame of analysis for the 2003 survey, which displays the effect of generalized access to upper secondary school much more massively than the previous three surveys– thus limited the overall increase in non-readers and the erosion of intensive reading, since heavy readers continued to be found among the better educated, the same group in which non-readers were less prevalent. Still, graduates were indeed the ones whose reading habits seem to have been the most strongly affected over the period under consideration.

#### *The increasing weight of television-watching in French graduates' leisure activities*

The sawtooth curve indicating trend in proportion of heavy television-watchers (more than 20 hours a week) from 1981 to 2003 –i.e., sharp rise until 1997; fall at the end of the period– is likely to conceal a combined effect of changes in individual behaviors and changes in the educational degree structure (Table 2). Intensive television consumption among non-graduates seems to have remained stable, whereas among graduates, who are only half as likely as non-graduates to be heavy television-watchers, the proportion of heavy television consumers increased quite sharply, particularly between the last two surveys.

Part of the changes observed in television-watching from 1981 to 1997 are surely due to changes in television program offerings. In the period running from the early 1980s to the early 2000s, the audiovisual industry underwent a series of radical changes –major increases in number of channels and types of broadcasts (cable, satellite, pay channels), extended broadcasting hours– which very likely had the effect of intensifying television-watching. Moreover, the arrival of increasingly differentiated “supply” may have brought graduates, traditionally more reluctant to use audiovisual media, closer to a practice partially legitimated by the development of theme channels (documentaries, cinema, etc.) that offer an opportunity to watch television “distinctively”. The indicator “amount of time spent watching television” is therefore probably too general and masks more subtle differentiations in television use.

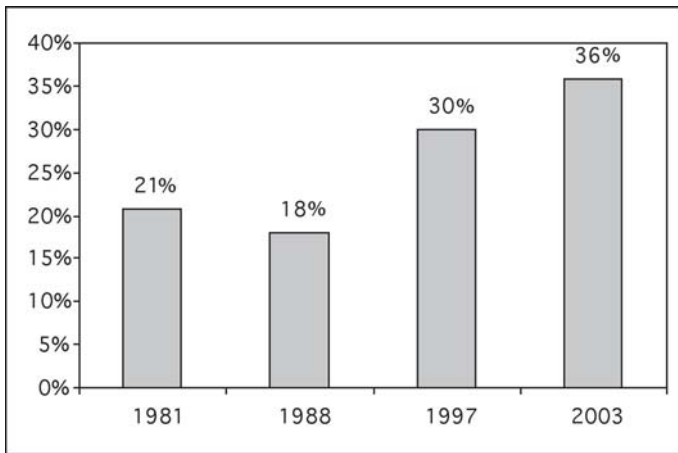
TABLE 2. – *Changes in proportion of heavy television-watchers by educational degree (1981-2003)*

		1981 (%)	1988 (%)	1997 (%)	2003 (%)	Variation 1981-2003 (odds ratio)
< Bac	> 20 hours of television/week	41	47	52	48	1.3
Bac and above	> 20 hours of television/week	20	23	25	27	1.5
All	> 20 hours of television/week	36	43	44	40	1.2

Source: Pratiques culturelles des Français (1981, 1988, 1997), EPCV (2003).

In any case, the change in structure of the French population by educational degree from 1981 to 2003, reflected in changes in the cultural practices survey sample structure for 1981, 1988 and 1997 and the EPCV for 2003, make it hard to interpret the changes observed in television-watching and reading (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. – *Proportions of high school graduates (bacheliers) in 1981, 1988, 1997 and 2003*



Note: For each survey, proportions of *bacheliers* were calculated on the basis of all persons 15 and over but not including high school and middle school students.

Source: Pratiques culturelles des Français (1981, 1988, 1997), EPCV (2003).

The considerable increase in proportion of high school and higher education graduates –from 20% to over 35% of respondents– requires identifying, for both reading and television-watching, which changes are strictly imputable to the structural component of the introduction of mass schooling and which refer to real changes in attitude.

### ***Distinguishing the net effect of education from the structural impact of mass schooling***

A significant proportion of the increased diffusion of cultural practices observed from 1973, when these surveys were first conducted by the French Ministry of Culture, is due to the increased weight in the French population of those categories that have traditionally been the greatest consumers of cultural goods and services; *i.e.*, senior managers, graduates, and city-dwellers (Donnat, 1994, 1999). However, this structural effect may well conceal real attitude changes. A cultural practice that is stagnating or advancing only slightly in the context of mass schooling is therefore very likely to be losing people's interest, but this reality will not appear because it is compensated for by the mechanical effect of the numerical growth of the "practicing" categories. The intertwining of these two phenomena does not generally allow for distinguishing directly the nature of the effects leading to the changes observed; statistical techniques have to be used to break down those effects.

#### *Net effects and structural effects: methodological problems and theoretical issues*

For both reading and television-watching, the impact of mass secondary schooling can be broken down using the Paasche index. This formula makes it possible to distinguish quite simply between net effects and structural effects (see Box 2).

#### **Box 2. – *Separating net and structural effects using the Paasche index***

This method breaks down change  $I^{2003} - I^{1981}$ , where  $I^{1981}$  and  $I^{2003}$  represent the respective occurrence rates in 1981 and 2003 of a given activity; *e.g.*, reading at least 25 books a year. Using the Paasche index formula,  $I^{2003} - I^{1981}$  can be rewritten as follows:

$$\sum_{i=1}^I p_i^{1981} (I_i^{2003} - I_i^{1981}) + \sum_{i=1}^I I_i^{2003} (p_i^{2003} - p_i^{1981}),$$

where  $I_i^{1981}$  and  $I_i^{2003}$  represent the occurrence rates of reading at least 25 books a year at different education levels  $i$  ( $i = 1, \dots, I$ ) and where  $p_i^{1981}$  and  $p_i^{2003}$  represent the respective proportions of the different education levels in the population at large in 1981 and 2003. The first term is to be read as a measure of the change in net effect, while the second is to be interpreted as a measure of structural effect (see Dumontier, Singly and Thélot, 1990).

In analysis of the effects of mass schooling, this breakdown operation (which consists in controlling for the structural part of the observed changes) is extremely important for understanding both the drop in reading and the rise in television-watching. First, the fact that reading decreased at the very time the population structure by educational attainment seemed to be mechanically moving in such a way as to increase it suggests that school is not impelling people to read as much as it once did. Conversely, the increase in proportion

of heavy television-watchers in a context of mass schooling can be read as an indication of graduates' greater receptiveness to mass culture.

*Changes in the place of reading and television-watching by educational degree from 1981 to 2003: predominance of net effects*

The breakdown of net and structural effects for the three indicators brings to light first that the increase in proportion of non-readers (persons reading less than one book a year) from 29.8% to 32.5% is due to two opposite movements (Table 3). On the one hand, if we suppose that the effect of educational attainment on propensity to read was constant from 1981 to 2003, the increase observed in proportion of the population with at least the *baccalauréat* would have led to a fall in proportion of non-readers from 29.8 to 25.3%; *i.e.*, a structural effect of - 4.5 points. On the other, the change observed in propensity to read by educational degree level would have led, with structure kept constant, to an increase in proportion of non-readers from 29.8 to 37%, or a net effect of + 7.2 points. Altogether, the net effect of the fall in propensity to read is greater than the structural effect of increasing proportion of graduates in the population, though this increase does limit the increase in proportion of non-readers that would have been observed without any structural effect. In other words, the introduction of mass schooling has worked significantly to lower the visibility of the drop in reading.

TABLE 3. – *Breakdown of changes in rates of non-readers, heavy readers and heavy television-watchers (%)*

	1981	Variation			2003	Estimated rate	
	Observed rate	(1)	(2)	Total variation (1)+ (2)	Observed rate	W/net effect only	W/structural effect only
		Net effect	Structural effect				
Non-readers (< 1 book a year)	<b>29.8</b>	+ 7.2	- 4.5	+ 2.7	<b>32.5</b>	37.0	25.3
Heavy readers (> 25 books a year)	<b>13.9</b>	- 2.1	+ 2.0	- 0.1	<b>13.8</b>	11.8	15.9
Heavy television-watchers (> 20 hrs a week)	<b>36.4</b>	+ 7.2	- 3.1	+ 4.1	<b>40.5</b>	43.6	33.3

Source: Pratiques culturelles des Français (1981, 1988, 1997), EPCV (2003).

Likewise, it appears that the relative stability of percentage of heavy readers (25 or more books per year) is due to two contrary movements that work to cancel each other out. Whatever the indicator considered, then, it would seem that the net effect of education on reading considerably declined over the period, meaning that mass schooling did not bring about the outcome expected and hoped for on this point.

As for television-watching, the proportion of viewers who watch more than 20 hours of television a week significantly increased over the period, regardless of educational attainment. This positive net effect (+ 7.2 points) more than compensated for the structurally induced fall (- 3.1 points) associated with the increase in proportion of graduates; the proportion of graduate heavy television consumers in 1981 was much lower than non-graduate heavy consumers. If the proportions of graduate and non-graduate heavy television

consumers had remained constant between the two dates, the effect of the structural change in the population by level of educational degree should have produced a significant fall in overall proportion of persons watching television more than 20 hours a week.

The breakdown of the observed changes in attitudes toward television-watching and reading from 1981 to 2003 thus indicates that those changes are not exclusively assignable to changes in the structure of the population by educational degree. Variations in the net effect of degree from 1981 to 2003 can be understood in three distinct ways: 1) the effect of degree on cultural habits changed in the course of individual's lifetime; meaning, for example, that the effect of being encouraged to read weakened as the ageing individual moved away from his/her student years while the opposite situation developed with regard to television-watching; 2) the effect of educational attainment changed by period corresponding to each of the four surveys, namely because of changes in the "supply structure", particularly pronounced in television and the audiovisual industries; 3) the effect of degree differed from one generation to another; this amounts to linking variations in net effect of degree on both practices to the gap between the schooling conditions of generations who experienced mass education and the generations who preceded them.

### The generational component of the change in cultural habits

Aggregating the 1981, 1988, 1997 and 2003 survey data allows for drawing up a pseudo-panel distributed by decennial cohorts (Table 4) whose attitudes towards reading and television-watching were observed at the four survey dates. For each of the dates, only individuals who had left the school system at the time of the survey were taken into account, since the point here is to measure changes in reading and television-watching practices by education degree within consecutive generations.

TABLE 4. – *Distribution of the nine generations across the four samples*

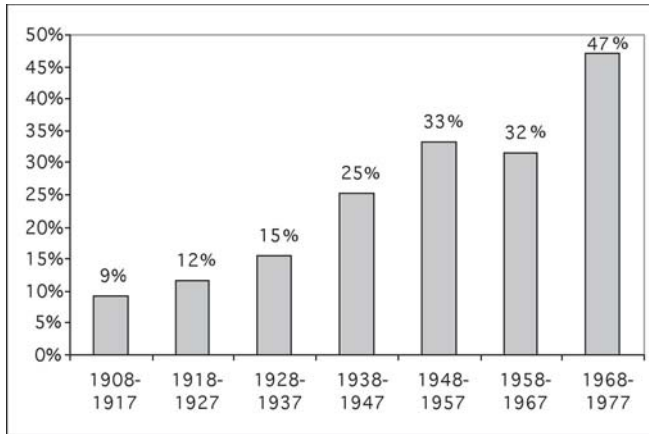
Observation year	1981		1988		1997		2003		All	
Cohort	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1898-1907	213	8	49	1	5	0	4	0	271	2
1908-1917	348	11	316	8	89	3	93	1	846	5
1918-1927	521	16	697	15	340	10	449	8	2,007	12
1928-1937	484	15	609	16	524	14	725	12	2,342	14
1938-1947	548	15	702	17	443	11	763	13	2,456	14
1948-1957	907	23	1,012	22	734	19	917	20	3,570	21
1958-1967	539	12	957	18	984	23	976	20	3,456	19
1968-1977			128	2	703	18	969	19	1,800	10
1978-1988					39	1	287	7	326	2
	3,560	100	4,470	100	3,861	100	5,183	100	17,074	100

Source: Pratiques culturelles des Français (1981, 1988, 1997), EPCV (2003).



The low number of respondents in the end cohorts; *i.e.*, persons born before 1908 and after 1977 –these cohorts are not consistently represented in the four survey dates– leads to centering the analysis on the seven intermediate cohorts; *i.e.*, from the 1908-1917 birth cohort to the 1968-1977 birth cohort. The change in proportion of *bacheliers* and higher education graduates between the first and last cohort suggests that some of the changes observed in reading and television-watching habits are of a generational nature, due to the increased proportion in the 1997 and 2003 surveys of individuals born in or after 1968, more than 45% of whom obtained the *baccalauréat* (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2. – *Proportion of bacheliers and higher education graduates by cohort*



Source: Pratiques culturelles des Français (1981, 1988, 1997), EPCV (2003).

### *Age effects, period effects and generation effects*

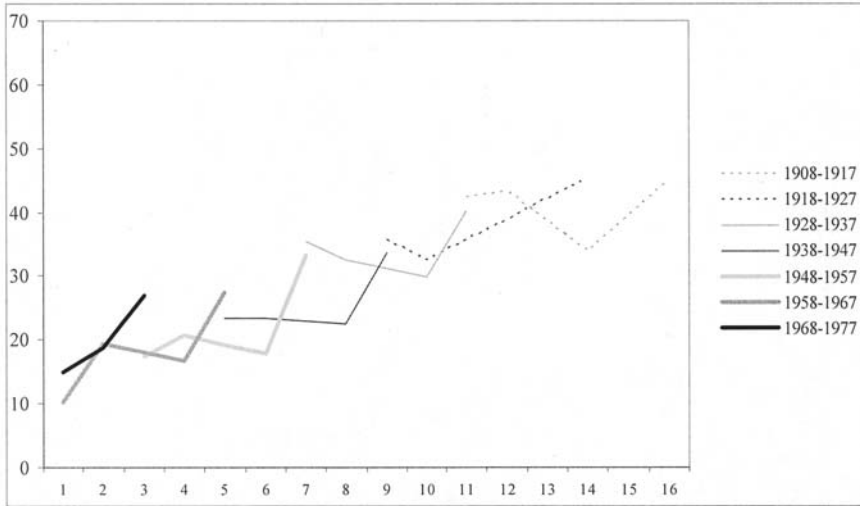
Analysis of the time differences observed for television-watching and reading brings up the classic problem of separating effects of age, period and generation. The graphic representation of these differences suggests that the way these three types of effects fit together is significantly different for the two practices.

#### *How the three effects fit together for reading and television-watching*

The y-axis in Figure 3 indicates proportion of non-readers and in Figure 4 proportion of heavy readers by cohort, age and date. The age groups figure on the x-axis, and each curve corresponds to a cohort observed at two, three or four dates, depending on cohort years. Variations in proportion of non-readers primarily bring to light the effect of age, because the proportion of individuals saying they did not read a book increases with age and peaks above 60.

Second, the graphs suggest a period effect: a slight fall in proportion of non-readers in the 1997 survey compared to those of 1988 and 2003.

FIGURE 3. – *Age, period and generation effects on proportion of non-readers*



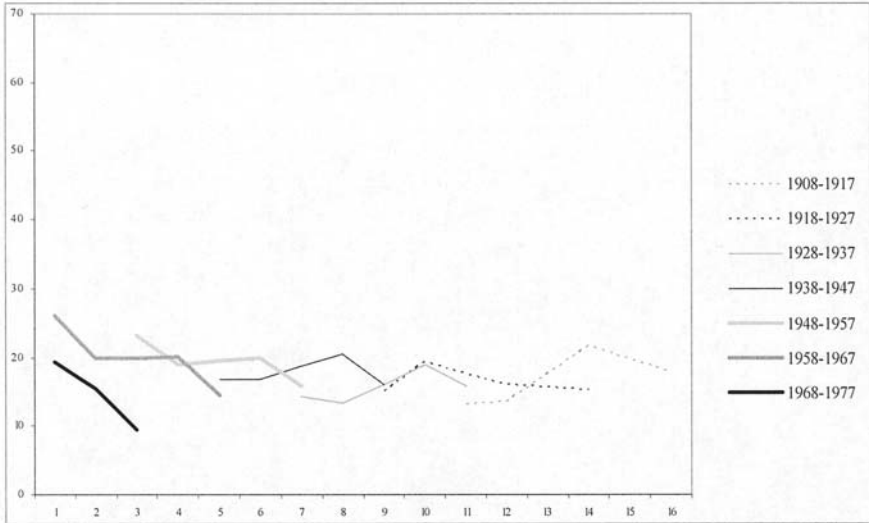
Note: Because the time lapse between two consecutive surveys was not identical in each case, the 16 age groups figuring on the x-axis were not exactly identical for each of the four observation years. For this graph and the following ones, the correspondence is as follows:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1981	14-23		24-33		34-43		44-53		54-63		64-73					
1988	11-20	21-30		31-40		41-50		51-60		61-70		71-80				
1997		20-29		30-39		40-49		50-59		60-69		70-79		80-89		
2003			26-35		36-45		46-55		56-65		66-75		76-85			86-95

Source: Pratiques culturelles des Français (1981, 1988, 1997), EPCV (2003).

Proportion of heavy readers (at least 25 books read in the year preceding the survey) does not seem very sensitive to ageing. The graph in Figure 4 suggests a period effect combined with a generation effect. For recent generations, the proportion of heavy readers tended to fall between the first and last survey. However, this period effect declined in pre-1948 generations, where the proportion of heavy readers actually tended to increase in the last two surveys, though age and period effects are not readily separable here. Most individuals in generations born between 1908 and 1937 retired at some point in time between the beginning and end of the survey series, and this status change may in part explain an increased interest in reading in those generations that compensates for the period effect also observed. The generational dimension of the changes observed is manifested here more clearly than is shown by the break between pre- and post-1968 generations. Regardless of observation year, the proportion of heavy readers in the 1968-1977 cohort is at least five points below that observed for the same ages in the 1958-1967 cohort.

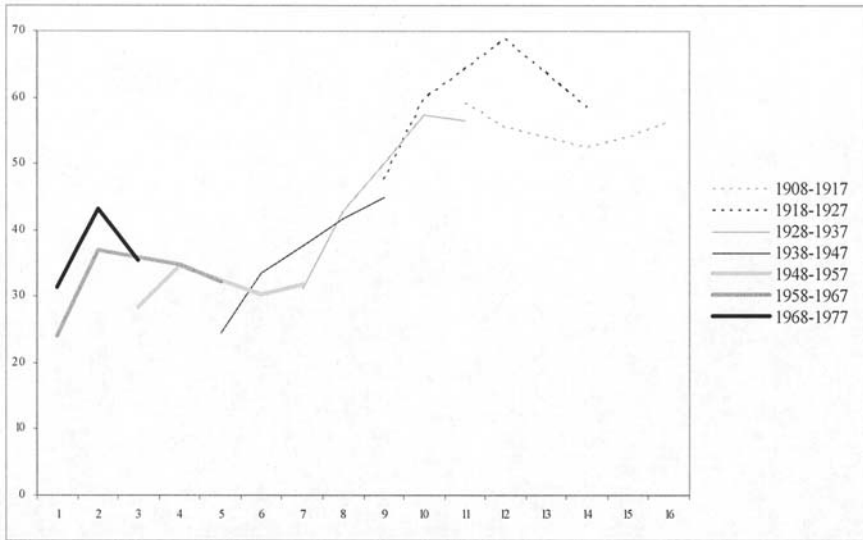
FIGURE 4. – Age, period and generation effects on proportion of heavy readers



Source: Pratiques culturelles des Français (1981, 1988, 1997), EPCV (2003).

Intensive television-watching (more than 20 hours a week) seems due to a strong age effect that takes the form of a significant increase in proportion of heavy television-watchers among persons aged 15 to 25 –nearly 40% of those age groups– followed by a slight fall, to around 30%, until around age 45 (Figure 5). After the age of 45 or 50, proportion of heavy television-watchers increases almost linearly, rising to over 60% for persons over 60. Secondly, variations in television watching intensity bring to light a gap between the 1958-1967 cohort and the 1968-1977 cohort: for younger ages, the proportion of heavy television-watchers in the later cohort seems slightly higher than in the earlier one.

FIGURE 5. – *Age, period and generation effects on proportion of heavy television watchers*

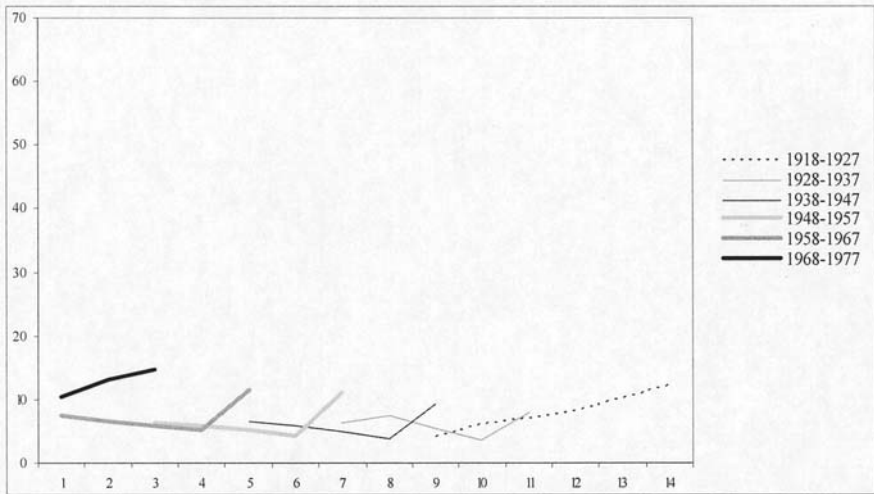


Source: Pratiques culturelles des Français (1981, 1988, 1997), EPCV (2003).

*Predominance of intergenerational differences among bacheliers and higher education graduates*

How the three types of effects –age, period and generation– fit together is highly sensitive to educational degree, as shown when we restrict the analysis to *bacheliers* and higher education graduates, which tends to amplify the generation gaps observed for the population as a whole. Among this group, the proportion of non-readers –relatively insensitive to age– clearly appears higher in the 1968-1977 cohort than in the preceding ones (Figure 6). What's more, the magnitude of this generation effect suggests that the particularly sharp fall in reading among *bacheliers* and higher education graduates is essentially due to the behavior of the most recent generations.

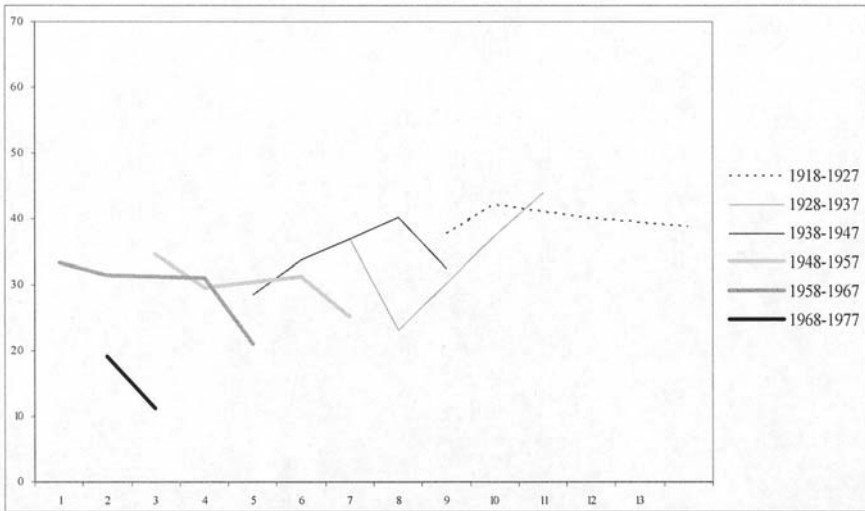
FIGURE 6. – Age, period and generation effects on proportion of non-readers (bacheliers and higher degrees only)



Source: Pratiques culturelles des Français (1981, 1988, 1997), EPCV (2003).

Likewise, the intergenerational differences observed for heavy readers underline the specificity of *bachelier* and higher education graduates born in or after 1968: the proportion of heavy readers is 10 to 15 points below those observed for the preceding generations (Figure 7). We also see within this sub-population a slight increase in proportion of heavy readers with age that is not observed at the level of the population as a whole and that manifests itself most strongly for retirement ages; the impact of retirement on propensity to read thus seems sharply dependent on cultural resource level.

FIGURE 7. – Age, period and generation effects on proportion of heavy readers (bacheliers and higher degrees only)

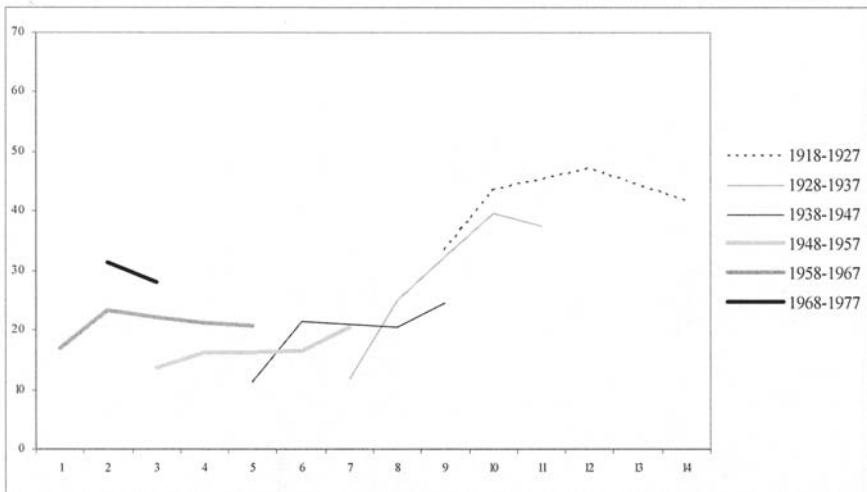


Source: Pratiques culturelles des Français (1981, 1988, 1997), EPCV (2003).

Inversely, the increase in proportion of heavy television consumers with age seems much lower among graduates, and this mitigation of the age effect is consistent with the observed increase in heavy readers. When it comes to “legitimate” practices, graduates are more sensitive to the age effect, and also probably less sensitive with respect to other practices (Figure 8). *Bacheliers* and higher education graduates also seem to exhibit the same generational splits with regard to television-watching. The proportion of graduates born between 1968 and 1977 and spending more than 20 hours a week watching television is significantly higher than in the preceding generations observed at the same ages.

Despite practice diversity, these results attest on the whole to a weaker inclination to read among graduates and a stronger attraction to television in cohorts born in the late 1960s and later. This generational component of the changes observed is difficult to dissociate from the socio-cultural characteristics of individuals in the various cohorts, and it therefore warrants testing by multivariate analysis.

FIGURE 8. – Age, period and generation effects on proportion of heavy television watchers (bacheliers and higher degrees only)



Source: Pratiques culturelles des Français (1981, 1988, 1997), EPCV (2003).

### **Multivariate analysis of the impact of mass schooling on reading and television-watching**

There are technical difficulties involved in identifying age, period and cohort (or generational) effects by means of multivariate analysis due to the fact that each of the three effects constitutes a linear combination of two others (Mason, Mason, Winsborough and Poole, 1973; Rodgers, 1982; Smith, Mason and Fienberg, 1982). Since there is no satisfactory solution to this problem, and since my analysis primarily concerns generation effects, I have chosen Rodgers' solution, which consists in omitting the period variable in the models tested, trying to apprehend the effect associated with it by introducing control variables understood to be linked to the period in which the survey was conducted.

The three indicators chosen –reading less than one book a year, reading at least 25 books a year, and watching more than 20 hours of television a year– were introduced as dependent variables in the logistic regression models to estimate the effects, “all else kept equal”, of a series of independent variables on the probability of each of those indicator situations. The independent variables are age at time of survey, sex, education level (measured by a dichotomous variable: *bacheliers* and higher education graduates, and the rest of the population), birth cohort, socio-occupational category and size of residence locale (Table 5).

TABLE 5. – *Logistic regressions on probability of being a non-reader, heavy reader and heavy television consumer*

Characteristic	Mode	Reading			Television		
		<1 book in the year		At least 2.5 books in the year		More than 20 hours a week	
		Coefficient	Marginal effect (%)	Coefficient	Marginal effect (%)	Coefficient	Marginal effect (%)
Constant	15-19	-1.129 ***	24.4	-1.816 ***	14.0	-0.776 ***	31.5
	20-24	-1.179 ***	-15.4	0.745 ***	+11.5	-0.775 ***	-14.0
	25-39	-0.961 ***	-13.4	0.315 ***	+4.2	-0.215 *	-4.5
	40-59	-0.478 ***	-7.7	0.190 **	+2.5	-0.150 **	-3.1
	60+	Ref.		Ref.		Ref.	
Residence locale	Rural town	0.122	+4.4	0.292 **	+3.9	0.424	-3.2
	< 20,000 inhabitants	0.225 ***		-0.088		-0.153 **	
	20 to 100,000 inhabitants	0.079		0.063		0.093	
	> 100,000 inhabitants	Ref.		Ref.		Ref.	
	Paris	-0.004	-10.5	0.111	+9.8	0.154 **	+3.4
Socio-occupational category	Greater Paris region (outside Paris)	-0.688 ***		0.652 ***	+2.7	-0.386 ***	-7.7
	Farmer	-0.126		0.206		-0.050	
	Crafts, shopkeeper, head of business	1.363 ***	+31.4	-1.401 ***	-10.1	-0.065	-6.7
	Managers and higher intellectual professions	0.879 ***	+19.3	-0.502 ***	-5.0	-0.334 **	-11.5
	Mid-level occupations	-0.376 **	-6.3	0.136		-0.612 ***	
	Clerical workers	Ref.		Ref.		Ref.	
	Skilled manual workers	0.469 ***	+9.6	-0.449 ***	-4.6	0.312 ***	+7.1
	Unskilled manual workers	0.799 ***	+17.4	-0.561 ***	-5.5	0.379 ***	+8.7
	Unemployed	1.089 ***	+24.6	-0.740 ***	-6.8	0.506 ***	+11.8
	Woman	0.739 ***	+15.9	-0.440 ***	-4.5	0.821 ***	+19.6
Sex	Man	-0.342 ***	-5.8	0.285 ***	+3.8	0.129 ***	+2.9
	Ref.			Ref.		Ref.	
Educational degree	Bac and above	-1.278 ***	-16.2	0.618 ***	+9.2	-0.813 ***	-14.6
	< bac	Ref.		Ref.		Ref.	
Generation	1908-1917	0.195		-0.394 *	-4.1	-0.218 *	-4.5
	1918-1927	0.031		-0.181		0.098	
	1928-1937	0.013		-0.257 *	-2.8	-0.080	
	1938-1947	-0.117		-0.176		-0.089	
	1948-1957	Ref.		Ref.		Ref.	
	1958-1967	0.085		-0.168		0.138 *	+3.1
Educational degree x generation	1968-1977	0.575 ***	+12.1	-0.686 ***	-6.4	0.574 ***	+13.5
	Bac +/1908-1917	-0.476		0.416		0.885 ***	+21.2
	Bac +/1918-1927	-0.776 **	-11.5	0.620 ***	+9.2	0.094	
	Bac +/1928-1937	-0.753 **	-11.2	0.566 ***	+8.3	-0.011	
	Bac +/1938-1947	-0.228		0.401 **	+5.5	0.004	
	Bac +/1948-1957	Ref.		Ref.		Ref.	
Educational degree x generation	1958-1967	0.198		0.059		0.153	
	Bac +/1968-1977	0.422 *	+8.6	-0.283		0.150	

\*\*\* significant 1%, \*\* significant 5%, \* significant 10%.

Source: Pratiques culturelles des Français (1981, 1988, 1997) EPCV (2003).



Among characteristics not taken into account were variables related to the socio-cultural characteristics of respondent's family of origin (parents' occupations and educational attainment). While these were collected in the three Ministry of Culture surveys, they were unfortunately not included in the INSEE survey. It is therefore not possible to control for the effect of these characteristics, though we know they have a determinant influence that is likely to absorb part of the generational differences observed, since the social characteristics of mass-schooled generations differ considerably from those of the preceding generations. In other words, it is plausible that part of the observed generation effect results from a social mobility effect (Van Eijck, 1999). Specifically, we can assume that the increase in proportion of higher education students from working-class backgrounds affected the convergence of school and family socialization processes that was observed for the preceding generations. But without the relevant information for the 2003 survey –without facts– we can only hypothesize on this point.

*Robustness of generational differences and effects of mass schooling for reading*

With other effects controlled for, the proportion of non-readers, very low among 15-24 year-olds, increases regularly with age. *Bacheliers* and higher education graduates are much less likely to be non-readers than those without an educational degree, while manual workers, farmers, craftspersons, shopkeepers and heads of business are much more likely to be non-readers than managers or persons in mid-level occupations. There are many more male than female non-readers. Proportion of non-readers also seems dependent on residence locale: inhabitants of rural communities are more likely to be non-readers, whereas the probability is minimal among Paris residents. Independently of social and cultural characteristics, a person's relation to reading seems linked to environmental characteristics: distribution of cultural commodities, life and leisure styles particular to the various types of settlement.

While the effects associated with sex, educational degree, socio-occupational category and residence locale on probability of being a heavy reader (at least 25 books a year) are similar –but inversely so– to those observed for the preceding indicator, the age effect here does not seem a linear effect of ageing. Persons under 40 and over 60 are more likely to be heavy readers than the 40-59 reference category; among the under 40, 15-24-year-olds show the sharpest differential. It is very likely that the age effect here refers to mechanisms related to individual's position in the life cycle. The age-related probability gap for the over-60 can be analyzed as an effect of having free time, whereas for the young this effect probably combines with the school's encouragement to read; this last influence may be assumed to diminish as an individual's schooling years recede.

In any case, the “all else kept equal” analysis confirms the robustness of the generation effects suggested by comparing raw rates by age and cohort.

With other characteristics controlled for, persons born in 1968 or after are more likely to be non-readers. Inversely, belonging to these generations makes one less likely to be a heavy reader. It is a more delicate matter to analyze the generation effect associated with this second indicator, since two cohort series prior to the 1948-1957 reference cohorts –*i.e.*, 1908-1917 and 1928-1937– also show negative parameters.

Lastly, estimating the parameters associated with the combined “generation x educational degree” variable provides an indirect measure of the cultural effects of mass schooling. Overall, the positive effect of educational degree on reading is smaller for recent generations and greater for the earliest ones. For non-readers, the + sign of the parameter associated with interaction between the 1968-1977 cohorts and educational degree (+ 8.6) indicates for individuals born in those generations, considerable mitigation of the lower probability of being a non-reader associated with having at least a *baccalauréat* degree (or equivalent). In other words, the fall in reading observed for mass-schooled generations compared to the preceding ones is greater among *bacheliers* and higher education graduates (+ 8.6) than among non-graduates. Inversely, the probability of being a non-reader is much lower for *bacheliers* born between 1918 and 1937. For heavy readers, the positive effect of having an educational degree only increased for the earlier generations. Overall, then, we observe a significant weakening of the positive impact of education on reading over successive generations.

#### *Predominance of the generation gradient for television-watching*

On many points, the profile of heavy television consumers resembles that of non-readers and directly contrasts with that of heavy readers. While reading and television-watching do not seem to be mutually exclusive activities (Establet and Felouzis, 1992), intensive practice of both is rare (approximately 5% of the sample).<sup>(3)</sup> Contrary to reading, intensive television-watching decreases with education level and increases with age. Managers and higher intellectual professionals are less likely to be heavy television-watchers, but so are the self-employed (craftspersons, shopkeepers, heads of business); manual workers and the unoccupied are more likely to be heavy television watchers. Television-watching, then, appears to be the special leisure practice of categories of people with a great deal of free time –categories for whom time is in fact the only abundant leisure resource (Coulangeon, Menger and Roharik, 2002).

Like reading, television-watching seems to be affected by a strong generational gradient. With other characteristics controlled for, persons born in 1968 or after are much more likely to be heavy television watchers. This also

(3) It is important to note that these heavy readers and television-watchers exhibit very particular characteristics: they are primarily female, generally unoccupied, and in most cases over 60.

applies, though not as much, to the 1958-1967 generations. The 1908-1917 generations are the only ones distinguished from the reference situation by a weaker inclination for heavy television consumption. The generational component of television-watching, then, is clearly operative. Contrary to what was observed for reading, the effect of educational degree does not seem to change in mass-schooled generations: intensive television consumption does not become even more intensive among mass-schooled *bacheliers*. This is the case, however, for the earliest generations, but here the generation effect is difficult to distinguish from the age effect: by definition, these generations were questioned at an advanced age, even in 1981.

### **The impact of education on reading and television-watching: skill-teaching or socialization?**

The preceding analysis of the generation-related changes observed in the impact of educational attainment on reading and television-watching establishes an opposition between two types of interpretation that in turn refer to the dual effect of education on cultural practices. The change in this effect on cultural habits first suggests a change in curriculum content and teaching methods. According to this interpretation, which has become fairly popular among cultural-world actors, in intellectual circles and among some teachers, the weakened impact of education level on orientation of cultural practices is to be explained by a fall in the status of high culture and the humanities in secondary education. The second interpretation is based instead on the socializing dimension of the school experience and emphasizes the morphological consequences of mass schooling.

### ***Do the cultural habits of graduates reflect a change in the educational model?***

The variety of contemporary secondary school systems is ordered around two ideal-typical models differentiated by the importance they attribute to classic culture and humanities and the relation to knowledge they encourage in students (Turner, 1960). The first model, termed the “sponsor” model, is based on early selection of talents using criteria defined by a society’s social and cultural elites. In this model, the school favors a disinterested relationship to culture by granting great importance to the arts, letters and humanities –this relationship is the distinctive feature of membership in these elites. Historically, this model imposed itself in traditional aristocratic societies such as Britain, through the separation of elite secondary schooling (“grammar schools”) and technical-occupational secondary schooling. But it was also adopted in modern states with a centralized bureaucracy, such as France, where it is said to have created a “state nobility” (Bourdieu, 1989) that monopolized recruitment of elites, recruitment based on social endogamy

mediated by a strong if implicit shared cultural understanding or “complicity”. In this model, the social function of schooling is valorized in and of itself by the contribution it makes to preserving high culture.

The “contest” model stands opposed to the “sponsor” one in Turner’s typology; it prevails most notably in the American teaching system. Here the cardinal values are merit and effort, and the school curriculum is organized around a plurality of excellence criteria. Two features distinguish this model from the “sponsor” one. First, in the secondary school teaching system there are no rigid dividing lines between particular disciplinary study programs, and selection processes are deferred. Emphasis is on having the greatest number of students possible pursue education and compete with each other. Second, the role of the school is assessed mainly in terms of student achievement and the social utility of educational attainment, independently of the content taught. The cultural function of schooling is thus not in itself particularly valued, and there is no particular encouragement to practice high cultural activities nor penalization for practices or attitudes associated with mass culture.

Since the 1975 creation of a single middle school and middle school curriculum for all in France, followed by the extension of education through upper secondary (in France this began in 1985), it has occasionally been suggested that French secondary schooling is now tending toward the contest model (Bulle, 2000). These developments are said to have worked to change *bacheliers*’ and higher education graduates’ cultural habits, namely by tipping the balance between disciplines and study programs over to the science and technology side, to the detriment of classic humanities. While I would emphasize this interpretation of the generational differences observed for reading and television-watching habits, it is important to keep in mind the increasing heterogeneity of the graduate population that has followed on the increase in number of technical and occupational study programs leading to the *baccalauréat* degree; these account for a major percentage of the increase in number of *bacheliers* that began in 1985. However, this heterogeneity could not be controlled for in processing the data chosen for this analysis because of constraints on respondent numbers that do not allow for breaking down *bacheliers* by study program majored in. Furthermore, the hypothesis of a conversion to the “contest” model has yet to be successfully demonstrated. The French middle school and high school system continues to exhibit features of the “sponsor” model.

The change can also be explained in part by the diffusion of theories criticizing symbolic domination. These may have worked to reorient education policy in France, policy that over time has moved from an approach of democratizing high culture to one of “cultural democracy” (Van Eijck and Knulst, 2005). On this point the change in teaching practices with regard to reading seems particularly telling. To encourage teenagers to read, the range of literature taught in middle school gradually expanded from the 1970s to include texts from children’s and adolescents’ literature that are quite remote from classic and contemporary literary canons and “great writers”, and this has

actually disrupted the transition toward the “literary” approach to reading that continues to dominate in high school and that has turned a number of adolescents otherwise interested in reading away from that practice (Baudelot, Cartier and Detrez, 1999). Nonetheless, these changes in teaching and their cultural effects remain indissociable from the context of mass schooling and the changes induced by it in the types of cultural socialization that students undergo in the school environment.

### ***Cultural socialization in the age of mass schooling***

There is no doubt that the morphological changes of the high school and higher education populations –particularly the university population– have deeply modified the conditions in which pupils and students have been socialized since the 1980s. Independently of changes in teaching or content taught, the school and university environments remain places where cultural norms and habits are formed and diffused, norms and practices whose nature is highly dependent on the social characteristics of the particular communities of high school and university students, their original family environments and their trajectories.

This sort of derived cultural inheritance, which arises from the mimetics of habits forged among peers, corresponds to the “status-assigning effect” mentioned by Bourdieu and Passeron in their discussion of the minority of sons of manual workers and peasants who “miraculously” managed to pass school selective admission tests in the 1960s and tended to adopt a sort of excessive conformity to the cultural norms of the bourgeoisie, the class whose children made up the crushing majority of the high school and higher education populations (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1964). The socializing dimension of the effect of education on cultural practices in this case derived from the fact that the “cultural willingness” of these “miracle” cases was not limited to strongly academic areas but also included areas quite distant from scholastic culture; *e.g.*, jazz, art film, contemporary art.

In this sense –and to return to the results of my analysis– I am inclined to think that mass schooling, through the changes it brought about in the social composition of high school and higher education populations –“inheritors” now constitute the minority of these populations– has altered both the positive impact that schooling had on practices pertaining to high culture, such as reading, and its negative impact on practices related to mass culture, namely television-watching. What remains of “cultural legitimacy” when the world of the school is no longer made up majoritarily of “inheritors”; when mass culture becomes in a sense the dominant culture (Pasquier, 2005; Glévarec, 2005)? Mass schooling has probably not just weakened the “status-assigning effect” once described by Bourdieu and Passeron, but actually tended to reverse its terms.

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How should we understand the changes observed in cultural habits of graduates in the generations implicated in the “second massification” of schooling in France? The meaning given to these changes varies by whether emphasis is on changes in the school’s cultural functions or the effect of morphological changes in the schooled population. These two types of interpretation are not mutually exclusive, since the changes that occurred in curriculum content and teaching methods are related to changes in the social characteristics of the schooled population and graduates consequent to the introduction of mass secondary schooling.

It is difficult to disentangle these questions from prejudices attaching to the period studied, during which most of the changes discussed occurred. The fact that the effects of the second school “massification” in France primarily concern generations born just before the 1970s is likely to give rise to inexhaustible ideological readings of the cultural heritage of “May ’68”, in which those events are made responsible for the loss of cultural direction and abdication so often imputed to the school institution in France. The arguments presented and demonstrated here suggest that a more modest reading of changes in the mechanism of scholastic transmission of cultural habits and attitudes would be more accurate. The school’s loss of cultural authority, which is probably not as radical as the most pessimistic observers of the contemporary school world say, is inscribed in a context where the number of behavior- and attitude-prescribing authorities is multiplying, where the boundary between learned and popular culture is being blurred, and where relations between “high” culture and mass culture are getting rearranged. Without overestimating the scope of the results presented here which bear on reading and television-watching frequency and intensity indicators –indicators that could only be refined and generalized by means of more detailed analysis that would take into account other practices and the variety of behavior and preferences– we can still read these observations as indicating a weakening in types of cultural domination that used to be operative in the school as an institution: under the combined effect of mass schooling and mass culture, these institutions have lost a degree of their “monopoly over legitimate symbolic violence”. In this connection, the changes can also be read as indicating a narrowing of cultural cleavages within “mass culture” generations, the same as those who experienced mass access to the *baccalauréat* degree.

There are, however, two limitations to the conclusions drawn from the analyses presented in this text. The first concerns the extreme generality of the indicators used. They inform us only on frequency of practices and say nothing about practice content, whereas both practices can be realized in many different ways. The practical impossibility of having stable indicators of practice content or individuals’ tastes and preferences reduces the import of these results. It is impossible to determine if the fall in reading is due to greater distance from “learned” forms of reading or a drop in more ordinary reading, now overtaken by the audiovisual media (detective or romantic novels overtaken by televised series, for example). Likewise, the diversified

offerings to be found on television due to the launching of theme channels and the use of VCRs and DVDs augur increasing differentiation of audiovisual media use; that differentiation is hard to apprehend on the basis of number of hours spent watching television every week.

The second limitation is clearly linked to the impossibility of controlling the education effect by means of social origin since this information is missing in the last survey used to compose the pseudo-panel. Given the robustness of the education effect itself, attested by previous studies (Coulangeon, 2003), we can assume that the changes observed in education effect are not purely specious, but it should also be stressed that taking into account social origin would diminish the magnitude of those changes to a degree we cannot estimate.

These two limitations indicate means of further studying of the cultural effects of mass schooling: 1) probing changes in practice content –i.e., cultural tastes and preferences, and 2) measuring the effects of intergenerational transmission. Future surveys should be more attentive to this dimension than INSEE's 2003 survey was.

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