

Annie Ernaux's Writing of Class Interest Under the View of Pierre Bourdieu

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ABSTRACT

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social space and segregation reveals the reproduction of social class differences and inequality, but there is still a research gap in how to reflect these social dynamics through individual narratives, especially in terms of cultural capital and aesthetic taste as social differentiation markers. This article explores how Annie Ernaux's personal narrative reflects and expands Pierre Bourdieu's theory by analyzing her works "The Location", "A Woman", and "The Long Years". Ernaux vividly demonstrates the role of cultural capital in social differentiation and reveals the close relationship between individual aesthetic taste and social status. Meanwhile, her works reflect the dual role of education in providing opportunities and maintaining unequal structures in social mobility. By combining Ernaux's literary works with Pierre Bourdieu's theory, a new perspective is provided for understanding contemporary French social structure and cultural differences.

Keywords: *Annie Ernaux, Pierre Bourdieu, Class interest, Social space, Division.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Theoretical system of Pierre Bourdieu, the most internationally influential sociologist in France, has become an important theoretical framework for in-depth exploration of social class differences and unequal phenomena in social reproduction, utilizing major conceptual tools such as capital (economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, etc.), habitus, field, and practice.¹ Pierre Bourdieu's segregation theory and social space theory constitute the core of his main ideas. The former emphasizes that in the process of cultural consumption, an individual's aesthetic taste reflects their social status and class attributes, and is deeply rooted in their social status and class upbringing, playing an important role in distinguishing social classes.² Correspondingly, the latter provides an analytical framework for the former through the multidimensional field composed of different types of capital, enabling individuals or groups to more accurately locate

their social status and understand the inequality of social structure.³

In the 1970s, Annie Ernaux came into contact with Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory and was deeply influenced by it. Pierre Bourdieu's works⁴ nourished Ernaux's literary creation, making her realize how the education system affects social inequality and re-examine her own experiences across social classes, as well as the relationship between her family's cultural taste, lifestyle habits, and other details and social classes. In "La Place(The Location)" and "Une Femme(A Woman)", Annie Ernaux vividly depicts how parents from the bottom of society strive to help "me" achieve class transition through education. However, in the process, "I" feels the huge differences in language, cultural tastes, and other aspects between the common and middle classes in contemporary France, where there is a significant

1. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: Social Critique of Judgment (La Distinction: Critique Sociale du Jugement)*, translated by Liu hui, Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2015. Introduction, pp1-11.

2. See Zhu Guohua, *The Cultural Logic of Power: Pierre Bourdieu's Sociological Poetics*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2016, pp266-269.

3. See Zhu Guohua, *The Cultural Logic of Power: Pierre Bourdieu's Sociological Poetics*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2016, pp228-232.

4. For example, Pierre Bourdieu's "The Heir: College Students and Culture(Les Héritiers)", "Reproduction: Elements of Educational System Theory(La Reproduction: éléments pour une théorie du système d'enseignement)", and "Distinction: Social Critique of Judgment (La Distinction: Critique Sociale du Jugement)".

capital gap, and thus feels ashamed and alienated from the original class. In "Les Années(The Long Years)", the author adopts a "impersonality" narrative style, integrating the evolution of the times into personal experiences and personal memories into the memories of a generation. It is not only an autobiography of the author, but also a "social autobiography", creating a new literary genre. Annie Ernaux's social insight not only provides new writing styles and perspectives in literature, but also provides excellent evidence for Pierre Bourdieu's theory in sociological research.

In previous academic research,⁵ scholars have extensively explored the literary value and social significance of Ernaux's works, but there is relatively little introduction of how she reflects Pierre Bourdieu's class interests and spatial differentiation in her works. Therefore, this article aims to analyze the reflection of social structural inequality through the depiction of spatial (geographic and social) differentiation of different classes in Annie Ernaux's works. At the same time, this article will further explore the expression of Pierre Bourdieu's "social space" in Annie Ernaux's works and its impact on class transition, in order to further clarify the class interests and academic significance in Annie Ernaux's works from Pierre Bourdieu's sociological perspective. This interdisciplinary exploration not only enriches the academic interpretation of Ernaux's works, but also provides a new perspective for understanding the contemporary social structure in France.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: PIERRE BOURDIEU'S SOCIAL SPACE AND SEGREGATION THEORY

2.1 The Distinction Between Social Space and Geographic Space

With the development of urban research and sociological theory, the concept of "geographic space" has gradually taken shape and been widely discussed. It usually refers to physical locations,

regions, or ranges, and is an objective natural phenomenon that not only includes natural features such as terrain, topography, and geographic location, but also encompasses artificially defined regional boundaries such as cities, rural areas, etc. Geospatial distinction is used in urban sociology and human geography to describe the phenomenon of urban residents being separated geographically due to factors such as socioeconomic status, race, and culture. However, in contrast, the concept of "social space" is more abstract and broad, constructed through relationships and capital (economic, cultural, social capital), involving all possibilities of individuals or groups regarding the social position (or field) they occupy.⁶ Pierre Bourdieu mentioned that members of the same class are often geographically close, such as the left and right banks of Paris, as well as the well-known "noble residential areas" where wealthy people live. Therefore, the distribution of geographic space is actually a concrete manifestation of social space, which is one of the results caused by uneven distribution of capital.

In his book "Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts", Michel Grenfell delves into Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "social space", viewing it as a "pan set" composed of different fields that are equivalent to "subsets" of social space, divided by consistent interests, actions, and participant habitus.⁷ Simply put, social space is like a large community composed of multiple small communities, each with its own rules and members who gather together due to common interests and behavioral habits. These small communities are the "fields" in social space, and there are objective social relationships between individuals within the fields, such as competition and cooperation, which also shape the structure of social space. The status of individuals in these communities is determined by the value of their capital (economic, cultural, social capital, etc.) to the field they are in. The status of individuals is not fixed and unchanging, but flows with the increase or decrease of capital and changes in social factors. Therefore, social space is a dynamic and complex system constructed by the capital, relationships, and actions of individuals and groups.

5. Lu Yichen's "On the Collective Dimension of Annie Ernaux's Autobiography 'The Long Years'" mainly analyzes Annie Ernaux's autobiographical work "The Long Years" from the perspective of social dimension; Yang Lingfei: "The Sociological Significance of Annie Ernaux's Works" mainly approaches from the perspective of literary sociology; Peng Yingying and Wang Jing: "Wandering between the Individual and Society: Interpreting the Sociality of Annie Ernaux's Autobiography" mainly analyzes from three aspects: theme analysis, first person writing method, and creative form.

6. See Michel Grenfell, "Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts", translated by Lin Yunke. Chongqing: Chongqing University Press, 2018, pp292-293.

7. See Michel Grenfell, "Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts", translated by Lin Yunke. Chongqing: Chongqing University Press, 2018, pp292-293.

Overall, geographic space describes more about the question of “where”, focusing on physical location and natural features, while social space focuses on the questions of “who is where” and “why is there”, emphasizing the distribution of social structures and individuals in space and their underlying social meanings.

2.2 Distinction Theory and Social Inequality

To delve deeper into the differences between social structures and social classes, it is necessary to make distinction within the broader and more abstract social space proposed by Pierre Bourdieu. So, how to distinct? In his book "Distinction: Social Critique of Judgment", Pierre Bourdieu revealed how aesthetic tastes and cultural consumption in daily life are associated with an individual's social status and class attributes through analysis.⁸ For example, some people enjoy listening to classical music and appreciating oil paintings, while others may prefer pop music and modern art. These preferences are not just a matter of personal preference, and they actually reflect a person's social background and class. In social space, the position of individuals and groups is determined by the total amount and proportion of capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital) they possess. These capitals not only determine the position of individuals in social space, but also subtly influence their habits, aesthetic tastes, and way of life.⁹ Therefore, according to this theoretical framework, distinctions in social practices such as lifestyle and aesthetic taste of individuals can be inferred from their total capital and composition ratio in social space, thereby distinguishing their social position and class attributes.

Meanwhile, Pierre Bourdieu's theory also emphasizes that the divisions in social space are not static, but dynamic and constantly constructed and reproduced through the practice of individuals and groups.¹⁰ For example, individuals from the upper class not only maintain their social status through their consumption habits and lifestyle, but may also

pass on these advantages to the next generation through education and other opportunities, thereby reproducing social inequality. On the contrary, individuals from lower social classes may struggle to change their social status due to a lack of corresponding capital and opportunities, thus also experiencing the reproduction of social structures. Therefore, the distinctions in social space reflect and reinforce structural inequality between social classes. However, Pierre Bourdieu's viewpoint has also received some criticism. Some scholars point out that although capital does play a very important role in social mobility, his emphasis on structure may lead to its neglect of individual subjective initiative (personal choices, opportunities) and external conditions.¹¹ For example, Annie Ernaux did achieve class transition through education, indicating that the boundaries between classes are not unbreakable.

2.3 Social Trajectory and Class Transition

The division of social space not only reflects social status, but also further consolidates the differences between individuals and classes through the distribution of capital. However, this division is not static and unchanging, precisely because social space is dynamically flowing, and the amount and proportion of capital possessed by individuals or collectives change with the changes in social conditions. This change in capital directly affects their position in social space, a process known as the "social trajectory".¹² Pierre Bourdieu believed that due to the diverse developmental experiences and social environments of individuals, even members of the same class exhibit unique traits and styles in class habits, which are internalized from their past experiences and influence their behavior, choices, and lifestyle.¹³ Therefore, an individual's social trajectory is not entirely determined by external social structures, but rather the result of the interaction between individual habits and social structures. Thus, by analyzing individuals' social trajectories and habits, people can better understand

8. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: Social Critique of Judgment (La Distinction: Critique Sociale du Judement)*, translated by Liu hui, Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2015. Introduction, pp1-11.

9. See Zhu Guohua, *The Cultural Logic of Power: Pierre Bourdieu's Sociological Poetics*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2016, pp228-232.

10. See Zhu Guohua, *The Cultural Logic of Power: Pierre Bourdieu's Sociological Poetics*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2016, pp228-232.

11. See Bridget Fowler: "Pierre Bourdieu on social transformation, with particular reference to political and symbolic revolutions", *Theory and Society*, vol 49, no.3, 2018, pp.439-463; Will Atkinson: "Beyond Pierre Bourdieu: From Genetic Structuralism to Relational Phenomenology, *Polity Press*, vol 62, no.3, 2016, pp.65-95.

12. See Zhu Guohua, *The Cultural Logic of Power: Pierre Bourdieu's Sociological Poetics*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2016, pp231-232.

13. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: Social Critique of Judgment (La Distinction: Critique Sociale du Judement)*, Introduction, pp1-11.

the root causes of social inequality and how individuals can achieve self-improvement or be restricted in society.

So where does the driving force and direction of an individual's social trajectory come from? In fact, educational mechanisms play an important role in it. On the one hand, educational mechanisms increase individuals' cultural capital by imparting legitimate cultural and aesthetic tastes, leading to an upward trend in their social trajectory in social space and the possibility of achieving class transition across class restrictions. On the other hand, it can be found that as the number of educated individuals gradually increased, the social structure did not undergo significant changes, and the relative stability between classes was maintained for a long time, mainly due to symbolic violence. In "The Cultural Logic of Power", Zhu Guohua pointed out that, "Culture imposes a symbolic violence on the ruled, which transforms their righteous indignation and dissatisfaction with their enslaved situation into lamentations and compliance with their inability to master cultural codes and lack of natural abilities. They sincerely identify with the unfortunate fate they are experiencing, and this effectively extinguishes their desire for subversion."¹⁴ The education system is actually a good carrier of symbolic violence, which transmits and strengthens specific cultural capital and social values through its curriculum, teaching methods, and evaluation system. This enables the lower class to generally receive education but still remain in a dominant position, thereby maintaining and reproducing social structure and power relations.

Therefore, the social trajectory of individuals is deeply influenced by educational mechanisms, which provide individuals with the possibility of upward mobility, increase their cultural capital, promote the improvement of social status and the crossing of social classes; At the same time, education also maintains the status quo through symbolic violence, enabling the sustainable reproduction of social structures and power relations.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN GEOGRAPHIC SPACE AND SOCIAL SPACE IN ERNAUX'S LITERARY WORKS

3.1 *Overview and Theme Analysis of the Works*

Annie Ernaux and her parents' personal experiences have well confirmed Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory mentioned above. In the autobiographical novels "A Woman" and "The Location", Annie Ernaux objectively and calmly tells the life experiences of her parents from a first person perspective. At the same time, "I"'s growth experience is intertwined with her parents' experiences. Their own low social status and hard work make them invest huge efforts and hopes in their daughter's education. However, the contradiction is that after "I" achieved the transition from the working class to the middle class through education, they gradually developed a sense of alienation and estrangement from their parents. The film "The Long Years" uses the narrative technique of "impersonality", connecting more than 60 years of life of Ernaux through 14 photos from different historical periods, reflecting the life and changes of a generation through the details of personal life.

The experiences of Annie Ernaux and her parents can be well answered in Pierre Bourdieu's social space theory model. In the works mentioned earlier, it can be found that the author and parents' social status is constantly changing due to the constantly changing total amount and proportion of capital (cultural, economic, and social capital, etc.). In "A Woman", the mother's social position can only remain stagnant in the lower class due to the lack of cultural and economic capital. The book says, "It is a common rule to leave school at the age of twelve and a half, neither happy nor sad. She suffered from the cold in a butter factory. With the bitterness of dampness, her wet hands were covered in frostbite, but she had never 'seen' artificial cream."¹⁵ The mother was unable to escape from the lower class due to a lack of capital, and the father's situation was no exception. But their daughter Annie Ernaux, through continuous learning and accumulation of more cultural capital, broke free from her original class and fulfilled her

14. See Zhu Guohua, *The Cultural Logic of Power: Pierre Bourdieu's Sociological Poetics*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2016, Introduction part.

15. Annie Ernaux, *A Woman*, Newly Revised Edition, Translated by Guo Yumei. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2022, p15.

parents' greatest wish. In contrast, Annie Ernaux's husband, who comes from the middle class, has rich cultural, economic, and social capital that sets him apart from "me" in terms of his worldview and outlook on life. "In the husband's world, although people are not particularly wealthy, they have all received higher education and have their own opinions on what happens in society. They are used to playing bridge."¹⁶ Annie Ernaux's unfamiliarity with the world is destined to become an irreconcilable contradiction between them, and at the same time, it implies the failure of their marriage. So, social spatial segregation not only affects an individual's external living conditions, but also shapes their perception of internal interpersonal relationships and views on intimate relationships.

Through the description of life fragments, it can be seen that spatial segregation in social space theory is not only physical isolation, but also the unequal access to social opportunities and resources brought about by the uneven distribution of capital. At the same time, the mother's experience also illustrates that an individual's acceptance and compliance with their own situation not only stem from a lack of capital, but may also involve factors such as personal choices and cultural identity. However, these factors have not been resolved in Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework. Only by adding other factors can we have a more comprehensive understanding of the fate of individuals and social issues in Ernaux's works.

3.2 The Interweaving of Geographic Space and Social Space

The position of individuals in geographic space corresponds to their position in social space, and the two are closely intertwined, which helps us better understand the inequality in social spatial differentiation.

Annie Ernaux lived with her parents in a worker's block far from the city center during her childhood, "in a small house with two rooms, no electricity, and some outdated old furniture placed against the wall."¹⁷ As the studies going deep, "I" began to want to stay away from "my" parents who were rude and conservative in their thinking. So "I"

16. Annie Ernaux, *A Woman*, Newly Revised Edition, Translated by Guo Yumei. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2022, pp42-43.

17. Annie Ernaux, *A Woman*, Newly Revised Edition, Translated by Guo Yumei. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2022, p27.

went to high school in Rouen and later went to London to study. Then "I" became a high school teacher, completing a class transition from quantitative to qualitative changes, and living with my middle-class husband in Paris. This is how "Long Years" describes Paris: "Paris represents beauty and strength, a mysterious and terrifying whole, with every street that appears in newspapers or is cited in advertisements: Avenue de Balbes, Rue des Garonne, and Jean Minol at 116 Champs - Élysées, sparking imagination. People who have lived here or just come here for sightseeing and have seen the Eiffel Tower will feel proud and honored."¹⁸ This spatial movement reflects the division and inequality of social classes.

So, when mother moved in with "me" and her husband, a sense of inferiority belonging to the lower class arose spontaneously. She jumped out of one "world" without any transition to another, where she was so out of place: "unable to dry clothes on the radiator at the door", "unable to wipe children's noses with her own handkerchief", "significant social news that was not important to 'us' to her..."¹⁹ This is just like Pierre Bourdieu believed that people of the same social class gather relatively geographically, and this spatial gathering reflects the structure of social space. When an individual enters a field that does not belong to their own social class, even without direct rejection, they may feel a kind of pressure or discomfort psychologically.²⁰ Therefore, geographic spatial distinctions reflect social spatial distinction and affects individual behavior and perception, thereby further strengthening class segregation in social space.

3.3 The Role of Social Trajectory and Education

Annie Ernaux achieved a transition from the working class to the middle class in social space through education, from being a daughter of a working-class family to becoming a literary teacher. Education plays a crucial role in this process, providing Ernaux with an upward force in social

18. Annie Ernaux, *Long Years*, Translated by Wu Yuetian. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 2021, pp111-112.

19. Annie Ernaux, *A Woman*, Newly Revised Edition, Translated by Guo Yumei. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2022, pp46-47.

20. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: Social Critique of Judgment (La Distinction: Critique Sociale du Jugement)*, translated by Liu hui, Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2015, pp190-208.

space. It is both a pathway for Ernaux's personal capital accumulation and a medium for her to enter different social spaces.

Isn't there any resistance to "upward social mobility"? Of course, on the one hand, the accumulation of cultural capital through education alone is not enough to enable Annie Ernaux to adapt to a higher social class. Her parents and years of living habits in the lower class have restrained her, becoming a link between her and her previous social class, as well as a burden for her to move towards a higher class. So, while education helps the author increase their knowledge and broaden their horizons, it cannot eliminate the bond between the author and their original family, which gradually deepens the estrangement between Ernaux and her parents, and gives rise to the idea of wanting to stay away from them and gain freedom.

On the other hand, Annie Ernaux's cultural conflicts and identity recognition during her education further exacerbated her confusion, as reflected in her attitude towards her mother: "I feel ashamed of her rudeness in speech and uncivilized behavior, especially when I feel like I am very similar to her, which makes me even more miserable. I now belong to two different types of people with her, and I am working hard to change the things she has passed on to me that I want to condemn. I have found a gap between the desire for cultivation and the fact of cultivation."²¹ Annie Ernaux was unable to integrate into the new social space or return to the old way of life, and could only wander between two classes, ultimately becoming a 'class defector'.

In summary, Annie Ernaux's works provide rich examples for understanding the role of education in social mobility, as well as how individuals can achieve self-transformation and class transition through education in social space. Meanwhile, the cultural conflicts and identity crisis that accompanied her in this process also revealed the limitations of education as a tool for class transition. Although education does provide upward momentum for individual social mobility, it cannot completely resolve the internal conflicts that arise during the process of social mobility. This also reflects the dual role of education in social change.

21. Annie Ernaux, *A Woman*, Newly Revised Edition, Translated by Guo Yumei. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2022, p37.

4. THE EXPRESSION OF CLASS INTEREST AND SOCIAL SPATIAL MOBILITY

4.1 *Sociological Analysis of Class Interest*

In social space, the distinctions between social classes is not only reflected in geographical differences in residential and activity areas, but also more deeply internalized as individual habits. This habitus is not a conscious product, but is unconsciously rooted in people's daily lives. Among them, aesthetic taste is not only a prominent manifestation of cultural habits, but also a distinguishing symbol of overall class habits. In his book "Distinction: Social Critique of Judgment", Pierre Bourdieu takes cultural consumption as a starting point and delves into the diverse aesthetic tastes exhibited by different social classes. He pointed out that an individual's social position determines the cultural capital they possess, which in turn shapes their interests.²² In other words, the position of an actor in social space determines what cultural capital they possess and thus exhibit corresponding interests. For example, in "The Location," Annie Ernaux mentioned that because her parents had a vague understanding of beauty deep down in their hearts and didn't know what they should like, they always followed the advice of painters and carpenters when decorating their houses.²³ However, for people from higher social classes, speaking standard French, politeness and grace seem like ordinary things.

Everyone has their own aesthetic taste, but why does Pierre Bourdieu see it as a symbol of social stratification? In fact, taste is often distinguished in a negative way, that is, by rejecting other tastes to establish oneself.²⁴ For example, in "Long Years", the lower class people will criticize items that symbolize superior social status, such as laundry machines wearing out clothes, television damaging eyesight, and so on.²⁵ In "A Woman", Ernaux also

22. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: Social Critique of Judgment (La Distinction: Critique Sociale du Jugement)*, translated by Liu hui, Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2015. Introduction, pp1-11.

23. Annie Ernaux, *A new revised version of a Man's Position*, Translated by Guo Yumei. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2022, p36.

24. See Zhu Guohua, *The Cultural Logic of Power: Pierre Bourdieu's Sociological Poetics*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2016, pp265-269.

25. Annie Ernaux, *Long Years*, Translated by Wu Yuetian. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 2021, p31.

mentioned, "Among them, my mother was the most rough and arrogant, with the strongest resistance from the lower class of society, refusing to be judged by others based on her family background. When it comes to the wealthy, she often says, 'We are much stronger than them.'"²⁶ Pierre Bourdieu mainly discussed three types of tastes based on different social classes, namely legitimate tastes, which are mainly the dominant tastes shared by the ruling class; Popular interest mainly refers to the interest shared by the ruling class in a dominant position; Moderate taste interest mainly refers to the middle-class interest that lies between these two.²⁷

Therefore, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of interest profoundly reveals the close relationship between social class and individual habits. The differences in aesthetic tastes among people from different social classes not only reflect their social status, but also their pursuit of self-identity and social belonging.

4.2 The Flow of Space and the Transformation of Class Interest

Annie Ernaux's social mobility and shift in class interests is a complex process, in which education and personal memory play crucial roles. In the social space, as her cultural capital gradually accumulated and her social status improved, Ernaux's aesthetic taste also changed accordingly.

She explored and reconstructs the past by writing personal memories, in order to understand personal feelings in class mobility. For example, in "A Woman", Ernaux described how he gradually realized the reality of being at the bottom of society during his education process. She was born in Lillebonne, Normandy, France in 1940 and grew up in a working-class neighborhood in Yvetot. Her parents ran a grocery store and café. This background shaped her language habits, and her exposure to working-class dialects and everyday language from a young age made her not accustomed to speaking standard French. Ernaux's living conditions, language habits, and unfamiliarity with Paris all reflect her social status. However, with the deepening of education, she began to pursue a more refined attitude towards life,

which was reflected not only in her participation in political topics, but also in her reassessment of family relationships. Mother's aversion to discussing political topics such as the Algerian War reveals the differences in intergenerational perceptions of cultural capital. After Ernaux got married, her husband, who came from a middle-class background, prompted her to start exploring the refined lifestyle of the bourgeoisie, such as skiing. But this transformation is not without cost, as her guilt for not being able to share this life with her mother reflects a conflict and redefinition of her personal identity.²⁸

It cannot be denied that education has provided her with cultural knowledge and expanded her horizons in this process, enabling her to break free from the interests of the working class and achieve a more refined way of life. However, education is also an important tool for the ruling class to consolidate the legitimacy of their interests.²⁹ Taking higher education as an example, certain cultural activities and advanced aesthetic standards, such as the appreciation of classical music, literature, and art, are often seen as signs of education and cultural level. These standards and values have influenced individuals who hope to gain social recognition and cultural capital through the screening and evaluation mechanisms of the education system. While pursuing academic achievements, students unintentionally accept these aesthetic norms and internalize them into their own aesthetic tastes and cultural habits. In fact, this internalization process is a way for the education system to differentiate and stratify members of society through the transmission and distribution of cultural capital.

However, cultural reproduction in the education system is not a one-way indoctrination. Individuals may also resist or reinterpret these norms during the process of receiving education, demonstrating their own cultural creativity and critical spirit. This kind of resistance behavior usually requires individuals to have a certain level of cultural confidence and critical awareness, as well as a deep understanding of the internal operating mechanisms of the

26. Annie Ernaux, *A Woman*, Newly Revised Edition, Translated by Guo Yumei. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2022, p17.

27. See Zhu Guohua, *The Cultural Logic of Power: Pierre Bourdieu's Sociological Poetics*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2016, pp265-269.

28. Annie Ernaux, *A Woman's Story*, Newly Revised Edition, Translated by Guo Yumei. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2022, pp37-38.

29. Zhu Guohua mentioned in his book "The Cultural Logic of Power", "The education system has successfully imposed this aesthetic temperament as a symbol of violence on any actor who attempts to enter the legal cultural sphere, whether they like it or not, and even whether they are willing to accept it or not, they are all measured by these aesthetic norms."

education system.³⁰ Therefore, although the education system cultivates individuals' aesthetic temperament and cultural habits, it also limits and regulates individuals' cultural choices and aesthetic freedom to a certain extent.

5. CONCLUSION

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social space and segregation provides us with a powerful tool for understanding and analyzing the class interests and spatial segregation in Annie Ernaux's works. Social space is a multidimensional structure composed of different types of capital (economic, cultural, social, etc.) that determine the position of individuals or groups in society. Through this theoretical perspective, people can see how the protagonists in Ernaux's works position themselves in different social spaces, and how their social status affects their daily life and cultural consumption habits. The distinction theory further emphasizes the role of cultural capital in social differentiation and explains how an individual's aesthetic taste and lifestyle become a symbol of their social status and class attributes. These tastes are not only a reflection of personal preferences, but also a reflection of social structure and class distinction.

Ernaux revealed the aesthetic differences and cultural consumption patterns of different social classes through the description of different cultural activities in his works, such as concerts, art exhibitions, etc. Education, as a transmission mechanism of cultural capital, played a dual role in Annie Ernaux's class transition process: on the one hand, as an accumulation pathway of cultural capital, it provided Ernaux with an opportunity to achieve social class transition, enabling her to move upward from a working-class background; On the other hand, education also maintains existing social structures and power relations through symbolic violence, limiting individuals' cultural choices and aesthetic freedom. This prompts people to realize that education is not simply a tool for social progress. While promoting individual development, it may inadvertently maintain existing social inequality. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct in-depth critical thinking on educational mechanisms in order to seek more equitable and inclusive educational models, thereby reducing the reproduction of social inequality.

As French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu once said, "Social space is like an endless stage of class struggle, in which individuals and groups seek their respective positions through their capital reserves."³¹ In view of this, future research should further explore the issues of class interest and spatial segregation in Ernaux's works. Especially in the context of globalization, it is also necessary to not only focus on the flow and transformation of cultural capital, as well as the impact of accelerated social mobility on individual social status and identity recognition, but also pay attention to emerging social and virtual spaces. Indeed, the online society is changing the way people exist, reshaping the boundaries of social stratification in unprecedented ways and providing new avenues for individuals to explore self-expression and identity in the intertwined fields of virtual and reality.

At the same time, future research should be a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary dialogue, which requires people to work together with knowledge from multiple fields such as sociology, cultural studies, and communication studies to draw a complex picture of contemporary social class interests and spatial differentiation.

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30. See Xiao Tong,
https://www.sohu.com/a/565710151_112404 2022-07-09

31. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: Social Critique of Judgment (La Distinction: Critique Sociale du Judement)*, translated by Liu hui, Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2015, p188.

- [6] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a social critique of judgment*, translated by Hui Liu. Beijing: Commercial Press Publishing House, 2015.
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