CHAPTER 8

The Class of Love

When winter came and there was little to eat, they were still content. They found a cave and told each other love stories and sang and played the harp in turn. They loved each other as their hearts prompted. How did they love? Their love was a part of the cave, and the cave was round and high and broad. As their bodies weakened, for there was little food, their loves soared, filling the expanse of the cave, exploring the depths of their hearts. In the roundness of the cave, they came to know the tender curves of love's inner circles.

Tristan and Iseult (as retold by Diane Wolkstein)

Tristan and Iseult illustrate a motif that haunts our love mythology: love flourishing where riches have fled. As hunger weakens the body, the radiant light of love fills the lovers' hearts (as well as, we are led to presume, their stomachs). Not only is love blind to status and wealth, it ultimately transforms poverty into abundance, hunger into satiation, lack into surplus. Reversal of identity is the theme par excellence of love, ugliness transformed into startling beauty, poor shepherds into kings, frogs into princes.

But this alchemy of love is primarily social, for it expresses the hope that lowly conditions can be transmuted into noble ones and that love can unite people otherwise separated by barriers of class, nationality, and birth.

Parallel to this classless mythology, the courtly and gallant ideal that was to shape Western romantic consciousness has promoted the very forms of expression of the literate and propertied classes: poetry, music, and songs are the consecrated and seemingly “natural” expressions of love. Although these literate ideals have less currency today, the cultural forms within which love is expressed are those of various factions of the dominant classes. As Herbert Lantz suggests, historians tend “to view romantic love as handed down from the affluent classes to the poor.” He gives three reasons for the origin of love among the literate elites. First, these classes were more likely to be influenced by the liberalizing effects of “macro” economic and political events. Given their relatively
secure economic existence, such groups could afford to experiment with new lifestyles. Second, because the poorer classes spent their energies on matters of economic survival, their family environment was harsh with competition for resources. Finally, literacy is a necessary precondition of romantic love: “people have to be able to read and discuss feelings before feelings can become part of their experience.”

Lantz’s observations suggest three elements important for a sociological understanding of the relationship between love and class. (1) Mechanisms of symbolic domination, that is, cultural standards flowing from the top to the bottom, can structure how romantic love is perceived by various social groups. (2) The practice of romantic love demands availability of time and distance from material necessity. The expression of romantic love may vary according to one’s economic capital and resources in leisure time. (3) Although it is doubtful that romantic love intrinsically demands reading skills, as Lantz implies, his observations suggest that romantic practices might be related to what Bourdieu calls “cultural competence,” that is, to forms of talk, taste, and aesthetic evaluation, themselves related to standards of romance.

As argued in earlier chapters, advertisers, cultural entrepreneurs, parascientific experts, and members of the new service class have contributed to definitions of love that promote modes of expression of relatively affluent and educated segments of the middle class. The therapeutic model of love discussed in chapter 6 privileges forms of self-awareness and expression that ultimately depend on the linguistic and cultural capital of people with college education. Similarly, the hedonist model of romance, which demands an efficient use of the leisure market, depends on the requisite income and lifestyle. Thus, the ability to enact the romantic ideal in the twin domains of communication and consumption demands a romantic competence marked by access to linguistic, cultural, economic, and time resources. This in turn implies that people with less access to these resources are at a disadvantage and are romantically “less competent.” At the heart of this chapter lies the claim that the notion of “cultural capital,” which has been recently under attack, is relevant to understanding differences in romantic practices. However, as we saw in chapters 2 and 3, the commercialized formula of romance addresses and includes disparate social groups. Differences of income, education, and culture are ultimately circumscribed within the common arena of the market.

THE ELEMENTARY FORMS OF ROMANCE

Working-class and upper-middle-class respondents share a common “blueprint” of romance, consisting of activities such as going to a movie or restaurant, having a candlelight dinner, going to the beach, taking a vacation or just “getting away,” being in nature. On the other hand, their romantic practices diverge most significantly in the case of cultural activities, whether these demand consumption (going to the opera, say) or not (writing love poems). Examples of the blueprint among working-class and upper-middle-class respondents in my interview sample are abundant:

What would you do if you wanted to have a romantic moment with your partner?

It would be at home. If I had my ultimate place. A very nice long dinner. Discussing things at candlelight. I am very attracted by candlelight. And very beautiful music.

What kind of music?

Beautiful classical music. Bach, Monteverdi. (Male orchestra conductor, interview 33)

What I would do is like, ah—okay, the first thing I would do is probably have a nice, romantic dinner at my apartment, candlelight and soft music and stuff like that, plus—that’s what I have done. That’s romantic to me. Very soft music and just be into each other with not a lot of distraction and things like that.

What kind of music?

Real soft, soft music. Easy listening music.

Do you have some at home? Can you name names?

Ah, let me see. I like Barry Manilow. I like soul, very light soul music. (Female security officer, high school education, interview 37)

Although these two respondents used different linguistic, cultural, and economic capitals, they both referred to a common cultural script of romance: the “nice” dinner at home, the candlelight, the beautiful music—all essential elements of romantic rituals.

Other examples show a similar pattern. Asked what he would do to have a romantic evening, a male university professor replied, “I’d say I had a pretty romantic evening one night recently. Is that reasonable to
describe? I went to a formal dance, so you get dressed up really nice and you go to a pretty place, you do some dancing, and then I think we came back here for the dessert” (interview 1). Similarly, a male janitor with a grade-school education said, “Have a nice dinner with some wine, quiet, dancing, I don’t know, go back to her place” (interview 40). Although formulated by two men at opposite ends of the economic and cultural spectrum, these answers enact a similar script of romance: eating a “nice” dinner, dancing, and going back to the man’s or woman’s place.

Activities taking place in nature also follow a common script. Responding to the same question, a female university professor said, “It would always be in a place in nature. Like either in the woods having a picnic or in the mountains hiking or at the beach. I think I would pick the beach as the most, like being at the seashore, maybe in the evening and eating a dinner, a picnic dinner there, and just listening to the waves and going for a walk on the beach, that’s to me very romantic” (interview 19). And a male electrician with a high-school education said, “It would be a couple places I would like to be. One is the beach early in the morning or late at night, when nobody else is around, either seeing the sunrise or the sunset, with somebody, even if you’re in [inaudible] or whatever, you’re warm, you’re snugly and, if you could build a fireplace, a fire and have a fire there and maybe have some hot chocolate or coffee or even have some diet drinks, since I don’t drink” (interview 36). Here again, the two answers articulate a common cultural scenario: both people chose the beach as the most romantic place and mentioned a picnic, the building of a fire, and having drinks as symbols of seclusion, tranquility, and romance.

As we would expect from our findings in chapters 3, 4, and 5, respondents from different cultural and economic backgrounds invoked similar meanings of love as a liminal ritual and an invisible act of consumption.7 Even if working-class people participate in the market of romantic leisure less than their middle- and upper-middle-class counterparts, and even if they do not manifest the same proficiency at manipulating the symbols of the romantic formula, it remains that many of the formula’s distinctive components have pervaded romantic practices at all levels of society. Far from being excluded from the market-based romantic formula, working-class people consume and enact the same “elementary forms of romance” as members of higher social strata.

This represents a break from the premodern period, when working-class and middle-class romantic practices differed significantly. During the nineteenth century, middle-class people interacted within the protected boundaries of the home, while members of the working class, who often lived in crowded apartments, were forced to meet outside their living space and were excluded from the practice of “calling.”8 The commodification of romance has provided a formula that, if it does not unify the romantic practices of different classes, is at least accessible to most of them. This development is not surprising since from the nineteenth century onward capitalist markets of consumption have grown by assimilating previously marginal groups, such as children and adolescents. In a similar vein, David Gartman suggests that advanced capitalist societies possess both a class culture and a mass culture and that these work conjointly rather than against each other. The homogeneity of products consumed in the leisure sphere does not cancel class relationships but translates and obscures them in a common language of consumerist solidarity.9 Social differences resurface in the ways in which cultural capital orients people’s choice and appreciation of romantic commodities.

**LOVE AS DIFFERENCE**

In their romantic practices, middle-class respondents extended the limits of the blueprint of romance by making greater use of what is offered by the market, whereas the latter remained within these limits. Working-class respondents rarely mentioned activities frequently reported by their middle-class counterparts, such as reading together (a book, a newspaper, poetry), going to art galleries, dining or strolling in a remote and exotic place, eating luxury goods (caviar or salmon), attending formal dances (which require formal attire), traveling somewhere on the spur of the moment, and finally, experiencing romance in the most mundane situation. To put these examples in broader categories, middle- and upper-middle-class respondents (1) display a broader range of romantic practices, which include directly consumptive, indirectly consumptive, and nonconsumptive activities; (2) consume more expensive goods more frequently; (3) consume more culturally legitimate goods; (4) are more likely to reject the idea of romance altogether and praise the category of the “mundane.”

As Bourdieu has suggested in Distinction, we can learn more by examining the how of consumption, the styles or codes under which consumption is practiced, rather than the what of consumption. That is, the meaning of a given commodity depends on the context of its usage and not on any intrinsic signification. Bourdieu thus invites us to examine the interpretations accompanying the use of romantic commodities, the structure of these interpretations, and their link to class position.
The differences between the social strata represented in my sample can be captured succinctly: whether they reported their romantic practices or commented on the props of the interview, middle-class and especially upper-middle-class respondents displayed an elaborate anticonsumerist ethos, whereas working-class people uncritically adhered to the content of mass-manufactured romantic commodities. By “anticonsumerist ethos” I mean a combination of several elements: an explicit rejection of goods manufactured expressly for “romance”; an emphasis on originality and creativity; and an emphasis on anti-institutional values such as spontaneity, informality, and authenticity. The following examples clarify the nature of these differences.

When asked to remember one of their most romantic moments, two working-class respondents mentioned trips to “romantic resorts,” catering solely to couples and abounding in highly conventional symbols of romance (heart-shaped furniture and accessories, love poems hung on walls, etc.). As a working-class male respondent said that during these weekends, “everyone else around are also couples.” Although I did not solicit respondents’ opinions about such romantic resorts, “middle-class and upper-middle-class respondents would have mocked such “organized romantic weekends,” for one of the recurrent traits of their responses was disdain for “manufactured,” “cheap,” and “cliquéd” expressions of romance. This was made particularly clear in their reactions to the three greeting cards shown during the interview. A Hallmark card containing a love poem and an image of a sunset elicited reactions such as the following:

*Which of these three cards would you give your partner?*

Ah, well I hate these things, the first [card] certainly would not be that, I hate these things, they’re just so, they’re just trashy, they’re just these poems that someone writes, they’re a dime a dozen, they’re so meaningless, I’d never give anybody one of those. (Female editor, interview 48)

*Sappy? What is “sappy”?*

*Sappy. Sentimental. It’s like overkill, you know. I just find I have a hard time getting into it. I don’t even like the colors they have used.* (Female artist, interview 35)

Middle- and upper-middle-class respondents nearly unanimously described card 1 as “ugly,” “trashy,” “corny,” “nauseating,” “silly,” “sappy,” “cliquéd,” and “tacky.” Asked why they would not give such a card to their lover, people with the highest cultural competence used the same vocabulary that, according to communication scholar Larry Gross, is used to evaluate art. The card was “not original enough,” was “not creative,” was “stereotypical,” and showed poor “colors” or “design.” In Gross’s terms, respondents invoked values of originality, sincerity, effort, and creativity to express their disdain and bristled at the fact that “someone else would have written it for [them].”

*Which one of these cards would you pick?*

This one [card 3].

Why?

I think it looks nice. It’s Matisse, right? I liked it visually, it’s an attractive card. Also what I liked about it is that I could write what I wanted and be sort of the message I wanted it to be.

*What about the other two?*

Well, they’re both somebody else doing the talking for me which is not something [inaudible] as an idea. I think one should say what one has to say oneself, you know, having it written for you does not seem you’re really saying it to them. (Female artist, interview 13)

The criteria of originality and creativity invoked by middle-class respondents are viewed as aesthetic equivalents of “spontaneity,” “sincerity,” and “authenticity.” Because the Hallmark card uses highly conventional symbols of love, it is perceived to be insincere and exaggerated. The word “sentimental,” often used to mock this card, expresses the scorn for forms of expression that are both too conventional and too emotional. In keeping with this viewpoint, card 2 was often chosen as a “card they would give” because its humorous message ironically deflates the mass cultural clichés of romantic pathos. Scorn for convention and consumption is also scorn for emphatic expressions of emotion, and according to Bourdieu emotional distance characterizes the attitude of people with high cultural capital to aesthetic forms.

By contrast, for the least formally educated classes the Hallmark card chosen most frequently precisely because it is the most emotionally expressive and therefore the most “romantic.” Where middle- and upper-middle-class respondents made aesthetic evaluations, working-class respondents made emotional evaluations. Because of these criteria, they viewed card 3, an abstraction, as “meaningless.” “I think it’s very nice but it does not say anything about love. If I was giving my husband a
As a romantic present, would you prefer to get a rose with a poem or an expensive object? Neither of them is appealing. Why? Because roses are very declasse and only if the poem is nice and felt. If it is an expensive gift, it doesn’t really matter, if I like the design. There are a few things at Tiffany’s that I like but it has nothing to do with money. If I like the design and I think it’s pretty, then it can be five cents or five million dollars, I don’t care. (Female artist, interview 6)

This respondent simultaneously distanced herself from the emotional code attached to roses and from the material value of expensive gifts. Her double scorn has the main function of emphasizing the importance of her idiosyncratic sense of good taste (“if I like the design”). In a similar vein, a male Ph.D. student recounted his reaction to a poem written by a woman in love with him:

As a romantic gift, would you prefer to get a rose with a poem or an expensive object?

That’s a hard one. I was involved with a person who used to write me poems and send me notes all the time, and at the time I thought it was nice but also kind of raise my eyebrow at it, I mean this is cute and clever but maybe a little too cute. What do you mean?

Forced or formal. But then I was going through these things, I was going through my boxes and found those and realized that she really loved me. I hadn’t thought of that in those terms then, it was more of a game, more of a formalized sort of thing. (Interview 24)

The Hallmark card expresses forcefully what working-class people felt they could not otherwise express themselves. For example:

Which one of these cards would you give your partner?

This one

Number one.

I’ve given ‘em and I like those.

Why?

‘Cause they express how I really feel. Some cards express how you really feel inside and sometimes you can’t say that. I’ve given those out.

What about two and three? What do you think of them?

Two is okay, if you want to be comical, but, uh—

What about three?

It’s wild. I don’t like that style. That’s not me. (Female security officer, high school education, interview 37)

While for the upper-middle-class respondents the expressive sentimental-ity of the Hallmark card was “inauthentic,” “cheap,” and “manufactured,” for the working-class respondents the same card was the most authentic because it uncompromisingly expressed the full intensity of their feelings.

In extending the scope of this observation to romantic gifts in general, I found the same differences among respondents. When asked to choose between a rose with a poem and an expensive object, none of the working-class respondents would have answered the way this female artist did:

As a romantic present, would you prefer to get a rose with a poem or an expensive object?

Neither of them is appealing.

Why?

Because roses are very declasse and only if the poem is nice and felt. If it is an expensive gift, it doesn’t really matter, if I like the design. There are a few things at Tiffany’s that I like but it has nothing to do with money. If I like the design and I think it’s pretty, then it can be five cents or five million dollars, I don’t care. (Female artist, interview 6)

The raised eyebrow betrayed his sense of cultural distinction, activated even by someone else’s love. People with the highest cultural competence were the most likely to characterize roses and poems as “stereotypical,” “forced,” “declasse,” and thereby “inauthentic.” This man’s suspicion, although not typical of most middle-class answers, underscores that the attribute of “stereotypical” opens an emotional distance from manufactured representations of love and more generally from any conventional (in their view, hackneyed) expression of love. In contrast, this secretary’s explanation of her preference for the rose and the poem is typical of women working in the pink-collar sector: “That’s romantic, I like romance. If the poem was, uh, if he wrote the poem that would mean a lot to me” (interview 16).

Instead of viewing presents as opportunities to express one’s own good taste and creativity, she values them in terms of their ability to directly signify emotions. Compare this answer to what an upper-middle-class woman remembered as a very romantic gift:

One night we were walking together and we were by a storefront and they had models with plastic around them, sort of like a dress, and we were laughing that was a new style of dress and that was a very romantic night.
And on my birthday, it was about three weeks later, I opened this beautiful package and it was the plastic and he had gone to the store and asked them to please give him the plastic, that was very romantic.

What was romantic about it?

It was taking something that we did together, doing something creative to remind us of that and putting some effort and thought into that. (Female lawyer, interview 23)

This present stood out in her memory because it had no conventional meaning of love. Instead, its romantic meaning was created by the shared experience of a singular moment and by the effort, creativity, and originality of the giver. The emotions conveyed by this present were thus mixed with aesthetic criteria.

Such upper-middle-class, aesthetic romantic ethos insists on its own autonomy from clichéd or manufactured practices and images of romance. Let's imagine you wanted to have a romantic moment. What would this moment be like?

No!

Why not?

Because I think it varies with every person, I don't have one image of romance, it changes according to the person.

OK. Then give me several examples of romantic moments you have had with several people.

Being at the beach at night, anything by the beach, by the ocean, it's difficult for me to be specific about romantic.

Then don't be specific. I just want you to pull out from your memory some moments that were romantic to you.

By the beach at night, usually you are able to concentrate on the situation I am in as opposed to worrying about other things. . . .

When you say you can't think of a general definition of romance, does it mean—I mean, I want to understand if you are rejecting the idea of romance or if you are saying it is more specific.

I personally cannot define romance because it is too varied in my experience. Pictures like this [figures 1, 2, 3, and 4; see appendix 3] don't intimate romance, they intimate people posing. (Male artist, interview 25)

This man's first reaction was to deny that he had a single (read, stereotypical) image of romance. Rather, as he suggested, his images varied with the identity of his partners. However, when prompted to give examples of romance, he answered with one of the most conventional images of all, the beach at night. Although his representation of romance was as stereotyped as those of others, he felt compelled to mark a distance between it and himself, a strategy rarely encountered among the working-class respondents.

Let's listen to another voice, very similar to the previous one:

If you wanted to have a romantic moment with someone, what would this moment look like?

You know, I may be a very bad person for this survey just because in a way the idea of romanticness is already to me sort of embedded in a prejudicial thing. To me, when something is moving or something involving love or something involving sex or anything, whatever it is, it is not something that I have an image of before it occurs. It is something special enough that you know if you plan it in a way, I mean the whole idea of "let's have a romantic dinner like candles and blah, blah, blah," that's never what happens. I mean it can be a time where you are with somebody in any kind of situation, it can be in an incredibly unromantic, traditionally unromantic setting, what makes it romantic for me is the interaction with the other person and the combination of moods you are in and things that happen, it is not something I would construct. (Female artist, interview 13)

This quote condenses many of the practices of distinction characteristic of the most culturally competent respondents. Prefacing her answer with "I may be a bad person for this survey," she singled herself out from the mass of people who are "good for the survey." She rejected the idea that romance can follow a script that she herself has not written, thereby affirming her ability to improvise, to create new versions of romance in a variety of situations. Similarly, a young Ph.D. student prefaced his response with "I pursue romance in a nontraditional sense." Another respondent of the same socioeconomic category suggested that "romance is this bullshit Park Avenue restaurant, wine and roses and flowers type of concept." The most educated classes vehemently asserted their distance from stereotypes of romance, thus affirming the autonomy of their thought from commercial influence ("no one dictates to me what to think"), the validity of their representations ("I am not as mystified as others are"), the originality of their self ("they all follow the same model, I am original"), their creativity ("I can create my own scenarios"), and the authenticity of their feelings ("Their feelings are manufactured, mine are authentic"). These ideas are inscribed within larger ideological practices of cultural specialists, who view themselves as modern iconoclasts.
who can dispel the mystifications that baffle others. More than any other class, educated, upper-middle-class people cultivate the "third person" effect, or the belief that others ("they") are victims of deficiencies from which they themselves are exempt.

These findings confirm Bourdieu’s observations that popular classes tend to identify emotionally and in a participatory mode with cultural products, while the most educated classes cultivate distance, either by disparaging cultural products or by focusing on their formal, aesthetic features. Upper-middle and, to a lesser extent, middle-class respondents valued highly autonomous and creative self-expression independent of the props provided by the market. More exactly, while they held as legitimate the "creative manipulation" of commodities (furniture, clothing) for expressing a genuine but hidden self, they spurn the use of mass-marketed commodities when unmediated by an original "self."

Romance seems to me something where you take your time and create something. When you are not creating something and you are just living your daily life, it’s not romantic.

When you are living your daily life.

Yeah, when you just day in and day out—but there is a certain fun living in New York, having a nice place, coming home. If you didn’t go out, if you didn’t put anything romantic in it, if you didn’t make these moments where you both realize how much one loves another, how attracted you are to another, then I think you become unattractive to that person and they become unattractive to you. (Female lawyer, interview 23)

A romantic moment must express not only one’s personal creativity but also one’s total inner being. Asked why he would prefer staying home to going out, the orchestra conductor replied, “Because I could create an environment that I like, with the right music and the right, you know. . . . In my ideal, in my fantasy, my home would express myself, and it would be a certain environment” (interview 33). He described at length how he would arrange background music, food, and clothes to create a romantic atmosphere. It is difficult to know whether in actuality working-class people indeed spend less time and effort to “create” their romantic moments, but clearly, for middle- and upper-middle-class respondents, a romantic atmosphere results from an expressive and individualistic conception of the self.

The ethos of spontaneity echoes that of creativity. Listen, for example, to two men relate how they would go about having a romantic moment. First, an investment banker: “Have dinner in a real romantic restaurant. On the spur of the moment pick up a flight and go to the South of France. Something like that” (interview 4). An actor: “I suppose it would involve a certain amount of surprise and spontaneity. . . . It might involve, ‘let’s get in the car and drive to the beach and have a picnic’; in the middle of dinner say ‘let’s go away for the weekend,’ that kind of element of spontaneity” (interview 33). Male working-class respondents never referred to spontaneity in this fashion. While upper-middle-class men easily articulated this ideal of spontaneity, it was not self-consciously spelled out by working-class men. But even if working-class men and women never referred to the value of spontaneity, they were not necessarily any less spontaneous about their feelings. Rather, such spontaneity presupposes availability of and total control over one’s time and money, as indicated by a male electrician.

What do you think are the consequences, if any, on romantic relationships of having a lot of money?

Actually, I’d love to have a lot of money, but [laughs] I don’t think, uh—

Do you think it would change anything in your relationships to have a lot of money?

Well, I’d be able to do a lot more things than I do now.

Like what, for example?

I’d love to go to Jamaica, love to go to Hawaii, love to go to Japan, love to say to somebody, “Pack your clothes. Let’s go. We’re going for a weekend or we’re going for a week.” Something like this. If I had the money, I’d love to. (Interview 36)

For this man, money meant the ability not only to travel but to do it on the spur of the moment. The ideal of spontaneity was rooted in and made possible by objective resources of time and money.

Class differences were apparent as well in the interview situation itself. Working-class respondents were hesitant and sometimes reluctant to answer my questions, whereas upper-middle-class respondents, both men and women, talked at great length. The average length of a working-class interview was one hour; for middle-class and upper-middle class respondents, interviews frequently lasted over two hours. Working-class people gave short and matter-of-fact answers; the tone of middle and upper-middle-class answers was chatty, light, and often confidential.
Part of the working-class resistance to the interview stemmed from their feelings of incompetence. They answered for example, “That’s a hard question,” “You’re taxing my mind,” “I don’t really know,” “I don’t have the words for it.” On the other hand, if and when middle- and upper-middle-class respondents resisted the interview, it was because they felt too competent. They reacted to the props used during the interview with the same scorn that they expressed for manufactured romantic objects in general.

You said before you don’t like any of the stories [see chapter 5 for the stories], but still, I was wondering if you can say which one of the stories you like best.

Let’s skip that question.

I would prefer not to, if you don’t object to it too much.

I am afraid we have to. Because I am an art reader and I write rather well. It would be very difficult to develop any good story out of any of these stories. It would be, I suppose, a sort of Harlequin novel.

You see, none of these stories has by any means any ambition or pretension to be what you call a “good” story. It is not supposed to be aesthetic. In each story, there is a different ending. Here people fall in love immediately, here it takes them more time, here they meet through their parents. The style is dry because it has to be readable by everybody. I am simply interested in how you interpret these stories. (Interview 6)

This interview with a well-established New York artist condensed the scorn that often accompanies the cultivation of “distinction” characteristic of the highest segments of artistic bohemia. Another respondent also expressed this scorn in a more subtle form:

_Which picture do you find the most romantic?

_In my terms of romance?

_Yes.

_These are very loaded pictures. I have a little trouble because I see them all cliché. So, in a way I have a hard time relating to them, as identifying with them because they look so constructed by somebody’s ideas. I mean they are from advertising but you know that they’re all alike ...

_Because to me they are like another kind of Hallmark cards and they are very much keyed into fashion. This one a stereotype of sensitivity and married couple, so I don’t really relate to them.

_Do you know more specifically what you find clichéd in them?

_Actually, when I look at this one, for example [figure 1], that one is the least extreme, I suppose all of them in some ways but you know for some reason I can’t help seeing as someone who has done this photograph to appeal to a group of people who would be maybe more mature and going out to dinner. I keep thinking of the person making the photograph rather than, I am blocked identifying with them.

_Thus, this is the cliché of what?

_Um, married couple going out to dinner, you know, family life is not excluded from this image. (Female artist, interview 13)

This interviewee also refused the terms set by the interview and rejected the photographs on the grounds that they were commercially and institutionally manufactured and thereby not even worth reacting to.

Several studies have argued that “creativity” and originality are particularly prized by the middle- and upper-middle-class, but why? Bourdieu would argue that these values actually depend on cultural capital, in a more or less explicit fashion. When asked why he would not choose card 1 (the Hallmark card), a respondent put the point bluntly: “Because I am an educated person, I have my own words. I wouldn’t take somebody else’s” (male university professor, interview 1]. For this man, writing a love note demanded the same verbal facility as succeeding in college does: a cultivation of “personal” tastes and opinions and an ability to articulate them clearly and effectively. Only someone comfortable with verbal self-expression will feel at ease with the ethos of creativity advocated by upper-middle-class respondents.

In contrast, in the course of their socialization, working-class people have been led to consider such verbal competence as outside of the reach of their capacity and identity. Not having attended college, they are less familiar with the formal exercise of self-expression, and they viewed Hallmark cards as useful aids for overcoming difficulties in expressing love. As a working-class man said, “I have the feelings, but I don’t have the words for it.” This does not mean that working-class respondents were less competent at expressing love than their upper-middle-class counterparts. It does mean, however, that working-class people perceived themselves as incompetent in domains traditionally related to school performance. Because romance is culturally constructed as an essentially linguistic form of expression, the feeling of linguistic incompetence spills over into the domain of romance.

The class differences displayed in romantic practice parallel not only differences in education but differences in work as well. Not only
do upper-middle-class jobs often require a mastery of grammar and vocabulary, these jobs are also likely to require creativity and autonomy. Working-class jobs, on the other hand, are less likely to engage linguistic skills or the autonomous and creative self. This would suggest a more straightforward relationship between the sphere of work and that of romance than has usually been assumed.

The notion of cultural capital has recently come under criticism by American sociologists who argue that it is problematic to illuminate the reproduction of inequalities in American society because in American society, high culture is not as valued as it is in Europe, France in particular. My own findings do not support these critiques. Although in my respondents' answers cultural capital does not always take the straightforward form of "high" culture, as is more likely to be true in Europe, abilities such as choosing a tasteful greeting card, writing a love note in clear but moving prose, carrying on an "intelligent" conversation, avoiding clichés, and so on are equally forms of cultural capital, ones that appear almost exclusively in the romantic practices of people who have earned degrees beyond the college level, professionals as well as cultural specialists. Although it is difficult to say just how central these forms of distinction are, it remains that middle-class and upper-middle-class respondents, women in particular, are receptive to such ephemistic expressions of cultural taste, which they interpret as manifestations of romance.

The greater attention they pay to individual "taste" and self-expression might imply, on the surface, that middle-class respondents are less dependent on the industry of romantic culture than working-class respondents. However, although middle-class and, especially, upper-middle-class people often derided commercialization, I found that not only were they avid consumers of romantic commodities but also they were likely to experience the stereotypical romantic moments they otherwise often deride. For example, a university professor with an income above $70,000 suggested that "a romantic night would be getting dressed up and going out, I guess champagne always makes it more romantic, coming back and being together and doing something intimate at home, after we went out" (interview 1). Describing a romantic evening with her husband the day before the interview, a female lawyer with a combined income over $100,000 said, "We had a really romantic afternoon yesterday, we went to see a movie, New York Stories, we came back in a cab, we came home, and I made champagne cocktails, and we had the champagne and we made love and we had dinner and we watched a video and we just stayed home together" (interview 23). Dressing up, drinking champagne cocktails, riding in a taxi, taking a long time (afternoon and evening) during a "normal" week to engage in leisurely and intimate activities require relatively large amounts of time and money and full participation in the market of luxuries.

Class differences go beyond sheer expense, however, for working-class experiences of romance seem much less dependent on commodities:

Can you give me an example of an actual romantic moment you have had?
Recently, someone came over to have dinner. That was very romantic.

What was romantic about it?
I was happy to see her. It couldn't be enough to prepare for the meeting. We talked about what she was doing. (Male private investigator, interview 22).

Can you describe an actual romantic moment you have experienced?
Well, we were at Han's Point and there's a really, really—ah, it was the Fourth of July, ah, fireworks and everything, just, you know, we were really together. I don't know. It just came on me in impulse.

What was romantic about that moment?
We were just close together, real close, I guess, it just, it looked like it was coming right at us.

You mean the fireworks?
Yeah, just—you know, he just grabbed me real close and it just felt really warm at that time. (Female security officer, interview 37)

Can you give me an example of an actual romantic moment?
This library [in a] law office where she worked as a secretary brings one to mind, with a coworker putting up books and setting things up and organizing and touching hands, something like that to me would be very romantic. (Female secretary, interview 18)

What was a romantic moment you have experienced?
I was walking on the street and he came behind me and he said "Hi, it's me!" and he held my hand, it was intimate, it was just like no one was around even though it was a busy street, there was like no one existed. (Female police officer, interview 21)

For these people (only one of whom was educated two years beyond high school), romance was grounded in physical and emotional intimacy...
from "romantic" props. Compare the simple response cited above of the working-class man who found it romantic that "recently someone came over to have dinner," with that of a college-educated movie distributor: "I remember once, some years ago, just off the top of my head, having dinner with a young woman in a sushi restaurant and I found that very—she had never eaten sushi before and, ah, sort of the, for the first time experienced how sensual that food can be, because it's raw flesh, I suppose, ultimately. I remember very much enjoying that, that moment, that extended moment of sharing that food, and there is a real sort of physical connection, you know, the food between us, and that sort of thing" (interview 34).

Middle- and upper-middle-class respondents dwelled much more on the physical, material, and atmospheric components of the romantic moment than did working-class respondents, who rarely mentioned the role played by beautiful, expensive, or rare objects in their romantic moments.20 Furthermore, middle- and upper-middle-class respondents not only tended to make greater use of commodities, and of expensive commodities, in romance, but also tended much more than members of the working class to spiritualize commodities, making them the carriers of romantic atmosphere and, at times, of their feelings as well.

The commodity-centered character of the upper-middle-class romantic experience goes hand-in-hand with the fact that this experience is more stereotypical than that of the working class, that is, it corresponds more closely to the clichés codified by mass culture. This can be seen again in the kind of travel associated with romance. While more than half of the middle-class respondents mentioned a romantic moment in a foreign country or in some other faraway place, working-class people tended to escape from their urban environment by going to parks (like Hane's Point in Washington, D.C.) or to places less than a day away by automobile (like New Hope or the Poconos from Philadelphia). One reason for this difference is rather straightforward: working-class respondents have little surplus income and time to go on vacations in foreign countries. Tourism and the paraphernalia of monuments and prepackaged sites occupied a central place in the romantic memories of middle- and upper-middle-class respondents:

What was a very romantic moment you have experienced?

It has been a while, um, probably when I was traveling with someone through Italy and we were at the Spanish Steps in Rome. The moon was out, we bought some wine, and we sat on the steps. We were a little older, everybody around was students, and I started to sing, I was an opera singer, and a whole group came and surrounded me, was applauding me. When they left, it was just the two of us, it was a very special moment, a very special feeling. (Male investment banker, interview 4)

This answer evokes ready-made images of romance that have been incessantly conveyed through the clichés of Hollywood cinema and advertising. Consider another example: "Finally, one evening in Paris, it has snowed, we walked for a long time, we ended up on the Eiffel Tower and we kissed each other, it was the first night I ever was with anyone and because for so long I had dreamed about that, it was wonderful" (male orchestra conductor, interview 33). This scene evokes the familiar imagery of romance we examined in chapter 3: Paris, for Americans the exotic, romantic city par excellence (just as the Eiffel Tower is the symbol par excellence of Paris), the "special" atmosphere of nighttime and snow. Both memories mix exotic travel settings, symbols of distinction, and commodities.

In my interviews, the very "scripted" character of the scenes evoked by upper-middle-class respondents was readily discernible. This is not surprising since the ideas and ideals at work in mass culture usually represent the practices, values, and interests of the upper segments of society. What makes the finding noteworthy is that the upper-middle-class romantic discourses were explicitly geared against the mass cultural and stereotypical practices of romance. The same respondents who most vocally rejected the commercial and codified character of romance were also those who reported the most stereotypical and the most deeply market-based practices of romance. As Mike Featherstone puts it, "The wealthy have always been able to display style by demassifying and individualizing commodities."21

LOVE AND SYMBOLIC DOMINATION

These findings still leave unanswered the question at the heart of this chapter: do romantic practices follow a logic of class domination? As one working-class man in my sample asked rhetorically, "So you give a dozen flowers, instead of one, so what difference does it make?" He suggests to sociologists that even if we can demonstrate that romantic practices differ along dimensions of income, education, or both, we cannot yet claim that certain groups are at a disadvantage when experiencing romance. In other words, the problem is to determine whether
and how we can make the transition, so often taken for granted, from an analysis of patterns of consumption to a sociology of "class domination." The argument about cultural domination makes several distinct claims: (1) cultural practices differ along class lines; (2) the dominated classes define and posit their own cultural practices in reference to upper-class definitions of romance; (3) the cultural standards adopted by the dominated groups reflect the particular positions and interests of the dominant classes; and (4) because they recognize as legitimate cultural practices that in effect exclude them, the culture of dominated groups is a culture "by default," deprived of a positive content of its own.22 The remainder of this chapter, then, will be concerned with questions raised by the hypothesis of cultural deprivation. Are the lower segments of society romantically less competent than their upper-class counterparts? Is the standard middle-class formula the only legitimate formula of romance?

From my interview data, I contend that the commercial formula of romance is easily accessed and experienced by the working class and the middle class when both groups are dating. Even if choices of consumption remain different, these differences have no consequences for the lovers' ability to "have a good time together," to express and live their love. It is when people get married that the qualitative romantic experiences of the two groups start to diverge significantly. Following Sci-towsky, one may say that once people start sharing daily life, they move from an intense feeling to a comfortable one, and that the phenomenology of their love changes: the challenge of the dating period is to experience intensity and to bring this intensity to the "comfort" of intimacy; on the other hand, during marriage, the problem is to bring a comfortable, familiar and sometimes dull relationship to the renewed experience of intensity.23 Although my working-class and upper-middle-class respondents coped equally well with the first challenge, the former seem definitely more ill-equipped to cope with the problem of creating intensity within the daily bond of marriage. It is precisely at this point, that is, where intensity must be voluntarily and skillfully created, that differences of income, leisure resources, and education play an important role in the political economy of love. A working-class woman, a secretary, recalled from her early days of dating, "We would do many things, we would go to the movies, flea markets, we used to rummage a lot, we would travel together. . . . We traveled a bit together, out to dinner, spend a lot of time with friends" (interview r6). A working-class homemaker had similar memories:

Can you remember a romantic moment [in your relationship with your husband]?

I would drive to his house—this is back to the gasoline crisis and we would drive together to work. Naturally, he was always dressed with a shirt and tie. This particular day he had no tie and his shirt open, and there was, I thought, wow! It seemed like Robert Redford walking in the street, like that feeling when you see somebody you like in a movie. Anyway, there was that time when we went down to the shore, no, I was sick, scrap that time. It must have been when we spent the weekend together, just spend the weekend together, it was just that spending time together.

Did you used to spend time together?

Yes we spent a lot of time together.

What would you do?

Go shopping, or look at things, go to movies maybe, a lot of times at home, maybe that's what we did, spend time together, all that starts falling apart when kids come along, that messes up your schedule. (Interview 9)

In the dating situation, middle-class standards of romance do not put working-class people at a disadvantage and do not create an incompetence. Having neither children nor mortgage, the dating working-class couple has the surplus income and time to engage in inexpensive leisure pursuits. Even if participation in the realm of leisure is more limited for the working class than for the middle or upper middle class, this does not affect the quality and intensity of their romantic feelings. In the dating situation, the need for intensity is met "naturally" by the beginning stages of love; the couple is thereby functionally less dependent on the leisure market to satisfy this need. Furthermore, working-class respondents' autobiographical accounts indicated that they were more likely to fall in love intensely and quickly than their middle- or upper-middle-class counterparts, who by contrast often seemed to move more slowly and cautiously. One possible reason for this difference is that, being less worried about social mobility than their middle- and upper-middle-class counterparts, working-class respondents have less at stake in falling in "love at first sight" and are less likely to conceive of their bonds in rationalized terms.

At the beginning of a relationship, then, the frequency, object, and mode of consumption have little bearing on the competence necessary to feel romance. From my respondents' accounts, nothing indicates that differences in income or education hampered their ability to form exciting or interesting romantic bonds. This implies that we cannot
deduce class domination or exclusion from class consumption: while in the dating situation, different patterns of romantic consumption do not interfere with the lived experience of love; these patterns become obstacles to love only within the framework of the daily life of those who have the least resources to carry on the leisure-based formula of romance.

When romance becomes integrated within the daily life-world and lifestyle of people, that is, when its intensity fades away and it no longer occupies the spare time of the couple, it becomes intertwined with the inequalities and lack of resources inherent to working-class lives. These inequalities take two forms: (1) Married working-class people practice the commercial romantic formula significantly less often do than their upper-middle-class counterparts, who, even after marriage, continue to be full members of the leisure market. (2) The working class and the upper-middle class have different patterns of romantic communication: while upper-middle-class people share many forms of companionate leisure (which is itself related to their broader cultural habitus), working-class men and women communicate less than their middle- and upper-middle-class counterparts.

CLASS, ROMANCE, AND THE STRUCTURE OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Frequency marks another class difference in romance. In my interviews, romantic memories were typically more distant in time for working-class than for upper-middle-class respondents. For example, a working-class man cited an experience “twelve years ago,” whereas upper-middle-class respondents referred to romantic moments that had taken place a few days or even the day before the interview. None of the working-class respondents said that they had had a romantic evening in the week prior to the interview. In fact, many elements of their responses indicated that the working-class people struggled much more than upper-middle-class respondents to experience romance in their daily lives. The most obvious explanation for this is shortage of money.

When asked to reflect on the “problems that people in general encounter in their relationships,” the only people in the sample who mentioned lack of money came from the ranks of the working class.

You need money to survive, the more money you have, the easier...it is to get along in life. Money problems can be a real hardship on marriage.

Do you think that love alone can make a couple happy?

Initially yes, but after a relationship, no. It’s not reality. You have to have money.

Why!

Because it allows you to have, to do this extraspecial thing that keeps the love going. Like going to dinner together, going out, going anywhere together, possibly taking a trip, only the two of you, it all takes money to do that. Aside from that, just to be able to get through your monthly payments, your bills, you’re paying for your apartment and whatever it may be, without worrying. It all helps make things easy.

If you had been richer, do you think this would have changed your relationships?

I think we have less stress in our relationships, if we had more money. (Female secretary, interview 16)

In 1974, Andrew Levison observed that despite their apparent prosperity, working-class people are caught in difficult financial struggles because, after paying for the mortgage, the car, and other expenses, there is not much surplus income for leisure: “Many workers, in the elation of the first days after their honeymoon, lock themselves into a lifetime of debt when they buy a house and furniture to add on the payments they are already making on their car. From then on, their freedom to travel, or to try a new job, or just engage in a range of activities outside work is taken from them by the structure of debt in which they are enmeshed.”

This is undoubtedly even more the case today because of the progressive erosion of real income that has characterized the last decade. As Collins and Coltrane put it, for working-class people “the most serious source of unhappiness...is simply economic pressure.” Such pressure is particularly acute during the first years of marriage, precisely during the transition from steady dating to a settled married life.

By contrast, only when probed did middle-class and upper-middle-class respondents admit that lack of money could be—thetheoretically—a problem. Rarely did they spontaneously refer to it as a concrete problem in their own relationships or even in those of people they knew. Instead, they framed problems in relationships in psychological or moral categories pertaining to the self, typically in terms of the “generosity” or “authenticity” of their feelings. For example, the male orchestra conductor cited, as “the problems most people encounter in their relationships, “Having illusions about the other one. And not accepting the other one’s feelings and judging the other one’s feelings instead of trying to accept them” (interview 33). Contrast this answer...
with the following response from a janitor: “The only problems that I have ever had is financial problems. . . . That causes problems. That’s why I say if two people really love each other, you really get through these problems. And maybe that’s why we both get along, because money doesn’t really mean that much to us. If you have it, it’s fine, if you have enough to survive, it’s fine, but it’s not really important” (interview 40). This man denied and at the same time acknowledged the effects of money on his marriage.

When asked to talk generally about their romantic lives, working-class people rarely referred to money-related difficulties, instead characterizing their lives as uncondusive to romance. However, asked to talk more specifically about the difficulties they had encountered in their relationships or to reflect on the role of money in romantic relationships, working-class answers differed from those of the upper-middle-class. A secretary with a high-school education thought that, for “most people,”

- the number one problem is money. Maybe the man doesn’t make enough money to give the girl what she wants or take her out as many times as she wants and the girl can resent that. Or jealousy, one partner is more successful than the other or. . . . [inaudible] about “we should do this fifty-fifty,” there is a lot of fights about that, I think. Money is the biggest problem.

Was this also your problem?
Yes, it was. (Interview 18)

A man with a high-school education and a working-class background, but who was upwardly mobile, gave the following response:

Do you think that money is important for love?
Yes. Everybody says if you really love somebody, your money doesn’t matter. You can be poor and all that. But I’ve seen too much. I’ve seen money, or rather the lack of money, drive families apart, because if you love somebody but you don’t have any money, then you’re spending all your time working, trying to get money, and it causes resentment and they’re not going to be in the greatest mood if you don’t have the kind of food they want. They can’t spend that kind of time on their relationship because you’ve got to worry about the money. So it caused a lot of stress and problems and worries and all that. . . . But if you have money, I am sure that gives you the time, you can be with the person as much as you want, spend the kind of time you want, not time working, but time getting to know each other and having fun with each other and concentrating on the relationship. So money definitely plays an important role. (Male boxer, interview 15)

Money was seen to affect romance in two ways: through the pressures produced by daily worries about bread-and-butter issues and by creating stress and competition between working-class men and women. But as indicated in the quote above, the importance of money was seen to lie not only in the commodities it could buy but also in the leisure time it made available.28

The different role attributed to money by different social groups was also apparent in the respondents’ interpretations of story 3: the only people who dismissed this story as “boring,” “dull,” “mediocre,” or too “calculated” and “yuppieish” were middle- and, especially, upper-middle-class respondents. Working-class respondents typically liked the third story because they interpreted it as a love story with “financial security.” The janitor, for example, thought that “this couple has probably a better chance than the other two.”

Why?
Well, they had more time to know each other, and they both seemed secure in what they were doing. Because I think, today in the world situation, you have to have some kind of security to make a marriage work.

Do you think they are right to wait for the promotion?
I don’t know, I guess so, I guess today maybe I would have. In the world economy, maybe to be a little more secure. You don’t have any kind of security today. That’s hard and that creates problems. (Interview 40)

By contrast, upper-middle-class respondents criticized the “calculated” aspect of the story in the name of an ethos of disinterestedness and spontaneity. The more one is removed from material necessity, it appears, the more one is likely to denounce calculation and the struggle for security in romantic bonds.

When middle-class respondents talked about their shortages of money, they reverted to a vision close to that of the working class, but with many hedges. For example, a music conductor who had lived in Paris for a few years—unemployed—reflected on the financial difficulties that arose in his relationship with a French woman there:

Do you feel that money is important for love?
Surprisingly, I do.

Why surprisingly?
Because I am an artist and artists are supposed to be very idealist. Only love exists.
Artists are supposed to be idealists.

Artists are supposed to be so idealistic that love is the only important thing. Money is horrible. I think that money itself is not important, and it's not a reason to, to love someone, but I think money is important, is important in that without it you can't really do what you want to do, you can't really express, it's very hard to express what you have inside and this I have experienced, being in a relationship and not having money, you automatically, there is an imbalance. You can't do things you would like to do, there is an inequality.

Did she have money?
Yes, she didn't have a lot, but she had money.

What kind of things did you want to do that you couldn't?
First, there is the problem, each time we went out there was a problem, we were always very careful, which I never liked, because that's not the way I am. I would like to just be, just not worry about that. I like inviting people to do things, like get little gifts to someone, if I see something that I like I like to get it. That's a problem, living with someone and not being able to pull my share. I think that in that way money is important. (Interview 33)

This man experienced the lack of money as a double source of problems: not only did it affect his sense of self-worth (he did not fulfill his alleged role of provider), but it also prevented the couple from engaging in enjoyable leisure pursuits. Despite his—admittedly temporary—experience of strained economic circumstances, this man repeated the ritual middle-class expression of repugnance to money ("money is horrible"), an aversion never expressed by working-class respondents.

But even when the romantic interchange did not demand large expenditures of money or time and took place inside the home, the romantic practices of married working-class and upper-middle-class respondents differed a great deal. Let us listen to two voices, the first of a working-class homemaker:

What would you do if you wanted to have a romantic evening?
I think that a romantic evening at this point in my life would be simply going out. We are talking about someone who has been married fourteen years and has two kids and... because my husband and I have been married so many years, just going out, going to dinner, or even going to a movie and stopping at the [inaudible] to do something, that would be romantic. It would have to be without worrying about coming home at a certain time... I am just saying there is no room to even think about being romantic, you know what I mean? Our lives are not like they are on television. (Interview 9)

The second belongs to a successful female lawyer, married and well educated:

[After describing a romantic restaurant.] There are different kinds of romantic evenings.

What, for example?
You just decide that you are going to make love that night and you do nothing but just make love, that would be a different kind of evening, or we would sit together and look at old photographs and talk about what happened a few years ago. That would be romantic.

Do you often have romantic moments like that?
Yes, I think so.

You mean, you devote a lot of time to it?
Well, I try to. I think we both get the urge for it, after we work so hard and we come home and you are tired during the week. But the weekends or when we are on vacation or even some weeknights when we get home early, we try to do something nice, romantic together, kind of quiet, the two of us and loving. (Interview 23)

Romance was not experienced as frequently by the working-class woman as by the upper-middle-class one. Are these differences due to the length of her marriage and the presence of children, or are there other reasons? As we will see, the differences are related to their leisure and financial resources as well as to the mode of interaction between wife and husband, that is, in the respective role they assume and their patterns of communication.

Several married working-class women in the sample suggested that the home was not a romantic place because of the burden of domestic chores. For these women, who could not afford outside help and whose husbands were less likely to help, the house was more work than for upper-middle-class women, who were more often able to pay for outside help and also were more likely to be married to men who shared domestic duties. Moreover, as Randall Collins argues, working-class women invest a particularly high amount of time in domestic labor because a neat and clean home is a source of status.

Do you often have [romantic] moments like that?
Not often enough, when we have children, it changes romance in marriage.

In what way?
Well, you don't have the time, you're too preoccupied taking care of your family to have a lot of time for romance. There is always some type of romance in a good marriage but you don't get the time to go to the beach just the two of you, which would be an ideal situation. (Interview 16)

For this woman, time more than money deprived her of the more frequent romantic moments enjoyed by the upper-middle-class women interviewed.

One could argue that, more than either money or time, children are the real obstacle to a frequent experience of romance. David Halle, for example, has shown convincingly that the leisure activities of the working-class man are significantly curtailed when he marries and has children, but that these patterns change again when the working-class couple has finished taking care of children. Thus, we should not "mistak[e] one stage in the life cycle, a stage when leisure is particularly restricted, for the essence of leisure among the working-class." 31 This view implies that the presence of children, more than class, accounts for the fact that working-class people rarely experience romance. Halle's sensible argument explains to a great extent the differences in leisure and romance found in my study, but it does not account for two other findings. First, the married upper-middle-class respondents who had children did not seem hampered by them in their pursuit of romance, as working-class couples often were. Middle- and upper-middle-class women who had children and worked outside the home (most of the working-class mothers stayed at home) usually did not mention the presence of children as a hindrance to romance. When they did acknowledge that children made romance more difficult, these women maintained that romance was always possible "if one puts enough time and effort into a relationship," by focusing on weekends, for example, or making "a special effort." Transferring the work ethic into their personal relationships, they viewed the creation of romance as under their control, a result of willed and skilled effort.32 Thus, lack of leisure time is only partly explained by the presence of children.

The other finding is that even romantic moments demanding little leisure time were reported significantly less frequently by working-class respondents than by upper-middle-class respondents. Contrast, for example, the responses of working-class women cited above with the following one from an about-to-be-married, upper-middle-class man:

So you think that romance lasts after marriage?

Obviously, I don't have marriage experience, but from experience of going out with someone for a long time, it can last if you keep it alive. But again,

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if you do things once in a while that you consider very romantic, you can keep it going.

How would you keep it alive?

That was an example of a romantic evening [dressing up, drinking champagne and going out to a formal dance], so by making sure you get dressed up even though sort of no courting anymore, make sure you do things out of the ordinary once in a while. (Male university professor, interview 1)

As this answer shows, the ability to "rekindle" (as the women's magazines put it) moments of passion by creating the conditions for romantic rituals is grounded in the middle-class belief that routine is not in- evitable but can be avoided by skill and effort. The middle-class ideal of communication also shows how the ability to maintain romance in daily life depends on one's class ethos. As we have seen, people with higher cultural capital tend to place a higher value on verbal communication in relationships, and this affects the experience of intimacy.

My husband and I had read something, by the time you are married x number of years, you say only y number of words, maybe something like fifteen or twenty, and I said, "That would never happen." It happens, it happens.

Is it good or bad?

It forces you sometimes to stop and say, "You wanna talk?" When a question pops into your head, you just know the answer. . . If there are things in his work, or the people he works with, he does not talk about them. I would be more inclined to talk about the people that I know, let's say that are volunteering at school, I would be more inclined to say, "Oh! So and so did such and such," you know, that sort of thing, and I am not going to say it just to keep the conversation going but because it's my life. His work is his life. He does not come home and tell me about the problems that they had, something with another department, because that's nice, he knows I [inaudible] care. He knows he does not need to talk about it. If he wants to talk about specific people or specific events or something that happened at work, that's different, you know, but it depends, what interests me, what interests him, and if what interests me doesn't interest him, and there are so many things that don't—I am very careful about choosing my words—so therefore what I am saying is that it would be a great put-off to him if I started talking about the other things that I do. (Homemaker, interview 9)

Asked if she found it romantic just to talk with her partner, another working-class woman said, "At times I could, but my husband is really
not a good talker. He is not a talker at all. There have been times when we have talked and it was a romantic talk but that does not happen very often at all" (secretary, interview 16). For working-class respondents, "communication" is a means to share information in order to fix problems. For upper-middle-class respondents, it intensifies their bond not only through the resolution of conflicts but by the exchange of ideas and tastes and the avowal of emotion.

Furthermore, this class difference was more pronounced for men than for women in my sample. While in upper-middle-class couples, both men and women placed a high value on "talking," among the working-class couples it was only women who did so (without, however, the stress on debating and intellectual challenge). For example, in response to a question about his most memorable romantic experience, a working-class man answered:

I don’t know how I would start it. As far as— I don’t know how I would start it. I tended bars years and years ago, and a nice French girl, I spent, I don’t know how to describe. I don’t know, it was a very passionate woman, it’s all I could say. It was very nice experience because it was very romantic, winter, and we really did a lot of things together. I don’t know how to put it into words. But it was a very nice thing.

Can you describe the feeling of being in love?

That’s hard to put into words. I guess when you really love someone it’s a nice feeling, because they’re always there for you. When it’s both ways. It’s nice to know no matter what you do, you’re going to have somebody there to back you up no matter what you do. To me love is a two-way street. You can overcome everything if you love somebody no matter what, it always works out. To me. (Janitor, interview 40)

This man’s difficulty expressing himself, his own perception that “he does not have the words for it,” contrasts with the verbal facility of upper-middle-class respondents, who talked with an obvious ease, dwelling at length on various shades of feeling.33 The gender gap in communication is much wider for the working class than it is for the upper middle class. In his update of the study of Middletown, Theodore Caplow confirms these findings (without, however, elaborating on them). He observes that in the late sixties and seventies there was an upsurge of advice literature advocating “communication” in marriage. Despite these models, however, working-class couples still were having difficulties communicating with each other.34 And in her study of working-class marriage, Lillian Rubin concluded that “the role segregation and the consequent widely divergent socialization patterns for women and men become clearly dysfunctional. And it is among the working class that such segregation has been more profound.”35 In the 1992 reissue of her study, she found that this had not changed. The following exchange from my interviews illustrates this difficulty:

Do you often have romantic talks with your wife?

No. Very rarely.

Why? Do you want them?

Yes, but I have to force myself to it.

Why?

Because I like to keep a lot of distance to myself, you know, you have to take these things out of me. I keep a lot of things inside me. It builds up until [inaudible], sometimes I want to, sometimes I don’t, so it’s like something in the way that is stopping me.

So you don’t like to talk about your feelings?

Right, I keep them inside me.

Most men around you, do you think they are romantic or not?

Around me? Naaaaah!

How do you know they are not romantic?

They just seem like they joke a lot.

Joke about what?

Anything, they just joke. Jokers.

They joke about their wives?

They just joke, jokers. When you joke like this every day, you’re just not yourself.

So why do you joke?

Just to make friends, to be with more friends and to be with, uh, and to get your bad feelings out, like sometimes you get bad feelings and you just joke and you just take it away, you know. If you joke with your friends, it takes that moment [away] for a while, but it comes back after you joke. (Male supermarket worker, interview 32)

As this man suggested, the reluctance of working-class men to express their emotions is an extension of their patterns of communication in the workplace. The “jokes” are ways of venting indirectly feelings that, if expressed directly, might make them seem emotional and therefore weak.
The nature of most blue-collar work can further deprive men of the opportunity or resources to engage in romance. An extreme illustration of this was provided by one of my male respondents who explained why he divorced his wife:

I had a terrible job, I had to work sometimes twelve hours a day.

*What were you doing?*

I was lugging pigs, carrying pigs on Fourteenth Street. The idea was, I was supposed to learn and make money, but it was damaging the relationship, then I quit. But I think it's more important, you can always get a job, it's a hard thing to talk about.

*When you say it was damaging the relationship, what do you mean?*

Well, if you are working all these hours, sometimes you can't speak, you just collapse, and if the person wants some romance perhaps you are practically unconscious, it's not conducive to nurturing a romantic situation.

(Private investigator, interview 22)

As this example potently illustrates, the sheer physical exhaustion that often characterizes working-class men's work is an obstacle to casual conversations, intimacy, sexual play, and romance after work.36

In general, working-class men tend to be more controlled and less emotional than their middle-class counterparts.37 Gender roles tend to be more traditional and rigid in working-class households, and male domination of women is more pronounced.38 The work of middle-class men typically gives them a degree of autonomy and power over others, which can translate into a psychological security at home not enjoyed by working-class men. A more subtle explanation, however, has been proposed by some Marxist scholars. Because of the demands of most blue-collar work, working-class men tend to base their identities and sense of worth on their physical strength, prowess, and stamina.39 To be asked to share in activities and attributes associated with women's sphere, such as emotional sensitivity and "talkativeness," is experienced as a threat to their virility. This gap is increased by the fact that working-class women, in charge of the "status work" of the family, are exposed to middle-class "romantic style" and are likely to adopt elements of middle-class cultural identity,40 thus making them even more estranged from the masculine, untalkative ethos of their spouses.

An example will usefully recap the discussion.

As I have suggested, in the dating stage working-class people show the same romantic competence as their upper-middle-class counterparts, and we see here that, before they got married, this couple was enacting the "correct" script of romance (he was buying flowers, taking her out to dinner, etc.) After marriage, however, living up to the standards of romance became more difficult, not only because of time and money, but because working-class men and women have different expectations of marriage. While the man expects wife and home to provide him with comfort and emotional security, the woman expects romance, passion, and communication to continue. If there is a gap in romantic competence, it is between working-class men and women, a gap that was opened by the middle- and upper-middle-class models of communication and intimacy that have been disseminated through popular culture and that are consistent with women's socialization at large.

By contrast, verbal communication is part of the social identity of both men and women of the upper middle class, a part of the exercise of cultural competence that is important in both their education and their work. As Randall Collins again puts it: "Probably male/female cultural differences are minimized for upper-middle-class men who themselves work in the culture-production sector; their own class positions are already involved in culture-laden activities that match those of their wives, whether the latter are employed or not."41 Moreover, the talk exchanged by upper-middle-class men and women during their romantic interactions is instrumental in furthering their work activities, as illustrated by the answer of a well-established artist asked what she talked about with her husband.
We often tell each other interesting things that happened to each other when we are not together, or ideas that really interest each other. Sometimes I would just read something that I think is wonderful, I would tell him to read it and talk about it. Vice versa. Sometimes I would be working on something and I would have a really good idea and I would just share it with him and he would give me his criticism. Sometimes when I write something or when he writes something, we edit each other's writing. And we're kind of as brutal as possible because like sometimes it's hard because neither of us get overcome by hurt feelings. We can usually deal with it and take criticism and use it and even hold on to—in the end if I really feel he is right about it, I will make the change. And he is pretty much the same way. So you know we definitely share our work with each other and ideas we have and things that happen to us. (Interview 13)

This answer helps us understand one reason why upper-middle-class couples converse more intensely and frequently than working-class couples. Upper-class couples are likely to hold jobs demanding similar intellectual and personal qualities and can therefore use their partners as “critics” or as an audience on whom to test ideas. Or if they work in corporations, conversations about work can help them plan moves, decipher the “boss’s” cues, and prepare strategies. This has the double effect of transferring their professional ethos into the private sphere (thereby improving their professional performance) and of increasing their communication with their partners. This intermingling of work and romance does not hinder or jeopardize their capacity to communicate with each other but rather increases it. Bryan and Alsikafı studied the leisure patterns of university professors (and by extension, the “intellectual” professions in general) and found that leisure and work greatly overlapped. Leisure was used to derive benefits directly recyclable for work, and vice versa; work provided many reasons to engage in the sphere of leisure. Middle-class and upper-middle-class couples enjoy more companionate leisure than do working-class couples, who tend to be more segregated.

How do working-class women cope with the fact that their husbands do not conform to middle-class models of communication? The evidence of my sample is mixed. In my interviews, women seemed to hold lower standards of communication than those advocated by mass culture, thus suggesting that they had adapted to their husbands' identity.

Television sometimes shows people that have been married for a real long time, having heart-to-heart talks about their deep feelings and holding each other. I don’t know anybody who talks that way.

What do you mean, “that has deep talks”?

My husband and I, we have a very good communication, but it is very brief, we are not going to get that deep, like you see people talking in the soap operas or on the TV shows. I don’t think that anybody does that.

What do you mean by “that”?

Let's take the soap operas. It seems that the same couple can sit there for one week, even though they have been married for many many years, and sit there and hold hands and look in each other's eyes and say “I love you” a million times and “You are the only person.” Married people do talk that way but it is not on a daily basis. Maybe we will reflect on these things once a year, on an anniversary or on Valentine's day... but it's not on a day-to-day basis. (Homemaker, interview 28)

Echoing other working-class women, this respondent suggested that the ideal of communication set by soap operas and mass culture generally was excessive for her own needs.

Working-class women's familiarity with new models of intimacy and masculinity conveyed by mass culture have nonetheless made them expect something different from their relationships. As Lillian Rubin has suggested, “The daytime soap operas, watched almost exclusively by women, do picture men who may be more open and more available for intimacy. But the men on the soaps don't work at ordinary jobs, doing ordinary things, for eight, ten, twelve hours a day.” Rubin notes that popular culture in general, and television especially, are closer to a middle-class experience. Consequently, working-class respondents are confronted with models that do not reflect their own circumstances but are powerful enough to make women expect their marriage to fulfill them.

The differences in leisure and communication entail different attitudes toward the home among working-class versus upper-middle-class couples. For my working-class female respondents, and for working-class women generally, the home is viewed as boring and the site of chores rather than leisure. This viewpoint in turn seems to define different attitudes toward the role of romance in daily life. When we examine how romance is enacted and lived inside the home, linguistic and cultural competence as well as the availability of leisure time appear to be very important factors in explaining why domestic romance is so different for the middle and working classes. Recalling what was romantic about her marriage, a woman in my sample, a social worker with a master's degree in education, said: “For example, on Sunday morning, we just used to read The New York Times together” (interview 44). In response to the same question, a working-class woman said that "the opportunity
to be with your husband, let's say sit in a bedroom reading a book, that does not happen in our life, that does not happen" (interview 9). Activities like reading the Times together or “doing a crossword puzzle” together use the home as a place of relaxation; by exercising together their cultural competence upper-middle-class couples make their daily domestic interactions romantic.

In my sample, only the upper-middle-class respondents intentionally defined romance in ways that explicitly reversed the traditional or standard conception. When expressing their scorn for romantic stereotypes, many respondents claimed, for example, that a romantic moment can be “very mundane.” A man who had lived for many years with a woman said that one can “find romance in the most mundane situations, just being with the person makes it a wonderful rosy situation, just sitting around, reading together.” The same man, asked what kind of things he usually likes to do with his partner, answered, “Going to the movies, going out to dinners, taking trips. I also like a lot of evenings at home, watching television together, fixing dinner together, even cleaning up together afterwards” (interview 29).

Not only are middle- and upper-middle-class romantic practices more varied than those of the working class, but they are also more inclusive, admitting activities usually excluded from traditional attitudes to romance (“just sitting at home,” “watching television,” “cleaning up together”). The more affluent respondents suggested that love does not take place in preconceived romantic places and that it can in fact occur within mundane or traditionally unromantic places. As has often been noted about the realm of culture, once upper-middle class people establish cultural standards, they engage in a more or less reflexive distancing from these same standards and are consequently able to opt for “nonstandard,” alternative cultural practices. Thus the idea that the mundane can also be romantic is an upper-middle-class cliché that aims precisely at the “sentimental” clichés favored by the working class:

What would be an unromantic thing to do?
That's a tough question. You could say, doing laundry, but if in the middle of doing laundry you start hugging each other and kissing each other, that would be romantic. (Female lawyer, interview 12)

Another woman, a married, successful artist, after explaining that love can happen in traditionally unromantic settings, opposed the traditional idea of romance in the following way:

What do you mean by traditionally unromantic settings?
What I mean is something pedestrian, like you fill up your car with gas, although I mean on the flip side you can have a stylish image of a gas station that can turn into anything. But traditionally when people think of romantic settings, it is not often at a truck-stop diner or, you know, on the highway, but those locations to me are not excluded from something that would have a sense of romance in it. (Interview 13)

Another respondent, an editor, said that “Romance to me is not really giving roses or going to a restaurant. It is not events or props. It is not setting up certain situations and being in them. It's more of a feeling that comes naturally from what you do day-to-day. . . . I am much more likely to do something like to be in a store, see something he would like, and buy it for him. That's much more mundane” (interview 45).

Contrast those previous answers with the following ones given by working-class women:

What would be something unromantic?
Almost everything that goes on generally. I guess what I am saying is all of the distractions that are in my life, all of those. I am not going to say it's a put-off. I am just saying there is no room to even think about being romantic, you know what I mean? Our lives are not like they are on television. (Homemaker, interview 9)

Or also:
Do you think that romance is important to keep love going?
Yeah, definitely.
Why?
I don't know, just—it makes you realize you're in love with each other. You know, day-to-day is not easy at all for any couple, especially in the long-term relationship, you need some romance to rekindle that spark that first brought you together. (Homemaker, interview 16)

Or also:
Did you used to do a lot of things together?
Yes, we spent a lot of time together.
What would you do?
Go shopping, or looking at things, go to movies maybe, a lot of times at home, maybe that's what we did, spend time together, all that starts falling apart when kids come along, that messes up your schedule. (Homemaker interview 28).

For the working-class woman, everything that goes on usually is unromantic; for the upper-middle-class woman the reverse is true, namely, everything that goes on usually could be romantic. In fact, the people who are most likely to say that something mundane can be romantic are those whose daily lives are the least burdened by chores and duties and who have, objectively and subjectively, the greatest sense of freedom. The more one is objectively distanced from necessity, the more one is likely to say that a mundane or ordinary moment can be romantic. Because laundry or housecleaning or child rearing is less oppressive for middle-class or upper-middle-class women, they are more likely to consider these tasks as potentially romantic. Thus, although the middle- and upper-middle class are the most likely to withdraw most thoroughly from daily chores, they are also the most likely to view daily chores as romantic.

Positions in the work process explain why daily life is likely to be more romantic for upper-middle-class people than for the working class. The categories and scripts used to evaluate and construct romance are rooted in objective resources such as nature of work, equality between men and women, educational competence, available leisure time, and income. Not surprisingly, the ability to subvert, invert, or twist conventional taxonomies of love also varies with possession of these resources. Because the "life-world" of upper-middle-class people is more congenial to romance, they are functionally less dependent on commodified forms of romance, and their chances to experience romance, in both traditionally romantic and traditionally nonromantic settings, is thereby increased. The middle-class models of love elaborated through the mass market and mass culture have created tensions in the working-class romantic experience. To put it differently, middle- and upper-middle-class people have two ways of coping with the threat of boredom. First, they can acquire novelty and stimulation by purchasing new leisure goods. Second, they have at their disposal a communicative competence that can substitute for and complement the model of intensity. Once they reach the level of comfort that follows the initial level of excitation, upper-middle-class people can avoid boredom by getting stimulation from the market, by sustaining relatively intense patterns of communication, and by incorporating their romantic experience within the very texture of the mundane. The inescapable conclusion is that the upper-middle class is better equipped to cope with the cultural contradictions between definitions of love that demand continuity and longevity and definitions of love as an intense and pleasurable bond. They can and do switch easily from being hedonist consumers to being the communicative "managers" of their relationships.

To summarize, married working-class respondents found romance less often than the upper-middle-class respondents, in the realms both of consumption and of communication. This difference can be explained by the combination of several factors: limited surplus income to invest in leisure or romantic pursuits; limited leisure time, the result both of limited income and of the more tiring character of their work (men's blue-collar occupations and women's lack of assistance in housework); gender differences in patterns of communication; the sharp separation of the men's and women's spheres, which translates into leisure activities and spills over into romance; and, finally, the different positions of men and women in the realm of work and culture.

CONCLUSION

The standard definition of romance demands a middle-class cultural competence and lifestyle. Lacking these resources, the working-class marriage can be considered deprived in several ways. First, as we have seen, in contemporary culture the experience of romance affords a secular access to the experience of the sacred, and without this experience or some analogue of it daily life becomes oppressive in its continuity, regularity, and necessity. The experience of the sacred is important in and of itself, but it also introduces into daily life an "organized disorder," a rhythmic alternation between "hot," passionate times and "cold," pragmatic, profane ones. Second, whether communal or interpersonal, human bonds are constituted through shared memories and the shared narratives that sustain them. I have argued that the liminal nature of romantic experience lends itself more readily to the "writing" of such bonding narratives of shared memory. Insofar as working-class couples engage less often in romantic practices, their lives are less likely to provide the raw material for such narratives.

Other kinds of narrative are also at stake here. The ideal of intimacy promoted by the therapeutic worldview entails a narrative of progress: as it moves forward in time, a relationship brings to its participants an ever-increasing understanding of self and other that carries emancipatory potential. This narrative provides the relationship with a structure
of meaning that not only strengthens the bond but makes differences and conflict more intelligible and therefore more acceptable and manageable. Insofar as therapeutic discourse and the therapeutic worldview are not part of the cultural capital of the working class, the members of this class, particularly the men, are less “romantically competent.” This implies that for working-class couples, the category of the “profane,” the day-to-day routine of relationships, does not have the rich texture offered by the therapeutic narrative of progress.

By contrast, because of their education, income, and position in the work process, middle-class and upper-middle-class respondents enjoy numerous advantages. For one thing, their contradictory attitude toward the stereotyped, mass-market version of romance is actually a source of strength. Their understanding of common romantic scripts and their ability to enact the more “upscale” ones (those requiring greater expenditure) provide the sense of security derived from the “fit” between actions and cultural standards. At the same time, their disparagement of “clichés” provides them with the psychological certainty that their experiences were “special,” “creative,” “unique.” They therefore had the comfort of living up to culturally prescribed standards while enjoying a sense of autonomy and individualism.

The success of a romantic moment, its capacity to draw the couple out of the routines of daily life, depends largely on its degree of ritualization and liminality, and in postmodern culture, as we saw in chapter 4, ritualization is achieved with the help of commodities. Access to luxury commodities, including expensive travel and vacations, enables partners to renew the feeling of love more frequently and to further intensify and solidify the romantic bond.

The common cultural competence upper-middle-class people exercise in their romantic communication has two positive consequences. First, it provides an experience of romance alternative to that promoted by the public sphere of consumption, making romantic even those moments that do not depend on the market of leisure. Second, shared cultural communication strengthens the organic bond between the couple.

Finally, because the daily life of the middle and upper-middle class contains fewer burdens or financial constraints than that of the working class, it is much easier for the former to view even the most mundane moments or situations as romantic. The better educated and better off thus have the easiest access to the commercial-ritual formula of romance but at the same time are functionally least dependent on it and can extend the scope of what they define and live as romantic.

We can see now that the intersection between class and romantic love is not transparent and can be understood only after a painstaking re-creation of the subjective meanings contained in the experience of romance. Furthermore, dating and marriage are phenomenologically different and reproduce the culture, values, and social relationships of late capitalism in different ways.

The crux of this chapter, as well as that of the preceding two, is found in the ambiguous, contradictory properties of the therapeutic ethos. On the one hand, in providing a language of self-direction, self-knowledge, and egalitarian self-assertion, therapeutic discourse helps enable women to formulate and assert their needs and conceive of themselves as equal partners, with “rights” and “duties” formulated in the abstract, contractual language of the sphere of work. This, of course, has emancipatory potential for men as well as for women. On the other hand, the therapeutic ethos risks commodifying relationships in two ways. The practice of self-understanding it promotes encourages people to conceive of themselves as a list of preferences and needs and to evaluate relationships in terms of the other’s abilities to satisfy these preferences and needs. Furthermore, by making “communication” so indispensable to intimacy, the therapeutic view discriminates against those men and women—but most often men—who feel uncomfortable, incompetent, or otherwise uninterested in articulating their emotions. Again, however, for those in possession not only of therapeutic discourse but of other material advantages, this contradiction brings benefits. The middle and upper-middle classes are the most likely to use the rationality of economic transactions in their self-conceptions and in their relationships, yet they are also the most likely to form marriages on the basis of what Anthony Giddens calls the “pure relationship,” a relationship for its own sake. In other words, they get to have their cake and eat it, too. In my conclusion, I examine what this and other paradoxes have to tell us about the contemporary romantic condition.
THE SAMPLE: DEFINITIONS AND PROCEDURE

I have used income, occupation, and educational level as the critical dimensions along which I compare the working and middle classes and also individuals within the middle classes.

Traditionally, the working classes have been defined by their position in the process of production (i.e., they sell their labor but do not own the means of production); by the nature of their occupation (in the "production" rather than service sector); and by a common lifestyle. Although this definition is still accurate to a great extent, it has been called partially into question because some of the traditional segments of the middle class also fall into the category of working class. Clerical workers and salespersons belong to the category of working class because these occupations do not require any college attendance and have been considerably devalued. Computers have made their work even more routine than task-oriented, thus even more boring and alienating. The lower fractions of the middle classes labor in a hierarchical system similar to the strict division of labor in factories. Moreover, they live in working-class neighborhoods and have lifestyles similar to those of their working-class counterparts. Thus, the working classes are made up of the "traditional working class" (that is, factory workers) and "all clerical workers and all sales workers with the exceptions of advertising, and insurance agents, stock and bonds salesmen, sales representatives, and related groups whose position in the labor process and more affluent lifestyle would make their inclusion in the working class somewhat ridiculous."2

Working-class membership is defined by an educational level of high school or less and a low-prestige occupation. Typical working-class occupations among my respondents included cleaning person, salesperson, secretary, electrician, security guard, babysitter, and doorman. The ratings from these dimensions were not always consistent. For example, two men in my sample had not completed
high school; though their incomes were low, they worked in middle-class professions, one as a private investigator (formerly an insurance representative) and the other as a professional boxer.

The middle class is notoriously difficult to define. Once the lower fractions are taken out, three subcategories remain. The first are managers, who direct and control the productive process and are least likely to be supervised. This subclass does not necessarily own the means of production but directly assists those who do. The second subcategory comprises “cultural specialists,” such as mathematicians, scientists, social scientists, researchers, artists, journalists, university professors, and editors, and cultural intermediaries such as nurses, paramedical workers, elementary-school teachers, and people working in advertising, public relations. The third subcategory is made up of persons commonly called “professionals”: lawyers, doctors, and financial consultants.

My sample of middle- and upper-middle class respondents held college and advanced degrees. Annual income ranged from $40,000 to $100,000. The sample includes professionals (doctors, lawyers, investment bankers, executives) and people whose main income derives from participation in the production of culture (actors, musicians, painters, filmmakers, movie distributors, cameramen, editors, academics, advertising executives, high-school teachers). Here also, some interviewees occupied contradictory positions. For example, a cameraman/filmmaker who dropped out of college and earned a low income had a very high cultural competence, manifest in his expertise and practice of art forms. One lawyer had average-to-low cultural competence, low income, and friends from the working classes, and did not participate in the arts.

INTERVIEWEES

N = 50. Number of women = 25; number of men = 25.

Symbols: M = male; F = female; S = single; MA = married; D = divorced; C = college; C + = graduate education; C - = two years of college or less; HS = high school.

In addition to income, education, and profession, I have evaluated respondents' class position and cultural capital with variables such as parents' profession (social origin); profession of close friends; neighborhood; and type and frequency of cultural activities.

UPPER-MIDDLE-CLASS RESPONDENTS (N = 20)

All respondents had undergraduate degrees, and many had graduate degrees as well.

Interview 1: M. S. C +. University professor; $70,000–100,000.
Interview 4: M. MA. C +. Investment banker; above $100,000.
Interview 5: M. S. C +. Lawyer; $20,000–40,000.

CULTURAL SPECIALISTS WITH AVERAGE TO LOW INCOME (N = 10)

Interview 6: F. D. C +. Artist; $60,000–100,000.
Interview 7: F. MA. C +. Lawyer; $60,000–80,000.
Interview 8: M. S. C +. Physician; $40,000–60,000.
Interview 12: F. S. C +. Lawyer; $60,000–80,000.
Interview 13: F. MA. C +. Artist; $60,000–80,000.
Interview 14: M. D. C +. Physician; $60,000–80,000.
Interview 19: F. MA. C +. University professor; above $100,000.
Interview 20: M. S. C +. Corporate banker; $60,000–80,000.
Interview 23: F. MA. C +. Lawyer (husband: graphic designer); above $100,000.
Interview 27: F. MA. C +. Homemaker (husband: economist); income $40,000–60,000.
Interview 30: F. S. High school student (parents: publishers); parents' income; $80,000–100,000.
Interview 35: F. MA. C +. Artist; above $100,000.
Interview 43: M. D. C. Art dealer; $40,000–60,000.
Interview 44: F. D. C +. Social worker; $40,000–60,000.
Interview 45: F. S. C +. Collagist; $20,000–40,000.
Interview 49: F. S. C. Advertising designer; $40,000–60,000.
Interview 50: M. S. C +. Scientist; $40,000–60,000.

LOWER FRACTIONS OF THE MIDDLE CLASSES (N = 4)

Interview 21: F. S. C +. Police officer; $20,000.
Appendix 1

THE INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUE

I used a structured, open-ended questionnaire (the full text of the questionnaire is given as appendix 2). The interviews were not standardized, as I often asked questions in response to the answers given by the interviewees. Because of the highly private quality of emotions and love, ethnographic observation was not possible. As Critcher suggests, such subjects are difficult to study other than through interviews.

I used my own personal knowledge of romantic practices to formulate hypotheses and to reflect on them. My approach to the interview subscribes to what Manning has called "existential fieldwork," which insists on the transaction between the subject and object and does not hesitate to use the researcher's own knowledge and even own circle of friends to make claims and hypotheses. The main purpose of my interviewing technique was to create a climate of trust and to make my respondent confident that I was nonjudgmental. To judge from the number of people who said things like "it's embarrassing to say, but . . . " or "I hope no one sees this because my wife does not know about this," I believe I succeeded in my aim. This does not necessarily mean that respondents were always candid, but it does indicate that the interview managed to overcome some of the reserve that often characterizes the interaction between interviewer and interviewee.

The interview elicited three different types of answers. Some answers are interpretative: that is, they interpret motives, intentions, and personal qualities in the character, events, situations, stories, and images offered as eliciting devices to respondents. Other answers tap into the "folk theories" by which respondents explain and justify the why's and how's of love, as so many self-help books put it, its failures and successes. The third type of answer is autobiographical, elicited by asking respondents to recount diverse aspects of their romantic experiences. But these different categories were analyzed with a single intention: to grasp the fluidity of the cultural repertoires on which respondents draw to make sense of their shifting emotions. Most of my questions were designed to make respondents choose and then justify their choices between different love stories, gifts, greeting cards, and images. Choosing among different options would, I hoped, force people to spell out the rationale, the tacit assumptions, and the values upon which their choices rest. While in actual social interactions people do not always perceive that their behavior is the outcome of conscious or unconscious choices among many possibilities, when a crisis arises or when they are called upon to justify themselves, actions or choices are explained by invoking the meanings of a particular repertoire. The questionnaire aims at grasping the various cultural repertoires within which people understand and interpret romantic behavior.

Although I used an elaborate questionnaire, I did not follow it in a standardized way, preferring to pursue particular issues that emerged as more prominent or characteristic of a given respondent's romantic life. For example, I put more questions about marriage to a working-class woman who had married her first boyfriend and who seemed to have marital difficulties than I did to a woman who had had many boyfriends before marriage and did not indicate marital problems. Probing was done either by repeating a key sentence said by the interviewee and waiting for the respondent's reaction, by asking such questions as "What do you mean?" or "In what way?" or "How so?" or by telling them "I am not sure I understand."
I have found some ambiguous economic properties: on the one hand they seem to evade the system of economic exchange. On the other, they are circulated within a binding system of reciprocity by which the social identity of givers and receivers is marked. It is precisely this duality I was interested in when I asked respondents which gifts they consider romantic and which greeting cards they would send. In each story there is some obstacle that causes a delay in the final decision to get married, whether it be (1) parental consent, (2) the shyness and awkwardness of the protagonists themselves, or (3) a promotion. To keep the outcome of the narrative from affecting respondents' evaluation of the beginning and development of love, all three stories end with marriage.

I randomly changed the sequence of presentation to insure that the interpretations were not constrained by a specific order. I did not find any significant bias produced by the order of presentation.

QUESTIONS ABOUT GIFTS

Gifts have ambiguous economic properties: on the one hand they seem to evade the system of economic exchange. On the other, they are circulated within a binding system of reciprocity by which the social identity of givers and receivers is marked. It is precisely this duality I was interested in when I asked respondents which gifts they consider romantic and which greeting cards they would send. These questions would make them, I hoped, spell out the norms by which a gift is considered as appropriately romantic: for example, an expensive gift is usually considered less romantic than a gift expressing the giver's creativity.
APPENDIX 2

Questionnaire

FACESHEET

Date: 
Place: 
Code #: 
Sex: M F 
Age: 
Currently married? Y N 
Has been married before? Y N 
If yes, how long? 
Single: Y N 
Have you ever lived with somebody? 
How long? 
Religion: Protestant Jewish Catholic Unaffiliated 
Neighborhood you live in: 
Formal education (diplomas and discipline): 
From which institutions: 
Current profession: 
Profession before this one: 
Profession of your parents: 
Profession of the person you are married or involved with: 
Profession of your close friends: 
Please circle the category of income that corresponds to your yearly income: 
$4,000-10,000 $10,000-20,000 $20,000-40,000 

Appendix 2

$40,000-60,000 $60,000-80,000 $80,000-100,000 
$100,000-above 
Do you have a lot of spare time? 
When you have some spare time, what do you like to do? 
Do you like reading? 
What kind of books do you like to read? 
Do you have many books at home? How many? 
Do you buy books? 
How many a year? 
What is the last book you have read? 
Do you read self-help books? 
Do you read romances? 
What kind of romances? 
Do you read magazines? 
What kind? 
Do you go to the movies? 
What kind of movies do you watch? 
What is the last movie you have seen? 
Do you watch TV? 
How often? 
What kind of programs do you like? 
Do you ever go to art museums and galleries? 
How often? 
When was the last time you went? What did you see? 
Are you affiliated to a group of any kind (religious, political, etc.)? 
Do you consider yourself a feminist? 

INTERVIEW

1. Look at the pictures and pick the one you find the most romantic [figures 1, 2, 3, 4; see appendix 3]. 
2. Why did you choose this picture? 
3. Why do you find the others less romantic? 
4. If you wanted to have a romantic evening with somebody, describe what this moment would be like. (Probing) Where would you go? What would you do? What time of the day would it be? Would there be people around? 
5. Do you prefer to stay home or go out? 
6. Can you give me an example of an actual romantic moment you have had recently? Please describe it.
7. In general, what kind of things do you like to do with your partner? Do you like talking? Do you go to the restaurants, movies, theater? How often? Do you take weekend trips, vacations together? How often?
8. Can you describe a romantic dinner?
9a. Imagine you just met somebody, what would this person have to do or say to be unromantic to you?
9b. Imagine the same but with somebody you would have been living with for a long time.
10. In general, do you think that romance is important to keep love going between two people? Why?
11. Have you ever had a relationship without romance? How do you describe the difference between a relationship with romance and a relationship without it?
12. Do you think that for most people romance lasts after marriage? (Probing) Do you know couples for whom it has lasted? How do you know that it has lasted for them?
13. Do you consider yourself a romantic person?
14. Do you think that sex is important for romance?
15. Would you say that a pornographic movie or picture romantic?
16. Are there any scenes from a movie or a book you have read that you remember as being romantic?

Story 1

17a. What do you think of this story?
17b. Do you think they marry for love?
18. Do you think they should have waited to get married?
19. Do you think they were right to get married without the bride's parents' consent?
20a. Do you believe in love at first sight?
20b. Have you ever fallen in love at first sight? If yes, what happened?
20c. Let's say, imagine you meet the man or woman of your dreams, would you like him or her to fall in love with you at first sight?
21. Do you know how your parents fell in love?
22. Which couples do you think have a better chance to succeed, those who fall in love with each other slowly or those who fall in love with each other quickly?
23. In your own life, did you fall in love with other people quickly or slowly? Ideally, would you prefer your relationship to be or to have been slow or quick?

Story 2

24a. Is love more important than family, i.e., your parents?
24b. Is love more important than your own family, i.e., with children?
25. Do you think that love is more important than work?

Story 3

26. What do you think of this story?
27. Do you think that Robert and Theresa marry for love?
28a. Would you like or would you have liked to meet or to have met the love of your life in the same way?
28b. Would you mind if a friend rather than family set you up?
29. How would like to meet or to have met the partner of your life?
30. Do you think that if your parents had to choose someone for you, this person would be the same person you would choose for yourself? If no, how would it be different?
31. Would you go to a matchmaker or an agency?
32. What kind of men/women do you think go to a matchmaker or to an agency?
33. How do you meet your partners most often?

Comparing the Three Stories

34. What do you think of this story?
35. Do you think they marry for love?
36. Do you feel that money is important for love? In what way?
37. Do you think that money can make love better and easier?
38a. Would you marry somebody who was much poorer than you?
38b. What do you think are the consequences for relationships, if any, of not having enough money?
38c. What are the consequences, if any, of having a lot of money?
39. Would you marry somebody who was much less educated than you?
40. Have you ever had a relationship with someone who was much less educated than you? How did it work out?
41. Do you think that rich and poor people experience love in the same way?
42. In general, do you think that people make some kind of calculation when they choose a partner?
43. Which one of the three stories do you like best?
Appendix 2

44. Which one of the men/women of the three stories do you find
the most interesting or appealing to you? Which one would you have liked
to be?

45. Which one do you find the most romantic?

46. What differences do you see between these stories?

47. Do you think that each story presents the same kind of love?

48. What is the difference between them?

49. What story presents the most passionate love?

50. What story is the most likely to last?

51. Is there a difference between love and passion?

52. Is there a difference between love and companionship?

53. Is there a difference between love and friendship?

54. Which story, if any, is the closest to your ideal of love? Why?

55. Would you change anything in it?

56. Which one is the least appealing to you? Why?

57. To which one were most of your relationships the closest?

58. Which one of these stories is the closest to movies or novels?

59. In which one of the three marriages is it most likely that there will
be problems?

60. What kind of problems would it be?

Difficulties Encountered in Relationships

61. According to you, what are the problems that most people en­
counter in their relationships?

62. What are the problems that you personally have encountered in
your relationships? How did you deal with them?

63. Do you usually fight in your relationship(s)? About what,usually?

64. Can you describe for me a fight scene you have had in your
relationships?

65. What would make you end a relationship with someone?

66. Can you remember one or several relationships you have
actually ended? Can you tell me why you ended them? What was bad
about it?

67. How do you know the difference between a good and a bad
relationship?

68. Do you think that doing psychotherapy, that is, going to see a psy­
chologist regularly, may help one in his or her relationships? Why?

69. Have you ever sought professional help? Did you find it
useful?

70. Do you talk with your friends about your relationships/affairs? Can
you describe a typical conversation with one of your friends about it? How do
you talk about it?

71. Do you talk with your own partner about your relationship? Do
you find it useful? Important?

72. Do you think of your emotions a lot?

73. Do you show easily your feelings? Do you hug, kiss, say sweet
words easily?

74. In general, would you say that romantic relationships are easy
or difficult?

75a. Your own relationships, have they been easy or difficult?

75b. Would you say that you have had a love story that corresponded to
your expectations of what love should be?

Ideal Mate

76. What attracts you in somebody?

77. What repels you in somebody? Try to imagine someone whom you
would be ashamed to be boyfriend or girlfriend with. What would this person
be like?

78. What is the most important quality you would require from
your partner?

79. Could you describe briefly the ideal mate?

80. Would you require the same qualities from a lover and from a
wife/husband?

81. Have you ever met someone very close to your ideal mate? What
happened with this person?

Autobiography

82. What were the most memorable love affairs you have had in
your life, if any? How did you first meet? What did you like about this
person?

83. Can you describe a moment in this relationship that was very spe­
cial for you?

84. (If several stories) what were the differences between these different
but important stories you have just told me?

85. How did you know that you were in love? Can you describe that
feeling?

86. If you wanted to show or say your love, what would you do or say?

Pictures/cards

87. Look at these two pictures [figure 5 and the Walker Evans
photo of a Depression-era family]. What do they evoke to you?
AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Did you feel I covered everything that was important to you, or are they things that you would have liked to talk about more?

Gifts

90. Look at these three cards (1, 2, 3). If you wanted to give one card to your partner, which one would you give?
91. Which one would you like to be given?
92. Is it important for you to buy presents for the person you are in love with?
93. What kind of presents do you usually buy?
94. Can you remember a present that you thought was very romantic?
95. Would you rather be given a rose with a poem or an expensive object?
96. Would you rather be given something for the house or a piece of clothing?
97. Do you usually celebrate Valentine's Day?
98. Do you celebrate any particular day related to the history you have or had with your partner?
99. Look at [figures 7, 8, 9]. What do they evoke to you?
100. Which one expresses love to you?
101. Which one expresses more romance?
102. Do you know couples who are very good couples? How do you see or know that they are very good couples?
103. In general, how do you recognize among your friends or acquaintances good from bad couples?
104. Among these three pictures, which couple would you rather be?

Sources of Love

105. Where do you think that your ideas of love come from? Movies? Family? Friends? Novels?
106. Do you think that your ideas of love have changed since you first started dating? How so?
107. In general, how would you say that media portray love? Accurately? Falsey? Idealized or realistic?
108. What, if any, are the love stories you have heard or read that you remember best?

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Before this interview, have you thought about most of the issues we talked about?
Did you find it difficult to answer my questions?
APPENDIX 3

Images of Romance

Figure 1

Figure 2
Consuming the Romantic Utopia

Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism

Eva Illouz
objects expressly designed to convey one's inner feelings. Valentine's Day is celebrated in the United States by the mass production of greeting cards, teddy-bears, coffee mugs, and innumerable heart-shaped artifacts.


CHAPTER 8. THE CLASS OF LOVE

1. For example, in his Marriage and Morals (1929), Bertrand Russell claimed that poetry and art are "intrinsic elements" of romantic love, thus ingenuously elevating his own cultural practices to universal standards.

2. Lantz 1982, 362. However, the reverse argument, that the propertyless classes were more likely to make choices based on personal inclination, has been forcefully advocated by E. P. Thompson (1966) and Edward Shorter (1977). Rejecting the claim that elite groups were the pioneers of romantic love, they suggest that romantic love flourished among the popular classes precisely because social or economic interests were less at stake than among the nobility. In a similar vein, Flandrin (1976, 1981) has suggested that in eighteenth-century France the elites' marriages mostly followed considerations of family alliances and economic interest and that the "popular classes," as he calls them, were more likely to perform love marriages. These views are all congruent with Engels's view of love.

5. While the "massification of culture" hypothesis claims that mass culture and mass consumption have leveled heterogeneous cultural practices, I suggest that the market intensifies inequalities but draws them into a common arena.
6. This claim differs from analyses of other domains of culture. For example, Paul DiMaggio (1982) and Lawrence Levine (1988) have convincingly showed that in the domain of art and culture the emergence of new elites has brought about a sharper division between the categories of art and nonart and the creation of "highbrow" culture.

7. As a corollary to this, and again as we might expect, it is noteworthy that the theme of nature has thoroughly pervaded the romantic imagination and romantic practices of both working-class and upper-middle class respondents.
8. See Bailey 1988. Theodor Dreiser's An American Tragedy offers a powerful illustration of these differences, as late as the 1920s.
10. I enclosed in the interview schedule three greeting cards. Card 1 was a Hallmark card showing a pastoral landscape with love poem superimposed over it: "I will love you / As long as I can dream / As long as I can think..." Card 2 is apparently intended to be humorous; its message, set in large capitals, reads, "I love you! I want you! I need you! You mean everything to me!" Card 3 reproduces, without any accompanying words, the abstract blue forms of Matisse's "The Pool." In choosing these three cards I assumed that each one would tap
into a different cultural habitus: the abstract card reflects the educated classes' proclivity for nonfigurative meaning; the Hallmark uses the traditional and presumably stereotypical rhetoric of romantic love; and the humorous card expresses love but with some distance.


12. This claim should be qualified since some working-class respondents did show such distance. Age and neighborhood seemed to be decisive factors: older respondents living in suburbs and working in "traditional" working-class jobs were less likely to deconstruct romance than were young, urban working-class respondents.

13. The self-proclaimed iconoclasm of these intellectuals is well described by Gouldner's (1979) notion of a "culture of critical discourse."

14. Although my examples here are mostly from "new cultural intermediaries," the same holds true for members of the wealthier segments, such as lawyers, investment bankers, and doctors. The last three professional categories showed the same deconstructive tendencies exhibited by artists and academics, although they tended to elaborate on them less.

15. It is interesting to observe how corporations have exploited the ethos of creativity when manufacturing romantic gifts. With the help of computer programs, for example, Swan Corporation manufactures and sells novels whose hero and heroine are given the names of the giver and the recipient. Each novel comes in three variations: "For $45, you choose the hero and heroine's name and get to insert a personal dedication. For $60, there is the ability to make additional choices regarding the couple's hair and eye color, hobbies, special songs, etc. For $200, you get all the above plus, after filling out a questionnaire longer than the Harvard entrance application, a custom-tailored epilogue" (Streitfeld 1991, 5).


17. See Kohn 1977.


19. Although people with higher incomes use more expensive commodities in their romantic practices, it is important to remember that there is no consistent relationship between a high income and the cost of the romantic commodity. In other words upper-middle-class people who make over $100,000 do not necessarily go only to very "fancy" and expensive restaurants.

20. This finding was a surprise to me and actually contradicted an assumption I had made prior to the analysis, that because of their orientation toward "therapeutic discourse" upper-middle-class people would hold person-centered rather than commodities-centered definitions of romance. I also assumed that working-class people, being "deprived" of a regular practice of expensive romance, would define or recall such instances as the most romantic. While my expectations about the use of therapeutic discourse by middle-class people proved accurate, the remaining expectations did not.

21. Featherstone 1983, 8. Bourdieu (1973) also observed the capacity of people with a high cultural competence to transform mass cultural objects (e.g., Hollywood films) into objects of art (see, for example, the relationship between the French New Wave and the Film Noir). However, in the case referred to by Bourdieu, people with high cultural capital are aware of

the mass or commercial character of the cultural objects and modify it as such. Here, on the other hand, the anti-institutional ethos of the upper middle class is predicated on a denial of the cliché character of their choices of consumption.


23. Scitovsky 1976; see chapter 5 above.


27. However, references to money problems did not occur within the more prosperous segments of the working classes, either.

28. This finding disconfirms the potent myth that busy upper-middle-class people experience romance less often than their working or middle-class counterparts because work has invaded their lives. As clarified in the next section, this is far from being the case.

29. Studies by Hochschild (1989), Kelly (1983), and Harris (1987) have largely demonstrated that working-class women enjoy much less leisure at home than their husbands and than their middle-class counterparts.


31. Halle 1984, 42.

32. According to an article offering tips on marriage in the upscale women's magazine Redbook, "More relations are ultimately destroyed than enhanced over time," says David Olson, Ph.D., of the University of Minnesota. "You have to work at counteracting that by keeping your marriage a priority and investing time and energy in it like you would a job" (Frank, C., "What's Your Marriage Style?" Redbook, May 1994, 93).

33. This finding echoes other studies comparing the working- and upper-middle-classes. In her study of working-class marriage, Lilian Rubin cites a particularly relevant example of a working-class woman who said: "I am not sure what I want. I keep talking to him about communication, and he says, 'Okay, so we're talking; now what do you want?' And I don't know what to say then but I know it's not what I mean" (Rubin 1976, 120).
49. This may explain the finding of the sociology of marriage that upper-middle-class couples, contrary to popular mythology, are much more stable than working-class married couples (Collins and Coltrane 1991).
50. See Zerubavel 1981, from whom I take the phrase "organized disorder."

CONCLUSION

1. Featherstone 1992b.
2. I did not have the benefit of Ulrich and Elisabeth-Gernsheim Beck's insightful analyses on the Normal Chaos of Love when I was writing this book.

APPENDIX 1

1. See Mills 1951; Braverman 1974.
3. Interview 25 was not used because the interviewee was discovered to be not of American origin. Interview 31 was inaudible because of technical problems.
6. The narrative structure of the idealist tradition is characterized by the suddenness of its onset, the struggle of love against social or moral obstacles, the relentless affirmation of the lovers' intense feelings, the superiority of love over sex, and the final (moral) victory of love through death or marriage. It has pervaded elite as well as popular culture.

APPENDIX 2

1. Figures 6–9 (not reproduced) are black-and-white photographs. In figure 6, a Walker Evans photo, father, mother, grandmother, and children sit staring at the camera in a room of utter poverty. They are barely clothed, and the photo conveys a state of naked misery and hard work. Figure 7, Robert Doisneau's famous "Le Baiser de l'hôtel de ville," shows a young woman and a young man, in public, in what seems to be a passionate and spontaneous kiss. Figure 8 shows a middle-aged couple sitting in a coffee house in physical proximity to each other, alone, in a private atmosphere, even though the setting is public. Figure 9 shows an elderly couple without physical contact.