

Progression of Social Status Signals in Near Future

Introduction

The rich and affluent invest greatly in maintaining distance from the general population.¹ Classical mechanisms include, but not limited to:

- Artistic and Cultural Sensitivity²
- Traveling and Adventuring
- Celebrity and Fame
- Expensive Material Possession
- Economically Costly Skill Acquisitions

Technological and Economic progress has made possible the democratization of these. With increasing counterbalance in the social status of the elite, seeking a longer lever or a new pivot axis to restore asymmetry in status is interesting to see in its unfolding.

It is reasonable to analyze past trends and current flux to generate insight, for academic purposes. Sowing creativity can be left to entrepreneurs to collect the fruits of economic growth from a historically fertile market.

Artistic and Cultural Sensitivity

Consumption of art has little economic return compared to warring strategists, politician, businessman or scientist/engineering technologist. Capacity to invest into something “wasteful” implies high socio-economical security. This ideology is not exclusive to the rich; it mostly likely has biological origins in *Zahavian signaling theory*³, following so allows for neurological-level status-signal transfer to all strata of society.

“Wasteful signals” as a phenomena peak in acquisition of artwork, be it paintings or clothing, can display affluence scaling with to the absurdity or “uselessness” of the work.⁴ This is further reinforced by high expenditure and price inflation of the painting. It could be thought intentional to fulfill the purpose referred to.

News outlets and social media reaction often point in ridicule towards these choices, while favoring more “established” art expressions. However, a point left obscured is that art tends to follow the patron and the patron follows social status up-shift. The modern concept of “established” art is mainly originating in the Renaissance era of Florence.

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

² C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956)

³ “The Cost of Honesty (Further Remarks on the Handicap Principle).” *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 67 (3): 603–605.

⁴ Veblen, Thorstein. *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*. New York: Macmillan, 1899.

During that time too, patrons and artists would produce art forms defined as outrageous and obscene by then ruling standards (owing to nudity, pride, and individualism conveyed)⁵. The rich would consume art that were above the god-fearing masses. Appealing to aesthetics was not the aim, but more display of power through moral defiance with no risk; or more politically framed, “appreciating higher human qualities”. Also, aesthetic standards shift. It could be thought that prior to renaissance, “god-fearing” art was the display of status over “barbaric”/”pagan”/”bestial” arts of the “mass”⁶⁷⁸.

The shift of the wealthy to new aesthetic standards in modern times seem to originate to wider access to fine-arts.

- Tickets to The *Accademia, Duomo*, are around € 35-40⁹.
- A ticket to London Philharmonic Orchestra costs £ 9-16¹⁰.

The affluent maintain power during the latency period where the middle-class enjoy what they discarded until they notice new standards and catch up to the new ones. During the latency period, the choices of the rich are ridiculed by the mass for violating aesthetic standards, oblivious to the consolidation process of new status. Only after realization will the chase begin again.¹¹¹²

Examples of ridicule from the masses include:

- *Comedian* by Maurizio Cattelan (Art Basel, Miami Beach-2019) at \$120 000
- *Robert Ryman* white paintings estimated at \$20 000 000.
- *Balenciaga* Towel Skirt, Spring 2024 collection at \$925
- *Vêtements* DHL Hoodie at \$800

One trace of this catch-up start to emerge is in minimalism being a popular aesthetic; distributed to mass market with positive reception from buyers.

Art flow from high culture to low culture can be seen in the following. *Gustav Holst's* Planets was aimed at that time towards the wealthy, attending orchestral performances. The emotions derived is remarkable. The pieces were later adapted to a low-culture medium, the video game *Destiny* in 2014 (*Martin O'Donnell, Michael Salvatori, and Skye Lewin*). The suite *Music of the Spheres* was inspired from so.

Be it a rich man attending the orchestra, or a poor shut-in who plays video games, both *The Planets* and *The Music of the Spheres* are phenomenal. I favor the latter's take on Mercury (The Union) and Jupiter (The Ecstasy). If we ask about true appreciation of art as an aesthetic experience, then it will be more likely that the person free of status concerns is able to enjoy such an experience for he is

⁵ Marcia B. Hall, *After Raphael: Painting in Central Italy in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

⁶ Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200–1000*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2013)

⁷ David M. Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Art: From the Seventh Century to the Norman Conquest* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1984)

⁸ Eric Fernie, *The Architecture of Anglo-Saxon England* (London: Methuen, 1983)

⁹ UNESCO. *Free Entrance to National Museums: Central Museums*. UNESCO Creativity Policy Monitoring Platform. Accessed February 20, 2026. <https://www.unesco.org/creativity/en/policy-monitoring-platform/free-entrance-national/central-museums>

¹⁰ Opera Europa. “Social Impact Subsidy.” Opera Europa. Accessed February 20, 2026. <https://opera-europa.org/news/social-impact-subsidy>

¹¹ “Trickle-down fashion.” *Wikipedia*. Last modified February 10, 2026. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trickle-down_fashion

¹² Veblen, Thorstein. *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*. New York: Macmillan, 1899.

fully dissolved in the numinous; that is one of the desired effects of art as opposed to consuming for status validation. It is not to say that poverty is key to appreciating art, it is more of a humility in letting go of the self to appreciate the piece; and that is accessible to anyone irrespective of social status.

Art still bears its soul-liberating properties, through creation or consumption. However, something to remember is the legacy and action of the affluent on aesthetic and moral standards, to affirm their superiority, resulting in a chase by lower classes.

Discernment of true enlightenment and peace from pleasure induced by biological wiring (Dopamine Pathways) involving status measurement and chase becomes visible. The latter hints at an addictive effect instead of its the detaching effects associated with art in philosophical texts. These serve as markers for what are is being used for in the mass.

Traveling and Adventuring

Traveling follows similarly. Vacations to Europe or The Indonesian Countries was almost exclusive to those who had time and resources. With the popularization of low-cost flights, the middle class could visit these countries during their 2-week breaks from work. By broadcasting similarly how the rich do, it becomes a valuable signal of status; the previously costly signal became more affordable.

The companies frame those in ideas that “Traveling broadens one’s soul”. This is true, encountering unknown cultures has beneficial effects on the person. But what is ignored is that this change takes time, meaning a lot of time outside work, paying rent in a different country for real neurological re-balancing.

Again, modern traveling culture has less marks of spiritual growth but more of consumerism. People visit lots of countries in short times while comparing and tracking number of countries visited points most to engagement of dopamine and status-reward circuits, seen in classical compulsive addiction.

Celebrity and Fame

Fame is not a social capital rooted materially, but it occupies the relational network between individuals; it generates an asymmetry and power concentration in the minds of people.

Glamor is not a modern concept; Japanese Feudal Lords’ choice of clothing was coveted, and aesthetics standards were borrowed from them by the peasant class. Gossips would be like modern movie stars. Ancient records would portray kings as most tall or beautiful. These desirable virtues were made to concentrate around them, while the true nature of genetics being randomly distributed irrespective of was overshadowed. A poor person would not be called so. This difference was further consolidated to account for genetic aberrations in the rich, the wealthy kids would be better fed for growth, and they would have access to adornments to enhance themselves.

In modern times, food safety is not of concern to the middle class in developed countries (where status salience is most important). Children can grow tall and strong like kings of old. Increasing

purchasing power made make ups, clothing, and jewelries available to all, so the mass could access the affluence their ancestors desired, getting closer to the ideal they grew up with. The middle-class gives himself the right to behave like the elite through their hard-earned money and contribution to social progress.

Investment in these status signals in terms of clothing is a huge market. Through saving wages, they can purchase expensive items and experiences. In fashion, further catering to the need for recognition and exploiting the need for status at a younger age are *diffusion lines*:

- *Tommy Hilfiger* and *Tommy Jeans*
- *Calvin Klein* and *Ck Jeans*
- *Boss* and *Hugo Boss*
- *Ermenegildo Zegna* and *Zegna*

Polo Ralph Lauren gives access to the brand while maintaining exclusivity with Ralph Lauren Purple and Black Label.

Same for perfumes:

Tom Ford's Private Blend Collection

- *Bois Marocain*
- *Tobacco Vanille*
- *Oud Wood*
- *Vanilla Sex*

And the Mainline/Signature Collection

- *Ombre Leather*
- *Oud Metalique*
- *Black Orchid*

An interesting reaction in keeping up with the wealthy is the concept of "Quiet Luxury" popularized on social media.

The rich were seen to wear well-fitting, high-quality material with no brands, and that caused a shift in the mass to adopt similar fashion. The fast-fashion market quickly adapted to their demands.

They were able to provide while forgoing the high material cost of wool, cashmere, and silk. This was partly due to the choice of clothing from the mass was less based on the material quality itself but more of the signal it sent. Investing in merely appearances was easier and cheaper both for the consumers and the distributors. Thus, the ideology of brands persisted in a new form.

Before the digital age, celebrity status was achieved by mingling in high social circles. This would signal belonging to an exclusive group. Also, someone was also more likely to hire a person as actor and actress in their movies compared to a stranger; similar applies when conducting business deals, or marriage. This ensured a closed group where only the members held social leverage.

To legitimize and justify their belonging, stories of person who made it from poverty or actors hired on pure talent was maintained and amplified to ensure that the lower class still aspire and maintain effort to reach their position, thus indirectly reinforcing the elite's status. This concealed the greater part of the already established networks of the rich while giving legitimacy.

Nowadays, with the lack of policing on the internet, celebrity is accessible to a greater portion of those who seek it. Mimicking the rich using pre-digital standards costs much less and adds legitimacy to the person. While celebrity and glamor required dedicated cameras, lighting, and access to beautiful places, with innovation in technology, with only a smart phone, it became easier to gain status like the rich.

This is real social capital in the modern age while bypassing all the costs previously associated acquisition, possession and inheritance of that capital. Differences between true wealth and mimicry dissolves in the digital space. The world has moved beyond the exclusivity of the rich in favor of massive mimics of the rich. “Hustlers” and “Baddies” are the new objects of gossips, and by ease of access to such status and reward by concentrating a high volume of social discourse, they effectively dilute the status of lineal wealth.

Retreat & Counter

To the rich, to maintain status becomes an endurance game, with technology evening the playing field faster. Something to enforce which would ensure their survival would be something that would give penalty to the mimics, should they try.

Borrowing from Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, he places self-actualization at the pinnacle. This is advantageous for it is culturally rooted hence felt by most (*Know Thyself*—Greek Maxims & Indian ideals of detachment in higher castes). This contact with “a deeper self” is however not quantifiable.

To remedy this, they seek something that alludes to that, namely creation of art. It takes time and has low economic return, something the middle class will be penalized if they try to retreat from work to learn about themselves, or invest huge time and money in art. To further discriminate from artisans, they would push for creation of art free of economic or social incentives. By the ability to produce an important volume of such art, they would form a new legacy for themselves.

This represents one possible path that could be taken; it is of entrepreneurial and academic advantage to invest exploration in this domain.