

# Post Modern Medievalism

A Sociological Study of the Society for Creative Anachronism

By Cary John Lenehan BA

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## **1. Introduction**

### **Outline**

This thesis examines the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA), a medieval recreation and re-creation group. In particular the cultural and social compositions of the SCA, as well as the reasons behind the members' choice of group and activities are probed. This thesis argues that no currently available theory of leisure, on its own, is sufficient as an explanation of the full range of responses and activities in the SCA. It concludes that a more complete explanation of the behaviour and attitudes of participants in the SCA can be gained by juxtaposing elements of several theories.

Chapter two outlines general accounts of social and cultural development that impinge on the problem and the theoretical viewpoints that have been brought to bear on these issues. These include a brief examination of the views of Elias on civilization and figurations; Bourdieu on levels of capital and taste, as well as the effect of the processes of postmodernisation. I also suggest some possible interactions between these approaches. The third chapter covers relevant issues from leisure theory, including Stebbins' work on the amateur / professional relationship and on serious leisure; Hoggett and Bishop's study on discussing group dynamics and life cycles; as well as functionalist perspectives.

The fourth chapter formulates specific research questions, and describes the methodology employed in the empirical study. The fifth chapter explains how the SCA was started, gives a profile of the group as a whole and examines the demographics of the membership. The sixth chapter takes other results of the research and applies them back to the theoretical accounts.

### **Background**

Drawing on different perspectives, from cultural and leisure theory, to look at the SCA, I examine the aesthetics of people's involvement in the SCA, the importance of their social origins and how they are recruited. The term 'aesthetics', usually used in art, is employed in a sociological context to talk about the development of artistic and leisure tastes. This thesis questions why people join in SCA activity, what they get out of it, and its social nature. The characteristics of the SCA can be generalised as an illustration of some of the processes that have occurred, and are occurring, in today's society.

Early approaches to leisure (Huizinga 1949) tended to be formalistic and to discuss it without reference to the activities of the society around it, as if it were an object separate from the rest of the life world and unconnected to it.

'Leisure consists of a number of occupations in which the individual may indulge of his own free will - either to rest, to amuse himself, to add to his knowledge or improve his skills disinterestedly or to increase his voluntary participation in the life of the community after discharging his professional, family and social duties.' (Dumazedier 1960:257)

These approaches ignored questions of differential access to resources and factors that determine an individual's aesthetic taste in leisure activities. They presuppose a condition of total free choice, with almost random selection from the options presented to each individual. Where there was a connection between leisure pursuits and the rest of the life-world, it was presumed that leisure served as a substitute for work, particularly if work was no longer available (Gelber 1991). In the alternative, it was assumed that people entered leisure activities as an escape from work. Leisure thus served the function of a safety valve (Parker 1971).

The possible centrality of leisure in helping establish a sense of identity for an individual was realised by Dubin (1979). However, the reasons that an individual made a particular choice of leisure were still not addressed. Formalist approaches give a sterile and descriptive look at leisure that explain the mechanics of what is happening without actually considering the central question of why it occurs.

## **2. Leisure and Social Change**

### **Civilizing Influences, Sport and 'Tension'**

'The fun is not so much bashing the head (of an opponent) in, but getting the skill to do it safely. You would not get as much gratification if you hurt someone. It is more honourable to defeat them safely.' (interview 45)

'No . . . that was too easy. It has to be harder to beat the bad guys, otherwise it is no fun'. Alexander in "A Fistful of Datas", Star Trek: The Next Generation, #134

As a sidelight to his thesis of the civilizing process, Elias (1982) considered the contribution of sports in the gradual evolution from a violent and individualistic society to one where courtesy and cooperation were more important (Elias and Dunning 1986). This trend, in relation to the tournament, was specifically commented on by Guttman (1992) who states that while Elias makes a valuable contribution to the field of leisure, figurational theories contain some gaps in the processes that they adequately explain. In the fashion of Dunning and Sheard (1979), an examination of the SCA is used to illustrate the change, over time, from a real battlefield (Denholm-Young 1969, Bloch 1975, Anstruther 1963) to a virtual one.

Elias argued that there is a necessary tension for any games or leisure to be satisfying (Elias and Dunning 1986). A goal achieved too quickly would be unsatisfying, but an ending that took too long to achieve would produce boredom. This concept of necessary tension is essential in the understanding of why people from differing situations derive satisfaction from their varied leisure activities. Their different aesthetics will make demands for different levels of tension before fulfilment from the leisure activities that are typical of their particular habitus (Wynne 1990). This necessary tension is well understood by the entertainment and leisure industries. There must be a provision of the new and exciting, but people wish to see this placed within a context of the familiar. This leads to a creation of standardised milieux in film and literature and to the popularity of sports where the rules can be absorbed, and are comfortably familiar, but the result is different each time.

## **Leisure Tastes**

Bourdieu (1978, 1984) adds a new theoretical dimension to the debate on leisure by offering an explanation of why a given person is likely to have a particular habitus. Their habitus is 'the internalised form of class condition and of the conditionings that it entails' (1984: 101) This leads to a particular 'aesthetic', or group of associated activities and tastes, that they 'must' adopt due to their situation. Class fractions within French society have differential access to cultural, educational and symbolic, as well as economic capital. According to Bourdieu, these categories of capital have causal force and are not merely taxonomic remnants of a class analysis. They are the determinants of the trajectory of individuals and thus are integral to their life worlds. Bourdieu's class fractions show a cohesion of taste that necessarily slot their members into various leisure activities. Different fractions each have a unique habitus and, in their own way, to have an internal logic to their sub-cultures and leisure activities.

These aesthetics will also make different contributions to the identity of the members of a leisure society. Additionally, the definition of the 'other' and the distinction between the group and the mundane world outside, make an important contribution to group identity (Stebbins 1992, Elias and Scotson 1965). Bourdieu's explanation of taste has at its core the continued salience of class alone as an explanatory variable. For other commentators, perceived and actual differences between people, whether they are based on consumption (Saunders 1981), geography (Weber 1976) or ethnic groups (Wallman 1983), or class, gender and race (Clarke and Critcher 1985, Tomlinson 1992, Hargreaves 1992) are an essential component in the establishment of identity. Elias and Dunning (1986) discuss the differences between groups and the contribution this makes to the choice of leisure.

Bourdieu's thesis shares several important features with Elias' notion of the civilising process. These include the importance of the individual's social location and the taking of a cultural and historical approach. Whereas Elias is concerned with the development of a dominant aesthetic (Mennel 1992), Bourdieu's work explains cultural difference.

## Leisure and the Postmodernising Process

Working earlier than Bourdieu, and from a different perspective, Gans (1975) concluded that there were five dominant 'taste cultures' in the America of his period. These taste cultures exert less causal force than Bourdieu's class fractions. Gans defines them simply by economic position. He does not mention differences in cultural, educational and symbolic capital. Gans also describes the emergent proto-cultures of the youth, black and ethnic groups. These new groups, which he declines to label as full cultures, break apart the neat economic classification of his main thesis. He also notes a key point on taste and leisure by pointing out the consequences of increased differentiation:

'Homogeneous societies offer little cultural diversity; they generally develop only a single concept of beauty, one style of art (often religious), and one way of home furnishing. American society, with its pervasive division of labour and heterogeneity, includes varieties of art ranging from pinups to abstract expressionism, types of music ranging from the latest rock hit to electronic chamber music, and most important, an equally large number of aesthetic standards to determine the choices people make from the available content.' (Gans 1975: 67-68)

Thus, the more differentiated the society, the greater the number of taste cultures and aesthetic standards that will be required. The implication of this for leisure is that, in an homogenous society, a small range of activities will satisfy the needs of all the populace (Endrei and Zolnay 1986). Diversity is only found by moving from culture to culture. As each society differentiates, further varieties of leisure are required to appeal to the different tastes that are created (or create themselves).

The hyper-differentiation of a society associated by Crook, Pakulski and Waters (1992) with the move out of 'modernity' and an increased intermingling of cultures gives an impetus into the proliferation of taste cultures that lie behind the processes of postmodernisation. Each member of a post-modern culture is 'free' to draw upon the palette of experience that has been collected by their society and in an attitude of 'do-it-yourself', construct the lifestyle that suits their tastes.

'The archive can be drawn in an eclectic and often parodic bricolage of elements . . . or in a 'nostalgic' re-creation of a valued past . . . The 'authentic' performance can only be a simulation which effaces historical distance and meaningful tradition.' (Crook et al. 1992: 65-66)

Contained in the SCA's structure are a selection of historical and fictional referents drawn together in a unique fashion that cannot be explained by modernist theories. To understand this composition, it is necessary to look at what postmodernism can tell us about pastiche and cultural diversity (Crook et al. 1992). The SCA is a group where, despite appearances, purely mimetic violence is enacted within the purview of a 'sub-culture' constructed from a

post-modern melange of images, a reality that is modelled from a series of real and fictional images (Kellner 1989, Gane 1983).

'Each postmodern style elaborates its theme in a methodical, 'rationalized', way: even the most exorbitant pastiche or parody . . . explores as it exploits the limits of simulation.' (Crook et al. 1992: 64)

Arguably, the nature of leisure and leisure cultures have experienced considerable change. Leisure forms that became popular (such as football or cricket) during the period of modernisation have continued to enjoy popularity. Others that emerged at the same time (fox-hunting or boxing) are in decline. At the same time new, postmodernist, forms of leisure have emerged. Examples of these include bungee jumping, surfing the electronic nets and a proliferation of historical re-enactment groups. However, there is no explanation within the sociologies of 'post-modernity' as to why a particular part of the palette of experience is chosen to construct a given pastiche. This is not a casual oversight, as it is argued that there are no longer any socio-tropic sites for this type of analysis. It may no longer be the appropriate map. Bourdieu's theories argue a continued salience for some form of class analysis.

### **3. Leisure and the individual**

#### **'Casual' and 'serious' leisure**

Stebbins (1992), Hoggett and Bishop (1986), and other leisure theorists, provide descriptive ethnographies of leisure and link it to central life interests (Dubin 1979) and explore why people have and need leisure. Central life interests are those activities that people can use to help them construct their identity. Thus, while in most standard accounts of identity, work is central to self-definition (Orzack 1959), other people may use a variant of serious leisure (Gelber 1991).

'Briefly, serious leisure can be defined as the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that is sufficiently substantial and interesting for the participant to find a career there in the acquisition and expression of its special skills and knowledge.' (Stebbins 1992: 3)

Stebbins (1992) contrasts 'serious leisure' with 'casual leisure', which is an activity that is undertaken simply because it is fun. This is a very broad and inclusive category that describes much of our leisure, from watching a comedy show to dining out with friends. To some extent, an activity may be casual leisure for one individual, but may constitute serious leisure for another. The characteristics of serious leisure are listed in Appendix Two.

Serious and casual leisure need to be distinguished from other categories of leisure, not dealt with here, such as 'volunteer' activity (Lenehan 1993, Stebbins 1992: 15). A 'volunteer' is a person who occupies his or her 'spare' time in helping and caring for others. The figuration of the volunteer sector has similarities to other leisure, but is not identical.

Stebbins extends the possible centrality of leisure activities into the concept of the public-amateur-professional figuration. Here, the amateur and the professional are seen as two parts of a single system. People move from one status to the other and a career structure (not necessarily paid) develops. Amateurism does not necessarily imply lower quality, as amateurs may be important contributors to a field, for example in astronomy (such as Levy).

Those persons whose leisure activities are without a professional equivalent can be described as hobbyists. This is the sole distinction between the two. The hobbyist's activity may be as technical and demanding as that of an amateur. 'Amateur' and 'hobbyist' are both descriptors of people who are active within serious leisure.

The third part of the public-amateur-professional figuration is the public. The lack of a sufficient public to pay to consume the results of the activity will mean that there is no chance for a hobby to be professionalised beyond the limits of the system. Thus there may be persons who make their living from a hobby, but their sole market is other hobbyists in their group. There is a limited chance of selling to the general public and thus their hobby will have a restricted internal market.

### **Leisure networks**

Hoggett and Bishop (1986) move from the realm of the individual, considered by Stebbins, to that of the group and address important issues such as recruitment strategies and the life cycle of groups. They stress the importance of the network and contribute the idea that the substantive reason for people engaging in an activity is not necessarily the ostensible purpose of the group to which they belong.

'Groups provide opportunities for making friends and meeting people, suggesting that the substantive activity itself may be of secondary importance.' (Hoggett & Bishop 1986: 33)

These approaches have been criticised as functionalist for failing to address the issue of why a particular activity is chosen by an individual. It is assumed that all forms of leisure are equally accessible to all people and that an individual's choice is made only through exposure in the family of procreation or through friends (Gelber 1991). Factors such as the restrictions placed upon choice of leisure by the socio-economic location of a person's network are conventionally ignored. This includes restrictions due to the level of education that they have achieved, either formally or through auto-didacticism. Notwithstanding any limitations of this approach, it has many valuable contributions to make to the field of leisure theory.

## **4. Methodology**

Most studies addressing questions of leisure activities and tastes have attempted to gather data about a wide variety of groups using either a

historical approach (Elias 1982), a questionnaire format (Bourdieu 1984, Parker and Paddick 1993) or else by selecting a few persons in each group for in-depth interviews (Hoggett and Bishop 1986, Stebbins 1992). This thesis uses all of these methods to focus on the membership characteristics and tastes of the SCA and to determine if a taste culture exists.

## **Quantitative Study**

The first part of the quantitative research was a detailed questionnaire done in Australia, with 184 responses. This represents 29.1 per cent of the Australian membership at the time of distribution. The responding group can be shown to be representative of the population of the SCA in Australia through the use of check questions. Answers to questions, on awards and titles received within the SCA, were compared to known information on the number of these held. There was a very close correspondence between these figures.

Due to copying of the questionnaire, and its distribution on electronic nets, it is not known exactly how many copies were distributed. I estimate a response rate of between 25 and 33 per cent was achieved.

To add to this data a similar questionnaire was used at a major event in America (see Appendix One) where a smaller number of forms were issued. Around 300 questionnaires were distributed, and there was less copying of the original. The estimated response rate is between 35 and 40 per cent. The nature of this event caused it to be attended by a large and representative proportion of the members in Northern California (where the SCA started).

The Californian questionnaire received 121 responses out of around five hundred attendees. People were asked to take a self-enumeration questionnaire on entering the event and returns were sought. The conditions of dissemination were similar to those used in Australia. The insertion of comparable checks was harder than with the Australian form due to some of the check information not being obtainable for the American SCA group.

Any data collected pertains only to the Australian and Californian branches of the SCA, and can not necessarily be generalised to the whole SCA. Thus any reference to the SCA, made without specifying a particular area, refers only to the Australian and Californian groups.

The issues addressed in the SCA questionnaire were the differences between the consumption behaviour of SCA members and patterns of general leisure consumption and behaviour in Australia (ABS 1978, 1992, 1994b). It also sought information to help determine if, over a broad range of members in two continents, people fall into either distinct class fractions, as Bourdieu's theories predict, or else if some other form of consumption or leisure based cohorts exist (Gans 1975). Information that supported the salience of class and of educational, cultural and symbolic capital would tend to endorse Bourdieu's theories. If a cohort is shown to exist, the answers will help gauge the patterns of behaviour and habitus of its members.



In order to investigate the relevance of Bourdieu and Gans, data was collected on the levels of economic, cultural, educational and symbolic capital held by members of the group studied. To help determine their habitus, members on both continents were asked what interests they have both inside and outside the SCA and on various cultural preferences.

To examine questions of group dynamics, information was sought on methods of recruitment into the SCA, reasons for staying in the group and the gratifications associated with membership.

### **Qualitative Study**

Additionally, 30 SCA members in Tasmania filled out California-styled questionnaires and focussed interviews with them obtained detailed information expanding on issues raised in their schedules. Information was sought on any parental employment when the informant was 15 years of age, as well as attitudes to casual and serious leisure.

Focussed interviews were also conducted in America with an isolated group of approximately the same size as the group examined in Tasmania. This was done in a northern Californian town with a population of 70,000 that has a large population of tertiary students. Quotations from Tasmanian interviewees are numbered from 1 to 30 and Californians; 31 to 60.

This second set of interviews enabled a comparison of the in-depth data on two continents. Feldman (1991) has already shown how the map of the habitus of one culture may differ from maps of the habitus of another. Getting the data from two different groups thus provided a modest check on whether the results are an artefact of cultural peculiarities, or if they have a greater universality.

### **Historical Study**

While a major examination of historical sources and of Elias' theories is precluded, some of the data on the tourney and on civility is derived from medieval writings and from historians' accounts. This is used to exemplify the effect of the civilising process and to place Elias in context for the SCA.

## **5. Postmodern medievalism: The Society for Creative Anachronism**

'Thus we are at present witnessing, both in Europe and America, a period of renewed interest in the Middle Ages, with a curious oscillation between fantastic neomedievalism and responsible philological examination.' (Eco 1987: 62)

## **A profile of the group**

The SCA is by far the largest of over a dozen medieval re-creation groups that exist in Australia. The SCA has been active in Australia for fifteen years, with branches in all State capitals and many smaller centres (such as Launceston, Whyalla and Toowoomba). Internationally it has existed for twenty-nine years, growing out of a party held 'to protest the 20th Century' (Paxton 1966) at UC Berkeley. The SCA has groups present on every continent except Africa. Members share a community of action and travel to events around the world. As an example of this, the Tasmanian branch received visits from 13 interstate and 16 international visitors in the last year.

The membership is involved in the study and selective re-creation of aspects of pre-seventeenth century culture in Europe and the Islamic world. SCA formal events held in costume include tournaments, feasts, balls, and games picnics. Other important (but uncostumed) activities include dance, fighting and archery practices, heraldic meetings, craft and history tuition, administrative meetings and informal social nights.

Members choose a 'persona', a name by which they will be known in the Society, and adopt certain aspects of heraldry. These are selected by a member's personal criteria, but must differ from those of a culturally significant person either real or fictional. A person is not tied to any particular time and place in this selection, (although many choose to be) and may attend one event dressed as a Celt and the next in 'Late Italian Renaissance' costume. Depending on individual preference, armour tends to include pieces that represent many different styles and times, but must fulfil stringent safety guidelines. Combat is a non-gendered activity, and takes place using mimetic weapons of rattan.

Titular power in the group (King and Queen, Prince and Princess) is fought for three times a year, with both sexes taking part. The positions of Baron and Baroness (leaders of large groups within a Kingdom, such as those in Tasmania or in Sydney) are the only jobs within the SCA that are elective and tend to change approximately every five years. The power and influence leaders have in their local group depends on the people involved and varies from a quasi-legal form to traditional to charismatic. Decision making at the local level is collegial (Waters 1989) with some increased input from either or both of the Baron and Baroness. All other office holders are appointed by the person they replace, acting in consultation with their local group heads.

The SCA is internally characterised by a fraternal feeling between most of its members and being a group the whole family can belong to. The number of families having three generations playing together in the Society is growing quite rapidly. Many SCA members travel to other parts of the world and are hosted by others whom they have never met before. At the heart of the group lies an interest in honour, courtesy and chivalry. It is common to find members of the group reading and actively discussing medieval books on these subjects and related issues. Castiglione (1976) and de Pisan (1985) are fairly common on the bookshelves of the longer term members and monthly

magazines are published which are devoted to discussing the history and meaning of the concept of 'chivalry' (among other subjects).

These interests are translated most directly to the field of combat. Unlike other forms of sport, and especially other forms of combative sport, the winner of any particular bout is decided only by the participants. It is up to each individual fighter, on their honour, to decide if a blow hitting them is to be counted or not, and to accept the consequences. Those who develop a reputation for not accepting perceived 'good' blows are referred to derisively as having a 'rhino-hide', a major tarnishing of their reputation that is hard to live down.

Chivalry and courtesy theoretically extend to all levels, from the latest newcomer to the most decorated individuals. Every person present is, at least, addressed as 'My Lord' or 'My Lady', while those with more awards may be 'Sir' or 'Your Excellency'. The mythos of the group (jokingly referred to in the SCA as 'The Dream') is that it is possible today to escape the mundane world outside and to briefly create the realm that Mallory wrote of and that John F. Kennedy dreamt of. Most importantly, this is a world that has never actually existed. The SCA represents a real group which simulates a non-existent place and time (Gane 1993).

'Everything here is real and pragmatic, and yet it is the stuff of dreams too.'  
(Baudrillard 1988)

Unlike many other re-creation groups, the SCA has no dogmatic insistence on a rigid time period for its members. This flexibility is an exemplar of the use of pastiche in the construction of post-modern leisure. The pervading spirit of bricolage makes it an ideal group to study and to examine the relevance of the historically based theories of Elias, the functionalist concepts of Stebbins and the theories of stratification of Bourdieu to participants in a leisure society.

Despite its focus on the archaic the utilisation of modern technology by many members helps maintain the SCA is a common culture, regardless of geographic distance. This includes the use of computers for desk-top publishing of newsletters and the diffusion of information through the Internet, and is symptomatic of the post-modern nature of the SCA (see Appendix Three). It draws its inspiration from many radically different periods, and fictional accounts of these periods, which members combine to construct a pastiche.

## **Demographic characteristics of population**

### **Background**

'(Members) are similar in background; middle-class America. Most are now either students or middle class; or trying to be or want to be.' (interview 44)

The family of procreation has long been held to be one of the most important influences upon a person's socialisation. Unsurprisingly, this proves to be the

case with SCA members. One of the most distinctive features of the interviewees is their firm background in the 'new classes' and professions. In most cases, where not absent or on a pension, both of their parents worked when the respondent was of age 15 years (76.9 per cent among Tasmanian interviewees). A comparison with the general Australian population shows that only 24 per cent of households had both partners in a household working full-time in 1991 (up from 21 per cent in 1985: ABS 1992).

There is a strong concentration of people having parents in the professional, managerial and self employed sectors (Table One). Bourdieu (1984: 59) includes these as three of the distinctive class fractions within the petit bourgeoisie. He divides the petit bourgeoisie into five fractions. According to Bourdieu, each fraction has a different habitus which will influence the socialisation of their children leading them to have generally differing tastes.

## Education

'Relaxing (in the SCA) means a break from (University), but the funny thing is that this is also learning - but you don't have to learn, it's because you want to.' (interview 33)

As mentioned earlier, one of Bourdieu's key means of differentiating fractions within each class is educational capital. The membership of the SCA is well endowed in this area. Overall, as a weighted average of the two SCA populations of Australia and California, 52.4 per cent hold a non-trade, post high school, diploma or university degree. Not content with this, 40.4 per cent of the total adult population of the SCA are still studying. Some are seeking further qualifications, but the majority are either at an early point in their career trajectory or are seeking to change to a new career path.

**Table One**  
Occupation of Members and their Parents  
Australian, Californian and Tasmanian SCA Respondents <sup>1</sup>

Parents	<sup>2</sup> Member							<sup>6</sup>
	as % Tas.	<sup>3</sup> Calif.	<sup>3</sup> Total	<sup>4</sup> Aust.	<sup>5</sup> Calif.	<sup>5</sup> Total	<sup>4</sup> Aust.	
self employed	8.5	27.1	18.0	0.0	1.1	0.4	12.2	
managers	17.0	8.3	12.6	4.1	5.3	4.6	7.4	
professional	31.9	29.2	30.5	29.3	40.4	33.7	12.1	
para-professional	14.9	8.3	11.6	10.6	5.3	8.5	7.4	
tradesperson	10.6	6.3	8.7	8.1	9.6	8.7	11.9	
clerical	6.5	6.3	6.5	27.6	13.8	22.2	15.7	
sales & service	8.5	4.2	5.4	3.3	12.8	7.0	13.5	
plant & machinery op.	0.0	6.3	3.1	0.8	2.1	1.3	6.9	
labourers	2.1	4.2	3.2	4.9	3.2	4.2	12.9	

home duties 7 10.9 14.0 12.5 6.0 2.5 4.6  
participation 9 85.5 84.2 84.8 63.4 74.0 67.6 61.4

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## Notes

1 All occupations based on the classification system in ABS 1990b

2 parents occupation when respondent was aged 15.

3 55 living parents were present at home in Tasmania and 57 in California.

4 average weighted by population size

5 184 responses in Australia and 121 in California

6 Source: ABS 1994a

7 percentage of respondents engaged solely in home duties

8 not collected by ABS.

9 participation rate: percentage in workforce (working or unemployed) and not in the armed services, students, pensioners or engaged in home duties.

Several respondents also mentioned that they had started university education, but had left and not completed their studies. Additionally, when asked 'what do you most like about the SCA?', an overall 24.5 per cent of responses indicated that the ability to keep learning was important to them. Thus a major defining feature of any possible taste culture that includes the SCA is either a high level of education, or the attempt to gain one either formally or informally.

## Occupation

'Most labouring trades prefer to be in a bar rather than go out and do things. I used to be like that.' (interview 34)

'People not only tend to choose the taste culture which is congruent with their education, but they cannot be expected to choose content which is incongruent with their education.' (Gans 1975: 126)

As would be expected from their educational levels, SCA members are heavily concentrated in the white-collar, professional and clerical areas and very under-represented in the manually oriented occupations (see Table One). A large proportion of the professionals (forming 15.8 per cent of the total SCA workforce) work with computers as programmers or analysts. Several of the managers also work in this field.

There are very few SCA members who are self-employed or owners. This may be an artefact of most members being at a relatively early stage in their career cycles and may change with time. As an indication of this, since the original survey, three of the original Tasmanian respondents have become self-employed. It is also important to note that very few successful self-employed people have much time to devote to leisure and success in their work may lead a person to leave the SCA, or at least reduce their activity levels.

Given that there is such a high proportion of students, there is a very high workforce participation rate. This is largely due to the low numbers of females who are exclusively engaged in home duties. From the distribution of occupations, there is no possible firm allocation of SCA members to any class category beyond the rather vague generalisation of 'white-collar'.

**Table Two**

Comparison of Other Demographic Figures  
 Californian and Australian SCA Respondents

Australia (%)	California (%)
own or have use of a car	19.1 91.7
have dependent children	8.7 22.3
if has partner, partner works	63.7 86.4
if working, enjoy work	89.5 81.0
SCA has changed self	75.7 83.2
SCA has led to me gaining new skills	95.1 98.3
% in combat <sup>1</sup>	30.1 40.1
% had break from SCA	38.6 51.2
av length of break (months)	14.6 18.0
time in SCA (years)	4-6 10-12

Note:

<sup>1</sup> Heavy or fully armoured combat only, does not count those only involved in archery fighting or period fencing.

### **Income**

The average income of SCA members is lower than would be expected given the high level of education of the group and is near the average weekly wage in both countries. This is explained by the average income of the group being deflated by the presence of disproportionately large numbers of traditionally poor, students (see Table Three). As time goes by, these persons will gain

higher incomes, but there will probably not be an increase in mean income as they will be continually replaced by new generations of students. A large proportion of the membership would thus be seen as continually aspiring to higher incomes, rather than having achieved them.

## **Spending**

The members of the SCA are profligate with both the time and money they spend on their recreation. Indeed, they would often like to be more so. When asked 'What do you like least about the SCA?', 6.1 per cent of respondents indicated that their main source of dissatisfaction was the inability to devote more resources to their leisure. This leads to an average quarterly Australian expenditure of \$235.20 on SCA activities alone. There is no directly comparable figure for Australia generally. The closest available is \$201.50 (ABS 1990a), which is a quarterly household average spent on selected recreational goods and activities. It includes cost of restaurant meals, sporting club and other club subscriptions and purchase of both sporting and recreational equipment. A modal household has two adults, therefore this figure can be roughly halved for an individual.

While most areas in Australia offer two or more SCA activities each week (see Appendix Four), in California it is possible to attend, besides informal events on week nights, a major event every weekend, which may last for the whole weekend. This leads to the higher expenditure by Californian SCA members of \$A489.04 (calculated at 73 cents to the Australian dollar).

For SCA members, like their medieval counterparts, 'conspicuous consumption of valuable goods is a means of reputability to a gentleman of leisure.' (Veblen 1994: 47). Thus, at the event attended in America, one Lady spent most of the time with a fully accoutred hawk perched on her hand. At this event there was no possibility of using this bird for hunting, and her bringing it, and the display of its mild manner was an occasion for showing her ability as a trainer and an exhibition of conspicuous consumption.

## **Work and leisure**

There was no support shown in the data for the contention that people partake in leisure activity as a self-defined escape from work (Parker 1971). The SCA in particular would seem to be an ideal escapist vehicle for the dissatisfied, yet overall 86.1 per cent stated that they enjoyed their work (see also Table Two). Of those who did not enjoy it, the most common response was that they felt their talents were not being recognised. The reaction of these people was not to escape into a leisure pursuit, instead they felt empowered to rectify their dissatisfaction by further education. Thus, despite having the possibility of escapism before them, most were able to consciously use bricolage to select a new future.

**Table Three**  
Comparison of Major Demographic Figures  
Californian and Australian SCA Respondents with General Australian Population

SCA Australia	Australian	general pop.	SCA California
males per 100 females	89.7 99.7		<sub>1</sub> 83.3
time spent (hours/wk)	15.2 5.0		<sub>2</sub> 34.1
% with degree or diploma	45.1 27.3		<sub>1</sub> 63.6
% still studying	41.9 2.8		<sub>1</sub> 37.2
strong religious belief	60.1 60		<sub>3</sub> 51.2

## Notes

1 source: ABS 1992

2 Source: ABS 1994b This includes: non-vocational training; sport, exercise and outdoor activities; attendance at sporting events; hobbies, arts and crafts; and associated travel.

3 Source: Bouma (1992)

The small measure of self-defined escapism, noted by 13.8 per cent of overall respondents, was directed largely towards unwanted aspects of the 'mundane' world; specifically the lack of courtesy. Thus to flee the decivilizing influences of the mundane world (see Mennel 1990 for a discussion of this point), they consciously enter the civilising influence of courtly graces and mimetic violence (see below). This was often done as part of constructing another identity, a conscious building of a 'play self'.

'There is a levelling and your mundane life can be irrelevant. You can choose to create yourself in a new role.' (interview 28)

'The ideals are things that we try and live up to - whereas in mundane life you do not always see this.' (interview 44)

Cohen and Taylor (1976) indicate that any hobby (or game) is a vehicle used to help manage reality, although they view hobbies very narrowly and functionally. They deny an escapist nature to these hobbies as they are part of the normal routine of a person's 'life plan'.

'They represent the attempts of man to preserve an area of "natural" behaviour at a time when the multiplicity of roles and activities available threatens to render everything relative.' (Cohen and Taylor 1976: 99)

Escapism is only conceded if a hobby becomes an obsession and 'the fantasy element threatens to take over' (Cohen and Taylor 1976: 100). They disapprovingly note that, from their perspective this includes 'individuals who have transformed their hobby into a way of life' (1976: 176). Thus it appears that whether escapism exists in a hobby depends on the viewpoint of the observer. SCA members appear to be well aware of crossing this line - and



that some individuals do cross it and are recognised as eccentrics by their fellow members.

'It is more exciting to be with people who are witty and off the wall. Mind you - that is the ones who are playing - I don't want to be around the others.'  
(interview 50)

Because work is part of an individual's *situs*, Parker's argument (1971) that different forms of work experience lead to different experiences of leisure, may be valid. However the work itself, as part of an individual's *situs*, would merely be taking its place as a contributor to each taste culture's *habitus*. Some respondents indicated that, since they indulged in work simply to finance their hobby, the type of work was almost immaterial as long it allowed them the ability to pursue the lifestyle they desired (see also Stebbins 1992: 124).

'(Leisure time) has become the period in which activities valued for their own sake are conducted. Some individuals who used to live in order to work now dare to work in order to "live" or at least dream of doing so.' (Dumazedier 1974: 74)

The SCA network has become important to many members, not only within the Society, but in the mundane world as well. People may live with a group of other members, or go to work at a company where several others already work, or form a discussion group on their company's internal e-mail. It was noted by several interviewees that the SCA formed a network which made work easier to find (see Appendix Three).

'It has been very significant - housing , jobs, information and goods, exchanges have become easier. It is a giant network.' (interview 34)

Hoggett and Bishop (1986: 33) noted the importance of the group *sui generis*, rather than its ostensible purpose and gave this as one of their main reasons, in general, for people staying in groups. The network they found suited them.

'Of the people I know, 95 per cent are in the SCA . I came not for the activity, but to do things with friends.' (interview 34)

'(They are my) family - my emotional support network - the people I call when emergencies happen.' (interview 37)

Others found that the skills that they had learnt in the SCA empowered them to change career:

'I am thinking of becoming a small merchant in (a skill).' (interview 41)

In the USA, large events have attached to them a 'Merchant's Row'. This is often made up of SCA people who have achieved sufficient skill at their crafts (be they armouring, jewellery or tailoring) that there is a demand for their products. This has enabled people to sell goods to a specialised market and

allowed, if not full self-employment in all cases, then at least a profitable sideline. This commodification of the leisure pursuit remains small scale and direct. The producer is the seller, often making goods on order for a particular customer. It has, at least in California, moved outside the scale of market of the hobbyist. Californian SCA merchants have available to them regular medieval marketplaces, called RenFairs, which are patronised by the general public. Whilst this marks some transition from being an amateur to being a professional medievalist (Stebbins 1992), the scale remains small.

'It nevertheless remains true that most of the manufacturing sector remains small-scale and is largely internally generated.' (Hoggett & Bishop 1986: 50)

Rather than representing a commodification of the group, this small scale manufacture represents a step along a career pathway from novice to master (Stebbins 1992: 7). In the SCA, this teaching / learning relationship is more formalised than in most clubs. Overall 20.8 per cent of people in the SCA are formally in such a relationship, either as a teacher or as a student. It also marks the maturing of the group. For Stebbins, an amateur is involved in a leisure pursuit that has a professional equivalent (he cites astronomers as an example). Hobbyists may be just as serious in the tasks they perform in their hobby, they just have very little chance of making a paid career from it. By invoking a professional element, a hobby can evolve into a more mature leisure pursuit with the full amateur - professional spectrum. A good example of this transition is surfing which has moved from its early days as a purely hedonistic hobby to a full spectrum activity catering to the casual amateur as well as the professional.

### **Joining groups**

While people may be predisposed to join in the activities of a particular group, there is nothing to say that they will spontaneously join, or even be aware of this potential. Despite attempts by SCA groups to recruit from the wider community, and an openness to newcomers, the data clearly shows that most SCA people joined a group that was already within their social network. 70.2 per cent of Australians and 67.6 per cent of Americans were introduced by friends, workmates or relations. They move within the orbit of the hobbies that they are exposed to.

'Rather than groups simply ending up with some purely fortuitous collections of people, they do - if mostly unconsciously - use social networks to attract those who will make appropriate contributions to the groups.' Hoggett and Bishop (1986:68)

Thus a person, who could be predicted on the basis of their tastes to have an interest in a certain recreational activity, may not have that activity included in the palette that they are presented with as part of their lifestyle choices. The activities that are readily available to them may not be within the typical choices that they would be expected to choose and may prove uninteresting to them. They may not feel any lack due to this, as they may achieve their central life interest in their work, their family or in volunteering. However, if this

is not the case, they can be characterised as being restless or 'seeking' something.

If these people achieve a realisation that they are in search of something, they will respond to advertising and to the visual stimulation of walking past an 'interesting' activity. The characteristic of seeking excitement that they cannot get through their 'normal' available range of activities is a characteristic of an experimenter in the drug culture. This lack was acknowledged in interviews. Once these 'seekers' had found what they were looking for, they did not need the substitute.

'I do not do drugs now since I got a new social life.' (interview 37)

'I gave up drugs and the drug scene. The SCA filled a space in my life.' (interview 58)

Interviewees were shown a summary of Stebbins' categorisation of serious leisure (see Appendix Two) and invited to comment directly on it, asking questions if they did not understand any portion. It was noted by many interviewees that even if an activity is categorisable as serious leisure by fulfilling all of Stebbins' criteria, it will not necessarily be regarded as serious leisure to all participants in it.

'Yeah, that works, but I wouldn't regard it to apply to the SCA.' (interview 8)

The interviewees strongly suggested that, whilst Stebbins uses a dichotomous division between 'casual' and 'serious' leisure, in practice people's attitudes tend to lie somewhere between them. The true situation is probably a continuum between rarely achieved ideal types.

'I don't think it is a quantum state; there is a spectrum for each person between serious leisure and casual leisure.' (interview 27)

This continuum fits well with a conventional notion of a career trajectory, with people becoming more (or less) 'serious' in their commitment to a group or activity. This variance depends on the time and resources they have available and the attractiveness of competition from other activities (see Table Four).

'You can dabble at any level - and then rest on your Laurels - so to speak.' (interview 37) (The major award available in Arts and Sciences is the Order of the Laurel.)

### **Staying in**

'When you're in the SCA; you're in the SCA.' (interview 43)

As is predicted by various theorists, over a half of all respondents on both continents indicated that they stayed a part of the group for lifestyle reasons.

'I have dropped my other interests - all my friends are in the SCA - my mother is in the SCA.' (interview 43)

The general high level of education is one of the factors that tends to self-select members. Only those who are comfortable in a group will stay in it.

'The main reason I haven't got more involved is that, I don't know if you guys are more intelligent or not, but you use a lot of words that I cannot understand and relate to, so I can't feel part of it.' (interview 21)

## **Gender**

The SCA is numerically dominated by females (see Table Three). It can be conjectured that the emphasis on courtesy helps it provide a congenial and non-threatening social atmosphere. The influence of this gender imbalance may perhaps be seen in the general reliance upon consensus for local decision making rather than more conflictual forms. These questions were not probed in this thesis, but could bear future study.

SCA females take part in all activities on the same basis as males and all competition is 'open'. The original Australian questionnaire asked if people thought females should take part in combat. This received many indignant responses questioning why it was even asked and only one answer of 'no' (from a female). The question was dropped from later versions.

## **Unemployment, age and mobility**

The number of unemployed persons in the SCA (10.7 per cent in Australia) is within the expected levels, and has the same effect upon income that it has in the general population.

The California group has a mean age (40 years) which is ten years older than the Australian group. The average age of the Australian population (32.2 years, ABS 1992) is slightly higher than the survey average (30 years). However, if children attending events were included in the survey average, it would be reduced in both countries, indicating that the SCA, in Australia at least, tends to be youthful.

There is a fair degree of movement of people into and out of the SCA. Overall, 43.6 per cent of respondents had 'taken a break' from the SCA for periods varying from a few weeks to several years. Mostly this was due to moving to an area where SCA was not available to them, but others indicated that it was due to 'burn out' from the high level of activity within the SCA. These people rejoined after they had taken a break from their leisure.

Most members of the SCA were also involved in other leisure, and interviewees indicated that periods of break from the SCA were usually marked by an increase in these other forms of leisure. Often this involved helping in running these groups. Usually this was done without breaking away from the individual's SCA lifestyle and friends.

'We found that organisers in one club were probably also organisers in at least one other.' (Hoggett and Bishop 1986: 65)

Part of the folklore of the SCA is that a 'SCA generation' is around five years. In that time there will be a change (by attrition or by increased recruitment) of around half of the membership of a local group. This implies an inherent instability with 'taste cultures' that 'class cultures' lack. It is harder to change your objective social class than to change the lifestyle with which you surround yourself.

## **6. Theoretical implications of the SCA study**

### **Taste Cultures and Lifestyle**

'Taste cultures are not cohesive value systems, and taste publics are not organised groups . . . they are analytical aggregates which are constructed by the social researcher, rather than real aggregates which perceive themselves as such.' (Gans 1974: 69-70)

According to Bourdieu (1984: 87 & 328), the autodidactic rising fractions who have acquired educational capital can invest this in the fields in which the possessors of social capital cannot have inherited abilities. This means they colonise the new, the re-discovered; making a lifestyle of collage or pastiche. They monopolise the new fields such as science fiction, cinema, jazz, and strip cartoons (Lash 1990). For reasons outlined later, I regard Gans' term of a 'taste culture' as being a more accurate descriptor than a 'class fragment', but the general point holds well (see Table Four).

'Our return to the middle ages is a quest for our roots and, since we want to come back to the real roots, we are looking for 'reliable Middle Ages', not for romance and fantasy, though frequently this is misunderstood and, moved by a vague impulse, we indulge in a sort of escapism à la Tolkien.' Eco (1987: 65)

The SCA is not an isolated taste culture, it is a part of a group of activities that are linked to science fiction. It is no coincidence that many of the founders of the SCA are writers in that genre (for example Gordon R. Dickson, Marion Zimmer Bradley and Poul Anderson). The eclectic attributes encouraged among organised science fiction aficionados (generally called 'fandom') provided a fertile place to experiment. Both the SCA and Fantasy Role Playing Games ('gaming', exemplified by Dungeons and Dragons) started out in the same era in California, both growing out of fandom and flourishing among the same group of persons. People continue to drift from one to another and one can be a recruiting ground for the other. This is not to say that a person will be automatically 'captured' by one activity if they are already involved in the other. The other main activity in this milieu is concerned with using computers creatively for fun.

### **Table Four**

Comparison of Tastes in Other Activities  
 Californian and Australian SCA Respondents

1

Australia (%)	California (%)
read <sub>2</sub> 34.8	read 41.3
game <sub>3</sub> 27.6	game 24.8
music <sub>4</sub> 15.5	computers <sub>5</sub> 18.2
computers 13.8	crafts 16.5
crafts 13.8	hiking 15.7
other sports 13.3	art 15.7
hiking 11.1	music 15.7
gardening 10.5	other 14.5
other 10.5	sciences <sub>6</sub> 13.2
other clubs 9.9	other sports 12.4
history 9.4	equestrian 11.6
SCA only 9.4	swimming 9.9

Notes

1 In Australia there were 33 other activities nominated by three or more people (1.66% of responses). In California there were 37 others from three or more (2.48%). All other activities are aggregated into 'other' and 'other sports'.

2 Where a genre is mentioned, it is almost invariably science fiction or fantasy.

3 Gaming consists of playing role playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons or Traveller.

4 Persons interested in music generally only listened to it, although a few played instruments or sang, and one wrote music.

5 Computers includes all computer games as well as Internet and programming.

6 Sciences includes such diverse elements as astronomy, palaeontology and geology.

The other major defining activities that lie within the taste culture occupied by the SCA are reading and gaming (Table Four). When the Tasmanian and Californian groups were asked to provide their 'three favourite books', an overall 51.4 per cent of nominations were for science fiction or fantasy with only adventure (18.1 per cent) and history / biography (11.0 per cent) also being of any importance. This breakdown carried over to television (SF / fantasy 34.4 per cent, comedy 19.2 per cent and documentaries 13.5 per cent).

Answers to a similar question on musical tastes reflected eclectic taste patterns. While some form of Rock music was nominated in 47.8 per cent of cases, and Classical in only 26.2 per cent, the severely classical pieces cited by Bourdieu (1984: 76) as belonging to the tastes of the most aesthetic fractions (such as Well-Tempered Clavier) were the ones most favoured. Lash (1990) signals that the massification of high culture by post-industrial taste cultures means that Bourdieu's map is increasingly compromised. Formerly obscure works are now released by K-Tel and popularised as movie themes. Other works cited by respondents ranged from Gregorian Chants to New Age. There were no significant taste differences in these areas between the two groups.

Tastes in sports watched were also congruent. Disregarding SCA combat, gridiron (31.8 per cent), winter sports (such as ice skating; 22.2 per cent) and gymnastics (17.5 per cent) were all well regarded as were the more culturally specific and predictable baseball / basketball (25.9 per cent in California) and cricket (21.4 per cent in Tasmania).

Which movies were favoured showed a taste divergence between the two groups. The Californians preferred Historical themes (like Henry V, A Man For All Seasons or Much Ado About Nothing; 24.3 per cent) and then Science Fiction or Fantasy (21.5 per cent). Tasmanians favoured SF or Fantasy (26.3 per cent) over Comedy (20.0 per cent). This is one of the few major taste divergences shown although, curiously, more Californians favoured Australian Rules Football than did Tasmanians.

### **Levels of capital**

As already noted, the economic capital held by SCA members displays the dichotomy of relative poverty (students) and relative prosperity. Despite this, there appears to be little behavioural difference between these two groups except in terms of expenditure. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital likewise seems to have little relevance to the SCA. Persons surveyed and interviewed varied from the majority, who held no symbolic capital, to others who were Ministers of Religion or held several major military decorations. Again, there was no discernible difference between the two groups. With the award system in the SCA, members have the opportunity to accumulate symbolic capital internally. This appears to have more importance to members, in terms of their participation in the SCA, than any external symbolic capital.

The possession of, or at least the desire to possess, high amounts of educational capital seem to be a common denominator of the whole group. To an extent, the same applies to cultural capital, where auto-didacticism seems to be the rule.

The implication of these mixed results is that the model of tastes expounded by Bourdieu may have more relevance in more class-stratified, classically 'modern' societies. In societies which are undergoing the process of hyperdifferentiation and radical change, the old schemata of class become

less relevant and education, culture, and above all else lifestyle come to the fore. Thus the term 'taste culture' is probably the best descriptor to use.

### **Why join the SCA in particular?**

'The SCA aims to recreate 'The Dream'. It is fairly nebulous. The closer you try and define it, the more nebulous it seems. You can only define it by being in it and recognising it (when it all happens).' (interview 28)

'You learn more and get to go more places and you get to wear weird clothes.' (interview 2)

The lifestyle of members is, as far as their resources allow, one of learning, travel and an attempt to translate the courtesy of the troubadours into both their leisure and mundane lives. It also translates into a uniformity of dislikes. Whilst initial responses, regarding dislikes about the SCA had 'internal politics' and 'cliques' predominating, probing during the interview phase established that behind these were concerns for the lapses of courtesy that they engendered.

The lifestyle of the SCA is appropriated and used by members for their own purposes:

'When I took on SCA, I had not actually created a life yet . . . I moulded my life around SCA . . . It is definitely central to what my lifestyle has become.' (interview 27)

'There are people who have grown, who are open, hospitable etc. There are a lot of young ones who have been steered away from drugs and street culture and matured and made socially accepted.' (interview 26)

While there are several options available within their taste culture, SCA members choose the option of increased courtesy, SF fans sought increased literary pursuits, gamers seek increased escapism and computer buffs, increased technology. From the interviewees, it is evident that most have moved from one or other of these other leisure pursuits into the SCA. Those who 'take a break' often do so by re-emphasising other connections and undoubtedly some leave the SCA entirely but remain within the ambit of the broader taste culture of which the SCA is a part. From the interviewees comments, the determinant of these movements is the individual stress on the elements of chivalry and courtesy that remain a central concern to the membership of the SCA.

'We can strive for something that is more than mundane and have ideals to keep intact - not like in Harlequin romances, but something more.' (interview 32)



## Identity

Much of the satisfaction with work, noted earlier, stems from the high number of professionals in the SCA. Those surveyed had occupations ranging from doctors and lawyers to University lecturers and NASA programmers. Some of the members, in their employment, are already qualified and working in the field of medievalism. They may teach, research or entertain and it is very easy for them to carry their leisure into their workplace and vice versa.

'Some (people work) because they find fulfilment in their jobs. The professionals of today and tomorrow tend to fall into this category; for many, the lines separating their work and their leisure have always been imprecise.' (Stebbins, 1992: 124)

For these fortunate people, work and leisure blend into a whole. Their central life interest is evident and they are able to enjoy it. For a large number of Australians, occupation is of declining importance as a source of identity (Emmison and Western 1990).

'The central life interest of many . . . is likely to shift to the leisure sector of life, encouraging men and women to work only long enough to make the money needed to enjoy their free time.' (Stebbins 1992: 124)

Many members of the SCA found their participation in the group to be a contributing factor in their development of identity (see Table Two). In the weighted sample available, 63.3 per cent stated that the SCA was important to them as a 'source of self-identification'. Emmison and Western (1990) showed that as class decreases in salience, other sources of identity will become more important. This self-identification level should not be overstressed as there is a methodological problem involved. Since the question was included in a framework which predisposes people to think about the SCA, there will be an increase in the number of affirmative answers expected. Therefore, this should only be taken as an indication of a trend without relying too much on the actual percentages.

This problem does not attach so much to asking whether a person has been changed by their contact with the SCA. Most people who commented on this area signalled that the greatest changes had been in the areas of social skills or of increased technical ability in craft or other areas (see Table Two).

Those interviewed showed themselves to be very selective in their self-identification, choosing from the identity sets available to them as it suited their purposes (Wallman 1983).

'The identity set chosen would depend on the circumstances.' (interview 12)

' . . . it depends on who I am with, how I identify and what identity I use.' (interview 18)

'People vary in how they define themselves, depending on the context you speak to them in.' (interview 7)

## **The Historical - Eliasian perspective**

As mentioned earlier, courtesy is of prime importance in the SCA and this courtesy is often best seen in combat. While the SCA creates a simulacra of medieval combat, rather than a reprise, it is still useful to briefly look at the episodic and disjointed history of the tournament. It evolved from the bloody open-field melees of the ninth century to the more 'sporting' standards of the thirteenth century (Denholm-Young 1969, Keen 1984) and finally to the style impressed upon us by Hollywood. Originally, when tourneys were the nobility's way of practising for war, the winners were the team who held the field. For the professional tourneyer it ceased to be a sport and became a means of earning a living. As time went by, the winner came to be judged by points scored or by the spectators (Endrei & Zolnay 1986). It is interesting to note that, after their military utility had ceased, each revival of the tournament used simulations of perceived earlier combats as a base (Williams 1971, Contamine 1984). Gradually this mimetic nature increased (Anstruther 1963, Guttman 1992) until the tension provided by the sport was not sufficient to maintain it.

'By the end of the Middle Ages, they had largely become a ritualised spectacle or formal parade respecting an increasingly strict etiquette.' (Contamine 1984: 216)

During the history of the tourney, there has been a trend towards lesser risk and greater courtesy. This reaches a pinnacle in the latest re-birth of the sport, the tourney as practised by the SCA. All combat is on foot (both for safety and financial reasons) and very strict safety standards are observed. Most important however is the attitude of the fighters:

'We deliberately do honour to each other. When I watch (sport) it is definitely a matter of what the ref doesn't see doesn't matter. In the SCA we have to deal with this ourselves, within us.' (interview 22)

Rather than the raw violence of the early tourneys, the attitude to the mimetic violence of the SCA is that the combat itself, by its very nature, is a civilising influence. The Knights (the highest award for fighting) are held up as models of chivalry and courtesy exemplifying the civilising influence of combat.

Although fighting in a tourney is the most visible manifestation of the SCA, it is only a small part of the figuration. Indeed an overall 72.6 per cent of respondents included crafts and learning as being their interest in the SCA, as opposed to 49.5 who included heavy combat. Behind the combat is a highly differentiated system which allows the construction of the armour and clothes, registers the coats of arms used on the field, records combat results, regulates safety, makes public announcements and provides a focus for the combat. Thus no single part of the SCA can be understood without looking at the rest of the figuration.

Not only do individual members have needs, but so does the figuration as a whole. Group status (being a Barony, for instance) depends on the size of the group and the level of activity in it. This flows back to the members, as a Barony has a much richer symbolic life than the next smallest group, a Shire. This richness stems from having a greater chance for pageantry and display (such as having local Awards, a Baronial Guard or a titled Herald). Each individual member thus has an interest in promoting the growth of their group.

The SCA is a complex and highly differentiated figuration which contains the latest simulacra of early medieval combat. The processes which are occurring within the SCA provide support for many elements of Elias' views on the civilising process and on figurational sociology generally.

## **7. Conclusions**

The SCA displays a homogeneity of demographic features and of taste among its members that indicates that it is not composed of a random collection of individuals. It is a part of a taste culture. Experience within the field of this culture suggests that the other main leisure activities that constitute this culture are science fiction, computers and gaming. Other areas where SCA members are likely to be found (although they are not dominant in them) are equestrian sports, hiking groups and other medieval re-creation groups.

This thesis therefore begins to illustrate that an individual's inclusion in a particular leisure activity is not allocated on a random basis. They choose activities, from the palette presented to them, creating a lifestyle that is suitable by a process of bricolage.

These results confirm those of other researchers in the field of leisure theory. There appears to be close similarity with the studies by Hoggett and Bishop (1986), regarding the internal workings of groups, their nature as social networks, and some of the motivations of their members.

'Indeed, several respondents even used the metaphor of 'the family' to describe the nature of their attachment to their group.' (Hoggett and Bishop 1986: 54)

'It is like a family - everyone is friendly.' (interview 23)

The importance of the leisure lifestyle and the growing effect of postmodernising influences (Crook et al. 1992) to SCA members is shown. This choice of lifestyles does not extend to an escape from work (Parker 1991), but rather complements it to create a whole lifestyle (Cohen and Taylor 1976). As a part of lifestyle, its role as one contribution to the development of identity as a central life interest (Dubin 1979) is also shown. This is done by individuals locating a chosen activity on a 'casual - serious' leisure spectrum (Stebbins 1992).

There appears to be support for the theories of Bourdieu (1984) and of Gans (1975), with the qualification that there is no universal map of tastes. If a society is class conscious, then class, and those factors that map it (such as occupation and income), will be an important indicator of membership in a taste culture (Bourdieu 1984). In a culture where class is of less salience (Emmison and Western 1990) then it will be less important as an indicator of taste (Feldman 1991). If class is divorced from Marxian theory, and used as a descriptor (Pakulski 1993), there may be a possible continuing use for the concept.

There is support for the work of Elias on the civilising process (1982) and on figurational theory generally (1986). The level of civility found in the Society indicates a basic desire amongst the members for a level of courtesy that they do not necessarily find in a mundane world which is popularly perceived (both inside and outside the SCA) as decivilised (but see Mennell 1990). The figuration of the SCA is a whole, with each of the parts helping to promote the activities of the group and individuals gaining pleasure from the 'tension' created in the activity.

### **Further research**

This thesis maps the limits of a section of a small, and limited, taste culture. While I have indicated other possible leisure activities which fall within this taste culture, it would be useful to research these and map the limits of the entire group. There exist in Australia a number of other taste cultures. It is likely that, with increasing complexity, and an increase in the processes of post-modernisation, this number will increase. An adequate map of this field needs to be undertaken.

Unlike the work of Feldman on dining habits (1991), this thesis has shown a basic internal consistency in a particular taste between two countries. This indicates that individual tastes and taste cultures vary in how ubiquitous they are in application. More work is therefore needed to show how universal (or restricted) each taste culture is.

The ultimate implication of this work is that, given a knowledge of the level of universality of taste cultures and adequate maps of them, it will be possible to begin to understand why people choose particular leisure activities and to understand the contribution of taste cultures to our increasingly lifestyle-dominated society.

### **Appendix One**

There were three questionnaires involved in this project. The set of questions in this attachment comes from the questionnaire used for California. The original Australian set differed from this in that it lacked questions 8 and 9, as well as 55 to 62. It included a separation of phone expenses, a question on attitudes to females in combat, and sought various measures of inclusivity in the group. These questions were dropped from later versions as they did not

provide significant extra information. The income question was based on an Australian income quartile instead of the Californian format. I was unable to obtain a set of quartile figures for America. There were also some minor linguistic variations, different pre-ambles. The form used for the Tasmanian interviewees differed from the Californian only in the income question and the pre-amble.

1. What is your sex?
2. How long have you been involved in the SCA?
3. What is your occupation?
4. How much time per week (average over the last three months) did you spend going to SCA events or meetings?
5. How much time per week (average over the last three months) did you spend making things for SCA purposes?
6. Roughly how many Principality or Kingdom events have you been to?
7. How much time per week (average over the last three months) did you spend on administration for the SCA?
8. How much time per week (average over the last three months) did you spend teaching in an SCA context?
9. Please list any medals, awards or titles that you may have outside the SCA.
10. How much money did you spend directly on SCA within the last three months? (estimate only please)

Please tick the box that most applies in your situation

11. I am currently:  
{single / unattached} {attached in a long term relationship}
12. My current income falls in the range of:  
{ \$0 - 308 week (\$0 - 16,003 p.a.) } { \$309 - 538 (16,004 - 28,000 p.a.) }  
{ \$539 - 769 (\$28,001 - 40,000 p.a.) } { \$769 - 1145 (\$40,001 - 59,550 p.a.) }  
{ \$1146 or more (\$59,551 or more) }
13. I am living in:  
{my own home with my (non-parental) family} {in my parental home}  
{in rented accommodation on my own or with another person}  
{in rented accommodation with a group of people}
14. I went to a:  
{government school} {church school} {military school} {other private school}

15. My highest level of education is:

{primary school} {secondary school (year 10)} {secondary school (year 12)}  
{trades certificate} {diploma or other formal qualification} {university degree}

My qualifications are in the field of:

I am still studying for:

16. I am:

{10 - 15 years old} {16 - 20 years old} {21 - 25 years old} {26 - 35 years old}  
{36 - 45 years old} {46 - 55 years old} {56 - 65 years old} {66 + years old}

17. My suburb is best described as: (you can tick more than one)

{inner city} {suburban} {rural fringe} {old} {affluent} {poor} {professional}  
{working class} {new}

Can you please answer these as YES or NO.

18. Do you have strong religious beliefs?

19. Is the SCA important to you as a part of your self-identification?

20. Have you been to an overseas or interstate SCA event?

21. Has the SCA, directly or indirectly, changed the way you act.

22. Has the SCA, directly or indirectly, led you to develop new skills.

23. Do you belong to an SCA household?

24. Have you ever acted as a host for interstate or overseas SCA guests (overnight or longer)?

25. Have you been hosted by interstate or overseas SCA people while travelling (overnight or longer)?

26. Have you ever read the Corpora?

27. If you have one, does your partner belong to the SCA?

28. Do you fight in "light" combat?

29. Do you fight in "heavy" combat?

30. Do you fight in rapier or "period fencing" combat?

31. Are you a paid up member of the SCA Inc?

32. Do you own, or have the use of, a car?

33. Do you have any dependant children?

Do you have any of these awards or titles? (Yes/No)

34. Duke / Duchess

35. Count / Countess

36. Viscount(ess)

37. Laurel / Knight / Pelican

38. Baron(ess)

39. Leaf or other Kingdom award

40. Principality awards

41. Award of Arms

42. Baronial awards

43. Do you have (or are you) an apprentice / protege / squire?

44. Have you been to an event in another Kingdom?

45. Have you ever had a break from the SCA?

How long for?

46. If you have one, does your partner do paid work?

If not, why not?

47. If you are engaged in paid work, would you count yourself as being happy in it?

If not, why not?

Please give a short answer for the following questions. If you wish to attach more comment, please feel free to do so.

48. If you have ever held any offices in the SCA, what were they? (please include level: canton, barony etc)

49. Please list other sports, hobbies or interests you have outside the SCA

50. How did you become involved with the SCA?

51. What areas of interest do you have in the SCA? \*(heraldry, arts, fighting etc)

52. What do you like most about the SCA?

53. What do you like least about the SCA?
54. Why do you stay in the SCA?
55. Please list your three favourite composers / songwriters.
56. Please list your three favourite visual artists.
57. Please list your three favourite film s / plays.
58. Please list your three favourite pieces of music / songs.
59. Please list your three favourite books.
60. Please list your three favourite foods.
61. Please list your three favourite sports to watch.
62. Please list your three favourite television shows.

## **Appendix Two**

This summary of Stebbins list of characteristics of 'serious' leisure (1992: 7) was shown to interviewees for reaction and comment.

- ıIt contains a need to persevere. There is no instant grasping or mastery of the whole activity. Skill may only be reached after many years of hard work.
- ıThere is a pattern of discernible career trajectories within the activity. These range from the novice to full mastery and may continue into a declining or 'emeritus' stage of semi-retirement.
- ıThere is a need for effort based on specially acquired knowledge, training or skills.
- ıThe practitioner of serious leisure has the possibility of obtaining eight durable benefits from their activity. These are in the areas of: self actualisation, self-enrichment, self-expression, re-creation or renewal of self, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image, social interaction and belongingness, as well as (often) lasting physical products. There is also one non-durable benefit, which is the shared attribute with casual leisure; that is self-gratification or pure fun.
- ıA serious leisure culture will contain a unique ethos, a series of 'special beliefs, norms, events, values, traditions, moral principles and performance standards'.
- ıPeople have a strong identification with their chosen pursuit - including a tendency to identify themselves by and with it when describing themselves.



## **Appendix Three**

These are excerpts from items taken from the Internet channel rec.sca.west on 14 November 1994. This channel is only used by SCA people in California, Alaska and Australia. The first example is an exemplar of the use by SCA members of the nets for communication and play. The posters are using pastiche to help construct their lifestyle, and sharing it with the world. The second shows the use of the nets to expand the network of the SCA as well displaying the use of SCA for finding work.

### **Item One**

'Kim and Laura are celebrating our birthdays together this year, and you're invited. Throw your voice off the moon. The first moon bounce radio demonstration in Monterey County . . . Glen Cox will be organising a SCA demonstration . . . For those who can't make it, we will load SCA pix on our www home page during the party . . . as the party rages on, Steve will upload pictures, sound clips, and anything else on the internet world wide web home page.

Also we'll do an electronic fox hunt, . . . Mariachi music, classical piano, singing'

### **Item Two**

'Anyone seeking employment in the Hayward area?

My company (in the computer field) is currently looking to hire two new positions. If you are currently looking for a new job in the Hayward area (San Francisco area, East bay) we might have something to interest you.

(job details and contact follow)'

## **Appendix Four**

This is the list of events for the SCA group in Tasmania for November 1994. It is included to illustrate the number, and range, of activities available in the SCA group in Hobart. Launceston has a separate list.

1 Tuesday night Social night

3 Thursday afternoon Fighter practice

5 Saturday afternoon Dance practice

Saturday night Arts and Sciences (teaching session)

6 Sunday morning Arts and Sciences (practical workshop)

Sunday afternoon Archery practice

7 Monday night Advanced dance practice

8 Tuesday night Heraldic workshop

10 Thursday afternoon Fighter practice

12 Saturday Feast and Tourney

14 Monday night Advanced dance practice

15 Tuesday night Social night

17 Thursday afternoon Fighter practice

19 Saturday afternoon Dance practice

20 Sunday morning Arts and Sciences (practical workshop)

Sunday afternoon Archery practice

21 Monday night Advanced dance practice

22 Tuesday night Heraldic workshop

24 Thursday afternoon Fighter practice

26 Saturday Tournament

Saturday night Administrative meeting

27 Sunday Demonstration of SCA activities for Red Cross Fete at  
Government House

28 Monday night Advanced dance practice

29 Tuesday night Social night

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