

The Field of Cultural
Production

Essays on Art and Literature

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The Historical Genesis of a Pure Aesthetic

Let us begin with a paradox. It has occurred to some philosophers (I have in mind Arthur Danto) to ponder the question of what enables one to distinguish between works of art and simple, ordinary things, and to suggest with unflinching sociologistic daring (which they would never accept in a sociologist) that the principle of this ontological difference must be sought in an institution. The art object, they say, is an artefact whose foundation can only be found in an *artworld*, that is, in a social universe that confers upon it the status of a candidate for aesthetic appreciation.¹ What has not yet occurred (although one of our post-modernists will surely come to it sooner or later) is for a philosopher – one perfectly ‘worthy of the name’ – to treat the question of what allows us to distinguish a philosophical discourse from an ordinary one. Such a question becomes particularly pertinent when, as in the case here, the philosopher, designated and recognized as such by a certain *philosophical world*, grants himself a discourse which he would deny (under the label of ‘sociologism’) to anyone like the sociologist, who is not a part of the philosophical institution.²

The radical dissymmetry which philosophy thus establishes in its relationship with the human sciences furnishes it with, among other things, unflinching means for masking what it borrows from them. In fact, it seems to me that the philosophy labelled post-modern (by one of those labelling devices until now reserved for the artworld), merely readopts in a denied form (i.e. in the sense of Freud’s *Verneinung*), not only certain of the findings of the social sciences but also of historicist philosophy which is, implicitly or explicitly, inscribed in the practice of these

sciences. This masked appropriation, which is legitimized by the denial of borrowing, is one of the most powerful strategies yet to be employed by philosophy against the social sciences and against the threat of relativization that these sciences have held over it. Heidegger’s ontologization of historicity is, indisputably, the model for this operation.³ It is a strategy analogous to the *double jeu* which allows Derrida to take from social science (against which he is poised) some of its most characteristic instruments of ‘deconstruction’. While opposing to structuralism and its notion of ‘static’ structure a ‘post-modernized’ variant of the Bergsonian critique of the reductive effects of scientific knowledge, Derrida can give himself the air of radicalism. He does this by using, against traditional literary criticism, a critique of binary oppositions which goes back, by way of Lévi-Strauss, to the most classical analysis of ‘forms of classifications’ so dear to Durkheim and Mauss.⁴

But one cannot win at all the tables, and the sociology of the artistic institution which the ‘deconstructor’ can carry out only in the mode of *Verneinung* is never brought to its logical conclusion: its implied critique of the institution remains half-baked, although well enough done to arouse delicious shudders of a bogus revolution.⁵ Moreover, by claiming a radical break with the ambition of uncovering ahistorical and ontologically founded essences, this critique is likely to discourage the search for the foundation of the aesthetic disposition and of the work of art where it is truly located, namely, in the *history* of the artistic institution.

THE ANALYSIS OF ESSENCE AND THE ILLUSION OF THE ABSOLUTE

What is striking about the diversity of responses which philosophers have given to the question of the specificity of the work of art is not so much the fact that these divergent answers often concur in emphasizing the absence of function, the disinterestedness, the gratuitousness, etc. of the work of art,⁶ but rather that they all (with the possible exception of Wittgenstein) share the ambition of capturing a transhistoric or an ahistoric essence. The pure thinker, by taking as the subject of reflection his or her own experience — the experience of a cultured person from a certain social milieu — but without focusing on the historicity of that reflection and the historicity of the object to which it is applied (and by considering it a pure experience of the work of art), unwittingly establishes this singular experience as a transhistorical norm for every aesthetic perception. Now this experience, with all the aspects of singularity that it appears to possess (and the feeling of uniqueness probably contributes greatly to its worth), is itself an institution which is the product of historical invention and whose *raison d’être* can be

reassessed only through an analysis which is itself properly historical. Such an analysis is the only one capable of accounting simultaneously for the nature of the experience and for the appearance of universality which it procures for those who live it, naïvely, beginning with the philosophers who subject it to their reflections unaware of its *social conditions of possibility*.

The comprehension of this particular form of relationship with the work of art, which is an immediate comprehension, presupposes the analyst's self-understanding of himself – an understanding which can be submitted neither to simple phenomenological analysis of the lived experience (inasmuch as this experience rests on the active forgetting of the history of which it is a product), nor to the analysis of the language ordinarily used to express this experience (inasmuch as it too is the historical product of a process of dehistoricization). Instead of Durkheim's saying 'the unconscious is history', one could write 'the *a priori* is history'. Only if one were to mobilize all the resources of the social sciences would one be able to accomplish this kind of historicist actualization of the transcendental project which consists of reappropriating, through historical anamnesis, the product of the entire historical operation of which consciousness too is (at every moment) the product. In the individual case this would include reappropriating the dispositions and classificatory schemes which are a necessary part of the aesthetic experience as it is described, naïvely, by the analysis of essence.

What is forgotten in self-reflective analysis is the fact that although appearing to be a gift from nature, the eye of the twentieth-century art lover is a product of history. From the angle of phylogenesis, the pure gaze, capable of apprehending the work of art as it demands to be apprehended (i.e., in itself and for itself, as form and not as function), is inseparable from the appearance of producers of art motivated by a pure artistic intention, which is itself inseparable from the emergence of an autonomous artistic field capable of formulating and imposing its own ends against external demands. From the side of ontogenesis, the pure gaze is associated with very specific conditions of acquisition, such as the early frequenting of museums and the prolonged exposure to schooling, and to the *skholè* that it implies. All of this means that the analysis of essence which overlooks these conditions (thus universalizing the specific case) implicitly establishes as universal to all aesthetic practices the rather particular properties of an experience which is the product of privilege, that is, of exceptional conditions of acquisition.

What the ahistorical analysis of the work of art and of the aesthetic experience captures in reality is an institution which, as such, enjoys a kind of twofold existence, in things and in minds. In things, it exists in the form of an artistic field, a relatively autonomous social universe

which is the product of a slow process of constitution. In minds, it exists in the form of dispositions which were invented by the same movement through which the field, to which they immediately adjusted themselves, was invented. When things and minds (or consciousness) are immediately in accord – in other words, when the eye is the product of the field to which it relates – then the field, with all the products that it offers, appears to the eye as immediately endowed with meaning and worth. This is so clearly the case that if the extraordinary question of the source of the art-work's value, normally taken for granted, were to arise at all, a special experience would be required, one which would be quite exceptional for a cultured person, even though it would be, on the contrary, quite ordinary for all those who have not had the opportunity to acquire the dispositions which are objectively required by the work of art. This is demonstrated by empirical research and is also suggested by Danto, for example.⁷ Following a visit to an exhibit of Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* at the Stable Gallery, Danto discovered the arbitrary character, *ex instituto* as Leibniz would have said, of the imposition of the value created by the field through an exhibit in a place which is both consecrated and consecrating.

The experience of the work of art as being immediately endowed with meaning and value is a result of the accord between the two mutually founded aspects of the same historical institution: the cultured habitus and the artistic field. Given that the work of art exists as such (i.e. as a symbolic object endowed with meaning and value) only if it is apprehended by spectators possessing the disposition and the aesthetic competence which are tacitly required, one could say that it is the aesthete's eye which constitutes the work of art as a work of art. But one must also remember immediately that this is possible only to the extent that aesthetes themselves are the product of a long exposure to artworks.⁸ This circle, which is one of belief and of the sacred, is shared by every institution which can function only if it is instituted simultaneously within the objectivity of a social game and within the dispositions which induce interest and participation in the game. Museums could bear the inscription: Entry for art lovers only. But there clearly is no need for such a sign, it all goes without saying. The game makes the *illusio*, sustaining itself through the informed player's investment in the game. The player, mindful of the game's meaning and having been created for the game because he was created by it, plays the game and by playing it assures its existence. The artistic field, by its very functioning, creates the aesthetic disposition without which it could not function. Specifically, it is through the competition among the agents with vested interests in the game that the field reproduces endlessly the interest in the game and the belief in the value of the stakes. In order to illustrate the

operation of this collective endeavour and give an idea of the numerous acts of delegation of symbolic power and of voluntary or forced recognition through which this reservoir of credit (upon which the creators of fetishes draw) is engendered, it will suffice to recall the relationship among the various avant-garde critics who consecrate themselves as critics by consecrating works whose sacred value is barely perceived by cultured art lovers or even by the critic's most advanced rivals. In short, the question of the meaning and the value of the work of art, like the question of the specificity of aesthetic judgement, along with all the great problems of philosophical aesthetics, can be resolved only within a social history of the field; along with a sociology of the conditions of the establishment of the specific aesthetic disposition (or attitude) that the field calls for in each one of its states.

THE GENESIS OF THE ARTISTIC FIELD AND THE INVENTION OF THE PURE GAZE

What makes the work of art a work of art and not a mundane thing or a simple utensil? What makes an artist an artist and not a craftsman or a Sunday painter? What makes a urinal or a wine rack that is exhibited in a museum a work of art? Is it the fact that they are signed by Duchamp, a recognized artist (recognized first and foremost as an artist) and not by a wine merchant or a plumber? If the answer is yes, then isn't this simply a matter of replacing the work-of-art-as-fetish with the 'fetish of the name of the master'? Who, in other words, created the 'creator' as a recognized and known producer of fetishes? And what confers its magical or, if one prefers, its ontological effectiveness upon his name, a name whose very celebrity is the measure of his claim to exist as an artist and which, like the signature of the fashion designer, increases the value of the object upon which it is affixed? That is, what constitutes the stakes in quarrels of attribution and the authority of the expert? Where is one to locate the ultimate principle of the effect of labelling, or of naming, or of theory? (Theory is a particularly apt word because we are dealing with seeing – *theorein* – and of making others see.) Where does this ultimate principle, which produces the sacred by introducing difference, division and separation, reside?

Such questions are quite similar in type to those raised by Mauss when, in his *Theory of Magic*, he pondered the principle of magic's effectiveness, and found that he had to move back from the instruments used by the sorcerer to the sorcerer himself, and from there to the belief held by his followers. He discovered, little by little, that he had to confront the entire social universe in whose midst magic evolves and is

practised. Likewise, in the infinite regress in search of the primary cause and ultimate foundation of the art-work's value, one must make a similar move. And in order to explain this sort of miracle of transubstantiation (which is at the very source of the art-work's existence and which, although commonly forgotten, is brutally recalled through strokes of genius *à la* Duchamp), one must replace the ontological question with the historical question of the genesis of the universe, that is, the artistic field, within which, through a veritable continuous creation, the value of the work of art is endlessly produced and reproduced.

The philosopher's analysis of essence only records the product of the real analysis of essence which history itself performs objectively through the process of autonomization within which and through which the artistic field is gradually instituted and in which the agents (artists, critics, historians, curators, etc.) and the techniques, categories and concepts (genre, mannerisms, periods, styles, etc.) which are characteristic of this universe are invented. Certain notions which have become as banal and as obvious as the notion of artist or of 'creator', as well as the words which designate and constitute them, are the product of a slow and long historical process. Art historians themselves do not completely escape the trap of 'essentialist thought' which is inscribed in the usage – always haunted by anachronism – of historically invented, and therefore dated, words. Unable to question all that is implicitly involved in the modern notion of artist, in particular the professional ideology of the uncreated 'creator' which was developed during the nineteenth century, and unable to make a break with the apparent object, namely the artist (or elsewhere the writer, the philosopher, the scholar), in order to consider the field of production of which the artist (socially instituted as a 'creator') is the product, art historians are not able to replace the ritualistic inquiry concerning the place and the moment of the appearance of the character of the artist (as opposed to the craftsman) with the question of the economic and social conditions underlying the establishment of an artistic field founded upon a belief in the quasi-magical powers attributed to the modern artist in the most advanced states of the field.

It is not only a matter of exorcising what Benjamin called the 'fetish of the name of the master' in a simple sacrilegious and slightly childish inversion – and whether one wishes it or not, the name of the master is indeed a fetish. It is a question of describing the gradual emergence of the entire set of social conditions which make possible the character of the artist as a producer of the fetish which is the work of art. In other words, it is a matter of constituting the artistic field (which includes art analysts, beginning with art historians, even the most critical among

them) as the locus where the belief in the value of art and in the artist's power of valuable creation is continually produced and reproduced. This would yield not only an inventory of the artist's indices of autonomy (such as those revealed through the analysis of contracts, the presence of a signature, or affirmations of the artist's specific competence, or the recourse in case of a dispute to the arbitration by peers, etc.), but also an inventory of the signs of the autonomy of the field itself, such as the emergence of the entire set of the specific institutions which are a necessary condition for the functioning of the economy of cultural goods. These include: places of exhibit (galleries, museums, etc.), institutions of consecration or sanction (academies, salons, etc.), instances of reproduction of producers and consumers (art schools, etc.), and specialized agents (dealers, critics, art historians, collectors, etc.), all of whom are endowed with the dispositions objectively required by the field and the specific categories of perception and appreciation, which are irreducible to those in common use and which are capable of imposing a specific measure of the value of the artist and of her products. As long as painting is measured by surface units and duration of production, by the quantity and price of the materials used (gold or ultramarine), the artist-painter is not radically different from a house painter. That is why, among all the inventions which accompany the emergence of the field of production, one of the most significant is probably the elaboration of an artistic language. This involves first establishing a way of naming painters, of speaking about them and about the nature of their work as well as of the mode of remuneration for their work, through which is established an autonomous definition of properly artistic value irreducible to the strictly economic value and also a way of speaking about painting itself, of pictorial techniques, using appropriate words (often pairs of adjectives) which enable one to speak of pictorial art, the *manifattura*, that is, the individual style of the painter whose existence it socially constitutes by naming it. By the same logic, the discourse of celebration, notably the biography, also plays a determining role. This is probably due less to what it says about painters and their work than to the fact that the biography establishes the artist as a memorable character, worthy of historical account, much like statesmen and poets. (It is known that ennobling comparisons – *ut pictura poesis* – contribute to the affirmation of the irreducibility of pictorial art, at least for a time and until they become a hindrance.) A genetic sociology should also include in its model the action of the producers themselves and their claim to the right to be the sole judges of pictorial production, to produce, themselves, the criteria of perception and appreciation for their products. Such a sociology should also take into account the effect – on themselves and the image they have of their

production, and thus on their production itself – of the image of themselves and their production that comes back to them through the eyes of the agents engaged in the field – other artists, but also critics, clients, collectors. (One can assume, for example, that the interest in sketches and cartoons shown by certain collectors since the *quattrocento* has only helped to contribute to the artists' exalted view of their own worth.)

Thus, as the field is constituted as such, it becomes clear that the 'subject' of the production of the art-work – of its value but also of its meaning – is not the producer who actually creates the object in its materiality, but rather the entire set of agents engaged in the field. Among these are the producers of works classified as artistic (great or minor, famous or unknown), critics of all persuasions (who themselves are established within the field), collectors, middlemen, curators, etc., in short, all who have ties with art, who live for art and, to varying degrees, from it, and who confront each other in struggles where the imposition of not only a world view but also a vision of the artworld is at stake, and who, through these struggles, participate in the production of the value of the artist and of art.

If such is, in fact, the logic of the field, then one can understand why the concepts used to consider works of art, and particularly their classifications, are characterized (as Wittgenstein has observed) by the most extreme indeterminacy. That is the case with genres (tragedy, comedy, drama, the novel), with forms (ballad, rondeau, sonnet, sonata), with periods or styles (Gothic, baroque, classical) or with movements (Impressionist, Symbolist, Realist, Naturalist). One can also understand why confusion does not diminish when it comes to concepts used to characterize the work of art itself and the terms used to perceive and to appreciate it (such as the pairs of adjectives beautiful or ugly, refined or crude, light or heavy, etc.) which structure the expression and the experience of the work of art. Because they are inscribed in ordinary language and are generally used beyond the aesthetic sphere, these categories of judgements of taste which are common to all speakers of a shared language do allow an apparent form of communication. Yet, despite that, such terms always remain marked – even when used by professionals – by an extreme vagueness and flexibility which (again as has been noted by Wittgenstein) makes them completely resistant to essentialist definition.⁹ This is probably because the use that is made of these terms and the meaning that is given to them depend upon the specific, historically and socially situated points of view of their users – points of view which are quite often perfectly irreconcilable.¹⁰ In short, if one can always argue about taste (and everyone knows that confrontations regarding preferences play an important role in daily conversation)

then it is certain that communication in these matters takes place only with a high degree of misunderstanding. That is so precisely because the commonplaces which make communication possible are the same ones that make it practically ineffective. The users of these topics each give different, at times diametrically opposed, meanings to the terms that they oppose. Thus it is possible for individuals holding opposing positions within a social space to be able to give totally opposed meanings and values to adjectives which are commonly used to describe works of art or mundane objects. The example of the adjective *soigné* comes to mind. It is most frequently excluded from 'bourgeois' taste, probably because it embodies the taste of the petit-bourgeois.¹¹ Situated within the historic dimension, one could go on drawing endless lists of notions which, beginning with the idea of beauty, have taken on different, even radically opposed meanings in the course of various periods or as a result of artistic revolutions. The notion of 'finish' is one example. Having condensed into one term the closely linked ethical and aesthetic ideals of academic painting, this notion was later banished from art by Manet and the Impressionists.

Thus the categories which are used in order to perceive and appreciate the work of art are doubly bound to the historical context. Linked to a situated and dated social universe, they become the subject of usages which are themselves socially marked by the social position of the users who exercise the constitutive dispositions of their habitus in the aesthetic choices these categories make possible.

The majority of notions which artists and critics use to define themselves or their adversaries are indeed weapons and stakes in the struggle, and many of the categories which art historians deploy in order to treat their subject are nothing more than skilfully masked or transfigured indigenous categories, initially conceived for the most part as insults or condemnations. (Our term 'categories' stems from the Greek *kathegoresthai*, meaning to accuse publicly.) These combative concepts gradually become technical categories upon which – thanks to genesis amnesia – critical dissections, dissertations and academic theses confer an air of eternity. Of all the methods of entering such struggles – which must be apprehended as such from the outside in order to objectivize them – the most tempting and the most irreproachable is undoubtedly that of presenting oneself as a judge or referee. Such a method involves settling conflicts which in reality are not settled, and giving oneself the satisfaction of pronouncing verdicts – of declaring, for instance, what realism *really* is, or even, quite simply, of decreeing (through decisions as innocent in appearance as the inclusion or exclusion of so-and-so from a corpus or list of producers) who is an artist and who is not. This last decision, for all its apparent positivistic

innocence, is, in fact, all the more crucial because one of the major stakes in these artistic struggles, always and everywhere, is the question of the legitimate belonging to a field (which is the question of the limits of the world of art) and also because the validity of the conclusions, notably statistical ones, which one is able to establish *à propos* a universe depends on the validity of the category *à propos* of which these conclusions were drawn.

If there is a truth, it is that truth is a stake in the struggle. And although the divergent or antagonistic classifications or judgements made by the agents engaged in the artistic field are certainly determined or directed by specific dispositions and interests linked to a given position in the field, they nevertheless are formulated in the name of a claim to universality – to absolute judgement – which is the very negation of the relativity of points of view.¹² 'Essentialist thought' is at work in every social universe and especially in the field of cultural production – the religious, scientific and legal fields, etc. – where games in which the universal is at stake are being played out. But in that case it is quite evident that 'essences' are norms. That is precisely what Austin was recalling when he analysed the implications of the adjective 'real' in expressions such as a 'real' man, 'real' courage or, as is the case here, a 'real' artist or a 'real' masterpiece. In all of these examples, the word 'real' implicitly contrasts the case under consideration to all other cases in the same category, to which other speakers assign, although unduly so (that is, in a manner not 'really' justified), this same predicate, a predicate which, like all claims to universality, is symbolically very powerful.

Science can do nothing but attempt to establish the truth of these struggles over the truth and capture the objective logic according to which the stakes, the camps, the strategies and the victories are determined. Science can attempt to bring representations and instruments of thought – all of which lay claim to universality, with unequal chances of success – back to the social conditions of their production and of their use, in other words, back to the historical structure of the field in which they are engendered and within which they operate. According to the methodological postulate (which is constantly validated by empirical analysis) of the homology between the space of the position-takings (literary or artistic forms, concepts and instruments of analysis, etc.) and the space of the positions occupied in the field, one is led to historicize these cultural products, all of which claim universality. But historicizing them means not only (as one may think) relativizing them by recalling that they have meaning solely through reference to a determined state of the field of struggle; it also means restoring to them necessity by removing them from indeterminacy (which stems from a

false eternalization) in order to bring them back to the social conditions of their genesis, a truly generative definition.¹³ Far from leading to a historicist relativism, the historicization of the forms of thought which we apply to the historical object, and which may be the product of that object, offers the only real chance of escaping history, if ever so small.

Just as the oppositions which structure aesthetic perception are not given *a priori*, but are historically produced and reproduced, and just as they are inseparable from the historical conditions which set them in motion, so it is with the aesthetic disposition. The aesthetic disposition which establishes as works of art objects socially designated for its use and application (simultaneously extending its activity to aesthetic competence, with its categories, concepts and taxonomies) is a product of the entire history of the field, a product which must be reproduced, by each potential consumer of the work of art, through a specific apprenticeship. It suffices either to observe the aesthetic disposition's distribution throughout history (with those critics who, until the end of the nineteenth century, have defended an art subordinated to moral values and didactic functions), or instead to observe it within society today, in order to be convinced that nothing is less natural than the disposition to adopt towards an art-work – and, more so, towards any object – the sort of pure aesthetic posture described by essentialist analysis.

The invention of the pure gaze is realized in the very movement of the field towards autonomy. In fact, without recalling here the entire argument, one could maintain that the affirmation of the autonomy of the principles of production and evaluation of the art-work is inseparable from the affirmation of the autonomy of the producer, that is, the field of production. Like pure painting, which, as Zola wrote *à propos* Manet, is meant to be beheld in itself and for itself as a painting – as a play of forms, values and colours – and not as a discourse, in other words, independently from all references to transcendent meanings, the pure gaze (a necessary correlate of pure painting) is a result of a process of purification, a true analysis of essence carried out by history, in the course of successive revolutions which, as in the religious field, always lead the new avant-garde to challenge orthodoxy – in the name of a return to the rigour of beginnings – with a purer definition of the genre. Poetry has thus been observed to purify itself of all its accessory properties: forms to be destroyed (sonnet, alexandrine), rhetorical figures to be demolished (simile, metaphor), contents and sentiments to be banished (lyricism, effusion, psychology) in order to reduce itself little by little, following a kind of historical analysis, to the most specifically poetic effects, like the break with phonosemantic parallelism.

In more general terms, the evolution of the different fields of cultural production towards a greater autonomy is accompanied by a sort of

reflective and critical return by the producers upon their own production, a return which leads them to draw from it the field's own principle and specific presuppositions. This is, first, because the artists, now in a position to rebuff every external constraint or demand, are able to affirm their mastery over that which defines them and which properly belongs to them, that is, the form, the technique, in a word, the art, thus instituted as the exclusive aim of art. Flaubert in the domain of writing and Manet in painting are probably the first to have attempted to impose, at the cost of extraordinary subjective and objective difficulties, the conscious and radical affirmation of the power of the creative gaze, capable of being applied not only (through simple inversion) to base and vulgar objects, as was the aim of Champfleury's and Courbet's realism, but also to insignificant objects before which the 'creator' is able to assert his quasi-divine power of transmutation. '*Écrire bien le médiocre.*' This Flaubertian formula, which also holds for Manet, lays down the autonomy of form in relation to subject matter, simultaneously assigning its fundamental norm to cultured perception. Attribution of artistic status is, among philosophers, the most generally accepted definition of aesthetic judgement, and, as could be proven empirically, there is no cultured person today (which means, by scholastic canons, no one possessing advanced academic degrees) who does not know that any reality, a rope, a pebble, a rag peddler, can be the subject of a work of art,¹⁴ who does not know, at the very least, that it is wise to say that such is the case, as an avant-garde painter, an expert in the art of confounding the new aesthetic doxa, made me observe. In fact, in order to awaken today's aesthete, whose artistic goodwill knows no limit, and to re-voke in him artistic and even philosophical wonder, one must apply a shock treatment to him in the manner of Duchamp or Warhol, who, by exhibiting the ordinary object as it is, manage to prod in some way the creative power that the pure aesthetic disposition (without much consideration) confers upon the artist as defined since Manet.

The second reason for this introspective and critical return of art unto itself is the fact that, as the field closes upon itself, the practical mastery of the specific knowledge – which is inscribed in past works, recorded, codified and canonized by an entire body of professional experts in conversation and celebration, along with literary and art historians, exegetes and analysts – becomes a part of the conditions of access into the field of production. The result is that, contrary to what is taught by a naïve relativism, the time of art history is really irreversible and it presents a form of cumulativeness. Nothing is more closely linked to the specific past of the field, including subversive intention – itself linked to a state of the field – than avant-garde artists who, at the risk of appearing to be 'naïve' (in the manner of Douanier Rousseau or of

Brisset) must inevitably situate themselves in relation to all the preceding attempts at surpassing which have occurred in the history of the field and within the space of possibilities which it imposes upon the newly arrived. What happens in the field is more and more linked to the field's specific history and to it alone. It is therefore more and more difficult to deduce it from the state of the general social world at any given time (as a certain 'sociology', unaware of the specific logic of the field, claims to do). Adequate perception of works – which, like Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* or Klein's monochromatic paintings, owe their formal properties and their value only to the structure of the field and thus to its history – is a differential, diacritical perception: in other words, it is attentive to deviations from other works, both contemporary and past. The result is that, like production, the consumption of works which are a product of a long history of breaks of history, with tradition, tends to become historical through and through, and yet more and more totally dehistoricized. In fact, the history that deciphering and appreciation put into play is gradually reduced to a pure history of forms, completely eclipsing the social history of the struggles for forms which is the life and movement of the artistic field.

This also resolves the apparently insoluble problem that formalist aesthetics (which wishes to consider only form in the reception as well as the production of art) presents as a true challenge to sociological analysis. In effect, the works that stem from a pure concern for form seem destined to establish the exclusive validity of internal reading which heeds only formal properties, and to frustrate or discredit all attempts at reducing them to a social context, against which they were set up. And yet, to reverse the situation it suffices to note that the formalist ambition's objection to all types of historicization rests on the unawareness of its own social conditions of possibility. The same is true of a philosophical aesthetics which records and ratifies this ambition. What is forgotten in both cases is the historical process through which the social conditions of freedom from 'external determinations' get established; that is, the process of establishing the relatively autonomous field of production and with it the realm of pure aesthetics or pure thought whose existence it makes possible.

Notes

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION: PIERRE BOURDIEU ON ART, LITERATURE AND CULTURE

- 1 Pierre Bourdieu was born in 1930 in Béarn. He studied philosophy at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris before initiating his work in anthropology and sociology. He currently holds the Chair of Sociology at the prestigious Collège de France and is Director of Studies at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales and director of the Centre de Sociologie Européenne.
- 2 Prior to the English-language publication of *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), originally published in French as *La distinction: critique sociale du jugement* in 1979, Bourdieu was probably best known in the United States and Great Britain for his ethnographic studies of Algerian peasant communities and his work on French education and its role in the reproduction of social classes. His *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), which is a much revised version of the original French edition *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* (1972), brings together several of his ethnographic studies and, as the title indicates, provides the first systematic exposition of his theory of practice, which is re-elaborated and refined in *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), originally published in French as *Le sens pratique* in 1980.

On education see especially the two books by Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Sage, 1979) and *The Inheritors: French Students and their*