

PART II

Foundations of a
Science of
Works of Art



When for a certain time the human soul has been treated with that impartiality invested by the physical sciences in the study of matter, then an immense step will have been taken. It is the only way for humanity to rise a little above itself. It will then consider itself candidly and purely in the mirror of its works of art. It will be god-like, judging itself from on high. Well, I consider this feasible. It is perhaps, as for mathematics, just a matter of finding a method.

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

I

Questions of Method

Forschung is die Kunst, den nächsten Schritt zu tun.

KURT LEWIN

I have never had much taste for 'grand theory', and when I read works which might enter into that category, I cannot stop myself from feeling a certain irritation before a typically scholastic combination of false audacity and true carefulness. I could reproduce here dozens of those pompous and almost empty sentences, which often finish with a disparate enumeration of proper names followed by dates, a humble procession of the ethnologists, sociologists or historians who have furnished the 'grand theoretician' with the substance of his meditation, and who bring him, as a tribute, the proofs of 'positivity' indispensable to the new academic respectability. I will give only one example of this, a quite ordinary one, but out of charity omit citing its author: 'As a number of ethnological reports have taught us, there exists in this type of society a sort of institutionalized obligation to exchange gifts, which prevents the accumulation of capital disposable for purely economic ends: economic surplus, in the form of presents, feasts and emergency aid, is transformed into non-specified obligations, into political power, into respect and social status (Goodfellow, 1954; Schott, 1956; Belshaw, 1965, esp. pp. 46ff.; Sigrist, 1967, pp. 176ff.)'

And when it happens that the implacable mechanics of academic

demand oblige me to contemplate for a moment writing one of these so-called synthetic texts on some aspect of my previous work, I find myself suddenly reminded of the most sombre evenings of my adolescence when, obliged to expound on the subjects required by scholastic routine, among fellow students harnessed to the same task, I felt I was chained to the bench of an eternal galley where copyists and compilers interminably reproduce the instruments of scholastic repetition – courses, theses or instruction manuals.

A new scientific spirit

To the same degree as I dislike those pretentious professions of faith by pretenders eager to sit down at the table of 'founding fathers', so do I delight in those books in which theory, because it is the air one breathes, is everywhere and nowhere – in the detour of a note, in the commentary on an old text, or in the very structure of interpretative discourse. I feel completely at home with those authors who know how to infuse the most decisive theoretical questions into a meticulously conducted empirical study, and who give concepts a usage that is both more modest and more aristocratic, sometimes going as far as to conceal their own contribution within a creative reinterpretation of theories which are immanent in their object.

To expect a solution to such and such a canonic problem from case studies – for example as I did in order to try to understand fetishism by equipping myself not with classic texts by Marx or Lévi-Strauss, but with an analysis of high fashion and the couturier's 'label'¹ – means to inflict a transformation on the tacit hierarchy of genres and objects which is not unlike that performed, according to Erich Auerbach, by the inventors of the modern novel, notably Virginia Woolf: 'The great exterior turning points and blows of fate are granted less importance; they are credited with less power of yielding decisive information concerning the subject; on the other hand there is confidence that, in any random fragment plucked from the course of a life, at any time, the totality of its fate is contained and can be portrayed.'² It is a similar transformation that must be effected in order to succeed in establishing a new scientific spirit within the social sciences: theories which are nourished less by purely theoretical confrontation with other theories than by confrontation with fresh empirical objects, and concepts which have above all the function of designating, in stenographic fashion, ensembles of generative schemas of scientific practices which are epistemologically controlled.

The notion of habitus, for example, expresses above all a rejection of a whole series of alternatives into which social science (and, more generally, all anthropological theory) was locked, that of the conscious (or the subject) and the unconscious, that of finality and mechanism, etc. At the moment when I introduced it, via the publication in French of two articles by Panofsky which had never been brought together, one on Gothic architecture, where the word was employed (as an 'indigenous' concept) to account for the effect of scholastic thought on the terrain of architecture, and the other on the Abbé Suger, where it could also have a role to play,³ 'habitus' permitted me to break with the structuralist paradigm without falling back into the old philosophy of the subject or of consciousness, that of classical economy and its *homo economicus*, returning these days under the name of 'methodological individualism'. In taking up the Aristotelian notion of *hexis*, converted by scholastic tradition into *habitus*, I wanted to react against structuralism and its strange philosophy of action which, implicitly in the Lévi-Straussian notion of the unconscious and avowedly among the Althusserians, made the agent disappear by reducing it to the role of supporter or bearer (*Träger*) of the structure. I wanted to do this while slightly taking advantage of the use (unique in his work) which Panofsky made of the notion of habitus, in order to avoid reintroducing the pure knowing subject of the neo-Kantian philosophy of 'symbolic forms' to which the author of *Perspective as Symbolic Form* had remained wedded. On this point I was close to Chomsky, who proposed at around the same time the notion of *generative grammar*. I wanted to demonstrate the active, inventive and 'creative' capacities of the habitus and the agent (which are not expressed by the term 'habit').⁴ But I intended to indicate that this generative power is not that of a universal nature or of reason, as it is with Chomsky (the habitus – the word says it – is acquired and it is also a possession which may, in certain cases, function as a form of capital), nor is it that of a transcendental subject in the idealist tradition.

To take back from idealism, as Marx suggested in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, the 'active aspect' of practical knowledge which the materialist tradition had left to it, notably with the theory of 'reflection', it was necessary to break with the canonical opposition between theory and practice, so profoundly inscribed in the structures of the division of labour (through the very existence of professionals of intellectual labour) and even in the structures of the division of intellectual labour, and hence in the mental structures of intellectuals, preventing them from even conceiving of a practical knowledge or a knowledgeable practice. It was necessary to unveil and describe a

cognitive activity of the constructing of social reality which is not, either in its instruments or in its approaches (I am thinking in particular of its activities of classification), the pure and purely intellectual operation of a calculating and rational consciousness.

It seemed to me that the concept of *habitus* – long outmoded, despite a number of occasional usages⁵ – was the best one to signify that desire to escape from the philosophy of consciousness without annulling the agent in its true role of practical operator of constructions of the real. The intention in taking up a word from tradition and reactivating it – diametrically opposed to the strategy of trying to associate one's name with a neologism or, on the model of the natural sciences, with an 'effect', even a minor one – is inspired by the conviction that work on concepts may also be cumulative. What a search for originality at all costs (often facilitated by ignorance) and a religious fidelity to such and such a canonic author (which inclines one to ritual repetition) have in common is a forbidding of what appears to me the only possible attitude to theoretical tradition: an inseparable assertion of both continuity and rupture, through a critical systematization of acquisitions from all quarters.

The social sciences are in a situation that is hardly favourable to the establishment of such a realist relation to theoretical heritage: judgements continue to be guided by the values of originality, which are those of the literary, artistic or philosophical fields. Discrediting as servile or merely fashionable the desire to acquire the specific instruments of production by inscribing oneself within a tradition and thereby within a collective enterprise, the social sciences favour those short-lived bluffs used by small entrepreneurs without capital to try to associate their name with a hallmark – as we see in the domain of literary analysis today, where there is no critic who does not give himself or herself a *nom de guerre* ending in -ism, -ique, or -ology. Moreover, the position the social sciences occupy, halfway between scientific disciplines and literary disciplines, is not made to favour the development of modes of production and the transmission of knowledge of a sort to foster cumulativeness: even if an active appropriation and an accomplished mastery of a mode of scientific thought are as difficult and as precious (and not only for the scientific effects they produce) as was its initial invention (more difficult and more precious, in any case, than the false, nugatory or negative innovations engendered by the search for distinction at all costs), they are often mocked and discredited as a servile imitation of an epigone, or as a mechanical application of an already invented art of inventing. But, just as music may be made not to be rather passively listened to, or even played, but to open the way to composition, so scientific works, in contrast to theoretical texts, call not for contemplation or dissertation, but for practical confrontation with experience; to truly understand them means to activate in relation to a different object the mode of thought they express, to reactivate it in a new act of production, just as inventive and original as the initial one, and completely opposed to the de-realizing *commentary* of the *lector*, an impotent and sterilizing metadiscourse.

The same dispositions were the impetus for the use of a concept such as *field*. Here again, the notion first of all served to designate a theoretical posture, generative of choices of method (negative just as much as positive) in the construction of objects: I am thinking for example of the work on institutions of higher education, and in particular the *Grandes Écoles*, where it served to remind us that each of these institutions could not deliver its singular truth unless, paradoxically, it was set in the system of objective relationships constitutive of the space of competition that it forms along with all the others.⁶ But it has also allowed us to escape the alternatives of internal interpretation and external explanation (alternatives which face all sciences of cultural works, social history and the sociology of religion, of law, of science, of art and literature) by reminding us of the existence of social microcosms, separate and autonomous spaces, in which works are generated. In all these areas, the opposition between a formalism born of the codification of artistic practices which have achieved a high degree of autonomy, and a reductionism bent on bringing artistic forms directly back to social formations, had obscured the fact that what the two currents had in common was a lack of recognition of the *field of production* as a space of objective relations. It follows that a genealogical investigation – which would lead to authors as distant from each other as Trier or Lewin – would have no interest, here again, except in so far as it would permit us to better characterize the theoretical choice (and the topic, to speak in Joëlle Proust's terms,⁷ in which it is inscribed) and to situate it more clearly in the space of positions in relation to which it defines itself.

The *relational* (rather than the structuralist) mode of thinking (which, as Cassirer has shown,⁸ is that of the whole of modern science and which has found some applications, with the Russian Formalists especially,⁹ in the analysis of symbolic systems, myths or literary works) can only be applied to social realities at the cost of a radical rupture with the usual representation of the social world. The tendency to a mode of thought which Cassirer calls 'substantialist', and which leads to privileging the different social realities, considered in themselves and for themselves, to the detriment of the objective relations, often invisible, which bind them, is never as powerful as when these realities – individuals, groups or institutions – entrench themselves with all the force of social sanction.

It is thus that a first effort to analyse the 'intellectual field'¹⁰ stopped at the immediately visible relations between agents engaged in intellectual life: the interactions between authors and critics or between authors and publishers had disguised from my eyes the

objective relationships between the relative positions that one and the other occupy in the field, that is to say, the structure that determines the form of those interactions. And the first rigorous formulation of the notion was elaborated on the occasion of an interpretation of a chapter of Weber's *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* on religious sociology, an interpretation which (haunted as it was by reference to the problems posed by the study of the literary field of the nineteenth century) was nothing like a scholarly commentary. Instead of a critique of the interactionist vision of relations among religious agents proposed by Weber, which implied a retrospective criticism of my first representation of the intellectual field, I proposed a construction of the religious field as a *structure of objective relations*, allowing us to account for the concrete form of the *interactions* that Weber tried desperately to enclose in a *realist typology*, one breached by innumerable exceptions.¹¹

It only remained to activate the system of general questions thus elaborated in order to discover, in applying it to different terrains, the properties specific to each field, and the constants revealed by the comparison of different universes treated as so many 'particular cases of the possible'. Far from functioning as simple metaphors guided by rhetorical intentions of persuasion, the methodical transfer of general problems and concepts, each time made specific by their very application, relies on the hypothesis that structural and functional homologies exist between all the fields. This is a hypothesis which finds its confirmation in the heuristic effects these transfers produce, and finds its corrective in the difficulties to which they give rise. The patience of repeated translation into practice is one of the possible avenues of 'semantic ascension' (in Quine's sense) which allows us to take to a higher level of generality and formalization those theoretical principles engaged in the empirical study of different universes and of the constant laws of the structure and history of different fields. By virtue of the particularities of its functions and of its functioning (or, more simply, the sources of information concerning it), each field delivers more or less clearly the properties it shares with all the others. Thus, undoubtedly because the 'economic' aspect of practices is less censored there and because, culturally less legitimate, it is less protected against objectification (which always involves a form of desacralization), the field of high fashion introduced me more directly than any other universe to one of the most fundamental properties of all fields of cultural production, namely the essentially magical logic of the production of the producer and of the product as fetishes.

The theory of fields which was thus gradually elaborated¹² never-

theless owes nothing, contrary to appearances, to a transfer of the economic mode of thought – even though, in rethinking from a structuralist perspective Weber's analysis, which applied to religion a certain number of concepts borrowed from economics (like competition, monopoly, supply and demand, etc.), I found myself introduced at the outset to general properties, applicable to different fields, which economic theory had brought to light without appreciating their true theoretical foundation. Far from the transfer being at the root of the construction of the object – as when one borrows from another universe (preferably prestigious, such as ethnology, linguistics or economics) a decontextualized notion, a simple metaphor with a purely emblematic function – it is rather the construction of the object which calls for the transfer and grounds it.¹³ And, as I hope to be able one day to demonstrate,¹⁴ everything leads us to suppose that, far from being the founding model, the economic theory of the field is a particular case of the general theory of fields which is gradually being constructed by a sort of theoretical induction that is empirically validated, and which, while allowing us to understand the fecundity and the limits of the validity of transfers such as the one Weber effected, obliges us to rethink the presuppositions of economic theory, especially in the light of what is learned from the analysis of fields of cultural production.

The general theory of the economy of practices as it is progressively disentangled from the analysis of different fields ought thus to escape all forms of reductionism, beginning with the most common and also the best known, which is economism. To analyse the different fields (religious field, scientific field, etc.) in the different configurations in which they may appear according to the era and to national traditions, treating each of them as a *particular case* in the true sense, that is, as a case which figures among other possible configurations, is to give the comparative method its full effectiveness. By this route, it is possible to gain an understanding of each case in its most concrete singularity without falling back complacently on an ideographic description (of a determined state of a determined field); and to try to grasp, in the very same process, the invariant properties of all fields and the specific form taken by the general mechanism in each field, as well as the system of concepts – capital, investment, interest, etc. – utilized to describe them. In other words, constructing the particular case as such obliges us in practice to bypass one of those unfortunate alternatives which the routine of lazy thought and the division of 'intellectual temperaments' reproduces indefinitely, pitting the uncertain and hollow generalities of a discourse proceeding by the unconscious and uncontrolled

universalization of a singular case against the infinite minutiae of an erroneously exhaustive study of a particular case which, for lack of being apprehended as such, cannot deliver either what it has of the singular or what it has of the universal.

One sees, however, what might make such a project excessive. To enter, for each case, into the particularity of the historically considered configuration, one must each time master the literature devoted to a universe which is artificially isolated by premature specialization. One must also launch an empirical analysis of a methodically elaborated case, knowing that the necessities of theoretical construction will impose on the empirical procedures all sorts of supplementary requirements, to the point of leading sometimes to methodological choices or to technical operations which, in the view of a positivist submission to the data as given, always risk appearing, by a strange inversion, as gratuitous freedoms, even unjustifiable liberties.¹⁵ The impression of heuristic strength often gained by the application of theoretical schemas expressing the very movement of reality has its counterpart in the permanent feeling of dissatisfaction aroused by the immensity of the work necessary to obtain the full return on the theory in each of the cases considered – which explains the innumerable restartings and reshuffles – and to try to export it farther and farther from its region of origin, so as to generalize it by the integration of observed traits in cases as diverse as possible. This labour could be prolonged indefinitely if one did not have to put a stop to it, a rather arbitrary one, in the hope that the first results, provisional and revisable, will have done enough to indicate the direction which should be taken by a social science concerned with converting into a really integrated and cumulative programme of empirical research that legitimate ambition for systematicity which is imprisoned by the totalizing pretensions of ‘grand theory’.

Literary *doxa* and resistance to objectification

Probably because they are protected by the veneration of all those who were raised, often from their earliest youth, to perform sacramental rites of cultural devotion (the sociologist being no exception), the fields of literature, art and philosophy pose formidable obstacles, both objective and subjective, to scientific objectification. In this case more than any other, the conduct of the research and the presentation of its results have run the risk of letting themselves be imprisoned within the alternatives of an enchanted cult or a disabused denigration – each of them being present, under diverse guises, inside

each of the fields. The very intention to write a science of the sacred has something of the sacrilegious about it, and the feeling of *transgression* – particularly scandalous, this, for those who continually pay lip service to the latter word – may incline those who risk performing it to increase the injuries which they must inevitably inflict (and self-inflict) by futile excesses – expressing not so much the desire to make the reader suffer (as one might have thought) as the temptation to ‘twist the stick in the other direction’, to overcome resistances.¹⁶

The rupture that must be effected in order to ground a rigorous science of cultural works is hence more than and different from a simple methodological overturning:¹⁷ it implies a veritable *conversion* of the most common manner of thinking and living the intellectual life, a sort of *epochè* of the *belief* commonly granted to cultural things and to the legitimate ways of approaching them.¹⁸ I did not think it necessary to specify that suspending support for the *doxa* in this way is a methodical *epochè* which does not in any way imply a reversal of the scale of cultural values, and even less a practical conversion to the counterculture, or even, as some pretend to believe, a cult of the lack of culture. This at least was true until the new Pharisees tried to confer on themselves a certificate of cultural virtue by denouncing loudly, in these days of restoration, the threats made against art (or philosophy) by analyses whose iconological intention looks to them like iconoclastic violence.

It remains true that scientific analysis finds a quasi-experimental validation in those kinds of spontaneous experiences which iconoclastic acts are, whether or not they are conceived as artistic acts (that is to say, performed by artists or by the simply uninitiated). As a practical suspension of the ordinary belief in the work of art or in the intellectual values of disinterestedness, such an act gives evidence of the collective belief which is at the basis of both the artistic order and the intellectual order, a belief which is left intact by criticisms which appear to be the most radical.¹⁹

This methodical suspension is all the more difficult in that the adherence to the cultural sacred has not, allowing for exceptions, had to enunciate itself in the form of explicit theses, still less to ground itself rationally. There is nothing more certain, for those taking part in it, than the cultural order. Cultivated people are in culture as in the air they breathe, and it takes a major crisis (and the criticism that accompanies it) for them to feel obliged to transform the *doxa* into *orthodoxy* or into *dogma*, and to justify the sacred and the consecrated ways of cultivating it. It follows that it is not easy to find a systematic expression of the cultural *doxa*, but it nevertheless always

crops up here and there. So when, for example, in their very classic *Theory of Literature*, René Wellek and Austin Warren extol the very banal 'explanation in terms of the personality and the life of the writer',²⁰ it is belief in the 'creative genius' that they are tacitly admitting that they take for granted (and no doubt most of their readers along with them), thus dedicating themselves, in their own terms, to 'one of the oldest and best-established methods of literary study', one that consists of searching for the explanatory principle of a work inside an author taken in isolation (uniqueness and singularity being central properties of a 'creator'). In the same way, when Sartre gives himself the project of recapturing the mediations through which social determinisms had fashioned the singular individuality of Flaubert, he condemns himself to imputing to the only factors capable of being apprehended from the viewpoint thus adopted – that is to say, the social class of origin as refracted through the family structure – both the effects of generic factors brought to bear on any writer by virtue of the fact that the writer is included in an artistic field occupying a dominated position in the field of power, and also the effects of the specific factors acting on the whole ensemble of writers occupying the same position as he does in the artistic field.

The statistical analysis which is sometimes used to reinforce external analysis, and which is commonly perceived by the defenders of the 'personalist' vision of 'creation' as the manifestation *par excellence* of 'reductive sociology', in no way escapes the dominant vision. Because it tends to reduce each author to a set of properties which may be grasped at the level of the individual taken in an isolated state, it runs every risk, unless special care is taken, of ignoring or annulling the *structural properties* linked to the position occupied in a field. These properties – as, for example, with the structural inferiority of the vaudevillean or the illustrator – are not generally evident except through generic characteristics such as membership of groups or institutions, reviews, movements, genres, etc, that traditional historiography ignores or accepts as self-evident without putting them into an explanatory model. To which may be added the fact that most of the analysts merely apply to *preconstructed populations* – just like most of the corpus worked on by practitioners of structuralist hermeneutics – *principles of classification* which are themselves *preconstructed*. They often skip the analysis of the process of the constitution of the lists they work on, which are in fact prize lists – that is, they miss the history of the process of canonization and hierarchization that leads to the delimitation of the population of canonic authors. They also dispense with reconstructing the genesis of the systems of classification (names of groups, schools, genres, movements, etc.) which are the instruments and the stakes in the struggle over classification, and which contribute thereby to establishing groups. For want of proceeding to a historical critique of this sort of the instruments of historical analysis, one runs the risk of unwittingly cutting out what is at issue and at play in reality itself – for example, the definition and delimitation of the population of writers, meaning those and only those who, among 'those writing', have the right to call themselves writers.

The 'original project', founding myth

But it is with his theory of the 'projet originel' that Sartre elucidated one of the fundamental presuppositions of literary analysis in all its forms, one inscribed in the expressions of ordinary language, and in particular in phrases like 'already', 'since then', 'from his earliest days' so dear to biographers.²¹ It maintains that each life is a whole, a coherent and directed ensemble, and that it cannot be apprehended except as the unitary expression of an intention, both subjective and objective, which is made manifest in every experience, especially the earliest. Thanks to the retrospective illusion which leads to the interpretation of recent events as the end result of initial experiences or ways of behaving, and thanks to the ideology of the gift or predestination, which seems to feature very particularly in the case of exceptional people who are willingly credited with a prophetic clairvoyance, it is tacitly acknowledged that life follows the pattern of a story and unfolds from an origin, understood both as a point of departure and also as a first cause or, better, a generative principle, up till a final point which is also a goal.²² It is this tacit philosophy that Sartre brings to an explicit state with the 'original project', by placing as a fundamental of a whole existence an explicit awareness of the determinations implied in a social position.

Regarding a critical period in Flaubert's life, the years 1837 to 1840, which he analyses at length in terms of a first beginning pregnant with the whole later development, or a sort of sociological *cogito* ('I think as a bourgeois, therefore I am a bourgeois'), Sartre writes: 'From 1837 and into the 1840s, Gustave has an experience which is crucial for the direction of his life and the meaning of his work: he *feels*, inside and outside himself, the bourgeoisie as his class of origin [...]. We must now trace the course of this *discovery* so pregnant with consequences.'²³ The research decision itself, in its double movement, expresses the philosophy of the biographer who makes a life into a succession of events which are definitively discernible – since they are all there in a potential state – in the crisis which serves him as point of departure: 'We must, in order to see clearly, run through this life once more from adolescence to death. We will then come back to the years of crisis – 1838 to 1844 – which potentially contain all the force lines of this destiny.'²⁴

Analysing essentialist philosophy (of which Leibnizian monadology seemed to him to be the exemplary form), Sartre observed in *Being and Nothingness* that it abolished chronological order by reducing it to logical order. Paradoxically, his philosophy of biography produces an effect of the same type, but starting from an absolute beginning which consists in this case of the 'discovery' accomplished by an original act of awareness: 'Between these different conceptions, there

is no chronological order: from the moment of its appearance in him, the notion of bourgeois enters into permanent disaggregation and all the avatars of the Flaubertian bourgeois are given simultaneously: circumstances call forth one or another of them, but only for an instant and against the dark background of this contradictory indistinction. At seventeen as at fifty, he is against all of humanity [. . .]. At twenty-four as at forty-five, he blames the bourgeois for not establishing itself as the privileged order.²⁵

It is worth rereading the pages in *Being and Nothingness* which Sartre devotes to 'Flaubert's psychology' and where he tries, against Freud and Marx combined, to tear the 'being' of the 'creator' away from every kind of 'reduction' in general – from genre, from class – and to assert the transcendence of the ego against the aggressions of genetic thought, incarnated by psychology or by sociology, according to the period, and also against 'what Auguste Comte called *materialism*, that is, explaining the higher by the lower'.²⁶ It is at the end of this long 'demonstration', where he mainly shows that any means will serve him to safeguard his final convictions, that Sartre introduces this sort of conceptual monster that is the autodestructive notion of 'original project', a free and conscious act of autocreations by which the creator assigns himself his life's project. With the founding myth of the belief in the uncreated 'creator' (which is to the notion of habitus what the Book of Genesis is to the theory of evolution), Sartre inscribes in the origin of each human existence a sort of free and conscious act of autodetermination, an original project without origin which encompasses all subsequent acts in the inaugural choice of a pure freedom, tearing these acts definitively away, by this transcendental negation, from the hands of science.

This myth of origin which aims to challenge any explanation by origin has the merit of giving an explicit form, and the appearance of a systematic justification, to the belief in the irreducibility of consciousness to external determinations, the foundation of the resistance provoked by the social sciences and their will to 'reductive' 'objectification': the 'determinist' threat they always pose never seems more menacing than when the social sciences push scientific arrogance to the point of taking intellectuals themselves as their object.

If the assertion of the irreducibility of consciousness is one of the most constant features of the philosophy of the professors of philosophy, it is undoubtedly because it constitutes a way of defining and defending the frontier between what rightly belongs to philosophy and what it may relinquish to the sciences of nature and society. Thus Caro, in the opening lecture he gave to the Sorbonne in 1864, agreed to concede to the positive sciences all *exterior* phenomena, provided it was granted to him in return that phenomena of

consciousness reveal a 'higher order of facts, realities and causes which escape, not only the present grasp, but the possible grasp of scientific determinism'.²⁷ This is an illuminating text, which makes it apparent that nothing is very new under the sun of philosophy and that, in beating back materialism or determinism, our modern defenders of liberty, the individual and the 'subject' aim (without always knowing it) to defend a hierarchy and a difference in nature or essence which separates philosophers from all other thinkers – with the latter often characterized as 'scientists' or 'positivists' who are not content with making a profession out of 'reducing the higher to the lower' and so snatching its object from the higher discipline, but push their impudence, with the sociology of philosophy, to the point of taking the sovereign discipline as their object, by an intolerable reversal of the established intellectual order.

God is dead, but the uncreated creator has taken his place. The same person who announced the death of God seizes all of his properties.²⁸ If it is true, as Sartre himself saw clearly, that the modern novelist – Joyce, Faulkner or Virginia Woolf – has abandoned the divine point of view, the thinker does not resign himself so easily to forsaking the sovereign position. Replaying in another register the Husserlian denial of any genesis of the absolute subject, logical in contingent and historical subjects, he submits 'creators' in the person of Flaubert to a supposedly radical interrogation, designed to mark once and for all the limits of all objectification. Instead of objectifying Flaubert by objectifying the social universe which was expressed through him, and of which Flaubert himself sketched the objectification (notably in the *Sentimental Education*), Sartre is satisfied with projecting on to Flaubert, in a non-analysed state, a 'comprehensive' representation of the anxieties generically attached to the position of writer, thus bestowing on himself that form of narcissism by proxy which is routinely taken for the supreme form of 'comprehension'.

How could it have escaped Sartre that the writer whom he describes, in terms of youngest son, as the idiot of the Flaubert family is also, in terms of writer, the idiot of the bourgeois family? What prevents him from understanding is, paradoxically, the thing through which he takes part in what he pretends to understand, the unthought which is inscribed in his own position as writer and from which he flees, in some way, into an auto-analysis functioning as the supreme form of *denegation*. In other words, the obstacle that inhibits Sartre from seeing and knowing what is really at stake in his analysis – to wit, the paradoxical position of the writer in the social world, and, more precisely, in the field of power, and in the intellectual field as a universe of belief where the fetishism of the 'creator' is progressively generated – is precisely everything that *attaches* him to this position of writer and which he has in common with Flaubert, and with all other writers, major and minor, of the past and the

present, and in addition with the majority of his readers who are predisposed in advance to grant him what he grants himself, and which he grants them at the same time, at least in appearance.

The illusion of the all-powerfulness of a thought capable of being the sole foundation for itself undoubtedly belongs to the same disposition as the ambition for unequivocal domination over the intellectual field. And the realization of this desire for omnipotence and ubiquity which defines the total intellectual – one who is capable of triumphing in all genres and in that supreme genre which is the philosophical critique of other genres – can only foster the expansion of the *hubris of the absolute thinker*, having no other limits than the ones his freedom freely assigns to itself, and who is thus predisposed to produce an exemplary expression of the myth of the immaculate conception.²⁹ Victim of his triumph, the absolute thinker cannot resign himself to searching within the relativity of a generic destiny – and even less within the specific factors capable of explaining the singularities of his experience of that common fate – for the veritable principle of his practice and, in particular, for the very special intensity with which, carried along by his hegemonic dream, he lives and speaks the common illusions.

Sartre belongs to those who, in Luther's phrase, 'sin bravely': one may be grateful to him for having brought out, by giving it an explicit formulation, the (tacit) presupposition of the literary *doxa* which supports methodologies as diverse as university monographs in the style of Lanson ('the man and his work'), or the analyses of texts applied to a single fragment of an individual oeuvre (Baudelaire's 'Les Chats' in the case of Jakobson or Lévi-Strauss) or to the oeuvre of a single author, or even undertakings in the social history of art or literature which, in trying to account for an oeuvre on the basis of psychological or social variables attached to a singular author, are doomed to allow the essential to escape. As is well demonstrated by a biography conceived as a retrospective integration of the whole personal history of the 'creator' into a purely aesthetic project, the labour necessary to destroy the obstacles to an adequate construction of the object (that is, reconstructing the genesis of the unconscious categories of perception through which primary experience receives the object) is part and parcel of that labour which is indispensable to the reconstruction of the genesis of the field of production in which this representation is produced. It is clear, in fact, that the interest in the personage of the writer or the artist grows in parallel with the autonomization of the field of production and with the correlative elevation of the status of producers.

The charismatic representation of the writer as 'creator' leads to

bracketing out everything which is found inscribed in the position of author at the heart of the field of production and in the social trajectory which led her there: on the one hand, the genesis and structure of the totally specific social space in which the 'creator' is inserted and constituted as such, and where her 'creative project' itself is formed; and on the other hand, the genesis of the simultaneously generic and specific dispositions, common and singular, which she has imported into this position. It is only by submitting (without complacency) the author and the work under study to such an objectification (and, by the same token, the author of the objectification), and also by eliminating all vestiges of narcissism linking the analyst to the analysand, limiting the scope of the analysis, that one may found a science of cultural works and of their authors.

Thersites' viewpoint and the false rupture

But the intellectual world also produces less enchanted images of itself and of its vocation. And one might be tempted – as a counterbalance to that unreal aspect of the sovereign image used by the total intellectual to project the illusion and the reality of his sovereignty – to give the floor to all the ordinary citizens of the Republic of Letters, to the obscure ones and to the foot-soldiers who, in the fashion of Thersites (the simple, surly soldier of the *Iliad* dramatized by Shakespeare in *Troilus and Cressida*) denounce the hidden vices of the great. Undoubtedly, a journalist concerned with 'objectivity' would proceed in this way, in one of those enquiries into the intellectual world designed to demonstrate, as is much done these days, the 'end of intellectuals'. Observing professional honour by being equally challenging to the foremost and the least, to those 'one absolutely must have' and those who absolutely want to be there, this journalist would infallibly produce, without even needing to look for it, a levelling of the differences which would be in perfect harmony with the journalist's positional interests, which are inclined to relativism.

There is no great intellectual in the eyes of the lesser ones, and this applies especially perhaps to those who, while occupying a dominated position in the universe, come to exercise a power there of another order. Owing part of their power over the consecrated producers to their art of maintaining or sparking competition among them, and being able to approach and observe them, sometimes with the right and duty of judging them (notably on committees and commissions

arranged for this purpose), they are well placed to discover the contradictions, weaknesses or pettinesses which go unnoticed by a more distanced reverence.

This means that the dominated regions of the fields of cultural production are permanently inhabited by a sort of rampant anti-intellectualism. This contained violence explodes into the light of day when there are great crises in the field (as with the 1848 revolution, so aptly described by Flaubert), or when regimes bent on taming free thought reach power (Nazism and Stalinism being at the extreme end); but anti-intellectualism also emerges at times in topical pamphlets where the most brutally reductive sociologism is often used as a weapon by the resentment of disappointed ambitions and lost illusions, or the impatience of arriviste pretensions, in order to destroy or cut down to size the most improbable conquests of free thought.

But the objectifications of the intellectual game inspired by these intellectual passions remain necessarily partial and blind to themselves: the resentment of disappointed love leads to a reversal of the dominant vision, demonizing what it once made divine. Since those who produce them are not able to comprehend the game as such or the position they occupy in it, the 'revelations' of a denunciation have a blind spot, which is simply the point (of view) from which they are taken; not being able to reveal anything of the reasons and the *raisons d'être* of the targeted behaviours, which are only evident in a global view of the game, they merely betray their own *raisons d'être*.

And, in fact, one could show that the different categories of 'critiques' of the intellectual world which are generated in the very heart of this microcosm could be easily related to the major classes of positions and trajectories at the core of this world: the disenchanting and haughty critique of polite society's anti-intellectualism (the paradigm undoubtedly being Raymond Aron's *L'Opium des intellectuels*) is opposed to the peevish polemic of populist anti-intellectualism in its diverse variants, just as the aristocratic distance of conservative intellectuals who come from the *grande bourgeoisie* and are recognized by it, and who are also endowed with a form of internal consecration, contrasts with the marginality of 'proletaroid intellectuals' who come from the *petite bourgeoisie*.³⁰

The partial objectifications of the polemic or the pamphlet are just as formidable an obstacle as the narcissistic complacency of projective criticism. Those who produce these instruments of combat posing as instruments of analysis forget that they ought first to apply them to that part of themselves which belongs to the objectified category. This would presuppose that they were able to situate themselves and situate their adversaries in the space of the game where their stakes

are engendered, and thus to discover the point of view which is the basis of their insights and their oversights, of their lucidity and their blindness. 'Error is privation,' and in order to have at one's disposal a true *instrument of rupture* with all partial objectifications, or, rather, an instrument of objectification of *all* spontaneous objectifications, along with the blind spots they imply and the interests they engage (not excluding the 'knowledge of the first kind' which is the lot of researchers themselves so long as they are engaged in the field as empirical subjects), it is necessary to construct as such this site of the coexistence of all the points from which the definitions of so many different and competing points of view stem – which is simply the field (artistic, literary, philosophical, etc.).

The space of points of view

This means that one cannot hope to get out of the circle of relativizations which mutually relativize each other, like so many reflections indefinitely reflecting each other, without putting into practice the maxim of reflexivity, trying to construct methodically the space of possible points of view on the literary (or artistic) act in relation to which the method of analysis to be proposed is defined.³¹ The history of criticism which I would like to sketch here in a preliminary way has the sole purpose of trying to bring to the consciousness of the one who writes it (and of his readers) the principles of vision and division which are the basis of the problems they pose and the solutions they bring to them. It demonstrates at the outset that position-takings on art and literature, like the positions where they are generated, are organized around pairs of oppositions, often inherited from past polemics, and conceived as insurmountable antinomies, absolute alternatives, in terms of all or nothing, and while these structure thought, they also imprison it in a series of false dilemmas. A first division is the one which pits internal readings (in the sense of Saussure speaking of 'internal linguistics'), that is to say, formal or formalist readings, against external readings calling on explanatory and interpretative principles, such as economic and social factors, which are external to the work itself.

I request indulgence for this evocation of the universe of position-takings with respect to literature. Concerned to stay with what seems to me essential, that is, explicit or implicit founding principles, I have not deployed the whole arsenal of references and quotations which would have given full force to my argument. Above all, I have reduced to what seems to me to be their inner truth those 'theories' which, like that of French semiologists, do not err on the side of

excessive coherence and logic, with the result that one could always find in them, given a close search, something to use to challenge me. Moreover, the proposed method of analysis of works is constructed in relation to both the literary field and the artistic field (and also the juridical and scientific fields) in such a way that, to be truly complete, my 'picture' of possible methodologies would also have to encompass the prevailing traditions in the study of painting, namely Erwin Panofsky, Frédéric Antal or Ernst Gombrich as well as Roman Jakobson, Lucien Goldmann and Léo Spitzer.

The first tradition, in its most widespread form, is simply the literary *doxa* already evoked; it is rooted in the job and ethos of the professional commentator on texts (literary or philosophical and, in other times, religious), which a certain medieval taxonomy contrasted, under the name of *lector*, with the producer of texts, the *auctor*. Encouraged by the authority and routines of the scholarly institution to which it is perfectly harmonized, the 'philosophy' of reading inherent in the practice of the *lector* does not have to constitute itself as a doctrine; except for some rare exceptions (such as New Criticism in the American tradition or the 'hermeneutical' in the German tradition), it most often remains in an implicit state and is perpetuated subterraneously beyond (and through) apparent renovations of the academic liturgy such as 'structural' or 'deconstructionist' readings of texts treated as perfectly self-sufficient.³² But it may also rely on the commentary on canons of 'pure' reading which are enunciated at the very core of the literary field, for example by T. S. Eliot in *The Sacred Wood* (which describes the literary world as 'autotelic') or by the writers of the *NRF* (*Nouvelle Revue Française*) and especially Paul Valéry, or again, it may rely on a soft eclectic combination of discourses on art derived from Kant, from Roman Ingarden, the Russian Formalists and the structuralists of the Prague School, such as in the *Theory of Literature* by René Wellek and Austin Warren, which claims to separate out the essence of literary language (connotative, expressive, etc.) and to define the necessary conditions of the aesthetic experience.

These approaches to literature owe their apparent universality only to the fact that they are upheld almost everywhere by the scholastic institution of the teaching of literature, that is to say, they are rooted in manuals or *textbooks* (such as the collection by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren entitled *Understanding Poetry* which reigned in American colleges well beyond the year of its first publication in 1938), and also in habits of thought among the professors who find in them a justification for their practice of reading decontextualized texts. Proof of this relationship of cause and effect may be seen in the resemblances to be observed between the practices and 'theories' which crop up, like simultaneous inventions, in the scholarly institutions of different nations. I am thinking of detailed 'explication' or the 'close reading' of poems understood

as 'logic structure' and 'local texture', which is extolled by John Crowe Ransom,³³ and, more generally, of those professions of literary faith, as innumerable as they are indistinguishable, which assert that the only purpose of a poem is the poem itself as a self-sufficient structure of significations. One would have to cite here, pell-mell, the defenders of New Criticism – John Crowe Ransom, already mentioned, Cleanth Brooks, Allen Tate, etc., and the 'Chicago Critics', who see a poem as an 'artistic whole', the depository of a 'power' whose causes the critic must seek in the interrelations and the structure of the poem, independently of all reference to external factors (the biography of the author, the public addressed, etc.) – and the English critic F. R. Leavis, very close to his American contemporaries in his practices and his premises and also in the immense hold he exercised on universities, British ones in this case. It would be necessary also to cite, for the German tradition, the whole litany of expositions of the hermeneutic 'method' (of which one can get an idea by reading the historical account offered by Peter Szondi³⁴). Finally, one would have to mention, for the French tradition, all the professorial (and other) professions of formalist (or internalist) faith, without overlooking the modernized versions of the famous 'explication de textes' brought about by the structuralist *aggiornamento*. But nothing is more liable to convince us of the ritual character of all these practices, and all these discourses designed to regulate and justify them, than the extraordinary tolerance of repetition, redundancy and the monotony of the liturgical litany manifest in all these interpreters, who are nevertheless totally devoted to the cult of originality.

If one wishes to ground this tradition in theory, it seems to me that one could look in two directions: on the one hand, to the neo-Kantian philosophy of symbolic forms, and more generally all the traditions which assert the existence of universal anthropological structures, such as the comparative mythology of Mircea Eliade or Jungian psychoanalysis (or, in France, Bachelardian psychoanalysis); and on the other, to the structuralist tradition. In the first case, literature is conceived of as a 'form of knowledge' (W. K. Wimsatt) different from the scientific form, and the purpose of internal and moral reading is to regrab the universal forms of literary reason, of 'literarity' in its different species, poetic especially – that is to say, the ahistoric structuring structures which are at the root of the literary or poetic construction of the world, or, more banally, something like the 'essences' of the 'literary', of the 'poetic' or of figures like the metaphor.

The structuralist solution is much more powerful, intellectually and socially. Socially, it has often taken over from the internalist *doxa* and conferred an aura of scientificity on professorial commentary as a formal taking apart of decontextualized and detemporalized texts. Breaking with universalism, Saussurean theory apprehends cultural works (languages, myths, structured structures without a structuring subject, and also, by extension, works of art) as historical products whose specific structure must be brought out by analysis,

but without making reference to the economic or social conditions of the production of the work or of its producers. But even if it vaunts its connection with structural linguistics, structural semiology only retains the second presupposition: it tends to bracket the historicity of cultural works and, from Jakobson to Genette, it treats the literary object as an autonomous entity, subject to its own laws and owing its 'literariness' or 'poeticity' to the particular treatment given to its linguistic material, that is to say, to the techniques and procedures which are responsible for the predominance of the aesthetic function of language – techniques such as parallels, oppositions and equivalencies between the phonetic, morphological, syntactic and even semantic levels of the poem.

From the same perspective, the Russian Formalists establish a fundamental opposition between literary (or poetic) language and ordinary language. While the latter, 'practical' and 'referential', communicates by references to the external world, literary language takes advantage of diverse procedures to foreground the enunciated itself, in order to distance ordinary discourse and to turn attention away from external referents and towards its 'formal' structures. In the same way, the French structuralists treat the work of art as a mode of writing which, like the linguistic system that it utilizes, is an auto-referential structure of interrelations constituted by a play of specific literary conventions and 'codes'. And Genette points out the postulate involved in these analyses of *essence* (the outcome, in Jakobson, of the combined influence of Saussure and Husserl and *fundamentally anti-genetic*) when he suggests that everything that is constitutive of a discourse is manifest in the linguistic properties of the text and that the work itself furnishes information on the manner in which it ought to be read. The *absolutization* of the text could not be pushed any farther.

By a strange turn of events, 'creative' criticism today seeks a solution to the crisis of the profoundly anti-genetic formalism of structuralist semiology by returning to the positivism of the most traditional literary historiography, with a form of criticism labelled, by a misnomer, 'literary genetics', 'a scientific approach possessing its own techniques (the analysis of manuscripts) and project of elucidation (the genesis of the work)',³⁵ Jumping without other form of proof from the *post hoc* to the *propter hoc*, this 'methodology' searches in what Gérard Genette calls the 'avant-texte' for the genesis of the text. The rough draft, the outline, the sketch – in short anything that can be lifted from notebooks and jotting books – is constituted as the unique and ultimate object of the search for the scientific explanation.³⁶ Thus it is difficult to see what differentiates those such as Durry, Bruneau, Gothot-Mersch, Sherrington, as authors of minute analyses of Flaubert's plans, projects or scenarios, from the new 'genetic critics' who do the same thing (they ask very seriously whether 'Flaubert had begun to

prepare *Sentimental Education* in 1862 or in 1863') but with the feeling of effecting 'a sort of revolution in literary studies'.³⁷ The gap between the programme of a true genetic analysis of the author and of the work such as it is defined here (and partially put into operation in this book) and the analysis, founded on the comparison of successive states and stages of the work, of the manner in which the work is fabricated ought to suggest (better, it seems to me, than all critical discourse) the *limits* of a *textual genetics*, justified in itself but risking presenting a new obstacle to a rigorous science of literature. (I could also, at the risk of seeming unjust, invoke the disproportion between the immensity of the work of erudition involved and the slightness of the results obtained.) In fact, if one brings this project back to the truth of it, one may see in the rigorous and methodical edition of preparatory texts a precious material for the analysis of the *work of writing* (one gains nothing except confusion by calling it 'editorial genesis'). And it is in just this fashion that Pierre-Marc de Biasi treats the notebooks of the *Education* when he observes, for example, how Flaubert develops an entirely neutral observation on the trade in knives and blades in the streets of Paris shortly before the uprising of June 1848 in order to make of it, by the effect of suggestion in the writing, the mysterious sign of a general plot, designed to nourish the anxieties of Dambreuse and of Martinon.³⁸

But the analysis of the successive versions of a text could not take on its full explanatory force unless it tried to *reconstruct* (no doubt a little artificially) the logic of the labour of writing understood as a search accomplished under the structural constraint of the field and the space of possibles it offers. One could better understand the hesitations, the regrets, the returns by knowing that the writing, a perilous navigation in a universe of threats and dangers, is also guided, in its negative dimension, by an anticipated knowledge of probable reception, inscribed in a state of potentiality in the field; and that, similar to the *pirate*, *peiratès*, someone who tries for a coup, who attempts something new (*peirao*), the writer as conceived of by Flaubert is one who adventures outside the channels marked out by buoys for routine use and one who is expert in the art of finding a passage through the perils consisting of the *common places*, the 'accepted ideas', the conventional forms.

In fact, it is probably in Michel Foucault that one finds the most rigorous formulation of the foundations of the structural analysis of cultural works. Conscious that no cultural work exists by itself, that is, outside the relations of interdependence that unite it to other works, he gives the name 'field of strategic possibilities' to the 'regulated system of differences and dispersions' within which each individual work defines itself.³⁹ But, very close to the semiologists such as Trier and the uses they have made of the idea of 'semantic field', he explicitly refuses to search outside the 'field of discourse' for the principle which would elucidate each of the discourses within it: 'If the Physiocrats' analysis belongs to the same discourses as that of the Utilitarians, this is not because they lived in the same period, nor because they confronted one another within the same society, nor because their interests interlocked within

the same economy; but because their two options sprang from one and the same distribution of the points of choice, from one and the same strategic field.'

Thus, faithful in this respect to the Saussurean tradition and to the rupture it effects between internal linguistics and external linguistics, Foucault asserts the absolute autonomy of the 'field of strategic possibilities'. He rejects as a 'doxological illusion' the endeavour to find in 'the field of polemics' or in 'the divergences of interests or mental habits of individuals' (all of what I put, more or less at the same time, into the notions of field and of habitus) the explanatory principle of what happens in the 'field of strategic possibilities'. That appears to him to be determined solely by the 'strategic possibilities of the conceptual games', according to him the sole reality which a science of works can seek to know. In this way, he transfers to the firmament of ideas oppositions and antagonisms that are rooted (without being reduced to them) in the relations between producers and he rejects any relating of works to the social conditions of their production (as he will later continue to do in a critical discourse on knowledge and power which – for want of taking into account agents and their interests, and especially violence in its symbolic dimension – remains abstract and idealist).

Of course, it is not a matter of denying the determination exercised by the space of possibles and the specific logic of the sequences in and through which novelties (artistic, literary or scientific) are engendered, since it is one of the functions of the notion of a relatively autonomous field, one endowed with its own history, to take account of them. Nevertheless, it is not possible, even in the case of the scientific field, to treat the cultural order (the *épistèmè*) as totally independent of the agents and institutions which actualize it and bring it into existence, and to ignore the socio-logical connections which accompany or underwrite logical sequences; this would be at the very least to prevent oneself from taking into account changes which happen to occur in this arbitrarily separated (and therefore dehistoricized and de-realized) universe – unless one grants the cultural order an immanent propensity to transform itself by a mysterious form of *Selbstbewegung* which finds its principle only in its internal contradictions, as did Hegel (who is also present in that other presupposition of the notion of *épistèmè*, the belief in the cultural unity of an era and a society).

One must resign oneself to admitting that there is a history of reason which does not have reason as its (sole) principle. In order to account for the fact that art – or science – seems to find within itself the principle and the form of its changing, and that everything

happens as if history were interior to the system and as if the coming-into-being of forms of representation or expression merely expressed the internal logic of the system, it is not necessary to hypostasize (as has often been done) the laws of this evolution. 'The action of works upon works' of which Brunetière spoke is only ever exercised by the intermediary of authors whose strategies are also guided by the interests linked to their position in the structure of the field.

To think of each of the spaces of cultural production as a field is to preclude any form of reductionism, any *flattening projection* of one space on to another which leads to thinking of the different fields and their products in terms of foreign categories (in the manner of those who make philosophy a 'reflection' of science, deducing, for example, the metaphysics from the physics, etc.).⁴⁰ And one must in the same way scientifically put to the test that 'cultural unity' of an epoch and a society which the history of art and of literature accepts as a tacit assumption, through a sort of diluted Hegelianism⁴¹ or (but is this not the same thing?) in the name of a more or less renovated form of culturalism, even if it be the kind for which Foucault found the theoretical guarantee in the notion of *épistèmè*, a sort of *Wissenschaftswollen*, very close to the old notion of *Kunstwollen*.⁴² It would be a matter of examining, for each of the historical configurations considered, on the one hand the structural homologies between different fields which may underlie encounters or correspondences with no borrowing involved; and on the other hand those direct exchanges which depend, in their form and very existence, on the positions occupied in their respective fields by the agents or institutions concerned, and hence on the structure of those fields, and also on the relative positions of the fields in the hierarchy established among them at the moment under consideration, determining all sorts of effects of symbolic domination.⁴³

By choosing to dissect and construct the subject on the basis of either a geographical unity (Basle, Berlin, Paris or Vienna) or a political one, there is the risk of returning to a definition of unity in terms of *Zeitgeist*. In effect, one tacitly assumes that the members of a single 'intellectual community' have in common certain problems linked to a common situation – for example, an interrogation of the relations between appearance and reality – and also that the members mutually 'influence each other'. If one realizes that each field – music, painting, poetry, or in another order, economy, linguistics, biology, etc. – has its autonomous history, which determines its specific rules and stakes, one sees that the interpretation by reference to the history unique to the field (or to the discipline) is the preliminary for an interpretation with respect to the contemporary context, whether one is dealing with other fields of cultural production or with political and economic production. The fundamental question then becomes to know whether the *social effects of chronological contemporaneity, or even spatial unity* – like the fact of sharing the same specific

meeting places (literary cafés, magazines, cultural associations, salons, etc.) or of being exposed to the same cultural messages, common works of reference, obligatory issues, key events, etc. – are strong enough to determine, over and above the autonomy of different fields, a common problematic, understood not as a *Zeitgeist* or a community of spirit or lifestyle, but rather as a space of possibles, a system of different position-takings in relation to which each must be defined. This brings up in a direct way the question of national traditions linked to the pre-eminence of state structures (notably scholastic) which lend themselves to the promotion to a greater or lesser degree of the pre-eminence of a central cultural site, of a cultural capital, and to encouraging more or less adequately the specialization within it (of genres, disciplines, etc.), or which, on the contrary, lend themselves to an interaction between members of different fields, or to consecrating a particular configuration of the hierarchical structure of the arts (with a predominance permanently or temporarily given to one of them – music, painting or literature) or of the scientific disciplines.

These disparities between hierarchies may be the basis of dissonances often imputed to the 'national character' and they help to explain the different forms taken by the international circulation of ideas, fashions and intellectual models. An example is the primacy accorded in France, at least until the middle of the twentieth century, to literature and to the figure of the writer (in contrast to criticism and erudition, which are often treated as pedantic), a primacy which time and again goes right to the heart of the school system in the shape of a series of oppositions between literature (*agrégation de lettres*) and philology (*agrégation de grammaire*), between discourse and erudition, between 'brilliance' and 'seriousness', between bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie, and one which governs all the relations throughout the nineteenth century which individual agents manage to maintain with the German model. The hierarchy among disciplines (literature/philology) is so strongly identified with the hierarchy among nations (France/Germany) that those who would like to invert such a relation, one which is politically overdetermined, are suspected of a sort of treason (one thinks of the nationalist polemics of Agathon against the Nouvelle Sorbonne).

The same critique applies to the Russian Formalists.⁴⁴ Refusing to consider anything other than the system of works, that is, the 'network of relationships established between texts' (and secondarily, the relationships, incidentally very abstractly defined, between this network and other 'systems' functioning in the 'system-of-systems' constituting society – not so far from Talcott Parsons), these theoreticians are also forced to find in the 'literary system' itself the principle of its dynamics. Thus, even if it does not escape their notice that this

'literary system' (far from being a balanced and harmonious structure in the manner of Saussurean language) is the site, at any one time, of tensions between opposed literary schools, the canonized and the non-canonized, and presents itself as an unstable equilibrium between opposed tendencies, they continue (especially Tynianov) to believe in the immanent development of this system and, like Michel Foucault, they remain very close to the Saussurean philosophy of history when they assert that everything which is literary (or, with Foucault, scientific) can be determined only by previous states of the 'literary (or scientific) system'.⁴⁵

Refusing to seek, like Weber, the principle of change in the struggles between the orthodox which 'routinizes' and heresy which 'de-banalizes', they are obliged to turn the process of 'automatization' and 'de-automatization' (or 'de-banalization' – *ostranenie*) into a sort of natural law of poetic change and, more generally, of all cultural change – as if 'de-automatization' would automatically result in 'automatization', which is itself born of a wear-and-tear linked to a repetitive use of the means of literary expression (destined to become 'as scarcely perceptible as the grammatical forms of language'). 'Evolution', writes Tynianov, 'is caused by the need for ceaseless dynamics. Every dynamic system inevitably becomes automatized and an opposite constructive principle dialectically arises.'⁴⁶ The almost tautological character of these propositions, couched in terms of a dormant virtue, inevitably flows from the confusion of two planes, the plane of works which, by a generalization of the theory of parody, are described as *referring themselves* back to one another (which is effectively one of the properties of works produced within a field), and the plane of objective positions in the field of production and the antagonistic interests based on them. (This confusion, exactly the same as that of Foucault when he speaks of the 'strategic field' with regard to the field of works, is found symbolized and condensed in the ambiguity of the concept of *ustanovka*, which could be translated both as position and position-taking, understood as the act of 'positioning oneself with reference to some given data'.⁴⁷)

While there is no doubt that the orientation and the form of change depend on the 'state of the system', that is, on the repertory of actual and virtual possibilities that are offered at a given moment by the space of cultural position-takings (works, schools, exemplary figures, available genres and forms, etc.), they depend also and above all on the relations of symbolic force between agents and institutions. Having totally vital interests in the possibilities offered as instruments and stakes in the struggle, these agents and institutions use all the

powers at their disposal to activate those which seem the most in accord with their specific intentions and interests.

As for external analysis, whether it treats cultural works as simple reflection or as 'symbolic expression' of the social world (in the phrase used by Engels with respect to the law), it relates them directly to the social characteristics of the authors, or of the groups to whom they were addressed or were assumed to be addressed, and regards them as expressing those social characteristics. To reintroduce the field of cultural production as an autonomous social universe is to get away from the *reduction* effected by all forms, whether more or less refined, of the 'reflection' theory which subtends Marxist analyses of cultural works, and in particular those of Lukács and Goldmann, and which is never completely spelt out, perhaps because it would not withstand the test of being made explicit.

It is presupposed, in effect, that understanding the work of art would mean understanding the vision of the world belonging to a social group which has figured either as starting point or as intended recipient for the artist in composing the work. This group, whether patron or recipient, cause or end, or both at the same time, would be in some way expressed through the artist, who would be able to make explicit (without being aware of it) truths and values of which the group being expressed is not necessarily conscious. But what group are we speaking of? The one from which the artist comes – and which might not coincide with the group from which his or her public is recruited – or the group which is the principal or privileged recipient of the work – which supposes that there is always a single and only one? Nothing permits us to suppose that the declared recipient, when one exists, whether patron or one to whom the work is dedicated, would be the true addressee of the work, or in any case that that person acts as an efficient cause or as a final cause in the production of the work. At the very most, this person could be the circumstantial cause of a labour which finds its basis in the whole structure and history of the field of production, and *through it* in the whole structure and history of the social world under consideration.

To thus bracket out the specific logic and history of the field in order to relate the work directly to the group to which it is objectively destined, and to make the artist the unconscious spokesperson of a social group to which the work of art would reveal what it unwittingly thought or felt, is to force oneself back on assertions to which metaphysics would not object: 'Between such an art and such a social situation, could there be anything but a fortuitous encounter? Of course, Fauré did not wish it so, but his *Madrigal* manifestly created a diversion in the year when unionization was recognized, the year in which 42,000 workers at Anzin launched a 46-day strike. He offers individual love as if to curb class

warfare. In the final analysis, one might say that the *grande bourgeoisie* required of its musicians that their dream factories furnish the dreams it needed politically and socially.⁴⁸ To understand the social significations of a piece by Fauré or a poem by Mallarmé without reducing them to the function of compensatory escapism, of denial of social reality, of a flight into lost paradises (which they share with many other forms of expression) would mean first of all to determine everything which is inscribed within the position from which they are produced. This means their position in poetry as it is defined around the 1880s, at the end of a continual movement of purification and sublimation which was begun in the 1830s with Théophile Gautier and the preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, extended by Baudelaire and Parnassus, and brought right up to its most evanescent limit with Mallarmé. It would mean determining as well what this position owes to the negative relation which sets it against the naturalist novel, and what conversely brings it closer to all the manifestations of reaction against naturalism, scientism and positivism: for example, the psychological novel (obviously in the forefront), the denunciation of positivism in philosophy with Fouillée, Lachelier and Boutroux, the revelation of the Russian novel and its mysticism with Melchior de Vogüé, the conversions to Catholicism, etc. Finally, it would mean determining what in the familial and personal trajectory of Mallarmé or Fauré predisposed them to occupy, in fulfilling it, that social role progressively fashioned by its successive occupants, and in particular the relationship, examined by Rémy Ponton,⁴⁹ between a declining social trajectory which condemns the poet to the 'hideous work of a pedagogue' and his pessimism, or hermetic (meaning anti-pedagogic) use of language, itself a manner of breaking with a rejected social reality. We would still have to explain the 'coincidence' between the product of that ensemble of specific factors and the diffuse demands of a declining aristocracy and a threatened bourgeoisie, and in particular their nostalgia for former pomp which is equally expressed in the taste for the things of the eighteenth century and in the flight into mysticism and irrationalism. In any case, the convergence of independent causal series and the appearance it gives of a pre-established harmony between the properties of the work and the social experience of privileged consumers appear like a trap waiting for those who want to avoid the internal reading of the work or the internal history of the artistic life, and so proceed to put the epoch and the work into direct relationship with each other, with both reduced to a few schematic properties selected for the purpose at hand.

Exclusive attention to functions (which the internalist tradition, and in particular structuralism, were undoubtedly wrong to neglect) tends to ignore the question of the internal logic of cultural objects, their structure as language, to which the structuralist tradition gives exclusive attention. More profoundly, it leads to an omission of the agents and institutions which produce these objects – priests, jurists, writers or artists – and for whom they also fulfil functions which are defined, essentially, within the universe of producers. Max Weber has the merit of illuminating, in the particular case of religion, the role of specialists and their own interests; however, he always remains enclosed in the Marxist logic of research into functions which (even when precisely formulated) do not teach us very much about the

structure of the religious message itself. But, above all, Weber does not perceive that the universes of specialists function like relatively autonomous microcosms, structured spaces (hence spaces amenable to structural analysis, but of another type) of objective relations between positions – that of the prophet and that of the priest or that of the consecrated artist and that of the avant-garde artist, for example. These relations are the true principle of the position-takings of different producers, of the competition which pits them against each other, of the alliances they form, of the works they produce or defend.

The efficacy of external factors, economic crises, technical transformations, political revolutions, or quite simply social demand on the part of a particular category of patrons, of which traditional social history seeks the direct manifestation in the works, can only be exercised by the intermediary of the transformations of the structure of the field which these factors may determine.

One may, by way of an illuminating analogy, evoke the notion of 'the Republic of Letters' and recognize in the description offered by Bayle several of the fundamental properties of the literary field (the war of all against all, the closing in of the field upon itself, etc.): 'Liberty is what reigns in the Republic of Letters. This Republic is an extremely free state. In it the only empire is that of truth and reason; and under their auspices, war is naively waged against just about anybody. Friends must be on their guard against friends, fathers against children, fathers-in-law against sons-in-law: it is a century of iron [. . .]. In it everyone is both sovereign and accountable to everyone else.'⁵⁰ But, as the half-positive, half-normative tone of this literary evocation of the literary milieu shows, this is a notion of spontaneous sociology and in no way a constructed concept and it has never provided a foundation for a rigorous analysis of the functioning of the literary world or for the methodical interpretation of the production and circulation of works (as those who rediscover it today would have us believe). In addition, this image (useful only because it spots a true structural homology, as ordinary intuition often does) can become dangerous if it leads to ignoring everything, beyond the analogies within difference, separating the literary field from the political field (the same evasiveness burdens the notion of the avant-garde). In effect, even if one finds in the literary field all the traits characteristic of the functioning of political and economic fields, and more generally of all fields – relationships of force, capital, strategies, interests – there is not a single one of the phenomena designated by these concepts which does not appear in a completely specific form, completely irreducible to the corresponding traits in the political field, for example.

Even further away, the notion of *art world*, which is in use in the United States in sociological and philosophical fields, is inspired by a social philosophy completely opposed to that which informs the idea of the Republic of Letters as Bayle presents it, and marks a regression in relation to the theory of the field as I proposed it. Suggesting that 'works of art can be understood by viewing them as the result of the coordinated activities of all the people whose cooperation is necessary in order that the work should occur as it does,' Howard S. Becker

concludes that the enquiry must extend to all those who contribute to this result, meaning 'people who conceive the idea of the work (e.g. composers or playwrights); people who execute it (musicians or actors); people who provide the necessary equipment (e.g. musical instrument makers); and people who make up the audience for the work (playgoers, critics, and so on).'⁵¹ Without entering into a methodical exposé of everything that separates this vision of the 'world of art' from the theory of the literary or artistic field, I will merely remark that the latter is not reducible to a *population*, that is to say, to the sum of individual agents linked by simple relations of *interaction* or, more precisely, of *cooperation*: what is lacking, among other things, from this purely descriptive and enumerative evocation are the *objective relations* which are constitutive of the structure of the field and which orient the struggles aiming to conserve or transform it.

Bypassing the alternatives

The notion of field allows us to bypass the opposition between internal reading and external analysis without losing any of the benefits and exigencies of these two approaches which are traditionally perceived as irreconcilable. Keeping what is inscribed in the notion of intertextuality, meaning the fact that the space of works always appears as a field of position-takings which can only be understood in terms of relationships, as a system of differential variations, one may offer the hypothesis (confirmed by empirical analysis) of a homology between the space of works defined by their essentially symbolic content, and in particular by their *form*, and the space of positions in the field of production. For example, free verse defines itself against the alexandrine and everything it implies aesthetically, but also socially and even politically. In effect, the interplay of homologies between the literary field and the field of power or the social field in its entirety means that most literary strategies are overdetermined and a number of 'choices' hit two targets at once, aesthetic and political, internal and external.

Thus the opposition (often described as an insurmountable anti-nomy) between structure, which is apprehended synchronically, and history is at last overcome. The motor of change or, more precisely, the motor of the properly literary process of automatization and de-automatization described by the Russian Formalists is not inscribed in the works themselves but in the opposition – which is constitutive of all fields of cultural production, even if it appears in its paradigmatic form in the religious field – between orthodoxy and heresy. It is significant that in speaking of the priesthood and prophets, Weber also refers to *Veralltäglicung* and *Ausseralltäglicung*, meaning banalization and de-banalization, routinization and de-routinization. The process in which works are caught up is the product of the struggle

between those who espouse conservatism because of the dominant position they temporarily occupy in the field (by virtue of their specific capital), that is to say, they defend routine and routinization, the banal and banalization, in a word, they defend the established symbolic order, and those who are inclined to a heretical rupture, to the critique of established forms, to the subversion of the prevailing models and to a return to the purity of origins. In fact, only knowledge of the structure can provide the tools of a true knowledge of the processes which lead to a new state of the structure and which thereby also comprise the means of comprehending this new structure.

It is certain that, as symbolic structuralism (such as Michel Foucault defines it in the case of science) reminds us, the direction of change depends on the state of the system of possibilities (conceptual, stylistic, etc.) inherited from history. It is these possibilities which define what it is possible or not possible to think or do at a given moment in any determined field. But it is no less certain that the direction of change also depends on the interests (often completely disinterested according to the canons of ordinary existence) guiding agents, as a function of their position in the social structure of the field of production, towards this one or that one among the offered possibles or, more exactly, towards a region of the space of possibles which is comparable to the one they occupy in the space of artistic positions.

In short, the strategies of agents and institutions engaged in literary or artistic struggles are not defined by a pure confrontation with pure possibles. Rather, they depend on the position these agents occupy in the structure of the field (that is to say, in the structure of the distribution of specific capital) or the recognition, institutionalized or not, which is granted to them by their competitor-peers and by the public as a whole, and which influences their perception of the possibles offered by the field and their 'choice' of those they will try to make into reality or produce. But, conversely, the stakes of the struggle between dominants and pretenders, the issues they dispute, the very theses and antitheses they throw at each other, depend on the state of the legitimate problematic, that is, the space of the possibilities bequeathed by previous struggles, a space which tends to give direction to the search for solutions and, consequently, influences the present and future of production.

To objectify the subject of objectification

At the end of this effort to apply the principle of reflexivity by trying to objectify (retrospectively) the space of possibles in relation to

which a method of analysis of cultural works has been constituted which brings to light, precisely, the decisive function of that space of possibles in the construction of any cultural work, it is hoped that a convincing case has been made that the *instrument of rupture* with all partial visions is indeed the idea of the field. It is this (or, more precisely, the labour of constructing the object whose programme it defines) that offers the real possibility of taking a point of view on the ensemble of viewpoints which come into being through it. This labour of objectification, when it applies, as it does here, to the very field in which the subject of the objectification is situated, allows us to achieve a scientific point of view on the empirical viewpoint of the scholar – which, being thus objectivized in the same way as other points of view, with all its determinations and limits, finds itself opened up to methodical criticism.

It is by giving oneself the scientific means to take one's own naive viewpoint as object that the scientific subject truly effects the break with the empirical subject, and simultaneously with other agents who (whether professionals or not) remain enclosed within a point of view of which they are unaware. The reason it is sometimes so difficult to communicate the results of truly reflexive research is because readers must be persuaded not to see as an 'attack' or a 'criticism' (in the ordinary sense) what is intended to be an analysis; they must accept that they have to turn on to their own viewpoints that objectifying point of view which is fundamental to the analysis, and associate themselves, notably by submitting to a critique founded on the acceptance of its premises, with a liberating effort to objectify all objectifications, instead of challenging its fundamentals by reducing them to an attempt to give the appearance of scientific universality to a particular point of view.

To adopt the viewpoint of reflexivity is not to renounce objectivity, but to question the privilege of the knowing subject, which the anti-genetic vision arbitrarily frees, as purely noetic, from the labour of objectification. To adopt this viewpoint is to strive to account for the empirical 'subject' in the very terms of the objectivity constructed by the scientific subject (notably by situating it in a determined place in social space-time) and thereby to give oneself awareness and (possible) mastery of the constraints which may be exercised on the scientific subject via all the ties which attach it to the empirical 'subject', to its interests, motives, assumptions, beliefs, its *doxa*, and which it must break in order to constitute itself. It is not sufficient to seek within the subject, as the classical philosophy of knowledge teaches us, for the preconditions of possibility (and also the limits) of the objective knowledge that the subject establishes. One must also

search within the object constructed by science for the *social conditions of possibility of the scholarly subject* (for example, the *skholè* and the whole heritage of problems, concepts, methods, etc., which render its activity possible) and the possible limits of its acts of objectification.

This totally unprecedented form of reflection leads to repudiating the absolutist pretensions of classical objectivity, but without being then condemned to relativism. In effect, the conditions of possibility of the scientific subject and those of its object are one and the same; to any progress in the knowledge of the social conditions of production of scientific subjects corresponds progress in the knowledge of the scientific object, and vice versa. This is never as well observed as when research takes as its object the scientific field itself, that is to say, the veritable *subject* of scientific knowledge.

Appendix

The Total Intellectual and the Illusion of the Omnipotence of Thought

The illusion of limitless thought is never as visible as in the analysis that Sartre devotes to Flaubert's work, where he reveals the limits of the comprehension that he can have of another intellectual, that is, of himself as an intellectual. This dream of omnipotence is rooted in the unprecedented social position that Sartre constructed by concentrating within a single person an ensemble of intellectual and social powers which had until then been split up.⁵² Transgressing the invisible, but almost unbridgeable, frontier which separated professors, philosophers and critics from writers, petit-bourgeois 'speculators' from bourgeois 'inheritors', academic prudence from artistic audacity, erudition from inspiration, the heaviness of the concept from the elegance of the writing, but also reflexivity from naiveté, Sartre truly invented and incarnated the figure of the *total intellectual*, the thinker-writer, metaphysician-novelist and artist-philosopher who brings to the political struggles of the time all the authority and abilities combined in his person. This has the effect, among other things, of authorizing him to establish an asymmetric relationship as much with the philosophers as with the writers, present or past, setting out to think them through more ably than they could themselves, by making the experience of the intellectual and of his social status the privileged object of an analysis which he believes is perfectly lucid.

The philosophical 'revolution' against philosophies of knowledge (symbolized by Léon Brunschwig) goes hand in hand with the 'revolution' in the writing of philosophy. The operation of the Husserlian theory of intentionality – which leads to substituting for the closed world of consciousness knowing itself the open world of the consciousness which 'bursts upon' things, upon the world and others – involves the eruption into philosophical

discourse of a whole universe of new objects (such as the celebrated café waiter) which had been excluded from the rather confined atmosphere of 'academic' philosophy and reserved until then for writers. It also calls for a new, openly literary manner of speaking about unexpected objects. And also for a new lifestyle: the philosopher writes, in the tradition of the writer, at café tables. As is manifest in his choice of Gallimard, the bastion of pure literature, to publish the philosophical writings previously entrusted to Alcan, ancestor of the Presses Universitaires de France, Sartre abolishes the frontier between literary philosophy and philosophical literature, between the effects of 'literariness' authorized by phenomenological analysis and the effects of depth guaranteed by existential analyses within a metaphysical novel such as *La Nausée* or *Le Mur*. By dramatizing and vulgarizing philosophical themes, plays with a thesis like *Huit clos* or *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu* were predisposed to enter into both bourgeois conversation and philosophy courses.

Traditionally entrusted to university people, criticism is the indispensable accompaniment of that profound transformation of the structure of the division of intellectual work. In the course of years of apprenticeship, Sartre finds in the analysis of his chosen authors, all foreign to the scholarly pantheon, an opportunity (if a slightly academic one) to stake out and assimilate the techniques constitutive of the 'calling' of avant-garde writer, integrating the influences of Céline, Joyce, Kafka and Faulkner in a literary form which is immediately, and justly, recognized as very 'classical'. Therefore, Sartre did not effect in the novel the revolution of forms called for in his critiques in *Situations* any more than he did in the theatre, where he remains closer to Giraudoux (another writer bred in the École Normale Supérieure) or, in a strict sense, to Brecht – for *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* – than to Ionesco or to Beckett. However, critical discourse allows him to give the flavour of an analyst's report to his imposition of a new definition of the writer and of the novelistic form. In writing in an article about Faulkner that a novelistic technique implies a metaphysics, he sets himself up as the holder of a monopoly of legitimacy with respect to the novel, against people like Gide, Mauriac and Malraux, since he is the only one who has credentials as a metaphysician. The auto-legitimizing function of criticism is clearly seen when, skirting polemic, it is applied to his most immediate rivals, such as Camus, Blanchot or Bataille, claimants to the dominant position, where there is only room for one, and to the correlative emblems and attributes that go with it, such as the right to claim the heritage of Kafka, the metaphysical novelist *par excellence*.

The strategies of distinction made possible by criticism owe their particular effectiveness to the fact that they rely on a 'total' oeuvre which gives its author the right to import into each domain the totality of the technical and symbolic capital acquired in others, metaphysics into the novel or philosophy into the theatre, simultaneously defining rivals as partial intellectuals, or even truncated ones: Merleau-Ponty, despite several excursions into criticism, is only a philosopher; Camus, having naively betrayed in *Le Mythe de*

Sisyphes and *L'Homme révolté* that he had nothing much of the professional philosopher about him, is only a novelist; Blanchot is only a critic and Bataille an essayist; not to mention Aron, disqualified in any case for not having taken up that other obligatory component of the figure of the total intellectual – political engagement (on the Left).

With the ground prepared by critical essays and philosophical manifestos before the Second World War, and also by the great success of *La Nausée*, which was immediately recognized as a 'magisterial' synthesis of literature and philosophy, the concentration of all the kinds of intellectual capital characterizing the figure of the total intellectual reaches completion in the immediate postwar period with the creation of *Les Temps Modernes*. The 'intellectual review', as the composition of the editorial board shows, gathers under Sartre's banner the living representatives of all the intellectual traditions integrated in the oeuvre and person of the founder, and allows the Sartrean project of thinking through all aspects of existence to be established in a collective programme ('we should miss nothing of our era,' as the 'editorial presentation' put it) and all intellectual production to be thus given an orientation, as much in its form as in its themes.

But the reconciliation of all genres of production performed by Sartre remains a particular form of philosophical ambition, growing out of the intersection of two phenomenologies, that of Hegel, read by Kojève, and that of Husserl, revised by Heidegger. Through the philosopher-writer, a philosophy which (with Kant notably) had been asserted against 'worldly' compromises obtains in the intellectual field as a whole the hegemonic position it had always claimed – without ever truly winning it except in the university field. One realizes that the will to totalization, the form which the ambition for absolute power takes in the intellectual field, is never asserted more clearly than in philosophical works, and first of all in *L'Être et le Néant*, the first affirmation of the claim to unsurpassable thought (which will find its absolute weapon in the omnivorous dialectic of *La Critique de la raison dialectique*, the ultimate effort to maintain a threatened intellectual power). The very size of the book, similar to that of compendiums or treatises, the amplitude of the field of vision and the universe of objects taken up (in appearance coextensive with life itself, in fact very classical and very near to a broadened scholarly tradition), the supreme loftiness (marked among other signs by the absence of references) of the confrontation with authors of the highest rank (Hegel, Husserl, or Heidegger) and especially perhaps the pretension to surpass everything and conserve everything, starting with competing systems of thought such as psychoanalysis or the social sciences – everything in this book attests to the will to institute philosophy as the founding authority, founded to reign without competition over all terrains of existence and of thought, to instal itself as transcendent authority, capable of delivering to any person, institution or system of thought to which it is applied a truth about itself of which it has been dispossessed.

Having become the incarnation of the total intellectual, Sartre could not

avoid encountering the demands of political involvement inscribed in the personage of the intellectual since Zola together with the vocation to moral magisterium which was so completely constitutive of the figure of the dominant intellectual that it had once imposed itself on Gide himself. Thrown into politics – this means, in the quasi-revolutionary period after the end of the Second World War, into the Communist Party – he finds once again, in the typically philosophical strategy of a radical superseding of what went before by a critical questioning of fundamentals (which he will employ once again with respect to Marxism and the human sciences), a method of giving a theoretically acceptable form to the relationship of mutual legitimation that he endeavours to establish with the party (in the fashion of the prewar Surrealists, but in a very different intellectual atmosphere and in a very different state of the Communist Party). The free assent of the high-flying ‘fellow traveller’ is not at all the unconditional handing over of self (fine for the proletariat, in line with the equation: ‘The Party is the proletariat’ . . .) that some have occasionally wanted to see in it: it is in fact what permits the intellectual to establish himself as the founding conscience of the party, and to place himself with respect to the party and the ‘people’ in a relationship which is that of the For-oneself (*Pour-soi*) to the In-oneself (*En-soi*), and thus be assured of a certificate of revolutionary virtue while safeguarding the full freedom of an elective adherence, the only kind seen as capable of grounding itself in reason. This distance from all established positions and from those who occupy them, whether communists of the *Nouvelle Critique* or Catholics of *Esprit*, is what defines the ‘free intellectual’, and its ontological transfiguration, the For-oneself.

One might in effect show that the fundamental categories of Sartrean ontology, the *Pour-soi* and *En-soi*, are a sublimated form of the antithesis (which haunts Sartre’s whole work) between the ‘intellectual’ and the ‘bourgeois’ or the people. As a ‘bastard’ without justification, a thin film of nothingness and freedom between the bourgeois (the ‘skunks’ of *La Nausée*) and the people, who have in common that they are fully what they are and no more than that, the intellectual is always distant from himself, separated from his being – hence from all those who are only what they are – by the tiny and unbridgeable gap which makes for his misery and his grandeur.⁵³ His misery, hence his grandeur: this reversal is at the heart of the ideological transfiguration which, from Flaubert to Sartre (and beyond), allows the intellectual to found his point of spiritual honour on the transmutation into free choice of his exclusion from temporal powers and privileges. And the ‘desire to be God’, the imaginary union of the *En-soi* and *Pour-soi* that Sartre inscribes in the universality of the human condition, could after all only be a transfigured form of the ambition to reconcile the satisfied plenitude of the bourgeois and the critical disquiet of the intellectual, a mandarin’s dream which is more naively expressed with Flaubert: ‘to live as a bourgeois and think as a demi-God.’

Sartre converts into an ontological structure, constitutive of human existence in its universality, the social experience of the intellectual, a

privileged pariah, doomed to the (blessed) malediction of an awareness which puts him at a distance from his condition and his conditionings. The malaise that he expresses is the pain of being [*mal d'être*] an intellectual and not a maladjustment [*mal-être*] within the intellectual world – where he is, at the end of the day, as at ease as a fish in the sea.⁵⁴