

The Future of Pierre Bourdieu's Politics:
Keeping the Promise of Reflexive Sociology

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ABSTRACT

The novelty of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of literature is a product of the ethical and political demands he makes of art and literature. Though Bourdieu's work ranges from research in social housing to a book length study of Heidegger, this project makes the argument that his investment in aesthetic practice is the constant that holds his political project together. Bourdieu's political reading of art and literature is, in turn, informed by a comprehensive theory of intellectual work.

Bourdieu relentlessly demonstrates that intellectual work arbitrarily marks itself off from other work and constantly ratifies that privilege or distinction by monopolizing the tools needed to construct and justify a worldview. The measure for any intellectual or political project is determined by the degree to which that project works to universalize access to the social conditions necessary to produce and consume cultural capital. This is the political and ethical challenge that defines Bourdieu's work and informs his theory of art. This study makes the case that the power of Bourdieu's work can only be properly assessed when his theory of intellectual work is read in concert with his political and sociological interpretation of art and literature. These dual elements in Bourdieu's thought are applied in a critical reading of the Charles Altieri's work.

This project culminates in a critical assessment of Bourdieu's political thought in light of Jacques Derrida's theories of ethics, politics, and justice. Derrida's concept of undecidability and his theory of political and ethical decision as perpetually "to come" complicates Bourdieu's political vision and offers a promising avenue for extending Bourdieu's work in ways not inimical to his original project.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Altieri, Charles

SA – *Subjective Agency*

Bourdieu, Pierre

IRS -- *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*

PM – *Pascalian Meditations*

PR -- *Practical Reason*

RA – *The Rules of Art*

Derrida, Jacques

SM – *Specters of Marx*

Guillory, John

BR – “Bourdieu’s Refusal”

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The Future of Pierre Bourdieu's Politics: Keeping the Promise of Reflexive Sociology

To seek in the logic of the literary field or the artistic field – paradoxical worlds capable of inspiring or of imposing the most ‘disinterested’ interests – the principle of the work of art’s existence in what makes it historic, but also transhistoric, is to treat this work as an intentional sign haunted and regulated by something else of which it is also a symptom. It is to suppose that in it is enunciated an expressive impulse which the imposition of form required by the social necessity of the field tends to render unrecognizable. Renouncing the angelic belief in a pure interest in pure form is the price we must pay for understanding the logic of those social universes which, through the social alchemy of their historical laws of functioning, succeed in extracting from the often merciless clash of passions and selfish interests the sublimated essence of the universal. It is to offer a vision more true and, ultimately, more reassuring, because less superhuman, of the highest achievements of the human enterprise.

Pierre Bourdieu
The Rules of Art

PREFACE

What I wanted to express, in any case, perhaps clumsily - and I apologize to those I may have shocked or bored – is a real solidarity with those who are now fighting to change society. I think that the only effective way of fighting against national and international technocracy is by confronting it on its own preferred terrain, in particular that of economics, and putting forward, in place of the abstract and limited knowledge which it regards as enough, a knowledge more respectful of human beings and of the realities which confront them.

Pierre Bourdieu
An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology

The following study of Pierre Bourdieu's work sets itself two distinct but related tasks: first, to establish the degree to which Bourdieu's theory of intellectual work grounds his political project; second, and in light of that theory, to recast the terms upon which Bourdieu's engagement with literature is understood. The terms upon which I engage Bourdieu in this study are largely abstract. However, one of the objectives of my inquiry is to measure the very specific contribution Bourdieu's theory of intellectual work and symbolic capital makes to wedding academic reflection with the struggle for social and economic justice. Therefore, a substantial portion of my argument is devoted to explicating the concepts that define Bourdieu's work in order to (re)contextualize those concepts in Bourdieu's avowedly political project. Such a re-contextualization is, to my mind, pressing because Bourdieu is read, almost without exception, as if his activist political commitments were marginal to his academic, sociological enterprise. Bourdieu characterizes his work as an attempt to strike "an intellectual posture" that conceives of the "work of the researcher as an activist task" (*IRS* 58). However, as David Swartz puts it in *Culture and Power*, Bourdieu's "normative vision for ... intellectual [work] and the critical

practice of sociology ha[s] received almost no attention” (4). Indeed, the occasional writing and political organizing that Bourdieu undertook throughout his career is largely viewed as an embarrassment – when it is countenanced at all in secondary readings of Bourdieu.¹

In this study, I want to make the case that Bourdieu’s scholarship cannot and must not be read in isolation from his political engagement. At every turn in this dissertation I will return to the point that Bourdieu’s sociological arguments mutually reinforce his political project. Indeed, one of the primary elements of Bourdieu’s political project is to demonstrate the ability of intellectual and scholarly work to perpetually domesticate the ethical and political stakes of its own operation. The political drive in Bourdieu’s work springs, no doubt, from his own marginal working class origins in the isolated Béarn village of Lasseube. After a brief, compulsory tour of military duty in Algeria, Bourdieu began his intellectual career with an anthropological study (heavily influenced by the work of structuralist anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss) of rural Algeria (Kabylia). His first book, *The Algerians* (1958), charts the relationship between archaic social rituals and the political economy of social practice. In this early work Bourdieu struggled to find ways of explaining social action that resisted accepted ethnological and economic models of the social world. This struggle would lead him to develop his signature theoretical tools: habitus, capital, and field (*In Other Words* 23). As Bourdieu began to develop these terms he also began to question many of the structuralist assumptions that informed his early research. Although structuralist models supplied Bourdieu with a means of resisting the subjectivism of the philosophical tradition (embodied, for Bourdieu, in

Sartre), he lost faith in structuralism's ability to supply a credible model of subjective agency. He concluded that structuralism had pushed subjective will too far into the background by imagining "the social world as a space of objective relations that transcends the agent and is irreducible to interactions between individuals" (*In Other Words* 8).

This move away from structuralism inaugurated what I would arbitrarily call the mid-point of Bourdieu's career. The intellectual questions that defined this period produced *Distinction* and *The Logic of Practice* – arguably, Bourdieu's two most important books. *The Logic of Practice* sets out his sociological terms and *Distinction* is a groundbreaking examination of the politics of culture. In this study I will be particularly concerned with how *Distinction* frames Bourdieu's theory of art and politics. I will also suggest that *Distinction* set the stage for Bourdieu's later focus on art and literature in *The Rules of Art*.² The first translation of *Distinction* appeared in 1984 after its original publication in French in 1979. The translation was greeted with a sense of revulsion among most literary and cultural critics and also received a tepid response in the sociological community.³ Given this backdrop, the central place of *Distinction* in North American readings of Bourdieu goes a long way in explaining the defensive response to the challenge laid down in *Distinction*. However, as time has passed and more of Bourdieu's texts have been translated into English *Distinction* has come to be viewed as a serious challenge to contemporary conceptions of culture and a unique attempt to write the sociology of culture. This voluminous and remarkable book is a unique blend of sociological data, cultural theory and political science. However, despite the profile of his work, Bourdieu's theory of culture is

generally read as “a blanket condemnation of the aesthetic as a mere class signal...[of] conspicuous consumption” (Jameson 132).⁴ In fact, Bourdieu juxtaposes critical readings of Kant and other theorists of culture with statistical data and other empirical data to buttress his claims about the social trajectory and political stakes at play in the game of culture. Over 1200 interviews with people from all social strata are compiled as a counter-discourse to traditional conceptions of culture and, as importantly, to the usual conventions deployed to provide a critique of aesthetic practice and theory. In addition to interviews, *Distinction* offers a subtle reading of how various positions and strategies *within* the field of culture translate into larger social and political divisions.

The manner in which the political challenge of Bourdieu’s work has been underplayed speaks powerfully to the need for reading Bourdieu as I do. Paradoxically, then, the level of abstraction that marks this project is intended to contribute to a more precise understanding of why it is that the political challenge of Bourdieu’s work is so rarely taken up by his readers. In addition, the general nature of my discussion is also designed to draw out the political stakes at work in Bourdieu’s sociological concepts. Clarifying the political thrust of Bourdieu’s work is, to my mind, a pre-requisite for any general application of his work.⁵ The politics of Bourdieu’s work are succinctly captured by the demand that the scholar always ask “who benefits and who suffers” from the unequal distribution of intellectual, cultural, and political capital (*IRS*, 93). Bourdieu further demands that the activist researcher develop tools to deconstruct the social privilege of intellectual work. In both content and title the recent film on Bourdieu’s work, entitled *Sociology is a Combat Sport*,

aptly captures the tenor I hope to convey in my assessment of Bourdieu's work. The film makes the case that Bourdieu's ideas remain sterile if they are not interpreted in the context of the injustice that inspired them.

Though I have given a brief explanation of the need for a general examination of Bourdieu's work, the vexing question of cultural and linguistic translation remains to be addressed, most especially for North American readers of Bourdieu. Bourdieu's project is, without doubt, anchored in the cultural, intellectual, academic, and economic world of France. However, I would argue that his work is also marked by an urgent need to move his analysis beyond the borders of France.⁶ Though Bourdieu is always careful to respect the specificity of national traditions and canons, he is also clear about a certain uniformity in the flow and distribution of capital in highly differentiated capitalist societies. Therefore, when I read *Distinction* I am careful to note the French context of Bourdieu's examples and the difference that makes to his larger arguments about cultural and symbolic capital. In doing so, however, I focus on those aspects of Bourdieu's thought that travel most easily, namely the unequal distribution of all forms of capital and the role intellectual conceptions of the social world play in legitimating that distribution.⁷ Bourdieu invites this reading when he sanctions a provisional generality for his concepts in *Practical Reason*:

[W]ith the exception of the least differentiated societies...all societies reveal themselves as social spaces, that is, structures of differences which cannot really be comprehended without construing the generative principle on which such differences are objectively based [i.e. the distribution of capital]. The principle is nothing other than the structure of the forms of power and types of capital which are efficacious in the social universe considered. (54)

On this count, Bourdieu follows Marx quite closely in the claim that the social differentiation and distinction conditioned by the unjust distribution of capital is the

defining feature of the agency exercised in capitalist societies. In the latter part of his career Bourdieu became increasingly concerned with creating the conditions for examining common structures of oppression and the equally common forms of intellectual complacency that ignore or applaud them. I will be concerned throughout this project with examining the structural elements of intellectual work that tend to conceal the political and material stakes that govern the social world. In the first half of this argument I will slowly work through the tools Bourdieu fashions to make the claim that “[t]hose who are immersed, in some cases from birth, in scholastic universes...are led to forget the exceptional historical and social conditions that make possible a view of the world and of cultural products that is characterized by self-evidence and naturalness” (*PM*, 25). This patient excavation will be necessary if we are to avoid allowing our response to Bourdieu’s work to partake in the very intellectualism he decries. It seems to me that signalling this challenge is the first step in taking full measure of how Bourdieu has changed what it means to think politically.

The second and more obvious issue of translation I broached above remains unanswered, but it cannot be entirely divorced from the argument I have been making thus far about the political nature of intellectual work. Throughout this study I will be relying on translations of Bourdieu’s work. Though such a reliance on translation is bound to raise certain concerns, Bourdieu’s work, thankfully, offers some assurances. Though Bourdieu, of course, wrote primarily in French he did occasionally write in English. He also collaborated closely with his translators and often wrote prefaces for the English versions of his books. In addition, *Weight of the World* (as well as several

other projects underway at the time of Bourdieu's death in January 2002) was always envisioned as a bilingual project. In the case of *Weight of the World* sociologists in Chicago and Paris collaborated on a massive project that sought to record the voices of the dispossessed in France and the United States. The interviews and findings were simultaneously translated under Bourdieu's supervision. More importantly, several of his most important interviews were given in English – including *An Invitation To Reflexive Sociology*, Bourdieu's most comprehensive interview. Because this interview was conducted relatively late in his career, Bourdieu responds to most of the salient debates generated by his work. I quote copiously from *An Invitation To Reflexive Sociology* in this dissertation and throughout the research for this project I consistently used it as a touchstone against which to measure the translations I come to rely upon.

The second task that this dissertation sets for itself is to evaluate the unique place of art and literature in Bourdieu's work. The governing paradox of Bourdieu's relation to art is that, while Bourdieu's sociological tools are very often used to unmask the privilege and snobbery that defines aesthetic perception, art and literature also form a vital part of the progressive political agenda that shapes his work.⁸ Again, I think a careful examination of this point will fill a gap in Bourdieu scholarship. Though Bourdieu is adopted by a substantial number of critics, there has been very little examination of how and why aesthetic practice lies at the heart of his political aspirations. David Swartz's *Culture and Power*, for example, scarcely mentions Bourdieu's theory of art and literature. In *Excitable Speech* and elsewhere, Judith Butler evaluates Bourdieu's theory of social transformation without any mention of

his investment in art and literature. Conversely, virtually none of the literary critics who read Bourdieu's work take any measure of the political point he is making about the very notion of literature and literary criticism as a profession. Though Toril Moi suggests that the de-politicized reception of Bourdieu's work is a product of the North American literary academy, Bourdieu's reception in the United Kingdom has been similar (504).⁹ While Bourdieu's project has been enthusiastically received by many British cultural critics, his work is read largely in isolation from his radical critique of intellectual labour. In *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory*, for example, Bridget Fowler offers a useful overview of Bourdieu's theory of culture in which his politics are, at best, periphery.¹⁰

Chris Beach's *The Politics of Distinction: Whitman and the Discourse of Nineteenth-Century America* is an instructive example of what I think is lacking in literary applications of Bourdieu's work.¹¹ Beach uses Bourdieu's terms to assess the social and aesthetic achievement of Walt Whitman. He also uses the notion of distinction to show how Whitman's poetic practice challenged established boundaries of literary and non-literary, journalistic and literary, and personal testimonial and poetry. Beach convincingly argues that Whitman's transgression of these boundaries is more than a poetic achievement; it is also an important social contribution to American social history and the uniquely American myth of self-invention. However, what Beach fails to do is incorporate Bourdieu's more radical analysis of the social space of intellectual work into his assessment of the distinctions Whitman's poetry generates.¹² Beach only examines in passing how Whitman's poetic practice entrenches a false notion of populism that has little interest in actualising the material

conditions for a genuine populist literature. Beach also properly points to Whitman's place in the development of a certain democratic idealism in the United States but he is, again, mute on how that idealism and academic assessments of it generally contribute to the very politics of distinction and exclusion that Whitman, in principle, opposed. All of these points are at play in a key passage in which Beach measures Whitman's achievement:

As we shall see below, Whitman's most significant contribution to poetic practice lies in his ability to fill gaps in the previously accepted register, to achieve a distinction defined not by his distance from the language and experience of the common man or woman but rather by a distance from the limitations imposed by the poetic canon and by the work of his contemporaries. (17)

The proximity of Whitman's poetry to a common voice or culture is well rehearsed. However, one would have hoped that a critic deploying Pierre Bourdieu as his primary resource would have analysed the degree to which the alleged access to a common language celebrated by Whitman and most of his readers is an ideological and social construct. The resort to a common language in Whitman is an attempt to create a different kind of distinction and capital within the field of aesthetic production rather than a radical social break to the outside world of the common man, as Beach seems to imply. I make these demands of Beach not to denounce his reading per se and even less so to denounce the poetic achievement of Whitman's work, but rather to ask for a more sober assessment of Whitman's claims to have created democratic vistas for anyone other than those with the cultural capital to read and understand him. What I think is missing from Beach's work is a full reckoning with what Bourdieu is saying about the larger nexus of power relations between literature, society, education, and politics. It seems to me that in absence of such a parallel

discussion of these concerns, any literary application of Bourdieu's work is destined to remain a consolidation of cultural capital within the field of literature and its academic study. I think there are good reasons to think that Bourdieu's work demands much more than that.

In order to set out an alternative to the gaps in Bourdieu scholarship I have identified thus far, I turn to the work of American critic John Guillory. Guillory's work is a notable exception to the evasion of Bourdieu's radical cultural politics. Guillory's argument in *Cultural Capital* is a powerful application of Bourdieu's work to contemporary debates about the literary canon. In "Bourdieu's Refusal" Guillory argues that the centrality of art in Bourdieu's work can only be properly understood in the context of Bourdieu's complex relation to economics. Guillory's assessment of Bourdieu's work is central to the case I want to make for Bourdieu's oeuvre and, therefore, I devote the majority of a chapter to Guillory's argument. Guillory weaves together the complex threads of Bourdieu's engagement with art through the lens of economic discourse. Guillory's argument provides me with the vocabulary necessary to make the claim that one of the core mandates of Bourdieu's work is to argue for a viable political alternative to the professionalization of literature. Throughout this project, I will claim that, for Bourdieu, it is this very professionalization that defines the capital of art and literature and ensnares it in an economy of unequal distribution. I also want to make the largely unique case that Bourdieu's political project is framed by the need to imagine (and fight for) a more democratic social destiny for art.

The theory of intellectual work that occupies the first part of this project prepares the ground for the kinds of aesthetic claims that mark the latter portion of

my argument. In order to explore Bourdieu's attachment to art, I trace the loose history he offers of the emergence of literature as a field in modern society, which is the key to understanding his conception of art and literature. His reading perpetually seeks to record the sense of historical novelty that mark literature's emergence as a specific profession in the modern capitalist economy. Though the actual history Bourdieu narrates is quite general, he is very specific about when modern art emerges as a field:

When we retrospectively project the concept of the artist before the 1880's, we commit absolutely fantastic anachronisms: we overlook the genesis, not of the character of the artist or the writer, but of the space in which this character can exist as such. (94)

In setting out this history Bourdieu works to recreate the political urgency and struggle that defined the emergence of art as a social field. I argue that the loss of this political urgency is inseparable from the scholastic disposition that defines Bourdieu's analysis of intellectual work. The slow naturalization of art and literature as a profession has turned literature into a "spectacle survey[ed]...from above...and designed for knowledge alone" (*PM* 21). In order to make this case Bourdieu turns to the work of Gustave Flaubert. Flaubert, for Bourdieu, is an artist whose raw artistic material is the very struggle for autonomy Bourdieu seeks to describe. Though Bourdieu's reading of Flaubert is, at times, unconvincing it is an important component of the very convincing cultural politics Bourdieu forwards. I also explore Bourdieu's reading of Flaubert in *The Rules of Art* as a means of extending Guillory's claim that "in the game Bourdieu plays, ...the name of art is staked in a contest of sociology with economics, and if Bourdieu is destined to lose this game, he will at least be seen to have been on the side of the artists" (398). However, the challenge

that art potentially poses to reified social relations can only be realized if we force ourselves to remember the social and material past, present, and future that grounds aesthetic practice and consumption.

In order to make those claims more specific, I turn to the work of Charles Altieri. Altieri is a prolific critic of modern American poetry and he has written extensively on the political pressure the profession of reading literature has come under in the last thirty or so years. Altieri's work forms a counter-discourse against which we might measure Bourdieu's sociological claims about literature and aesthetic perception. While at first glance Altieri may seem like an arbitrary choice, I endeavour to read his arguments as the logical conclusions of those who believe in the profession of literary criticism *qua* profession.¹³ An infinite variety of beliefs shape the professional study of literature, all with varying degrees of intensity and ambivalence. However, I think, as an abstract case, if one is going to hold to the social divisions endemic in the notion of literature as a profession, the arguments Altieri makes are quite representative of good faith positions one would need to hold – at least implicitly – to dismiss Bourdieu's political challenges to literary study. The particular form of belief I identify in Altieri, then, is a prurient strain of the kind of belief that I think is needed to sustain the academic study of literature. For as I claim by way of Bourdieu, this belief is premised on the need to suspend or defer the sanctions of the social world. In the absence of a such a belief, I think one is left to confront the sometimes very painful and militant demands that Bourdieu makes of intellectual work. Throughout this project, those demands are interpreted as the ethical and political future of Bourdieu's work.

The final chapter of this project will examine the ethical and political implications of Bourdieu's work. I will be arguing that when the logic of the social world is run to ground, what emerges is an ethical-political summons. In characterising this summons I will relate Bourdieu's work to recent work in ethical theory as well as more traditional notions of ethics. The organizing conceit of this chapter is, ironically, my dissatisfaction with the terms in which Bourdieu seeks to account for the ethical challenge of his work. Though I am guided by Bourdieu's demands that we assess who benefits and who suffers from the monopoly acquisition of capital that defines market societies, I want to complicate the terms upon which that judgment is made. I will look, primarily, at Jacques Derrida's work in *Specters of Marx* to develop a set of political and ethical terms that augment Bourdieu's project. I will also use Judith Butler's work to negotiate the largely overlooked parallels between Derrida and Bourdieu.

In the end, then, this dissertation will be but a preliminary contribution toward the cultivation of a more democratic spirit for literature and intellectual work. It is, however, this spirit above all else that I think defines Pierre Bourdieu's work and it is this spirit that moves my work. Bourdieu makes his democratic ambitions clear in the following powerful passage from *Distinction*:

Perhaps the most radical approach to the problem is to ask the question that Marx and Engels raise in relation to art. Having analysed the concentration of the capacity for artistic production in the hands of a few individuals and the correlative (or even consequent) dispossession of the masses, they imagine a (communist) society in which there are no painters but at most people who engage in painting among other things... This utopian paradox breaks a powerful *doxa*: by imagining a social world in which anyone in whom there is a potential Raphaels of painting or politics could develop without hindrance, it forces one to see that the concentration of the embodied or objectified instruments of production is scarcely less in politics than in art, and prevents one forgetting all the potential

Raphaels whom the mechanisms responsible for this monopoly keep excluded much more effectively than any ideological state apparatus. (397-98)

This a powerful passage because it licenses a principled sentimentality to all those who feel themselves excluded from the spoils of artistic and intellectual enchantment. However, Pierre Bourdieu's work is powerful precisely because he provides us with the tools to move beyond sentimentality in order to imagine and fight for a society in which the possession of the few does not come at the expense of the dispossession of the many.

INTRODUCTION

My goal is to contribute to preventing people from being able to utter all kinds of nonsense about the social world. Schönberg said one day that he composed so that people could no longer write music. I write so that people, and first of all those entitled to speak, spokespersons, can no longer produce, apropos the social world, noise that has all the appearance of music.

Bourdieu

An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology

The novelty of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of literature is a product of the ethical and political demands he makes of art and literature. Though Bourdieu's work ranges from research in social housing to a book length study of Heidegger, I want to make the argument that his investment in aesthetic practice is the constant that holds his political project together. In order to make that case it will be necessary to first demonstrate a coherent political project in Bourdieu's thought and, second, to clarify the ambiguous place of literature in this project. This task will be further complicated by the fact that I will be using terms like ethics and politics in a somewhat different manner than Bourdieu uses them. The bulk of this project will be devoted to explicating Bourdieu's key terms and the vitality of those terms for a politicized reading of literature. The final chapter will evaluate Bourdieu's work in the context of recent innovative work in political and ethical theory. This closing chapter will take its cue from the work of Jacques Derrida. Indeed, the genesis of this project lies in the promise of Bourdieu's political project and, paradoxically, a discontent with how underdeveloped his own theory of "post-Marxist" politics is.¹⁴

Bourdieu's disparate oeuvre yields a coherent political project that is held together by a deceptively simple demand that he makes of intellectual work and aesthetic practice. Though Bourdieu's work is replete with this demand it finds its clearest explication in *An Invitation To Reflexive Sociology*:

We may concede that Kant's aesthetics is true, but only as a phenomenology of the aesthetic experience of those who are the product of the *schöle*, leisure, distance from economic necessity, and practical urgency. To know this leads to a cultural politics as opposed to the absolutism of the knights of Culture constituted as the preserve of a happy few (Bloom) as it is to the cultural relativism of those who, forgetting to include in their theory and practice differences inscribed in reality, merely ratify and accept the fact of the cultural dispossession of the

majority; an ethical and political program aimed at universalizing the conditions of access to what the present offers us as most universal. (88)

The ethical challenge in this simple summons is clear. Intellectual work arbitrarily marks itself off from other work and constantly ratifies that privilege by monopolizing the tools needed to construct and justify a worldview.¹⁵ The measure for any intellectual or political project, then, is whether that project aims to expand access to the social conditions necessary to produce and consume the object in question. The novelty of Bourdieu's work lies in his ability to invoke a crisis of legitimation at the heart of intellectual work.¹⁶ Throughout this project I will refer to the aporia opened up by Bourdieu's work, one that is both intellectual and ethico-political. When the material and social history of intellectual work is reintroduced into the interpretive equation the defensive posture instinctively adopted by the "scholastic disposition" confirms rather than refutes a sociological account of intellectual work.¹⁷ Without an anchor in the symbolic capital of academic title or social ratification the specialized and radically unequal distribution of capital realized in intellectual work is de-legitimized. When intellectual work and scholarship is recast in Bourdieu's economy of capital, ethical and political questions of distribution and production become as epistemologically important as the content of particular academic and intellectual pursuits:

To denounce hierarchy does not get us anywhere. What must be changed are the conditions that make this hierarchy exist, both in reality and in minds. We must – I have never stopped repeating this – work to *universalize in reality the conditions of access* to what the present offers us that is most universal, instead of talking about it. (*IRS* 84, author's emphasis)

The validity or "truth" of specific intellectual pronouncements is not in question here.

The focus is on how intellectual work comes to ratify certain social hierarchies by

failing to take into account the symbolic and material economy that underwrites the right to think, write, and be heard. The very fact that the tools of critical thought are concentrated in very few hands anchors Bourdieu's politics.

The work of reflexive sociology is an interruption in the flow of specific social games designed to re-articulate the stakes at play in them. In the case of intellectual work, academic research seen as an end itself is recast as a social stake with ethical and political dilemmas not immediately apparent in the economy of the field. Reflexive sociology has the unique capacity to unfurl these dilemmas precisely because it is standing outside of (versus above) the field itself. The distance provided by sociology allows us to perceive the fact that the "immediate harmony between the logic of a field and the dispositions it induces and presupposes means that all its arbitrary content tends to be disguised as timeless, universal self-evidence" (PM 29). It follows then that the intellectual field, as Bourdieu sets it out, is also unlikely to see the capital and stakes of its daily battles as primarily internal to the field itself. Despite the hybridity and vibrancy of recent research in literary theory, for example, there is very little work that actually challenges the professional core of academic, literary work.¹⁸ As John Guillory argues in *Cultural Capital* recent debates about the literary canon have largely been defined by identity politics. That is not say that vibrant political debate has not emerged from the reconsideration of the canon, but rather that this debate has not engaged the question of how the profession of reading literature and thinking itself ignores the very question of who is invited to join and contribute to this debate. Despite a catalogue of radical pronouncements what one has, in the end, is a Habermasian dialogue independent of the material conditions that

ground thought. In other words the debate that has raged about the canon has taken place largely independent of any reflection on the “*social uses of culture as a capital and an instrument of symbolic domination*” (IRS 154, author’s emphasis). Though thinkers such as Eagleton, Williams, and others, have examined cultural capital as a form of social domination, the novelty of Bourdieu’s thought is, in part, defined by his theory of symbolic capital and field. One of the critical elements in defining the notion of field is recognizing the degree to which the efficacy of a field is dependent on the stakes and rules of the game not being articulated as such. When the capital at stake in the field is not articulated it is almost impossible to comprehend or resist the politics of capital distribution. As we shall see shortly, symbolic capital is defined by its ability to mask the politics of distribution that mark all forms of capital. It is from this standpoint that reflexive sociology can claim to interrupt the flow of the field by posing questions that, in most cases, the field is premised on not asking. The questions Bourdieu asks of intellectual work are, in the end, basic pragmatic questions about what the social meaning of intellectual work looks like stripped of its ritualistic ornamentation. The kinds of answers Bourdieu develops are designed to trouble the conscience of the democratic spirit. The radically unequal distribution of capital and time is, for Bourdieu, both an epistemological and an ethical dilemma. It is, however, critical to note that Bourdieu’s argument is not an argument against intellectual work in the name of a pure materialism. Rather, it is a challenge to turn the tools of reason and scholastic thought toward rethinking the social distribution of capital. Writing the material and social conditions of “the right to speak” into the fibre of intellectual work radically alters the kinds of questions one asks and the

political answers one receives. In this project I hope to use Bourdieu's notion of reflexive sociology to ask different questions and hint at different answers to the question of literature's social and political place. In order to refine the ethical challenge of Bourdieu's work I want to examine what I think is best characterized as the political unconscious of universality.

The appeal to universality that defines Kantian aesthetics and morality is a potent political tool according to Bourdieu because it founds an entire political tradition of purely formal appeals to universality. This appeal to universality takes several forms united by a disingenuous notion of universal access to the conditions of intellectual or aesthetic perception. Bourdieu defines this appeal to universality as a fraudulent linguistic communism:

The illusion of "linguistic communism," which haunts all of linguistics [and most other intellectual work]...is the illusion that everyone participates in language as they enjoy the sun, the air, or water – in a word, that language is not a rare good. In fact, access to legitimate language is quite unequal, and the theoretically universal competence liberally granted to all by linguistics is in reality monopolized by some. (*IRS* 146)

The notion of universalism Bourdieu speaks of above appeals to a common humanity and a common access to the best that has been thought and said. However, one of the more prescient charges that Bourdieu makes against intellectual work is that it replicates the symbolic violence of market economic and social relations.¹⁹ Symbolic violence, as I shall outline in detail, is the term Bourdieu uses to denote the process whereby arbitrary relations of power are (mis)recognized as legitimate or natural rather than as the markers of fate and chance they almost invariably are. This misrecognition is vital to the claims of universality made (consciously and unconsciously) by intellectual work. The dual effect of the generally successful

appeal to universality made by scholarly utterance is to authorize the content of its utterance while simultaneously legitimizing the social difference that sets the thinker apart from the rest of society. Bourdieu carefully outlines how this tendency pervades intellectual work and the vital political work it does in reproducing relations of power. In order to substantiate this claim we need to look closely at the social character of the appeal to universality contained in scholarly utterance.

Universality has a slippery conceptual and philosophical lineage and Bourdieu often slides between traditions without noting which connotation he is citing.²⁰ It would, however, be safe to say that the ethics and politics of Bourdieu's work are held together by a renunciation of false or formalist notions of universality that punctuate intellectual and aesthetic discourse (*PM* 73). In examining intellectual discourse and what he refers to as the scholastic disposition, Bourdieu highlights several mutually reinforcing notions of universality. In the first instance Bourdieu traces the installation of a particular scholastic disposition and world-view through the random chance of birth and schooling. The scholastic disposition, acquired through class and access cultural capital, imbues particular subjects with the confidence to engage in contemplative dialogue, for example, about the social world, or the capacity to engage scholarly work in a second, third, or fourth language. The transmission of this competence is, ironically, premised on forgetting "the exceptional historical and social conditions that make possible a view of the world and cultural products that is characterized by self-evidence and naturalness" (*PM* 25). This social forgetting leads to an appropriation of universality in which the scholastic experience of the world becomes the marker and measure of the social world because of its self-

anointed and self-replicating right to speak. Bourdieu points out that intellectual, scholastic claims of universality are almost always a phenomenology of the writer's own experience. In typically stark language Bourdieu summarises this circle by arguing that social difference is ratified "through [the] simple omission of the social conditions which make it possible, thereby setting up as the norm of all possible practice the one that has benefited from these forgotten or ignored conditions" (*PM* 74). The universality of the intellectual world relies, paradoxically, on the monopoly of the few over the means to produce and understand cultural and intellectual work. This point is made in *Distinction* and *The Weight of the World* by Bourdieu through first hand interviews that excavate the silences and repressions that shape and consolidate views of the social world. Instead of being viewed as a relation to power and capital, intellectual utterances are often viewed, among the dispossessed, as a measure of merit. However, the very dispossession that creates the social distinction of the aesthetic and intellectual perception of the social world leads those excluded from that world to internalize this distinction as legitimate. This process whereby the dispossessed internalize the legitimacy of their own dispossession is a recurring theme in Bourdieu's theory of the social world.²¹ This misrecognition provides intellectual and cultural actors with what Bourdieu calls a perfect sociodicy of their own privilege as well as a self-fulfilling argument for their own claims to universality (*PM* 25). The political work done by false or formalist appeals to universality is particularly pertinent in examining the history and consolidation of aesthetic experience as a distinct social marker. From its inauguration in Kant, modern aesthetic experience has always occupied a liminal social space. While the very

distinction of aesthetic perception relies precisely on its resistance to any reduction to social measures, it always has to look back hesitantly to the social world to confirm its “universality.” It is in this relay, between an enchanted apprehension of the object world and the social world coupled with the turn back to the social world to consecrate the universality of a particular social experience, that Bourdieu locates his political analysis (*IRS* 88). It is also here that we have the clearest line joining the disposition and tendencies of intellectual work generally with Bourdieu’s specific arguments about aesthetic perception. More important for his political theory, the distinctions and demarcations that define the intellectual and aesthetic field exercise a defining influence on a variety of other patterns of consumption and perception throughout the social world. The effect of reflexive sociology is to lift the rules and conventions of aesthetic practice out of context and subject them to a political measure.

The intriguing element of the politics at play in Bourdieu’s work is the central role that aesthetic practice plays in the formulation of an oppositional politics. The elements of social forgetting and the invocation of an illusory universalism make the assessment of art in Bourdieu cognate with his general theory of intellectual work. However, the subversive vision of art Bourdieu proffers is, paradoxically, dependent on the deconstruction of intellectual work his sociology undertakes (Swartz 219). In addition to an explication of his theory of art, a careful examination of Bourdieu’s politics and his sociology of intellectual work will be necessary to yield an integrated picture of the social world that supports his political project. One of the more obvious objections that this project will have to refute is the notion that Bourdieu’s overtly

political reading of art and academic work is little more than an outsider's resentment.²² The detail that marks the précis of Bourdieu's theory of capital and his sociology of intellectual work in my argument is designed to build the case that, when the social world is re-attached to intellectual production, Bourdieu's ethical demands become credible and compelling on both epistemological and political grounds.

The sociological tools that Bourdieu develops to excavate the social world share the common goal of illuminating the specific stakes of particular social worlds. For Bourdieu, what is particular to the intellectual world is a form of capital founded on a denial of its debt to the social world coupled with a form of competence and a roster of rewards that make it unlikely that that they will ever come to be experienced as a denial - or as an act at all (*PM* 81). As these social exchanges are rendered opaque, the political promise of Bourdieu's work becomes intelligible as an ethical measure of intellectual work rather than a lament of political frustration. The virtue of terms like habitus, field, and capital in Bourdieu's work is that they provide an explanation of the social world that is not wholly dependent on the notion of conscious intention. Indeed as we shall see when we examine the notion of habitus Bourdieu's conception of practice focuses on how the durable and regulated nature of the social world defines and enables praxis.

Without jettisoning the notion of individual choice, I believe Bourdieu's sociological tools offer the promise of a materialist ethics not answerable to philosophical or academic measure. Bourdieu's work is not defined by a particular contribution to philosophical knowledge but by the very political demands he makes of intellectual work. However, as previously mentioned, the final element of this

project will entail showing how Bourdieu's own work is not a particularly good gauge of the ethical demand his work makes. In order to make that demand sustainable and credible we will need to turn back to the philosophical resources offered by the work of Jacques Derrida. I will argue that Derrida's complex conception of ethics and politics powerfully captures the spirit of Bourdieu's project – a spirit that Bourdieu himself is, paradoxically, resistant to. For the moment, however, I want to offer a preface to my reading of the place of art in Bourdieu's work. The lure of Bourdieu's treatment of literature is to be found in the rich complexity that he encounters when trying to apply his relentless materialism to aesthetic practice. Bourdieu's encounter with aesthetic practice is marked by two distinct political problems. The first challenge is to provide a compelling sociology of the radically unequal distribution of the capital required to consume and produce literature. Further, he seeks to demonstrate the formative role that this political reality has had on the social construction of the literary act and the influence it exerts over any attempt to proffer a convincing politics of literature. The second challenge is then to argue that, despite its restricted economy, aesthetic practice contains a vital kernel of resistance to the hegemony of economic and rationalistic accounts of the social world. Both of these challenges are integral to the political and ethical power of Bourdieu's project. In order to make sense of art's restricted economy I will offer a detailed overview of Bourdieu's key sociological terms.

The scholastic disposition and capital that mark intellectual and aesthetic work will, in turn, place aesthetic practice (and its interpretation) in the larger social context of capitalist social relations. From this ground it will be then possible to offer

a historical and political account of the ambiguous relation that art enjoys with the market economy. In chapter two, I offer an outline of the theoretical progression that highlights the historical battle for autonomy that defines modern art. In *The Field of Cultural Production* and *The Rules of Art* Bourdieu traces this struggle for autonomy as a means of arguing that this history has largely been forgotten in contemporary accounts of the corrosive relationship between art and capitalist social arrangements. The key question Bourdieu's analysis poses concerns how and why a form of aesthetic practice premised on radical aesthetic and social transformation became compromised and contained. The creativity and freedom Bourdieu identifies with art is repressed or "sublimated" when it becomes one social and academic field among others (RA xx). Without passing judgment on the form of politics invoked, Bourdieu carefully draws out the stridently anti-capitalist gesture of artists like Baudelaire as a means of demonstrating how the practice of intellectual work more often than not buries rather than illuminates the political, ethical, and social stakes of art (*The Field of Cultural Production* 42). In chapter two, I assess John Guillory's powerful argument that Bourdieu embraces the aesthetic act itself as a symbol of human freedom capable of providing a counter-discourse to the reifications of capitalist social relations. The tension between the values of the market and the creativity of the aesthetic act is a useful shorthand for Bourdieu's larger political project. However, in order to make that case seem credible a careful review of how Bourdieu comes to invest in the political potency of aesthetic practice will be necessary.

The restricted economy that has come to define the consumption and production of art is inseparable from social hierarchies of taste. In chapter one, I also

examine the exhaustive research Bourdieu undertakes on the sociology of taste in *Distinction*. The evidence presented in *Distinction* forms the foundation of Bourdieu's argument that reading art in isolation from the ethical and political imperatives inherent in the social distribution of capital (or reading that distribution through a purely academic or intellectual lens) is neither politically nor epistemologically valid (*Distinction* 99). The tools produced by reflexive sociology turn inward on intellectual and cultural work to ferret out social relations necessarily repressed by the capital that defines that work. This point will become more clear when Bourdieu's theory of intellectual work is unfurled. What I am interested in asserting for the moment is the ambiguous relationship Bourdieu enjoys with aesthetic practice. This ambiguity has led many critics to see Bourdieu as dismissing art as simply a symbol of conspicuous class consumption. Refuting that misreading will be central to making my case that Bourdieu's political aspirations are only intelligible in light of his theory of art.

At first glance it would seem that, in John Rawls' terminology, Bourdieu claims literature and art as a primary good in his conception of social justice.²³ Given other options on offer as primary goods, such as freedom, equality, and fairness, art is an odd choice of a primary good by a thinker with the Marxist pedigree of Bourdieu. However, I want to argue that Bourdieu has several compelling reasons to foreground aesthetic practice the way he does. First, literature provides him with an exemplary case to test the efficacy of his politicized theory of intellectual work. In assembling his theory of literature and art Bourdieu demonstrates that there is a relentless drive to obscure, sublimate, and repress the ethical and political stakes at the core of

producing and consuming art. These stakes are to be found in the restricted economy and radically unequal distribution of the competence, disposition, and leisure required to possess and be possessed by literature. Whatever else it is, literature is a referent for the dispossession endemic to the differentiated distribution of capital (RA 285). As my explication of Bourdieu's theory of art develops, this dispossession will form one of the key ethical challenges of his work as well as a primary target for reflexive sociology. The centrality of art to Bourdieu's political practice finds its genesis in the fact that the social meaning and capital of art and literature have formed what he refers to as a humanistic pastoral of universality.²⁴ Bourdieu charts the history of a particular aesthetic discourse that entertains a highly politicized and paradoxical relationship with universality. Art is the highest ideal of human freedom and a repository of what is most worth fighting for and preserving in the human spirit, while at the same time being a discourse that has its historical, social, and economic currency precisely because, as Eliot would say, the mermaids do not sing for all. It is in this tension that Bourdieu erects his politics of culture as a means of articulating a vision of aesthetic practice that has the goal of genuine universality. The denied universality of the prevailing professionalized versions of aesthetic practice dilute the core of freedom and creativity embodied in art as both a practice and a social symbol. Aesthetic practice is at the core of Bourdieu's politics because of the permanent struggle it symbolizes to resist the de-humanizing effect of rationalist and economic definitions of what it means to be human.²⁵

In my examination of *Distinction* I will detail this argument as a primary component of Bourdieu's political *and* aesthetic achievement. The communion of

Bourdieu's theory of intellectual work and his theory of artistic consumption and production makes his project unique. Integral to this theory of intellectual work is the notion that the very questions that define literature (within and outside the academy) insure that the political and ethical stakes of literature are rarely, if ever, foregrounded. The consecrated authority and cadence of academic and intellectual utterance ratifies the privilege of the few (sometimes unwittingly) and consolidates the dispossession of the many. In the following passage from *Pascalian Meditations* Bourdieu makes this point by arguing:

[O]ne of the least noticed effects of academic procedures of training and selection, functioning as rites of the institution, is that they set up a magic boundary between the elect and the excluded while contriving to repress the differences of condition that are the condition of the differences they produce and consecrate. (25)

Art is of specific interest to Bourdieu because it is a discourse that defines itself by contrast to the crass consumption that defines market economics. Because of this social and psychological ambition, art becomes an exemplary space of the wider political denial of class and the "euphemization" of the violence that defines market social relations. In addition, the empirical data (drawn from interviews in France) found in *Distinction* offers a scientific deconstruction of the belief that the value and efficacy of art transcends social division. *Distinction* is a six hundred page deconstruction of the magic boundary between the vulgar and the sacred. The ability to consume and "appreciate" art illuminates a depressing continuum of access to capital and free time that mirrors consumption in social spaces not traditionally associated with art. Despite claims to universality, intellectual and aesthetic discourse reinforces, almost without exception, the legitimacy of social relations based on

inequity and, as importantly, perpetually reinforces its own monopoly on describing and defending its own legitimacy. As Bourdieu puts it in *Pascalian Meditations* the most powerful form of capital is “that form of capital whose particularity is that it contains its own justification” (240). Throughout this project I will offer a detailed overview of Bourdieu’s argument in order to chart a crisis of legitimacy at the very heart of intellectual work. That crisis forms the ethical and political summons of Bourdieu’s work and, as I shall argue, it is a crisis that is not fully reckoned with in Bourdieu’s most political ambitions.

The second compelling reason Bourdieu has for a heavy theoretical investment in aesthetic practice is as a symbol of a social utopia that subverts the dehumanizing model of social action that governs capitalism. Such a contention seems incongruous in the wake of what I have just said about Bourdieu’s general theory of intellectual work. However, I want to argue that aesthetic practice contains a vital resource in Bourdieu’s struggle to imagine an alternative form of economic and social cooperation. I will spend a good part of this project mounting the case that Bourdieu’s political critique of aesthetic discourse and intellectual work and his deployment of aesthetic practice in an avowedly political project are two parts of a whole symphony and only make sense in concert with each other. The key bridge between these two visions is Bourdieu’s social history of aesthetic practice as well as an assessment of its contemporary deployment. Holding these two ideas together leads to a rich and ambiguous engagement with art that does not force one to choose between the political and the aesthetic project. In fact, Bourdieu’s political and sociological project is defined by his deconstruction of this dualism and his refusal to

engage in intellectual reflection free of activist commitment; this refusal to choose will form a politics worth explicating in detail.

From its genesis in modern society through to its contemporary, ambiguous invocation in complex, capitalist “post-national” contexts, aesthetic practice has drawn Bourdieu’s attention because of its restricted economy. Literature is premised on a unique economic reversal of values that defines it as both a discourse and a social practice. Unlike most consumption in capitalist society literature has always trafficked in the social belief that it is a rarefied form of consumption defined by its spiritual flavour. By definition, literature reverses the calculus of capitalist economics and offers an edifying space of reflection.²⁶ The measure of that space is, by definition, not accessible to the tools of economic calculus. This admittedly rough definition of literature is the working premise Bourdieu uses to explain the social context of art. In *Distinction* and elsewhere he tirelessly interrogates the social and material conditions necessary to produce and consume high cultural “goods”. However, in his later work Bourdieu also explores the subversive genesis of aesthetic production as a means of laying down an ethical challenge to contemporary conceptions of literature.

The nexus of Bourdieu’s engagement with literature is to be found in the antagonism between art and economics. In chapter two, I will use John Guillory’s argument to explore how economics and literature are linked in antagonism. The ongoing challenges that literature can provide to economic models of social, cultural, and political meaning is a vital clue to Bourdieu’s paradoxical deployment of aesthetic practice in an unapologetically political project. In order to refute the

inevitable and prevailing criticism that Bourdieu reduces art to politics and reduces all discourse to the power of the dominant over the dominated, I will outline how his sociological concepts form the flank of his investment in art.²⁷ Primary in that outline will be the notion of field as that which preserves the specific integrity of social action without reducing it to external factors of explanation such as sociology or economics. In doing so, however, the concept of field allows Bourdieu relentlessly to apply his logic of capital to the stakes of all social universes. Capital is the specific profit that drives the rules and competition in all arenas of social endeavour. It is only by understanding the capital specific to aesthetic practice that one can responsibly imagine an alternative. In *The Rules of Art* Bourdieu outlines what is at stake in his reading of literature:

Renouncing the angelic belief in pure form is the price we must pay for understanding the logic of those social universes which, through the social alchemy of their historical laws of functioning, succeed in extracting from the often merciless clash of passions and selfish interest the sublimated essence of the universal. It is to offer a vision more true and, ultimately, more reassuring, because less superhuman, of the highest achievements of the human enterprise.
(xx)

This passage captures the dual ethical and political challenge Bourdieu lays down for the critical assessment of art.

Though I want to frame Bourdieu's theory of art as largely political, it is also important to note that his assumptions about art are rooted in a historical analysis of art's emergence as a social act. This historical task is defined by the argument that art took on specific social meaning "based on two sets of conditions: on the one hand, the emergence, through a long evolutionary process, of an autonomous universe, the artistic field freed from economic and political constraints, and knowing no other law

than the law it sets for itself...and on the other hand, the occupation, within the social world, of positions in which the 'pure' disposition which gives access to the 'pure,' purely aesthetic pleasure, pleasure can be formed, in particular through upbringing or schooling, and in which, once formed, it can be exercised and, through use, be maintained and perpetuated" (*PM* 73). The creation of these irreducible social spaces and dispositions is the basis upon which Bourdieu claims that a certain material and social forgetting is lodged at the origin (both discursively and historically) of aesthetic discourse. In *Distinction* this pleasure is defined by its distance and distinction from all that is base and mundane:

The social relations objectified in familiar objects, in their luxury or poverty, their "distinction" or "vulgarity", their "beauty" or "ugliness," impress themselves through their bodily experiences which may be as profoundly unconscious as the quiet caress of beige carpets or the thin clamminess of tattered garish, linoleum. (77)

Aesthetic discourse allows the subject to embrace a view (vouchsafed by material conditions) of the object world that consolidates and legitimates its own privilege by constructing a *social* experience as spiritual or aesthetic. Aesthetic experience and the language used to describe that experience militate against assessing the social meaning of art through the language of capital.

In chapter two I outline how Bourdieu applies the critical terms introduced in chapter one to the emergence of literature as a social field. The most important of these is the concept of field. Bourdieu's notion of field is, as I have been stressing, the decisive term that allows him to reconstruct the ambiguous politics of art without collapsing art into sociology or politics. In *The Field of Cultural Production* the concept of field is applied to the development of art as a specific and autonomous

sphere of human activity. The social history of art offers a means of erecting the sublimated and repressed social relations of domination and dispossession that sets those elected for the distinctive charms of art apart from those who are not. This social history also allows for a fresh look at the very novelty of looking at the object world from an aesthetic point of view. The simple distinction between the world of utility and practical necessity and the cognitive space of aesthetics carries vital social distinctions that have largely been forgotten. Examining the genesis of these distinctions in the development of modern art makes them strange again and opens them up for a different kind of political reflection. However, within that same genealogy Bourdieu also sets out the case that when stripped of its social pretence and theological trappings art yields a set of resources vital to any political project founded on the desire to resist and transform capitalist social relations. The sublimated essence alluded to in the above passage is not a resurrected Marxist teleology but rather a counter-discourse to the instrumentalist and de-humanizing vision of human work, value and creativity that define capitalist economics.

Though Bourdieu relentlessly locates a certain social privilege and unequal distribution of capital in the creation of art, his historical analysis also allows him to reconstruct the subversive potential of art. In addition to the more political points I have been stressing, Bourdieu is also interested in making the point that most contemporary literary criticism does not adequately address the oppositional, historical origin of art in modern capitalist society. More importantly, he argues that contemporary literary criticism rarely raises the question of how and why the subversive potential of aesthetic discourse became contained and professionalized. In

other words, the one question not asked by literary critics is how and why a discourse premised on social and symbolic revolt became so completely domesticated as a profession and an industry that to ask after that domestication is viewed as professional discourtesy or mistaking literature for politics.²⁸ In short, I believe reflexive sociology provides the best chance of avoiding any simple political denunciation of aesthetic practice. As importantly, the deconstruction undertaken by reflexive sociology provides a means of recasting aesthetic practice in a new light and, to be frank, imbuing it with more genuinely democratic political ambitions.

In order to avoid being a phenomenology of the “happy few” literary criticism must be infused with the ethical demand made by Bourdieu’s general theory of intellectual work. That ethical and political demand is both a materialist call to universalize access to the material conditions for a contemplative, dignified sense of self and a more philosophical plea for the reflexive vision of selfhood and society that art provides. Though these political demands seem vague, Bourdieu refuses to quantify what a just distribution of cultural capital would look like in order to focus his political energy on the arbitrary and unjust distribution of all forms of capital (*PM* 20). In addition, Bourdieu is following a critical part of Marx’s legacy in refusing to speculate on a future classless or democratic society. Though he is clearly not heavily invested in the teleological strain of Marx’s thought, Bourdieu does share a certain utopian vision with Marx. As I shall be arguing in my final chapter that utopia finds its most credible vocabulary in Derrida’s notions of ethics and politics. When the social world is run to ground under the weight of reflexive sociology an aporia of value opens. This aporia has been well documented in Marxist literature as the purely

arbitrary foundation of exchange value. As I shall argue in chapter two, however, Bourdieu goes a step farther and posits the social relation between art and economics as a crucial but largely diluted and forgotten challenge to market social relations. The primary contention of this project will be that these demands cannot be read in isolation. In addition, the relay between art and economics imbues Bourdieu's work with a theoretical complexity and political urgency that has often been ignored by friend and foe alike (*BR* 398).

In the final chapter of this work I turn to the work of Jacques Derrida to trace the contours of Bourdieu's politics. Derrida will also provide a platform to outline what I think is missing from Bourdieu's conception of ethics and politics. As suggested above Bourdieu's critique of capitalist market relations relies on the groundless foundation of exchange value as the primary cue to unravel the entire network of power relations supported by the misrecognition of the "true" origin exchange value.²⁹ What is not properly theorized in Bourdieu's work, however, is the effect that the delegitimization of exchange value has on value and judgment writ large. In Derrida's terms, once the non-originary origin of value is posited there is no "true" register of value from which to posit an alternative or measure the validity of your critique. (This is, of course, a rough summary of the defining philosophical dilemma of postmodernism.) In Bourdieu's work there is, to my mind, a theoretical impasse reached at the point that social relations are stripped of their mooring in convention, ritual, and symbolic violence. At this moment of aporia, Bourdieu is largely silent or he slips back into an instrumentalist view of politics and ethics that at times implies that a proper ethics and politics will follow from material redistribution.

I want to argue that Bourdieu's trepidation is attributable to a fear that many of the materialist gains won by his reflexive sociology would be lost if he were to entertain "soft", relativist notions of politics and ethics.

My task in the final chapter will be to make the case that Bourdieu's work has in fact brought him to a precipice that will not allow any turning back to any familiar conception of "what is to be done". In this simple context I will use notions like ethics, politics and justice as a way of reflecting on the aporetic space carved out by Bourdieu's bracing deconstruction of the social world. In order to make this case I will focus on a related set of terms in Derrida's work that share a common theme. In the latter part of his career Derrida has turned more overtly to notions like justice, responsibility, ethics, and politics. What unites these terms in his work is the focus on undecidability and the kind of political and ethical judgment made possible by the very lack of proper measure I referred to above. Undecidability is the crucial philosophical term upon which much of Derrida's work turns and it has been subjected to much philosophical and political misreading. A detailed overview of the concept and argument for its coherence in the context of terms like ethics and responsibility will provide the means to move beyond the impasse we ultimately arrive at in Bourdieu's writings. In addition, I will draw a link between Derrida's practice of philosophy and his reading of literature. This link will lead us back to Bourdieu and his unique engagement with literature.

CHAPTER 1: THE POLITICS OF REFLEXIVE SOCIOLOGY

Given my trajectory and position...I am...well placed to know that any analysis that compels us to uncover the social determinants of a posture which tends to be experienced as a freely arrived-at, discretionary choice, or even a heroic rupture, must be to some degree unpleasant or irritating.

Bourdieu

An Invitation To Reflexive Sociology

1. Sociology as Political Praxis

Pierre Bourdieu's key conceptual terms are held together by a commitment to the idea that reflexive sociology is a form of political resistance. For Bourdieu, the stakes of sociological inquiry are never simply empirical or scientific but also political and ethical. In *Pascalian Meditations*, Bourdieu lays down the challenge that makes it obvious why one should feel compelled to read his work as a political intervention:

The social sciences, which alone can unmask and counter the completely new strategies of domination which sometimes help to inspire and arm, will more than ever have to choose which side they are on: either they place their rational instruments of knowledge at the service of ever more rationalized domination, or they rationally analyze domination and more especially the contribution which rational knowledge can make to *de facto* monopolization of the profits of universal reason. Awareness and knowledge of the social conditions of that logical and political scandal, the monopolization of the universal, indicate without ambiguity the ends and the means of a permanent *political struggle* for the universalization of the means of access to the universal. (84, author's emphasis)

Paradoxically, reflexive sociology is the scientific method Bourdieu deploys to buttress his most political claims. In addition to a meticulous alchemy of sociology and philosophy, Bourdieu relies on a singular conception of reflexivity to politicize the very construction of the power relations always already at work in the social world. The key to Bourdieu's reflexive sociology is its ability to turn in upon itself to unveil the social and economic conditions of scientific and academic knowledge. In *Homo Academicus*, he undertakes a book length study of the relations of power that underlie academic research and the power of academic discourse in social, economic, and political debates. However, Bourdieu is very careful to separate the terms of a sociological critique of knowledge from the more cynical anti-intellectualism that

punctuates most political discourse about academic work.³⁰ In essence, Bourdieu employs epistemology as a means of holding knowledge, most especially knowledge of the social world, to political account. One of the goals of this study will be to demonstrate the political vigour Bourdieu's theory brings to cultural and political debates.

As I specify the ethical and political implications of Bourdieu's various tools of inquiry, a particular irony will resonate: Bourdieu's relentless struggle to politicize knowledge and hunt down the power dynamics at work in all social relations preserves and promotes the social good of autonomous scientific and academic inquiry. Bourdieu makes this point when he argues that "whatever political potency [sociology] may have will be due to its properly scientific authority, that is, due to its autonomy" (*IRS* 186). The sober realism Bourdieu brings to sociological analysis is characterized by a relentless desire to mark off both the limits and opportunities that intellectual thought can offer a project of radical, liberatory politics. Throughout his work, Bourdieu uses his singular conception of social criticism to offer possibilities of resistance that are equally wary of revolutionary delusion and cynicism. The most radical thing sociology can do is to learn how to avoid asking both too little and too much of itself when it comes to the task of "universalising that which the present offers as most universal."

The first key term that defines Bourdieu's political and intellectual ambitions is reflexive sociology. Reflexive sociology is Bourdieu's attempt to position social analysis itself within the particular set of economic and social relations that conditions and receives it. Bourdieu's early work in anthropology raised the

theoretical question of the role of the observer or recorder in the (re)construction of the social world under observation. In addition to the more obvious ethnocentric dilemma raised by external observation, Bourdieu was intrigued by the kind of knowledge one might produce if the position of the observer became as important as that of the object under observation. This dilemma would take him far beyond the kinds of reflexivity being contemplated by thinkers such as Parsons and Garfinkel.³¹ The question of the analyst's role in the process of producing knowledge of the social world was the genesis of Bourdieu's "sociology of sociology." The task Bourdieu set himself was daunting: to construct a sociology that could turn back upon the investments of the analyst and her discipline while still addressing the more traditional mandate of sociology to map the relations of power, affinity, and transformation that mark the social world.

In his introduction to *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Loic Wacquant sets out three signal elements that mark Bourdieu's singular conception of reflexivity (49). Wacquant defines Bourdieu's concept as a theoretical stand against three biases that threaten the validity of sociological research. The first of these is the bias of individual social origin in the form of class, race, or ethnicity. Bourdieu is certainly not alone nor is he the first sociologist to point out the bias of social origin. However, Bourdieu's conception of reflexivity consciously resists any hint of narcissism in its deconstruction of intellectual work. In order to be properly reflexive, sociology cannot be a simple testimony to or recitation of social categories to which one belongs. Bourdieu advocates the objectification of individual social position but such a pronouncement cannot be an egoistic treatise of biographical history. However, it

should not be so broad as to reduce the individual to a token of a particular category. Both forms of reflexivity run the risk of obscuring the degree of freedom and necessity that condition all social action and intellectual production. In addition, Bourdieu argues that attempts at reflexivity are destined to remain rhetorical or grammatical meditations if they do not examine or challenge the founding social and historical conditions that “entitle one to speak” in the first place.³²

This form of reflexivity leads directly to the second bias that orients Wacquant’s definition of Bourdieu’s reflexivity. The second bias occurs when reflexivity is limited to tracing the place occupied by the analyst in her field and the place of that academic field in the larger context of academic study. In *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* Bourdieu offers a very specific definition of field:

In analytic terms, a field may be defined as a network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and political situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.). (97)

Bourdieu employs the notion of field as a means of identifying the relations between subject areas in the academy and the relationship of particular disciplines to the larger world of economics, politics, and culture. Analyzing the minutiae of academic competition, promotion, convention, and ritual is integral to a genuinely reflexive sociology. However, if such analysis does not move beyond the field of intellectual work, an entire universe of social and political questions is muted. The concept of the field is designed to trigger a sophisticated dialogue between various fields of social activity that define themselves over and against each other. More importantly, the

theory of field allows a productive dialogue between intellectual conceptions of the social world and conceptions of practice and action not generated or answerable to strictly rational, academic analysis (97). When we explore the concept of habitus, it will be clear that Bourdieu is not speaking of an irrational or unconscious mover of action. Rather, he is pointing to that which necessarily remains unthought and unsaid in the most mundane and sacred daily social rituals. More importantly, Bourdieu is also making the case that the social space, time, and economy of academic work make intellectuals less likely to account for the material conditions of thought and less likely to digest the political consequences of such an omission (Swartz 227). Again, the point of such an analysis is not to bog social criticism down in perpetual self-reflection but rather to turn to social and political dilemmas with the most scientific gaze possible.³³

The final element Wacquant identifies as central to Bourdieu's reflexive sociology is the bias endemic in intellectual work itself. This bias, for Bourdieu, is the most pervasive and, therefore, the most difficult to break down. Bourdieu defines the intellectual bias as a certain blindness to the social potency of intellectual work and, more importantly, to the fundamentally different kinds of social action which thought and theorizing are. Even where the analyst is conscious of her social position, there is almost no systematic analysis of intellectual work itself. It is not just that intellectual work is separate and distinct from the "practical" action it seeks to interpret and account for, but also that intellectual work consciously and unconsciously distinguishes itself (socially and politically) by repressing the social conditions of its own production. For Bourdieu, this is the singular feature of the scholastic, academic

method of accounting for the social world. Bourdieu suggests that this fact has a determining effect on our view of the social world when he argues “that [the] incapacity of both philosophy and social science to comprehend practice...lies in the fact that, just as in Kant reason locates the principle of its judgments not in itself but in the nature of its objects, so the scholarly thinking of the practice includes within practices the scholarly relation to practice” (*IRS* 40).

The entire system of recognition, reward and ritual in the scholarly world is premised on the repression of a certain social and political history. Bourdieu puts the point starkly in *Pascalian Meditations* when he argues that scholastic work is constituted by a “more or less triumphant ignorance of the social and economic conditions that make [intellectual work] possible” (*PM* 15). In addition to tracking this blindness, Bourdieu also argues that the social distinction of intellectuals confers a particular ability to legitimate a view of the social world that (re)affirms what he calls the scholastic disposition. The scholastic disposition embodies the social distinction of intellectual work and, simultaneously, consecrates the ability of academic, scientific, and cultural work to intervene in social and economic struggles in the social world:

The fundamental ambiguity of the scholastic universes and of all of their productions – universal acquisitions made accessible by an exclusive privilege – lies in the fact that their apartness from the world of production is both a libratory break and a disconnection, a potentially crippling separation. While the suspension of economic or social necessity is what allows the emergence of autonomous fields, “orders” (in Pascal’s sense) which knows and recognize only their specific law, it is also what, in the absence of special vigilance, threatens to confine scholastic thought within the limits of ignored or repressed presuppositions, implied in the withdrawal from the world. (PM 15 author’s emphasis)

The “exclusive privilege” that defines scholastic work as a field replicates (and justifies) its capital by denying the determining role of material conditions in the social construction of all privilege – that denial is, paradoxically, for Bourdieu one of the most important privileges that come with the ability to describe yourself and your social world. In *Pascalian Meditations* Bourdieu argues that intellectuals “not only have a *de facto* monopoly over the conditions of appropriation of the universal but also grant themselves a legitimation of their monopoly” (70). Bourdieu ascribes such importance to a sociology of intellectual work because, in the absence (or abeyance) of brute force, he argues that the “practical belief” embodied in the reproduction of power is dependent on the principles of symbolic recognition and symbolic violence that are the founding features of intellectual work as an autonomous social sphere. I will offer a detailed definition of symbolic violence in Bourdieu’s work. For now, however, I simply want to register the central and ambiguous engagement with intellectual work that marks all of Bourdieu’s social and political theory.

In *Culture and Power*, David Swartz suggests that Bourdieu overplays the political potency of intellectual work in the realm of power.³⁴ Swartz suggests that Bourdieu overlooks the fact that less varnished forms of power are often deployed in the service of power. Though I agree with Swartz’s contention that Bourdieu overplays the ubiquity of symbolic power, the credibility of Bourdieu’s critique is buttressed by his compelling analysis of the degree to which symbolic power goes unrecognized. Brute force and the violence of the market economy are much more easily recognized and, to my mind, much more thoroughly analyzed than symbolic power. Swartz himself puts the point very well when he argues:

For Bourdieu, the study of intellectuals is crucial for an understanding of the character of stratification, political conflict, and the perpetuation of inequality in modern societies.... Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power holds that class relations are mediated through symbolic struggle. A key dimension of class relations is the struggle to legitimate particular definitions and classifications of the social world. This struggle for symbolic power involves the capacity to name and categorize....It calls for symbolic labour, which is precisely the work of intellectuals who, as symbolic producers, are strategically situated for shaping the character of class relations. (219)

The political power that intellectuals hold in society is, for Bourdieu, a product of the very symbolic capital Bourdieu seeks to address through the practice of reflexive sociology. This misrecognition of power relations takes place at both the level of self-fashioning particular to intellectuals and the profile of intellectuals among "lay people". Bourdieu also deploys sociology as a means of making the case that the sanctions and rewards of intellectual work themselves make intellectuals poorly placed to recognize (and transform) the ideology of meritocracy. This ideology ratifies the judgment of academics and, as importantly, justifies and perpetuates the radically unequal distribution of the capital and disposition necessary to excel at intellectual work. If one accepts this point as a working hypothesis, Bourdieu's highly ambiguous relationship to intellectual work comes into sharper focus. Despite his antagonistic stance toward much intellectual work, Bourdieu's point is not, to borrow from Said, to engage in the politics of blame but rather to challenge the practice of sociology and social, political analysis in general in order to neutralize the gaze inherent in intellectual work.³⁵ That said, Swartz's point is well taken when he suggests that Bourdieu and others would do well also to turn their theoretical gaze towards how and why intellectuals are ignored and devalued.³⁶ Moreover, one must be careful to specify what kind of intellectual work is able easily to trade in its capital

for influence and why other kinds of intellectual work remain largely irrelevant. The desire to remain immune from such analysis is, for Bourdieu, always a political, ethical, and scientific (epistemological) choice – and, it must be said, not always the choice of the intellectual.

For Bourdieu, one of the most important contributions that sociology has to make to knowledge and politics is working within and through the profound difference between the logic of practice and the “thought of action” at work in constructing a theory of the social world. This distinction between thought and action requires “a fundamental [ethical and political] questioning, since it bears on the epistemic posture itself and on the presuppositions entailed by the fact of being able to withdraw from the world so as to think it” (*PM* 49). By definition, the difference between thought and action cannot be closed by the reflexivity of a particular analyst. However, for Bourdieu, the scientific validity of any social study rests upon the degree to which the analyst takes this reality into account. The task of the reflexive sociologist is to incorporate the difference between thought and the temporality of social action into her practice and, more importantly, to highlight the political stakes at work when the distinction is forgotten. This task carries political weight because, as we shall see when we examine habitus, Bourdieu’s theory of the social world is dependent on the concept of embodied knowledge – a knowledge not particularly amenable to intellectualist constructions of the social world.³⁷ The process of reflexivity is charged with the task of examining how and where the bias of intellectual work and its (past, present, and future) social trajectory finds its way into objective, scholarly accounts of the social world. What is key for Bourdieu is

distinguishing between the abstract logic of scholarly inquiry that (re)constructs the social world and the practical logic that informs the struggle of everyday social existence.

In *Homo Academicus*, Bourdieu rigorously explicates how the social position and the institutional habits of academia impede a scientifically and politically compelling account of social transformation and power. Paradoxically, however, Bourdieu is relentless in his defense of the space symbolized by academia, a space of contemplation and distance from which to undertake a “systematic exploration” of “the untaught categories of thought which delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought” (*IRS* 40). That which remains unthought (with, of course, a few exceptions) in the history of intellectual thought is the social history of intellectual thought itself. Bourdieu seeks to write that history in the present of the social misery that pervades Western, liberal democracies.³⁸ In doing so, he balances a perpetually ambiguous relationship with the academy that works vigilantly to expose the social mooring of all intellectual work while also opening new ethical and political possibilities for intellectual thought. Bourdieu captures this ambivalence in the following passage:

The fundamental ambiguity of the scholastic universes and all of their productions - universal acquisitions made accessible by an exclusive privilege - lies in the fact that their apartness from the world of production is both a liberatory break and a disconnection, a potentially crippling separation. While the suspension of economic and social necessity is what allows the emergence of autonomous fields, orders (in Pascal’s sense) which know and recognize only their specific law, it is also what, in the absence of special vigilance, threatens to confine scholastic thought within the limits of ignored or repressed presuppositions, implied in the withdrawal from the world (*PM* 15).

The social position of the intellectual and the social conditions of academic inquiry must be objectified as a matter of scientific method and political rigour.

The subject enacting the objectification of the social world must in turn become the subject of objectification. Again, the object is not personal testimony but rather a dynamic, relational account of the analyst's social relation to the object under scrutiny and the place of the academic discipline in relation to the social world at large. Ironically, Bourdieu is advocating the abdication of the privileged place intellectual work holds as a means of making that work more scientific and more credible in sifting through the struggles that define the social world. Intellectual and scientific inquiry depends on a certain necessary retreat from the world of action, but that inquiry must consciously inscribe the limits of its own knowledge. Such limits are conditioned by its very nature as an intellectual project. The result is not a self-serving, false modesty but rather a reckoning with Marx's challenge to intellectual work to change rather than simply interpret the world. In *Pascalian Meditations*, Bourdieu captures his ambiguous relationship with philosophy in the title.³⁹ He deploys Pascal's method of doubt to the entire universe of intellectual inquiry. In *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Bourdieu argues that the pursuit of reflexivity is both a political and epistemological task:

The upshot of this is not that theoretical knowledge is worth nothing but that we must know its limits and accompany all scientific accounts with an account of the limits and limitations of scientific accounts: theoretical knowledge owes a number of its most essential properties to the fact that the conditions under which it is produced are not that of practice (70).

For Bourdieu, the conscious interrogation of thought's social limit is the primary gesture in developing an intellectual practice that is also a politics of intellectual resistance.

In the case of the figure of the intellectual, Bourdieu identifies a series of traits and investments (both acknowledged and unacknowledged) that value the notion of individualistic achievement and particularly voluntaristic notions of social action. In effect, Bourdieu argues that by and large academics transpose the relative degree of freedom they enjoy in academia onto their analysis and interpretation of society and politics. To give but one example, Bourdieu has written extensively on the history of May 1968, which was an important moment in the history of counter-culture resistance. Paris was gripped by riots for weeks as students, workers, and others joined together in violent resistance to the ruling de Gaulle government. In his analysis, Bourdieu examines the degree to which the revolt of '68 was by and large an intellectual revolt without a commensurate shift in (or attention to) or attention to grounding social conditions. Bourdieu, like many others, was buoyed by the solidarity between students, workers, and intellectuals in the protests of '68. However, his analysis focuses primarily on the aftermath of May '68 and the reforms won. For Bourdieu, the reforms were primarily academic and, therefore, socially limited.

In the universities in both Europe and North America, after 1968, a newly politicized academy emerged that focused on the place of the intellectual. This heightened consciousness fostered a form of identity politics grounded in the testimonial of social standing (*IRS* 64). Bourdieu summarizes this tendency toward personal testimony in Sartre and others as the proclamation: "I am a bourgeoisie intellectual, I am a slimy rat." Such guilty proclamations short circuit the real work of transforming social relations and leave politics at the level of the individual -- the first and last refuge of the intellectual. In addition to this tendency, Bourdieu argues that

the energy of 68 had the peculiar effect of containing and consolidating radicalism within the academy. He contends that the social irritant that drove the protests of 68 was a “frustration of expectations” that saw an increase in access to post-secondary education without commensurate social and economic prospects to satisfy the expectations that come with such credentials (*Distinction*, 68). Nowhere was this frustration greater than in the French universities where younger faculty were in constant conflict with older established academics. As a result, most of the real victories of ‘68 in France came in the French academy. Bourdieu insists that gains made in ‘68 - the opening of stodgy curricula, an acknowledgment of systemic patriarchy and racism in the academy, a politicizing of the content of what counts as proper academic work - were, and largely remain, either unrealized or irrelevant to the larger socio-economic world to which the radical gestures of May ‘68 were directed. In addition to being a depressing recitation of the ability of power to contain and redistribute resistance, Bourdieu’s analysis of May ‘68 is an instructive example of how intellectuals come to mistake the intellectual field for society writ large.⁴⁰ For Bourdieu, the transformation of the French academy in the aftermath of May 1968 was a revolt of the middle class with the spoils largely distributed through the middle class. Many of these transformations were real social victories but they only take on the proper scope when their limits are acknowledged.

The above analysis of intellectual work is particularly pertinent for assessing literature and culture. The production, dissemination, and preservation of literature is almost unimaginable without what Loic Wacquant calls “the charismatic self-conception of intellectuals” (44). Few other disciplines premise themselves on the

centrality of individual achievement and the figure of solitary resistance to the depersonalized forces of society than art and literature do. Indeed, the vocation of literature and art is defined against the pathology of social interest and the values of the free market. In addition to the figure of the artist, the institutionalization of literature in the academy at the turn of the twentieth century entrenched the social and political distinction of the literary intellectual. Bourdieu's conception of reflexivity, capital, field, habitus, and symbolic violence are all well placed to negotiate the ambiguous social and political place of literature and art.

Most theorists of literature have sought to define the specificity and distinction of literature from other discourses.⁴¹ Though there are, of course, exceptions to this point, my argument, like Bourdieu's, will not be particularly concerned with specific historical or philosophical debates about the definition of literature. The novelty of Bourdieu's work lies in his theory of intellectual work and the application of the notion of field to the study of art and literature (*The Field of Cultural Production* 106). Though elements of Bourdieu's work brush up against many current and past academic debates about literary theory and literary study, I want to argue that the political and ethical challenge that defines his work sets him apart. In chapter two I argue that besides the emotional and intellectual richness of art and literature, the most compelling element of art is its highly ambiguous relationship with power. Without a doubt the enduring tendency of the literary academy is to view literature as a vessel of subversion -- whether that subversion entails an investment in emergent, *avant-garde* social identities or, conversely, subversion of the vulgarity of market values and a call to return to organic, conservative, traditional values. The

relation of art to power is complex and Bourdieu's theory of reflexivity makes a compelling case that evaluating the politics of literature demands a discourse outside of the conventions of literary criticism (*RA* xix). As I shall argue in chapter two, the analysis that Bourdieu brings to the sociology of intellectual thought will offer fresh avenues of inquiry in what seem like intractable theoretical dilemmas. Most notable among those dilemmas is the question of literature's ability to offer a subversive alternative to the vulgarity of free market social relations. In order to add weight to these claims made in Bourdieu's name we must turn to an explication of his key terms. In defining each term and its specific use I will relate it to Bourdieu's theory of reflexive sociology and his general analysis of intellectual work.

2. Capital, Habitus, and Field

Bourdieu's most obvious theoretical and political lineage is, of course, traced through Marx.⁴² Marx supplies Bourdieu with a vision of intellectual vocation and a model of theory grounded in materialist, historicist, and empirical investigation. Bourdieu's deepest theoretical debt to Marx is to be found in the notion of capital. The political economy of capital that Marx observed in nineteenth century social relations is the marrow of all of Bourdieu's political discourse. However, Bourdieu's notion of capital differentiates itself in the same moment as it acknowledges its debt by extending the notion of capital far beyond Marx's purely economic determination. Bourdieu expands Marx's conception of capital to include concepts not accounted for or anticipated in Marx's work or in the work of most Marxist theorists over the last century. In the work of Louis Althusser, for instance, Bourdieu endorses the attempt

to grant spheres of human activity outside of economics a degree of real autonomy. However, Althusser consistently recalls that autonomy by concluding that all spheres of human endeavor ultimately reduce to an economic determinant. Most of Bourdieu's theoretical innovations are a product of his frustration with the base/superstructure model of Marxist analysis and its resort to economics in the "last instance". For Bourdieu, this model forecloses all inquiry into the concrete nature of the "relative autonomy" of the social structure that Marx struggled so hard to find a place for in his theory. Theoretically, Marx tirelessly railed against the empirical and moral bankruptcy of separating the study of economics from the study of political and social relations. At the same time, he was also very sensitive to the autonomy and specific logic of spheres of human activity that managed a provisional distance from purely economic determination. Ironically, the base/superstructure model of interpretation leads, for Bourdieu, to a highly anti-materialist notion of social relations that fall outside the domain of the economic.⁴³ More important, it truncates the tedious work of demonstrating how the mundane social hierarchies of speech, occupation, geography, and gender guarantee the reproduction of power relations. Contra Althusser, the perpetual injury and opportunity of social privilege (or dispossession) is a far more compelling reason why the factory worker shows up at the company gates every morning than any elaborate conception of state power or Ideological States Apparatus. The promise of autonomy is swallowed up by a slavish devotion to the epistemology of the base/superstructure theorem. Despite this divergence, Bourdieu shares Marx's belief that the distribution of capital and control

of the means to produce and expand capital is the single greatest determinant of human freedom and general life prospects.

Capital represents the very matter (both tangible and intangible) through which we negotiate our grandest desires and our most petty needs. No corner of the social world is immune from the logic of capital; the social world is literally unimaginable in Bourdieu's theoretical universe without the concept of capital. Capital represents the tangible, embodied interests human subjects have in the social world. The social stage, therefore, is saturated with the economy of capital of which economic capital is only the most literalized form. In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu argues that "the theory of strictly economic practice is simply a particular case of a general theory of economic practice" (7). It is this theoretical innovation that allows Bourdieu to characterize his project as an attempt to offer a "non-economic economy" of human practice. The basis of Bourdieu's theory of social action is premised on extending the notion of interest and accumulation to non-economic factions of social life. However, Bourdieu's theory has drawn a steady stream of critiques based on the notion that his work is really not so distant from economic determinism. The very implication of terms like interest, strategy, and maximize put Bourdieu in an uneasy relationship with economic determinism. At some level Bourdieu's work is certainly influenced by a utilitarian view of human action. However, Bourdieu's theory is best read as a complex interplay between human agency and the social conditions that refuses to choose between voluntaristic or utilitarian views of the social world. In fact, Bourdieu's work is unique in the manner

in which he attempts to account for human action that consistently resists “means-ends calculation” (Swartz 69). Swartz clarifies this point:

Critics misinterpret Bourdieu’s concept of interest by reading it as an independent principle of action in his conceptual framework. Bourdieu sees individual interests as defined by an actor’s position within the social hierarchy. But he thinks of those interests as embodied dispositions of actors that operate at a tacit, taken for granted level. He does not think of interest as goal orientation. Interested action is not a means-end mode of organizing action. Rather, interest is practical and dispositional and does not have the goal orientation commonly associated with a utilitarian framework. (71)

What does remain as a theoretical dilemma in Bourdieu’s work are the criteria for judging the degree to which conscious “economic” calculation accounts for particular social relations and, conversely, the degree to which tacit, unarticulated choices mark the social world. This question has obvious implications for any theory hoping to account for the reproduction of social relations and their possible transformation. Though Bourdieu never explicitly addresses this problem, I would argue that his conception of habitus takes account of the dilemma. On the whole, Bourdieu’s critics have missed the degree to which his theoretical terms are dynamic, iterable tools guided by the empirical historicity of the social world. Bourdieu’s unrelenting focus on the empirical conditions of the social world serves to buttress his conception of agency and social critique. As I knit the concepts of capital, habitus, and field together it will become obvious that each is an indispensable part of the dynamic equation that comprises Bourdieu’s non-economic economy of human practice.

Bourdieu outlines at least three distinct notions of capital. First, there is the standard notion of economic capital represented by money, stocks, access to credit, and other liquid assets. This is the most transparent sense in which Bourdieu uses the term. Bourdieu also ratifies the common sense sociological vision that the economic

field and the players in it are not only closer to power but hold a capital (i.e. money) that is most easily converted to power. That observation, however, is the start of a dialogue with the rest of the social world and its relation to power. The next form of capital in Bourdieu's scheme is cultural capital. Cultural capital is the broadest of Bourdieu's categories of capital and takes into account several dimensions of social power. In his parlance, cultural capital represents the more traditional notion of culture founded by the ability to deploy certain competencies in the production and dissemination of ideas in the form of art, literature, film and a series of other symbolic forms. However, cultural capital also represents the highly politicized transmission of class division manifest in everything from nutritional choice to taste in music. Cultural capital represents the nexus of social power embodied in all of the non-durable "goods" traded and pursued on the market of social class. Cultural capital is, therefore, central to Bourdieu's theory of agency and power precisely because of its ubiquity and distance from the more brute and transparent differences assigned by the discipline of the "free" market. Cultural capital is also a separate and distinct form of capital from economic capital but like all other forms of capital, it is conditioned and influenced by the ebb and flow of economic capital. The process through which cultural capital comes to ratify and legitimate very real differences in social standing and opportunity takes place through the interplay between various autonomous fields of activity (and capital) that are inseparable from cultural capital. As we shall see, Bourdieu is particularly interested in how forms of cultural capital are exchanged and sought in a very specific and restricted field of activity. When we examine *Distinction* in detail, the peculiar nature of the cultural field will make it

clear why Bourdieu is obsessed with extending the notion of capital and power beyond the bounds of economic relations and the power of brute force.

The two sub-species of capital most closely linked to cultural capital are educational and linguistic capital. I say they are a sub-species of cultural capital because it is impossible to imagine either form of capital being of much value without the stakes of cultural capital. In fact, the political point Bourdieu emphasises in his analysis of both education and language is that the best way to avoid an idealist account of either discipline is to relate its functioning to specific social stakes. In *Language and Symbolic Power*, Bourdieu demonstrates that any explanation of language that fails to account for its genesis and efficacy in terms of social power and the logic of capital acquisition is doomed to be locked in an idealist account that is, at best, politically useless and empirically unsound. In doing so, Bourdieu argues against the founding assumption of linguistics as an academic discipline.

Linguistics as an academic field is grounded in the study of language as a neutral medium of communication fulfilled by social actors who freely choose from the infinite variety of lexical and semantic possibilities. Bourdieu cites Noam Chomsky as an exemplar of this view of language.⁴⁴ In the following passage Chomsky outlines the classic assumption grounding modern linguistics:

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention or interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance. This seems to me to have been the position of the founders of modern general linguistics, and no cogent reason for modifying it has been offered. (3)

By idealizing the context of linguistic communication, Chomsky and most other linguists idealize or ignore the manner in which language is a powerful marker of social distinction and material dispossession. Bourdieu points out that such an account of language mirrors the fallacy of free choice that defines most apologies of free market economics. Like the “free market”, linguistic players do not start from an equal ground and pursue the spoils of the linguistic world with equal competency or equal opportunity. Despite the deceptive universality of linguistic acquisition and competence, linguistic capital is distributed in the same unequal manner as other forms of capital. In *Language and Symbolic Power*, Bourdieu rigorously outlines the manner in which linguistic competency regulates everything from the dialect and accent we adopt to our ability to participate in conversations about the construction and orientation of the social world.⁴⁵ Though his analysis owes much to the deconstructive move in the study of linguistics, Bourdieu clearly marks himself off from thinkers such as Lacan and Derrida by making linguistic acquisition and deployment a political matter of distribution and efficacy. The physical capacity to speak is but the building block of the more decisive political and social reality of who speaks and who has the power to *capitalize* on language.

In essence, Bourdieu argues that language is best explained in terms of capital because language is convertible to other kinds of social distinction (or profit) that culminate in the very powerful “right to speak.”⁴⁶ In the following passage Bourdieu enumerates what the tradition of linguistics disavows:

The competence adequate to produce sentences that are likely to be understood may be quite inadequate to produce sentences that are likely to be listened to, likely to be recognized as acceptable in all situations in which there is occasion to speak. Here again, social acceptability is not reducible to mere grammaticality.

Speakers lacking the legitimate competence are *de facto* excluded from the social domains in which this competence is required, or are condemned to silence. (*LSP* 55)

The obfuscation of these stakes is what founds linguistics as a specific, professional field of academic inquiry. Bourdieu argues that the resistance to a sociology of language stems from the desire to tacitly defend the capital that gives the field of linguistics its solidity and academic distinction. As a consequence, the political exchange and quest for capital are buried in discourse that aims for a scientific method that defines itself against its social grounding.

The other sub-species of cultural capital that is identifiable in Bourdieu's system is educational capital. Educational capital takes the form of credentials conferred by primary, secondary and post-secondary institutions. Such credentials register competence in particular fields of endeavour but they also initiate a network of subtle social hierarchies that consolidate and circulate power. In *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture*, Bourdieu undertakes an exhaustive empirical study of the manner in which education, both secondary and post-secondary, acts as a primary vehicle of social inheritance and, conversely, registers cultural and social dispossession. A child comes to the classroom with a certain capital absorbed from the environment that nurtured that child prior to entering the system (*Distinction* 80). For Bourdieu, this process of inculcation transmits both the material goods (not least in the form of leisure time) and the real competence needed to take on a dominant position in society. In *Language and Symbolic Power* Bourdieu makes a direct link between language, education, and power:

Given that the educational system possesses the delegated authority necessary to engage in the universal process of durable inculcation in matters of language, and

given that it tends to vary the duration and intensity of this inculcation in proportion to inherited cultural capital, it follows that the social mechanisms of cultural transmission tend to reproduce the structural disparity between the very unequal *knowledge* of the legitimate language and the much more uniform *recognition* of this language. (62 author's emphasis)

Language and the ability to manipulate discourse are among the most tangible assets that "prolonged exposure to the legitimate language" passes on (*LSP* 61). As noted above, Bourdieu notes the fallacy in linguistic accounts of language by pointing out the failure to take account of the difference between exposure to language and the technical (biological) capacity to master it and the real condition of time and material circumstance that differentiates those who are able to master language and convert that competence into material opportunities and goods. Nowhere is this reality more striking than in the symmetry between the time spent in school at all levels and general social standing. The material need to find paying work, as well as the discouragement born of an environment felt to be alien, marks the radical difference in educational attainment along strictly class lines.

For Bourdieu, the time to master the rules of the social, political, and economic games of the social world is offered by the space of the educational system. Access to that space and time is as restricted and regulated as any other profit accumulated or cultivated. However, the educational system and the commensurate acquisition of language also pass on (and withhold) something less tangible in the form of a certain style, distinction, and confidence. Such an inheritance is very difficult to measure in sociological terms but, in *Language and Symbolic Power*, Bourdieu traces it through the very manner in which we carry our bodies, patterns of

speech, and aesthetic taste. In *Distinction* social hierarchy is marked both by the acquisition and use of culture:

The manner in which culture has been acquired lives on in the manner of using it: the importance attached to manners can be understood once it is seen that it is these imponderable of practice which distinguish the different – and ranked – modes of culture acquisition, early or late, domestic or scholastic, and the classes of individuals which they characterize... Culture also has its titles of nobility – awarded by the educational system – and its pedigrees, measured by seniority in admission to the nobility. (2)

Education regulates the distribution of cultural capital but, for Bourdieu, the deployment of that capital plays an even more important role in consolidating the inequities of the social world. Bourdieu's theory of education and culture leads directly to the next species of capital we find in his work: social capital.⁴⁷

Social capital is the asset consolidated through a wide network of social associations and connections. Social capital usually mixes in the same space as other forms of capital, most especially educational and cultural capital. Social capital is, for Bourdieu, a key element of the inheritance of power and privilege. However, it permeates the social world at all levels and forms the basis for various strategies that inform the pursuit of other forms of capital. Social capital is the venture capital of Bourdieu's economy in that it lubricates an existing economy. Bourdieu insists that social capital, though difficult to perceive, provides connections to other forms of capital and circulates in the same unequal economy of distribution as all other forms of capital.

The final form of capital Bourdieu examines is the notion of symbolic capital. Symbolic capital is the most difficult to examine because its effects are largely intangible. Symbolic capital is defined by its ability to legitimate the acquisition of

other forms of capital and, as importantly, its contribution to the reproduction of unequal systems of distributing all kinds of capital. Symbolic capital or power is that peculiar kind of capital that has the power to legitimize and naturalize all other forms of capital and their subsequent (uneven) distribution. Symbolic capital is what other forms of capital become when they are “grasped through categories of perception that recognize its specific logic or, if you prefer, misrecognize the arbitrariness of its possession and accumulation” (*IRS* 119). The central place that Bourdieu accords to symbolic capital is its ability to legitimate relations of power in the eyes of the dominated as much as the dominant. Nowhere is this silent consent more prevalent than in the cultivation of aesthetic perception. As we shall see when we examine *Distinction*, the dismissive attitude that outsiders adopt toward the art world is very often a defense mechanism designed to buffer them from a world they know they are excluded from. Bourdieu clearly argues that symbolic capital does the same kind work as brute force -- only more insidiously and more efficiently. The concept of symbolic capital allows him to chart the manner in which certain social actions and capital act simultaneously as both a mark of distinction and a powerful justification for that distinction. This justification takes the form of overt elitism or more commonly a ratification of privilege through the myth of universality and democratic access. This myth is perpetuated by theoretically or formally extending the possibility of refined dispositions and achievements to all without the slightest intention or commitment to extending the material conditions that form the prerequisite for the acquisition of such capital. The defining feature of symbolic capital is its ability to go unrecognized or, more precisely, misrecognized. Misrecognition is the process

whereby power relations are seen as legitimate by those who exercise power and, more importantly, those who are subject to power. The theory of symbolic capital attempts to describe “the laws of transformation which govern the transmutation of the different kinds of capital into symbolic capital, and in particular the labour of dissimulation...(in a word euphemization) which secures a real transsubstantion of the relations of power by rendering recognizable and misrecognizable the violence they objectively contain” (*LSP* 170). In the case of those who exercise power, the gradual inheritance of class secretes an entitlement to power that very often goes unarticulated and is simply assumed. The discourse of political charisma and natural leadership ability that permeates the political and business world is imbued with the ideology of the gift.

The magical gift for leadership and industry of those who wield power are always already mirrors of the dispossession and possession that defines social existence. Symbolic capital is that peculiar form of power that is able to efface its effects *and* its social origin. In short, the completely arbitrary and capricious nature of power relations is seen (misrecognized) as justifiable thanks to the “transmutation” symbolic capital performs on the sordid reality that underlies all relations of domination (*LSP* 170). All other forms of capital in society depend on the work done by symbolic capital in order to replicate the conditions of possibility for their exchange. The durability of any form of capital is dependent on its ability to be (mis)recognized as an arbiter of merit and initiative rather than recognized as part of larger power relations that enforce social and economic inequality. The moment a piece of capital is stripped of its symbolic power, it generally becomes the object of

overt and transparent political contest. A clear case in point for literature is the recent debates over the constitution of the canon. The aura once held by the notion of canonical and non-canonical literature gave way under social analyses designed to re-historicize the selection (and rejection) of great texts. The radical questioning of the canon was made possible by the de-legitimation of the notion that canon formation was a natural process of genius unfolding. In short, the misrecognition of the historical and social relations of power at the core of canon formation amounted to mistaking political judgments for aesthetic ones. Theoretically, therefore, symbolic capital gives Bourdieu the means to highlight the largely overlooked political work performed by symbolic capital. It is critical to refer to the degree to which the political work of symbolic capital is overlooked because the very social efficacy of symbolic capital is dependent on its being overlooked or misrecognized.

Socially, it is those who work in the intellectual field who are the most avid and interested producers of symbolic capital. In addition, as I have been emphasizing, the historical genesis and structural functioning of the intellectual field is particularly well placed to misrecognize relations of power, not least in the very production of symbolic capital. The disposition of academic and intellectual work defines itself against the very social world that divides those who produce symbolic capital from those who are subject to it. However, the efficacy of symbolic capital is paradoxically dependent on the existence of autonomous fields and the highly specific laws of functioning within those fields. It is precisely because the operation of the field is autonomous and not directly traceable back to a transparent centre of power that symbolic capital is able to do the ideological work it does. In fact, I would argue that

the autonomy of fields is one of the most important, and ignored, facets of modern power relations.

The stakes of the field itself compel a tacit but very strong agreement about the general mandate of the field and the symbolic goods the field comes to produce. This consensus is, of course, quite complex and flexible and is usually formed over a very long period. The process of highly specialized and autonomous production that defines a field has the dual ideological effect of justifying its own restricted economy of production and of naturalizing the larger matrix of social inequality it replicates. The internally formed consensus that regulates a field is particularly potent because its very specificity is what insulates it from political scrutiny. Articulating the arbitrary nature of the rules that govern a field is a political gesture. When the arbitrary nature of any field is foregrounded, necessarily submerged social and political distinctions become more visible. However, it would then be a mistake to conclude that intellectual work is a handmaiden to relations of power. It is precisely because there is no collusion that symbolic power reigns. To be sure, there are intellectuals who have “sold their intellectual soul” to the interest of money and power but Bourdieu is always and everywhere more interested in those realms of social endeavour least likely to recognize an illicit relationship with power. The role of reflexive sociology in Bourdieu’s theory of intellectual work is not to produce a superior academic space for sociology, but rather to make the social and material conditions of thought’s possibility transparent. This transparency, in turn, (re)introduces ethical and political stakes into intellectual work that had been repressed by the specific logic of the capital attached to scholarship. That capital is, of

course, defined by the specificity of the field in question and the tacitly agreed upon rules of the “game”. When the rules and functioning of that game are related back to questions of capital distribution and the monopoly of the few over the competence and disposition to play the game, a crisis of legitimation envelopes the pronouncements and judgments of intellectual work. However, that crisis is likely only to be felt if one is engaged in the “permanent political struggle for the universalization of the means of access to the universal” (*PM* 84).

Theoretically, the concept of field also allows Bourdieu to move beyond structuralist descriptions of social relations. As I noted earlier, Bourdieu’s early training and inclination leans heavily toward structuralist accounts of social practice. Such models allow the kind of scientific rigour Bourdieu demands of social analysis. However, his need to move beyond structuralist models follows a familiar intellectual pattern. Structuralism ultimately settles for static, descriptive accounts of power relations that ultimately mute political and materialist questions. This silence springs largely from a resistance to any reflexive analysis of the social space of thought itself. The scientific rigour that marks structuralism generally impedes a social examination of thought itself. The virtue of a structuralist thinker, like Lévi-Strauss, for Bourdieu is his insistence on a careful examination of the internal, formal relations that produced social and textual meaning. What also defined such models of interpretation, however, was a failure to extend those relations outward to a larger set of external social and economic conditions concerning both the relations in question and the relation of thought itself to the phenomenon under observation. The very nature of thought itself as a model has rarely if ever been an issue for the structuralist

tradition.⁴⁸ The theoretical gap is quite simply the failure to think through the structural and social difference between the logic of practice and the logic of intellectual reasoning. This deceptively simple distinction is fundamental to understanding Bourdieu's theory of intellectual work. The necessary retreat from the logic of practice implied in intellectual work leads to an almost universal social forgetting of the historical and material character of that withdrawal. In addition, the founding conceit of intellectual work is precisely that it is not a practice but rather a privileged reflection on practice. Bourdieu argues that the analyst is "no less a stranger to his own practice than the strange practices he observes, or rather, that his own practice is no less strange to him in its truth as practice, than the strangest practices of other people, with which it shares, in its trivial self-evidence, one essential thing, but so hard to think, namely the logic of practice" (*PM* 54).

The temporality of academic reason is a contemplative space marked by a choice and distance from immediate urgency that is alien to the logic of practice that unfolds in the daily existence of most people. Bourdieu's materialist reading of intellectual work points to what is most lacking in intellectual accounts of the social world; namely, the practical interest and logic that drives human praxis. This practical interest is the core of Bourdieu's theory of power because it helps explain why the dispossessed so rarely rise up against their dispossession. The practical realities of daily existence tie habitus to necessity without discounting subjective agency. Material conditions circumscribe praxis but they also determine the very strategies that we most commonly associate with subjective action. Quoting from *Distinction*, Swartz draws together habitus, agency, and culture to argue that taste "transforms

necessities into strategies, constraints into preferences and, without any mechanical determination, it generates the set of choices constraining life-styles....It is a virtue made of necessity which continuously transforms necessity into virtue by inducing 'choices' which correspond to the condition of which it is the product" (175).

Habitus explains the tacit acceptance of power relations without reducing human subjects to dupes and is, therefore, a vital weapon in the struggle to demystify the brutal efficiency of power. By listening to the dispossessed Bourdieu is able to make the empirical case that the transformation of necessity into virtue or choice is indeed a creative, realistic, sobering variant of agency not a fatalism or determinism. Habitus is, basically, a survival mechanism which "functions as a sort of social orientation, a 'sense of one's own place,' guiding the occupants of a given place in a social space towards the social positions adjusted to their properties, and towards the practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position" (*Distinction* 466). Habitus is the irreducible dialectic between individual desire and will and the social world into which that will and desire are grafted.⁴⁹ When intellectual work fails to theorize the exclusivity of its access to a certain kind of practice and a privileged relation to time and economic necessity, it universalizes its own particularity and simultaneously generates a political and ethical firewall around that privilege. In addition, throughout his work Bourdieu relentlessly traces the political consequences of a view of the social world which assumes that the notions of choice, reason, and merit that mark the academic world are extended equally and in kind across the social world. This is precisely the tendency that marked the earlier passage quoted from Chomsky that amply demonstrates the pernicious effects of a false universalism that mistakes

theoretical access with real material access. Such constructs of the social world lead to “euphemized” explanations (which are no explanation at all) of radically unequal social destinies and the role intellectual work plays in consolidating or ignoring those destinies. The social space in which intellectual work is conducted leads its actors to create accounts of the social world that are largely “mythic algebra” when weighed against the material and practical sense that spurs action and paralysis in the social world (*PM* 55). Despite such limitations, however, a structuralist style of thought, ironically, allows Bourdieu to counter subjective accounts of the social world. Such accounts rely upon an autonomous notion of human subjectivity that reduces the social world to inter-subjective relationships, rather than objective relationships of power supported by access to capital.⁵⁰

In more general terms, the concept of field allows Bourdieu to mediate subjective praxis through empirical social formations. Bourdieu defines a field as any social space in which specific forms of capital are produced by social actors (*IRS* 97). The field both structures and is structured by the capital at stake in any given context. The field is both a determining limit and an enabling structure of human action. In addition to a theory of subjective praxis, the notion of field also allows Bourdieu to define social transformation in a far more local and realistic way. In the absence of one centre of power and one node of resistance, any account of social transformation must tie the political economy of individual action to a localised structure. In turn, however, that structure must be tied to the larger universe of competing fields (for example, the economic). Each field is marked with a singular, and usually unstated, set of rules and rituals that regulate the pursuit of capital. Within the field itself

relations of power and identity are structured in relation to capital. Capital is, in this case, cognate with power and takes the form of everything from the literacy required to intervene in political discussion to marriage rites. The field organises and regulates praxis through the objective relations established within a field and between other fields. The generality of the field allows Bourdieu to account for particular individual trajectories and social standing. In *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Bourdieu defends himself against the persistent charge of determinism:

This [theory] does not imply that individuals are mere “illusions”, that they do not exist: they exist as agents – and not as biological individuals, actors, or subjects -- who are socially constituted as active and acting in the field under consideration by the fact that they possess the necessary properties to be effective, to produce effects, in this field. And it is this knowledge of the field itself in which they evolve that allows us best to grasp the roots of their singularity, their point of view or position (in a field) from which their particular vision of the world (and of the field itself) is constructed. (RS 106)

The notion of field, along with capital and habitus, is indispensable to Bourdieu’s effort to offer a non-economic economy of human practice.

In *Language and Symbolic Power*, Bourdieu argues that the “law” of the field “conceals both from the eyes of the producers themselves and from the eyes of non-professionals, the fact that internal systems of classifications reproduce overt political taxonomies in misrecognizable form, as well as the fact that specific axiomatics of each specialized field is the transformed form (in conformity with the laws specific to the field) of the fundamental principles of the division of [class]” (169). As an example of this process, Bourdieu builds on Weber’s work on the institutionalization of the Protestant work ethic at the origin of capitalist social relations. This ethic has evolved into a sophisticated and relentless ideology of merit. Bourdieu tracks this form of symbolic capital through the education system and the production and

consumption of culture. The currency of symbolic capital in the school system is particularly potent where merit and promotion are dependent on a system of examination blind to social hierarchies. In the university system, for example, the method of selecting “worthy” applicants, the system of financial aid, and the entire ritual of the examination all emphasize and exacerbate the real barriers to social hope (*The Weight of the World* 185). Such examinations play an important role in determining and solidifying social position. Merit and initiative, of course, play a role in social success but those terms are meaningless (or worse) if they are not examined in the social context Bourdieu provides. The notion of social capital discussed earlier is a vital because it supplies the confidence and the sense of entitlement that predicts academic and economic success (*Distinction* 23). For Bourdieu, the sense of entitlement is inseparable from the privilege of not having to consider the material conditions of academic or scholastic achievement:

These conditions of possibility, which are conditions of existence, act, as it were, negatively, by default, in particular because they are themselves essentially negative, such as the neutralization of practical urgencies and ends and, more precisely, the fact of being detached for a more or less long time from work and the world of work, from serious activity, sanctioned by monetary compensation, or, more generally, of being more or less completely exempted from all the negative experiences associated with privation or uncertainty about the morrow. (*PM* 14)

The political and social point is, of course, that purely academic measures of merit mask and justify the social inequality already at play in the days, hours and years before a child enters the meritocracy of the school system—or as Bourdieu puts it, scholastic notions of merit and the social world confirm that “nothing is more dogmatic than a *doxa*...which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma” (*PM* 15).⁵¹

In addition to field, Bourdieu's theoretical project is held together by the notion of habitus. Habitus is the final crucial element of the trio of theoretical terms that I will use to explicate Bourdieu's notions of culture and power. Habitus can be defined as the practical sense with which the human subject apprehends the world based on her social context (*IRS* 97). Bourdieu's theory of practice and agency makes a direct link between social position and human praxis. Habitus is the term that denotes the embodied context in which social agents live and breathe -- and in Bourdieu's words "habitus accounts for the fact that social agents are neither particles of matter determined by external causes, nor little monads guided solely by internal reasons, executing a sort of perfectly rational internal program of action" (*IRS* 136). The ritualized connotation of the term conveys the unconscious, unthought daily acts that sediment and codify everything from fashion habits to the psychic view we take of our bodies. Habitus is the most powerful element in the reproduction of relations of power. Habitus is the learned behaviour that marks the subject as social and defines the horizon of praxis for that subject. Though not habit in the common sense, habitus is an internalized set of actions and perceptions that regulates the opportunities and limits that condition human agency. It is also a set of dispositions that are situated in social time and, through time, become sedimented as "regular" and "regulated" without taking on the status of blind, impersonal obedience. However, Bourdieu has been careful in his deployment of habitus, to insist that the social origin of agency does not deny the active and creative relation between individual subjects and the world (*IRS* 161).

The regular nature of such structures undermines traditional, autonomous notions of freedom and praxis. The structural relations that inform Bourdieu's notion of habitus are, by definition, durable but they do not preclude the possibility of strategic subversion or transformation. Indeed, the habitus is a space of identification, repetition, and potential trouble for the multitude of social identities and compacts that mark modern societies. Bourdieu shares a conception of subversion with poststructuralist thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Judith Butler that relies on the ambiguous moment of repetition when the subject agrees (usually without agreeing) to play the social game. Butler, in particular, has written powerfully of the trouble the perpetually repeated gesture of gender identification can cause for networks of social power. Though Bourdieu shares much in common with such poststructuralist accounts of agency, he differs in his assessment of the degree to which such structures are under threat from their constant (re) consolidation. Bourdieu has relentlessly and, unfairly I think, ascribed Foucault's entire experiment in subversive thinking to the realm of discourse versus the materiality of social space. Where, however, Bourdieu differs most from poststructuralist social theorists is in his conception of subversion and transformation.⁵² The entire point of developing the notion of habitus is to devise an account of social practice and, indeed, social suffering, that accounts for the depressing durability of oppressive structures and the highly ambiguous and often self-defeating strategies of social agents. In order to answer this challenge, Bourdieu relies on the rigour and discipline enforced by a devoutly empirical and historicist analysis.

The theoretical tools Bourdieu uses are shaped by the empirical, sociological and political dilemmas he encounters in pursuit of his larger political project. Habitus is a concept developed, in large part, to refute notions of agency that rely on notions of choice and freedom generally found only in academic and cultural circles. The point here is that the kind of reasoning and logic the intellectual worker brings to bear on the social and literary world is not universally distributed. The very disposition required to deploy the reasoning and tools of intellectual work is a capital like any other, developed through a series of endowments and exclusions. Habitus is the concept that most closely captures the unthought bodily knowledge that accompanies all human action, not least thinking itself. In *Pascalian Meditations* and elsewhere Bourdieu demonstrates the patient historical battle for a particular kind of reason that set itself off as a social marker of distinction from all other ways of knowing and being (78). Most notable among these enabling exclusions was all that would tether the human subject to the sensual and bodily (*Distinction* 7). Habitus restores the sense in which human practice is always already guided by a certain practical impulse that owes more to our universal physical vulnerability than it does to the tribunal of reason.

The obvious objection at this point is that Bourdieu's discourse is itself academic discourse and largely dependent on the very tools of reason he seems to deride. Though true, such an objection misses the point that Bourdieu's intention is to historicize and politicize reason as a means of re-deploying it for avowedly political purposes. In addition, the critique he makes of reason and intellectual work is designed to mount a rational argument that the very precepts upon which scholarly

work is built make it unlikely for those working in the field to reckon with their own relation to power. The same line of thought leads Bourdieu to conclude that intellectuals are even less likely to develop a credible theory of power that accounts for those excluded from the very practice of reason and discourse academics use to construct and legitimate the social world (*LSP* 171). The role of habitus is to introduce a practical form of knowledge that explores a notion of logic that has more in common with practical exigency than it does with the universal traits of reason. This practical form of knowledge undermines the false universalism I alluded to in my introduction and demonstrates just how socially limited the notion of choice and intentionality is in the social world. The conception of reason deployed and constructed by the scholastic disposition is accorded only to those with the capital and competence to exercise it.

The political virtue of habitus is its capacity to account for a very different kind of reason rooted in the infinite number of daily clashes between needs and means. This “allogic of practice” is absolutely vital to Bourdieu’s conception of aesthetic practice and the degree to which the prevailing conceptions (and silences) about the social world lead those dispossessed by the radically unequal distribution of capital to accept and sometimes “consent” to their own dispossession (*LP* 7). In my examination of *Distinction*, I shall outline how closely class positions mirror a subject’s capacity to experience the world aesthetically. The varied responses to art that Bourdieu documents form a very political challenge to the ongoing attempts to define aesthetic experience. When I turn to an examination of Charles Altieri’s definition of aesthetic experience later in this project, Bourdieu’s political challenge

will become readily apparent. If, as I think Bourdieu amply demonstrates, the ability to experience art is a product of a material and historical habitus, what does that say about the latent (and conscious) claims to universality that mark most definitions of art? Without turning practical knowledge of the social world into a kitschy folk wisdom, Bourdieu uses the language of the dispossessed in *Distinction* and *The Weight of the World* to demand more of the intellectual work than a phenomenology of its own privilege. This demand is felt particularly clearly when habitus is related to the expectations and aspirations people develop at various levels of the social stratum. For Bourdieu, the learned behaviour that is both an adjustment to material reality and a creative engagement with one's circumstances calls for a theory of agency that incorporates necessity as its defining feature. The refined form of human contemplation is but one very powerful explanation of the social world:

In order not to naturalize dispositions, one has to relate these durable ways of being...to the conditions of acquisition. Habitus of necessity operates as a defense mechanism against necessity, which tends, paradoxically, to escape the rigours of necessity by anticipating it and so contributing to its efficacy. Being the product of the learning process imposed by the sanctions or injunctions of a social order, these profoundly realist dispositions (sometimes close to fatalism) tend to reduce the dissonance between expectations and outcomes by performing a more or less total closure of horizons. Resignation is indeed the commonest effect of that form of "learning by doing" which is the teaching performed by the order of things itself. (*PM* 233)

The dispositions adopted toward the social world, in the form of habitus, make little sense outside a particular social field. The above passage also re-iterates why Bourdieu is so cautious in crafting a theory of social change. As should now be clear, the theoretical precision of habitus is dependent on its relation to its twin concept of field.⁵³ Field represents the development of relatively autonomous social microcosms, institutions and networks that characterize complex modern societies. These social

universes form the boundaries and structures onto which habitus grafts and, of course, transforms the structures onto which it is grafted. The field is the game in which the practical sense of the habitus is deployed for economic gain. The relay between habitus and field is a subtle, but objective economy in which agents make necessary choices based on subjective desire and objective chances. The development of particular fields is the material manifestation that the habitus takes on in a social context. The universal element that marks all fields is a specific value or stake that motivates particular investments and positions relative to the field in question.

The mediating term that Bourdieu uses to denote the stakes at play in any given field is, of course, capital. Bourdieu notes the seamless relationship between field and capital when he argues that “the value of a species of capital (e.g. knowledge of Greek or integral calculus) hinges on the existence of a game, of a field in which this competency can be employed: a species of capital is what is efficacious in a given field, both as a weapon and as a stake of struggle, that which allows its possessors to wield a power, an influence, and thus to exist, in the field under consideration, instead of being considered a negligible quantity” (*IRS* 98). The agency human subjects have is circumscribed by the amount of capital they bring to a given field of social struggle. As a field evolves, it develops internal laws, a specific logic of functioning as well as systems of inclusion and exclusion. The borders and internal hierarchy of a given field police themselves by virtue of the competitive position-takings based on what is at stake in the field. This contention counters both voluntarist accounts of power and overly deterministic and transparent models of agency by demonstrating that power operates much more insidiously. As we shall see

when we turn to *Distinction*, Bourdieu's notion of power has particular purchase in measuring the claims for agency that one finds in aesthetic discourse.

3. THE *DISTINCTION* OF POLITICS

Because the appropriation of cultural products presupposes dispositions and competences which are not distributed universally (although they have the appearance of innateness), these products are subject to exclusive appropriation, material or symbolic, and, functioning as cultural capital (objectified or internalized), they yield a profit in distinction, proportionate to the rarity of the means required to appropriate them, and a profit in legitimacy, the profit par excellence, which consists in the fact of feeling justified in being (what one is), being what it is right to be. Thus the difference between the legitimate culture of class societies, a product of the domination predisposed to express or legitimate domination, and the culture of little-differentiated or undifferentiated societies, in which access to the means of appropriation of the cultural heritage is fairly equally distributed, so that culture is fairly equally mastered by all members of the group and cannot function as cultural capital, i.e., as an instrument of domination, or only so within very narrow limits and with a very high degree of euphemization.

Bourdieu
Distinction

In what follows I will offer a detailed explication of *Distinction* in concert with Bourdieu's other writing on art and culture. In particular, I will touch on *The Rules of Art* and *The Field of Cultural Production*. *Distinction* is a social and intellectual experiment that attempts to draw a detailed map of all the relations that link culture and class, education and inheritance, and politics to intellectual work. The obstacles to such a study are immense and Bourdieu addresses each in turn as a means of laying out his methodology. The first obstacle Bourdieu outlines is the complacency borne of unearthing the social conditions of taste. Uncovering the "self-evident" relationship between culture and education, for instance, is but the first step in developing a compelling account of how culture reflects and expands social

inequality (11). As noted, statistical analysis plays a large part in supporting the positions Bourdieu takes in *Distinction*. However, Bourdieu explicitly distances himself from a “substantialist” view of statistical data that allows the facticity of the data to stand for itself (22). For example, in the case of the relation between culture and educational capital, statistical data is incapable of registering the manner in which educational capital is convertible to other kinds of social profit not accounted for in the skills that schools explicitly impart. Though Bourdieu perpetually insists on the importance of empirical statistical data, he theorizes its object as an effect of larger social, regional, and economic factors. For Bourdieu, such factors provide the sociological significance of statistical data by integrating that data into a larger relational network. Such networks, which Bourdieu develops through his use of habitus, field and capital, reveal complex and often contradictory strategies adopted by social agents which a statistical analysis would not bring to light. The concept of habitus is a particularly potent critical tool because it resists the temptation of equating social behaviour with income or class. Habitus is the cumulative effect of a subject’s social history and income is only one factor in that history. Further, the creative component of habitus is mobilized by the specific struggles of various fields and, therefore, is not a simple product of upbringing or occupation.

The next obstacle that Bourdieu identifies is the relationship that his study privileges between culture and class. The very privileging of culture in this context must be objectified in order to resist the very tendency we are analyzing, namely the proclivity to view the social world through the lens of culture. For Bourdieu, the only alternative is to “objectify as fully as possible the very operations which one is

obliged to use in order to achieve the objectification” of cultural theory and practice (12). This means that the tools that are brought to bear on the “enchanted” discourse of culture must themselves become objectified in the context of competing struggles to define the social world. Although in his discussion of field Bourdieu often uses the metaphor of a game, he uses this metaphor most often in reference to culture. Heavily influenced by Wittgenstein, this notion of game emphasizes the internal integrity of the rules that govern the game and the manner in which those rules promote an unarticulated insularity. Bourdieu also endorses Wittgenstein’s emphasis on the social convention and competence at the heart of all social and language games.⁵⁴ The theoretical deployment of reflexivity in *Distinction* is motivated by the need to understand and internalize the logic that sustains a field and defines that field’s relation to the larger social world. One must stand within that field and accept the rules of functioning if one hopes to unveil the unarticulated political and social investments that generate the field in the first place. In the case of cultural theory and practice, Bourdieu points to a resilient ability to absorb one kind of critique and abort a more searching critique precisely because the field is imbued with a partial commitment to reflexivity.⁵⁵ There is a long history of what Bourdieu calls the quasi-objectification of the field that invariably amounts to objectifications of positions within the field itself.⁵⁶ In fact, in intellectual and artistic work, objectifications of other positions in the field are endemic to the field itself.

It is possible, borrowing from Richard Rorty, to view the history of culture as an archive of perpetual redescription.⁵⁷ While there is, for Bourdieu, no pure outside to the circle of redescription, sociology does provide the tools necessary to construct

the game of culture as a whole and lay bare many of the latent ethical and political choices that condition it. As outlined earlier, reflexive sociology offers the best method of unlocking “the law of mutual lucidity and reflexive blindness” that grounds most intellectual and cultural production. Throughout *Distinction*, Bourdieu attempts to write a political theory of culture that respects the immanent logic of the field in the same moment as pointing outside of that logic toward different possibilities for social Being. The text is informed by a rigour that guards against easy moralism while evaluating various possibilities for the transformation and subversion of the social order. In short, *Distinction* brings together all of Bourdieu’s theoretical and political investments under the rubric of culture (xii). Cultural politics are central to Bourdieu’s primary project of providing an economy of human practice that goes beyond the constraints of economism and a taxonomy of brute force. For this reason the dense argumentation and confrontational conclusions of *Distinction* need to be unpacked in some detail.

Distinction begins with Bourdieu’s now familiar sociological analysis of cultural discourse which argues that the competence needed to produce and consume culture is not a “gift of nature” but rather “a product of upbringing and education” (1). As I have already outlined, the educational system dispenses both the competence and, as importantly, the disposition required to experience art. Bourdieu conceives of the aesthetic disposition on several different levels. At first glance, Bourdieu’s notion of aesthetic disposition would seem to confirm many of the suspicions about the reductive nature of his understanding of art. However, outlining the specific disposition is the crucial first step in showing what it is in the very definition of

aesthetics and culture that resists sociological probing - this resistance is what most compels a sociological analysis. In order to make this case, Bourdieu not only outlines the social conditions of taste, he also argues that the politics of acquiring the skill and disposition to consume and produce art is inseparable from the social stratification that marks late capitalist societies. Throughout *Distinction*, Bourdieu scrupulously avoids any mechanistic reduction of aesthetic taste to class interests. Rather he makes the more compelling case that aesthetic taste ought to be a prime target of sociological objectification because it obfuscates class relations (*Distinction*, 99). The transgression sociological discourse is capable of making is to step outside of the hermeneutic circle that governs aesthetic reflection and to remember the social world in a way that challenges social dispossession. For Bourdieu, the aesthetic disposition requires forgetting the social and economic inheritance that grounds the “enchanted” relationship to the world of music, art, and literature.

The aesthetic disposition also implies an internalized ability to bracket the functionality of the world of objects in order to engage with the “de-familiarized” world represented in the artwork. Bourdieu defines art, particularly modern art, by its demand “to be referred not to an external referent but to the universe of past and present artworks” (3). In *Distinction*, he also makes the basic point that the internal logic of art calls for greater and greater formal innovation as a means of distinguishing itself from the world of functionality (54). However, as I shall outline in the next chapter, Bourdieu’s stance on art’s relationship with society at large in *The Rules of Art* is more complex than the argument outlined in *Distinction*. For now, however, it is enough to note his insistence on art’s triumph over the practical and

functional nature of the social world. Finally, the aesthetic disposition is premised on the denial of the “lower, coarse, vulgar, venile, and servile” in favour of “the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished” pleasures of the aesthetic (*Distinction* 63). Each and every one of these distinctions carries within it a microcosm of the struggle that defines the social world and the symbolic violence that lies just below the surface of these distinctions.

The defining distinction at work in all of these demarcations is a certain distance from the urgency and demands of daily existence. The cognitive demand to view the world of objects independent of function has a social collorary:

The aesthetic disposition, a generalized capacity to neutralize ordinary urgencies and to bracket off practical ends, a durable inclination and aptitude for practice without a practical function, can only be constituted within an experience of the world freed from urgency and through the practice of activities which are an end in themselves, such as scholastic exercises or the contemplation of works of arts (54).

This distance from necessity is a key component of the capital conferred by the privilege of prolonged education and cultural inheritance. Bourdieu stresses the cumulative nature of cultural inheritance in contrast with the overt transmission of pedagogical content. Though cultural inheritance passed through the family is less tangible than other forms of capital, Bourdieu insists on its role in the formation of an aesthetic disposition. The social and economic conditions that allow for exposure to a certain kind of education and the more intangible entitlement it engenders are critical to any sociology of culture.

After setting out a preliminary sense of what constitutes the aesthetic disposition, Bourdieu goes on to argue that the class relations implied in properly aesthetic pronouncements are a part of a larger network of social investments and

preferences. At first glance, such “choices” bear little relation to the discourse of aesthetics. However, in *Distinction*, Bourdieu deploys first hand interviews and analysis to make an oblique but compelling connection between positions in the social world (172). Such connections are critical for my argument because it further tethers the magic of the field of aesthetic activity to the social conditions of its existence. Within the field itself, Bourdieu outlines a critical difference between the acquired and the learned taste. Because culture is a living embodiment of its acquisition, learned or academic views on culture are condemned as pedantic. The more pure form of taste cannot be taught, only inherited. Bourdieu traces this difference in everything from culinary taste to classic statements of aesthetic philosophy. Though not cognate, the difference here is best captured in the distinction between old money and new money. The more deeply ingrained the sense of privilege is, the less ostentatious the display of that privilege is likely to be. In the primary interviews, these differences manifest themselves in the verbal evaluations of particular photographs or pieces of art (*Distinction* 46). The respondent’s reaction to each piece of art mirrors a commensurate relation to the social world marked by relative distance from necessity, education, and economic and cultural inheritance. The sociological strategy of analysing the response is part of Bourdieu’s strategy of meticulously building the case that the social world and human agency in it is best defined by the struggle for distinction. The perpetual exchange and movement of all capital is an expansion of a certain distance from brute necessity and privation and this movement manifests itself in both real distance and conspicuous consumption embodied in taste that symbolises such distance. The properly aesthetic nature of

aesthetic distance is inseparable from the fact that its currency as capital consolidates class distinction in the very act of concealing it.⁵⁸

Thus far I have been focusing on the structural nature of Bourdieu's theory of the social world. I would now like to turn to a closer analysis of his treatment of class and social distinction. The concept of distinction that I established in the previous section lays the groundwork for Bourdieu's notion of class and its possible discontents. In the main, Bourdieu is guided by Marx's contention that society is best viewed as a battleground of competing classes. However, as was the case with capital, Bourdieu extends Marx's notion of class to make it more fluid and to complicate the terms upon which it can be resisted. The first step Bourdieu takes away from Marx is to de-substantiate the category of class. For Marx, operating in the context of nineteenth century capitalism, class was the defining feature of an individual's relation to the means of production. Class marked an almost exclusively material relation to the world in Marx's attempt to calibrate a political economy of capitalism. For Bourdieu, however, Marx's theory of class forecloses the possibility of accounting for the reproduction of class in terms that are not entirely material (*IRS* 121).

Marx's theory of awakening class consciousness and the perils of false consciousness falls down when asked to account for social relations that embody a denial of the very phenomenological frame Marx brings to his analysis.⁵⁹ In particular, Bourdieu argues that late capitalist social relations are perpetually reinforced by cultural distinctions that are not reducible to an economic account. In addition, Bourdieu argues that in order to account for social praxis, it is vital to

illuminate the social conditions of agency in any given social relation. Such conditions provide a more compelling account of the odd allegiances and stubborn durability that characterize class division. As with capital and field, Bourdieu's notion of class is also dependent upon a careful account of the specificity and autonomy of a particular social stake. The integrity of specific social struggles is the key to understanding how class relations are reproduced and, as importantly, what the terms of their resistance might be. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu argues for a relational conception of class:

Social class is not defined by a property (not even the most determinant one, such as the volume and composition of capital) nor by a collection of properties (of sex, age, social origin, ethnic origin...), nor even by a chain of properties strung out from a fundamental property (position in the relations of production) in a relation of cause and effect, conditioner and conditioned; but by the structure of relations between all of the pertinent properties which give its specific value to each of them and to the effects they exert on practices. (106)

The key theoretical ambition here is the attempt to view the social world as a whole by, paradoxically, arguing that what knits the social world together is a structure of relations operating largely independent of each other. Unlike unified Marxist notions of class Bourdieu attempts to chart social division along a series of complex and contradictory lines. The only truly common thread between such relations is a struggle defined by possession and dispossession (class).

The primacy Bourdieu attaches to class in his theory of the social world has led to a general consensus that he reduces the social world to brute determinism and base economic calculation. Without doubt, Bourdieu shares Marx's vision that class position is the single greatest determinant of human subjectivity. In doing so, however, he builds on Marx's accomplishment of rebutting the myth of the

autonomous subject pursuing an infinite variety of prospects for life, liberty, and happiness. Politically, agency is tied to social inheritance and material history rather than the creative energy of the individual will. The social axis upon which human subjects act and are acted upon is an irreducible dialectic of subjective need and objective structure. In stressing the necessity that informs any act of freedom Bourdieu is not reducing human activity to a calculus of determinism but rather mounting a case that human agency is always already overdetermined by social history. That social history unfolds in the multitude of practical urgencies, mundane needs, and silent repressions that mark human beings on a daily basis (*Distinction*, 180). The tenor of that history is dependent on the volume, nature and currency of the capital the social subject brings to the field in question.⁶⁰ Indeed the very field in which individuals have the inclination and confidence to invest will be dependent on the nature of the capital at their disposal (*Distinction* 125).

Bourdieu's theory of overdetermination follows the Marxist tradition in that agency is always already conditioned by a web of social relations too thick to support any voluntaristic (humanistic, revolutionary or otherwise) conception of human subjectivity. The point is not to vitiate the creativity of human praxis but rather to tie that creativity to the divisions that fuel late capitalist society. No portion of the social world is immune to the exchange of power in pursuit of human Being and, for Bourdieu, ignoring that relation can only end in the reification of human subjectivity. In the case of culture, Bourdieu's contention is particularly pointed because the aesthetic disposition is marked by a highly ambiguous claim to universality. The universality that Bourdieu analyses in *Distinction* and *Pascalian Meditations* is the

ideological effect produced by purely theoretical academic and aesthetic claims of universality (*PM* 74). This universality, however, is a peculiar kind of universality that affirms a capacity in *potentia* while denying that potential in the material reality of society. The principle here is the same as we saw in Bourdieu's social theory of language. The ideological character of linguistics is contained in the perception that leads to a biological, formalist capacity for speech which ignores the social power relations that determine whose speech is heard and whose words matter.

In *Distinction*, the link that Bourdieu makes between the denied universality of the aesthetic disposition and a more general economy of practice is designed to augment the project of tracking aesthetic practice back to its social roots (172). The properly social nature of aesthetic tastes "cannot be fully understood unless they are reintegrated into the system of dispositions" (*Distinction* 99). Bourdieu (re)unites the specific competence and inheritance that grants entry to the aesthetic realm with the uneven distribution of capital that governs the consumption and production of much more pedestrian elements of social life. This act of unification is the key moment in stripping aesthetic discourse of the magic aura that allows it to traffic on its distance from social determination (*Distinction* 100). Such a claim may seem at odds with the case that I have been making thus far for Bourdieu's notion of field and his careful attention to the autonomous functioning of particular fields of human activity. However, this respect for autonomy is, paradoxically, what allows Bourdieu to highlight the repressed labour of acquisition that characterises the aesthetic universe. Such repression is not an accidental feature, but rather the ideological effect of a discourse that defines itself against less refined forms of consumption. For Bourdieu,

the return of the political repressed in aesthetic discourse is critical to formulating a different conception of aesthetic practice -- one that not does root itself in a restricted economy of distinction. In the next chapter I outline what this alternative looks like. For now, however, I would like to refine the terms with which Bourdieu links aesthetics to other forms of consumption.

Throughout *Distinction*, the empirical link between aesthetic taste and more general forms of consumption is the foundation of the political challenge sociology poses to traditional notions of aesthetics. In presenting his data, Bourdieu makes an implicit philosophical case for a notion of agency that allows the empirical reality of the social world to deconstruct voluntarist notions of subjectivity (366). The degree of agency at work in any social action or lifestyle “choice” is governed by social necessity. The notion of habitus is the key mediating term that allows Bourdieu to relate aesthetic tastes and dispositions to forms of consumption at all strata of society. By tracking the verbal response to art and first hand interviews with subjects from a multitude of social classes and geographical regions, a theory of praxis emerges that is regulated by measurable social limitations. However, those limitations are not simple determinants but rather the conditions that shape the horizon of human ambition and expectations. The division of class does not merely assign material status but also informs an entire world-view that shapes perceptions of the social world and what one expects of the social world. Empirically, this point is made in the transcription of the first hand interviews with French citizens about their perception of the social world and the opportunities it offers them. Theoretically, habitus allows

Bourdieu to deploy a political conception of what conditions social action and, more importantly, the terms upon which such conditions might be resisted and revised.

In *Distinction*, and elsewhere, Bourdieu demonstrates how the complex architecture of oppression relies upon an internalized set of dispositions and expectations (468). By listening to those who are subject to power, Bourdieu insists that any theory of power must account for both for the capacity to speak and, more importantly, the right to speak and be heard. The right to speak and literally to be is lodged at the heart of class division in contemporary capitalist society. The very existence of such dispositions undermines the pretense that aesthetic discourse makes to universality; whatever enchantment art has is irrevocably social and political in nature. To say so, however, is far from dismissing what it is that art does and says. Bourdieu's accomplishment in *Distinction* is to materialize what goes unsaid in the politics of culture (and politics more generally) -- the participatory role that those dispossessed of "high" culture play in their own dispossession (110). This point is important not only for what it introduces into an analysis of class but also what it says about what is missing from political accounts of culture. The political and ethical challenge laid down in Bourdieu's work is twofold: first to articulate the political and social economy that distinguishes the restricted economy of culture; and second, to set the terms upon which the distribution and production of art can realize the universality it claims in discourse in the social reality of late capitalist society. The sociological analysis performed in *Distinction* is, for Bourdieu, the return of a repressed ethical imperative. The analysis of cultural consumption is, in effect, the preface of Bourdieu's larger conception of art and politics (397). The theoretical

discipline imposed by sociology in *Distinction* furnishes Bourdieu with a political conception of culture that is grounded in the radically uneven distribution of capital. Therefore, if the production and consumption of art and culture is to become part of a comprehensive social critique, the social conditions of production must form the origin of its ethico-political imperative.

The signal achievement of *Distinction* is to demonstrate that any politics of culture that resists an analysis of its social determinants is destined to remain locked in the very terms of privilege and distinction it putatively seeks to transform and re-describe. As we shall see in the next chapter, Bourdieu entertains a schizophrenic relationship with aesthetic production and consumption. On the one hand, it is a social practice singularly vulnerable to the sociologist's deconstruction; on the other, it is a vital form of agency that challenges both reified economic social relations and social theories that attempt to theorize subversion primarily through the eyes of an economic vision of agency and society. This tension is the defining element of Bourdieu's contribution to the politics of culture. Thus far, I have been describing Bourdieu's notion of culture and politics primarily in the negative. In the next chapter, I will explicate the alternative vision Bourdieu offers for cultural and political theory.

CHAPTER 2: The Aesthetics of Refusal

In the game Bourdieu plays, I would say that the name of art is staked in a contest of sociology with economics, and if Bourdieu is destined to lose this game, he will at least be seen in the end to have been on the side of the artists.

John Guillory

“Bourdieu’s Refusal”

In the preceding chapter, I briefly defended Bourdieu against the charge of economism by arguing that his work is a vibrant attempt to articulate the power relations at work in cultural consumption and production. Bourdieu is very clear that his work is founded on the belief that neither economic nor cultural models of interpretation adequately explain the political economy of culture and art in modern (and postmodern) society. For Bourdieu, addressing that gap does not amount to dismissing the social or emotive efficacy traditionally associated with aesthetic practice. The transposition of economic terms into realms in which they are likely to be regarded as reductive is a strategic move on Bourdieu's part. By extending the reach of a term like capital, Bourdieu is able to mount a compelling genealogy of the necessarily repressed social and economic conditions at the heart of aesthetic practice. In fact, Bourdieu's ambiguous engagement with economic metaphors is inseparable from his theory of art. The denial of the social world is indeed the founding gesture of art. Distance from the vulgarity of market economics is also the measure of legitimacy in the social universe of art and literature. However, as we saw in *Distinction*, Bourdieu demonstrates the manner in which the economy of cultural practices replicates the logic of surplus, accumulation, investment, and dispossession that defines more properly economic, capitalist relations. That said, if Bourdieu's contribution to the theory of art stopped there, much of the hostile criticism of his work would be validated. However, as should be obvious by now, I want to argue that Bourdieu's work in *Distinction* is part of a larger theory of art and literature that must be evaluated holistically. In order to go beyond the negation and resentment that is often read into Bourdieu's work, it will be vital to integrate his blunt assessment of art

and literature into a larger political project. The political potency of Bourdieu's work calls for a renewed form of aesthetic practice marked by its encounter with reflexive sociology. As I detail the specifics of Bourdieu's singular theory of art and culture, the peril of reading Bourdieu's application of economic metaphors literally will become apparent. Indeed, it will become clear that interpreting Bourdieu's "non-economic economy of human practices" as economic determinism would, ironically, amount to the very reduction of culture to social determinants of which Bourdieu himself is perpetually accused. In order to undertake this reading the following chapter will be divided in to three sections: in the opening section I will examine how John Guillory ties Bourdieu's conception of art to economic discourse; next, I will outline the specifics of Bourdieu's political economy of art; in the third and final section I will examine *The Rules of Art* and the historical account Bourdieu provides of modern art.

1.

In order to elaborate the specifics of Bourdieu's theory of culture I will begin by tracing his ambiguous relationship with economic discourse. In order to complete this task, I will examine what I take to be the defining irony of Bourdieu's conception of culture: not only does Bourdieu's notion of culture not reduce to social and economic determinants, but his defense of art and culture as possible spaces of resistance is also intimately tied to the fact that cultural discourse finds itself on a conscious rejection of market rationalization. In "Bourdieu's Refusal," John Guillory offers an intriguing argument that deftly navigates the relationship between

economics and art in Bourdieu's work. I will outline Guillory's article in order to augment my own contention that the complexity of Bourdieu's engagement with art offers an innovative way of imagining the political import of art.

Guillory begins his argument by asking after the hostile reaction Bourdieu's work has generated in North America. Guillory argues that the resistance to Bourdieu's work amounts to a refusal of what is regarded as his pessimism and social determinism. Guillory takes note of this reading in the burgeoning field of cultural studies and among more conservative sociological and political commentators.⁶¹ In the face of this critical reception, Guillory counters by suggesting "the very vehemence with which his perceived determinism is rejected can be said to express by contrast an intellectual ethos of voluntarism" (369). This point echoes the detailed exposition offered of Bourdieu's theory of intellectual work in the first chapter. Guillory extends this analysis to draw a parallel with Bourdieu's account of social change.

Sociology identifies intellectual work as particularly prone to voluntarist accounts of agency and optimistic predictions of the role intellectual work plays in social change. However, that point is but one part of Bourdieu's larger project of demonstrating just how much agency is circumscribed by material social relations. Guillory underlines this point when he argues: "Raising social change to consciousness, or rationalizing it as a theoretically informed practice, is a project whose realization should not be confused with the mode of change in social reality" (371). If one accepts this blunt assessment the question becomes: Is there any possibility for social change or resistance in Bourdieu's work? In order to answer that

question Guillory doubles back to Bourdieu's theory of art and, more specifically, the relationship between art and economics. In the face of the almost accepted argument that Bourdieu's sociology is theoretically and politically hostile to aesthetic practice, Guillory makes the case that, in fact, Bourdieu throws his political lot in with art when the question of economics and the tyranny of market capitalism is raised in his work. Guillory admits that such an argument is novel in light of the fact the author of a book entitled, *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market*, has no elaborated historical or sociological account of Western capitalism. Guillory explains this gap by reading it as a clue to unraveling Bourdieu's political commitments. In effect, for Guillory, Bourdieu's refusal to engage economic accounts of agency and society is a conscious strategic move designed to dramatize what economic theory (and practice) elide. In his argument Guillory moves back and forth between economics as a social practice (that is, capitalist exchange and its supporting institutions) and economic theory (that is, the intellectual discipline that explains capitalism and explains away its social relations). Guillory also argues that economic practice cultivates a habitus that is reflected in economic theory. For both Bourdieu and Guillory the habitus of market economics is defined by voluntarism:

The ideology of the free market has...never dispensed with an essential voluntarism...In the aggregate behavior of the market's free agents, economic science discerns regularities that, insofar as they are determinable, can be said to be determined. For economics, the market is like nature, the object of increasingly mathematical description and prediction. At the same time, the quasi-religious faith of this science is that all is for the best when the market is left in its natural (i.e., free) state. The more ideologically committed free-market economists give no indication at all of recognizing the contradiction in asserting a freedom that their science disallows, but this may be the kind of philosophical question in which economists have long since lost interest. (375)

This voluntarist habitus is marked above all else by the sanctity of individual achievement and choice and the science of measuring that choice. Bourdieu and Guillory echo Marx when they argue that, as a science, economics finds itself on the exclusion of its social effects.⁶² This exclusion is framed as a founding gesture because, Bourdieu argues, a fully developed relational account of the social world would fatally undermine the scientific and political claims of economics. By definition, sociology is the discourse that tethers the tenets of free market ideology – choice, merit, and the cult of the duly rewarded individual – to a social foundation. In addition, the reproduction of market social relations is dependent, in large part, on a seamless relationship between economic theory and economic practice. Put simply, Bourdieu and Guillory claim that the economic view of society has entrenched itself so completely in the popular consciousness that it shapes the practice of people who need not understand or endorse the macroeconomic policies that shape their social world (*BR* 378). The practical exigencies of the multitude of social games we compete in militate against any overt reflection on the often arbitrary and unequal rules of the game (*IRS* 143). In addition, the practical understanding that most social actors have of those rules inspires a worldview that closely matches expectations with realistic chances. Of course, those most tethered to necessity most acutely feel the need to match expectation with reality.⁶³

In the context of the hegemony of economics, it becomes easier to read Bourdieu's refusal as a political and empirical move. Politically, economics is a truncated vision of the social world that "euphemizes" and naturalizes a far more complex economy of dispossession, exchange, and capital. Guillory claims that

Bourdieu's refusal to employ the language of economics in his description of the social world created by market exchange is "a challenge to the very entitlement of economics to the language of exchange" (377). Therefore, it is not simply a matter of refusing an ideology one opposes but also of challenging the social and scientific legitimacy of that discourse by refusing its founding terms and demarcations. If one accepts Guillory's point here, the charge that Bourdieu's work reduces to economism becomes highly suspect. At first blush, such an approach would seem to be at odds with the arguments presented in *Distinction*. However, the "barbarous" methodology of *Distinction* is only the preface of Bourdieu's "non-economic economy" of human practice. Such an account of human practice carries the political task of sketching alternative terms of exchange in a social world dominated by another kind of exchange. The affirmative riposte to economics for Bourdieu is reflexive sociology and aesthetic practice.

For Guillory, Bourdieu's peculiar relationship with economics has, from the beginning, been inextricably tied to art (BR 389). In his early work on Algerian peasants, Bourdieu makes a critical distinction between modern and archaic economies.⁶⁴ The defining difference, for Bourdieu, is that in an archaic economy the reproduction of the social world is dependent on its not being recognized as an economy at all. In a series of social rites including marriage, housing, and food, material economic relationships are camouflaged by social conventions such as caste and prestige. These conventions obscure the economy through collective acts of consecration. In effect, there is a denial of the rational calculation of the market "without [ever] ceasing to be a kind of economic practice" (378). The profoundly

social economy of archaic society was displaced by market exchange that, by definition, modernized the social world by radically alienating the act of exchange. Exchange became literalized through the universal prominence of a mediating term. That mediating term was, of course, money. Though none of this analysis is particularly new or bracing, Bourdieu gleans an important clue about the place of art in modern society from this well rehearsed history. The move from the general economy to the division of labour that defines capitalism is also the founding condition of art as we know it today. Art is the remainder that retains the symbolic kernel of the general economy in modern society.

In *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu argues that “[t]he denial of the economy and economic interest which, in pre-capitalist societies, was exerted first in the very area of ‘economic’ transactions from which it had to be expelled in order for ‘the economy’ to be constituted as such thus it finds itself the favored refuge in the domain of art and ‘culture’” (133). Paradoxically, the hegemony of market social relations and the concomitant creation of autonomous social spaces provide the historical conditions for the survival of archaic forms of exchange and production. It is precisely for this reason that Bourdieu can be said to illuminate the economy of exchange at the heart of aesthetic practice without reducing that practice to cynical calculation. We are dealing with two distinct and almost contradictory arguments Bourdieu is making about the social meaning of art. The competence and disposition required to consume and produce art is not immune from the distinguishing hierarchies that define late capitalism. Art has always traded on this hierarchy. However, the nature of the relationship between art and the market is far more

ambiguous than either economics (not least Marxist economics) or artistic criticism and philosophy account for. The register of value that governs art and, for Bourdieu, sociology produces a discourse capable of challenging the possibilities of human subjectivity regimented by the market. The two points are inseparable and, as Guillory's argument demonstrates, culture and art are central to Bourdieu's project of a reflexive, politicized practice of sociology.⁶⁵ For Guillory, then, the terms of Bourdieu's engagement with art come to rest on a wager that art is indeed the discourse best placed to renew modes of human agency and exchange that are not reducible to the vicissitudes of the market (*BR* 398).

Though Bourdieu acknowledges the history of aesthetic criticism that characterized the work of art as a sublimated religious object, he builds his theory of art and culture by reconstructing the history of art in the shadow of market capitalism's triumphant march toward hegemony and saturation (*The Rules of Art* 203). Bourdieu's archeology of the aesthetic disposition is designed to offer an account of a social space not reified by the market. However, in his later work Bourdieu assembles an elaborate theory of culture that tests the theoretical efficacy of his critical terms: capital, habitus and field. The challenge, for Bourdieu, is to balance two almost contradictory views of aesthetic practice: first, the integrated vision of aesthetic practice as a consolidating effect of social stratification; and second, the view that aesthetic discourse has, historically, formed a counter discourse to the instrumentality of modern, capitalist subjectivity. Paradoxically, Bourdieu uses the blunt sociological assessment of his first view of art to make the case for the second. In order to effect such a balancing act, he rigorously applies his notion of field (*The*

Field of Cultural Production 34). The concept of field is indispensable to the task of avoiding the binarism that haunts the practice and theory of culture and art. These binarisms take the following form: inside/outside, form/content, individual/history, text/society, authorial intent/social conditions, high art/low art, political/non-political art, canonical/non-canonical (*The Field of Cultural Production* 55-56). For Bourdieu, these binarisms structure the world of art and the intellectual struggle to offer a definitive account of that world. These binarisms are also social judgments that resonate beyond the enclosure of aesthetic practice. The concept of field allows for an account of the terms of exchange between the various positions within the field of culture and other social fields. The theory of field also allows Bourdieu to analyze literature on two diachronous planes: the internal symbolic and literary code that governs a particular text and the social relationships reflected in the consumption and production of that code (RA 376, n17). For Bourdieu, this theory will carry a certain oblique political promise. If such a promise is ever to be realized, however, it will require a properly sociological analysis of what it is that constitutes literature at the very specific historical moment that occasioned the work in question. In the following section I will detail Bourdieu's methodology for writing the ongoing history of art's creation.

2.

In *The Field of Cultural Production* Bourdieu lays the groundwork for his theory of culture. The first step Bourdieu takes is to augment his assertion that the assessment of art and culture follows an uncompromisingly social logic. High art is

defined as the economic world reversed and other cultural products are evaluated by their relative proximity to the brute logic of accumulation that defines market exchange. The orientations and strategies adopted by actors in the field are, by definition, oriented to either flaunt or reduce the distance between the market and the text. The distance at stake here is both literal and symbolic. Literally, it is a matter of how marketable and economically successful a cultural product will be.

Symbolically, art that measures success by its distance from material gratification (in its consumption and production) also projects a vital form of social being that, in its form and content, resists the rationalization of the market (53). Bourdieu's interest is obviously in the more complex discursive performances that revel in their distance from necessity and easy consumption.

The "barbarous reintegration of aesthetic consumption in the world of ordinary consumption" that punctuates *Distinction* is designed to shatter the image of aesthetic practice as a de-materialized space of liberatory possibilities (100). Though this view of art is a caricature of some very sophisticated theories of art, Bourdieu carefully traces a more or less continuous history of viewing and art and artists in heroic and charismatic terms. More recent work in literary theory has, of course, dislodged the primacy of such views. Bourdieu indeed draws on the work of French contemporaries like Derrida, Foucault and Barthes in his work.⁶⁶ What, however, distinguishes Bourdieu is his attempt to tie the textual deconstruction of literature to the deconstruction of the social relations refracted and consolidated by the "market of symbolic goods." In doing so, however, Bourdieu is careful to insist on the specificity of the aesthetic field a pre-condition of any properly political reading. The rigour and

detail of *Distinction* is, therefore, a necessary step in Bourdieu's larger argument that the historical, social and political power of art is actually augmented by its subjection to the laws of the field, capital and habitus. The lucidity promised by the sociological analysis is, for Bourdieu, indispensable to insuring the continued relevance of culture in a social space that has come to be defined almost exclusively by the rationalization of the market.

In *The Field of Cultural Production*, Bourdieu attempts to fulfill this promise by offering a complex application of his theory of fields to the realm of culture. Bourdieu chooses the literary field, primarily drawing on nineteenth century examples (such as Flaubert, Baudelaire, and Zola) to demonstrate the challenge his sociology poses to traditional notions of literary theory and literary history. As importantly, Bourdieu's work seeks to redress the absence of sociological accounts of art that respect the internal logic of aesthetic practice. The first law of the field demands that any inquiry be guided by the internal laws, rituals, and conventions that govern the arena of human praxis under examination (42). In his reading of the literary field, Bourdieu presents at least two substantial difficulties. First, the complexity of literary discourse makes it particularly resistant to social analysis. For Bourdieu, that which makes itself off as literary does so by leaving behind the discursive mooring that defines social and political discourse (*RA* xvii). Second, this resistance has the effect of either shutting out social and political analysis or compelling a reduction of literature to the social and political conditions of its production - in essence, a hostile theoretical takeover of art by sociology. In both cases I want to make the argument that the notion of field provides an innovative

solution to the vexing dilemma of how to set the terms for a productive dialogue between literature and the realities of the social world. In the context of the persistent charges of economic reduction that plague Bourdieu's work on art, it seems particularly pressing to define the credibility of Bourdieu's work on the basis of his respect for the power of the literary act.⁶⁷

The complexity of examining the literary work as a social act is premised on the reality that the very disposition that marks the literary off as a specific realm of the social world, cultivates and rewards distance from and hostility to external explanation. In fact, Bourdieu argues that this is the founding gesture of a separate and autonomous field. However, far from politically denouncing this gesture, Bourdieu places it in the historical context of the development of modern capitalist society. In the transition from a general economy to the complex division of labour that marks the capitalist market, the autonomy of art from the market (and other institutions such as the church) was a social struggle waged for the right to a social and psychological space not reducible to the subjective possibilities offered by the new mercantilist social arrangements. I shall, in the next section, examine Bourdieu's notion of art's autonomy in more detail. For now, however, it is enough to remark that the historical vision Bourdieu's theory brings to literary production inspires a more ambiguous and complex view of "aesthetic disposition" than was apparent in *Distinction*. In *The Field of Cultural Production*, Bourdieu's goal is to illuminate the internal structure of the literary field by reference to the texts themselves but also by examining the social and material history that it necessarily represses (76). For Bourdieu this repressed history is both the universe of power relations at any given

moment between particular actors and the symbolic and “real” economies that govern the functioning of the field. Like all other fields, the literary field is structured by the relationship between the specific capital at stake at any given moment and the other forms of capital (educational, cultural, economic) which individuals bring to the field. In addition, the field is influenced by its relationship with other fields. In the case of literature the fields in closest proximity are the economic, political and educational fields. In his analysis of literary history and theory, Bourdieu argues that a certain autonomy of analysis has precluded a full assessment of the literary field as a whole (RA 61). While there has been considerable attention to the formal aspects of literature and what defines the literary as well as many attempts to write the relationship between literature and politics, Bourdieu contends that there has been a consistent divorce between formal and social analysis.

In his examination of archival and textual material from nineteenth century literature, Bourdieu argues that the institutional, biographical, and economic forces at play in the production of a literary text are vital because the history of literature is a perpetual struggle to define what literature is. The history of literature is no more (or less) than the social struggle for legitimacy in the field. This struggle is a struggle over not only the definition of literature but also the institutions (both formal and informal) that have the power to consecrate a piece of writing as literature. This historical task is relevant not only for the arduous task of accounting for the literary object in the richest possible social context, but it is also a blueprint for sorting through our contemporary disputes about the definition of art and the place of art in the public sphere. In addition, the demand to read the institutional history of the field

addresses one of the dilemmas that have marked literary history from its inception. The question of what literature is becomes, strictly speaking, an academic question if it is separated from its original context. For Bourdieu, the question of what literature is, is a question that can only be answered historically by reference to the struggle to define literature when the text was produced and the stakes of the contemporary struggle to define literature. In *The Field of Cultural Production* Bourdieu makes this point by arguing:

While it is true that every literary field is the site of a struggle over the definition of the writer, the fact remains that scientific analysts, if they are not to make the mistake of universalizing the particular case, need to know that they will only ever encounter historical definitions of the writer, corresponding to a particular state of the struggle to impose the legitimate definition of the writer. (42)

From this standpoint, the long standing task of devising a trans-historical definition of literature becomes an idealistic and strictly intellectual exercise. Bourdieu makes the case that this anxiety about a “proper” definition of literature marks even the most materialist accounts of literary history. By contrast, Bourdieu is building the case that to argue that literature can only be defined socially is not to reduce literature to social determinants but rather to raise the analysis to the level of the object’s historical production. By re-constructing the field of production, a different set of questions emerges about literature and its social context.

In *The Field of Cultural Production*, Bourdieu builds a theory of literature by piecing together a bricolage of many of the theories he rejects as incomplete.⁶⁸

Despite the critical tone of much of his discourse Bourdieu is, I am arguing, most interested in the limits and potential of intellectual thought. The alternative he defends is neither revolutionary nor messianic but rather a pragmatic inventory

ordered by the demands of reflective sociology. In the case of literary theory that simply means integrating much of the important work already done in the field. In the end, the most innovative element of his theory, beyond breaking the enchanted spell of aesthetic discourse, is deconstructing the division of labour within the field of literature (127). In *The Field of Cultural Production*, *The Rules of Art*, and elsewhere, Bourdieu integrates various models of thought as an implicit critique of the professionalization of literary theory, philosophy, and intellectual history generally. This professional ethos is inseparable from the broader history of modern institutions like the university and the development of various spheres of relatively autonomous realms of human activity developed contemporaneously with capitalism, liberal democracy, and the market economy.

In *The Field of Cultural Production*, Bourdieu also sets out his alternative in light of what he views as two dominant streams within literary theory: formalism and political criticism (34). The formalist school of literary thought (exemplified by the Russian formalists and the New Criticism) constructs an elaborate system of explanatory factors drawn almost exclusively from the text itself. The formalist impulse leads to a dissection of the internal semantic relations within a text and other texts directly related to the piece under examination. While such an approach respects the first rule of the field in that the structural integrity of the object guides the inquiry, the entire relationship of the text to its social and political moment is ignored (71). In addition, the position of the author in relation to the literary field and the larger social world is elided. In *In Other Words*, Bourdieu crafts a singular conception of the relationship between the author and the text by suggesting:

The theory of field [leads] to both a rejection of direct reading of the individual biography to the work of literature (or the relating of the “social class” of origin to the work) and also a rejection of internal analysis of an individual work or even of intertextual analysis. This is because what we have to do is all of these things at the same time. (7)

Bourdieu’s assessment of literary formalism mirrors his relationship with structuralism. Like the structuralist turn in anthropology and sociology, the structuralist turn to formalize in literary theory provides a powerful riposte to the myth of the omnipotent author. The formalist school restored literary meaning to a larger, structured whole. For Bourdieu, the system of relations upon which formalism defines itself rigorously opens literature up to an analysis that moves beyond iconoclastic celebration. In the process of that movement, however, the social actor responsible for the text becomes a ghost in the machine. The invisibility of the author leaves a substantial blind spot for any analysis trying to relate the production back to a concrete social context. Finally, a formalist account of literature either takes the definition of literature for granted or addresses the problem by resort to formalist tautologies (*The Field of Cultural Production* 33).

Political criticism inverts the shortcomings of formalism by ignoring the structural relations of the text in question and looking almost exclusively at factors external to the text itself. The text of the author becomes the conscious or unconscious bearer of an ideological message or the interests of the particular class. Such readings ultimately ignore the field they set out to account for. Bourdieu singles out Lucien Goldmann and Georg Lukács as exemplars of the desire to substitute a politics for a social and historical analysis of the text (*The Field of Cultural Production* 180). Though Bourdieu rarely mentions cultural studies specifically in his

work, in *Cultural Capital* John Guillory takes his cue from Bourdieu when he analyses recent terms in literary theory like cultural studies and movements like queer studies. Guillory concludes that the political pronouncements made by these new schools almost always say more about the social space of intellectual work than they do about the vexing question of literature's relationship to the social world. Bourdieu also sets out the perils of biographical criticism that seeks to remedy the shortcomings of formalism (RA 258). Such criticism exhausts the personal details of the author's life without ever touching on what is most vital about the work and its reception. The empirical demands of sociology pull the supporting cast of any text back into the picture. Contemporary literary journals, philosophical quarrels, political debates and the entire social universe that inhabits the production and consumption of the author's work are critical to a historical and social understanding of literature (*The Field of Cultural Production* 48-49). Setting out this vibrant living history is part of the task of measuring a work's efficacy. More important than all of that, however, is the fact that Bourdieu views this social history through the lens of the permanent political struggle for democratic access to the means of production. It is at this level that Bourdieu's work can be read as an implicit political challenge to the very notion of literary study as a profession.

Practically, Bourdieu's reading of culture is held together by combining the distinct social spaces that govern any textual production with the specific architectonics of the text. The often invisible factors that account for the meaning of the text are the position of the text in the literary field, the internal textual relations of the work, and the disposition of the author. In *The Field of Cultural Production*,

Bourdieu patiently lays out the manner in which various elements of any textual production simultaneously inhabit different social and symbolic spaces. The empirical evidence offered up by a sociological analysis explains the volume and weight of each space and helps in assessing the social and symbolic effects of the text under examination. The first space is the differential stances at play in any given text. This is the space of the textual referents, historical and literary allusions, and the poetic, theatrical, or novelist genre in play. The formal structure of any text is central to Bourdieu's theory of literature. However, that structure must be related to the social space that inspired and received the work or literary analysis remains trapped in an incomplete idealism (*The Field of Cultural Production* 34). It is, as I have suggested, Bourdieu's conception of literary field that moves us beyond a formal analysis. It is the construction of the literary field itself that "requires and enables us to make a radical break with the substantial mode of thought...which tends to foreground the individual, or visible interactions between individuals, at the expense of structural relations – invisible, or visible only through their effects – between social positions that are both occupied and manipulated by social agents which may be isolated individuals, groups or institutions" (29). For Bourdieu the historical archive of the literary field itself fatally undermines any immanent, hermeneutic analysis of the literary text.

Bourdieu argues that the sociology of art is perennially hampered by the aesthetic disposition the field of art and literature itself cultivates (*Distinction* 100). As we saw in the first chapter, a certain social and economic denial is endemic to the field. Bourdieu also points out that writing is among the least classifiable professions

because it is not governed by the explicit institutional associations and rituals that govern other fields and make them more amenable to sociology. In ambition and in reality, the vocation of the writer resists, in Weber's terms, routinization (*The Field of Cultural Production* 114). This fact, of course, makes it all the more vital that the particularities of the literary field are explicated. In addition to the form and properties of the text in question, Bourdieu examines the literary text in a political economy of what is denoted as banal (or routine) and what becomes legitimated as high art. The social value of each judgment is dependent on the hierarchies that sustain and cultivate distinction. In addition, the exercise of that judgment ratifies and justifies the arbitrary social privilege of those who make them. Without denying the common sense point that the ability to creatively read and engage literary texts requires a measure of personal initiative and discipline not reducible to class membership, Bourdieu demonstrates that the very ability to read and assess literary texts ultimately depends on one's social access to the competence and disposition that literature calls for. The denial of this reality is always already the origin of the humanist pastoral of universal access to the fruits of aesthetic perception.

The literary field is where the implicit and the explicit struggle for the value of symbolic capital takes place (*The Field of Cultural Production* 113). This space is also the battleground for the definition of the avant-garde, commercial, and bourgeois art. Each of these terms is a vessel of aesthetic value but each is also simultaneously a social value that obliquely reflects other economies of capital distribution. As outlined earlier, the struggle to define literature is inseparable from the capital at stake in literary production. Bourdieu argues that the farther one moves from commercially

accessible and successful writing, the more likely the capital at stake is symbolic capital in the form of prestige and the ability to define the standard. In terms of commercial writing, popular forms such as the romance novel fall into this category. Such writing follows a generally successful formula and earns the monetary rewards and symbolic disdain that comes with following such formulas. Next, there is a kind of writing that Bourdieu vaguely designates as bourgeois writing: writing that is of a high enough quality to provide enough distinction to rise above the popular but to also remain entertaining. Finally, we have the most restricted form of literary production that generally takes the form of experimental novels and plays, and the entire genre of poetry. In this area of production, fellow producers usually supply both the audience and the tribunal established to adjudicate membership (*The Field of Cultural Production* 187-88). These are rough boundaries that not only flow into each other but also are often subject to historical redescription about what defines popular, bourgeois and literary writing. Once one gets past the reductive façade of these demarcations a historical model of analysis becomes apparent. Previously excluded institutions like publishing houses, universities and the educational system in general, and the striking parallel between cultural consumption and other modes of consumption, become the proper object of literary analysis (RA 141-146).

Within the field of symbolic goods, Bourdieu further sub-divides the restricted field of production by outlining the opposition between genres like poetry and experimental theatre and the market economy (*The Field of Cultural Production* 114). The nature of the distance here is obvious and, as John Guillory argues, the universe of art and literature is the economic world reversed. Within the restricted economy

itself Bourdieu identifies a further division across which social and literary subjectivities are pursued. The other division Bourdieu suggests is between the “consecrated avant-garde and the avant-garde” or between “cultural orthodoxy and heresy” (53). Within this social world the confluence of position and disposition culminates in the production of specific works and the rise and fall of particular schools and movements. The inclusion of what had hitherto been excluded as marginal to the study of literature becomes essential to Bourdieu’s theory. The politics of small press distribution, national cultural policy, and the like are all central to Bourdieu because of the transient nature of what texts come to count as legitimate, cutting-edge art. Far from being arbitrary or teleological, the definition of literature is a historical product of exchange between social actors in a quantifiable social space. The dissemination and production of literature is based on such social relations. However, as I have been arguing throughout this study, Bourdieu’s apparently reductive analysis of art is a defensive move in a larger retrenchment of art’s social resistance to the subjective possibilities proffered by market economics.

In Bourdieu’s historical model it is not the categories that count but the ability of the values inherent in each category to mobilize and legitimize certain judgements. In order to specify the social act of judgement at stake in literature, Bourdieu charts the relation between social position and the individual disposition. In most realms of social activity this methodology is generally accepted. However, in *The Field of Cultural Production*, Bourdieu acknowledges that art and literature are marked by discontinuity and uncertainty more than any other sphere of human action (137). In addition to the functional resistance to sociological terms, such analysis also has to

contend with the intellectual disposition outlined earlier in his study. As I argued in chapter one, the milieu cultivated by the intellectual world is anathema to Bourdieu's project. In order to gauge the degree to which there is a readable relationship between positions and dispositions it will be necessary to articulate the crucial role habitus plays in Bourdieu's theory of literature. The appearance of any literary text is, for Bourdieu, the congruence of several different histories that come together in one social space. The first history is the history of the positions a social actor takes up – most especially positions within the field of cultural production. The second, more complex, history is the history of dispositions all social actors are imbued with. For Bourdieu, the history of positions is bound up with all of the sundry occupations and vocations the literary field offers. The position of poet, writer, or critic “is the crystallized product of a...whole previous history” (62). This history is, in short, the history of the struggle to enshrine and resist various registers of value and representations of the work of the writer. For Bourdieu, the most important history attached to the position of a serious writer is the struggle for autonomy and in “particular awareness of [and investment in]...the fundamental law of the field: i.e. the theory of art for art's sake” (62). Bourdieu characterizes this law as a “will to autonomy” that measures its liberty by virtue of its distance from politics and economics. The imposition of this will eventually takes the form of a vocation in the calling of the artist

In order to complete his equation, Bourdieu unites the social position of the writer and the disposition of those it attracts and the desire it stirs within them. Position, in this case, has other connotations. The first notion of position Bourdieu

engages is the space occupied by various actors in relation to the various possibilities offered within the field (*The Field of Cultural Production* 51-55). As I have already outlined, such positions run the gamut from a poet at the most restricted end of the economy to the commercial publisher of bestsellers. The symbolic value attached to particular works is largely dependant on the “economies of production” established within the field. The historical evolution of the field changes the definition of avant-garde as well the definition of what should count as literary. Such demarcations affect the reception of both contemporary works and initiate what we now recognize as canon wars.

The second and more complex connotation of position is the social value attached to the title of writer, artist, or painter. In the larger social context, Bourdieu classifies the writer as a dominated member of the dominant class (128). What is implied in this broad-brush distinction is that cultural producers generally have a high quotient of cultural capital but diminished economic and political capital. In exchange, the artist or writer has a hand in legitimating particular visions of the social world and enjoys the real status that comes with living the life of the mind as opposed to selling one’s body in the form of labour value. In this regard, Bourdieu mirrors Marx directly in his view that commodified economic value is nothing more (or less) than embodied labour. The distinction gives Marx (and Bourdieu) the basis for all further social distinction based on proximity or distance from the alienation of embodied labour as the measure of the dominated and the dominant. For this reason the competence and consecrated social status of cultural producers, which gives them a provisional ability to appropriate an identity and social being, also sets them off

from the dominated society. However, that freedom is circumscribed by their relation to economic and political power. Within the field itself, the various positions are defined by their proximity to economic success. The more commercially successful work is the less likely it is to bear the aura of symbolic capital. Two obvious caveats are those rare cases of literature that becomes commercially popular and those works whose economic value accrues precisely because of their symbolic value.

Within the field of literary production, however, Bourdieu sets out the empirical difference between writing that seeks the reward of the commercial market and those works which seek the deferred value and status that comes with producing great literature. The rejection and refusal of the commercial remains to this day an effective distinction in the literary world. Bourdieu also notes that there have been complex and subtle shifts in what constitutes art and literature (*RA 157*). Some of those shifts have self-consciously deconstructed the distance between observer and artist. Indeed, in much recent postmodern art and architecture, the commodity and the artwork are inseparable. It would, however, be relatively easy to demonstrate that such cultural production does nothing to undermine the basic distinction that separates art from all that is ordinary and pedestrian – even when the ostentatious show of the ordinary is the art. Despite the complex history of cultural production, Bourdieu's point remains sound if we acknowledge exceptions and denote that the commercial success of certain works occurs in spite of rather than because of their symbolic value. In addition, as Bourdieu's theory of autonomy unfolds it will become clear that these distinctions carry social and political implications not accounted for in traditional notions of literary scholarship.

The production of art is also an inversion of the trappings of power. By definition, those who participate in the most restricted literary economy are the most marginal to the field of power that Bourdieu defines as the marriage of economic and political capital. This distance often equates to economic marginalisation and, more importantly, a self-fulfilling alienation from power and the accumulation that raises social and economic privation to a sacred level. The denial of immediate worldly social rewards leads, for Bourdieu, to national monuments of the first order: books, sculptures, paintings and the like. As has often been noted elsewhere literature and art have played a decisive role in the construction of national identities.⁶⁹ As I shall outline in the next section Bourdieu has a highly developed account of art's relative autonomy. At this point it is only important to note that when Bourdieu speaks of the author's position he is referring to a discernible social position that is only intelligible relative to the social whole. The relative social power a piece of literature has is based on its disavowal of that power. Again, it is the inversion of the temporal and pathological that defines the position of the writer and the work (62).

The objection most often raised at this point is that Bourdieu merely replicates the more egregious reductions that sociology undertakes of art – only in a more arcane and theoretical vocabulary. Bourdieu's retort, throughout *The Field of Cultural Production* and *The Rules of Art*, to such a charge is twofold: first, sociology is a necessary check and balance against the pathological attempt of literature and art to forget their social and economic place; second, for Bourdieu this generally unacknowledged social genesis is integral to a full reading of any cultural object. The structural relationship of a piece of art to the field of power or other

social fields does not determine the meaning of a work. However, it is instrumental in shaping the values and vocabulary of a text's "message". Bourdieu's theory of literature is an archeology of terms elided and assumed by literary criticism (such as literature itself). For Bourdieu, the social posture of the artist or writer and the table of rewards and refusals that posture inspires are indispensable to a properly historical reading.

The key to mediating the relation between position and disposition is habitus. As we saw earlier, habitus represents Bourdieu's conception of a human agency that is tethered to social context without being mechanistically pre-determined by that context. Bourdieu's theory of art and literature depends heavily on the conception of habitus to break the ideological spell of the charismatic artist-creator *and* the view of art that reduces it to a mirror reflection of class interests. In the literary field, Bourdieu argues that the positions taken up by various actors in the social field are intimately intertwined by the disposition that they bring to the field. The disposition of social actors is produced by details like inherited cultural capital, geographic location, and the full mundane menu that comprises social class. Through empirical analysis, Bourdieu argues that the "free" choices made within the literary field to produce particular works or defend a certain conception of literature is, in fact, subject to a certain social logic of necessity. In the case of avant-garde literature, for instance, despite the usual posture of subversion the ability to produce avant-garde literature relies on the ability to deter both economic and symbolic success. The disposition required to "invest" in experimental work requires a sense of belief that, for Bourdieu, can only be the product of social and economic conditions:

More precisely, it is based on two sets of conditions: on the one hand, the emergence, through a long evolutionary process, of an autonomous universe, the artistic field, freed from economic and political constraints, and knowing no other law than the law it sets for itself, which means, ultimately, that of art with no other end than itself; and, on the other hand, the occupation within the social world, of positions in which the “pure” disposition which gives access to “pure”, purely aesthetic, pleasure can be formed in particular through upbringing or schooling, and in which, once formed, it can be exercised and, through use, be maintained and perpetuated. (*PM* 73)

In *Distinction, Weight of the World*, and elsewhere, Bourdieu augments this argument by using statistical data and first hand interviews to relate positions adopted in the field to social origin. In *The Field of Cultural Production* he contends that social agents are guided by a practical sense that leads them to evaluate the prospects and the viability of positions within the field (61). Particular positions present themselves as “a sort of necessary locus which beckons those who are made for (vocation) or, by contrast, as an impossible destination, an unacceptable destiny or one that is acceptable only as a temporary refuge or a secondary or accessory position” (64). In making this case, however, Bourdieu actually undermines the notion that any simple line can be drawn between cultural production and social history. For Bourdieu, the disposition is but one part of the equation and is only complete when the universe and history of possible positions within the field are articulated.

Field and habitus (position and disposition) form an irreducible economy of human agency that does not admit a mediating term. It is this absence of a positive term that gives Bourdieu’s work its historical edge. In the following passage Bourdieu offers a detailed assessment of the relationship between field and habitus:

There is nothing mechanical about the relationship between the field and the habitus. The space of available positions does indeed help to determine the properties expected and even demanded of possible candidates, and therefore the categories of agents they can above all retain; but the perception of the space of

possible positions and trajectories and the appreciation of the value each of them derives from its location in the space depend on these dispositions. It follows as a point of method that one cannot give a full account of the relationship obtaining at a given moment between the space of positions and the space of dispositions, and, therefore, of the set of social trajectories (or constructed biographies), unless one establishes the configuration, at the moment, and at the various critical turning-points in a career...[and] the social value attached to each of them. (64)

In his conception of the artistic field Bourdieu complicates the role of individual social origin. As I argued earlier, the habitus of individual actors only makes sense in the flux of the social time and space Bourdieu alludes to above. The rhetorical move of this crucial passage is the dialogue between various temporalities and spaces in the social world – both “real” and symbolic. This passage also highlights the historical nature of the field itself and the manner in which a subject’s encounter with a field bears a closer resemblance to historicism than determinism. The event, in this case a literary text, is a singular merger of an individual subjectivity and the social history of the struggle for a particular species of capital. The consecrated (or banal) objects of human achievement the literary critic or sociologist is drawn to is, for Bourdieu, incomplete if the critic does not set herself the task of reconstructing the multitude of competing social and individual pressures that produced the work. Such a task is, needless to say, enormous but the degree to which the burden is met is the degree to which the critic appropriates the right to call her analysis properly scientific and historical. For Bourdieu the historical nature of the dialectic between field and habitus (position/disposition) precludes the reduction of the social world to the ambition of individual subjects or to the structure that moulds human subjects. In short, if we want to offer a systematic analysis of literature as a field then we must entertain the kind of partial and temporary reductions that define Bourdieu’s work. Only through

such an analysis can literature and art peacefully co-exist in Bourdieu's radically democratic project. If art remains aloof from its material origins, the ethical and political task of redistribution is obscured and denied in favour of the fictitious notions of merit and universality I outlined in my introduction.

In *The Field of Cultural Production*, Bourdieu outlines what he contends is the most complex strata of the literary field in the form of the restricted economy. The key element that marks off what Bourdieu refers to as the restricted economy of the literary field is the amorphous nature of the capital at stake (82). Bourdieu's interest in developing a theory of this portion of the literary field lies in the fact that the capital at stake is not accountable in terms of traditional conceptions of profit and accumulation. He argues that the economy of practice that reigns in the production of literature is based, "as in a generalized game of 'loser win, on a systematic inversion of the fundamental principles of all ordinary economies:...it excludes the pursuit of profit and does not guarantee any sort of correspondence between investments and monetary gains and...it condemns honours and temporal greatness" (39).⁷⁰ The peculiar nature of capital at stake makes the struggle for legitimacy in the field of "high" cultural production the centre of theoretical attention. The struggle for legitimacy in the field defines the competitors in the field and, by definition, constantly transforms the character of the capital at stake. The intangible nature of the capital Bourdieu identifies demands a certain sociological and historical rigour because, as Bourdieu argues, the struggle to appropriate the field of literary production is often a struggle to efface the social roots of the production in question. In *Distinction*, the theoretical strategy was guided by the goal of uncovering the

repressed economy of the heart of social representations of taste and art. In *The Field of Cultural Production*, the task is to demonstrate how the economy of cultural production not only differs from a utilitarian vision of human practice but also the manner in which it is already an implicit rejection of the economic view of human being. If one accepts this premise, the relationship between economics and art in Bourdieu's work becomes the ambiguous space of a particular kind of politics. In the next section, I will detail that politics in the historical context of art's struggle for autonomy.

3.

In *The Rules of Art* and elsewhere Bourdieu articulates a historical vision of art as evolving in concert with other elements of modern Western culture. Bourdieu's catholic view of history documents the development of Western liberal society in much the same manner as Jürgen Habermas. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas provides a definitive account of the tensions and contradictions that conditioned the modern conception of the public sphere and the politics of public utterance. Habermas' account begins in the late seventeenth century and traces a familiar history of disenchantment with onto-theological worldviews. This disenchantment leads, in turn, to the political and cultural development of public articulation as both a topological space and a way of Being that defines the individual as both autonomous and singular. Habermas' contribution to this well-told story is marked by the manner in which he ties the emergence of modern selfhood and "free" speech to the rapid urbanization and industrialization of European society (15). Habermas' patient analysis draws out the dialectic relationship in which the

development of a public space for intellectual work is dependent upon the division of labour and the economic liberalization of the market economy. Though much of the Western canon of literature and philosophy will come to define itself against market exchange, Habermas brilliantly draws out the irreducible relation between the market economy and the public spaces it conditioned: “To the autonomy of property owners in the market corresponded a self-presentation of human beings [as free and autonomous]” (46).

The diversification, automation, and expansion of the market created the competence and the leisure time necessary to incubate philosophical and literary work. The development of the market economy, in essence, provided the demand and the material conditions for its own cultural institutions and categories. It also paradoxically produced an immense desire for symbolic goods capable of distancing the refined self from the market. That desire found its market in the creation of an aesthetic disposition and, as Terry Eagleton puts it, the ideology of the aesthetic. As we shall see when we examine Bourdieu’s version of art’s struggle for autonomy, this desire eventually mutated into a rejection of market social relations. From its inception, however, artistic enterprise came to embody several ambiguous social and political spaces at one time. On the one hand it was the marker the privileged used to efface their own material conditions and, on the other, it became a counter-discourse to the vulgarity of the market and the social world of the bourgeoisie. As I argued earlier, Bourdieu justifies his seemingly blunt examination of symbolic goods as a means of providing specificity to the myriad of political pressures and commitments

co-existing under the banner of art. In examining Bourdieu's conception of autonomy we shall see just how contemporary these political ambiguities remain.

In *The Rules of Art* Bourdieu generates a theory of art based on what he reads to be the historical origin of art's struggle for autonomy. He regards this struggle as both decisive and highly relevant to contemporary efforts to reckon with art. The conquest of autonomy was nothing less than the creation of a new field of modern practice. It was and remains, however, what Derrida called that most peculiar of institutions. Its institutional status is largely a product of its struggle to remain independent of institutions and their measures of value. For Bourdieu, however, the struggle over definitions of the canon and the largely philosophical debate about what exactly constitutes a piece of art completely overlook what is most relevant and politically intriguing in the history of modern art. Bourdieu argues for a historical and sociological reading because it offers "a real chance of placing ourselves at the origins of a world whose functioning has become so familiar to us that the regularities and the rules it obeys escape our grasp" (RA 48). Bourdieu traces the concept primarily through nineteenth century art and literature. For Bourdieu, the concept of autonomy embodies the resistance of art, initially, to the dictates of the church and later the market and the modern state.⁷¹ In his unified theory of the public sphere Habermas also makes note of a general movement away from the patronage of the church and the aristocracy toward the development of a self-reflexive sense of subjectivity. Autonomy, according to Bourdieu's theory, is both a psychological and conceptual space as well as a real space locatable in the political economy of literary sales, galleries and the myriad of other institutions that trade on the market of

symbolic goods. For Bourdieu, then, none of the claims of aesthetic practice are intelligible without reference to the institutional struggles to define art. In the case of nineteenth century French literature Bourdieu argues that the struggle for autonomy was the defining struggle of modern literature as we now know it.

In *The Rules of Art*, Bourdieu writes a version of artistic history that attempts to make a general case out of the examples provided by Flaubert, and to a lesser extent, Baudelaire. The tension and contradiction of aesthetic practice within a market economy reach a breaking point in the struggle for autonomy. For Bourdieu, the struggle for autonomy is a breaking point precisely because modern art defines itself by attempting to reverse the values of economics in a society quickly being overrun by capitalist market values (RA 142). This breaking point represents, for Bourdieu, a set of tensions and political dilemmas inherent in the very practice of art (at least art for art's sake) in a market society. Though I will follow Bourdieu's path through the nineteenth century, I also hope to make the argument that Bourdieu's point is not localized in nineteenth century examples. Indeed through the rigour of his historical and social analysis it will become clear that a certain apogee was reached in the gestures of Flaubert and Baudelaire. In Derrida's terms, Bourdieu's argument illuminates a parasite at heart of the claims made for aesthetic practice in the nineteenth century. Though locatable in historical examples, no temporal, epistemological or political remedy exists for this parasite. In short, there will be no gathering *Aufhebung* of the dilemmas articulated in *The Rules of Art*. In my final chapter I will return, via Derrida, to the manner in which this parasite haunts

Bourdieu's larger conceptions of politics and ethics. For now, however, I will turn to the specifics of Bourdieu's notion of autonomy.

In *The Rules of Art*, Bourdieu equates the notion of autonomy with the political and social desire to integrate aesthetic practice into an entire way of Being. Though Bourdieu is generally skeptical of heroic social ruptures, he emphasizes the historically unique and, indeed, revolutionary nature of the struggle undertaken in the name of autonomy. This struggle offers a political genealogy of modern art as well as the promise of reviving the stridently anti-market ethos that founded it. In order to substantiate this sense of rupture Bourdieu examines the paradoxical movement in which the de-personalization of social relations, documented by Habermas, creates the conditions for a very personal sense of style and aesthetic practice. The roots of such a movement date back to the creation of literary salons and other public spaces designed to cultivate self-expression. However, for Bourdieu the world of the literary salon quickly ossified into the bearer of determinate political and social values. In this regard Bourdieu parts company with Habermas' view that "[i]n the salon the mind was no longer in the service of a patron; 'opinion' became emancipated from the bonds of economic dependence" (33). Bourdieu relies on first hand accounts that paint a picture of the salon as a political battleground between differing visions of art and politics. The salon also served to divide those with political and economic capital (the dominant in Bourdieu's terms) and those bereft of power but blessed with cultural capital (the dominated fraction of the dominant class). Bourdieu describes the dynamic as follows:

The salons are also, through the exchanges that take place there, genuine articulations between the fields: those who hold political power aim to impose

their vision on artists and to appropriate for themselves the power of consecration and of legitimization which they hold...by means of...the literary press; for their part, the writers and artists acting as solicitors and intercessors, or even sometimes as true pressure groups, endeavour to assure for themselves a mediating control of the different material or symbolic rewards distributed by the state. (RA 51)

It is against this reality as much as bourgeois society itself that the struggle for autonomy played out.

The rupture that opens up in early and mid nineteenth century is an extension of the social, political, and aesthetic ambition unleashed by modernity itself. The desire for self-expression that I tried to link above to economic expansion is echoed by Bourdieu's invocation of Weber in his account of the emergence of the modern artist. In the de-personalized world of the market Bourdieu suggests that "one might think of it by analogy with the oft-analysed shift from the servant...to the free worker who, freed from the ties of dependence which limited or prevented the free sale of his labour, is available to put himself on the market and to undergo its anonymous constraints and sanctions, often more pitiless than the gentle violence of paternalism" (RA 55). The historicity of Bourdieu's account is decisive here. The struggle for autonomy and the desire for the bohemian life that will culminate in the figure of Flaubert is the product of bourgeois power establishing its hegemony and, in essence, dividing within itself. The somewhat undivided picture that Habermas tends to present of the early formation of bourgeois categories is a product of the fact that the institutions of state power and taste had yet to be wholly formed. Once they had formed, to put it somewhat roughly, they had also prepared the historical and material conditions for the notion of the artist and art to emerge in the nineteenth century as it did in the struggle for autonomy. The development of bourgeois society widened the

circle of consumption and education in the realm of symbolic goods. This expansion, in turn, created a markedly different set of social relations. For Bourdieu, this new set of social relations is best characterized by the anonymous sanctions of the free market. Paradoxically, then, the art of Flaubert was a product of the universalisation of market social relations as much as it was a protest against it.

The dispersal of power, endemic to the creation of fields in modern society, was facilitated by two mediations between artist/work and society/market. First, the market of symbolic goods I articulated earlier is developed by critical spin-off efforts, namely, the financial reality of tickets sold or books published on the open market. In a slightly less direct way the powerful new positions offered by the burgeoning industry of journalism and mass-market publication also mediated cultural production. It is in this context that Bourdieu makes very specific claims about the work of Flaubert his contribution to the creation of the modern artist. Over and against the hegemony of bourgeois values *and* the culture industry Flaubert and initiates a struggle for autonomy and a pure art for art's sake. In this context the culture industry refers to what is both above (safe "official" art) pure art and below (mass-market serial novels and other "low" forms). In the struggle to define an art free from these constraints an entirely new field and way of Being was created. However, Bourdieu also offers a bluntly material and economic explanation for this new way of Being.

The teeming expansion of cultural workers at the start of the nineteenth century created a demand for jobs that could only be satisfied by the development of a market for symbolic goods. The economic and cultural expansion I have been

discussing created what Bourdieu calls a “proletaroid intelligensia” (RA 55).

Bourdieu defines this new *intelligensia* as an underclass of well educated workers seeking out their fortune in the world of art, culture and journalism. With this broad category Bourdieu lumps together those expanding their class horizons through education and those throwing off their privilege in exchange for the spoils of the symbolic economy. This underclass created the blend of energy and resentment needed to fuel the new field. Bourdieu puts this materialist point bluntly when he suggests:

With the assemblage of a very numerous population of young people aspiring to live by art, and separated from all other social categories by the art of living they are in the course of inventing, a genuine society within society makes its appearance. (RA 55).

The claim Bourdieu is making for autonomy as the crucial gesture of modern art rests on the notion that this gesture created a new and hitherto unimagined field of human activity and exchange. It is important to note, however, that Bourdieu is not making the naïve claim that prior genres, national movements, or particular artists had not toiled under the banner of autonomy. If this were so contrary examples would vault to mind. Bourdieu, however, is careful to argue that what he is emphasising is a rupture significant enough to create a field unto itself. He makes this critical distinction in

The Rules of Art when he argues:

But the society of artists is not merely a laboratory where this singular art of living that is the style of an artist’s life is being invented as a fundamental dimension of the enterprise of artistic creation. One of its major functions, and yet one always overlooked, is to be its own market. This society offers the most favorable and comprehensive welcome to the audacities and transgressions that writers and artists introduce, not only into their works but also into their existence (itself conceived as a work of art); the rewards of this privileged market, if they do not manifest themselves in cold cash, have at least the virtue of assuring a form

of social recognition for those who otherwise appear (that is, to other groups) as a challenge to common sense. (RA 58)

Bourdieu is, in essence, claiming that this style of living connected directly to aesthetic practice has no historical antecedent. The creation of this new way of Being comes with an almost unparalleled psychic and material tax. The resistance to classification embodied by autonomy provided for both a sense of the heroic historicity of the moment as well as simultaneously stirring the cauldron of political, social, and psychological resentment and dislocation.⁷²

In the conception of autonomy I have been forwarding thus far, Bourdieu clearly identifies the ethical here as the defiance of the market. However, as I examine his reading of Flaubert I would like to introduce another conception of the ethical at work in Bourdieu's reading. This sense of the ethical is embedded in the abstraction of the aesthetic gesture itself. In *The Rules of Art*, Bourdieu persistently reminds us that modern aesthetic practice reject bourgeois norms of taste as much as it rejects social (usually socialist) and political art. Bourdieu unites the ethical and aesthetic gesture in the refusal to moralize. This element of modern aesthetic practice goes to the heart of the struggle for autonomy. Despite the bohemian experimentation and lifestyle excesses, Bourdieu is drawn to a figure like Flaubert because he charts a course for art that mimicked its traditional genres while withholding the content, entertainment or didactic message associated with the genre. The aesthetic gesture of withholding edifying content becomes, for Bourdieu, a political gesture manifest in the formal innovation of Flaubert's work. In reviewing Bourdieu's reading of Flaubert I want to explore this politics of form as a preface to my final chapter on Bourdieu's politics.

Flaubert's oeuvre is central for Bourdieu because, for Bourdieu, Flaubert more than any other writer made art's social struggle for autonomy central to his own aesthetic strategies. In "Bourdieu's Refusal" Guillory links Bourdieu's interest in Flaubert directly to the politics of form I want to highlight:

What is most important for Bourdieu in Flaubert's stance, however, is not just disdain for the market...but the fact that the artwork that enacts this refusal is itself supremely accurate in its representation of the relation between culture and the market. (390-91)

Flaubert's aesthetic practice simultaneously offers an alternative to the negation of the destitute, miserable bohemian, the bourgeois "knights of good taste," and the vulgarity of market capitalism. Bourdieu makes this point through a novel reading of *Sentimental Education*. In *The Rules of Art*, Bourdieu consistently claims that Flaubert, particularly in *Sentimental Education*, is a sociologist *avant la lettre*. He argues that *Sentimental Education* could thematically be classified as "sociological if it were not set apart from a scientific analysis by its form, simultaneously offering and masking it" (31). This claim seems somewhat strange given what I have been saying thus far about Bourdieu's notion of autonomy. However, in *Sentimental Education* Bourdieu identifies an intricate social force field that stages the relation of power faced by the "pure" artist. While the figure of Arnoux represents the pole of art and politics, the Dambreuses represent the pole of politics and business. These key characters "function as symbols charged with making and representing the pertinent positions in the social space" (51). It is against these two worlds that the artist will find himself socially situated. It is for this reason that Bourdieu insists on seeing Flaubert's achievement, at least partially, in sociological terms.

At the very height of the struggle for autonomy and art for art's sake Flaubert plots the social trajectory that informs the autonomy of the artist. In the figure of Frederic, Flaubert creates a character that inhabits an indeterminate social space in a manner that sheds light on the entirety of the social world. It is at this level that Frederic is a case study of the artistic position in his sentimental wanderings. Though, of course, it does not fall to Frederic to synthesize these insights, he is nonetheless the bearer of what might best be called the disinterest required for autonomous aesthetic practice. By conflating Flaubert's notion of autonomy with the architectonics of *Sentimental Education* Bourdieu argues that the formal structure of the novel is practically indistinguishable from sociological analysis:

In situating himself, as it were, at the geometric intersection of all perspectives, which is also the point of greatest tension, he forces himself in some fashion to raise to their highest intensity the set of questions posed in the field, to play out all the resources inscribed in the space of possibles that, in the manner of a language or musical instrument, is offered to each writer, like an infinite universe of possible combinations locked in a potential state within the finite system of constraints. (100)

Flaubert's analytic position is cognate with the distance Bourdieu hopes to establish through reflexive sociology. Bourdieu also lifts a portion of his entire theory of capital and field from *Sentimental Education*, which is the literary correlative of his sociology. Flaubert's work is also, however, the political correlative of Bourdieu's sociology.⁷³ In fact Bourdieu conflates the rejection of morality and sentimentality with what he sees as Flaubert's most important aesthetic and social achievement: "To reject the stylistic properties and conventions of the established novel and to reject its moralism and sentimentalism is all of a piece" (RA 108). Without reference to dialectical political answers, Bourdieu constructs his politics from the "scientific"

view of the social world he offers. He mines the politics behind Flaubert's call to treat "the human soul with the impartiality that one puts into physical sciences." For Bourdieu, it is this impartiality that allows Flaubert to offer a sentimental education of social capital and ambition. That education is particularly poignant and political for Bourdieu because it rejects sentimentality and moralism as a response to the divisions of the social world.⁷⁴ In his writing Flaubert refused the call to moralize as an aesthetic and political imperative; in his theory Bourdieu uses the sociological imagination to keep moral sentiment clear of politics.⁷⁵ The precision that marks Flaubert's description of social ambition mirrors Bourdieu's own attempt to reconstruct the social world in a manner that radically refutes voluntarist notions of social mobility.⁷⁶

In articulating political and aesthetic practice Flaubert created a space for himself as a writer and, as importantly, inaugurated a poetics of form that is still with us today. In the gesture of lifting the realistic novel from its context and frustrating the very aesthetic and social aims associated with the novel, Flaubert appropriates the autonomy of art by, paradoxically, emptying art of its edifying content and constructing form as the arbiter of value. By suspending the appeal to an external referent, Flaubert hopes to create an art that in and of itself could provide the means for imagining less corrupt, less disingenuous social relations. Bourdieu argues that the pure gaze is what challenges the notion of the free subject, making meaning and trading value in a free market social economy. Moreover, the struggle to legitimize this gaze was both political and aesthetic:

In fact the pure gaze which in those days it was a matter of inventing (instead of being content with putting it to work, as today), at the cost of breaking the links

between art and morality, requires a posture of impassivity, indifference and detachment. (RA 110).

This formal innovation throws into relief the demand that art edify by virtue of content. The hyper-reality of Flaubert's realism undermines confidence in the solidity of the real world enough to inscribe a different definition of art. At the same moment (and in the same novel), Flaubert is also able, through Frederic, to explore the social and political fate of such a stance. This is what Bourdieu means when he makes the somewhat hyperbolic claim that Flaubert created the terms of legitimacy for modern art (RA 105). When framed in the context of the self-reflexive style of *Sentimental Education* the claim becomes less exaggerated.

The universe of "possibles" laid out in *Sentimental Education* is Flaubert's counter-discourse to the nearly impossible stand that he and other "symbolic revolutionaries" of modern art take towards form. The challenge was both cognitive and social. Cognitively, autonomy meant it was "not sufficient to constitute as beautiful that which is excluded by the official aesthetic, to rehabilitate modern, base or mediocre subjects; a power must be affirmed that belongs to art to constitute everything aesthetically by virtue of form, to transmute everything in a work of art by the efficacy peculiar to writing" (106). It is Flaubert's use of the peculiar efficacy of writing that defines his ability to challenge the social reality he writes about and to inscribe a new measure of legitimacy for art. Bourdieu seeks to mimic this gesture on the sociological plane through his reflexive sociology. As I have been arguing throughout, Bourdieu's self-reflexive sociology monitors its own gesture (and intellectual work generally) as a means of shattering the doxological belief in the power relations that determine social subjectivity. From Flaubert and the quest for

autonomy, he learns the power of field as a historical and political explanatory tool. Through Flaubert he also learns the terms upon which he would mount his own resistance to the market. In what follows, I want to examine Jonathan Loesberg's reading of Bourdieu as a means of exploring how and why Bourdieu turns to aesthetic practice as a political resource. Loesberg's argument will also introduce some of the problems with Bourdieu's conception of politics that will be explored in my final chapter.

In "Bourdieu and the Sociology of Aesthetics," Loesberg makes an explicit link between Bourdieu's sociology and his aesthetic theory. Loesberg echoes the claim I made earlier that Bourdieu's turn away from structuralist anthropology is contemporary with his engagement with aesthetics. Loesberg claims that Bourdieu's analysis is "simultaneously aesthetic and sociological" and that he "deploys the aesthetic he simultaneously analyzes" (1034). In addition, Loesberg argues that Bourdieu's entire theory of practice is at stake in his theory of aesthetics: "If he can produce a sociology of aesthetics, if he can comprehend aesthetics within a sociological explanation, then the aesthetics that permeates his key anthropological concepts and ideas will be contained within the sociology of that larger practice" (1037). Loesberg's argument turns on Bourdieu's desire to construct a dynamic, reflective account of experience free from what he sees as the formal impositions of structuralism. In attempting to explain social practices and experience structuralism negates what is primary and historical about experience; the sense of singularity that is the essence of what makes it an experience or event. No retrospective model can do justice to that event, precisely because it has passed. Loesberg describes this impasse

as follows: “On the one hand, one cannot describe primary experience and still convey the feeling that makes it primary. On the other hand, the descriptions one can offer lack accuracy precisely because, lacking the feeling of primariness, they do not correspond to primary experience” (1035). He identifies this impasse as the moment of political and textual undecidability for many postmodern commentators and, indeed, Bourdieu is often classified as a postmodern sociologist. However, such a label fails to take account of Bourdieu’s obsession with mounting a politically engaged sociology that builds out from this double bind. As I have already argued this desire led him to develop concepts like habitus, field, and capital. Loesberg takes this contention one step further and argues that in developing notions like habitus and symbolic capital Bourdieu, in effect, relies on aesthetic categories of perception and appreciation. Loesberg’s argument definitively addresses the apparent contradiction between Bourdieu’s relentless analysis of the class politics at the heart of aesthetic practice and his reliance upon and investment in that practice.

In examining habitus Loesberg pays particular attention to the paradoxical nature of end and goal in the concept of habitus. In his argument Loesberg makes the case that habitus and several of Bourdieu’s other key terms bear a striking resemblance to Bourdieu’s sense of aesthetic practice. Habitus is that strange social temporality in which subjective will corresponds to outward constraint (or opportunity). Habitus is also the social temporality in which agency and constraint are locked in a perpetual and irreducible dialectic. Against economic versions of agency, which sketch agency in terms of the freedom and (of) choice proper to the market, Bourdieu “favors elaborating practice as a form of play whose inner truth is labor

against an economism that would...reduce all practice to the labor of accumulation” (BR 285). By using habitus to determine the relative autonomy and freedom a human agent has in relation to objective social and economic structures, Bourdieu sets distance from the market and symbolic, economic, and real violence as an explanatory principle *and* as his heuristic political goal. Though habitus guides human action without a teleological plan or recoupable rationality, it does, however, admit, for Loesberg, “a certain kind of systematic regularity that agents follow, even if unconsciously” (1035). The notion of habitus allows Bourdieu to make compelling arguments based on a certain observable “regularity.” This limited access to the praxis of the most mundane elements of daily existence and dialogic interaction allows Bourdieu to construct what I take to be among the most sophisticated modern accounts of power relations. However, the very iterability that defines that regularity precludes any teleological politics or sociology. It is this element of Bourdieu’s practice that leads Loesberg to claim that Bourdieu’s oeuvre has at least as much in common with aesthetics as it does with traditional notions of sociology. In the *Logic of Practice* Bourdieu’s oft-quoted definition of habitus as “informed by a kind of objective finality without being consciously organized in relation to an explicitly constituted end; intelligible and coherent without springing from an intention of coherence and a deliberate decision; adjusted to the future without being the product of a project or plan” (51) finds an aesthetic correlative in Kant’s definition of beauty in *Critique of Judgment* as “the form of purposiveness of an object, so far as this is perceived in it without any representation of a purpose”(18).

Loesberg goes on to recount the congruence of a certain aesthetics in Bourdieu's work by examining the concept of symbolic capital. As I suggested earlier Bourdieu leans heavily on the notion of symbolic capital for his theory of power and the reproduction of power relations. Symbolic capital is that form of capital that has the power to legitimate other forms of capital by veiling their economic interest and allowing them to be (mis)recognized as legitimate. Loesberg cites the consensus of Bourdieu scholars when he notes that Bourdieu regards symbolic capital as the condition of all capital and exchange in modern economies. Symbolic capital usually functions in the service of other forms of capital. In the case of aesthetic practice, however, Loesberg identifies a form of capital that defines its value by the very act of flouting economic exchange. The "economic world turned upside down" in aesthetic practice is the economic world run to ground, robbed of the mediating role of symbolic capital. It is this point, I would argue, that is as important as all of the more obvious political and social stakes in the struggle for autonomy. The struggle for aesthetic autonomy was, in some sense, the struggle to create a form of value that did not rely upon symbolic capital. Bourdieu's analysis adeptly deconstructs that dream of purity. However, the point remains that in aesthetic practice Bourdieu discovers the sociological truth of all exchange: the mystically empty foundation of exchange and value itself. It is almost as if, 150 years later Bourdieu arrives at Marx's theory of the commodity fetish -- only through aesthetics rather than political economy.⁷⁷

The other implication of Loesberg's argument is that, for Bourdieu, aesthetic practice can only be fully articulated when (re) located in a sociological context. This point, left in summary form, is a fair précis of the argument of those who accuse

Bourdieu of reducing aesthetics to sociology. The value of Loesberg's argument, however, is that it goes a long way toward dispelling that argument by demonstrating the aesthetic sensibility at the heart of Bourdieu's key terms. It is critical not to mistake this contention as an argument for a simple correspondence between aesthetic and sociological terms or a denial of the discursive and social specificity of aesthetic practice. Rather, the task is to make the case that the demands that Bourdieu puts on his own sociological practice are best answered with a mode of thought that bears a family resemblance to aesthetic practice. For as we have seen, symbolic capital, the truck and trade of aesthetic practice, is the foundation (or non-foundation) of all social value. The self-reflexive effort to create symbolic value, in and of itself, independent of economic value, best explains the centrality of aesthetic practice in Bourdieu's project. His reading of nineteenth century French literature demonstrates that sociology provides an intellectual practice capable of articulating the singularly strange and liminal space of art. That dialogue, however, between art and sociology disturbs the very measure of value that founds the epistemological desire of disciplines like sociology and political science. The founding paradox of Bourdieu's theory is that this dialogue can only take proper shape if the autonomy of artistic practice is historicized and, more importantly, if the specificity of aesthetic practice is respected as a field. Pace his critics, Bourdieu's theory of aesthetics only works if the singularity of the aesthetic gesture is respected. Without a proper genealogy of its status as a field and an explication of its relation to the larger social world, aesthetic practice will be reduced to a theology.

In my final chapter I will demonstrate the manner in which Bourdieu does not follow the radicality of his own gesture when he moves to the larger question of politics and praxis in a (post) modern world. To conclude this chapter, however, I want to further explore the manner in which the historical genesis of the artistic field carries a latent and powerful critique of capitalist exchange and the division of human labour endemic to that exchange. Bourdieu identifies a resistance to and deconstruction of capitalist exchange value (and use value) in the very gesture of reversing the value of the economic world in the creation of art.⁷⁸ As we saw in Guillory's "Bourdieu's Refusal," this resistance to exchange value defines Bourdieu's political investment in aesthetic practice. Loesberg builds on the argument I mounted with Guillory's help in the previous chapter by separating the specific action of a group of writers from the critical potential of the gesture itself:

In terms of what this group of artists does, their actions do not amount to exchange and creation of capital in terms of some incalculable analogy to economic capital and exchange. Rather, the activities the group engages in just constitute the value creating activities of exchange and disguised exchange that found all capital. It may be that, in creating this socially definable group, artists must also create an object to which their immediate relation is one of disinterest, but if the purpose of that relation is to allow one to enter into a larger system of exchanges, then a full description of aesthetic activity has to comprehend various sociological interests. (1047)

Loesberg's argument here augments my point that Bourdieu turns to Flaubert and other nineteenth century writers for more than simply historical or academic reasons. Bourdieu turns, then, to the aesthetic practice of nineteenth century writers both as an instinctive gesture for his own practice as well as a political act designed to reunite aesthetic thought with its more political impulses. In this context, the political encompasses two modalities. The first sense of the politics Bourdieu derives from

aesthetic practice is as a counter-discourse to economic reductions of human subjectivity. As I argued in the previous chapter aesthetic practice mitigates against a dual division of labour in capitalist society, that is, the division of theoretical labour at work in the hegemony of economic explanation of social life. In addition Bourdieu, like Marx, looks to aesthetic practice as a means of imagining a de-reified form of social action. Such a space, usually cast as utopian, is completely anathema to the logic of accumulation that marks capitalism.⁷⁹

The second conception of politics that can be gleaned from Bourdieu's work, however, complicates the space from which one could launch a critique of market social relations and an alternative register of value. The second more complex politics at work in Bourdieu's thought calls for a form of responsibility and politics not measurable in traditional conceptions of politics, sociology, and aesthetics. Bourdieu's work focuses on the social rupture in the work of Flaubert. However, Bourdieu also alludes to an epistemological and ethical fissure in the formal gesture of modern art. The ethical fissure Bourdieu outlines is not just a turn away from the moral mandate of literature. It is also the first stirring of the ethics of undecidability that finds its most intriguing elaboration in Derrida's work. Epistemologically, the division of labour of art in a capitalist society undermines not only the fetishistic exchange value that grounds that society. It also permanently undermines a stable measure of value from which one might contest the prevailing system of value. I want to slowly build the argument that none of these fissures can be contained within the confines of aesthetic discourse or reflexive sociology. This "trouble" spills over into the kind of politics Bourdieu hopes to draw out of both his sociology and his theory

of art. Despite the degree of reflexivity and novelty I have been claiming for Bourdieu's thought, he does not explore the effect of these fissures on his own political desire.

The historical turn of Bourdieu's sociology of art is designed to recast notions of autonomy and disinterest in a manner that takes full account of the historical, social, and political stakes of their creation and reproduction. In Flaubert, Bourdieu finds an art in which the struggle for autonomy had not yet become ossified and naturalized. In short, in *Distinction* we have an exploration of what art has become when its practice and consumption takes place in utter seclusion from a larger system of exchange. In *The Rules of Art*, we have an exploration of an aesthetic gesture that did not have the luxury of not "comprehending [the] various sociological interests" at the core of its practice (28). Far from dismissing aesthetic practice, then, Bourdieu's theory of art can be read as a relentless attempt to redress the arbitrary separation of art from its social and political origins. Indeed, it is the rigour of sociology that allows Bourdieu to respect and dwell within the internal logic of aesthetic practice and, in turn, it is sociology that refuses to allow that logic to be reduced to a stale theology or a political homily. It will now be my task to show how Bourdieu's sociology and politics can only co-exist very uneasily, if at all, with his theory of art. Before doing so, however, I want to test some the claims I have been making for Bourdieu's thought against the work Charles Altieri. In doing so I hope to crystallize some of Bourdieu's sharp sociological distinctions by using the example of an important thinker who attempts to wrench a conception of political and social agency from aesthetic practice.

CHAPTER 3: Charles Altieri and the Aesthetic Imaginary

The political is a domain we must endure, rather than identify with.

Charles Altieri

Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry

In Painterly Abstraction in Modern American Poetry Charles Altieri

approvingly quotes David Antin's warning that "[f]rom the Modernism you choose you get the PostModernism you deserve" (1). In this chapter I want to argue that in Altieri's case the Modernism you choose yields the politics and ethics you deserve. As I build this case, I hope to also show how Altieri's project creates the need for the political and social analysis that I have been forwarding in Bourdieu's name. Altieri is an apt choice to reinforce the need for such a critique precisely because I think his project is founded on an exemplary belief in the ability of aesthetic practice to deliver the raw material needed to construct a political project. Altieri's faith in aesthetic practice is inseparable from his belief in the ability of literature to produce viable models of political judgment and social identities and solidarities. The kind of belief that defines Altieri's work is endemic to the structures of investment and fealty that Bourdieu identifies to demarcate the notions of field and capital in the context of art. Altieri's work is also an important counterpoint to Bourdieu's work because it is defined by a perpetual struggle to preserve the specificity and distinction of art as a performative discourse while addressing the equally pressing need to show that such a demand can be reconciled with a liberal (even progressive) political project. It is for this reason that I am provisionally claiming an exemplary status for Altieri's work. In light of the case I have been making for Bourdieu's work thus far, it seems to me that the arguments that define Altieri's project are precisely the arguments one would need to make in order to push back against Bourdieu in the name of literature.

Bourdieu argues that the very distinction and exclusion that defines literature as a social field calls for resistance and critique – so far, that is, as one's project is

defined by democratizing access to the capital needed to read and respond to literature. In Altieri's writing we have a vibrant and unapologetic voice claiming that the political concerns that drive Bourdieu and other politicized readers of literature can be addressed from within the domain of aesthetic practice as it stands, or at least as it stood during the most productive years of his Modernist poets. In order to examine the case that Altieri builds we will first need to follow the intellectual trajectory of his career. In the early portion of his career Altieri was concerned with revaluing canonical poets and arguing for the inclusion of marginalized poets into the canon. In his first book, *Enlarging the Temple*, Altieri puts forward spirited briefs on behalf of poets such as Charles Olson and Gary Snyder. I use the term briefs in this context in order to cite the kind of quasi-legal structure Altieri sees himself responding to. For Altieri, the canon is an established body of judgment upheld by an informal body of judges who include or exclude texts on the basis of the assessments brought forward on behalf of particular works and genres. This body of judges is largely an ideal community composed of the most talented minds who define themselves and establish their credentials by identifying and perpetually defending the edifying values of literature. When Altieri responds to this community he affirms his belief in the conception of the ideal judge who bears a resemblance to the poetic, literary version of what John Rawls calls "the original position."⁸⁰

Despite such idealist commitments, Altieri is also very invested in the role the academy and less formal cultural institutions play in protecting and preserving the standards of the canon.⁸¹ Though Altieri has retained these investments throughout his career, a subtle shift occurs in the latter portion of his career. This shift reaches

an apogee in two of his later books, *Subjective Agency and Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry*. I believe this shift in Altieri's career was precipitated by the emergence of the "canon wars" in the 1980's.⁸² Altieri addresses the political and intellectual debates about the canon directly in *Canons and Consequences* (1990), in which he lays the groundwork for his later philosophical and political concerns. Even in *Canons and Consequences*, however, Altieri's energies are devoted primarily to the values of the canon and the poets he is reading. Though one could argue that political concerns were always latent in Altieri's reading of particular poets, the claims of his earlier work are generally localized in particular poets or, in the case of *Act and Quality*, in the philosophical claims of speech act theory.⁸³ In his later work *Subjective Agency and Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry* Altieri extends the claims he makes about aesthetic practice in what I want to claim is a defensive action designed to preserve the values he has invested in poetic practice from a hostile takeover by political forces. I make this claim not to cast Altieri as some kind of straw man conservative critic, but rather to draw some important lessons from his struggle to preserve literary and aesthetic practice as a separate social, emotive, and intellectual domain. Indeed, the relevance of Altieri for my argument is defined by his belief in literature as a field and, more importantly, by his strident argument that this very belief is what defines and sustains the socio-political relevance of literature.

As I offer close readings of the ornate arguments that shape his work, I will establish that Altieri, in effect, is arguing that in order to preserve the disciplinary and political integrity of poetry one must first save it from politics. By measuring these

claims in the context of Bourdieu's political and sociological theory of intellectual work, I hope to show how Altieri systematically domesticates the ethical and political challenges Bourdieu poses to readers of literature. I also want to frame my argument so that the symptomatic gestures Altieri makes in the name of aesthetic practice are not reducible to Altieri's practice alone. By examining the case Altieri makes it will be possible to draw some critical conclusions about the political dead ends that follow from fighting to preserve literature as a separate and distinct sphere of social and intellectual distinction. In order to substantiate this argument I will divide the chapter into three numbered sections. In the first section I examine Altieri's abstract and philosophical conception of subjectivity. I argue that his theory of subjectivity is grounded in a congenital aversion to the political economy of agency. In my reading, Altieri's engagement with Kant's concept of *sensus communis* forms the bridge between his abstract theory of subjectivity and his reliance on aesthetic examples. Altieri's version of *sensus communis* grounds his political claims for literature. More importantly, these claims confine Altieri's theory of literature to a "phenomenology of... [the] happy few" (*IRS* 88). Once I have established the basic assumptions of that argument I will demonstrate, in section two, why Altieri is dependent on aesthetic examples to realize the public and political ambition he has for his theory. In section two I will focus on his reading of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound as representative examples of how Altieri deploys particular poetic examples in the service of larger claims in the name of aesthetic practice. In this section I also argue that Altieri's aversion to sociological and political assessments of subjectivity is inseparable from his theory of aesthetic practice. In the third and final section of the chapter I will

return to *Subjective Agency* in order to assess Altieri's political claims in light of what we have gleaned from Bourdieu's work thus far.

1.

Altieri's work is shaped by the belief that faithful readings of "great" poets can offer two specific theoretical resources. First, the creative and self-legislative nature of aesthetic practice offers a more compelling account of human agency than what Altieri calls the hermeneutics of suspicion.⁸⁴ Second, this renewed form of agency can restore a sense of ethical judgment and responsibility that is evacuated by postmodern conceptions of agency. The conception of subjective agency that Altieri sketches is a reaction to contemporary notions of subjectivity that are so obsessed by the contingency of agency that the subject is left no credible ground from which to reflect on its own construction and, more importantly, no ground from which to justify ethical and political pronouncements. For Altieri, the linguistic skepticism of thinkers like Derrida and Foucault leads to an unsustainable and ultimately empty concept of agency.⁸⁵ Arguing that this weak version of subjective agency has regrettable political consequences, Altieri poses this dilemma in specifically political terms:

To the benefit of whom or what, finally, is the truth finally banished, this meaning deconstructed? For without these questions, such critique is likely not only to exacerbate our 'schizo' inability to think our present, but also to serve capital in its erosion of the traditional form of family and community (361).

The model of subjective agency Altieri formulates, then, will carry significant political stakes. Aside from demanding a closer reading of Modernist poetry, the abiding concern of Altieri's career has been countering postmodern theories of

subjectivity and politics. One could argue that there are two currents in Altieri's thought are united by his belief in art's ability to address the void inevitably left by strictly philosophical or political conceptions of subjectivity. The crucial balance Altieri must strike is between a contingent and fluid notion of selfhood and the expressed demand that subjective agency be imbued with a "strong" model of ethical and political judgment. The most detailed treatment of this dilemma is found in *Subjective Agency*.

In *Subjective Agency* Altieri consistently relies upon aesthetic practice to unite the first and third person elements of selfhood. To take but one instructive example, Altieri argues that Malevich's *Red Square and Black Square* "takes the very relation between self and *sensus communis* as its central drama" (127).⁸⁶ In Malevich's painting the jarred expectation (or "tilt") of abstract modernist art is a private, existential experience that demands a legible public voice. The relation between self and *sensus communis* shapes Altieri's notion of responsibility:

As radically free individuals displaced from distinctive empirical lives, the audience nonetheless feels its relation to the tilt as carrying a deep sociality, since all subjects who try to attune themselves to the work so that they can make judgments are likely to occupy the same emotional state...And this disposition concretely willed and concretely carried out, provides an analogy for the more radical fusion of will and objective substance that dialectic shows us is necessary for our identifying with the moral good. (127)

In Malevich's work the tilt represents the disconcerting juxtaposition of images that frustrate the desire for coherent pictorial themes. However, the tilt is also meant to enliven the constructivist will. The radicality of Altieri's subjectivist impulse is carried in the above passage by the "nonetheless," nonetheless sets a tone of veritable surprise at the self being drawn into the dialectic of recognition.⁸⁷ The challenge of

constructing ethical and political responsibility in Altieri is intimately tied to giving reasons why a “radically free” individual would willfully bind herself to a social order. Philosophically, this tethers Altieri to a conception of the self that is temporally prior to its ethical commitments and social conditions. Politically, I want to argue it ties Altieri to a form of judgment that ratifies the substance of the self in an elitist tribunal defined by aesthetic disposition. What is critical to demonstrate, however, is the fact that this conception of a self, constructed prior to and against the social, is a profoundly social and intellectual construct.

Altieri’s project attempts to build a bridge between individualist will and the submission of that will to social negotiation. He is clearly arguing that the self is dependent on a public legitimacy, but the critical point is that the self is not, in the first instance, dependent on the social world for its affirmation. He locates the origin of the self in the voluntarist power of the will and judgment. Ethical responsibility in Altieri, then, is based purely on the choice to turn outward and measure our identity against cultural grammars and social structures. Altieri is in good company when he tries to sketch the psychological intensity that would compel us to seek validation from the larger community. However, he has fewer resources to draw upon when he consistently sketches the substance we construct for ourselves as identities largely unaffected by social forces. As I have been arguing throughout, Altieri finds the best analogy for the construction of the self in the freedom and performativity of aesthetic practice. Geoffrey Galt Harpham captures the relation between Altieri’s notions of subjectivity and agency:

In the absence of an interior subjective core, we become who we are by virtue of the ‘style’ that marks our acts. Agency shapes itself aesthetically, and the styles

we inhabit are best understood as artifacts, or expressions – purposive structures shaped by understandable intentions. (12)
 Altieri's voluntarist notion of agency is, then, justified tautologically by the aesthetic models it supplies for itself.

In *Subjective Agency* Altieri is largely silent about the complex philosophical and political problem of the degree to which subjective agency is constructed or conditioned. More troubling, Altieri is not deterred by the degree to which his models of judgment rely on an elitist conception of the social world. The social legitimacy he claims for his notion of subjective agency is dependent on a highly specialized competence that implicitly excludes those lacking this disposition to respond to art. In the above passage and elsewhere in his work, Altieri talks about a shared model of judgment and a shared vocabulary with those who read and respond to literature as the basis for his political claims on behalf of art. In the end, however, I will claim that Altieri's cultural politics amount to what Bourdieu calls the "phenomenology of... the happy few," rather than a convincing claim for art or politics (*IRS* 88). The argument that punctuates *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry* and *Subjective Agency* is that the ideal audience for the theory of agency and literature he proffers is modern American poets and their most astute critics. This point will become critical as our reading of *Subjective Agency* unfolds. In his drive to preserve the vitality of the poets from derivative political readings, Altieri's vision of the social never breaches the confines of poetic practice. His conception of subjective agency is so concerned with protecting poetry from "ideological shibboleth[s]" that he paints himself into an aesthetic corner (312). His disavowal of politics makes his own claims

highly suspect. In order to substantiate this contention I will examine Altieri's the unique theory of politics and ethics presents in *Subjective Agency*.

Subjective Agency is an expansive, brilliant attempt to synthesize Altieri's theory of subjectivity. *Subjective Agency* is also defined by Altieri's attempt to repay the debt he owes aesthetic practice for his theory of agency. Altieri's interest in poetic practice leads him to a sense of subjectivity that leans heavily on first person expressivity. The expressive paradigm affords him an opportunity to unite the creativity of aesthetic practice with the "serious" concerns of the philosophical tradition to develop an ethical framework for praxis. Further, Altieri looks to an expressivist notion of subjectivity as a means of resisting the more dogmatic and metaphysical tendencies of ethical thought. Expressivism is proffered as an attempt to address a blindspot in dominant, empirical, philosophical notions of subjectivity:

Empiricist thinking offers a fundamentally two-term model for knowledge based on correlating image and world. Because that model lacks any term for handling the desires that frame and direct representations, it cannot easily handle pressures of change or deep conflict among possible incommensurate perspectives and practices, nor does it have the tools for connecting how signs work within the system that gives them meanings to the ways agents make investments in their uses of those signs. (97)

What is lacking from this empiricist model is the creative dynamic element of subject formation. Though Altieri never specifies what tradition of philosophy he is denoting as empirical, it is clear he has in mind rationalist theories that rely heavily on categorical method. By definition, such accounts are poorly situated to account for those elements of subjectivity, like desire, that overrun conceptual distinctions. The task of assessing our attempts at self-creation and self-description leads Altieri to ask after a more supple discourse for his theory of subjectivity. Altieri finds that discourse

in aesthetic practice and a particular account of how first person expressivity is translated into public judgment.

Expressivist considerations allow Altieri to tie the need for ethical and political considerations to a radically singular conception of selfhood. In *Subjective Agency* he argues that his conception moves beyond the mere presentation of subjective desire and will because in expression we learn “who I can represent myself to be and how that representation enables me to express myself as responsible for this contingent life” (105). The evaluative impulse that defines this process is, again, expressed in the first person: “As I constitute who I can say I am, I also bring into being models of who I can want to be” (105). The obvious problem for Altieri is how to unite first person stances with “third person frameworks of judgment” (111). If he cannot do so he will not be able to address what he sees as the shortcomings of traditional humanistic accounts of agency and, more importantly, he will not be able to establish a distance between his thought and the work of contemporary thinkers like Derrida whom he finds so unsatisfactory.

In order to meet this challenge Altieri turns to Kant and freely translates his conceptions of subjective agency, aesthetic practice, and judgment. Altieri’s investment in Kant follows quite logically from his concern with uniting the first person expressions of selfhood with third person frameworks of judgment. Kant takes this very question up in his third critique when he applies the method of his first two critiques to determine the criteria for judgments of taste. In his desire to account for the dynamic, synthetic elements of human subjectivity, Kant sought a form of knowing that, paradoxically, moves beyond the purely cognitive elements of reason

found in the understanding. As Howard Caygill, Terry Eagleton and others have pointed out the renaissance of interest in the *Critique of Judgment* is, ironically, a product of postmodern critiques of the rational unified subject.⁸⁸ The struggle to conceive of subjectivity on more creative, aesthetic grounds led naturally to Kant's meditations. In addition, the renewed interest in Kant by thinkers like Lyotard stems from the need to find alternative models of public judgment and community than those handed down from the Enlightenment.⁸⁹ As Henry Allison puts it in *Kant's Theory of Taste*, Kant's notion of taste and aesthetics was "not a private but a social phenomenon, inseparably connected with a putative *sensus communis*" (1).⁹⁰ At one level, the appeal for Altieri is obvious here. He is drawn to Kant because not only does Kant point the way to an aesthetic conception of selfhood he also provides a model of judgment to round out that sense of self. However, what is unique about Altieri's engagement with Kant is how seriously he takes the possibility of conceiving of subjectivity in aesthetic terms.

In most recent treatments of Kant the aesthetic notion of self is thrown into serious doubt by Kant's equally rigorous demand that this selfhood be both universally available and publicly legible.⁹¹ My earlier discussion of universality in Bourdieu's work outlines how limited philosophical claims of universality turn out to be, but Kant offers a rich set of resources for thinking through how our model of judgment must inevitably be public and social. Altieri reads directly against the grain of this impulse in Kant and instead insists on what Kant's aesthetic notion of selfhood offers the inner struggle of the constructivist will. The importance of this sense of self will become much clearer when I examine what Altieri stakes on his reading of

Eliot and Pound. In order to set the stage for those readings I want cite a passage that defines Altieri's engagement with Kant and with Modernist poetry:

Kant's principles...afford us a model that clarifies the vision of artistic lawfulness and self-realization that the artists set against the frustrations engendered by the political order. If they could cast their art as the pursuit of something that simply could not be incorporated in any practical model of living, something that claimed its authenticity as a refusal of the compromises demanded by common sense, they too could insist on a dignity that stemmed from seeking absolute conditions of being. Art would have its version of pure rationality, and the artist's legislative act could be at once the expression of her deepest subjective interests and the articulating of the transpersonal structures that give those interests an objective form. And then one could simultaneously explain one's frustrations with the compromises required by politics and offer one's own constructions as an alternative, within which one could experience human powers unlikely to be cultivated in any political order. Forced back on self-reflexive resources, the artists could cultivate a 'fascination with the unlivable,' which required their pushing imaginative investments to the point where the creative mind seems unsatisfied with any merely social theatre. (377)

Nowhere in Altieri's work are his sympathies more directly aligned with the poets he reads. In this version of Kant the dilemma of *sensus communis* is emptied out and swallowed up by "artistic self-realization" that defines its authenticity by its resistance to any political order. As we will see, in *Subjective Agency* Altieri is unable to conceive of the political as anything other than an impediment to authentic selfhood. The constructivist impulse in Altieri's writing is so overwhelming that all else is merely social theatre.⁹²

Nonetheless, like Kant, Altieri's thought seeks to move beyond first-person claims on selfhood and subjective power to argue for a form of ethics and responsibility. In his theory of rationality Kant explores the power of the mind to move from the concrete to the universal by deriving what is universal in the concrete. This model of cognition served Kant well in his attempt to account for our empirical encounter with the world and our practical use of that knowledge. In the realm of art

and morality, however, Kant notes that the concrete did not yield a universal. This schism led Kant to differentiate between judgment one could call determinative versus those judgments that are “merely reflective” (*CJ* 18-19). In the realm of the merely reflective, however, Altieri locates the condition of human freedom and responsibility. Reflective judgment is the site of freedom and responsibility because it liberates the subject from “the directions imposed by fixed categories” (*SA* 114). Rather than searching for a means of transcending the merely reflective Altieri suggests “we may be able to get by with responsibility based on accepting the pathos of being this contingent being making these specific efforts” (115). In order to sign off on this compromise, however, Altieri still needs a way to move beyond the pathos of first person contingency to a vision that compels the subject to take responsibility for the “self-aware determining factors” in the subject’s own action (115). Further, we are left to answer the question: “how will we be able to develop substantial public criteria for assessing such special and privileged processes of determination?” (115). Like his contemporary counterparts Altieri wants to locate a conception of responsibility on the grounds that ethics is conditioned by the chasm between subjective praxis and objective value. Ethical responsibility is, indeed, only imaginable in that chasm. What sets Altieri apart is his drive to restore the self-legislating element of subjectivity at the heart of Kant’s project. The self-legislating power of the self reaches its apogee, for Altieri, in aesthetic practice. Aesthetic practice provides both a resistance to the reductions of the understanding and sufficiently fluid terms for exploring and testing various modes of judgment. Working through Kant’s notion of genius, Altieri argues that the discursive differences that

mark art off from “straightforward discursive communication” are analogous to the dilemma of finding ethical purpose in that which resolutely refuses to vouchsafe anything other than its own radical singularity. For Altieri, the task of accounting for the social meaning of aesthetic practice is almost cognate with the demand that we find a shareable context where the singularity of the self could be said to take responsibility for its action.

Altieri ties responsibility to the sense of purposiveness and freedom found in Kant’s aesthetics. Responsibility is to be found in the purposiveness a self brings to its own expression and constitution. The power of aesthetic practice is located in its ability to exemplify a conception of legislative agency which is not reducible to any determinable concept or context. The aesthetic act displays the purposive power of the will and generates a “desire for articulate substance enabling us to feel a shape to that will, which takes form as a responsibility for the meanings we cultivate” (121). In Altieri’s schema substance is nothing less and nothing more than purposiveness itself; purpose with no determinative truth independent of the self’s ordering powers. It is, for Altieri, the ability of the subject to reflect on its own process of construction in what “reveals the state of one’s being and gives us material by which to consider reorienting ourselves” (124). Once this reorientation (“as if the agent had literally taken on new substance”) occurs it can be said to become a “matter for ethical reflection when the purposiveness gets defined in relation to roles and concepts”. However, Altieri leaves as unspecified what kinds of agency are not defined in relation to roles and concepts and are, therefore, not a matter for ethical consideration. It is the reflective capacity of the subject that generates a credible conception of ethics

for Altieri.⁹³ The key mediating term between mere “attentive investment” and purposiveness that demands ethical reflection is the will. Willful action to construct the self invariably leads to expressive desires and a concomitant desire to have the product of one’s desire appreciated in the public sphere. What is critical to note, however, is that this substance is ostensibly negotiated separately and in many ways in opposition to the social order. As is the case with Pound, the founding ethical gesture is fidelity to the creative act of self. That self is then submitted to the public order where it can be augmented or hindered and even radically changed. It is, however, clear that for Altieri the defining strength of the self is largely independent of the social world. The account of responsibility Altieri is making is based on a faith in what, I think, can best be described as a speech act: “We rely on the expressionist sense of a dialectic between subject and substance so that the claims for identity must be understood as continuous with the actions – each qualifying and reinforcing the other” (125). The unity of the claims that the self makes for itself with the action it undertakes to substantiate those claims is the heuristic measure of responsibility. The measure of this ideal is how we adapt to a cultural grammar and how we negotiate what we have made of that grammar with “social situations” (125). Throughout *Subjective Agency*, the construction of the self is prior to an engagement with the social world. It is not that the social or political context for selfhood is irrelevant for Altieri, it is simply secondary to the emotive and expressive investments that form the core of subjective agency and aesthetic practice. As I have been arguing thus far, Altieri is unwilling or unable to ask after the degree to which his notion of subjectivity and aesthetic practice is always already ensnared in the social theatre. As

we shall see when we examine his reading of Pound and Eliot he responds to the distressing political commitments of his poets (as well, one might assume, to the rather depressing array of contemporary political models on offer) by eschewing the very notion of political commitment altogether. The pressing historical and temporal dilemma of praxis gets folded into the meditative models supplied by Modernist American poetry. As I shall now seek to demonstrate, the conception of subjective agency Altieri wagers on his poets commits him to a highly compromised politics. As importantly, I also want to argue that there is good reason to believe that neither Pound nor Eliot actually supplies the validation for his theory of subjective agency in the way Altieri imagines they do. In *Painterly Abstraction in Modern American Poetry*, Altieri argues that “rather than offering only impoverished and defensive rivals of empiricist statements, poetry can present itself as a considerable social force” (315). In what follows I want to offer an overview of this claim in two separate contexts. First, I will examine Altieri’s reading of two Modernist American poets, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, in order to evaluate what it is Altieri draws from specific aesthetic practices for his notion of subjective and political agency. Second, I will turn to *Subjective Agency* in order to interrogate the philosophical language Altieri uses to make his claims for aesthetic practice. Though I think Altieri’s larger vision of literature cannot hold, his careful reading of literary texts offers important clues about the politics of reading literature politically.

2.

What is singular about Altieri's work is the stubborn patience with which he attempts to wrench ethical and political principles from his unapologetically elitist aesthetics. In *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry* Altieri lays out his credo as follows:

Everything that I argue for depends on the following idealist tenets: By attending to probable authorial intentions, and by close-reading individual art objects in a provisionally reverential tone we can project as exemplary certain imaginative modes of thinking and feeling that have the capacity to influence how we dispose ourselves toward the world and toward other people. (360)

Later in the same chapter Altieri makes the case that only by adopting this idealist stance are we able to convincingly frame subjective agency. Altieri also argues that these idealist tenets are the best hope for those who read literature politically. Altieri adopts this position as a response to postmodern critics who elide the political by too quickly traversing the literary act and ignoring elements of aesthetic practice that may trouble the founding assumptions of such political praxis. In *Painterly Abstraction in Modern American Poetry* he lays down the critical gauntlet against postmodernism:

We are left with a politics without a polis, an obsession with ethical judgment without a carefully established set of ethical principles, and a hunger for action deprived of any means of showing how what people have valued in aesthetic experience can claim the kind of material effectivity that their doctrine demands. (362)

It is clear from this passage that Altieri is wagering a great deal on his reading of poetry. In order to assess Altieri's argument we shall have to turn to his reading of

Modern American poetry. For Altieri, Modern American poetry most effectively addresses these dilemmas and provides a critical vocabulary capable of assessing its own claims for subjectivity and politics. Altieri's reading of Modernist poetry often takes on an evangelical zeal as a response to highly caricatured or weak versions of postmodernism.⁹⁴ I will not engage Altieri's crusade against all that is postmodern except in critiquing his notions of subjectivity and politics. However, Altieri's position must be put in the context of the fate Modernist art and literature has endured of late.⁹⁵ In examining Altieri's dynamic reading of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound I will simply cite Altieri's investment in Modernist American poetry as means of buttressing a particular notion of subjective and political agency. Altieri's desire to change the way in which Modernist poetry is read and assessed has two primary grounds. The first is that the extreme politics adopted by many practitioners of Modernist art makes them particularly susceptible to thematic political readings. Such critical positions made it very easy to sweep away what is most resonant in Modernist aesthetic practice. Altieri saw his critical task as recovering those resources without turning a blind eye to the disastrous political history of certain artists. Second, the sheer difficulty of reading the work has made it marginal.⁹⁶ Altieri is certainly right to point to simplistic readings of Modernism that reduce it to the poor, underdeveloped cousin of postmodernity. However, I want to focus on just how wedded Altieri is to Modernist poetic practice for his conception of politics and subjectivity.

Though *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry* is ostensibly an examination of the "painterly" influence of other arts on Modern poetry, it is much more accurately characterised as Altieri's manifesto in defense of Modern American

poetry. *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry* synthesizes all of Altieri's critical ambition to build a coherent theory of subjectivity from aesthetic practice. For Altieri, the cultural, political, and cognitive questions posed by his poets have found no equal in contemporary critical or artistic production. The poets Altieri examines share a common performative struggle to stage the dilemma of finding a measure for value and judgment while at the same moment staging its absence. As Charles Taylor argues in *Sources of the Self*, the incommensurability between fact and value gives shape to the aesthetic and political commitments and drives the formal innovation of poets like Eliot and Pound (464). Altieri's reading focuses on the confluence between formal innovation and a larger view of subjective agency. Altieri sets the problem out by suggesting that "Modernist art demonstrated the capacity of formal energies to reject mimetic structures and still retain extraordinary semantic force by relying directly on the production of exemplary attitudes that an audience might project into extra-artistic context" (3). He goes on to claim that by focusing on the "specific values" we might grasp "more accurate and more intricate versions of own contemporaneity" (3). Altieri, then, takes the cognitive map staged in Modernist poetry and extends it to demonstrate the purchase it still has on contemporary problems of agency, politics and the social meaning of aesthetic practice. The full range of this reading is at work in Altieri's assessment of Eliot and Pound. Pound and Eliot also represent the most treacherous political ground for Altieri's critical ambition. Examining how he handles that challenge will be a critical first step in assessing Altieri's own conception of subjective agency.

In his reading of Eliot, Altieri tries to push back against thematic readings of Eliot's politics by focusing on the critical contribution Eliot made to the formal innovations of Modern poetry. T.S Eliot is central to Altieri's subjective and aesthetic claims because, for Altieri, Eliot's oeuvre represents the pinnacle of poetic attempts to reconcile the power of first person expressions with the potentially crippling demands of third person valuations. By examining Altieri's reading of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "The Waste Land" I want to reinforce the degree to which he depends on aesthetic practice for his theory of subjectivity and political agency. In addition, I want to use both readings to reinforce the case that it is politically important that aesthetic practice not only grounds Altieri's conception of subjectivity, but that it also provides the terms upon which the political and historical vitality of this subjectivity are to be judged. For Altieri, reading Eliot from the standpoint of his conservative politics or religious beliefs is to ignore elements of his poetry that challenge the very space from which to launch such a reading. In the following passage from "The Theory of the Emotions in Eliot's Poetics" Altieri identifies the current in Modernist readings he rejects:

The history of Eliot criticism offers a depressing form of justice: the very vocabulary for appreciating poetry that he did so much to shape has turned out to be in large part responsible for the decline in his power and influence in the academy. Ambivalence now becomes effete-ness, complexity idealism, and the desire for intricate unities defensive projection of mastery to ward off threats of castration. Consequently what has been staged as a revolutionary modernism gets taught primarily as a reactionary evasion of historical realities from which we can be freed by a less pretentious modernism or, even better by an enlightened postmodernism. (1)

Though Altieri is careful not to dismiss Eliot's reactionary politics, he attempts to account for those values in the context of the unrequited intellectual and ontological

desires that shape Eliot's poetic ambition. He glosses over Eliot's prose in an attempt to link his cultural ambitions to his formal poetic innovations. In a manner typical of his style, Altieri attempts to find what it is in the richness of the poetry that challenges the poet's own least tenable positions. As I shall argue, however, Altieri does not deploy this reading to critique particular political positions rather he uses his conception of aesthetic practice to carve out a social and subjective space that defines and measures itself by its capacity to resist the contradictions and compromises of political positions per se. In doing so Altieri charts an elitist course for both politics and aesthetic practice. In his reading of both Pound and Eliot Altieri's politics are fatally undermined by his persistent denial of the social world and the compromises that define subjectivity agency. By foregrounding the self-reliant subject in the manner he does Altieri is able to look past Pound and Eliot's disturbing political commitments – not because he seeks to apologize for them but because these particular political commitments are, strictly speaking, beside the point when set against what poetry can offer subjective agency. Altieri makes the link between his conception of subjective agency and political agency explicit when he claims that “the way to change society is to change the ways in which individuals understand the powers available to them as separate and self-defining agents” (*PA* 485). As I have been claiming thus far in my argument, aesthetic practice is the meta-discourse Altieri looks to in order understand and enrich subjective and political agency. I want to be clear that I am not claiming that Altieri falls into the trap of claiming aesthetic practice as a separate autonomous realm. What is important to note in Altieri's argument is how political and social dilemmas are folded into the subjective powers

aesthetic practice makes available. For Altieri, aesthetic practice does not nullify the social world, rather it offers a means of overcoming the social world and its thematic and reductive shortcomings.

Altieri sketches Eliot's early oeuvre as an engagement with Baudelaire and the latter's attempt to turn disenchantment into a formal poetic principle. Eliot's sense of Baudelaire is very much in line with Bourdieu's notion of Baudelaire as the founder of an aesthetic practice bent on reckoning with the intractable irony of a subject for whom the only certainty is a world that refuses to cohere. Altieri identifies the tension in Baudelaire as the struggle between the knowledge of the self's existential emptiness and the relentless desire of the will to overcome that self-knowledge. For the early Eliot the task was to reckon with this tension in a way that could resist the irony that proved too corrosive for Baudelaire. Altieri characterises Eliot's response to this task as follows:

[Poetry] must be able to treat Baudelaire's tension between knowledge and will sympathetically, as the fundamental modern dilemma; yet it must not take itself so seriously that it celebrates having defined a psychology that makes suffering a form of nobility....And it must try to locate through form a relatively independent vantage point from which to maintain the necessary distance (145).

The distance Altieri identifies here is precisely the autonomy I sketched in the last chapter. The properly social form of this distance is a renunciation of contemporary cultural and social institutions. For Altieri, this alienation defines the modern dilemma of the subject he speaks of above. The decline or disintegration of the social order only compounds the sense of ontological dislocation. The tension between distance and identification that Altieri hones in on is analogous to the dilemma of first person expressivity and third person abjection that Eliot inherited from Baudelaire.

The critical advance that “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” makes on Baudelaire’s practice is that it stages the abjection that crushed Baudelaire. The act of staging this abjection takes the form of folding the lyric ego into an endless chain of metonymic desire. Under Eliot’s influence, however, this staging becomes abstracted from a subjective context we can readily identify with. The distance is achieved by formalizing the mind’s attempt to escape the perpetuity of the metonymic substitution. The poem also chokes off any hope of satisfying the frustrated desire. In Altieri’s critical vocabulary the term he uses to mark the distance required for this formal innovation is abstraction. For Altieri, abstraction is embodied in modernist poetic practice by a refusal of the lyric ego and all of the attendant Romantic conceptions about the unity of imagination, nature, and language. The reader who, like Eliot, is striving for a way out of Prufrock’s pathos will be forced to imagine a different response to the spiritual and psychological dead ends of modern existence. If such an alternative is to be imagined it must move beyond the first person desire that, for Altieri and Eliot, reached a breaking point in Baudelaire. In order to achieve this breakthrough Eliot attempted to marshal the resources of poetry to develop what Altieri calls an “historical intelligence” (148). The distance that Eliot imposes on the reader through the maudlin, mock-heroic status of Prufrock is what allows the reader the space to reflect on what that historical intelligence might look like. Paradoxically, however, the power of the poem lies in its ability to incite the kind of desire that stirs and torments Prufrock and Baudelaire while insisting upon a critical distance from those emotive registers. The trans-historical registers at stake here are modes of desire and feeling capable of transcending (or at least coping) with the encroaching

instrumental brutality of modern existence. For Altieri, Eliot is the poet who offers the most productive vocabulary for generating utterances about human emotion and desire capable of resisting the sanction and repression of the critical intelligence.

Though Prufrock himself is unable to overcome this malaise Altieri argues that the reader's experience of the poem might just be enough:

One may not be able quite to overcome the Prufrock within, but one may be able to use that knowledge as a means of capturing what all human voices seem to share, as they face ...Modernity (150).

The sense of a shared voice is what defines Eliot's cultural ambitions for Altieri and, more importantly, offers him a way of talking about subjective agency as a matter for the public sphere.

In his reading of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" Altieri examines the tension between distance and identification in the poem's internal structure. That task is complicated by the fact that the poem is constantly "chok[ing] on its own rhetoricity" (145). The play in the poem between pathos and profundity, paralysis and parody, is an emblem of both participation in and resistance to the suffering it illuminates. The formal distance of the modern poet is the innovation that allows for this kind of duplicitous reflection. However, it was also Eliot's "unique model of self-referential authorial activity" that transposes this reflection from the terrain of the individual to the realm of the "transpersonal" or intersubjective (149). This move, through the impersonality of the modern poet voice, allows us to glimpse "how understanding might make us aware of how problems are shared and perhaps even how this sharing suggests certain transpersonal aspects of the psyche that have transcendental implications" (145). The transcendental aspect of Eliot's vision is well

rehearsed, but what Altieri's reading emphasizes is the move from the personal to the transpersonal and the struggle to make the personal public. Altieri's reading emphasizes a double bind in Eliot's work that cannot be accounted for rhetorically or poetically. Altieri also argues that Eliot's poetry can and should be read in a manner that capitalizes on the myriad of poetic and philosophical resources for our contemporary dilemmas of agency. For Altieri, the most engaging of these avenues is the recurrent desire for a union of the self-referentiality of modern consciousness and a mode of judgment that can peacefully co-exist in the public sphere. This desire is nothing less than the chasm between fact and value that Altieri finds most powerfully articulated in Modern poetry. Altieri consistently poses a virile, potent notion of self-creation as the only viable answer to this chasm. The most pressing task, therefore, of the modern poet is finding a way to "drama[tize] a constructivist will that [does not] need the sanction of universals" (163). This drama takes the form of the virile subjective agency that informs Altieri's work. The poets Altieri reads provide a sufficiently strong set of resources to address both the public and private demands that threaten the modern psyche.⁹⁷ As I expand this reading, the degree to which Altieri's own conception of politics is dependent on the ideal of authorial self-intent that governs the poets he reads will become clear.

Altieri differentiates Eliot's early work from what comes later by the move away from the dramatic monologue. Of course, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is so shot through with irony and cynicism it would be impossible to argue that Eliot had a deep attachment to the genre of dramatic monologue. However, it is significant that the dramatic monologue is abandoned even in its parodied form. For

as Judith Butler argues there is always a reformist belief in a restoration of the “proper” when parody is deployed.⁹⁸ When Eliot had come to write “The Waste Land” he no longer had even a cynical, parodied investment in the coherent, ordering ego. Therefore, the task of form in Eliot’s work is to demonstrate the crippling particularity of the empirical world while, at a minimum, providing the means to reflect upon that predicament. Altieri resorts to a philosophical vocabulary to gauge Eliot’s notion of subjective agency:

Instead of finding himself trapped within the intricacies of identification, he could treat the tension between sympathy and judgment as a much clearer, more literal embodiment of an essential contradiction between first and third person principles within the psyche. And then, rather than recapitulate essentially historical dilemmas, he might explore transhistorical states, where the poem would include within itself the very impulses that lead us to construe the world in subjective terms. (150)

The gulf between first and third person principles is at the heart of Altieri’s argument for the purchase of Modernist poetry on contemporary debates about subjective agency.⁹⁹ Modernist poetry offers Altieri a means of constructing the world in subjective terms without relinquishing certain claims about ethics, judgment and the social world. As importantly, poetry offers Altieri the means to construct a creative notion of selfhood that is defined by its resistance to the reductive claims of the social world. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” is a founding gesture, for Altieri, of the complex claims he hopes to make for poetry.

Altieri argues that in “The Waste Land” the tension between the “constitutive mind and recalcitrant world” becomes a “complex tragic rendering of public life” (156). The relentless drive of the mind to bring order to the pattern of modern, urban life is at the heart of the echoes and alleys of the poem. Though the alleys set out in

“The Waste Land” are generally dead ends the engine of desire in the poem is for a public voice. Altieri argues that “The Waste Land” correlates “the psyche’s most intimate fears with its most abstract cultural dependencies” (159). The cultural models Eliot found at hand were inadequate and inspired most of his conservatizing ambition for culture. However, the key point Altieri gleans from the poem is that the internal anguish of a mind canvassing its own powers is the site where renewal of the public mind must originate. For Altieri, reading “The Waste Land” becomes analogous to the precarious task of constructing and taking responsibility for a sense of self in the face of the historical and existential pressure of Modernity.¹⁰⁰ The bleak vision of “The Waste Land,” paradoxically, reminds the reader that “complex, self-interpreting quests can provide much richer and more powerful versions of ‘meaning’ than any thematic assertion” (159). Altieri clarifies this point when he links the task of coming to terms with the complex meanings and abstractions at work in modernist poetry with the struggle to take ownership of one’s subjective agency:

Where answers had been, there only self-consciousness about one’s limitations can emerge. But there remains the possibility of a heroism based on the degree to which one explores who one becomes because of those changes. (160)

It is this heroic quest that founds most of Altieri’s ethical and political claims about subjective agency. The novelty of Altieri’s reading lies precisely in the fact that he makes claims for Eliot as a poet of the public sphere. More precisely, he claims Eliot as a rich resource for imagining a renewed form of social life generated by his self-reflexive meditation on modern identity. The tension between first and third person utterance conditions the retreat to the internal, formal energy of the poem.

Paradoxically, however, it is this provisional retreat that provides the grounds for

Altieri to make what might best be described as Kantian claims for the ability of aesthetic practice to supply a model of judgment and an allegory for subjective agency. In the case of Eliot Altieri argues that he “transforms...individual withdrawal into a mode of access to values that lead back into public order: minimally, as the basis for new modes of sympathy; maximally as the ground for understanding the forms of consciousness that sustain those who accept religious dispensation” (148). In this, its initial form, the claim Altieri is making is quite modest. However, Altieri will have to look to a more secular poet to further pursue his claims.

In Ezra Pound, Altieri finds a poet who deploys and builds on the level of abstraction in Eliot’s work. Eliot’s move beyond the lyric voice is indispensable in Altieri’s contention that the aesthetic practice of Modernism offers a form of subjective and political agency. However, Pound is the better exemplar for Altieri because Pound saw his task as working out “an individualist constructivism that could compete with the ethical models sustaining traditional epic poetry” (284). Altieri focuses on the early cantos because they prove that the “heritage of Modernist abstraction creates a personal presence in the poem’s structuring action that commands respect and makes individual assertions seem a threshold bordering on some more intense, and perhaps more sublimely tragic, form of composed energies” (320). This point is borne out, for Altieri, in “Canto I” in which Pound deploys the metaphor of translation. Pound turns to translation as a means of exploring what the *Odyssey* has to offer our present historical moment. The task of translating and preserving the energy of the *Odyssey* becomes a practical exercise in the self-mastery that Pound and Altieri share. The individual self assertion at stake here is borne out

by the act of translation *The Cantos* forces upon the reader. Pound looks to the rich historical transmission in the *Odyssey* as well as the power of the work itself to stand as a metaphor for the energies the poem has to offer the constructivist will. From the very first canto the reader is drawn into a labyrinth of meaning through the encyclopedia of literary allusions and historical contexts. The historical fuel of the poem serves two distinct purposes: to point to exemplary historical models *and* to serve as “sources of energy” for transforming our fallen modern moment into a period that might itself one day come to be viewed as exemplary (309).

Altieri extends this reading to “Canto II” by claiming that the historical and literary echoes summon the reader to construct a sense of self he or she is ready to take responsibility for. For Pound that challenge is met by creating an epic poetry equal to the demands and malaise of the time. Despite the contemporary cultural dilemma that obsessed Pound, *The Cantos* are firmly rooted in the tradition of epic poetry. In “Canto II” Pound draws explicitly on Browning’s “Sordello.” In Browning Pound finds an exemplary practitioner of the long poem and, more importantly, a poet using a real historical character as the hero of a poem. Browning draws on Sordello’s legend as a twelfth century troubadour poet and warrior in order to make his own case for the heroism of the poetic imagination. Pound extends this desire but also undercuts the desire for heroes in the first two lines of the canto: “Hang it all Robert Browning/ there can be but the one ‘Sordello’” (6). There may be only one Sordello but Pound imposes an ironic distance from Browning in order to reinforce the singularity of our being. In the canto Pound achieves that distance by a reinterpretation of Sordello’s history (“my Sordello” [6]) in order to meet his own

cultural needs. It is also in the recognition of this singularity that Pound locates his hopes for a culture that values and nurtures characters like Sordello, Sigismundo Malatesta, and Guido Cavalcanti. For Pound this singularity can only be found in a hostile counter-discourse to the lyric conceits of Romantic poetry. In clarifying the historical account in Browning's "Sordello" Pound is also, as Kenner puts it, "trying for a style, and looking for a 'Sordello,' a focusing hero" (360).

As Altieri stresses, Pound demanded to be judged for the poetry he wrote *and* for the life that poetry allowed. Both the life and the poetry must be judged by the weight of the cultural and historical ambition they could tolerate. The seemingly random tissue of allusions paradoxically intensifies our powers of concentration on the immediacy of our existential moment. That immediacy then morphs, for Altieri and Pound, into an ethical obligation to act and build our own epic. The difficulty of reading and processing *The Cantos* is rewarded with an individualistic aura of confidence in our capacity to live up to our historical obligations. In a telling assertion Altieri defines the pragmatic imperative of *The Cantos* by suggesting that "the concrete is a world we win— not a world we are given" (310). This passage buttresses my contention that Altieri takes the individualist ethos of his poets and converts that ethos into a theory of subjective agency. The difficulty for Altieri then becomes to articulate a political position in favour of this individualism without succumbing to the disturbing social fantasies that haunt Pound, Eliot, and so many other Modernist writers. As we shall soon see, it is Altieri's very aversion to the social world that makes this challenge both impossible and politically compromised.

In place of the desire for spiritual depth we find in Eliot, Pound, most poignantly in *The Cantos*, deploys history as a means of intensifying the subjective imperative to act and to take responsibility for what you do as the sum total of who you are. Such a vision negates the onto-theological conclusions Eliot draws from the same existential dilemma. In order to manufacture the kind of energy proper to the human subject Pound fuses the poetic form of impersonal abstraction with an eclectic collection of historical figures and cultural models (such as Calvalcanti, Sordello, and Thomas Jefferson among others). It is the subjection of historical examples to the impersonality of his method that allows Pound to simultaneously resist a humanistic or nostalgic history of his heroes and draw out energy and purpose from what he hears in history. For Pound, history teaches the perpetual struggle to transform individual praxis into a public form and the further struggle to find a public language and public institutions capable of honoring that individual trial. The public and political ambition of Pound's work is marked by a ferocious individualism. Altieri is intrigued by the paradox of Pound's individualism because the individual or self in Pound is visible and possible only within concrete historical and social institutions. Altieri argues that for Pound "[a] person's claim to value as an expressive individual depends entirely on his ability to create articulate structures for the self within public life" (337). Public life in Pound (and I am arguing in Altieri) has a dual sensibility here. Pound looks to previous concrete historical episodes as a means of projecting the energy and will that drove particular achievements or exemplary postures of individuality. In addition, Pound had a keen sense of the manner in which that individuality had to be contained within a larger social whole that appreciated and

nourished individualist gestures. This was critical for Pound on two levels. The socius would have to offer the economic and cultural milieu for the kind of authentic individual interventions he idealized and the socius would have to evaluate the gesture.¹⁰¹ In both Pound and Altieri, however, this socius is either so truncated as to be unrecognizable or located in the ideal space of literature itself. *The Cantos* were to be, for Pound, “testimony” of poetry’s power to order and energize personal praxis as well as to restore a sense of personal responsibility for that action. Altieri sketches this point as follows: “instead of relying on the purported inwardness characteristic of Romantic heroes, Pound sought objective measures of character by emphasizing the degree of certitude achieved in the process of transforming subjective desire into articulate public structures that literally carried on the work of defining possible principles of value” (284).

It is clear then that Altieri, like most critics, locates the ethical promise of Pound’s work in the compositional energy of poetic practice.¹⁰² The intensity and immediacy of poetry allows a conception of agency and responsibility not reducible to a determinable moral, political, or theological context. In fact, Pound’s ethical claims are premised on the absence of such contexts. Simply put, Pound’s dilemma was that “so long as no ethical correlate emerged, it was impossible to jettison idealist baggage” (314). The ethics he supplied through his poetic practice were, paradoxically, designed to cure the desire for idealistic conceptions of ethics. Though in its abstract form the ethical gesture of Pound’s poem is premised on the absence of external, onto-theological terms of validation or value, the ferocity of Pound’s individualist stance quickly leads him to political investments that respect the sanctity

of the individual will. In Altieri's reading, then, the task becomes how to preserve the model of subjective agency that Pound worked out in his poetry without having to dismiss his politics or cede the case that the politics voids the poetic practice. Altieri is certainly right that we must "grant ... a certain amount of interpretive generosity, if we are not to make ourselves appear more tyrannical and shrill than Pound at his worst" (315). In his reading of Pound, the interpretive generosity that Altieri grants comes in the form of embracing Pound's individualist notions of tradition and self-creation without looking to the anti-democratic institutions Pound courted.

Altieri's political commitments are on display in his response to the vexing questions that persist about Pound's politics. In his reading of *The Cantos* Altieri has made a provisional case that Pound's poetry is, ostensibly, the measure of the poet's life. Altieri argues that the "psychic economies [of]...[p]oems written over a lifetime [are] a literal test of the lives that poetry elicits and helps authorize" (315). This argument is a challenging one to sustain in Pound's case. In order to make the case Altieri leans heavily on what he calls the ethics of individualism. Pound's relentless drive to restore the intensity proper to the creative power of the self is, for Altieri, Pound's highest poetic achievement. It is also the embryo of an ethics capable of carrying the promise of Modernist poetic practice to buttress a viable politics and vision of the social world. However, Altieri also acknowledges that Pound's curious, brilliant form of individualism led Pound to his politics. In order to reckon with this contradiction Altieri adopts a two-pronged strategy. First, he makes the case that Pound's earlier cantos did not foreclose the social model adequate to its individualist ambitions. With those earlier cantos, then, Pound worked out a "distinctive project"

of poetic practice that need not be “subordinated to more general social programs” (315). While Altieri is right that one can embrace this individualistic ethos of Pound’s work without falling for fascist social relations, I want to argue the scholastic social relations Altieri does engage compromise his political credibility. The political perils of the individualist stance that Altieri and Pound endorse will become more apparent if we make demands of them that go beyond the scope of the social world and public sphere they imagine and hope to convince us of.

The second, and more problematic, part of Altieri’s case is the assertion that “individualist principles are more likely than most to succumb to the temptation of trying to realize, through state power, those commitments that cannot be accomplished by means of example and discussion” (316). However, those “dangers are counterbalanced by the fact that these principles provide us with the moral terms on which to resist the tyrannies they engender” (316). As I suggested at the opening of this chapter, it is this hope for an ethico-political vision from aesthetic practice itself that sets Altieri apart from the more conventional divides of recent debates about the politics of literature. This ethico-political ambition is a common thread through most of Altieri’s readings of particular poets.¹⁰³ Pound is set apart by his ability to “see the self as positioned within a vortex of competing and conflicting human possibilities” (317). Differentiating and deciding among these conflicting possibilities is both the ground of selfhood and the basis for claiming his work as an ethical system. Pound’s ethos of the individual is not narcissistic in Altieri’s eyes because of his engagement with history and the struggle to “[g]ather from the air a

live tradition” capable of both judging and redeeming contemporary social institutions (*Cantos* 542).

However, what is not clear from Altieri’s argument is how Pound’s poetry provides us with the terms to resist what is least palatable about Pound’s more regrettable political pronouncements and trenchant individualism. For both Pound and Altieri, the individual will is formed in spite of rather than because of the social world. In addition, the focus on the will that Altieri finds appealing in so much modern American poetry reinforces a conception of art that relies on the power and strength of individual traits to account for human subjectivity. This conceit finds its way into the form and content of Altieri’s analysis. The social power of art seems to rest almost solely in the imagination of the creator and recognizing that power is primarily an individual enterprise. There is very little in Altieri’s argument about exactly how literature exerts social force beyond subjective charisma.¹⁰⁴ Like Pound and Eliot, he is left to rely on conservative notions of individual will, literary tradition, and a social order commensurate with those values. In my third and final section I want to show precisely how Altieri’s subjectivist notion of agency is indistinguishable from his regressive cultural politics.

3.

Altieri’s attempt to “save” aesthetic practice from postmodernism and other threats is premised on severing aesthetic practice from the distributive stakes of the social world. By distributive in this context, I am referring to the tendency in Altieri to universalize the aesthetic disposition as a means of asserting the political and social relevance of poetry. Paradoxically, the terms of Altieri’s universalism are premised

on the individualism that drives his aesthetic theory, which implies that all individuals bring the same competence and capital to the arena of subjective agency. This assumption is buried in the language of merit and ownership that characterizes his conceptions of agency. Altieri is not in a position to question such an assumption because to do so would require seriously considering the degree to which the social world circumscribes our acts of self-creation. In universalizing aesthetic practice as he does, Altieri necessarily denies the political reality that the competence to cultivate a measure of social judgment via aesthetic practice is not universally distributed. At the level of common sense, Altieri would surely recognize this point but the political claims he makes for aesthetic practice are utterly unencumbered by the theoretically and politically vexing economy of symbolic capital.

As we saw in the introduction and chapter one, Bourdieu's theory of the field demonstrates that the historical genesis of literature and aesthetic perception generally was a slow and thoroughly political process. The political and social grounding of aesthetic practice is inseparable from its development as a field of separate and autonomous activity. The discursive and social difference of art also carries a political message of denied universality and symbolic capital. In *Pascalian Meditations*

Bourdieu captures this point in a passage worth quoting at length:

The fundamental ambiguity of the scholastic universes and of all of their productions – universal acquisitions made accessible by an exclusive privilege – lies in the fact that their apartness from the world of production is both a liberatory break and a disconnection, a potentially crippling separation. While the suspension of economic or social necessity is what allows the emergence of autonomous fields, “orders” (in Pascal's sense) which know and recognize only their specific law, it is also what, in the absence of special vigilance, threatens to confine scholastic thought within the limits of ignored or repressed presuppositions, implied in the withdrawal from the world. (*PM* 15)

As we saw earlier, Bourdieu insists on examining literature as a social field in order to unearth the repressed social and economic stakes at the heart of the aesthetic disposition. However, Altieri's arguments for subjective agency and poetic practice insist that whatever social force poetry exerts over us occurs in spite of rather than because of "the social theatre". In Altieri's work the status of literature as a field is, strictly speaking, beside the point. However without a historical and social point of reference for aesthetic practice and consumption Altieri has no way to measure his social and political claims outside the circle of the aesthetic and intellectual fields. The political echo between literature and economics, for example, is not relevant quite simply because the disposition, habitus, and historicity of aesthetic practice itself is never in question in Altieri's work. As Bourdieu's work demonstrates, taking this dilemma into account disturbs both the definition of the aesthetic object and the kinds of claims that can be made about the social world. In *Pascalian Meditations*, Bourdieu argues that when aesthetic practice is dehistoricized and the social and material base of aesthetic practice is denied the aesthetic disposition itself quickly coalesces into a self-interested form of political amnesia. The general tag Bourdieu gives this view is, of course, the scholastic disposition. For Bourdieu, the scholastic disposition is a social view of the world so imbued with questions of abstract knowledge that its defining social gesture is the tendency to "perceive the world as a representation, a spectacle, to survey it from above and afar and organize it as a whole designed for knowledge alone" (*PM* 21). In Altieri's case, the knowledge in question is a marked by a contemplative and distinctive (i.e. non-political) relation to the literary act. As I have demonstrated, when this knowledge is run to ground it is a

form symbolic capital defined by charisma and style. Altieri also attempts to extend that capital by claiming an ethical and political force for the subjective postures it makes possible.

I think this argument is best supported by examining how Altieri's philosophical and aesthetic conception of subjectivity leads him to political claims that cannot be sustained if a political examination of intellectual work is foregrounded (rather than endured). In *Pascalian Meditations* Bourdieu supplies a framework for examining the politics of conceiving of agency in primarily philosophical and aesthetic terms. He outlines the scholastic disposition as the abstract capacity to bracket the social and economic conditions of knowledge and action. The willing suspension of the economic and social world leads to a meditation that generally remains closed in the circle of academic reflection. This disposition has three consequences that are particularly pertinent in our evaluation of Altieri. First, the social world is likely to be experienced as a hostile barrier to knowledge. Second, social struggles and political gestures are interpreted through the lens of the scholastic disposition and intellectual thought rather than through what Bourdieu calls the logic of practice. As we have seen Altieri's methodology works from an intellectual premise that will either supply models for public judgment or render the dilemmas of the social world redundant. In either case, the problem of agency is first and foremost intellectual and interpretive rather than social and material. When the ethical and political stakes of practice are hollowed out they become spectacles for knowledge rather than the invested, interested struggles they are. Third, the disposition that produces particular theories of identity universalizes the scholastic disposition as if

access to the means of earning a self were a secondary question. Though Altieri clearly deploys a hybrid of discourses in his theory of agency, the fact remains that his investment in the self-legislating, radically free subject is an idealist philosophical experiment. Bourdieu argues that this “self-transparency of consciousness” (*PM* 9) is a social gesture of learning to forget “the material determinations of symbolic practice” (*PM* 20). The point of invoking Bourdieu at this point is not to cleverly point to politically compromising blindspots in Altieri’s work. Rather, the task is to argue that Altieri’s important claims close off a materialist reading of aesthetic practice. In addition, I want to make the case that Altieri’s theory of subjectivity impedes the notion of ethical responsibility he hopes to glean from aesthetic practice.

The philosophical discontent with Altieri’s theory of subjective agency is inseparable from the politics the theory allows. As I have argued, the social world occupies an ambiguous place in Altieri’s theory. It is at once the testing ground for the subject’s claims and the siren song luring the self toward pathological political and social identities that dull the psychic intensity of the radically free individual. Even if Altieri admits that certain social and political realities inform such identities, he holds out resistance to those realities as an ideal measure of responsibility. This balancing act puts Altieri’s project under intense pressure considering he is attempting to offer a model of judgment that resists both the idealism of the coherent ego and the frivolity of postmodern critiques of that subject. In order to demonstrate that Altieri is trying to preserve and protect judgment and subjective agency from what conditions it, I will conclude by showing how Altieri’s theory of subjectivity compromises his political claims.

The first and most obvious problem with the political subject Altieri is attempting to proffer is that its positivistic ethos leaves no room for a conception of agency in which social conditions and hierarchies exercise a decisive role in shaping the self *and* shaping the view one is likely to have of the social world. In short, Altieri is hostile to the idea that relations of power may, in fact, be inseparable from the process of “self-legislation”. At various points in *Subjective Agency* he falls back on what might be best described as a Rousseauesque view of the relation between self and society. However, in Altieri’s scheme it is in aesthetic practice, and not nature, where freedom, over and against the social, is to be found. This dynamic is played out in the following two passages from *Subjective Agency*:

In describing these second-order investments I have had to presuppose what I would now like to make explicit – that no matter how insistent one’s individualism, speaking about values will return us to our dependencies on others (125).

The object world, and the self as objectified, both appear to us as demands on us that we make the adjustments necessary so that we can feel subjective agency aligned with apparently external forces. Purposiveness provides a sense of substance because it composes paths for negotiating those forces, at times even by locating as potential within those forces what makes possible our transformation of them. Yet purposiveness also explains why no concept can suffice for this means of taking substance, since the agency consists precisely in a process of negotiating between the desire to experience ourselves as singular creative agents and the need to use concepts connecting those expressions to originating circumstances and to other people (123).

Both these passages enunciate the strange relay in *Subjective Agency* between the purely singular agent and the reluctant submission of that agent to the social world. The dependency of the self on the other for validation and judgment is temporally and conceptually after its encounter with society. In both passages the self takes on an objective structure that is necessarily influenced and judged socially. However, the

purposive substance the self takes on is always prior to that encounter. Altieri's credo for reading literature that I cited earlier in this chapter is a microcosm of his view of the self. Aesthetic practice provides Altieri with an irresistible model of self-legislation that founds its credibility on the intensity of the internal relationships it posits for itself. The self in Altieri's theory will ultimately have to look outside but, ironically, does itself an ethical disservice if it shirks the responsibility to "earn" an identity independent of the social theatre (124). One cannot help but hear an echo of the ideology of merit that grounds capitalist economics. The self gets the identity it earns rather than the one it is born to.

The play in the second passage, quoted above, between purposiveness, agency, and concept rests on Altieri's investment in aesthetic practice. Concepts are the bridge between the self and the social other(s) but what remains most creative and vital for ethical judgment remains out of the reach of concept for Altieri. In this regard he is perilously close, as we shall see, to the ethical imperative that Derrida draws from literature. Despite his explicit pronouncements, Altieri borrows a great deal from Derrida's notion of undecidability as the ground for ethics and subjectivity.¹⁰⁵ What differentiates Altieri's work, however, is his vision of a self present (however provisionally) to itself. Altieri insists that the very strength and integrity of the identity or self we construct for ourselves is capable of closing (or rendering obsolete) the ethical distance between fact and value. In the following passage Altieri outlines what is at stake in his conception of identity:

Even more important, this stress on identities provides us with a means of reconciling (in most cases), if not resolving, the sharp opposition philosophers posit between agent-relative claims embodied in performance on the one hand

and, on the other, claims of public accountability based on moral principles or consequentialist calculi. (125)

This positivist faith in the purposive ability of agency has several political consequences. First, the entire realm of social critique is dismissed as, at best, a distraction from the business of earning an identity. In brusquely dismissing the work of thinkers like Derrida, Altieri is left constantly to rely on a notion of subjective agency in which the struggle to craft a self is habitually sketched in philosophical terms.¹⁰⁶ The subject resists the categories of understanding and the lure of the merely social and thematic concepts as an ethical matter of self-definition. In doing so, however, the material and historical forces that shape subjectivity are either bracketed or so idealized as to be unrecognizable as historical forces. What such a view does is, a priori, blind itself to the manner in which a philosophical conception of agency is itself a social stance.

The social and political stakes are never more on display than when Altieri articulates what kind of social contract he imagines judging the identities that we earn. In *Canons and Consequences* Altieri unapologetically calls for an acknowledged legislature of poets and their critics. Note the composition of the social tribunal in the following passage:

Judges for the canon must be projections from within the canon as it develops over time. Here we can construct a normative circle, analogous to the principle of competent judgment John Stuart Mill proposes as his way of testing among competing models of happiness. Our judges for ideals must be those we admire as ideal figures or those whom these ideal figures admire. Only such an audience of judges can save us from the trap of an even smaller circle. (35)

One might be tempted to defend this passage on the basis that Altieri is merely referring to the basic competence to judge works of art. Such a defense would,

however, be insufficient on two grounds. First, as I have argued, Altieri has set out aesthetic judgment and perception as a fundamental resource in “reconciling (in most cases), if not resolving” some of the most vexing ethical and political dilemmas facing contemporary criticism. On those grounds the terms of the tribunal constituted to adjudicate the claims of the subject are not an accidental or literary matter for Altieri. Second, Altieri’s conception of judgement precludes, as a matter of pride, any assessment of how the competence and the disposition required to read literature is a social marker that, in and of itself, conditions the kind of identity one can earn.¹⁰⁷ Further, the manner in which Altieri looks to the exemplary status of the literary act guarantees the segregation of literature from the social world.

In *Painterly Abstraction in Modern American Poetry* and elsewhere Altieri passionately and compellingly argues for the conceptual resources poetry offers social and ethical judgment. He does so against the almost stock dismissal of Modernist poetry as detached from the social world. Ironically, however his conception of subjectivity consolidates and redoubles the separation between what literature teaches and the material conditions under which knowledge is produced. In short, I think Altieri asks both too much and too little from literature in his ethical and political meditations. Reading Altieri contra Bourdieu augments the position that a political understanding (and recasting) of both literature and politics is doomed without a reckoning with the social world that conditions them both. As I have been at pains to argue, such a view would not mean reducing literature to a sign of class consumption but would rather read it as a symptom of a denied universality and freedom. Instead of reveling in the intensity and status born of selection to the limited tribunal, the very

limited nature of the tribunal itself would become the occasion for ethical reflection and the political impetus for imaging a different kind of politics for literature. There is indeed an ethical imperative in literature but it is not the one Altieri is arguing for.

Conclusion: The Permanent Future of Pierre Bourdieu's Politics

If things were simple, word would have gotten around, as you say in English.

Derrida

Limited Inc

Time is out of joint....What does not happen in this anachrony? Perhaps "the time", time itself, precisely, always "our time", the epoch and the world shared among us, ours everyday, nowadays, the present as our present. Especially when "things are not going well" among us, precisely: when "things are going badly," when it's not working, when things are bad. But with the other, is not this disjuncture, this disadjustment of the "it's going badly" necessary for the good, or at least the just, to be announced? How to distinguish between the two disadjustments, between the disjuncture of the unjust and the one that opens up the infinite asymmetry of the relation to the other, that is to say, the place for justice.

Derrida

Specters of Marx

Throughout this study I have been alluding to a shortcoming in Bourdieu's conceptions of ethics, politics, and justice. In this final chapter, I want to chart this unease and forward a theory of ethics and justice that rounds out Bourdieu's critical enterprise. In order to make this argument, it will be necessary to read against the grain of Bourdieu's own conception of ethics. Bourdieu has not elaborated an extensive theory of ethics, nor has he waded into the various contemporary debates about it. When he does address the issue of ethics, he is usually referring to a pragmatist conception of virtue dependent on a minimum of material ease. This conception of ethics is largely a response to abstract conceptions of the "good" and law that assume a universal subject and a vision of society that universalizes access to the material conditions needed to invest in social mores and norms. These notions actualize formalist conceptions of law and ethics by ignoring the material reality that drives the logic of practice and judgment. In his article "Force of Law," Bourdieu chooses the following epigraph from Anatole France, "The rich and the poor are equally free to live under bridges." This depressingly relevant assessment of bourgeois notions of freedom and law goes to the heart of Bourdieu's dismissal of philosophical notions of ethics.¹⁰⁸ The overview of Bourdieu's theory of intellectual work we have already undertaken, makes it clear why he would adopt this stand. However, I argue that in brusquely dismissing philosophical theories of ethics and justice, Bourdieu inadvertently tears out the core of his own critique.

In mounting a principled critique of intellectual work and of the responsibility of intellectuals, Bourdieu is, however, forwarding a counter-discourse of ethics and justice. This counter discourse takes two forms. The first form is a rejection of the de-

humanizing humanism that argues for a common humanity while ignoring the material conditions of access to that which makes us most human. The second, and more complex form, is a rejection of the formalist assumptions of society and subjectivity that allow one to ground judgement. This grounding forms the basis upon which our very justification of ourselves and our social being takes place. As I demonstrated earlier, Bourdieu's notions of capital, habitus and field are designed to expose the notion of the autonomous, rational, free subject as a social and political fiction. Throughout Bourdieu's project, we find a ruthless deconstruction of the grounds upon which we justify our social being, and, as I have been arguing, this crisis of legitimation is best viewed as both a political and ethical dilemma. Though Bourdieu's work speaks powerfully to the practical dilemma such a crisis presents, he crafts his response to it as if he were immune to the crisis of legitimation he invokes. In his article, "Ethics, Politics, and the Middle Voice," Vincent Pecora makes this point:

But it must also be noted that the felicitous notion of an 'objective event' which is simultaneously outside of and yet produced by the habitus would seem to forestall the hegemonic articulation of political positions even as it obviates the need for ethics. Unlike Foucault, who at least recognized the necessary discrepancies between a theoretical structure dependent on irrational discontinuities and the practical requirements of 'political' and 'ethical' choices, Bourdieu comes close at times to a rhetoric of pure magic. (222)

Though Pecora gives short shrift to the concept of habitus in this passage, he powerfully registers the dilemma that Bourdieu creates when he ignores the economy of ethical and political decision.

In addition to his devastating critique of the false universalism and thin conception of democracy at the heart of most definitions of the social world,

Bourdieu issues an ethical summons to intellectuals in the name of the permanent political struggle for economic and social justice. That summons issues from the deconstruction of the suppositions and practical interests that underwrite the notions of art, intellectual work, and society that have formed the core of this study. At every turn, Bourdieu deconstructs social action and accounts of that action to unearth repressed ethical and political stakes. However, what we never get is the theoretical foundation or ground from which Bourdieu mounts his alternative. There is no account in his project of the measure or value that would set his politics or ethics apart from what he is resisting. This silence is curious in Bourdieu's work precisely because he is so strident about his work's overtly political and ethical nature. In posing the question this way I am not suggesting the need (or existence) of some such grounds for acting and theorizing "properly". Rather, I am asking what it would mean to Bourdieu's work if there were no proper and thematic grounds to establish and measure insurgent and resistant calls for social justice.

Bourdieu's project could stand without such an inquiry, but in this chapter I make the case that his work is augmented and emboldened by the discourse of ethics and justice I am invoking. As I have already hinted, the reason for the theoretical absence I have cited is that Bourdieu feels he has painted himself into a deconstructive and relativist corner. To move from that corner would, for Bourdieu, be to risk the guiding political passion of his entire project. Jonathon Loesberg makes this point in "Bourdieu and the Sociology of Aesthetics" when he argues that "[o]nly by abandoning the desire to exit the [academic] field into a realm from which a pure political attack may be launched...may one coherently obtain the political

implications many of us want from Bourdieu” (1054). As my argument unfurls in this chapter I want to chip away at the idea that Bourdieu can simply choose to remain silent on the larger theoretical questions of justice and ethics. I want to show, through the medium of Jacques Derrida, that Bourdieu’s work is always already speaking above him and beyond him to questions of justice and the age-old quandary of what is to be done in the face of injustice.¹⁰⁹

In order to recast the notions of ethics in Bourdieu’s work, I want to first examine his own limited but telling treatment of ethics. A good précis of Bourdieu’s engagement with ethics can be found in the final brief chapter of *Practical Reason* which is entitled “A Paradoxical Foundation of Ethics”. The first element of this engagement is the now familiar call for intellectuals to direct their cultural and intellectual capital toward the political struggle to distribute capital of all forms more equitably. The social privilege of intellectual work carries an ethical responsibility to end, so far as is possible, that privilege (as privilege). Any other form of intellectual work is, by default, a ratification and legitimation of that privilege. The uncompromising nature of this demand raises several troubling questions. First, Bourdieu does not situate his ethical demand in any kind of historical or intellectual context. He does not, for example, acknowledge that there are competing, if reactionary, calls for intellectual responsibility that would conceive of themselves as ethical responses to the dehumanizing nature of capitalist accumulation. William Bennett and Allan Bloom are both good examples of such a current in American culture. Bennett’s work, for example, is, if nothing else, an ethical call to arms and a

demand that intellectuals and academics abandon their frivolous cultural pursuits and turn their talents toward a more just, civil, and moral “civilization”.

I cite Bennett not because I think his child-like conceptions of politics, society, and morality pose much of a challenge to Bourdieu’s work. Rather, Bennett’s challenge here, ironically, points to the lack of a mediating term to adjudicate between competing claims on justice and the common good. Leaving aside Bennett’s Christian context, one is left to judge between visions here on grounds clearly murkier than Bourdieu’s analysis allows. At some level, it would not be a misreading of Bourdieu’s work to suggest that all one needed to adjudicate such disputes is properly apply reflexive sociology. Though I obviously believe Bourdieu’s project is much richer than such a reading would suggest, I do think it is a significant weakness that he is generally silent on the question of how one would come to judge between competing visions of justice and responsibility. Again, the point here is not that there is ultimately some measure, as Bennett surely believes there is, between competing views, but rather that any credible view of ethics and responsibility must be premised on the absence of any such measure. I want to argue that the paradoxical notion of undecidability that runs throughout Derrida’s work grounds a conception of ethics that fits more easily with Bourdieu’s work than he has allowed. Indeed, Bourdieu’s resistance to a theory of ethical and political judgment leaves his project susceptible to the very charges of economism he effectively refutes in other parts of his work. This threat is particularly evident in “A Paradoxical Foundation of Ethics,” in which a certain economism marks Bourdieu’s concept of ethics: “To state the questions of the morality or moralization of politics in sociologically realistic terms, we must consider

in practical terms the conditions that would need to be fulfilled to keep political practices permanently subjected to the test of universalizability” (PR 144). The implicit claim here is that virtue requires a certain material ease in order to prosper. This claim is motivated by the hypocritical and criminally self-interested discourse that suggests that not only are all equal under the law but that we are all equally disposed to respect and act within the bounds of the law. In *The Weight of the World*, Bourdieu’s interviews with inner city youth render such notions of law and virtue obscene when viewed from the perspective of the dispossessed. The material depravity of circumstance robs these youth of much of their self-respect and the brute law of survival tears the veneer off of both the notion of legal constraints and the idea that everyone has the same investment in following and respecting law. Further, Bourdieu uses his primary material to argue that the ability to treat yourself and others with respect is intimately tied to material circumstance. At a basic level, Bourdieu is refuting the tacit conception of ethics that a core of selfhood and judgment forms independent of social bonds and material distribution. Virtue, like the law, is a product of a social time and place and is no more immune from the sanctions of the market than more tangible markers such as employment or educational attainment. Seen from this perspective, it is easy to understand why Bourdieu would be dismissive of philosophical conceptions of ethics. Such conceptions repeat the intellectualist fallacy of ascribing universal competence without taking account of the material conditions that regulate the distribution of that competence. However, in his haste to point out the self-interest and moral bankruptcy of such views of the social world, Bourdieu gravitates toward a highly suspect theory of ethics.¹¹⁰

The core of Bourdieu's thinking on ethics is manifest in the second critical element of the argument put forward in "A Paradoxical Foundation of Ethics." A proposed remedy emerges in his argument, and this remedy is decidedly materialist. In essence, Bourdieu argues that if we were to subject the various fields of human action to the test of universal access to the capital necessary to function in that field, we would find that virtue would flow in increments equal to the degree of universality achieved in the field (144). Though he stops short of saying that a more equal distribution of capital would guarantee virtue, Bourdieu is certainly locked into a highly materialist and economistic account of ethics and politics. This account forecloses any concept of responsibility and judgment not reducible to material circumstance. In what can only be described as a Kantian gesture, Bourdieu is arguing for a zero point of disinterest from which one might actually mediate the myriad of competing definitions, contradictions, and subversions of the social world. In constructing a fictive space of disinterest, Bourdieu runs counter to the most radical potential of reflexive sociology by looking outside the philosophical and cultural "game" for grounds of judgment (145). Though this runs counter to most of what Bourdieu has to say about the social world, the most pressing ethical and political questions that his work raises come, ironically, to rely upon a philosophical tradition he has disavowed.

At a common sense level, Bourdieu is surely right that social standing plays a role in the ability to invest in notions like ethics and justice. However, his thin conception of these terms leaves a plethora of troubling questions unanswered. The first obvious problem is that the historical record is overcrowded with exceptions to

the idea that material wealth guarantees or even encourages ethical behaviour. The second question that must be posed is: what is left of decision, responsibility, and justice if they can, ostensibly, be reduced to the accident of material distribution? Indeed, following Bourdieu's lead in his analysis of art, I want to argue that such terms only have relevance and resonance when they define themselves against thematic or economistic reductions. In order to put together a critical vocabulary to address what I see as the shortcoming of Bourdieu's notions of politics, ethics, and judgment, I will now turn to Derrida's work. First, however, I want to enumerate the limited theoretical dialogue that exists between Bourdieu and Derrida.

Jonathan Loesberg has outlined the critical tension between Derrida and Bourdieu. In both "Bourdieu's Derrida's Kant: The Aesthetics of Refining Aesthetics" and "Bourdieu and the Sociology of Aesthetics," Loesberg sets out Bourdieu's antagonistic assessment of Derrida's work. Bourdieu claims that Derrida's work is merely a clever reworking of the philosophical abstraction that suppresses the social world (*Distinction* 494-500). Derrida embodies Bourdieu's point that academic and philosophical work is largely a game that takes place in the shadow of social exchange proper. However, Loesberg argues that Derrida's work is a powerful critique of the very categories Bourdieu uses to differentiate his work from Derrida's. In particular, I concur with Loesberg's view that, despite his overt political commitments, Bourdieu leans on an uncritical and transparent model of political judgement. For Bourdieu, a properly reflexive sociology will separate the serious from the frivolous and the interested from the disinterested. In order to counter that vein in Bourdieu's work, I want to deploy Derrida's oeuvre in several different

contexts. First, I want to review the philosophical heritage of the notion of undecidability and its philosophical and linguistic origins in Derrida's work. From that account, I want to make the case that this undecidability in Derrida's project frames his ethical and political pronouncements.¹¹¹ Such an argument will go a long way toward undermining both Bourdieu's dismissal of Derrida and those readings of Derrida that insist on a strict separation of his ludic deconstruction from the serious business of political commitments. Second, I examine *Specters of Marx* as a text that represents, in many ways, the culmination of Derrida's political thinking. Finally, I want to use Judith Butler's comparison of Bourdieu and Derrida in *Excitable Speech* as a way of concluding my own remarks about the need for a merger of critical enterprises.

In invoking Derrida's work, I want to make the case that the troubling complacency that attaches to Bourdieu's notion of judgment is vital to the political and intellectual legacy of the rest of his project. Bourdieu and others separate themselves from Derrida by suggesting that what they are up to is the real business of political commitment versus the gamesmanship of Derrida.¹¹² In my reference to Bourdieu's critique of Habermas, I noted Bourdieu's brilliant contention that Habermas' ethics of conversation relied on universal access to a form of reason that was only universal in the pages of Habermas' work. In response, however, Bourdieu consistently speaks of a "*Realpolitik*" of reason. At one level he clearly means a political analysis of the material conditions that govern access to reason and its attendant capital. However, it is also clear that Bourdieu is implying that a real form of politics lies hidden beneath the false universalism and scholastic fallacies that mark

most inquiries into the social world. These implied distinctions littering Bourdieu's work between real and illusory do not hold. The social and political history of reason that Bourdieu writes does not entertain the possibility that there is something that exceeds rational calculation and critique in the arena of politics and ethics. Derrida's work, on the other hand, is defined by the tortuous task of perpetually holding in view the double gesture of writing and acting without hope of proper origin or measure.

The terms upon which Derrida launches his critique of Western metaphysics preclude, *a priori*, any transcendental, non-contingent vantage point on the very hierarchies that have been deconstructed. Critics of Derrida's work are fond of claiming that he boxes himself into a corner by relativizing all meaning. They further argue that this initial error causes Derrida to miss the simple point that we make distinctions and enjoin hierarchical linguistic and social relations as surely as we breathe. What such symptomatic readings miss is the ethical summons that emerges from the performative spotlight Derrida shines on the unstated exclusions and silences that condition human meaning and social arrangements. The point is not that there is some ludic space where one could imagine a world or an utterance without exclusion or binary opposition. Rather, the point is that the power of Derrida's work is to be found in the suspension of our certainty about the decisions and exclusions that ground the world we inhabit and the words we utter to evaluate that world. The meditative pause that Derrida's work enacts is a moment of critical self-reflection that, in the end, is the founding moment of a credible model for conceiving of ethics and politics. In *Derrida & the Political*, Richard Beardsworth conceives of this middle ground as follows:

As...radical critique, deconstruction is, secondly, a 'method' of analysis which thereby accounts, without positing another horizon, for the tertiary structure of the discipline's (or institution's) foundation, its exclusions and consequent contradictions. This tertiary structure is another way of thinking the originary law of repetition or the law of contamination. Whilst non-phenomenalizable, it allows for a certain formalization....These quasi-transcendental structures – quasi since they open up and collapse the transcendental difference in one and the same movement – are thus as much a way of formalizing the essential contamination of any principle of thought as of accounting for the history of a principle, norm or institution. (19)

In Bourdieu's writing there is no space from which to imagine the contamination of reflexive sociology. More importantly, there is no reckoning with the economy of decision and measure in Bourdieu's work. If we are to imagine an intellectual practice grounded in the struggle for social justice as Bourdieu suggests, then his conceptions of justice and ethics must be extended to include the notion of undecidability. Only within the horizon of undecidability can terms like justice and ethics embody the kind of principled resistance Bourdieu calls for.

As I weave together my forced dialogue between Bourdieu and Derrida, I will constantly return to the concept of undecidability. In lieu of the catalogue of misreadings that has defined its critical reception, I want to make the case that this quasi-philosophical, non-concept of undecidability is the most promising way we have of talking about politics at present.¹¹³ In order to develop this point I want to offer a brief overview of Derrida's notions of language and writing. I do so to insist upon my earlier point that the deconstructive readings that Derrida offers of Western philosophy and linguistics cannot be separated from his thinking on ethics and politics. The governing premise of Derrida's method of deconstructive readings issues from Saussure's Copernican insight that the relationship between signifier and signified is an utterly arbitrary and non-natural one. In *Of Grammatology* and

elsewhere Derrida demonstrates how this initial move of Saussure's is but a detour on his path to a science of language grounded upon the distinction between the natural identity of phonetic sound and learned structure of the written text. Nonetheless, Derrida takes this important clue about the nature of language and writing and uses it to mount a theory of language. For Derrida, the intelligibility of speech and writing is dependent on an internal system of differences among alphabetic symbols and between words (*LI* 4). This internal and arbitrary set of differences is not only untethered to any pre-linguistic order but its very efficacy as human communication is dependent on this non-identity and difference. The non-identity of language to that which it references in the object world undermines the ontological depth of writing and language and makes language a poor vehicle to transport truth and non-contingent value statements. This non-originary origin of language is not an accidental feature of language nor a historical development in the study of language or philosophy but it is, rather, what grounds our very ability to speak and write at all (*LI* 14). For Derrida, if this were not so, there would literally be nothing to say or do. Language would merely be a medium through which value and truth are transmitted.

The paradox of Derrida's view of language is captured in his vocabulary by the term *différance*. *Différance* is a play on the notion of difference and deferral designed to capture the sense in which the meaning of words and utterances are perpetually dependent on their difference from each other and the other elements contained within any system of language or communication. It also plays on the notion of deferral in which the very fact that language is a system of arbitrary differences guarantees that any final conception of meaning or truth is perpetually

deferred. Strictly speaking, a table is a table because this word only arbitrarily refers to the physical object we have come to know as a table. The ability of that semantic relationship to succeed is dependent on the perpetual deployment of the term in real-time contexts. The very need to strike the relationship between this word table and this object in the physical world opens a chasm that, for Derrida, linguists, philosophers and, I would add sociologists, have not taken proper account of. In making this point, Derrida is not saying that we can never understand an utterance or that what we think of as meaning in conventional terms is a chimera. Rather, the argument here is that because language is dependent for meaning upon an infinitely differentiated chain of differences, there will never be a fixed (or third) term to arbitrate the meaning or value of what is said outside the context of its saying or the social world into which it is received.¹¹⁴ Like Lacan and other poststructuralist thinkers, Derrida builds his analysis of language out of the insight that language emanates from an ontological nullity between human beings and the object world. It is this nullity that forms the critical and generative distance between words and that to which they refer. This distance creates the space and spacing that necessitates language and writing in the first instance.

Language is the proxy that stands in for our contingent relation to the world and perpetually marks that distance in its functioning. As Derrida has made clear throughout his work, philosophers as divergent as Kant and Plato, betray an intuitive sense of the danger that this view of writing and language poses to their claims in the name of truth and reason. This spacing also calls forth the radical contingency and historicity that inaugurates thinking and acting in the first place. However, it is also

this contingency that exposes the utterance (whether written, spoken, or visual) to the historical peril of an uncertain journey to interpretation. The very moment that conditions language robs the speaker or writer of what Derrida refers to as the purity of presence. Presence in Derrida's lexicon refers to a kind of immanent consciousness that governs the production and reception of language and meaning. In *Limited Inc* this radical contingency goes under the banner of iterability. In the following passage, Derrida lays out the meaning of iterability:

In order for my 'written communication' to retain its function as writing, i.e. its readability, it must remain readable despite the absolute disappearance of any receiver, determined in general. My communication must be readable – iterable – in the absolute absence of the receiver or of any empirically determinable collectivity of receivers. Such iterability –(*iter*, again, probably comes from *itara*, other in Sanskrit, and everything that follows can be read as the working out of the logic that ties repetition to alterity) structures the mark of writing itself, no matter what particular type of writing is involved...A writing that is not structurally readable – iterable – beyond the death of the addressee would not be writing. (7)

This concept of iterability is not one term among others for Derrida; rather, it is the term that best articulates the differential, non-present relation we bear to language as the cost of speaking and being.¹¹⁵ Iterability itself is, paradoxically, not contingent or deconstructible because it is the ground of all contingency and structure. Politically, Derrida also locates the ability to challenge, question, and, ideally, resist power in the iterable structure of all utterance. We are, however, only able to do so because the intention, meaning, and desire of what a subject says is, by definition, never exhausted in its saying. Its meaning and destiny depend, precisely because it is written, on the context in which it is received.

In *Limited Inc*, Derrida argues that for writing to “be...writing it must continue to “act” and to be readable even when what is called the author of the

writing no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, be it because of temporary absence, because he is dead or more generally, because he has not employed his absolutely actual and present intention or attention, the plenitude of his desire to say what he means, in order to sustain what seems to be written in his name” (8). The meaning, then, of any utterance is not the product of the sovereign human consciousness but rather of the potentially infinite context into which human meaning can land. This latter point has led many critics to claim inaccurately that Derrida is denying that there is any such thing as meaning or intention in the use of language. I want to turn briefly to one such critic, John Searle, in order to build the case for the political potential of Derrida’s work. Searle provides a useful example of the practical and generative notion of judgement and decision that are always already at play in Derrida’s deconstructive thought.

In his response to Derrida’s work, Searle argues that Derrida makes the most elementary of philosophical errors by relying on marginal cases and aberrations to make his case that language and human meaning depend on a hitherto unacknowledged contingency. Searle’s argument is dependent on a rigorous separation of normal, proper communication from aberrant cases in which the message misfires. This dichotomy is evident when Searle argues that Derrida is “ignoring marginal, fringe, and partially defective promises.” The problem is exacerbated for Searle because Derrida “confines himself to full blown explicit promises and ignore[s] promises made by elliptical turns of phrase, hints, metaphors, etc” (55-56). In his response, Derrida applies the theory of language I have been outlining thus far to demonstrate not only that Searle’s “rigorous,” “scientific”

distinctions do not hold but that the very ability to enjoin a promise or utter a meaningful statement is dependent on such distinctions not holding. The simple uttering of a promise is not enough to guarantee that it is kept, and Derrida further argues that if such a congruence between speech and act or language and history were to exist, there could be no such thing as a promise. A promise, like any utterance or intention, relies upon a certain alterity that takes the form of the very possibility that it might not happen, that it might not be a promise at all but rather a turn of phrase. As is characteristic of Derrida's thought, that which is marginal or excluded from thought proves to be its very condition of possibility.

The crucial point to be drawn from Derrida's nasty tussle with Searle is the undecidability of the context of interpretation. One cannot, as Searle hopes, determine the rules of reception ahead of time with a certainty that will allow you to know when you are in the presence of true scientific promises. Bourdieu shares with Searle a faith in science to sift the banal from the redemptive as well as the promise of science to normalize judgment. The primary element that precludes such a vision is, again, this notion of context that holds so much of what Derrida says together. The singular nature of the event of meaning demonstrates "why a context is never absolutely determinable, or rather, why its determination can never be entirely certain or saturated" (*LI 3*). Context is, in this case, the dialectic of the rules and conventions that mark an utterance and the irreducibly singular deployment of those rules and conventions in a pragmatically determined instance. For Derrida, this singularity must be thought every time in its singularity for the temporality of speaking and being to be properly rendered. Registering this temporality "entails the necessity of thinking *at*

once both the rule and the event, concept and singularity” (*LI* 119, author’s emphasis). In the course of daily life, certain turns of phrase, promises, and utterances become so routine we forget the contingency and iterability that underwrite them. The extravagant gesture of Derrida’s thought is designed to demand that we recognize the contingency and mark the historical process of institutionalization that produces the illusion that a context is saturated and determined. It is during this process of institutionalization that certain utterances and practices take on the hue of normality or marginality in the daily practice of judgment and interpretation. Even those silly, non-serious utterances, such as the shopping list Derrida deploys in *Limited Inc*, answer to the law of iterability. In short, the marginal nature of the examples Derrida uses to make his argument carry the political point that all language is subject to the same structural economy. If in all rigour we cannot, for structural reasons, elevate our most juridical, normative and political pronouncements about the social world above the shopping list, we must look to another model of political thinking and beyond the strictly political terms supplied by Bourdieu.

The largely linguistic insights I have been recording are largely what lead many commentators to classify Derrida’s work as either a banal truism or virtuoso gamesmanship.¹¹⁶ However, in *Dissemination*, *Of Grammatology*, *Limited Inc*, and other texts, Derrida relentlessly builds upon his theory of language to show that many of the most cherished and “serious” claims of Western philosophy, linguistics, and politics are premised on ignoring or repressing the implications of what he argues about language, meaning, and communication. These paradoxes structure the arguments Derrida brings to bear on the canon of philosophy. However, the stakes of

those readings only become compelling when the link is made between what I will provisionally call the undecidability of language and communication and the undecidability of ethics and politics. In the same vein that Derrida argues that the undecidability of language simultaneously represents the very possibility of thinking and speaking, undecidability is also the term upon which ethical and political judgment must be negotiated. I want to argue that Bourdieu's work does not reckon with the undecidability of political and ethical judgment precisely because of its faith in the transparency of language and the powers of critique. At a sociological level, the prevailing doxa of late capitalist social relations are laid bare in Bourdieu's work, but prevailing notions of politics and language are left untouched.

By deploying Derrida's conception of undecidability I hope to argue that Bourdieu has an ethical obligation to subject the terms of his resistance to the same kind of deconstruction to which he subjects the social relations and values he so brilliantly dissects. Before doing so, however, I want to cement the link between linguistic deconstruction and the deconstruction of ethical and political decision by referring to several passages in Derrida's work that shepherd this transition. The first passage, from *Dissemination*, makes the link between writing and morality by suggesting that:

[T]he question of writing opens as a question of morality. It is truly morality that is at stake, both in the sense of the opposition between good and evil, or good and bad, and in the sense of public mores and social conventions. It is a question of knowing what is to be done and not done. (74)

The link between writing and morality is the sense of contingency I discussed earlier between subject and object, world and language, and signifier and signified. As this passage makes clear, the dissonance at work in Derrida's readings is not simply the

cognitive or linguistic interruption of our knowledge of the world. These readings only take on their full force when they are explicitly framed as an ethical summons. Indeed, I have only referred to a few of the many explicit links that Derrida makes between the questions of ethics and the practice of deconstruction. In citing terms like morality and, much more frequently, ethics, Derrida is referring to the age old philosophical tradition dedicated to finding models and maxims that formalize the moment of ethical decision. Such accounts are inimical to differentiating right from wrong and reaping fact from value. In lieu of cosmological or theological conceptions of right and wrong, the discourse of ethics springs from the need to construct conceptions of the good and the good life.¹¹⁷

Though I will not rehearse Derrida's engagement with particular traditions of ethical thought, what unifies Derrida's thought about ethics is the need to retain the emancipatory promise of ethics while simultaneously deconstructing philosophical efforts to account for the moment of decision (and responsibility).¹¹⁸ For Derrida, such accounts, in thinkers as diverse as Aristotle and Kant, ultimately domesticate that which is most historical, most painful, and most necessary about making ethical judgments. The motif of undecidability is what allows Derrida to evoke a sense of ethics through the very absence of any philosophical, discursive, or rational account of ethics. In the following critical passage from "Force of Law," Derrida sets out the relationship between undecidability and ethics:

The undecidable is not merely the oscillation or the tension between the two decisions; it is the experience of that which, though heterogeneous, foreign to the order of the calculable and the rule, is still obliged – it is of obligation that we must speak – to give itself up to the impossible decision, while taking account of laws and rules. A decision that did not go through the ordeal of the undecidable

would not be a free decision, it would only be the programmable application or unfolding of a calculable process. (24)

The aconceptual, irreducible nature of a decision or a judgment is the ethical summons of Derrida's work. If an ethical decision is nothing other than the perpetual oscillation between two or more competing poles, the most one must do is illuminate the space of a decision in the context of its irreducibility, contingency, and fragility. This double gesture of hollowing out the philosophical ambition that attaches to ethics also marks Derrida's conceptions of politics, justice, and democracy. In each case he employs a conception of futurity as a means of enacting the heuristic idealism that we attach to notions like ethics and justice while simultaneously arguing that, by definition, such terms can never realize the promise or embody the hope (for the future) they carry. The argument that true justice or democracy are ideals which we must perpetually strive for without any hope of realizing them is the very same paradox that drives Derrida's notion of language. We write and speak in the hope of making ourselves finally understood, although at some level that communication is destined, by definition, to fail. It fails not out of some empirical defect (which is always possible) but because the very structure of language is, in Lacan's terms, a perpetual placeholder and symbol of our permanent exile from truth and plenitude. One can never learn or find Justice or Democracy because to do so would be to lose that which is most human in Derrida's lexicon – that is, the precious and undeconstructible undecidability of decision and Being.

I now want to develop Derrida's concepts of politics and ethics and outline how they contrast with Bourdieu's vision. As I have been claiming throughout this study the difference is a product of both Bourdieu's confident relation to language

and his similarly untroubled notion of what political praxis and ethics are. Although Derrida's career is dotted with interventions in political debates such as the Algerian conflict, apartheid, and the rise of the new anti-immigrant right in France, politics in Derrida's work does not unfold in its positive content but rather in the singular resistance to naming what a proper politics would look like. Our founding inability to account for politics or ethics outside of the irreducibly singular event is what, for Derrida, constitutes the very essence of the political and ethical. Responsibility, ethics, and justice are all prodigies of the moment of undecidability that, by definition, can never reduce to a rule or program. This, of course, is not to deny the common sense reality that certain programs can and must prevail over others everyday. The point, rather, is to reinscribe and, to my mind, reinvigorate the moment of decision that conditions all political, national, and ethical programs. It is from this foundation that Derrida claims: "Infinite responsibility, therefore, no rest allowed for any form of good conscience" (*SM xv*).

The obvious caveat to Derrida's notion of ethics and politics is that he obscures the pressing and seemingly infinite need to name and resist injustice.¹¹⁹ At first glance, the ludic nature of Derrida's project would seem particularly incompatible with the permanent political struggle that defines Bourdieu's work. The criticism of frivolity in the face of injustice has dogged Derrida throughout his career and, to my mind, he offers his most comprehensive and compelling retort in *Specters of Marx*.¹²⁰ He is also constructing a legacy for his work by claiming a stake in Marx's commitment to social justice and intellectual responsibility. In order to answer Marx's ethical and political demands, Derrida employs the metaphor of

haunting. The metaphor enables a reading of Marx and Marx(ism) that delves into the anxiety of influence that attaches to Marx's work and the ability (or lack thereof) to properly inherit Marx's legacy.¹²¹ In a complex and brilliant reading of Marx and Marxism, Derrida explores how our ability to conceive of politics and justice continues to be haunted by Marx's critique of capitalism. At one level, Derrida's reading is responding to a dogmatic strain of Marxism that continues to try to read an algorithm for politics from *Capital*. At this level, *Specters of Marx* is a piercing critique of the idea that social justice can be read, like a map, out of Marx's formulation. Implicitly, Derrida is also responding to those who have called on him to finally speak of Marx and the political. At times the call for Derrida to speak out is premised on the belief that doing so would remedy the particular problems he is called upon to speak out on. Leaving aside the point that prominent intellectuals can and often have intervened in particular political debates, the denunciation (and defenses) of his work makes Derrida well suited to sketch a theory of politics that goes beyond any calculable view of political dilemmas.

Specters of Marx is an inquiry into what it means to speak of politics and to speak of politics in the shadow of Marx. As we shall see shortly the metaphors of haunting and ghosts complicate that speech in a way that is avowedly political. One of the primary ways that Marx's work haunts our present political struggles is the manner in which his name is formalized in Marxism(s). Derrida argues that this conception of Marx is a dead letter that buries him in a fixed ideology. Such readings refuse to be haunted by the ellipses and lacunae that, despite Marx's own best efforts, continue to speak to a conception of justice that goes beyond a deconstruction of

capitalist social relations. The Marx that Derrida is most eager to exploit and inherit is the Marx who drilled down to the core of justice, history, and value only to find a productive emptiness. Derrida makes this point by suggesting that “one must assume the inheritance of Marxism, assume its most living part, which is to say, paradoxically, that which continues to put back on the drawing board the question of life, spirit, or the spectral, of life-death beyond the opposition between life and death” (SM 54). It is this spirit of Marx that Derrida attempts to mobilize against the political institutionalization of Marxism as well as those who continually raise Marx from the dead to finally declare him dead. The latter trend has recently been embodied by Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History*. Though Derrida refers to Fukuyama’s text in *Specters of Marx*, he cites it as merely the latest in a long line of premature eulogies for Marx and triumphant, de-historicized declarations of capitalism’s conquests. The question that Derrida constantly refers to in his engagement with Marx, then, is how is it that Marx continues to haunt capitalism in ways that nourish and replenish the struggle for justice. Without doubt, this is the same question that drives Bourdieu’s work, but Bourdieu’s conception of justice remains tied to a positivistic notion in which justice remains an answerable and attainable other of injustice.

In order to outline more carefully what Derrida’s sense of justice is I want to examine the notion of haunting that informs his argument in *Specters of Marx*. The metaphor of the spectre is, of course, tied to the first page of *The Communist Manifesto*. Marx and Engels famously claim that a spectre is haunting Europe and that spectre is the revolutionary movement of communism. The haunting here is dual: first, there is the political sense in which a workers’ movement was building across

national borders to overthrow the minority rule of the bourgeoisie; second, there is the critical methodology of Marx's texts which expose the vacuity of exchange value and the fetishization of commodities that underwrite the social relations of capitalism. Value is reduced to a tautology of exchange-value and the political, economic, and, social claims that the bourgeoisie have on justice and democracy are reduced to dust. The political institutions of capitalism and the Enlightenment become haunted by their own groundless origin. The power of Marx's insight lies largely in his ability to demonstrate that this haunting was not a foreign body that took hold of European, capitalist societies at some determined date but, rather, that from its origin, the ghost has "always occupied the domesticity of Europe" (*SM* 4). For Derrida, these two modalities of haunting are inseparable and perpetually co-mingle in Marx's work and in the work of those who invoke his name. Derrida goes so far as to argue that Marx's ability to render his historical cry for justice was, paradoxically, dependent on the pre-historical or ahistorical deconstruction of value that he performs throughout his work. Nevertheless, Derrida also points out that Marx himself was haunted by these realities in his own attempt to cover over the fissure of value he dramatizes in his work. What returns and refuses to die (or to be properly born so that it could be killed) is nothing other than the fissure of undecidability and iterability we have already examined.

Throughout *Specters of Marx*, the terms in which Derrida accounts for his use of haunting bears a resemblance to the terms he uses to explain his other key non-conceptual or aconceptual terms such as iterability, *différance*, and undecidability.¹²² Like undecidability and iterability, the "spectropoetics" of Marx's work inhabits a

marginal borderland between a knowledge that we can possess and apply and, simultaneously, an alterity that calls into question the concept of knowledge and application. Derrida refers to the unique knowledge that comes with the deconstruction of writing and value as a ghostly presence always already at work in the desire for meaning and truth. Derrida tries to quantify this liminal knowledge by suggesting “one does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge. At least no longer to that which one thinks one knows by the name of knowledge. One does not know if it is living or if it is dead” (*SM* 6). The quasi-living status of this knowledge makes it spectral and links the metaphor of the ghost with the problematics of reading and reckoning with an author like Marx. Marx’s work forms a limit point in which intellectual work is welded seamlessly to an “imprecation” of justice. This imprecation must be honoured, but it is also haunted by the very fact that it is a historical promise that must be kept in history (versus simply interpreted or inherited) and kept in the absence of Marx and a certain form of Marxism.¹²³ The metaphor of haunting also enjoins Derrida’s complex engagement with mortality. Death is the ultimate symbol of finitude for Derrida but it is also the paradoxical symbol of the future. The death and memory of those who have gone are symbols of our destiny, but they also point to the unbroken temporal chain that (almost) guarantees that others will come after us. This notion of futurity and of those others to come is not just a literal reality; it is also the decisive break with the present and the dream of self-presence that drives Derrida’s methodology.¹²⁴

The finitude and temporality carried by death constitutes the founding disjuncture of Being and come to haunt all of our calls for justice and justification. Derrida's overt interest in questions of justice and ethics comes from a desire to ask what it would mean to continue to ask questions like: What does it mean to live? or What does justice look like? When such questions come after the ghost of Marx or before the ghost of deconstruction, Derrida answers:

But to learn to live, to learn it from oneself and by oneself, all alone, to teach oneself to live ("I would like to learn to live finally"), is that not impossible for a living being? Is it not what logic itself forbids? To live, by definition, is not something one learns. Not from oneself, it is not learned from life, taught by life. Only from the other and by death. In any case from the other at the edge of life. At the internal border or the external border, it is a heterodidactics between life and death. (xviii)

By framing his inquiry into Marx in these terms, Derrida overtly links his work with the tradition of ethics. As should be obvious by now, however, he also distances himself from philosophical attempts to answer the "problem" of ethics and justice. In *Fables of Responsibility* Thomas Keenan offers a reading of Marx's work in ethical terms and ends his argument by claiming, "It is not simply the ignorance of not knowing what to do; it is rather that terror of still having to do, without knowing" (185). The performative nature of the reading of Marx in *Specters of Marx* points to a concept of justice that attempts to exceed the very economy of problematics that has defined ethical, political, and judicial thought.

I would now like to turn to an examination of this spectral symbol of justice and what it has to offer overt political projects like Bourdieu's. As I have insisted throughout this study, the question of justice is largely absent in Bourdieu's work. The most obvious reason for this absence would be that in his analysis of power and

oppression, Bourdieu simply sees no need to occupy himself with abstract questions about the nature of justice. At some level, this answer suffices because Bourdieu's corpus could indeed stand on its own. At another level, however, Derrida's reading of Marx taps into a kind of symptomatic denial in Bourdieu. To put an eloquent reading in the bluntest possible terms, Derrida points out that what is most haunting about Marx's work was the struggle that Marx endured against his own most radical analysis. Marx hollowed out the very terms of economic, social, and political value and, at critical moments, refused to reckon with the depth of his own deconstructive efforts. To my mind, a similar disavowal is at play in Bourdieu's work. Throughout his work Bourdieu constantly and tentatively approaches larger questions of value and justice only to retreat back into the shell of reflexive sociology. In articulating Derrida's conception of justice, I want to argue that Bourdieu is always already invoking an idea of justice in his work. Further, I want to contend that the experience of justice Derrida postulates enriches Bourdieu's claims by supplying the overtly activist thinker with a politically enabling perspective and resonance. As I argued earlier in this chapter, in lieu of such a vision of justice, Bourdieu is saddled with a highly suspicious materialist moralism.

The idea of justice at play in *Specters of Marx* is governed by Derrida's attempts to balance the abstract sense of justice and ethics that issues from deconstruction with the more pressing need to answer the injustice of capitalist social relations one associates with the spirit of Marx. That tension is at work in the following remarkable passage from *Specters of Marx*:

No justice – let us not say no law and once again here we are not speaking here of laws – seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some responsibility,

beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any other forms of totalitarianism. Without this non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present, without that which secretly unhinges it, without this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those who are not there, of those who are no longer or who are not yet present and living, what sense would there be to ask the question “where?” “where tomorrow” “wither [Marxism].
(xix)¹²⁵

The demand here is to think of justice as a permanent struggle not reducible to a law, political program, or a particular political analysis. Though each of these elements is inscribed in the struggle for justice, they cannot be taken as examples or maxims that exhaust, codify, or formalize justice. Justice is an emancipatory ideal that perpetually points to the future in the moment of its impossibility as a present and identifiable reality. The dilemma of “doing” justice is a perpetual present that overdetermines any temporal, philosophical, or judicial attempt to quantify it. The distinction between law and justice is crucial here. One can and indeed must enact laws as, to borrow from Heidegger, a product of our Being-in the world-together. However, those laws are only possible in the absence of any formal meaning of Justice. One can always critique and analyze particular laws as they manifest themselves in a myriad of institutional and informal settings, but that critique can never exhaust itself in the name of justice. Paradoxically, the elusive nature of Justice is the founding moment, for Derrida, of political debate and dialogue. In addition, that debate and dialogue is a product of the absence of a third term to adjudicate between competing views. The absence of a third term creates a crisis in value that is perpetually renewed in every value judgment. Without such a crisis, however, one could hardly conceive of value judgments, justice or responsibility in the context that Derrida uses those terms. It is

in this sense that Derrida employs the motif of the future which, in turn, allows him to speak of justice or democracy as perpetually to come. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida insists that one can only speak of justice as that which exceeds our current conceptions of analysis and critique. Without such an excess it would be impossible to speak sensibly of an infinite responsibility. If Bourdieu's political project is to endure as long as Marx's (and I think it can), it must be replenished by the conception of justice and responsibility I have identified in Derrida's work.

To conclude, I now want to turn to the more explicit comparison of Bourdieu and Derrida undertaken by Judith Butler. Butler is an apt critic to compare Derrida and Bourdieu because her intellectual practice forms a kind of middle ground between the two thinkers. Her work in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, in particular, is an engagement with the politics of gender that draws heavily on Derrida's deconstructive insights. Indeed, despite certain differences and criticisms, Butler's general approach to issues of gender and language could best be described as deconstructive. However, the manner in which she deploys her deconstructive insights has an activist bent that seeks to intervene in ongoing cultural and political debates. In this regard, she draws heavily on Bourdieu's work for an engaged model of social analysis and intellectual work. In her essay "Implicit Censorship and Discursive Agency," contained in *Excitable Speech*, Butler examines the issue of censorship as it relates to utterances that challenge and subvert power. In the essay, she makes extensive use of both Derrida and Bourdieu and offers an implicit comparison of the two thinkers. I will outline Butler's main argument in the essay as a means of assessing her comparison of Bourdieu and Derrida.

In an intricate argument, Butler recasts censorship in a generative and productive relationship to power. For Butler, the political question of censorship and the power to censor must be extended beyond the conventional judicial bounds that structure current debates. In the work of Catherine MacKinnon and other thinkers at the forefront of the politics of censorship, the political struggle has been to change the public status of offensive speech to acts. In doing so, MacKinnon and others are responding to the long and almost sacred tradition of constitutionally protected speech in the United States. In order to argue for the censorship of pornography, for example, it was necessary to recast it as an act, and therefore, not protected as free speech. This movement has won some substantial political and judicial victories and, in the process, has made strange bedfellows of right and left wing activists. In her argument, Butler questions how helpful this development has been in the task of illuminating the far more ubiquitous censorship that governs social norms and relations of power. These social relations of power determine the very border between offensive and non-offensive speech as well as the distinction between politically viable and accepted speech and acts. For Butler, such informal borders are more ubiquitous and insidious than formalized laws because they are rarely recognized as prohibitive (and productive) borders at all. Butler argues that they go unexamined because Mackinnon, and others invested in the hyper-political battles to censor pornography or rap music, limit their view of censorship to overt legislative acts of censorship. Butler points to the shortcomings of this view:

Censorship is most often referred to as that which is directed against persons or against the content of their speech. If censorship, however, is a way of producing speech, constraining in advance what will and will not become accepted speech, then it cannot be understood exclusively in terms of juridical power. (128)

The critical task here is to probe a censorship that precedes our ability to speak and be socially recognized and rewarded for our speech.

While Butler does not entirely dismiss the importance of debates ignited by critics like MacKinnon, she argues that such debates obscure a more comprehensive critique of language and power. Specifically, the focus on juridical forms of power leaves more subtle forms of power unexamined and, at some level, censored. In order to extend our conception of power and censorship, Butler liberally borrows the psychoanalytic term of foreclosure. She denotes foreclosure as a kind of instinctual, self-censoring in which human subjects foreclose certain possibilities of speech and action as the very condition for speaking and acting. This foreclosure is a productive and generative moment in which “the speakable is differentiated from the unspeakable” (137). The movement of foreclosure is neither properly social nor subjective, but it conditions both arenas of subjective agency. The foreclosure is both psychoanalytic/subjective and social/political because what is excluded as unsayable in speech is generally the product of a long and complex history of suppression that is not recognized as an exclusion until it is actually said. As I shall note shortly, this point leads to Butler’s interest in the ability of “insurrectionary” speech acts to give voice to the unsayable and the possibility of mobilizing such utterances for political purposes. Butler sets out her paradoxical economy of subjective agency in the following passage:

To become a subject means to be subjected to a set of implicit and explicit norms that govern the kind of speech that will be legible as the speech of a subject....Here the question is not whether certain kinds of speech uttered by a subject are censored, but how a certain operation of censorship determines who will be a subject depending on whether the speech of such a candidate for

subjecthood obeys certain norms governing what is speakable and what is not.
(126)

If we accept this theory of subject formation, then the task of identifying and countering power is decidedly more complicated and dense than the initial terms of the censorship debate allow. The political currency of this argument is that those utterances and acts that are excluded to generate the domain of the sayable also perpetually threaten regimes of power and normative social identities. In order to fully elaborate the political potential of this position, Butler invokes both Derrida and Bourdieu's work.

Bourdieu and Derrida both offer Butler tools to round out her analysis of censorship. In selectively drawing from each thinker Butler also undertakes an implicit comparison that is useful for my purposes in this chapter. She equates Bourdieu's notion of habitus with foreclosure in order to explore the social nature of the censorship. Like habitus, the foreclosure that defines our subjective ability to speak is a product of our largely unconscious engagement with our social milieu. Butler shares Bourdieu's contention that the social world that conditions subjectivity is a hierarchical universe structured by the unequal distribution of capital. The foreclosure and censorship a particular subject "enacts" is dependent on the social context in which that subject circulates. For all that, Butler refuses to identify habitus as a conscious choice or active repression but rather as a complex relation to power in which "the normative exercise of power is rarely acknowledged as an operation of power at all" (134). For Bourdieu and Butler, this theory of power has the advantage of accounting for power's durability as well as offering a sophisticated explanation of how it is that subjects come to perpetuate and consolidate their own exclusion and

dispossession.¹²⁶ The conception of power that Butler deploys in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* builds on the advances that Bourdieu has made in our understanding of power. Unlike Bourdieu, however, Butler is most concerned with how the structures of power that condition subjectivity come to be challenged. These concerns, in turn, lead her to argue that Bourdieu's work "fails to consider the crisis in convention that speaking the unspeakable produces" (142). Butler goes on to argue that in "making social institutions static, Bourdieu fails to grasp the logic of iterability that governs the possibility of social transformation" (147). The critical divide here between Bourdieu and Butler is that Butler sees the public recitation of official discourse and accepted social norms as a perpetual risk in which what is sayable and official discourse necessarily exhibits its other in the form of the unofficial and the unsayable.

As her citation of iterability hints, Butler turns to Derrida for a more supple vision of language and power. In effect, Butler recites Derrida's insight that identity is internally and structurally dependent on what it is not and what it excludes. Bourdieu argues, on the other hand that such public performances simply drill the screw tighter into the soul of the subject. Though cautious and rigorous in her theory of subversion, Butler simply cannot accept the rigid terms upon which Bourdieu conceives of the political domain. Though her argument is different in tone from mine, the reason she rejects a full critical embrace of Bourdieu's work follows the spirit of my critique of Bourdieu. For Butler, Bourdieu's conception of power fails to take account of the fact that in order to resist power and oppression one can only look to the very terms upon which power and oppression cast their net. Power is born of

the iterability of language and Being and the act of resisting and countering power has no appeal beyond this iterability for its terms of engagement. For Butler and Derrida, that iterability is what generates the promise of justice as surely as it opens history up to the peril of injustice. Butler capitalizes on the implicit political power of Derrida's work by emphasizing that every iteration of power is, *in potentia*, always already vulnerable to subversive reinscriptions and, in Rorty's terms, redescriptions. Butler uses various examples from gender and race politics to demonstrate that the subversive element of wayward reiterations of social norms lies in exposing the sheer arbitrariness of normative social identities. That said, she acknowledges that such reinscriptions may not (and often do not) have any immediate subversive effect. However, she argues that theorizing successful moments of insurrectionary speech is an urgent political task. For Butler this task takes place in the context of her attempt to "force a radical rearticulation of what qualifies as bodies that matter, ways of living that count as 'life', lives worth protecting, lives worth saving, lives worth grieving" (*Bodies That Matter*, 16).

Butler ends her argument in the same place I would like to, with a return to Bourdieu. Having invoked Derrida to articulate a more pliable sense of power, Butler makes the point that Derrida, at times, seems to universalize the play of language without ever burdening himself with the task of examining how social conditions circumscribe how and when that play unfolds. In *Excitable Speech*, Butler makes this point when she argues that in Derrida's thought language "is abstracted from its social operation" and iterability becomes an "inherent structural feature of all marks" (151). The tools of Bourdieu's reflexive sociology allow Butler to bring linguistic

utterance back into a social context. Indeed, Bourdieu does a better job than either Derrida or Butler of articulating the social conditions of thought and speech. However, as Butler's analysis amplifies, the endurance and power of Bourdieu's work is dependent on a more reflexive vision of justice. The necessary supplement offered by Derrida's work makes it more vital and more legitimate to hold Bourdieu's work up as a fearless cry for justice. Indeed, fulfilling the promise of the permanent political task that Bourdieu has set out for us is dependent on our ability to inscribe that permanence in our political praxis and theory.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Ironically, Swartz's own work is a fine example of this evasion. In *Culture and Power* he makes the following curious claim: "[Bourdieu's] 'political practice' has been markedly different from that...of the common image one has of the Parisian Left Bank intellectual. Bourdieu rarely signs public petitions, participates in public demonstrations, or writes about strategies for political engagement" (37). It is hard understand how, in an otherwise careful piece of work, Swartz could ignore (or not know about) Bourdieu's role in organizing the nationwide strikes that gripped France in 1995. The epigraph for this preface is lifted from Bourdieu's speech to thousands of workers, students, and farmers gathered at the *Gare de Lyon* for a rally in support of the strikes. The entirety of this speech and a sample of Bourdieu's political writing appear in *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market*. Also included in the same collection is an address to the Greek Trade Union Confederation (GSEE) in October 1996. Prior to the strikes of 1995, Bourdieu also participated in various campaigns against the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment in France and he has participated in a number of campaigns designed to expose France's lamentable record of human rights abuses in Algeria.

² Though Bourdieu was concerned with art at an early stage in his career (*The Love of Art*, 1966), there was a demonstrable shift in the the latter third of his career toward literary and artistic criticism. *The Rules of Art* is one of Bourdieu's most ambitious books, taking over ten years to complete. In addition, he left a book length study of Manet unpublished at the time of his death.

³ See, for example, Peter Bürger's "The Problem of Aesthetic Value" and Nicholas Garnham's review of *Distinction* in *The Sociological Review*.

⁴ One counter reading to Jameson's is Readings' unique claim in the *University in Ruins* that Bourdieu is actually a conservative critic. Readings claims that Bourdieu's conception of aesthetic practice is actually quite traditional and that he has essentially fooled most of his readers with a progressive gloss on social issues.

⁵ Toril Moi makes a similar case in "The Challenge of the Particular Case: Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture and Literary Criticism." Moi argues for the need to emphasise the political aspect of Bourdieu's thought lest he be absorbed by the North America academy as the latest fad from France.

⁶ Bourdieu addresses this issue directly in "The Social Conditions of the International Circulation of Ideas." He argues that a balance must be struck between carelessly applying his terms to overt political projects and the equally pressing need to identify and resist structures of domination. Later in his life, Bourdieu tilted the balance toward the latter need and actively worked to establish collaborative activist research projects with North American and European colleagues – specifically through an informal union of European activist intellectuals and the more formal establishment of his own research institute and its publishing wing, *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*.

⁷ In "How Schools Help Produce the Social Order," Bourdieu examines the remarkable overlap between the reproduction of class and privilege in the French education system with the education systems of the United States, Sweden, Germany, and Japan. Again, the point is not to claim that Bourdieu's project reduces to a meta-theory but rather to claim that we need to study the political potency of his terms in the context of applying them beyond his French examples. In order to manage this challenge, I will work with the concepts in Bourdieu's project that define social differentiation in market societies.

⁸ In a conversation with Günter Grass, Bourdieu speaks of a union of progressive writers and sociologists joining forces in the name of a "literature from below" (21). Bourdieu also explores the role of the novel as social commentary in his discussion with Grass. However, such discussions of literature's role in a progressive political agenda generally remain at the abstract level at which I engage them in this project.

⁹ Though Canadian scholars (such as Barbara Leckie and Imre Szeman) have written on Bourdieu, his work is virtually absent from the study of English Canadian literature. His work has, however, been used in several Canadian social contexts -- see, Brian Wilson's "Distinctions in the Stands: An Investigation of Bourdieu's "Habitus," Socioeconomic Status and Sport Spectatorship in Canada" and Mathieu Albert's "The Relevance of Pierre Bourdieu's Social Theory for the Study of Scientific Knowledge Production."

¹⁰ See also John Frow's *Cultural Studies and Cultural Values* (27-47).

¹¹ Bridget Fowler's *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory* would have also been a useful example to make my point. Though Fowler argues that the study of culture is a defining feature of Bourdieu's work, there is almost no examination of what difference that makes to Bourdieu's political ambitions. In addition, there is very little assessment in Fowler's argument of how the avowedly political nature of Bourdieu's work might affect our assessment of the political efficacy of cultural studies within the academy.

¹² It seems to me that Whitman's work is a unique opportunity to assess poetic attempts to connect with ordinary language and "ordinary people." In *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Bourdieu sets out the contradiction I am hinting at in my reading of Beach: "We could go on enumerating the strategies of bad faith through which the privileged of culture tend to perpetuate their monopoly, very often under the appearance of sacrificing it -- whether it be verbal deplorations of cultural dispossession...or the rehabilitations, as spectacular as they are inefficacious, aimed at universalizing cultural exigencies without universalizing the conditions that make them attainable" (88). In many ways this passage defines Bourdieu's cultural politics but the challenge it sets out is nowhere to be found in Beach's reading of Whitman.

¹³ Bourdieu makes this point in the following unvarnished and ungenerous assessment of the kind of belief I am discussing: "[A]ll forms of artistic faith, whether blind belief or pharisaic piety, or even belief freed from the observances of cultural ritualism (to which a scouring sociology can give access), have social conditions of possibility. This strikes a devastating blow to the mystical representation of the artistic 'encounter' and to the primary cult of art and the artist, with its holy places, its perfunctory rites, and its routinized devotions. And it is particularly devastating for those 'poor whites' of culture who desperately cling to the last vestiges of difference, that is, humanist culture, Latin, spelling, the classics, the West, and so on" (RS 86-87).

¹⁴ Despite his obvious Marxist heritage Bourdieu has been very hesitant to wade into any of the recent debates about the future of Marxism. He has not, for example, responded to the work of Laclau and Mouffe or others who have attempted to rethink and refit Marx's categories. Laclau and Mouffe mirror Bourdieu's attempt to rethink class in a less essentialist way than Marx conceived it. Also, in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe's notion of hegemony bears a strong resemblance to Bourdieu's conception of power.

¹⁵ Throughout his work, Bourdieu conflates intellectual work and cultural work (see, for example, *PM* 74, for a representative example). Swartz makes this point in chapter nine of *Power and Culture* and the overlap between intellectual and cultural work is the founding premise of Bridget Fowler's argument in *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory*. More precisely for my purposes, when I refer to culture, art, or literature throughout this project I am implicitly referring to Bourdieu's theory (and politics) of intellectual work.

¹⁶ In deploying this phrase I am, of course, borrowing from Jürgen Habermas' argument in *Legitimation Crisis* that the rational need to appeal to norms is the perpetual condition of both rational dialogue and its ongoing vulnerability. For Habermas, the legitimacy of administrative (i.e. state) action is to be judged by the degree to which it exposes itself to this paradox. I would also argue that Bourdieu builds on this theory by outlining the degree to which the reason of intellectual work

contributes to legitimizing (rather than exposing) unequal social relations. Indeed, I think one could so go far as to say Bourdieu's work invokes a materialist legitimation crisis in the very conception of reason and consensus as Habermas uses them.

¹⁷ In *Pascalian Meditations*, Bourdieu defines the scholastic disposition as follows: "Learning situations, and especially scholastic exercises in the sense of ludic, gratuitous work, performed in the 'let's pretend' mode, without any real economic stake, are the occasion for acquiring, in addition to all they explicitly aim to transmit, something essential, namely the scholastic disposition and the set of presuppositions contained in the social conditions that make them possible" (14).

¹⁸ Michael Bérubé's *The Employment of English* is a recent exception. Bérubé explores the political state of the profession in a series of essays. In a particularly pointed chapter, entitled "The Blessed of the Earth," Bérubé tells the fascinating story of how the English faculty (and other faculty) at Yale behaved in response to attempts by graduate students to organize a union. Bérubé's account is an excellent example of the clash between scholastic liberal ideals and the reality of self-interest from which academics so often claim immunity – in the name of collegiality and professionalism. See also Cary Nelson's *Manifesto of a Tenured Radical*.

¹⁹ Bourdieu equates the formalist appeal to universality he finds in Rawls and Habermas with market economics in the following passage: "It is impossible to grant anything other than an arbitrary and quasi-ludic adherence to the typically scholastic mental experience which, as in Habermas – who, despite the apparent differences...is very close to Rawls – tends to reduce a question of politics (already a somewhat unreal one) to a problem of rational ethics: to imagine that we are trying to organize social and economic institutions with people whose agreement we must obtain, but on the basis that we know nothing about the social position that that each will occupy or of the society in which they will live. And it is impossible not to think that what Rawls calls the 'veil of ignorance,' ...is a fine evocation, a useful one in the end, of the abstraction on which the economic orthodoxy from which Rawls has adopted his mode of thought is, often unwittingly, based" (*PM* 79). Bourdieu also engages the overlap between economics and his theory of intellectual work in chapter one of *Pascalian Meditations* (19). In addition, in "Bourdieu's Refusal" Guillory also makes an overt link between the voluntarism almost universally present in intellectual work and the illusion of the "free market" at play in economics (369-73).

²⁰ There is, for example, a strong echo of Marx in Bourdieu's arguments on universality: "For each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it, is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones" (*The German Ideology* 62).

²¹ See, for example, chapter two of *Distinction* and chapter one of *Language and Symbolic Power*. In addition, the submissive role that the dispossessed play in their subjection is also the defining theme of *Weight of the World* (see, in particular, 607-626).

²² Bourdieu addresses this question throughout his career and, in particular, in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. He carefully argues that being an outsider, by virtue of class, allows one a certain jaundiced perspective on much of the ritual that governs academic work. That perspective, however, is only useful if it is the genesis of a political gesture as opposed to any kind of moralism rooted in resentment. A political analysis is only useful if it deploys the tools of reason as a means of illuminating the political stakes engendered by the discomfort of someone socially placed to experience the restricted economy of intellectual work as arbitrary. This point is also addressed in Ryan and Sackery's *Strangers in Paradise: Academics from the Working Class*.

²³ In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls sets out a series of primary goods to define his notion of justice (90). These "goods" take the place of the Good in moral philosophy and Rawls' selection of primary goods

defines his political liberalism. Bourdieu, of course, rejects the political economy and philosophy of choice in Rawls' work. For Bourdieu's discussion of Rawls, see *Pascalian Meditations* (78).

²⁴ In *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, and elsewhere, Bourdieu invokes the sentimental connotations associated with the pastoral to denote the invocation of popular consciousness. This, again, represents, for Bourdieu, a form of idealistic universality in which equality of access exists in the linguistic claim but is implicitly and perniciously denied in material reality. This point will form the core of the arguments I make in reading the work of Charles Altieri.

²⁵ When Bourdieu speaks of rationalist notions of subjectivity, he is generally referring to economic models of human behaviour. For Bourdieu, such models reach an apogee in the social sciences with the claims of rational actions theories (RAT). RAT posits a conception of social action reduced largely to rational choice. Such a model of social action repeats the empty formalism of economics because, for Bourdieu, "RAT is thoroughly oblivious to the historically varying forms of interests" (*IRS* 125). See John Elster's *Rational Choice* for a critical examination of theories of social action based on RAT.

²⁶ Marc Shell provides a fascinating historical examination of the relationship between literature and economics in *The Economy of Literature and Money, Language, and Thought*. In addition to a historical overview, Shell examines the structural analogies between language and monetary exchange. On the whole, however, Shell plays down the social antagonism between money and thought and literature and economics.

²⁷ The ongoing debate about Bourdieu's model of social change (or lack thereof) is captured in *Exploring the Social Theories of Pierre Bourdieu*, a collection of essays organized around the question of social transformation in Bourdieu's work. See also Judith Butler's *Excitable Speech* – Butler's arguments are taken up in some detail in the final chapter of this project.

²⁸ Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature* is a definitive exception to this statement. In *Professing Literature* Graff offers an important history of literary study in the United States. Graff captures the sense of historical novelty attaching to the very notion of studying literature as a profession (2). Though one could argue that the work of British cultural theorists such as Anthony Easthope, Raymond Williams, and Jonathon Dollimore are also exceptions, none of these thinkers fully develops the degree to which the very notion of literary study as a profession is a profoundly social and political construct. By contrast, Bourdieu takes the social and economic position of scholastic work as the starting point for his politics of intellectual labour. There is, in short, an important difference between showing how cultural and literary objects are socially constructed and examining the political economy of thought itself.

²⁹ Michael Ryan's *Marxism and Deconstruction* is an important elaboration of this point. Ryan argues that the overlap between Marxism and deconstruction is defined by Marx's deconstruction of exchange value. Ryan claims that this overlap has been ignored by Derrideans and Marxists in equal measure. In many ways his argument anticipated *Specters of Marx* and the flurry of debate it sparked.

³⁰ Russell Jacoby and Roger Kimball both mount what I consider to be cynical critiques of intellectual work. Jacoby's thesis in *The Last Intellectuals* is defined by an unsophisticated and ultimately anti-intellectual demand that intellectual work must always be first and foremost a political statement. At the other end of the political spectrum, Kimball sees himself as the last man at the barricades protecting high culture from the infidels. Kimball's signal statement on the decline of the intellect and morality can be found in *Art's Prospect: The Challenge of Tradition in An Age of Celebrity*.

³¹ Though Bourdieu rarely engages in contemporary debates in sociology, Parsons often stands as a shorthand for academic sociology in the United States. For Bourdieu, Parsons' attempt to devise a theory of social action and the social world devoid of a social theory of intellectual work is a paradigmatic example of de-politicized sociology. For a further discussion of Bourdieu's relation to Parsons see *IRS* 72.

In the case of Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, Bourdieu argues that the social and intellectual habitus of the observer is elided. Though Garfinkel sets out to capture the logic of social practice, his work does not integrate the social status of the observer's habitus into its methodology (see *IRS* 73).

³² Susan Rubin Suleiman's *Budapest Diary: In Search of a Motherbook* is a particularly good example of an autobiographic form of reflexivity that is much more an academic memoir than a searching analysis of the social grounding of intellectual work.

³³ Wacquant elaborates on the generative nature of Bourdieu's methodology in his introduction to *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*: "In sum, Bourdieu's concern for reflexivity like his social theory, is neither egocentric nor logocentric but quintessentially embedded in, and turned toward, scientific practice. It fastens not upon the private person of the sociologist in her idiosyncratic intimacy but on the concatenations of acts and operations she effectuates as part of her work and on the collective unconscious inscribed in them. Far from encouraging narcissism and solipsism, epistemic reflexivity invites intellectuals to recognize and to work to neutralize the specific determinisms to which their innermost thoughts are subjected and it informs a conception of the craft of research designed to strengthen its epistemological moorings. (48)

³⁴ This point is made by several other readers of Bourdieu's work. In particular Derek Robbins notes the paradox of Bourdieu's emphasis on intellectual work as a privileged political space in *The Work Of Pierre Bourdieu: Recognizing Society*.

³⁵ Said uses this phrase in *Culture and Imperialism* (18). Said's phrase complements Bourdieu's work because it demands a politics that moves away from individual choice and recrimination toward a material, historical analysis of political conflict.

³⁶ Steven Brint pays particular attention to this problem in "The Powers of the Intellectuals." Like Bourdieu, Brint examines the social power of intellectuals but he also pays closer attention to how and why most intellectuals remain marginal to the real machinations of power.

³⁷ Charles Taylor makes this point in his work on Bourdieu in *Philosophical Arguments*: "Maps or [intellectualist] representations, by their very nature, abstract from lived time and space. To make something like this the ultimate causal factor is to make the actual practice in time and space merely derivative, a mere application of a disengaged scheme. It is the ultimate in Platonism.... This invitation to imitate the really successful modern sciences also encourages reification" (40).

³⁸ Though I obviously agree with Guillory's thesis that Bourdieu's aesthetic theory is premised on a certain refusal of economic discourse, Bourdieu did turn his attention, toward the end of his life, to the political and economic discourse of neo-liberalism. Several chapters in *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market* talk about a global consolidation of economic policy expressly designed to wipe out collective progressive social programs (see in particular "The Left Hand and the Right hand of the State" and "Neo-liberalism, the Utopia (Becoming a Reality) of Unlimited Exploitation").

³⁹ Richard Shusterman offers a comprehensive overview of Bourdieu's relation to philosophy in "Bourdieu and Anglo-American Philosophy" and "Bourdieu as Philosopher" from *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*. Shusterman pays careful attention to Bourdieu's engagement with Dewey, Wittgenstein, and Austin.

⁴⁰ Though I largely concur with Bourdieu's analysis of the events of May 1968, his analysis does call into question the generality subsumed under his notion of field. For example, the reaction within the intellectual field was not uniform between the engineering and humanities faculties in May 1968. Such shortcomings, however, call to mind the need for a greater subdivision within a field. It does not as Readings suggests render the notion of field meaningless or useless in the analysis of power. In addition to the foregoing problem, Swartz has also pointed out the lack of analysis in Bourdieu's work of non-governmental political formations (of both the left and right) and social movements. Such

movements often straddle the intellectual field and other fields in ways that make their relation to power ambiguous. I would argue that a careful analysis of such groups (the gay liberation movement for instance) would complicate the terms of Bourdieu's analysis. Again, the solution is an expansion of Bourdieu's idea of field rather than any weakness inherent to the concept itself.

⁴¹ Mikhail Bakhtin's argument in *The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* is a limited exception to this tendency. Bakhtin argues that the modern discourse of literature is defined by its ability to recite and dramatize common speech genres. Dostoevsky's work is radical for Bakhtin precisely because his language is not distanced from common utterance. However, Bakhtin is also very clear that literature is a highly specialized, performative use of language.

⁴² For a more detailed treatment of the relationship between Bourdieu's work and Marx see Rogers Brubaker's "Rethinking Classical Sociology: The Sociological Vision of Pierre Bourdieu." See also Axel Honneth's "The Fragmented World of Symbolic Forms: Reflections on Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture."

⁴³ See Tony Bennett's *Outside Literature* for a concise overview of the manner in which Marxist readings of literature tend to be idealistic precisely because they exclude literature from the base/superstructure model. The peculiar economy of literature and art generally induces either a reductive reading or, as Bennett outlines, a very 'un-materialist' notion of art. Art is seen as either a direct reflection of capitalist relations or as an ideal, emancipatory discourse.

⁴⁴ Throughout his work, Bourdieu views Chomsky's career through the lens of academic linguistics. Bourdieu simply does not explore Chomsky's activist politics nor does he seem interested in how his radical politics are sometimes at odds with his deterministic linguistics (see Robert Barsky's *Noam Chomsky: A Life of Dissent*). Though Chomsky himself insists on a strict separation of his academic and political work, Bourdieu's adherence to this split is curious.

⁴⁵ Bourdieu, like Habermas, regards the construction of the social world as an ongoing conversation. Where he differs sharply from Habermas is the attention he pays to the power relations that regulate who speaks and who is listened to in modern "democracies."

⁴⁶ Bourdieu takes up this issue in the "Culture and Politics" chapter of *Distinction*. He elaborates on his empirical findings about class and taste and makes the important point that we need a rigorous sociology to distinguish between the (physical) ability to speak and the (social) right to be heard. This point is also addressed in chapter 8 of *Language and Symbolic Power*, "Political Representation: Elements for a Theory of the Political Field."

⁴⁷ Robert Putnam's work on the decline of civic life in United States is an intriguing analysis of the decline in civic institutions. However, in *Bowling Alone* and elsewhere, Putnam relentlessly avoids the political and materialist implications of his empirical research.

⁴⁸ For Bourdieu, structuralism ultimately undermines the place of agency in the social world: "In taking up...habitus, I wanted to react against structuralism and its strange philosophy of action which, implicitly...made the agent disappear by reducing it to the role of supporter or bearer of the structure" (RA 179). This bracketing of agency also extends to the social space occupied by the structuralist theorist. It is in this context that Bourdieu claims that, despite what he has learned from structuralism, the structuralist model of the social world actually impedes a proper sociology of intellectual work.

⁴⁹ In "Performativity's Social Magic" Butler defines habitus as follows: "[H]abitus is formed, but is also formative. The habitus is not only a site for the reproduction of the belief in the reality of a given social field – a belief by which that field is sustained – but it also generates dispositions which are credited with inclining the social subject to act in relative conformity with the ostensibly objective demands of the field. Strictly speaking, the habitus produces or generates dispositions as well as their transposability" (116).

⁵⁰ Though it would be a caricature of Habermas' work to characterize it as inter-subjective, his conception of the public sphere and the ethics of communication is heavily reliant on a view of society that is inter-subjective. Habermas' work, to my mind, does not address the tension between the voluntarist rational self on the one hand and the material condition of thought on the other. As Bourdieu stresses in *Pascalian Meditations*, social contradictions in Habermas' project are addressed by appealing to a subjectivist version of rationality (65-67).

⁵¹ Bourdieu makes the same point in *Distinction* when he argues: "Academic capital is in fact the guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the school (the efficiency of which depends on the amount of cultural capital directly inherited from the family). Through its value-inculcating and value-imposing operations, the school also helps (to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the initial disposition, i.e. class of origin) to form a general, transposable disposition toward legitimate culture, which is first acquired with respect to scholastically recognized knowledge and practices but tends to be applied beyond the bounds of curriculum, taking the form of a disinterested propensity to accumulate experience and knowledge" (23).

⁵² See Judith Butler's comparison of Bourdieu and Derrida on the question of subversion in *Excitable Speech*.

⁵³ In "Performativity's Social Magic" Judith Butler also claims that habitus is dependent on field: "Indeed, the habitus is the sedimented and incorporated knowingness that is the accumulated effect of playing that game, operating within those conventions. In this sense, the habitus presupposes the field as the condition of its own possibility" (117).

⁵⁴ See Charles Taylor's "To Follow a Rule," in *Philosophical Arguments*. In "To Follow A Rule" Taylor examines Bourdieu's work through the lens of Wittgenstein's philosophy. However, like most of Bourdieu's readers, he elides the difficult political questions that define Bourdieu's work. In "To Follow A Rule," Taylor pays very little attention to Bourdieu's profound political ambivalence about the enterprise of philosophy.

⁵⁵ The notion of reflexivity Bourdieu is demanding here clearly moves beyond a reflection of a particular discipline or the academic problems that drive that discipline. In fact, the way Bourdieu uses field suggests that these internal battles within the field (that so often seem catastrophic and toxic to those outside it) are actually vital to the field's survival and vitality. This sense of productive conflict is what Bourdieu has in mind when he identifies field as "the locus of relations of force – and not only of meaning – and of struggles aimed at transforming it, and therefore of endless change" (RS 103). As I suggest in my chapter on Charles Altieri, Bourdieu's concept of field allows a more sober assessment of the political at play in critiques of the literary canon. Indeed, this is the very argument that John Guillory forwards in *Cultural Capital*.

⁵⁶ See Stanley Fish for one of the latest variations on such quasi-objectifications in *Professional Correctness*. Fish's analysis takes place at the level of "professionalism" and he offers a spirited and strident defense of the autonomy of intellectual work. In doing so, however, Fish simply endorses the current rift between the social world and the professional world of academia by arguing that no good can come to either world by mingling them. Without doubt, Fish makes a strong case that no good could come to his own conception of intellectual work if it were subjected to a reflexive analysis.

⁵⁷ Rorty uses the notion of redescription as a means of offering an intellectual history of philosophy and literature. However, he also extends the term in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* and *Achieving Our Country* as the basis for subjective and social agency. As a working concept of culture, Rorty's premise is useful but, of course, he is simply not interested in the vexing question of the social and material terms upon which we acquire the skill to redescribe our cultural inheritance. In Rorty's work, politics ultimately reduces to the social hope that those who read Proust or Nabokov will find enough common human cause to be stirred to fight for the redistribution of material wealth.

⁵⁸ This point is powerfully captured when Bourdieu links taste and necessity: “The specific effect of the taste for necessity, which never ceases to act..., is most clearly seen when it is, in a sense, operating out of phase, having survived the disappearance of the conditions which produced it” (374).

⁵⁹ Though there is an affinity between Bourdieu’s notion of misrecognition and Marx’s notion of false consciousness, Bourdieu crafts misrecognition as a means of addressing what is least convincing about Marx’s use of class consciousness. As Marx uses false consciousness in *The German Ideology* and elsewhere it assumes a correlative true consciousness – that is, of course, class consciousness which leads, ultimately, to revolution. Bourdieu is much more cautious about the potential for recognizing and resisting social relations of power. More importantly, Bourdieu’s notion of misrecognition supplies a convincing theory of why the dispossessed submit to power even when they are fully conscious of their domination. Though Marx was fully aware of this political reality, his conception of false consciousness does not properly account for its durability.

⁶⁰ Bourdieu captures this sense of embodied history when he draws a direct link between our present agency and past history in *The Logic of Practice*: “The body believes what it plays at: it weeps if it mimes grief. It does not represent what it performs, it does not memorize the past, it enacts the past, bringing it back to life” (73).

⁶¹ The issue of social change in Bourdieu’s work is far from settled among readers of his work. Sympathetic and hostile critics alike question whether or not social change is possible in Bourdieu’s social world. Virtually all of the contributors to Craig Calhoun’s important collection, *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, are sympathetic to Bourdieu’s work but the consensus of the contributors is that Bourdieu forecloses the possibility of social change. Edward LiPuma, for example, argues that Bourdieu outwits any potential intellectual theory of social change. While LiPuma’s concerns about social change are well founded, I think most of Bourdieu’s critics miss the degree to which he is arguing that working to transform the material conditions of class is a more pressing task than conceiving of theoretical models of social change. Bourdieu has also consistently claimed that his theory is designed to show how difficult and slow social change is, not that it is impossible (see *IRS* 196 for a powerful example of such a point). Though it is true that Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic power and cultural capital distances him from Marx, I think many of his readers forget that Bourdieu is indeed a Marxist thinker more interested in changing the social world than interpreting it.

⁶² See “Neo-liberalism, the Utopia (Becoming a Reality) of Unlimited Exploitation’ in *Acts of Resistance* for a representative sample of Bourdieu’s critique of economics and economists.

⁶³ In *The Weight of the World*, Bourdieu discovers an exception to this tendency amongst what he refers to as the “sub-proletariat.” Those without work or much hope for a future tend to engage pathologically in fanciful speculation about future plans and imminent success. Far from indulging in the pathos of these tendencies Bourdieu mounts a material explanation for this disparity and leaves little doubt about the social and psychological ruin that most of these plans come to.

⁶⁴ Though Bourdieu wrote about the distinctive nature of agrarian economies in Algeria throughout his career, he offers a detailed overview in *The Logic of Practice* (147-199) and *Practical Reason* (94-123).

⁶⁵ Jonathan Loesberg makes this point in “Bourdieu’s Derrida’s Kant: The Aesthetics of Refusing Aesthetics.” Loesberg argues that Bourdieu’s aesthetic theory has much more in common with Derrida’s reading of Kant than he is willing to admit. He also hints at some of the political implications of this point – implications I develop in some detail in my final chapter.

⁶⁶ Bourdieu’s relationship with his French post-structuralist contemporaries is largely antagonistic. In *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* he asserts that Barthes’ work is “aestheticist entertainment... concealed behind a scientific front” (154). In the case of Derrida, Bourdieu argues that

deconstruction's primary achievement is the aestheticization of philosophy: "Derrida is, on this point, no doubt the most skilled and the most ambiguous insofar as he manages to give the appearance of a radical break to analyses which always stop short of the point where they would fall into 'vulgarity,' as I showed in the postscriptum, to *Distinction*: situating himself both inside and outside the game, on the field and on the sidelines, he plays with fire by brushing against a genuine critique of the philosophical institution without completing it" (IRS 154). Derrida addresses this very accusation in his new book *Who's Afraid of Philosophy: The Right to Philosophy*.

⁶⁷ As Guillory notes, Craig Calhoun goes so far as to agree that Bourdieu's work does invite an economic reading. In *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, Calhoun conflates Bourdieu's notion of interest and capital with economic accumulation: "The motive force of social life is the pursuit of distinction, profit, power, wealth, and so on. Bourdieu's account of capital is an account of the resources that people use in such pursuits. In this sense, despite disclaimers, Bourdieu does indeed share a good deal with Gary Becker and other rational choice theorists" (71). Bourdieu has never ignored a certain economic element to human agency, but what Calhoun glosses over is the degree to which habitus, capital and the entire vocabulary of terms I examine in my first two chapters complicate the idea of accumulation and interest. In addition, Calhoun's reading confirms the need to carefully examine Bourdieu's investment in art and literature. To my mind, Bourdieu's complex engagement with art is vital to assessing the notion of economy in his work and it is, therefore, telling that culture is largely ignored in Calhoun's writing on Bourdieu.

⁶⁸ Though Bourdieu does not do a thorough survey of literary criticism, there are three basic "schools" he defines his theory against: first, Russian formalism -- on the basis that the analysis pays too little attention to the social and material foundation of the literary object (*The Field of Cultural Production* 180); second, he rejects Marxist critics such as Georg Lukács and Lucien Goldmann because they pay insufficient attention to the autonomy of the literary object (*The Field of Cultural Production* 180); third, he rejects the contemporary French criticism of Barthes and Derrida as apolitical gamesmanship (IRS 154).

⁶⁹ There is a veritable encyclopedia of scholarship on this topic but Sarah Corse's *Literature and Nationalism: The Politics of Culture in Canada and the United States* is a very useful summary of the debates in a North American context. Corse examines over 200 novels and outlines the role that their publication and dissemination play in the creation of nationalist myths. Corse also argues that while grand national narratives have declined, literature still does subtle and important ideological work in the creation of nationalist self-images in Canada and the United States.

⁷⁰ In *Contingencies of Value*, Barbara Herrnstein Smith also argues for an antagonistic relation between literary value and economic value. However, Herrnstein Smith differs from Guillory in that she ends up conflating the struggle for cultural value with the undecidable terms of exchange value. For Guillory's critique of Herrnstein Smith, see chapter 5 of *Cultural Capital*.

⁷¹ For Bourdieu's theory of the modern state, see *The State Nobility and Practical Reason* (35-63).

⁷² This sense of resentment and dislocation has led some to define the modern gesture of literature in terms of a "mad" transgression. In *The Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva attempts to synthesize her interest in psychoanalysis with a sociological and political examination of Modernist aesthetics. Despite the fact that only the first third of the book is translated, *The Revolution in Poetic Language* is an important attempt to link the "mad," radical experimentation of Modernism with a progressive political project. However, the counter-point of Bourdieu's work is the manner in which he relentlessly demonstrates the social origin of this "madness" and the political stakes bound up with energies too often seen as subjective revolts.

⁷³ In *Rules of Art*, Bourdieu conflates "the whole process of social ageing [with what] which Flaubert calls sentimental education" (10). See note 126 below for a full description of social ageing.

⁷⁴ Though Bourdieu has consistently distanced himself from Foucault and other postmodern thinkers, his refusal to spell out a specific political program has led to charges of relativism. His investment in the impartiality he learned from Flaubert in describing the social world leads some readers to suggest that he mirrors Foucault's depressing, cold, and aesthetic picture of power. It is for precisely this reason that Readings calls Bourdieu a conservative thinker. It is also this reasoning that leads Jeffrey Alexander to conclude that Bourdieu's social analysis is a "Trojan Horse for determinism" – as opposed to a catalyst for social change (131). In a different context, Derek Robbins accuses Bourdieu of "fatalism or...[a] reluctant cosmic conservatism" (175). What these characterizations miss, as I have already noted, is that Bourdieu's practice is designed to show how difficult meaningful social change is. Reflexive sociology demands a provisional distance from the social world in order to describe the laws of its functioning. From that knowledge we may develop modest strategies of resistance in line with our actual freedom – which is, for Bourdieu, very often much less than we imagine it to be. Bourdieu argues that the kind of distance that this knowledge requires is a particular challenge for intellectual work: "The political task of social science is to stand up both against irresponsible voluntarism and fatalistic scientism, to help define a rational utopianism by using the knowledge of the probable to make the possible come true. Such a sociological, that is, realistic, utopianism is very unlikely among intellectuals. First because it looks petty bourgeois, it does not look radical enough. Extremes are always more chic, and the aesthetic dimension of political conduct matters a lot to intellectuals" (RS 97).

In addition to this realistic assessment of social change, Bourdieu also consistently rejects any teleological relation between what is and what is to be done. Judgment, for Bourdieu, takes place in the undecidable flow of social time. This sense of judgment is what defines the provisional link between Derrida and Bourdieu in my final chapter. As I argue in that chapter, however, Bourdieu is not always coherent on this point. I argue that Bourdieu is, at times, in denial about the effect that this his rigorous examination of the social world has on his more avowedly political aspirations.

⁷⁵ In a letter to Colet, quoted in *Rules of Art*, Flaubert lays out this politics: "The only way to live in peace is to place yourself in one leap above all of humanity, and to have nothing to do with it but an ocular relation. This would scandalize...the whole sterile and dried up race (inactive in the public good as in the ideal) of humanitarians, republicans, etc. – Too bad! They should start paying their debts before preaching charity...Fraternity is one of the most beautiful inventions of social hypocrisy" (110). I would argue that, like Flaubert's aesthetic gesture, Bourdieu's reflexive sociology is an attempt to pay the debt Flaubert cites above. For Bourdieu, all politics are vacuous without the painful self-reflection of sociology and art.

⁷⁶ Bourdieu is also responding, in *Rules of Art*, to the tendency to read Flaubert's struggle as a heroic individualist gesture. For Bourdieu, Sartre's reading of Flaubert is emblematic of this tendency. Where Sartre begins his inquiry by asking what we know about Gustave Flaubert, Bourdieu begins his inquiry by asking what it is about the social field of possibilities that conditioned Flaubert's work. For a more detailed examination of Bourdieu's antagonistic relationship with Sartre see Moi's "The Challenge of the Particular Case: Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture and Literary Criticism" and Joseph Margolis' "Pierre Bourdieu: Habitus and the Logic of Practice."

⁷⁷ Bourdieu is clearly picking up on the heirs to Marx's thought who hope to follow up on Marx's engagement with aesthetics. Though never clearly articulated, Bourdieu's sense of political economy could be read as an acceptance of Paul de Man's challenge to read Marx aesthetically in *Blindness and Insight*.

⁷⁸ In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida offers a compelling deconstruction of Marx's faith in value as an alternative ground to exchange value (155-60).

⁷⁹ In fact Bourdieu follows Marx quite closely in attempting to politicize the very specificity of aesthetic activity. The fact that aesthetic practice in capitalist society stands as a marker of class division forms an ethical and political challenge independent of art's form and content. The echo of Marx in Bourdieu's work is unmistakable in this regard and the following quote from *Marx and Engels*

on *Literature and Art* could have come from *The Rules of Art*: "The exclusive concentration of artistic talent in particular individuals, and its suppression in the broad mass which is bound up with this, is a consequence of the division of labour. If even in certain social conditions, everyone was an excellent painter, that would not exclude the possibility of each of them being also an original painter, so that here too the difference between 'human' and 'unique' labor amounts to sheer nonsense. In any case, with a communist organization of society, there disappears the subordination of the artist to local and national narrowness, which arises entirely from division of labor, and also the subordination of the artist to some definite art, thanks to which he is exclusively a painter, sculptor, etc, the very name of his activity adequately expressing the narrowness of his professional development and his dependence on the division of labor. In a communist society there are no painters but at most people who engage in painting among other activities" (71). While Bourdieu does not buy into Marx's evangelical belief in communism, he is implicated in the horizon of desire Marx defines. The political desire at stake here views the division of labour as a collective forgetting of the material dispossession at the heart of modern society.

⁸⁰ In Rawls' conception of the original position, in *A Theory of Justice*, we are called upon to imagine a ubiquitous, disinterested subject who is able to exercise judgment unfettered by prior social, personal, or historical realities. In *Canons and Consequences*, Altieri mirrors this structure in his conception of the canon and the model of judgment that sustains it. Indeed Altieri devotes an entire chapter to Rawls' work in *Canons and Consequences*. As I argue throughout this chapter, Altieri then transposes Rawls' formalist notion of judgment onto ethical and political dilemmas. In the end, I think a compelling case can be made for the overlap between Rawls' project and the politics Altieri ultimately settles for. It may also be the case that such an assessment is too generous because, unlike Rawls, Altieri offers no caveats about how his model of judgment might be compromised by existing material inequities.

Altieri makes this direct connection himself in *Painterly Abstraction in Modern American Poetry* when he links the original position to the self-reflexive nature of reading literature (see 374). In addition to my point above, Altieri also views literature as an ideal venue for developing the skill and disposition needed to assume the original position. Again, however, this position is assumed without regard for the fact that social circumstance and the disposition required to assume the original position is tacitly universalized.

⁸¹ Altieri was recently appointed director of the Consortium for the Arts, a California based lobby organization housed at Berkeley. The consortium's mandate is to increase the public profile of the arts, secure greater government support for the performing arts and their study in the academy, and to act as a bridge between performers, academics and the general public. Altieri has taken partial leave time from his teaching and is developing a fairly substantial public profile as an activist campaigner for the arts.

⁸² Readings argues that, with the decline of the nationalist mission of literature, those who study literature are left to redefine the cultural capital of their work. Readings sees the canon wars and the development of cultural studies as natural outgrowths of this history (3).

⁸³ In *Act and Quality*, Altieri leaned heavily on Austin's notion of speech act theory to expand the horizon of his poetic readings. However, by the time he comes to write *Subjective Agency* and *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry*, speech act theory had literally been reduced to a footnote. This eclectic and often fleeting investment in philosophical traditions runs throughout Altieri's work.

⁸⁴ Altieri uses this phrase in *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry* to characterize the work of Derrida, Foucault and an assembly of other thinkers he denotes as postmodern. However, the phrase is lifted out of its context in Paul Ricoeur's argument in *Freud and Philosophy*. Ricoeur uses the phrase to denote the reading strategy of Freud, Marx and Nietzsche, but he is not at all pointing to the kind of cynical relativism Altieri is hoping to capture with the phrase. In fact, Ricoeur uses suspicion in this context to announce a new interpretive method: "All three clear the horizon for a more

authentic word, for a new reign of Truth, not only by means of a 'destructive' critique, but by the invention of an art of interpreting" (33).

⁸⁵ Though Derrida and Foucault often come to stand as representatives of what ails postmodernism, Altieri has Hal Foster in mind when he makes his most dismissive comments about postmodern readings of art and politics. Foster is, in some ways, a curious choice. Though interesting in his own right, he is a highly unlikely candidate to stand for all of the sins (or virtues) of cultural studies. Thinkers such as Raymond Williams and Stephen Greenblatt would have been far more provocative foils for Altieri's claims.

⁸⁶ Altieri elaborates on his reading of Malevich in "The Concept of Force as Modernist Response to Science." Malevich's project appeals to Altieri because he uses painting as a means of exploring the constructivist energy created by juxtaposing image and form. The internal energy the poem creates in its very abstraction is the same principle Altieri locates in his modernist poets.

⁸⁷ This modality of "nonetheless" occurs in another crucial passage of *Subjective Agency*: "I will develop two very general claims: we can use this model of expressivity to explain why agents make substantial investments in personal identities, understood as achievements, and, building on this approach to identities, we can formulate a model of social life in which self-determining individuals nonetheless have compelling interests in recognizing their dependence on one another" (121).

⁸⁸ In *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, Paul Guyer pays specific attention to the public nature of Kant's arguments on taste. Though Guyer is largely unconcerned with postmodern debates about subjectivity, his work is useful because he helps support the case that Kant's notions of taste and judgment have important political resources. To my mind the political entanglements one encounters in making claims for taste go a long way in explaining the resurgence of interest in Kant among literary critics.

⁸⁹ Michel Foucault's essay "What is Enlightenment?" is also a critical part of this theoretical story. In this essay Foucault stresses Kant's discontinuity with most of traditions he inherited and the degree to which Kant himself was casting about for a public sphere capable of absorbing his conception of subjectivity.

⁹⁰ *Sensus communis* is, one could argue, the final crucial term in Kant's thought that links individual freedom with universality. For Kant, a judgment could only be valid and useful if its terms of reference were potentially universal – if not universally held. *Sensus communis* supplied Kant with the vital missing term to make the claims he does for taste in *Critique of Judgment*. Unlike the claims for epistemology and ethics that respectively mark the first two critiques, "there is no science of the beautiful" (*CJ* 172). The claim that Kant makes for taste, then, comes to rest on a potential solidarity that he identifies in our ability to experience beauty and to feel pleasure. Kant defines *sensus communis* in the following strictly theoretical terms: "We must take *sensus communis* to mean the idea of a sense shared, i.e., a power to judge that in reflecting takes account (a priori), in our thought, of everyone else's way of presenting, in order as it were to compare our own judgment with human reason in general and thus escape the illusion that arises from the ease of mistaking subjective and private conditions for objective ones....we compare our judgement not so much with actual as rather with the merely possible judgments of others" (*CJ* 160).

As Kant makes clear in this definition, judgments of taste are universal insofar as they create the grounds for shared experiences (or as Kant calls it above, "sense shared") of beauty and pleasure. Kant was, of course, vague on just how that sense would work itself out in lived time and real communities. Indeed, much of the recent work on Kant's thought has focused on the gulf between Kant's ideal of universal judgment and the dissonance of that universality in reality. What is clear from this passage, however, is that Kant is more invested in the ideal of shared sense than in any empirical community. That said, for many of Kant's contemporary readers, such as Lyotard in *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* and in a different context, Jean Luc Nancy in *The Inoperative Community*, *sensus communis* becomes a subversion of the hegemony enjoyed by the first two critiques – and, by extension, the

claims of universality, knowledge and truth made in Kant's name by philosophers. Derrida's argument in *The Truth in Painting* takes up the tension between philosophical and aesthetic readings of Kant. In Lyotard, *sensus communis* is also vital to his attempt to disturb the symmetries of reason inaccurately (for Lyotard) ascribed to Kant. The key link to Altieri is the sophisticated sense in which, like, Kant he believes in the ability of the aesthetic object to allow us to avoid "mistaking subjective and private conditions for objective ones". Though Altieri avoids terms like objective and universal, his argument bears the weight of such terms precisely because he promises us an ethics and a politics that moves beyond Derrida's gamesmanship. Altieri locates (in a more idealistic gesture than Kant's) his *sensus communis* in art's "pure rationality" (PA 377).

⁹¹ One notable exception is Anthony Cascardi's *The Subject of Modernity*. Cascardi offers a historical survey of philosophical debates about subjective agency but ends his argument with an appeal to "aesthetic liberalism" as a potential answer to the contradiction his study unearths. Cascardi's notion of aesthetic liberalism adopts most of Kant's claims about aesthetics in a manner that sets him aside from Eagleton, Caygill, Derrida, Deleuze, and others who are reading Kant's aesthetics with an eye to contemporary philosophical dilemmas.

⁹² Altieri's exuberance for the potential of Modernism is reminiscent of a stunning passage from George Steiner's *Real Presences*. In the following passage Steiner takes Altieri's dismissal of the social theatre to its logical conclusion, in the name of the formal innovation of Modernism: "We can, I think, cite certain things said or unsaid irretrievably, in which Western consciousness, in respect of its literacy and commitment to an examined life moves house.

This move is first declared in Mallarme's disjunction of language from external reference and in Rimbaud's deconstruction of the first person singular. These two proceedings, and all that they entail splinter the foundations of the Hebraic-Hellenic-Cartesian edifice in which the ratio and psychology of the Western communicative tradition had lodged. Compared to this fragmentation, even the political revolutions and great wars in modern European history are, I would venture, of the surface" (94-95).

⁹³ Geoffrey Galt Harpham takes up this problem in an unflattering review of *Subjective Agency* in *The London Review of Books*. Galt Harpham argues that Altieri's commitment to a self-fashioning subject blinds him to the degree to which our formation as subjects is very often the product of unpredictable and unwelcome forces that we have little control over. He makes this point by claiming: "In Altieri's way of thinking the subject has no problematic 'depth,' no layers, no fugitive energies, creating opportunities for *méconnaissance*" (12).

⁹⁴ This animosity often finds its way into strange chapter and article titles such as "Postmodernism Unfair to Modernist Poetry" in *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry*.

⁹⁵ For example, Michael North, "The Dialect in/of Modernism: Pound and Eliot's Racial Masquerade," which argues that Eliot and Pound's formal innovation is inseparable from a certain set of racist social relations. See also Harriet Davidson's *T.S. Eliot* for a representative sample of politicized readings of Eliot.

⁹⁶ Bob Perelman makes the same argument in a different tone in *The Trouble with Genius*. Perelman argues that the difficulty of reading writers like Pound, Zukofsky, and Joyce betrays the potentially revolutionary power of the work. In the name of a qualified populism, Perelman argues for a return to more straightforward and clear language in poetic utterance. To my mind, Perelman's argument simply replicates the inequity inherent in the ability to understand and respond to literature by locating the inequity in language, rather than in social and material conditions. The problem, from my standpoint, is not that the poetry or fiction of Modernist writers is too complex but rather that the capital needed to accrue the competence necessary to appreciate the work is unjustly and unequally distributed.

⁹⁷ Though Martin Heidegger's work is not prominent in Altieri's work, Heidegger's notion of resolve, and the historical mandate and obligation of the will to battle its "thrownness" all complement Altieri's notion of the subject. Indeed many of the sociological arguments that Bourdieu makes against

Heidegger in *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger* could be transposed to Altieri's work, minus, of course, the commitment to National Socialism.

⁹⁸ See Butler's *Gender Trouble*.

⁹⁹ Altieri does not cite much of the contemporary debate about subjectivity in *Subjective Agency*. For a very useful survey of recent debates on subjective agency, see Cadava's *Who Comes After the Subject*. In "Eating Well," his contribution to this volume, Derrida explores subjective agency in terms that Altieri's theory of subjectivity is incapable of reckoning with.

¹⁰⁰ In reading "The Waste Land" Altieri leans heavily on Michael Levenson's reading of the poem in *The Genealogy of Modernism*. Levenson's reading is particularly compelling for Altieri because Levenson focuses on the plurality of meaning in the poem as opposed to the well-rehearsed readings of its multiplicity and indeterminacy. Levenson captures this sense of overdetermined meaning when he argues that: "[E]very model accounting for the synthetic acts that the mind is clearly performing seems to collapse under its own success. This poem does not lack synthetic patterns: it overflows in them" (159).

¹⁰¹ As I suggested earlier in the chapter, Altieri sidesteps the actual political commitments of his poets. In the case of Pound this is a particularly distressing omission. Pound's prose and poetry are littered with economic and social theories designed to underwrite his aesthetic practice. His investment in economic theory, for example, is always punctuated by a desire to reform economic and social institutions in the name of his epic, poetic ambitions for the individual. Again my point is not to deride Altieri for failing to denounce Pound or Eliot for their particular political positions, but rather to argue that he dodges the truth that his poets regarded the social world as far more than mere theatre. For a closer reading of economics in Pound's work see Richard Sieburth's "In Pound We Trust: The Economy of Poetry/The Economics of Poetry."

¹⁰² Altieri takes his cue for reading Pound from Hugh Kenner and his definitive *The Pound Era*. However, Altieri differentiates his reading from Kenner by moving away from what he sees as Kenner's excessive focus on the "contemplative attitude" Pound learned from painting and the other arts. Altieri goes on to argue that Kenner's concern for "pattern may even trap him in precisely the picture of religious need and responding modes of attention that Pound suggests confine us to the world of Botticelli" (290).

¹⁰³ In order to make the case for Pound's ethical concerns Altieri turns to Robert Nozick's *Philosophical Explanations*, which argues for inalienable individual rights and values that need not be vouchsafed (except in the most abstract, formal legal sense) by the "existing social order" (316). At one level, Nozick is a very odd choice for Altieri to turn to for philosophical support. Nozick was, until his death, a leading philosopher dedicated to the notion of individual rights over social control. He viewed virtually any program of social equalization as an infringement of individual rights. Quite naturally he became the adopted philosopher of Republicans in the 1970's and later the Libertarian party. Nixon's concept of the "night watchman budget" is borrowed from Nozick. Nozick employed this metaphor to imply that the state should be reduced to a shell and empowered only to keep the peace when absolutely necessary. All other interventions by the state on behalf of certain individuals would violate what Nozick saw as the inalienable rights of all individuals.

Despite such conservative pedigree, however, Nozick is, in some ways, a natural ally for Altieri. Altieri's vocabulary of winning and owning a sense of self is very much in line with Nozick, as is Altieri's contention that the social world is, at best, social theatre when matched against the struggle of the individual.

¹⁰⁴ Bourdieu identifies the social force of charisma when he argues as follows in *Distinction*: "Whereas the ideology of charisma regards taste in legitimate culture as a gift of nature, scientific observation shows that cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education... That is why art and cultural

consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social difference" (7).

¹⁰⁵ See for example the chapter entitled "Frank Stella and Jacques Derrida: Toward a Postmodern Ethics of Singularity" in Altieri's *Postmodernisms Now: Essays on Contemporaneity in the Arts (Literature and Philosophy)*.

¹⁰⁶ For a more extensive discussion of Altieri's view of Derrida see chapter three of *Postmodernisms Now: Essays on Contemporaneity in the Arts (Literature and Philosophy)*.

¹⁰⁷ At a recent talk in Quebec City, Altieri made the explicit argument that an elite form of judgment and perception wrenched from literature may be the only political hope we have. The conceit of his talk was the humorous, but politically unconvincing, notion that George W. Bush could be rescued by an education in the sensibilities that literature offered. Though he is clearly jesting, Altieri has very real political investments in the power of aesthetic education for social reform.

¹⁰⁸ See Barbara Leckie's "The Force of Law and Literature: Critiques of Ideology in Jacques Derrida and Pierre Bourdieu" for a comparison of Derrida's notion of law with Bourdieu's sociological analysis of law as a field.

¹⁰⁹ In "Derrida vs. Bourdieu: Sociologizing Deconstruction, Deconstructing the Social," Johannes Angermuller examines Bourdieu's ambivalent relationship to writing: "What Bourdieu's theory manifestly means is countered by what he is nevertheless forced to say: that there is no referential content without a textual form. Reality cannot but be represented through writing; a meaningful reality is never just there, but always produced as an ever differential form, as writing" (6). Despite a tantalizing title, however, Angermuller never really develops exactly what Derrida's terms have to offer Bourdieu's political ambitions.

¹¹⁰ There has been very little work done to date on the notion of ethics in Bourdieu's work. One notable exception is Jon Beasley's "Ethics as Post-Political Politics." In a Marxist context, Beasley large adapts Bourdieu's notion that philosophical conceptions of ethics are little more than manifestations of class ethos.

¹¹¹ There is a group of scholars, including Richard Kearney, John Caputo, John Llewelyn, and Simon Critchley, who read Derrida's work as, primarily, a reflection on ethics. Critchley, for example, argues that "ethics is the goal, or horizon, towards which Derrida's work tends" (2). This drive to read Derrida as a philosopher of ethics is premised on the belief that Emmanuel Levinas exercises a decisive influence on Derrida's work. Levinas transposes our infinitely open relationship to otherness as the basis for ethical action. Out of this infinity comes an infinite responsibility to the Other and otherness. The dilemma of acting and being is infinite and, therefore, so is the dilemma of ethical decision. The echo with Derrida's work is obvious here. Indeed, Levinas' notions of otherness, responsibility and infinitude predict many of Derrida's concerns. However, though Critchley sees himself as responding to a dearth of readings that acknowledge Levinas' influence on Derrida, I think he overplays the point. Levinas' influence on Derrida's thought is undisputed, but I think it is important to stress several differences between Derrida and Levinas. For example, Derrida has a far more developed conception of how writing influences the paradoxes of ethics. Derrida is also more concerned with finding a public voice for his conceptions of ethics and politics than Levinas was.

¹¹² Alex Callinicos' view typifies this dismissal of Derrida's politics: "Derrida's ethical turn is likely to amount to little more than an avowal of left liberalism and a rather weak one at that" (41).

¹¹³ Nancy Fraser's "The French Derrideans: Politicizing Deconstruction or Deconstructing the Political?" is, to my mind, among the most thoughtful critiques of Derrida's work. Working out of a feminist framework, Fraser argues that Derrida's notion of undecidability amounts to a pragmatically useless "meta-philosophical reflection" (148). What Fraser refuses to consider is that deconstructing

the political is the defining moment of the politics of deconstruction. Though Fraser has little investment in normative solutions to political dilemmas, she ignores the fact that her trenchant critique of Derrida implies that such solutions are out there. It is precisely this hope that Derrida deconstructs and, in doing so, he opens up new pathways for political thinking. Moreover, I think Fraser is simply wrong to suggest that Derrida's work remains at the level of "meta-political reflection." As I argue throughout this chapter, Derrida's work is about recasting the grounds upon which we act politically, not suspending action in the name of philosophy.

¹¹⁴ Though few critics make the overt link, this notion of difference and deferral is quite close to Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogism. For Bakhtin, the condition of any dialogue is that, strictly speaking, it can never end. The absence of a third term in communication insures that there will always be something to say and something to be understood.

¹¹⁵ See 155, n2 of *Limited Inc* for an overview of iterability's place in Derrida's thought.

¹¹⁶ John Searle's critique of Derrida would be an exemplar of the former view and, in different contexts, Terry Eagleton and Richard Rorty embody the latter.

¹¹⁷ Alisdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* and the third volume of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* set out the history of ethics. Both studies make a distinction between a rigid sense of morality and the conventional use of ethics as an exploration of how one comes to justify, to oneself and one's community, ethical decisions.

¹¹⁸ John Caputo's *Against Ethics* provides a comprehensive philosophical overview of Derrida's engagement with ethics. In addition to Kant, Hegel, and Levinas, Caputo also examines Derrida's conception of ethics in the context of Søren Kierkegaard's work. Caputo also examines some of the more theological influences on Derrida's notion of ethics.

¹¹⁹ Kate Soper offers an extreme version of such a critique when she suggests that the notion of undecidability actually leaves "more space" for "messianic totalitarianism." Soper's point is that if we allow ourselves to be paralysed by Derrida's self-reflection the world of politics is left to those much less circumspect about their praxis (27). What Soper misses is that Derrida's theories of decision and political *praxis* are conditioned by the possibility of totalitarianism as much as they are by the radical progressive form of justice and democracy he advocates. The very openness of history to the nightmare of totalitarianism is what calls us to act and judge. Soper, in the end, seems to be arguing that because Derrida cannot guarantee the permanent exile of totalitarianism from the political sphere, he might even be aiding and abetting anti-democratic structures.

¹²⁰ I am skeptical of those like Michael Sprinker who see *Specters of Marx* as Derrida's long awaited exit from the political closet. That said, many Marxist critics waiting for Derrida to take up Marx's challenge were disappointed with *Specters of Marx*, none more so than Terry Eagleton: "It is the ultimate post-structuralist fantasy: an opposition without anything as distastefully systemic or durably orthodox as an opposition, a dissent beyond all formulable discourse, a promise which would betray itself in the act of fulfillment, a perpetual excited openness to the Messiah who had better not let us down by doing anything as determinate as coming" (35).

¹²¹ Though I do not engage this issue directly, my reading of *Specters of Marx* runs counter to Ernesto Laclau's attempt to affiliate Derrida with Post-Marxism (see "The Time is Out of Joint"). Post-Marxism is a postmodern variant of Marxism that seeks to find ways of deploying Marx's critique while deconstructing his totalizing ambitions. Though Laclau's notion of Post-Marxism has much in common with Derrida's arguments, I believe that Laclau does not pay sufficient attention to the residual revolutionary desire that is at the heart of Derrida's reading. Laclau is also not particularly concerned with the searching critique of intellectual work that I outline in Bourdieu's thought.

¹²² See for example the following passage in *Limited Inc.*: “The concept of iterability is this singular concept that renders possible the silhouette of ideality, and hence of the concept, and hence of all distinction, of all conceptual opposition. But is also the concept that, at the same time, with the same stroke marks the limit of...conceptualization.” (LI 119). The silhouette here, I would argue, is like the spectres of Marx. They offer the shadow of justice as well as its absolute limit and horizon.

¹²³ The motif of making and keeping a promise recurs throughout Derrida’s work and it rehearses many of the paradoxes that inform this chapter. For example, Derrida argues that if one could guarantee that a promise would be kept it would, structurally, not be a promise. Making and keeping promises requires a certain historical opening or aporia. The historical opening is a moment of both peril and opportunity and the rigorous undecidability of those outcomes is the founding (and foundering) moment of all analysis. It is this opening for a promise or a decision that motivates Derrida’s poetic, performative style.

¹²⁴ For more on the paradoxes of death in Derrida’s work see *The Gift of Death*.

¹²⁵ The original paper that spawned this book was given at a conference entitled “Whither Marxism.”

¹²⁶ Note the overlap between Butler’s conception of censorship and the following powerful passage from *Distinction*: “Social ageing is nothing other than the slow renunciation or disinvestment (socially assisted and encouraged) which leads agents to adjust their aspirations to their objective chances, to espouse their condition, become what they are and make do with what they have, even if this entails deceiving themselves as to what they are and what they have, with collective complicity, and accepting bereavement of all the ‘lateral possibles’ they have abandoned along the way” (110).