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"Sketch for a Self-Analysis": Self-Reflexivity in Bourdieu's Approach to Literature

Abstract: This contribution explores how the pivotal role Pierre Bourdieu ascribes to self-reflexivity, in his theorisation of research in the social sciences and humanities, plays out in his theory of the literary field. According to Bourdieu, the concept of self-reflexivity is the most powerful methodological tool against the "scholastic point of view" typical of the academe, which imputes its own social logic to any object studied and is unable to account for the "practical logic" governing other social fields. A truly self-reflexive research should take into account the relation of the scholar to the social space, to the specific scholarly field in question and to the general conditions of the scholastic point of view. After an outline of Bourdieu's concept of self-reflexivity the chapter turns to the book *The Rules of Art* (1992) and asks how the general theoretical framework of self-reflexivity fits into the theory of the literary field.

Keywords: self-reflexivity; sociology of literature; sociology of science; literary theory; Pierre Bourdieu; author; habitus; literary field

1 Introduction

In the context of the social sciences and humanities, the idea of self-reflexivity is by no means new or surprising. In the second half of the twentieth century, in anthropology, sociology and many other disciplines, theorisation of the research process itself was understood to be one of the most urgent priorities. It also provoked the relatively new branch of the social theory of science which found its disciplinary voice with Robert K. Merton, David Bloor, and Bruno Latour. In the domain of literary criticism and literary theory the imperative to self-reflexivity has been perhaps even stronger and, since the 1960s, it has been embodied in quite varying approaches: from reader-response theory (especially in the variant advanced by Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser and inspired by Gadamer's hermeneutic), through post-structuralism and deconstruction (Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, etc.), new historicism and cultural materialism, feminist, queer and postcolonial criticism, to the new sociology of literature that aims to bridge the gap between the social sciences and humanities.

Needless to say, these are profoundly different ways of looking at literature, leading to more than one concept of self-reflexivity. These concepts can be reduced, however, to one basic assumption: self-reflexivity always stems from an awareness of the involvement of the scholar in the object of study, of the fact that the subject inevitably participates in the construction of the object studied. When we approach a literary text – and the analysis and interpretation of texts is at the core of any literary-critical project, even the "purely" theoretical one – we inescapably approach it from the point of view of readers embedded in particular historical and cultural frameworks, as well as scholars endowed with certain information, concepts and specific *doxa* anchored in the discourse of our (sub)discipline. (The relation between these two contexts is a difficult matter in itself.) In order to avoid the universalisation of our perspective, which would compromise our attempt at critical analysis, we have to incorporate this awareness into our scholarly methods and strategies.

The point is that this basic challenge in literary research (and in any research, although the challenges of self-reflexivity in particular disciplines differ) cannot be overcome simply by "bracketing" the involvement of the researcher, methodologically and/or rhetorically, so as to exclude it from the object of research. Many approaches to literary analysis thus turn self-reflexivity into a methodological imperative: it takes up the form of the historical hermeneutic circle in reader-response theory, the two-way exchange between the culture studied and the culture of the scholar in new historicism, or the political commitment in cultural materialism and theories based on the "politics and poetics of social difference" (feminism, queer theory, etc.). It also has to be said that even the fact that an approach is overtly self-reflexive does not prevent it from facing extremely difficult questions and aporias, be it in the form of the paradoxes of historicism or in the form of universalisation of certain political affiliations.

In this contribution I will focus on a theory that deliberately centres itself around self-reflexivity, and not only in the domain of literary studies: Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of literature, put under the umbrella of the "literary field". In Bourdieu's theory of practice, habitus and social fields, the intention to "objectify [...] the subject of objectification" (Bourdieu 2000, p. 10) – to objectify, in other words, the scholar embedded in a particular scholarly field as well as in the larger social space – is virtually omnipresent. The strength of this emphasis on self-reflexivity is extraordinary and perhaps beyond comparison in contemporary social science. This holds for Bourdieu's theory of literature as well; but as I will try to show, a truly self-reflexive theory of the literary field is difficult to achieve.

In order to demonstrate this, I will proceed in the following steps. First, I will sketch the role self-reflexivity "plays" in Bourdieu's theory of action and I will

analyse its principal forms. Then I will focus on two of his works that emphasise self-reflexivity by way of using narrative strategies, that is, by letting the social agent (the agent studied and/or the researcher) "speak". Subsequently I will turn to his book *The Rules of Art* (first published in 1992) that incorporates most of his writings on literature and proposes a "new science of works" based on his theory of the literary field; specifically, I will ask how the general theoretical postulates of self-reflexivity are realised in the book. Finally, I will follow several directions that critique the notion of self-reflexivity in Bourdieu's theory of literature, with the help of current French "post-Bourdieusian" research. I should clarify here that my objective is not to demonstrate that self-reflexivity within the field theory simply doesn't "work" but rather to point out the difficulty of achieving a "practical" self-reflexivity, even within a theoretical framework that genuinely attempts to reconstruct the positions of social agents and the inner logic of their actions.

2 A Self-Reflexive Social Theory of Science and Knowledge Production

Bourdieu's theory of the literary field is part of his project on the analysis of social fields, including fields of cultural production. The whole project in turn is framed by his theory of practice structured around the concept of habitus. In the initial stages of the formation of his theory, Bourdieu had to come to terms with structuralism – at that time the most innovative approach – in anthropology, philosophy and linguistics. His concept of the social field owes much to such major figures of sociology as Max Weber and Émile Durkheim (which he preferred to most American sociologists of his time) as well as to the structuralist notion that elements are determined by their mutual relations, and that the human subject is at least pre-determined if not fully constituted by social structures. However, Bourdieu wanted to avoid the objectivism of structure implied by these notions, and so set out in his own notion of habitus to establish a set of socially "sedimented" dispositions of the subject, incorporating the social history of the social agent into the wider social space and/or in a particular field.[1] In the effort to grasp the relation of habitus and field as they apply to different social fields, the idea of self-reflexivity has gradually become central: the awareness of the involvement of the scholar in the object of his study and of the

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[1] For the general outline of Bourdieu's theory of social action and habitus, see esp. Bourdieu (1977); Bourdieu (1990).

way his own position in a particular disciplinary field influences the way he approaches the object. In other words, it involves a degree of awareness on the part of the researcher that his position mirrors the agent that is the object of his study; he too, as a researcher, functions as an agent in a particular field and in the wider social space. The situation of the scholar is at the same time strange (he makes the object of his examination a human subject similar to himself, thus reclaiming certain sovereignty over this other subject) and necessary (it is not possible to improve the understanding of our society without objectifying other subjects in this way). Moreover, the analysis of human individuals and social groups inevitably poses questions concerning the behaviour of the scholar as a member of a certain social group, and as a vehicle of certain assumptions and social logic no less "hidden" than the logic of the subject studied. Ignoring this basic constellation only exacerbates an already precarious situation. Since self-reflexivity is so thoroughly embedded in Bourdieu's approach and explicitly theorised in many of his books and articles, I will seek only to outline the problematic rather than addressing it in an exhaustive manner. Nevertheless, after capturing its central aspects, I hope to be able to assess to what degree these assumptions concerning self-reflexivity are realised in *The Rules of Art*.

According to Yves Gingras (2004), reflexivity[2] was important in Bourdieu's sociology (not only) of science from the beginning but did not appear explicitly in his work before the 1990s (partially as a retroactive effect of the reception of his work in the Anglo-Saxon world, where the concept had already been established). Since then, it has become prominent in almost all of his books, including *Pascalian Meditations* (2000), the "eponymous" *Science of Science and Reflexivity* (2004), and *Sketch for a Self-Analysis* (2008). In his lucid analysis, Gingras identifies two possible meanings for "reflexivity" as it has been applied in social theory: it is either the "epistemic reflexivity" which consists in the examination of the general social conditions of research (especially questions of social class, power structures, and political issues), or "sociological reflexivity" which focuses on the position of the researcher in the particular scholarly field and the overall character of the field. If we follow Gingras' categorisation, we see that Bourdieu proceeds from the basic "epistemic reflexivity" to "sociological reflexivity", and from there to yet a third form that involves the peculiar characteristics of scientific and philosophical knowledge in the social world (especially in his works on the "scholastic reason", the academe, etc.; see Bourdieu 2000, p. 10).

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2 In sociology, the most common term is "reflexivity". This term also appears in Bourdieu's texts and their English translations; it designates turning the reflection towards the subject and the process of research. Since the framework of this chapter is literary-theoretical, I use the term "self-reflexivity", a term prevalent in literary criticism.

Bourdieu defines the motivations for his self-reflexive approach in sociological and anthropological research in the following way:

> First, the principle of the most serious errors or illusions of anthropological thought [...], and in particular the vision of the agent as a conscious, rational, unconditioned individual (or "subject"), lies in the social conditions of production of anthropological discourse, in other words in the structure and functioning of the fields in which discourse on "humanity" is produced. Secondly, there can be thought about the social conditions of thought which offers thought the possibility of a genuine *freedom* with respect to those conditions. (Bourdieu 2000, p. 118)

And he continues:

> To practise reflexivity means questioning the privilege of a knowing 'subject' arbitrarily excluded from the effort of objectification. It means endeavouring to account for the empirical 'subject' of scientific practice in the terms of the objectivity constructed by the scientific 'subject' – in particular by situating him at a determinate point in social space-time [...]. (Bourdieu 2000, p. 119)

The self-reflexive approach Bourdieu offers should therefore not only make visible these hidden presuppositions and automatisms but also give us a means to overcome them. According to him, historical sciences

> [b]y turning the instruments of knowledge that they produce against themselves, and especially against the social universes in which they produce them, [...] equip themselves with the means of at least partially escaping from the economic and social determinisms that they reveal and of dispelling the threat of historicist relativisation that they contain [...]. (Bourdieu 2000, p. 121)

This is precisely the programme of self-reflexive research Bourdieu subscribes to.

At the centre of *Pascalian Meditations* from which these quotations have been taken is the third "stage" of reflexivity, the "scholastic point of view" typical of the academe as it has developed historically. According to Bourdieu, the position of the academe in society as well as its relationship to the human subjects it studies is strangely privileged. At the same time, this "point of view" remains unaware of the historical conditions of its own genesis, specifically with regard to the *skholè* in which it is firmly rooted. Bourdieu uses the term *skholè* here to refer to the time available for accumulating cultural/symbolic capital in the form of knowledge, and to the material conditions necessary for acts of "pure" reflection. By virtue of its own detachment from the "practical point of view", the "scholastic point of view" is in fact incapable of grasping the logic of action in other, non-academic fields: the scholar unconsciously projects his ways of thinking and reasoning onto the object of his analysis, thus imputing de-

tached, rationalist, theoretical logic to social agents who have no need for such a logic since they are not partaking in the "scholastic point of view". This can be overcome – at least partially – by making oneself "the object of objectification". As we have seen, "objectifying" here involves not only thinking of oneself in an introspective manner or as an individual but putting oneself – in an "auto-analytical" way – into the disciplinary context of the respective field and of the "scholastic" world as such. Sociology and anthropology are potentially equipped for such a self-reflexive endeavour, but this requirement holds for philosophy as well, which in *Pascalian Meditations* and some of Bourdieu's other works is under close scrutiny.[3]

What is most crucial here is the imperative not to impute the "scholastic" categories of perception to the practical categories of action of the agents under consideration, since this inevitably leads to the assimilation of the logic of action in the given field into the logic of action typical of the scholar himself:

> Projecting his theoretical thinking into the heads of acting agents, the researcher presents the world as he thinks it (that is, as an object of contemplation, a representation, a spectacle) as if it were the world as it presents itself to those who do not have the leisure (or the desire) to withdraw from it in order to think it. (Bourdieu 2000, p. 51)

The only way to transcend this fatal encapsulation of the "scholastic point of view" is a self-reflexive enterprise whereby one makes of oneself the object of scientific objectification: it is necessary to grasp the scholar-agent in the context of the particular disciplinary field and by this to "objectify" his intentions and strategies. Thus, an analysis of certain agents and/or fields always has to be an auto-analysis as well:

> We [scholars] are no less separate, in this respect, from [our] own practical experience than we are from the practical experience of others. Indeed, simply because we pause in thought over our practice, because we turn back to it to consider it, describe it, analyse it, we become in a sense absent from it; we tend to substitute for the active agent the reflecting "subject", for practical knowledge the theoretical knowledge which selects significant features, pertinent indices (as in autobiographical narratives) and which, more profoundly, performs an essential alteration of experience [...]. (Bourdieu 2000, pp. 51–52).

Interestingly enough, the activity of the scholar ultimately has "practical" character as well. However, to a large degree, the awareness of this fact remains inaccessible to him, due to the "scholastic illusion" in operation, in the same man-

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3 Bourdieu himself studied philosophy and only later "converted" to anthropology and sociology.

ner as the scholar tends to be misled when he tries to analyse the behaviour of an agent in a "non-scholarly" field. Genuine self-reflexivity thus enables the scholar to restore, or at least make visible, the logic of action in his own field as well as in those he studies.

The study of fields of cultural production, among which belongs the literary field, has certain unique aspects. In my view, the most important difference here is that the social practices of cultural production results not only in decisions, relationships, practices, etc. but works that traditionally become primary objects of scholarly examination. Unlike other fields, these fields produce artistic objects as their ultimate objective and carrier of value. And, as Bourdieu maintains, it is here that the "reification" of these objects – that is, of the intentions, strategies and practices of social agents that result in these objects – is most perceptible:

> The work as it presents itself, that is, as an *opus operatum*, totalised and canonised in the form of a corpus of "complete works" torn from the time of its composition and capable of being run through in all directions, obscures the work in the process of construction and above all the *modus operandi* of which it is the product. And this leads them [scholars, J. Š] to proceed as if the logic that emerges from the retrospective, totalising, detemporalising reading of the *lector* had, from the beginning, been at the heart of the creative action of the *auctor*. (Bourdieu 2000, p. 53)

Bourdieu therefore suggests placing literary and artistic works back into the historical context of their genesis and treating them as the stakes or "position-takings" (*prises de position*) of the social agents who create them. It is only through such "dereification" and contextualisation that the genuine meaning of these works can become intelligible. What is necessary here is to reconstruct the "point of view" of the author so as to understand the behaviour of agents in the field of cultural production in relation to the object produced. Analysis of this relationship leads in turn to the reconstruction of the space of positions – the "space of possibles" – from the author's point of view: the literary field as such. In Bourdieu's theory an object can only be understood on the basis of its relationship to the human agent who produced it (typically its author), or to the successive agents who surround it with further discourse (critics, but also publishers, etc.). In fact, objects are only intelligible as "exteriorisations" of human intentions that are typically of a social and collective rather than individual nature. The interpretation of these objects then restores the "problematic" they relate to as the true signification of the objects themselves. (It also follows that these objects don't have any intrinsic value since their value is derived from the position of their authors in a particular field.) This is certainly a daring statement given the kind of objects in question (literary texts, works of art),

which are more commonly understood to be ambivalent and polysemic. I will return to this in the following sections.

It needs to be added that Bourdieu is aware of the fact that the "self-objectification" of the scholar is possible only to a certain degree:

> To explore and make explicit all the commitments and proclivities associated with the interests and habits of thought linked to occupation of a position (to be won or defended) in a field are, strictly speaking, infinite tasks. One would be falling into a form of the scholastic illusion of the omnipotence of thought if one were to believe it possible to take an absolute point of view on one's own point of view. (Bourdieu 2000, p. 119)

However, the social character of self-reflexivity thus construed guarantees a form of objectivity; and the principles of scientific fields themselves – with their competitiveness and mutual recognition (or rejection) of agents – can naturally contribute to self-reflexivity if it is accepted as an intrinsic component of the research.

In *Science of Science and Reflexivity* (2004), his last course at Collège de France, Bourdieu presents a concrete and detailed examination of different approaches in the theory of science and compares them with his own, that is, the field theory applied to the sociology of science itself. As we have seen, any sociology of a particular field must be to some extent the sociology of the scientific enterprise and of the scholar himself; this is the main methodological imperative of self-reflexivity. In *Science of Science and Reflexivity* Bourdieu sketches a more thorough picture of how self-reflexivity in research can be obtained. He advances three beliefs in particular that are crucial here: first, that true self-reflexivity is achievable and that it grounds the research in objectivity; second, that science can reasonably aim at such objectivity, and by objectifying itself it can come closer to this goal and avoid being determined by its own "historical apriori"; third, that the very structure of the scientific field contributes to the valuation of self-reflexivity because it imposes rigorous epistemological demands on the methods and results of research.

The underlying aim is to achieve some form of objectivity through the work of self-reflexivity. But how can such objectivity be achieved? First, a certain degree of self-reflexivity is embedded in the requirements of scientific fields themselves: for example, the strict regulation of competition among those seeking scientific validation. Unlike Bruno Latour and Stephen Woolgar, Bourdieu firmly believes in the "rules of the scientific game" (its autonomy being the crucial aspect of the scientific field, similar to the role of autonomy in literary and artistic fields) and maintains that "the truth recognised by scientific field is irreducible to its historical and social conditions of production" (Bourdieu 2004, p. 84). Reflexivity also plays a role in the culmination of this effect:

> it is a particularly effective means of increasing the chances of attaining truth by increasing the cross-controls and providing the principles of a technical critique, which makes it possible to keep closer watch over the factors capable of biasing research. It is not a matter of pursuing a new form of absolute knowledge, but of exercising a specific form of epistemological vigilance, the very form that this vigilance must take in an area where the epistemological obstacles are first and foremost social obstacles. (Bourdieu 2004, p. 89)

Bourdieu returns here to the notion of "epistemological vigilance" coined by Gaston Bachelard in his epistemology of science.

The idea of a self-reflexive "science of science" (that is, the sociology of science) is remarkable in itself, confronting us with a vertiginous *mise en abyme*. However, Bourdieu maintains that it implies instead a "spiral" character, one that may be regulated or halted at any reasonable point by the mutual control of social agents:

> Far from fearing this mirror – or boomerang – effect, in taking science as the object of my analysis I am deliberately aiming to expose myself, and all those who write about the social world, to a generalised reflexivity. One of my aims is to provide cognitive tools that can be turned back on the subject of the cognition, not in order to discredit scientific knowledge, but rather to check and strengthen it. [...] Casting an ironic gaze on the social world, a gaze which unveils, unmasks, brings to light what is hidden, it cannot avoid casting this gaze on itself – with the intention not of destroying sociology but rather of serving it, using the sociology of sociology in order to make a better sociology. (Bourdieu 2004, p. 4)

What Bourdieu seems to imply here is the unique epistemological position of sociology and anthropology. These disciplines are far better equipped to reflect upon themselves, as well as on other disciplines, than physics or musicology, for example. This is typical for Bourdieu: he regards sociology as a privileged channel to the social world, capable simultaneously of maintaining its scientific character and accounting for the logic of behaviour of social agents in the radically diverse fields and spheres that make up the social space. I would therefore argue that it is here – in the overestimation of the epistemological privilege of sociology – that we find a potential, deeply-rooted problem for self-reflexivity. One thinks immediately of Bourdieu's imperative not to replace the logic of action of agents in different social fields with that of the scholar.

However, in an interesting move, Bourdieu provides a concrete example of how to "objectify" oneself by analysing his own professional curriculum vitae in terms of his habitus and the "space of possibles" that was offered to him, as well as major agents in the fields he was aspiring to enter. (He later reworked this chapter from *Science of Science and Reflexivity* into a separate book, *Sketch for a Self-Analysis*.) I will therefore briefly turn to one prominent method by which Bourdieu attempts to overcome the over-imposition of the scholar vis-à-

vis the agent studied, one that consists in letting the agent "speak for himself" and produce a specific form of ego-narrative. Such narratives seem to be a natural way to trace the logic of one's action or give sense to a series of one's actions and may therefore be more suitable than theoretical descriptions. In Bourdieu's case they acquire peculiar shape and meaning.

3 Narratives as Vehicles of Self-Reflexivity

As we have seen, one of the crucial demands of self-reflexivity is that the scholar tries not to silence or "overlay" the voices of social agents he studies. In his efforts to understand the social regularities that determine the position and trajectory of an agent, including that agent's habitus, motivations and strategies, it is all too easy for the scholar to take over the point of view of the agent – under the impression that he sees "more clearly" from that point of view than the agent himself. It might be possible to avoid such generalisations by falling back on narratives produced by the social agent. Bourdieu employs this technique on several occasions. I will focus here on two rather different types of narrativisation.

   The first of them is the short, posthumously published book *The Sketch for a Self-Analysis* (2008). Here Bourdieu speaks about himself in narrative fashion, making himself the object of his own analysis while reflecting upon his scientific trajectory and the positions he has occupied in various professional fields. The title is reminiscent of another rather paradoxical endeavour: Sigmund Freud analysing himself.[4] Bourdieu famously introduces his book with the pronouncement: "This is not an autobiography." The sequence of narratives he provides regarding his own positions and "points of view" within different fields – his university education, philosophy, anthropology, sociology but also the intellectual field as a whole – is supplemented by passages about his family, his primary and secondary education, and his experience in Algeria. However, in each story he is sure to emphasise aspects that express general regularities and surpass unique individual experience. This stems from his efforts of "self-objectification": "I have that much more chance of being objective the more completely I have objectivated my own (social, academic, etc.) position and interests, in particular the specifically academic ones, linked to that position." (Bourdieu 2004,

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[4] Bourdieu's term "socioanalysis" is modelled on psychoanalysis. Although Bourdieu is critical of the psychoanalytic approach and of the position of this discipline as one of the most "scholastic", he describes, on the other hand, the intentions of his own research as "organising the return of the repressed" (Bourdieu 2008, p. 112).

p. 92) Bourdieu is at pains to distinguish this kind of self-objectification from autobiography: "what has to be objectivated is not the lived experience of the knowing subject, but the social conditions of possibility, and therefore the effects and limits, of this experience and, among other things, the act of the objectivation." (Bourdieu 2004, p. 93) The individual always should reveal itself *qua* social.

The statement "This is not an autobiography" should be read as an utterance by which the author distances himself from the "flaws" of the traditional autobiography, and points instead to the methodological framework of the ideal self-reflexive science. What we get is a description of the social trajectory and the series of points of view adopted by the narrator-agent. Bourdieu thus applies the "logic of practical action" on himself. After all, who has more privileged access to one's own point of view? And yet, any form of ego-narration inevitably raises questions concerning the author's self-transparency, the *post-factum* reconstruction, and the genre (which he claims to reject, but cannot ultimately avoid). This remarkable text thus becomes the narrative odyssey of the difficulties and aporias of self-objectification.[5]

Another example of narrativisation can be found in the book *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society* (1999) by Bourdieu and his collaborators. In his previous works he relied predominantly on statistical research, so that the various idiosyncrasies and points of view of social agents tended to "evaporate" during the processing of the data.[6] Bourdieu has always used examples and occasionally cited the agents; however, the overall results were rather impersonal. In *The Weight of the World* it is the other way round: the book is based on a series of structured interviews with French citizens, each one accompanied by the interviewer's introduction. The central conceit of the book is that interviews with social agents speaking in their own voices can "put flesh" on research, in this way exposing the regularities and inner logic of various social positions and points of view, at the same time preserving – at least partially – the raw material produced by the agents themselves. It is hard not to see here a kind of "socioanalysis" whereby the sociologist (modelling himself on the figure of the psychoanalyst) works with an agent to reveal the "social unconscious" through a collaboration on his narrative, its framing and interpretation.

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5 Interestingly, Bourdieu has become the object of this kind of contextualisation in scholarly fields by others as well: see, for example, Pinto (2002); Heinich (2007); and several contributions in the volume Pinto/Sapiro/Champagne (2004).

6 See esp. his "magnum opus" *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Bourdieu 1984).

The resulting book – which offers a striking contrast to *Sketch for a Self-Analysis* for both its length and collaborative aspect – is an interesting object of methodological and rhetorical reflection. The introductory texts that accompany the interviews feature titles in the form of concise summaries: "The Temp's Dream" or "A Compromising Success". Additionally, the interviews are grouped into sections by theme and supplemented by general essays on related and/or overarching topics. The manner of conducting and editing each interview is of utmost importance. It is evidently the task of the sociologist to work with the material in a methodologically transparent and honest way; no one may proceed under the illusion that an interview has succeeded in capturing "reality itself". This effort on the part researchers to avoid imposing the scholastic point of view on the social agent, to let the agent speak even when it runs up against the cognitive frameworks and expectations of the researchers, can be found in all aspects of the collection.

4 The "Author's Point of View"

Let's now turn finally to literature, and to Bourdieu's influential book *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, first published in 1992 and containing – in revised format – texts by the author going back to the late 1960s. I will limit myself to several key aspects of the book that are crucial for the question of self-reflexivity.

The notion of "sociological reflexivity" is presented here in a comprehensive discussion of the field of contemporary literary theory that spans from formalism to Marxism. Bourdieu's objective is to integrate two divergent ways of reading literary texts, immanent and social-contextual, into one overarching methodology. He claims that he can overcome the flaws of both extremes by reading literary texts as a particular position (or set of positions) adopted in the literary field. He is preoccupied with the French literary field of the second half of the nineteenth century, especially with Gustave Flaubert and his *Sentimental Education*, published in 1869. His reading of Flaubert's novel as both socioanalysis and social autoanalysis (see Bourdieu's own *Sketch*) is remarkable and convincing. Absent from the book, however, are readings and interpretations of other literary works, which are reduced instead to groupings of general "aspects" – by literary school, style, genre, and theme – that are meant to represent the actual position-taking of authors. If we carefully read the long section dealing with literary criticism, we find that Bourdieu does not critically focus on himself as a sociologist entering into the field of literary criticism, bringing into it a certain "point of view" and disciplinary *doxa* – in the spirit of his general demands for scientific

reflexivity. Rather, he insistently and eloquently argues for the privileged place of sociology vis-à-vis the substantial flaws and biases of other contemporary literary-theoretical and interpretive approaches.

Let's now turn to the crucial question of the relation of the scholar to the agent studied: How does the book fulfil the imperative not to "silence" the social agent in question, not to impute to him the logic of the scholastic field? It is evident that Bourdieu theorises literature *qua* social micro-world, and that an interpretation of a literary work as well as the reconstruction of the literary field in the particular moment of its development is unthinkable without the pivotal role of social agents. The key agent of the literary field is the author, determined by his habitus (consisting of the general social dispositions transmuted into specific dispositions in the field) which co-determines his position-taking and trajectory in the field. Unlike in many other social fields, the opposition of habitus and field (as subjective and objective structure) is complemented here by a third figure: the literary text. The author thus mediates between the text and the field – or, as Bourdieu puts it, "'the action of works upon works' [...] is only ever exercised by the intermediary of authors" (Bourdieu 1996, p. 199).

Bourdieu criticises the biographic approach that seeks to make sense of the author's personality (and of the work) by way of his social origin and personal idiosyncrasies. For Bourdieu, the cardinal example of this approach is Sartre's three-volume opus on Flaubert. Sartre attempts to find the logic of the literary personality where, according to Bourdieu, it could never be found; outside the literary field. Bourdieu's concept of the author is more restricted: the author becomes himself through the adoption of positions (by using certain generic or poetic forms, narrative modes, etc.) in the space of positions (that is, in the literary field as such) which is mediated – in the mind and body of the author – by his dispositions (habitus) and by the space of possibles which is the literary field (Bourdieu 1996, pp. 233–4, 256–7). All information about the author's life gains relevance exclusively through the prism of the field.

In his conception, Bourdieu takes into account the intentions of the author: when an author creates a work, he makes particular choices in order to achieve certain effects or to avoid certain generic, stylistic and other relations to the competing positions in the field. If we want to analyse the work, we have to take these choices into consideration. Bourdieu is convinced that it is possible to reconstruct the author's point of view in a given moment (Bourdieu 1996, pp. 106–30) and that "[b]iographical analysis thus understood can lead us to the principles of the evolution of the work of art in the course of time" (Bourdieu 1996, p. 260). In other words, the contextualisation of the literary work with reference to the author (via the author with the literary field) ensures the most adequate

understanding of the work itself, which means as an adoption of particular positions in the field.

The point of view of the author is the crucial term: it is the vanishing point where the social agent is present in the fullest. Bourdieu claims that it is possible – indeed critical – to reconstruct this point of view. The only aspects that matter, in this case, pertain to the literary field, and all that is meant by the "point of view of the author" is the description of his position at a given moment of the development of the field. Consequently, this also means that the author may be described from the point of view of the field. How can we take into account all the relevant intervening factors? Bourdieu's reconstruction of Flaubert's (and partially also Baudelaire's) point of view is based on their literary works, but even more on their essays and ego-documents: memoirs, correspondence, or notes. Yet even these textual traces are ultimately subject to interpretation. Indeed, to appeal to them in the course of an argument is also to select and interpret them, to call on them to serve the argument. Many documents are missing – though it is quite possibly meaningless to speak of missing evidence in a situation where, in the case of most authors, the process of creation is not well documented, certainly not in continuous fashion.

Moreover – and significantly – the question poses itself: Who "speaks" here? As Geoffroy de Lagasnerie, one of Bourdieu's recent commentators, aptly puts it, since the author doesn't have to be fully aware of the space of positions, nor his strategies fully conscious or intentional (the textual traces of which, in any case, are typically not at hand), it then falls on the researcher to capture the relevant circumstances and the whole range of his motivations, on the basis of the analysis of the author's position in the field. Thus, when Bourdieu analyses "Flaubert's point of view", it is as if he was able to "know" not just what Flaubert himself knew but also what Flaubert did not or even could not know. In other words, Bourdieu's field theory presupposes the epistemic sovereignty of the scholar over the agent of the field in consideration (see Lagasnerie 2011b, pp. 117–120). The sociologist speaks here in the name of the author. Indeed, can we get a valid description of the actual point of view of an agent when many of the relevant factors are only evident retrospectively, from the perspective of later research and models of literary development? Are we dealing here with the agent, or with the scholar's reconstruction of the field in the guise of the point of view of the social agent? Or is this based on a retrospective illusion of transparency which is not typical of the "practical" perception of the authors themselves (see the questions of the "practical" vs. "scholastic" point of view above).[7]

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7 Lagasnerie's book is one of the most succinct critical accounts of Bourdieu's theory of fields of

However, the problematic is even more layered in the book: Bourdieu assumes a certain *mise en abyme* effect between the hero of Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*, Frédéric Moreau, and Flaubert the author, as well as the reader and literary sociologist analysing the novel. Flaubert serves here as a model of self-objectification: the reader and the researcher can find inspiration in Flaubert's example to set off on their own socially self-objectifying journey. On the one hand, the author becomes paradigm for the reader as well as for the researcher and an interesting and somewhat hidden aspect of literature comes to the forefront.[8] On the other, the author is expected by the analyst to perform the task the analyst wants to perform himself: to (re)construct the space of positions in the field, as well as the individual but socially grounded point of view. Not many literary works are self-reflexive to such a degree as *Sentimental Education* (not even Flaubert's other novels and short stories). This unique aspect of the novel makes it an excellent hermeneutical tool for the purposes Bourdieu wants to pursue, but it also seems to diminish the possibility of finding such hermeneutically fertile grounds in the case of most other literary texts.[9] Lacking the same degree of self-reflexivity, they can be analysed in relation to the literary field, its positions and position-takings, mostly through the abovementioned labels of literary school, style, theme, or genre.[10]

It would be wise to take note here of a warning Bourdieu himself expresses in the context of his self-analysis, but which is also pertinent to the reconstruction of the point of view of the author:

> The fact that I am [...] both subject and object of the analysis compounds a very common difficulty of sociological analysis – the danger that the "objective intentions", which are brought out by analysis, will appear as express intentions, intentional strategies, explicit

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cultural production from a sympathetic viewpoint; the author focuses especially on the question of mutual separation of social fields and of the reception of literary works and meaning production outside the literary field. See also Lagasnerie's own theory of intellectual creation (Lagasnerie 2011a). For the problem of self-reflexivity, the author's point of view, and interpretation in *The Rules of Art*, see also Macherey (2010).

8 See the last paragraph of the *Sketch for a Self-Analysis:* "I have never thought that I was committing an act of sacrilegious arrogance when I posited, without taking myself for the artist, like so many inspired critics, that Flaubert or Manet was a person like me. And nothing would make me happier than having made it possible for some of my readers to recognise their own experiences, difficulties, questionings, sufferings, and so on, in mine, and to draw from that realistic identification, which is quite the opposite of an exalted projection, some means of doing what they do, and living what they live, a little bit better." (Bourdieu 2008, pp. 112–113)

9 However, there are other interesting contemporary attempts to read literary texts as "socioanalyses"; see for example Dubois (1997) for Proust, and Dubois (2007) for Stendhal.

10 On the "mirroring" effect between Flaubert and Bourdieu see also Dubois (2010).

projects, in the particular case the conscious or quasi-cynical intention of safeguarding a threatened symbolic capital. (Bourdieu 2008, p. 69)

We are faced here with the problem of imputing "objective intentions", which are properly based on the overall picture of the field (an account of which may or may not be possible), to the personal will of the social agent (the author).

At this point I would like to return briefly to the question of narratives as vehicles of self-reflexivity. Is the problem here that Bourdieu deals with dead authors and is therefore compelled to draw on existing textual sources – ego-documents and other materials as well as literary texts? One possible solution to this problem is offered by Bernard Lahire in his book *The Literary Condition: The Double Life of Writers* (2006). Lahire lets the living authors-social agents narrate themselves, in a manner perhaps even more eloquent than in Bourdieu's *The Weight of the World*. He is interested in what he aptly calls "the sociology of the practical conditions of practising literature" (Lahire 2006, p. 11; see also Lahire 2010). Although he doesn't renounce quantitative methods, it is equally important for him to listen to the life-stories of writers. In this book, he works with a group of 503 writers who filled in his extensive questionnaires. Out of this group, 40 of them were chosen to be interviewed extensively by Lahire and his collaborators. The resulting interviews, transcribed into a continuous text, form the largest part of the book. Generally, according to Lahire, the writer is always a multidimensional social being; although some regularities can be observed across the population of writers, individual conditions of writing and the relationship of each writer to his writing are unique. Lahire is interested in authors who invest their efforts and intellectual capacity in a specific activity while working a "civil" job on the side (hence the "double life"). Unlike in the case of Bourdieu, his objective is not to (re)construct the logic of their strategies but to make their lives intelligible, to the extent that sociology is adequate to the task. This way of interacting with living authors offers one possible remedy to the problem of "silencing" the social agent studied.

I will add just two brief comments. First, these comparisons between Bourdieu's and Lahire's projects are somewhat problematic, since Lahire deliberately departs from the framework of the literary field, applying his interest instead beyond the pure positions and position-taking in the field. It is disputable that most agents would be able and/or willing to comment in a detailed way on their strategies, choices, and perceptions of the literary field. This is due in part to the difficult leap from the embodied, practical logic of action to the scholastic logic of reflection that is unfamiliar to many of them. Second, it would be ungrounded to think that the material obtained from the agent is not processed and manipulated by the researcher, even though it is evident that in Lahire's *The*

Double Life of Writers the intention is similar to what Bourdieu achieves in *The Weight of the World*, in a more layered situation of the literary sphere where not only authors but also works have to be taken into account.

5 Are We Being Self-Reflexive Yet?

As I stated at the beginning, my objective is not to reject Bourdieu's theory completely, but to look closer at the problem of self-reflexivity at the centre of his sociological works, including his writings on literature. As I have also indicated, in the sphere of literary studies self-reflexivity presents itself often in a rather aporetic way. To sum up the problem of self-reflexivity in Bourdieu's work in the context of his theory of the literary field, I will stress three aspects.

- The "narcissistic trap". Bourdieu criticises what he calls "narcissistic" self-reflexivity (see Bourdieu 2004, p. 89): the "mirroring" of the scholar in the object of his research. Instead, he proposes "sociological reflexivity" and even reflexivity in terms of the overall scholastic point of view and its conditions. I will leave aside whether "narcissistic" self-reflexivity cannot sometimes be beneficial – either way, certain effects of mirroring are typical also of *The Rules of Art*.[11]
- The "noetic trap". When the researcher attempts to reconstruct the structure of the field at a given moment and the "stakes" produced by the *illusio* of the agents active in the field, it is easy to make the mistake of falling back on retrospective knowledge and a "panoramic" bird's-eye view that is not only unavailable to agents themselves at the time of genesis of their works, but also heavily dependent on literary-historical and interpretive work and preconceptions that came after the period under scrutiny. The same holds for the interpretation of literary works. In his literary-sociological fervour Bourdieu easily loses sight of the hermeneutic and hypothetical character of the interpretation of any literary text.[12]
- The "agent and/vs. scholar trap". Bourdieu risks projecting the scholar's perception onto the "mind" of the author. The author's point of view, in the end, becomes the scholar's point of view; the "scholastic illusion" is in operation.

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11 The "confessional" narrative is typical of some seminal texts of cultural analysis, for example, the famous essay "Culture Is Ordinary" by Raymond Williams (1958; 2001); it would be very illuminating to compare it for example with Bourdieu's *Sketch for a Self-Analysis*, with regard to the constellation of the individual, social and cultural aspects in these ego-narratives.
12 I would argue that this lack of a literary hermeneutic is one of the fundamental flaws of Bourdieu's theory; he substitutes it with the objectivist "analysis".

It would certainly be fascinating to reconstruct the "habitus in the action" of authors, to trace their "practical sense" (as opposed to the scholastic analysis of the author via the field/space of possibles). But can we really be wiser than the author himself? In psychoanalysis (to return to the analogy) the "patient" is also necessary – the process can't be carried out without his presence. Can there be a socioanalysis or "ethnography" of dead authors that can't narrate for themselves?

In his *Literary Condition*, Bernard Lahire writes about living authors, with the aim of giving them their own voice and narrative agency. These narratives are more like general ego-narratives than narratives that merely describe the particular point of view of an author as an agent of the literary field. He thus inevitably falls back on "biography", the genre Bourdieu so vehemently rejects in *The Rules of Art* (especially in the case of Sartre's book on Flaubert), and in his own "autobiography" *The Sketch for a Self-Analysis* – which, according to him, is not one. Dead authors can't narrate; but if they could, it is highly probable they wouldn't produce narratives congruous with Bourdieu's reconstruction of the author's point of view, limited to problematics inherent to the literary field.

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