

THE ART OF ENTRANCE  
Notes on an "intellectual field"

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The late 1970's and the early 1980's brought with them new tendencies in some vanguard circles inside or on the margin of the fields of cultural production. New entrants talked less about politics and more about esthetics, referred rather to Nietzsche, or Foucault, Deleuze, Lyotard, Baudrillard, than to Marx, etc. In the field of literature there occurred a decline in value of the stock of the political engagement, documentary, "social realism" stamp. Simultaneously, new issues of shares were placed on the market, e. g., "postmodernist," "poststructuralist," and "deconstructivist" discourses à la the late Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man. More generally, preoccupation arose with questions of text-awareness, language, form, style and specific literary values.

These types of change seem to have appeared in many countries in the western world. I will here, choosing the case of the Swedish discourse on literature and literary criticism as a somewhat provincial example, explore the possibility of making use of the concept "intellectual field" (P. Bourdieu) in the sociological study of such phenomena.

Take the field of literary production. It is populated by authors, critics, editors, some specialized journalists, etc. To reside, to "feel at home" and survive within this field,

one must be have gained certain dispositions, that is one must be prepared in a specific way. If the newcomer is to be recognized as, let's say, a critic ("recognized" in both senses of the word: identified as a critic and granted the right to talk and pass judgement on matters of literature), it is demanded that he has made specific investments: He must have undertaken a specific type of extensive reading. He must have made acquaintance with certain people and intellectual milieus. In short, he must have accumulated a sufficient amount of the kind of symbolic capital which is specific to the field; i.e., he must have acquired enough knowledge about past and current struggles inside the field to be capable of distinguishing the legitimate or applicable themes of discussion, the appropriate styles of talking on literature - and the styles of reading literature; to procure for oneself a literary "taste" is a hard and lengthy investment work.

Maybe even more important than the specific content of these investments is that the newcomer demonstrate a general will to invest, and that he profess himself to the specific beliefs which underpin the struggles inside the field. These beliefs, which unite all the participants and render the possibility to continue the struggles despite (or rather, by means of) their disagreements, are the beliefs in the importance and legitimacy of participating in the struggles on how to write literature and how to judge literature. The most scandalous offence against decorum would be if someone questioned, not the value of this or that authorship, but what struggles on the value of authorships are worth.

An intellectual field is also characterized by specific forms of symbolic or economic profit and reward. A critic may gain specific signs of recognition and authority: he receives invitations to participate in public debates, requests for interviews, as well as publishing possibilities, grants, etc.

In short, a field in Pierre Bourdieu's sense exists where people are struggling on something that they are sharing, where something specific to the field is at stake (e.g., how to write

literature, and the legitimate right to write and pass judgement on literature, where specific investments and entrance-money are exacted from new entrants, where there are specific rules of the game, specific stakes, rewards, signs of authority, etc. In other words, a field is a field only if it is relatively autonomous. To investigate different intellectual fields is to investigate the distribution and accumulation of symbolic capital in different specific forms.

In connection with a study of recent social transformations among Swedish intellectuals, Mikael Palme and I have discerned some changing patterns in the discourse on literature and literary criticism. Our method involved the study of new entrants into the field. To make the structure of a magnetic field visible one might spread iron filings into it, and the magnetic curves and poles would appear. Analogously, we assumed, the study of new pretendants entering the field of literary production (how they are received by competitors and established critics and authors, trajectories, strategies and faculties allotted to them by the field) might make the structure of the field merge into vision.

We shall consider the case of a young literary student in the late 70's and early 80's, Mats Gellerfelt, who made an interesting entry as critic at the cultural section of the leading Swedish conservative newspaper, Svenska Dagbladet. Without being overly gifted with symbolic or social capital, he started setting marks on contemporary literature, treating literature as a racetrack, where the so-called "social realists" and surviving leftist propagandists were the laggards and the authors who had learned from modernism or the Latin American novel were in the fore. Without ceremony he ranked the authors of today, using Joyce, Eliot and Ekelöf as pivotmen. A pervading characteristic of his writings during this period of installation as a literary

critic (1979-80) was a multitude of value judgements which all could be reduced to one simple statement: what gives value to a work of literature is its connections with other works of literature. He praised poems by enforcing the fact that they contained "learning, allusions, and quotations." He emphasized the importance of myths, referring not to the ethnologists, but to Eliot. He tried to legitimize an odd genre, the nonsense verse, by assuring: "T.S. Eliot loved it, just as did Ekelöf and Joyce." This confession to the primacy of internal literary values was accompanied by attacks on <sup>other</sup> critics who were accused of giving opinions on matters other than intra-literary connections.

Let me suggest a possible explanation for the fact that this young critic, some 25 years of age, was given (by the field?) the opportunity to deliver this message in a leading newspaper. For this purpose, I must outline a sociological explanation of the condition of the fields of cultural production ten years previously, i.e., phenomena connected with the so-called "generation of 68."

Ten years earlier a consequence of the "educational explosion" of the sixties had been that hordes of educated twenty-five-year-olds found themselves locked out from such trajectories to which entrance had traditionally been guaranteed by education, and, instead, <sup>many of them</sup> entered the fields of cultural production.

They were convinced that culture should be their vocation and vindicated their right to enter the fields of cultural production without having performed the investment work (reading the canonical classics, serving the hard years as free lancer, as locum tenens at the cultural section of a newspaper or a broadcasting company) which had previously constituted the

condition for entrance and recognition as, e.g., a critic. These new entrants justified their right to write and pass judgement on literature with reference to political clear-sightedness (red but not expert) and knowledge from other fields (i.e., symbolic capital brought from the political fields<sup>and</sup> areas such as political science, sociology, or history). This means that these new pretendants based their claims on alliances with other fields.

This "demographical" catastrophe, this influx of numerous unorthodoxly-prepared new pretendants, caused great turbulence inside the fields of cultural production and disorder in the rules of recognition. The borderlines around the fields were expanded, mellowed and penetrated: in other words, the autonomy of the fields was declining dramatically.

This was an extraordinary condition, and at the latest during the late 1970's the fields started to restore their autonomy. The specific symbolic capital of each field gained increasing weight inside the same field. An enclosure process started. Walls towards neighbor fields were erected. In this situation, an appropriate task allotted to young men of letters entering the business of literary criticism was that of frontier-patrolling: of condemning the transgression of borderlines and the mixing of art and politics, literature and everyday life, writing and talking, author and public, etc. This meant simultaneously condemning the somewhat older competitors (the "generation of 68") who had built their positions on alliances with other fields and on transgression of borderlines. This strategy implied the undermining of the value of the investments - first and foremost alliances with other fields - which had led these half-established men and women to their positions. The new pretendant therefore had to argue that the social engagement had been just as overrated on the intellectual market as knowledge in literature's own traditions had been undervalued.

The above-mentioned were some observations in connection with an entry which in 1979 made new lines of force within the field of literary production discernible. An enclosure process recommenced, a re-establishment of borderlines and a rise in the value of the kind of symbolic capital which is specific to the field. It is not too venturesome to assume that this is true of several other fields of cultural production at present.

The late sixties and the seventies had brought with them an extraordinary state of affairs. Now the coming eighties meant restored order.

This did not, however, occur in one blow. No matter how much the young critic just mentioned advocated the autonomy of literary values, in his literary criticism he sedulously expressed various viewpoints in numerous current debates on social and political matters, thereby attacking the values of the 68-generation. In other words, he took over their strategy of basing the claim of legitimacy on alliances with other fields.

Such a strategy was neither a necessary nor a winning one a few years later, in 1982, when a new group of critics entered. It was the editorial board (Horace Engdahl, Anders Olsson, et al.,) who, from an up-to-that-date esoteric and marginal journal on contemporary humanities and philosophy, KRIS, in full muster, and almost overnight, were admitted into the cultural sections of the leading newspapers, the literary magazines and the broadcasting company. For these new pretendants, the sophisticated men of 1982, it would have appeared vulgar to express opinions on each and every current issue. They were extraordinarily well-equipped with the kind of symbolic capital which distinguishes literary criticism: familiarity with literary genres, forms and styles; familiarity with the outcomes of earlier struggles on literature and criticism, as well as familiarity with the

latest struggles in Paris and Berlin, at Yale and Johns Hopkins Universities - all of which have comprised to make the field what it is today. It seems that in 1982 the enclosure process had proceeded so far that such investments were demanded from new critics.

When pretendants threaten to disturb the established order, and when heterodox discourses find their ways into an intellectual field, a convenient solution may be the cooptation of a newcomer who can undertake the regrouping required in a cultivated fashion, i.e., without risking the legitimacy of the game. In this case, everything happened as though there were a pre-constructed position as generation-critic waiting to be occupied by one or more of the writers from the above-mentioned esoteric journal, namely a position as critic in the leading Swedish newspaper, the liberal Dagens Nyheter.

The man picked out to fill this position was Horace Engdahl. In the spring of 1982 he wrote a minor article in Dagens Nyheter which triggered an extensive debate during the summer and autumn. In this article he, inspired by a strand within French post-structuralism, argued that authors of literature in connection with their own work are submitted to several kinds of western metaphysical prejudices. The authors believe that they are mirroring reality or expressing their own I's, etc. They are in fact entering in upon languages and texts already existing beforehand.

Engdahl's lead, executed from a dominant position, met with a considerable number of parrying riposts from critics and others, many of them using metaphors varying upon the same, simple up/down opposition: Engdahl and contemporary French text theory were located up in the thin-air strata, while the Swedish authors and more orthodox critics were depicted as rooted in the Swedish mould, "the concrete text," real life and real reality.

This dichotomy formed the leitmotif of the debate, and it seems to have corresponded to a social opposition between two fields, viz., a scientific field on the one hand and the field of literary criticism on the other. The fact that a majority of the participants in the debate assailed "the high" and stood up for "the low" could be sociologically understood as a wish, produced within the field of literary production, that the criticism of the daily papers should be protected from the influx of theories à la mode and styles of writing (and writers) from the esoteric university circles and journals.

It is important to notice that categorizations such as this are stakes in the game, weapons used in the struggles within the field. In a parallel way, though with opposite aim, the young critic of the early eighties, as we saw, used the categories of language awareness versus political awareness in order to classify the somewhat older critics and authors as belonging to the punch-drunks of the 68-generation, beforehand doomed to lose the combats of the eighties. If we intend to undertake a sociological study of a field, it is important not to fall for the temptation of uncritically taking over the categorizations which function as stakes in the game under study.

In conclusion, the features mentioned seem important to a sociological understanding of the shift of dominance and authority within recent Swedish literary criticism - and mutatis mutandis, other cultural fields. As a rule, intellectuals themselves prefer to talk about the social conditions for their mission in terms of degenerate phenomena which are to be regretted, saying that there are, to be sure, some contemptible colleagues who constitute coteries, scratch each others' backs and retaliate upon their enemies, but the normal, or at least the only honourable thing is to serve Art and Literature, Truth and Liberty...

This is a socially-produced error in judgement. Each intellectual field is constituted by its own prehistory, i.e., by the outcomes of previous struggles, and it is characterized by its specific rules for entrance, recognition and consecration, investments, stakes, strategies, profits, etc. This does not disqualify all the doings and dealings of the intellectuals. They can play the game more or less honestly. One of the least honest and most common fashions of playing is to conceal the social conditions of one's own trade by paying homage to the so-called free intellectual, i.e., to oneself.

Finally, I have a few comments on the contributions of Bill Martin, Ivan Szelenyi and Gernot Böhme to this volume.

The study on literary criticism previously presented here was inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's ongoing enterprise of investigating various species of capital, a concept which has often been subjected to the type of criticism that recurs in Martin and Szelenyi's contribution. There are, to be sure, difficulties connected with Bourdieu's theory of capital, and he has devoted much of his first course of lectures at Collège de France (the extensive Cours de sociologie générale 1982-84) to related problems. The problem is not, however, that Bourdieu is making unallowable analogies with "economy" in the usual, narrow sense of the word. On the contrary, his project is to contribute to the revival of a general theory of exchange and capital, in which the "economic capital" is only one species among others. To ask for the capital in this sense is to ask for the hidden basis of the practices and exchanges of man.

Further, Martin and Szelenyi accuse Bourdieu of not being able to make comprehensible why intellectuals, though part of the dominant class, are often anti-capitalistic in their orientation.

This critique must be due to a confusion of the Bourdieuan concept of dominant class with the Marxian concept of capitalist class. A large number of the studies of Bourdieu and his collaborators are devoted to the examination of the two main fractions within the dominant class. One, the dominant fraction, bases its positions on the holding of economic capital, while the other, the dominated fraction (i.e., the "intellectuals" in Bourdieu's broad sense) bases its positions on the holding of cultural capital. (Cultural capital is, in a society such as that of France, the most important form of symbolic capital. and it is first and foremost legitimized by and reproduced by means of the educational system). This notion of the intellectuals as a dominated fraction within the field of the dominant class seems to be an historically reasonable alternative to the new class theories.

The intellectuals reside within "relatively autonomous" fields. An historical and sociological investigation of these fields means examining the logic of the autonomy. As mentioned, a field is a field in the Bourdieuan sense only if it possesses a certain degree of autonomy, i.e., if it is underpinned by a specific kind of symbolic capital, etc. As far as I can understand, the main characteristic of the relation between symbolic capital and economic capital in this context is that recognition, authority, consecration, etc, are allotted within the field. That is what the autonomy of an intellectual field is about - not that anything should be possible. On the other hand, resources - money, people - are transferred from outside. If we want to work with Bourdieu's concept of capital, we must have in mind that symbolic capital is the general concept. In a society in which reproduction is to a high degree based on schooling and written texts, the symbolic capital mainly takes the form of cultural capital. In his most recent work, Bourdieu seems on his way towards a concept of information capital instead of that of cultural capital.

In Gernot Böhme's contribution, the statement that demarcations between types of knowledge mean borderlines between people, as well as his effort to interpret demarcation of certain types of knowledge historically as social strategies, brings him close to the Bourdieuan concept of (intellectual) field.

Here I should like to add that the intellectuals, philosophers, scientists, do not erect borderlines only in order to separate their specific kinds of knowledge from other, inferior kinds of knowledge. The borderlines also delineate a field within which they are able to compete, to accomplish struggles against each other. Without these borderlines, the scope and number of possible strategies, stakes, profits, etc., would be unlimited, and consequently the game unplayable. The intellectuals may have varying opinions on many issues, and these various opinions are weapons in the struggles, but what unites them is the interest in the continuation of the struggles, the maintenance of the social belief that the game is worth being played.

Under workshopen "Intellectuals, Universities and the State", Kristineberg, 12–15 jan. 1984, arrangerad av Universitets- och högskoleämbetet (UHÄ), ritade Donald Broady av några av deltagarna. Teckningen skickades brevledes som en hälsning till Thomas Söderqvist.

