AFFECT, SOCIOLOGY, INDEX, AND OTHER CRITICAL EVASIONS

Afecto, sociología, indexicalidad y otras evasiones críticas

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In her 1997 essay "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," foundational for what we call affect theory, Eve Sedgwick describes her project as the attempt to "disentangle the question of truth value from the question of performative affect" (Sedgwick, 1997: 129). Sedgwick exhibits this disentanglement from two standpoints that appear at first to give symmetrical views. On one hand, what she calls paranoid reading can be bad even if its conclusions are taken to be correct: "The main reasons for questioning paranoid practices are other than the possibility that their suspicions can be delusional or simply wrong" (130). On the other, reparative reading can be good even if its conclusions are taken to be incorrect: "it is possible in turn to use one's own resources to assemble or 'repair' the murderous part-objects into something like a whole – though, I would emphasize, not necessarily like any preexisting whole" (128). Bad readings (because a reading that makes of its object something that it is not is at least in one sense bad) can be good if they are reparative; good readings (because a reading that is not wrong is at least in one sense good) can be bad if they are paranoid.

The apparent symmetry is false. But what we call affect theory cannot do without it: what we call affect theory derives its descriptive force from one standpoint, which then lends prescriptive force to the other. That this rhetorical structure may not be deliberate – that it may at least sometimes rather be the contingently productive effect of a confusion or suppressed incoherence – only lends a certain pathos to a "theory" that, in its desire to invest the body with meaning – in its desire for "joy as the guarantor of truth" (138) – can find no better way to do it than to make that joy over into the truth, thereby reducing meaning to a discursive shadow of bodily processes.

What, on Sedgwick's account, is the problem with paranoid reading? Paranoia is said to be a bio-affective defense mechanism, a "strong theory of a negative affect" (136). Since its purpose is contain the humiliation of bad surprises that may

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in principle be lurking anywhere, its effects tend to be totalizing, preemptive, and contagious.

Transferred from psychology to hermeneutics, this account of paranoia is unpersuasive. How is a defense mechanism that emerges as a psycho-biographic outcome of the coordination of disarticulated subprocesses supposed to transfer seamlessly to the professional domain of specialists, a domain where none of those psycho-biographic motives would seem to apply? Moreover, it is weak tea. In the 1990s, the accusation of projecting a totalizing system was a common one to make against both of Sedgwick's targets – Foucault and Marxism – and it still is. A ban on totality had been announced by Adorno and pursued relentlessly by poststructuralism; its genealogy probably goes back as far as the early German Romantics. All that has been accomplished in the transfer is to ground an already commonplace critique in a controversial bio-affective theory of the emotions (one that even Sedgwick cannot full-throatedly endorse), rather than in a controversial theory of signification or a controversial interpretation of the dialectic. And because this critique was and is commonplace, the feared totalizations of paranoid reading can hardly be as preemptive and contagious as all that.

But paranoia is also "characterized by placing, in practice, an extraordinary stress on the efficacy of knowledge [...] in the form of exposure" (138). This criticism, while placed paratactically in a list with the rest, is of an entirely different nature. It is not based on discovering a bio-psychic defense mechanism behind paranoia, but rather on discovering immanent in paranoid discourse a claim that Sedgwick takes to be false, and which implicitly entails other, subordinate claims (for example, about the naiveté of the public) that Sedgwick also takes to be false. More specifically, Sedgwick finds that precisely the paranoid thoroughgoingness of the disciplinary structure that organizes D. A. Miller's *The Novel and the Police* implicitly endorses a whole philosophy of history – which Sedgwick also takes to be false.

> "Writing in 1988 – that is, after two full terms of Reaganism in the United States – D. A. Miller proposes to follow Foucault in demystifying "the intensive and continuous 'pastoral' care that liberal society proposes to take of each and every one of its charges." As if! I'm a lot less worried about being pathologized by my therapist than about my vanishing mental health coverage – and that's given the great good luck of having health insurance at all." (141)

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Amen to that. The intervening quarter-century only makes Sedgwick's criticism appear more perspicuous. But my point here is not to agree with Sedgwick but to point out that here paranoid reading is not problematic because of its defensive, totalizing posture, but rather false because that posture is, implicitly but necessarily, the bearer of dubious claims about visibility, about the public, and about the current course of history.

Precisely where the argument acquires its ballast, we find not that good readings can be bad if they are paranoid, but that paranoid reading takes up a false posture toward what exists in the world – a false posture toward the true. That implicit truth claims lie immanently in subjective (tacit, embodied, etc.) postures is a (Hegelian) insight that might legitimately take the name "affect theory," but it owes nothing to a bio-affective theory of the emotions. Ideology is one word for it: "an imaginary relation to real conditions of existence," in Althusser's unusually lapidary phrase. Think here not of Sedgwick's unrecognizable caricature of the putatively paranoid "theory of ideology" (1997: 139) in Marx, but rather of the comical knot of contradictory propositions that are embodied, but not consciously entertained, by the commodity owner in the act of exchange in the second chapter of *Capital I* (Marx, 2008: 101). Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as we shall have a chance to touch on below, can be seen as a catalog of ways to take up the true, falsely.

But embodied postures, like explicit claims, can be true as well as false. Even in Hegel, some are less false than others. Think of art historian Michael Fried's years-long "discomfort" (2018: 6) before the paintings of Thomas Eakins. It is not that Fried's discomfort is justified, ex post facto, by his later ascription to Eakins's work of an incompletely mastered dissonance between the logic of painting and the logic of drawing. Rather, his discomfort *is* the discovery of that dissonance, in its embodied (intuitive, tacit, etc.) form, before it undergoes the disciplined process of explicit elaboration (Fried, 2018: 1-7). The basic form aesthetic judgment takes in Fried – the conviction that something holds, or fails to hold, as a painting, as a sonata, as a novel – is a subjectively immediate relationship to the work that can be, but needn't be, unspooled as a set of explicit claims. This is why, in Kant's foundational formulation of aesthetic judgment, it is understood to be, apparently paradoxically, both subjective and universal. It is understood to be universally valid because it has a determinate content, but it is understood to be valid specifically as an aesthetic judgment: that is, without reference to determinate content. The specificity of artworks is that the discoveries they convey are embodied (sensuous,

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concrete, etc.), which does not at all mean that they can't be made explicit, only that their force derives from their embodiment.

There is no parallel structure on the reparative side of Sedgwick's essay. False attitudes to the true – like paranoia – contain, tautologically, claims about what is. The same cannot be said of the inverse. There can be neither a true relation to the reparative, nor a false one, only an affective one. Since what matters is that the affect be reparative, the question of truth is irrelevant – that is the meaning of Sedgwick's "disentangled." Sedgwick doesn't spend any time showing what reparative reading might look like, for the good reason that it doesn't matter what reparative reading looks like, since the wholes it constructs are a matter of "extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture" (Sedgwick, 1997: 150-151). What matters is that they sustain "selves and communities" (Sedgwick, 1997: 150), not that their insights are, because they claim to be true, available in principle to all selves and communities. Since considerations of truth can't come into Sedgwick's vision-board theory of interpretation, the aesthetic judgment proper to it is subjective, but not universal – that is, possibly contagious but not communicable. Kant calls this the judgment of the agreeable; Sedwick calls it "maximizing positive affect."

These two conflicting standpoints correspond to what Ruth Leys identifies as cognitivist and anticognitivist theories of the emotions. I take the time to disentangle them in Sedgwick for two reasons. First, because the shuttling back and forth between two forms of "affect theory" is essential to its rhetoric. The considerable descriptive force of the first sort of affect theory, its investment in "real conceptual work" (Sedgwick, 1997: 136), is the part of affect theory that has the power to compel agreement, rather than possibly to be contagious. The circulation of the second sort of affect theory – prescriptive, but without the power to compel agreement because it is committed not to truth but to maximizing positive affect – is parasitic on the first. The shuttling back and forth between two incompatible, cognitivist and anticognitivist, accounts of affect is essential to the historical success of the essay – and the rhetorical structure is common to much contemporary theory.

It is not clear whether this shiftiness in Sedgwick's essay is a conscious rhetorical strategy or a genuine confusion. The two accounts are often present as alternative readings of the same sentence, where the ambiguity reads as completely conscious.

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But suppose one takes seriously the notion [...] that everyday theory qualitatively affects everyday knowledge and experience; and suppose that one doesn't want to draw much ontological distinction between academic theory and everyday theory; and suppose that one has a lot of concern for the quality of other people's and one's own practices of knowing and experiencing. In these cases, it would make sense – if one had the choice – not to cultivate the necessity of a systematic, self-accelerating split between what one is doing and the reasons one does it. (144-145)

If "theory" means "real conceptual work," as it does when most of us use the word "theory," then the point would be that "everyday theory," or the taking up of subjective postures toward the world, also involves real conceptual work, and that "academic theory" is the explicit form of theory but is ontologically similar to such "everyday theory." But if "theory" rather denotes a non-conceptual response-pattern, the attunement through feedback of disarticulated subsystems of affects and drives, as it does in the bio-affective model of the emotions that Sedgwick leans on – then it means precisely the opposite: since "academic theory" is not ontologically distinct from "everyday theory," neither does "academic theory" involve real conceptual work.

> "At other times, the shuttling seems unconscious and even desperate.
>
> Indeed, from any point of view it is circular, or something, to suppose that one's pleasure at knowing something could be taken as evidence of the truth of the knowledge." (Segdwick, 1997:138)

There is pathos in that "or something," a throwing up of hands marking a limit to thought. To experience pleasure in the dawning of conviction, in the gathering solidity of an argument, in the intuition of an artwork's coherence – and why else would one want to test the conviction, to pursue the argument, to explore the coherence? – is only circular from one point of view, namely the anti-cognitivist version of affect theory, in which affect has been "disentangled" from truth. Meanwhile, what Sedgwick really appears to want – "joy as the guarantor of truth" – is symmetrically hyperbolic, since truth is not the kind of thing that comes with a guarantee. Joy can be the guarantor of truth only if the joy is the truth, in which case affect is just as much "disentangled" from any ordinary understanding of truth. What we call truth is produced through (and presupposed by) disagreement. If the wholes strategically constructed in the pursuit of "maximizing positive affect" do not have a determinate relationship to some "preexisting whole," namely the artwork, then there is nothing to disagree about and no truth to be produced. But

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for the version of "affect theory" that has held some authority for someone ever since Kant, the entanglement of affect with truth is the reason we take works of art seriously.

The entanglement of affect with truth – an entanglement it is the work of interpretation to elucidate – is denied in a different way by Pierre Bourdieu's ambivalently brilliant reading of Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*. As is well known, *Sentimental Education* hinges on Frédéric Moreau's inability or unwillingness to turn to account any of the several opportunities that present themselves to him. Bourdieu wants to show that Frédéric's disposition allows Flaubert to map the social conditions that underlie conduct in the Second Empire, and in so doing, maps the conditions under which Flaubert himself acts. Bourdieu's purpose is to establish sociology as the necessary horizon of literary interpretation. But what he does instead is tacitly to transfer Flaubert's insights to sociology: to appropriate literary discoveries (that is, discoveries grounded in implicit attitudes, embodied postures – affect entangled with truth) to a scientific discourse whose explicit claim is to have superseded them.

In brief, Bourdieu brings to light in *Sentimental Education* a systematic understanding of two forms of class dynamic. The first has to do with the origins and destinies of the various adolescents whose coming of age parallels Frédéric's, all of whom come in one way or another to embody by the end of the novel what, in retrospect, they were destined from the beginning to become, "as if [Flaubert] had wanted to expose to the forces of the field a collection of individuals possessing, in different combinations, the aptitudes representing in his eyes the conditions for social success" (Bourdieu, 1996: 10). (Note the characteristic Bourdieusian "as if," as necessary for Bourdieu as it is superfluous to his or anybody's understanding of Flaubert.) The second has to do with the relation between the political-economic élite in mid-nineteenth-century France and the heteronomous realm of the art market, whose essence is pithily contained in the name of Arnoux's fictional journal *L'Art Industriel*. This relation is implicated in the tensions between the right wing, representing the bourgeoisie proper, and its centrist elements among the dominated fraction of the bourgeoisie, as well as the more radical plebeian and bohemian elements with whom the latter associate. This complex map also has a historical dimension, as Frédéric's two visits to the Dambreuses' allow us to see the subtle loosening of the boundaries of the dominant pole in the wake of 1848, an event that cleaves the novel in two but barely makes a dent in Frédéric's life.

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All of the characters in the novel but Frédéric occupy a determinate space in Bourdieu's diagram of the social space of the novel (Figure 1). Frédéric, as the novel's narrative focus, appropriately occupies the center. But we should take note of what goes unremarked in the diagram, namely that while everyone else's position is sociological, Frédéric's is narratological. Only if Frédéric pursued with sufficient tenacity any of the opportunities presented to him – mostly from the right-hand side of the diagram but a few from the left – would he occupy a determinate place in the diagram, but then that place would no longer be at its center. The central space is not defined sociologically as "to the right of Arnoux but to the left of Dambreuse," but rather narratologically as the position that, by refusing to identify with either Arnoux or Dambreuse, touches them both.

So on one hand we can understand Frédéric as a structural element of the novel, a non-sociological figure that makes both the novel and its sociological translation possible in the first place. In this case the mapping of social space can for Flaubert hardly be as unconscious ("repressed," "hidden," "buried," among many other synonyms, paraphrases, and euphemisms) as Bourdieu wants to make out. Perhaps the strongest evidence for this is that after reading Bourdieu's account of the novel, such mapping appears as simply (part of) what the novel is about. Bourdieu's "sociological" interpretation is in that case a plain-vanilla interpretation. But a good one. (And all good interpretations are plain-vanilla).

On the other hand, no matter how cannily crafted Frédéric is as a figure, he appears to us not as a figure but as a character. In a formalist register, we would say that his structural function is well motivated. But Bourdieu admits as well that the apparent reality of Frédéric and his world – its plausibility – is something to be accounted for. Bourdieu ascribes to Frédéric and his world something he explicitly distinguishes from the Barthesian, merely rhetorical, reality effect: a "*belief effect*" (1996: 32, Bourdieu's emphasis), which designates nothing other than what Fried names as "conviction" – even if in his deflationary mode Bourdieu will try to dial it down to "charm." This belief-effect – the felt reality of Frédéric and his world despite the possibly schematic structures that underlie them – is at the center of Bourdieu's reading, and of the sociological insight that he draws from *Sentimental Education*. On Bourdieu's account, what Frédéric reveals is the ambivalently illusory quality of the social games he is expected to play:

> "Frédéric does not manage to invest himself in one or another of the games of art or money that the social world proposes. Rejecting the *illusio* as an illusion

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> unanimously approved and shared, hence as an *illusion of reality*, he takes refuge in true *illusion*. [...] The entry into life as entry into the illusion of the real guaranteed by the whole group is not self-evident. And novelistic adolescences [...] remind us that the "reality" against which we measure all fictions is only the universally guaranteed referent of a collective illusion." (1996: 13, Bourdieu's emphases).

Illusio is in Bourdieu a term of art designating the tacit belief in social games that gives them their reality, a reality that essentially masks what is really at stake, namely the "social conditions which made them possible" (Bourdieu, 1996: 167). The *illusio* at work in Bourdieu's explication of Frédéric is the same as the *illusio* that functions throughout Bourdieu's work on artistic fields:

> "The producer of the *value of the work of art* is not the artist but the field of production as a universe of belief which produces the value of the work of art as a *fetish* by producing the belief in the creative power of the artist." (1996: 229).

Bourdieu makes this identity explicit. "At the basis of the functioning of all social fields, whether the literary field or that of power, there is the *illusio*, the investment in the game. Frédéric['s]... Bovarysm is grounded in the powerlessness to take the real – that is, the stakes of games called serious – seriously" (1996: 33). Or again, climactically: "the reality against which we measure all fictions is merely the recognized referent of an (almost) universally shared illusion" (1996: 34).

There is nothing self-evident in Bourdieu's understanding of social fields as requiring the investment in an illusion. Consider Hegel's description of precisely same phenomenon in the section of *Phenomenology of Spirit* called "The Spiritual Animal Kingdom and Deception, or the 'Task in Hand.'"[1] There, individual aptitudes, resources, and interests – the "spiritual animal kingdom" part – are unavoidably and in some sense centrally at stake in any intellectual project (in, for example, the literary and theoretical debates this provocation takes part in) – the "task in hand" part. But the debates don't take the interests into account, and that's the deception part: participation in a disinterested "task in hand" can always be accounted for by a deflationary account of the interests involved. It is not only always possible but in a sense always true that my intervention is, in Hegel's words, "not at all where I thought it was" (1970: 308, 309). One could then call the "task in hand" an "*illusio*," as Bourdieu does. But one could also continue unproblema-

[1] See Hegel, 1970: 308-309. Translations from Hegel and from Barthes and Kleist, below, are my own.

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tically to call it "the universal," as Hegel does. Hegel's point in doing so is to insist that the deception or "illusion" is also where everything gets done, and so can hardly be as deceptive or illusory as all that. "(Almost) universally shared" norms and aims are a good working definition of Hegelian Spirit. The fact that such norms and aims are themselves only grounded in "(almost) universally shared" procedures for arriving at them is just sort of how it is, a non-problem. The remaining proposition – that specific achievements have specific social conditions of possibility – is hard to deny but hardly a fresh insight. "To become real," as Hegel puts it, "is to exhibit what is one's own in the element of the universal" (1970: 309).

All this is to suggest that the "sociological" insight of Bourdieu's reading belongs in scare quotes. The force of the discovery of the *illusio* derives not from any sociological data (what would that data look like?), but rather entirely from the force of Flaubert's presentation of Frédéric's relation to the conditions under which he acts. If Frédéric, who embodies a complex set of relations between belief and the social facts believed, belongs anywhere besides *Sentimental Education*, it is not in a sociological treatise but in *Phenomenology of Spirit* somewhere between the "beautiful soul" and the "man of virtue" in its rogues' gallery of ways to appropriate the true, falsely.

The entire thrust of Bourdieu's argument up to this point is to turn a kind of "affect theory" – a cognitivist understanding of aesthetic response – into a form of mystification, to which sociology is the antidote:

> "[The presentation of the field of power in Sentimental Education] is a vision one could call sociological if it were not set apart from a scientific analysis by its form, simultaneously offering and masking it. In fact, Sentimental Education reconstitutes in an extraordinarily exact manner the structure of the social world in which it was produced and even the mental structures which, fashioned by these social structures, form the generative principle of the work in which these structures are revealed. But it does so with its own specific means, that is, by giving it to be seen and felt in exemplifications (or, better, evocations in the strong sense of incantations capable of producing effects, notably on the body), in the "evocatory magic" of words apt to "speak to the sensibilities" and to obtain a belief and an imaginary participation analogous to those that we ordinarily grant to the real world.
>
> [...] But it says it only in a mode such that it does not truly say it. The unveiling finds its limits in the fact that the writer somehow keeps control of the return

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of the repressed. The putting-into-form operated by the writer functions like a generalized euphemism…" (1996: 31-32, Bourdieu's emphases)

But why? Why does a novel "not truly say" what it means? Does a metaphor not "truly say" what it means? A sonnet?

Whether or not he would acknowledge it, Bourdieu is repeating Hegel's "end of art" thesis: that once systematic knowledge takes on a certain field, artistic knowledge in that field is left without a vocation. Despite Bourdieu's intentions, what he shows is the opposite. First, Flaubert's insight is anchored, by the central (though diegetically peripheral) events of 1848, in the Second Empire – the referent of Marx's famous "second time as farce," a period whose open cynicism, summarized in Flaubert's recollection that "everything was false," is hard to exaggerate (qtd. Bourdieu, 1996: 59). For that reason, what is true in Frédéric's non-investment in the social games available to him – the historical novelty and visibility of the rottenness of the social games available in the Second Empire, a historical novelty that has implications that reverberate far beyond the period, but which is rooted nonetheless in a particular historical moment – is false when repeated by Bourdieu's insistence on the *illusio* as a trans-historical principle. If we want to understand *Sentimental Education*, it will have to be by entering into the specificity of its concerns, not by reducing them – the word is for once appropriate – to sociological banalities. Second, and following from this, Bourdieu's truth-claims fall to the ground without our prior conviction that Flaubert gets something right in the figure of Frédéric. Bourdieu wants to show that his tendentious ideas about social fields subsume Flaubert's local insight. But the situation is the reverse: Flaubert's local insight lends Bourdieu's tendentious ideas what plausibility they have.

My final exhibit will be a book whose aims have generally been misunderstood, Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*. Guilelessly, Barthes lands on both sides of the problem of the entanglement of truth and affect – and also in the middle of it, suggesting that for Barthes something else is at stake, something that might make clearer the attraction for us of the ambivalent abdication of criticism undertaken by followers of Sedgwick and Bourdieu, and by many others besides: partisans of actor network theory, distant reading, object-oriented ontology, new historicism and much of what we call new formalism, to name just a few.

As is well known – too well known – Barthes's fateful little book on photography hinges on a distinction between two aspects of the photograph. On one side Barthes places the *studium* – everything that can be chalked up to the artist's explic-

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it intention, to an intention that can be *said*: a 1926 photograph by James Van der Zee "*says* respectability, family life, conformism, Sunday dress, an attempt at social advancement" (Barthes, 1980: 73, my italics). On the other Barthes places the *punctum*, the detail or "partial object" that "breaks the *studium*. ... [I]t is not I who goes to seek it out, but it that emerges from the scene, like an arrow, to pierce me" (Barthes, 1980: 48).

With good reason, *studium* has been assimilated to intention – a certain picture of intention as something that is exhausted by being *said* – and *punctum* to the unintended indexical trace – "this accident that *pricks me*" [ce hasard qui, en elle, *me point*]." (Barthes, 1980: 49). But matters are not so simple. In the next sentence, Barthes says that in thus being composed of two themes, the photographs he likes "were constructed after the manner of a classical sonata" (1980: 49), which is hardly the same thing as the first theme being interrupted by an accident. There is considerable hedging around this distinction: see the rapid accumulation of modifiers like "pas rigoreusement... probablement... pas obligatoirement" (1980: 79-80) that encroach whenever the question of artistic intention becomes unavoidable.

In his commentary on the Van Der Zee photograph, the *punctum* shifts from one part of the photograph (shoes) to another (a necklace), a shift that can only be ascribed to the internal movement of the spectator: "the *punctum* ... is a supplement, it is what I add to the photo and *which is nonetheless already there*" (Barthes, 1980: 89). This purely subjective relation to the purely objective indexical trace is entirely coherent. It is typical of subject-object relations in general: at one moment Barthes likes a photo because of some shoes, at another because of a necklace; at one moment I like bourbon because of its taste, a little later, because it is intoxicating.

It does not cohere, however, with Barthes's understanding of a Robert Mapplethorpe photograph, a partial self-portrait against a white screen, where the *punctum* consists in the way the photographer [Mapplethorpe] "has caught the hand of the young man (Mapplethorpe himself, I believe) at just the right degree of openness, the right density of abandonment; a few millimeters more or less and the suggested body would no longer have been offered with benevolence...: the Photographer has found *the right moment*, the *kairos* of desire" (Barthes, 1980: 95). A sharper assertion of artistic intention – an intention that is not *said* in the photograph, but pointed to by the critic – would be hard to conceive.

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At one moment, the *punctum* is a contingent appearance that defies the intention of the photographer; at another, it is an expression of the genius of the Photographer. In pointing out this inconsistency I am not catching Barthes in an error, exactly. Rather, the discovery of the photographic index as the antidote to the mistake of interpretation is at most (here) in Barthes's peripheral vision. What Barthes cares about (here) is the disruption of the *studium* by the *punctum*. The origin of the *punctum* – whether artist's intention or unintended trace – is a secondary concern. In the second, less discussed half of the book, the too-well-known opposition between *studium* and *punctum* is twice overcome. First, it is redescribed as a normative condition for the reception of the photograph as such, since what we are presented with in a photograph is necessarily represented in the imperfect tense. What we see *has been*; what we know is that it is no more, and that is what pricks. (Just around the time Barthes is writing, ambitious photography begins to address itself to this condition as a limit to be overcome: see for one well-known example Cindy Sherman's first *Untitled Film Stills*). A little later on, the opposition is overcome without remainder by the photographic portrait when it successfully presents an "air" – "a word I use," writes Barthes, "*faute de mieux*, for the expression of truth" (Barthes, 1980: 168).

In something like the book's peroration, the climactic "love" for an image (and Barthes only loves images that "prick" him [179]) is his love for a scene in Fellini's *Casanova*, where Casanova dances with an automaton: more specifically, Barthes's love is for the automaton: "N'étais-je pas, en somme, amoureux de l'automate fellinien?" (Barthes, 1980: 179). A reference, conscious or not, is surely being made to Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater*, where something like the "air" as the expression of truth (in Kleist, "grace": *die Grazie*) spirals vertiginously away from the *studium* (in Kleist, "affectation," *die Ziererei*). Since the complex movements of the puppets' limbs, prompted by the simple movements of the puppeteer, simply follow the laws of physics, they are free of affectation. But can't affectation be discerned, then, in the higher-order intentions of the puppeteer? Well, then, automate the whole thing. But can't affectation be discerned, then, in the design of the automaton? Well, then, perhaps grace can only be traced "either to no consciousness or to infinite consciousness," either to "inanimate matter" or to a god – to the contingent trace, or to genius (Kleist, 1987: 561).

"Grace" in Kleist's sense – that which escapes affectation – is what Barthes is aiming for with the *punctum*. What is Barthes's concern (here) with the inter-

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ruption of the *studium* by the *punctum*? *Studium* ("a sort of general, eager investment in something" [48]) is governed by "a contract concluded between creators and consumers" (Barthes, 1980: 51). The *studium* of the photograph communicates directly with the *studium* of the spectator without, as it were, touching either one. The *studium* "endows the photograph with *functions*" which "I recognize with more or less pleasure: I invest them with my *studium* – which is never my pleasure or my pain" (1980: 51). In other words, *studium* is something like ideology, or Barthesian myth. One's "investment" in the photograph is a function of one's prior "investment" in its content. The field of the *studium* is governed by the dichotomy "I like / I don't like" (1980: 50). The question of judgment never arises, even when the content does not agree with me, because I am not obliged to agree with it, only either to invest in it, or to withhold investment.

The *punctum* interrupts this domesticating, ideological agreement "between creators and consumers." As we have seen, there are, in the first half of the book, already two versions of this. One of these (the punctum is "what I add to the photo") leads, if not back to the *studium* itself, then to something like a sentimenttalized version of it: the structure of the subjective *punctum* is also still that of investment, with the difference that the investment is now irreducibly mine. (It is the difference between buying a baking dish because no kitchen is complete without one (*studium*), and (*punctum*) buying a cornflower casserole because it reminds me of Sunday dinners at my grandmother's, or a *cazuela* because they have been made in the same kiln for eight generations, or…). The other version ("the Photographer has found the right moment") leads to an interpretation (Mapplethorpe has found the *kairos* of desire), necessarily opening up a normative field, provoking agreement or disagreement (perhaps Mapplethorpe's half-open hand is instead asserting a filiation from Michelangelo). But throughout *Camera Obscura*, Barthes does not concern himself with the distinction between these two manifestly contrary possibilities. He is only concerned to pierce the unanimity of "culture." Sentiment will do as well as a good picture.

The apparent congruence of the Barthesian *punctum* with the North American (but global) understanding of indexicality as the antidote to artistic meaning as such (see, for example, Rosalind Krauss's "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America") is historically contingent. In *Camera Obscura*, Barthes is not interested in foreclosing interpretation. What he dismisses under the sign *studium* is something like interpretive affectation, the artificial unanimity of interpretive culture;

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what he celebrates under the sign *punctum* is something like interpretive grace. The beauty of the *punctum* is that it always, either way you take it, lets the artwork's limbs fall where they may. At a time like ours, when left and right (as these are currently understood) respond to art by lining up joylessly behind their favored messages, interpretive grace, where one finds it, is a balm. It is no accident that in Kleist's vignette, the figure who sets it in motion by finding human dance to be hopelessly riddled with affectation is himself "the principal dancer at the opera, having extraordinary luck with the public" (Kleist, 1987: 560). Impatience with exegesis principally affects professional exegetes, who reach for grace by the dizzyingly self-defeating means of exiling meaning from the object of interpretation. Revealed in this posture is an amnesia. The identity of contingency and intention – of "no consciousness" and "infinite consciousness," of contingent part and expressive whole – is what, under the name "artistic unity," was once understood to be the criterion of a successful artwork.

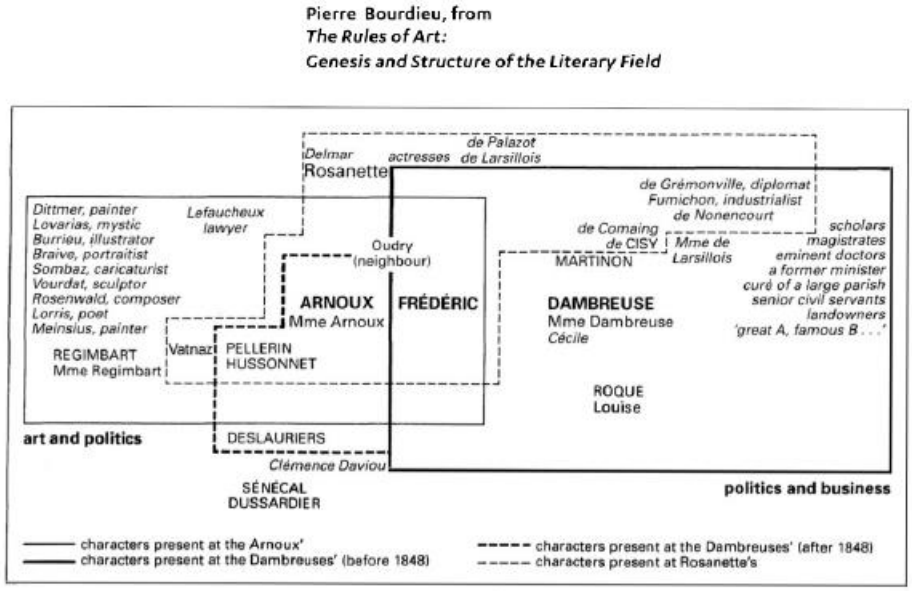

Figure 1 The field of power according to *Sentimental Education*

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