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## **Sociological Reflexivity in Action**

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Pierre Bourdieu, *Sketch for a Self-Analysis* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2008), translated by Richard Nice, x + 118 pp., ISBN-10-0-226-06751-3, US\$20.

If a single word had to be used to summarize the entire intellectual life of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), knowing of course that any such reduction cannot really do justice to the complexity and diversity of his multifarious analysis of social life, I think that word should be: reflexivity<sup>1</sup>.

As a theme and, more importantly, as a practice, before being a word and a concept, reflexivity has been at the heart of Bourdieu's writings from the very start and throughout the whole course of his career. Though most readers of *Social Studies of Science* heard a lot about reflexivity since David Bloor made it the fourth guiding principle of the Strong Programme (Bloor, 1991[1976]), the 'reflexive turn' in SSK has, however, shown itself to be quite different from Bourdieu's use of that notion. Bourdieu's brief but dense *Sketch for a Self-Analysis*, thus offers an exemplary case of a practice of a *sociological* reflexivity that, as we will see, contrasts with the *textual* and often *narcissistic* reflexivity that was predominant in the SSK during the second half of the 1980s and which rapidly led to an impasse.

Bourdieu's project of a 'self-socioanalysis' is implicitly presented as a necessary complement (if not even a replacement) for the usual psycho-analysis, very much in vogue among French intellectuals –

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<sup>1</sup> For complementary analyses of Bourdieu's conception of reflexivity see Frangie (2009), Heilbron (1999) and Robbins (2007)

and which, Bourdieu tells us, lodged, at least in the 1970s France, ‘at the antipodes of sociology’ (p. 17), though it shares with the latter ‘the ambition of giving a scientific account of human behaviours’ (p. 16). The massive book he directed in 1993 on *La misère du Monde* (translated as *The Weight of the World*) also constituted such a socioanalysis of the misery present (then as now) in all sectors of French society (Bourdieu, 1993a). So, one can say that his own self-analysis is not simply, as is often the case, the mechanical result of academic aging and retirement, when a scholar tends to look back instead of forward, often pressed by younger colleagues asking biographical questions about relations entertained with other major actors of the discipline. For example, most important French intellectual figures wrote their own autobiographies or books of interviews telling of their lives, even though in most cases their own social theory did not contain that step as a necessary one for a complete sociological analysis. For example Raymond Aron, under whom Bourdieu first worked as an assistant, as well as Michel Crozier, also a colleague of Bourdieu’s under Aron’s tutelage, wrote their own autobiographies. Not surprisingly, however, Bourdieu did not want to follow that dominant path and explicitly writes that his book ‘is not an autobiography’. A slim book just over a hundred pages could hardly be comparable to the usual tomes covering many hundreds of pages, often filled with superfluous details. Having himself denounced ‘the biographical illusion’ (Bourdieu, 1986), and being ‘profoundly antipathetic’ to a genre that inspires in him ‘aversion mingled with fear’ (p. x), Bourdieu could not indulge for long in anecdotes or personal comments on former colleagues (as can be found in Aron’s and Crozier’s autobiographies (Aron (1995, Crozier (2002, 2004))<sup>i</sup>). Hence his decision to provide only ‘a sociological analysis excluding psychology, except for some moods’ (p. ix). His project thus aims at retaining ‘all the features that are pertinent’ from the point of view of ‘sociological explanation and understanding’ (p. 1). Despite this affirmation, Bourdieu does provide some introspective information when he says that his own “‘choices” manifested themselves above all in refusals and in intellectual antipathies that were most often barely articulated’ (p. 2). And he cannot refrain from adding some personal, often scathing, remarks about colleagues, such as when he recalls his meeting with the

American sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld (pp. 74-75) or when he admits to envying the position of the American sociologist Aaron Cicourel for being part of a ‘scientific environment that is both stimulating and demanding’ (p. 18). These brief personal confidences – often violent when addressed at his enemies like Raymond Boudon, ‘the accredited agent’ of Lazarsfeld ‘scientific multinational’ (p.75)<sup>ii</sup> – are usually embedded in a structural analysis of the academic field as if to put more flesh on an otherwise abstract presentation. So, readers in search of Bourdieu’s views on Derrida, Foucault or Habermas will be disappointed, though the few pages (pp. 79-82) where he contrasts his own style (personal and scientific) with that of Foucault are illuminating.<sup>iii</sup>

The importance of the book does not lie in these bits of confidence for academic paparazzi but in the model it provides for a rigorous approach to the difficult problem of a self-socioanalysis of the sources of one’s schemes of thinking, evaluating and acting, that is the analysis of the social construction of the self as habitus. For Bourdieu’s model contains all the elements necessary for such a difficult sociological undertaking: sensitive to the entire spectrum of determinants of practice it makes explicit the often taken-for-granted hierarchy of institutions and disciplines and analyzes actors’ trajectories in the social, disciplinary and political fields.

The book is designed to make visible the fact that it is only a sketch and not a final and polished volume. The divisions are not numbered as chapters nor do they have titles. Nonetheless, its general structure conforms to Bourdieu’s definition of reflexivity as ‘the scientific objectivation of the subject of objectivation’ (p. 63). Between a brief introduction (pp. 1-3) and epilogue (pp. 111-13) justifying the writing of the book, are three chapters in which Bourdieu proceeds with a self-analysis that he had in fact begun at the end of the 1980s and published in different forms in different places. The most recent version forms the concluding section of his book on *Science of Science and Reflexivity*, which contained his final series of lectures at the Collège de France.<sup>iv</sup> In choosing science as a lecture topic,

Bourdieu was in fact echoing his 1982 inaugural lecture at the pinnacle of French institutions titled 'lecture on the lecture', a very reflexive exercise designed, he now tells us, as 'a way out of the contradiction into which [he] was thrown by the very fact of a social consecration which assaulted [his] self-image' (p. 109). The cycle was thus complete and Bourdieu could retire convinced of having done his best to fulfill his ambitious research program.

According to Bourdieu, the 'work of objectivation of the subject of objectivation must be carried out at three levels': one must objectivate: (1) the position of the agent in the overall social space; (2) the position of that agent within the field, that is the discipline and specialty in which he or she is active; and (3) everything linked to membership of the scholastic universe, 'paying particular attention to the illusion of the absence of illusion, of the pure, absolute, 'disinterested' point of view' (Bourdieu, 2004: 94). The first level objectivates the social conditions that accompany the formation of the scholar, highlighting the associated class, religious and gender-based dispositions and interests. Reflexive criticism of late-1960s sociology were generally limited to this first social level, directly linking the social position of the researchers to their cognitive interests in the manner of Karl Mannheim, who, following Marx, already noted in his *Ideology and Utopia*, first published in 1929, that it was 'a specific situation which had impelled [him] to reflect about the social roots of knowledge' (Mannheim, 1985: 7). We can also find this type of analysis, based on a simple theory of *reflection* (i.e. the social sphere is somehow *reflected* in the content of science) in many case studies published during the first wave of SSK in the second half of the 1970s and where the social and ideological characters of the actors were related directly to their scientific discourses and practices.<sup>v</sup> To this analysis of social origins Bourdieu adds another level, inspired by the work of the philosopher J.L. Austin who called it the 'scholastic bias' and that Bourdieu sociologizes by objectivating the scholarly perspective itself and its bias for categories of thought that bring about a scholarly conception of the world, often unconsciously projecting these thoughts onto the real world (Bourdieu, 1990). It is this most deeply-buried level of

reflexivity that allows us to see, for example, that those who claim that everything is a text or a discourse are in fact only projecting their academic unconscious onto the scientific and technological worlds.<sup>vi</sup>

Perhaps in order to maximize his distance from the usual structure of autobiographies, Bourdieu begins his analysis with the second step of field analysis and ‘examines the state of the field at the moment [he] entered it, in the 1950s’ (p. 4). Thus, ‘at the risk of surprising a reader who perhaps expects [him] to begin at the beginning, that is to say with the evocation of [his] earliest years and the social world of [his] childhood’ (p. 4), he defers that part to the very end of the book. Thus, Chapter 1 opens with the statement: ‘To understand is first to understand the field with which and against which one has been formed’ (p. 4). This chapter evokes ‘the space of possibles as it then appeared to [him] and the rites of institution that tended to produce the element of inner conviction and inspired attachment which, in those years, were the conditions for entry into the tribe of philosophers’ (p.4). From this perspective, the researcher exists not only in a social space as Mannheim noted, but also within the specific space of his discipline and its corresponding institutions. Reflexive analysis thus must *also* objectify the researcher’s position in the field, that relatively autonomous space having its own logic and interests.

Once the habitus and the structure of the field are understood, one should also analyze the relative position of these fields within the field of power, but that part is not really discussed in his *Sketch*, which focuses instead on the link between his habitus and the fields of philosophy and social sciences. So, far from being an *ad hoc* exercise, Bourdieu’s process of reflexivity is inseparable from the fundamental concepts underlying his theory of the social world, where *field* and *habitus* are related through the incorporated experiences of the singular *trajectory* of the agent both within social space *and* within a given *relatively autonomous* field.

### **From the Theme to the Term: A Reflexive Analysis of ‘Reflexivity’**

Despite the many existing analyses of Bourdieu’s conception of reflexivity, none seems to have noted that the term ‘reflexivity’ was hardly ever used by Bourdieu himself before the 1990s, though the theme it names is already present since his early works from the end of the 1950s (see, for example, Deer, 2008). Its explicit usage is relatively scarce compared with the more central themes in his work, such as *field* and *habitus*. The term is even absent from the indexes in books of his published before the 1990s, and it is well known that Bourdieu placed a great deal of importance on the preparation of each index, a practice not at all common among French editors.<sup>vii</sup> So, before looking at Bourdieu’s self-analysis in more detail, it is worth analyzing in a reflexive way the emergence of ‘reflexivity’ in his work and, more generally, in the social sciences.

The ‘reflexive’ nature of his work was first made visible through the uses of expressions that explicitly denote a certain *circularity*: ‘the sociology of sociology’, ‘sociologists of mythologies and mythologies of sociologists’, ‘who created the creators’, ‘sociologists of beliefs and belief in sociologists’, to give just a few examples taken from the titles of his papers. As an avid reader of the philosopher Gaston Bachelard, Bourdieu also used the term ‘epistemological vigilance’, as a central element in his methodological book, published with two of his colleagues in 1968, *Le métier de sociologue* (Bourdieu, et al. 1973 [1968]). Bachelard often used analogies drawn from psychoanalysis and spoke of ‘the superego of the scientific city’ that called for a dialectic and recurrent ‘intellectual surveillance of oneself’, leading to a ‘surveillance of surveillance’ (Bachelard, 1975 [1948]: 70). Extending this ‘psychoanalysis of the scientific mind’, through an ‘analysis of the social conditions in which sociological work is produced’ can become, according to Bourdieu, the ‘tool of choice for epistemological vigilance in the sociology of knowledge’ (Bourdieu, 1973 [1968]: 14). It is indeed this

Bachelardian tradition, as adapted to socio-analysis, that is at the root of Bourdieu's reflexivity. As we shall see, Bourdieu will push this inherently recurrent process, moving from the objectivation of a given agent to the objectivation of the entire field. In a lecture given in 1975, he went as far as to suggest that 'it should even be prohibited to practice sociology, and even more the sociology of sociology, without having done before (or simultaneously) one's own socio-analysis (if that is at all completely feasible)' (Bourdieu, 1980, my translation).

So, before the 1990s, reflexivity is a pervasive *theme* but not yet a frequent *word* in Bourdieu's work. This fact is consistent with the broader diffusion of the word 'reflexivity' in the lexicon of the social sciences. Though it first emerged in Garfinkel's ethnomethodology in the mid-1960s as a technical term referring to a quality of interactional sequences, as opposed to a conscience or self-awareness of their actions by the actors (Garfinkel 2006:18, 33-34), the word 'reflexivity' also began to be used more generally in the latter sense of self-awareness and applied to the analysis of the practice and position of sociologists in society toward the end of the decade (Gouldner, 1970; Friedrichs, 1970). However, its explicit use in titles and abstract of papers become frequent only in the 1970s in the pages of social sciences scholarly journals, and remains stable at about ten papers a year until the end of the 1980s. The term become widespread in the 1990s with an exponential growth until 2002, with a peak of about ninety papers a year, followed by a decline of about one-third to sixty papers a year by 2008.<sup>viii</sup> The appearance and then frequent use of the term 'reflexivity' in Bourdieu's published papers and books in the 1990s can, in fact, be interpreted as a feedback effect resulting from the international reception and interpretation of his writings in the Anglo-Saxon field where the term was then popular. This context affected the translation of Bourdieu's book titles from French to English. For instance *Choses dites*, first published in 1987, was translated and published three years later, in 1990, under the title, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*. In 1992, another English-language publication, *Invitation to a Reflexive Sociology*, witnessed the migration of the concept from subtitle to title. It then

returned to the subtitle in the French version of that book, whose title became: *Réponses. Pour une anthropologie réflexive*. Note also a subtle change: ‘sociology’ became ‘*anthropologie*’, confirming Bourdieu’s own observation (p. 40) that anthropology was, in France, more respectable than ‘ethnology’, to which we could add: also more respectable than ‘sociology’, which like ‘ethnologie’ has a more empirical connotation than ‘*anthropologie*’ with its philosophical reference to a global conception of human nature. This 1992 episode marked the beginning of the circulation of the word *réflexivité* in Bourdieu's French-language publications, although the term remained marginal in subsequent years.<sup>ix</sup> Finally, the term comes back in the title of his last book, published in 2001, *Science de la science et réflexivité*.

For the most part, it was thus the dissemination of Bourdieu's work in the English-speaking world that raised the profile of the word ‘reflexivity’ in Bourdieu’s own works in French after 1990. The usage of this term in turn made a central characteristic of his work more apparent. Bourdieu may not have explicitly used the word earlier, but the concept was certainly well-entrenched in his conception of sociology and he had adopted reflexive practices well before the label became fashionable in the late 1980s and early 1990s when he himself adopted it.

### **Epistemic vs. Sociological Reflexivity**

Although Bourdieu’s use of the word ‘reflexivity’ may itself be an interesting case of reflexivity -- his work acquiring a new vocabulary by the simple virtue of being reflected in the mirror of the Anglophone social scientific field -- one may ask: How is Bourdieu’s reflexivity different from the uses of reflexivity in the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK)? An answer to this question is I think necessary to highlight the specificity of the notion of reflexivity in Bourdieu’s work.

In order to fully grasp the kind of reflexivity practiced in SSK in the mid-1980s, its limits and how it differs from that promoted by Bourdieu, it is useful to distinguish between an epistemic and a sociological reflexivity.<sup>x</sup> The former is limited to an analysis of ideas and their reflexive use in theories or texts without ever connecting them to the trajectory and social positions in institutions, while the latter takes into account the path and position of the analyst in a structured social space. Sociological reflexivity in this sense had already been applied by Karl Mannheim to the sociology of knowledge as itself a sociohistorical development. As we already noted, Mannheim directly related the emergence of the sociology of knowledge to conflicting, socially situated modes of interpretation arising out of a situation of social crisis (Mannheim 1985: 5-6). This first level of reflexivity, directly tying a global socio-economic context to a scholar's theoretical stance, became dominant in the late 1960s when American society and sociology were in crisis. At that time, many critical sociologists were advocating a sociology of American functionalist sociology formulated as a critique of its implicit social conservatism (Gouldner, 1970; Friedrichs, 1970).

As put into practice through SSK in the 1980s, reflexivity was essentially epistemic in nature and not really concerned with this first level of sociological reflexivity, which, whatever its limits, was at least sensitive to the trajectory (ascending or descending) and position of scholars within a social space. As first explicitly formulated in 1976 by David Bloor in *Knowledge and Social Imagery*, the principle of reflexivity plays a purely formal role ensuring, as a meta-principle, the logical coherence of any given sociological theory of knowledge. In other words, since all knowledge must be the object of sociological analysis, there is no reason to exclude the sociology of knowledge from such an analysis. Given that the sociology of scientific knowledge sees itself as a science, its theories of the production of scientific knowledge should also be applied to itself (Bloor, 1991 [1976]). But once the principle was made explicit as a formal constraint on acceptable sociological theories of knowledge, it did not really play a role in most analysis of particular case studies based on the strong program. A symptom of

its perfunctory status as a sociological tool, the term was not even included in the index of Bloor's book. A few years later, Harry Collins, promoting an 'empirical programme of relativism' even explicitly excluded 'reflexivity' from its purview as being at best a distraction and at worst a hindrance leading to 'paralizing difficulties' (Collins 1981: 215). Along the same lines, the descriptive language of 'actor-network' does not show much interest in reflexivity (Latour 1987).

It was only in the second half of the 1980s that a 'reflexive turn' was made within SSK, thanks mainly to the contributions of Michael Mulkey (1985), Steve Woolgar (1988a) and Malcolm Ashmore (1989). They forcefully argued that SSK could not be truly reflexive unless one managed to *make visible* that the author/researcher is conscious of being 'socially' constructing his or her results. This making visible should apply as much to the research practice as to the form of the text that is the end product. This 'constitutive' – and, of course, 'radical' – reflexivity, as Woolgar called it, thus led to the construction of new narrative forms as necessary tools for making reflexivity manifest. But even the use of non traditional forms of narratives remain essentially epistemic as it aims at making visible the cognitive process of constructing explanations while leaving aside the *social position* of the analyst and the *social origins* of his categories of thought. Though 'textual reflexivity' may help create a distancing or 'estrangement' effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*) as found for example in Bertold Brecht's plays.<sup>xi</sup> it remains that we should recognize that this practice takes the reader as being excessively naïve. However, unlike the case of theaters where the audience is not usually composed of playwrights but of 'ordinary people', readers of 'reflexive' texts in SSK are essentially social scientists (much more than scientists), a fact that renders such a technique or style of writing a bit pedantic. A more charitable and generous view of the interpretative skills of the readers – colleagues and competitors in the same field, for the most part – might lead one to conclude that they know all too well that the author's analysis is but one interpretation among possibly many, that it is obviously 'constructed' and thus open to discussion. It therefore seems useless for sociologists to generate overly complex prose, especially considering that it

cannot by itself guarantee that readers will not in fact reify even this ‘reflexive’ writing. Even the most fervent supporters of this form of reflexivity seem to admit that it has its limits.<sup>xiii</sup> A nice confirmation of the danger of infinite regress coming with this kind of textual reflexivity obsessed with making everything ‘visible’ is provided by Frederic Steier who, using a traditional narrative style, wrote in a survey of the literature on reflexivity that ‘alternative forms are useful, but happen when they happen and do not in any way, by their alternativeness, guarantee a ‘reflexive and constructed reading’ which is up to the reader’ (Steier, 1991: 10). It is indeed somewhat curious to note that those who encourage the use of a prose which is supposed to make reflexivity explicit and visible never quite explain how such a style would automatically imply a reflexive *reading* of the text. In a typical case of the ‘biter bit’, Woolgar and Ashmore were criticized by Thomas Søderqvist for not having convinced the reader of ‘the unique, contingent, local and embodied character of the production of their own text’ (Søderqvist, 1991: 156). According to Søderqvist, to be really convincing, the two sociologists ‘would have had to show us the text in embodied progress, including video-recordings of writings of handwritten notes, glossed typed drafts [...], etc’ (p. 156). One can easily see that such an extreme view leads to an infinite regress as even the physical presence (if that were possible) of all the archives, and of course of the videotapes of the researcher creating these archives, would not suffice to be ‘really’ reflexive. Woolgar pushed to its limit the narcissistic type of reflexivity when he concluded a study on the nature of science with the proposition that ‘Self [should become] a strategic target for social science’ (Woolgar, 1988c: 108-09). That is certainly an extreme example of the ‘scholastic bias’ analyzed by Bourdieu.

These few examples should suffice to show where such a textual form of reflexivity can lead when it is not controlled by a more sociological reflexivity that takes also into account the audience of the texts. With institutions and social structures having all but vanished as explanatory variables, one should not be surprised that only individuals and their texts remain as the basis for a reflexive analysis. The regression from a sociological reflexivity taking into account the position of the scholar in social space

to a simple epistemic reflexivity focused on discourses or writing ‘practices’ is in fact the result of an overly-individualistic conception of scientific practice in which the specific social conditions and constraints that make this practice possible in the larger social space have disappeared or, more precisely, have been explicitly left out from the investigation thus leaving nothing but ‘subjectivity’ and the ‘self’ as an object to be objectified.

But should we simply reject reflexivity just because ‘experiments’ with textual reflexivity have shown their limits or should we instead promote a broader form of sociological reflexivity that not only could counterbalance and prevent these excesses of scholasticism, but also even explain them? Taking into account the structure of the field in which a researcher is placed allows one to avoid the pitfall of a regression to the individual level, analyzing instead the ensemble of active agents within the field as well as the interactions between them as the result of a trajectory that constructs individual habitus that are thus the internalized and individualized form of the state of the field at a given time. It is worth noting here that the absence of the intermediate level of institutional analysis in most SSK-type studies is a direct consequence of having discarded (instead of building on) Robert K. Merton’s contributions to the sociology of science. Despite its limitations, the sociology of science as developed by Merton and his disciples had the means to – and was – more reflexive about its institutional status than the reflexivity exemplified in SSK or actor-network; the notions of discipline and specialty made it possible at least to undertake a reflexive analysis of the emergence and institutionalization of the sociology of science as a specialty, for example (Cole & Zuckerman 1975).<sup>xiii</sup> Though it is true, as Lynch (2000) noted, that the kind of reflexivity promoted is itself a reflection of the kind of social theory promoted, it remains that one can evaluate which of the alternative conceptions does incorporate previous levels and which simply exclude them as irrelevant. From this point of view, it seems hard to consider ‘textual reflexivity’ as richer in content than the 3-level sociological reflexivity promoted by Bourdieu. For can one really believe that actors are ‘free agents’ and that social position (in a central

country, institution or discipline) does not affect discourses and practices? It is in its multilevel aspect that the Bourdieusian conception of reflexivity contributes to a more complex description and analysis of scientific practice. Let us see how he used it on his own case.

### **The Field of French Philosophy Circa 1950**

Bourdieu gives a central place to philosophy in his account. It may seem peculiar that the field of philosophy was central to many French social-scientists-to-be in the 1950s, but that was an effect of the unique structure of the French educational system, in which philosophy was central to the curriculum. The high prestige of philosophers as intellectuals, ‘the whole machinery of the process of consecration’, as Bourdieu (p. 4) calls it, led the best students to the prestigious *École normale supérieure*, and the choice of philosophy was then a ‘manifestation of a status-based assurance which reinforced that status-based assurance (or arrogance)’ (p. 5). The intellectual field was then dominated by the figure of Jean-Paul Sartre, himself a former student of the *École normale*, and his figure ‘exerted a fascination’ for all those ‘who then had any connection with philosophy’ (p. 9). But this pole of attraction was not unique and those like Bourdieu (and also Foucault before him<sup>xiv</sup>) ‘who sought to resist ‘existentialism’ in its fashionable or academic forms could draw support from a set of dominated currents’ (p. 9) like a history of philosophy closely linked to a history of the sciences in the works of Martial Guérault and Jules Vuillemin, and an epistemology and history of the sciences represented by Gaston Bachelard, Georges Canguilhem and Alexandre Koyré. The ‘desire to shun fashionable enthusiasms’ (p. 11) could also lead one towards the phenomenologists who were the most inclined to conceive phenomenology as a rigorous science, such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ‘who also offered an opening toward the human sciences’ (p. 12). Finally, reading the journal *Critique* gave ‘access to an international and transdisciplinary culture [that] made it possible to escape the closure effect exerted by every elite school’ (p.12).

Having shared the vision of the world of the ‘1950s-French-normalien-philosopher’ (p. 22), Bourdieu had to construct himself, ‘as [he] left the scholastic universe, and in order to leave it, against everything that the Sartrean enterprise represented for [him]’, that is against the dominant view of the immediate post-war philosophy, as did also Foucault and Derrida who followed different routes. Bourdieu particularly disliked the ‘mythology of the free intellectual’ promoted by Sartre and the fact that ‘there are many intellectuals who call the world into question but there are few intellectuals who call the intellectual world into question’ (p. 23). The domination of philosophy in the French intellectual space was such that he even writes that he has ‘often had occasions to describe [himself], with some irony, as the leader of a liberation movement of the social sciences against the imperialism of philosophy’ (p. 72). This explains that a large part of his comments concerns philosophy, since the discipline of sociology was not in fact much developed in France before the 1960s, contrary to what was the case in the United States, for example, and thus had to carve a place of its own.

### **The French Field of Social Sciences**

In Chapter 2, covering more than half of the book (pp. 22-83), Bourdieu focuses on ‘describing the state of the social sciences as it appeared to [him], and in particular the relative positions of the various disciplines or specialties’ (p. 30). The landscape of French sociology appeared to Bourdieu as ‘a closed world where all the places were assigned’. It should be added here that in the French system, professorships (‘chairs’) are defined by the State and are few in number, and there is no free market for autonomous universities and departments to develop by themselves to facilitate the emergence and growth of new disciplines and specialties.<sup>xv</sup> So, no wonder Bourdieu saw in Raymond Aron, who at the time had been recently named Professor of Sociology at the Sorbonne, an ‘unhoped-for opening to those who wanted to escape from the forced choice between the theoreticist sociology of Gurvitch and

the scientific, Americanized psychosociology of Stoezel' (p. 30). Thanks to the social relations of the *École normale* graduates, Bourdieu was thus introduced to Aron and became his assistant in 1960, freshly returned from Algeria. Bourdieu completes his description of the field by noting the recently founded academic journals associated with each group, like the *Revue française de sociologie* 'controlled by Stoezel', the *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*, controlled by Gurvitch and the *Archives européennes de sociologie* founded by Aron (p. 31).

With all this in place, Bourdieu returns in more detail to his experience in Algeria where he served his military service and where he started to read ethnology and do fieldwork. His Algerian experience and ethnological fieldwork 'acquired in the difficult conditions of a war of liberation, had marked for [him] a decisive break with scholastic experience' and inclined him to a 'rather critical vision of sociology and sociologists', as well as a 'somewhat disenchanted, or realistic, representation of the individual or collective position-takings of intellectuals' (p. 37). His Algerian experience was thus 'no doubt the pivotal moment' in 'the transformation of [his] vision of the world that accompanied [his] transition from philosophy to sociology' (p. 58). As much as Sartre had been the central figure during his transition through, and from, philosophy, so was the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. Bourdieu thus 'placed [himself] in the tradition he (Lévi-Strauss) had created', that is structural anthropology' (p. 44). But he was soon to distance from what he came to consider a 'fundamentally dehistoricized vision of social reality' (p. 45), which he criticized in his 1972 book *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1977 [1972]). One can even see in the very concept of *habitus* the solution Bourdieu found to keep his distance from the extreme subjectivism of Sartre and the extreme objectivism of Levi-Strauss' structuralism.

Given how much Bourdieu is now seen (wrongly I think) as the incarnation of an objectivist view of sociology, it is no small irony that Lévi-Strauss, according to Bourdieu, 'could only or wanted only to

see in this critique a regression from the objectivist vision that he had imposed in ethnology, that is a return to subjectivism, to the subject and his or her lived experience, which he had sought to expel from ethnology, and which I was revoking just as radically as he, with the notion of habitus' (p. 45). Despite taking distance from both Sartre and Lévi-Strauss, Bourdieu learned from the latter a profound belief in science, that he shared also with Canguilhem, and from the former a strong commitment to the role of public intellectual. He insists that the 'self-interested myth' of the mission of the intellectual is 'something to be defended at all costs, against everything and everyone, and especially perhaps against a sociologistic interpretation of the sociological description of the intellectual world: even if it is much too great for even the greatest of intellectuals, the myth of the intellectual and his universal mission is one of those ruses of historical reason which mean that those intellectuals most susceptible to the profits of universality can be led to contribute to the progress of the universal, in the name of motivations which may have nothing universal about them' (p. 25).

We see here the typical Bourdieusian mix of reflexive sociological analysis describing the mechanism behind the construction of a myth but going beyond a mere 'deconstruction', which may lead to a cynical vision of the world, to promote the social usefulness of the belief in universalism usually associated with the role of the intellectual. Always keen on finding a sociological basis to individual choices, Bourdieu notes that his own transition from the highly coveted title of 'philosopher' to the much humbler one of 'ethnologist' was no doubt 'eased by the extraordinary prestige that the discipline of anthropology had just acquired, among philosophers themselves, thanks to the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who also contributed to this ennobling by substituting for the traditional French designation of the discipline [*ethnologie*] the English label anthropology, thus combining the prestigious connotations of the German sense – Foucault was then translating Kant's *Anthropologie* – with the modernity of the Anglo-American meaning' (p. 40).

Bourdieu insists many times that his likes (and dislikes) are linked to affinities (and disaffinities) of habitus (as embodied systems of schemes of perception and evaluation of practices), and not to the ‘rational choices’ of a transparent thinking subject that would be dictated by reason alone as consciously calculated ‘best interests’. For sympathies and antipathies, ‘which pertains to the person as much as to his works, are the principle of many intellectual affinities, which remain entirely obscure and are often experienced as inexplicable, because they engage the two habitus concerned’ (p. 22). Thus his attraction to Canguilhem and Vuillemin – and later to Jacques Bouveresse – as exemplars of scholars ‘often of lower-class provincial origin, or brought up outside France and its academic traditions, and attached to peripheral university institutions’ (p. 10).

### **From Denguin to Paris: The Determinants of a ‘Cleft Habitus’**

But to understand the determinants of these ‘affinities of habitus’ (p. 27) as Bourdieu calls them, we must turn to the last chapter (pp. 84-110) devoted to his own social origins and intellectual trajectory in the 1940s. For, as he notes in the opening sentence, ‘this sketch of a self-analysis cannot avoid giving some space to the formation of the dispositions associated with the position of origin, dispositions which we know play a part, in relation with the social spaces within which they are actualized, in determining practices’ (p. 84). Bourdieu is thus convinced that coming from a remote little village in Bearn, even ‘unknown to [his] lycée classmates [at Pau], who would make jokes about it’, and having moved out of that village to be admitted to the best schools of the Republic (lycée Louis-le-Grand in Paris and then the *École normale supérieure*), made his childhood experience that of a ‘*transfuge*’<sup>xvi</sup> who deserted his origins, an experience which ‘no doubt weighed heavily in the formation of [his] dispositions towards the social world’ (p. 84).<sup>xvii</sup> Though very close to his primary school classmates, ‘sons of peasants, craftsmen or shopkeepers with whom [he] had almost everything in common’ he was in fact separated from them by a kind of invisible barrier’ due to his academic success (pp. 84-85). He

discovered ‘little by little, mainly through the gaze of others’ – a brief sign of a need for others even in a self-analysis – that the particularities of his habitus were linked ‘to the cultural particularities of [his] region of origin’ (p. 89).

This interiorized feeling of being an outsider was probably reinforced by the fact that there were very few ‘Béarnais *normaliens*’ (p. 90). His social trajectory from Denguin to Paris, developed in him a ‘cleft habitus, inhabited by tensions and contradictions’ (p. 100). The product of a ‘conciliation of contraries’ which ‘inclines one to “conciliation of the contraries”’, his habitus manifested itself ‘in the particular style of [his] research, the type of objects that interested [him] and the way in which he approached them’ (p. 103). This tension led him to ‘invest great theoretical ambitions in often at first sight trivial empirical objects’ (p. 103). For example, he studied the Algerian sub-proletariat in order to think about the temporal structure of consciousness, photography to discuss Kantian aesthetics and even *haute couture*, and the price of perfumes to analyze fetishism (Bourdieu, 2004: 112). Going even further in his conviction of the social determination of thinking, Bourdieu considers that ‘perhaps the fact of coming from what some like to call ‘modest’ origins gives in this case virtues that are not thought in manuals of methodology such as lack of any disdain for patient, painstaking empirical work; attention to commonplace objects; the refusal of dazzling ruptures and spectacular outbursts; the aristocratism of discretion which induces contempt for the brio and brilliance rewarded by the academic institutions and nowadays by the media’ (p. 103). In his book on science he had also suggested that one could find some explanation of the difference in style and object of research between the two French Physics Nobel Prizes, Claude Cohen-Tannoudji and Pierre-Gilles de Gennes, by taking into account their social origins, aristocratic for the former and petit-bourgeois for the latter (Bourdieu, 2004: 43).

A striking aspect of Bourdieu’s work, at least in the context of French social science, is his creation of a

strong research group, something that was ‘perfectly antinomic to the literary (and very Parisian) vision of “creation” as the singular act of an isolated researcher’ (p. 19). Such a vision could even incline ‘many ill-trained and intellectually ill-equipped researchers to prefer the sufferings, the doubts and, very often, the failures and the sterility of solitary labour to what they perceive as the depersonalizing alienation of a collective undertaking’ (p. 20). Consequently, he co-authored many articles with his collaborators, something very unusual at the time (and even now) on the part of French ‘mandarins’ in the social sciences. His group collectively produced a huge number of original studies, mainly published in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, a journal created by Bourdieu in 1975 and still very much active today. If this group has been ‘so continuously subject to pressures and reactions of collective defense aimed at preventing its “normal” reproduction’ it must be, he thinks, because ‘by the logic of its functioning as much as by the content of its scientific productions’, it has ‘threatened the order and routines of the field’ (p. 83).

Though Bourdieu has always taken care to keep his distance from an explicit psycho-sociology, his own socio-analysis nonetheless points in that direction as any fine-grained analysis of a trajectory is bound to take into account contingent events that can reorient a trajectory. Hence, it may come as a bit of a surprise to many to read the kind of ‘*aveu*’ by Bourdieu that ‘what I have said here of the causes or reasons of each of the experiences described, such as my Algerian adventures or my scientific enthusiasm, also masks the subterranean impulse and the secret intention that were the hidden face of a double life’ (p. 72). For all these social reasons ‘are in part only the relay and rationalization of a deeper reason or cause: a very cruel unhappiness which brought the irremediable into the childhood paradise of my life and which since the 1950s, has weighed on every moment of my existence, converting for example my initial dissension with the *École Normale* and the impostures of intellectual arrogances into a resolute break with the vanity of academic things’ (p. 71). He admits that above and beyond all the reasons invoked, his behaviors were ‘overdetermined (or subtended) by the inner desolation of

solitary grief: frenetic work was also a way of filling an immense void and pulling myself out of despair by interesting myself in others; abandoning the height of philosophy for the wretchedness of the *bidonville* was also a kind of sacrificial expiation of my adolescent avoidances of reality; the laborious return to a style stripped of the tricks and tics of scholastic rhetoric also marked the purification of a new birth' (pp. 71-72).

We are now perilously close to psychoanalysis, a discipline about which Bourdieu has always been ambivalent and on which he never expressed himself in any detail.<sup>xviii</sup> In the end however, the most individual and contingent aspects of a social trajectory can hardly avoid using psychological idioms to describe the inner feelings that accompany the formation of a given habitus. One could recall here the opening line of *Distinction*, first published in 1979, in which he wrote that 'there are few cases where sociology looks more like a social psychoanalysis than when confronted with an object like taste' (Bourdieu, 1979: 9; my translation), and add: except when it looks at the most obscure sources of the habitus.

There are obvious limits to trying to be one's own socio- and psycho-analyst and even Bourdieu cannot bootstrap himself without using a *fulcrum*, even if only in the 'gaze of others' (p. 89). So, as with any other self-description, it should not be taken as supplying uncontested facts but submitted to a critical analysis of the very type he used in his own works. For instance, his description of the field of social sciences does not take enough account of the trajectories of sociologists who did not pass through the *École normale supérieure*. After all, many French sociologists were not trained as philosophers. Also, Bourdieu does not discuss links between sociologists and the state or private firms through contract research, though he himself accepted such contracts: one with Kodak, for instance, led to his book on the social uses of photography (Bourdieu, et al. 1965). Those limitations confirm Bourdieu's own view that such a towering endeavor as self-analysis 'can only be a starting point' and that the sociology of

the self, that is the objectivation of one's point of view, 'is a necessarily collective task' ((Bourdieu, 2004: 94).

As experts like to compare the sketches left by a *grand maître* to the final result of his painting, many would have loved to see what Bourdieu's sketch would have become after a few more years of working on it. Though we won't have this pleasure, we can imagine the result by considering that he could have used these new elements, particularly the most personal ones, to integrate them into a new and updated edition of his *Homo Academicus* – which he said comprised 'a considerable proportion of self-analysis by proxy'<sup>xix</sup> – completed by the detailed analysis of the categories of professorial understanding and of elite schools in the field of power found in *The State Nobility* (1998), to which he could have joined the analysis of the scholastic bias developed in his *Pascalian Meditations* (2000). Though Bourdieu is gone, the sociological tools he has fabricated are here to stay and it is now up to social scientists to use them with other tools developed by social scientists in order to better understand the social world and our place in it. As scholars devoting our time to advance knowledge and understanding in our particular fields, we may want to contribute, as Bourdieu did, to 'saying out loud to everyone what no one wants to know' (p. 112).

## Notes

I would like to thank Johan Heilbron, Gisèle Sapiro, Micheal Lynch and an anonymous reader for comments and suggestions.

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<sup>i</sup> But he could not resist opening a parenthesis to comment on Aron's comments on him in his memoirs (p. 32).

<sup>ii</sup> The violence is even stronger in French as the expression used, 'chef de comptoir', is even more derogatory and condescending than 'accredited agent'

<sup>iii</sup> For an exemplary analysis of the comparative trajectories of Bourdieu, Foucault and Derrida, along the lines of Bourdieu's program of socioanalysis, see Pinto (2004).

<sup>iv</sup> For a recent defense of Bourdieu's approach to sociology of science against its many critiques, see Kim (2009).

<sup>v</sup> See, for example, the collection by Barnes & Shapin (1979).

<sup>vi</sup> For an example of considering technology ‘as a text’, see Woolgar (1991).

<sup>vii</sup> For a brief sociological analysis of the difference between the French and Anglo-Saxon intellectual fields and how it impacts on the presence or absence of an index in scholarly books, see Gingras (1983).

<sup>viii</sup> These data, based on the presence of the word ‘reflexivity’ in the abstracts of articles, are taken from the multilingual database *Sociological abstracts* that compiles most scholarly journals from the social sciences. For my purposes, this source serves as an indicator of a trend and is not meant to be exhaustive. We obtain similar results using the *Sociofile* database and also the same trend (but on a lower scale) by looking only at the presence of the word in the titles.

<sup>ix</sup> It is in fact during this period (1992-93) that Bourdieu wrote an article criticizing the Anglo-Saxon conception of reflexivity developed, for instance, by Alvin Gouldner. This essay, which was never published in French, is available as a German translation (Bourdieu, 1993).

<sup>x</sup> It would of course be possible to multiply *ad infinitum* the kinds of reflexivity. Steve Woolgar (1988b), for instance, opposes ‘constitutive’ and ‘instrumental’ reflexivity (with the latter type having a negative connotation), while Michael Lynch (2000) identifies six broad categories divided into fourteen sub-categories and George Marcus (1994) distinguishes between sociological, anthropological and feminist reflexivities. For my purpose, the two chosen categories are sufficient since I contrast the analysis of the social position of the actors to that of their intellectual and writing practices.

<sup>xi</sup> See for example Brecht (1964: 91).

<sup>xii</sup> It seems reasonable to believe that Mulkay himself ended up realizing the limits of these textual gymnastics. In 1997, he published a purely classical (and very interesting) study on the British debate over embryonic research, admitting that ‘a straightforward narrative form is *well suited* to the topic of the embryo research debate’ (Mulkay, 1997: x, emphasis added). As if to avoid giving the impression of entirely letting go of ‘textual reflexivity’, and to show that the story *could* have been written in different ways, the epilogue is presented in the form of a ‘dream fantasy’. But the author never really indicates *why* the whole book is not written as such a dream. From a prosaically sociological point of view that is sensitive to institutions, however, one may wonder if ethical reasons were not at play and if Cambridge University Press would have published a book based on a real case but constantly mixing reality and fiction on so timely and topical an issue as embryo research. Here, a modicum of *sociological* reflexivity, instead of the epistemic reflection on the ‘choice’ of narrative forms, would have been welcome to convince the reader that an apparently free ‘choice’ of narrative was not in fact constrained by practical or even ethical considerations.

<sup>xiii</sup> This particular contribution is so consistently neglected in the SSK literature that Malcolm Ashmore, discovering a certain degree of reflexivity among Mertonians, notes that that ‘this may seem slightly surprising’ (Ashmore, 1989: 63, n.24), thus confirming the ignorance of the real contributions from that tradition, for which institutional reflexivity is in fact quite obvious and a logical consequence of its theoretical structure.

<sup>xiv</sup> For the case of Foucault see Pinto (2004).

<sup>xv</sup> On this question, see Ben-David & Zloczower (1962); Ben-David (1968); and Clark (1973).

<sup>xvi</sup> Note that in French, ‘*transfuge*’ has a less negative connotation than ‘renegade’ used by the translator, but ‘turncoat’ would also be too strong, so I keep here the French term.

<sup>xvii</sup> The feelings of loss associated with such a social displacement are typical and can be found in many other autobiographies describing a kind of ‘emigration’, see for example Dumont (1997); for a comparative analysis of autobiographies including Bourdieu’s, see Reed-Danahay (2005: 28-34); nearer to Bourdieu is Hoggart (1957), a book Bourdieu published in French translation in his own collection (‘*Le sens commun*’) (Hoggart, 1970) as he saw in it a clear example of ‘auto-analysis’, as it is in part based on Hoggart’s self-analysis of his working class origins.

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<sup>xviii</sup> Explicitly asked the question about the link between his theory of habitus and psychoanalysis, he only responded that ‘this is very complicated. I will only say that the individual history even in its most singular aspects, including its sexual dimension, is socially determined’. But he also added that the sociologist, in turn, should not ‘forget the properly psychological dimension of the father-son relation’; Pierre Bourdieu (1980: 75), (my translation).

<sup>xix</sup> Bourdieu (1988: xxvi). See also Waquant (1989).

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