

Homo Academicus

Pierre Bourdieu

Translated by Peter Collier

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Preface to the English Edition

It is history which is the true unconscious.

Emile Durkheim, The Evolution of Educational Thought

This analysis of the academic world is the end product of the critical reflection on scientific practice which I have never ceased to conduct as part of the very process of my research, since the time when, as a young ethnologist, I took my own native region as the object of my ethnological observation.¹ Thus my sociological analysis of the academic world aims to trap *Homo Academicus*, supreme classifier among classifiers, in the net of his own classifications. It is a comic scenario, that of Don Juan deceived or The Miser robbed, and there are those who, hoping to feel endangered or to make others feel threatened, prefer to treat it in tragic terms. I for my part think that the experience whose results this book presents is perhaps not so different from that attributed by David Garnett to the hero of his short story *A Man in the Zoo*, where the young man, as the result of a quarrel with his girlfriend, writes in despair to the director of the zoo to offer him a mammal missing from his collection, that is, himself, so that he is placed in a cage, next to the chimpanzee, with a notice saying: 'Homo sapiens. This specimen is the gift of John Cromantie, Esquire. Visitors are requested not to tease the man with personal remarks.'

The sociologist who chooses to study his own world in its nearest and most familiar aspects should not, as the ethnologist would, domesticate the exotic, but, if I may venture the expression, exoticize the domestic, through a break with his initial relation of intimacy with modes of life and thought which remain opaque to him because they are too familiar. In fact the movement towards the originary,

and the ordinary, world should be the culmination of a movement towards alien and extraordinary worlds. But it hardly ever is: in Durkheim as in Lévi-Strauss, there is no prospect of subjecting to analysis the 'forms of classification' employed by the scholar, and seeking in the social structures of the academic world (which Durkheim had none the less analysed superbly in his *The Evolution of Educational Thought*) the sources of the categories of professorial understanding. And yet, social science may expect to derive its most decisive progress from a constant effort to undertake a sociological critique of sociological reasoning – that is, to establish the social derivation not only of the categories of thought which it consciously or unconsciously deploys, such as those pairs of antithetical terms which so often inform the scientific construction of the social world, but also of the concepts which it uses, and which are often no more than commonsense notions introduced uncritically into scholarly discourse (like the notion of 'profession', which is tacitly repudiated in this study²), or of the problems which it elects to study, which not infrequently are nothing but more or less skilfully disguised versions of the latest 'social problems' ('poverty' or 'hooliganism', 'under-achievement in school' or 'the senior citizen', etc.).

One cannot avoid having to objectify the objectifying subject. It is by turning to study the historical conditions of his own production, rather than by some form or other of transcendental reflection, that the scientific subject can gain a theoretical control over his own structures and inclinations as well as over the determinants whose products they are, and can thereby gain the concrete means of reinforcing his capacity for objectification. Only a sociological self-analysis of this kind, which owes and concedes nothing to self-indulgent narcissism, can really help to place the scholar in a position where he is able to bring to bear on his familiar world the detached scrutiny which, with no special vigilance, the ethnologist brings to bear on any world to which he is not linked by the inherent complicity of being involved in its social game, its *illusio*, which creates the very value of the objectives of the game, as it does the value of the game itself.

In making a scientific analysis of the academic world, one takes as one's object an institution which has been socially licensed as entitled to operate an objectification which lays claim to objectivity and universality. Far from leading to a nihilistic attack on science, like certain so-called 'postmodern' analyses, which do no more than

add the flavour of the month dressed with a soupçon of 'French radical chic' to the age-old irrationalist rejection of science, and more especially of social science, under the aegis of a denunciation of 'positivism' and 'scientism', this sort of sociological experimentation applied to sociological study itself aims to demonstrate that sociology *can* escape from the vicious circle of historicism or sociologism, and that in pursuit of this end it need only make use of the knowledge which it provides of the social world in which science is produced, in order to try to gain control over the effects of the social determinisms which affect both this world, and, unless extreme caution is exercised, scientific discourse itself. In other words, far from destroying its own foundations when it brings to light the social determinants which the logic of the fields of production brings to bear on all cultural productions, sociology claims an epistemological privilege: that conferred by the fact of being able to reinvest in scientific practice its own scientific gains, in the form of a sociological increase in epistemological vigilance.

What scientific profit can there be in attempting to discover what is entailed by the fact of belonging to the academic field, that site of permanent rivalry for the truth of the social world and of the academic world itself, and by the fact of occupying a determined position within it, defined by a certain number of properties, an education and training, qualifications and status, with all their concomitant forms of solidarity or membership? Firstly, it provides an opportunity for conscious neutralization of the probabilities of error which are inherent in a position, understood as a point of view implying a certain angle of vision, hence a particular form of insight and blindness. But above all it reveals the social foundations of the propensity to theorize or to intellectualize, which is inherent in the very posture of the scholar feeling free to withdraw from the game in order to conceptualize it, and assuming the objective, which attracts social recognition as being scientific, of arriving at a sweeping overview of the world, drafted from an external and superior point of view. There is patent bad faith in refusing to credit science, when it encroaches on the world of the scholar, with the qualities readily granted to structuralist objectivism when it handles the 'savage mind', assumed to be inaccessible to itself; none the less, this should not prevent us from asking if the will to know is not surreptitiously motivated in the present case by a special kind of will to power, which is displayed in the fact of attempting to adopt towards rivals,

reduced to the state of objects, a point of view which they are unable or unwilling to adopt towards themselves. But in the event the declared intention of the enterprise is hardly relevant, since the enterprise functions as a mechanism generating 'problem situations', as Popper would say. The tendency to forget to programme into the complete theory of the world analysed the gap between the theoretical and the practical experience of this world is compensated for by the inevitably reflexive view imposed by the sociological analysis of the social conditions of sociological analysis: the objective analysis, or even the objectivist or structuralist analysis, of the structures of a world in which the scientist responsible for the work of objectification is himself ensconced, and of which he has an initial representation which is capable of surviving objective analysis, will then reveal its own limits in its turn by calling attention, for instance, to its own individual or collective defence mechanisms, which often take the form of an operation of negation, and through which the agents aim to maintain in being, for themselves and for others, representations of the social world which clash with the representation constructed by science through a totalization which ordinary existence precludes, in spirit and in letter. Objective analysis obliges us to realize that the two approaches, structuralist and constructivist (by which I mean a kind of phenomenology of one's initial experience of the social world and of the contribution which this experience makes towards one's construction of that world), are two complementary stages of the same procedure. If the agents do indeed contribute to the construction of these structures, they do so at every stage within the limits of the structural constraints which affect their acts of construction both from without, through determinants connected with their position in the objective structures, and from within, through the mental structures – the categories of professorial understanding – which organize their perception and appreciation of the social world. In other words, although they are never more than particular angles of vision, taken from points of view which the objectivist *analysis situs* constitutes as such, the partial and partisan views of the agents engaged in the game, and the individual or collective struggles through which they aim to impose these views, are part of the objective truth of this game, playing an active part in sustaining or transforming it, within the limits set by the objective constraints.

It is understandable that a book aiming to account for this sort of initiatory itinerary orientated towards that reappropriation of the self which, paradoxically, is only accessible through objectification of the familiar world, is bound to be read differently by readers who are part of this world as opposed to those who are outsiders. And this is so despite the fact that this text, given its object, has the singularity of providing its own context – contrary to what usually happens, in the international (and also the intergenerational) circulation of ideas, where texts are transmitted without the context of their production and use, and count on receiving a so-called 'internal' reading which universalizes and eternalizes them while derealizing them by constantly relating them to the sole context of their reception.³ It could be supposed that, contrary to the native reader who understands only too well in one sense, but who may be inclined to resist objectification, the foreign reader, because (at least at first sight) he has no direct stake in the game which is described, will be less inclined to offer resistance to the analysis. All the more so since, as it happens in the theatre that one may laugh unwittingly at the portrait of one's own foibles, the foreign reader can always elude the challenges implicit in situations or relations which he *does* find familiar, by isolating only the most blatantly exotic, but perhaps also the least significant, characteristics of academic traditions thus dismissed as archaisms, thereby managing all the better to keep his distance.⁴ In fact, *mutatis mutandis*, the foreign reader finds himself faced with the same alternative as the native reader (and the sociologist himself): he can use the objectification of a world in which he participates at least by analogy (as witness the international solidarity between holders of equivalent positions in the different national fields) in order to reinforce the defence mechanisms of his bad faith, by accentuating the differences which particularize the species *homo academicus gallicus*; or, alternatively, he may use it to lay the foundations of a self-analysis, either by concentrating on the invariants of the genus *homo academicus*, or, better still, by educating himself with what he may discover about himself through the objectification, however harsh at first sight, of one of the positions of *homo academicus gallicus* which is homologous to his own position in his own field. In order to foster the second kind of reading, the only one, I believe, which reflects the epistemological intentions of this book, one would need

either to offer a constructed set of transformational rules enabling systematic transfers to be made from one historical tradition to another,⁵ or at least, more modestly, to suggest starting points for the transposition of the analyses, those, for instance, which concern the rhetorical strategies of teachers' judgements, the pairs of adjectives which structure professorial understanding, or the objective and subjective bases of that management of one's own and other people's time which ensures the maintenance of the hierarchy of power, that is, if I may make a slight modification to Leibniz's famous definition of time, 'the order of successions' on which depends the perpetuation in time of the social order.⁶

The scientific virtue (and perhaps also the ethical value) of the notion of the field resides no doubt in the fact that this notion tends to exclude those partial and unilateral objectifications of the unconscious of other people, whether rivals or opponents, which characterize the 'sociology of intellectuals', and which differ from the folk-sociology of intellectual gossip only in their claims to the 'ethical neutrality' of science, which render them guilty of a veritable abuse of symbolic power. Thus for instance when in *The Opium of the Intellectuals* (a classic of the genre) Raymond Aron undertakes to lay bare the reasons behind the arguments of his opponents of the day, and describes the social determinants of the ethical or political stances of those he calls intellectuals (excluding himself, of course, from the stigmatized class), that is, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and the other 'left-wing intellectuals', Aron makes no attempt to ask himself from what point of view he operates this sovereign objectification (no more than does Simone de Beauvoir herself in the diametrically opposite article which she devotes, at roughly the same time and with the same lack of moral hesitation, to 'right-wing thought'): trapped within the lights of his self-interest, he is entirely blind, as blind as those whose blindness he denounces, to the space within which he is situated, yet within which may be defined the objective relation which connects him to them, and which is the source both of his insights and of his oversights.

The construction of the field of production, substituting for a polemic where prejudice is disguised as analysis a polemic where scientific reason challenges itself, that is, challenges its own limits, implies a break with naïve and self-indulgent objectifications unaware of their sources. It can only be an unjustifiable abstraction (which

could fairly be called reductive) to seek the source of the understanding of cultural productions in these productions themselves, taken in isolation and divorced from the conditions of their production and utilization, as would be the wish of *discourse analysis*, which, situated on the border between sociology and linguistics, has nowadays relapsed into indefensible forms of internal analysis. Scientific analysis must work to relate to each other two sets of relations, the space of works or discourses taken as differential stances, and the space of the positions held by those who produce them. This means for instance that any one particular work produced by an academic on the subject of the events of May 1968 only yields its significance if, using the principle of intertextuality, it is set in the space of the works dealing with this subject, within which its symbolically pertinent properties are defined, and if this space is related to the homologous space of the positions held by their authors in the academic field. Any reader familiar with this literature will be able to verify, if they refer to the diagram on p. 276, how this functions as an instrument of analysis: the differences observed in the distribution of power and prestige among the authors correspond to the differences, intentional or not, which they display not only in their overall judgement of the events but also in their way of expressing them. The hypothesis that there is an almost perfect homology between the space of the stances (conceived as a space of forms, styles and modes of expression as much as of contents expressed) and the space of the positions held by their authors in the field of production finds its most remarkable confirmation in the fact, which will be blindingly obvious to all observers familiar with the details of what happened in the universities in 1968, that the distribution in the academic field – constructed by considering *exclusively* the most typically academic characteristics of the different professors (the institution they belong to, their academic qualifications, etc.) – corresponds very closely to the distribution in terms of political positions or trade-union affiliations and even stances adopted during the events of May 1968. Thus it is that the Director of the Ecole Normale Supérieure, Robert Flacelière, who made a very firm stand against the student movement, is surrounded on the diagram by the names of the professors who signed motions in support of his action, whereas those who took up positions favourable to the movement are all situated in the opposite area. This means that it is not, as is usually thought, political stances which determine people's

stances on things academic, but their positions in the academic field which inform the stances that they adopt on political issues in general as well as on academic problems. The margin of autonomy which ultimately devolves to the specifically political sources of the production of opinions then varies according to the degree to which the interests directly associated with their position in the academic field are directly concerned or, in the case of the dominant agents, threatened.

But one could go further and reintroduce into the model not only the political stance but also the works themselves, considered in their most visibly social properties, like their genre or their place of publication, and in their topic as well as their form: thus we see, for instance, that the distribution of works according to their degree of conformity to academic norms corresponds to the distribution of their authors according to their possession of specifically academic power. And to give a more concrete idea of this relation I need only mention the astonishment of a certain young American visitor, at the beginning of the seventies, to whom I had to explain that all his intellectual heroes, like Althusser, Barthes, Deleuze, Derrida and Foucault, not to mention the minor prophets of the moment, held marginal positions in the university system which often disqualified them from officially directing research (in several cases, they had not themselves written a thesis, at least not in canonical form, and were therefore not allowed to direct one).

If we linger a while over the case of these philosophers, who are the most likely to be familiar to Anglo-Saxon readers, we see that knowing the structure of the overall space in which they are situated enables us to put ourselves so to speak *in their place* in the social space, through a genuinely 'participant objectification' which has nothing reductively polemical about it, and to reconstruct the point of view from which their intellectual project was defined. As may be seen from the diagram, they were caught in a dual relation with the worlds of philosophy and the social sciences. Their relation to the temporally dominant pole of institutionalized philosophy, which, frozen in the motionless time of lectures informed by the eternal recurrence of the topics set for competitive examinations, is personified by the university professors who control the organs of reproduction of the corps, agencies entrusted with the selection of teachers for secondary education, such as the *agrégation* competitive examination, or for higher education, such as the Comité Consultatif

des Universités, the Universities Consultative Committee. In their relation with the philosophical high priests of the Sorbonne, who, like most of them, are products of the 'great lay seminary', the Ecole Normale Supérieure, which is the apex of the whole academic hierarchy, they appear like religious heretics, or, in other words, rather like freelance intellectuals installed within the university system itself, or at least, to venture a Derridean pun, encamped on the margins or in the marginalia of an academic empire threatened on all sides by barbarian invasions (that is, of course, as seen by the dominant fraction). More or less totally deprived of, or liberated from, the powers and privileges but also the tasks and the responsibilities of the ordinary professor (examining the entrance examinations, supervising theses, etc.) they have strong connections with the intellectual world, and especially with the avant-garde reviews (*Critique*, *Tel Quel*, etc.) and with journalism (especially the *Nouvel Observateur*): Michel Foucault is no doubt the most representative of this position, since, until the end of his life, and even when he became professor at the Collège de France (after this enquiry was completed), he remained almost entirely bereft of specifically academic and even scientific powers, and therefore of the clientele which these powers afford, even if because of his fame he wielded considerable power over the press and, through it, over the whole field of cultural production. The marginal nature of this position, even more striking in the cases of Althusser or Derrida, who held minor posts (tutor or *caïman* – 'alligator', in Ecole Normale slang – at the Ecole Normale Supérieure), is obviously not unconnected with the fact that all these heretics with a vocation to become heresiarchs, beyond the differences, the divergencies, and sometimes the conflicts which separate them, share a sort of *anti-institutional mood* homologous in its form to that of a considerable fraction of students: they are inclined to react impatiently to the discrepancy between their already considerable fame in the outside world, that is, outside the university and also outside France, and the subaltern status which is accorded them inside the French university world, in collusion with their contempt and their rejection, by an institution which, when they were adolescents, had attracted and even consecrated them.⁸

If it was necessary to start by considering the case of the most obscure pole, it is because that is the one most likely to escape the foreign observer or the superficial analyst (not to mention the

polemicist whose home ground it is), although it no doubt played a decisive part – and not just as a foil, but also as the opponent who had to be constantly fought in order to assert the right to exist or at least to subsist – in the same way that the old Sorbonne did, when faced with the *Annales* team, in the constitution or the reinforcement of the ethical or political dispositions which will define the general trend of the works. It remains the case that it is above all in relation to the other pole, that of the all-conquering social sciences, which are incarnated by Lévi-Strauss, who rehabilitates these disciplines traditionally despised by the philosophy teachers from the École Normale, and who establishes them as the paragon of intellectual achievement, under the heading of *anthropologie*, that it is necessary to redefine these philosophical projects which had initially been constituted between 1945 and 1955, both with reference to the phenomenological and existential tradition and the figure of the philosopher as endowed by Sartre with exemplary stature, and also, and above all, against it. The adoption, instead of the banal and restrictive term 'ethnology', of the term 'anthropology', which, borrowed from the Anglo-Saxon tradition, is also laden with all the prestige of a great philosophical past (it is in this period that Foucault translates and publishes Kant's *Anthropology*), symbolizes the formidable challenge that the social sciences, through their most eminent representatives, offer to philosophy, which previously was all-powerful. This challenge comes out into the open in the confrontation between Lévi-Strauss and Sartre, in the first real protest against its undivided rule over the whole intellectual field for a quarter of a century. Indeed, although Sartre and Merleau-Ponty also had to take the social sciences into account during the preceding generation, they were in an incomparably easier situation, since, because of the extreme decadence of the Durkheimian school and the very inferior status of an empirical sociology still in its infancy and 'compromised', in those highly politized times, by its American origins, they were confronted with only a 'scientistic' psychology (albeit with the exception of Piaget) and a psychoanalysis with no influence (despite the presence at the Sorbonne of Lagache, a fellow student of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty at the École Normale).

Henceforth, as the final diagram clearly shows,⁹ it is the social sciences as a whole or even as a mutually supportive autonomous bloc (the arts faculties become faculties of the arts and social sciences) which hold the symbolically dominant position, confronting the

representatives of philosophy, threatened with an entirely new situation not only in its position of dominant discipline but also in its intellectual identity and its research programmes: this is the case in linguistics, a truly dominant discipline, with Benveniste and the virtual presence of Jakobson (living abroad but consecrated by Lévi-Strauss), and, albeit less importantly, Martinet; in 'anthropology', with Lévi-Strauss, backed up by Dumézil; in history, with Braudel, long since consecrated by the long discussion that Sartre had devoted to his *Méditerranée*, working to lay the institutional foundations of a renovated and integrated social science, with the 6th section of the École Pratique des Hautes Etudes, its prestigious scientific council (including Lévi-Strauss, Aron, Le Bras, Friedmann), its research centres in full development, its reviews (including *Les Annales*, inherited from Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, and *L'Homme*, founded by Lévi-Strauss, which supplants the ageing *Temps modernes*, relegated to the status of purveyor of partisan, Parisian literary essays), and, soon, its Parisian stronghold, the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme; in psychoanalysis with Lacan, who, socially and symbolically allied to Lévi-Strauss and to Merleau-Ponty, has great importance in the field (although he was not included in the correspondence analysis, and therefore not in the diagram, because he did not hold an official position in the university – the refusal to permit him to lecture at the École Normale Supérieure had been at the root of the revolt against Flacelière); in sociology itself which, although relegated to the bottom division of the major new intellectual powers, manages, through Raymond Aron and his polemics with Sartre or the new philosophical currents (*D'une sainte famille à l'autre*), to command the respect of a generation of philosophers who had still been brought up to write essays on the themes launched, between the two wars, by the *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*.

One might also pause for a moment to consider the case of Roland Barthes, which shows us more clearly than others the relation of twofold difference which is characteristic of the avant-garde of the seventies: not being one of the institutional elite (he is neither *normalien* nor *agrégé*, nor a 'philosopher'), and, doubtless moved by the obscure sentiment of revenge felt by the outsider, he is able to engage with the ordinary professors (represented in this instance by Picard) in public controversy which their feelings of statutory dignity prohibit in the more consecrated of the young heresiarchs;

and he can also display towards the great masters, who accumulate both ordinary and extraordinary claims to his gratitude, an unambiguous reverence, which others grant only in much more subtle or perverse forms. Condensing in his social being the tensions or contradictions inherent in the awkward position of the marginal academic institutions (like the Ecole des Hautes Etudes 'après Braudel', or, at other times, Nanterre or Vincennes), which try to convert a twofold opposition, often linked to a double privation, into a willed transcendence, and which, as places of transit for some and as terminus for others, cause divergent trajectories to meet momentarily, Roland Barthes represents the peak of the class of essayists, who, having nothing to oppose to the forces of the field, are condemned, in order to exist, or subsist, to float with the tides of the external or internal forces which wrack the milieu, notably through journalism. He calls to mind the image of a Théophile Gautier whom a contemporary described as 'a spirit floating on every breeze, quivering at every touch, able to absorb every impression and to retransmit it in turn, but needing to be set in motion by a neighbouring spirit, always eager to borrow a watchword, which so many others would then come to seek from him': like the good Théo, who was accused of lacking 'character' by his friend Flaubert who failed to see that his very inconsistency was the source of his importance, and who inspired someone else to remark that he adopted in turns the Chinese, the Greek, the Spanish, the medieval, the sixteenth-century, the Louis XIII, the Louis XIV, the rococo and the romantic styles, Roland Barthes gives instantaneous expression to all the changes in the forces of the field while appearing to anticipate them, and in this respect it is sufficient to follow his itinerary, and his successive enthusiasms, to discover all the tensions which were applied to the point of least resistance of the field, where what is called fashion continually flowers.

It is clear that the relation of twofold opposition would inevitably be experienced very differently according to the position occupied in the field and the previous trajectory, as we have just seen in the case of Roland Barthes, and according to the specifically philosophical capital which could be invested in the effort to overcome the tension it engendered. Those who, like Althusser and above all Foucault, had been led by their rejection of what has been called the 'philosophy of the subject', and of the 'humanism' associated with existentialist ideas, towards a tradition of epistemology and of history of science

represented by Gaston Bachelard, Georges Canguilhem and Alexandre Koyré (among others), were predisposed, with that touch of ostentatious extravagance needed to signal their distance from the 'positivism' of the scholars ('Man is dead. . .'),¹⁰ to identify with the 'subjectless philosophy', which Lévi-Strauss, loyal in this to the Durkheimian tradition, had just reaffirmed, giving it a modernist air by referring to a notion of the unconscious which reconciled Freud revised by Lacan, Saussure summarized by Jakobson, and, if not the old Durkheim, still excluded from the very closed circle of distinguished philosophers, at least Marcel Mauss, easier to adapt at the cost of some bold reinterpretations to the new intellectual regime (Merleau-Ponty, who played an important part in the transition between the two intellectual generations because of his particularly open and comprehensive attitude towards the social sciences, notably biology, psychology and linguistics, had written an article entitled 'From Mauss to Lévi-Strauss'). Thus through a strange ruse of intellectual reason it happened that the Durkheimian philosophy of man became rehabilitated, with the more acceptable face of an anthropology legitimated by linguistics, in opposition to the 'philosophy of the subject' that an earlier generation of *normaliens*, that of Sartre, Aron and Nizan, had set up in the thirties in opposition to this 'totalitarian' philosophy of the Durkheimians, among others.

But, let there be no mistake about it, the acknowledgement of the social sciences implies no unconditional surrender. Although each philosopher in his own way betrays his deference to or dependence on the social sciences – if only, like Derrida, by choosing them as the target of his criticism, or by borrowing their themes (for instance the criticism of the use of pairs of adjectives in literary criticism) – the philosophers constantly mark (and not least in their style, as with Foucault, who indulges in set-pieces of rhetorical elegance, or with Derrida, who imports into the philosophical field the procedures and effects which are used in *Tel Quel* circles) their statutory distance from the ordinary practitioners of the 'so-called social sciences', as Althusser liked to put it (and thus, not surprisingly, they elicit quite a different reaction from those who read them and expect to find in their reading a demonstration of the dignity which they invest in their writing). And they deploy all the resources of their culture in order to transfigure, perhaps above all in their own eyes, the 'historicist' philosophy which they borrow from social science along with many of its themes, its problems and its mode of thought.

Thus it is that Foucault finds in Nietzsche an acceptable philosophical sponsor for the socially improbable combination of artistic transgression and scientific invention that he achieves and for the screen-concepts which, like that of genealogy, help to provide a cover for an ambitious enterprise in social history or genetic sociology. Similarly, as I have shown in the case of the analysis which he devoted to the *Critique of Judgement*, Derrida knows how to suspend 'deconstruction' just in time to prevent it tipping over into a sociological analysis bound to be perceived as a vulgar 'sociological reduction', and thus avoids deconstructing himself *qua* philosopher.¹¹

In addition to all this argument, which cannot take the place of genuine genetic sociology of the works themselves, perceived from the particular points of view (specified by the secondary social, religious or sexual characteristics of the different producers) in which they were elaborated, we could not understand the critical liberty which gives these works a family resemblance and which makes them much more than variously successful reconversions of the philosophical enterprise, if we failed to see that this critical liberty is rooted in the especially intense experience of an especially dramatic crisis. The previously dominant disciplines, philology, literary history and even philosophy, whose intellectual foundations are threatened by their new rivals, disciplines like linguistics, semiology, anthropology, or even sociology, find that the social foundations of their academic existence are also under siege from the criticisms welling up on all sides, usually in the name of the social sciences and on the initiative of teachers from these disciplines, against the archaic nature of their contents and their pedagogical structures. This double criticism frequently awakens touching reactions of traditionalist conservatism in those professors who did not have the instinct and the boldness to recycle themselves in time, and in particular among those whom I call the 'oblates'¹² and who, consigned from childhood to the school institution (they are often children of the lower or middle classes or sons of teachers), are totally dedicated to it. These reactions are bound to exacerbate the revolt of those who are by their capital and dispositions led to break simultaneously with institutionalized philosophy and the philosophical institution. The break, which sometimes takes on the aspect of a civil war, is accomplished in fact, well before 1968, between the professors who remained attached to the traditional definition of their discipline and

the social foundations of its existence in terms of a social body (like the *agrégation*), and the members of the new avant-garde who managed to find in the resources inherent in membership of a prestigious discipline the means necessary to operate a successful reconversion and who are perceived as traitors or renegades by the guardians of orthodoxy – who, like themselves, are products of the 'great seminary'. All the more so because these modernists, despite being called by a precocious and often dramatic consecration to fulfil the highest academic destinies, found that they were relegated, often with their own connivance, to awkward positions which predispose them to feel and express, whether in direct or in transposed forms, a crisis of the academic institution of which their very position in the institution is proof enough. A crisis affecting an institution which has the function of inculcating and imposing forms of thought must weaken or ruin the social foundations of thought, bringing in its wake a crisis of faith, a veritable, practical *epoche* of doxa, which encourages and facilitates the appearance of a reflexive awareness of these foundations. If the experience and the expression of this crisis took a more radical form in France than elsewhere, it is because, owing to the particularly archaic nature of an educational system hypnotized by illusory images of its grandeur, those consecrated by a bankrupt institution were obliged, if they were to be worthy of the ambitions which it had inculcated in them, to break with the derisory and henceforth untenable roles which it assigned to them, and were led to invent new ways of playing the part of the teacher (all based on adopting a reflexive distance from practice and from the ordinary definition of their functions), by lending him the strange features of an intellectual master of reflection who reflects on himself and in so doing, helps to destroy himself *qua* master.¹³

Because of their self-critical dispositions and their impatience with authority, and especially with the power wielded in the name of science, these self-destructive masters were prepared to harmonize their rhythms with the movements which pulsed through the ethical and political avant-garde of the student world. The students of bourgeois origins who have become academically downclassed, and who populate the arts faculties, especially in the new disciplines, are victims of verdicts which, like those of the school, appeal to reason and science in order to block off the paths leading (back) to power. They are spontaneously inclined to denounce science, power, the power of science, and above all perhaps a power which, like the

triumphant technocracy of the moment, appeals to science in order to legitimate itself. Moreover, the new 'student life' which is created in the faculties suddenly invaded by an incomparably more numerous and more diversified clientele than in the past, in terms both of social origins and of gender (it is around 1970 that girls become as numerous as boys in the arts faculties) forms a social experiment through which, as in bohemian circles in the nineteenth century, a new bourgeois 'life-style' developed, making room for values excluded from the old, pre-war, neo-Kantian university and still not admitted in the disciplines professed by the boarding schools leading to the 'schools for the elite' – that is, desire, pleasure and 'anti-repressive' dispositions. All these are themes which will be strongly orchestrated by all the philosophical avant-garde,¹⁴ from Deleuze to Foucault, via Derrida and even Althusser (with his 'ideological state apparatuses'), not to mention the minor heresiarchs, more closely 'tuned in' to the new vulgate.¹⁵

I have made no concessions in writing this book, but I trust that it bears no malice, for it comprises, as the reader will have guessed, a considerable proportion of self-analysis by proxy, as well as a distance, no doubt encouraged by sociology but first affirmed in the fact of abandoning philosophy for the social sciences – and that, obviously, at a time when, thanks to Lévi-Strauss's rehabilitation of ethnology, it became possible to do so without stooping too low . . . And the special place held in my work by a somewhat singular sociology of the university institution is no doubt explained by the peculiar force with which I felt the need to gain rational control over the disappointment felt by an 'oblate' faced with the annihilation of the truths and values to which he was destined and dedicated, rather than take refuge in feelings of self-destructive resentment.

1

A 'Book for Burning'?

Historians don't want to write a history of historians. They are quite happy to plunge endlessly into limitless historical detail. But they themselves don't want to be counted as part of the limitless historical detail. They don't want to be part of the historical order. It's as if doctors didn't want to fall ill and die.

Charles Péguy, L'Argent, suite

In choosing to study the social world in which we are *involved*, we are obliged to confront, in *dramatized* form as it were, a certain number of fundamental epistemological problems, all related to the question of the difference between practical knowledge and scholarly knowledge, and particularly to the special difficulties involved first in *breaking* with inside experience and then in reconstituting the knowledge which has been obtained by means of this break. We are aware of the obstacles to scientific knowledge constituted as much by excessive proximity as by excessive remoteness, and we know how difficult it is to sustain that relation of a proximity broken and restored, which requires much hard work, not only on the object of our research, but also on ourselves as researchers, if we are to reconcile everything we can know only as insiders, and everything we cannot or do not wish to know as long as we do remain insiders. But we are perhaps less aware of the problems which arise when we attempt to transmit scientific knowledge of the object, especially through the medium of writing. These problems are particularly apparent in the case of *exemplification*. This rhetorical strategy, which is commonly employed to 'make things clear', but by persuading the reader to draw on his own experience, that is, to smuggle subjective information into his reading, almost inevitably