Lynn Hershman Leeson
Conceiving Ada
1997
Film still
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BIOGRAPHICAL ILLUSION AND METHODOLOGICAL REALITY

LELAND DE LA DURANTAYE

Pierre Bourdieu. ESQUISSE POUR UNE AUTO-ANALYSE. *Paris: Raisons d'Agir, 2004*.

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Like his student and friend Nietzsche, Jacob Burckhardt often stressed the necessity for a scholar to work in solitude. Like Nietzsche, he also possessed a gift for acidic analogy and likened the world of academia to a group of dogs sniffing one another.

Few observers of the academic interactions of his time had such sharp senses as Pierre Bourdieu, and few have been as torn between solitary reflection and communal exchange. Trained by France's most elite academic institutions (such as the celebrated Parisian *lycée* Louis-le-Grand and the even more celebrated École Normale Supérieure), Bourdieu was grateful for the opportunities that this training afforded him. And he felt that this gratitude could best be repaid by submitting those elite academic institutions and their insular world to an unsparing critique, to unveiling the distance that separated their stated ideals from their real effects.

Like Bergson and Jaurès, like Sartre and Aron, like Foucault and Derrida, Bourdieu studied that which was most difficult and most prestigious where it was most difficult and prestigious: philosophy at the École Normale Supérieure. Like those famous fellow alumni, he was a brilliant student, and like them, he longed to distinguish his personal vision from those around him. This led him to do something surprising, something that, despite their separate and significant dissatisfactions with the philosophy of their day, neither Bergson nor Sartre, neither Foucault nor Derrida ever did: he abandoned philosophy. He left what he saw as the intellectual royal road for the most pedestrian of paths—that of sociology.

As he often reminded his readers, sociology was in a sorry state when he entered it. Both in academic appraisal and the popular imagination, it was considered dry and provincial. It was thought to have no true intellectual adventure in it—nothing of the ethnologist tramping through the rain forests of the Amazon, nothing of the lone philosopher working through the night on an opus to end metaphysics. It was laborious and abstract; it dealt in statistical generalities. Bourdieu repeatedly described sociology as "the pariah of disciplines."[1] He had, however, a special mission for it in mind.

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*1. "It would not be excessive, I think, to speak [of sociology] as a pariah discipline. [. . .]" [*Esquisse pour une auto-analyse *52; Bourdieu's emphasis; all translations from Bourdieu's works are my own]. Cf. also Bourdieu's* Méditations pascaliennes, *where he also refers to sociology as a "pariah science" [16].*

In Bourdieu's posthumous memoir *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse,* published in February 2004—two years after his death—by the small publishing house he helped found, Raisons d'Agir, he notes how, "a bit as a joke," he had often defined himself as "the leader of a liberation movement aiming to free the social sciences from philosophy's imperialism" [94].[2] From early on in his career, he had wished to revolt against the "empire of the total philosopher"—an empire reigned over by, more than any other, Jean-Paul Sartre [cf. 25].[3] Looking back upon this decisive period of his development, Bourdieu goes so far as to state that the shaping of his identity was done "against everything which the Sartrian enterprise represented for me" [37]. In historical accounts, Sartre is often given as counterfigure his friend and fellow *normalien* Raymond Aron. In his *Esquisse,* Bourdieu proposes a different, and less conventional, counterfigure for the imperial philosopher: the brilliant Austrian satirist and cultural critic Karl Kraus. Bourdieu notes the particular affection he had always felt for Kraus and attributes it to the latter's singular capacity for "critical reflectivenesss" [37]. Subtly, and appropriately, Bourdieu follows this remark with something that occurs nowhere else in his memoir: an epigram (the composing of which Kraus excelled in). Bourdieu writes: "there are a great many intellectuals who question the world, but there are very few intellectuals who question the intellectual world" [37]. The remark could not more compactly and precisely reflect what Bourdieu had aspired all his life to do: to excel in the art and science of questioning the intellectual world.

2

Leo Spitzer liked to cite Friedrich Gundolf's dictum "Methode ist Erlebnis" (method is lived experience). Nearing the end of his career, Spitzer wrote that, for methodological reasons, "I would advise every older scholar to tell his public the basic experiences underlying his methods" [1]. As its formal title suggests, Bourdieu's memoir is to be seen in a similarly methodological light. It is neither a confession nor a defense. He does not, like another famous and talented philosophical dissident, imagine himself giving his final accounts to a higher reader ("Let the trumpet announcing the Last Judgment sound when it will. I will come with this book in hand to present myself before the sov-

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2. The work's publication itself was a sociological experiment. Following Bourdieu's wishes, the work was first published far from the intellectual million-dollar mile of Paris's Left Bank (a milieu he had often criticized and in which he had not a few outspoken opponents in the worlds of both academia and journalism)—and in another language. Under the title Ein Soziologischer Selbstversuch *(literally: "A Sociological Experiment on Oneself"), the German publishing house Suhrkamp published a translation in 2002 (in his impatience with what he saw as a sort of Parisian intellectual nepotism, Bourdieu had gone so far as to seriously consider granting Suhrkamp the rights to* all *his works).*

3. In an essay entitled "Sartre, l'invention de l'intellectuel total" [225], Bourdieu asked the question:

> How was Sartre, the (French) intellectual par excellence, possible? What were the social conditions of possibility for the coming about of the total intellectual—the philosopher, critic, novelist, and man of the theater—present on all fronts of thought? A typically anti-Sartrean question. Sartre, creator of the intellectual as uncreated creator, did not cease to affirm through ever-renewed self-analyses his capacity to exhaust the knowledge of his own truth, both as an individual and an intellectual. At the same time, he always rejected as reductive any attempt to avoid the unavoidable, to classify the unclassifiable, to think objectively the thinker of all objectifying thought. *[my translation]*

ereign judge. And I will proclaim: this is what I have done, what I have thought, what I was").[4] Nor is he, like his teacher and fellow *normalien* Louis Althusser, posthumously unveiling the private pain that darkened his life.[5] Bourdieu presents to his public the basic experiences that he saw as underlying his methods. He tells the story of his life for no other reason than, so it appears, to tell the story of his work. Bourdieu was well aware of the broad fame that accrued to him toward the end of his career—above all in the 1990s through his association with various antiglobalization movements, his defense of the homeless, illegal immigrants, unprotected workers, the independence movement in Poland, and antiracist activists (though this was not the first time he had been in the political limelight: during the skirmishes of May 1968 students were seen literally carrying Bourdieu's work *Les héritiers* onto the barricades). Like Sartre and Foucault, Bourdieu was, if in his own way, politically engaged. In the 1980s, he produced two major reports on the future of education for Mittérand's Socialist government. The photographs he took in Algeria in the 1950s and 1960s became the subjects of major museum retrospectives. Bourdieu became a public intellectual, but remained intensely private. He unconditionally refused to appear on television (the first work Raisons d'agir published was his *On Television* (1996), which condemned the shallowness and conformity of the medium). He who so often and so well wrote about the "l'illusion biographique," he who was so energetic in dissuading others to write the story of his life or be taken in by the alluring illusions of biography, subjects himself to such for the purpose of better elucidating his methods. This is both the book's *raison d'être* and its *raison d'agir.*

Documentary filmmaker Pierre Carles made a documentary about Bourdieu, following the sociologist over the course of some three years to research seminars, lectures, political rallies, and trips abroad to visit the likes of Günter Grass. Carles gave his film the title *La sociologie est un sport de combat* (*Sociology is a Martial Art*). The title could hardly have been better chosen. Bourdieu saw sociology as *martial,* as combative. He gave it a "special mission," and he employed hard means to carry that mission out. He also saw it as a *sport* (*sport de combat*), as an exercise, as training of self and other. He notes how certain divisions within the social world of the École Normale Supérieure were reflected in the sports played by its members. The metropolitan bourgeoisie, such as Aron, played tennis. Those of more provincial extraction, like Foucault's mentor Canguilhem, played rugby. Bourdieu played rugby, and one might suggest that he carried its principles into the classroom. He saw his discipline first of all not as one which should consecrate privilege and individual achievement, but instead one which should be carried out collectively, as a team. Despite his singular skills and unorthodox approach to the intellectual world, Bourdieu thus began early in his career

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4. "voilà ce que j'ai fait, ce que j'ai pensé, ce que je fus" [Rousseau 5]. Bourdieu's Méditations pascaliennes *contains a chapter entitled "Confessions impersonelles," which contains passages to be found reproduced verbatim in Bourdieu's memoir [cf. 44 ff.].*

5. Bourdieu does, however, refer at a given point in his memoir to a "malheur très cruel qui a fait entrer l'irrémediable dans le paradis enfantin de ma vie [cruel misfortune that thrust the irremediable into the paradise of my early life]" [93]. He does not, however, describe that cruel loss—nor does he return to it again in his memoir.

In his posthumously published L'avenir dure longtemps, *Althusser details how he spent the near entirety of his adult life on the grounds of the École Normale Supérieure—until being led away for the murder of his wife in his rooms there. Bourdieu refers in his* Esquisse *to Althusser as "without a doubt the most exemplary figure" of the "closed world" of the École Normale Supérieure [52].*

*6. Bourdieu's friend and colleague Jacques Bouveresse has recently published a collection of writings on Bourdieu with a significantly biographical slant [*Bourdieu, savant et politique*].*

to work collaboratively and to publish collectively.[7] If, however, sociology was a sport to be played as a team, it was not *only* a team sport. It necessitated another type of full contact—one harder to see and harder to grasp—a contact with and against oneself.

Bourdieu was elected to the chair of sociology at the Collège de France, previously held by Mauss and Aron, in 1981.[8] His first lecture there in 1982 was entitled "Leçon sur la leçon." He ended his tenure there nearly twenty years later equally concerned with the forms of the academic world and the exercise of self-reflection.[9] This last challenge met, Bourdieu sat down to continue the line of self-reflection opened in his farewell lecture and which he had also begun to explore in the final chapter of his tellingly titled *Science de la science et réfléxivité* (2001). But to what end was all this self-reflection directed?

An excellent field sociologist trained as a philosopher, Bourdieu was highly sensitive to the uncertainty principle inherent in sociological inquiry. As he well knew, any social phenomenon or sociological question was conditioned by the subject that observed it. The unreflective sociologist was a poor one, because he or she failed to take into account the experimental effects of the principal tool of analysis: the sociologist him- or herself. In his *Esquisse,* Bourdieu states that "the work I conducted upon myself [*tout un travail sur moi-même*] [. . .] was inseparable from the work I carried out on the social world [*le monde social*]" [78]. The condition for an increased understanding of what lay in one direction ("the social world") was increased understanding of what lay in the other ("myself").[10] The two activities were for him a single one. His last work was the only one to bear the title *An Attempt at Self-Analysis,* but a consequence of the statements he makes therein is that, in fact, *every* one of the forty works he wrote before it must have borne it as silent subtitle.

Giving the inseparability of social and self-reflective knowledge, it should not be surprising, then, that Bourdieu endeavored not only to turn sociology back upon itself by introducing into it a higher degree of self-reflectiveness, but to turn it back upon

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7. Bourdieu notes with surprise—and a hint of disdain—that even a thinker so concerned with institutions and communal effects as Foucault did not until very late in his career consider founding a research collective—and then only with the help of Bourdieu himself [cf. 106].

8. Bourdieu refers to the Collège de France in his memoir as "a place of confirmation for intellectual heretics" [107].

*9. His final lecture was, in the words of the editor of the Esquisse, "a last challenge" in "the exercise of reflection [*l'exercice de la réfléxivité*] which [Pierre Bourdieu] had always considered one of the necessary preconditions for scientific research" [8]. Though nowhere named in the edition, the editor in question is Jêrome Bourdieu (the author's son).*

10. In this sense, Bourdieu's vision of the social sciences accords with that of a thinker he felt little sympathy for and whose philosophical imperialism he harshly criticized: Martin Heidegger. On this latter point, cf. L'ontologie politique de Martin Heidegger. *On a less personal and more disciplinary level, Heidegger himself remarked in* Being and Time *that, "Das Niveau einer Wissenschaft bestimmt sich daraus, wie weit sie einer Krisis ihrer Grundbegriffe fähig ist [The level of a science is determined by how capable it is of a crisis in its fundamental conceptions]" [*Sein und Zeit *§3 8].*

*In a gesture which is personally close, but methodologically far, from Bourdieu, Heidegger famously began his lecture course on Aristotle with all the biographical information he thought relevant. Of Aristotle he said: "He was born, he worked, he died" ("Aristoteles wurde geboren, arbeitete und starb"). Reported by Hannah Arendt in "Martin Heidegger ist achtzig Jahre alt" [237]. (The remark is not to be found in the manuscript for the lecture course Arendt is presumably referring to—*Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles *from the winter semester 1921–22, published as vol. 61 of Heidegger's* Gesamtausgabe.*) It should be noted that Arendt cites the remark not as an instance of Heidegger's indifference toward biography, but as an instance of a thought and a life where thinking was so "passionately" bound up with life that thought and life became indistinguishable from one another.*

himself. After path-breaking sociological analyses of Algeria at war, he turned, early in his career, to the French Pyrénées at peace—and, in particular, to the small village in which he was born and raised. In a long article the importance of which he later emphasized, entitled "Célibat et condition paysanne," Bourdieu conducted extensive field research there where he had grown up, in his own initial "habitus."[11] In his *Esquisse* he cleverly calls this process "an inverted *Tristes tropiques*" [83].[12] This personal *habitus*

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11. Bourdieu had been criticized early in his career for writing in a style that seemed to require for its comprehension the very (privileged) educational background he was seeking to put into question. Whatever the validity of this critique, his Esquisse *contains only a single term which is not immediately transparent:* habitus. *From the Latin for "manner of being," the word was widely employed in the nineteenth century as a medical term denoting the visible manifestations of physical sickness or health. In the early twentieth century it came to be employed more broadly to denote an individual's outer aspect (by such widely read authors as Péguy, Daudet, Jarry, Claudel, and Roussel), before entering fully into its sociological rights (*Le Grand Robert de la langue française *dates this lexicographical shift from 1980). Though employed by Husserl (whose works he intensively studied before his change of discipline; Bourdieu envisioned his first work as treating "the structural of temporal experience" in Husserl's work—a topic Derrida dedicated no small energy to elucidating), as well as by such sociological forefathers as Durkheim, Weber, and Mauss, Bourdieu adopts the term* habitus *from an art historian—Erwin Panofsky (Bourdieu first makes use of the term in an introduction to a translation of Panofsky's work). What distinguishes Bourdieu's use of the term, and the reason that it is today so closely associated with his work, is the reflexivity he introduced into its usage. Panofsky employs the term "mental habitus" to denote activities or concepts that, in "diffuse" fashion, reproduce and cement habits. Though Bourdieu will describe habitus in one place as simply "an old Aristotelian-Thomist concept," his use of it is more complex than such a remark would lead one to believe [*Choses dites *20]. Habitus, for Bourdieu, is, not only a "structuring structure [*structure structurante*]," but also a "structured structure [*structure structurée*]" [*Le sens pratique *88—these same terms are to be found in* La distinction *191]. Bourdieu's use of the term endeavors to grasp it as something like a constant feedback system: a thing that changes (subjective) every time it changes (genitive). The fact remains that in most cases he uses it simply to denote a body of influential social determinants.*

*12. It should be noted that Lévi-Strauss's intellectual trajectory is closer to that of Bourdieu's than any of the other figures he mentions in his memoir. Though he does not note this, Lévi-Strauss too, years before him, studied philosophy in and around the École Normale (without being a member), and found it an equally sterile exercise. Of this time, Lévi-Strauss was to write, "l'enseignement philosophique exerçait l'intelligence en meme temps qu'il désechait l'intelligence [philosophical teaching exercises the intelligence in the same time as it desiccated it" [*Tristes tropiques *43]. After completing his studies (in brilliant and precocious fashion), Lévi-Strauss abandoned philosophy for the broader horizon that ethnology offered him. Like Bourdieu, Lévi-Strauss reproaches the philosophy of his century for its obsession with linguistic subtleties and, like Bourdieu—but to a far greater extent—is dismissive of both phenomenology and existentialism (Lévi-Strauss lends the latter the damning epithet "métaphysique pour midinettes [metaphysics for salesgirls]" [50]). Lévi-Strauss amusingly claimed, "j'ai l'intelligence néolithique," whereby he means that he cannot tend a single field for long periods of time but requires constant intellectual and physical movement to sustain his thought—and for this reason could not occupy himself with the development of a single disciplinary space [43]. It is on this point that he most notably differs from Bourdieu. One might easily consider the chapter "How to Become an Ethnologist," from* Tristes tropiques *a model for Bourdieu's methodological memoir, as well as his claim, during a talk in Geneva to commemorate the 250th birthday of Rousseau, that "tout ethnologue écrit ses Confessions [every ethnologist writes his* Confessions*]" [cf. Lévi-Strauss and Eribon,* De près et de loin *233]. As to philosophy's future, one might compare Bourdieu's many remarks on this subject with those of Lévi-Strauss when asked by Didier Eribon if he thought that "la philosophie garde une place dans le monde d'aujourd'hui [philosophy retains a place in today's world]" He answered: "Bien sûr, mais à condition de fonder sa réflexion sur la connaissance scientifiique en cours et sur ses acquis [Of course, but on the condition that it bases its reflection on the attainments of scientific knowledge]" [*De près et de loin *167].*

was but the first one he would turn his sociological study toward. The next major turn in his methodological circle was his analysis of a species of which he was a prominent member. The introduction to *Homo academicus* (begun shortly after the above article in question, but not published until 1984), bears the telling title "A 'Book to Burn'?" Bourdieu turns therein to the intellectual world—and the discipline of philosophy, which was at its summit—so as to examine the presuppositions and prejudices that he saw as characterizing its practices. His analyses are serious, scientific, and statistical: they do not name names and they do not engage in personal polemic.[13] Its conclusions are nevertheless polemical: he draws hard sociological conclusions about intellectual pretensions and philosophical presuppositions. Bourdieu diagnoses a wide-ranging "scholastic bias" in the tendency of academics to project their own (hermeneutic) relation to the social world into the minds of the people they observe. Like earlier works, it gave the lie to the egalitarian ideology of meritocratic educational institutions which, in his view, tended to reproduce and legitimate social inequalities (by favoring, for example, certain family backgrounds or familiarity with typically bourgeois language on academic tests and thereby making the culturally arbitrary appear as unquestionable truth). To borrow a phrase from Max Weber that Bourdieu liked to cite, *Homo academicus* turns its sharpened senses towards "the theodicy of privilege" upon which academia had founded its most republican of all possible worlds.

In this later work, Bourdieu describes a process that had begun with his article on celibacy and the peasant condition: "the *rupture* with indigenous experience" and the "knowledge acquired at the price of this rupture."[14] This breaking with oneself and with one's past was, as he makes clear, a sociologically productive one. This is, however, only one side of the equation: it names the fruits of sociological speculation, but not those of self-discovery. Sociology is a hard school—one of discipline and rupture. But there is a complement to this rupture which, for Bourdieu, is not merely "objective." As his *Esquisse* outlines, his work upon the social world was absolutely inseparable from the work he conducted upon himself. Instead of, so to speak, waiting for the presuppositions of his social *habitus* to come to him, Bourdieu seized the methodological initiative and went to them. So as to sharpen the tools of objective analysis, he, like Freud, conducted an *auto-analyse*. Bourdieu claimed toward the end of his career: "I always demanded of even the most brutally objectifying knowledge-producing instruments to also be instruments for the production of knowledge about myself [*j'ai toujours démandé aux instruments de connaissance des plus brutalement objectivants dont je pouvais disposer d'être aussi les instruments de connaissance de moi-même*]" [*Méditations pascaliennes* 12]. For him, the advancement of sociological knowledge could be made only at the price of the advancement of self-knowledge. This process, like the one Freud submitted himself to, was not simple and not pleasant. The full contact it demanded was not, as Bourdieu remarked, without its share of "brutality."

This brutality is a familiar—and ancient—one. Bruno Bettelheim, a very different self-reflective social scientist whose public analyses of private experiences also profoundly marked a long and productive career,[15] writes of "the earliest method for

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13. Cf. his remark toward the end of that work: "Le sociologue n'a pas à s'instaurer en juge des juges, et de leur droit de juger. Il rappelle seulement que ce droit est un enjeu de luttes, dont il analyse la logique [The sociologist has no right to declare himself the judge of judges or the right of judges to judge. He only reminds them that this right is a contested matter, and he analyzes its logic]" [286].

14. "la rupture *avec l'expérience indigène et de la restitution de la connaissance obtenue au prix de cette rupture" [*Homo academicus *11; Bourdieu's emphasis].*

15. Bettelheim was a prisoner in Buchenwald and Dachau for a year beginning in 1939. Shortly after his release, Bettelheim began to write of the nature of his experience, its psychologi-

comprehending man," which he simply describes as: "to know oneself so that one may also know the other" [*Empty Fortress* 3]. Bettelheim's dictum could not be more classical: it is that which philosophers have always called for (one need only think of the inscription at Delphi—"Know thyself").

Bourdieu's memoir is singularly occupied with philosophy. There are methodological reasons for this. The world of philosophy and philosophers was the *habitus* in which he circulated at a decisive point in his development, and his rebellion against that *habitus* was the reason he developed a methodology in the first place. His special perspective leads him to remarkably sharp-sighted observations about individual philosophers of his times and the tendencies they moved or were moved by. Late in his career, Bourdieu wrote that, for his part, he followed Pascal in believing that "la vraie philosophie se moque de la philosophie [true philosophy cares nothing for philosophy]" [*Méditations pascaliennes* 10].[16] As we saw above, Bourdieu saw himself as something of a leader of a liberation movement seeking to free the social sciences from philosophy's imperialism.[17] As one looks more closely at Bourdieu's final works, his reader might easily wonder whether he did not have still more in mind for his liberation movement. If *la vraie philosophie se moque de la philosophie,* it was not, for Pascal, out of contempt for philosophy's aims or essence. If it is necessary for *la vraie philosophie* to *se moquer de la philosophie,* this is because of the tendency of philosophy's practitioners to present it as rigid and dogmatic, and to demand that it be treated with a reverence that Pascal and Bourdieu found misplaced. If Bourdieu approvingly cites Wittgenstein's claim that in the accounting of the pleasures of understanding, the "pleasure of destroying prejudices" is not an insignificant one, this is not the full extent of his views [Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art* 15]. Nor is his reference to his own work as "a sort of *negative philosophy*" that might easily appear "self-destructive" ("sorte de *philosophie negative* exposée à paraître autodestructrice") [*Méditations pascaliennes* 15; Bourdieu's emphasis]. *La vraie philosophie se moque de la philosophie* for the same reason that Bourdieu's vision of philosophy incorporates a measure

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cal underpinnings and the widely varied effects it had upon those submitted to such "extreme situations." His article "Individual and Mass Behavior in Extreme Situations" was, by order of then-General Eisenhower, made required reading for all military government officers stationed in Europe. Cf. also Bettelheim's The Informed Heart: Autonomy in a Mass Age. *In his work on infantile autism and schizophrenia in children he makes frequent reference to such "extreme situations" [cf.* The Empty Fortress: Infantile Autism and the Birth of the Self*].*

16. Bourdieu slightly misquotes Pascal. In the passage of which Bourdieu is thinking, Pascal claims: "Se moquer de la philosophie, c'est vraiment philosopher" [Pascal 1094]. It seems that Bourdieu melded two remarks, "La vraie éloquence se moque de l'éloquence [True eloquence cares nothing for eloquence]" and "Se moquer de la philosophie, c'est vraiment philosopher [To mock philosophy is to truly philosophize]," to arrive at his version. The entire passage in which the remark in question occurs is as follows:

> Géométrie, finesse.—La vraie éloquence se moque de l'éloquence, la vraie morale se moque de la morale; c'est à dire que la morale du jugement se moque de la morale de l'esprit, qui est sans règles.
>
> Car le jugement est celui à qui appartient le sentiment, comme les sciences appartiennent à l'esprit. La finesse est la partie du jugement, la géométrie est celle de l'esprit.
>
> Se moquer de la philosophie, c'est vraiment philosopher. *[1094]*

*17. One might note as well how Bourdieu compares orthodox philosophical followers of Heidegger to "des aristocrats déchus [fallen aristocrats]" [*L'ontologie politique de Martin Heidegger *8]. Elsewhere in that work he refers to the "aristocratic populism" of Heidegger's thought [60].*

of irreverence and negation—so as to encourage the daring that *la vraie philosophie* demands. In his work on Heidegger—who, without any question, did not *se moquer de la philosophie*—Bourdieu lays special stress upon "the effect exercised by constraints specific to the philosophical microcosm" [*L'ontologie politique de Martin Heidegger* 10]. Sociology opposes itself to philosophy in the name of sociohistoric realities—it conditions the unconditional postulates of philosophy and contextualizes its abstract truths.[18] Bourdieu's *vraie philosophie* is not one purified of all worldly concerns and does not reflect a distilled world of ideal forms and transcendental structures. It corresponds, instead, to the task of examining thought in all its depth and breadth, which necessarily includes the social conditions in which given thoughts or given works came into being.[19] Bourdieu may indeed have seen his intellectual trajectory as one of rebelling against philosophy, of *se moquant de la philosophie,* but it seems that he did so in the name of philosophy itself—the philosophy that Pascal called *la vraie philosophie,* and Bourdieu, more humbly, sociology.

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Upon his first arrival in Paris as a teenager from a small village and of even smaller means, Bourdieu was engrossed. Traversing a major intersection near his school, he found himself riveted by Rodin's larger-than-life statue of Balzac [87]. Bourdieu came to spend his Sundays in a Balzacian fashion—not merely reading but exploring. Bourdieu recounts how he lingered around football fields, post offices, cafés, and crosswalks to listen and to learn. He began to single people out of crowds and to follow them for hours, trying to guess along the way where they lived, what they did, where they were going. Just as there was a sociologist lurking in Balzac's massive breast, so too was there perhaps something of a novelist lurking in Bourdieu's (and a detective's lurking in both). Each was filled with his chosen calling, but those callings had a great curiosity in common.

Bourdieu's memoir is a *Bildungsroman* whose hero is sociological method. As the book progresses, however, a new figure steps from the shadows. This figure is the sociologist himself looking back upon "what I have done, what I have thought, what I was." This look back is best described in nonmethodological terms: it is honest and open; it excites interest and inspires trust. It is hard for the reader not to feel that for all its theoretical valences and methodological value, what singles it out is a real and touching personality, which comes to the fore at the memoir's end. The final section is the least philosophical, the least sociological, and the most sentimental. It is marked by the sudden mention of a tragedy which is never elucidated and which opened a rift never closed in the writer's life—and which he keeps from his readers. He tells the tale of his earliest years, of losses and sorrows, of indignities and ambitions, and of a desire that is only half-articulated but that could with equal justice be called philosophical, sociological, or novelistic: a desire for "realism," a desire to get at that which in his world and in himself was most fully and immediately *real*.

This novelistic description might give a reader pause. One of the aggressive sociological acts for which Bourdieu is famous is his vehement denunciation of an aesthetic

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18. For an example of such concerning Bourdieu's French philosophical contemporaries, see Esquisse *100.*

19. Bourdieu reproached Heidegger's defenders as well as his opponents for "leur obstination à s'interroger sur des faits biographiques sans les mettre en relation avec la logique interne de l'oeuvre [their obstinate examination of biographical facts without putting those facts into relation with the internal logic of the work]" [11].

ideology—of social forms drawing their credibility from an austere philosophical tradition (crystallized in Kant) and making of taste a thing of mystery and a means of covert class war. The suspicion he brought to the study of literature, and the regrettable high-handedness of his pronouncements in such works as *The Rules of Art,* did not show his sociological method, Flaubert, or literature in their best light. His admirable sensitivity to the social conditions of possibility for the idea of aesthetic disinterestedness unfortunately led to an oversimplifying view of the complexities with which aesthetics struggles to comes to grips.

An unlicensed excerpt of Bourdieu's *Esquisse* was (fraudulently) published in 2002 by *Le nouvel observateur,* and was promptly used against its author. Under the guise of understanding and praise, commentators claimed that if one saw his work through the lens of his striving and suffering, he didn't seem like such a bad guy after all. Even a writer as well disposed toward Bourdieu as Michel Onfray would say of Bourdieu's "vision of the world" that in the personal light cast by his *Esquisse* it became "more living, more human [. . .] more right and more true"; by becoming "visceral" his thinking became "irrefutable" [100]. One can hardly imagine Bourdieu ready to pay the price of viscerality for irrefutability. Boudieu's friend and colleague, the philosopher Jacques Bouveresse, was right to be suspicious of such readings where the dagger seemed visible beneath the cloak of kindness (though this was not the intention of Onfray). "If there is a single idea which was always foreign to Bourdieu," Bouveresse writes in his *Bourdieu, savant et politique,* "it was to consider sociology as a branch of literature—and, more precisely, as a sort of biography expressed in the style of theory [*comme une sorte d'autobiographie exprimée dans le style de la théorie*]" [Bouveresse 20]. The last section of Bourdieu's *Esquisse* is neither literature nor biography, but it does set a literary and biographical limit to his sociology, which is, in fact, its ultimate limit. This is not because it appears at the ultimate limit of his life, but because in striving with ever more energy and determination to achieve a maximal degree of self-reflection, it shows the limits of such self-reflection. The *Esquisse* shows that there is a point where frank and daring methodological self-reflection grades into a frankness and a daring of another sort, which we might with equal justice term psychological and literary. The effect of reading Bourdieu's methodological memoir, moving as its last section might be, should not be to throw a metaphorical arm over the ghostly shoulder of the sociologist and resolve to be friends, bygones at last bygone. What its effect *should* be depends, however, on where you are looking from.

Bourdieu wrote in the margins to this memoir, "I am placing the most objective analysis at the service of that which is most subjective [*je mets au service du plus subjectif l'analyse la plus objective*]" [qtd. by the editor 8]. Bourdieu is not describing here the placing of the most subjective material at the service of the most objective analysis so as to test and strengthen that objective analysis. He is, instead, placing the entire arsenal of his objective findings—the sociological tools he spent a life shaping—at the service of that which is for him the most subjective: himself. Here, as Bourdieu looked back upon life and work, he saw more than self-reflection. It is perhaps of this that he was thinking when he wrote at the end of his work that "nothing would make me more happy that to have succeeded in allowing some of my readers to recognize their experiences, their difficulties, their questioning, their suffering, in my own—and that they draw from this realistic identification [. . .] the means to better do and to better live, if only just a little bit, that which they live, and that which they do" [142].

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Lynn Hershman Leeson
Conceiving Ada
1997
Film still
Photo courtesy of Lynn Hershman Leeson and bitforms gallery, New York