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From a Politics of Transgression
Toward an Ethics of Reflexivity

Foucault, Bourdieu, and Academic Practice

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Perhaps one day [transgression] will seem as decisive for our culture... as the
experience of contradiction was at an earlier time for dialectical thought.

Michel Foucault (1977, p. 33)

James Miller (1993) has generated quite a stir with the publication of a life
history of Michel Foucault, receiving attention in both academic and popular
forums. Beginning with an account of reasons for writing his book, Miller
focuses attention on Foucault’s efforts to transgress conventional limits of
experience, or socially or rhetorically constructed boundaries, including those
of sexuality, self, philosophy, and epistemology. By addressing the possibility
that Foucault engaged in unsafe sexual practices while aware of his own positive
HIV status, Miller brings to the fore the issue of ethics in considerations of
boundary transgression. Although the issue of Foucault’s sexual activities is not
a concern in the present article, I do think that accusations that Miller is
sensationalizing Foucault’s story are unfair and inaccurate. Miller closes his book
by saying that none of his own research leads him to believe rumors that Foucault had
engaged in unsafe sex practices. Further, it is the transgression of limit experi-
ences, rather than Foucault’s sexuality, that is the organizing theme of the work.¹

My concern in this article is with the importance of transgression for
progressive academic practice. As will be discussed below, the notion of
progressive practice no longer refers to a unidirectional model of historical
development oriented toward an emancipatory telos, and although a politics of
transgression seems to guide contemporary progressive practices generally, and
academic practice in particular (see, for example, Stallybrass & White, 1984),
available conceptions of ethics seem incapable of directing such actions.

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Foucault's own ethical sensibility cannot serve as an exemplar for progressive academic practice. Although Jürgen Habermas mounts an effective critique of Foucault, his own discourse ethic, it will be argued, also falls short in this regard. Foucault's ethical sensibility is thus only a starting point that could be developed. I turn to the early epistemological work of Pierre Bourdieu to find a more satisfying version of ethics. Bourdieu offers a way of engaging in academic practices that will help to alleviate the dangers of a politics of transgression identified by Habermas.

THE FOCUS ON PRACTICES

Before turning to an account of the importance of transgression in Foucault's writings, it is first necessary to describe practices and explain why I focus on them, as opposed to the norms or values that are more familiar topics for many social scientists. The attention to practices that is found in much post-structuralist writing has epistemological and ontological justifications. First, this concern with practices is warranted epistemologically because it denounces theoretical work that makes general, and supposedly generalizable, truth claims in the absence of historical or substantive grounding in human conduct. Foucault (1980b) conceptualizes a practical consequence of this epistemological issue by distinguishing between the general and the specific intellectual. Only the latter is a legitimate speaker in contemporary society, because all knowledge is, though not reducible to power, implicated in power relations. All knowledge is therefore always bound by its social and historical contexts of creation and application. Hence, it cannot be the basis for its possessors to speak for all of humanity. The universal intellectual is obsolete. There can no longer be faith in this person who, as the final arbiter in issues of universal justice, reason, and truth, was to expose a true reality to those blinded by their own life circumstances.

Second, this focus is important ontologically because it sees practices, rather than more familiar concepts such as norms and values, as the subject matter of the social sciences. Norms and values, if they exist at all, are emergent and reified phenomena that have no grounding outside of the practical activities of functioning subjects. To focus on norms and values rather than practices is to ignore the local. The local is not a manifestation of universal norms and values. The social scientist who focuses on these more familiar notions is only legitimizing them and obfuscating the ways in which the power relations encoded in them can be changed. The point of progressive academic practice is not to legitimize such notions, but rather to show how they have come into existence and to transgress them.

TRANSGRESSION

The poststructuralists have situated the study of language at the center of intellectual life. Given this refocus of progressive attentions, the poststructural-
exist critiques of academic practice and knowledge production have made problematic the status of the progressive intellectual in contemporary society. In postmodern times, the image of intellectuals comprising the vanguard in an unfolding historical dialectic is antiquated. Poststructuralists have exposed the teleological and totalizing notion of historical progress that informs this image as a myth and have replaced it with a call for practices that identify and transgress limits. To speak of progressive practices is therefore not to suggest that a telos exists or even that one should exist. It is rather to emphasize ways of resisting and altering existing structures of hierarchy. The goal is to allow for and encourage difference in a normalizing and homogenizing society.

Transgression is a strategic move in this reconceptualization of academic practice. Transgression, says Foucault (1977), is the crossing of a line:

Transgression is an action which involves the limit, that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage, but perhaps also its entire trajectory, even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses. (pp. 33-34)

Foucault is speaking here about the limits imposed by any discourse. The discursive practices that are authorized by any structure tend to legitimize and reproduce it, in extreme instances eclipsing the possibility that other structures might exist. The possibilities of being are inherently limitless, and so discursive limits are themselves violent toward the open possibilities of being.\(^5\) Nonpermeable identities that are fixed by a discourse are unnecessary limits on the ways of being and doing that are our existence. Political action is action that demonstrates this. It is action that unveils the unnecessary closure of avowed right and wrong ways of being.

If transgression generally is the act of going beyond or exceeding a limitation, then transgressive academic practice is important politically. It exposes the relations between truth and power. All categories, distinctions, and limitations are embodiments of power insofar as logical distinctions between categories readily become or reinforce hierarchical distinctions between persons. This is not inherently negative because it also allows for a certain type of practice that could not otherwise exist. Discourses constitute their own objects by providing categorizations with which objects are recognized. Foucault (1966/1970), for example, argued that it is only with the rise of the human sciences that the modern conception of man has arisen. Similarly, to offer an example that is unlikely to incur the same kind of wrath aroused by Foucault's assertion that "man is dead," it is only in religious discourse that the sinner can exist.\(^6\)

While power conceived in this way is therefore productive, it is at the same time potentially constricting and violent. When a single structure of discourse is hegemonic, it is limiting because it forecloses alternative ways of being and means of communication. Such foreclosure, as Connolly (1993) suggested, is implicitly evil.
Foucault finds a covert problem of evil to be lodged within the conventional politics of good and evil. Evil not as actions by immoral agents who freely transgress the moral law but evil as arbitrary cruelty installed in regular institutional arrangements taken to embody the Law, the Good, or the Normal. . . . systematic cruelty flows regularly from the thoughtlessness of aggressive conventionality [italics added] . . . Evil . . . as undeserved suffering imposed by practices protecting the reassurance . . . of hegemonic identities. (p. 366)

Discourse is the social scientist’s subject matter in postmodern times. Foucault (1972) wants

to substitute for the enigmatic treasure of “things” anterior to discourse, the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse. To define these objects without reference to the ground, the foundation of things, but by relating them to the body of rules that enable them to form as objects of a discourse and thus constitute the conditions of their historical appearance. To write a history of discursive objects that does not plunge them into the common depth of a primal soil, but deploys the nexus of regularities that govern their dispersion. (p. 47)

Foucault (1966/1970, 1961/1965) expends considerable effort in his earlier empirical works examining the rules by which different discursive practices construct scientific bodies of knowledge about man. As the above quote shows, Foucault’s focus is on the discourses of the sciences, rather than the “man” that is constructed and examined by these sciences. This archaeology of knowledge allows Foucault (1972) to write “histories of systems of thought,” in which similarities and differences in the discursive practices of knowledge producers are identified. There is a shift in Foucault’s (1977/1979) later writings toward a genealogical approach, which, broader in scope and more explicitly political than archaeology, has as its primary focus “the mutual relations between systems of truth and modalities of power, the way in which there is a ‘political regime’ of the production of truth” (Davidson, 1986, p. 224).

For the poststructuralists, power is no longer conceptualized as a characteristic possessed to a greater or lesser extent by actors that allows one participant to compel another to do something that would otherwise go undone. Instead, it is seen as implicit in a discourse: hence power is closely related to knowledge and is important for those who have traditionally been the arbiters of knowledge, intellectuals.

The new model of politics and political action for intellectuals that is inspired by this reconceptualization is indebted at least as much to Nietzsche as it is to Marx, and it demands a corresponding reassessment of academic practice. Progressive action is reconceptualized as the effort to expose the perceived naturalness of things as a fiction. Progressive action is now oriented toward demonstrating that things are constructed—as opposed to natural—and therefore open to modification.

Scott (1990) showed that these constructions encode hierarchies of gender, ethnicity, class, race, and nationality, and that resistance to them is always dangerous. Poster (1984, p. 9) includes reason itself in this list because it too is legitimate only within a given discourse. Just as there are no natural, or
ultimate, categories of the characteristics Scott identifies, reason is constituted in, and is generalizable only to the limits of, the discourse in which it resides. The limits of these categories are constructed and (often) unknowingly reconstructed by actors as they proceed through their practical activities. As Bourdieu (1979/1984) argued, implicated as they are in this process of reproduction, our day-to-day activities have much more meaning than we intend, and much more meaning than we can ever know. Transgression provides one means of resistance to the unreflective hierarchies that are encoded in discourses.

HABERMAS’S CRITIQUE

Jürgen Habermas (1983, 1985) has of course been at the forefront of the critiques of the politics of transgression.9 He suggested that the poststructuralist move is dangerous and likely neoconservative to the extent that it provides no basis for determining the direction of progressive political action. Poststructuralism is seemingly indecisive where politics are concerned. To transgress seems to say nothing about what to do after transgression, and hence offers no assurance that what comes later will be more just or more benevolent than what now exists. In effect, Habermas argues that the poststructuralists have given up too soon on the enlightenment project of modernity. That the ideals of emancipation and the realization of reason have not been effected does not, he argues, delegitimize the project itself. By contrast, the poststructuralists have generally refused to accept the normative ideals of the enlightenment project, instead condemning the violence that has been done in their name and engaging in acts of transgressive resistance to existing structures.10

So while the assertion that transgression has nothing to say about the appropriate direction for political action is perhaps correct, it is also to a large degree extraneous. Habermas is questioning the ethics of the transgression being proposed by poststructuralists, but transgression is no more inherently unethical than is consensus. Neither transgression nor consensus is inherently good or bad. Moral judgments are relevant only within the particular historical situation in which practices of consensus or transgression occur.11 Ethics, and in addition truth and justice, have relevance only within their own language games.12 Thus, if transgression à la Foucault cannot be advocated as in itself a moral good, neither can Habermas’s alternative to it, his cherished ideal of consensus.

FOUCAULT’S ETHICAL SENSIBILITY13

William Connolly (1993, p. 369) argues, following Nietzsche, that the analytic separation of a moral code from its social and political circumstances is impossible. At best, one can hope to develop an ethical sensibility that will make one more sensitive to the constructedness of moral codes.
cally, Connolly (1993) articulates four purposes of an ethical sensibility inspired by Nietzsche and taken up by Foucault. These purposes are

1. to expose artifice in hegemonic identities and the definitions of otherness (evil) through which they propel their own self-certainty;
2. to destabilize codes of moral order within which prevailing identities are set, when doing so crystallizes the element of resentment in these constructions of difference;
3. to cultivate generosity—that is, a “pathos of distance”—in those indispensable rivalries between alternative moral/ethical perspectives by emphasizing the contestable character of each perspective, including one’s own, and the inevitability of these contestations in life;
4. to contest moral visions that suppress the constructed, contingent, relational character of identity with a positive alternative that goes some distance in specifying the ideal of political life inspiring it. (p. 373)

In some of his last writings, Foucault’s (see especially 1984/1986 and 1978/1980a) attentions shifted toward the final purpose of ethical sensibility. In his essays on sexuality, Foucault begins to articulate a positive alternative to the essentializing moral orders he critiques, and so his work is important not only to the politics but also the ethics of academic practice. Foucault is careful to articulate this alternative without simply replacing extant moral decrees with essentialist notions of his own. His description of the self avoids making extensive ontological claims. Rather, it is a picture “of the self working on the self, an aestheticization of the subject” (Veyne, 1993, p. 2) whereby care of the self is based on the recognition that the self is never final and is always a work in progress that must be refined or transgressed.14

Foucault offers us an aestheticization of the self. The self is itself not an essence, but a process of reflexive cultivation. Halperin (in press) describes the ancient Greek notion of cultivation that informs Foucault’s ideas. It is
designed to produce a heightened scrutiny of oneself, a constant monitoring of one’s behavior and dispositions, a holistic and therapeutic regimen of mind and body. The result of self-cultivation was not only self-mastery but self-sufficiency and happiness. For in the process of styling and perfecting oneself . . . one came eventually to find a source of pleasure, a means of happiness, in oneself. (p. 2)

On the one hand, as this passage suggests, Foucault’s refusal to essentialize the self or ethics does not lead to anarchistic nihilism. By recognizing the political/discursive limitations of the ethical sensibility, we can begin a search for some more cautious approach to a grounding for ethical action. On the other hand, this awareness does nothing to diminish Foucault’s refutation of Kantian transcendental reason. Indeed, while Habermas asserts the danger of Foucault’s sensibility, it is more to the point to say that the recognition of such limitations can make us more, rather than less, hesitant to engage in transgressive practices. That we are aware that our actions are potentially dangerous, and that our voice is enmeshed in, and enabled by, power relations, can make us more sensitive to the existence and legitimacy of alternative language games and the spaces occupied by other voices. That ours is only one language game among many,
rather than the only language game sanctioned by our own particular version of an essentialized ethics, gives us pause rather than assurance. It can make us hesitant to engage in practices that in all likelihood will do some amount of violence to ourselves and others.

FROM SENSIBILITY TO REFLEXIVITY: THE CONTRIBUTION OF PIERRE BOURDIEU

What is the relevance of Foucault’s “fashioning of the self” for discussions of academic practice? If we rely on an ethical sensibility to inform our practices, we do run the risks identified by Habermas. Transgression, in and of itself, is dangerous. Foucault (1977), of course, recognized this:

(Transgression) should not be understood as the promised return to a homeland or the recovery of an original soil which produced and which will naturally resolve every opposition. (p. 37)

Transgression is violent. It can hurt. While it is dangerous for the transgressor, it is potentially dangerous to those who occupy privileged positions as well. The legitimacy of privilege is placed in question by transgression. For that reason the transgressor can expect reactionary condemnation, in any of its various guises, of his acts. Privilege is not likely to be abandoned without a fight.

However, while transgression is dangerous, so is nontransgression. Indeed, not to transgress is to accept one’s self as final and comply with the domination of extant discourses. Such compliance is especially damming for members of the academy. It is not that the academic is, through some special skill all her own, able to see the violence in discourse that others miss. Rather, as Bourdieu (1984/1988) argued while identifying academics as the dominated segment of the dominant class, academics occupy a social space that allows them the opportunity to examine the grounding and implications of any form of discourse.

Truth and power are intertwined historically in specific discourses. Transgression opens a space in extant discourses where alternative discourses can arise. To push a metaphor that ecologists might prefer to avoid, it clears this space for the construction of new communities. Although transgression is certainly dangerous, perhaps steps can be taken to limit its violence. If limitations on ways of being are seen as a form of violence, then the construction of alternative categories that are more permeable and of identities that are polysemous can contribute to a community that is less violent. On this premise I examine the implications of Bourdieu’s methodological reflexivity for those involved in the social sciences and humanities. Bourdieu argues that subjects are rhetorically created and self-creating through power-laden discursive practices. Given this empowering reconceptualization of social life, it is the position of the intellectual in contemporary society to engage in the analysis of these processes of reproduction. While Bourdieu is certainly not calling for a resurgence of the model in which intellectuals served as the vanguard for social
movements, he is claiming that some version of a constructivist sociological vision—a stance attained through reflexive sociological practice—can inform transgressive practices.

For those interested in progressive academic practices after the poststructuralist critique, Bourdieu’s powerful notion of reflexivity may provide the basis for a kind of processual ethics that is not, however, universalist or idealist as is that offered by Habermas. Bourdieu does not return us to any essentialist version of ethics. We do, however, get a sense of an ethics of method where “method . . . becomes an ethical exercise, an exercise in responsibility—or perhaps in interrogativity!”15

To illustrate the ways in which this conceptualization of methods can inform work in the social sciences and humanities, I turn specifically to Bourdieu’s early, but only recently translated, epistemological work.16 Bourdieu argues there that the task of the social scientist is to confront commonly held—and illusionary—conceptions of social reality by constructing and confirming scientific objects. Thus science is one way of constructing alternative categories of being that can serve as an exemplar for transgressive practices both inside and outside of academia. For Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron (1991)

> politics begins . . . with the denunciation of the tacit adherence to the established order which defines the original doxa; . . . political subversion presupposes cognitive subversion, a conversion of the vision of the world. (p. 127)

Reflexivity is central to Bourdieu’s efforts to confront the symbolic violence inherent in doxic experience (see especially Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Wacquant, 1993). However, Bourdieu’s notion of reflexivity differs considerably from the reflexive self that Foucault identifies in his essays on the care of the self. Bourdieu is inviting us to join him in a rigorous scientific method in which our own positions as social scientists are foregrounded. Bourdieu (1984/1988) shows the academic how much of the self is social. He shows us just how much of what we see and feel is a consequence of where we stand in relation to others in the social space.

Such a reflexive method helps us to identify the socially or rhetorically constructed boundaries that delimit our view of the social field. If unable to confront and transgress the seemingly natural limits that confine us in our everyday practices, we are unknowing accomplices in the reproduction of oppressive social hierarchies. As Bauman (1992) argued, academics who accept such official categorizations lend an air of intellectual authority to them, thus reinforcing their position and the social hierarchies they constitute.

For Bourdieu, reflexivity is both a method for identifying such limits and a basis for the creation of alternatives to them. This constructivist approach is antithetical to more positivistic methods that rely on the collection and analysis of evidence. The problem with the reliance on evidence—especially that generated using either official or common-sense categorizations—is that it is dependent upon its categories of construction even to exist. Evidence is not a primary
phenomena. Because discursive categorizations constitute their objects, anything not recognized by these categories is denied relevance. For purposes of the scientific project at hand, it is either noise or it does not exist. Put simply, categories determine what counts as evidence and, more subtly, what evidence counts.

The emphasis on evidence in scientific research is inherently conservative, especially in the social sciences. By virtue of the fact that it is dependent upon the categories that allow for its existence, this emphasis tends to support and reaffirm the social and scientific status quo. For example, the dictum “the data suggest” masks all the discursive activity and political contestation that go into constituting “data” as an agency of knowledge or insight. What’s more, by proclaiming that its methods are “the” scientific way of determining truth, positivist versions of science censure other ways of truth telling.

We want, then, to participate in the construction of alternative ways of being, ways that are hopefully more just and less hierarchical. This is not an exercise in intellectual barbarism, nor is the point to write as if our own categories are perfect categories. The point is not to simply make things or categories up or to write in ignorance of history and philosophy, and it is certainly not to accept common-sense notions of reality. Rather, by transgressing existing social categories, their constructedness is foregrounded. As Bourdieu (Bourdieu et al., 1991, p. 19) argues, we must uncover “the system of historical and social relations in which (categories) are located” and introduce and demonstrate the possibility—through the construction of scientific objects—that things could be different. If we can show, as Harding (1987) and others have, that—in this age of science—scientific objects are constructed, we can show that no categorizations are natural. Neither are they necessarily immutable.

In a sense, engaging in transgressive academic practices resembles writing fiction. Specifically, it is like writing science fiction; but with the knowledge that today’s fiction may become tomorrow’s fact, this requires an epistemological break with common-sense or conventional scientific understandings. We might say that the progressive social scientist is able to render a kind of social-science fiction in which the possibility of alternative ways of being are introduced. To calm the fears of those convinced that the social sciences must somehow resemble the natural sciences to be legitimate, it is important to emphasize that this conception of the social sciences is not really very far removed from conceptions of practices in the “harder” sciences. Categorizations, regardless of their scientific status, have no ultimate grounding. They have no grounding outside of the boundaries of their own discourse. Even statistical accounts of the facts, as Brown (1987) has argued, are rhetorically constructed in a manner that resembles the writing of fictions. Both assume “authorial omniscience as a basic stance” (Brown, 1987/1989). Every established discourse, and every category within it, is a form of more or less coerced consensus. The social scientist has the opportunity, because of the structural conditions that allow for her existence, to write a new story. This allows “readers a chance to
stretch their minds by experiencing an alternate world and then a chance to return to [the consensual] reality with a changed perspective."^{20}

It is in the writing of these new stories, or narratives, in the creation of alternate categories of being, that ethics and reflexivity are most important. The social scientist is in the unique position within the social structure to write alternative stories. Again, this is not because the person who is the social scientist necessarily possesses some inherent intellectual or artistic superiority that allows her to see worlds that others miss, but because she is in a social space that allows her the opportunity to engage in the practices of teaching and writing. She is also allowed the opportunity to incorporate reflexive methods into her practical activities, and it is the insistence on both reflexivity and confirmation that distinguishes our social scientist from the poet or the science fiction writer.

In order to illustrate the importance of this distinction, it is necessary to introduce one other issue that the postmodern critique of science has generated. Lyotard (1979/1984) critiques the state of knowledge production in contemporary society because its legitimacy is based on performativity rather than narrative. Science’s authority in contemporary society is dependent upon its ability to do things. As long as it can do things for us, it is legitimate.\textsuperscript{21} Contrasting scientific knowledge with the narrative knowledge produced by the South American Cashinahua, Lyotard claims that science is trapped in a performatory contradiction. Among the Cashinahua, narratives are legitimated in the process of their telling. The Cashinahua narrator begins a story by identifying himself. Because his own name also names, or identifies, his position among the Cashinahua, he demonstrates his own legitimacy as a speaker as well as the legitimacy of his story. Lyotard claims that science, although it denies the importance of narrative and does what it can to avoid narrative as a basis for its legitimacy, is ultimately dependent upon the enlightenment metanarrative of emancipation for that legitimacy. Although science nominally rejects narrative as a basis for legitimacy, if truth be told, it must ultimately resort to narrative for its own legitimacy. Other scholars, such as Brown (in press) and Gross (1990) argue that science, in its very activity of inventing or discovering truths, is a narrative practice.

Bourdieu’s methodological reflexivity is a way, within science and using scientific methods, to situate the social sciences and the social scientist within narrative. What Bourdieu does with his reflexive approach is situate himself as a speaker occupying a particular position in the scientific field, which is itself positioned within the more general social field. The whole point of engaging in reflexive sociology is to try to understand one’s place within the social field in order to better understand the social in the social scientist. Reflexive social science is social science that acknowledges the objective social conditions allowing the social scientist to speak and considers the ways in which those conditions contribute to what he sees. We are, after all, writing and teaching stories of the social. The least we can do for those who make up the social (ourselves included) is to ensure our own legitimacy as writers and speakers.\textsuperscript{22}
TRANSGRESSION AND
REFLEXIVE ACADEMIC PRACTICE

The awareness that, in the writing of narratives, categorizations and their limitations are constructed rather than natural implies that they are malleable and not immutable. Transgression becomes a way of opening space in which alternative discourses can flourish. This is a desirable and empowering realization, especially as it pertains to social scientific research. We (whoever might be implied by this potentially tyrannical term) can recognize and change the ways in which categories constitute the world, and we can recognize the ways in which our practices contribute to these constructions.\(^{23}\) Indeed, as scientists we must do this. After all, constructing versions of social reality is what we do. We must break with both official and common conceptions of reality. Hierarchies can be questioned, oppression can be made visible and delegitimized, creativity can be unleashed. We can (and do) rewrite the world. At the same time that we are defetishizing social limits by transgressing them, we are reconstructing society in other ways.

Obviously, efforts to eliminate hierarchy will be resisted, and so such activities may be dangerous. Speakers and writers who recognize the legitimacy of the dominant discourse can resort to that discourse (and its constabularies) when the legitimacy of their own voice is questioned.\(^{24}\) This is a problem Habermas's discourse ethic is unable to address. Habermas's focus on the notion of distortion-free communication is idealistic—it implies that it would be somehow possible to decontextualize discourse, to disembody speech, so that all domination and subordination could be suspended. However, as the post-structuralist focus on practices is designed to illustrate, discourse does not exist outside of practical activity. Like all other human activities, ethics are located in discursive practice. Discourse constitutes both dominator and subordinate, and it cannot be realized outside of these embodiments.

This is a problem that Bourdieu recognizes at the outset. Bourdieu (Bourdieu et al., 1991) argues that

the scientific fact is won, constructed, and confirmed. . . . the sociological community is now tending to forget the epistemological hierarchy of scientific acts which subordinates validation to construction and construction to the break with self-evident appearances. (p. 11)

The social sciences are creative, just as all practices are creative. Scientific objects must be won against, at the very least, official and common-sense notions of reality. Efforts will be made to delegitimize our categories—indeed, in our processes of confirmation we may even rewrite them ourselves. Ours is not the ultimate or the final word, it is rather just a social scientific word. I close, then, by saying about Bourdieu's ethical method what Veyne (1993) has to say about Foucault's ethical care of the self. Bourdieu, in offering us a vision of social science as reflexive and constructive
would not (claim) to have supplied a true or definitive solution, for humanity is constantly on the move, to such an extent that each current solution soon reveals that it too involves dangers; every solution is soon imperfect, and this will always be so: a [social scientist] is someone who, facing each new present circumstance, diagnoses the new danger and points to a new way out. (pp. 7-8)

NOTES

1. The issue is one of the relationship between an author and his works, itself one of the key concerns in Foucault’s (1977) essay “What is an Author?” It is unlikely to disappear any time soon. Owing as much to revelations of the Nazi connections of Heidegger and de Man as to the life of Foucault, the connections between one’s work and one’s life are again receiving considerable attention. My focus in this article is limited strictly to academic practice. Speculation as to whether or not the argument has implications for what is done outside the academy, or indeed whether or not such a distinction is even legitimate, is left to the reader.

2. The critique of the turn toward practice that is offered by Turner (1994) appeared too late to be considered in this essay.

3. The terms postmodernist and poststructuralist are often used interchangeably in discussions of modernism and postmodernism. Poster (1989) points out that the term poststructuralism is a label applied by theorists in the United States to a relatively small group of French thinkers that includes Lacan, Derrida, Baudrillard, Deleuze, and Lyotard. I use the term poststructuralist to refer to these theorists and others, including Foucault and Bourdieu, and the term postmodernist to refer to the current historical era. Whether or not Bourdieu, or any of the others mentioned above, would willingly accept the moniker is another matter. On this term as it applies to Bourdieu, see Wacquant (1993).

4. Fetzer and Almeder (1993) describe epistemology as having the aim of “discovering the principles by means of which the world’s properties might be known,” and ontology as the attempt to discover “a framework for understanding the kinds of things that constitute the world’s structure” (p. 101). The poststructuralist move is to de-essentialize these notions and focus on their local features. That is, epistemology and ontology are not universal. They are situated spatially and temporally.

5. The violence of such limits is best described by Deleuze and Guattari (1983).

6. For such a reaction, see Ferry and Renaut (1990).

7. The clearest theoretical description of this earlier view of power is found in Weber (1978, p. 53), who says that “power is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests.” Closely related to his notion of power is domination, which Weber defines as “the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons.” The poststructuralists have shifted our focus from man to discourse.

8. For an account that suggests that gender is an effect rather than an essence, and that inasmuch as it is “an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification,” see Butler (1990, p. 33).

9. For a similar critique, see Fraser (1989).

10. Bourdieu has been perhaps less hasty than others to dismiss the enlightenment project. He is unwilling to give up the understanding generated by science, but wants social sciences, sociology in particular, that “make trouble.” On this issue, see Bourdieu (1993) and Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992).

11. It is at this point that a red flag should go up. Are not, for example, the practices of genital mutilation performed on women in many areas of central and southern Africa unethical? The simple answer, from a nonessentializing position, is obviously not. Only if the constructedness of this way of marking women can be assessed through transgression or intertextuality—placing the ethics of the cultures in question into a kind of metadiscourse of ethics—can the ethics of such practices be
deemed unethical. Nothing, whether it is clitoridectomy in the Sudan or unequal funding of public school districts in the United States—is inherently anything. The beauty of this move is that, if nothing is inherently anything, then the ethics of any and all practices can be questioned. The suggestions that such practices “are natural” or “are the way things have always been done” no longer have legitimacy. Consequently, they can be changed if one is willing to take the risks involved in changing them.

12. *Language game* is a term introduced by Wittgenstein to foreground the contextual grounding of speech practices. Lyotard (1979/1984) has renewed interest in the term by arguing that the postmodern condition is characterized by agonistic competition within and between language games. I am using the term in a way that is synonymous with discourse.

13. This section is largely informed by three secondary works on Foucault. I rely almost exclusively on these works here because my reading of them partially preceded and strongly influenced my reading of Foucault’s later volumes. The essays are Connolly’s (1993) elaboration of Foucault’s ethical sensibility, Veyne’s (1993) “The Final Foucault and His Ethics,” and Halperin’s (in press) treatment of ethics in Foucault’s writings on sexuality.

14. Halperin (in press) points to Foucault’s use of the term *soi* in his writings on the self rather than the term *sujet*. Whereas both terms translate as subject in English, in French the former does not come with the metaphysical baggage—including the arguments that accompany the structure/agency debate in the United States—that accompanies the latter. This also distances Foucault from the ontological freedom described by Sartre.

15. I borrow these words from Abel (1993, p. 23), who uses them to describe the methods that inform Ricoeur’s critical hermeneutics.

16. (Bourdieu, Chamboredon, & Passeron, 1991). All Bourdieu references, unless otherwise noted, are to this volume.

17. The burgeoning field of science and technology studies, much of which has taken form as ethnographies of the laboratory, makes a convincing argument in this regard. See, for example, the essays in Knorr-Cetina and Mulkay (1983) and Pickering (1992), as well as works by Latour and Woolgar (1979), Latour (1987), and Pinch and Bijker (1984). In addition to these studies of laboratory life, Brown (in press), Gross (1990), and Prelli (1989) critique the supposedly apolitical communicative practices of scientists.

18. In addition to the works cited at the end of the prior note, see especially Rouse (1987), for whom the interpretive/natural science dichotomy is not supportable because both types of scientist are engaging in interpretive practices.

19. They are, nonetheless, real. As Lance and May argue in this volume (1995), and as Brown (1978) argued elsewhere, conflict over such constructions can have serious consequences.

20. This is the way in which Cummins (1993, p. 7) describes the science fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin. However, social scientists need not be able to create the equivalent of *Earthsea* or *Orsinia* to be transgressive, although that would certainly be nice. In this era of the bell curve, we might consider ourselves successful if we are able “merely” to show the constructedness of categories like race, à la Fields (1990), or ethnicity, à la Said (1978). Said, in particular, demonstrates the danger in academic practice that supports, and thus lends scientific legitimacy to, coercive power. As always, there is no guarantee that anyone will care or be persuaded by the accounts of social scientists, but at least we will not be lending our voice to the legitimacy of extant categories.

21. As critical theorists from Horkheimer and Adorno to Aronowitz (1989) have pointed out, capital is generally the “us” for whom science is doing things in capitalist society.

22. This notion of interconnected social fields—of which the scientific field is only one example—compares favorably with the notions of intertextuality offered by Derrida (1982). With Bourdieu, however, we never forget that textuality and undecidability are social.

23. The difference between this and, for example, Zarubavel’s (1991) conception is subtle but important. Zarubavel suggests that reality is *sliced up* by the distinctions that we make in everyday life. For the poststructuralists, reality is *constituted* by the distinctions that we make in everyday life. What is important here is primacy. For Zarubavel, reality has ontological priority over discourse, rather than reality itself being constituted by discourse.
24. At no point in this essay have I been so naive as to equate the plight of the marginal academic with that of torture victims.

REFERENCES


