Call for papers, *Cahiers du Genre*

Feminist perspectives on Bourdieu

Translation by Lisa Yahia-Cherif

Editorial coordinators :
Emmanuel Beaubatie, chargé de recherche au CNRS, emmanuel.beaubatie@cnrs.fr
Anna Berrard, doctorante en sociologie à l'EHESS, anna.berrard@ehess.fr
Camille Courgeon, doctorant·e en histoire à l'UPEC, camille.courgeon@u-pec.fr

Article proposals (8000 to 12000 characters maximum, or 2 to 3 pages) should be submitted before 1 June 2026 to the three coordinators. Complete articles of approximately 50,000 characters will be due by the end of November 2026. The journal's editorial guidelines are available here.

References to Pierre Bourdieu's work have grown substantially in research on gender and sexuality. Within this field of study, the concepts of habitus, field, cultural capital, and symbolic violence are now commonplace. Some researchers go so far as to openly debate the strengths and limitations of the Bourdieusian approach as applied to gender and sexuality. Nearly thirty years ago, when the publication of *Masculine Domination* (2001 [1998]) provoked the indignation of many feminist scholars — due to the erasure of their work, the reduction of masculine domination to its symbolic dimensions, and the author's lack of gender reflexivity, among other concerns — few of them would have predicted such widespread appropriation and debate of Bourdieu's work. Drawing on disciplines including sociology, literary studies, gender studies, cultural studies, political science, and education studies, this body of work has developed in France, but also — and perhaps above all — abroad. In 2004, even as criticisms of *Masculine Domination* continued to be voiced forcefully, *Feminism after Bourdieu* was published in Britain — a collective volume coordinated by Lisa Adkins and Beverley Skeggs. Drawing on a range of contributions and following the conference "Feminists evaluate Bourdieu" held in Manchester in 2002, this volume was not the first to address the fraught relationship between feminism and Bourdieu, but it nonetheless formalised the question: how does one work with Bourdieu from a feminist standpoint? To what extent is it possible, and indeed desirable, to produce feminist research with — but also inevitably against — Bourdieu?

An unavoidable figure in the social sciences and beyond, Bourdieu features prominently in much research whose object of study concerns gender. Within the field of feminist studies, however, his presence is often met with suspicion. The question of feminist loyalty arises whenever he is cited as a primary inspiration, particularly when *Masculine Domination* is at issue. Why turn to Bourdieu

— for whom masculine domination is, at best, a theoretical appendage — rather than to feminist researchers for whom it has long been the central object of inquiry? Why draw on the theory of masculine domination rather than the considerably older theory of the social relations of sex/gender, or the more recent concept of heteronormativity? In turning to this theoretical framework, are we not ourselves overlooking the contributions of feminist studies? This thematic issue sets out to explore these tensions and the perspectives that seek to resolve them. The choice of this theme necessarily raises the question of what constitutes strong or weak uses of Bourdieusian theory. While some researchers in feminist studies are specialists in Bourdieu's work, most are not. This thematic issue therefore addresses discussions and appropriations of Bourdieu in the broadest sense, since the relationship between this sociologist and feminist studies is approached here from within feminist studies — not the other way round. The aim is to bring into view, within this field of study, work that engages in dialogue with his sociology, offering critiques, rereadings, hybridisations, and reflexive approaches. More broadly, this thematic issue sets out to examine the theoretical and epistemological questions raised by the uses of Bourdieu within feminist studies.

Article proposals may draw on a range of disciplines (sociology, political science, gender studies, cultural studies, history, philosophy, education studies, etc.). They should engage with one or more of the following themes, without being limited to them: 1/ The issues bound up with the structuring of the academic field and its relationship to politics, which are inseparable from reflexivity and positionality; 2/ Theoretical discussions and synergies between feminist epistemologies and Bourdieusian approaches; and 3/ Feminist transpositions of Bourdieu, particularly around the articulation of social relations.

Theme 1. The Academic Field and its Relationship to Politics

A first line of inquiry concerns the relations between feminist epistemologies and Bourdieusian approaches in light of their respective positions within the academic field and their differing relationships to politics. Articles that revisit the history of these relations are welcome, as are those offering reflexive accounts of intellectual trajectories with multiple theoretical groundings.

This first theme echoes the French feminist critiques directed at Bourdieu at the time of the publication of *Masculine Domination*. This short work, published in 1998 and translated into English in 2001, met with strongly negative reception from the outset (Lerch, 2000). The points of contention are numerous. Incorporating little or none of the work produced by gender studies researchers, the text conveys an impression of lofty detachment (Lagrave, 2003) that sits in direct contradiction with the very foundations of many feminist epistemologies. Furthermore, while the symbolic dimension of masculine domination is developed at length, its material dimension — already explored by materialist feminists since the 1970s — is given comparatively little attention (Mathieu, 1999). Moreover, heterosexual love is described in a postscript as a sphere that partly escapes masculine domination (Devreux et al., 2002; Bozon, 2005) — even though, within materialist thought, the gendered division of labour within the heterosexual couple represents the very foundation of patriarchy. Finally, Bourdieu's argument focuses on contexts and periods other than his own — his Kabyle fieldwork from the 1960s as well as literary works (Virginia Woolf) — in ways that tend to produce a universalist reading of gender domination (Krais, 1999). Added to this is the absence of any engagement with feminist and LGBTQ struggles and with the transformations they have brought about in terms of gender and sexuality, resulting in an essentially static vision of these social relations (Perrot, 1999; Devreux, 2010).

Beyond the blind spots they identify, these critiques denounce, above all, an epistemic injustice. They implicitly raise the question of the power relations that structure the academic field,

governing the production and hierarchisation of knowledge. To justify the ignorance of gender he had helped to perpetuate, Bourdieu would invoke "the space of the division of scientific labour" (2002) before an audience of feminist researchers for whom this very formulation could not but cause offence — for that is precisely part of the problem: Bourdieu never saw fit to engage in genuine scholarly dialogue with them, whilst they — feminist sociologists in particular — had no option but to engage with his work. Following Rose-Marie Lagrave (2015) among others, many feminists have underlined the limits of Bourdieu's "reflex reflexivity" (1998 [1993]) when it comes to gender — a social relation in which he evidently occupied neither the same position nor the same trajectory as they did. Some connect this critique to that of his treatment of racial social relations — such as the Algerian sociologist Marnia Lazreg (2018 [1994]), who demonstrates how far Bourdieu underestimated not only women's agency during the war, but also the consubstantiality of masculine domination and colonial domination. Such critiques point to a fundamental disagreement between the Bourdieusian approach and feminist epistemologies regarding the autonomy of the academic field — although this autonomy is itself open to question in Bourdieu's own work (Fassin and Ibos, 2025). In standpoint epistemologies and positionality-based approaches, the scientific is always intrinsically political: research is inseparable from social movements, and understanding is in the service of emancipation.

These epistemological divergences make it possible to raise the thorny question of the legitimacy and relevance of drawing on Bourdieu in research on gender — notwithstanding his evident difficulties in theorising this form of domination. The question of reflexivity — or, to frame it from a feminist standpoint, the question of positionality and standpoint — is all the more central given that this failure is reproduced in certain works within gender and sexuality studies. The American sociologist Emily Ruppel (2022) goes so far as to invoke Bourdieusian sociology in defence of feminism when she formulates a critique of the "theory of sexual fields" proposed by the Canadian sociologist Adam Green (2014), following John Levi Martin and Matt George (2006). In this theory, she identifies a striking absence of analysis of gender domination, or even of power — including between men. Surprisingly, then, Bourdieu is sometimes invoked as a guarantor of the study of gender domination. This observation raises the question of what should be retained and preserved from the Bourdieusian approach, including — and especially — in studies of sexuality. Conversely, one may also ask what it is not reasonable to borrow from Bourdieu — and from Bourdieu alone — a genealogical question that underpins the dilemmas of bibliographic reflexivity: why and how to cite Bourdieu, and above all, alongside whom? For whilst citing him may help to legitimate an object deemed marginal or minority, such a move risks perpetuating symbolic violence against feminist scholars.

Theme 2. Theoretical Discussions and Synergies

A second line of inquiry aims to deepen the theoretical discussions and synergies between Bourdieusian concepts and those — less widely known — that have emerged from research on gender and sexuality. Without separating these discussions from the epistemological concerns outlined above, the aim is to place in dialogue notions drawn from both bodies of work, to identify points of proximity as well as difference, and to bring possible hybridisations to light.

This theme is situated within a long tradition of feminist debates about what Bourdieu does or does not contribute to the understanding of gender. As early as the 1990s, political scientist Leslie McCall (1992) openly posed the question: "Does gender fit [in Bourdieusian theory]?" She interrogates, among other things, the place of women in the social space mapped in *Distinction* (1984 [1979]), within which gender appears, in her view, as a secondary structuring principle. This discussion was also taken up in literary studies by Toril Moi (1991) in her work on Simone de Beauvoir's literary legitimacy. For Moi, gender cannot be reduced simply to a form of capital —

just as one does not speak of class capital — yet it can nonetheless function as such, as either positive or negative symbolic capital. In sociology, Terry Lovell (2000) would also address this question. For her, one of the core problems lies in the fact that women are sometimes represented — whether Bourdieu intends this or not — as a form of capital, or as a vector for its accumulation, rather than as subjects who possess capital on equal terms with men. It is worth noting that critiques of Bourdieu are rarely entirely negative. Researchers who engage with his work also emphasise the usefulness of his social theory for feminist studies (in France, see recently Lagrave, 2020; Beaubatie, 2023). For German sociologist Beate Krais and literary studies scholar Jennifer Marston Williams (2000), for instance, Bourdieu's relational sociology proves particularly pertinent for theorising gender relations. The concepts of habitus and field are widely taken up (Ramires, 2006; Silva and Bartolozzi Ferreira, 2023), including by researchers who argue that Bourdieu underestimates women's movement across fields and, consequently, the complexity of their gender habitus (McLeod, 2005).

Between feminist studies and Bourdieusian theory, a number of conceptual moves are simultaneously similar and distinct. Their respective relationships to historical materialism offer one example, as materialist feminism and the Bourdieusian approach both constitute forms of Marxist heterodoxy. Whilst materialist feminists — themselves critics of Marxian androcentrism — ground domination in economic relations of production, Bourdieusian theory — drawing on Marx whilst moving closer to Weber — conceptualises domination across multiple dimensions, including the symbolic, which in some respects brings the Bourdieusian approach closer to queer feminist studies. Bourdieu's notion of "symbolic violence" resonates with certain feminist writings, including those of the Indian postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak (2009 [1985]), who, through the concept of "epistemic violence," designates the systematic negation of the speech and worldview of the dominated, these being necessarily read through the lens of the dominant. To theorise symbolic violence from a feminist standpoint, the Spanish philosopher Lucía Acosta Martín (2013) undertakes to bring the concept of the "lived body" — and more broadly the phenomenological perspective of philosopher and political theorist Iris Marion Young — into dialogue with the concept of habitus, with the aim of thinking reproduction and social change simultaneously. Another example of theoretical homology concerns the conditions of knowledge production — addressed in Bourdieu's work through his writings on reflexivity (2001) and, in feminist scholarship, through standpoint epistemologies and positionality-based approaches. The two approaches do not, however, share the same aim: unlike the first, the second does not seek to neutralise the very effects it describes.

Some feminist research goes as far as creating theoretical synergies with Bourdieu's thought. Such work sometimes combines the Bourdieusian approach with intersectional perspectives (Krishna Mehta, 2020; Romero-Moreno, 2025) but more often brings Bourdieu into dialogue with queer studies. From this unlikely alliance, such work seeks to theorise the resistance of women (Skeggs, 1997) and/or sexual and gender minorities (McDermott, 2011; Samuel, 2013), making room for agency as well as for class/gender/sexuality consciousness — a dimension relatively neglected in Bourdieu's writings. The Bourdieusian approach is also sometimes mobilised as a resource for engaging with queer approaches. The British political theorist Loïs McNay (1999; 2000), for instance, draws on Bourdieu to complicate Judith Butler's account of gender performativity (1990) — even as Butler, in other work, engages with Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus (Butler, 1999). For McNay, the concept of habitus makes it possible to foreground the embodied character of the repetition of acts described by Butler. For her part, the Scottish sociologist Bridget Fowler (2003) advocates drawing on Bourdieu to interrogate the capacity for agency that Butler attributes to individuals. Focusing on the performative power of language, she takes a Bourdieusian position, reminding us that certain conditions of possibility govern the performativity of speech acts. Bourdieu is thus sometimes mobilised to engage, from a feminist standpoint, with other feminist

work (in this case, queer) — a finding that speaks to the plurality of theoretical approaches in gender studies and their varying affinities with the Bourdieusian lens.

Theme 3. Transpositions and the Articulation of Social Relations

A third line of inquiry concerns feminist transpositions of Bourdieu, particularly in empirical work. In theorising gender and sexuality, many researchers draw on Bourdieu whilst engaging, more often than not, in describing the entanglement of social relations. The aim of this theme is to bring together articles that engage and re-engage with Bourdieusian thought within the framework of research that adopts an explicit feminist standpoint.

Drawing on his work on class rather than on *Masculine Domination*, feminist transpositions of Bourdieu span a wide range of research objects. Some focus, for example, on literary activity (Naudier, 2010) or reading practices (Albenga and Bachmann, 2015; Albenga, 2007; 2017) which, as cultural practices, lend themselves particularly well to an approach that articulates Bourdieu and feminist studies, as evidenced by Viviane Albenga's work in France. Others examine political representation (Matonti, 2017), the world of work — where gender can function as embodied cultural capital (Ross-Smith and Huppatz, 2010; Huppatz and Goodwin, 2013; Powell and Sang, 2015) — the family and its reproduction of gender inequalities (Bessière and Gollac, 2020), or minority processes of racial and gender subjectivation (Guénif Souilamas, 2000). Others still — following the Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell (1995) — explore, alongside Bourdieu, the plurality of masculinities (Bridges, 2009; Thorpe, 2010; Dulong and Wagner, 2024), sexuality among LGBT people (Green, 2014) and among heterosexual people (Powell, 2008), gender transitions (Beaubatie, 2021; Aboim and Vasconcelos, 2024), and heteronormativity and gay/trans-friendliness (Tissot, 2018; Morantes-Africano, 2023). The usefulness of Bourdieusian thought is also highlighted from a theoretical standpoint, for theorising gender and race by analogy with class (Beaubatie, Brun and Cosquer, 2025) or for conceptualising the entanglement of these social relations (Roueff, 2025).

More often than not, it is through empirical work articulating gender and class — and/or race, somewhat less frequently — that Bourdieu and feminist scholarship coexist. This is notably the case in *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* by British sociologist Beverley Skeggs (1997), which demonstrates how distinction is a co-construction of gender, sexuality, class, and race. Widely influential in France since its translation, this book is devoted to the struggles over classification at work among young women. Closer to the Bourdieusian perspective than Raewyn Connell's work on masculinities, it explores the subject of feminine respectability — in which multiple social relations are entangled — which, unlike masculine respectability, rests largely on virtue. Less well known in France, *The Aftermath of Feminism* by Angela McRobbie (2009), also a British sociologist, addresses a related subject — namely, the symbolic violences of gender, class, and race exerted upon young women. Although they share a common grounding in cultural studies, McRobbie is partly distinguished from Skeggs by her analyses of neoliberalism and the media construction of more or less legitimate femininities. In the French context, this work — particularly that of Skeggs and Connell — has helped inspire research on "styles of femininity" (Avril, 2014) and masculinity, in reference to Bourdieu's concept of "lifestyles."

If the Bourdieusian approach proves useful in gender studies, the reverse is equally true. A number of works concerned with the entanglement of social relations have imported approaches and concepts from feminist studies into the sociology of class — specifically, of the Bourdieusian variety. This is the case with *Women without Class* by American sociologist Julie Bettie (2002), which employs the concept of "class performance," transposing the Butlerian theory of performativity to class. This is also the case in the work of English sociologist Steph Lawler, who argues from 1999

onwards for the inclusion of class subjectivities — and indeed of class self-identification (drawing, moreover, on the concept of class passing) — in the analysis of upward female mobility. In studying social mobility, the British sociologist Diane Reay (1997) similarly underlines the importance of thinking gender and class together — a point that Danish anthropologist Yvonne Mørck (2006) extends to intersectionality more broadly. Reay demonstrates, in particular, that gender habitus can shape feelings of class belonging, leading some women in situations of social mobility to consider themselves as classless — in the same way that some individuals may consider themselves genderless. In doing so, such research explores analogical reasoning between social relations whilst simultaneously describing their interlocking.

Within the framework of this call for papers, proposals drawing on diverse theories and empirical terrain are welcome. Such proposals should not, however, be limited to a purely Bourdieusian reading of an object related to gender and sexuality: contributions will be expected to engage in dialogue with feminist thought and, accordingly, to demonstrate critical reflexivity.

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