

# Feminism after Bourdieu

Centre for Gender Studies Stockholm University, March 2007

# Personal Use

- Ambivalent relationship: passion and pulping.
- Capital metaphors: cultural capital: economic, social, symbolic (explanatory power).
- We carry these with us in different combinations, compositions and volumes. Their value depends on the dominant market rate for exchange (what he calls fields).
- Never used habitus.
- Selective appropriation of concepts not Bourdieu scholar.

# Back Catalogue

- Pierre Bourdieu died in January 2002, His first substantive research was anthropological – on the Kabliya in Algeria (*The Algerians* 1958).
- From this he developed his ‘theories of practice’ in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1972) and *The Logic of Practice* (1980)
- moving to education: *The Inheritors* (1970), *Reproduction in Education, Culture and Society* (1970), *Homo Academicus* (1984), and *The State Nobility* (1989).
- His concerns then led to culture more generally: *Distinction* (1979) a critique of the judgement of taste, *Photography: A Middle brow Art* (1964) on art and its institutions, *The Love of Art* (1966), *On Television* (1996) and quantitative analysis of museums and *The Rules of Art* (1992) on literature.

# Back Catalogue continued...

- Interested throughout in the institutional structures and methods of knowledge: *The Craft of Sociology* (1968) and *Pascalian Meditations* (1997) develop his theory of 'bodily knowledge' on dispositions and recognition.
- Masculine Domination* (1998) is a study of the power of masculinity.
- His more polemical and political writings, include searing critiques of neo-liberal globalisation: *Acts of Resistance* (1998) and *Firing Back* (2002).
- The Weight of the World* (1998) is a jointly produced empirical study that documents the economic and moral poverty in contemporary France.
- Bourdieu was also a dedicated teacher as well as a public intellectual, organising '*Reasons to Act*' French dates given for original publications, English translation of titles given.

# **Lisa Adkins and Beverley Skeggs (2004) *Feminism after Bourdieu*. Oxford: Blackwell.**

Intro1 : Feminism, Bourdieu and After

***Lisa Adkins***

*Intro 2: Introducing Pierre Bourdieu's Analysis of Class, Gender and Sexuality*

***Beverley Skeggs***

Bourdieu, Class and Gender: 'The Return of the Living Dead?'

***Terry Lovell (and also see article on performativity in TCS (2003) and Feminist Theory 2000)***

Gendering Bourdieu's Concept of Capitals? Emotional Capital, Women and Social Class

***Diane Reay***

Exchange Value and Affect: Bourdieu and the Self

***Beverley Skeggs***

Notes On: 'What Not to Wear' and Post-Feminist Symbolic Violence

***Angela McRobbie***

Rules of Engagement: Habitus, Power and Resistance

***Steph Lawler***

Mapping the Obituary: Notes Towards a Bourdieusian Interpretation

***Bridget Fowler***

Agency and Experience: Gender as a Lived Relation

***Lois McNay***

Reflexivity: Freedom or Habit of Gender?

***Lisa Adkins***

Anamnesis and Amnesia in Bourdieu's Work: The Case for a Feminist Anamnesis

***Anne Witz***

Shame in the Habitus

***Elsbeth Probyn***

***(Other important feminist theorists of Bourdieu: Moi, McCall, Mottier, da Silva and Lamont).***

# Limits to Bourdieu

- He explores gender and sexuality in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, *Logic of Practice*, *Distinctions* and *Masculine Domination*.
- But rarely engages with feminist theory

## **So what does he offer:**

- Social space analysis of class
- Capitals
- Reflexivity
- Taste and Culture
- Theory of embedded practice (and others would argue – habitus)
- An understanding of knowledge production
- What he cannot explain is relations of powerlessness (especially the working class, femininity and sexuality)
- Very good analysis of how power works (eg masculinity/the middle class)

# Bourdieu's Theory of Gender/Sexuality

- For Bourdieu social identity is first made from sexual identity, from the experience of the mother's and father's bodies.
- To this he adds the sexual division of labour in the home; the experience of the parental body is always shaped by this sexual division formed by the wider sexual division of labour.
- The body experienced is always a social body made up of meanings and values, gestures, postures, physical bearing, speech and language.
- It is through the body that the child learns to intimately experience wider structural features, which are never just an experience of the structural, but always entwined with the child's physical and sexual presence, with its bodily relation to others.
- This is a dialectical process involving objectification in which some features become objectified over time and form the habitus.



# Bourdieu on Femininity/Masculinity

- A dialectic of objectification and embodiment is formed via an 'elective affinity' shaping the habitus (between school subjects and take-up: school subjects defined as femininity weak-masculinity strong).
- For boys the elective affinity offers masculine power, institutionalised in the school.
- The embodied gendered dialectic is structured through hierarchical relations of difference, symbolised by binary oppositions (high/low culture; strong/weak fields; by which, in a very traditional manner, masculinity exists in the public (via the economic) and femininity in the private.
- So already problems of descriptive reproduction: family universal; traditional hetero family assumed; binaries of value fixed; everything feminine weak; public/private dichotomy and fit between positions and take-up assumed.



# If we Compare Race to Gender: McCall (1992) Critique

- Bourdieu identifies ethnicity as a 'secondary principle' that reinforces the structure of capital since it is relatively independent of economic or cultural properties (ethnicity distributes its members into social classes according to location in the hierarchy of the ethnic group).
- Ethnic stratification, therefore functions as a secondary vertical overlay on the stratification of social classes.
- Whereas gender is a mediating dimension of the position in social structure, distinguishing class locations.
- For Bourdieu a class is defined by the place and value *it gives* to the two sexes and to their socially constituted dispositions (Bourdieu 1986:106)
- McCall asks, therefore, are not forms of gender forms of capital if they exist as indices of the class structure, as capital? For Bourdieu it is only masculinity.

# Misrecognition

- Bourdieu attempts to deal with this by suggesting that the 'secondary' criteria of gender within (not structuring) rather than vertical is 'hidden'.
- Although forms of capital correspond to occupational fields such as literary, scientific, managerial, they have gendered meanings because they are given form by gendered dispositions which are misrecognised.
- A tautology is apparent in Bourdieu: gender as a principle of division is secondary because it is hidden, and it is hidden because it appears to be universal and natural - secondary (McCall 1992: 844).
- For Bourdieu femininity is an embodied disposition, which becomes part of the habitus, through performativity, (see debate between Butler and Bourdieu in Shusterman, R.). It is continuously repeated and embodied; it fits, no space for disruption.

# Symbolic Loves: Dominance and Fate

- It is as a result of this symbolic violence (unequal hidden devaluation) that women misrecognise their domination, leading ‘the dominated to take the point of view of the dominant on the dominant and on themselves’ (p.42), in fact, he believes women do this to such an extent that they develop an extreme form of fatal love, a ‘*libido dominantis*’ (a desire for the dominant) (p.80 MD). (But note this has also been repeated in feminist work).
- For Bourdieu the symbolic universe is organised on the basis of the world’s division into two: those who have capital to place on the symbolic market and those who have only their labour power to reproduce; those whose necessity becomes identified with illusory games of free will; those whose freedom is reduced to internalising necessity as *amor fati*, love of fate. (Ranciere 2004:184 ‘*The Philosopher and the Poor*’).
- The powerless learn to love being powerless!!
- For women there is no space for any alternative ways of being, no re-signification, no re-valuation, no challenge, no change for gender; we trap ourselves and cannot see.

# Bourdieu: Habitus

- Very french: technologies always produce some form of self: see chapter on self).
- Habitus is both a model of disciplined bodies in which the habitus is the product of strategies objectively co-ordinated by mechanisms unknown to the individual.
- The habitus is an 'immanent law' laid down by each agent in their earliest upbringing (p.81), the internalisation of objective structures.
- It is based on embodied gender but also the future-projected, strategising, accruing, exchange-value self.
- Bourdieu argues that individuals are always placed in situations in which they will be uncertain of the outcomes, thereby they have to draw on strategies to operate in particular situations; these strategies are objectively co-ordinated without the individual's consciousness, enabling the analogical transfer of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems (PM).
- The habitus is 'a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions'

# Women as Bearers of Taste and Distinction

---

- In the process of objectification Bourdieu argues women are the predominant markers of taste. They are objectified!
- It is women's role to convert economic capital into symbolic capital for their families through the display of tastes.
- As Lovell (2000) points out, for Bourdieu women's status is as capital bearing objects, rather than as capital-accumulating subjects in social space.
- Women as bearers of taste enhance the symbolic capital held by men.
- Rarely having capital-accumulating strategies of their own; they are heterosexual, male-defined repositories. (This is most clearly shown in the diagram in *Distinctions* on 'the space of social positions', in which to include women would be to include them twice – back to the problem of gender as secondary).

# Critique: Is power misrecognised?

## Do women love domination?

- Feminist research suggests that continual assessment of women through their appearance and bodies makes them highly conscious of their gender and that they do not mis-recognise masculine power.
- Women are highly conscious not just of the 'construction' demands placed upon them, but the unfairness of the demands (hence feminism).
- The lack of challenge to gender relations is rarely libido dominatis but a problem of dispersal: Emily Martin charts the phenomenal range of gendered representations across science, media, education, family, would require the construction of powerful alternatives and access to sites of symbolic distribution, of which feminism is a start.



# Critique: Is power misrecognised?

## Do women love domination? continued...

- Martin argues that women internalise the operation of gender because gender is contradictory.
- Women learn how to operate across a range of sites in which the dispositions and positions are rarely in alignment. This does not produce a 'fit' by which the habitus adjusts to its field positions, because this *is* the 'fit'; a 'fit' of ambivalence, dispersal and contradiction, a multi-tasking, multi-occupying, multi-knowledge, consciousness, with little access to the structures of power to change.
- Post-colonial theorists on race have shown it is precisely ambivalence - always amenable to change and adaptability - which guarantees the survival of anything of a dispersed, repetitive and ambivalent nature (Bhabha 1994).



# Feminine Challenges

## (Formations of Class and Gender/Becoming Respectable)

- For the women of my research femininity was not pre-reflexive, unconscious, misrecognised or embedded as an exchange-value accumulating strategic interest-shaped habitus.
- Caring dispersed their investment in themselves.
- It was consciously performed, often grudgingly, sometimes with a lot of fun, and the dominant (masculinity) was rarely taken seriously.
- They did not fit the positions to which they were symbolically allocated; they dis-identified. They challenged their devaluation; they found a variety of ways to challenge masculine domination.

# And Sexuality...(Bourdieu 2001) Queers Reproduce Gender Divisions

- It is not the take up of norms rather the **inversion of norms** that is the product of feminist and queer struggles.
- As David (Halperin 2003) points out, lesbians and gay men have learnt, not to just to occupy positions of ambiguity but to also **deploy ambiguity** to resist the forces of power and violence by making oneself unrecognisable, difficult to read, or making oneself abject in a non-pathological way.
- Rather than taking on the view of the dominant, queers have been copiously involved in **reworking what it means to be dominated** and refusing the value that is attributed to domination:

e.g:

- Monica Wittig's (1992) philosophical **refusal as a lesbian to 'be a woman'**, or Biddy Martin's (1996) attention to **femininity played straight**, Ann Tyler's (1991) study of **passing and drag**, or Judith Halberstam (1998) critique of **female masculinity**.

# The Working-Class Habitus

- For Bourdieu, the working-class habitus is shaped by necessity and resignation, an adapted habitus (as in *Distinction or Weight of the World*).
- The working-class only enter a zero-sum game. A game Ranciere (1983) argues is a symbolic game reserved for the powerful a mere euphemising of domination.
- If the working-class are only ever known and evaluated through the dominant symbolic and read both through methodology and theory as trapped by their habitus – positions embodied as value-less dispositions, then how do we represent them with value?
- And how do those trapped within the negative symbolic ever forge value for themselves?
- Bourdieu's theory is performative of the power of the dominant? (*Weight of the World* contains no analysis: see fab McRobbie critique in Theory, Culture and Society).

# An Alternative Focus on Use-Value

- What happens if we shift our analysis from what Marilyn Strathern (1992, *After Nature*) identifies as a 'bourgeois perspective', and what Bourdieu paradoxically describes in *Homo Academicus*, from a perspective based on exchange-value and accrual (often reproduced as the 'commodity logic of things' e.g. Appadurai) to use-value (i.e. what people value beyond what they can commodify and exchange).
- Gayatri Spivak (1990) shows how use-value disrupts the chain of value connections, because it is beyond value, understood in traditional economic terms.
- Use-values can only be known when they are put to use, so they force a focus on the uses of culture, relations and practice.
- This means we can explore how something has different values in different relations, different contexts, enabling us to break through the dominant symbolic understandings premised on exchange.
- Spivak argues that value is a catachresis: contra to Marx, it has no literal origin or referent, because use-value will always exceed that which it claims to represent.

# Conclusion: Ambivalence and Value

- Bourdieu's analysis of the gendered and sexed habitus can only ever be reproductive because it is locked within that which produces it (a bourgeois perspective, a description of the workings of power). His own analysis is performative of the categories it seeks to critique. It euphemises domination.
- Those positioned as powerless do not often 'love' fate or domination; they spend an inordinate amount of energy in challenges.
- Power relations are rarely mis-recognised; dispersal, ambivalence, contradiction and lack of alternatives are more significant.
- Good on the workings of power for the interests of the powerful – shame about the rest.
- If only he had read the plentiful feminist/queer research, he would have understood that things are rarely the way they seem; those who are consistently symbolically devalued are always producing creative ways to challenge their evaluations or just getting on with life in a completely different way. Things and people do not fit.
- He needed a different perspective – a feminist one !