

FEMINISM AFTER BOURDIEU

Lisa Adkins and Beverley Skeggs

书馆

 **Blackwell**
Publishing

Feminism After Bourdieu

Edited by Lisa Adkins and Beverley Skeggs

Blackwell Publishing/The Sociological Review

© The Editorial Board of the Sociological Review 2004

Blackwell Publishing
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK

and

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5018, USA

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders. The authors apologise for any errors or omissions and would be grateful to be notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in the next edition or reprint of this volume.

First published 2004 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd

Transferred to digital print 2006

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data applied for

ISBN 1-4051-2395-8

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

The publisher's policy is to use permanent paper from mills that operate a sustainable forestry policy, and which has been manufactured from pulp processed using acid-free and elementary chlorine-free practices. Furthermore, the publisher ensures that the text paper and cover board used have met acceptable environmental accreditation standards.

For further information on Blackwell Publishing, visit our website:
<http://www.blackwellpublishing.com>

Feminism After Bourdieu

A selection of previous *Sociological Review* Monographs

The Sociology of Death: theory, culture, practice*

ed. David Clark

The Cultures of Computing

ed. Susan Leigh Star

Theorizing Museums*

ed. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe

Consumption Matters*

eds Stephen Edgell, Kevin Hetherington and Alan Warde

Ideas of Difference*

eds Kevin Hetherington and Rolland Munro

The Laws of the Markets*

ed. Michael Callon

Actor Network Theory and After*

eds John Law and John Hassard

Whose Europe? The turn towards democracy*

eds Dennis Smith and Sue Wright

Renewing Class Analysis*

eds Rosemary Crompton, Fiona Devine, Mike Savage and John Scott

Reading Bourdieu on Society and Culture*

ed. Bridget Fowler

The Consumption of Mass*

ed. Nick Lee and Rolland Munro

The Age of Anxiety: Conspiracy Theory and the Human Sciences*

eds Jane Parish and Martin Parker

Utopia and Organization*

ed. Martin Parker

Emotions and Sociology*

ed. Jack Barbalet

Masculinity and Men's Lifestyle Magazines

ed. Bethan Benwell

Nature Performed: Environment, Culture and Performance

eds Bronislaw Szerszynski, Wallace Heim and Claire Waterton

After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere

eds Nick Crossley and John Michael Roberts

*Available from Marston Book Services, PO Box 270, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4YW.

The Sociological Review Monographs

Since 1958 *The Sociological Review* has established a tradition of publishing Monographs on issues of general sociological interest. The Monograph is an edited book length collection of research papers which is published and distributed in association with Blackwell Publishing. We are keen to receive innovative collections of work in sociology and related disciplines with a particular emphasis on exploring empirical materials and theoretical frameworks which are currently under-developed. If you wish to discuss ideas for a Monograph then please contact the Monographs Editor, Rolland Munro, at *The Sociological Review*, Keele University, Newcastle-under-Lyme, North Staffordshire, ST5 5BG.

Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
Introduction, Context and Background	1
Introduction: Feminism, Bourdieu and after <i>Lisa Adkins</i>	3
Context and Background: Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of class, gender and sexuality <i>Beverley Skeggs</i>	19
Section I: Rethinking class and gender	35
Bourdieu, class and gender: 'The return of the living dead?' <i>Terry Lovell</i>	37
Gendering Bourdieu's concept of capitals? Emotional capital, women and social class <i>Diane Reay</i>	57
Exchange, value and affect: Bourdieu and 'the self' <i>Beverley Skeggs</i>	75
Section II: Symbolic violence and the cultural field	97
Notes on 'What Not To Wear' and post-feminist symbolic violence <i>Angela McRobbie</i>	99
Rules of engagement: Habitus, power and resistance <i>Steph Lawler</i>	110
Habitus and social suffering: Culture, addiction and the syringe <i>Nicole Vitellone</i>	129
Mapping the obituary: Notes towards a Bourdieusian interpretation <i>Bridget Fowler</i>	148
Section III: Retheorizing the habitus	173
Agency and experience: gender as a lived relation <i>Lois McNay</i>	175

Reflexivity: Freedom or habit of gender?	191
<i>Lisa Adkins</i>	
Anamnesis and amnesia in Bourdieu's work: The case for a feminist anamnesis	211
<i>Anne Witz</i>	
Shame in the habitus	224
<i>Elspeth Probyn</i>	
Contributors	249
Index	253

Introduction, Context and Background

Introduction: Feminism, Bourdieu and after

Lisa Adkins

Introduction: feminism and contemporary social theory

How might Bourdieu's social philosophy and social theory be of use to feminism? And how might it relate to – or possibly even fruitfully reframe – the ongoing problematics and current theoretical issues of feminism? It is very well recognized that Bourdieu's social theory had relatively little to say about women or gender (although see Bourdieu, 2001) with most of his writings framed pre-eminently in terms of issues of class (Moi, 1991). Yet the premise of this volume is that this substantive omission should not be taken to mean that Bourdieu's theoretical apparatus does not necessarily have relevance for feminism. Other key contemporary social theorists such as Foucault and Habermas have also – substantively speaking – had little to say about women and gender or indeed feminism but this, of course, has not stopped feminists deploying, rethinking and critically developing the theoretical resources offered by these theorists to produce some of the most influential, compelling and productive forms of contemporary feminist theorizing (see eg Butler, 1993; Fraser, 1997). In this volume contributors will use, critique, critically extend and develop Bourdieu's social theory to address some of the most pressing issues of our times. And in so doing they will address both ongoing and key contemporary problematics in contemporary feminist theory. These include the problematic of theorizing social agency (and especially the problematic of social versus performative agency); the issue of the relationship of social movements (and especially women's movements) to social change; the politics of cultural authorization; the theorization of technological forms of embodiment (that is the theorization of embodiment post bounded conceptions of the body); the relations of affect to the political; and the articulation of principles of what might be termed a new feminist materialism which goes beyond Bourdieu's own social logics.

In critically extending Bourdieu's social theory to illuminate contemporary socio-cultural issues, the contributors in this volume therefore attest to the powerful tools that Bourdieu's social theory may offer contemporary feminist theory, tools which are increasingly recognized by feminists working across both the humanities and social science disciplines (see eg Butler, 1997, 1999; Fowler, 2003; Krais, 1993; Lawler, 2000; Lovell, 2000, 2003; McNay, 1999, 2000; Moi,

1991; Reay, 1998; Skeggs, 1997; Woolf, 1999). These tools are legion, from a theory of modernity drawing on a heady mixture of phenomenology and elements of Marxism – or as it is sometimes termed Bourdieu's constructivist structuralism (Fowler, 2000) – through the drawing together of both cultural and economic space, to the centrality given to embodiment in his non-idealist theory of practice. And it is these tools that contributors to this volume have mobilized to produce both compelling analyses of contemporary issues and new directions in feminist theory.

Yet while this is so, it is worth reflecting on just how and why the contributors to this volume have found Bourdieu's contemporary social theory such a productive ground for feminist analyses, that is, on how and why the contributors to this volume have found a social theorist who had little interest in gender or feminism a central tool for feminist theory. In this context it worth pointing out, as Gerhard (2004) has argued, that *classical* social theory had an 'elective affinity' with both feminism and feminist issues whereby the object of social theory – the social – was in part conceived and defined by questions of gender (see also Evans, 2003; Felski, 1995).¹ In contemporary social theory, however, 'theories of gender difference play no role' (Gerhard, 2004:129). And this is the case from Luhmann's system theory, through Habermas's critical theory, to Foucault's genealogies of power/knowledge. Such contemporary social theory is also marked, Gerhard argues, by a general tendency towards a lack of appreciation of feminist theory.

In his general lack of attention to gender problematics and to feminist theory Bourdieu must therefore be located as typical of his contemporaries. But while the disavowal of feminist theory on the part of Bourdieu is to be lamented, nonetheless on the evidence of this volume, and perhaps counter intuitively, an understanding of the social which is not conceived with reference to a gender difference defined in the registers of social theorizing should not necessarily be read as limiting the possibilities of a dynamic engagement between contemporary feminist and social theory (although see Witz, this volume). Indeed, given the weight of critiques that the (sociological) concept of gender now carries, especially the problems that contemporary feminists have identified as inhering in the concept (see eg Barrett, 1992; Gatens, 1995; Grosz, 1990; Haraway, 1991), and how feminism itself no longer posits the sex/gender distinction as one of its key objects,² a social theory which does not place the concept of gender as central to its vision of the social – and particularly one which has at its core a critique of idealist thinking – precisely opens itself out to contemporary feminism.

What is important here, and as is very widely recognised, is that while social theory was once a rich resource for feminist theory, the past two decades or more have seen feminists generally disengage with social theory and move towards various forms of cultural theory. And this move was made precisely because of the exposure of the limits of sociological concepts such as gender or social structure for feminist analysis (Barrett, 1992). In their engagement with Bourdieu's contemporary social theory, the chapters in this volume are therefore suggestive

of the emergence of a renewed relationship between feminist and social theory. This however is a relationship which does not cohere around a single concept, nor is it one of an elective affinity vis-à-vis the social and gender, but a relationship which is far more dispersed. Thus it is notable that very few of the chapters in this volume are centrally concerned with a sociologically defined gender. Instead they have a range of diverse concerns as their central foci, ranging from embodiment, through temporality, to symbolic violence. These concerns have emerged as central to feminist inquiry post sociological gender, and it is around these concerns where Bourdieu has purchase for feminist theory. In the theorization of social action as always embodied (of the social as incorporated into the body), of power as subtly inculcated through the body, of social action as generative, and in his emphasis on the politics of cultural authorization, recognition and social position taking, Bourdieu's social theory offers numerous points of connection to contemporary feminist theory.

These connections are increasingly being recognised by contemporary feminists. Thus, and to name some well-known examples, Judith Butler (1997, 1999) has elaborated the relations between performative utterances and Bourdieu's understanding of social position taking and social space; Moi (1991, 1999) and Woolf (1999) have mobilized the resources of Bourdieu to think through the gendered dynamics of the field of cultural production; Lovell (2000) has made use of Bourdieu's social theory to rethink some of the key objects of feminism; McNay (2000) has drawn on Bourdieu's emphasis on practical action to retheorize agency for feminist theory and Skeggs (1997) and Lawler (1999, 2000) have made use of Bourdieu's concept of capitals to theorize classed femininity and motherhood respectively. Such writers have opened up a space between feminist theory and Bourdieu's social theory which this volume both contributes towards and further articulates. In so doing it marks, as I have already alluded to, a renewed synergy between feminist and social theories. But while, as I have suggested, this synergy cannot be conceived as an affinity regarding gender and the social (as Gerhard has identified to be operative for classical social theory) neither is it a synergy which can simply be characterized as a 'return to' an already known social on the part of feminists. For this is a turn to the social post critiques of the concept of gender; of social structure; of the bounded human subject; and of the dualisms of mind and body, nature and culture, subject and object. In short, this volume is not simply an engagement with, extension, or further elaboration of the work of Bourdieu, for the various contributors are reworking and redefining the contours of the social as a new ground for feminist theory.

Appropriating Bourdieu?

This reworking has taken place along a number of axes but what has characterized the contributions to this volume still further is a refusal simply to place the historical objects of feminism within a Bourdieusian frame. Thus the con-

tributors have not asked whether gender, sexual difference, sexuality or the sexed body constitute a field, or whether or not gender has a discernable habitus, or whether or not masculinity and femininity can be conceived as different forms of capital. They have not sought therefore simply to modify Bourdieu's social theory to accommodate the objects of feminism or literally to ask if the objects of feminism translate into Bourdieu's theoretical world. Considering the possibilities (and limits) of appropriating Bourdieu's social theory for feminist purposes, and in her seminal *New Literary History* essay of nearly fifteen years ago, Moi (1991, 1999) explicitly warned against this starting point. Focusing on the object of gender and especially the question of whether or not gender can be understood as a (Bourdieuian defined) field of action, Moi argued that rather than a specific, autonomous field, gender is far better conceptualized as *part of* a field. This field is not one of Bourdieu's autonomous fields (such as the legal or educational field) but is Bourdieu's general social field. Gender is best conceptualized in this way, Moi argued, since gender is extraordinarily relational, with a chameleon-like flexibility, shifting in importance, value and effects from context to context or from field to field. Thus, much as Bourdieu himself defined social class as structuring social fields, Moi suggested that gender should also be understood in these terms, that is as dispersed across the social field and deeply structuring of the general social field. Such a conceptualization leads to an understanding of gender not as an autonomous system but as a 'particularly combinatory social category, one that infiltrates and influences every other category' (Moi 1999:288).

It is this kind of critical interrogation of Bourdieu's social theory of the sort performed by Moi which characterizes the contributions to this volume. Indeed, and echoing the concerns of Moi, the continuing need to destabilize the assumption that gender is associated with particular social fields or sites within both general and Bourdieusian inspired social theory has been further underscored in this volume. In my own contribution, for example, I explore the problems inhering in the assumption that femininity has a 'home' – the domestic sphere – and that current social change vis-à-vis gender concerns a movement of femininity from the domestic to the economic field. I suggest that working with this assumption can cause all sorts of problems, not the least of which is a tendency towards an idealized (and liberal) account of progress through time vis-à-vis gender relations. And in Terry Lovell's contribution, following Moi's Bourdieusian feminist work (and echoing McCall 1992), Lovell asks 'does gender fit' Bourdieu's social field? This leads Lovell directly into the thorny and disputed territory of the relations between class and gender, but in novel re-thinking of these relations, Lovell draws attention to the relations between feminism as a social movement and to Bourdieu's understanding of class formation.

Specifically, Lovell proposes that 'women' might be considered as a 'social group'. While, historically speaking, within feminism questions of this character have generally been framed by discussions of the axes of commonality and difference, the universal and the particular, Lovell reframes this issue by drawing

upon Bourdieu's ideas regarding class formation and especially his view that social classes and groupings are constructed through successful bids for cultural and political authorization and recognition. Lovell suggests further vis-à-vis women that a process of group formation has occurred whenever women's movements as social and political movements have arisen. In short, her claim is that women's movements do the work of creating recognized representatives who in turn create a system of recognition and authorization, which allows 'women' as a group to come into being. In this formulation 'women' do not (and cannot) exist as a class 'in itself' (as has so often been posited within certain modes of feminist theorizing) but will only become a practical group through a process of authorization. 'Women' in other words *become* a socio-political category. What is so interesting about this formulation for feminism is that, rather than an external 'out there' phenomenon which is left more or less unaccounted for, Lovell's analysis brings feminism as a political movement right into the heart of feminist social theory. In so doing Lovell practises the art of Bourdieu's reflexive sociology. She is aware, like Bourdieu, that there is no point outside of a system from which an emancipatory politics or social movement can simply emerge, and that all social movements attempt strategies of authorization. Lovell herself recognizes that acknowledging feminist social movements as an actor in a field in this way may raise some uneasy questions for feminists but, nonetheless, this is a move which must be made if contemporary social phenomena are to be addressed; not least in the form of increasing class inequalities between women.

Symbolic violence and social change

The issue of increasing class inequalities between women is a major if not central point of concern in a number of chapters in this volume, including not only Lovell's, but also Stephanie Lawler's, Angela McRobbie's and Diane Reay's. Drawing on Bourdieu's understanding of symbolic power or symbolic violence as a key vehicle for the social reproduction of classed divisions, McRobbie suggests that the large scale movement of women into the labour market, the detachment of women from traditional family roles, and subsequent female individualization, has heralded new forms of class distinction and classification. More specifically, McRobbie holds that the (post-feminist) production and reproduction of social divisions is now increasingly *feminized*. Thus McRobbie notes how in the British context classed forms of social categorization are now inseparable from the female body. Moreover, these new forms of classification are increasing (and autonomously) circulated by and through the mass media, or as Bourdieu might have it, through the cultural and media field. McRobbie's chapter therefore underscores two crucial points for contemporary feminist social and cultural theory. First, it highlights the widening of class divisions between women (and the increasing articulation of class divisions *through* the bodies of women, that is the increasing feminization of class divisions), and

second (and also in line with the arguments put forward by Lawler in her chapter) it underscores the increasing significance of the media field for these new forms of classification. Thus and in line with other recent commentators sympathetic to Bourdieu's social theory, McRobbie's chapter suggests that the media field is one of the most powerful and important in the contemporary world (Lash, 1995).

The significance of the media for new forms of social classification is also at issue in the chapter presented by Nicole Vitellone. Analysing recent child poverty campaigns in Britain, the crack-baby crisis in the US and recent British social realist films focusing on the use of heroin, Vitellone shows how these texts figure poverty in new ways, and in particular how they move away from what might be thought of as a sociological explanation of poverty (where for instance, economic exclusion is understood to lead to or cause poverty) to a model of poverty which centres on embodiment, where the embodiment of pharmacological substances produces notions of social suffering as well as forming the basis of new systems of social classification particularly as they relate to the problematic use of the category of the 'underclass'. In so doing Vitellone suggests that the now relatively established social science tool for understanding social suffering – the ethnography – is unable to address the ways in which the cultural field is now central to the articulation of poverty. Vitellone therefore adds fuel to McRobbie's (2002) critique of the Bourdieusian methodology employed in the *Weight of the World* (Bourdieu *et al*, 1999), namely that it remains untouched by the insights of Cultural Studies. But Vitellone takes her critique further to argue that her analysis of the embodiment of pharmacological substances has implications for the notion of the habitus. First, she argues that Bourdieu's habitus excludes the matter of substances and must be extended if the concept is to have any purchase for the contemporary world. Second, Vitellone questions universalistic notions of the future orientation of the habitus – for as she shows, the pharmacological habitus has a temporality which breaks with such a future orientation, involving a *suspension* of time. Finally and crucially, Vitellone demonstrates how Bourdieu's habitus is increasingly the subject of cultural production. She thus confirms Lash's (1995) claim that the real world increasingly resembles Bourdieu's theoretical world – particularly in the field of cultural production.

The importance of the cultural field for feminist social theorizing is also underscored by Bridget Fowler in her chapter on the obituary as a form of collective memory. In her historical account of the obituary Fowler documents a shift in biographies away from criteria of blood towards criteria of occupations defined and dominated by cultural capital. While Fowler notes that a common reading of this shift is one of a narrative of change through time or of an unfolding democratization of the obituary, this she argues is a selective reading which will ignore how the obituary involves a continuing *reproduction* of the class order through specific narrative strategies. Fowler writes of the how the modern meritocratic obituary is typically marked by its reliance on notions of a transformative future orientated agency, a form of agency which the modern obituary

genre so often denies to women. This leads Fowler to reflect on the issue of cultural survival and in particular on the issue of literary survival value for women. Here Fowler wants to rethink agency outside of the registers of the obituary. Drawing on the work of Ricoeur (see also McNay, 2000 and Lawler, 2002), and in a parallel move to that made by Vitellone, in her chapter, Fowler argues for a notion of agency in which the future does not simply unfold as part of the logic of the habitus (as it does, for example, in Bourdieu's *State Nobility*, 1996) but one which may be typified by *suspensions of effort*, a temporality which Fowler claims typifies women's engagement in the work of cultural production. Such an understanding of agency will not only break with the illusive of cultural work as a heroic life or death struggle, but also with notions of transformative agency on which the modern obituary typically draws. Indeed this temporal horizon may durably transform the habitus of cultural production.

Yet while this may be so, Fowler's chapter as well as McRobbie's raise a perennial question in regard to the social theory of Bourdieu, namely that of social change (Calhoun, 1995; Fowler, 2000). For while Fowler's and McRobbie's accounts are most definitely Bourdieusian, at their heart is a narrative of social change, namely an account of women's (or at least some women's) increasing individualization (see also McNay, 1999). But, as is well documented, Bourdieu's social theory has consistently been reproached for its lack of attention to social change, that is, for its overwhelming focus on social reproduction. In a twist to this storyline, neither McRobbie's nor Fowler's accounts seek to rectify this problem via a focus on change through resistance, as is so commonplace within sociological discourse, but *both locate change in regard to a shift in the conditions of social reproduction itself*. In Fowler's case this is a shift in narrative strategies, while in McRobbie's it concerns the reproduction of classed distinctions through the bodies of women. Both of these chapters, therefore, refuse an easy story line of women's resistance to gender norms, and refuse to see individualization as a release from such norms. Instead, both understand how individualization may bring new social divisions into being (see Adkins, 2002).

In my own chapter, too, I problematize accounts which will see the decomposition of the norms, traditions and expectations associated with modernity as a simple freedom or release from gender. Here I take issue with an increasingly mobilized Bourdieusian inspired account regarding gender transformation. Very briefly put, this argument runs as follows: that the large-scale movement of women into the labour market (or a feminization of public spheres of action) involves a clash of habitus and field, which leads to a critical reflexivity on the part of men and women vis-à-vis gender norms and to a detraditionalization of those norms. What I find problematic about this account is that while in late modern societies gender may certainly be said to be characterized by reflexivity, this reflexivity concerns not a freedom from gender but is actively reworking the social categories of gender – a reworking which has significant implications for the very spheres in which women are now so often heralded to be free, especially the economic field. But I take this further to ask why is it that there is an elision of reflexivity and freedom within the contemporary theoretical imaginary even

for those who work with and through Bourdieu – a social theorist who after all was so keen to undo the determinism/freedom binary. I locate this problem in Bourdieu's writings on social change. Here Bourdieu will always break with his main theoretical principles and will see the possibilities for social change when a conscious or thinking mastery of the principles of the habitus can be gained.

Working both with and against the social theory of Bourdieu (Lovell, 2000), the chapters in this volume therefore offer up important challenges to current tendencies within social and cultural theorizing with their analyses clearly warning against idealized readings of the processes and dynamics which are so often cited as driving the contemporary world. They also work towards suggesting a research agenda for feminism or, as McRobbie might put it, a research agenda post-feminism. Specifically, they place the issues of social change, of social reproduction and the rethinking of classificatory systems as central to the concerns of contemporary feminism. If these issues sound familiar, it is worth underlining that they have not been framed in terms of the traditional registers of sociology and/or social theory, for instance, of social reproduction as an issue of the reproduction of labour power or the recursive reproduction of social structures; of social change as an outcome of resistance to traditions and norms; or of social hierarchy as the outcome of the exploitation of labour power. Instead the very terms and contours of these processes have emerged as fundamentally transformed, with for example, social reproduction understood as centrally concerned with shifting forms of (increasingly media mediated) female embodiment, social change as concerning these very shifting conditions of social reproduction, and processes of individualization as involving complex new modes of gendered and classed differentiation and division.

Reconceptualizing identity

Further lines of research potentials have been drawn in this volume via critical engagements with the emphasis in Bourdieu's theorizing on the subject as always a subject of praxis or the subject of practical reason. Drawing on and extending the phenomenological tradition (especially the work of Merleau-Ponty), Bourdieu will always see the subject as engaged in practical action, action which is always embodied and which (for the most part) is not necessarily consciously known. The consequence of this understanding is that the social will always be understood not as an external law, set of rules or representations which the subject will somehow blindly follow, learn or incorporate since, and as Lawler puts it in her contribution, the social will always be literally incorporated in the subject. This notion of the subject as not simply engaged with the world, but *in* the world is one which has great appeal to feminists. It breaks for example with idealist tendencies found in certain forms of feminist structuralist thinking, where gender or sexual difference always tend to end up being a product of the mind or of consciousness, for instance as a product of ideology or a loosely conceived 'discourse'. It thus breaks with the Cartesian traditions of social