

OUTLOOK

THE SOCIOLOGIST AND THE PARADIGM-ALCHEMY – On Pierre Bourdieu’s *Masculine Domination* –

Miklós HADAS

Center for Gender and Culture, Budapest University of Economic Sciences and Public Administration
Budapest, Fővám tér 8. H-1093; e-mail: miklos.hadas@bkae.hu

When the reader takes the English version of Pierre Bourdieu’s book in hand (Bourdieu 2001), he will probably be unaware that the *Masculine Domination* had an earlier variant (Bourdieu 1990) published by the author as an article in the periodical he founded and headed. Besides, the present author made an interview with Bourdieu in 1993 about his article of 1990, which was not available in English till now. The reviewer thus has the exceptional chance to steal a glimpse of the creative workshop and study in vivo the working of the sociological paradigm-alchemy by comparing the study of 1990 and the book of 1998 (in the context of the interview made in 1993).

The main thesis of the study of 1990 was that masculine domination – actually the model of all kinds of domination – was a social institution deeply inculcated in the objective social and subjective mental structures over the millennia, practically existing by the same laws in the archaic Kabil society of the Mediterranean region as in London’s Bloomsbury district in the early 20th century, in Virginia Woolf’s circle, or in Western Europe at the end of the millennium. The basis for its emergence is the *libido dominandi* or the instinctive desire after domination, a sort of sense of duty based on an inner drive that a man “owes himself”, acquired unconsciously in the course of socialization. This drive, or *illusio dominandi*, is constitutive of masculinity, and causes men to be socially instituted to let themselves be caught up, like children, in all the games of domination that are socially assigned to them, of which the form par excellence is war. At the same time, men also become victims – victims of their own illusion.

In this sexually determined, “sexualized and sexualizing” social order of labor division, men are active mainly in the public spheres, while women in the non-public, private spheres not oriented towards profit or power and mostly requiring unlimited time input. The latter are virtual goods of exchange in the games of men based on valor and dignity, serving in this capacity the reproduction of the men’s *symbolic capital*. Women, argues the author, are disposed to generate liking, hence it is no wonder they spend a considerable part of their time with cosmetic work. They are mainly in charge of the ceremonies (also) organized by aesthetic rules (family and firm feasts, literary salons, receptions), so they may fill important positions in the cultural sphere

specialized for the production and consumption of differentiating signs. Besides, borrowing the nice metaphor of Virginia Woolf, they act as *flattering mirrors* in which men can view their enlarged images. Ultimately, then, all women do enrich the wealth of men who possess them. At the same time, they have the perspicacity of the outsiders, so they can view the “most serious” games of men “with amused indulgence”.

In his analysis, Bourdieu ascribes salient significance to habitus, i.e. behavioral patterns fixed in durable dispositions, which govern human praxis at the unconscious level; being perceptible, these manifestations are liable to social classification and differentiation. In his study, he goes as far as writing about “the somatisation of power relations”. He formulates one of the basic tenets of feminist thinkers in a polarized manner: the socially constructed biological body is at the same time politicized body, or even, “embodied politics”. Among other things, he refers to elementary school education which incorporates in the dispositions of growing generations a multitude of sexually differentiated ethical, political, or even cosmological elements – e.g. teaching pupils how to hold the (masculine) right hand, how to walk, look into someone’s eyes, dress, etc.

He supports his argumentation from two angles. On the one hand, with the description of the material and symbolic universe – i.e. everyday practice and cosmological system – of the Kabil society structured by genders. He shows that all activities connected to the concepts of “internal”, “damp”, “low” and “crooked” (not only child-rearing but such dirty chores as mucking out the stable) are performed by women, as compared to the “external”, “official”, “straight”, “dry”, “tall” etc. activities of men. Convincing argumentation can be read about the manifestation of the major cultural oppositions in the division of the body (high/low, up/down): pure vs. impure, public vs. private, legitimate vs. illegitimate. (Typically enough, as the author points out, the sexual intercourse itself is deemed “normal” and “classical” in the position in which man is above, and all different positions are condemned as perverted and often penalised by sanctions.)

The other reference in support of the author’s reasoning is Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, the protagonist of which, *Mr Ramsey* is an excellent basis of reference for the illustration of modern-time male dispositions based on libido dominandi. An early 20th-century academic intellectual, Mr. Ramsey is a man “every of whose words are verdicts”, all whose predictions “are self-fulfilling, they make themselves true”, and whose “paternal prophecy is both a forecast of science and a prediction of wisdom, which sends the future into the past”. He is the man who experiences the fantasies of the *libido academica* which express themselves in warlike games: “Yet he would not die *lying down*; he would find some crag of rock, and there, his *eyes fixed* on the storm ... he would *die standing*” (Woolf is quoted by Bourdieu – Bourdieu’s italics).

The above theses are repeated almost unchanged in the book of 1998: there is no substantial difference between the two texts as to the main message, the set of concepts and the references used as an empirical basis.¹ The question arises, then, why Bourdieu

¹ It is then the more surprising that there is no reference in the French edition to the author’s article under the same title published in 1990. The English version is somewhat more correct as in the first sentence of the preface Bourdieu notes that he dealt with the subject earlier, too. True, no bibliographical reference is given.

deemed it important to publish the study enlarged to nearly double the size eight years later.

At first sight one may explain this move by his dissatisfaction with the formal structure of the first text. As a *normalien*, or one-time student of a *Grande École* of the French social scientific elite of greatest prestige, the *École Normale Supérieure* founded by Napoleon, he would have been heir to a philosophical tradition which ascribes at least as much significance to the “form” as to the “contents”. On the one hand, that means that ideas should be put forth with the elegance of the continuous resolution of (seeming) paradoxes arising from binary oppositions. Needless to say: this obligation is satisfied with self-evident ease in the author’s first text variant, too – as in nearly all his works.

On the other hand, as to the building of the formal structure, there are, however, considerable *aesthetic differences* between the two versions, to the benefit of the latter. As against the article divided into seven chapters of varying length and more or less ad hoc titles,² the book appears to comply more thoroughly with the formal requirements of the scholastic traditions: it is divided into three parts, the first containing five, the last four (?),³ the middle chapter three sections, and the whole being framed by a preamble and a conclusion.⁴ Thus, a quasi symmetry is created, which is at the same time put in parentheses via a subtle structural dissonance, in order to avoid the appearance of orthodox conservatism. The *post-scriptum* may belong to the third part – extending it to five sections – or may not. It also depends on the vantage point whether the appendix is taken for an essential (sub)chapter upsetting the formal balance, or for a structural unit of secondary importance compared to the primary argumentation. At any rate, the fact that the author attached this section after his final conclusion appears to suggest that his thoughts about the gay and lesbian movement are beyond his central concern.

In this rhetoric tradition, the questions of “form” assume the weight of “content” owing to the complex play of ambiguous subtle distinctions. The techniques creating the ambivalence of simultaneously being outside and inside are essential constituents of this type of *libido academica*. It was presumably the driving force of this disposition that also stimulated the author to make a more perfect new version of his former article. But however important the requirements of a rhetoric tradition may be, they are certainly insufficient to prompt a new text variant. That needs other things, too. Such as – to mention another important factor that has great significance in the French intellectual context with a penchant for subtle distinctions – the altered *reference horizon* that is deemed important for the argumentation. Taking a close look at the sources and references used by Bourdieu in the two texts, we will find considerable divergences.

2 *Symbolic rape: physical compulsion; somatisation of power relations; social construction of sexuality; social genesis of illusion and libido dominandi; clearsightedness of the outsiders; women as objects of exchange; the institutional libido.*

3 Seemingly a trivial matter, it is also important: in the contents of the French edition, the post-scriptum was printed as if it were the last chapter of the third part. By contrast, the contents of the English version only include the three main parts – quite inexplicably – without the subchapters. The lucidity of the argumentation is gravely marred thereby.

4 In the English version the Latin references are lost. The “preamble” is rendered as “prelude”, the “post-scriptum” as “postscript”, the latter omitted from the contents; hence the discussion about love is “hidden” in the English edition.

What first strikes the eye is the conspicuously high number of self-citations (eight in the article and fourteen in the book). The most frequently cited work is *Le sens pratique* (*The Logic of Practice*) mentioned ten times in the essay and eleven times in the book. There are another two books (*La Distinction* 1979, *Ce que parler veut dire*, 1982) referred to several times in both the book and the article.⁵ The other four self-references of the article are not included in the book.⁶ By contrast, there are six references in the book to pre-1990 writings that are not named in the essay.⁷ In addition, he deems five post-1990 works worth mentioning.⁸ All in all, there are *seventeen* references in the essay and *twenty-seven* references in the book to his own works. Probably the structure of mythic order of the elements constituting his own symbolical history changed over the times, which he subtly but for insiders perceptibly revealed.

As for references to others, it may be striking that in both variants there are relatively rare and few citations of other authors. Still, there are far more references in the book, so it is clear – especially in the light of what was said above about the formal structure – that the enlarged version satisfies more completely the requirements of scholarship. The top list of authors in the book (after twenty-seven self-citations) is led by *Foucault* and *Sartre* with four mentions, respectively.⁹ Foucault's importance had grown with the passing of the time (from one reference in the article); although in most cases his name appears in a polemic context, the fact that he finds him (of all people) worth arguing with is remarkable.

Opposite is the case with Sartre. In the article there is a lengthy, though small-typed, passage about how the philosopher's private imagination laden with fears of castration, conceiving of the sex act via the metaphor of "a wasp drowned in jam", becomes a "fundamental philosophical intuition" – a kind of intuition that discusses with self-evident ease the "honey-sweet death of the *für-sich*" etc. (Bourdieu 1990: 15). As a sign of considerable self-restraint, Bourdieu omitted this passage from his book, though he could not help passing a slightly denunciatory reference to Sartre, which for lack of a concrete example is not quite understandable.¹⁰

5 The index of the French edition does not contain the *Bourdieu* name, so the self-citations can only be gleaned from the text one by one. The English version is more correct, including the Bourdieu-item in the index. It is not clear, however, why only eight of his works are named as references, and the number of an item's occurrence is also lower than actually. For example, out of the 14 references to *The Logic of Practice*, a mere four are noted in the English edition.

6 *Le nord et le midi*; *L'ontologie politique de Martin Heidegger*, *La noblesse d'état* and *Le patronat*. The omission of self-reference concerning the latter two books is probably connected to the fact that in the meantime Monique de Saint Martin, the co-author of the two books, broke up the collaboration with Bourdieu.

7 *Célibat et condition paysanne* (1962), *Travail et travailleur en Algérie* (1963); *Algérie 60* (1977); *Sur le pouvoir symbolique* (1977); *Homo academicus* (1984); *Choses dites* (1987).

8 *Les règles de l'art* (1992); *La misère du monde* (1993); *Le corps et le sacré* (1994); *Apologie pour une femme rangée* (1995); *Méditations pascaliennes* (1997).

9 A work by Chodorow and another one by MacKinnon is also referred to three times.

10 „The most alert of analysts (Kant, Sartre, Freud, even Lacan...) is liable to draw unwittingly on an unthought unconscious for the instruments of thought that he uses in order to think the unconscious.” (2001: 113–114) By the way, the names mentioned in this phrase are failed to be taken into account in the index of the English-language edition.

In the article of 1990 he makes a reference to some thirty authors, usually one (rarely two-three) time. They include those often cited in other Bourdieu works (Bergson, Goffmann, Kant, Husserl, Kafka, Lévi-Strauss, Van Gennepe, Freud, Lacan) and some less known, mainly French researchers not connected to feminism. In a footnote, he refers to the “feminist discourse stranded frequently in essentialism” (Bourdieu 1990: 4), naming Féral, Irigaray and Kristeva. Far more authors are cited in the book, usually also only once. From these references, however, not only Féral, Irigaray and Kristeva, but other key authors of the gender issue are also missing – although he refers to post-1990 works at least thirty times. Among the important authors, Judith Butler is mentioned, but – not really correctly – the citation from her is used in support of Bourdieu’s argument.¹¹

Obviously, there are differences in contents between the two texts. In the *post-scriptum*, speaking about domination and love – Bourdieu states that in border cases there might be exceptions to the general rule of masculine domination. Such a border case is “the enchanted island of love, a closed and perfectly autarkic world which is the site of a continuous series of miracles, can be snatched from the icy waters of calculation, violence and self-interest” (Bourdieu 2001: 110). The thesis is somewhat surprising as nothing would have been easier than conferring the validity of the law to this area as well.¹² In the appendix dealing with the gay and lesbian movement he raises the following questions: “How can one stand up to a hypocritical universalism without universalising a particularism? (...) How can one prevent the conquests of the movement from ending up as a form of ghettoisation?” (Bourdieu 2001: 123) Undoubtedly, the fact that he formulates the problems connected to the gay and lesbian movement in the form of questions suggests some relaxation of his rigid position represented by the article of 1990.¹³

In sum: Bourdieu does not modify his position about the universality of masculine domination in his book. On the contrary: he becomes even more radical! This

11 “Judith Butler herself seems to reject the “voluntaristic” view of gender she seemed to put forward in *Gender Trouble*, when she writes: “The misapprehension about gender performativity is this: that gender is a choice, or that gender is a role, or that gender is a construction that one puts on, as one puts clothes on in the morning” (Butler 1990: 103). With a classic trick, Bourdieu merely forgets to note that in this passage Butler worded the critique of the extreme interpretations of the *Gender Trouble*. It is then far from discarding her previous theory, as Bourdieu claims.

12 The more so, as in 1993, when I made the interview with him (see attached), he declared: “I’ve long been saying and I tried to prove when I studied the peasants of Béarn, that we live in a social order that inculcates in us dispositions for love, even *fatal love*. (...) I firmly contend that in this area the overwhelming majority of people are far more thoroughly determined by their socialisation than is presumed. Crude, beastly, purely biological desire does not exist: social conditions always powerfully influence the biological libido. What is more, I may even say that it is astonishing for a sociologist to what a great extent desire is the outcome of socialisation. It always surprised me that in our societies, in which marriage no longer depends on family decision but is determined by the conditions of the free marital market, the rate of marriages between people of equal social status is so high. Most interestingly, the more subtle and detailed the analyses are, the more conclusively this phenomenon is revealed.”

13 In the latter he writes: “Women’s studies, black studies, gay studies (...), by turning a social problem raised by a dominated group into a sociological problem without any special procedure, ignore everything that constitutes the reality of the topic while they exchange the social relation of domination with a substantial entity, with an essence, thought in itself and for itself, with an idea of a complementary entity (as happened in the case of men’s studies, too).” (Bourdieu 1990: 30)

statement can best be verified by an examination of the only new chapter fitted in the book (and not the appendix or post-scriptum): *Permanence and change*. Setting “the historical labour of dehistoricisation”, Bourdieu defines here the study of social institutions (church, state, school, family) sustaining continuity as the primary task of the approach to “the history of women”. He declares that “the major change has doubtless been that masculine domination no longer imposes itself with the transparency of something taken for granted. Thanks, in particular, to the immense critical effort of the feminist movement”. He also mentions “the substantive transformations seen in the conditions of women, especially in the most advantaged social categories” (Bourdieu 2001: 88), by referring to the increased access to secondary and higher education, waged work, public sphere, the degree of distancing from domestic tasks and reproductive functions (Bourdieu 2001: 88–89).

In spite of all this, he formulates the following thesis: “the changes visible in conditions in fact conceal permanent features in the relative positions: the leveling-out of the chances of access and rates of representation should not be allowed to mask the inequalities which persist in the distribution of boys and girls among the various types of schooling and therefore among possible carriers (Bourdieu 2001: 90). He uses the term “permanence in and through change” (Bourdieu 2001: 91), by claiming that “whatever their position in the social space, women have in common the fact that they are separated from men by a negative symbolic coefficient which, like skin color for blacks, or any other sign of membership of a stigmatized group, negatively affects everything that they are and do, and which is the source of systematic set of homologous differences” (Bourdieu 2001: 93). Consequently, “the structure of the gaps is maintained” (Bourdieu 2001: 91) because “girls internalize, in the form of schemes of perception and appreciation not readily accessible to consciousness, the principles of the dominant vision” (Bourdieu 2001: 95). Or to put it differently: “the constancy of habitus (...) is one of the most important factors in the relative constancy of the structure of the sexual division of labour” (Bourdieu 2001: 95). And so on, and so forth...

The fundamental question is whether at the end of the twentieth century the thesis that the structure of the relationship between the two genders is basically unchanged was still tenable or not. In my opinion, it was not. Untenable it was to such an extent, that the reviewer is embarrassed having to set in the following items of essential evidence against the work of the great French sociologist.

It is presumably a sort of *paradigm blindness* that made Bourdieu formulate this thesis as late as the end of the 20th century. Even if we agree that at the end of the millennium masculine domination was practically unchanged in the Western world as far as the institutions of church and the state are concerned (disregarding the differences between the Protestant and Catholic Churches, and, say, the Swedish and French state bureaucracies), the degree of Bourdieu’s generalisation appears untenable for the school and the family. Especially problematic is the mention of schooling in this context, as it is well known what radical changes took place in the education of the two genders after World War II in the West. As a result of these transformations, a significantly higher – in many countries identical – rate of women acquire qualifications in a spectrum of professions from art to economics, from law to

medicine, than was possible a generation or two earlier. As a result, the centuries-long lag of women in the labor market also decreased; in other words, the structure of inter-gender differences definitely modified to their benefit. As regards the changes in family structure, Bourdieu himself devoted a major study to it,¹⁴ but he ignores its statements in this book.

But, in my view, apart from these over-generalizations, the book version of *Masculine Domination* has a graver deficiency. Notably, Bourdieu simply ignores perhaps the most momentous social change of the last third of the 20th century: the transformation of intimacy. He seems to overlook that from the '60s something changed irrevocably in the Western world: a growing rate of women has gained legitimate control of their own bodies. That does not merely mean their right to decide about abortion, but also their growing claim to the right of sexual satisfaction. To use Giddens' term: sexuality is gaining plasticity.¹⁵ As a result of radical changes in power relations of heterosexual experience from the sixties-seventies onwards, the universality and constancy of masculine domination bumped against hard barriers in the intimate sphere.

In the age of plastic sexuality, the social construction of homosexuality has changed fundamentally, too. As Henning Bech has proven convincingly, by the end of the 20th century, modern homosexuality practically ceased to exist in Scandinavia, with the lifestyles of homo- and heterosexuals being leveled out (Bech 1997). In other words: the homosexual ceased to be the other. Similar tendencies can be demonstrated in several Western countries, too, including not only the United States¹⁶ but also France. In 1998, for example, in the year when Bourdieu's book appeared, the French parliament passed PACS, the *Pact of Civil Solidarity*, legally codifying live-in companionship for partners of the same sex. It can also be interpreted as a sign of decreasing prejudice against homosexuals that actually the popular mayor of Paris is a politician who acknowledged his gay identity openly.

In other words: the social changes touched on merely in passing here are followed by changes in legal regulation.¹⁷ Both social changes and the legal regulatory moves legitimating these changes point towards the erosion, deconstruction of the traditional masculine domination. It can therefore be taken for an almost necessary development that in the second half of the 1970s men (first of all divorced fathers and gays) began to

14 *La famille comme catégorie réalisée. Actes de la recherche en science sociales.* (1993), /84. It is noteworthy that in the interview I made with him in 1993 he also mentioned his article about the family.

15 „Plastic sexuality is decentred sexuality, freed from the needs of reproduction... can be moulded as a trait of personality and thus is intrinsically bound up with the self. At the same time – in principle – it frees sexuality from the rule of the phallus, from the overweening importance of male sexual experience.” (Giddens 1992: 2). We can also refer to the New Hite Report (Hite 2000) in which it is revealed that in the '90s Anglo-Saxon women put up the value of their clitorises to an unprecedented extent, thus giving rise to the possibility to experience ideal orgasmic delights even without men.

16 In the first version of *Masculine Domination* (Bourdieu 1990: 10) and in the interview of 1993 Bourdieu designed to admit that the USA could be an exception, but there is no trace of this in his book.

17 Just to cite a few – French – examples: in 1970 the omnipotent “father of the family” term enacted by the Code Napoleon was abolished, to be replaced by “parental authority”; from 1975, divorce declared on the basis of mutual agreement was possible; from 1984 both spouses had equal right to dispose over the family fortune; in 1998 PACS was introduced, etc.

stir – not independently of the experiences of the second wave of feminism, either. They began to identify themselves as members of an oppressed minority, demanding equal rights for themselves. Their steps were not ineffective, since, apart from gaining rights, they also achieved that within the academia *men's studies* assumed more and more weight over the 1980s. This sub-discipline conceives of masculinity and its various social forms as a historically and culturally determined specific human experience, instead of a universally valid experience.¹⁸

Today in the Western world, it is not in TV talk-shows, female magazines, adverts of remedies to improve male potency that one can read or hear about the “changed”, “vulnerable”, “impotent”, or, say, “gay” men presented as *legitimately different*, but also in many social scientific publications, which shows clearly that the theme has oozed from popular discourse into the realm of science irrevocably. Anyone can verify it who types the term *masculinity* in a search-program on the internet. In no time hundreds of articles will be found surfing on the possible links, all written in the last few months. With adequate persistency, we can get to the sources that thrash out the subject in thematic division, referring to hundreds of links, almost encyclopedically.

An essential common feature to men's studies is that the authors tackle “masculinities”, that is, they demonstrably emphasize the variability of male experiences.¹⁹ The authors declare as their main task the *deconstruction of* so-called *hegemonic masculinity*. They reject the truism interlaced with (hardly) hidden value elements, which claims that a real man is heterosexual, active in the public sphere and occupies the power position at home over his wife and children. Researchers aiming to deconstruct hegemonic masculinity ascribe salient importance to the *plurality of masculinities*, to the changing historical characteristics of manliness, and tend to deal with different social and cultural aspects of male experience: the position of the divorced husband, the changing construction of paternity, various forms of sexual otherness (homo-, bi- and trans-sexuality), the life cycles and life spheres of men (including their private life – practically unexplored earlier) as well as the *crisis of masculinity*: how man got into a subordinated, losing, exposed position in the most diverse public and private spheres of life, on the labor market, in the political field, facing his partner laying claim to sexual equality. By highlighting the concept of hegemonic masculinity, the authors chiefly intend to prove to what an extent masculinity is *not hegemonic* in its forms they examine.

The other typical research themes include analyses of men's friendship, the role of sport in the emergence of male identity, or the explanation of men's professional careers on the basis of plural models. Other researches of masculinity deal with transvestism, male prostitutes, policewomen, *off-white* blacks and their constantly

18 “While seemingly about men, traditional scholarship's treatment of generic man as the human norm in fact systematically excludes from consideration what is unique to men qua men. (...) The most general definition of men's studies is that it is the study of masculinities and male experiences as specific and varying social-historical-cultural formations. Such studies situate masculinities as an object of study on a par with femininities, instead of elevating them to universal norms.” (Brod 1987: 2)

19 Typically, Bob Connell published his book, a reference manual, with the title *Masculinities* (Connell 1995). The title of the main periodical of the field can also be referred to in this context: *Men and Masculinities*.

redefined, realigned, re-contextualized identity (see e.g. Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1996). The latter claim that it is not at all self-evident that the categories of male/man/masculine and female/woman/femininity tally. There are even more radical thinkers such as *Homi K. Bhabha*, who does not rest content with superseding the essentialism of the concept of “man”, but goes as far as writing: “It must be our aim not to deny or disavow masculinity, but to disturb its manifest destiny – to draw attention to it as a prosthetic reality – a “prefixing” of the rules of gender and sexuality; an appendix or addition, that willy-nilly, supplements and suspends a “lack-in-being”. (Bhabha 1995: 57).

With these few remarks I merely aimed to illustrate that Bourdieu’s *Masculine Domination* is pointed in quite a different direction, formulating a different thesis than the growing canon of men’s studies. To put it even more sharply: *men’s studies focusing on the deconstruction of hegemonic masculinity keep doing the opposite to what the school-founder French sociologist says in Masculine Domination*. I do not state, obviously, that the authors of men’s studies cannot be discussed or criticized. It is, at the same time, untenable that a social scientist should write an essay, then a book, on the theme of masculine domination by practically ignoring the entire literature of gender studies, feminist studies, women’s studies and men’s studies, while incessantly referring to himself, as Bourdieu does.

Let me point out, finally, two specificities of his paradigm: an inherent and a strategic one. The *inherent specificity* of his paradigm can be reconstructed most clearly on the basis of his chef d’oeuvre, *Distinction*. In this book he analyses the interrelations between different social classes in a three-dimensional space: examining the quantity of capital possessed by the classes and class fractions; the structure of this capital (the rate of economic and cultural capitals, the re-conversion strategies between different types of capital); and the temporal changes of these two factors. In a sophisticated and witty critical analysis of the French society of the ‘60s and ‘70s he also outlines a model of the reproduction of the social structure called the *displacement of the social structure*. He writes (à propos the displacement of schooling rates of 16- to 18-year-olds between 1954 and 1975):

Re-conversion strategies are nothing other than an aspect of the permanent actions and reactions whereby each group strives to maintain or change its position in the social structure, or more precisely – at a stage in the evolution of class societies in which one can conserve only by changing – to change so as to conserve. Frequently the actions whereby each class (or class fraction) works to win new advantages, i.e., to gain an advantage over the other classes or so, objectively, to reshape the structure of objective relations between the classes (the relations revealed by the statistical distributions of properties), are compensated for (and so cancelled out ordinarily) by the reactions of the other classes, directed toward the same objective. In this particular (though very common) case, the outcome of these opposing actions, which cancel each other by the very countermovements, which they generate, is an overall displacement of the structure of the distribution, between the classes or class fractions, of the assets at stake in the competition. (...)

The dialectic of downclassing and upclassing which underlies a whole set of social processes presupposes and entails that all the groups concerned run in the same

direction, toward the same objectives, the same properties, those which are designated by the leading group and which, by definition, are unavailable to the groups following, since, whatever these properties may be intrinsically, they are modified and qualified by their distinctive rarity and will no longer be what they are once they are multiplied and made available to groups lower down. Thus, by an apparent paradox, the maintenance of order, that is, the whole set of gaps, differences, differentials, ranks, precedents, priorities, exclusions, distinctions, ordinal properties, and thus of the relations of order which give a social formation its structure, is provided by an unceasing change in substantial (i.e., non-relational) properties. This implies that the social order established at any given moment is also necessarily a temporal order, an “order of successions”, as Leibniz put it, each group having as its past the group immediately below and for its future the group immediately above. (Bourdieu 1984: 157–163.)

This lengthy quotation might also illustrate the *strategic specificity* of Bourdieu’s paradigm-alchemy: in *Masculine Domination* all Bourdieu does is to replace class by gender, and class habitus by gender habitus. When in *Masculine Domination* he discusses “the constancy of habitus”, “the negative symbolic coefficient by which women are separated from men”, the “permanence in and through change”, or the “strength of the structure”, he extends his thesis about the social structure to the men/women relationship.²⁰ In this way, his theory about the displacement of the social structure is extended to the displacement of the men/women relationship, in what is no less than an unfounded paradigm-expansion.

It is beyond this criticism to review Bourdieu’s reproduction theory in detail. Let me merely note that while his reproduction theory is more or less adequate for the period between the last third of the 19th and the last third of the 20th centuries, it becomes especially problematic when it is applied to late-modern Western societies (and it is somewhat already problematic for the French society of the 1960s–1970s). Should we accept that “the social order established at any given moment is also necessarily a temporal order, an order of successions, each group having as its past the group immediately below and for its future the group immediately above”, we would be at a loss viewing the radical transformations that have fundamentally restructured social relations in multicultural Western societies over the past few decades.

I do not only mean women and homosexuals, but also blacks and any other, earlier stigmatized and oppressed minority. Their social position changed fundamentally in late modern Western societies. A few decades earlier it would have been out of the question what now, at the time of writing this text in December 2002, happened necessarily, as it were: the leader of the Republican fraction of the US Senate (senator Trent Lott) was forced by the republicans themselves (!) to resign because of a few ambiguous, awkward, somewhat racist sentences he had uttered. It is undoubtedly an event in a society whose *multidimensional and multicultural structures* can no longer be fitted into the frames of Pierre Bourdieu’s once highly powerful paradigm of reproduction.

²⁰ One could go back even to earlier times and find that his thesis put forth in *Distinction* was already worded in *Reproduction* (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970) which is devoted to the logic of the reproduction of the educational system.

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