

PRACTICAL SENSE

NEWSLETTER OF THE PIERRE BOURDIEU FOUNDATION

PUBLISHING SELF-SOCIOANALYSES



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EDITORIAL

The thematic part of the fourth issue of *Practical Sense* gathers articles on what Bourdieu called self-socioanalyses. While several scholars have focused on “transfuges de classes,” “class defectors” or “class migrants,” as a particular social group and type of trajectory, or on “transclass” narratives in general, few studies have used the tools of the sociology of publishing to examine the publications in this area. Although the articles in this issue may seem rather franco-centric, international interest in many of the authors involved and the circulation of their works confirms that their significance is in no way restricted to a particular national context. The French context, which does represent a particularly vivid case, will hopefully stimulate studies about other countries and provoke international comparisons.

The current issue contains articles about different aspects of the topic. Rose-Marie Lagrave first narrates in a reflexive manner the editorial making and reception of her book *Se ressaisir. Enquête autobiographique d'une transfuge de classe féministe* [Pulling Oneself Together: An Autobiographical Inquiry by a Feminist Class Defector], an empirically based inquiry to understand the social trajectory that led her from a Catholic rural background to the position of Director of research at École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris. As narratives of class migrants have now entered a global circulation, Carolina Pulici and Jéssica Ronconi tackle the case of such narratives in Brazil, by showing the reproduction of the traditional cultural import-export between central and peripheral nations. Sophie Noël focuses on the editorial making of one of the most famous of these stories, *En finir avec Eddy Bellegueule* [The End of Eddy] by Édouard Louis.

Moving from the publishing pole to the reception, Lucas Pontzeele studies the effects of such narratives on French upwardly mobile individuals. In a reflexive attempt to better understand this phenomenon, Matthias Fringant retraces the main social uses of the words “transfuges (de classe)”/“transclasses” and their English translations. Finally, Marco Pitzalis reviews a recent and important study on the subject, *Trahir et Venger. Paradoxes des récits de transfuges de classe* [Betrayal and Revenge: Paradoxes in the Narratives of Class Defectors] by French sociolinguists Laélia Véron and Karine Abiven.

Each one of these relatively short articles draws upon extensive research. The objective in bringing them together is to draw attention to some of their most important results, and, by uniting them in a single issue, to contribute to overcoming the usual separation of different research areas of sociology.

The issue, furthermore, contains the usual rubrics. First, an events section featuring short notes about recent manifestations: a Nobel symposium held in Sweden, a tribute to the late

Brazilian social scientist Afrânio Garcia in Paris, a conference by the *Grupo de Estudos em Bourdieu (GEBU)* in Brazil, and the first edition of the *Bourdieu Lectures* held in Bielefeld, Germany. Then, a list of recent books inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's work.

Finally, we would like to draw the attention of our readers to an important aspect of our enterprise. Since its launch in December 2024, the Newsletter has reached hundreds of scholars all around the world, many of whom have expressed a keen interest and a lot of enthusiasm for the new publication. While editors receive a small reimbursement for their work, members of the Board and all others involved do their work voluntarily and for free. The finances of the Newsletter derive from the sale of Pierre Bourdieu's photographs to the Centre Pompidou Museum in 2024. While it has allowed launching the Newsletter and publishing it during the first years, this capital is running short and we are actively seeking alternative sources of funding to keep the activities going.

The Newsletter is therefore very grateful for any [donation](#), large and small, specified or general, anonymous or denominated. We are also grateful for any suggestions for possible support, financial or otherwise. As the Pierre Bourdieu Foundation is being transferred from Switzerland to Paris, Éditions Raisons d'Agir will temporarily host the donations. For any further queries, please contact us at: donations@fondationbourdieu.net

The editorial team

SPECIAL EDITION: PUBLISHING SELF-SOCIOANALYSES

"As you see, that path returning to the hill— momentarily forgotten— is long. The work of reclaiming one's original culture, in a victory over cultural shame, is a real socio-analysis, one that can never be completed with perfect certainty. Particularly because one cannot move past the initial denial by denying its causes, namely all the resources offered by the dominant culture. What makes this path towards self-reconciliation difficult is that the very tools needed to reclaim the renounced culture are provided by the culture that imposed the renouncement."

"Translated from: Bourdieu, P. (1998) "L'Odyssée de la réappropriation", *Awal, cahiers d'études berbères*, 18.



SE RESSAISIR. **EDITORIAL GENESIS** **AND RECEPTION**

Rose-Marie Lagrave

Analyzing the process leading to the publication of a work, which thereafter structures its reception, requires considering that beyond the text itself, a work is inscribed in a publishing field. What to make of this banal observation when publication was not aimed for, or when the reception surpasses the author's expectations? Returning to the particularity of *Se Ressaisir* gives the opportunity to present the various paths to publication and the diverse uses of a text.

The ambiguities of a context

Essais d'ego-histoire [Essays of ego-history], edited by Pierre Nora in 1987, Chantal Jacquet's 2014 *Les transclasses ou la non-reproduction* [Transclasses: A Theory of Social Non-Reproduction], and Philippe Lejeune's *Les brouillons de soi* [Drafts of Self] are three waypoints for the rising strength of autobiogra-

phical writing in the social sciences. They were cautiously received, at first, in the field of social sciences, due to an aversion against any hint of subjectivity and possible drift towards the "biographical illusion" (Bourdieu, 1986). However, as two recent introductions demonstrate, the social sciences have become more receptive to self-narratives. Feminist epistemologies have integrated the *standpoint* to knowledge (Harding, 2004) as it is considered to assure greater objectivity in the research process. Moreover, the normalisation of the degree of Habilitation to supervise research (HDR) has encouraged the autobiographical expression of the author, through the writing of a "short dissertation."¹ Self-narratives in the social sciences have become less exotic and less exposed to the stigmatization in an environment that has been resistant to autobiography, although its favorite field remains literature. To cite just two, the books of Annie Ernaux and Édouard Louis have become bestsellers. And despite their authors' intentions, they have contributed to giving their readers a representation of *transfuges de classes* as "miraculous".

It was in this paradoxical context that I received an invitation from the sociologist Claire Ducournau. She wanted to explore "what talking about oneself

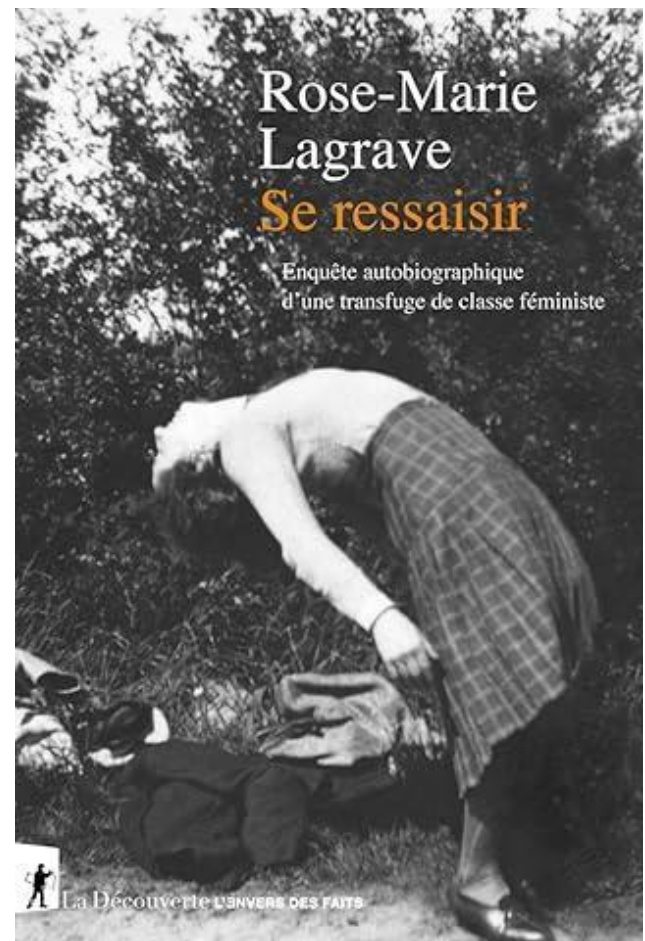
¹ In the French system, the Habilitation to supervise research, introduced in 1984, is the highest academic degree and allows the

supervision of doctoral dissertations. It includes a biographical section.

means,” in an issue of the online journal *Genre, Sexualité, & Société* dedicated to “egologies” (Ducournau, 2010). In responding positively to her request, I nonetheless indicated “*that I would never have consented to this exercise had I not been approached by the editors of the journal, as if breaking the silence could only find its legitimacy outside oneself, within the frame of this academic exercise’s well-known dynamics.*” This digression underlined my difficulty in permitting myself to speak about myself; the mediation of a request was needed. The same phenomenon recurred again. After reading this article, the sociologist Paul Pasquali suggested that I expand upon it for publication with *La Découverte*.² After publishing *Passer les frontières sociales* [Passing Social Borders] in 2014, Pasquali had all the dispositions and skills for recognizing and drawing attention from a larger public to the uncertain path of social mobility.

The acceptance of this synopsis by the editorial committee of *La Découverte* fell into a context of intensified publications by *transfuges de classe*, as much in social sciences as in literature. Without our mutual awareness³, I thus joined other colleagues simultaneously engaged in writing socioanalyses. This recourse to

autobiography is also explained by a generational effect for those who arrived at retirement and felt the need to take up the threads of a trajectory now in decline, which trajectory must be recorded in order to understand its logic and its meaning. It is encouraged and supported by the intensification of relations between social sciences and literature, of which autobiographies are the paragon, insofar as they tend to borrow a novelistic style and romanticize lives.



² *La Découverte*, founded in 1983, is the successor to *Maspero*. The publisher specializes in social science research aimed at a broad audience.

³ To only mention the main publications: Delsaut (2020), Winock (2020), Delahaye (2021), le Foll (2021), Michel (2021), Alter (2022), Le Bihan (2021) and Moreau (2022).

It's no minor paradox that the explosion of publications by *transfuges de classe* comes just as downward mobility has become one of the most notable phenomena of recent decades (Bourdieu, 1978; Peugny, 2009; Maurin, 2009). There is a generational effect, between the generation of retirees who benefitted from the social advantages of the welfare state and believed in a better future, and the generations of their children and grandchildren, carrying devalued diplomas and being socially and politically disillusioned. The narratives of these *transfuges de classe* (including my own) that highlight upward social mobility do not match the frequent stagnations and regressions of current social trajectories. In this respect, these autobiographies of *transfuges de classe* mark the end of a liberating education system, which engineered potential passages across social boundaries. The publishing field captured well this turning point, publishing some of the last beneficiaries of social salvation through schooling. And this impression of a swan song is reflected in the reception of *Se ressaisir*.

An unexpected but sociologically predictable reception

In an attempt to clarify the different appropriations of the work, I will draw

together different materials concerning its reception, distinguishing between reviews in social science journals, seminar presentations, letters from readers, and readings in libraries or bookstores. With the exception of Didier Éribon's comment at the 2021 symposium "Writing one's life, narrating society. Autobiography at the risk of sociology," held at the National Library of France (BNF), in which he declared my book to be "*horrendous and homophobic*," and that of the anthropologist Bernard Hours who held that the book "*is cold and doesn't express the passion of a life, the affective and emotional dynamics*,"⁴ the reception from my sociological colleagues was unexpected. By emphasizing method, they underlined the challenge implied in researching so close to oneself (Bouffartigue, 2022 ; Rabier, 2022) and the pitfalls linked to the exercise of self-reflexivity (Piponnier, 2024). They assessed the work in light of the question posed by Jean-Claude Passeron (1990, p. 3): "*Is there a biographical method capable of offering to sociology the guarantees of proof and reasoning that characterize other data processing methods?*" and they concluded that the essay was promising in this regard. Thereby validating the sociological dimension of the work, these reviews thus count autobiographies

⁴ The author makes a mistake in the subtitle and in the body of the text by writing "an anthropological study" instead of an autobiographical study.

among the legitimate objects of sociology. While discourses on method are the prerogative of sociologists, method is the least of the reader's concerns.

In the case of *Se ressaisir*, the reception includes reports in generalist newspapers, media interviews, meetings with readers during presentations in libraries or bookstores, and the letters and emails I received. The media appearances and newspaper reports emphasized what was considered a performance: the reconstitution of my family history, and, as part of it, my own fragmented trajectory. They particularly highlighted the cleavage between the initial handicaps and my family's collective "success," between the impossible made possible. The questions also touched the term "transfuge," rather than "transclass," and it was necessary to make it clear that transfuge is neither a noun nor a quality, but a process of class migration. I noted a deep consistency between radio programs and generalist newspapers, which share the same cultural space, the same literary references, and know the tricks for promoting a book. As the majority of journalists are inheritors (Lafarge, 2019), curiosity is what guides them when seeking to understand a trajectory that transgresses the logic of social reproduction. They would emphasize the uniqueness of my trajectory, often related back to and summarized by my family of origin. Eleven children, an ascetic and

rigorous catholicism, the social consequences of illness, the daily life in a village of 348 people – in their eyes, these features painted a strange setting. Of all these readings, that of Tiphaine Samoyault in *L'Obs* (2021) is the most comprehensive and the one that aligns best with my intentions, receptive as she is to the details of the work, often ignored elsewhere. For these journalists, it is the distance between them and me that intrigues them, and they seek to pierce its secret.

An opposite logic inspires ordinary readers, as the majority of their letters express a closeness to the author. The recurring question put to me in letters and at conferences is whether my trajectory would still be possible in 2026, given the education system's inability to counteract social inequalities in the schools, as if the French schools of the 1950s were more egalitarian. This question and others suggest a reading of my book through the prism of a lost world – a world I do not, however, describe through rose-colored glasses. Not having the possibility to assess the social characteristics of the readership, the quality of their reception and their competence as I could evaluate it from the length of their letters, their style, and their analytical capacity attest to a high level of education, which is often corroborated by the indication "I am a secondary school teacher." The majority of the letters I received are situated

within this social space for which the education system ensured a certain social ascension, though expectations had been more ambitious. The beginning of the letters is always the same: they indicate that they have not had as “prestigious” a trajectory as mine, and then, through analogy, note a series of points of convergence with my path. Identification is the most frequent way to convey the focus on some of my specific experiences: boarding school, the grip of catholicism, injustices, and class contempt are the most frequently themes evoked and reworked.

The process of appropriation of the work invites readers to revisit their own trajectories in the light of the embodied experience it offers. They feel recognized by a book that allows them to reflect on their own paths, which, in view of this reading, appear in a new light. Reading *Se Ressaisir* is nothing but a pretext to engage in a reading of oneself. The longest letters are true personal narratives, dotted with resentments against an unjust society, and an indictment of the silencing and lack of recognition of ordinary people, who relate to it even more as they cannot write it in the first person. This sort of revelation experienced by readers also plays in reverse, as they point to those elements left out of the book, notably concerning my private life, or the narrative shortfall around my integration into the EHESS (School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences),

thereby accentuating the readers’ active engagement and capacity to co-construct a work.

While the horizon of expectation inscribed in the text calls for a process of recognition among non-inheritors, the extra-textual horizon of expectation, which carries the expectations of the social milieu at any given moment, is harder to ascertain (Jauss, 1978). It is marked by ambiguities, disposed to let the meaning of the work drift towards its opposite. The craze for accounts of *transfuges de classe* hides, in effect, an intent to deny the reproduction of social classes. *Transfuges de classe* are the proof of the efficacy of a social elevator that assures convenient fluidity between classes, perhaps even challenges their existence. Autobiographical narratives, if they do not carefully underline that *transfuges de classe* are the exceptions that make the rule of social reproduction, sometimes rebound in veiled terms against Bourdieu. “The doleful narrative is the counterpart to deterministic theories in sociology: even when individuals escape the mechanisms promised to them and destined to assign them their social category, it can only work through suffering,” writes sociologist Gérald Bronner (2023, p. 113). The narratives of *transfuges* thus become sites of struggle between competing positions in the social sciences. Nevertheless, the majority of the receptions underlined the satisfaction of seeing the question of

social classes return to the spotlight. All emphasize my individual “success,” even if the text indicated that if there was any success, it had to be collective, leading forward towards a classless society.

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“IT’S ALWAYS THE SAME, IT COMES TO US LATER”

Publishing Literary Self-Socioanalyses in Brazil

Carolina Pulici & Jéssica Ronconi

Given the determinants of publishing strategies, investigating the diffusion of self-socioanalyses reveals at the outset an unequal capacity of different publishing houses, as well as different countries, to import and export. The international circulation of Annie Ernaux’s work was “doubtless facilitated by the prestige of being published by Gallimard” (Hugeny-Léger, 2025, p. 3), which published 18 of her books in France and counts among the publishers with the greatest power of consecration demonstrated by their ability to export their authors (Sapiro, 2024, p. 40). It was, however, on the recommendation of the British publisher Fitzcarraldo, during the Frankfurt and London book fairs, that the Brazilian publishing house Fósforo de-

cided to translate her work at the turn of the 2020s (Interview I¹).

Similarly, Édouard Louis, another French author associated with this literary genre, only became a publishing phenomenon in Brazil after being published by Todavia in 2023, following the direct intervention of his Anglo-American literary agency, Wylie:

“When it reaches us, it’s already, in a certain way, filtered through a certain echo in Europe. It’s always the same, it comes to us later. [...] Our daily work is always in contact with literary agents based in England, in the United States, less in France [...] The case of Édouard Louis, in particular [...], his agent is among the most powerful in the world [...] And Annie Ernaux arrived by the same route [...] through a kind of British filter, in reality, via Fitzcarraldo, a small English publishing house that has in these last few years published some very high level literary authors; it is through the English language that it began to resonate internationally ; it is rare that something comes directly from France.” (Interview II²).

Given that this literary form is predominant in rich, industrialized countries (Lammers and Twellmann, 2021), this text presents the preliminary findings of

¹ Interview with one of the founders of Fósforo (11/03/2026).

² Interview with one of the founders of Todavia (19/03/2026). *The Wylie Edition* took the French

writer from the Spanish publishing house Tusquets, who had published him in Brazil since 2018, due to a poor critical reception and insufficient sales.

recently initiated research on the publication of literary self-socioanalyses in the context of a country like Brazil: a former Portuguese colony and the last western nation to abolish slavery (1888). This research is based on interviews with publishers responsible for the import, and, since 2023, for the domestic production of this literature, as well as on documentary analysis (promotional materials and press clippings).

A gamble on newcomers already rich in assets

In discussing new trends in literary production, Pierre Bourdieu (1999) observes that newcomers, by their very existence and the competition they introduce, threaten the established literary order. If this is the case, what has been described in France as a significant media and publishing interest in narratives of *transfuges de classe* (Véron and Abiven, 2024) has now arrived in Brazil, with critical and public acclaim, through three new publishing houses established over the past decade: *Todavia* (2016), *Âyiné* (2017), and *Fósforo* (2021).

Despite the lack of seniority, this central component of a publishing house's symbolic capital is offset by other crucial assets, such as the influence of the catalog, which can be measured by the number of established writers and Nobel Prize winners it represents (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 4). Indeed, *Fósforo* published, in

the very year of its founding in 2021, *La Place* [A Man's Place] by Annie Ernaux, which was awarded the Nobel Prize by the Swedish Academy the following year. And the position of this 22 employees publishing house is defined by its possession of other significant resources, such as the presence, among its co-founders, of the widow of the editor-in-chief of *Folha de S. Paulo*, Brazil's largest newspaper. In 2017, she launched, in partnership with a former journalist from *Folha de S. Paulo*, the magazine *Quatro cinco um*, dedicated to book reviews. Both have organized several editions of the Paraty International Literary Festival (FLIP), one of the leading instances of literary consecration in contemporary Brazil, which welcomed Annie Ernaux as its guest of honor in 2022. Finally, in 2020, this same co-founder established the Megafauna bookstore, located within the Copan Building (1966), one of São Paulo's architectural landmarks designed by Oscar Niemeyer, Brazil's most internationally renowned architect. In 2025, a new branch of the bookstore opened in another iconic building of Brazilian modernism: the Teatro Cultura Artística (1942), designed by the Italian-Brazilian architect Rino Levi, featuring an artistic fresco by Di Cavalcanti [Figure 1]. Thus, the history of *Fósforo* merges with that of other instances dedicated to promoting authors and books.

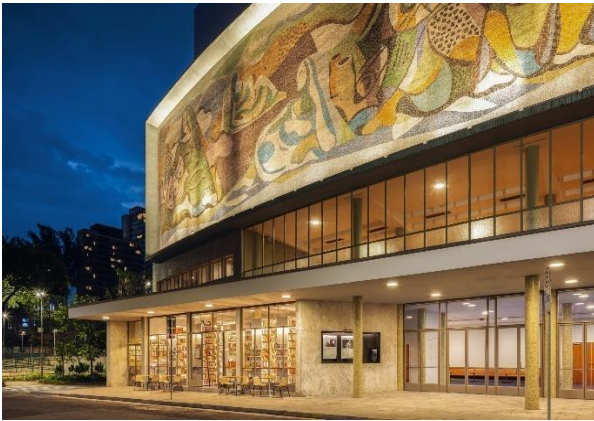


Figure 1: Megafauna Bookstore at the Teatro Cultura Artística (São Paulo). Source: <https://www.livrariamegafauna.com.br/sobre-a-livraria/>.

Like Annie Ernaux’s Brazilian publisher, *Todavia*, a mid-sized publishing house (34 employees) that has been publishing Édouard Louis’s books since 2023, has also predicted Nobel Prize winners in its catalog, specifically two: Polish author Olga Tokarczuk (2018) and South Korean author Han Kang (2024). In 2020, after only four years in business, it already ranked second among publishing houses in terms of the number of its authors nominated for the Jabuti Prize (Amado, 2020), one of the country’s most prestigious literary awards, trailing only Companhia das Letras, one of Brazil’s largest publishing groups, which combines symbolic capital with commercial power, and from which all of *Todavia*’s founders hail, with the exception of the son of the chairman of one of Latin America’s largest financial institutions,

Itaúsa, the publishing house’s main investor at its founding (Maia, 2017).

In this context, Didier Eribon’s publisher, *Âyiné*, most closely resembles the ideal-typical condition of recent, small-scale publishing houses (8 employees), with limited economic capital and almost no institutionally recognized symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 11). Reluctant to attend the London and Frankfurt book fairs, the editor, who came across Eribon’s book by his own means rather than through recommendations from literary agents, foreign publishers, or scouts, observes: “*Sometimes, to sell a book, they tell you, ‘Oh, this book was published by this or that publishing house. Us, we’ve never paid attention to that. It’s an advantage for us that... we speak many languages. We read many languages’*” (Interview III³). Founded thanks to the personal inheritance of a young Brazilian – the only editor who comes neither from the publishing world nor from São Paulo, who has been living in Venice for over twenty years – and to the investment in euros from an Italian co-founder (and his former professor), this publishing house derives one of its key strengths from its special relationship with Italy: “*In our case, since we’re in Venice, there’s this positive side, perhaps, that there are many bookstores [...] The two best ones sell almost*

³ Interview with one of the founders of *Âyiné* (16/03/2026).

exclusively books from independent publishers.”

By way of comparison, while the author of *Retour à Reims* [Returning to Reims] has reportedly sold around 8,000 copies since 2020, placing him third in Âyiné’s catalog in terms of sales (“*Eribon is bigger than the publishing house,*” Interview III), Édouard Louis, published by *Todavia* three years later, already counts 155,000 copies, making him the publisher’s second most selling author and Brazil the second-largest market, after France, for his bestsellers. Despite this, the Venice based publisher, which stands out for publishing comparatively few translations from English (even though it publishes more translations than any other), enjoys a certain prestige among critics and booksellers, notably thanks to its “off the beaten path catalog” (Meirelles, 2018), focused on Italian and Eastern European authors, such as Joseph Brodsky and Wisława Szymborska, winners of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1987 and 1996.

This emblematic prize of the unification of the international literary scene (Casanova, 2008) demonstrates its quasi-universal recognition when, by awarding it to Annie Ernaux in 2022, it considerably reduces the time lag previously observed in the publication of her work in Brazil, which extends to the works of the entire line valued by the prize (Table 1).

The characterization of the publishing houses of Annie Ernaux, Édouard Louis, and Didier Eribon suggests that the financial resources at their disposal, particularly in the case of the first two, do not necessarily place them in the most heteronomous segment of the Brazilian publishing landscape. This is evidenced by the absence of their titles from the list of the top twenty bestsellers of 2025 (Sobota, 2026), as well as the presence of Nobel Prize winners and Jabuti Prize finalists in their catalogs. As demonstrated by their visibility in the mainstream print media, “a form of recognition that is both symbolic and commercial” (Noël, 2012, p. 142), Fósforo, *Todavia*, and, to a lesser extent, Âyiné seem to occupy intermediate positions between the poles of financial power and symbolic power, as if they were following in the footsteps of *Companhia das Letras*, where one of Fósforo’s co-founders also began her career.

Table 1: Chronology of the publication of Annie Ernaux, Didier Eribon, and Édouard Louis' works in Brazil

Author	Title	France	Publisher	Brazil	Publisher	Delay (years)
A. Ernaux	<i>La place</i>	1984	Gallimard	2021	Fósforo	27
A. Ernaux	<i>Une femme</i>	1988	Gallimard	2024	Fósforo	26
A. Ernaux	<i>Passion simple</i>	1992	Gallimard	1994/2023	Objetiva/Fósforo	2
A. Ernaux	<i>La honte</i>	1997	Gallimard	2022	Fósforo	15
A. Ernaux	<i>L'événement</i>	2000	Gallimard	2022	Fósforo	20
A. Ernaux	<i>L'écriture comme un couteau</i>	2003	Stock	2023	Fósforo	20
A. Ernaux	<i>L'usage de la photo (avec Marc Marie)</i>	2005	Gallimard	2025	Fósforo	20
A. Ernaux	<i>Les années</i>	2008	Gallimard	2019/2022	Três Estrelas/ Fósforo	11
D. Eribon	<i>Retour à Reims</i>	2009	Fayard	2020	Âyiné	11
A. Ernaux	<i>L'autre fille</i>	2011	Nil	2023	Fósforo	12
D. Eribon	<i>La société comme verdict</i>	2013	Fayard	2022	Âyiné	9
É. Louis	<i>En finir avec Eddy Bellegueule</i>	2014	Seuil	2018/2025	Tusquets/Todavia	4
A. Ernaux	<i>Regard les lumières, mon amour</i>	2014	Seuil	2024	Fósforo	10
É. Louis	<i>Histoire de la violence</i>	2016	Seuil	2020/2026	Tusquets/Todavia	4
A. Ernaux	<i>Mémoire de fille</i>	2016	Gallimard	2025	Fósforo	19
É. Louis	<i>Qui a tué mon père</i>	2018	Seuil	2023	Todavia	5
É. Louis	<i>Combats et métamorphoses d'une femme</i>	2021	Seuil	2023	Todavia	2
É. Louis	<i>Changer : méthode</i>	2021	Seuil	2024	Todavia	3
ANNIE ERNAUX RECEIVES THE NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE						
A. Ernaux	<i>Le jeune homme</i>	2022	Gallimard	2022	Fósforo	0
D. Eribon	<i>Vie, vieillesse et mort d'une femme du peuple</i>	2023	Flammarion	2024	Âyiné	1
É. Louis	<i>Monique s'évade</i>	2024	Seuil	2024	Todavia	0
É. Louis	<i>L'effondrement</i>	2024	Seuil	2025	Todavia	1
D. Eribon	<i>Sociobiographie. Entretien avec Geoffroy Huard</i>	2025	Flammarion	2026	Âyiné	1

Source: Information taken from publishers' websites and press releases

Strategies for the creation of a lineage

The dissemination of the prize awarded to Annie Ernaux with all of her “offspring” is reflected in the exchanges of recommendations and favors that take place within the interpersonal networks of editors from different countries (Bourdieu, 1999). Thus, during the Nobel Prize ceremony in Stockholm, while the laureate’s editors were gathered, the British publishing house Fitzcarraldo, which had already offered to acquire the first book by José Henrique Bortoluci, a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Michigan and a lecturer in Brazil, en-

couraged other publishers to do the same, thus helping ensure that *O que é meu* [What is Mine] was sold to ten foreign publishers even before its publication in Brazil, including the Dutch Arbeiderspers, the Swedish Norstedts, and the Spanish Random House (Gabriel, 2023), which, like Fitzcarraldo, was already publishing Annie Ernaux: “*They are interested in this type of narrative [of a transfuge de classe] [...], but I have no doubt that the entry of the English editor made other editors take notice and become interested in the book*” (Interview I).

The attempt to attach the three French and two Brazilian authors recently published by Fósforo to a lineage that can be traced back to Bourdieu, as argued by a literary critic (Angiolillo, 2023), is also evident in the editorial work shaping their reception in the public space through book covers, back covers, and even the physical space of bookstores [Figure 2]. Thus, in the promotional material for *La Place* [A Man's Place], we read: “one of France’s most important living writers [...] who, decades later, would serve as a declared inspiration to major figures in global autofiction and to leading names in French literature such as Édouard Louis and Didier Eribon.” Similarly, *Todavia* places *Combats et métamorphoses d'une femme* [A Woman's Battles and Transformations] “in a tradition which leads back to Annie Ernaux and Didier Eribon.” While this is not the case with Âyiné (“I don’t like to use one author to sell another”) (Interview III), Eribon nevertheless writes blurbs for foreign editions of Bortoluci’s book, such as the German edition published by Aufbau, just as Annie Ernaux does for Fitzcarraldo and Random House.

Finally, the same logic of elevating the debut author to the level of their prestigious predecessors (Sapiro, 2024, p. 67) appears in the synopsis of *A boba da corte* [The Court Jester], by Tati Bernardi, a screenwriter, podcaster, and highly publicized columnist for *Folha de*

S. Paulo, published by Fósforo: “If the theme has already been extensively explored by Annie Ernaux, Didier Eribon, Édouard Louis, and, in Brazil, by José Bortoluci, among others, in *A boba da corte* Bernardi takes the tradition of autosociobiography even further, adding layers of irony and humor to narratives of class transition.” Her inscription in this lineage predates the book’s publication, as Bernardi had led reading groups for Ernaux’s novels under the auspices of Fósforo itself. She had also participated, in the 2024 edition of FLIP, in a roundtable discussion alongside Édouard Louis, whose coverage in the major national press helped turn the French writer’s work into a market phenomenon in Brazil rather than merely a niche one (Interview II).



Figure 2: Livraria da Tarde, in São Paulo, 10/10/2025. Credit: Carolina Pulici.

If the importation of an author also depends on book clubs and other alternative channels for promoting books and connecting with readers, in Louis’s case, these interactions are amplified by his personal involvement in promoting his work on social media, on Brazilian television shows, and, in March

2026, through his participation in the *Mostra Internacional de Teatro de São Paulo* (MITsp). Confirming the importance, for an author's commercial success, of their dissemination through other cultural products beyond the book (Florimond-Clerc and Gabrysiak, 2025), the adaptation of *Qui a tué mon père* [Who Killed My Father], produced by the Schaubühne Berlin and the Théâtre de la Ville de Paris, was directed by Thomas Ostermeier himself, who, in 2019, had adapted *Retour à Reims* [Returning to Reims] within a French context, thereby contributing once again to the consolidation of a lineage.



Figure 3: Édouard Louis onstage in a (new) adaptation by Thomas Ostermeier in São Paulo.

Credits : MITsp and Jean-Louis Fernandez. Source : https://www.instagram.com/p/DVbul8aDZ2/?img_index=2.

Homogenization of catalogues and the preservation of traditional cultural import-export

Our initial results lead us to believe that the importation of literary self-socio-analyses into the Brazilian context of the 2020s primarily reveals the unifying and homogenizing dynamics of the publishing market and, consequently, the “growing isomorphism” of catalogs (Sapiro, 2024). Thus, in explaining why it entered the race for the distribution rights to Édouard Louis’s work in Brazil, Todavia acknowledges that the affinity between this literature and its developing catalog “*obviously has to do with this circuit, which is a well-defined circuit of literary agents and countries where these authors find success. [...] a Romanian author who hasn’t gone through this circuit of literary agents isn’t just going to arrive out of nowhere and come here. No matter how good the book is.*” (Interview II)

The assertion that the authors most likely to be translated in Brazil are those who fit into the circuit defined by major anglo-american literary agents, as well as those who have achieved success in certain countries, reflects the reproduction of the traditional cultural import-export dynamic between central and peripheral nations. Thus, Fósforo describes his trips to the countries “*where literature comes from*” as a unidirectional exchange: “*We go to London and*

Frankfurt every year; we go there to do business. They don't come [...] with my close friends, I say: 'I'm already in a bad mood, I've already arrived having spent more than you, I don't even speak my own language anymore.' (Interview I)

Likewise, the cultural and commercial recognition of Édouard Louis in Brazil reiterates what Pascale Casanova has called the “subjugation of the (necessary) inventions of the South to the preestablished norms of the North” (1997, p. 88), insofar as “*much of the buzz he generates is linked to the echo he produces among Brazilian authors who seek to write both autofiction and fiction based on the experience of transference de classe, as is the case with Tati Bernardi, as is the case with Bortoluci*” (Interview II).

The persistence of relations of domination between nations is ultimately expressed by the weight that approval from central nations carries in obtaining national prestige, as the editor of *O que é meu* [What is Mine] notes: “*The fact that it has largely sold well abroad also means that the Brazilian market pays more attention to it.*” And this is true even when reception in international spaces remains, it seems, and as is often the case for other Brazilian authors who break through the barrier of translation, limited: “*The fact that it has been translated does not necessarily mean that it has been widely read [...] there are two barriers; the first and most difficult one—in reality, I don't even know which*

is harder, whether getting published or getting read.” (Interview I).

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THE BEGINNING OF ÉDOUARD LOUIS

The Making of a Transnational Best-Seller

Sophie Noël

The 2000s saw the emergence, in France, of a literary phenomenon situated at the crossroads of autobiographical narrative and sociological testimony, the narrative of *transfuge de classe* depicting the author's often painful upward social mobility. This type of work enjoyed an important success since the publication of Didier Eribon's *Retour à Reims* [Returning to Reims] in 2009, which sold nearly 100,000 copies, and of Édouard Louis' first book *En finir avec Eddy Bellegueule* [The End of Eddy], in 2014. A "surprise" critical and commercial success from a young, unknown 21 years old author, the book sold more than 200,000 copies in just a few months in France and has been translated into more than 30 languages.¹

While this type of work can be linked to numerous literary antecedents, particularly coming-of-age narratives and the

figure of the "school miracle" in the 19th century (Meizoz, 2025), the movement has taken on a distinctive character in France, leading to numerous publications enriching the spectrum of stories of *transfuges de classe* or auto-socio-biographies (Lammers and Twellmann, 2021), while also resonating abroad. These narratives of social ascension, whether anonymous or written by notable figures in the cultural and economic world, whether they take the form of literary autofiction, testimony, interview, sociological essay, or even comic strip, have thus been labelled as a "literary trademark" (Abiven and Véron, 2025, citing Thérenty and Wrona, 2020) or a "media and publishing brand" (Fringant, 2026). The Nobel Prize in Literature awarded to Annie Ernaux in 2022 further strengthened the phenomenon due to the importance of the theme of social revenge in her work.

Rapid buzz for an author or a genre of writing is nonetheless a commonplace phenomenon in the history of publishing, each commercial success prompting numerous imitations and variations among competing publishers, regardless of the sector. The phenomenal success of Françoise Sagan's *Bonjour Tristesse* in 1954, published by Julliard, is a well-known precedent in literature. More recently, the graphic novel provides a good illustration of this "reappro-

¹ The book, across all editions, has sold more than 400,000 copies in France (according to the

publisher) and several hundred thousand copies worldwide.

privation” in the comics industry (Menu, 2005), as well as the social critique essay in trade publishing (Noël, 2021). Thus the aim here is less to revisit the phenomenon of *transfuges de classe* narratives, which has been extensively commented upon and analyzed (notably by Abiven and Véron, 2024 and 2025), than to use the dazzling success of Édouard Louis, author of seven books to date with the same publisher, to reflect on certain recent transformations to the French publishing field and within a general-interest publishing house such as Le Seuil.² Described by its main protagonists as a true “editorial miracle,” the success of *The End of Eddy* merits analysis insofar as it illustrates the effectiveness of the mechanisms which produce belief in the publishing field (Bourdieu, 1992), but also the entanglement of market and symbolic logics within a publishing house occupying a unique place in French literary and intellectual history. Founded in 1935, and derived from Christian humanism, Éditions du Seuil acquired an important position in the 1960s and 70s in literature (with Césaire, Glissant, Böll, Grass, etc.) and in the social sciences, notably around structuralism with authors such as Barthes, Lacan, Chomsky, and Genette (on the history of the publishing house, see Serry, 2008).

The construction of a “surprise” success

As is often the case in the “golden legends” that punctuate the history of publishing, Édouard Louis' manuscript was initially rejected by every publisher. This first-person narrative of a young gay man's painful childhood in the Picard countryside nevertheless found a favourable audience in René de Ceccatty, a writer, translator from Italian and Japanese (Pasolini, Moravia, Abe...), and series editor at Seuil: “I read the first ten pages thinking it was a very well written pastiche of the 19th-century world. But really, sincerely, that's what I thought [...] and I understood, obviously, as I read further, that it's a completely autobiographical text. I remember, it was a Monday, and that same evening, I called him.” He presented the manuscript to the Seuil reading committee as “utterly extraordinary.” The head of the foreign rights department was also enthusiastic upon reading the manuscript, which she sent to a large number of foreign publishing houses. In her pitch, she emphasised the author's original style, which blended different registers of language, and his connection to Pierre Bourdieu “in order to tone down the manuscript's ‘overly French’ feel” and “so that the focus doesn't dwell too much on

² We rely here on interviews carried out in 2026 with his editor, the two successive heads of

foreign rights at Éditions du Seuil, as well as with his literary agent in London.

homosexuality, which doesn't sell well abroad." If publishing an unknown author always represents a risk for a publisher, only sales or exceptional circumstances could justify the transfer of rights at this stage, and the "Bourdieu argument" would prove essential in launching the bidding process abroad.

The book was published in January 2014 in Seuil's prestigious literary series, "Le Cadre rouge." The initial printing of 2,000 copies was prudent: it was a debut novel, and the sales department, monopolized by launching a title from an author who had received a significant advance on royalties, wasn't particularly attentive to its release. This first printing nonetheless sold out very quickly, and reprints followed, with the book topping the weekly bestseller lists, ahead of mass-market titles with substantial promotional budgets like E. L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey*. The book's media reception played an important role in this rapid growth. The head of press at Seuil was also part of the "web of collective belief" (Thompson, 2010) that contributed to building the symbolic value of this first book. She meticulously prepared its release, predicting that it would be "an unimaginable hit." The vast majority of critics (*Le Parisien*, *Le Nouvel Obs*, *Marianne*, *Le Monde*, *L'Express*, *La Croix*, the program "La grande librairie" on France 5 television channel...), with

only a few dissenting voices³, hailed a "literary revelation" at a moment when controversies over same-sex marriage dominated the media landscape, making the issue of homophobia sensitive. The symbolic capital attached to a publishing house like Seuil was clearly a factor in this "incredible press," as were Édouard Louis' contacts in the intellectual and journalistic world through Didier Éribon and the sociologist Geoffroy de Lagasnerie, with whom he is close. The fact that Édouard Louis had been, before the publication of his first book, employed by the bookstore of the Théâtre de l'Odéon, and then at Cahiers de Colette, a Parisian bookstore run by Colette Kerber, must undoubtedly also be considered. The rights manager forwarded this rave press to her address book of foreign publishers, permitting her to secure six rights sales just three months after the book's release, notably in Germany with Fischer Verlag, a house with a prestigious literary catalogue, in Italy (Bompiani), in Spain (Salamandra), and in Brazil (Tusquets/Planeta). Around thirty sales followed, in Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, the Mediterranean basin, Asia, and Latin America. The author's trip in October 2014 to the Frankfurt International Book Fair, which occupies a central role in accessing global publishing circuits (Serry and Vincent, 2013), accelerated the process and led to

³ Notably David Beliard in *Libération*, March 2nd, 2014.

significant bidding for the title. As John Thompson (2010, p. 208) notes, the role of auctions is as symbolic as it is economic in the publishing world: they constitute a signal that strengthens belief in the value of the work in question.

A powerful literary agency

The role played by literary criticism in the recognition and success of Édouard Louis, as well as his rapid accession to the transnational rights circuit, is thus central, as evidenced by his decision, after this first success, to be represented by The Wylie Agency – the famed American agency – for the management of his foreign rights.

The agency, founded by Andrew Wylie in New York in 1980, is famous for having established a new balance of power between authors and publishers, favouring the first. Nicknamed “the Jackal” due to the brutality of his methods, Wylie is known as “the agent of Nobel Prizes” because of the number of prestigious authors who have entrusted him with the management of their rights. René de Ceccatty explains this choice, unusual for a young author in France, by the fact that “very quickly, there were requests that we were not used to handling. That is

to say, requests from universities, movies, television series, and theatres.” While this type of “all-out” strategy might evoke the more commercial end of the field, where transmedia adaptations are the rule in the case of success, it was accompanied by markers that are more typical of the literary and intellectual sphere. One could mention the numerous stage adaptations of several of Édouard Louis' texts, in the wake of Eribon's *Retour à Reims* [Returning to Reims], which helped to inscribe the author within the artistic and intellectual sphere⁴, as well as the requests from universities for courses and conferences, particularly in the United States, which made him “a public intellectual whose voice is sought after,” as his agent explains.

Édouard Louis is also known for his high standards when it comes to the editing of his texts, as attested by the 4 to 5 proofs preceding their publication, due to his frequent corrections (his editor speaks of “remorse, not whims”), a costly practice for the publisher. Likewise, he is involved in the choice of his translators abroad. *The End of Eddy*, for example, was translated three times into Italian. His agent describes him as someone “who makes decisions, who has a vision.” And if he is involved in promoting his works, it is to better control their

⁴ Among the many theatrical adaptations of Édouard Louis in France and abroad, we should quote *Histoire de la Violence* [History of

Violence], his second work, directed by Stanislas Nordey at the Théâtre de la Colline in Paris and by Thomas Ostermeier at the Schaubühne in Berlin in 2018.

content: “He doesn't want any vulgarity at all [...]. We don't place any advertisement without submitting it to him,” emphasizes René de Ceccatty, who also mentions his interest in the choice of covers for the paperback editions of his titles. The account he gives of his first meeting with the agent from the Wylie Agency, who came to Paris to sign Édouard Louis' representation contract, illustrates well the tension between contradictory imperatives, with the editor positioning himself as a bulwark against the commercial logic pushed by the Anglo-Saxon agent: “The first thing he said was: ‘we need to see what your promotional campaign plan is.’ And then I said: ‘listen, you've got bad timing, because the first thing Édouard demanded was above all that we not display any posters for his book.’”

Homology of positions

Édouard Louis appears therefore as an author perfectly suited to his publisher, Le Seuil: the denunciation of the logics of domination and social violence in his works mirrors the intellectual and political engagement of a house that occupied an important place in the post-war literary and intellectual field, committed against the Algerian War and colonialism, and Bourdieu's publisher

since the early 1990s. A closeness confirmed by René de Ceccatty, for whom “Édouard corresponds to a certain aesthetics and politics of Seuil [...]. He is very attached to Seuil. For him, it makes sense.” His success can also be read through the house's adaptation to a new state of the publishing field. The acquisition of Seuil by La Martinière in 2004, then by Média-Participations, the third largest French publishing group,⁵ in 2017, accelerated the shift: the importance of the commercial promotion of titles, the role of press officers in the construction of success (Naudier, 2011; Donnart, 2022), but also the emphasis on the personality of the author, who “plays” well in the media because of his youth (“He fascinates, he has a sort of aura”, as his editor comments). We can also mention the growing role of literary agents in France (Leperlier and Sapiro, 2021) who, without severing the privileged relationship between authors and their editors, a “traditional” model that persists in France and constitutes an essential link in the system, ensure the multiplication of foreign rights contracts, while also managing subsidiary rights, thus assuring them an unprecedented presence in Europe, the United States, Latin America, and Asia.

To a certain extent, Édouard Louis seems to combine the characteristics of “quality

⁵ Média-Participations, which achieved a turnover of 700 million euros in 2025, occupies an important place in the comics and illustrated

book sector (with imprints such as Dargaud, Dupuis, Le Lombard).

bestsellers” (Pouly, 2016): “easy to read” literary narratives that combine symbolic and economic capital, without, however, attaining the stratospheric sales of globally commercial best-sellers like J.K. Rowling or Freida McFadden. If national receptions are, according to his agent, extremely diverse, they find their point of convergence in the “universal” theme of exclusion, which lends itself to differentiated and more or less politicized readings, depending on national context. This type of hybrid literary genre allows Louis’ publisher to reap critical and commercial profits, without endangering its image as a “quality” publishing house embodying literary, intellectual, and political values. The fact that this first book, like the author’s subsequent works, has enjoyed long-lasting and steady sales even after its release in paperback is, in this respect, remarkable. One cannot help but see a possible illustration of the phenomenon described by Pierre Bourdieu (1999): “Some commercial publishers can therefore try to reconcile strategies that in another, more autonomous state of the literary field, were irreconcilable: investment, necessarily long term, in lasting authors and the search for commercial success in quick turnaround literary production.” Seuil’s desire to “carry the voices of all those who shed light on how we live” while remaining “consistent with our values,” according to the current head of foreign rights, seems perfectly aligned with this trend.

One illustration of this is the 2025 publication of blogger Rose Lamy’s essay, *Ascendant beauf*, in Seuil’s “documents” series, which found great success (20,000 copies sold in a few months). A denunciation of cultural domination, presented in a much more accessible style, it was like an offshoot of Édouard Louis’ auto-socioanalyses and the phenomenon of *transfuge de classe*, allowing it to reach different and larger fractions of the public.

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READING NARRATIVES OF *TRANSFUGES DE CLASSE*

*Reception and Identification Among
Individuals Experiencing Upward
Social Mobility*

Lucas Pontzeele

In recent years, autobiographical accounts by *transfuges de classe* have seen a considerable surge in popularity in France and abroad. Part of their publishing success is probably due to the way authors describe the psychosocial violence generated by their experiences of upward social mobility. Indeed, the narrative structure relies in particular on the unveiling of their private lives, which facilitates readers' compassion and even identification with these narratives (Florimond-Clerc & Gabrysiak, 2025). Nevertheless, when examining the best-known works, namely those of Annie Ernaux, Édouard Louis, and Didier Eribon, a relatively homogeneous representation of the experience of upward social mobility emerges. This experience is often presented as a painful process, associated with "uprooting." This reading

remains fairly faithful to that proposed by Richard Hoggart in his book *The Uses of Literacy*, in which he portrays "anxious" and "uprooted" individuals (1957, p. 238). This uprooting is said to stem from a "divide" caused by the acquisition of a scholarly culture transmitted through school, which is foreign to the family environment. However, as Olivier Schwartz and Paul Pasquali (2016) point out, the "Hoggartian" model should be handled with caution, as it can prove reductive in understanding social mobility, which is in reality highly diverse.

Given the variety of paths to social mobility, it is worth asking how people in the process of social ascension receive these narratives, which highlight only one facet of this social phenomenon. From this perspective, this article examines how individuals undergoing upward social mobility internalize (or don't) these narratives: do they subscribe to the authors' perspectives? How does their reception reveal the diversity of trajectories and ways of understanding them? To answer these questions, this text draws on a study of the reception of narratives of *transfuges de classe* by individuals aged 22 to 30 from modest backgrounds who are graduates of prestigious French universities and *grandes écoles*. This data was collected as part of a doctoral dissertation on the role of cultural practices in contemporary upward social mobility; the dissertation is based on approximately fifty

biographical interviews. As not all respondents were familiar with the works of the three authors cited, the article focuses primarily on those who have read them. Nevertheless, the focus on non-readers helps to situate the practice socially: the majority of readers had studied social sciences (notably at the *École normale supérieure* and *Sciences Po*), whereas non-readers tend to come from economic and technical field (business, engineering, and medicine).

Family breakdown as a factor of identification

One of the study's first findings shows that the more readers are detached or even estranged from their background, the more profoundly they connect with the narratives of *transfuges de classe*. This observation is hardly surprising, given that the authors themselves describe a progressive, and sometimes painful, distancing from their family sphere over the course of their careers. Thus, we observe that the more the respondents' experiences resemble those of the writers, the more they identify with them (Lévy, 2015). Like the writers, they are devoted to the school system, which appears as a space for empowerment, legitimization, and, ultimately, emancipation from their original social milieu. This finding aligns

with that of Isabelle Charpentier (2009), who, in her analysis of letters addressed to Annie Ernaux, shows that nearly all of the senders are in fact “upwardly mobile [...] holders of cultural capital acquired through schooling”¹ (p. 23). Overinvestment in academic and mainstream culture during childhood and adolescence appears to be a way of justifying and compensating for the transgression of the norms of one's social background. Annie Ernaux perfectly describes how school and reading helped her envision a future beyond the roles assigned to women of her social class, while still meeting her parents' expectations through academic success. In parallel, Édouard Louis and Didier Eribon describe how their homosexuality and femininity were largely punished by their family environments (Lucca, 2022). Integrating into the cultural domain of the upper classes was for them a way to escape the constant reminder of gender norms.

It is therefore unsurprising to find that agreement with the narratives is particularly strong in the gay men of the sample. This is particularly true of Sacha – a graduate of the *École normale supérieure de Lyon*, an *agrégé* in history, and a high school instructor – whose expression of his femininity and homosexuality was restricted by his father, who was hostile to any trans-

¹ Primarily civil servants and professors.

gression of gender norms. The rupture with his family only deepened after he discovered his parents had voted for the far right. Reading social science books and narratives by *transfuges de classe* helped him contemplate his own path: “At that point, I started to read for myself, without forcing myself. I found readings that resonated with me, that helped me to reflect. I was going through something powerful; it stirred up a lot of emotions.” These readings also served as a way for him to justify distancing himself from his family: “I’ve always liked the writings of people who criticize their families because, exactly, it makes me feel like we have the right to do so!” He ventures, however, some reservations about Édouard Louis, considering his account “sometimes a bit exaggerated” compared to Annie Ernaux’s, more authentic in his eyes.

Narratives as tools for appeasing family ties

While these stories can contribute to the weakening of family bonds, they can also help to appease them (Charpentier, 2009). This is particularly true in the case of Arthur – a graduate of the *École normale supérieure de Lyon* and a doctoral student in sociology – who encouraged his mother to read Didier Eribon’s *Retour à Reims* [Returning to Reims]: “She didn’t understand everything, but that’s how she became

interested in sociology. So when I abandoned the idea of becoming a diplomat, she ended up telling me that being a sociologist was just fine!” By sharing this reading, far removed from his mother’s cultural habits, Arthur sought to bridge the cultural capital gap that now separates them: “After that, I had her read Annie Ernaux, and she started little by little, reading more and more!” This sharing allows Arthur to indirectly convey his feelings regarding the “social and affective costs” (Lagrave, 2019, p. 691) caused by social mobility. In other cases, it is the parents who use these narratives to (re)establish a connection with their children. This is notably the case for Aurélien’s mother – a graduate of the *École Polytechnique* and a civil engineer – who sought to engage in a discussion about Édouard Louis after hearing him on the radio, to reopen a dialogue about her son’s homosexuality, which remains a taboo within the family: “I was very surprised when she told me about this book [The End of Eddy]. It is, after all, at the intersection of a number of things. If I’d been brave, I would have drawn a parallel with myself, but well... I didn’t really feel like coming out that day, so I let it slide...” Whether the prescription goes one way or the other, sharing a book can induce “a recognition of the other and of oneself as the foundation of all ethics,” to quote Viviane Albenga (2017).

The “miserabilist” critique of narratives

If some of the respondents identify with the narratives, others address sharp criticism towards them. These are primarily readers whose social mobility is motivated by a “parental project” (Gaulejac, 1987). Consequently, they struggle to identify with the figure of the “uprooted” individual, insofar as their paths largely align with the aspirations of their community of origin. Far from breaking with their family sphere, they express a form of solidarity, and even gratitude, toward it. This stance is most evident among racialized people. This observation corroborates the results of numerous studies on migration trajectories in France. For example, Mathieu Ichou and Mathieu Ferry clearly demonstrate how “immigrant parents have a tendency to transfer their expectations of success onto their children born in the country of immigration” (2025, p. 16). This constitutes a “transfer of mobility” (Gans, 2009). Consequently, respondents from immigrant backgrounds voice a “miserabilist” (Passeron & Grignon, 1989) critique of these narratives. This critique consists, at first, of firmly opposing any denigration of their community of origin.

This is the case for Yacine – a Sciences Po graduate and an executive at a polling firm – angered by Édouard Louis’s criticism of his family: “*What he did in his*

book The End of Eddy, you don’t do that. I find it profoundly immoral to insult the people who raised him, who fed him for 18 years. The guy always had a full plate [...] And then to say it’s horrible that they watch soccer on TV, it’s shameful!” By denouncing a form of ingratitude on the part of Édouard Louis toward his family, Yacine expresses his attachment to his own. This idea is reinforced when he asserts that he has never left his community of origin, sometimes minimizing the existing social and geographical distance: “*Me, my family loves me, I love my family [...] I still speak with a strong Périgord accent, and I often go back to the Dordogne.*” Linked to his miserabilist critique, Yacine also reproaches Édouard Louis for his full assimilation into the cultural sphere of the upper classes: “*I find it incredibly arrogant to say that he can no longer talk to his parents because he’s cultured. As if, every day, you’re talking about Shakespeare and the latest translation of Tolstoy that came out from Belles Lettres. It’s absolutely delusional!*” Thus, for Yacine, reading Édouard Louis constitutes a form of “external negation” (Iser, 1978); that is to say, it provokes a moral judgment, translating a different attitude toward upward social mobility.

The “political” critique of narratives

Some respondents addressed a “political” critique at the narratives of Eribon, Ernaux, and Louis. This critique

can be divided into two main arguments. The first focuses on the meritocratic dimension of the writings: even though the authors seek to denounce social inequalities, they narrate a story of individual success. This paradox, already identified by Karine Abiven and Laélia Véron (2024), is also raised by some of the respondents. This is particularly the case for Médina – a graduate of the *École normale supérieure de Lyon* and a doctoral student in sociology: “*It’s a term that’s actually hyper-meritocratic; I’ve never thought of myself as a transfuge – I’m just moving, that’s all! [...] And actually, the framing of the narrative bothers me.*” She emphasizes here the difference between *transfuge de classe* and social mobility. In fact, the young woman, whose parents did not attend university, rejects the label of *transfuge de classe* for two reasons. First, because she did not struggle with her upward mobility, fulfilling her parents’ aspirations – like the respondents previously mentioned. Thus, the term seems once again to be associated with the idea of a painful class transition.

Moreover, she believes that the term encourages a focus on individual experiences at the expense of collective struggles: “*I’ve never really talked about my own journey because nobody cares. I was into something more political around class struggle and anti-racism. All of that took precedence over my personal journey.*” The second argument focuses

on the “white” dimension of the expression. For Médina, it’s difficult to claim it as a racialized woman: “*It’s a white concept. There are places in the social space I’ll never be able to access. So frankly, the concept of a transfuge, if you will, it... pff... it doesn’t speak to me.*” This position aligns with that of Kaoutar Harchi, who asserts that the concept “denies the social relations of race” (Harchi & Zinzius, 2023), notably because changing one’s social class does not eliminate discrimination based on skin color. Nevertheless, the recent publication of autobiographical accounts by racialized people, such as those by Nesrine Slaoui (2021) or, more recently, Marwan Mohammed (2026), has sparked discussions – particularly in the media – about the “whiteness” of the term.

Conclusion

The varied ways in which individuals on an upward social mobility trajectory receive narratives of *transfuges de classe* reflect the heterogeneity of their life trajectories and the dispositions associated with them. Thus, respondents have different relationships with these works depending on what motivated their upward mobility (escaping their original social milieu or fulfilling parental expectations), a motivation itself shaped by the logics of gender, race, and sexual orientation. A second finding concerns the limited reach of these narratives, as

they are read only by respondents belonging to the cultural fraction of the upper classes. Thus, fears² regarding the appropriation – or even the political instrumentalization – of these narratives by the economic fraction of the upper classes to promote a meritocratic discourse appear, for the moment, to be limited.

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² See for example: Véron, L., and Abiven, K. (2024, April 1).

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THE SOCIAL USES OF *TRANSFUGES (DE CLASSE)* AND *TRANSCASSES*

Research Notes

Matthias Fringant

The French terms *transfuges* (defectors), *transfuges de classe* (class defectors), and also *transclasses* (transclasses) are often used to designate subjects in a situation of social mobility at the center of narratives of self-socioanalysis. “Narratives of *transfuges*” and “narratives of *transclasses*” are thus often used to describe what can be understood as a publishing phenomenon. Commonly adopted indiscriminately by factions of the publishing, journalistic, and social sciences fields, these terms actually span different, sometimes antagonistic, conceptualizations. Discussing recent works, some of them including firsthand information gathered through written correspondence and interviews with the writer Annie Ernaux and the philosopher Chantal Jaquet, central actors in the circulation of these terms, this text seeks to outline a social history of the uses of these terms, taking note to the

continued process of their translation into English, with the aim of lexical and conceptual clarification.

“Transfuges,” “*transfuges de classe*,” “*transclasses*”: the ambiguities underneath an apparent unity

As Karine Abiven and Laélia Véron explain (2024 ; 2025), if *transfuge* initially carried a military dimension, referring to a defector joining the enemy camp, it was only in the latter half of the 20th century that the word was connected to the theme of social mobility. It was the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre who used the term in his preface to *Aden Arabie* (1960 [1931]) to describe the character of Antoine Bloyé as well as the book’s author, Paul Nizan. The word circulated in the following decades with this meaning. It is thus unsurprising to find it on occasion in writings by Pierre Bourdieu. The sociologist sometimes used the word to designate individuals experiencing upward social mobility through schooling. However, several terms, such as *miraculé* (a person miraculously saved or redeemed) are used interchangeably and sporadically, such that *transfuge* doesn’t play a major role in Bourdieu’s conceptual system. In support of this argument, it can be noted that the word doesn’t appear in the index of *Distinction* (1979), and that it is used only once within the work itself.

More recently, the lexical field of social class has been appended to the noun.

After infrequent use in the decades following the Second World War, it was the writer Annie Ernaux who popularized the expression *transfuge de classe* in the 1980s (Fringant, 2026). Annie Ernaux read *Distinction* in the context of a writing project on her father's life, faithfully accounting for an experience of heartbreak without complicity with a bourgeois readership. This project led to the publication of *La Place* [A Man's Place] (1983). In correspondence, she explained to me that in 1985 – having subscribed the prior year to *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* – she met a researcher at the National Institute of Agricultural Research (INRA) named Pierre Saunier in a cafe in a swanky neighborhood of Paris. During the conversation, or in a letter soon after, he called her a *transfuge* or a *transfuge de classe*. Whatever the precise vocabulary he used, Annie Ernaux herself used the expression *transfuge de classe* for the first time in an interview published in the social science journal *Politix* in 1991, referring to herself. Unlike these earlier, infrequent uses, the expression was taken up in the 1990s by French sociologists such as Isabelle Charpentier and Bernard Lahire. The second used it sociologically in his studies on the processes of social mobility, inaugurating a larger set of uses within the discipline. If it was rapidly adopted by sociologists, it was only later that the media seized upon the expression, following in Ernaux's footsteps. It was in

2001, when the French newspaper *Le Monde* dedicated an article to her latest book, that the expression was first used. This kind of use would only develop in the press as the writer's reputation grew. Annie Ernaux was awarded the Marguerite Yourcenar prize in 2017, followed by the prestigious Nobel Prize in Literature in 2022. Her acceptance speech, organized around the phrase “I will write to avenge my people,” includes a mention of *transfuge de classe sociale* to designate, within a broader reflection on her writing choices, those who “think and express themselves with other words” than those of their parents.

It's in the framework of this expression that alternatives such as *migrant de classe* (class migrant) or *transclasse* developed, meant to resolve the problem of the strong negative axiological charge associated with *transfuge de classe*. The project of the philosopher Chantal Jaquet, conducted in *Les transclasses ou la non-reproduction* [Transclasses. A Theory of Social Non-Reproduction] (2014), is to neutralize the pejorative connotations of *transfuge de classe*. She seeks to study, without prejudice as to its value, any movement of transition between two classes, principally through literary narratives. Jaquet's analysis focuses first on the causes of non-reproduction. Her speculation brings to light the need for combinatorial thinking – which, according to the author, the Spinozist concept of complexion pre-

sented in the second part of the work comes closer to approaching than does the concept of habitus. The term has a very different circulation than the expression it opposes. *Transfuge de classe*, by importing the language of social class into literature and the press, has been adopted by sociologists. *Transclasse*, in neutralizing this language, has received a lukewarm reception in sociology but a much wider one in the cultural press. The reception *Les transclasses ou la non-reproduction* is quite subdued among sociologists and more unanimously positive in the media. This gap continues to widen, notably with the publication of the collective book *La fabrique des transclasses* [The Making of Transclasses] (2018) and the broadcast two years later on a French public television channel of the documentary “Le défi des transclasses” [The challenge of the Transclasses]. From the 2020s, the majority of the uses of the notion reside within self-presentations inextricably tied to media and literature by members of different factions of the dominant class, all while empirical uses of the research initially proposed by Chantal Jaquet in 2014 remain relatively few.

English translations of these concepts: several landmarks

Transfuges, *transfuges de classe*, and *transclasses*, which thus attest to three very different histories, were nevertheless all coined within the context of

French literature and philosophy. Having quickly delineated the contexts of their production and circulation in French, we can now examine the circulation of these terms in English via their translation to see if any sociologically pertinent constants emerge.

Insofar as the term *transfuge* belongs to everyday language, it is impossible to satisfactorily trace its successive uses across time. If we consider the occurrence found in *Distinction*, we see that Richard Nice’s translation (1984) is meaningful, as *transfuge* becomes “solitary renegade.” We see that the semantic field of betrayal is thus accentuated, the adjective “solitary” fortifying this negative connotation. Around the same time that Annie Ernaux’s *La Place* [A Man’s Place] was published, in a context of the disappearance of the language of social class in favor of representing a society without divisions, Richard Nice responded to the demand for lexicon linking social groups and conflict.

The procedure seems to be the same for Annie Ernaux, who thus imported at the same moment the language of class into literature with the expression *transfuge de classe*. As she herself explains, if sociology gives her the language and the means to conceptualize her literary project, it cannot replace it. Sociological concepts are seldom used in Ernaux’s literary writings. Rather, they appear in the discourses that accompany them, such as interviews with researchers and

journalists, or in commentaries. It therefore seems unnecessary to examine the English translations of her books, beginning in the 1980s, to concretize the dissemination of the expression in English. One can however hypothesize that Alison L. Strayer's translation of Ernaux's Nobel Prize acceptance speech (2023) and the rendering of the phrase *transfuge de classe* as "class defector" contributed to a renewal of the process of translating the expression into English (Hugueny-Léger, 2025). Another research hypothesis: it's useful to include English translations of successful narratives that extended the literary approach initiated by Annie Ernaux, such as Didier Eribon's *Retour à Reims* [Returning to Reims] (2013) and Édouard Louis' *En finir avec Eddy Bellegueule* [The End of Eddy] (2017) – both translated by Michael Lucey – to understand the dissemination of the expression in the anglophone world. One should note that works by these three authors have been adapted for the stage and screen (Edy, 2025), having perhaps played an important role in the circulation of the expression *transfuge de classe* in the anglophone world.

Finally, as regards *transclasses*, as the term appears in the title of Chantal Jaquet's book, we can here examine its English translation. *Les transclasses ou la non-reproduction* was translated by Gregory Elliott as *Transclasses. A Theory of Social Non-Reproduction* (2023). The

emphasis here was placed on the theoretical dimension of the work and of the concept. The book's description on the publisher's website, paradoxically, reads "how people become class traitors." The phrase thus invokes the central concept against which *trans-classe* was originally coined. The theoretical value emphasized by the English translation seems to have generated a feedback effect on the philosopher's work, having recently published the essay *Révolutions transclasses. Une nouvelle théorie de l'émancipation* [Transclass revolutions: a new theory of emancipation] (2026) in French.

The demarcation of the uses of the French terms *transfuges*, *transfuges de classe*, *transclasses*, and their translations into English reveals two principal elements.

First, all these words, now often used interchangeably, were coined in different contexts and have different values from a sociological perspective. *Transfuge* has never been the subject of a precise sociological conceptualization. It's certainly *transfuge de classe* which (paradoxically as the expression circulated from literature towards sociology) has been the subject of the most controlled sociological uses, at the same moment when prophecies heralding the end of antagonistic relations between social groups were circulating within the discipline. As for *transclasses*, coined in

reaction to *transfuge de classe*, until today it has principally been used in the media without having been applied to empirical research.

Secondly, each of these expressions has been primarily coined within a national, or even a Parisian, context. Initial outlines of an inquiry into their translation into English reveals that this process is very recent and still unfixed, as demonstrated by the continued use of quotation marks and variations between the English terms “class defector” and “class traitor,” not to mention *transfuge de classe* which sometimes remains in French.

This attentive, preliminary study of these terms relative to social mobility and the narratives accompanying it will, hopefully, contribute to further sociological reflections on our collective uses of words and concepts.

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TRANSFUGE DE CLASSE AND THE PARADOXES OF SOCIAL MOBILITY

Laélia Véron and Karine Abiven,
*Trahir et venger. Paradoxes des récits de
transfuges de classe.* Paris: La
Découverte, 2024

Marco Pitzalis

In recent years, narratives by *transfuges de classe* (class defectors) have become one of the most visible forms of self-writing in the French public sphere. Their success, however, has often encouraged a loose and inflationary use of the category itself. One of the major merits of Laélia Véron and Karine Abiven's *Trahir et venger* is precisely to resist this inflation. Rather than simply adding one more commentary on a fashionable literary and sociological object, the book interrogates the very polysemy of the notion of *transfuge de classe*.

The book first shows that the term “*transfuge*” is never neutral. The authors provide a semantic history of the concept, showing that before its partial neutralisation in contemporary usage, it

was associated with the ideas of desertion, betrayal, and moral suspicion. This history matters because the term's current prestige often obscures the extent to which it remains normatively charged. The notion of a *transfuge de classe* is, in fact, related to certain “affects” and moral categories such as shame, merit, guilt, treason, and revenge. Véron and Abiven are thus right to insist that the category cannot be treated as a transparent sociological descriptor.

This conceptual clarification becomes especially important when the authors move from the word to the corpus. One of the book's most convincing claims is that the current sense of ubiquity surrounding class-defector narratives partly stems from the circulation of a media script rather than from the existence of a stable and clearly delimited corpus. A relatively narrow canon – Annie Ernaux, Richard Hoggart, Pierre Bourdieu, Didier Eribon, Édouard Louis, Rose-Marie Lagrave – has gradually given rise to a much broader discursive frame, now used to classify journalists, politicians, actors, social media testimonies, and even retrospective literary figures (the case of Rastignac). In that respect, the book is a salutary warning against anachronistic or overly elastic uses of the category.

Véron and Abiven clearly use Bourdieusian tools when they analyse *habitus clivé*, symbolic violence, school-based reproduction, and the domination

of legitimate language. Nevertheless, they also develop their analysis beyond a simplified Bourdieusian legacy by reintroducing what many contemporary invocations of the *transfuge* tend to forget: the social space must be grasped in its multidimensional and historically changing structure. In the spirit of *Distinction*, the book reminds us that different principles of hierarchy coexist and compete, and that their relative weight changes over time. One cannot, therefore, speak of “class defection” as though social space were homogeneous and univocal. On the contrary, much of the current discourse on class-defector narratives tends to privilege upward mobility through school and the acquisition of cultural capital. The book shows how central this configuration is in the canon of French narratives of social ascent. School appears as the decisive institution, the privileged site of rupture, shame, and transformation. Following the authors, the prevalent identification of mobility with educational ascent risks confusing one historically dominant form of mobility with mobility as such. In this way, trajectories structured by economic capital, commercial activity, professional sports, or less spectacular, reversible displacements across social space are definitely overlooked. Thus, the book restores a necessary epistemological vigilance by showing that the category's relevance depends on how one constructs the social space in which it operates.

Moreover, the book focuses on the success of the class-defector category and its stabilisation in a recognisable, quite prescriptive model in which popular origins, school as rupture, shame before legitimate culture, linguistic correction, divided habitus, and eventual reconciliation through writing constitute the recurrent *topoi*, thereby obscuring the heterogeneity of the realities it claims to name. The chapter on language is especially strong in this regard. By focusing on diglossia, linguistic shame, and the tension between dominated and dominant forms of speech, Véron and Abiven demonstrate that class mobility is also a struggle over legitimate expression. Nevertheless, they avoid any naïve celebration of an authentic “popular” idiom. What they reconstruct is rather the paradox whereby anti-literary or anti-legitimate styles themselves become new forms of literary legitimacy.

In this sense, *Trahir et venger* is best read not simply as a study of a literary trend, but as an exercise in conceptual clarification. Its central contribution is to remind us that the notion of the *transfuge de classe* remains analytically useful only if constantly re-situated within a multipolar, historically evolving social space. Véron and Abiven's book is therefore valuable not only for what it says about contemporary French literature, but also for the form of epistemological vigilance it encourages.

Events



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THE SOCIOLOGY OF PRIZES, PUBLISHING AND WORLD AUTHORSHIP

The Nobel Symposium in Literature, May 21-24, 2026, Stockholm, Sweden

Madeline Bedecarre

Nothing evokes “the glorification of ‘great individuals’, unique creators” bemoaned by Pierre Bourdieu quite like the Nobel Prize in Literature, where a singular writer is celebrated for their individual, innate genius- “a divine spark” to quote one member of the Swedish Academy (Bourdieu, p. 29).¹ However, the participants in the Nobel Symposium in Literature did not gather together to further worship this canon of world literature, but instead to interrogate “the role played by literary prizes in the processes of consecration”. They used empirical case studies to “question the impact of international literary prizes on various national and linguistic book markets” and to explore in turn “how the transformation of the publishing

industry impacts international literary prizes.”

The four-day conference entitled “Literary consecration and the transformation of publishing in the era of globalization” was convened by Gisèle Sapiro (CNRS-EHESS), Carlos Spoerhase (University of Munich), Henrik Fürst (Stockholm University), Sandra Richter (Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach), Jørgen Sneis (University of Munich) and Bo G. Ekelund (Stockholm University). The international event funded by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences brought together sociologists and literary scholars based in ten different countries.

Across the nine different panels and around thirty speakers, four main themes emerged.

Some presentations theorized prizes as “instruments of power” to quote Henrik Fürst. Clayton Childress presented on the way tokenism excludes swaths of writers from the Booker prize and its long-term consequences which echoed Claire Ducournau’s research on the racialized reception of different Black winners of France’s Goncourt Prize. Madeline Bedecarré spoke about the double-bind of accepting politicized awards in the case of French-language African writers and Fürst examined how

¹ Ellen Mattson quoted in “Behind the Scenes of the Nobel Prize in Literature”.

<https://www.nobelprize.org/behind-the-scenes-of-the-nobel-prize-in-literature/>

the Nordic Council Prizes attempt to foster a collective “nordic” identity.

Other papers parsed the relationship between literary prizes and the proliferation of popular genre fiction. Jim English discussed his empirical study of the non-professional “para-consecration” of the Goodreads Choice Awards. Michael Hockx touched on the proliferation of amateur writers, online self-publishing platforms, and prizes in China that have cropped up to recognize these new bodies of textual production. Whereas Bo G. Ekelund’s paper addressed how literary prizes “police” genre boundaries by focusing on international science fiction awards.

Still other presenters explored the role of translation in literary consecration. Jana Rüegg shared data on the Swedish translations of recent Nobel laureates, Anna Baldini analyzed the Italian translation and reception of Nobel winning authors, and Yvonne Lindqvist defended the idea of double consecration in the case of hispanophone caribbean literatures, meaning they must first be recognized in centers like Paris, then secondly in Anglo-American centers before they are translated into Swedish.

Many participants zeroed in on the publishing market. Formerly the head of Fayard publishing house, Sophie de Closets, now the CEO of Flammarion, concentrated on the economic benefits of the Nobel Prize for French publishing

houses which she dubbed “the Nobel miracle”. John Thompson explained the commercial logics of Anglo-American trade publishing as being defined by the phenomena of big books. Starting with the premise that the conglomeration era which he studied in his book won’t last forever, Dan Sinykin introduced new developments in the American literary field such as the Mellon Foundation’s Literary Arts Fund grant. Other scholars focused on the role of publishing intermediaries. Gisèle Sapiro presented new work on literary agents and their role in the international circulation of literature as well as their involvement in “the construction of world authorship”. Sandra Richter’s talk, based on fascinating archival research, centered on scouts as an important yet often ignored actor in the circulation and consecration of world authors leading up to awards.

Two features of the conference contributed to its originality and speak to the thoughtful curation of the event on the part of its organizers: the inclusion of publishing professionals alongside scholars as well as the shared Bourdieusian theoretical framework amongst attendees. A highlight of the conference was the panel discussion on the future of the publishing industry hosted at Stockholm’s Kulturhuset. Boubacar Boris Diop, the prizewinning novelist and founder of the first Senegalese wolofophone publishing

house EJO-Editions, spoke of the importance of linguistic diversity and the need for African-language publishing houses on the continent. Thomas Meaney, the editor of the literary magazine *Granta* weighed in on how mediators in the literary field must now contend with AI. One participant memorably joked in the opening of his talk that Bourdieu was his intellectual “daddy” and this communal father figure indeed informed the majority of the research presented. Many mentioned the pleasure and camaraderie found in the common Bourdieusian vernacular (the production of belief, the literary field, symbolic violence, the space of position takings) and the use of diagrams to map different fields and processes of recognition.

The last paper delivered by Pavithra Narayanan on the final day of the conference gestured at the stakes of teaching and opened up a fruitful, reflexive discussion around how some of these processes studied during the conference such as consecration, tokenisation, or translation play out on a daily basis in the confines of our classrooms.

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AFRÂNIO GARCIA, INTER-NATIONAL RESEARCHER AND GO-BETWEEN

*Conference, December 3-4, 2025,
EHESS and Maison du Brésil, Paris,
France*

Camila Gui Rosatti & Vassili Rivron

Organized by the European Centre for Sociology and Political Science (CESSP) and the Reflection Group on Contemporary Brazil (GRBC), this event brought together 23 speakers who had collaborated with the Brazilian anthropologist Afrânio Garcia. The meeting, organized one year after his death on 30/11/2024, aimed to discuss the contributions of his work, situated within what some have called a “Bourdieuian international”, imagined as a network for the circulation of questions, methods, and researchers. The roundtables were dedicated to the political anthropology of Brazil, transformations of the rural world, the sociology of education and international circulations, as well as the sociology of intellectuals. This thematic diversity is anchored in his academic trajectory spanning Brazil and France: trained in

economics, professor of anthropology at the Museu Nacional of the UFRJ from 1978 to 1995, and then elected in 1995 to the EHESS, Afrânio Garcia continued and widened his research there, in an interdisciplinary and comparative perspective.

His work is particular in that it touches on all the positions inherited from the decline of the plantation system in Brazil. José Sérgio Leite Lopes has shown that his analyses take into account the transformation of the descendants of enslaved populations into agricultural laborers and their migrations towards industrialized cities. His studies have also been used in debates with state experts, particularly about agrarian reform. Thomas Cortado concentrated on his innovative role in a “new anthropology of the house” in Brazil, a habitat that materially and symbolically shapes networks of kinship, neighborhood and power, where autonomy and dependence intertwine. Jean-Pierre Faguer underlined the contributions of his entire œuvre towards understanding forms of workplace domination, from the most violent agrarian structures to more diffuse contemporary forms linked to educational selection and career management. He demonstrated that this approach allows a joint conception of social reorientation “from below and from above.”

It was at the EHESS that Afrânio Garcia systematized his study on the conversion of agrarian oligarchies into political and intellectual elites. Sergio Miceli showed how he was able to mobilize his work in rural sociology to analyze the social and regionalist novel of the “sugar cane cycle.” Anne-Marie Thiesse noted his attention to the transformations of the link between the political and literary fields, an approach that anticipated key debates in current decolonial studies, questioning racial categories and resistances to imperialism. Gisèle Sapiro revisited his study dedicated to Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Cardoso, a sociologist who became President of the Republic, embodies a figure who is both academic and political, two distinct types of dispositions that Garcia considered might intertwine.

Within the framework of the emerging theme of globalization in the 1990s, Afrânio Garcia demonstrated that the analysis of the production of national symbols must also be understood within inter-national relations. Louis Pinto thus revisited an article on *Brazil, land of the future*, by Stefan Zweig, a cosmopolitan intellectual who sought refuge in Brazil. Sketching a cosmopolitan utopia, Brazil appears in it as an alternative to a Europe that had become obscurantist. This inter-national orientation also became a collective research program on Brazil's policy of expanding access to study-abroad scholarships, which Letícia Bicalho Canêdo reported on, showing its

effects on the scientific field and Brazil's leading cadre. Rodrigo Bordignon detailed the appropriation of these questions by a new generation of Brazilian researchers. As for Anne-Catherine Wagner, she showed that this bilateral program was also part of other studies on the international circulation of ideas. Namely, that education itself fit within the logics of the globalization of knowledge markets and of the transformation of national elites. And Yves Dezalay analyzed the intellectual reorientations of Brazilians in Paris (in the social sciences), in opposition to the emergence of a hegemonic American model (in economics and political science, leading notably to high finance). Thus, his work is situated within the very long history of globalized elites who re-compose themselves within the various states of republican meritocracies.

Several contributors emphasized Garcia's attentiveness to collaborative work and international comparison, as well as his openness to dialogue with so-called “peripheral” contexts, such as Romania (Mihai Gheorgiu) and Hungary (Victor Karady). He was also attentive to the asymmetries and homologies between the social configurations that structure North-South and South-South relations. Monique de Saint-Martin and Tassadit Yacine underlined how Algeria, in dialogue with Bourdieu and Sayad, was a constant point of reference to consider the processes of uprooting and migra-

tory dynamics, whether they came from rural-urban trajectories or international circulations.

A series of presentations highlighted the institutional and pedagogical aspects of this scientific work. Benoît de L'Estoile analyzed the Franco-Brazilian accords established during Afrânio Garcia's tenure at the Center for Research on Contemporary Brazil (CRBC/EHESS). They permitted the stabilization and experimentation of sustainable forms of collaboration around major research topics. Thus, Delphine Serre reported on a fieldwork experience on agrarian reform conducted in Pernambuco (1997 and 1999), where Afrânio Garcia was very involved in guiding young researchers, fostering in them a strong sociological imagination. Vassili Rivron sought to analyze how the mechanisms of the Political Anthropology of Brazil seminar and the GRBC allowed him to question the hierarchical logic of the french tradition of "aires culturelles" (Area Studies), understood here as an institutional and epistemological framework organizing knowledge by geographic regions. Maurice Aymard explained how his scientific commitments resulted in publications and host institutions (the Sérgio Buarque de Holanda Chair). Marie-Vic Osouf-Marignier and Michel Agier emphasized to what extent national, thematic, and (inter)disciplinary positions inevitably raise the stakes of competition and integration within prestigious institutions such as

the EHESS. The account of Francine Muel-Dreyfus— as well as those of Franck Poupeau, Francis Chateauraynaud, Laurence Proteau, Camila Rosatti, and Christian Baudelot— reminded us that research collectives also flourish amid friendships which, as Julien Duval analyzed, constitute networks of international circulation and are passed down through generations.

Archives

Video recordings

First Day:

<https://youtu.be/YPgsbSYo3sY>

Second Day:

<https://youtu.be/gleELZAYL6w>

Texts

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DISTINCTION IN SÃO PAULO

Research Seminar, November 25-26, 2025, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Brazil

Michel Nicolau Netto, Miqueli Michetti
and Edison Bertonecelo

On November 25–26, the [Centro de Sociologia Contemporânea](#) held the seminar “[Seminário Final da Pesquisa Para Além D’A Distinção](#)” at Universidade Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP), Brazil. The event marked the conclusion of the research project *Distinction in São Paulo*¹. It was the latest in a series of events organized at the end of 2025: at École Normale Supérieure (ENS) Paris-Saclay (15–16 October), London School of Economics (LSE) (28 October), and Universidade de São Paulo (USP) (12 November). Coordinated by Renato Ortiz, the project brings together an international team of scholars from Brazil, France, England, Portugal, and Norway.

At UNICAMP, the Brazilian research team presented the project’s main findings. To our knowledge, this is the

first study in South America to adopt a comprehensive Bourdieusian framework, particularly inspired by *La Distinction*, to construct both symbolic and social spaces and assess their possible homologies. Conducted in the city of São Paulo amid recent social transformations in Brazil, the project examines the social determinants of cultural tastes and practices and evaluates whether cultural capital shapes class dynamics and stratification. More broadly, it investigates whether and how cultural capital is converted into symbolic power within contemporary stratification processes.

The research follows a mixed-methods design in which each phase informs the next: document analysis and focus groups → survey → in-depth interviews (see [here](#)). These stages were preceded by the construction of a spatial typology of São Paulo. Based on socio-demographic indicators, we identified clusters of districts. This typology guided both the survey sampling strategy and the selection of areas for closer observation.

Document analysis and focus groups functioned as exploratory tools. The document analysis mapped cultural and lifestyle offerings to inform both the focus groups and the survey. The six focus groups – comprising participants

¹ This project was funded by the [Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo](#) (FAPESP).

from different class positions – were especially important in preventing us from “imposing the problematic.” By observing discussions about leisure, tastes, distastes and aversions, and cultural hierarchies, we generated hypotheses and questions for the questionnaire (see our use of focus groups in Mira, Castro and Michetti (2024) and Bertencelo and Nicolau Netto (2023)).

The survey was conducted through household interviews between June and October 2024, based on a representative sample of 2,004 adult residents (18+) of São Paulo. Respondents answered more than 900 questions designed to construct both symbolic and social spaces. We also included items to map geographic location and mobility, enabling the construction of a geographic space. To build the symbolic space, we designed questions across 14 domains (from the arts to food and travel) in order to map lifestyles. The questionnaire ([here](#)) captured knowledge, practice, aspiration, taste, and distaste. For the social space, we collected extensive data on cultural and economic capital (both current possession and trajectories of acquisition/inheritance), along with sociodemographic variables (Nicolau Netto, Michetti, Bertencello, 2024). To deepen the analysis, we added two booster samples in 2025 (100 respondents each): one targeting high-income individuals from privileged

districts, the other educated young people from lower-class backgrounds from poorer districts, according to our aforementioned spatial typology.

After constructing the symbolic space through Multiple Correspondence Analysis – following procedures similar to those used by Bourdieu – we identified five clusters of tastes and practices. We then selected five individuals from each cluster (25 in total) for in-depth interviews. In addition to conducting the interviews, we examined their neighborhoods and carried out field observations in these areas. The interviews allowed us to analyze how individuals subjectively hierarchized culture, justified their tastes and distastes, and drew symbolic and social boundaries.

Some of the principal findings were presented at the seminar and are currently being prepared for publication. Among them, we concurred with the thesis suggesting a homology between the social and symbolic spaces of São Paulo, although we noted its limits, as the homology is stronger among the highest and lowest social classes. We also showed how elite distinction is produced through highly selective practices and tastes that abhor commercial popular culture and adhere to popular urban and legitimized cultures.

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PRACTISING THE SOCIOLOGICAL GAZE. GENDER, DOMINATION AND VISUALITY

*Bourdieu Lectures, November 19-20,
2025, Bielefeld, Germany*

Amelie Kybart

The first impression when entering the Kunsthalle Bielefeld is one of controlled dissonance: large-format black-and-white photographs from colonial Algeria line the walls, while in the adjacent lecture hall scholars discuss gendered bodies, field structures and symbolic violence in late modern societies. The 2025 Bourdieu Lectures, titled “Geschlecht – Herrschaft – Visualität” [Gender, Domination and Visuality], unfolded precisely in this tension between historical images and contemporary diagnoses, between exhibition and symposium, between aesthetic experience and praxeological theory. Bringing together the University of Bielefeld, Zeppelin University, the University of Education Freiburg and the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna in cooperation with the Fondation Bourdieu, the

event proposed a particular way of “doing” Bourdieu today: by training a sociological gaze that is at once visual, gender-sensitive and reflexive.

A conversion of the gaze

The accompanying booklet to the exhibition “Pierre Bourdieus soziologischer Blick” explicitly frames Bourdieu’s Algerian work as a “Konversion des Blicks”, a conversion of the gaze. Drafted as a young conscript in the midst of the Algerian War of Independence, Bourdieu turned away from an academic trajectory in Parisian philosophy towards ethnographic fieldwork among Kabyle populations and displaced peasants, equipped with a camera and a notebook.

The exhibition arranges roughly thematic sections around this biographical and methodological turning point: the gendered order of the world, the visualisation of sociological concepts, colonial destruction and uprooting, enforced modernity, and the parallel processes of “Entbäuerlichung” [Urbanization] on both sides of the Mediterranean. In each section, photographs are carefully juxtaposed with quotations from Bourdieu’s own writings and later commentaries, forming text-image collages that invite visitors to read images not as illustrations, but as condensations of practical sense. A photograph of Kabyle women returning from a well, for instance, is placed

alongside dense descriptions of female hexis – bent posture, lowered gaze, restricted movement – through which Bourdieu came to conceptualise gendered dispositions as embodied honour and shame.

These curatorial choices re-enact, for a contemporary audience, the very process of learning to “see” social structures in gestures, spatial arrangements and everyday routines that Bourdieu underwent in Algeria. In this sense, the exhibition does not simply display Bourdieu’s photographs; it performs a pedagogy of the gaze, training its viewers in a praxeological way of apprehending the world.

Gender, domination and symbolic violence

The lecture programme mobilised Bourdieu’s concepts in order to interrogate contemporary gender regimes. Across two days, keynotes, workshops and colloquia traced the reach and the limits of Bourdieu’s analysis of masculine domination in fields as diverse as education, migration, queer spaces and global capitalism.

Several contributors took Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic violence as a starting point for re-examining forms of gendered domination that operate beyond direct physical coercion. A workshop on “Interdisciplinary dialogues on violent articulations” proposed to

treat symbolic violence as a processual analytic lens for uncovering how patriarchal orders are sustained through routine schemes of perception and evaluation in everyday practices – be it in medical visualisations of normative bodies, in juridical procedures or in the normalisation of right-wing language in public discourse.

Other panels shifted the geographical and institutional frame. A talk on South Korea read Bourdieu’s capital and gender theory against an “Asian modernity” characterised by belated industrialisation, a strong educational ethos and a rapidly transforming welfare state, asking how meritocratic distributions of economic, social and cultural capital intersect with gendered expectations in a digitalised, globally integrated society. Another contribution analysed “third path” access to higher education via vocational routes, showing how non-traditional students’ trajectories are not only constrained by economic conditions, but also by patriarchal and spatial structures in peripheral regions.

The themes of marriage, inheritance and generational transmission – central to Bourdieu’s own work on Kabyle societies and on rural Béarn – were also revisited from a gender-reflexive perspective. One project on first-generation female students, for example, re-read Bourdieu’s famous vignette of the “son” who betrays class expectations through educational upward mobility by focusing

instead on mother–daughter relations. Here, mothers emerge both as negative foil and as carriers of a familial project of mobility, complicating the paternal figure that dominates Bourdieu’s own narrative of “wounded” trajectories. Such empirically sensitive work underlines how Bourdieusian concepts can be re-oriented to account for gendered experiences that were only partially visible in the original texts.

Bourdieu Lectures as a reflexive format

A distinctive feature of the Bourdieu Lectures was their continuous movement between text, image and embodied discussion. The presence of the exhibition meant that panels on gender doxa in schools, on habitus analyses of marriage migration or on the classed and gendered structuring of social milieus unfolded only a few steps away from photographs of Kabyle houses, regroupment camps and rural festivities in Béarn.

In their combination of exhibition, digital reader, keynotes, workshops and publisher presentation, the Bourdieu Lectures 2025 offered a reflexive format for engaging with Bourdieu’s theory of practice at a time when gender orders, colonial legacies and global inequalities are being renegotiated under conditions of accelerated neoliberal capitalism. Situating the Algerian photographs at the centre, yet insisting on contemporary

re-appropriations and critiques, the Bielefeld Lectures treated Bourdieu not as a closed system, but as an open repertoire of concepts and sensibilities to be tested, revised and sometimes resisted.

RECENT BOOKS' LIST

Inspired by/About Pierre Bourdieu's Work

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- Pulici, C. (2026) *As Boas Maneiras de Morar. Repertórios Prescritivos Franceses e Brasileiros no Século XXI*. [The Art of Living: French and Brazilian Prescriptive Repertoires in the 21st Century] São Paulo: Edusp.
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