CALL FOR PAPERS

FEMINIST MATERIALISMS

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INTRODUCTION

This call for papers echoes what has been a growing debate within Feminist Studies these last years in France. These debates have focused on the use of a Marxist or Marxian framework to analyze hierarchical systems of gender and sexuality, as well as of race and class in an analogical or symptomal perspective. We do not aim to recreate these debates but rather expose their theoretical filiations, the social contexts in which they are produced, the histories of which they are the temporary final stop, and the boundaries – whether national, disciplinary or epistemological – passing through and shaping them. Against the idea that there would be one single materialist feminism established once and for all, we wish to show a plurality of materialist feminisms or feminist materialisms: existing elsewhere, existing here but marginalized, or in progress.

The objective is then to open up French-speaking materialist feminism in several ways: 1) “deterritorializing” it by turning to materialist feminist theories developed outside of France; 2) historizing it by revealing the dynamics of its formation through a critical genealogy; 3) putting national disciplinary issues and their possibilities and impossibilities of circulation into perspective.

THEMES

- For a sociohistory of “French materialist feminism”
In France, a body of work on materialist feminism exists that is mandatory reading for any person with feminist background. It is based on a shared framework, the Marxian method, and has its reference authors: Colette Guillaumin, Monique Wittig, Nicole-Claude Mathieu, Danièle Kergoat, Paola Tabet, Christine Delphy. Thirty years after a paper often lauded as foundational (Delphy, 1998 [1975]), the latter detailed the progressive formation of a “materialist feminist school” (Delphy, 2005, p. 35). This work constitutes an authentic and retrospective act of institution, reminding us that in order to understand the debates and arguments regarding materialism within Feminist Studies nowadays, it is useful to take the contexts of production into consideration. Materialist feminism is a major theoretical school in France. It has its reviews, collections, spaces of transmission, taboo and consecrated words, friendly disciplines and “perpetual” adversaries.

One of the main characteristics of French materialist feminism is its antagonistic construction: against androcentric knowledge, against the naturalization of social relations, against idealism, against disciplinary boundaries – at least against some of these boundaries. This initial positioning has had a variety of effects within Feminist Studies: the antagonism identifies problems, clarifies positions and consolidates knowledge, but also sometimes tends to silence internal questionings in the name of theoretical (and then political) unity. It also tends to rephrase these questionings in terms of enemies – notably accusing them of idealism. Thus, “the materialist feminism” is sometimes used as a copyrighted defensive weapon for internal purposes.

Its singular form also tends to mask the plurality of concepts within the school: ‘domination’, ‘social relations’ [‘rapport social’], ‘alienation’, ‘appropriation’, ‘oppression’, ‘exploitation’, ‘patriarchy’, ‘sexage’, etc. are not equivalent terms, nor easily compatible, and their definitions may vary depending on the authors reclaiming the feminist-materialist corpus. Taking this plurality into account is even more necessary when considering that these concepts had different outcomes: some became essential in the long run while others disappeared – sometimes only momentarily. This diversity, along with its history, reveals a theoretical heterogeneity within the school’s foundations. Therefore, it should undergo scrutiny as different definitions and redefinitions of materiality are competing with each other within feminist research.

We strongly encourage proposals aiming to contextualize and historicize theoretical debate, or even to provoke it by focusing on its contexts of production. How did an apparent seal of approval and radicalness develop within French/francophone Feminist Studies? What are/have been the effects of such a stamp on the development of research objects throughout the years? Did it slow down the circulation of ideas beyond national borders or rather encourage it? What diversity does it include in terms of perspectives, lexical practices and conceptualizations?

• The meanings of “materiality”

Althusser’s work arguably nourished poststructuralist feminist research (Butler, 2002; Lauretis, 2007), as well as feminist research rooted in materialism (Barrett, 1988; Gibson-Graham, 2006). “ ‘M’atter is expressed in several senses’ or, rather, that it exists in different modalities, all rooted, in the last instance, in ‘physical’ matter”, Althusser wrote in
1976. This quote complexifies his suggestion that ideology has a material existence, and opens a space to question or even overhaul the current definition of “materiality”. However, materialist feminism in France didn’t make much use of Althusserian theories, which probably explains part of its conflict with poststructuralist or queer perspectives, as well as a blatant ignorance of the most heterodox Anglophone materialist variations – be it feminisms inspired by cultural materialism (Women’s Studies Group, 1978), the materialist theory of discourse (Hennessy, 1993) or, more broadly, “Western Marxism” (Gramsci, Lukëcs, Adorno, etc.).

The reflections on theoretical genealogy that led to the crystallization of the French model of materialist feminism can help to account for the effects of limiting/reducing/restraining the definition of "materiality". The “Marxian” model of French materialist feminism, particularly as Delphy (1998) defined it, progressively dismissed the issue of ideology as a lever of social reproduction from research programs. It consequently put aside a series of objects whose importance in thinking conflictuality is crucial, such as language, representations or subjectivity. However, this materialist feminist model, now passed on as a canonical intellectual tradition, experienced internal tensions that produced multiple historic occasions to expand its contours. Monique Wittig’s work, her attachment to ideology and her insistence on the materiality of discourse (2001; 70) can then be understood as an inaugural rupture within this tradition – a rupture whose theoretical impact, going as far as redefining the approach of materiality, has been insufficiently highlighted. Wittig (1999) did evoke, albeit between the lines, the progressive shrinking of the materialist line towards a form of orthodoxy (the determination by material base ‘in the final analysis’) that led to a complete delegitimizing of any consideration of the superstructure and the crucial role it can endorse.

In this issue, we want to question the filiations of different materialist feminist theories, their consequences on the definition of materiality and its effects on the construction of research objects. Any contributions that seek to confront French materialist feminism with the materialist traditions it doesn’t discuss (or not enough) are also encouraged, for they will contribute to moving away from classic oppositions which have artificially settled in France through the conflict between materialist feminism and poststructuralist approaches: discursivity versus materiality, fluidity versus social conflictuality, subjectivity versus social relations.

The article proposals could, for example, read this debate in the light of post-structuralism and thereby shift the point of view towards the tension between materialism and queer studies that has hitherto been mainly produced by the authors defending materialism (Mathieu, 1994; Agone, 2010; Cameron and Senalon, 2014). But they could also imagine new theoretical hybridizations or present some redefinitions of the concept of "materiality" made in the feminist field, for example by discussing the emergence of the Affect Theory (Clough and Halley, 2007; Gregg and Seigworth, 2009) or of "neo-materialism" (Coole and Frost, 2010; Braidotti, 2011).
EDITORIAL GUIDELINES

To propose an article, please submit an abstract with its title up to 500 words and a presentation of the author(s), including your name(s), discipline(s), contact details and a short biography (up to 150 words). Send your proposal to redaction@commentensortir.org

For further details, please check the journal website: http://commentensortir.org

DEADLINES

• **Submissions of proposal**: September 14th, 2015
  Acceptance decisions will be communicated October first 2015

• **Submissions of articles**: January 11th 2016

• **Publication**: Winter 2016

Articles should not exceed 7,000 words, including references.

REFERENCES


AGONE (La rédaction), « Ce que le tournant postmoderne a fait au féminisme », *Agone*, n°43, 2010, pp. 7-21.


(Récemment republié dans MATHIEU Nicole-Claude, L'anatomie politique 2. Usage, déréliction et résilience des femmes, Paris, La Dispute, 2014, pp. 321-336.)

