Value(s) as Field: An Interview with Gisèle Sapiro

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ABSTRACT: This interview explores Gisèle Sapiro's work on the contributions of field theory to the study of value. Field theory highlights the struggles that structure the possibilities for action within specific fields. The discussion covers field theory's role in analyzing the production, circulation, and contestation of value; how semantic ambiguity shapes discourse; the dynamics of ideological conflict and their implications for legal and political action; and the concept of autonomy. It also examines the interplay between knowledge, power, and symbolic capital.

Gisèle Sapiro, senior researcher at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (National Center for Scientific Research, CNRS) and professor of sociology at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales (School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences, EHESS), combines in her scholarship formal analysis, field theory, and intellectual and political history. For more than two decades, she has developed a rigorous yet flexible methodology for treating literature as a complex, multidimensional social fact. Her work transcends national boundaries and brings into conversation differing systems of value without collapsing them into one another, offering a robust model of interdisciplinarity.

For this interview, we took the opportunity to explore a representative selection of her extensive scholarship and to examine how field theory enables the study of value in its various yet interconnected dimensions. Field theory focuses on the formal, ideological, institutional, juridic, and economic struggles that shape individual possibilities for action and engagement. Accordingly, this conversation spans a wide array of topics: semantic ambiguity, ideological conflict and its impact on political and legal action, autonomy as descriptor and ideal, writerly and academic responsibility, translation, and the international circulation of scholarship.

—Olga Nedvyga and Victoria Zurita

OLGA NEDVYGA AND VICTORIA ZURITA: Ambiguity has long been valued in literature, especially in postmodernism, since it challenges the structural dichotomies of modernity by signaling ontological and moral uncertainty. Yet it has also been criticized for failing to mobilize consciousness and to act upon the social world. You engage ambiguity as a rhetorical device in the titles of two works: *La Responsabilité de l'écrivain* (The writer's responsibility) (2011) and *Des mots qui tuent* (Words that kill) (2020). In the former, "responsibility" suggests both an ethical duty and potential legal liability, implying that writers are ethically and professionally expected to defy social and legal norms in the name of autonomy. In the latter, "words that kill" refers to language that incites antisemitism, denounces *résistants* (members of the French Resistance) like Georges Politzer, or holds the collaborators of the Vichy regime accountable during the *épuration légale* (the legal purge following the Liberation). Unlike traditional literary ambiguity, yours is historically and culturally grounded, shaped by shifting legal and professional contexts. It is nonessentialist and relational, situated in a field's "space of possibles." How do you, as a literary sociologist, conceptualize ambiguity, especially in these two works?

GISÈLE SAPIRO: From a sociological standpoint, I would say that ambiguity stems from the use and appropriation of words in different and sometimes contradictory ways by individuals or groups in a certain context and for certain purposes. Field theory helps us understand these struggles over the definition of concepts. Field theory, as elaborated by Bourdieu, implies that when a concept enters the field, it is placed in relation to a whole discursive tradition which is (more or less) specific to that field, and it is "retranslated" according to the issues at stake in the field. For instance, in my book on writers and politics in France, *Les écrivains et la politique en France* (Writers and politics in France) (2018), I studied the use of the concepts of "right" and "left" in the French literary field at the beginning of the twentieth century, shortly after these concepts had become central in the political field, in the context of the new parliamentary regime of the Third Republic.[1] However, what Bourdieu called the "field of ideological production," a concept he didn't develop, is the arena of struggles around the definition of words. We see this today with the appropriation of liberal concepts by the far right, like Antonio Gramsci's concept of "hegemony." Modern literature plays on the ambiguity of words to complexify meaning and question the common sense—we could say, to deautomatize words and representations, in the tradition of the Russian formalists—which in my eyes is an action in the social world because it destabilizes mechanical associations and commonsense evidence. By contrast, in the scientific field, one of the objectives is to reduce ambiguity and to define with precision the use of words and concepts to enable discussion and confrontation of research results. In the field of ideological production, words are used as weapons to attack adversaries. In these fights, their meaning is often distorted to manipulate, as pointed out by Victor Klemperer in his seminal book on the vocabulary of

[1] Gisèle Sapiro, "De l'usage des catégories de droite et de gauche dans le champ littéraire," *Sociétés et Représentations* 11 (February 2001): 19–53; reprinted in *Les écrivains et la politique en France, de l'affaire Dreyfus à la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Seuil, 2018).

the Third Reich, *Lingua Tertii Imperii* (1947). This is not specific to Nazism. We can observe today the use Elon Musk makes of the word "freedom."

I have been elaborating for a while a theoretical framework to study what I call "axiological operators." It refers to key notions such as "freedom," "civilization," or "disinterestedness" (the concept I am working on), which, at the same time, give systems of cultural oppositions their meaning and their position in a hierarchy of values through spatial designators—in this case high and low. These operators have moral connotations: worthy, unworthy, or undignified.[2] Their social efficacy stems from their ability to symbolically unify systems of classification or heterogeneous types of hierarchies in the domain of values and institutions. As a consequence, axiological operators play a major role in symbolic struggles, especially in times of crisis, but they are also an object of constant struggle over their definition and appropriation.[3]

But in ideological struggles, words can kill when freedom of expression is annihilated, when there is no open opposition to the dominant ideology, and when they serve to denounce adversaries, to turn them into public enemies. The discourse may be incoherent from an academic standpoint, but what counts is not its coherence; it is its social efficacy. In such contexts, more than in others, words become performative; they become "speech acts" in John Austin's sense, not because they cause actions (I am not endorsing an idealist standpoint) but because stigmatization produces beliefs which legitimate physical violence. This is what I argue in my study on the purge trials of intellectuals in postwar France (*Des mots qui tuent*): These intellectuals had monopolized the field of ideological production. Although they were competing and fighting among themselves over the meaning of some notions like "revolution," they legitimized the stigmatization of the Jews, whom they accused, following the Nazis, of having brought about the war. They also stigmatized the Communists and Gaullists, who were framed as "terrorists," even though they defended the French territory against the occupying forces. All mass murders have started with the dehumanization of the future victims. Very sadly, we observe this today as well.

2.

ON AND VZ: "Autonomy" is a key term in field theory. In *The Sociology of Literature* (2023), you explain, following Bourdieu, that there are three conditions for the autonomization of a field: the appearance of specialists endowed with the authority to attribute symbolic value; the existence of consecrating institutions, such as the *Académie française* (The French Academy); and the appearance of a literary market. Moreover, "autonomy" also names a position within a literary field; in *Les écrivains et la politique en France*, the avant-gardes and the esthetes are more autonomous than the notabilities and the pamphleteers, since the former protect to varying degrees intrinsically literary values against the desire to maintain or subvert the social order. In both cases, autonomy is a purely descriptive term. Heteronomy is never fully overcome,

2 Gisèle Sapiro, "Défense et illustration de 'l'honnête homme': les hommes de lettres contre la sociologie," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 153 (2004): 11–27.

3 Gisèle Sapiro, "Against Self-Interest: The Codification of 'Disinterestedness' as an Axiological Operator in Religion, Aesthetics, and the Ethics of Intellectual Professions," in *Historicising Self-Interest in the Modern Atlantic World*, ed. Christine Zabel (New York: Routledge, 2021), 24–60.

because there are heteronomous positions within the field (in relation to politics, the economy, the values of other disciplinary practices such as the sciences, etc.), but also because a field's gains in autonomy can be undermined (for instance, during the occupation, in France's case).

This approach to autonomy differs from previous ones, which are prescriptive and even teleological (Clement Greenberg's theory of modernist art would be an obvious example). They generally suggest that the more autonomous a work is—the more preoccupied it is with the strategies of representation—the greater the achievement. One major work where autonomy seems to be both a descriptive and a prescriptive term is Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* (1999). In Casanova's view of the international literary field, the bid for recognition in Paris has a positive effect in that it nudges peripheral literatures toward aesthetic autonomy.

How much do you feel the need to differentiate autonomy as a value from its descriptive uses in field theory? Is such a differentiation possible? What remarkable evolutions have you noticed in the status of aesthetic autonomy in France or across the different national and transnational spaces you have studied?

GS: For Bourdieu, autonomy is first a methodological principle which enables us to study some social spaces, such as art, literature, and music, in their specificity, taking into account their specific values, capital, and struggles. It is indeed not teleological, because his field theory is based on the idea that the field's dynamic results from inner struggles: struggles between those who occupy dominant positions and defend an orthodoxy, and the newcomers who challenge this orthodoxy and try to subvert the field (the avant-garde), but also struggles between forces of autonomy and forces of heteronomy. In authoritarian conjunctures, it is hard to maintain a field's autonomy, although some kind of refraction of the issues at stake, specific interests, and specific capital can be observed even under communist regimes. However, there is indeed an ambiguity in Bourdieu's use of the concept of autonomy, which operates in both a descriptive and prescriptive way, sometimes alternatively, sometimes simultaneously.

The same ambiguity is also very present in Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters*, and I am conscious of it in my own work. Working on the literary field during the German occupation, I could not treat symmetrically the Resistance and those who collaborated with the Nazis. But I had to solve a problem: Among the writers, the collaborators were those who claimed autonomy, while the opponents engaged in the Resistance. Confronting discourse and practice, I could show that those who claimed they defended literary autonomy were also those who accepted that Jews and Communists be excluded from journals, not for aesthetic but for ideological reasons, which contradicted their claim to embody autonomy. By contrast, the Resistance authors—who, for the most part, had not been nationalists but internationalists and antifascists before the war—politicized their claim to literary autonomy, since the heteronomization of the field resulted from the political situation in which defending literary autonomy meant struggling for the reconquering of national independence. It is interesting to see that the French literary resistance adopted high literary standards both in writing and in publishing, although it was underground. It is a unique case in Europe.

I don't think scientific concepts are neutral. The way we describe the social world engages us in the sense Sartre said a writer is engaged by the very fact of writing. It does not mean that it is subjective; objectivity is not necessarily neutral. For Bourdieu, like for Durkheim, the study of the social world aims to make an impact on the world, to inform decisions and actions based on scientific knowledge, but not in the expert way, which proposes a neutral diagnostic and leaves it to the politicians to make decisions; sociologists can produce critical knowledge which can help the dominated and subaltern groups in their struggles, or groups like experimental writers who are marginalized within the public sphere. In *On Television* (1996), for instance, Bourdieu criticizes the media field for focusing on what attracts a larger audience and for reducing complexity by staging opposite opinions and thus pretending to be "objective."

On the other hand, autonomy is not always positive in Bourdieu's work. He criticizes the political field for restricting itself to inner competition for power and leaving aside the interests of the people they are supposed to represent—we observe this every day. He also criticizes the economic field's dominant trend to mathematization and modelization, by which this field achieved autonomy from the social sciences and pretends to be close to the natural sciences, but which cuts it off from empirical research and leads it to support neoliberal policies.

3.

ON AND VZ: As a literary sociologist, you are guided by principles of relative objectivity and impartiality, but, more recently, in *Peut-on dissocier l'œuvre de l'auteur?* (Can we separate the work from the author?) (2020), you seem to take a stance on certain debates, such as whether Gabriel Matzneff's literary accounts of pedophilia can be accepted in the name of the writer's license, or the centrality of Heidegger's antisemitism to his philosophy. After so many years of working on the ethics and politics of writing, how do you see intellectual responsibility today? How does your vision influence your aspirations as a researcher and public writer?

GS: Today, I am engaged in the struggle to defend academic freedom, the very basis of academic autonomy, against the attacks on its principles and also on colleagues. These attacks come from authoritarian or illiberal regimes (like Russia or Turkey) and the far right and conservative circles (in the US, in France, and elsewhere). By the same token, I defend, like Bourdieu and Casanova, literary autonomy against economic constraints, which have stiffened in the publishing field, or contemporary music, which is also threatened by the focus of public institutions on expanding audiences rather than on innovation.

I also think, like Bourdieu, that knowledge can serve to criticize public policies or political decisions, as well as forms of domination and exploitation. And it can also play a role in public debates and polemics, as in the case of my book *Peut-on dissocier l'œuvre de l'auteur?,* which was commissioned by my publisher, Le Seuil. In this book,[4] I try to problematize the question of whether or not we can separate the work from

[4] Gisèle Sapiro, *Peut-on dissocier l'œuvre de l'auteur?* (Paris: Seuil, 2020). An augmented edition was published in 2024, and an English translation is forthcoming with Stanford University Press.

the author, in philosophical and sociological terms, and to analyze the arguments mobilized by opposing sides in different cases: Roman Polanski, Gabriel Matzneff, but also Martin Heidegger, Paul de Man, Hans Robert Jauss, and Peter Handke. This book made waves in the media, and I was invited to present my reflections and discuss these issues in the written press, on radio, and TV, as well as at art, theater, and philosophy festivals. I think there is a demand for clarification and more objective (and less polemical) discussions in the public sphere and professional milieus. At the same time, the media field tends to reduce all arguments to position-taking, without allowing for complex thinking and nuance, as Bourdieu denounced. Even if I have an opinion, I find it more interesting to develop an analysis and show aspects of an issue that are not self-evident or bring a socio-historical perspective, rather than just expressing a given view. My preferred form of intervention is closer to that of the "specific intellectual" in Foucault's sense, who tries to ground their intervention on scientific knowledge, than that of the "total intellectual" embodied by Sartre, who intervenes on all fronts, based on moral and political grounds, even if these grounds are established via rational argumentation and philosophical reflection.

4.

ON AND VZ: We can begin to explore transnational perspectives by examining how internationalization has unfolded within France. In your article "Formes et structures de l'engagement des écrivains communistes en France. De la 'drôle de guerre' à la Guerre froide" (Forms and structures of political commitment among communist writers in France: From the "*drôle de guerre*" to the Cold War) published in 2003 in *Sociétés et Représentations* (Societies and Representations), you suggest that French leftist intellectuals, particularly (but not exclusively) those around the Union nationale des intellectuels (National Union of Intellectuals, UNI), managed to preserve national forms of writing—redefined during the Liberation—that rejected or bypassed the more stagnant aspects of socialist realism. To this end, they embraced Louis Aragon's idea of aligning the French tradition with values like humanism, pacifism, national dignity, and sovereignty. You argue that the UNI did this to resist Soviet models of intellectual engagement and professional associations. Why is this internal dynamic of internationalization important, and what led you to focus on it?

GS: This case study is interesting for understanding relatively autonomous logics even in conditions of stark political constraints. During the German occupation, Aragon, who was in the southern zone (not occupied by the German forces until 1942), had a room to maneuver in a conjuncture when the French Communist Party was banned and weak. He didn't act according to the Party line, but opened a new path, reinterpreting the national path to communism announced by Stalin in 1935 in his own way, and turning it into a poetics of resistance in 1940. He did this by rediscovering medieval rhymes, contrasting them with the classical tradition, and turning the "*amour courtois*" into a code for what he called "literary contraband," by which he meant using literary codes to spread subversive messages, for instance, the love for a woman as a metaphor for the love of the nation. He was denounced by his enemy, the collaborator

Drieu La Rochelle, who argued that his nationalism was masking his submission to Moscow. However, I argue that after the war, especially toward the end of the 1940s, this national poetry, which had been attacked by the surrealists when they returned from exile (especially Benjamin Péret), became routinized, less inventive, and more heteronomous.

For me, it was interesting to analyze the way literature and politics are intertwined and negotiated within the Communist Party, which is a different question than that of UNI, whose aim was to mobilize noncommunist left-wing writers to causes like peace without imposing on them any writing or creative constraints. These were only for the members of the Communist Party. And, in this case, I was less interested in internationalization than in literature written under political constraints. Aragon could also play on the fact that, through his wife, the Russian Elsa Triolet, he was well informed about the state of affairs in the USSR. However, a couple of years after the war, his position was weakened by the "working class" line, which criticized him for writing for a bourgeois readership. Aragon defended the principles of literary autonomy even later when he was elected a member of the Central Committee of the French Communist Party, as I argue in *Les écrivains et la politique en France* based on the transcription of his recorded oral interventions at the meetings of the Central Committee, which are preserved in the archives of the Communist Party and often had to do with literature, publishing and translation. He continued to renew his prose writing and to extend the borders of socialist realism.

5.

ON AND VZ: Socialist realism and communist committed literature bring us to their main aesthetic rival: existentialism. You draw on Jean-Paul Sartre's *L'être et le néant* (*Being and Nothingness*) (1943) and his two lectures "L'existentialisme est un humanisme" ("Existentialism Is a Humanism") (1945) and "La responsabilité de l'écrivain" ("The Writer's Responsibility") (1946) to explore his notion of the writer's "absolute" responsibility. Sartre indeed sets the bar radically high—expecting writers to engage internationally with social issues—so much so that he could be judged irresponsible by his own standards. How should we understand Sartre's rapprochement with the Communist Party, despite his awareness of the atrocities committed by Soviet and Eastern Bloc regimes? How do you interpret this contradiction? Beyond your book, but perhaps still relevant, is the case of Viktor Kravchenko, a Ukrainian Soviet defector who sued *Les lettres françaises* (*The French Letters*) for libel in 1948. What does this trial reveal about the relationship between freedom of speech and editorial or institutional responsibility at the time? Sartre seems to shift his criticism toward US involvement rather than centering the victims' claims. How might we reflect on this in terms of intellectual responsibility?

GS: My study concerns how Sartre defined responsibility, and I am indeed doing an intellectual history of the concept and the way it was used. In the book *La Responsabilité de l'écrivain*, I mention previous uses of this concept—by Catholic conservative writers—just after the republican laws on freedom of expression were

passed in France in 1881. Responsibility was used against literary autonomy, calling writers to endorse a moralistic stance. After the Second World War, I argue that there was a reversal between the conservative and liberal writers. Art for art's sake had been used during the war by collaborators to normalize the situation of occupation, whereas the literary resistance, gathering the most autonomous writers, published committed literature clandestinely, even though it was organized by the communists.

After the Liberation, the Communist Party became powerful thanks to the Stalingrad victory and the major role it played in both the armed and civil Resistance. Sartre's redefinition of the writer's responsibility was an autonomous response to the Party's definition, and also to the purge trials, in which writers were tried for treason. Antisemitism and the oppression of the Jewish population were considered, from a legal standpoint, not in their specific racist dimension, but as "intelligence with the enemy," or under other accusations, such as fostering national division. A law against antisemitism had been passed in 1939 but was later suppressed by the Vichy regime. The same law was subsequently reestablished, but it did not become a central motive for prosecution. Intelligence with the enemy was punished far more severely (by the death penalty) unless there were attenuating circumstances.

Sartre freed the definition of the writer's responsibility from this national framework and made it much more universal, relating it to the freedom which the writer ought to fight for. This happened in the context of the Nuremberg laws, which codified "crimes against humanity" and placed them above national interests. When defining the writer's responsibility, Sartre had in mind such superior crimes and other forms of oppression of humans by humans. In an article she published in February 1946, Simone de Beauvoir accused Brasillach (a collaborator who was given the death penalty and executed) of having perpetrated a "sin against man," because he "degraded men into things."

Sartre formulated his conception of the writer's responsibility in two texts. First, in his introduction to the journal he launched in October 1945, *Les Temps modernes* (*Modern Times*), where he developed his theory of literary engagement: not only does writing engage the author; silence does as well. He blamed Gustave Flaubert and the Goncourt brothers, Edmond and Jules, for not supporting the Paris Commune and traced a genealogy of the committed writer from Voltaire in the Calas affair to Gide's critique of French colonialism in his *Voyage au Congo* (*Travels in the Congo*) (1927), via Zola's engagement in the Dreyfus affair. He also theorized his conception of the writer's responsibility in a talk in November 1946 at the newly founded UNESCO, assigning the writer a responsibility superior to others, because of the higher degree of freedom they enjoy (he contrasted it with the limited responsibility of the doctor or the shoemaker).

At that time, Sartre was harshly criticized by the Communist Party, who denounced existentialism as subjectivist and decadent. It was not until 1952 that he became a "fellow traveler" of the Communist Party.

In my first book, *The French Writers' War: 1940–1953*, I discuss extensively the reorganization of the intellectual field until the mid 1950s. At the moment of the Kravtchenko affair, Sartre had launched a political party of intellectuals, the

Rassemblement démocratique révolutionnaire (Revolutionary Democratic Rally), with David Rousset. But this party was not viable in the context of the bipolarization of the political field around the Cold War. Sartre decided to support the Communist Party (without becoming a member) in this context, when the party was advocating for peace, and also in the context of the Rosenberg trial in the United States. This is not to justify his position-taking but to situate it in its full context. I analyze in the book the dilemmas that many liberal intellectuals who took part in the intellectual Resistance had to face as they progressively took distance from the Communist Party, first with the Rajk affair in 1949 (he was accused of Titoism and executed), then with the 1952 trial of the doctors (most of them Jewish) that Stalin accused of conspiracy and terrorism. For Sartre, however, there was another issue: In 1951, he published, with Maurice Merleau-Ponty, an article rejecting the comparison of the mass murder committed by the Communist Regime to the Holocaust, because of the specificity of the industrial extermination of a whole ethnic group as such.

6.

ON AND VZ: Since you have written extensively on the subject, what lessons can we learn from developments in French intellectual history? Can empirical data help us to revise some of the dominant theoretical frameworks in both literary studies and sociology?

GS: I think it is rather the use of field theory as a methodology that produces new knowledge. For instance, cultural historians had focused either on collaborators or the literary Resistance. Field analysis enabled me to understand the effects of the occupation on the field and its institutions (it was Bourdieu who encouraged me to look at the Académie française) and to analyze how their political choices were related to their position in the field, as well as to their conceptions of literature and the social role of the writers. Field theory also requires that we pay attention to social agents (both individuals and institutions) and their trajectories and strategies, relating them to their social properties and position in the field. In *The Sociology of Literature*, I suggest distinguishing the authorial strategies of the writer in the field from the writing strategies, that is, the study of narrative, thematic, and/or poetic choices. Something important I've learned is that discourse should be confronted with practices, because, as in the case of art for art's sake, writers can do the contrary of what they say they do. I also distinguish field autonomy from professional autonomy, which can sometimes imply forms of heteronomy (like under communism).[5] As mentioned earlier, I demonstrate that politicization is not necessarily contradictory with autonomy, especially when it is based on the defense of specific values such as freedom of expression, truth, or justice.

Another contribution is the materialist approach to intellectual history and literature: taking into account the conditions of production and of circulation of the texts, which frames their reception.

5 Gisèle Sapiro, "Rethinking the Concept of Autonomy for the Sociology of Symbolic Goods," *Biens symboliques / Symbolic Goods* 4 (2019).

Finally, regarding the methodology, the approach I developed combines quantitative (prosopography, that is, collective biography, or data on translations, publishers or festivals, for instance) and qualitative methods, including text analysis—of literary texts but also of criticism, essays, controversies, etc.—and archives when available, or interviews and observations for contemporary periods. For instance, for my work on translations, I built databases of translated texts, with variables related to genre, publishers, translators, etc., which enabled me to study the flows of translation and the role of import agents. But I also did interviews, mostly with editors and translators, and consulted archives, which allowed me to understand the motivations and criteria, as well as the arbitration between these criteria in the decision-making process. For instance, when Gaston Gallimard decided to continue publishing William Faulkner despite poor sales because he trusted the literary value of his work. I have also studied the critical reception of foreign writers in France, like Faulkner, or, for a different project, contemporary Hebrew writers such as Zeruya Shalev. Of course, my analysis is oriented by a theoretical framework and by hypotheses, which guide the methodological choices and the data gathering, but these choices also depend on availability and feasibility. For literary life, observation is a method that can be used for public performances at literary events and festivals or at awards. In the case of literary awards, however, we usually do not have access to the deliberations. I was able to study the discussion of the Académie Goncourt and the Académie française only through their archives. Preparing my last book, *Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur mondial?* (What is a world author?) (2024),[6] I also had access to the archives of the Nobel Committee, where you do find traces of deliberations. Observation can also be used for editorial work (often requiring participant observation, which I have not done).

7.

ON AND VZ: In *The Sociology of Literature*, you state that sociologists of literature seek to transcend the division between internal and external analysis. The structure of *Les écrivains et la politique en France* exemplifies this aim. Methodologically, the first half adopts an externalist approach: It examines the social conditions of literary production by focusing on homologies between literary and political fields, which have enabled writers to align their aesthetic projects with their political beliefs in socially and institutionally legible ways. The second half of the book takes a partially internalist approach. It explores the relationship between stylistic choices and extraliterary values, such as scientific objectivity, while also showing how extraliterary pressures like censorship shaped the emergence and generalization of certain formal strategies. As you acknowledge, internal and external factors together determine the existence of literature as a social fact.

One of our aims in editing this issue is to encourage dialogue between practitioners of different approaches. As someone who navigates multiple methods of analysis, we would like to ask you to reflect on how, in practice, you compile, select, and integrate different types of evidence in your research. More specifically, do you

6 Gisèle Sapiro, *Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur mondial? Le champ littéraire transnational* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil/EHESS, "Hautes études," 2024). An English translation is forthcoming with Polity Press.

encounter contradictions between, for example, a writer's stylistic practices, the textual traces of what you call the collective "preconscious," her aesthetic and political statements, her private opinions, and her institutional affiliations? If so, how do you decide what to prioritize?

We see Flaubert as a possible case of such contradictions. In *L'éducation sentimentale* (*Sentimental Education*) (1869), to focus on one novel, the construction of an impersonal narrator and the stated aspiration to quasi-scientific objectivity are belied by instances of irony which do not go in the direction of axiological neutrality but rather serve to attack a political faction (utopian socialists) and to ridicule the desire for social mobility (through the characters of la Vatnaz and Deslauriers). Relatedly, how do you take into account the evolution of a writer's style, positions, and affiliations over time? And, finally, how do you integrate disagreements on the meaning of formal choices? In *Les règles de l'art* (*The Rules of Art*) (1992), Bourdieu highlights the commonalities between Frédéric Moreau and Flaubert, going against the propensity to separate author, narrator, and character, which, you note, starts to crystallize in the nineteenth century, partly thanks to Flaubert himself. How much do you feel you need to acknowledge divergences and disagreements regarding the social significance of a literary form?

GS: I must make clear that not all objects require all the methods I mentioned before, and the methodology should be adjusted to the question at hand and to the construction of the object. If my question is, "what are the explanatory factors for the political choices writers made under the Occupation?" the answer may not be found directly in their literary work but in their social properties and/or positions in the field. These properties and positions call for a quantitative approach based on prosopography, although I will have to demonstrate how these politics are reflected in their work.

By contrast, my research on literary trials did not use quantitative methods, except for the part on the professional épuration, because my object was to work on arguments in a *longue durée* frame, confronting legal discourses on literature with discourses in the public sphere, especially literary criticism (which has been an important source for most of my work on different topics).

I dedicated a long analysis to *Madame Bovary* (1856), because of the debate on whether the novel was indeed challenging the bourgeois norms of marriage (as argued by the prosecutor but also by Dominick LaCapra) or blaming Emma's readings for her adulterous behavior. The answer required an in-depth inner analysis of the novel: I could show that the readings were indeed playing a determining role in the causal scheme of the narrative, provoking hysteria. However, the readings responsible for her attitude were not realist novels, but romance novels and religious books, which was, of course, an ironic choice by the author. Moreover, the novel was parodying both the romantic and the realist novel. The impersonal narrator (although there is a strange "we" in the first chapter, as if the narrator were one of Charles Bovary's classmates) is not entirely objective because he oscillates between empathy and irony toward the protagonist (for example, through free indirect speech). I also proposed a new interpretation of these devices—impersonal narrator and free

indirect speech—as expressing the point of view of a narrator that could be Emma's lawyer in a trial. There are always contradictions as we all experiment, and writers often try to supersede them in their literary works, as Bourdieu shows in his reading of *L'éducation sentimentale*. The methodology consists not only in analyzing the novel but also in relating the choices to a large space of possibles in the field and seeing these choices as strategies in that context.

In *Les écrivains et la politique en France*, I gathered empirical case studies on the relationship between literature and politics into a theoretical framework. Although it focuses on France, my framework can be easily extended to other contexts. I distinguished two different modes of political intervention by writers: through political commitment in the public sphere (writers using their symbolic capital) and through their literary works. These two modes of intervention are not always combined (think, for instance, of the Nouveau Roman, which depoliticized literature in opposition to the existentialist movement, even though its authors took a strong public stance against the Algerian war). Again, these two modes of intervention call for different methodologies, and this is why I divided the book into two parts. The first one is not purely externalist, because it requires a lot of text analysis about their political position-takings (in the press or in essays), even if the literary works themselves remain secondary (this is equally true in my study of fascist writers). Nor is the second part purely internalist, since I always try to position the texts in a space of possibles (or field), under various constraints (such as restrictions to freedom of expression, or other political constraints). Furthermore, I aimed to show that ethical-political schemes are not only present in committed literature but more broadly in all literary works, through the worldview they convey and through formal narrative or poetic choices. I chose, for instance, to analyze fascist writer Drieu La Rochelle's autobiographical novel, *Rêveuse bourgeoisie* (Dreamy bourgeoisie) (1937), rather than his ideological novel *Gilles* (1939), which Susan Suleiman takes as one of her case studies in her book on the ideological novel, and I compared it to a short autobiographical text he wrote after the First World War. This novel was written in the 30s, after he had left the surrealist movement and turned to fascism, which offered him an opportunity to combine his attraction to modernity with his nostalgia for aristocratic values. His decadent vision of the world imbues the narrative of his autobiographical novel and underlies his description of the familial trajectory of his protagonist. I also use Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence to analyze literary works like those by Annie Ernaux and Edouard Louis, which reveal the functioning of symbolic violence in class and gender relationships. I also argue that some literary works reproduce symbolic violence (for instance, the representation of women in Albert Camus' fiction works, notwithstanding their high literary value in my view).

8.

ON AND VZ: To stay on the topic of internal vs. external analysis, do you see any significant correlation between the educational habitus of different countries (for instance, France vs. the US), the dominant theories and methods, and the value ascribed to the consumption and study of literature? Relatedly, what is the standard trajectory of the students that you supervise? Do they tend to come from literary studies or sociology?

GS: There are certainly different national habitus regarding literature. In France, literature has had a very high status since the seventeenth century. Until the mid-twentieth century, classical literary education (that is, the mastery of Latin and Greek) was considered the highest curriculum, much higher than science. According to Durkheim, the emphasis on exegesis, clearly distinguished from medieval teaching, was established during the Renaissance, both in Jesuit colleges and university colleges, and prevailed until the end of the eighteenth century, even into the following century. In contrast to Germany and England, in France, the introduction to humanist culture remained predominant in secondary school curricula throughout the nineteenth century, even if science courses were introduced on the margins. Another feature of this humanist culture, as it developed in France according to Durkheim, is its abstract universalism, its de-historicized approach to ancient texts, found in the French literature that flourished from the seventeenth century onward, which was characterized by "its marked, exclusive taste for general and impersonal types."[7] By contrast, the German philological tradition was introduced in France only by the end of the nineteenth century. Focused on the teaching of rhetoric and the imitation of classical models, literary education has transmitted the literary canon but also trained students to write an *explication de texte* or *commentaire* (exegesis) and the *dissertation*, built in three parts: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. In the 1970s, rhetoric was replaced with a formalist approach, based on literary theory. This approach was universalist (for instance, Voltaire's philosophical tales) and was sometimes made to dialogue with philosophy, which is also taught in high school and in the preparatory classes for the entrance exams to the Grandes écoles. Personal interpretations and moralistic stands are not encouraged, in contrast with North America, despite the important place of the French moralists in the national canon.

Not all my students are French. I have a very international group of students, especially my PhD students, and not all of them work on literature. I advise graduate students (master's and PhD) at the EHESS in Sociology and in the Department of Arts and Languages. Among the thirty or so theses I have supervised (twenty-three of which have already been defended), the topics include cinema, art, music, theater, publishing, translation, the UNESCO, and international education, to mention a few. But those who work on literature have been trained in literary studies. For example, Claire Ducournau, Associate Professor at Montpellier; Tristan Leperlier, researcher at the CNRS; and Madeline Bedecarre, Assistant Professor at Davidson College. They have all produced authoritative scholarship on, respectively, the careers

7 Émile Durkheim, *L'évolution pédagogique en France* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990), "Quadrige" collection; originally published in 1938.

of Francophone African writers, the Algerian literary field during the civil war, and the impact of Francophonie literary prizes on the trajectories of postcolonial writers. They have all secured positions in literary studies, where they develop a sociological approach (Claire and Tristan did their PhDs in Sociology, while Madeline graduated in Arts and Languages). It is important to me that they master the methods of text analysis and build solid knowledge in literary studies, like I did. I am critical of sociological approaches to literature that ignore form and reduce the text to representations or to the readers' interpretation collected in interviews.

9.

ON AND VZ: Your article "Le champ est-il national?" (Is the field national?) (2013) significantly complicates Bourdieu's field theory by incorporating the interactions between political and economic forces and literary modes of consecration. In it, you acknowledge the role of hegemony and the unequal distribution of power in shaping certain literary spaces, particularly postcolonial ones. We would like to ask whether, given the low degree of professionalization in literature and the complexity of interactions between local, national, and transnational factors, you have felt the need to reconsider the conditions under which a field becomes autonomous, particularly when it comes to nondominant literatures.

GS: Constructing transnational fields requires that we complicate field theory. The emergence of national fields was in large part encouraged by the Nation-States, but at the international level, there is no State. However, in my recent research on the International Sociological Association, I have shown that, in some cases, national fields were built at the instigation of international organizations like the UNESCO; for instance, the disciplinary fields in the new social and human sciences that became institutionalized in the 1960s (sociology, economy, and psychology). The UNESCO was traversed by tensions and power relations between France, the United States, and the United Kingdom. But it was the scientific model promoted by the United States that managed to circulate, even if it encountered resistance and adaptation.

The center-periphery model was developed in Latin America before it was adopted and reformulated by Immanuel Wallerstein. Although it is often criticized, I think it is very relevant to describe the circulation flows (for instance, translations). Central languages, as Johan Heilbron has shown, export more than they import, while the peripheral ones import more than they export. I showed that these asymmetries do not simply reflect the volume of production, but are the outcome of a combination of political, economic, and cultural factors, which need to be studied each according to their own logic. The logic of the economy oscillates between market expansion and protectionism; the logic of politics uses censorship as a tool to regulate the circulation of ideas, but also makes ideological uses of literature and social sciences, leaving more or less autonomy to these fields, which have their own values and specific criteria. As Casanova has argued, at the autonomous pole of the literary field, importing foreign works and models can be a means to subvert the field's orthodoxy, and the circulation of symbolic revolutions contributes to the unification of the

international field. I also distinguish internationalization, transnationalization, and globalization as different processes involving different agents and authorities. For instance, the nation states and their international organizations play a major role in the first process, whereas transnationalization results from transnational networks of writers or publishers who gather at book fairs, literary festivals, and so on.

Of course, fields look different from the centers and the peripheries. In my latest book, *Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur mondial?*, I show the unequal conditions of access to the world market for translations and to transnational consecration—especially the Nobel prize in literature—and the need for peripheral literatures and authors to rely on active importers. This has changed since 1990 as a consequence of globalization. But entire regions, like Africa, are left out of this market. The African writers who get translated are usually those who write in the former colonial languages and publish in these centers of the transnational publishing field (London, Paris, New York, and others) rather than those who write in African languages and publish in Africa. Another good example is the Indian subcontinent, which abounds in texts written in languages other than English. It does not mean there is no literary life in either region; numerous works are produced therein, but they very seldom get translated.

Authors writing in languages and living in countries that occupy peripheral positions in the market for translations are eager to access international recognition. In the 1960s, embassies of such countries put pressure on the Swedish Academy to get a Nobel prize in literature, and Korea was overjoyed to see a Korean author awarded for the first time.

Latin America is a very interesting area: The Spanish language is a semicentral one, but the subcontinent once held a peripheral position in the Spanish-speaking area. During Franco's dictatorship, however, exiled Spanish intellectuals and publishers helped develop the Latin American press and intellectual life organized and blossomed there. Political factors often help raise interest in peripheral literatures, which happened with the so-called Latin American boom, when intellectuals in the region were confronted with dictatorships but were also promoted by a Spanish literary agent, Carmen Balcells, who learned the business in the US. They were also participating in transnational intellectual networks. However, here again, the Latin American authors who obtain transnational recognition are mostly those published in Spain and not in Latin America.

10.

ON AND VZ: Can you talk about the translation of your work? How does its transnational/translingual circulation inform your ideas about translation?

GS: I trained in translation studies at the Department of Literary Theory at Tel Aviv University, and I am myself a translator. I translated into French David Grossman's first novel, *The Smile of the Lamb* (1983), and some short stories by Yoram Kaniuk, Ronit Matalon, and Aharon Appelfeld. I also translated texts by Pierre Bourdieu into Hebrew, and into English with the help of Brian McHale (Bourdieu's lectures in Japan for *Poetics Today*). "The Market of Symbolic Goods" came out this year with

Magnes Press, more than thirty years after I first translated it at Itamar Even-Zohar's request. For this publication, I revised my original translation with Amotz Giladi, a translator and former PhD student of mine, who also translated my introduction and afterword. In addition, I have done scientific editions of other translations for Resling (Bourdieu's *Masculine Domination* [1998] and *Sociology in Question* [1984], Durkheim's *The Rules of the Sociological Method* [1895], and Levi-Strauss' *Totemism* [1962]). I have also revised many translations for the volumes and special issues I have edited.

In addition, I regularly revise the translations of my articles and books into English (or the revisions for the articles, since I often write directly in English), and I check the articles in German (although my command of German is not very satisfying). For other languages, such as Turkish, I sometimes ask a colleague or a PhD student, but this is time-consuming for them. I have been lucky enough to see my work translated by colleagues who have done an excellent job in Spanish (Argentina), Portuguese (Brazil), Italian, Croatian, Korean, Russian, Chinese, Arabic, and so on (including, now, Greek). All of them have become "importers" by initiating circulation. They often do this as a labor of love. When I do not speak the language (as in the case of Japanese, Arabic, and Farsi, for instance), I can intuit the quality of the translation based on my interactions with the translator and the questions they ask me. In other instances, I rely on colleagues' feedback, as was the case with Swedish. I have no idea, however, about the one or two papers translated into Chinese.

I know that my work, either in French or in other languages, has served for theoretical analysis, although it is not always acknowledged as such (for instance, my reflections on literature and politics or my analysis of responsibility). It has also served as a model for empirical research, especially my work on translation. There is also now a big project entitled "Words and Violence," led by Prof. Kjetil Jacobsen on the political choices of Norwegian writers during the Second World War, which is overtly inspired by my PhD dissertation, and I serve on its scientific board.

These experiences with the translation and circulation of my work have been supplemented by numerous travels around the world as a guest at talks, conferences, and, occasionally, literary festivals, where I have done field work (interviews and/or observations) while also intervening. Mauricio Bustamante (another former PhD student) and I have also carried out a quantitative study of the translation of Bourdieu's works (in all languages until 2008), and I am currently conducting a qualitative study, based on written sources, archives, and interviews, of his reception in the US and Germany.

My knowledge about the transnational publishing field helps me understand why my work is translated in some languages or places and not in others. I have studied in my latest book, *Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur mondial?*, the asymmetrical circulation of literary works, tying it to inequalities between written languages (central languages, such as English or French, are more likely to be translated than peripheral languages) and to some properties of the authors (classics vs. contemporaries, endowed with symbolic capital vs. newcomers, female vs. male, etc.). I have also studied the specific mechanisms of circulation of academic books in the social and human sciences,

which are a little different from literature.[8] Writing in French, I know I am privileged, although the position of French in the transnational literary field as well as in the field of social and human sciences has declined in the globalization era. But as a woman, I know I am disadvantaged: Female authors are underrepresented on the transnational translation market in the human and social sciences, much more than in literature. In the years 2002–2012, only 15 percent of the books translated from French into English were written by women, even though the English-speaking publishing field is perhaps the most feminized, the most open, and one where there is demand for female authors. This is now changing, but female authors whose work circulates are more likely to specialize in gender studies and feminism. Female authors are also far less frequently cited for their theoretical contributions (which are sometimes appropriated without acknowledgment or only by reference to their empirical work).

For economic reasons, short books are preferred over longer ones, and this is why my most translated book is *The Sociology of Literature* (in eight languages), and the second *Peut-on dissocier l'oeuvre de l'auteur?* (already seven languages, though it appeared only five years ago). On the other hand, my first book, *French Writers' War* (800 pages), has been translated only into English, by Duke University Press, and *La Responsabilité de l'écrivain* (also 800 pages) has not been translated at all, though I have published articles and book chapters based on them in English and German). These books might be disadvantaged by their focus on France, but forty years ago, a book on France was regarded as having a universal scope; today, it is considered too particular. Even the Germans did not translate my study of the French literary field under the occupation. Theory circulates better than empirical work. However, *Les Écrivains et la politique en France*, despite its strong, portable theoretical framework, has been translated only into Brazilian Portuguese for the moment. But *Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur mondial?*, because of its international scope, is now being translated into English (Polity), Spanish (Fondo de Cultura Económica), Croatian (Meander), Russian (NLO), and Bengali and Hindi (Sampark for both).

These trends also result from the economic constraints I mentioned before. I observe a growing gap between the current research in academia and what circulates internationally as scholarly books (for instance, translations from English into French), which are often books published with the support of a literary agent in the trade publishing industry. European trade publishers used to publish scholarly works. However, under the influence of the American publishing field, where academic books are published by academic presses in the not-for-profit sector, on the one hand, and of the business model of educational or scientific publishers in the UK and Germany, on the other, scholarly books became marginalized in the UK, German, and Italian book markets, and can seldom be found in the bookstore chains, except for some aimed at a large audience. Neither gold open access online, which embezzles

8 Gisèle Sapiro, "What Factors Determine the International Circulation of Scholarly Books? The Example of Translations between English and French in the Era of Globalization," in *The Social and Human Sciences in Global Power Relations*, eds. Johan Heilbron, Gustavo Sorá, and Thibaud Boncourt (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 59–93; "L'américanisation des sciences humaines et sociales françaises? Une cartographie des traductions de l'anglais, de l'allemand et de l'italien en français (2003–2013)," *Biens symboliques / Symbolic Goods* 12 (2023).

resources from research for private profits, nor even the much fairer diamond model, will replace the role scholarly books played in the book market. Scholarly books published by trade publishers used to have a resonance in the media (and still do in France), and translations enabled research done abroad to be introduced, discussed, and compared in different countries. A