

# ANTINOMIES OF FEMINISIM: BEAUVOIR MEETS BOURDIEU



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Fifth Conversation with Pierre Bourdieu,  
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# OVERVIEW

- I. Introduction: Silencing Beauvoir
- II. Symbolic Domination: Sartre-Beauvoir-Fanon
- III. Symbolic Domination: Beauvoir Meets Bourdieu
  - Naturalization: Reversing Cause and Effect
  - The Historical Labor of Dehistoricization
  - Producing the Gendered Habitus
  - Adaptations to Domination
  - Liberation
- IV. Theory and Practice

# I. Bourdieu's Silencing of Beauvoir

- Strategies of Distinction
  - Marx
  - Gramsci
  - Fanon
  - Beauvoir
- Footnote to Beauvoir

# BOURDIEU'S FOOTNOTE TO BEAUVOIR

“For a specific illustration of what is implied by this perhaps somewhat abstract evocation of the specific forms that masculine domination takes within the educational institution, see Toril Moi’s analysis of the representations and academic classifications through which Sartre’s hold imposed itself on Simone Beauvoir.”

(Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, p.86, footnote 11)

# BOURDIEU'S PREFACE TO BEAUVOIR

“If the scholarly principle of her literary "vocation", of her emotional "choices" and even of her relation to her own status as a woman offered to us by Toril Moi have but little chance of appearing as Simone de Beauvoir, this is because she is separated from this by the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre to whom she delegated, in a way, her capacity to do philosophy... There is not a better example of the symbolic violence that constitutes the traditional (patriarchal) relationship between the sexes than the fact that she will fail to apply her own analysis on relations between the sexes to her relationship with Jean-Paul Sartre.”

[From Bourdieu's Preface to French Edition of Toril Moi's *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*]

# Theses on Bourdieu

- Bourdieu dismisses Beauvoir by reducing her to Sartre
- *Masculine Domination* as diminutive  
Replica of *The Second Sex*
- *Masculine Domination* as Masculine  
Domination

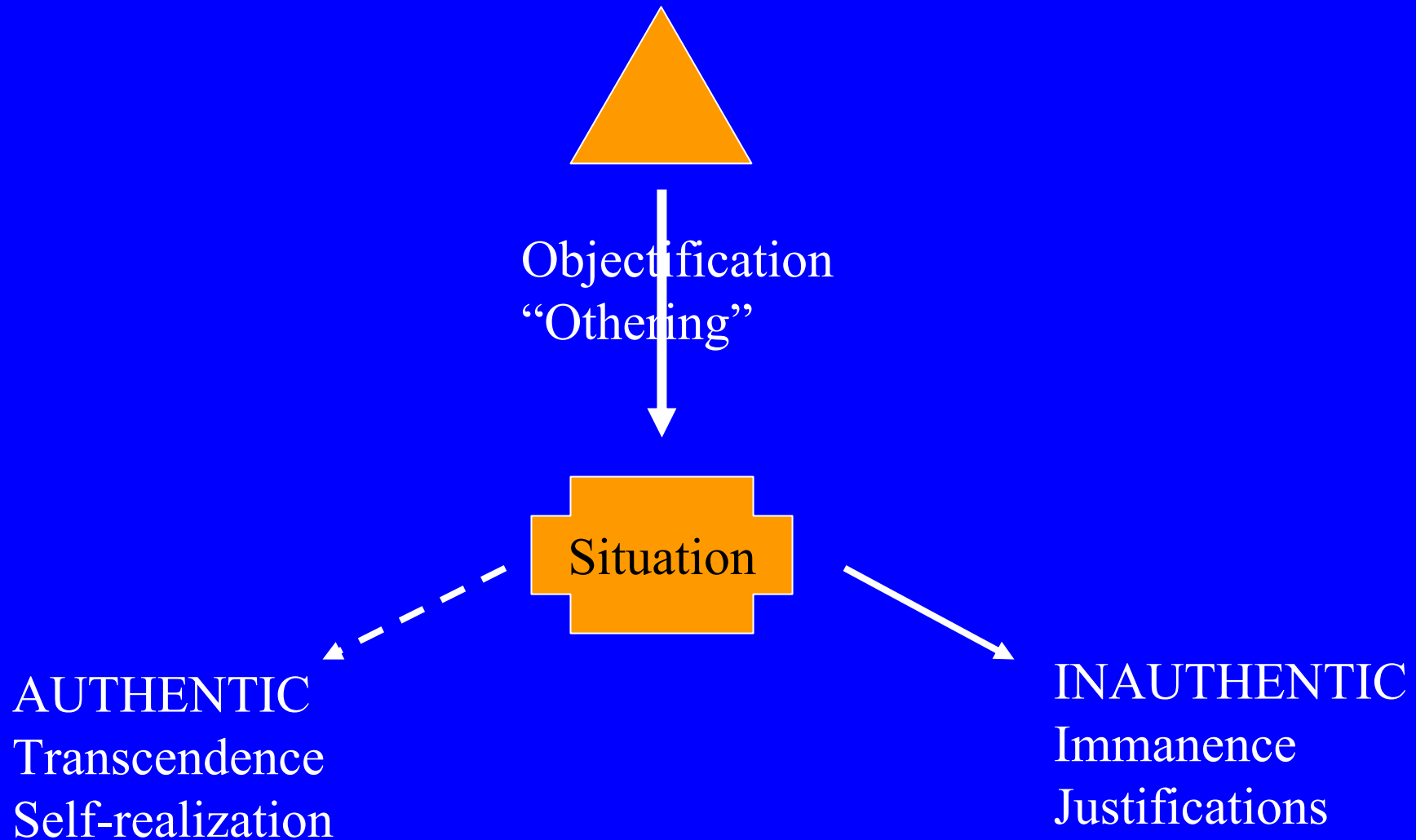
## II. Symbolic Domination in Sartre, Fanon, and Beauvoir

- *Anti-Semite and Jew* – Sartre (1946)
- *The Second Sex* – Beauvoir (1949)
- *Black Skin, White Masks* – Fanon (1952)

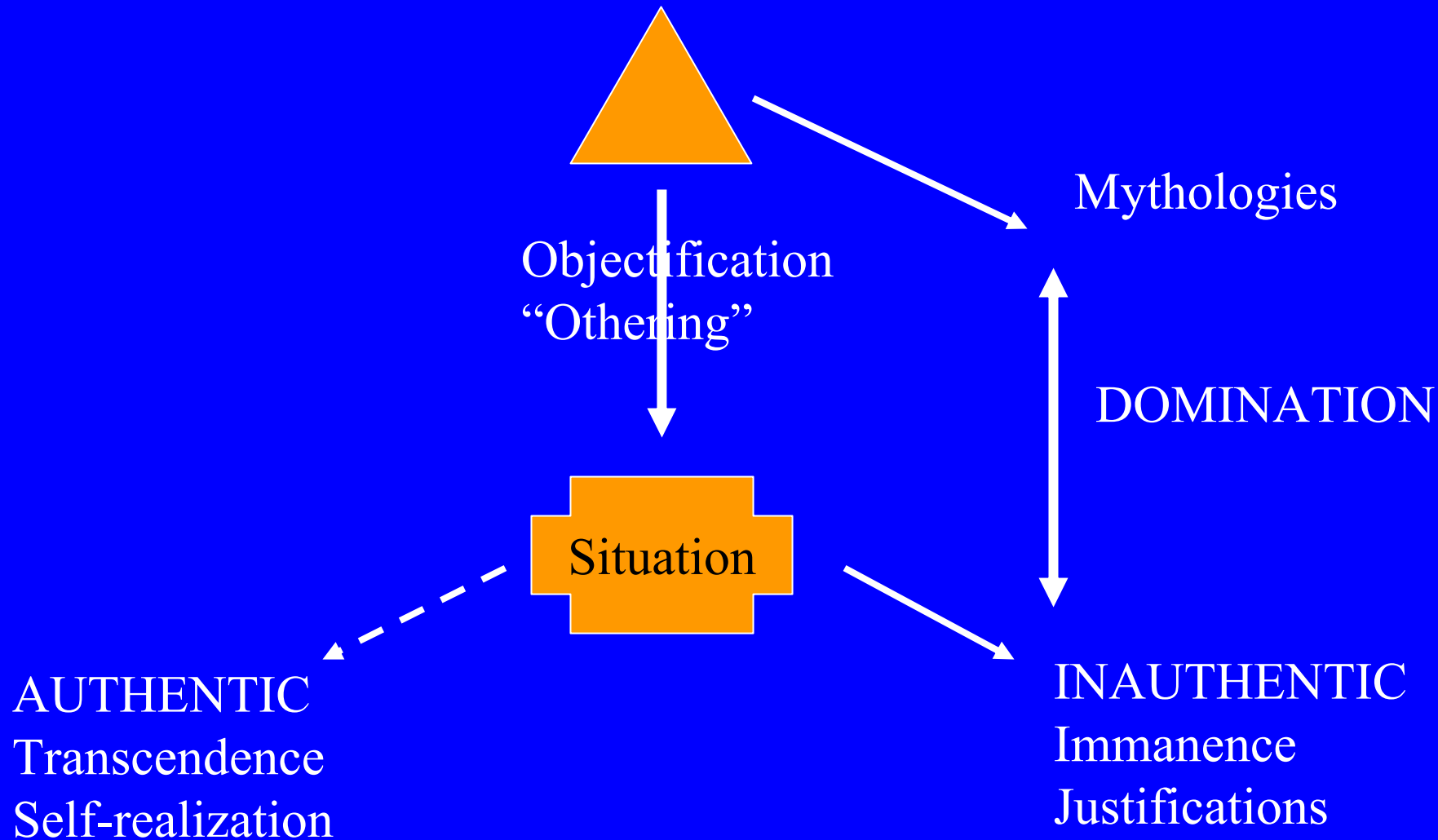
# Symbolic Domination in Sartre, Fanon, and Beauvoir



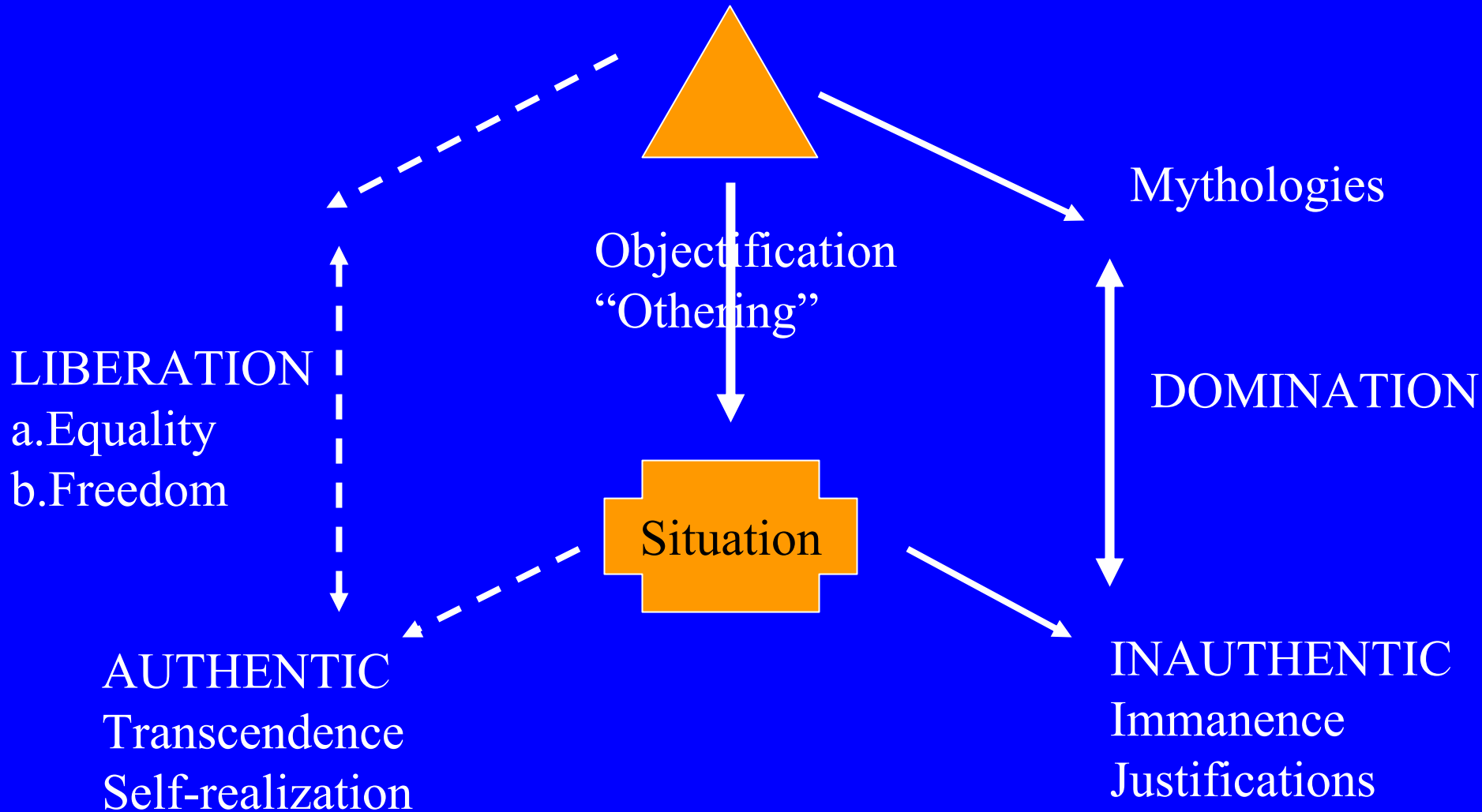
# Symbolic Domination in Sartre, Fanon, and Beauvoir



# Symbolic Domination in Sartre, Fanon, and Beauvoir



# Symbolic Domination in Sartre, Fanon, and Beauvoir



# III. MASCULINE DOMINATION: BEAUVOIR MEETS BOURDIEU

- Symbolic Domination

## MASCULINE DOMINATION AS PROTOTYPE OF SYMBOLIC DOMINATION

“[Masculine domination is] the prime example of this paradoxical submission, an effect of what I call symbolic violence, a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling” (Bourdieu, MD:2).

## BOURDIEU'S SYMBOLIC DOMINATION

“So the only way to understand this particular form of domination is to move beyond the forced choice between constraint (by forces) and consent (to reasons), between mechanical coercion and voluntary, free, deliberate, even calculated submission. The effect of symbolic domination (whether ethnic, gender, cultural or linguistic, etc.) is exerted not in the pure logic of knowing consciousness but through the schemes of perception, appreciation and action that are constitutive of habitus and which, below the levels of the decisions of the consciousness and the controls of the will, set up a cognitive relationship that is profoundly obscure to itself. Thus, the paradoxical logic of masculine domination and female submissiveness, which can, without contradiction, be described as both *spontaneous and extorted*, cannot be understood until one takes account of the *durable effects* that the social order exerts on women (and men), that is to say, the dispositions spontaneously attuned to that order which it imposes on them.” (Bourdieu, MD: 37-8)

## BEAUVOIR'S GENDER AWAKENING

I realized that the first question to come up was: What has it meant to me to be a woman? At first I thought I could dispose of that pretty quickly. I had never had any feeling of inferiority, no one had ever said to me: “You think that way because you’re a woman”; my femininity had never been irksome to me in any way. “For me,” I said to Sartre, “you might almost say it just hasn’t counted.” “All the same, you weren’t brought up in the same way as a boy would have been; you should look into it further.” I looked, and it was a revelation: this world was a masculine world, my childhood had been nourished by myths forged by men, and I hadn’t reacted to them in at all the same way I should have done if I were a boy. I was so interested in this discovery that I abandoned my project for a personal confession in order to give all my attention to finding out about the condition of women in the broadest terms. I went to the Bibliothèque Nationale to do some reading, and what I studied were the myths of femininity. (*Force of Circumstance*, pp.94-5)

# MASCULINE DOMINATION: BEAUVOIR MEETS BOURDIEU

- Symbolic Domination
- Naturalization or Reversing Cause and Effect:

## REVERSING CAUSE AND EFFECT

The biological appearances and the very real effects that have been produced in bodies and minds by a long collective labour of socialization of the biological and biologicization of the social combine to reverse the relationship between causes and effects and to make a naturalized social construction ('genders' as sexually characterized habitus) appear as the grounding in nature of the arbitrary division which underlies both reality and the representation of reality and which sometimes imposes itself even on scientific research. (MD, p.3, See also, MD, pp.22-3)

# MASCULINE DOMINATION: BEAUVOIR MEETS BOURDIEU

- Symbolic Domination
- Naturalization or Reversing Cause and Effect:
  - Biology
  - Psychoanalysis
  - Historical Materialism

# MASCULINE DOMINATION: BEAUVOIR MEETS BOURDIEU

- Symbolic Domination
- Naturalization or Reversing Cause and Effect
- The Historical Labor of Dehistoricization

# The Historical Labor of Dehistoricization

“It follows that, in order to escape completely from essentialism, one should not try to deny the permanences and the invariants, which are indisputably part of historical reality; but, rather, one must reconstruct the history of the historical labour of dehistoricization, or, to put it another way, the history of the continuous (re)creation of the objective and subjective structures of masculine domination, which has gone on permanently so long as there have been men and women, and through which the masculine order has been continually reproduced from age to age. In other words, a “a history of women” which brings to light, albeit despite itself, a large degree of constancy, permanence, must, if it wants to be consistent with itself, give a place, and no doubt the central place, to the history of the agents and institutions which permanently contribute to the maintenance of these permanences, the church the state, educational system, etc., and which may vary, at different times, in their relative weights and their functions.”

(Bourdieu, MD: 82-3)

# MASCULINE DOMINATION: BEAUVOIR MEETS BOURDIEU

- Symbolic Domination
- Naturalization or Reversing Cause and Effect
- The Historical Labor of Dehistoricization
  - Materialist and Institutional History
  - Mythologies

# MASCULINE DOMINATION: BEAUVOIR MEETS BOURDIEU

- Symbolic Domination
- Naturalization or Reversing Cause and Effect
- The Historical Labor of Dehistoricization
- Producing the Gendered Habitus

## PRODUCING THE GENDERED HABITUS

“The work of transformation of bodies which is both sexually differentiated and sexually differentiating and which is performed partly through the effects of mimetic suggestion, partly through explicit injunctions and partly through the whole symbolic construction of the view of the biological body (and in particular the sexual act, conceived as an act of domination, possession), produces systematically differentiated and differentiating habitus. The masculinization of the male body and the feminization of the female body, immense and in a sense interminable tasks which, perhaps now more than ever, always demand a considerable expenditure of time and effort, induce a somatization of the relation of domination, which is thus naturalized.” (Bourdieu, MD: 55-6)

“One is not born, but becomes, a woman.” (Beauvoir, TSS, p.267)

# MASCULINE DOMINATION: BEAUVOIR MEETS BOURDIEU

- Symbolic Domination
- Naturalization or Reversing Cause and Effect
- The Historical Labor of Dehistoricization
- Producing the Gendered Habitus
  - Formative Years (The Lesbian)
  - Woman's Situation (Prostitution)

# MASCULINE DOMINATION: BEAUVOIR MEETS BOURDIEU

- Symbolic Domination
- Naturalization or Reversing Cause and Effect
- The Historical Labor of Dehistoricization
- Producing the Gendered Habitus
- Adaptations to Domination

## LOVE OF THE DOMINANT AND DOMINATION

Because differential socialization disposes men to love the games of power and women to love the men who play them, masculine charisma is partly the charm of power, the seduction that the possession of power exerts, as such, on bodies whose drives and desires are themselves politically socialized. Masculine domination finds one of its strongest supports in the misrecognition which results from the application to the dominant of categories engendered in the very relationship of domination and which can lead to that extreme form of *amor fati*, love of the dominant and of his domination, a *libido dominantis* (desire for the dominant) which implies renunciation of personal exercise of *libido dominandi* (the desire to dominate). (Bourdieu, MD: 79-80)

# MASCULINE DOMINATION: BEAUVOIR MEETS BOURDIEU

- Symbolic Domination
- Naturalization or Reversing Cause and Effect
- The Historical Labor of Dehistoricization
- Producing the Gendered Habitus
- Adaptations to Domination
  - Justifications (Women in Love)
  - Feminist movement

# MASCULINE DOMINATION: BEAUVOIR MEETS BOURDIEU

- Symbolic Domination
- Naturalization or Reversing Cause and Effect
- The Historical Labor of Dehistoricization
- Producing the Gendered Habitus
- Adaptations to Domination
- Liberation

## LIBERATION

“This is a world of non-violence, made possible by the establishment of relations based on full reciprocity and authorizing the abandonment and entrusting of self; a world of mutual *recognition*, which makes it possible, as Sartre [sic] says, to feel “justified” in existing”... the world of *disinterestedness* which makes possible deinstrumentalized relations, based on the happiness of giving happiness, of finding in the wonderment of the other, especially at the wonder he or she arouses, inexhaustible reasons for wonder.”  
(Bourdieu, MD:110)

“To emancipate woman is to refuse to confine her to the relations she bears to man, not to deny them to her; let her have her independent existence and she will continue none the less to exist for him *also*: mutually recognizing each other as subject, each will yet remain for the other an *other*.”  
(Beauvoir, TSS: 731)

# MASCULINE DOMINATION: BEAUVOIR MEETS BOURDIEU

- Symbolic Domination
- Naturalization or Reversing Cause and Effect
- The Historical Labor of Dehistoricization
- Producing the Gendered Habitus
- Adaptations to Domination
- Liberation
  - Equality in Inequality
  - Social Equality
  - Liberation (universality)

# IV. THEORY AND PRACTICE

- From Beauvoir to Fanon

# THEORY AND PRACTICE

- From Beauvoir to Fanon
- Objectivity and Misrecognition

## OBJECTIVITY AND “THE WOMAN QUESTION”

Very well, but just how shall we pose the question? And to begin with, who are we to propound it at all? Man is at once judge and party to the case; but so is woman. What we need is an angel – neither man nor woman – but where shall we find one? Still, the angel would be poorly qualified to speak, for an angel is ignorant of all the basic facts involved in the problem... It looks to me as if there are, after all, certain women who are best qualified to elucidate the situation of woman ... Many of today’s women, fortunate in the restoration of all the privileges pertaining to the estate of the human being, can afford the luxury of impartiality—we even recognize its necessity. ... Many problems appear to us to be more pressing than those which concern us in particular, and this detachment even allows us to hope that our attitude will be objective. Still, we know the feminine world more intimately than do the men because we have our roots in it, we grasp more immediately than do men what it means to a human being to be feminine; and we are more concerned with such knowledge.

(Beauvoir, TSS: xxxiii-xxxiv)

# THEORY AND PRACTICE

- From Beauvoir to Fanon
- Objectivity and Misrecognition
- How to explain Bourdieu's silencing of Beauvoir
  - Habitus
  - Capital
  - Field of academic warfare

# THEORY AND PRACTICE

- From Beauvoir to Fanon
- Objectivity and Misrecognition
- How to explain Bourdieu's silencing of Beauvoir
  - Habitus
  - Capital
  - Field of academic warfare
- Domination and Difference Feminism