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Toril Moi

Feminism as Critique

FEMINIST THEORY is critical theory; feminist critique is therefore necessarily political. In making this claim I draw on the Marxist concept of "critique," succinctly summarized by Kate Soper as a theoretical exercise which, by "explaining the source in reality of the cognitive shortcomings of the theory under attack, call[s] for changes in the reality itself" (93). In this sense, Soper writes, feminist critique comes to echo critical theory as developed by the Frankfurt School with its emphasis on "argued justification for concrete, emancipatory practice" (93).¹ This is clearly an ambitious aim, which would require me to situate Pierre Bourdieu's social theory in relation to the specific French social formation which produced it. Such analysis would require substantial empirical research: there is no space for such an undertaking in this context.

I have therefore called this paper "Appropriating Bourdieu." By "appropriation" I understand a critical assessment of a given theory formation with a view to taking it over and using it for feminist purposes.² Appropriation, then, is theoretically somewhat more modest than a full-scale critique and has a relatively well-defined concrete purpose. Neither "appropriation" nor "critique" rely on the idea of a transcendental vantage point from which to scrutinize the theory formation in question. Unlike the Enlightenment concept of "criticism," the concept of "critique" as used here is immanent and dialectical. My proposal of "appropriation" and "critique" as key feminist activities is intended to contest the idea that feminists are doomed to be victimized by what is sometimes called "male" theory. If I prefer to use terms such as "patriarchal" and "feminist" rather

*Portions of this essay were presented at the Commonwealth Center.

than "male" and "female," it is precisely because I believe that as feminists we struggle to *transform* the cultural traditions of which we are the contradictory products.

Why Bourdieu?

Since the 1960s the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, professor of sociology at the Collège de France and directeur d'études at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, has published over twenty books on anthropology, cultural sociology, language and literature. Only recently, however, has he found an audience outside the social sciences in the English-speaking world. One of the reasons for such relatively belated interdisciplinary interest is surely the fact that his resolutely sociological and historical thought, which owes far more to classical French sociology, structuralism, and even Marxism than to any later intellectual movements,³ could find little resonance in a theoretical space dominated, in the humanities at least, by poststructuralism and postmodernism. Today, however, there is a renewed interest in the social and historical determinants of cultural production. The fact that Bourdieu has always devoted much space to problems pertaining to literature, language and aesthetics makes his work particularly promising terrain for literary critics.⁴

In a recent paper, the British cultural sociologist Janet Wolff puts the case for a more sociological approach to feminist criticism: "[I]t is only with a systematic analysis of sexual divisions in society, of the social relations of cultural production, and of the relationship between textuality, gender and social structure," she writes, "that feminist literary criticism will really be adequate to its object."⁵ I agree with Wolff that feminist criticism would do well to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the social aspects of cultural production.⁶ Bourdieu's sociology of culture, I would argue, is promising terrain for feminists precisely because it allows us to produce highly concrete and specific analyses of the social determinants of the literary *énonciation*. This is not to say that such determinants are the only ones that we need to consider, nor that feminist critics should not concern themselves with the *énoncé*, or the actual statement itself.⁷ Again I agree with Janet Wolff who holds that feminist criticism fails in its political and literary task if it does not study literature both at the level of texts and at the level of institutions and social processes. I should perhaps add that

just as it is absurd to try to reduce the *énoncé* to the *énonciation* (for instance by claiming that every statement can be fully explained by one's so-called "speaking position"), it is equally absurd to treat texts as if they were not the complex products of a historically and socially situated *act* of utterance, the *énonciation*.

If I am interested in Bourdieu, then, it is not because I believe that his theory of the social construction of conceptual categories, including that of "woman," somehow makes all other theory formations superfluous. There can be no question of abandoning Freud for Bourdieu, for instance. Nor can we afford to neglect textual theories in favor of sociology of psychology. I do not wish, either, to reduce the work of the French sociologist to a simple tool for literary critics. For Bourdieu also has considerable theoretical relevance for feminism. In this paper, for instance, I hope to show that a Bourdieuan approach enables us to reconceptualize gender as a social category in a way which undercuts the traditional essentialist/nonessentialist divide.

Bourdieu's *general* theories of the reproduction of cultural and social power are not per se radically new and original. Many of his most cherished themes have also been studied by others. To some, his general theory of power may seem less original than that of a Marx or a Foucault; his account of the way in which individual subjects come to internalize and identify with dominant social institutions or structures may read like an echo of Gramsci's theory of hegemony; and his theory of social power and its ideological effects may seem less challenging than those of the Frankfurt School.⁸ For me, on the other hand, Bourdieu's originality is to be found in his development of what one might call a *microtheory* of social power.⁹ Where Gramsci will give us a general theory of the imposition of hegemony, Bourdieu will show exactly *how* one can analyse teachers' comments on student papers, rules for examinations and students' choices of different subjects in order to trace the specific and practical construction and implementation of a hegemonic ideology. Many feminists claim that gender is socially constructed. It is not difficult to make such a sweeping statement. The problem is to determine what kind of specific consequences such a claim may have. It is at this point that I find Bourdieu's sociological theories particularly useful. For a feminist, another great advantage of Bourdieu's microtheoretical approach is that it allows us to incorporate the most mundane details of everyday life in our analyses, or in other words: Bourdieu makes sociological theory out of *everything*.

Refusing to accept the distinction between "high" or "significant"

and “low” or “insignificant” matters, Bourdieu will analyse various ways of chewing one’s food, different forms of dressing, musical tastes ranging from a predilection for “Home on the Range” to a liking for John Cage, home decoration, the kind of friends one has and the films one likes to see, and the way a student may feel when talking to her professor. In one sense, then, some of my interest in Bourdieu is grounded in my basic conviction that much of what patriarchal minds like to trivialize as *gossip*, and as women’s gossip at that, is in fact socially significant. But it is one thing to make such a claim, quite another to make a convincing case for the claim. After reading Bourdieu I now feel confident that it *is* possible to link the humdrum details of everyday life to a more general social analysis of power. This in itself ought to make his approach attractive for feminists looking for a mode of social analysis which seeks to undo or overcome the traditional individual/social or private/public divide. Again it may be necessary to stress that I am not arguing that Bourdieu is the only thinker to take a theoretical interest in everyday life. What I am arguing, however, is that I know of no other theory formation which allows me to make highly complex, yet quite concrete and specific links between, say, my fascination with Simone de Beauvoir, my tendency to eat fish in restaurants, and my specific position in a given social field.

It nevertheless remains true that until very recently Bourdieu himself has not had much to say about women.¹⁰ This means that the place of gender in his thought is somewhat undertheorized. A feminist approaching Bourdieu must necessarily ask whether his major concepts can simply be applied to gender or whether they require rethinking and restructuring in order to become usable for her purposes. She will also have to raise the question of social change. Are Bourdieu’s theories, with their insistence on the way in which social agents internalize dominant social values, capable of theorizing change? Is Bourdieu implying that social power structures *always* win out? That *amor fati*—love your destiny—is an appropriate motto for every socially determined act? Crucial for feminists and socialists alike, these questions will be considered below.

Field, Habitus, Legitimacy, Symbolic Violence

At this point it is necessary to introduce some of Bourdieu’s key concepts. Two of his most fundamental terms, *field* [*champ*] and *habitus*, are deeply interdependent. A field may be defined as a competitive system of social relations which functions according to

its own specific logic or rules. "A field," Bourdieu writes, "is a space in which a game takes place [*espace de jeu*], a field of objective relations between individuals or institutions who are competing for the same stake" (*Questions de sociologie*, 197). In principle, a field is simply any social system which can be shown to function according to such a logic.

But if the field is a competitive structure, or perhaps more accurately a site of struggle or a battlefield, what is at stake? Generally speaking, any agent in the field may be assumed to seek maximum power and dominance within it. The aim is to *rule* the field, to become the instance which has the power to confer or withdraw *legitimacy* from other participants in the game. Bourdieu defines *legitimacy* as follows: "An institution, action or usage which is dominant, but not recognized as such [*méconnu comme tel*], that is to say, which is tacitly accepted, is legitimate" (*Questions de sociologie*, 110). Such a position of dominance is achieved by amassing the maximum amount of the specific kind of symbolic capital current in the field. In his pioneering article of 1966, "Champ intellectuel et projet créateur," Bourdieu presents a striking analysis of the interrelations between the writer's project and the structures of the intellectual field. The intellectual field, he argues, is relatively autonomous in relation to the whole social field and generates its own type of legitimacy. This is not to say that the social field is not present within the intellectual field, but rather that it is present only as a *representation* of itself, a representation, moreover, which is not imported from outside, but produced from within the intellectual field itself.

The intellectual and educational fields, like any other such, have their own specific mechanisms of selection and consecration. Intellectual legitimacy as a symbolic value is produced by the field itself and may be defined as that which is *recognized*—or in Bourdieu's term, *consecrated*—by the field at any given time. In order to achieve legitimacy, the agents in the field have recourse to many and varied strategies. These strategies, however, are rarely if ever perceived as such by the agents themselves. Instead, each field generates its own specific *habitus*, which Bourdieu defines as "a system of dispositions adjusted to the game [of the field]" (*Questions de sociologie*, 34). "For a field to work," he writes, "there must be stakes, and people ready to play the game, equipped with the habitus which enables them to know and recognize the immanent laws of the game, the stakes and so on" (110). *Habitus*, then, may be seen as the totality of general *dispositions* acquired through practical experience in the field. At one level, then, habitus is practical sense (*le sens pratique*). In some

ways, habitus may be compared to what educationalists have called the "silent curriculum": those norms and values that are inculcated through the very forms of classroom interaction, rather than through any explicit teaching project. For Bourdieu, however, habitus is an active, generative set of unformulated dispositions, not a store of passive knowledge.

As the internalized set of tacit rules governing strategies and practices in the field, the habitus of a field is destined to remain unarticulated. Insofar as the field cannot function without its specific habitus, any field is necessarily structured by a series of *unspoken* and *unspeakable* rules for what can legitimately be said—or perceived—within the field. In this sense, Bourdieu writes, the whole field functions as a form of *censorship* (see *Questions de sociologie*, 138–42). Within the field, every discourse is *euphemistic* in the sense that it has to observe the correct *forms*, legislated by the field, or risk exclusion as nonsense (in the case of the intellectual field, excluded discourses would tend to be cast as *stupid* or *naive*).

If the field as a whole, however, functions as a form of censorship, every discourse within the field becomes at once an enactment and an effect of *symbolic violence*. This is so because a field is a particular structure of distribution of a specific kind of capital. The right to speak, *legitimacy*, is invested in those agents recognized by the field as powerful possessors of capital. Such individuals become spokespersons for the *doxa* and struggle to relegate challengers to their position as *heterodox*, as lacking in capital, as individuals whom one cannot *credit* with the right to speak. The powerful possessors of symbolic capital become the wielders of symbolic power, and thus of symbolic violence. But given the fact that all agents in the field to some extent share the same habitus, such richly endowed agents' right to power is implicitly *recognized* by all, and not least by those who aspire one day to oust them from their thrones. That different factions within the (battle)field fight to the bitter end over politics, aesthetics, or theory does not mean that they do not to some extent share the same habitus: in the very act of engaging in battle, they mutually and silently demonstrate their recognition of the rules of the game. It does not follow, as far as I can see, that they will all play the game *in the same way*. The different positions of different players in the field will require different strategies. To the extent that different agents have different social backgrounds (they may come from different geographical regions, be of different class, gender or race and so on), their habitus cannot be *identical*.

The same thing goes for legitimacy as for "distinction" (distinction, after all, is nothing but *legitimate taste*). The whole point of the

process of imposing legitimacy is to reach a point where the categories of power and distinction merge. Legitimacy (or distinction) is only truly achieved when it is no longer possible to tell whether dominance has been achieved *as a result of* distinction or whether in fact the dominant agent simply appears to be distinguished *because* he (more rarely she) is dominant (see *Distinction*, 92).

In *Le Sens pratique*, Bourdieu defines symbolic violence as “soft” violence, or as “censored and euphemized violence, which is to say that it is unrecognizable and acknowledged [*méconnaissable et reconnue*]” (216–17). One has recourse to symbolic violence when open or direct violence (such as economic violence, for instance) is impossible. It is important to realize that symbolic violence is *legitimate* and therefore literally unrecognizable as violence. If explicit ideological or material struggle between groups or classes develops, such as class conflict or the feminist struggle, symbolic violence may be unmasked and recognized for what it is. In the very moment it is recognized, however, it can no longer function as *symbolic* violence (see *Le Sens pratique*, 230, n. 27). Insofar as they tend to deny the importance of economic structures, precapitalist societies, Bourdieu argues, make widespread use of symbolic violence. In late capitalist societies, on the other hand, symbolic violence flourishes most perniciously in the domains of art and culture, perceived as sacred refuges for disinterested values in a hostile, sordid world dominated by economic production (see *Le Sens pratique*, 231).

Education and the Reproduction of Power

For Bourdieu, the educational system is one of the principal agents of symbolic violence in modern democracies.¹¹ It is also a pivotal factor in the construction of each individual’s *habitus*. In *La Noblesse d’état* he studies the way in which the imposition of social power in the educational system is linked to the transmission or reproduction of power in other social spheres.¹² The function of the educational system, Bourdieu argues, is above all to produce the necessary social *belief* in the *legitimacy* of currently dominant power structures, or in other words: to make us believe that our rulers are ruling us by virtue of their qualifications and achievements rather than by virtue of their noble birth or connections. The coveted diploma or exam paper becomes a token of *social magic*, the emblem of a transformational exercise which truly changes the essence of the chosen elite.¹³ To claim that something is an effect of social magic, Bourdieu reminds us, is not of course to say that it is illusory or unreal: “One

must be noble in order to behave nobly; but one would cease being noble if one did not behave as a noble. In other words, social magic has very real effects. To assign somebody to a group with a superior essence (nobles as opposed to commoners, men as opposed to women, cultured people as opposed to uneducated people and so on) operates an objective transformation determining a learning process which in its turn facilitates a real transformation apt to bring that person closer to the definition that has been bestowed on him" (*Noblesse*, 157, my translation). The fact that distinguished products of the educational system are distinguished as a result of the social *belief* in their distinction, then, does not mean that they do not in fact also possess some objective competence (the ability to read Greek, solve complex equations, or whatever). Such competence, however, has very little to do with the nature of the tasks they will be called upon to perform as, say, managing directors of important companies or members of politically powerful commissions. The fact that the educational system necessarily produces some competence without for that matter ceasing to exercise social magic is a phenomenon Bourdieu labels the "ambiguity of competence." This ambiguity, then, is precisely what enables the educational system to make such an efficient or *convincing* contribution to the legitimization and naturalization of power.

The reproduction of power, however, is not merely an effect of education. On the contrary, the evidence produced by Bourdieu would seem to indicate that whereas the educational system has an indispensable role to play as one of the most important agents of legitimate symbolic violence, social agents rich in political and economic power know how to overcome the educational hurdle if they have to. If persons from disadvantaged social groups require all the educational capital they can obtain if they are to advance in society, members of more favoured classes can get further on less educational capital, simply because they have access to large amounts of other kinds of capital.

Bourdieu convincingly shows how the educational system favours the bourgeoisie even in its most intrinsically academic exercises. The consequences are ominous: students lacking in cultural capital (for instance those of modest social origins) tend to fare badly at a very early stage in their educational careers. According to Bourdieu there is an almost perfect homology between the class position of the individual pupils and their teachers' intellectual judgments of them. Defined as failures, these students *become* failures in precisely the same way as the distinguished students *become* distinguished.

When it comes to measuring social success in later life, however, Bourdieu chillingly demonstrates how a certain lack of educational capital can be compensated for by the possession of other forms of capital. Money and political power (that is, economic and political capital in Bourdieu's terms) are obviously important here. But in *La Noblesse d'état* he also places much emphasis on a new concept, that of *social capital*. Social capital is defined as "relational power," that is to say the number of culturally, economically, or politically useful relations accumulated by a given person. In France it would seem that the "great" bourgeois families maintain or reproduce their social standing by relying on extensive networks of family members with large amounts of capital in different fields. Thus one family may comprise outstanding medical doctors, powerful bankers, influential politicians, and perhaps an important artist, writer or professor. In this way the family as an extended group can be said to have heavy symbolic investments safely spread across the whole social field. This was also true for the great noble families under the *ancien régime*, and, as Bourdieu drily remarks, this is why even a revolution tends to have little impact on the fortunes of such family networks. Persons from this kind of background can be shown regularly to achieve higher positions of power in relation to their educational capital than members of less favored social groups. Or in other words: a star pupil at the *École Polytechnique* who is also the son of a prominent politician is far more likely to become the president of an important bank than an equally successful student at the *École Polytechnique* whose father happens to be a mere worker, schoolteacher, or engineer.

And if the son or daughter of the prominent banker somehow fails to get into *Polytechnique*, there are other, less prestigious but "classy" educational establishments, such as the new breed of private schools focusing on business and management, which compensate for their lack of intellectual prestige by their upmarket, "modern" image. For the offspring of the privileged, such "little" schools (as opposed to the "great," intellectually highly prestigious state schools such as the *École Normale*, the *Polytechnique*, and so on) produce an educational cachet which allows them to aspire, after all, to positions of a certain economic or political power. For the sons and daughters of the less favoured classes, however, such schools hold little promise. Again, the social logic at work is the same: if capital is what it takes to produce more capital, an agent lacking in social capital at the outset will not benefit greatly from a relatively non-prestigious ("low-capital") education.

The ideological role of the education system, then, is to make it *appear* as if positions of leadership and power are distributed according to merit. The existence in every educational institution of a tiny percentage of what Bourdieu likes to call “miraculous exceptions” (*des miraculés*—educationally highly successful members of disadvantaged groups) is precisely what allows us to believe that the system is egalitarian and meritocratic after all.¹⁴ For Bourdieu, then, the widespread democratic belief in education as a passport to freedom and success is no more than a myth: the myth of the *école libératrice* is the new “opium of the people.”

Doxa, Orthodoxy, Heterodoxy, and Change

Taste or *judgment* are the heavy artillery of symbolic violence. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu denounces the “terrorism [of] the peremptory verdicts which, in the name of taste, condemn to ridicule, indignity, shame, silence . . . men and women who simply fall short, in the eyes of their judges, of the right way of being and doing” (511): “[There is terrorism] in the symbolic violence through which the dominant group endeavour to impose their own life-style, and which abounds in the glossy weekly magazines: ‘Conforama is the Guy Lux of furniture,’ says *Le Nouvel Observateur*, which will never tell you that the *Nouvel Obs* is the Club Méditerranée of culture.¹⁵ There is terrorism in all such remarks, flashes of self-interested lucidity sparked off by class hatred or contempt” (511).

These are not the comments of a man who believes in the inevitability of the status quo: *Distinction* is nothing if not a work of *critique*, a theoretical intervention which assumes that the very fact of exposing the foundations of bourgeois esthetics will contribute to its transformation.¹⁶ In order to discover how Bourdieu would argue this case, it is necessary to turn to an earlier work, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. For Bourdieu, “every established order tends to produce . . . the naturalization of its own arbitrariness” (164). In a highly traditional, relatively stable and undifferentiated society, this process is so successful as to make the “natural and social world appear as self-evident” (164). Such self-evidence is what Bourdieu calls *doxa*. *Doxa* is to be distinguished from *orthodoxy* (the effort to defend the *doxa*), as well as from *heterodoxy* (the effort to challenge the *doxa*) insofar as these two positions more or less explicitly recognize the possibility of different arrangements. To defend the “natural” is necessarily to admit that it is no longer self-evident.

A “doxic” society is one in which the “established cosmological

and political order is perceived not as arbitrary, i.e., as one possible order among others, but as a self-evident and natural order which goes without saying and therefore goes unquestioned" (166). Or to put it differently, this is a society in which everybody has a perfect *sense of limits* (see 164). In such a society there is no place for opinion in the liberal sense of the word, or as Bourdieu puts it: "what is essential *goes without saying because it comes without saying*: the tradition is silent, not least about itself as tradition" (167). In such a society, then, there is no space for change or transformation. Entirely doxic, social power rules without opposition: this is a universe in which the very question of legitimacy does not even arise.

What, then, does it take for critique—and thus for change—to enter the social space? On this point Bourdieu is recognizably *marxisant*: the condition of possibility for a critical discourse which would "bring the undiscussed into discussion," he writes, is an "objective crisis, which, in breaking the immediate fit between the subjective structures and the objective structures, destroys self-evidence practically" (168–69). "The would-be most radical critique always has the limits that are assigned to it by the objective conditions," he continues: "Crisis is a necessary condition for a questioning of doxa but is not in itself a sufficient condition for the production of a critical discourse" (169).

Crisis, then, is necessary for critique to develop, and crisis is always a matter of *praxis*. The class struggle is the obvious example of such a crisis, but it is not the only one: other social groups, such as women or ethnic minorities, or the old or the young, may also constitute themselves as social agents challenging specific power structures. The reason why crisis alone is not sufficient to trigger critical discourse is obvious: only the dominated classes or groups have an objective interest in "pushing back the limits of *doxa* and exposing the arbitrariness of the taken for granted," as Bourdieu puts it (169). The dominant classes, on the other hand, will take up their position as orthodox defenders of the integrity of the *doxa*. The emergence of a critical discourse becomes a stake in the very social struggle which at once enables and limits it.

For Bourdieu, crises also provoke a redefinition of experience, giving rise to new forms of language. When the everyday order is challenged by an insurgent group, hitherto *unspoken* or *private* experience suddenly finds itself expressed in public, with dramatic consequences:

"Private" experiences undergo nothing less than a *change of state* when they recognize themselves in the *public objectivity* of an already constituted dis-

course, the objective sign of their recognition of their right to be spoken and to be spoken publicly: "Words wreak havoc," says Sartre, "when they find a name for what had up to then been lived namelessly." Because any language that can command attention is an "authorized language," invested with the authority of a group, the things it designates are not simply expressed but also authorized and legitimated. This is true not only of establishment language but also of the heretical discourses which draw their legitimacy and authority from the very groups over which they exert their power and which they literally produce by expressing them: they derive their power from their capacity to *objectify* unformulated experiences, to make them public—a step on the road to officialization and legitimation—and, when the occasion arises, to manifest and reinforce their concordance (170–71).

This account of the way in which previously dominated experience is legitimated and constituted *qua* experience in the very act of being given public utterance, strikes me as a particularly useful theorization of feminist practice with its emphasis on constructing a language expressing women's experience. On this theory, to study feminist discourse is to situate it in relation to the structures of the field in which it arises. A truly critical (that is to say, *anti-doxic*) account of feminism, then, would be one which also reflects on the social conditions of possibility of feminist discourse. Or in other words: feminism as critique must also be a critique of feminism.

In this way, the would-be critic of the *doxa* finds herself obliged to reflect on the conditions which produce her as a speaker. As an intellectual, her position becomes particularly ambiguous, insofar as her social or political critique necessarily also finds itself caught up in the mechanisms and strategies—the *habitus*—of the intellectual field she is in. Bourdieu's own role as an intellectual setting out to describe and explicate the tacit rules of the intellectual game is of course no exception. Any effort to make a specific analysis public—to objectify it, as Bourdieu puts it—must include the speaker (see also *Distinction*, 12).

But such "objectification" of one's own position can never be complete. If the intellectual field itself constitutes the "site of objectification, the unseen standpoint, the blind spot of all theories" (*Distinction*, 511), it follows, Bourdieu adds, that "scientific work on [such an] object is inseparable from work on the working subject" (*Distinction*, 511). In this way the cultural sociologist finds herself in a position analogous to that of the psychoanalyst, that is to say, not as one who has managed to jettison her own unconscious, or who is free from blindspots, but rather as somebody who can be expected to recognize the strategies of the unconscious for what they are

when they manifest themselves. "Sociology is rarely more akin to social psychoanalysis than when it confronts an object like taste," Bourdieu writes in *Distinction* (11). And for Bourdieu as for Freud, the way to change goes through the verbalization and analysis of the unspoken and repressed rules that govern our behaviour. The point to be remembered, however, is that such discourse itself is the product of the very crisis it seeks to resolve.

Change, then, is not impossible in Bourdieu's scheme of things: symbolic violence is not the only form of violence in society. Insofar as symbolic violence is deeply *doxic*, it may be challenged on precisely the same grounds and in the same ways as the *doxa*. But social change is grounded in practice, in the objective conditions of everyday life. In this context the revolutionary role of intellectuals is bound to be relatively limited. Insofar as intellectuals may contribute to change through the production of discourse, they can only do so when the social structure they inhabit is in an explicit or implicit state of conflict. The very fact of producing a critical discourse, however, helps to *legitimize* the experience which directly or indirectly has contributed to producing the critique in the first place.¹⁷ In this way, I take it, critical discourses do not simply remain derivative or marginal in relation to the material and practical conditions which enable them to come into existence, but come to produce material and practical effects in their own right. This is why such discourses, in their limited way, can be seen as transformative of practice.

The Social Construction of Gender

What, then, can Bourdieu's sociology of culture add to a feminist analysis of social power structures? Recently, in an effort to show that his own approach can expand beyond class, Bourdieu has turned to the question of the social construction of gender. In principle, such a turn ought not to surprise us. As Rogers Brubaker has shown, Bourdieu's concept of "class" is so indistinct as to be applicable to any social group whose members share a certain number of material and social conditions and thus also develop a common habitus. In an unpublished paper from 1989 entitled "La Construction sociale du sexe," Bourdieu starts from the assumption that men and women do in fact constitute two such social groups, and then proceeds to analyse the social relations between men and women in exactly the same terms as any other set of social relations between a dominant and a dominated class. This analysis is expanded and

developed in "La Domination masculine," published in September 1990.¹⁸ In 1990, for the first time, Bourdieu's journal, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, devoted two special issues to questions of sexual difference.¹⁹ Questions of patriarchal power and the social construction of gender would therefore seem finally to be acknowledged as central issues for Bourdieu's sociological enterprise.

For Bourdieu the sexual division of human beings into two fundamental categories is a thoroughly arbitrary cultural construction. For him, sexism—like racism—is an essentialism: "It [sexism] aims to ascribe historically produced social differences to a biological nature functioning like an essence from which every actual act in life will be implacably deduced" ("Domination," 12). Such essentialism is politically nefarious insofar as it is invoked to *predict* and thus to *control* the behaviour of every member of a given social group. On this point, then, Bourdieu's analysis rejoins that of many socialist or materialist feminists over the past two decades.

The invocation of biology as the "root" or "cause" of any specific social practice is deeply suspect to Bourdieu. To believe that the so-called biological "facts" of reproduction, for instance, are the *causes* of the sexual division of labor, which hands "important" tasks to men and "low" or "menial" tasks to women, is precisely to be in the grips of phallogocentric thought. Far from ruling our social life, Bourdieu writes, our perceptions of the biology of reproduction are the *effects* of the thoroughly arbitrary social construction of gender divisions which they are supposed to legitimate and explain (see "Domination," 14).

While the invocation of biology allows the social construction of sexual difference to appear motivated or "natural," its real function is to mask the true, socially produced power relations between the sexes, to present social gender divisions as *doxic*, that is to say, as that which cannot be questioned. For Bourdieu, then, sexual oppression is above all an effect of *symbolic violence*. As such, the traditional relationship between the sexes is structured by a habitus which makes male power appear legitimate even to women.²⁰ Insofar as symbolic violence *works*, it produces women who share the very same habitus which serves to oppress them. In a wholly doxic society, women as social agents will freely choose the social destiny which they cannot in any case expect to escape: *amor fati* or "self-confirming prophecy" are terms Bourdieu uses to describe the position of such women.

To produce a gender habitus requires an extremely elaborate social process of education or *Bildung*. For Bourdieu, an important aspect of this process is the inscription of social power relations on

the body: our habitus is at once produced and expressed through our movements, gestures, facial expressions, manners, ways of walking, and ways of looking at the world. The socially produced body is thus necessarily also a political body, or rather an embodied politics. Thus even such basic activities as teaching children how to move, dress, and eat are thoroughly political, in that they impose on them an unspoken understanding of legitimate ways to (re)present their body to themselves and others. The body—and its apparel such as clothing, gestures, make-up and so on—becomes a kind of constant reminder (*un pense-bête*) of sociosexual power relations.

It follows from Bourdieu's understanding of the social effects of gender divisions that the dominant group—in this case men—do not escape the burdens of their own domination. Through a reading of the episode in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* where Mrs. Ramsay overhears Mr. Ramsay's monologic recitation of "The Charge of the Light Brigade" and pities him for his childish preoccupations with intellectual prestige and his masculine delusions of grandeur, Bourdieu makes the point that the sexual division of labour assigns to men the most prestigious and therefore the most serious games. This is certainly true, but it is hardly news to feminists. Bourdieu's own formulation is nevertheless striking: men, he says, are socialized to *take serious games seriously*.²¹ According to Bourdieu this has a series of unpleasant side effects for the men themselves, effects which may be qualified as the *noblesse oblige* syndrome.

Only an outsider, or perhaps somebody lacking in legitimacy within the dominant group, can expect to see through what Bourdieu calls the "masculine illusion"—the illusion of self-importance. But this is not a *necessary* effect of marginalization; on the contrary, only exceptional agents who somehow find themselves in a position relatively free from various forms of dependence can expect to get away with the superb irony of a Virginia Woolf. Thus women who laugh at male self-importance in university seminars may find themselves constructed not as lucid critics of male ridicule, but as frivolous females incapable of understanding truly serious thought. And to say that a construction prevails is to say that it becomes a social fact with real effects for those agents' careers. In some circumstances, then, female laughter may be an excellent instrument of critique and in other instances quite counterproductive.

The example of Virginia Woolf would seem to demonstrate that critique and change may occur even within fairly traditional social structures of gender. What, then, does it take to change dominant gender relations, to undo "la dominance masculine"? Given the fact that patriarchal power²² would seem to be universal, it is exceptionally

hard to “denaturalize,” Bourdieu writes, since such critical unmasking tends to come about as the result of the historical encounter with other ways of life (see “Domination,” 7). It is striking—and somewhat surprising—to notice how close Bourdieu’s analysis on this point comes to that of Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*. Like Bourdieu, Beauvoir sees male domination as a universally existing social phenomenon and as such particularly likely to be mistaken for nature:

Throughout history they [women] have always been subordinated to men, and hence their dependency is not the result of a historical event or a social change—it was not something that *occurred*. The reason why otherness in this case seems to be an absolute is in part that it lacks the contingent or incidental nature of historical facts. A condition brought about at a certain time can be abolished at some other time, as the Negroes of Haiti and others have proved; but it might seem that a natural condition is beyond the possibility of change. In truth, however, the nature of things is no more immutably given, once for all, than is historical reality. If woman seems to be the inessential which never becomes the essential, it is because she herself fails to bring about this change. (*The Second Sex*, 18–19)

Focusing on women’s complicity in their own oppression, Beauvoir here raises a question more recent feminist theory often has sought to avoid. For Beauvoir, there can be no liberation until women themselves cease to reproduce the power mechanisms that confine them to their place. In spite of her own valiant efforts to construct a *social* understanding of the female condition, Beauvoir nevertheless overestimates the ease with which change may be accomplished. Nowhere is her existentialist voluntarism with its characteristic underestimation of the effect of social and psychological structures more apparent than in her profound belief that, in 1949, she and other professionally trained women of her own generation had already “won the game” (27).²³

Bourdieu, on the other hand, certainly does not underestimate the difficulties of breaking loose of patriarchal shackles. It follows from his theory that the effects of symbolic violence do not necessarily disappear even if social conditions change. Here Simone de Beauvoir’s own life furnishes an excellent illustration of his point. Earning her own living, leading a life independent of social conventions and believing in her own freedom, Beauvoir nevertheless displays the most painful conflicts and contradictions when it comes to asserting emotional autonomy or intellectual independence in relation to Sartre. While such difficulties may well be analysed from a psy-

choanalytic perspective, they should also—simultaneously—be grasped as the *political* effects of the socially constructed habitus of a bourgeois woman brought up in Paris in the 1910s and 1920s. There can be no doubt, either, that Bourdieu is right to point to the powerful and lasting effects of the social construction of our body as well as our subjectivity. One cannot “liberate the victims of symbolic violence by decree,” he writes (“Domination,” 12).

In its insistence on the way in which women’s habitus is produced by the symbolic violence that oppresses them, Bourdieu’s analysis in “La Domination masculine” comes across as somewhat bleak, or even despondent. What is required to effectuate change, according to Bourdieu, is “collective action which sets out to organize a *symbolic struggle* capable of *questioning* practically every tacit presupposition of the phallonic vision of the world” (“Domination,” 30). This is certainly true, but in my view, it is precisely what the feminist movement has been striving to do for the past few decades. Luckily we are not today in a position where we have to *start* this struggle afresh. If Bourdieu’s analysis of gender in “La Domination masculine” ends up sounding such a gloomy note, it is not least because the bulk of his empirical material is taken from his own field work in Kabylia in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Judging from his evidence, it would appear that at that time, Kabylia was indeed a near-doxic society insofar as gender relations were concerned. While Bourdieu is probably right to claim that such a society may reveal more clearly than others the way in which gender comes to be *experienced* (and not just *represented*) as natural, his reliance on his Kabyle material makes him underestimate, in my view, the level of crisis we are experiencing in gender relations today. On his own theory, such social crisis produces the conditions for social change on a scale unthinkable in a more doxic situation.

In contemporary society, then, the position of women—and of men—in relation to social power is far more complex and contradictory than Bourdieu would seem fully to acknowledge.²⁴ Such complexity is precisely what allows for questioning of received notions: in my view, current gender relations are by no means tacitly and unquestioningly accepted, or in other words, they are by no means entirely doxic. In many areas of social life today, there is an outspoken and ferocious battle between what Bourdieu would call the orthodox and the heterodox. This is not to say that social change takes place at a uniform pace in all social fields. If there is explicit struggle over the received order of things in one field, it does not follow that the same absence of natural or doxic gender

differences dominates in others. This complex social situation is, in my view, at once a problem and a source of great strength for the feminist project of social transformation.

For contemporary feminist theory the strength of Bourdieu's analysis is perhaps not so much his specific analysis of the social relations between the sexes—the *effects* described by him are, after all, fairly well known—as the fact that he manages to eschew the traditional essentialist/antiessentialist divide. Firmly antiessentialist, Bourdieu's analysis does not lose sight of the fact that if women are socially constructed as women, that means that they *are* women. Or to put it in the terms of current theoretical debates within feminism: *sexual differences are neither essences nor simple signifiers, neither a matter of realism nor of nominalism, but a matter of social practice.* Sexual differences or sexual identities, then, cannot simply be deconstructed away: real social change is required to empty these categories of current meanings. This is not to say that the deconstruction of sexual metaphysics is not a useful activity in the struggle against patriarchy: it is rather to indicate that only the existence of a social crisis—a power struggle—on the level of gender can enable such a potentially critical activity to take place in the first place.

Bourdieu and Feminist Theory: Gender, Habitus, and Social Magic

Bourdieu's analysis of the oppression of women as a matter of habitus and symbolic violence would seem logically to presuppose the idea of a *field*. If gender has a habitus, there must, surely, be a field (*champ*) in which this habitus can come into play. But how can one conceptualize a field of gender? Arguing that the concept of habitus is crucial for feminism, Beate Kraus claims that the concept of field is rather useless, since it is impossible to isolate a "distinctive field where gender is of special relevance."²⁵ But if Kraus is right, two of Bourdieu's most central concepts—field and habitus—would seem to be in jeopardy. While it may be gratifying to a feminist to argue that the introduction of gender (and, I would suspect, race) as a fundamental term in Bourdieu's theory produces a grievous conceptual problem, I am not convinced that it is the case. Rather, I would argue, it would seem that gender—like class—is part of a field, but that this field is the general social field, rather than any specific field of gender.

Sociologically speaking, gender would seem to behave in an unusually *relational* way. There seems to be no limit to its chameleonlike

capacity for change in value and importance according to its specific social context. One of the advantages of Bourdieu's theory is that it not only insists on the social construction of gender, but that it permits us to grasp the immense *variability* of gender as a social factor. But if we assume that gender is a particularly *combinatory* social category, one that infiltrates and influences every other category, it would precisely seem to have much in common with the concept of *social class* in Bourdieu's own theories. All his analyses of education, art, and taste tend to show the influence of social class on the *habitus* of individual agents. Yet he never studies social class as a "pure" field in its own right. Nor does he ever talk about "class capital." Rather it would seem that class is part of what he sometimes calls the "whole social field": that which underpins or structures all other fields. This "whole social field" may then be imported into another field as a field-specific *representation* of itself (see "Champ intellectuel et projet créateur").²⁶

Such a conceptualization of gender is not unproblematic. It does not, for instance, resolve the general problem of the relationship between gender and class. The question of whether *race* can be theorized in such terms would also require further investigation. Bourdieu's own discussions of gender sometimes, but by no means always, occur in contexts where it is assumed that class is a "more fundamental" social category (this would for instance seem to be the case in *Distinction*). In his most recent publication, "La Domination masculine," however, he explicitly states that "male domination constitutes the paradigm (and often the model and stake) of all domination" (30–31). It nevertheless does not follow that male power is always the most central power relation at stake in every social situation. My own tentative view is that we may try to see both class and gender as belonging to the "whole social field" without specifying a fixed and unchangeable hierarchy between them. The advantage of such an approach is that it enables us to escape a futile dogmatism which would declare the absolute primacy of class over gender or of gender over class.²⁷ Instead we might be able to seize the complex *variability* of these social factors as well as the way in which they influence and modify each other in different social contexts.

A field is a space structured by competition and exchange and thus behaves much like a market. If, as the very term "symbolic capital" implies, the "whole social field" is assumed to behave according to a logic of exchange, a Marxist might argue that this in itself is an ideological analysis of social relations, one which presupposes something like a Hobbesian view of human self-interest as the prime mover of social relations. This is not necessarily a

theory compatible with current feminist ideals for social interaction. On the other hand, it must be said that feminists have never been reluctant to analyse current gender arrangements in terms of interests and benefits.²⁸

Leaving these questions aside, I would now like to turn to the productive implications of theorizing gender in Bourdieuan terms. In Western democracies sexual oppression tends to take the form of *symbolic violence*. As we have seen, in times of social crisis symbolic violence ceases to function as such and is replaced by more overt forms of violence. In this sense the increase in physical violence against women since the emergence of the new women's movement signals the fact that gender relations now are constantly in crisis.

The imposition of femaleness on women (or in other words, the gendering of women as socially female) can be seen as another example of *social magic*.²⁹ This is why Simone de Beauvoir is quite correct to insist on the fact that one isn't born a woman, one *becomes* one. As we have seen, social magic is a socially sanctioned act which attributes an essence to individual agents, who then struggle to become what in fact they already are declared to be. In other words: to cast women as women is precisely to *produce* them as women. From a social perspective, without this categorizing and defining act of symbolic violence, women would simply not *be* women. Theorized in this way, the category of woman is neither an essence nor an indeterminate set of fluctuating signifiers, but an arbitrarily imposed definition with real social effects. Like all other social categories, the category of woman therefore at once *masquerades as* and *is* an essence. While it is necessary to deconstruct the category of woman, it should be remembered that such deconstruction remains politically toothless unless it also demonstrates the *social* interests at stake in the construction of this or any other "social essence."

The difference between a feminist appropriation of Bourdieu and certain other forms of materialist feminism is not, of course, the emphasis on gender as a socially constructed category, but the fact that a Bourdieuan perspective also assumes that gender is always a socially *variable* entity, one which carries different amounts of symbolic capital in different contexts. Insofar as gender never appears in a "pure" field of its own, there is no such thing as pure "gender capital." The capital at stake is always the symbolic capital relevant for the specific field under examination. We may nevertheless start from the assumption that under current social conditions and in most contexts maleness functions as positive and femaleness as negative symbolic capital.

In order to illustrate some of the concrete consequences of these positions, I will use the case of Simone de Beauvoir to provide a few cursory examples. When analysing the social position and habitus of one particular woman it is easy to overestimate the effects of one specific social factor such as femaleness, or to ascribe to gender alone the effects of a much more complex and interconnected web of factors such as sex, class, race and age (see *Distinction*, 105–6). This amounts to saying that although social agents are undoubtedly always gendered, one cannot always assume that *gender* is the most relevant factor in play in a given social situation. But insofar as gender is implicated in all other social fields, it is always in principle a relevant factor in all social analysis: one can therefore never discard it without further examination. If feminists sometimes are guilty of overemphasizing gender to the detriment of other factors, then, this is a venial sin compared to the massive repression of gender routinely carried out by the great majority of workers in every intellectual discipline.

In the case of Simone de Beauvoir, it would seem that we are dealing with a particularly suitable subject for a gender-based analysis. Born into a bourgeois Paris family, Beauvoir grew up in circumstances very similar to those of her male friends, colleagues, and competitors at the time. The *only* obvious social stigma from which she suffers in the educational and intellectual fields of her day is that of femaleness. When analysing certain tensions and contradictions in her discourse, then, it is therefore not unreasonable to ascribe them to the fact of her femaleness. In the case of other French women writers, however, the analysis of the impact of gender would be far more complex. I am thinking of Christiane Rochefort, born into the Parisian working class, or Marguerite Duras, growing up as a “poor white” in a French colony, or, at the other end of the social scale, of Marguerite Yourcenar, an aristocrat of independent means.

A feminist analysis of the impact of gender on a woman’s discourse and consciousness must also bear in mind that to be a member of a disadvantaged minority within a given institution or field in no way guarantees that one will develop a revolutionary or oppositional consciousness. On the contrary: ostensibly egalitarian institutions tend to breed consent rather than opposition, *particularly* among the *miraculés*—the miraculous exceptions. For the paradox is that members of minority groups who do succeed in such a system are at least as likely to identify with it as the enabling cause of their own success as to turn against its unjust distribution of symbolic capital. In this way, for instance, the very fact that Simone de

Beauvoir was a brilliant student, combined with the fact that she met with very little overt institutional discrimination at any point in her career, would certainly dispose her to identify with the intellectual values of the system, rather than to revolt against them. Such implicit intellectual solidarity with the dominant French educational institutions of her time can in fact be traced in the very texture of her style and rhetoric.

Bourdieuian categories are always relational, always determined by their fluctuating relationship to other categories. One interesting consequence of this is that we cannot assume that femaleness will carry equal amounts of negative capital throughout a woman's life or in all social fields. Socially speaking, then, it follows that sometimes a woman is a woman and sometimes she is much less so. In some contexts, "femaleness" may even be converted from a liability to an advantage.

In general, the impact of femaleness as negative capital may be assumed to decline in direct proportion to the amount of other forms of symbolic capital amassed. Or to put it the other way round: although a woman rich in symbolic capital may lose *some* legitimacy because of her gender, she still has more than enough capital left to make her impact on the field. In the case of exceptionally high amounts of capital, femaleness may play a very small part indeed. In sociological terms such cases are so rare as to be negligible. For literary critics, however, it is not an entirely irrelevant problematic, since until recently the very fact of being a non-neglected woman writer was so rare as to turn the author into a *miraculée* almost per definition.³⁰ The works of such women cannot be read in the same way as those of writers lacking in symbolic capital. Their relationship to the works of more or less legitimate male colleagues will also be different from that of their less well endowed sisters.

When it comes to explaining why it is that some exceptional women writers manage to accumulate more symbolic capital than others, Bourdieu's concept of *social capital* becomes particularly interesting. As we have seen, social capital is defined as relational capital, or in other words, the power and advantages one gains from having a network of "contacts" as well as a series of other, more personal or intimate personal relations. Social capital helps its possessor to develop and increase other forms of capital and may greatly enhance his or her chances of achieving legitimacy in a given field.

By the early 1950s, Simone de Beauvoir had developed considerable social capital in addition to the intellectual capital she had

accumulated through her education and early career. At this stage, then, her gender does not produce the same effects as, say, in 1943, when she was an unknown philosophy teacher publishing her very first novel. A social agent as richly endowed in intellectual and social capital as Beauvoir was in the 1950s will not suffer the most usual effects of gender discrimination in the intellectual field: she will not be silenced, ignored, or relegated to subservient positions in the contexts where she appears. Paradoxically, it is the very fact that such a woman has become *impossible to ignore* that inspires some of the more outrageous sexist attacks on such women. Some patriarchal souls, and particularly those whose own position in the field is threatened in some way or other, find the very thought of a female *monstre sacré* extremely hard to swallow. The very intensity of the sexist onslaughts on Beauvoir in the later parts of her life, then, could be read as the *effects* of her legitimacy, rather than as serious threats to that legitimacy.³¹ Needless to say, such a reading of sexist responses would not be at all appropriate if applied to the younger, less prestigious Beauvoir, or indeed to other young, unknown women writers without conspicuous amounts of cultural or social capital.

The concept of social capital also allows us to grasp the *social* significance of Beauvoir's relationship to Sartre. Beauvoir often said that she did not owe her postwar success to Sartre. Although it is true that he never used his influence to further her projects, the very fact of being his companion enabled her quickly to gain access to important institutional contexts (including those of Gallimard and *Les Temps modernes*) and thus to wield a considerable amount of symbolic power in the cultural field. It is not unfair to point out that without Sartre she would not have gained access to these contexts quite so easily. To my mind, then, there can be no doubt that, at least from about 1943 onwards, Beauvoir's relationship with Sartre significantly increased her social capital and thus helped her to maximize her intellectual and literary capital.

It should be noted that there is nothing gender specific about Sartre's role here. Traditionally women have performed exactly the same kind of service for men. This is particularly obvious if one looks for instance at the role of society hostesses and literary salons in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³² In this case women exceptionally well endowed with social capital would put it at the disposal of aspiring young artists or writers from undistinguished social origins. As a result, their intellectual or artistic careers would be significantly advanced. Social capital is above all a matter of personal relations. Since some personal relations are sexual and

intimate as well as social, it follows that aspiring artists of both sexes risk squandering their artistic capital by loving unwisely. From a purely social point of view, outstanding female intellectuals have often loved very wisely indeed: think of George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, or indeed of Simone de Beauvoir.³³

An analysis of gender as a socially variable effect of social magic has obvious implications for feminist theory. Insofar as the accent is placed firmly on social practice, and on the shifting social relations between gender and other fields, this is a truly nonessentialist, yet historically and socially concrete, analysis of the shifting significance of gender. To say that Simone de Beauvoir was a woman, then, is no longer to invoke a rather static or predictable social category, but to open for highly flexible analysis of a variable and often contradictory network of relations. Such an analysis cannot remain on the level of generalities: it must engage with specific social institutions and practices, and it must show precisely how these factors influence the intellectual choices and strategies of the writer in question. The attraction of Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of culture is that it may help us to do precisely that.

Reading with Bourdieu

I have argued that Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of culture may be of considerable use to literary and/or cultural critics. Yet my claim is not that Bourdieuan theory provides us with new models of narrativity or a better understanding of rhetoric or tropology than current textual theories. On the contrary: insofar as his is not a theory of textuality at all, a *purely* Bourdieuan reading is unthinkable.³⁴ What his analyses may help us to see, however, is the way in which certain texts enter into field-related intertextual relations with other texts. Once we have perceived these relations, we may then go on to use them to produce new readings of the texts in question.

To be consistent, such a Bourdieuan strategy must of course also be applied to Bourdieu's own works. At first glance, at least, his texts would seem to situate themselves in intertextual relations above all to the work of Sartre and Derrida. In the early 1950s when Bourdieu started studying philosophy, Sartre was *the* dominant French philosopher. Derrida, on the other hand was Bourdieu's fellow student (his *petit camarade*, as it were) at the École Normale

Supérieure. The intertextual links between Bourdieu's work and that of Sartre are numerous, but perhaps best illustrated in Bourdieu's enduring concern with Flaubert. In some ways it is tempting to say that Bourdieu's whole project may be seen as an effort to do what Sartre could not do in *L'Idiot de la famille*: provide an exhaustive analysis of every social and individual determinant of agency and subjectivity. Bourdieu's implicit polemic against Derridean aesthetics is nowhere more obvious than in *Distinction*, but can also be traced in his persistent effort to vindicate empirical methods of research against what he would call the *unscientific* textual idealism of dominant trends in French philosophy.

But, one may ask, what are the *effects* of such analyses on what many take to be the primary task of the literary critic—that of *reading* texts. A simple example from my own experience may help to provide a concrete answer to this question. In *Sexual/Textual Politics* I devote considerable space to a discussion of Hélène Cixous's highly influential essay "The Laugh of the Medusa." At the time of writing (1984) I was perfectly well aware of the fact that the French text of that essay was originally published in a special issue of the literary magazine *L'Arc* devoted to Simone de Beauvoir. It is difficult not to notice the fact that there is a photograph of Simone de Beauvoir on the cover, and that the issue opens with an interview with Jean-Paul Sartre conducted by Simone de Beauvoir herself. Yet I utterly failed to grasp the implications of the discursive and institutional aspects of Cixous's *énonciation*. The significant point that escaped me is the fact that in "The Laugh of the Medusa" there is not a single reference to Simone de Beauvoir. Now, it is true that this issue of *L'Arc* is entitled *Simone de Beauvoir et la lutte des femmes*, and that several other essays deal with various topics concerning the situation of women in France without mentioning Simone de Beauvoir by name.³⁵ Apart from "The Laugh of the Medusa," however, every one of the essays in this issue is consonant with Beauvoir's own feminist positions. "The Laugh of the Medusa" is also the only essay to deal with women's writing, a field in which Beauvoir after all has a certain claim to fame.

Today I would not hesitate to analyse this phenomenon as an effort to snub Beauvoir, a deliberate challenge to the *doyenne* of French feminism, and, more specifically, as Cixous's bid for power—*legitimacy*—within the field of French feminism. Implicitly casting Beauvoir as *orthodox*, Cixous's defiant exclusion of the author of *She Came to Stay* and *The Second Sex* signals her need to erase a figure she perceives as the powerful and censorious origin of her own discourse.

Drawing on Bourdieu's work on French intellectual styles, I also think one can show that in the very act of denouncing the rhetoric of male-dominated French philosophy (which is that of Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, for instance), Cixous displays a range of the very same rhetorical strategies (silencing of the opposition, tendentious summary of unnamed opponents' views, generalizing from one's own particular experience, and so on). This is not surprising: Cixous's own bid for legitimacy cannot succeed were she to jettison *all* the hallmarks of the field she is in. Given her rhetoric, that field can now be defined as that of the French intellectual field in general, not simply that of French feminism. In this context it is easy to show that in 1975 it is Cixous, not Beauvoir, who most masterfully displays the strategies and moves likely to be defined as "high" or "canonical" in the French intellectual field.³⁶ This is no doubt an important reason why "The Laugh of the Medusa" produced such a powerful impact in 1975, and thus did so much to secure the prestige of its author, at the direct expense, I would argue, of that of Simone de Beauvoir. Drawing on Bourdieuan categories, then, it is possible to show that the rhetoric of Cixous's brilliant essay more or less unwittingly enters into conflict with her explicit message of generosity, openness, and receptivity to the text of the other writer/woman.

What then, is the status of these observations on Cixous's essay? In my view, they all, including my comments on the significance of certain rhetorical moves typical of French philosophy, contribute to an understanding of the *énonciation* of "The Laugh of the Medusa." As argued above, however, the *énoncé* can never simply be reduced to the *énonciation*. While the latter certainly constrains the former, this constraint is best envisaged as a horizon or limit to what is *speakable*, rather than as a set of unmediated reflections to be faithfully reproduced in the *énoncé*. The *énoncé*, then, must necessarily still be read in ways which may not be directly related to the position of the speaker.

As a *reader* of "The Laugh of the Medusa," I might go on to use my Bourdieuan insights to produce an intertextual reading of Cixous's essay with *The Second Sex*. My hypothesis would be that a careful reading of the texts—perhaps one drawing on psychoanalytic as well as deconstructive strategies—would show that the obliterated figure of the powerful mother is a problem not only for Beauvoir, but for Cixous as well. No doubt the Oedipal mother Cixous seeks to displace has many names: what I am arguing here is that one of them is that of Simone de Beauvoir.

Such a reading is not the only desirable reading of "The Laugh of the Medusa" nor indeed of *The Second Sex*. It does not, for instance, oblige me to reject my own theoretical analysis of Cixous's text in *Sexual/Textual Politics*. Moreover, one may also produce elegant intertextual readings of these two texts without having read Bourdieu. The problem for *any* intertextual reading, however, is to counter the charge of arbitrariness. Paradoxically, it is precisely because there is, in principle, no limit to the number of possible intertexts to any given text, that it becomes necessary explicitly to justify one's choice of any *particular* intertext. In the case of Cixous and Beauvoir, then, the advantage of a Bourdieudian approach is, first, to provide us with a series of insights about the relations between H el ene Cixous and the feminist and intellectual fields in France, and between "The Laugh of the Medusa" and *The Second Sex*. It also enables us to note and interpret a series of formal rhetorical moves in the texts (the presence or absence of footnotes, quotations, and certain names, for instance) as recognizable power bids in a specific intellectual field. And, finally, such an approach provides a reply to the question of *why* one should juxtapose these specific texts in the first place and *why* such an intertextual reading should be considered relevant and interesting. I am old-fashioned enough to believe that such questions still matter.

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NOTES

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- 1 For another discussion of feminism as critique see Benhabib and Cornell, eds.
- 2 I first tried to develop the concept of appropriation in a paper reprinted under the title "Feminist, Female, Feminine."
- 3 I am not arguing that Bourdieu is a Marxist. For his critique of certain forms of traditional Marxism see "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups."

4 See for instance "Flaubert's Point of View" and *Ce que parler veut dire*, as well as *Distinction*. See also "Sartre," and the closely related work on Sartre and *Les Temps modernes* by one of Bourdieu's students, Anna Boschetti. In this introductory context I would also like to mention Bourdieu's inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, *Leçon sur la leçon* and the collection of short essays entitled *Choses dites* as accessible and readable examples of his cultural criticism. A selection of essays from *Choses dites*, together with Bourdieu's inaugural lecture, have now been published in English under the title *In Other Words: Essays Toward a Reflexive Sociology*. New readers of Bourdieu's social theory should perhaps start with this volume and then go on to *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, *Questions de sociologie*, "Le Marché des biens symbolique," "The Production of Belief," "Champ du pouvoir," and at least the first few sections of *Distinction*. Then they might turn to *Le Sens pratique* and *La Noblesse d'état*. Yvette Delsaut has produced a full bibliography of Bourdieu's work up to and including 1988, a bibliography now readily available in English in *In Other Words*, pp. 199–218. Loïc J. D. Wacquant has conducted, edited, and annotated a series of interviews with Bourdieu under the title *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. When published, this book will provide by far the most pedagogical, accurate, and accessible introduction to Bourdieu's work in English.

5 I am quoting from the English manuscript version of her paper "Texts and Institutions: Problems of Feminist Criticism." In the French published version the quote can be found on p. 181. The English version will be published in Wolff's forthcoming collection of essays *Feminine Sentences*.

6 Bourdieu does not provide the only theoretical inspiration for such work. The whole tradition of British cultural criticism from Raymond Williams to the Birmingham school would be another obvious source of inspiration.

7 For Emile Benveniste's original definitions of the terms *énoncé* and *énonciation*, see his "Les relations du temps" and "L'appareil formel." For my own view on the relation between Benveniste's *énonciation* and Julia Kristeva's theory of language as the discourse of the speaking, embodied subject, see my *Feminist Theory and Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 53 n. 2 and p. 87 n. 3.

8 My claim, then, is not that Bourdieu somehow supersedes or finally transcends these other theories. In order fully to grasp the relative strengths and limitations of Bourdieu's theories, one would need to produce a careful reading of his works in relation to the whole tradition of Western Marxism on the one hand, and to French sociology and ethnology on the other: such an appraisal is not my purpose here.

9 This specific formulation was first coined by Terry Eagleton.

10 This is not to say that Bourdieu systematically ignores the question of women in earlier works. There are sustained and interesting discussions of the position of women in Bourdieu and Passeron, *Les Héritiers* (1964) and *La Reproduction* (1970), and in Bourdieu, *La Distinction* (1979) and *Le Sens pratique* (1980).

11 It is important to stress that Bourdieu's work is based on the French educational system. This is a system which is ostensibly egalitarian and meritocratic in a way which is not true for, say, the British educational system with its clear-cut class-based divisions between public schools and state schools. Some of Bourdieu's conclusions about the discriminatory and oppressive nature of the French educational system may come as a surprise to the French, while in Britain the very same points may seem rather obvious, precisely because the British educational system does not mask its symbolic violence as well as the French.

12 For other works on education and the intellectual field in France, see Bourdieu and Passeron, *Les Héritiers* and *La Reproduction*, Bourdieu's own *Homo Academicus*,

and the essays "Epreuve scolaire" and Bourdieu and Saint-Martin, "Les catégories de l'entendement professoral" (these two papers are now revised and included in *La Noblesse de l'état*). See also the closely related work by Boschetti, Charle, and Fabiani.

13 As mentioned above (n. 12), Bourdieu's work on the social power of the tokens of educational capital is based on empirical research in France. In other countries certain educational diplomas do not necessarily carry such high social prestige as in France. This does not mean that the educational systems of other nations are not crucial to the reproduction of social power: what remains to be studied is precisely how the educational system interacts with other social institutions and structures in different countries. There is no reason why Bourdieu's general point about *social magic*—the socially sanctioned belief in the value of certain tokens and insignia—should not be deployed in contexts quite different from those of the French educational system.

14 This still leaves the problem of where the *miraculés* come from. In *Les Héritiers* Bourdieu and Passeron point to specific and exceptional constellations in the family of the successful student from the peasantry as one element that may explain the relatively successful educational career of the individual in question. This is clearly not all there is to be said about the matter. Bourdieu, himself a *miraculé*, would seem to be well placed to produce a fuller analysis of this question.

15 Here Bourdieu uses exactly the same rhetorical strategy against *Le Nouvel Observateur*. I take it that the difference is that Bourdieu is not in a position of power in relation to *Le Nouvel Observateur*. His ironic echoing of their rhetoric can thus be read as a denunciation, not as a celebration of the strategy. I have previously argued that in some cases Luce Irigaray's ironic use of mimicry functions in a similar way (see *Sexual/Textual Politics*, 140).

16 In his paper on "Habitus, Field of Power and Capital" Craig Calhoun also argues that Bourdieu's theory should be seen as critical theory in the tradition of the Frankfurt school.

17 I should make it clear that I am *not* arguing that such legitimizing expressions of experience must *always* take the form of intellectual discourse.

18 In fact, I have consulted three different papers by Bourdieu dealing specifically with gender. First there is the full-length unpublished 1989 manuscript entitled "La Construction sociale du sexe" (50 pp.). A somewhat rewritten excerpt from this paper appeared in English in 1989 under the title "He whose word is law." Finally, there is Bourdieu's 1990 essay published in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, entitled "La Domination masculine."

19 *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 83 and 84 (June and September 1990).

20 It is, of course, impossible to use the term *habitus* without raising the question of the social conditions which give rise to it (see "Domination," 11).

21 This formulation is taken from "La Construction sociale du sexe" (p. 37). This specific turn of phrase has been left out of "La Domination masculine." The argument nevertheless remains the same. It is also expressed in "He whose word is law," where Bourdieu writes that the "specific process of socialization of which they [men] are the products inclines them to take seriously those games that the social world constitutes as being serious, and to 'play them seriously'" (13).

22 I use the terms *patriarchal* or *masculinist* power or domination as synonyms to Bourdieu's "domination masculine." It is well known that the term "masculine" in French may correspond either to "male" or to "masculine" in English. It is clear that what Bourdieu has in mind is domination by males, but it is equally clear that for him it is unthinkable to posit such a domination without at the same time positing

the concomitant social construction of masculinity and so-called masculine values. When I use the term "patriarchy" I do not mean to indicate any specific social theory of patriarchal rule. For me, the term is equivalent to the idea of "domination by men."

23 "En gros, nous avons gagné la partie," she writes in French (29).

24 Bourdieu does insist, however, that there is always space for "cognitive struggle" over the meaning of the world ("Domination," 15). The paradox is, according to Bourdieu, that when or if the dominated group applies the schemes of dominant thought *to their own situation*, they cannot fail to expose the logic of that thought. The question is, I suppose, whether they themselves always realize the political implications of their own insights. But Bourdieu also points out that even the closest-knit mythical categories of sexual difference leave a space for reinterpretation *within the very same schemes of thought*. Let us assume that if patriarchal thought holds that men are superior because they have penises, women might counter that *they* are superior because they have breasts. In such an exchange there is no challenge to the fundamental structure of patriarchal thought, yet that very thought certainly gives space for conflict, even on its own terms. The problem with this account, as it appears in "La Domination masculine," is that Bourdieu does not sufficiently elaborate his understanding of the nature of male power in society. If it is seamlessly efficient in its imposition of symbolic violence, it would seem to be difficult ever to get out of it. If it isn't, we need to know more about the gaps and contradictions in its mode of operation, which may provide the space for critique and resistance. A more complex theory of ideology and its relations to the contradictions of power might be helpful here. For a truly complex understanding of ideology, see Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*.

25 I am quoting from the manuscript, p. 6. The paper will be published in Calhoun, LiPuma, and Postone, eds.

26 I have not been able to discover a sustained account of the *precise* relationship of specific fields to the "whole social field." The way in which specific fields relate to each other and to the general social field strikes me as somewhat undertheorized in Bourdieu's work.

27 Perhaps a similar move might be productive when it comes to theorizing race as well.

28 Much more work needs to be done on this subject. Many more problems than the ones I touch on here are raised by Bourdieu's field theory. Some of these are discussed in Thompson, Lamont, Calhoun and in Garnham and Williams. The implications of these debates for feminism remain to be discussed.

29 Bourdieu would seem to agree. In "La Domination masculine" he stresses both the crucial role of symbolic violence when it comes to upholding male power (see 11), and the process of *symbolic consecration* essential to the reproduction of such "mythico-ritual" systems (see 15).

30 There is also the complicated problem of the difference in a writer's status in her own life and after her death. It would be anachronistic to assume that Stendhal, to give an obvious example, carried as much literary capital in his own lifetime as he does in ours.

31 The virulence of sexist attacks on Beauvoir in the 1970s and 1980s, however, is not an effect of legitimacy. The emergence of the women's movement made it impossible to ignore the fact that relations between the sexes were in a state of crisis. In France, the appearance of the women's movement in the early 1970s led to a predictable intensification of *explicit* struggle between the sexes. One sign of this struggle is that the *general* level of sexist invectives in newspaper and magazine articles increases.

32 I am grateful to Pierre Bourdieu for suggesting this example.

33 I am not at all arguing that these women *only* achieved symbolic capital through their social relations, only that the social capital obtained through marriage or stable liaisons may have helped them to maximize other forms of symbolic capital more rapidly and more efficiently than they could have done without these relationships.

34 It may be necessary to add that I am using a fairly narrow definition of "textual" theory: I am referring to the vast body of work dealing with, say, narratology, genre, rhetoric, figures, tropes, and so forth.

35 The editors, Bernard Pingaud and Catherine Clément, explain that for political reasons Simone de Beauvoir herself chose to be "une parmi d'autres, une femme entre autres, anonyme" (1). Given the title, layout and contents of this special issue, that anonymity is nevertheless somewhat illusory. I have already mentioned the cover photograph and the initial interview where Beauvoir makes Sartre discuss his views on women. There is also a discussion between Simone de Beauvoir and several other militant feminists, and a series of essays on various aspects of women's situation, including an essay by Sylvie Le Bon (Beauvoir's close friend, later her adoptive daughter) on *The Second Sex*.

36 For a discussion of Beauvoir's relative lack of distinction in the French intellectual field, or what one might call her "petit bourgeois appeal," see my "Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman."

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