THEORIZING OPPRESSION[1]

TEORIZANDO A OPRESSÃO

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ABSTRACT

"Theorizing oppression" draws on a variety of Beauvoir's works to explore the different dynamics through which oppression operates. Oppression functions so as to close down the ambiguities of embodied subjectivity and to deny freedom, most often by objectifying and treating persons as if they were things. It may, however, operate in different ways, and three primary modes of oppression are distinguished and discussed: asymmetrical recognition, indifference, and aversion. These are paradigmatically described by Beauvoir as they operate, respectively, in the spheres of gender (in *The Second Sex*), race (in *America Day by Day*), and age (in *The Coming of Age*). The question of how far oppressed groups may become complicit in their own oppression is also addressed: sometimes the line between oppressors and oppressed is far from unambiguous.

Keywords: asymmetrical recognition; aversion; indifference; objectification; oppression.

RESUMO

O texto "Teorizando a opressão" baseia-se em uma variedade de obras de Beauvoir para explorar as diferentes dinâmicas através das quais a opressão opera. A opressão funciona de modo a recusar as ambiguidades da subjetividade incorporada e negar a liberdade, na maioria das vezes por definir e tratar as pessoas como se fossem coisas. Pode, no entanto, operar de maneiras diferentes, e três modos principais de opressão são diferenciados e discutidos: o reconhecimento assimétrico, a indiferença e a aversão. A forma como operam é paradigmaticamente descrita por Beauvoir, respectivamnte, nas esferas do

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The abbreviations used for the most frequently cited works of Beauvoir are given at the end of the article.

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gênero (em *O Segundo Sexo*), da raça (em *América dia-a-dia*) e da idade (em *A Velhice*). A questão do quanto grupos oprimidos podem tornar-se cúmplices de sua própria opressão é também abordada: às vezes a linha entre opressores e oprimidos está longe de ser inequívoca.

Palavras-chave: reconhecimento assimétrico; aversão; indiferença; objetificação; opressão.

"There is no comparison between what others experience and what we feel. For us the strongest pain in others is absolutely nothing, but we are affected by the slightest tickle of pleasure that touches us," so says the Marquis de Sade (MWBS 56 TA; FBS 83). Sadism, the deliberate infliction of sexualized pain, even torture, on others commonly stands as the epitome of dehumanization. The sadist denies all recognition to the subjectivity of his victims, treating them as mere objects, their bodies as things to be used for the sadist's own violent pleasures – or so it seems. However, in her study of Sade, Beauvoir argues that his affective life was not as simple as he claims. For it would not satisfy him to inflict such violence on an unfeeling corpse and, contrary to the "autism" he demonstrates in this statement, the subjectivity of those he tortures is all important to him.[i] For he also wants *recognition* from his victims. His pleasure lies in their coerced recognition of his power over them, in their acknowledgment of his sovereign and unambiguous freedom. Sade engages in what I call an *asymmetrical* dialectic of recognition, and this is generally present in what we have since come to call "sadism." For a certain degree of recognition must be bestowed on the victim's subjectivity in order for her or him to serve as a source of validation – one that will never be adequate, however – for the sadist's claim that he is the Absolute Subject. "What the [sadistic] torturer demands is that, alternating between refusal and submission, whether rebelling or consenting, the victim recognizes in every case that his destiny lies in the freedom of the tyrant. He is then united to the tyrant by the closest of bonds. They truly form a couple" (MWBS 57-58 TA; FBS 84-85).

There is thus a paradox at the heart of sadism: It is a form of objectification that still must acknowledge, however inequitably, the distinctly human, embodied subjectivity of its victims, endeavoring through their suffering flesh to harness their subjectivity to the will of

the dominator. Although, as Elaine Scarry has argued, extreme torture may sometimes go so far as to annihilate a victim's relation to the world, literally reducing the "self" to no more than a bundle of agonized sensation (Scarry 1985), this is not what one might call the "normal" sadist's project. For the latter rather demands that victims express their powerlessness and their humiliation in ways that, whether by "refusal" or "submission," appear to confirm the torturer's sovereign subjectivity.[ii] Sade's relation to his victims is an intimate one. It is, as Beauvoir presents it, a relationship in which (irrespective of its coerciveness) an asymmetrical dynamic of mutual recognition is enacted within the torturer/tortured dyad.[iii] But it is a dynamic that can never satisfy the torturer. Here, Beauvoir's reading of Sade is indebted to Hegel's "master-slave dialectic," in which the "master" demands recognition from his "slave" but, because he has denied the slave the status of his equal, cannot adequately obtain it. Beauvoir reads the coerced relation of sadist to victim as analogous.

Hegel was a major influence on Beauvoir's thinking, as already discussed, and many commentaries (notably on *The Second Sex*) presume her account of oppression to be but an elaboration of Hegel's master-slave dialectic. Beauvoir does draw on the Hegelian account to theorize certain objectifying intersubjective dynamics. However, this is not her sole explanation for oppression, and critics that focus on it too exclusively occlude the breadth and complexity of her analysis. Robin Schott, for example, writes that Beauvoir "articulate[s] a philosophical anthropology that posits an inter-dependency and reciprocity between individuals, following Hegel's account of the master-slave dialectic. The master needs the slave both for economic conquest and for the recognition of his own mastery. It is on the basis of this need that Beauvoir portrays the attitudes of the oppressor as defined fundamentally in relation to the oppressed" (Schott 2003, 235).[iv] Schott then goes on to criticize Beauvoir on the grounds that, in situations of extreme evil, such as the Holocaust, not even "perverted forms of recognition" take place. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's account (Arendt 1963), she argues that Eichmann, for example, did not seek any recognition from the Jews whose extermination he organized; rather, his attitude was "one of indifference and detachment." Thus, Schott argues that, "*contrary to Beauvoir*… the philosophical analysis of human conflict through the dialectic of recognition is inadequate to account for how human beings create extreme situations of evil… this account does not address the

ability of human beings to detach themselves from relations of interdependence with the oppressed in a way that enables them to commit atrocities" (2003, 236; my emphasis). However, Schott's reading of Beauvoir is too uni-dimensional, and it misses much of what Beauvoir has to tell us about the complexities oppression and its various modes.[v]

As I argued in chapter 1, it is not only recognition but also our recognition as particular embodied subjects (thus neither as mere bodies nor as the bearers of disembodied consciousness) that human freedom and flourishing require; denial of such recognition constitutes a foreclosure of ambiguity and an oppression. However, the master-slave dialectic is not alone sufficient to account for how oppression operates in a great many situations – and Beauvoir is very well aware of this. My aim in this chapter is thus to draw on Beauvoir as a theoretical resource to think more widely about how relations of oppression may become perpetuated and be "assumed" by those whose freedom they foreclose. For, in addition to oppressions in which the Hegelian dialectic of asymmetrical recognition is indeed central, there are also those that rest primarily on "indifference and detachment" and yet others that stem primarily from profound aversion. Indeed, it is these that may lead to some of the most virulent forms of objectification, to literal dehumanization. Beauvoir considers these other modes at some length in her treatments of race and old age. However, even in *The Second Sex*, where she does indeed invoke a version of the Hegelian dialectic as intrinsic to women's oppression, she is well aware that it is not by itself sufficient to account for the situation of women. For this dialectic is sustained only through its symbiosis with large-scale social structures, institutions, norms, and practices, and Beauvoir also closely examines these.[vi]

Indifference (an accompaniment to forms of *abstraction*) is, as Schott rightly suggests, often characteristic of the most intense modes of oppression, those for which *dehumanization* is perhaps the more appropriate term. Indeed, these are modes that, as Beauvoir notes, even Sade himself rejected! Freed from the Bastille in 1790, Sade was appointed as a Grand Juror, but he would consistently dismiss charges against the accused who were brought before him. As Beauvoir observes, "What he demanded essentially of cruelty was that it reveal to him both particular individuals and his own existence as, on the one hand consciousness and freedom and, on the other, as flesh. He refused to judge, condemn, and witness anonymous deaths from afar." For, she goes on to elaborate, "when

murder becomes constitutional, it is nothing more than an obnoxious expression of abstract principles: it becomes inhuman." (MWBS 19 TA; FBS 27).

Beauvoir is hardly uncritical of Sade. But her reading of him points us toward a different mode of dehumanization, one in which no degree of reciprocal recognition will be demanded from its objects. Instead, individuals are categorized and disposed of as mere abstract entities – in this instance, as members of the judicial category known as traitors.[vii] Similar processes of abstraction and detachment are often at work in many other instances: in the oppressive treatment of workers as mere units of labor power, in the racial objectification of blacks in the American South, of colonized people in Algeria and elsewhere – all of which Beauvoir discusses at one time or another. Of course, absent total domination of the body, the subjectivity of the oppressed must always be minimally acknowledged since it must be harnessed (through, for example, fear or self-interest) to ensure their compliance in their own oppression. But obtaining *recognition* from them may not be an objective of the oppressor at all, while in other instances their recognition may still be sought but only as a secondary matter. In what follows I distinguish (borrowing rather loosely from Max Weber) three "ideal types" (or three distinguishable modes) of oppression and dehumanization. I call these, respectively, *asymmetrical recognition*, *indifference*, and *aversion*.

"Dehumanization" is a fluid term whose meanings shift according to the meanings imparted to "the human." For Beauvoir, as we have seen, "the human" is aligned not with the "sovereign" subject but with a multiply ambiguous embodied subject. Dehumanization and oppression aim to harness, to suppress, or, at the most extreme, wholly to expunge these ambiguities. However, Beauvoir herself rarely uses the term *dehumanization*, reserving it only for the most extreme instances. Instead, she refers more often to the condition in which the ambiguities of embodied subjectivity are suppressed as *oppression*. She refers to the allied processes of "objectification" (treating/being treated as a thing) and "alterity" (making/being made "Other") as the primary means through which oppression is produced. When Beauvoir does employ the term dehumanization, it is to describe the most extreme forms of objectification: those at the end point of a continuum in which lives have become so entirely disposable that the subjectivity of victims has become wholly irrelevant to the dominators. This is the situation in the Nazi extermination camps

and, in her preface to J.-F. Steiner's book on Treblinka, Beauvoir refers to them as "a dehumanized world" (Beauvoir 1966, 12). Here, the objectification of the trainloads of arrivals who were to be gassed immediately was total. They were just so much material to be processed efficiently. Meanwhile, in the Sonderkommando units, the members' desperate hopes of survival were cunningly harnessed to the labor demands of the extermination process – a process to which they themselves were also doomed shortly to become victims. Even though a certain minimal subjectivity (the recognition of their desire to continue living) had tacitly to be acknowledged, the objectification of this latter group too was virtually total.

Perhaps shockingly, in *The Coming of Age* Beauvoir also describes how the aged in "normal" Western society may be subjected to a dehumanization that shares some affinities with that of the camps. For they (and, one might add, those with severe physical or cognitive disabilities) are also frequently deemed superfluous. Useless, often helpless, Beauvoir says that the aged are frequently viewed as nothing more than pure objects, and their vulnerable and inert bodies may literally be treated like things. I consider Beauvoir's treatment of old age and its wider implications later in the chapter. However, what is important to note here is that, in most other instances, the oppression of one group provides *benefits* – be they of existential recognition, social status, and/or material advantage – to members of another group and that this is its main purpose. In order for such transfers of benefits to take place, a degree of compliance on the part of the oppressed must be created. Here arises the paradox illustrated in sadism, and that Beauvoir captures at length in her discussion of women: the existence of embodied subjects who are required not only actively to objectify their own subjectivity but also to demonstrate their subjection. As Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex*,:

> What specifically defines the situation of woman is that while being, like all human beings, an autonomous freedom, she finds and chooses herself in a world where men force her to assume herself as Other: an attempt is made to freeze her as an object [*on prétend la figer en objet*] and to doom her to immanence… Woman's drama lies in this conflict between the fundamental claim of every subject, which always posits itself as essential, and the demands of a situation that constitutes her as inessential. (TSS 17 TA; DS I 31)

What, adapting from Axel Honneth (2008), one might call "fictive objectification" – the treatment of persons *as if* they were things rather than the endeavor *literally* to render

them things – is implicated in this kind of oppression. For if women, or other categories of persons, were literally to become things or objects, they would be of little use to their oppressors.[viii] It is true that Beauvoir sometimes makes it sound as if the goal *were* actually to transform persons into things. For example, she writes in *The Second Sex* that "when woman is delivered up to the male as his property, what he demands is that, in her, flesh is present in its pure facticity. Her body is not grasped as a radiation of subjectivity but as a thing solidified in its immanence [*une chose empâtée dans son immanence*]" (TSS 176 TA; DS I 264). However, she repeatedly makes it clear that what is most often sought – and achieved – must stop short of such total objectification. Woman does not *literally* become a solidified thing; rather she lives out, in varying intensities, a painful and impossible contradiction. For to conform with her femininity, *as it is now designated*, she must consent to make herself "object and prey" – and yet to refuse to do so would also be to deny who she is; it would be what Beauvoir calls a "mutilation." This, then, is "the conflict that singularly characterizes the situation of the emancipated woman." For "she refuses to confine herself to her role as female, because she does not want to mutilate herself; but it would also be a mutilation to repudiate her sex. Man is a sexed human being; woman is a complete individual, and equal to the male, only if she too is a sexed human being. Renouncing her femininity means renouncing part of her humanity" (TSS 723; DS II 600-601). Woman, as flesh, as prey, is cast as the Other, as "the incidental, the inessential," vis-à-vis man's claim to represent the human.

Beauvoir argues that the production of "alterity," or "otherness," pervades human relations. However, alterity may take many different forms, and not all of them are necessarily oppressive. Thus (as discussed in chapter 1) Beauvoir makes an important distinction between what one might call "normal" alterity, in which objectifying and objectified roles, those of subject and object, are fluid and may easily be exchanged, reversed, or even (as in the ideal love relationship) reciprocally embraced by each, and the oppressive alterity in which certain groups and their individual members tend to remain *irreversibly* frozen in the role of the object or the 'inessential" Other. But how does such irreversibility become stable and enduring? Even in those cases (epitomized in the master-slave dialectic) where a dynamic of coerced, asymmetrical recognition does occur, alterity

cannot be sustained as a relationship of individuated subjectivities alone. It is always instantiated in – and, in turn, perpetuates – large-scale, structural forms of domination.

Thus, to return to Sade for an example, the acts of intimate violence of the Sadean boudoir must be understood as more than "private" or merely interpersonal interactions. They replicate late-feudal social hierarchies, for Sade's sexual proclivities are manifestations of how he has chosen to assume his anachronistic class position in prerevolutionary France. A member of the decadent French aristocracy but hounded for his perversions, he will not align himself with his class, and yet he still seeks to reproduce seigniorial privilege over his victims. Thus, in *The Second Sex* (and later in *The Coming of Age*) Beauvoir sets out to explore the production of oppressions from two convergent and interconstituent poles: both as social structure and as individuated lived experience. It is not as autonomous individuals that men oppress women in modern Western societies since they are not the sovereign subjects beloved of abstract humanism. Rather, they do so as individuals who are themselves already socially constituted as "men" – and who may discover that they cannot but assume the privileges that accompany this status (TSS 759; DS II 650-651). It follows that the stable and usually irreversible quality of oppressive relationships is not the effect of, nor is it to be overcome by, individual action alone.[ix]

Beauvoir offers her most extended explorations of oppression in three works, each of which explores the situations of a specific category of persons: women, in *The Second Sex*; racialized native and black Americans, in *America Day by Day*; and the aged in *The Coming of Age*. Each of these books also strongly typifies one of the three different modes of oppression: namely, asymmetrical recognition, indifference, and aversion. I discuss each work and the kind of oppression that it typifies in turn. However, in any particular situation of oppression, more than one mode of oppression is likely to be present. Moreover, each mode of oppression may operate with varying degrees of intensity and (except in the most extreme instances of dehumanization) may be assumed in different ways.

The Second Sex: Asymmetrical Recognition

The Second Sex is most often read as a work of phenomenology, since in it Beauvoir endeavors to capture the "lived experience" through which, as she famously put it, "one is not born but becomes a woman."[x] However, a solely phenomenological reading of *The Second Sex* fails to grasp its full significance. For Beauvoir brings to bear on women's lives not only a phenomenology of their embodied experience but also a Marxist-inflected analysis of large-scale socioeconomic and political structures of domination.[xi] In addition, she considers the power-effects of discourse, examining such discursive forms as myth and literature, as well as the representation of woman in the "scientific" discourses of biology, psychoanalysis, and historical materialism. Thus the two volumes of the book should be read conjointly, as dialectical and not as sequential. Volume 1, "Facts and Myths," describes the power-freighted construction of women from "without": that is, in practices, institutions, and social structures, as well as in masculinist discourses that range from biological theory to "myths."[xii] Volume 2, "Lived Experience," is written phenomenologically, "from women's point of view" (TSS 17 TA; DS I 32). It is important to note Beauvoir's caveat here, however: The lived experience she presents will be that of women "in the present state of education and customs" (TSS 279; DS II 11).

Iris Young argued shortly before her death that, although a phenomenological approach is valuable for grasping the lived experience of oppression, a theory that is excessively focused on "issues of experience, identity, and subjectivity" is too constricted to support an effective politics (2005, 19; see also, for similar arguments, McNay 2008 and Fraser 2009). A critical social theory must also seek to identify and explain what Young calls the "macro" social structures that give rise to harms to oppressed groups. For women, this means that more systematic attention must be given to what she calls the gendered "structures of constraint," which operate independently of the individual intentions of either men or women (21).[xiii] Without attending to these basic structural realities – namely, the sexual division of labor, normative heterosexuality, and gendered hierarchies of power – possibilities for a politics of radical transformation are severely truncated (2005, 22). Such "gender structures" are historically given, Young says, and they "condition the action and consciousness of individual persons. They precede that action and consciousness. Each

person experiences aspects of gender structures as facticity, as sociohistorical givens with which she or he must deal" (2005, 25). Young is surely correct that we must, as Beauvoir puts it, "assume" these givens in one way or another. However, if we read *The Second Sex* in its entirety, we find Beauvoir engaged – in 1949! – in exactly the kind of synthetic project that Young urges.

Indeed, right from the introduction Beauvoir introduces her claim that "exterior" social realities ineluctably suffuse and constrain individual women's lives (and those of others). "The same vicious circle can be found in all analogous circumstances," she writes. "When an individual, or a group of individuals, is kept in a situation of inferiority, the fact is that she or they *are* inferior. But the import of the verb *to be* must be understood… *to be* is to have become, it is to have been made as one manifests oneself [*c'est avoir été fait tel qu'on se manifeste*]. Yes, women in general *are* inferior to men today; this is to say that their situation affords fewer possibilities: the difficulty is to know whether this state of affairs must continue" (TSS 12-13 TA; DS I 25). If woman is man's Other, if she is a human being who is denied the reciprocal recognition possible only among equals, then two key questions follow: How is this situation of inferiority produced and perpetuated? And in what different ways may it be accepted or resisted?

Producing inferiority

Women's inferiority is produced, one might say, at once wholesale and retail: that is, both through their location in "macro" social structures and through "micro," interpersonal, self-other encounters and idiosyncratic experiences. For example, the experiences of heterosexual sexual initiation that Beauvoir describes are both general and yet particular (TSS 383-416; DS II 146-91). They are general because the norms that invoke masculine agency and feminine passivity structure the "taking" of virginity on each occasion. They are also normatively linked (even today) to marriage and to all that accompanies it for women: their socioeconomic and other structural dependencies, their expected reproductive, maternal, and domestic roles, and so forth. They are also general as instances of the "normal" bio-physical mechanics of heterosexual vaginal penetration. Yet, at the same time each initiation is a particular encounter of two embodied subjectivities,

both of whom bring their own (already gendered) desires, fears, dispositions, and dreams to the moment.

Thus, in her discussion of psychoanalysis Beauvoir criticizes Freud for essentializing sexuality by taking it as "an irreducible given" (TSS 55; DS I 88). For it is only in light of social practices and values, as well as the individual existential choices through which these are assumed, that sexuality takes on its meanings. How we experience ourselves as sexual beings and what values we affirm through our sexuality will be at once idiosyncratic and socially structured. In a highly significant passage Beauvoir writes as follows:

> Across the separation of existents existence is one: it becomes manifest in analogous organisms; thus there will be constants in the relation between the ontological and the sexual. *At a given epoch, the technologies, the economic and social structure of a collectivity [collectivité], reveal [découvrent] an identical world to all its members*. There will also be a constant relation of sexuality to social forms; analogous individuals, located in analogous conditions, will grasp analogous significations from the given. This analogy does not ground a rigorous universality, but it does enable us to rediscover *general types within individual histories*. (TSS 56 TA; DS I 89; my emphases)

Sexuality, then, is at once general and particular. Epoch-wide technologies and economic and social structures will be assumed as particular experiences. Without asserting any essentialist claims, we may still delineate *general* descriptions of how sexuality is constitutive of objectifying and oppressive relations for women. For example, the prohibition of abortion and contraception in France in the 1940s profoundly suffused the sexual experiences of the majority of women, as well as shaping the meanings of motherhood (TSS 524 ff; DS II 330 ff). Beauvoir infamously begins the chapter of *The Second Sex* on "The Mother" with a discussion of abortion, the prohibition of which made (and, for many, still makes) a free choice of maternity virtually impossible. There are "individual histories," and women's lives and experiences are each particular, but women are also what she calls a "collectivity." That is, they are embedded within the same social structures (legal, religious, medical, familial, and so forth) as instances of a "general type," and they thus will discover themselves to belong to – and to be constrained by – an "identical world."

In using the term "collectivity" [*collectivité*] in this passage Beauvoir strikingly anticipates the notion of a "collective" [*collectif*] that Sartre will later elaborate in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason* ([1960] 1976). By a "collective' Sartre does not mean (as one might perhaps expect) an association of individuals linked by their common goals. On the contrary, a collective is an anonymous "series" of individuals who are unified passively and "externally" to their own intentions and practices (often without realizing it) through their involuntary location in one and the same set of structural constraints. Such a collective (in contradistinction to what Sartre will call a "group," which is indeed linked by a shared goal) does not produce shared internal and intentional bonds among its members. Instead, through their insertion in one and the same series each unwittingly alters the significance of the action of the others and, through them, of each individual's own action: "Each is something other than himself and behaves like someone else, who in turn is other than himself," Sartre writes ([1960] 1976, 166). Thus, women, as Beauvoir characterizes them already in *The Second Sex,* may be conceptualized (although she does not use the term) as a series.[xiv] For each, having to accommodate to the "identical world" in which they are situated, becomes other than herself through a relation of passive, "exterior" unification with other members of the series of "women." For example, in endeavoring to conform to current beauty norms that identify the ideal feminine body with slenderness, each interchangeably imposes upon others and, through them, back onto herself the norm of slenderness.[xv] How that "identical world" for women comes into being and how it passively connects women as a series not only to men but also to each other as the Other entails the material practices that give rise to the structures of constraint. It also involves the values of masculine superiority which are most generically expressed in mythic discourse, for material structures and discourses interact. They function symbiotically, giving rise to a generalized situation of oppression that individual women must assume in one way or another.

In order for women's situation to change significantly, all the main axes of gender oppression will have to be challenged. However, men do not, generally speaking, have an interest in such large-scale change. For the benefits – material, psychological, existential – that accrue to them from the perpetuation of women's subordination remain significant. Nevertheless, these benefits are bought at the cost of men's flight from the ambiguities of

their own embodied existence. For what lies at the root of woman's oppression is man's bad faith (and in vain) affirmation of himself as Sovereign, and his desire to see his sovereignty reflected back to him by woman. Man endeavors to sunder the attributes of reason, consciousness, and autonomy from his own embodiment by fraudulently arrogating only the former to himself.

Here we must also consider masculinist values and Beauvoir's discussion of how they come to be expressed, especially in mythic forms. For myths both signify and reaffirm the asymmetrical relations between men and women. Men refuse to grant adequate recognition to women's subjectivity even as they (impossibly) demand from women recognition of their own status as the Sovereign, the Essential, the Absolute. Men "seek in the depths of two living eyes their own image haloed with admiration and gratitude, deified. If Woman has often been compared to water this is, among other reasons, because she is the mirror in which the male Narcissus contemplates himself" (TSS 202 TA; DS I 302). However, there are diverse and incompatible myths about Woman. For, as his Other, she is required by Man to affirm in him various qualities that he arrogates to himself and to acquiesce in her alleged lack of them. Thus she is Nature, carnality, flesh, and animality, and she threatens him as such. However, she is also the domesticated inversion of these, who may docilely serve him: virgin, wife, mother, muse, and so forth. She is both physis and antiphysis (TSS 178; DS I 266).[xvi] Yet, whatever the content of such mythic projections, the point is that "each of the myths built up around woman claims to sum her up *in toto*" (TSS 266 TA; DS I 396). Woman is thus frozen, rendered object-like. Her subjectivity and ambiguity are denied in the project to reduce her – even though she never can be fully reduced – to the object of male fantasies.[xvii] It also follows that Woman, in all her alleged guises, remains for man a "Mystery." She is opaque, thing-like, an "in-itself" – and she must *be so* (even though, of course, she cannot fully be so), or else she would demand from him the reciprocity between equals in which they each mutually acknowledge their embodied and objective status, as well as their subjectivity.

Beauvoir also observes in *The Second Sex* that women are not the only category to be rendered thus "mysterious." She points out that non-Western peoples are (in Europe) similarly cast: "There is… a mystery of the Black, of the Yellow, insofar as they are considered absolutely as the inessential Other." However, she goes on to note that

Americans (who, she says, also greatly baffle Europeans), as well as men (i.e., Western men), are not regarded as mysterious at all. Rather, one simply remarks that one does not understand them. “The point is,” she says, “that rich America and the male are on the side of the Master, and Mystery is a property of the slave” (TSS 271; DS I 403). It is the identification of “the human” not only with the male but with the white Western male that is at issue here.[xviii]

Assuming Inferiority: Submission, Complicity, and Resistance

To assure Man’s place as the Absolute Subject, Woman must act not merely in accordance with his mythic projections of the “Eternal Feminine” but in a more profound way must also “become” them: “In order for any reciprocity to appear impossible, it is necessary *for the Other to be for itself an other*, *for its very subjectivity to be affected by otherness*” (TSS 271 TA; DS I, 403; my emphasis). Thus, even though freedom is an ontological quality of human existence, those oppressive situations that prevent meaningful action may impinge upon it so totally that its enactment will virtually cease (or in the most extreme, dehumanizing cases actually cease). Because ontological freedom is coextensive with its realization in action it is, de facto, inseparable from the conditions in which it may be practiced. Thus, in the most extreme cases oppression does not only constitute an “external” impediment to effective action but, permeating subjectivity, may also suppress the potential for ontological freedom itself. Here, the oppressed cannot be said to be complicit in their oppression or to bear any responsibility for it. What, in the introduction to *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir describes as the falling of transcendence into immanence and of freedom into facticity is, she says, a “moral fault” if it is agreed to but an oppression if it is “inflicted” (TSS 16; DS I 31).

However, Beauvoir realizes that matters are usually more ambiguous. Although the most extreme oppressions may place their victims in the quasi-infantile world of the “serious,” where they cannot be held responsible for their actions,[xix] this is very seldom the case. For most women considerable benefits are also attached to embracing their objectification. In these circumstances an active complicity rather then a reluctant and bare submission becomes attractive, and “men find in their women more complicity than the

oppressor usually finds in the oppressed” (TSS 757 TA; DS II 649). Beauvoir argues that complicity is especially pervasive among the dependent, middle-class, European women whose lives she mainly describes in volume 2, although it is certainly not unique to them. The benefits may be material ones, being kept by a man, but they also include being able to flee from the anxiety arising from one’s own ambiguous freedom. Abstract humanism, we saw, aligns itself with the masculine and evades ambiguity by affirming that “man” is a sovereign consciousness, an autonomous agent. However, an alternative evasion is possible: to embrace one’s objectification. This is the path that women are enticed to follow. Thus Beauvoir writes of woman in the introduction to *The Second Sex*:

> To refuse to be the Other, to refuse complicity with man, would be to renounce all the advantages that an alliance with the superior caste may confer on them. Man-the-sovereign will provide woman-the-liege with material protection and take care of justifying her existence: along with economic risk, she evades the metaphysical risk of a freedom that is required to invent its goals without assistance. Indeed, alongside each individual’s claim to affirm oneself as subject – an ethical claim – there also lies the temptation to flee one’s freedom and to make oneself into a thing: it is a pernicious path, for passive, alienated, lost, the individual is thus prey to foreign wills, cut off from transcendence, deprived of all worth. But this is an easy path: one thus avoids the anguish and stress of an authentically assumed existence. The man who constitutes woman as *Other* will thus find in her a deep-seated complicity… she often finds pleasure in her role as *Other*. (TSS 10; TA; DS I 21-22)

Much of volume 2 portrays the actions and experiences of women who engage in such strategies of complicity. From the woman who plays dumb and passive (who “makes herself prey”) to get a man; to the housewife who automatically adopts the her husband’s political views or relies on him to navigate technology for her; to the narcissist who is in love with her own self-objectified image; to the mystic who tries to lose herself in mythical union with a great spiritual Other, Beauvoir describes women who willingly assume and affirm their feminine alterity. They try both to resolve the painful paradox of being a subject whom men posit as a thing and, simultaneously, to evade the ontological ambiguity of embodied subjectivity by positively identifying themselves with their objectification. “Acting” to one degree or another as if they lacked agency, they reaffirm the myths of woman as absolute Other. However, in so doing they also further reinforce all women’s serial subjection to the myth of Woman, and thus they bear a degree of responsibility for its perpetuation.

A question that Beauvoir's characterization of feminine complicity raises is how far this is specific to the white middle-class women she mainly discusses, or whether it is a pervasive phenomenon among other oppressed groups of either sex. Are, for example, racially objectified groups, menial wage-workers, or the aged (of either or both sexes) similarly complicit in their own objectification? There is, of course, no one answer. However, Beauvoir suggests that there is a quality to the oppression of women that, while not unique, is particularly pervasive: This is the highly personal character of the relationship of oppressor and oppressed. She captures this well in the analogy with feudal relations in the passage quoted earlier. For where members of the oppressed group have enduring and *particularistic* (indeed, here intimate) relations with specific members of the oppressing group (and, concomitantly, less possibility of intensive bonds with each other) they are more likely to develop the strong symbiosis that gives rise to complicity in their oppression. Women, grosso modo, do not conceive of their situation as a collective one. To the contrary, Beauvoir notes, "they do not say 'we.'" For "they live dispersed among men, bound by residence, work, economic interests, social condition, to certain men – fathers or husbands – more firmly than to other women." Indeed, anticipating the kind of divisions that were later to fracture second-wave feminism, she continues: "As bourgeois women they feel solidarity with bourgeois men, not with proletarian women; as white women their allegiance is with white men, not with black women" (TSS 8 TA; DS I 19).[xx] However, for other subordinate groups oppression tends to be less embedded in particularistic relations, and the "master" often has little interest in receiving recognition from the "slave." Then the subjectivity of the oppressed will be acknowledged only to the barest extent necessary to harness their behavior to the interests of the dominant. In such instances a more resentful and resistant submission is the likely response. Thus, I now turn to Beauvoir's discussion of forms of objectification that are primarily grounded in depersonalization: in indifference, detachment, and abstraction.

America Day by Day: Indifference

Individuals may be treated as no more than anonymous members of a social category, as interchangeable units in a "series." This kind of objectification often facilitates economic exploitation or cultural appropriation. Beauvoir explores such forms of oppression most fully in her discussion of race in *America Day by Day*, her account of the four months she spent traveling coast to coast and lecturing in the United States in early 1947. Arriving from more ethnically homogenous France, she was passionately interested to learn about the lives of immigrant groups, as well as the "race" question in America. However, she did not set out systematically to investigate race as a site of oppression. Nor could she engage with race as lived experience – except insofar as it thrust upon her the startling discovery of her own whiteness. Rather, she proceeds via reportage and anecdote, describing her own encounters and offering observations (some insightful, others naïve or mistaken), relaying what others have happened to tell her on the topic of race (some of it informative, some of it inaccurate), and summarizing a certain amount of reading she did about the "Negro" question. When she was in New York, the black novelist Richard Wright (with whom she had previously become friends in Paris) provided her with entrée to various events in Harlem, and he talked with her extensively about black experience. She spent about a week in New Mexico, where she was keenly interested in the situation of Native Americans, and about twelve days in the Deep South, where suddenly race confronted her as totally conditioning life. None of this amounts to anything equivalent to the amount of research and reflection that went into *The Second Sex*. Yet Beauvoir's account still captures (if at times unintentionally and against the grain) how the dynamics of race oppression are ideotypically distinct from those of sex. She describes a mode of oppression here in which the Hegelian dialectics of asymmetrical recognition are not the essential.

Beauvoir writes that America is "idealistic," but it is also the land where "abstraction" rules. High ideals are inscribed in the Constitution, such as "the essential dignity of human beings, the fundamental equality of all men, and certain inalienable rights to liberty, justice, and concrete opportunities of success" (ADD 237; AJJ 329). However, she observes, these ideals have been consigned to an "intangible heaven," while on the

ground “realism escapes the bounds of morality.” For, refusing to tolerate ambiguity, “the most determined idealist is also the most vulnerable as soon as someone explains to him, ‘You have to take reality into account’” (ADD 295; AJJ 409). America’s “sincere humanists” will all too easily consider going to war or even using nuclear weapons against the population of the Soviet Union (ADD 295; AJJ 409), while good liberals will “realistically” accommodate themselves to extreme economic inequalities and racist segregation. For the problem is not only the mouthing of grandiose abstract principles, detached from the complex realities of actual lives, but the accompanying flight from ambiguity into the ostensible certainties offered by abstraction and objectivity. [xxi]

When abstraction is a general societal norm, it is also conducive to the reduction of others to “objective” categories: to racist pseudoscience and to stereotyping. It thus serves to legitimize both economic exploitation and cultural appropriation. Abstraction then becomes vital to those forms of oppression that, in Schott’s words, function through “indifference and detachment” (2003, 236). The instances that Beauvoir considers most fully in *America Day by Day* are white characterizations of “Indians” in the West and of “Negroes” in the South. But she observes that similar objectifying dynamics affect many groups in other places, including “natives” in the French (and other) colonies and workers from whom labor is exploitatively extracted. In none of these instances is the desire for recognition a primary impetus for oppression. Although the dominant group usually defines itself in contradistinction to the oppressed in order to justify its benefits in its *own* eyes, and although the oppressed group will discover that it cannot but assume its despised characteristics, what is different here from the case of (notably white, middle-class) women is that not even a dialectic of asymmetrical recognition is initiated.[xxii] In such situations, it follows, the responses of the oppressed are likely to be different, for complicity and its accompanying rewards are generally not available to them. Survival may necessitate a bare submission, but it is likely to take more resistant forms.[xxiii]

In New Mexico, Beauvoir observes, “the exotic” is “Indian” (ADD 177; AJJ 248). Both for tourists and for the resident Anglo population, “Indians,” stripped of other sources of livelihood, exist here above all as a category of Other for cultural appropriation. She is struck, as they enter New Mexico, by the new imagery on the roadside billboards. Now "there were Indians with feathers in their hair advertising the smoothest cigarettes or tastiest

Quaker Oats," while the curio shops sell moccasins and Indian jewelry, feather headdresses, woven blankets, and so forth (ADD 177; AJJ 248). Beauvoir is well aware of the murderous past that has left the surviving Native American population here isolated within the small confines of reservation and pueblo, and without access to land or other economic resources. Her visits to various pueblos make it yet more obvious that the main economic activity left to them is a debasing sale of their culture; they must commoditize their historic sites, crafts, and dances for a livelihood. She is told there is no discrimination but notes a sign in a bar in Albuquerque that says, "Off-limits to Indians" (ADD 183; AJJ 258). She is scathing about the "aesthetes of Santa Fe," the artistic types who deck themselves in Indian clothing and jewelry while they compete "to acquire the rarest rugs, blankets, and knickknacks" (ADD 188; AJJ 264), and about the good ladies who are members of societies for "Indian improvement." She sums up the views presented to her by the director of the Santa Fe museum as "they live a life rather like that of carefully kept animals in a zoo" (ADD 187; AJJ 263). At once admired and deemed inferior, "Indians" here remain (as Beauvoir later put it in *The Second Sex*) a "Mystery." Opaque, they are an Other to be appropriated, to be both romanticized and condescended to, but from whom, *unlike* the women whom she treats in *The Second Sex*, no degree of reciprocal recognition is demanded.

Accordingly, the Native Americans Beauvoir describes are not as liable to complicity.[xxiv] They live starkly segregated on the reservations rather than scattered among the "superior" group. Given their economic constraints, they have little option but to comply with their role as exotic objects of touristic appropriation. However, their attitude, as she perceives it, is primarily one of antagonism. Their hostility manifests itself as the endeavor to get as much income as they can from visiting white tourists, while giving them minimum access to their inner sanctums. Visiting Taos pueblo, Beauvoir notes with irritation that there is a charge for parking and for permission to take photographs, that there are limited hours when outsiders may visit, and that severe restrictions are imposed on the areas to which they have access. She describes being driven away by a group of angry women from a well that turns out to be an important sacred site. "We have violated the boundaries assigned to whites," she observes (ADD 192; AJJ 269). Likewise, the local "Indians" endeavor to keep secret the locations for their ritual dances (unsuccessfully, it

seems, since Beauvoir attends one along with many of the local Anglo Indian-lovers), while they endlessly perform what Beauvoir senses are ersatz versions of the dances for tourists.

Perhaps oddly, and certainly troublingly, Beauvoir does not appear to recognize the behavior of the Taos residents as a form of very justifiable resistance, and she aligns her perspective with that of her Anglo acquaintances and informants. Frustrated at being prevented from roaming freely and at being denied access to the "authentic" life of the pueblo, she writes:

> I've heard that in many villages the Indians surround themselves with prohibitions to preserve the mystery and allure that are their chief economic resources, as they largely live on money extracted from tourists. But perhaps they sincerely respect certain taboos. The most experienced Indian observers here say that no one can claim to know them. Whether they are commercial ruses or religious prejudices, all these restrictions annoy us. (ADD 192; AJJ 270)

Here, against the grain of her own arguments, Beauvoir is frustrated by the "Mystery" of the "Indians" and by the lack of reciprocity shown to her – even though this is surely an appropriate form of resistance to a white tourist. Indeed, it disturbs her to be considered a mere tourist (though this is what she is), and she seems unconscious of her position as a member of the privileged racial "caste." She is unaware of the seriality that enforces her white identity on her and that, unbidden, establishes her social designation as Other in the eyes of the Native American population, as well as theirs for her.

The same cannot be said, however, of Beauvoir's experience of antiblack racism in the Deep South. Beauvoir crossed the state line into Texas at night on a Greyhound bus. At the bus station she saw, for the first time, the signs that commanded the segregation of "whites" and "coloreds" into different waiting areas and restrooms. Unlike in New Mexico, she knew instantly that she herself was implicated: "This is the first time we're seeing with own eyes the segregation we've heard so much about," she writes, "and although we'd been well warned, something fell onto our shoulders that would not lift all through the South; it was our own skin that became heavy and stifling, its color making us burn" (ADD 202-203; AJJ 284). She discovers that she is herself a bearer of the existing structures of racism, irrespective of the fact that she is a foreigner and irrespective of her radical politics or her desire to offer solidarity to blacks. Her good intentions notwithstanding, she cannot but assume her whiteness and the superior "caste" position that attaches to it. Even enclosed in

a bus, she cannot escape what Gunnar Myrdal had called "the American dilemma." [xxv] She cannot escape "the smell of hatred in the air – the arrogant hatred of whites, the silent hatred of blacks" that it engenders it (ADD 233; AJJ 322).

Beauvoir describes how, when she is traveling in Mississippi on a very hot day, a pregnant black woman at the back of the bus faints; the woman is jeered at by the white passengers, none of whom will help her. She would be better off in the front of the bus where there is less jolting, but Beauvoir recounts that she did not dare to offer the woman her seat in the front: "The whole bus would oppose it, and she [the woman] would be the first victim of their indignation" (ADD 233; AJJ 323). Beauvoir was surely correct that it would have been naïve – not to mention dangerous for both of them – to think she could ignore her own "objective" classification and that of the black woman. For the dynamics of racism here locate each in the appropriate series – be it that of "white" or "colored" – from which personal intentions or volitions offer no escape. Walking across the black section of New Orleans, she realizes that here "we are the enemy despite ourselves, justifiably responsible for the color of our skin and, against our wishes, of all that it implies" (ADD 227 TA; AJJ 318).

Here no reciprocity is possible. Whites define themselves as the Subject or the Essential. However, they will seek recognition of this status from other members of their own "caste," and they regard blacks as so "dubiously human" (to use Butler's phrase) that recognition from them would be worthless. Blacks, unlike the women discussed in *The Second Sex*, are not usually invited into relationships with their oppressors that would make complicity an option. They cannot but assume their designated status, but they do so with hatred toward the dominant white Other, for whom "they" all seem the same.[xxvi] As the bus drives through black areas, or as she and her white travel companion walk through them, hostility is the ubiquitous response to white intrusion. She describes walking into a black area of Savannah:

> With every step, our discomfort grows. As we go by, voices drop, gestures stop, smiles die; all life is suspended in the depths of those angry eyes. This silence is so stifling, the menace so oppressive that it's almost a relief when something finally explodes. An old woman glares at us in disgust and spits twice, majestically, once for N. [Beauvoir's companion], once for me. (ADD 236; AJJ 326-327)

But Beauvoir can only observe this hatred and report on her own discomfiting experience of being its target, for she has no entry point into the lived experience expressed in the hostility she encounters.[xxvii] Back in New York, Richard Wright is her guide to black life. His novel *Black Boy* captures for her "the black person's double face, one side of which is expressly meant for whites" (ADD 242; AJJ 335). He also takes her to Harlem to visit jazz venues and to attend a Sunday church service.[xxviii] However, she writes about these only as an outside observer: She seems to realize that no endeavor of imagination and no goodwill attempt at recognition will overcome the separations that racism here imposes on those of different skin colors, each located in a different and antagonistic series. The facticities of embodiment and their accompanying life histories are, at least in this particular social context, overwhelming.

In *The Second Sex* Beauvoir writes both *about* women and *as* a woman,[xxix] and, likewise, in *The Coming of Age* (published when she was sixty-two) autobiographical elements contribute significantly to the phenomenology of aging she elaborates. But she has no direct access to the lived experience of being subject to racial oppression.[xxx] Thus, in describing and analyzing her travels in the South and elsewhere she relies heavily on Gunnar Myrdal's "objective" sociological analyses to interpret (and confirm) her own observations about race, and she uses Wright as her guide to "inner" black experience. Margaret Simons has suggested that both thinkers profoundly influenced the writing of *The Second Sex*, offering Beauvoir the methodological resources for developing its double focus, on both lived experience and social construction (1999, chapter 11).[xxxi] However, if Beauvoir may later have applied Wright's methods to grasping women's experience, she did not – and arguably could not – apply them to race. It was not possible for her to write anything analogous to the accounts of how black objectification comes to be assumed which we get from a Wright or a Du Bois or, in the Francophone context, from a Fanon. Yet what she did perceptively observe is how black compliance had very different and generally more deeply resistant qualities than that of (white) women. Apart from describing persistent black hostility she also notes, for example, that the stereo-types of black "laziness" and "dishonesty" actually describe forms of resistance: "'Laziness' means that the work doesn't have the same significance for the person who profits from it as for the person who executes it," she writes, while "lying and theft are the defense of the weak, a

silent clumsy protest against unjust power" (ADD 240; AJJ 332). It is significant that the one explicit reference Beauvoir makes in *America Day by Day* to "the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave" does not refer to race (although the vestiges of historical master and slave statuses do still actually persist) but is made with regard to middle-class American women who, even as they ostensibly claim greater independence than French women, still remain in relation to man the "inessential" (ADD 330-31; AJJ 454). In racial oppression a very different logic generally predominates.

The Coming of Age: Aversion

Beauvoir can conceive of a hypothetical society (as can we) in which having a female or a male body would not make a great difference to one's life possibilities and where neither privilege nor oppression would follow from one's sex; we can also conceive of societies in which attributes such as one's physiognomy (including "race"), one's religion, or language would not oppressively delimit a life at all. However, we cannot conceive of old age without the accompanying inexorable decline of our bodies. Old age is a physiological reality, but it is not only that. Beauvoir argues in *The Coming of Age* that old age today is also a situation of oppression; indeed, sometimes it is one of profound dehumanization. What typifies oppression here is neither a master-slave relationship nor indifference but *aversion*.

Published in 1970, twenty-one years after *The Second Sex*, *The Coming of Age* is as voluminous. It is also similarly organized – except for the striking absence of an equivalent to the final section on the "Liberated Woman," for no path to liberation appears for the aged. Part 1, "The Viewpoint of Exteriority,"[xxxii] sets forth the "data" on aging (some of it dubious, much now dated) offered by biology, anthropology, history, and postwar sociology. Part 2, "Being-in-the-World," develops a phenomenology of the lived experience of the aged. It draws extensively on memoirs, letters, surveys, and contemporary interview-based research, as well as containing strong autobiographical elements.[xxxiii] As with *The Second Sex*, the two parts of *The Coming of Age* should be read conjointly. For the lived experience of age is produced through a dialectic in which one cannot but assume an "exterior" situation that one has not chosen and that severely limits one's freedom.

For the most part (although not entirely), Beauvoir's focus is on men, so that when she writes of "man" or the "aged man" [*le vieillard*], she does indeed means male human beings.[xxxiv] Old age is above all a man's problem, she asserts, since women, who already live mainly in the private realm, do not suffer the abrupt descent into the category of the less-than-human which men undergo as they are excluded from public activity. Women still have places in the home and the family "that enable them to remain active and to retain their identity" (CA 262 TA; V 279). This argument was already becoming problematic in 1970 since by that time women (even in France) had left the domestic sphere more fully than in 1949. Indeed, much of what Beauvoir says about the crisis old age presents for men increasingly applies also to women, especially to professional women, who have gained further entry into public life. In addition, women suffer acutely from other forms of objectification as their aging bodies fall away from norms of feminine beauty and sexual attractiveness. As Beauvoir had argued in *The Second Sex*, the decline in sexual attractiveness that accompanies old age presents more of a crisis for women than men, with menopause marking a definitive turning point in the aging process. There is thus a troubling disjuncture between Beauvoir's treatment of women's aging in *The Second Sex* and her very scant consideration of the specificities of women's aging in *The Coming of Age*.[xxxv] Even so, Beauvoir's central arguments about the *sui generis* nature of aging and age oppression in modern societies remain applicable. Far more than for the (younger) women whose lived experience is portrayed in *The Second Sex*, societal structures, norms, and practices that define the aged must assumed by an embodied subject that increasingly discovers its own body *also* to be an objective impediment.

Near the beginning of the book Beauvoir points out that the topic of old age has become taboo, subject to a "conspiracy of silence" in which old age is said not to exist (CA 1-2; V 7-8).[xxxvi] It does! For although old age is a social and discursive construction it is not only this; it is also biological. Beauvoir strongly rejects the kind of nominalism implied in an adage such as "so long as you feel young, you are young" (CA 284; V 301). Thus, she would have rejected the more radical versions of poststructuralist theory that take physical conditions such as age to be discursively constituted. She would, for example, have objected strongly to Donna Haraway's appropriation of her work. Haraway writes: "One is not born a woman, Simone de Beauvoir correctly insisted. It took the political-

epistemological terrain of postmodernism to be able to insist on a co-text to de Beauvoir's: one is not born an organism. Organisms are made; they are constructs of a world-changing kind. The constructions of an organism's boundaries are the job… of discourses" (1999, 207). In opposition to such discourse-reductionism, Beauvoir insists that organic bodies *do* have objective qualities, and these may impinge on one's ability to act. Real biological changes mark the aging process: cellular regeneration slows; hair whitens; skin wrinkles; teeth fall out; muscular strength declines; and for women, menopause ends reproductive capacity (CA 25-28; V 31-34).

With the approach of old age one makes the startling discovery that one's body, in its brute physical facticity, is *itself* "Other," and this is not only, as for (younger) women, because of its meaning for others. For one's body is increasingly encountered as the source of an immediate and unambiguous "I cannot," or as a source of pain and suffering that impinges on one's intentions and color one's experiences of the world: "My body" is "me," yet ever more "it" constrains me; "it" dominates me, "it" pains me. In *The Coming of Age*, Beauvoir quotes extensively from memoirs and other sources to show how pervasively the aged experience their own bodies as impediments rather than as "instruments" for their projects. Here, embodied subjectivity, integral to freedom, begins to tilt objectward; the weight of the material body becomes ever greater, ever more constraining of free action.

Thus, although its particular meanings will vary, the aged undergo what Beauvoir calls "a biological destiny" (CA 86 TA; V 95), for there develops "a 'fatigability' that spares none" (CA 28; V 34). "The coefficient of adversity in things rises: stairs are harder to climb, distances longer to cover, streets more dangerous to cross, parcels heavier to carry" (CA 304 TA; V 323), and "from being an instrument the body becomes an obstacle" (CA 317; TA; V 336). "Biological decay [*La déchéance biologique*]," she says, "brings with it the impossibility of transcendence, of becoming passionately involved; it kills projects and… makes death acceptable" (CA 443 TA; V 468). Such decay is also intimately linked to the temporal experience of old age: to the emergence of a horizon that is "both short and closed" (CA 373; V 395). For this militates against initiating new projects, killing the zest for life, and increasingly locking the aged into their past.[xxxvii]

This said, however, Beauvoir also insists that the body is never an unalloyed "pure nature" (CA 12; V 18). To the contrary, bodily experience is always imbued with meanings

that are shaped by social structures, practices, and discourses, and Beauvoir talks of the "circularity" through which the various aspects of old age become mutually implicated in each other (CA 9; V 15-16).[xxxviii] The aged often become frozen in conditions of irreversible objectification, and these may be so profound that their dehumanization will be nearly total. Again, Beauvoir asks, why? However, her answers are significantly different from those concerning sex and race. For the advantages offered to others through the oppression of the aged are few, and what distinguishes the oppression of aged is above all *aversion*: aversion to their deteriorating bodies and to their perceived superfluity. This superfluity may produce a certain affinity (as mentioned earlier) between the condition of the aged and that of concentration camp victims, and, indeed, Beauvoir remarks, "in the death-camps they were the first victims chosen; having no capacity to work they were given no chance of any kind" (CA 220 TA; V 234). But even in "normal" life the aged are subject to intense oppression: Active adults do not seek recognition from them, nor are they considered to serve any useful material ends. Now they are just "useless mouths" (CA 241; V 258), and their ineffectual bodies instill horror and disgust in still-active adults,[xxxix] who rightly see their own future in this Other, decaying and near death. Unlike other oppressions, that of the aged is potentially ubiquitous. For, except in the case of premature death, old age awaits us all, and each of us will in turn succumb to it. However, in bad faith, still-active adults seek to flee this premonition: They refuse to acknowledge their connection with the aged.

To become old is to discover, usually against one's will, that one is already instantiated in the series of the aged. Age is an identity that cannot *not* be assumed. "In our society the elderly person is marked as such by custom, by the behaviour of others and by vocabulary itself: he must take up this reality. There is an infinite number of ways of doing so: but not one of them will allow me to coincide with the reality that I [must] assume"(CA, 291 TA; V 309). Thus, we initially realize we are becoming "old" (just as a young girl discovers she is becoming "a woman") through the words and actions of others even if we do not feel old "inside."[xl] Old age comes to us as the point of view of the other (CA 286; V 304), and "it is the other within us who is old" [*en nous c'est l'autre qui est vieux*] (CA 288; V 306). There is, says Beauvoir, "an irresolvable contradiction between the personal evidence that assures our unchanging quality and the objective certainty of our

transformation. We can only oscillate between them" (CA 290 TA; V 309). In the longer term, however, the oscillations normally cease; the condition of "being old" is reluctantly assumed and is most often internalized as self-disgust. "If one could die of shame and distress, I should no longer be alive," wrote the elderly Michelangelo (cited in CA 513; V 539); while, following a stroke, Churchill described himself as having become "a bundle of old rags" (CA 431; V 455). If (as an American gerontologist complained) many elderly men in nursing homes are dirty, this is in Beauvoir's view quite understandable: "They have been tossed on the rubbish-heap, so why should they obey the rules of decency and hygiene?" (CA 481 TA; V 506).

Beauvoir begins *The Coming of Age* with the story of how Buddha, as Prince Siddhartha, when he first left his father's palace encountered a feeble old man on the road. Initially astonished at the sight, he then affirmed, "I myself am the dwelling place of future old age." Born to save humankind, Buddha "wanted to assume the entire human condition," and so the young Buddha recognized both himself in the old man and the old man in himself (CA 1 TA; V 7). However, Beauvoir's point is that most of us choose to do the very opposite. Here the "'common' corporeal vulnerability" that Butler suggests might draw human beings together (2004, 42) instead inspires dread and flight. Fearful of our own future degeneration and death, we vainly seek to evade them by casting the aged as a "foreign species," as an absolute Other – while at the same time we know only too well that they are us and we are them.

It is this fear that so often gives rise not to mere indifference to the aged but rather to a profound horror and aversion. Apart from a few exceptions, Beauvoir writes, "the old man [*le vieillard*]… doesn't *do* anything. He is defined by an *exis*, not a *praxis*. Time carries him toward an end – death – which is not *his* end, which is not intended as a project [*qui n'est pas posée par un projet*]. And this is why he appears to active individuals as a 'foreign species' in which they don't recognize themselves." She continues: "Old age inspires a biological repugnance; in a kind of self-defense one pushes it far away from oneself" (CA 217 TA; V 231).[xli] Here vulnerability arouses not compassion but rather a visceral aversion. Mockery, frequently sadistic in tone, is used as a distancing device. The aged are objects of manipulation, condescension, infantilization, and dishonesty even when they are still relatively sound in mind and body (CA 218-19; V 232-233).[xlii]

If fear and disgust and the aversion they inspire provide the major impetus for the objectification of the aged, this arises, however, not only from their bodily decrepitude but also from its accompanying social superfluity and dependence. From a practical perspective the aged are superfluous in a way that younger women, workers, the colonized and/or racially denigrated are not; the dependent housewife, for example, still offers valuable services to her husband, as does the menial black worker in the American South to a white employer, while the dependent child has a productive future ahead. The aged person thus has no *value* in our productivity-oriented society and is not acknowledged as a subject. Instead, “he is condemned to stagnate in boredom and loneliness, just a throw-out… a piece of scrap” (CA 6; V 13). No longer considered a subject, others treat him as a “nullity” [*en quantité négligeable*] (CA 219 TA; V 233) – and this is how he will come to feel and regard himself.

In all societies, Beauvoir argues, younger adults seek to distance themselves from the aged because they so profoundly fear their own old age. In some traditional societies the aversion this provokes is mitigated by respect for the aged as transmitters of knowledge or as interceders with ancestors or gods. But in modern Western society, where rapid change renders experience irrelevant and where productivity, profit, and the cult of novelty are the most prevalent values (CA 380-82; V 402-404), no positive value is associated with age. Moreover, since one’s occupation and income are also vital to an individual’s identity, retirement constitutes its sudden destruction (CA 266; V 283-284). Because retirement rarely provides opportunities to acquire meaningful new identities, it means “losing one’s place in society, losing one’s dignity and almost one’s existence [*presque sa réalité*]” (CA 266 TA; V 284). Once retired (or “redundant”), the elderly (with the exception of the wealthy few, who may purchase a degree of recognition) are often reduced “to the condition of sub-man” [*à l’état de sous-homme*] (CA 505 TA; V 531).[xliii] Now, “fictive” objectification may indeed yield to literal objectification in the treatment of those who become physically helpless or demented. Whether attended to by family members or paid domestic “carers,” or warehoused in homes for the elderly or hospitals to await death, they may be subjected to callousness, neglect, and sometimes direct physical and psychological abuse.

Far more than for women or even black Americans, Beauvoir frames the oppressive situation of the aged as structured by contemporary capitalism. In a for-profit economy not only are those who are no longer economically productive objects of contempt and disgust but, for many, a prior life of alienated labor means that they have no existential resources to enjoy the enforced "leisure" of retirement. Indeed, with strong echoes of Marx's notion of the proletariat as a universal class, Beauvoir ends *The Coming of Age* by suggesting that the treatment of the aged "exposes the failure of our entire civilization." More generous pensions and so forth – although vital – would not be sufficient to make old age more meaningful. For in modern society old age is usually but the terminus of a lifetime of objectification and exploitation in the labor force: "It is the whole system that is at issue and our demand cannot be other than radical – change life itself" (CA 543 TA; V 569-570).

But who will change it? Not the aged. For their very condition precludes effective resistance. Each isolated and each "the same," passively unified through structures and practices that locate each in the series of "the aged," powerlessness is their common hallmark. Dispersed and excluded from public activities and spaces, apart from a small elite, the aged have virtually no capacity for resistance.[xliv] The individual would-be liberated woman has some ability to resist her objectification in spite of the limits she encounters and, as Beauvoir described in *America Day by Day*, resistant responses are open to those subjected to racial objectification. In addition, both groups have also developed organized movements of collective resistance that have met with some success. Likewise, workers and the colonized peoples have at various times developed effective collective resistance. However, the aged, especially as they become increasingly debilitated, inactive, and isolated, cannot do so.

Of course, and as Beauvoir herself occasionally notes, her overwhelmingly negative depiction of old age does not apply to all elderly people, and some continue to enjoy warm relationships with family and friends and to have meaningful projects.[xlv] One also needs to distinguish more carefully than Beauvoir does between those we might call the "active" aged, who still have a range of different ways in which they may assume their status, and the "debilitated" aged, whose lives are constricted through and through by bodily decline and whose vulnerability to oppression – and indeed dehumanization – are far greater. Reading Beauvoir today, one is struck by how greatly extended active old age has become

for many in Western societies since 1970. This is especially so for members of the upper and professional classes (for whom life expectancy itself has also increased). Still, her diagnosis of the role poverty plays in reducing many others to a life of exclusion and incapacity remains disturbingly accurate, as does her portrayal of the aversion – the disgust, derision, hostility – with which younger adults generally respond to the aged. This is an aversion that the aged most often internalize in the form of self-disgust, for "becoming aged" offers no equivalent to the rewards of complicity that may attend "becoming a woman."

The Multiple Ambiguities of Oppression

My aim in this chapter has been to move beyond readings of Beauvoir that focus too exclusively on her appropriation of Hegel's master-slave dialectic as offering *the* key characterization of oppression. This project is important both in terms of how we should read Beauvoir and because she offers us the resources for thinking about the complexities of oppression and the different modes through which it is perpetuated. Drawing from Beauvoir's discussions of sex, race, and age, I have elicited three "ideal types," or modes, of oppression, each of which has a different core dynamic: asymmetrical recognition, indifference, and aversion. Up to now I have tended, like Beauvoir, to write as if individuals pertain only to one particular series of the oppressed but, of course, they are often instantiated in more than one. Thus, women's experiences are more inflected by race or ethnicity, class, age, and so forth than Beauvoir often considers in *The Second Sex*. Similarly, as I have noted, Beauvoir's treatment of race tends to occlude gender (and other) differences, while in *The Coming of Age* she misguidedly claims that "Old age is a problem of men" even though she draws on examples concerning women when it suits her purposes. Although, for example, Beauvoir describes the condition of Woman as one that, paradigmatically, is constituted by asymmetrical recognition, this will not be the case for every individual woman. For some men will not seek recognition from aged women of any description, or from women whom they perceive as their inferiors in class or race status. Conversely, a higher economic or race status may diminish the degree of objectification that accompanies aging, and so forth. This also means, of course, that particular individuals

may occupy ambiguous positions, in which they are at once members of an oppressive and an oppressing series.[xlvi]

Additionally, even within a fairly homogenous series, more than one mode of oppression is often operative. The aged of all descriptions, including those who are male, wealthy, and white, may be subject to indifference as well as to aversion or to an oscillation between them, while even elite women may also be subject to profound aversion on the part of men. Indeed, men's disgust for women's bodily processes may sometimes be as intense as the repugnance the young feel toward the aged, and it may displace or alternate with men's desire for recognition from women.[xlvii] Likewise, antiblack racism on the part of whites does not always proceed through indifference and objectifying abstraction alone. Although Fanon, Ellison, and others confirm the centrality of the dynamic of indifference by pointing to "absence" or "invisibility" as fundamental to black experience (Fanon [1952] 1967; Ellison 1990), racism may also be propelled by a fear of (and perhaps an envious desire for) the sexual prowess that is often projected by whites onto black men. It may also be driven by the desire that blacks should recognize white superiority, since such recognition may help to assuage white guilt and to justify economic exploitation.[xlviii]

Irrespective of which particular modes and dynamics are at play, what always makes a situation one of oppression is that it curtails the ambiguities of an embodied subject and forecloses freedom. To return to Honneth's notion of fictive reification, such a situation always involves the treatment of persons (through whatever modes or admixture of modes) *as if* they are merely "things." In both *The Second Sex* and *The Coming of Age* (though much less in *America Day by Day*), Beauvoir focuses extensively on the experiential, "lived," aspects of this objectification. She captures, in vignette after vignette, how oppression is variously assumed by those who are subjected to it, and she vividly portrays its "taste" in a myriad of instances. However, in addition, she theorizes how these particular experiences are situated within the general societal "structures of constraint" that make them stably possible, and she shows how individual actions and social structures iteratively reinforce each other.

Oppression creates for the oppressed constrained situations in which change is nearly impossible since whatever they may individually choose to do will only tend further to consolidate oppression. This is what Marilyn Frye has described as the "double bind" of

oppression, in which whatever one does confirms one's oppressed status.[xlix] As we have seen, women are serially caught up in the perpetuation of their subordination, so that even the would-be liberated woman, whom Beauvoir applauds for resisting complicity, finds she must still attend to the demands of "femininity": "The individual is not free to shape [the idea of femininity] as she pleases. The woman who does not conform to it devaluates herself sexually and, consequently, socially… It is a bad move to choose defiance unless it represents a positively efficacious action: one consumes more time and energy than one saves" (TSS 724 TA; DS II 601-602). For example, a woman will need to dress "properly," perhaps flatter a male boss (or more) to retain the job that will provide her "independence." The black American who, exploited and working for a pittance, puts little effort into his (or her) work reinscribes the stereotype of black laziness. But whether it is through the resentful compliance that bare survival required of blacks in the American South (and that poverty and economic insecurity still demand of so many today), or the resignation and self-aversion of the aged, or the active choice of complicity of many women, the oppressed become implicated in their own oppression.

However, if structures of constraint are perpetuated not only by those who benefit from them but also by those who are oppressed, then the obverse may also be the case. For those who benefit from oppression may also find ways to contest it. This is the ambiguous situation of those privileged would-be "progressives" who discover that they are not free to refuse the social rewards conferred on them because of the chance of their beneficial location in large-scale structures of constraint and oppression. Beauvoir herself was such an individual. As she turned increasingly to political activism in the 1950s she also began to confront her own complicity in structures of oppression. "I am a woman," she had written in *The Second Sex* (TSS 5; DS I 14). But she was not simply a woman. Beauvoir was a particular woman in a particular time and place: French, educated, wealthy, famous. It was the struggle for independence in Algeria and the brutal war that ensued that concretely thrust her own complicity in oppression upon her. She began to reflect on questions about whether or how one may contest oppressions of which one is also a beneficiary. This is the topic to which I turn in the next chapter.

NOTES

[i] Likewise, Beauvoir notes, Sade's very project of writing belies this autism. "Anyone who finds it paradoxical that a 'solitary' should have engaged so passionately in an effort to communicate misunderstands Sade," she writes (MWBS 35; FBS 50-51).

[ii] In his study of humiliation William Miller asks, with regard to modern "regimes" of torture, "what does the torturer want? To break down the victim so completely that he really will be the rat the torturer's ideology tells him the victim is? Or does he want to preserve just enough of the victim's self-respect so that the victim can feel degraded?" (1993, 166) Although contemporary "political" torture may sometimes aim at the total annihilation of subjectivity, and thus to make its victim "a rat," the latter goal of degradation is more probably common. From what we know about treatment at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, various forms of torture were state-sanctioned in order to try to obtain information from victims. However, the motives of those who directly inflicted torture would appear to have been pleasures that were detached from this "official" aim. As Miller suggests, the greatest delight of the torturers lay in viewing their victims' experiences of their (often sexually inflicted) degradation.

[iii] The relationship is paradigmatically dyadic since it relied on the coerced recognition of individual dominators by individual victims, even though Sade often organized group sexual encounters in which it was essential that some also functioned as spectators for others. The main point here is that the site for Sade's practices was an intimate one, it was "face to face," and not anonymous.

[iv] As well as the extended treatments of Beauvoir and Hegel by Eva Lundgren-Gothlin and Nancy Bauer discussed below, some other recent discussions of these Hegelian aspects of Beauvoir's thought include Hutchings (2003, esp. chapter 3); Purvis (2003); Scarth (2004, esp. chapter 4); Mussett (2006); Altman (2007); Green and Roffey (2010).

[v] Ann Morgan has also criticized Schott's reading of Beauvoir as being too narrow. For, she points out, there are those who are able to transcend the master-slave relationship (that is, to engage in free and equal reciprocity) and there is also "the dehumanized person who is denied participation in this peculiarly human interactivity" (Morgan 2009, 40). Morgan argues that a different variation of the master-slave dialectic operated, in which it was Eichmann who was the slave. For he was "the slave" to dominant Nazi values; while the Jews were simply excluded from any dialectic, or dehumanized. She writes: "in this dialectic, the Nazi value system (and Hitler as its exemplar) was the master, Eichmann was but a pathetic slave, and the Jews, to the shame of everyone concerned, were simply barred from participation"(51). She suggests also that Eichmann corresponds to the "sub-man" whom Beauvoir described in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*: the one who attempts to avoid his ambiguity by making himself as thing-like as possible; such people easily accept being cogs in a machine, or members of a lynch mob, Beauvoir had noted.

[vi] The most extended discussions of Beauvoir's appropriation of the "master slave dialectic" as a model for dialectics of recognition and alterity between men and women are those of Eva Lundgren-Gothlin (1996) and Nancy Bauer (2006). Lundgren-Gothlin argues that woman in *The Second Sex* is not wholly analogous to the slave because Beauvoir truncates Hegel's dialectic: since woman does not demand recognition from man, she is in a condition of stasis in which, unlike Hegel's slave, she continues to remain the object. This, says Lundgren-Gothlin, "makes their relationship more absolute and *non-dialectical*, and it explains why she is the *absolute Other*" (1996, 72). Bauer, by contrast, points out that Beauvoir insists on the ambiguity of *both* parties and she argues that Beauvoir thus sees their relationship as more fluid and open to change. She writes, "Beauvoir is to my knowledge wholly original in figuring reciprocal recognition as requiring the acknowledgment of one's own and the other's essential nature as *objects* as well as subjects" (2006, 186). My own reading is closer to Bauer's. For Beauvoir's point is that although men may *attempt to* deny, or drastically to curtail, women's ambiguous embodied subjectivity they cannot actually succeed in doing so (this is also the point she makes about the necessary failures of Sade's project). Beauvoir also discusses at length how some women contest their role as Absolute Other. Not withstanding various passages that do

suggest that woman's alterity is absolute and inescapable, taken over all *The Second Sex* does not portray women as in such a static a condition as Lundgren-Gothlin claims.

[vii] In Chapter 5 we will see how she takes up the issue of abstraction in the specific case of the trial of Brasillach for treason in 1945.

[viii] Beauvoir frequently refers to the making a person into a "thing" [*une chose*]. Her meaning is similar to Honneth's and could also be translated as "reification" instead of "objectification." However, as the verb "to reify" [*réifier*] was already in circulation in French in the 1940s, and since Beauvoir did not choose to use it I have remained with the term "objectification" as my translation here.

Introducing the idea of "fictive reification," Honneth observes "just how improbable true cases of reification are for the social world as a whole," and he goes on to make the following distinction: "fictive reification – cases in which other persons are treated *as if* they were mere things – is part and parcel of some of the more intensified forms of human action. In the case of both sexuality and cruelty [these cohere in sadism, of course], we are familiar with plenty of situations in which it appears that the other is nothing but an object to be dealt with at will, but these forms of reification have their stimulus in the fact that beneath the surface we remain aware of the ontological difference between persons and things" (2008, 157). The idea of "fictive reification" also has the benefit of allowing us to examine how objectification may take place to different degrees: the "as if" may move closer to being literal in some instances than others.

[ix] Although Beauvoir affirms the significance of subjectivity and individual agency far more than Michel Foucault, there are strong affinities between her account of the ubiquity of relations of oppression in modern societies and his conception of power as a web in which all are positioned and produced. However, Beauvoir examines the different *qualities* of such webs of power and, unlike Foucault, she asks to whose specific benefit they usually operate.

[x] Indeed the phenomenological tradition is where Beauvoir explicitly locates herself philosophically, as working in the mode of Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (TSS 2010 46; DS I 73).

[xi] However, to recall, her Marxism is not the "orthodox" communist Marxism, prevalent in France in the 1940s, but instead has strong affinities with the "early" Marx. See chapter III of *The Second Sex*, "The Point of View of Historical Materialism" (TSS 53-60; DS I 96-106), for her critique of Engels' reduction of women's oppression merely to a matter of private property and class relations. It should be noted (but has not often been) that Beauvoir ends *The Second Sex* with an enthusiastic endorsement of the young Marx's vision of an emancipated society as one in which women are free. Declaring, "one could not state it better," she cites from the Paris manuscripts as follows: "The immediate, natural and necessary relation of human being to human being is also *the relation of man to woman*… From this relationship man's whole level of development can be assessed. It follows from the character of this relationship how far *man* has become, and has understood himself as, a *species-being*, a *human being*. The relation of man to woman is the *most natural* relation of human being to human being. It indicates, therefore, how far man's *natural* behaviour has become *human*, and how far his *human* essence has become a *natural* essence for him, how far his *human nature* has become *nature* for him"(TSS 766; DS II 662-663). Marx's notion of what is "natural" here does not, of course, refer to some vision of a previous state of nature, or to a biological condition. Rather "nature" refers to the possibility of a non-alienated existence, in which human potentiality (for men and women alike) may be fulfilled. I cite the Marx passage as given in the English translation by Bottomore (Marx 1964, 154).

[xii] "We will begin by discussing the points of view taken on woman by biology, psycho-analysis, and historical materialism. We will then try to show exactly how 'feminine existence' [*la <<réalité feminine>>*] has been constituted, why woman has been defined as the Other and what, from men's point of view, have been the consequences" (TSS 17 TA; DS I 32).

[xiii] Young notes she borrows this useful concept from Nancy Folbre (1994).

[xiv] An important goal for Sartre in the *Critique* is to show the negative historical effects of seriality on the conditions of French workers. Atomized and each interchangeable, unorganized workers have competed for

jobs with the effect of worsening wages and conditions for each other. But, as we see here, Sartre's mode of analysis may be extended to other collectives.

[xv] I explore some of the uses of Sartre's notion of seriality for gender and feminist analysis more fully in Kruks (2001, chapter 4). In Kruks (2010) I discuss the interconnections among the later works of Beauvoir and Sartre more fully than I do here, showing how Beauvoir takes up and integrates aspects of *Critique of Dialectical Reason* for her own purposes in *The Coming of Age*. See also Iris Young's argument that conceptualizing gender as "seriality" permits feminist politics to maintain the important category of "women" while avoiding the twin perils of essentialism and identity politics. Young gives some further examples of how women today experience seriality: being a woman "means that I check one box rather than another on my driver's license application, that I use maxipads, wear pumps… I experience a serial interchangeability between myself and others. In the newspaper I read about a woman who was raped, and I empathize with her because I am rapeable, the potential object of male appropriation. But this awareness depersonalizes me, constructs me as Other to her and Other to myself in a serial interchangeability rather than defining my sense of identity" (1994, 731).

[xvi] As such, woman also mediates for man between nature and the human. As Shannon Mussett puts it: "In a peculiar doubling, woman not only acts as the embodiment of nature for man (thus making his separation from nature *and* woman easier) but because she cannot possibly *be* the totality of nature, woman can act as a mediating tool *between* man and nature" (2006, 281).

[xvii] Deutscher clarifies this important point in Beauvoir's thinking well: "her point is that the subjugation of women is itself a paradox. Women are equal [to men], and they are definable in terms of an irrecusable freedom. If they are nonetheless constrained, if there has been a diminishing not only of their material conditions but also of the very freedom of consciousness that, via a definition accepted by Beauvoir, is not diminishable, the paradox would belong to women's situation rather than to a deficiency in her understanding of freedom" (2008, 9). Butler also describes this paradox in more general terms when she writes that "the norm [of the human] continues to produce the nearly impossible paradox of a human who is no human" (2009, 76).

[xviii] This identification of "the human" with the male extends across social classes. Although it is above all within leisured elites that the myths of Woman have been elaborated they pass into general social currency, and they offer an attractive affirmation of their superiority also to lower class men: "The taste for eternity at a bargain price, for a pocket-sized absolute, which one finds in most men, is satisfied by myths" (TSS 272 TA; DS I 405). Here, a general ideational system merges with material systems of constraint to shape the oppressive situations of individual women.

[xix] She argues that the world of the most oppressed is similar to the serious world of the child: "there are beings whose life slips by in an infantile world because, having been kept in a state of servitude and ignorance, they have no means of breaking the ceiling which is stretched over their heads" (EA 37; PMA 54).

[xx] Beauvoir does, however, suggests that there is something ontologically unique to oppressive man-woman relationships: they had no specific beginning (see, for a discussion Kail 2006). We can (even though we may argue over the precise timing) date the emergence of slavery or wage labor, and this means that they have a contingent quality that the oppression of women, linked to (though not explained by) dimorphic sexual reproduction lacks. We can conceive of a world without slavery, or racism, or wage labor. But (high-tech, high-price, fantasies notwithstanding), there could not be an on-going human world without heterosexual reproduction. However, what follows from reproduction by way of kinship or family forms, by way of oppressive or free gender relations, and so forth, is equally contingent.

[xxi] Beauvoir identifies technicism, positivism, a-historicism, "other-directedness," and money used as the criterion of what is good, as symptoms of this pervasive tendency to abstraction (ADD 383-389; AJJ 527-535). None of these tendencies are, of course, as unique to the United States as Beauvoir suggests. But she clearly encountered them in heightened form there. Much of what she says anticipates the account of American life that Marcuse was to give nearly two decades later in *One Dimensional Man* (1964). I abridge

Beauvoir's extended discussion of "abstraction" here but it builds in interesting ways on her account, in *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* of the flight into self-objectification of the sub-man and the serious man. Beauvoir is careful to point out that her portrait is itself a generalization – and that it certainly does not apply to all Americans! (ADD 387; AJJ 533).

[xxii] To the contrary, among the dominant group recognition is more likely to be sought from peers, or from superiors within their own group.

[xxiii] "As for the attitude of black people, it is of course basically one of protest and refusal; but they must also adapt themselves to the conditions they have been given, so their conduct necessarily oscillates between submission and revolt" (ADD 247; AJJ 342).

[xxiv] She does not differentiate here between men and women. Almost always referring to "Indians" as male, she does not consider how their situation may impact men and women in different ways. However, she does reflect on age differences, and she wonders how life may be altered for the future generation (ADD 191-92; AJJ 269).

[xxv] *An American Dilemma* (1944) is the title of Gunnar Myrdal's magnum opus on race in America. Since it was, at the time, deemed the authoritative study of 'the race problem,' Beauvoir presents Myrdal's work at length, using it as a key resource through which to interpret her own brief experiences and impressions (ADD 236ff; AJJ 327-328). For an insightful discussion of how Beauvoir reads Myrdal, and of the tensions and resistances that arise among her readings of race and sex as sites of oppressive difference, see especially Deutscher 2008, chapter 4.

[xxvi] Some years later, in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (a work for which Sartre wrote the preface, and part of which was first published in *Les Tempes Modernes*), Albert Memmi appropriately described such use of "they" as the depersonalizing "mark of the plural." He writes: "another sign of the colonized's depersonalization is what one might call the mark of the plural. The colonized is never characterized in an individual manner; he is entitled only to drown in an anonymous collectivity ('They are this.' 'They are all the same')" ([1957] 1991, 85).

[xxvii] Beauvoir has been accused of voyeurism and a desire to appropriate black experience, given her insistence on walking into a black area such as this. Alfonso comments, for example: "her voyeuristic, exoticizing gaze, is put back in its place by the resisting stares of angry eyes" (2005, 95). There is some truth to this accusation, but then Beauvoir's whole trip may be seen as one of voyeurism and appropriation. She seeks to consume "America," hungrily to gulp down each and every possible experience and, as an outsider, she has no sense (until perhaps this moment) that it is less appropriate to consume some experiences than others. As Deutscher points out, there is a naïve lack of reflection on Beauvoir's part about the nature of foreign travel and travel writing: "the questions of form that had earlier preoccupied Beauvoir vanish and she supposes that methodological problems are not hers insofar as she undertakes what she apparently understands to be the simple project of recounting her travel experiences" (2008, 66).

[xxviii] She notes that she finds less hostility towards whites in Harlem than in the South. She does, however, encounter overt and hostile racism in New York – on the part of whites as she and a white friend travel back downtown from Harlem in the company of Wright (ADD 276; AJJ 382).

[xxix] "It would never occur to a man to write book on the particular situation of males within humanity. If I want to define myself, I first have to state, 'I am a woman'" (TSS 5 TA; DS I 14).

[xxx] Deutscher rightly observes that "The encounters Beauvoir has with racial and cultural difference in *America Day by Day* take place 'elsewhere' and within communities described as in some ways self-enclosed" (2008, 132). However, this is not surprising since Beauvoir is so profoundly trapped in her outsider status as a white tourist.

[xxxi] To recall, Beauvoir had begun preliminary work on *The Second Sex* prior to her trip to America but she wrote most of it afterwards. Although Simons makes a plausible case that Myrdal's work was influential in showing Beauvoir how to move beyond the more individualistic and subjectivist perspective of her earlier existentialism, other influences were also at work. In particular, Beauvoir was also much interested in the path-breaking structuralist anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss. She read the proofs of his book on kinship structures while she was writing the first volume of *The Second Sex,* and she cites it as providing evidence for the ubiquitous and fundamental presence of systems of dualistic opposition in human cultures (TSS 7; DS I 16-17). She also wrote an extensive review of the book (*The Elementary Structures of Kinship*) for *Les Temps modernes*.

[xxxii] The English translation renders this title as "Old Age Seen From Without," a formulation that misses Beauvoir's appropriation of the idea of "exteriority" from Sartre's *Critique*. Because the English translation of *The Coming of Age* preceded that of the *Critique* by several years, English conventions for translating Sartre's neologisms were not yet in place. I have frequently altered the translation of *The Coming of Age*, in order to make Beauvoir's significant use of Sartre's terminology more visible.

[xxxiii] In the Preface Beauvoir writes as follows: "Every human situation can be viewed from without [*en extériorité*] – as seen from the point of view of others – and from within [*en intériorité*], insofar as the subject assumes it while transcending it. For others, the aged man is an object of knowledge; for himself, he has a lived experience of his condition. In the first part of the book I shall adopt the first view point: I shall examine what biology, anthropology, history and contemporary sociology have to tell us about old age. In the second I shall endeavor to describe the way in which the aged man interiorizes his relationship with his body, with time, and with others" (CA 10 TA; V 16). As with *The Second Sex*, most of the materials Beauvoir draws on for her phenomenology come from the more literate and literary European classes, but now from the men of these classes. There is also a strong autobiographical element to the account of "being-in-the world." As Beauvoir notes in her autobiographical volume *All Said and Done,* just as she had wanted to understand woman's situation since it was her own, so now, on the threshold of old age, she also wanted to understand this condition. (ASD 130-31; TCF 183). For an exploration of the similarities between Beauvoir's autobiographical account of her own aging and the account offered in *The Coming of Age* see Strasser 2005-06.

[xxxiv] The feminine form, *la vieillarde*, exists in French, although it is not commonly used.

[xxxv] However, some data on aged women is provided and there is a discussion of sexual desire among the elderly of each sex. Beauvoir also notes that elderly women more commonly suffer from "melancholia" than men (CA 495; V 520) – surely an indication that old age is not easier for them.

[xxxvi] Today, as a cohort of wealthy 'baby boomers' become aged, the topic of aging is far less taboo than in 1970. To the contrary, the wealthy aged have become an important market for diverse commodities and services, and they are more of an organized voice in politics than Beauvoir could have anticipated. But even so old age generally remains a profoundly despised condition, and there still remains a "conspiracy of silence" about the less visible – and far more numerous – aged poor.

[xxxvii] "'Life is a long preparation for something that never happens,' said Yeats. There comes a moment when one knows that one is no longer getting ready for anything and understands that one was deluded in believing one was advancing towards a goal" (CA 491 TA; V 516-517).

[xxxviii] She writes: "An analytical description of the various aspects of old age is therefore not enough: each reacts upon the others and is affected by them, and it is in the indeterminate movement of this circularity that old age must be grasped" (CA 9 TA; V 15-16).

[xxxix] "A hypocritical sense of decency forbids a capitalist society to get rid of 'useless mouths'. But it allows them only just enough to keep them on this side of death" (CA 241; V 257-258).

[xl] For even when our bodies begin to suffer from various disabilities of age, such as rheumatism, we will not see these as symptoms of "old age" until we have, through others, interiorized and assumed that condition. Until this time, "we fail to see that [such symptoms] represent a new status. We remain what we were, with the rheumatism as something additional," (CA 285; V 303).

[xli] Beauvoir is drawing here on Sartre's notion of *exi*s in the *Critique.* Exis is a condition of inertia so severe that it precludes the ability to engage in further meaningful action (*praxis*). In a condition of exis the *very being* of a person comes to be constituted by their membership in an unchosen, passively formed, "collective." In exis, the self is so fully constituted from without that the possibility of future praxis is foreclosed. Selfhood now comes to be defined, in it fixity, above all by a person's "being," and no longer by their actions ([1960] 1976, 255). McBride notes that Sartre is adapting for his own use the Aristotelian notion of exis (or, more properly transliterated, hexis). For Aristotle, hexis, meaning habit, is conceived as a desirable component of education; but for Sartre it carries only the negative connotation of the blockage of the possibility of praxis (McBride 1991, 121-2).

[xlii] Beauvoir quotes Dr. Johnson's nice example: "There is a wicked inclination in most people to suppose an old man decayed in his intellects. If a young or middle-aged man, when leaving a company, does not recollect where he has laid his hat, it is nothing and people laugh. But if the same inattention is discovered in an old man, people will shrug up their shoulders and say, 'His memory is going'" (CA 479 TA; V 504).

[xliii] In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir uses the term *les sous-hommes* [sub-men] to describe those who, rather than run the risks and assume the responsibilities associated with free action, try in bad faith try to make themselves as passive and thing-like as possible. The sub-man's acts "are never positive choices, only flights. He cannot prevent himself from being a presence in the world, but he maintains this presence on the plane of bare facticity" (EA 42-45; PMA 61-65). But here, Beauvoir is suggesting that this becomes a *condition* for the aged: that is, it is imposed on them without their consent.

[xliv] As Beauvoir said a few years later: "The split in class is very important. There is an immense difference between an old tramp and an old oil millionaire. One can just imagine, though it doesn't exist yet, a movement of solidarity among women; but one can't possible imagine solidarity among the old" (cited in Moorhead 1974).

[xlv] She gives a couple of extended examples of more positive experiences of old age: Victor Hugo (CA 505-511; V 531-537) and Lou Andreas-Salomé (CA 518-19; V 544-545), both of whom were writers.

[xlvi] This phenomenon is often explored now through the lenses of "intersectionality." However, the concept is used so variously that I don't find it very helpful. For an excellent survey of the diversity of conceptions and uses of "intersectionality" in both North American and European research see Bilge, 2010.

[xlvii] "In all civilizations and still today, she inspires horror in man: the horror of his own carnal contingence, that he projects on her" (TSS 167; DS I 249). There are some intriguing anticipations of Kristeva's notion of "abjection" in Beauvoir's treatment of the disgust that female and aged bodies may incite (Kristeva 1982).

[xlviii] Alfonso, for example, writes, drawing on Zizek: "It is what we feel as lacking in ourselves, and our own tortured relationship to our own desires, that makes us susceptible to racist fear, guilt and hatred" (2005, 98). On the vicious circle of guilt and racism see also Memmi [1957] 1991, especially 45-76.

[xlix] "One of the most characteristic and ubiquitous features of the world as experienced by the oppressed is the double-bind situations in which options are reduced to very few and all of them expose one to penalty, censure or deprivation" (Frye 1983, 2). For example, today, the young woman who flouts norms of sexual restraint may be labeled "promiscuous" while the one who does not is "frigid."

ABBREVIATIONS FOR THE MAIN WORKS BY BEAUVOIR CITED

Frequently cited works appear in the text using the abbreviations listed below.

Each in-text citation provides the page(s) of the English translation used, followed by the page(s) of the French edition consulted. Because many of the English translations of Beauvoir's work are of poor quality, I have frequently altered them. The abbreviation 'TA' means that the translation has been altered.

The full bibliographic references for these frequently cited works are provided below. Where I have not used the first French edition of a work, the original date of publication is provided at the end of the reference in square parentheses.

Works by Beauvoir that are only cited occasionally are included in the general bibliography.

ADD *America Day by Day*. Translated by Carol Cosman. Foreword by Douglas Brinkley. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

AJJ *L'Amérique au jour le jour: 1947*. Coll. Folio. Paris: Gallimard, 2001 [1954].

ASD *All Said and Done*. Translated by Patrick O'Brian. Introduction by Toril Moi. New York: Paragon House, 1993.

CA *The Coming of Age*. Translated by Patrick O'Brian. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1972. [The British edition is entitled *Old Age*. London: André Deutsch and Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972].

DS I *Le deuxième sexe*, Vol. 1. Coll. Folio. Paris: Gallimard, 1989 [1949].

DS II *Le deuxième sexe*. Vol. II. Coll folio. Paris: Gallimard, 1988 [1949].

EA *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Translated by Bernard Frechtman. New York: The Citadel Press, 1967.

EE “Eye for Eye.” In *Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophical Writings*. Edited by Margaret A. Simons. Translated by Kristana Arp, 245-260.Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004.

FA I *La force de l'âge*, Vol. I. Coll. Folio. Paris: Gallimard, 1981 [1960].

FA II *La force de l'âge*, Vol II. Coll. Folio. Paris: Gallimard, 1977 [1960].

FBS “Faut-il brûler Sade?” In *Privilèges,*11-89. Paris: Gallimard, 1955.

MWBS “Must We Burn Sade?” Translated by Annette Michelson. In *The Marquis de Sade: an Essay by Simone de Beauvoir With Selections from His Writings Chosen by Paul Dinnage*. London: New English Library, 1972

OO “Oeil pour oeil.” In *L'existentialisme et la sagesse des nations*, 125-165. Paris: Editions Nagel, 1948.

PMA *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*. Paris: Gallimard, 1947.

TCF *Tout compte fait*. Coll. Folio. Paris: Gallimard, 1978 [1972].

TSS *The Second Sex*. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. New York: Alfred Knopf, 2010

V *La vieillesse*. Paris: Gallimard, 2005 [1970].

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