

**Charles University**

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## **Bachelor thesis**

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**Tělesná situovanost a subjektivita v dílech Simone de  
Beauvoir a Luce Irigaray**

**Embodiment and subjectivity in the works of Simone de  
Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray**

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### **Declaration**

I hereby declare that I have written this thesis independently, using only the mentioned and duly cited sources and literature, and that the work has not been used in another university study program or to obtain the same or another academic title.

In Prague on 16.7.2023

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**Abstract:** This thesis is concerned with the topic of embodiment and subjectivity in the works of two key authors of the French feminist theory – Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray. Its goal is to both elucidate the positions of both of the philosophers, as well as attempt to find a common ground between their respective positions, that is the positions of existential feminism and psychoanalysis-influenced feminism. In doing so this work likewise deals with a number of varying interpretations of both of the authors and discussed their respective merits.

**Key words:** Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, feminist theory, embodiment, subjecthood, psychoanalysis, phenomenology

**Abstrakt:** Tato práce se zabývá problematikou tělesné situovanosti a subjektivity v dílech dvou klíčových autorek francouzské feministické teorie – Simone de Beauvoir a Luce Irigaray. Jejím cílem je jednak osvětlit pozice obou filozofek, ale také se pokusit o nalezení společných bodů těchto pozic, tedy pozic existenciálního feminismu a feminismu ovlivněného psychoanalýzou. V tomto projektu se nutně potýká s množstvím různých interpretací obou autorek, a tudíž diskutuje i různost těchto přístupů.

**Klíčová slova:** Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, feministická filozofie, tělesnost, subjektivita, psychoanalýza, fenomenologie

## Contents

1. Introduction .....	1
2. Embodiment in <i>The Second Sex</i> .....	2
2.1 Beauvoir's critique of biological essentialism .....	2
2.2 The significance of embodiment.....	5
2.3 Is Beauvoir a (soft) determinist? .....	7
2.4 Beauvoir as a gender constructivist .....	9
2.5 Phenomenology of the body .....	11
2.6 Phenomenological subject in <i>The Second Sex</i> .....	14
3. Woman's body in (Irigarayan) psychoanalysis .....	16
3.1 Psychoanalysis and woman's body .....	16
3.2 Irigaray's reversal .....	20
3.3 The impossibility of a real binary.....	22
3.4 Irigaray, the essentializer .....	25
3.5 Phenomenology and psychoanalysis.....	26
3.6 Irigaray's corporeal phenomenology .....	28
3.7 Phenomenology between Beauvoir and Irigaray .....	30
4. Similar, yet different.....	34
4.1 Difference and equality.....	35
4.2 'Disagreement' over psychoanalysis.....	37
4.3 Body and subjecthood.....	38
4.4 Paths towards emancipation .....	41
5. Conclusion .....	43
Bibliography .....	45

## 1. Introduction

Both Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray hold unique positions in the context of not only the French feminist cannon, but within the overall feminist theory as well. One as the foundational author of existentialist feminism as well as a key theoretical inspiration to many of the second-wave feminists, the other as the key figure of psychoanalysis-adjacent feminism. While both of these claims are undoubtedly true, they likewise fail to capture the uniqueness of approach of both of these authors, relegating them mostly to their respective historical functions – the first as the impetus which has been since overcome,<sup>1</sup> and the other as a theorist of an approach which has since been largely overshadowed.<sup>2</sup> This work instead wants to view both authors' projects in their own right, and to also suggest that there is something particularly unique present in both of them which stands outside the conceptual schema of the majority of contemporary feminist theory.

Feminist theory has since the time either of the authors enjoyed their peak theoretical significance gone through a process of certain homogenization. Particular styles, terminologies, claims and approaches have reached the status of near unquestioned ubiquity, with especially the sex/gender distinction, to which Toril Moi points,<sup>3</sup> gaining a near-universal status.<sup>4</sup> Such an approach has been certainly useful in understanding identity as produced by variety of social processes and has undoubtedly led to great achievements of feminist theory through deepening the understanding of structures such as the patriarchy or the perpetuation of gendered violence. However, this strategy is likewise woefully inadequate in accounting for phenomena such as subjectivity and embodiment, which are at stake in the singular lives of any given individual.

It is this sense in which Beauvoir and Irigaray work differently. Neither of them operates inside the sex/gender dichotomy and while their works are 'structural' to a certain point, they are equally as much individual-focused.<sup>5</sup> While both *The Second Sex* and *Speculum of the Other Woman* have been attempted to be read as structural

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<sup>1</sup> As will be discussed later, this is for example the approach of Judith Butler, who rather than seeing Beauvoir's project in itself, considers it a historical steppingstone to her own theory. Butler J. (2006). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge; p. 12

<sup>2</sup> While much of Irigaray's later, more polemic works receives significant attention to this day, her earlier work and psychoanalysis-adjacent feminism suffers from a general disinterest of the contemporary feminist and cultural theory. Such is at least Irigaray own view as per Hirsh, E., Olson, G., Hirsh, E., & Brulotte, G. (1995). "Je—Luce Irigaray": A Meeting with Luce Irigaray. *Hypatia*, 10(2), 93-114.; p. 105

<sup>3</sup> Moi, Toril (1999). *What is a woman?: and other essays*. New York: Oxford University Press.; p. 1

<sup>4</sup> This is not to claim that the understanding of this distinction has not gone through a huge shift between second-wave feminists and post-structuralist feminists, who specifically attempted to problematize it. Nevertheless the distinction has been and still is taken near unquestionably as a baseground.

<sup>5</sup> As mentioned, the sex/gender dichotomy is today usually presupposed in discussions such as those which this work concerns itself with. Nonetheless due to historical reasons applying this dichotomy to either of the authors risks being anachronistic at least. Due to this this work attempts to minimize the usage of this language as much as possible.

accounts of the process of becoming a woman, in which sense they are necessarily outdated as products of their respective time, they quite contrarily strive to show how any such structural account necessarily fails to account for woman's existence fully. Hence both authors aim to offer something akin to a phenomenological account of womanhood, which respects both the rootedness of the subject in the materiality of their body, alongside the necessary embeddedness in the processes of the social.

Accordingly, this work seeks to contest some of these problematic and simplistic readings of both Beauvoir's and Irigaray's work and subsequently shine light to the subjective and experiential dimensions of their projects, that is their ideas of embodiment and subjectivity, and point out how these differ and align.

## **2. Embodiment in *The Second Sex***

The chapter at hand concerns itself with starting the discussion of embodiment between Beauvoir and Irigaray through the exploration of the critique of biological determinism and essentializing contained within *The Second Sex*. From this a sufficient understanding of both concepts is gained. Such understanding can subsequently be used in discussing the common misreadings of the role body plays in *The Second Sex*, as well as discussing the topic of essentialism of Irigaray, which will be done in the next chapter. Hence the first part of the chapter deals with the text directly and is followed by a critique of certain commentaries upon the text. Finally, Beauvoir's text is placed within its proper context through its connection with the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, with the phenomenological aspect of the work being explored thoroughly.

### **2.1 Beauvoir's critique of biological essentialism**

Toril Moi has suggested that one way of understanding *The Second Sex*, specifically its first part, is Beauvoir attempting to show that any formal theory of womanhood is doomed to wind up a failure, as it ends up producing a too abstract and necessarily clichéd view of what a woman is.<sup>6</sup> This is the fundamental problem of *essentialism*, an approach which poses the existence of an *essence* of a certain something, essence imbuing women with their womanhood in this case. Such an essence is typically understood to have an ontological status of sorts; it is definite, immutable, unchanging, and importantly also universal, meaning that it imbues all women with womanhood in the same sense between them all, no matter the time or location. One of these aspiring theories of womanhood, one which seems perhaps most readily available and to which Beauvoir pays the greatest amount of attention is the approach of *biological essentialism*.<sup>7</sup> She provides helpful explication of this view:

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<sup>6</sup> *What is a woman?: and other essays.*; p. 7

<sup>7</sup> Biological essentialism has certainly proven to be the most alluring kind of essentialism up to this very day, however ways of essentializing based on social grounds or more apparently religious grounds are also existent. For example, the claim that patriarchal societal arrangement is universal, hence essential to women's social existence, and underpinned not by female biological factuality, but rather



*“Woman? Very simple, say those who like simple answers: she is a womb, an ovary; she is a female: this word is enough to define her. ... The term ‘female’ is a pejorative not because it roots woman in nature, but because it confines her in her sex.”<sup>8</sup>*

Hence as she writes, essentialism is to confine woman in her sexed body. Or so to say inscribe the meaning of womanhood within the assumed meaning of the female body as an object of biological discourse. To Beauvoir this means concretely the perpetual attribution of certain stereotypical characteristics and destinies to women, coupled with the subsequent justification of them on the bases of the supposed biological facticity of their bodies, through their femaleness. Such an approach practically leads to the universalization, or rather attempts to universalize, exactly those characteristics which narrow a woman’s destiny and weaken her grasp of the world. Alternatively, it can be said that such strategy serves to naturalize the state of social subordination of women. Concrete manifestations of this subordination are the woman’s weaker economic status, feminine stereotypes, societal expectations bearing heavier on her, societal objectification and many others problems, with which feminist theory concerns itself with.<sup>9</sup> These various biological facticities which supposedly justify this ordering however do not stem so much from the real being of the female body, but rather the culturally mediated view of it, at least up until a certain level of development of the biological sciences.<sup>10</sup> This is apparent in a number of examples Beauvoir provides, when for example the dated medico-biological beliefs about the nature of conception led to justifying a number of problematic beliefs about the nature of womanhood overall.<sup>11</sup>

Various claims about the nature of women can be found in the works of philosophers from Plotinus,<sup>12</sup> through Thomas Aquinas,<sup>13</sup> all the way to Hegel<sup>14</sup>. Many assign to her defectiveness and passivity, deem her to occupy the position of particularity and much else, not on purely philosophical bases but on biological or philosophico-biological bases. For example, Aquinas calls her misbegotten being in herself, defective in comparison to a man, appealing to Aristotle’s works on biology. Meanwhile theologically, that is not conceived in herself but as a part of humanity, she

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by the universal cultural-discursive conceiving of her specific biology has for example appeared in feminist anthropology, like Ortner, S. B. (1972). *Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?* Feminist Studies, 1(2), 5–31.

<sup>8</sup> Beauvoir, S. de. (2015). *The Second Sex*. London, England: Vintage Classics.; p. 33

<sup>9</sup> All these problems are discussed at length in *The Second Sex*, in chapters such as *Dreams, Fears, Idols, The Married Woman, The Mother, ...*

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.; p. 34

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.; p. 45

<sup>12</sup> Gerson, L. (Ed.). (2017). *Plotinus: The Enneads* (G. Boys-Stones, J. Dillon, R. King, A. Smith, & J. Wilberding, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.; III.6.19. It could be argued Plotinus is highly allegorical in this passage, nonetheless Irigaray goes into a further critique of Plotinus’s metaphysics along similar lines in Irigaray, Luce (1985). *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

<sup>13</sup> Aquinas T., *ST I*, q.92, a. 1, ad 1

<sup>14</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. (1991). *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*.; §166

is no longer such.<sup>15</sup> While Beauvoir never goes as far as to cast doubt on biological realism at large, she certainly suggests that in the case of biological determinism the case was often that preconceived notions of womanhood influenced the nature of the scientific discourses throughout history.<sup>16</sup>

Beauvoir afterward goes to great lengths in showing how any attempts to derive something about woman's nature based on the examination of biological data about animal females in general is doomed to a failure or said more clearly it is bound to be utterly fruitless.<sup>17</sup> The main problem of such a strategy is the immense wealth and diversity of nature. For each species which exemplifies something like a female passivity there are yet many others which show the very opposite. She carefully exemplifies how for every male dominated species there are still those that operate in the very opposite way, both amongst the mammalians, such as hyenas or elephants, and the insectoid species like praying mantises and bees. Still in many other species much more egalitarian division can be seen, or the division can even be hard to spot, as is the case in many bird species. And yet more different is the case of simpler organisms, where it hardly even makes sense to speak of any sex hierarchy. As Beauvoir says, it is hardly sufficient to define either of the sexes simply through their carrying of the respective gametes, as this gives only the most basic description, which while being scientifically valid says nothing meaningful at all about their specific existences.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the meaning of a female in the animal kingdom takes on radically different meanings in different animals, due to the incredible wealth of biological differences between the species themselves, the various shapes sexual differentiation takes on.

In a more analytic sense, all the various claims of biological essentialism attempt to justify woman's inessential status. This is to say a man posits himself, unquestionably, as the subject, the essential, this essential is however posited in opposition to the inessential.<sup>19</sup> Hence he exists as a subject insofar as she is relegated to the position of an object. The claim that his speech may speak the objective is mediated necessarily through the relegation of her speech and opinion to the particular. In other words, the assertion of generality of his experience is legitimized precisely through particularization of hers. In Beauvoir's language, she is the *Other* to his Absolute. The discourse of biological essentialism is one way of justifying this ordering through practically imbuing her body with the meaning which naturalizes her oppression. On this view Beauvoir's critique of essentialism as it appears in the works of above-mentioned philosophers is very much similar to the discursive analysis and critique as it is contained within Michel Foucault's<sup>20</sup> or even Irigaray's projects,<sup>21</sup> as Beauvoir

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<sup>15</sup> *ST I*, q.92, a. 1, ad 1

<sup>16</sup> *The Second Sex*; p. 42

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*; pp. 39-45

<sup>18</sup> *The Second Sex*; p. 45

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 26

<sup>20</sup> As exemplified in Foucault, M. (1978). *History of Sexuality I*

<sup>21</sup> Specifically in *Speculum of the Other Woman*.

points to how the body is made meaningful through discourse. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that Beauvoir does not go as far as to analyze how this meaning-creation likewise leads to the production certain types of subjectivities, nor does she go as far as to claim that the meaning of the body is entirely discursive.

## **2.2 The significance of embodiment**

What has been said points to the issue that biological facts are never the whole story for Beauvoir, but they are nevertheless a key part of it. Indeed, when discussing the fates of the respective females of all animal species but humans, biological facts make up all of the story. One must refrain from extending this facticity about the specific into the realm of the general however, life of a female duck tells nothing of the life of a female cat and most importantly neither can explain anything whatsoever about the life of a woman. Nature in this sense is one big discontinuity.

Beauvoir nonetheless sees one rule which can be observed throughout the animals, a progressive tendency towards greater and greater individuation.<sup>22</sup> This progress happens along the lines of how much of individuals life is dedicated to the maintenance and procreation of the species. This hierarchy can therefore be drawn all the way from what Beauvoir calls lower animals to the higher animals. For example, in the case of the many hive insects the lives of the female queens are entirely exhausted in their reproductive functions and the lives of male drones in their maintenance function. In the case of birds, the reproduction occurs once a season, is relatively quick and the part of caring for the offspring is commonly shared between the parents. Beauvoir suggests, that while there is a supposed growth of individuality throughout the animal kingdom, the females are always a step behind the males. The actions of maintenance and reproduction are more-or-less equally divided between the two sexes, with females being disadvantaged in this equation.

According to Beauvoir, across the animal kingdom this is the one definite law of the relationship between the sexes throughout all the species – of the sexes, female is the more subordinated to the species, through her body being the one adapted for procreation.<sup>23</sup> Therefore there is a difference of freedom offered to the sexes; as mentioned above, termite queen's body and therefore life is exhausted entirely in her reproductive function, whereas the body and life of the male drone are utterly expendable and less fixed. This relationship persists throughout the animal kingdom. In mammals or birds, the hardships of procreation are still carried primarily by the female, whereas the life of the male becomes increasingly richer in possibilities, less and less time has to be spent by him in the act of maintenance and this activity itself becomes increasingly more varied, the male is offered more and more opportunities for creative engagement with the world, while the female is still imprisoned within the same drudgery. Human female tops this hierarchy in a sense, with the difference between the individual freedoms and options offered to humans, and the acute

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<sup>22</sup> *The Second Sex*; p. 56

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60

awareness of the limits placed on her body due to its biological specificities most pronounced.<sup>24</sup> Hence they are the most alienated as female-subjects from their bodies, from all of the animal kingdom.

In Beauvoir's language, whereas men are free to fully realize themselves as transcendent subjects through their activities in the world, women are limited in this projecting of themselves.<sup>25</sup> The limits come not only from the social realities, such as preconceptions, but also from their own biology, that constantly grounds them in the facticity of their bodies. Consequently, the origins of a woman's status could be searched for in her body which is, as Beauvoir puts it, a victim of the species. That is to say at least to a significantly greater degree than in the case of a male body. Even through all this, Beauvoir still say:

*"... body is not a thing, it is a situation, ... Woman is weaker than man, she has less muscular strength, she runs more slowly, can lift less heavy weights, ... Her grasp on the world is thus more restricted; she has less firmness and less steadiness available for projects that in general she is less capable of carrying out. In other words, her individual life is less rich than man's. Certainly, these facts cannot be denied -- but in themselves they have no significance. ... the 'weakness' is revealed as such only in the light of the ends man proposes, the instruments he has available, and the laws he establishes."<sup>26</sup>*

This suggests the complexity with which Beauvoir views the relationship of embodiment and subjectivity, as she allows for a certain and not insignificant amount of determination by the body which is nevertheless coexistent with the claim to freedom of an individual to make of themselves what they will. What this quote suggests is that woman's bodily limitude, for example manifested in her comparative weakness to a man on average, is a weakness insofar as society values strength, whether for legitimate reasons or not. As she says, "*humanity is something other than a species: it is a historical becoming; it is defined by the way it assumes natural facticity.*"<sup>27</sup> Hence it is presumably possible to imagine a society which would possess different values and it would be a woman's body which would advantage her in some sense and vice versa in the case of men, her body occupying the position of generality and his of defective particularity. Beauvoir, however, does not invite the reader to imagine such a society.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.; p. 59

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.; p. 54-55

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.; p. 61

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.; p. 848

### 2.3 Is Beauvoir a (soft) determinist?

*The Second Sex* is notably lacking in the positive visions of feminine embodiment, with which for example Irigaray's project is filled.<sup>28</sup> This has led to some commentators suggesting that there is a kind of a residual deterministic tension contained within Beauvoir's work. Such a view does not deny that Beauvoir is both concretely advocating for the emancipation of women and also pointing towards the crucial importance of embodiment for this project, but it nevertheless claims that Beauvoir's view is that woman's body is fundamentally more limiting than man's and therefore a hurdle for this emancipation. As for example Georgia Warnke claims:

*"Beauvoir suggests that a female's sexual biology has devastated her life prospects from human prehistory onwards."*<sup>29</sup>

On this view it would be more proper to say that while woman's fate is not fully predetermined and it cannot be extrapolated fully from her body as is the case in some animals, it nonetheless still acts as an added shackle that weighs her down in becoming a fully realized subject, at least in comparison to men, who are generally not limited in this way.

At a quick and cursory glance at certain isolated passages it may at first seem that Beauvoir is indeed defending this point. Many commentators point primarily to the specific language she often uses when talking of the woman's body and her lived bodily situation.<sup>30</sup> It is true that the language of *The Second Sex* is at points noticeably visceral and negative in its connotations – women used as examples throughout the book feel intensely negative emotions concerning their bodies, such as anger, revulsion, nausea, fear and others. Still as Penelope Deutscher suggests, the usage of this phrasing may not be Beauvoir betraying her true feelings about woman's body through the language she uses.<sup>31</sup> While they are admittedly dated as she puts it, she argues instead Beauvoir ought to be read as posing a psychosomatic link, between woman's body and her social situation.<sup>32</sup> The reality of puberty may manifest in states of panic or nausea about one's body, but this is in fact only a reaction to, a feedback manifest, to a broader socially constructed judgments made about, and values placed upon the woman's body.

Another point which may be considered deterministic, Beauvoir's claims of woman's bodily limitude, is more complicated than it may seem. As showed, she definitely believes this is the case in some, if not nearly all animal species – female is the victim

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<sup>28</sup> Example of this which will be discussed later is Irigaray's *When Our Lips Speak Together* from Irigaray, Luce (1985). *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

<sup>29</sup> Warnke G. (2011). *Debating sex and gender*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; p. 6

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Deutscher P. (2016) *Dead Camp? Beauvoir on the Life and Death of Femininity Reading "The Second Sex" with Butler, Brown and Wilson* in Parker E. & Van Leeuwen A. M. (Ed.). (2018). *Differences: Re-reading Beauvoir and Irigaray*.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.; p. 78

of the species as she puts it, more or less across all of the animal kingdom.<sup>33</sup> Therefore for example Elizabeth Grosz in *Theories of Representation and Difference* classed Beauvoir into the camp of egalitarian feminists who take “negative view [of the female body],”<sup>34</sup> which is to attribute to Beauvoir the view, that female embodiment is simply said limiting for the project of women’s emancipation. Grosz’s claim is interesting mainly because of the company she places Beauvoir alongside with, that is exclusively besides Shulamith Firestone. It is a curious comparison insofar as Firestone orients her philosophy towards a technologically emancipatory horizon for women, whereas Beauvoir in essence does no such thing. While Firestone embraces the vision of freeing women from the difficulties of childbearing and birthing,<sup>35</sup> Beauvoir only mentions the benefits of contraceptives and liberal abortion policies.<sup>36</sup> But it is important to note that *The Dialectic of Sex* starts with the dedication to Beauvoir and Firestone’s project could be reasonably viewed as an expansion of a certain reading of *The Second Sex*, which could be called soft-deterministic. Even if bringing the two authors together is pointing towards a certain connection between them, there is undeniably more Beauvoir wanted to point towards other than the limits placed on women by their embodiment in itself. Nonetheless, the view that Beauvoir takes woman’s body as a negative influence in life is still rather common. It is typically embodied in the perplexingly common misunderstanding of Beauvoir message as claiming that sexual difference should be eradicated, and women must become like men.<sup>37</sup> This articulates quite directly the rawest form of the belief ascribed to Beauvoir by some readers. Tina Chanter, who commits to this exact understanding of Beauvoir’s project, says about it:

“... Beauvoir’s answer to women’s situation is to ignore the fact that the female sex is different ... This means that that not only that sexual difference is seen as irrelevant for feminism, but also that freedom is constructed as disembodied and gender-neutral transcendence.”<sup>38</sup>

This reading is in its conclusion similar to the claims made of Beauvoir by Judith Butler as will be shown, who however takes a different view of her work overall. It is still a perplexing conclusion to make, or as Moi puts it, it is an altogether bad reading of the text.<sup>39</sup> And while such a description from Moi may seem harsh, it may be adequate, as such reading of Beauvoir ignores large swaths of the text, which is to say everything concerning phenomenology. It is likewise contested by Beauvoir herself

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<sup>33</sup> *The Second Sex*; p. 49

<sup>34</sup> Grosz E. (1994). *Volatile bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*.; pp. 15-16

<sup>35</sup> Firestone S. (1970). *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*. These thoughts are most pronounced in the last chapter and conclusion.

<sup>36</sup> *The Second Sex*.; both abortions as well as domestic labor are addressed in most detail in the chapters *The Mother* and *The Married Woman* respectively.

<sup>37</sup> This precise formulation is contained within Chanter, T. (1994). *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray's Re-Writing of the Philosophers*. New York: Routledge.; p. 76.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 75

<sup>39</sup> *What is a woman?: and other essays*.; p. 112

repeatedly throughout the book, such as in quote mentioned before.<sup>40</sup> It is likewise problematic, due to the fact it accuses Beauvoir of the exact position she is criticizing throughout the entirety of her work – viewing man’s body as the absolute and woman’s as the particular. As has already been mentioned, though it is seemingly ignored by some, the bodily facticity of women may be considered limiting only insofar as society imbues different activities with differing meanings. Beauvoir could point to the fact that a society where the reverse would be the case is imaginable and possible and men in it would be considered as inherently lacking due to their biological facticity. However, such an argument is not made in *The Second Sex*, as it would likewise end in reinscribing the belief that biology should or can ground values, something Beauvoir clearly argues against. In any way, accusing Beauvoir of essentialism fails on these multiple fronts.

## 2.4 Beauvoir as a gender constructivist

Another reading of Beauvoir, one which is much more prevalent, is made up of those who view Beauvoir as a gender theorist or said more properly a kind of a proto-gender theorist. The term gender, nearing in meaning the current usage of the word, factually entered lexicons only significantly after the release of *The Second Sex*; gender entered scientific terminology around the mid-60s through the works of American psychiatrist Robert Steller<sup>41</sup>; it was most fully developed in his book *Sex and Gender*, and further trickled into feminist literature in the works of feminists like Kate Millet, Germaine Greer and Ann Oakley,<sup>42</sup> finally embedding itself as a staple of feminist theory through the classical texts such as *Traffic in Women*. It is nonetheless worth mentioning that the concept was primarily developed as a medical tool and only subsequently, through its use in feminist theory, has come to be an ontological position of the nature of sexed subjectivity.<sup>43</sup> While these developments largely postdate Beauvoir, many attempted to read *The Second Sex* as a work either already containing the distinction or attempting to develop it in some sense.

According to this reading, Beauvoir’s position would be quite diametrically opposed to the one just articulated above. Woman’s lived situation would be the effect of broad social configurations and her embodiment would take a backseat.<sup>44</sup> In a world possessing the concept of gender, it is admittedly hard to read *The Second Sex* in any other way. Many commentators, for example Georgia Warnke, point to the most famous line of the book as a proof that Beauvoir supposes a difference between one’s

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<sup>40</sup> This addresses the quote at the 6<sup>th</sup> page of this work.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.; p. 22. Robert Stollar (1924-1991) was an American psychoanalytically trained psychiatrist who formalized the concepts of gender identity and sex/gender distinction through his work with transgender patients.

<sup>42</sup> This list of names as well as a broader account of the process is contained in Heinämaa, S. (1996). *Woman — Nature, Product, Style? Rethinking the Foundations of Feminist Philosophy of Science*. In: Nelson, L.H., Nelson, J. (eds) *Feminism, Science, and the Philosophy of Science*.

<sup>43</sup> *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray's Re-Writing of the Philosophers.*; p. 40

<sup>44</sup> *What is a woman?: and other essays.*; p. 74

sex and a separately gained gender identity, which is however yet unable to articulate in the proper language.<sup>45</sup>

*“One is not born, but rather becomes, woman.”<sup>46</sup>*

To be more specific, to claim one is not born a woman but becomes one can be very easily read from within the context of gender theory as a claim that something like a pre-gendered body exists and one becomes gendered through a set of social practices. Concretely, one is born with a set of biological sexual characteristics through the recognition of which they are assigned one of either of the two genders and subsequently go through a myriad of processes which instill in them their gender identity and a feeling of gender congruence – these would be for example encounters with gender stereotypes or gendered upbringing practices. At times, it truly seems that this is what Beauvoir is tracing, a genesis of a woman brought on by innumerable facts of her life, with great attention paid to the childhood and adolescent experiences. Therefore, such an interpretation is certainly appealing.

A notable reading of Beauvoir, due to how famous it is, which goes precisely along these lines is contained within Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*. Butler views Beauvoir as a precursor to her own theory of gender performativity of sorts, reading her as positing a kind of a theory of gender acquisition.<sup>47</sup> According to Butler, Beauvoir essentially arrived at the concept of unfixed and culturally variable gender identity, which is perpetuated through a set of ritualized gender performances.<sup>48</sup> As she puts it:

*“... sex does not cause gender, and gender cannot be understood to reflect or express sex; indeed, for Beauvoir, sex is immutably factic, but gender acquired, and whereas sex cannot be changed—or so she thought—gender is the variable cultural construction of sex, the myriad and open possibilities of cultural meaning occasioned by a sexed body.”<sup>49</sup>*

This quote reveals an interesting belief Butler holds about Beauvoir – she ascribes to her certain Cartesianism.<sup>50</sup> Hence she suggests Beauvoir was on the same track as herself but could not yet properly conceive of the process of gender acquisition, having to view it as a pure voluntary and rational act of a *cogito*, what Butler calls a voluntaristic conception of gender acquisition, instead of a process embedded in a field of discursive power relations, as Butler’s own project suggests. However, this reading has been contested by a multitude of authors, mainly due to its ignoring the importance of embodiment in *The Second Sex*. According to Sara Heinämaa, Butler altogether ignores the complexity of embodiment contained within the work, in order

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<sup>45</sup> *Debating sex and gender*; p. 5

<sup>46</sup> *The Second Sex*; p. 330

<sup>47</sup> *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*; pp. 43-44

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 142

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 164



to simply paint Beauvoir as a precursor to her own theory, instead of viewing her thought in its own right, that is as an altogether different approach.<sup>51</sup> Moi likewise argues that the attribution of sex/gender dichotomy to *The Second Sex*, which Butler commits to, leads to a fundamental misreading of the book signature of the anglophone commentators as a whole.<sup>52</sup> Reasons for this being the injection of current understanding of the word 'sex' into the work, thusly ignoring both the anachronism of such an approach and the particularities of French language when compared to English.

Moi herself further calls this reading altogether wrong not only due to the misguided anachronism, but a crucial misunderstanding of the whole purpose of the book. As Moi puts it, *The Second Sex* is not a book of feminist sociology, putting forward a theory of gender-subject production through socio-cultural means, instead it is a phenomenological study akin to Frantz Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks*, exploring the various ways the unfolding of one's life is underpinned, which is not to say predetermined, by a set of constraints with which they are necessarily imbued as embodied beings.<sup>53</sup> This is to say, read the text with a close eye to its much-ignored connection to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, focusing on the precise meaning of Beauvoir's claim that "body is a situation", in the light of embodied phenomenology.

## 2.5 Phenomenology of the body

Beauvoir's intellectual heritage as a phenomenologist is stressed continually, but whether this is done by Butler or by Irigaray the line painted leads from a single starting point to the endpoint in Beauvoir – from Sartre.<sup>54</sup> This is however strange insofar as Beauvoir's central claim of body being a situation is quite clearly related to the work of Merleau-Ponty.<sup>55</sup> As has been mentioned already, many Beauvoir scholars choose to direct their attention to this precise intellectual connection. However, for this discussion it is key to first briefly outline the difference between Sartrean and Merleau-Pontian phenomenology in their respective view of the problem of the body.

Concerning Sartre's phenomenology of the body Kathrine J. Morris says in the Introduction to the anthology *Sartre on Body* that Sartre has been very overlooked in the discussions of the 'philosophers of the body'.<sup>56</sup> Morris claims this to be unfair to Sartre, while admitting it may very well be a situation of his own doing, brought on by both the textual nature and the structure of *Being and Nothingness*. Nonetheless this overlooking is particularly stark when Sartre is compared to his contemporary and repeated interlocutor Merleau-Ponty, who is typically considered a chief philosopher

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<sup>51</sup> Heinämaa, S. (1997). *What is a Woman? Butler and Beauvoir on the Foundations of the Sexual Difference*. *Hypatia*, 12(1), 20–39.; pp. 22-23

<sup>52</sup> *What is a woman?: and other essays*.; p. 5

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 67

<sup>54</sup> Heinämaa critiques this identification at length in *What is a Woman? Butler and Beauvoir on the Foundations of the Sexual Difference*.

<sup>55</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M. (2010). *Phenomenology of Perception* (D. Landes, Trans.; 1st ed.). Routledge.; pp. 124, 191

<sup>56</sup> Morris, K. J., (Ed.). (2009). *Sartre on the Body*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.; pp. 5-6

of the body. The specificities of their engagement need not to be of a special concern in this work, sufficed to say they are complicated and while some commentators accept the critique of Sartre provided by Merleau-Ponty, others hold he has misread Sartre.<sup>57</sup> Their theoretical differences are however of some considerable importance in the Beauvoir scholarship as well, for it is on the grounds of identification with Sartre that Butler says that “[in her] work ... ‘the body’ is figured as mute facticity, ...”<sup>58</sup> It is of course on this point where Heinämaa criticizes Butler, safeguarding Beauvoir through association with Merleau-Ponty.

To sketch out the difference between the two, it is best said that while Sartre pays certain attention to the lived-in body and its entanglement with the world, the attention he pays to this issue is nowhere near as exhausting as in the case of Merleau-Ponty. Importantly, his concept of freedom poses a certain difficulty in this, due to the fact Sartre views freedom in an absolute radical and individualistic sense and while such a concept may work on the level of consciousness, it starts facing issues and struggling when attempting to describe the lived being of a body in a world. In other words, through the privileged position on which Sartre places the subject in relation to the world of objects, he ends up reproducing a Cartesian subject/object dichotomy. Therefore, as Heinämaa argues, Sartre’s conception is not sufficient for Beauvoir.<sup>59</sup> It should not be ignored, that Beauvoir herself addressed the issue of her connection to both thinkers:

*“However, one might say, in the position I adopt – that of Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty – that if the body is not a thing, it is a situation: it is our grasp on the world and the outline for our projects.”<sup>60</sup>*

It is apparent, that while Moi and Heinämaa take Beauvoir as accepting Ponty’s position and Butler as her accepting Sartre’s, she herself seems to not draw a particular distinction between the two. This poses a certain problem, as the difference in their respective views of embodiment and consequently the nature of freedom is the key to understanding Beauvoir’s own position. Sonia Kruks deals with this exact issue in her *Simone de Beauvoir: Between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty*.<sup>61</sup> Her view is that Beauvoir takes on a position of a silent rejection of Sartre. In other words, while she claims in word to adhere philosophically to *Being and Nothingness*, she nonetheless does not seem to be justified in doing so.<sup>62</sup> Trotz herself does not end up deciding

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<sup>57</sup> This debate and the broader engagement of Merleau-Ponty with Sartre is discussed well by Joseph S. Catalano in his essay Catalano, J. S. (1974). *Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre's Being and Nothingness* in Morris, K. J., (Ed.). (2009). *Sartre on the Body*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>58</sup> *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*; p. 164

<sup>59</sup> *What is a Woman? Butler and Beauvoir on the Foundations of the Sexual Difference*; p. 32

<sup>60</sup> *The Second Sex*; p. 64

<sup>61</sup> Kruks, S. (1988). *Simone de Beauvoir: Between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty*. *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, 5, 74–80. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45173384>

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 76

whether this was due to respect or simply not noticing. Either way *The Second Sex* is clearly influenced by Merleau-Ponty with whom Beauvoir was deeply familiar.<sup>63</sup>

As foreshadowed by Butler's comments, the most noticeable point of divergence of Beauvoir from Sartre is precisely her view of situated freedom. It is his most famous claim of essentially unconditional absolute freedom of the subject which is necessarily at odds with Beauvoir's phenomenological account of woman's life, both as a life of a certain embedded subject and as a life of the othered subject in society. From Sartre's point of view the unconstrained freedom of the individual simply could not coexist with the existence of a whole group of people, half of the world's population nonetheless, that live in oppression. Or rather his account would be compatible, would it have claimed, that all of womankind lives in a bad faith. This is a claim Beauvoir never explicitly makes and also seems to implicitly contest the very possibility of such a claim. As she says:

*"The proletariat could plan to massacre the whole ruling class; a fanatic Jew or black could dream of seizing the secret of the atomic bomb and turning all of humanity entirely Jewish or entirely black: but a woman could not even dream of exterminating males. The tie that binds her to her oppressors is unlike any other."*<sup>64</sup>

To overcome one's bad faith and grasp one's freedom was possible for groups such as the Algerians, whom Sartre himself wholeheartedly supported in this endeavor. However, the ubiquitous distribution of women upon the Earth and their immediate interconnectedness with the men they share their lives with makes any progress to a serious class struggle inconceivable.<sup>65</sup> Beauvoir's point is even more subtle than this; the problem is not the simple impossibility of such a task, but the essential nonsensicalness of it. As she says "[t]heir opposition took shape within an original *Mitsein*, ... [it is] a fundamental unit with the two halves riveted to each other ..."<sup>66</sup> One can hardly talk of any real freedom of women to somehow overcome this situation in a Sartrean way, as it is fundamentally different to any other situation of oppression. Slaves can more or less easily imagine their lives without their masters and locals without their foreign oppressors, but women can only very hardly imagine life without men and much less hope to find a way of achieving it. Their relationship is the most primary and therefore the relation of oppression between them appears to be too.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Trotz importantly mentions that Sartre has progressed closer to Beauvoir's own position in *Critique of Dialectic Reason*, while he himself attributed the change of his opinion to Merleau-Ponty. Nonetheless this change in opinion is chronologically not relevant for this work.

<sup>64</sup> *The Second Sex*; p. 28

<sup>65</sup> Nonetheless there are still those pointing towards the advantages of this ubiquity, would an actual arrival at violent feminine struggle be achieved. This strategy for overturning patriarchy is discussed in Land, N. (1988). *Kant, Capital, and the Prohibition of Incest*, Third Text, 2:5, 83-94.

<sup>66</sup> *The Second Sex*; p. 29

<sup>67</sup> This is why both Shulamith Firestone and Karl Marx chose to view the relationship of oppression between women and men as the most foundational as well.

Sartre's position does not lend itself well to conceptualizing the type of a problem which is of concern to Beauvoir, that is how to conceptualize woman as both free and limited by her body in a particular way, but Merleau-Ponty's view does. Indeed, while Sartre's radical freedom does not allow for a constraint-proper, Merleau-Ponty's conception rests on the necessity of constraint implied by any embodiment. One's being-in-the-world and having a body implies both freedom and corresponding constraint in their encountering of the world.<sup>68</sup> As he illustrates on the example of one's view encountering a mountain, to paraphrase: it is of little importance whether I have chosen or planned to climb the steep mountain in front of me, the mountain appears to me high nonetheless, as it simply both dwarfs the human stature and exceeds the body's capacity to scale it.<sup>69</sup> Here Merleau-Ponty points towards a key difference between him and Sartre. To elucidate this through comparison, whereas for Sartre the limits exist in the world only insofar as the subject projects themselves into the world, for Merleau-Ponty views this as a bidirectional relationship between us – encountering the world while situated in a body – and the world. This is also readily apparent by the usage of the phrase *corps propre* which is very clearly positioned against the Sartrean subject-object duality. The key distinction is accordingly that the subject is not a pure disconnected *cogito* encountering the world, projecting itself into it as a purely one-way operation, but an embedded thing, intertwined with its body, which still projects itself into the world and inscribes meaning upon it, but reciprocally also has meaning and limitude inscribed upon itself by the world.

## 2.6 Phenomenological subject in *The Second Sex*

This is the understanding of the subject which underpins Beauvoir's account of woman's subjectivity and embodiment. Reading her accordingly therefore clears out difficulties encountered by the two readings which have been previously criticized in this chapter.

Firstly, the biological description of generalized female and specifically woman's body was not, as Grosz has suggested, in any way meant to signify that women are limited in their emancipatory struggle by their bodies. Instead, the chapter is concerned with something altogether different – outlining the particular situation female subjects find themselves embedded in. Or better yet, outlining a specific way the markedness of certain bodies necessarily shapes their entanglement in the world. One can imagine many other 'markings', which would influence the life of an individual or individuals to a greater or a lesser degree; they may be given characteristics, such as color of the skin,<sup>70</sup> sexual orientation<sup>71</sup> or anything else, or acquired, such as an age or a crippling. All of these mark the subject's body in a certain way and influence the way the world

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<sup>68</sup> *Phenomenology of Perception*; p. 507

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*; pp. 511-513

<sup>70</sup> Phenomenological exploration of which is done by Fanon. Fanon, F. (1967). *Black skin, White masks*. New York: Grove.

<sup>71</sup> This is a project Sara Ahmed undergoes in Ahmed, S. (2006). *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke University Press.

seems to them and proportionally influence the way the world influences and sees them. Importantly, the fact that the world may be a better or a worse place to various individuals by the virtue of the world itself being socially 'made' for someone else is not denied by this claim. In other words, Beauvoir can simultaneously affirm that the female body offers women certain ways of encountering the world, and that society nonetheless values certain other ways of engaging with the world purely due to social reasons. Hence every subject is constrained in a respect to something; woman's body may indeed be limited in some senses, so can be a non-abled body or a colored body, nevertheless this limitude appears as a limitude only as long as the societies values primarily benefit subjects who are men (or white able-bodied men to follow the example used), and as long as the state of their generality is further naturalized.

Secondly, it is now apparent that the social constructivist reading of Beauvoir does not do justice to her philosophy. This is clear for a number of reasons, most apparently in case of the much-debated famous sentence, "*One is not born, but rather becomes, woman*". This sentence has been interpreted in a number of ways, in the context of anglophone scholarship it was most commonly understood as a nudge towards the gender theory, as was exemplified on the case of Butler's reading of Beauvoir earlier. But this is not the only possible way of understanding it. Its point may not be that one is born of the female sex, but has to wait to acquire the woman-gender through a set of societal procedures and processes quite disconnected from the sex, but rather, as Moi puts it, "*I constantly make myself the woman I am*".<sup>72</sup> If Beauvoir says that the body is a situation, the body-subject is permanently in the state of becoming themselves in the relation to the freedom and the necessarily corresponding constraints of this freedom. One is not born a woman, but through their encountering of the world situated in a certain body finds themselves in the ongoing process of making themselves and being made into some kind of a woman. This is to say one becomes a woman through their entangling in the world while being a human possessing a specific biological body – a proper meaning of woman itself is however situated within historical and cultural contexts. Beauvoir's understanding is clearly at odds with any number of gender-based theoretical approaches, whether they are structuralist, poststructuralist or posthumanist, and therefore they cannot be ascribed to Beauvoir in any real way. Whereas those approaches necessarily see 'woman' gender as more-or-less unrelated to some biological facticity and as an effect of social power, Beauvoir clearly sees the meaning of woman as contingent and as an effect of a lived experience diverse between individuals both in time and space.

Woman therefore reveals herself as not being the result of various power functions operating inside the society, nor as a pure biological given. As has been shown, the first position would certainly seem to Beauvoir to be woefully naïve, ignoring how absolutely crucial the materiality of the body is for any functional theory of subjectivity. However, concerning the second position she would most certainly agree

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<sup>72</sup> *What is a woman?: and other essays*; p. 74

that it is definitely true when discussing all of the animal females, exempting the human. A generalized woman, as much as we can talk of her in Beauvoir's philosophy, is all that is biologically given, encountering a world which is for her not simply a mute materiality, but is imbued with meanings, values and norms which she herself engages with and takes part in their creating.

### **3. Woman's body in (Irigarayan) psychoanalysis**

To view works of Luce Irigaray and Simone de Beauvoir as diametrically opposed to each other, with one being a philosopher of difference, whereas the other of emancipatory sameness has become a rather common understanding of the difference between the two.<sup>73</sup> There is something to be said about how Beauvoir focuses on the societal mechanisms of othering of women, their exclusion from universality, whereas Irigaray looks towards how women are unable to truly signify their difference in the current societal ordering.<sup>74</sup> However while such reading truly points towards a certain difference of focus between the two, this difference can also be viewed as a difference in the question they each pose for themselves, not a fundamental difference of their theories overall. That is the reading which for example Heinämaa suggests, that both authors can be viewed as developing on the same project – a phenomenology of the body, only coming to from slightly different positions.<sup>75</sup>

For that reason, this chapter first describes the view of female embodiment and subjectivity in psychoanalysis itself and from here continues into the complexities of Irigaray's own view. Therefore, her view of feminine subjectivity and embodiment will be discussed alongside her critique of psychoanalysis. Next the accusations of essentialism which have been levied against her account will be showcased. Finally, it will be considered to what degree is it fair to dub her approach as phenomenological and in this sense similar to Beauvoir's own view.

#### **3.1 Psychoanalysis and woman's body**

It is necessary to begin any discussion of Irigaray's view of womanhood with a preliminary setting of the grounds through the discussion of the complicated relationship psychoanalysis holds towards the feminine subject. When discussing Irigaray alongside Beauvoir this is also an opportune moment to also show Beauvoir's view of and ultimate rejection of psychoanalysis, at least insofar as it attempts to theorize the woman.

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<sup>73</sup> The commonness of this view is discussed for example in *What is a Woman? Butler and Beauvoir on the Foundations of the Sexual Difference.*; footnote 4 or *Differences: Re-reading Beauvoir and Irigaray.*; p. 5

<sup>74</sup> *Woman — Nature, Product, Style? Rethinking the Foundations of Feminist Philosophy of Science.*; p. 289

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*; p.291

*The Second Sex* contains a short section in which Beauvoir discusses and subsequently rejects psychoanalytic determination of the feminine subject.<sup>76</sup> Description of Freud's theory of formation of feminine subject is provided alongside this, that is the account of *feminine Oedipus complex*, which Beauvoir calls *Electra complex*.<sup>77</sup> Just like the typical boy Oedipus complex Electra complex begins in the phallic stage of development, in this case with the girl realizing herself as lacking a penis. This leads to *penis envy*, as it is something the girl wishes herself to possess, or rather she sees herself as being robbed of; in other words she comes to view herself as castrated.<sup>78</sup> This envy further turns into a desire for having a child as a substitute (as Freud puts it instead of desiring to possess a penis she desires penis-child<sup>79</sup>) and a complimentary desire for her father and for having a relationship with him, coupled with a corresponding hatred for her mother, who is both a competitor in the fight over father's affection and the potential castrator. This tension should ideally be resolved in the girl relinquishing her desire for her father and replacing it with a generalized heterosexual desire as well as accepting her mother as a role model in order to one day attract a man like her father. As is apparent and as Freud himself admits, this makes Electra complex be a secondary psychic formation stemming from castration complex,<sup>80</sup> which means that the whole account of Electra complex entirely lies on the idea of penis envy. This runs contrary to the way Oedipus occurs in boys, where it is a primary psychic formation and castration anxiety is only secondary.

Beauvoir critiques Freud's account precisely on the idea of penis envy. She contends that Freud does not provide a sufficient argument for the existence of this phenomena.<sup>81</sup> It is supposedly reasonable to suggest the girl perceives a lack, but it is equally possible to suppose she herself perceives the male as defective, as possessing a strange growth. Still another possibility, a certainly common one, is for the girl to simply not perceive this difference in the correct time set by Freud and still end up with a completely normal development. This criticism largely succeeds at destabilizing Freud's self-admittedly cursory description of girl's development. Nonetheless it should be noted that psychoanalysis already at the time of writing of *The Second Sex* had alternative theories that attempted to correct for the original shortcomings and minimize or altogether remove the concept of penis envy, such as in

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<sup>76</sup> *The Second Sex*; chapter *The Psychoanalytic Point of View*

<sup>77</sup> It should be noted that Beauvoir seemingly misattributes the term *Electra complex* to Sigmund Freud, when it was Carl Jung who coined it (originally in his New York lectures in 1912, which were later published under the name *Versuch einer Darstellung der psychoanalytischen Theorie* in 1913). This mistake is also present in *The Dialectic of Sex* of Shulamith Firestone. Even though it was Jung who came up with the term and Freud never came to using it, it still is structurally identical with what Freud originally called *feminine Oedipus complex* or simply *Oedipus complex in girls*. For clarity this work further uses the term Electra complex when talking of Beauvoir's description of feminine Oedipus complex, but in other contexts refrains from it.

<sup>78</sup> Freud, S. (1925). *Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes* in Burke, N. (Ed.). (1998) *Gender and Envy*; p. 22

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*; p.24

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*; p.25

<sup>81</sup> *The Second Sex*; pp.68-72

the case of Melanie Klein.<sup>82</sup> Beauvoir does not provide a further critique of either the shortcomings of psychoanalysis overall, or of views other than Freud's.<sup>83</sup> Irigaray herself criticizes Freud and implicitly Lacan as well on these exact grounds, which is to say she contends they both take the male biology as default and consequently can only imagine the feminine as a lack, essentially reproducing Beauvoir critique on a larger scale.<sup>84</sup> However, Lacan does more than just simply copy Freud's view.

An undeniable shortcoming of Freud's account is its reliance on pseudo-biological explanation of Oedipus complex, as Grosz puts it.<sup>85</sup> This shortcoming is repeated in a different way also by Melanie Klein. It is only in Lacan where the view of mother/woman as concretely castrated in a real sense is overcome. To Lacan the mother's lack, or in other words the perceived castrated status of the mother, does not signify an actual anatomical difference of her body, instead it stands for a symbolic lack carried by the relationship between the mother and the father. In other words, it is a recognition of the lacking in the symbolic sense on the side of one of the parents, through their relation of authority to the other parent. As Lacan would put it, the lack on the side of the mother is concretely perceived both in reverence in the pronunciation of, as well as the typically authoritative usage of the *Name-of-the-Father*, which itself is the locus of *Oedipal prohibition*, the prohibitor of incest, as well as the conferrer of identity of the subject. It is through the father that the child enters the *symbolic order*, that is the realm of culture and language.<sup>86</sup> Only in this the child, not yet possessing the *symbolic phallus*, marker of male privilege, comes to realize itself to be a girl or a boy, a castrated or a non-castrated subject.<sup>87</sup>

Oedipal structure in Lacan therefore overcomes the Freud's reliance on the real lack of a penis through its introduction of psychic registers, mainly the symbolic order. The child gains her sexed identity as a woman, castrated subject, through occupying a status of a girl, juvenile woman, in the symbolic order and afterwards finally coming to identify herself with her mother, an already castrated subject.<sup>88</sup> Subject formation is therefore necessarily a-sexed-subject-formation for Lacan, but the connection of biology to this sexing is rather tenuous.<sup>89</sup> The subsequent identification with the mother in order to gain the father is in a sense analogous to Freud's description of feminine Oedipal complex.

To be a subject and to gain access to language therefore means precisely to acquire 'gender' in Lacan's view. Only through acquiring a meaningful position in relation to

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<sup>82</sup> For further information Spillius, E., Milton, J., Garvey, P., Couve, C. & Steiner, D. (2011). *The New Dictionary of Kleinian Thought*.; pp. 103-125.

<sup>83</sup> Beauvoir herself stresses she does not intend to attack psychoanalysis as a whole, even as she takes a few digs at both the orthodoxy and incessant flexibility of thought that permeate it.

<sup>84</sup> The similarities of their critiques of psychoanalysis will be discussed in more detail further on.

<sup>85</sup> Grosz, E. (1990). *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*.; p. 74

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 34

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*; pp. 70-71

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Fink, B. (1995). *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*. Princeton University Press.; p. 108



the symbolic phallus, general signifier of desire – either possessing it or lacking it – can one become subjectivized.<sup>90</sup> Importantly, it is not prelinguistic bodily reality that underpins the subject, subject is formed by as well as forever embedded in the symbolic order; therefore the experience of the body itself is mediated for the subject through the symbolic order. Gender as a formation of symbolic order is consequently necessarily a construct maintained through language as a specific, variable cultural formation. As Fink says about this:

*“... men and women are defined differently with respect to language, that is, with respect to symbolic order. ... masculinity and femininity are defined as different kinds of relations to the symbolic order.”<sup>91</sup>*

The difference implied here, however, does not signify an ‘equal, but different’ kind of difference. Quite the opposite, due to the symbolic order being centered on the phallus it is only men who can properly be said to have entered it. Feminine subjects remain irrepresentable and cannot be understood to gain a proper subjecthood on the level of men. All this is not to commit to some critique of Lacan, as Lacan has articulated this explicitly in *Seminar XX: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*. Here Lacan says very explicitly what this different kind of relationship Fink talks of implies:

*“‘Woman’ is a signifier, the crucial property of which is that it is the only one which cannot signify anything, and this is simply because it grounds woman’s status in the fact that she is not-whole. ... The fact remains she is excluded by the nature of things.”<sup>92</sup>*

The irrepresentability and exclusion of the feminine subject from symbolic order is therefore a necessary outcome of the ‘nature of things’. The ‘not-wholeness’ mentioned does not signify a ‘less-than-the-whole’, but instead a certain overflowing of the whole, an ‘always-partially-outside-the-whole’. This concretely means that while the man is whole, as he is entirely exhausted in the totalizing *phallic function* or *phallic jouissance*, woman is never wholly confined in it.<sup>93</sup> She is, as Freud already foreshadowed in his own theories, split between the phallic jouissance and something else. As Lacan crucially notes, this other jouissance must not be conceived of as complimentary as it is in fact only supplementary. Importantly, due to the linkage of phallic function and symbolic order this ‘supplementary jouissance’ can not be said to properly exist or be signifiable.<sup>94</sup> Hence the woman who experiences it knows it exists, but it cannot be said to exist as it is unsignifiable, even to her.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.; pp. 101-104

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.; pp. 105-106

<sup>92</sup> Lacan, J., Miller, J. (Ed.). (1999). *On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX, Encore 1972-1973* (Fink, B. Trans.). W. W. Norton & Company; p. 73

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.; p. 74

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

### 3.2 Irigaray's reversal

As Grosz explains, many feminists have a complicated relationship towards psychoanalysis – many deride it as a sexist patriarchal or outright misogynist discourse, still many other see in it a discourse rich both in terminology for explaining the particular social formations of women's oppression, as well as of certain theoretical achievements useful for the feminist project.<sup>95</sup> Yet there are still those in whom these two views coexist in one way or another. Luce Irigaray is precisely one of these authors.

Irigaray takes much from the Lacanian position, all the while mentioning his name exactly zero times throughout her most famous work, *Speculum of the Woman Other*. Nevertheless, the book contains many of the concepts which have been articulated in Lacan's work. This includes his distinction of three psychic registers<sup>96</sup> as well as viewing the unconscious as structured by language<sup>97</sup>. She likewise uses much of Lacanian terminology, like the name-of-the-Father. While Lacan's name is mentioned in the *This Sex Which Is Not One*, neither here does Irigaray pay any special consideration to him. Lacan, just like Françoise Dolto, Helena Deutsch or Marie Bonapart, is only another psychoanalyst, who in the end failed to find answers to some key mysteries plaguing the psychoanalytic understanding of womanhood. These are very concrete questions for Irigaray, concerning primarily woman's sexuality.<sup>98</sup> Why is she expected to make a sharp choice between clitoral and vaginal pleasure, with the former being identified with "masculine" sexuality? And why are these the only choices? Why does her sexual development have to be "more difficult" as both Freud and Lacan put it, if not for the reason of considering a man the baseline? Why is female homosexuality viewed only as a mirroring of male homosexuality and not a distinct phenomenon? However, these and many other questions are not simple mistakes, errors or silent places of psychoanalysis for Irigaray. They are necessarily caused by the position feminine subjectivity holds to the discourse proper, as Lacan has already articulated.

Irigaray follows Lacan in his recognition that subject is properly located within language, that is in the symbolic order. However symbolic order is not neutral for her; instead it is necessarily marked by and reproductive of the patriarchal society which has spawned it. It is, as Irigaray says, phallogocentric, meaning it views the subject possessing of a phallus as the default and woman therefore necessarily as a lack.<sup>99</sup> Consequently, psychoanalysis plays an important role for Irigaray, as in its theory it strives to articulate the structuring and nature of precisely these phallogocentric structures. For example, Lacanian psychoanalysis viewing woman as generally lacking in the symbolic phallic sense is correct, insofar as such a claim is not to be taken as a

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<sup>95</sup> Jacques Lacan: *A Feminist Introduction.*; pp. 147-150

<sup>96</sup> *Speculum of the Other Woman.*; p. 71

<sup>97</sup> Jacques Lacan: *A Feminist Introduction.*; p. 171

<sup>98</sup> *This Sex Which Is Not One.*; pp. 63-67

<sup>99</sup> *Speculum of the Other Woman.*; pp. 52-53 & Jacques Lacan: *A Feminist Introduction.*; p. 170

totalizing ontological fact, but a description of the status of women in the society. In other word psychoanalysis shows the phallogocentric foundations of the symbolic order and therefore society and culture as such. The presumed desiring of sameness on the side of the women, so central to psychoanalytic theory, can be explained only through phallogocentrism:

*“... the a priori desire for sameness can be maintained only if a single desire is in control. As a result, psychoanalysts often complain about women being unanalyzable. This is quite true if one adheres to Freud’s theories ... ‘Female libido’ is in effect excluded. The phallus, quite to the contrary, functions all too often in psychoanalysis as the guarantee of sense, the sense of sense(s), ... Off with the masks. The suspicion is unavoidable that the Same is postulated again in this “new” signifying economy, organized under the control of the said Phallus”<sup>100</sup>*

In this long, but scathing quote Irigaray touches on multiple of her signature points. First, she critiques original Freudian psychoanalysis, as being capable of conceiving of a woman only through a man. Their bodies are alike, but while his is the general, hers is particularly marked by her lack of a penis. This difference is conceived however only through presupposed sameness of the pre-oedipalized child.<sup>101</sup> Further she implicitly critiques Lacan, as his introduction of the symbolic phallus did not overcome the presupposed sameness contained in Freud. Finally, she also points towards her key observation – the irrepresentability of women both in psychoanalysis, as well as symbolic order overall being in its effect more than just a theoretical hurdle. Psychoanalysis is unable to accentuate her subjectivity due to it being outside the phallogocentric symbolic order, however this influences her as well, which is to say the feminine subject experiences herself as a split-subject, due to her being split between being embedded in language as typical psychoanalytic subject and her embodiment for which this language, only one she has access to, is unable to account for.

This irrepresentability has been prefigured already by Lacan, either as showcased above or in his famous claim that “there is no such thing as a woman”.<sup>102</sup> As Fink explains, to Lacan this claim obviously does not imply the corporal inexistence of women, it rather points to the fact, that it is impossible to signify woman in herself, it is possible only through her relationship to a man.<sup>103</sup> This is equally as much a problem for the analyst as for the woman herself due to her position as the subject to the symbolic order.<sup>104</sup> As mentioned, Lacan explains this phenomena by the supposed problems of feminine jouissance and complementary difficulties of the feminine

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<sup>100</sup> *Speculum of the Other Woman.*; pp. 43-44

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*; pp. 32-34

<sup>102</sup> Lacan, J. (1973). *Télévision*. Paris: Seuil [*Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*. ed. Joan Copjec, trans. Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson, New York: Norton, 1990].

<sup>103</sup> *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance.*; pp. 115-117

<sup>104</sup> *Speculum of the Other Woman.*; p. 165-166

Oedipus. He further naturalizes this explanation. Irigaray herself contests specifically the naturalizing part of this explanation – feminine subject is for her still indeed not a subject-proper, as she cannot be properly located in language. This state is, however, not natural and is caused only by the particular ordering of symbolic order around the masculine subject and a corresponding erasure of femininity.<sup>105</sup>

Irigaray poses the idea of a certain fake binarity, where the supposedly actual and equalized binary relation of men (males) and women (females) in actuality rests on posing one side of the binarity as the default absolute and the other as a derived, atrophied or defective being.<sup>106</sup> Whereas for Freud the fake binary had its bases in pure biology, the lack of a real organ on the side of the woman, for Lacan this lack has only been displaced into the symbolic realm, becoming a symbolic lack of the phallus. Woman does not overcome being only a purely relational being to the chiefly considered man. Hence Grosz describes Irigaray's project simply – whereas Freud and Lacan essentially signify woman as a -A to the man's A, Irigaray wishes to arrive to the articulation of B, in order to allow for a true difference.<sup>107</sup> Importantly, and as was showcased, Lacan's displacement does not allow for a more authentic description of woman's body, her desires, feminine jouissance, ... as these aspects of embodiment only get displaced by Lacan into the purely symbolic realm. For all the changes he makes to Freud's schema, woman remains the dark continent of psychoanalysis.

Emma R. Jones makes a crucial observation in pointing to the fact that the silence of Lacan and psychoanalysis on the issue of female subjectivity is not simple ignorance, but is theoretically crucial, due to Lacan's view of the phallus being the only locus of meaning and all the possible signification.<sup>108</sup> This is because in Lacan's view one's transition from the realm of the *real* into the *symbolic order*, the passage through the mirror stage and the subsequently oedipal triangle, is made possible only through the privileged signifier, the symbolic phallus. Hence there cannot properly be the 'other sex', they each can be represented only through the phallus, and consequently only one can be represented properly. Woman's sense of herself, her body, her jouissance is doomed to remain incomplete and mediated to herself through a symbolic order which is not her own. Irigaray is acutely aware of this. Agreeing with Lacan that to be a subject is to be sexed alongside the entering to symbolic order, she therefore argues for a construction of a different symbolic order, which could successfully signify the woman and her embodiment.<sup>109</sup>

### **3.3 The impossibility of a real binary**

As said, the result of the phallogocentric ordering of the symbolic order is that the sexual binary is fake in a sense. As Lacan already said, woman is conceived only

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<sup>105</sup> Jones, E. R. (2023). *Being as Relation in Luce Irigaray*. Palgrave Macmillan.; p. 44

<sup>106</sup> *This Sex Which Is Not One*; pp. 68-69

<sup>107</sup> *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*; pp. 172

<sup>108</sup> *Being as Relation in Luce Irigaray*; p. 46

<sup>109</sup> *This Sex Which Is Not One*; pp. 122-124

through her relationship to a man. And as Irigaray mockingly puts it “*the little girl is (only) a little boy.*”<sup>110</sup> Indeed this is how Freud has conceived of her before she has passed through her Oedipus, she is just “*a little man.*”<sup>111</sup> A real binary would suppose both of its aspects could be conceived of non-relationally, but it is only the man who can be conceived of in himself, without reference to a woman. The real body is obviously pre-symbolic however, even if subjective perception of the embodiment is necessarily grounded in the symbolic order, the language still refers back to the facticity of the pre-symbolic body. This referencing is perfect in the masculine subject however it is problematic in the case of the feminine. This is due to the communication of her body being unable to map itself properly into the symbolic. For her to speak this speech is to speak the impossible; her attempts at it can only be seen as raptures in discourse of phallogentric symbolic order. It results in her becoming mute or hysteric, as Irigaray puts it.<sup>112</sup>

The impossibility of the feminine to be symbolically represented is a given, but what Irigaray suggest as a primary solution is the retreat back to the body.<sup>113</sup> The alternative Irigaray suggests is to let the feminine body ‘speak’ its language. This language cannot form a symbolic order proper, at least yet, as it is in a sense reactionary, a symptom of woman’s exclusion from the symbolic.<sup>114</sup> It is the reaction to her exclusion from the symbolic order made manifest. But nevertheless, it will give one a glance at what a feminine symbolic order is, as what it is essentially the muted authentic speech of her body, which has been covered over by the phallogentric symbolic order. In Irigaray’s own words:

*“But the really important thing is that no one should question the achievement of this ‘difficult development of femininity’. Already that development will, alas!, have covered over and buried hysteria by the mimetic submission to the obsessional economy. And once again woman will support that economy, without ever being a part to it, without her sexuality being accounted for.”*<sup>115</sup>

The woman is, as Lacan suggested, grounded in the symbolic with one foot and the real with the other only when viewed from inside of this order, by a man. Instead she

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<sup>110</sup> *Speculum of the Other Woman.*; p. 25

<sup>111</sup> This claim specifically is contained in *Lecture XXXII. Femininity*, contained in *Volume XII. New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis and Other Works (1932–1936)* of the Standard Edition.; p. 118. Freud says specifically: “*We are now obliged to recognize that the little girl is a little man. In boys, ... they have learnt how to derive pleasurable sensations from their small penis ... Little girls do the same thing with their still smaller clitoris.*” This again showcases the subjugation of female jouissance under male jouissance to which Irigaray points.

<sup>112</sup> *This Sex Which Is Not One.*; pp. 136-138

<sup>113</sup> Irigaray does not explicitly say this is her strategy for challenging phallogentrism, but the view that she implicitly suggests the reinterpreting of female bodily experience as one way to do this is contained both in Stone, A. (2006). *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press as well as *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*.

<sup>114</sup> *This Sex Which Is Not One.*; p. 138

<sup>115</sup> *Speculum of the Other Woman.*; p. 129

could also be seen as speaking, as Grosz puts it, “a language which Lacan cannot hear.”<sup>116</sup> At the moment this language exists only as an inverse of the phallogocentric symbolic order, it mimes and displaces its meaning.<sup>117</sup> While it is unknown what a gynocentric symbolic order would look like, Irigaray notes a number of aspects of the feminine which are opposite to the character of the phallogocentric ordering and which could then logically be supposed to be its alternative. Whereas phallogocentric ordering presupposes unambiguity, structures of binary opposition and presupposed unity, gynocentric ordering would supposedly be ambiguous, non-totalizing in its scope and based on the specific non-oneness Irigaray attributes to womanhood<sup>118</sup>. It is therefore of some interest that while phallogocentric order can and does make the claim to universality, it is doubtful whether the gynocentric order of thing could even attempt to do so, based on the characteristics Irigaray ascribes to it.

What is at the center of the problem then is not the necessity of overturning phallogocentric symbolic order, but to point towards how it is innately and necessarily sexed; how a discourse viewing itself as purely objective in fact only a product of the realities of certain embodiments and subsequently can properly only account for them. The last part of the sentence is crucial, as Irigaray supposes a certain connection between the ordering of the symbolic order and the actual being of the body.<sup>119</sup> In other words, phallogocentric order has the aforementioned characteristics due to certain truths about the male body and vice versa. Irigaray illustrates this connection of symbolic ordering and biology in *When Our Lips Speak Together*:

*“We are luminous. Neither one nor two. I’ve never known how to count. Up to you. In their calculations we make two. Really, two? Doesn’t that make you laugh? An odd sort of two. And yet not one. Especially not one. Let’s leave one to them. ... Without lips, there is no more ‘us’. The unity, the truth, the propriety of rules comes from their lack of lips, their forgetting of lips.”<sup>120</sup>*

The image of the lips Irigaray draws one’s attention to has become equally famous and infamous. There are clearly two different levels to this quote. Firstly, it offers a celebratory, positive and quite unique vision of the specificity of female embodiment. One which is quite rare in psychoanalytic discourse. However secondly, it links the specificity of this embodiment with a kind of subjectivity which stands at odds with the other kind of embodiment. Therefore, it may be and was discussed whether this account borders on essentialism.

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<sup>116</sup> Jacques Lacan: *A Feminist Introduction*.; p.175

<sup>117</sup> *This Sex Which Is Not One*.; pp. 136-137

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*; pp. 205-218

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*; this point is discussed at length throughout the book, for example pp. 134-135.

<sup>120</sup> *This Sex Which Is Not One*.; pp. 205-218

### 3.4 Irigaray, the essentializer

Irigaray has faced accusations of essentializing women due to the emphasis she places on sexual difference conceived of in a purely binary way.<sup>121</sup> By finding the path to woman's emancipation in her body and a discourse which is understandable properly only from the locus of her body. Sexual difference is primary and seemingly unbridgeable, certainly so from the position of current social ordering. This is especially apparent the just mentioned last chapter of *This Sex Which Is Not One*, where Irigaray views the woman's speech as intensively bodily, inseparably bound up to the specific arrangements of her body insofar as they are different from the man's. Hence the criticism becomes clear and readily apparent – Irigaray claims that to be a woman, participate in the womanhood as conceived for her, means to possess a certain type of body.<sup>122</sup> It also bears mentioning that this is not an understanding of Irigaray which somehow overfocuses on one rather poetic part of her work. These ideas can also be observed in later, more polemic parts of her project, such as *Human Nature is Two, Sexual Difference as Universal*<sup>123</sup> or *Feminine Identity: Biology or Social Conditioning*.<sup>124</sup> Here Irigaray says:

“... becoming a woman means acquiring a civil identity which is appropriate to ‘feminine identity’ ... to one's own body and specific genealogy, one's way of loving, procreating, of desiring and of thinking.”<sup>125</sup>

Irigaray claims that women are constituted as such due to their particular bodies, which in turn relate to other of their characteristics, such as specific type of eroticism, speech, ... and also the social identity which they will grow to acquire, together forming the ‘feminine identity’.<sup>126</sup> She therefore seems to admit a specific essence to womanhood alongside a sort of determinism. What more, since the body is pre-symbolic there is a kind of realism at stake here – a woman's bodily facticity is a certain way and afterwards necessarily produces certain characteristics in the subject embodying it objectively, not due to discursive or social orderings. Such a claim is clearly at odds with the approaches of the third-wave feminism, which typically claim that one's body is always already mediated by discourse. In this view Irigaray is doing only a little more, than just reproducing many of the characteristics already attributed to women by the patriarchy and grounding them in their bodies, with the only slight difference being rearticulating them as positives. By the way of example, the identification of femininity with liquidity or with water for example in art heavily predate Irigaray's own project, but Irigaray has grasped this identification and

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<sup>121</sup> Irigaray has rarely pointed towards the possibility of more than two sexes existing, such as in Irigaray, L. (1996). *I Love to You: Sketch of A Possible Felicity in History*. New York: Routledge.; p. 35. However she has not developed these thought further.

<sup>122</sup> *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray's Re-Writing of the Philosophers.*; pp. 44-46

<sup>123</sup> Both are chapters contained in *I Love to You: Sketch of A Possible Felicity in History*.

<sup>124</sup> Chapter in Irigaray, L. (1994). *Democracy Begins Between Two*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*; pp. 36-37

<sup>126</sup> *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference.*; pp. 22-24

reimagined it as a positive vision of feminine subjectivity.<sup>127</sup> Woman's embodiment and jouissance are indeed still nearly as incomprehensible in Irigaray's view as it is in Freud's, the key difference is only that Irigaray imbues its enunciation with a revolutionary potential.<sup>128</sup>

Still, as Alison Stone notes, this is only one way of reading Irigaray. She points to another possible reading – political essentialism, or alternatively opportunistic essentialism.<sup>129</sup> According to this reading Irigaray's insistence on sexual differentiation is a strategy of sorts. It is part of a "cultural effort," as Irigaray herself put it.<sup>130</sup> This cultural restructuring of the perspectives of female embodiment and values associated with it is to her the main project towards which the emancipatory efforts should be aimed, as simple calls for equality are doomed to a failure. Failure in this case means the further collapsing of women under the category of men, in other words the perpetuation of the false binary. Therefore, viewed in this way, Irigaray is deconstructing the insistent patterns of understanding females through the lenses of sameness with males, and offering an alternative, but nonetheless still situated account of the female.<sup>131</sup> The alternative offered by her should therefore be accepted as ontologically false, or equally as situated as the status quo, but politically useful for the feminist project.

Political essentialism of this kind is importantly necessarily anti-realist, which challenges the typical understanding of essentialism, which usually occupies the status of an ontological position. Reading Irigaray as a political strategist has an important drawback though, as it casts doubt on essentially all of Irigaray's claims about the female body and the kind of embodiment it offers. To be more precise, it is certain that Irigaray does not espouse the phallogocentric way of understanding women, but if we read her essentialism as purely political, her own views of the womanhood gain practically identical status. As Grosz says, the image of woman's lips is merely combative and in no way an accurate descriptor of women.<sup>132</sup>

Still some others maintain that Irigaray's position is neither essentializing nor is it a pure political posturing. Sara Heinämaa and Virpi Lehtinen suggest that the correct reading of Irigaray is phenomenological. To pay proper attention to this view, it is first necessary to shine light on the difficult relationship between psychoanalysis and phenomenology.

### **3.5 Phenomenology and psychoanalysis**

The relationship of psychoanalysis and phenomenology is a complicated one. At a first glance it may even seem that as exemplified in the works of their founders, Freud and

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<sup>127</sup> As is done in the chapter *Volume-Fluidity in Speculum of the Other Woman*.

<sup>128</sup> *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference*; p. 24

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 26

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 28

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*; pp. 30-32

<sup>132</sup> Grosz, E. (1989). *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*. Routledge; p. 116



Husserl, they each work in opposite directions – whereas phenomenology strives to establish a rigorous system of understanding knowledge through uncovering the subjective conditions of knowledge, psychoanalysis tries to understand the subject through an essentially positivistic understanding of science.<sup>133</sup> Nevertheless, to describe them as such and hence to view them as opposites is clearly incorrect as it ignores huge swaths of both of the traditions. Phenomenology has gone through multiple shifts while still keeping close to its original concerns, for example in the bodily turn in Merleau-Ponty, or the ‘queer turn’ in Sara Ahmed. It is equally wrongheaded to describe psychoanalysis only through the scientism and positivism of Freud, as these aspects have been called into question by the generations of subsequent psychoanalysts, with for example Lacan rejecting such understanding of it, while some others, undeniably, still hold to it.

While Freud’s and Husserl’s lives overlapped greatly, neither of them ever commented on the works of the other. This however was not the case between subsequent theorists of both camps in the future, with Lacan and Merleau-Ponty famously being friends and interlocking on multiple issues. These differences are of significantly more interest for this work than any supposed original differences between Husserl and Freud. Their disagreement is described in detail by James Phillips in *Lacan and Merleau-Ponty: The Confrontation of Psychoanalysis and Phenomenology*<sup>134</sup> however it suffices to only go over the general gist of this specific engagement here, as it is nevertheless illustrative concerning the broader difference between the two approaches. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the chief issue is the nature of the subject. As Lacan himself puts it in his lecture *Circuit*<sup>135</sup>:

*“Merleau-Ponty’s position is essentially a humanist one. And you can see where that leads him. In effect, he hangs on to the notion of totality, of unitary functioning, he always presupposes a given unity accessible to what in the end will be an instantaneous, theoretical, contemplative apprehension ... for Merleau-Ponty, it’s all there, in consciousness. A contemplative consciousness constitutes the world through a series of syntheses, of exchanges, which at every moment place it within a renewed, more enveloping totality, but which always finds its origin in the subject.”<sup>136</sup>*

The problem is therefore clear, as Lacan’s suggests Merleau-Ponty has not managed to overcome phenomenology’s reliance on a presupposition of a unified consciousness,

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<sup>133</sup> Marilyn Nissim-Sabat describes this positivist understanding of science implied in Freudian psychoanalysis in her *The crisis in psychoanalysis: Resolution through Husserlian phenomenology and feminism* (1991)

<sup>134</sup> Phillips, J. (1996) *Lacan and Merleau-Ponty: The Confrontation of Psychoanalysis and Phenomenology* in Pettigrew, D. & Raffoul, F. (Ed.) (1996). *Disseminating Lacan*. New York: SUNY Press

<sup>135</sup> This lecture was part of Lacan’s seminar in 1954-1955 and reacted to Merleau-Ponty’s lecture *Philosophy and Psychoanalysis* which happened the day earlier. Its content sadly was not preserved.

<sup>136</sup> Lacan, J., Miller, J. (Ed.). (1991). *The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, 1954-1955 Book II* (Tomaselli, S. Trans.). W. W. Norton & Company.; p. 78

hence becoming essentially incompatible with psychoanalysis, due to its own model of subjectivity and consciousness formation, which hinges so completely on the psychic registers. Consequently, the main difference reveals itself to be the stressing of the importance of the unconscious on one side and the insistence on the primacy of the consciousness on the other.

### 3.6 Irigaray's corporeal phenomenology

Phenomenology of the body, as Sara Heinämaa says, is not only discipline cofounded by Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty, but importantly also critically developed by Irigaray.<sup>137</sup> In the light of the disagreement just mentioned this claim might seem perplexing. How could Irigaray, who is so often viewed solely through her psychoanalytic influences, be considered a phenomenologist? It is indeed a strange claim, especially in the light of Irigaray distancing herself from the phenomenological approach of Beauvoir.<sup>138</sup> Heinämaa herself sadly does not develop on it further, however her colleague Virpi Lehtinen does so in her book *Luce Irigaray's Phenomenology of Feminine Being*, arguing for reading Irigaray through the lenses of phenomenology.<sup>139</sup>

As Lehtinen notes, Irigaray's engagement with phenomenology is complicated, on one hand she critiques many male phenomenologists just as she does other philosophers,<sup>140</sup> nonetheless she concludes that her own project can be understood as phenomenological due to how intertwined it supposedly is with phenomenology of the body.<sup>141</sup> Consequently three important questions to answer emerge – what are the issues Irigaray finds in phenomenologists, in which way is her own project phenomenological and what is her position in relation to Lacan's critique of phenomenology. Irigaray devotes a whole chapter of her *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* to engaging with Merleau-Ponty.<sup>142</sup> Here she deals with a chapter from his *The Visible and the Invisible*, beginning with an affirmation that her and Merleau-Ponty's projects have hitherto not differed much. As she puts it, they both agree on the necessity of recommencing everything and returning to pre-discursive experience; only through such an exercise can feminine truly enter language.<sup>143</sup> Nonetheless she continues with a complex reading of Merleau-Ponty's text, continually deeming it marked by the similar insufficiencies as most other works of western philosophical canon.

All the while acknowledging the value of Merleau-Ponty's work, Irigaray repeatedly spots unspoken motives in the gaps of it – for example maternal flesh, two lips, or

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<sup>137</sup> *Woman — Nature, Product, Style? Rethinking the Foundations of Feminist Philosophy of Science.*; p. 289

<sup>138</sup> Irigaray, L. (1992). *Je, Tu, Nous: Towards a Culture of Difference*. New York: Routledge.; p. 10

<sup>139</sup> Lehtinen, V. (2014). *Luce Irigaray's Phenomenology of Feminine Being*. Albany: SUNY Press.; p. 29

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 25

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 78

<sup>142</sup> Irigaray, L. (1993). *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.; chapter *The Invisible of the Flesh*

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*; pp. 150-51

intrauterine life. In other words, Irigaray agrees that phenomenology of the body does allow in a sense for the body to return into phenomenology, nevertheless the issue of the bodily in the case of feminine-maternal is again left out in the region of not-sufficiently-discussed. Hence the problem is that the silent ignorance of such phenomenological concerns not only fundamentally privileges the male subject, but consequently forecloses on the possibility of articulation of the feminine phenomenology.<sup>144</sup> Irigaray's subsequent engagement with Levinas' phenomenology contained within the same book needs not be described here, but it follows much the same trajectory.

When discussing Irigaray's style it is hard to deem it any certain way, as while her broader concerns remain much the same, the ways she goes about dealing with them differ from one book to another and sometimes even within the same book. Simply said, Irigaray of the *Speculum* is not Irigaray of *An Ethics*, and still so on. Therefore, it can seem difficult to deem Irigaray as writing a phenomenology, as Lehtinen and Heinämaa does, for she never truly commits to it ontologically. There is however an argument to be made that she uses phenomenology descriptively, so as to write the female body from the position of the female subject in some of her work. Indeed, it is hard to deny that *When Our Lips Speak Together* is a phenomenological description of sorts, and later parts of the *Speculum*, such as *La Mystérique* read in very much the same way. For Irigaray the body is definitely not primarily a scientific object, but a lived-in body which is always intertwined in a multitude of situations and relations she has at length described. In a move reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty she also notes the ways of bodily expressiveness specific to women – chatting, tattling, gossiping.<sup>145</sup> In moments such as these it is possible to grasp a certain similarity between Irigaray's ambiguous position and Beauvoir's position to phenomenology, which was outlined earlier. However, large swaths of the *Speculum* are likewise spent in the mimetic reading of Freud and the totality of *Ethics* is spent in a dialogue with various philosophers. These writings are not phenomenological in any significant way.

Concerning the critique levied by Lacan against Merleau-Ponty, Irigaray herself never raises it against him or any other phenomenologist. This is peculiar, insofar as Irigaray does presuppose a type of subject composition not dissimilar to Lacan's. However, such an incongruence can be explained away by thinking pragmatically of the goals Irigaray is concerned with in her work. Through the phenomenological explication of the feminine situation a true feminine subjectivity that will be unbound to the male one can emerge and the false binary can be overcome. Therefore, her project is not the debasement of all of phenomenology, but a utilitarian and cautious usage of parts of it for her own purposes. Nevertheless, as she stressed in one of her interviews, it is

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<sup>144</sup> Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology has been criticized by a number of other feminist and sometimes feminist phenomenologist authors for much the same thing, albeit perhaps articulated more clearly. It appears for example in Elizabeth Grosz's *Volatile Bodies* (1994) or Iris Marion Young's *Throwing Like a Girl* (1990).

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 138

important for phenomenology to remain only as a part of the project and not become full ontological commitment, as that would risk bringing on a sexual solipsism of sorts.<sup>146</sup>

Donna Haraway in her *Cyborg Manifesto* said, “French feminists like Luce Irigaray know how to write the body.” This is undoubtedly true, however as has hopefully been shown in a sufficient manner, this is done mainly through borrowing from and critically engaging with phenomenological tradition, rather than a real methodological or even ontological commitment on Irigaray’s part. Her views of the body and subjectivity are her own and they need not to be placed into a bracket of ‘phenomenologist’. This can be best seen when placing her work alongside Beauvoir’s.

### 3.7 Phenomenology between Beauvoir and Irigaray

Lehtinen considers Irigaray’s phenomenological approach to be heavily indebted to Beauvoir’s own project, seeing their main difference in that whereas Beauvoir writes of the feminine externally in a sense, Irigaray takes on the mantle of writing about the feminine internally, as ‘I, the woman,’ so to say.<sup>147</sup> Lehtinen is certainly right on this account, as Irigaray’s phenomenological style of writing is significantly different from Beauvoir’s, nevertheless it is of an equal importance to recognize that phenomenology plays a strikingly different role and holds different importance in both of their projects, something which Lehtinen does not do.<sup>148</sup> The work of honestly comparing the importance phenomenology holds to the project of both of the philosophers is important however, as to not slip into a simplifying misunderstandings of either of their works.

It must be admitted that both of the philosophers seem to embrace something which may be called phenomenological understanding of the body, which traces itself back at least to Merleau-Ponty. This connection is made explicit in the case of Beauvoir but ascribing this view to Irigaray has only been done by some and been considered controversial by others.<sup>149</sup> What can be said with certainty is that they both explicitly argue against scientifically reductionist conceptions of the body, calling into question the usefulness of these approaches in understanding the particular embodiments and ways of subjectification encountered by subjects in general and the female subject in particular. They also both stress the embeddedness of the subject in the world and the

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<sup>146</sup> Irigaray, Luce (1996). *Thinking life as relation: An interview with Luce Irigaray*. *Man and World* 29 (4):343-360.; p. 351

<sup>147</sup> *Luce Irigaray's Phenomenology of Feminine Being.*; Introduction, footnote 3.

<sup>148</sup> In fact, Lehtinen embraces the position that Beauvoir’s whole goal is to reject particularness of feminine subjectivity in order to seek equality with men. A position which has already been heavily discussed in this work.

<sup>149</sup> Dorothea E. Olkowski discusses exactly this point in Olkowski, D. E. (2000). *The End of Phenomenology: Bergson's Interval in Irigaray*. *Hypatia*, 15(3), 73–91., claiming that such connection cannot safely be made, due to the inherent sexism of phenomenological ontologies, of which herself Irigaray has been clearly aware of in *Ethics*.

reciprocity of meaning-creation implied in this.<sup>150</sup> Also while obvious, the aspect of one's self-description should not be ignored, as both of the philosophers have described their projects as phenomenological to a certain point. This is however where the problems arise.

Beauvoir continually stresses the key importance of not only phenomenology as such, but specific phenomenologists to her work, but in the case of Irigaray this is more complicated as has been shown. While she has described parts of her project as phenomenological, she likewise stressed the importance of its other aspects. Her engagement with the works of phenomenologist can be considered as primarily critical, or perhaps even more tellingly as not significantly different from her engagement with the projects of any other philosophers whatsoever. Hence it is alluring to deem Irigaray as sometimes borrowing from phenomenology in one aspect, its descriptive aspect, but passing on the rest, primarily its ontological commitments.

Dorothea E. Olkowski, who argues heavily against reading Irigaray phenomenologically in any way, points to two of phenomenologist ontological claims which are unacceptable to Irigaray.<sup>151</sup> First of these is its view of the body. Merleau-Ponty (and subsequently Beauvoir) certainly offer a view of the body and its relation to the outside which is itself more developed than Sartre's, however they still lack in comparison to Irigaray's view of the female body:

*"No surface holds. No figure, line, or point remains. No ground subsists. But no abyss, either. Depth, for us, is not a chasm. Without a solid crust, there is no precipice. Our depth is the thickness of our body, our all touching itself. Where top and bottom, inside and outside, in front and behind, above and below are not separated, remote, out of touch. Our all intermingled. Without breaks or gaps."<sup>152</sup>*

This is a tellingly confusing quote, as it illustrates well the problems of grasping the feminine body inside the phallogocentric linguistic and discursive system. It is also complimentary to Irigaray's critique of Merleau-Ponty in *Ethics* which has been discussed above, for it shows how utterly alien this conception is when compared to the generalized, that is masculine, embodiment. In comparison to Beauvoir, it can be noticed that while both authors strive to articulate the particular expressiveness of the feminine body-subject, Irigaray's project goes a big step further. That is specifically showcased on her emphasis on the overcoming of the subject-object divide and the philosophy of oneness engendered by the experience of the female

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<sup>150</sup> This is a rather controversial claim in the case of Irigaray, as exemplified in the debate over her essentialism. However, it can hardly be denied that especially in her later work like *I Love to You* or *Democracy Begins Between Two* she stresses this aspect more and more.

<sup>151</sup> *The End of Phenomenology: Bergson's Interval in Irigaray.*

<sup>152</sup> *This Sex Which Is Not One.*; p. 213

body. This kind of a problem is not problematized by Beauvoir in any way and is one for which Irigaray criticizes the phenomenology of the body at large.<sup>153</sup>

The second aspect of disagreement between Irigaray and phenomenology concerns its view of the subject as such. Irigaray has described her project as the questioning of the universal subject, deconstruction of the one-gender system.<sup>154</sup> Hence her understanding of the feminine subject is irreducible to the nature of the male subject, but equally as importantly it is irreducible to any significant and useful common ground. Phenomenological subject on the other hand is in a sense universal; while it certainly does allow for some space for sexual particularity on the level of embodiment, it nonetheless ends up practically reducing the embedded subject to universal, treading dangerously close to reducing it to the male generality. Irigaray's most famous discussion of feminine subjectivity is contained within the chapter *Volume-Fluidity* present within the *Speculum*. The 'fluid character' of women signifies both the aforementioned particularities of their bodies and their nature as the speaking subjects, or the speech-producing subjects. This is again because in the feminine subject the division of inside and outside, or 'I' and 'you' or analogically 'I' and 'this' is overcome through her embodiment. Irigaray's position is that none of the philosophers who have attempted to overcome these dualities, such as Merleau-Ponty, have ultimately failed due to not accounting for the particular uniqueness or rather the fundamental difference of the feminine experience. In the case of Merleau-Ponty Irigaray's point is exactly that the concept of reversibility of the world and the subject (or the seer and the seen) only repeat the prenatal closed economy.<sup>155</sup> But through this repetition Merleau-Ponty just ends up unable to account for the prenatal experience. According to Irigaray this problem repeats throughout his philosophy, making it unable to account for the feminine experience in general. This links to the discussion of feminine speech above, but more generally to the impossibility of fixing or 'solidifying' woman's identity. Irigaray herself speculates of its nature thusly:

*"... what a feminine syntax might be is not simple nor easy to state, because in that would no longer be either subject or object, "oneness" would no longer be privileged, there would no longer be proper meanings, proper names, "proper" attributes . . . Instead, "syntax" would involve nearness, proximity, but in such an extreme form that it would preclude any distinction of identities, any establishment of ownership, thus any form of appropriation."*<sup>156</sup>

As Irigaray points out, capacity to speak as such is generally paralyzed within women due to the phallogocentric language economy, even when discussing women speaking amongst women.<sup>157</sup> Hence it typically comes out only in the form of certain

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<sup>153</sup> As discussed before through her engagement with Merleau-Ponty.

<sup>154</sup> *Thinking life as relation: An interview with Luce Irigaray.*; pp. 343-344

<sup>155</sup> *An Ethics of Sexual Difference.*; pp. 172-173

<sup>156</sup> *This Sex Which Is Not One.*; p. 134

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 135

gesticulations of the body, or in a displaced form as the speech of a hysteric. Nevertheless, this is what is at stake in the irreducibility of feminine subjectivity to masculine subjectivity.

In the case of Beauvoir, the acceptance of the aforementioned ontological commitments of phenomenology is apparent. The particularity of the female body is not simply reduced to a particularity of a generalized masculine body, but this femaleness is nevertheless conceived of only as a certain markedness of a body. That is to say both maleness and femaleness, just as any number of other physical characteristics are specific ways an idealized undifferentiated body may be marked, through which it gains access to particular ways of being. Certainly, every body is a sexed body in one sense or another, but what Beauvoir is drawing attention to is simply both how the meaning this sexing takes on is contingent to social realities and how being sexed is certainly a part of ones being, but ones humanity is not exhausted in this fact. To illustrate:

*“The advantage man enjoys and which manifests itself from childhood onward is that his vocation as a human being in no way contradicts his destiny as a male. 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.”<sup>158</sup>*

Irigaray would certainly agree with this quote practically, that is to say she would agree in warning against ones denying of their own femininity. Nevertheless, the ontological reliance on posing a shared term between the man and the woman, here designated with the simple terms ‘human being’ and ‘humanity’, is something which Irigaray continually rejects. This is not to deny the simple biological facticity of both being examples of *homo sapiens*, but such an insistence only clouds the project of articulating difference of the two. Just the name of one of her writings, *Human Nature is Two*, is telling. And as she says here, “*it is wrong for them to be brought back to one.*”<sup>159</sup> Further simply deeming such reduction to be a showcase of reason’s immaturity.

Similarly, concerning the issue of subjectivity Beauvoir takes the position of there being no difference between men and women subjects in the absolute sense. She does spend time thematizing some issues faced by women on this front, such as their objectification or their enclosure in their particular subjectivity. The latter is to say that men, due to the generality with which their existence is imbued, may elevate their subjectivity to the status of the objective. To women, imprisoned in their otherness, this option is foreclosed. However, concerning this issue it is possible to draw a line here between her and Irigaray. As the latter would agree with Beauvoir’s diagnosis to a significant degree, but would ultimately reject her conclusion, as for her

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<sup>158</sup> *The Second Sex*; p. 815

<sup>159</sup> *I Love to You: Sketch of A Possible Felicity in History.*; p. 36

both male and female subjectivities are necessarily particular to their own kinds of embodiment, whereas the point for Beauvoir is that such a division does not make sense as to her there is no such cavernous rift between any two types of subjectivities, hence both should be able to make a claim to the objective.

At this moment it is appropriate to return to Heinämaa's already mentioned quote concerning the development of phenomenology of the body. She states, "*phenomenology of the body as founded by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Simone de Beauvoir - and critically developed by Luce Irigaray.*"<sup>160</sup> It needs not to be an issue of contention to attribute its genesis to works of Merleau-Ponty or in the particular case of phenomenology of the female body to Beauvoir. What, however, should be called into question and at least problematized is the connection made to Irigaray. It must be said at least that the word 'critically' in the quote is doing a lot of work. As has hopefully been shown, Irigaray's project is on multiple key points divergent from the work done by Merleau-Ponty and Beauvoir. Heinämaa concludes her article with the claim that Irigaray's work does not lapse to simple essentialism or biological determinism, but neither is it a pure theorizing about language and discourse.<sup>161</sup> She is certainly right on all these accounts, however may one not also add, in light of the things discussed, that 'neither is it a pure work phenomenology of the body'?

While Beauvoir is certainly in agreement with the broader phenomenological project, of Irigaray it is better said only that she has developed her project in conversation with the phenomenology of the body. It seems at least partially misleading to ascribe to her a position which she herself claims forms only a part of her methodological toolkit and from which she has critically distanced herself from repeatedly. Likewise, such a claim brings with it a not small amount of theoretical baggage which as has been shown does not apply to Irigaray at all.

#### **4. Similar, yet different**

The discussion up to this point now finally allows for some detailed comparison of the two theorists on a handful of key issues which have up to this point only been touched upon. Hitherto a number of commentators could have been seen, who wish to relegate both to a diametrically opposed positions – one theorizing differing of the same or similar, woman's exclusion from universality, and the other saming of the fundamentally different. There have also been those who wish to see a close affinity between the two, seeing one as developing on the work of the other. In deciding this issue this chapter interrogates a few aspects shared between their respective works. It starts with a comparison of their views on the importance of sexual difference. Subsequently their respective approaches to psychoanalysis and validity of their respective distancing from one another are discussed. Consequently, the significant

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<sup>160</sup> *Woman — Nature, Product, Style? Rethinking the Foundations of Feminist Philosophy of Science.*; p. 291

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 303



dissimilarities of their views of embodiment and subjectivity mentioned over the previous chapters are brought together. And finally, a contrast is made between their respective views of and approaches to the possibilities of women's emancipation.

#### 4.1 Difference and equality

In one of her more famous essays, *A Personal Note: Equal or Different*, Irigaray critically distances her own project from the project of 'equality feminism'. In doing so she does not specifically identify Beauvoir's position with this kind of feminism, but nevertheless makes a gesture to Beauvoir, whom she mentions, being unable to differentiate between it and Irigaray's own brand of 'difference feminism'. This essay is of interest for two different reasons. Firstly, it is one of a very few places where one of the philosophers reacted to the project of the other. The largest engagement Irigaray offered to Beauvoir's project is possibly contained in this short essay. In the case of Beauvoir providing criticism to Irigaray's project, the only comment Beauvoir ever provided was single sentence in an interview for *The Women's Review of Books* in the year of her death.<sup>162</sup> Here she simply criticized Irigaray for her usage of the Freudian framework, which to her inherently reproduces a sexist conception of women. In *A Personal Note* Irigaray at first regrets that she never got to engage in a friendship with Beauvoir, but subsequently repeats the same claim Beauvoir has made of her. That is that their positions are fundamentally different and the rift of the two can essentially be understood as a disagreement over the value of psychoanalysis.<sup>163</sup> Therefore it can be said that the awareness of this key difference between their two position was acknowledged by both of them.

The second point of interest which ought to be interrogated is the pairing of terms which Irigaray chooses to structure of her essay around. The formulation "*Equal or different*" seemingly poses a binary opposition between 'philosophizing equality', which is often attributed to Beauvoir, and Irigaray's own project of 'philosophizing difference'. The pairing is perplexing, which is mainly to say words 'equal' and 'different' simply do not make an antonymic pairing together, that would require 'unequal' and 'same' for each of them respectively. Irigaray herself explains what she means by this 'equal':

*"To demand equality as women is, it seems to me, a mistaken expression of a real objective. The demand to be equal presupposes a point of comparison. To whom or to what do women want to be equalized? To men? To a salary? To a public office? To what standard? Why not to themselves?"*<sup>164</sup>

Just a few lines later Irigaray clears up her position even more as essentially advocating for the social realization of a state of 'equal, but different'. Concretely she

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<sup>162</sup> It is uncertain whether Irigaray herself knew of this interview, as she does not mention it in her own essay. This information is contained in *Differences: Re-reading Beauvoir and Irigaray*; p. 7.

<sup>163</sup> *Je, Tu, Nous: Towards a Culture of Difference*; pp. 10-11

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 12

suggests for example realization of different legal frameworks and laws which would reflect and depend upon a person's sex.<sup>165</sup> However, this claim from Irigaray leads one to two obvious questions. Firstly, the more general one – is this a position which any feminist truly uncritically holds? To interrogate this question is obviously above the range of this work, nevertheless it should be asked whether Irigaray truly does not simply brush over many different kinds of feminism, labeling them all as striving to remove sexual difference altogether, as they struggle for the ambiguous 'equality'. The more specific question that ought to be answered here is whether Beauvoir's own position is of this kind.

Beauvoir repeatedly mentions the importance of equality as well as the significance of current inequalities facing women, however her understanding of these is broad. At times she discusses specific inequalities in the spheres of legislature, reproductive rights or women suffrage. It must be said that it is hard to imagine Irigaray as standing against any of these, in fact she would doubtlessly agree with Beauvoir on all of these. However, Beauvoir states over and over how many of these rights which have been achieved, rights she calls 'abstract rights', have not been sufficient in improving woman's situation, as they do not grant women concrete hold of the world in themselves.<sup>166</sup> This statement can be held alongside few others as a claim that while women are gaining abstract right, the sexist and patriarchal nature of society which hinders them has not been overcome simply by these. This is certainly a part of Beauvoir's point, but the statement should also be held alongside her phenomenological stances.

Abstract rights not granting women hold of the world in themselves can also imply that the specificities of women's embodiment serve more as an obstacle than an asset in their being-in-the-world. As has been shown earlier, this is not due to their constitution inherently, but due to the values society places on the body and activities it may or may not perform. Beauvoir in no way argues for sameness, or 'equality' of the kind Irigaray warns of. Of this the closing words of *The Second Sex* are telling:

*"To emancipate woman is to refuse to enclose her in the relations she sustains with man, but not to deny them; while she posits herself for herself, she will nonetheless continue to exist for him as well: recognizing each other as subject, each will remain an other for the other; ... it is when the slavery of half of humanity is abolished and with it the whole hypocritical system it implies that the "division" of humanity will reveal its authentic meaning and the human couple will discover its true form."<sup>167</sup>*

Quite on the contrary this quote reveals Beauvoir's position concerning equality to be strikingly similar to that of Irigaray, as just as she Beauvoir underlines the point that

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<sup>165</sup> This project is more developed for example in the chapter *Feminine Identity of I Love to You: Sketch of A Possible Felicity in History*.

<sup>166</sup> *The Second Sex*; p. 185

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 862

the fight for 'equality' does not mean a fight for erasure of all the difference. It could even be said that these words could be taken straight from Irigaray's later work. This point can be illustrated for example on this quote:

*"Women and men will have to be granted a real identity, ... if 'we' is to be formed. Being 'we' means being at least 'two', autonomous, different. This 'we' still has no place, neither between human genders of sexes, nor in the public realm where male citizens form a social whole ..."*<sup>168</sup>

Upon seeing the quotes side by side, it is very hard to deny that the view of the goals of emancipation does not differ significantly between the two, certainly not to the point that Irigaray herself suggests. The point that the true meaning of sexual division, sexual difference and significance of coexistence can only come about through the success of emancipation is shared between them both. Hence it is certainly true that the gravity of sexual difference and its significance for the subject differ between the two, they nonetheless both stand on the side of necessity of this importance.

#### **4.2 'Disagreement' over psychoanalysis**

It is worth to return back to the supposed key difference between the two, as has just been mentioned. In *The Second Sex* Beauvoir notes two main reason for not accepting psychoanalysis as a method. First the Freud's poverty in the description of feminine libido and experience, viewing women only from the viewpoint of the men. Then also the alienation from oneself implied by the Oedipus, which is to say rejecting the necessity of modeling oneself on one's parent and embracing subject's capacity of transcendence.<sup>169</sup> In the aforementioned interview for *The Women's Review of Books* Beauvoir says of Irigaray specifically that she is "too ready to adopt the Freudian notion of the inferiority of women. ... Anyone who wants to work on women has to break completely with Freud."<sup>170</sup> However she does not specify this further, leaving one wondering what are these problematic notions which Irigaray allegedly adopts. Irigaray herself positions the difference between herself and Beauvoir in the same way, saying "Simone de Beauvoir ... [was] always resistant to psychoanalysis."<sup>171</sup>

However, Beauvoir's and Irigaray's critiques are remarkably similar when concerning psychoanalysis. Irigaray's project is largely composed of pointing to the specific instances and concrete effects of those precise problems which Beauvoir has articulated. The point of the necessary objectification and particularization of women's perspectives in order to continually safeguard the absoluteness of phallogocentric or patriarchal discourses is a present theme in both of their works as well as their respective critiques of psychoanalysis as has been shown. In fact, the first overarching part of the *Speculum, The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry*,

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<sup>168</sup> *I Love to You: Sketch of A Possible Felicity in History*; p. 48

<sup>169</sup> *The Second Sex*; pp. 83-85

<sup>170</sup> Quote taken from *Differences: Re-reading Beauvoir and Irigaray*; p. 7

<sup>171</sup> *Je, Tu, Nous: Towards a Culture of Difference*; p. 11

undeniably traces the very similar critique of Beauvoir's, albeit it is longer.<sup>172</sup> They also both point to the ignorance of the particularity and difference of feminine jouissance present throughout psychoanalysis. Therefore, Beauvoir's claim is strange, as their respective critiques of Freud amount to essentially the same.

Irigaray's own comment is likewise curious, as Beauvoir's alleged resistance to psychoanalysis is also nowhere near absolute. She in fact commends its view of the body,<sup>173</sup> as well as appreciates its theoretical achievements.<sup>174</sup> For example in her treatment of the childhood she uses descriptions which are unmistakably seem psychoanalytic. Therefore, Beauvoir's position is not that psychoanalysis is terrible and should be forever forgotten, but that it is a discourse as any other, marked by the patriarchy and othering of women, as well as method which is unable to account for the totality of one's destiny. However, it can still be partially coopted for its achievements, as it is not utterly unobjective and wrong on everything.

The comments both philosophers made about each other are consequently quite odd, as there is much similar in their positions concerning psychoanalysis. They both spend time criticizing the psychoanalytic discourse in general for essentially identical things, though they obviously pay differing amounts of attention to this. Neither of their refusals of psychoanalysis is absolute and they borrow parts of it for their own projects, nevertheless they too do this in differing amounts. Truly the most significant and noticeable difference between Beauvoir and Irigaray concerning psychoanalysis is Beauvoir's refusal of viewing the sexual identity as a primary constituent of subjectivity, contrary to Irigaray's acceptance of this point.

### **4.3 Body and subjecthood**

As has been indicated in both the previous chapters, the views of Beauvoir and Irigaray concerning the body are in a few ways similar but in others are hardly compatible. Beauvoir's often misconstrued position of 'body as a situation' is in a way very close to Irigaray's own position, as she indeed stresses the reality and importance of *bodily* or *pre-discursive difference*. This is a point brought on repeatedly in *The Second Sex*, for example in the case of strength difference between the sexes, when grasped on the average. As has been explained, such difference gains meaning through the particular configuration of social ordering – one sex is oftentimes scared of the other and not vice versa due to their average strength differential, nevertheless this fear has to be situated within the context of normalization of gendered violence and patriarchy. Said more generally - bodily dispositions of both sexes open different options of engaging in meaningful acts, but these nevertheless gain their meaning socially. Hence bodily difference is not erased by Beauvoir, instead it is a crucial aspect in determining one's options inside one's social life.

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<sup>172</sup> *Speculum of the Other Woman.*; pp. 11-129

<sup>173</sup> *The Second Sex*; p. 73

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 83

Irigaray's position is in a sense similar, albeit more radical, and in another problematically different. To start with the latter, as has been mentioned already, Irigaray has a diametrically different view of the body itself from Beauvoir. While they both argue against a purely scientific view of it, they nonetheless differ on what should replace it. Beauvoir favors what can simply be called a phenomenological view of the body which was inspired by works of Merleau-Ponty, whereas Irigaray's conception of the body is strictly her own. This conception was explored in detail earlier, but it bears mentioning again that its nature and more importantly its centrality to Irigaray's project makes it very difficult to identify her view of embodiment with Beauvoir's in any deeper sense. The aforementioned similarity, which may be in a sense considered superficial, is that they are both philosophers of the body. They both view it and its particularities as key constitutors of one's life. But this bears mentioning primarily in the light of the less material approaches common to some contemporary schools of feminism. The position which Irigaray holds is considerably more radical, as Beauvoir's claim is that body opens up a field of possibilities for the subject which does not neatly overlap with the field of possibilities of another subject, due to for example their sex or innumerable other bodily characteristics. Irigaray's claim is that one's body already prefigures in itself a certain pre-discursive matrix due to its sex. Hence one can be a man and be therefore able to become a subjectivized inside the dominant phallogocentric symbolic order, or one can be born a woman and be refused this subjectification due to this fact. Here the point is not that any particular woman's destiny is completely exhausted in this inability nor is it the case correspondingly for the man, however she is much more determined by her embodiment than in Beauvoir's account. In other words, while they both thematize embodiment, the importance they place upon it and the significance it holds to their respective subjects differ by an order of magnitude.

When subjecthood is concerned their views are likewise incompatible. Beauvoir points towards the phenomenologist theme of becoming oneself through one's entanglement in the world and the projects one decides to take on. As much is implied in Beauvoir's famous quote.<sup>175</sup> Such a position presupposes an existence of a subject, who then becomes themselves through their activity. In other words, as Moi puts it, one is born with a female body and what they and the surrounding world will make out of it, what kind of a woman will they become, is yet to be seen.<sup>176</sup> Therefore subjecthood emerges from a freedom within in a constraint, which is crucial to distinguish from any kind of real unfreedom imposed on a subject by another. One's self-determination may only arise through such a constraint which is implied in the embodiment itself and in the reciprocal relating to and projecting oneself onto the surrounding world.

Irigaray's treatment of this topic is more complicated, as her key point is how a woman's subjecthood simply cannot be fully represented in the current discursive

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<sup>175</sup> "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman." In *The Second Sex*; p. 330 as already quoted.

<sup>176</sup> *What is a woman?: and other essays*; p. 82

order. Precisely through the irrepresentability of her bodily experience in the phallogocentric discourse, she is unable to fully articulate herself as a subject – that is as a speaking subject. Most concretely this leads to the essential splitting of feminine subjectivity, as the unspeakability of things such as experienced embodiment and jouissance leads to a disconnect within the subject. Here rests the key difference of the two authors – for Beauvoir the only barriers standing in the way of feminine subjectification are engendered in the number of particular acts of oppression by the patriarchal society which make up its totality, but for Irigaray this barrier is closer to an impasse which comes into being as if from the patriarchal assembling of the society as a whole. To reiterate, in the case of Beauvoir the oppression of women stems from innumerable acts of patriarchal violence. But this violence is not totally suppressing in its power, to Beauvoir woman still experiences herself as a subject, albeit an othered subject. She recognizes how she is limited in concrete ways and how the surrounding society tries to objectify her. But in the case of Irigaray this oppression is begat in the structure of the symbolic order, which functions as a totalizing whole engulfing the would-be-subject, with its power to suppress them being near absolute, therefore a woman is never able to access her subjecthood properly.

It must be admitted that both authors hold very disparate views concerning embodiment and subjectivity. The main commonalities of their positions may as well be considered superficial, as they only loosely bring them together under the quite wide umbrella of ‘philosophers who accentuate different kinds of embodiment’. They undoubtedly share worries of particular difficulties facing women subjects socially and their view of importance of embodiment certainly heads in a similar direction, nevertheless the type of emphasis Irigaray places upon embodiment is found nowhere in Beauvoir’s work. This is an important thing to note, as it is not a simple difference of a degree, but an incompatibility between the two. Beauvoir’s point is that one’s embodiment is an undeniable facticity, which nevertheless does not determine one’s fate. This determination can only happen partially through the society treating differently embodied subjects in different and unfair ways. One can always struggle against such a fate. In the case of Irigaray embodiment prefigures one’s subjecthood in ways that transcend any societal orderings. The social conditioning certainly produces similar types of effects in Irigaray’s view as it does in Beauvoir’s, however different types of embodiments produce different types of subjectivities from the ground up. Therefore, the key difference here is that for Beauvoir sexed embodiments can imply sexed subjects only through certain further social processing. In the case of Irigaray sexed embodiments necessarily imply different sexed subjecthoods absolutely, that is without referencing to any additional social orderings, as such would be the case in any social configuration.

The additional point which must be made here is that Beauvoir’s view is far from anything which could be called essentialist or deterministic. This is however not the case for Irigaray. Her insistence on a certain yet-unrealized authentic way of feminine

being has been accompanied by claims of existence of formations such as ‘culture in the feminine mode’.<sup>177</sup> Hence whereas Beauvoir’s wish is for women to be recognized as subject, Irigaray’s wish is for them to be recognized as women. One is left wondering how does this not lapse into wholly essentializing the female subject, as Irigaray does not provide a vision of femininity or womanhood, which would not refer back to an essentialized view of the female body, in other words a body predisposed for birthing children, menstruating or having certain types of sexual relations. Therefore, it remains highly problematic whether Irigaray does not reproduce essentialism, or at least leave doors wide open for it.

#### 4.4 Paths towards emancipation

Both Irigaray’s and Beauvoir’s projects are aimed towards a supposed emancipatory horizon, which as was shown moments ago is both surprisingly similar and radically dissimilar between them. However, attention should also be paid to how each of them suggests this emancipation should be achieved, as this also points to their respective theoretical commitments and again some crucial differences.

Beauvoir’s emancipatory strategy is befitting to her intellectual heritage and some of the tensions contained within. Her arguing for the necessity of women to become fully-fledged subjects essentially means them gaining an equal access to or a hold of the world as men. In other words, for them to become phenomenological subjects offered equal freedom in their engaging with the world.<sup>178</sup> Withholding this freedom from her is a set of societal barriers which practically limit her. These can be institutional, in the case of unequal laws, or cultural, in the case of stereotypes, differing upbringing or sexist social values. Therefore, most generally it can be said that change will be brought through a social transformation.

When it comes to the labor of bringing this transformation on however, Beauvoir seems split between her commitments to existentialist individualism and feminism as a collective project. This is to say that on many occasions Beauvoir suggests that the key to women’s emancipation is their own overcoming of their situation as individual transcendent subjects. *The Second Sex*, particularly the second part, *History*, is full of examples of women who have managed to succeed and transcend the limited and hindering conditions of societies and times they lived in. Beauvoir clearly has great reverence for these figures and admits to them the greatest credit in bringing essentially each and every improvement in women’s general condition throughout history. But as she nonetheless says

*“What determines women’s present situation is the stubborn survival of the most ancient traditions in the new emerging civilization. ... Men’s economic privilege, their social value, the prestige of marriage, the usefulness of masculine support—all these encourage women to ardently*

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<sup>177</sup> *Democracy Begins Between Two.*; p. 32

<sup>178</sup> *The Second Sex.*; pp. 844-845

*want to please men. They are on the whole still in a state of serfdom. It follows that woman knows and chooses herself not as she exists for herself but as man defines her.”<sup>179</sup>*

Indeed, it is the patriarchal values which have proven to be so difficult to weed out and still hinder women even in the light of equal or near-equal legal status. Beauvoir seems to believe that these values can be overcome in their totality through the struggle of individuals over a sufficiently long time, however this makes her dreams of a little girl “little girl [being] raised with the same demands and honors, the same severity and freedom, as her brothers, taking part in the same studies and games, promised the same future, ...” a far distant future.<sup>180</sup> Beauvoir is well aware of this and sometimes carefully embraces an organized political feminist struggle, as was attempted in the early years of USSR,<sup>181</sup> but these are much more rare than her embrace of the strives made by individual heroic women. Therefore, her emancipatory strategy may sometimes appear to be less of a call for an organized struggle for emancipation, than a call for each and every woman to struggle against her condition as an individual.

Irigaray's own position is somewhat more ambiguous. A true emancipation for her is possible only through the successful actualization of women's subjectivity. Irigaray who views her own writings as a part of this project, has herself articulated a three key parts to it (which copy the three stages of her own theoretical development).<sup>182</sup> First it is the necessary criticism of the monosexual discourses which permeate the society. Next it is the articulation of the possibility of a second kind of a subject. Finally, it is the attempt to imagine ways of relating to one another in this new economy of subjectivity.

It is quite apparent how this leads to the development of something which can be called feminine symbolic order, nevertheless it is likewise very abstract. The first point brought on by Irigaray is simply the work of textual and philosophical criticism, however the other two are not simply a labor of criticism. For Irigaray they are much more projects of linguistic playfulness trying to bring on new kind of subjectivity and relating through experiment.<sup>183</sup> However whether it is the critical or constructive aspects of her work which are concerned, Irigaray does not truly voice an emancipatory program or even shine light on ways of individual progress as at least Beauvoir does.

When viewed next to each other, it is apparent that Irigaray's and Beauvoir's strategies of emancipation differ heavily. Beauvoir's approach is marked by her existentialist feminism; this is to say it voices both the demand for structural changes

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.; pp. 188-189

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.; p. 857

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.; pp. 179-181

<sup>182</sup> “Je—Luce Irigaray”: *A Meeting with Luce Irigaray.*; pp. 96-97

<sup>183</sup> Irigaray herself says this in “Je—Luce Irigaray”: *A Meeting with Luce Irigaray.*; p. 106. Example of these experiments can be for example the writings *I Love To You* and *He I Sought But Did Not Find*.



in the direction of equal treatment of the sexes as well as the simultaneous necessity for transcendent projects on the side of individual women. Irigaray's strategy is altogether different and significantly more theoretical in its form, and it can be called a program for emancipation only with some difficulties, as it would be more proper to just simply call it a philosophical project with only a tenuous relation to the practical. In this sense their approaches may be viewed as practically compatible as they do not truly overreach in their respective scopes.

## **5. Conclusion**

The goal of this thesis was to give a general overview of the views of the embodiment and subjectivity in the respective works of Luce Irigaray and Simone de Beauvoir, as well as to point to certain similarities and divergences of these works. It has been shown how understandings of both of their projects are plagued by certain oversimplifications, anachronisms, and oversights, which lead to misconstruing of either of their positions in various ways.

Simultaneously the projects of both philosophers have been explicated in such a way, as to best lead to the comparison of the two on the given issues. This meant primarily the discussion of their respective stances to biological and psychoanalytical essentializing of the female subject, as well as the meaning of a woman as a sexed subject in relation to a man and her own body. Consequently, their respective stances to phenomenology could be interrogated and subsequently they could be compared directly on some key issues.

When brushing over the obvious fact that both philosophers are members of the feminist tradition which near-necessarily implies certain facts about their projects, there are truly only few similarities which are of note. There is a surprising similarity concerning the importance they both place upon the bodily, that is sexual, difference both descriptively and prescriptively. This is to say that they both not only see a key importance of woman's embodiment in explaining her situation hitherto, but that they also insist to varying degrees on the significance of embracing the sexual difference in the feminist emancipatory project. This point is important due to the fact of how often this aspect is left mute in commentaries on Beauvoir. It however bears mentioning that in the case of Irigaray this may border on actual essentialism, which is present nowhere in Beauvoir's work. Likewise, their self-ascribed differences over their approach to psychoanalysis have been found to be possibly exaggerated on both of their parts, as they share noticeable similarities.

Nevertheless, there is a duo of key differences which should be paid great attention to. First of these is the incompatibility of phenomenology with Irigaray's project. An attempt to read Irigaray primarily as a phenomenologist has been made, possibly due to the incessant debates about her essentialism, but such reading fails to accommodate for her theory of subjecthood and embodiment. Hence a line of intellectual heritage between the two can be drawn only in the sense of possible

critical engagement and not actual continuation. The second key difference is their approach to emancipatory politics. Insofar as each of them offers a kind of a strategy, these strategies are significantly different, although likely not mutually exclusive.

As has been shown in many aspects Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray are similar to each other only insofar as they are both feminists, one might perhaps specify French feminists. While much can be gained in understanding each of them through their comparison, this comparison necessarily leads one to the conclusion that there is nothing short of a fundamental theoretical difference between the two. Nevertheless, it bears mentioning that one may also discover that this difference lies in quite different places than is typically thought.

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