THE ECLIPSE OF GENDER

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR AND THE *DIFFÉRANCE* OF TRANSLATION

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In a critical passage of the introduction to his *The Birth of a Clinic*, Michel Foucault suggests that we belong to "an age of criticism whose lack of a primary philosophy" keeps us "at a distance from an original language" (Foucault 1973, xv) and dooms us "to the patient construction of discourses about discourses" (xvi). Thus for Foucault to comment is "to admit by definition an excess of the signifier over the signified; a necessary, unformulated remainder of thought that language has left in the shade—a remainder that is the very essence of that thought, driven outside its secret—but to comment also presupposes that this unspoken element also slumbers within speech, and that by a superabundance proper to the signifier, one may, in questioning it, give voice to a content that was not explicitly signified" (ibid.).

It will be my contention that in thebirth of modern feminism we find a nuanced discourse about gender that has for far too long been left in the shade.

The Eclipse of Simone de Beauvoir

For those of us who have followed the history of modern feminism from its inception, the contribution of Simone de Beauvoir to the philosophical question of gender is "an unformulated remainder" that is yet to be explicitly signified. For while Simone de Beauvoir explicitly sought to give body and substance (materiality) to Sartre's existential philosophy of the Other by way of the instance of gender (Le Doeuff, 1989, 52; Le Doeuff 1981), that substance has become so deeply buried in the fabric of contemporary discourses about discourses that we do not even talk about it anymore. Indeed Simone de Beauvoir, sole heir to a philosophical tradition that seems to have "died" with Jean-Paul Sartre,[1] has been buried along with him. The difficulty of course is that she has, to all intents and purposes, been buried alive. It is in this that the case of Simone de Beauvoir presents us with a hermeneutical puzzle in its own right. On the one hand she is hailed as "prophetess extraordinaire" (O'Brien 1981, 65) and "Mother of Us All" (Ascher 1987; qtd. in Dietz 1992, 74), "the emblematic intellectual woman of the twentieth century" (Moi 1994, 1), "the greatest feminist theorist of our century" (Moi 1994, 2), author of "the definitive analysis of sexism" (Firestone qtd. in Dietz 1992, 74), "the classic manifesto of the liberated woman" (Dietz 1992. 74), on the other, we have dismissed her (work) even before we have encountered it. As Mary Dietz has recently pointed out: "The Bible of contemporary American feminism *The Second Sex* seems to have been worshipped, often quoted, and little read" (Dietz 1992, 78).

Even with the re-situation of academic feminist theorizing,[2] the break with what Rosi Braidotti calls "a crusade against Beauvoir-style feminism" (Braidotti 1991, 168), we have not seen an end to the feminist neglect of her thought as some suggest we have (Dietz 1992, 81). For those of us still locked into looking for Simone de Beauvoir in the first stage of feminism, the leap into recuperation is less than clear; particularly as it depends on a prior appreciation of her work—the allegedly "Beauvoir-style feminism"—that still remains enigmatic, if only because it is so fundamentally untheorized and undivulged. For she is equally absent from the pages of the Sartrean existentialism and phenomenology that, at the very least, she is (by feminists) given to belong[3] and the faithful follower eventually bumps up against what Margaret Simons describes as "the nearly universal failure of contemporary American phenomenologists to acknowledge the contribution of Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* to a phenomenological analysis of the social world" (Simons 1983, 563).

Whatever happened to Simone de Beauvoir? How did she slip so unmentionably past us? In the short discussion that follows, I propose to do some digging to unearth some of that life that vibrates today more than ever before in what Michele Le Doeuff calls a "tremendously well-hidden philosopher" [*une philosophe formidablement*

cachée] (qtd. in Moi 260, n. 1). This is a move to show up both the nature of de Beauvoir's "existentialism" and the ways in which it can offer a blueprint for how gender and sexual difference can be positively worked into the "philosophical" text. Taking as my starting point the eclipse of Simone de Beauvoir, the question that I propose to address is: Why? In attempting to answer it I take one theoretical presupposition to be self-evident: that while the legacy of contemporary thought can be summed up in thankfully more ways than one, one appropriate way is to say that understanding the context within which a particular "work" (or for that matter "author") first appeared, as well as understanding that into which it is interpreted, is a theoretical project of interpretation and reading in itself, one that takes history, language, and culture extremely seriously.

French Text, American Context

According to David B. Allison, whose English language translation of Derrida's *Speech and Phenomenon* has provided the conditions of possibility for the all American cult-of-Derrida, a work in translation is significantly transformed. Allison smuggles the Derridean notion of *différance* into a discourse on translation that voices the sense in which that transformation is at once both a necessary part of the translation process (i.e., is the "*différance*" [deferral] inherent in any act of language production) and incidental to it: i.e., is part of the actual historic, social, and cultural "*différence*" between the context in which it arose and that into which it is subsequently introduced (Allison 1990, 184). I wish to take this operational notion of *différance/différence* and apply it with a difference. I want to use it as a heuristic and hermeneutical tool for addressing the passage of Simone de Beauvoir's philosophy of gender and sexual difference (her philosophy of the Other) into oblivion, a passage marked (if not haunted) by the story of her migration from the ranks of philosophical disciple of Jean-Paul Sartre to that of Mother of modern-day feminism.

The Translation

For starters, let us remember that the definitive tome of burgeoning modern-day feminism is a work that has principally been received in translation only. In this respect, the particular migration of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* across the Atlantic where it has found its home as the origin of modern feminism has its own hermeneutical traces to reveal—traces both internal and external to the text itself. Following a discussion of the conditions of possibility for the translation itself, my attention will be divided between a theoretico-historical approach to the critical reception of the work in the US (the *différence* of translation) and France (the *différance* of translation) from which point I will address the issue of the in-difference of gender in the *The Second Sex* as the repressed ground for the relation between philosophy and feminism.

It was initially Blanche Knopf, wife of Alfred A. Knopf, who was instrumental in bringing about the book's introduction to the American context. Having bought the book on a trip to France, she conceived it to be an important "modern-day sex manual, something between Kinsey and Havelock Ellis" (Bair 1989, xiv). When her husband decided to seek "expert" opinion about the substance of the book itself, it was to H. M. Parshley—a professor emeritus of zoology at Smith College—that he turned. As a consequence, the single English translation of *The Second Sex* to date remains the 1953 Knopf translation produced by a retired Smith College professor of zoology whose only claim to understanding *The Second Sex* resides with the book's presumed focus on issues pertaining to "female sexuality" (Bair 1989, xiv)—issues that, in translation, become cast in the interests of biology and pop sexology rather than philosophy.

Without going into the intricate details of this particular comedy of errors, suffice it to point to but a limited number in order to support the view that something here was definitely askew. And askew it has remained through the multi-fold reprintings that the book has been through to since its initial publication. For Parshley not only apparently thought that philosophical sophistication was not necessary for reading *The Second Sex*, he obviously placed gender in a zone outside the sphere of philosophical interest altogether. One might recall that he writes as of the second page of his translator's preface to the work: "the reader who is indifferent to existentialism or even in opposition to it will nevertheless gain pleasure in plenty" and justifies his position with the words that "Mlle de Beauvoir's book is, after all, on woman, not philosophy" and goes on with: "in any case, the serious reader will find that the occasionally recurring passages of exitentist

thought and terminology will tend to lose their strangeness and their meaning will take shape in his mind as he progresses" (de Beauvoir 1989, xxxviii). Thus segregating women from philosophy on the basis of his own biological imperative, Howard M. Parshley proceeds with a translation that omits all reference to the book's "philosophical" heritage—the heritage so essential to its coming into being. In keeping with his mandate to bring his zoological expertise to de Beauvoir's interest in woman, Parshley not only distorts her artful *mise-en-abîme* of the biological category of woman, which she supplants with an "existential" one—but fails to translate the theoretical corner-stones of her suppositions. Beginning with the deletion of large sections of historical investigation, which suggest as Margaret Simons points out that "Parshley obviously finds women's history boring" (Simons 1983, 562; qtd. in Dietz 1992, 76), we have a series of omissions and distortions that do justice neither to the presence of de Beauvoir's phenomenological existentialism, on the one hand, nor to its significance in application to woman's situation, on the other. Let us turn to each of these translations individually.[4]

(1) Throughout *The Second Sex*, we are given a translation of the textured existential concept *la realité humaine* by the rather flat, fixed and unambiguous term "human nature" despite de Beauvoir's post facto words "I have never believed . . . in human nature. So its a serious mistake to speak of 'human nature' instead of 'human reality' which is a Heideggerian term" (Simons 1989, 20).

(2) The continuous and consistent rendering of the phenomenological concept of *expérience vécue* as "woman's life today" dissolves the phenomenological reference to actuality or "lived experience" (Dietz 1992, 76) in favor of presenting us with an all too one-faced sociology that seems to "date" the book's significance unnecessarily.

And (3), The words "being-for-itself" (*pour-soi*), used interchangeably with "being-in-itself" (*en-soi*), render inoperative the carefully wrought Sartrean distinction between the self and the Other, a distinction that is instrumental to Simone de Beauvoir's monumental tour-de-force in using Sartre's existentialism as a "pertinent theoretical lever . . . for exposing the character of woman's oppression" (Le Doeuff 48) in ways that would not otherwise be possible.

So what then is the significance of these "translations"? How have they worked not to only obliterate but to inscribe the work of Simone de Beauvoir as the significant discourse on gender during the latter part of the twentieth century and the one to dynamize women's movements on two continents? For this we must turn to the contexts of reception, the American and the French, and recast the *différence/différance* problematic of translation in light of the thorniness of gender as a philosophical concept—its presence/absence as the signifier that remains in the shade.

The American Context of Reception

Needless to say, while the notion of "woman's lived experience" as a phenomenological idea worthy of further notice did not survive the vicissitudes of translation in the hands of H. M. Parshley, the presence of sociological and historical factors pertinent to the American context of reception impacted upon the conditions of possibility for a sophisticated American response to the notion of "woman's life today" rather negatively. Not only did the eclipse of *expérience vecue* evacuate the philosophical and phenomenological implications of this notion in relation to woman's lived experience, but the American climate into which it was subsequently introduced had its own restraining influence in relation to giving that concept a full-blown actualization. All in all, there was clearly not to be found much sympathy for exposure to women's oppression either by way of leftist intellectual sympathies or by way of commitment to a philosophical understanding. Not only was the social and ideological milieu of the US in the early 1950s not particularly favorable to Simone de Beauvoir's critique of woman's position—one has only to think of the social environment that was heralding the return of middle-class women to domesticity and that was barely emerging from cold war paranoia of leftist struggles—but this complex existential tome on "feminine existence" was not destined for overwhelming popular interest and appeal, received as it was into a culture where as Alexis de Tocqueville once observed, less attention is paid to philosophy than in any other country in the world (Dietz 1992, 77). With the exception of a small handful of American intellectuals—Elizabeth Hardwick, Irving Howe, C. Wright Mills—who gave credit to her work, Si-

mone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* was all but dead already. Thus the 1953 issue of *Newsweek*, for example, announces the book as the product of "an alarmed male mind" and "a singular mixture of pedantry, nonsense, quotations from novels, case histories, and psychological, anthropological, and other works" (Newsweek 1953, 101; qtd. in Dietz 1992, 77), and *Time* magazine was pre-occupied by the very heft of the volume. With Simone de Beauvoir's figure on the cover, its caption sardonically read "Weight 2 3/4 pounds" (Time 1953, 110; qtd. in Dietz 1992, 77)). Of course, this was then. But once more, American history did not work in Simone de Beauvoir's favor. But by the 1960s, when the economic and social conditions of women's lives and the American feminist movement had caught up with Simone de Beauvoir's critique, the US had acquired its "own" manifesto in the form of Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* (1963), one which according to one theorist was "better suited to the pragmatic, non-philosophical character of the American feminist movement" (Dietz 1992, 78). Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, having been completely emptied of its philosophical content, on the one hand, and having been grafted onto a partial and determinate sociological field, on the other, died silently and perhaps unnoticeably a death that we have yet to recover from. For, unfortunately, we have not yet even begun to mourn.

The Intellectual Climate in France

If *The Second Sex* hit "the rocks of American culture" (Dietz 1992, 77), its fate in France was not much better. In the context of a French intellectual tradition in which philosophy was (contrary to the pragmatic American context) itself valorized and highly represented, it is not without consequence to the eclipse of Simone de Beauvoir that the radical 60's structuralist critique was, above all, the product of a battle against Jean-Paul Sartre.[5] With the passage of structuralism into poststructuralism's hostility to the humanist subject, it is that humanist subject, as encoded by the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre's transcendental ego, that has absorbed that hostility, and has done so to this day (Kruks 1992, 93; Ewald 1990). And of course, along with Jean-Paul Sartre, "out" too goes Simone de Beauvoir. It matters not a dime that Parshley's translation completely obliterates finely wrought phenomenological distinctions. In accordance with this oppositional "poststructuralist" perspective there emerges an unbridgeable divide between (a) a humanist (and Sartrean) conception of the subject as "constituent" and transcendental to history and (b) a post-humanist poststructuralist conception of the subject as constituted, an "effect" of discourse (Kruks 1992, 93). The untranslated, original and fully philosophical version of *The Second Sex*, *Le deuxième sexe* remained stuck somewhere between a rock and a hard place, "foundering" on the rocks of French intellectual culture as much as it did on those of American anti-intellectualism.

Following an initial *succes de scandale*, its phenomenological premises went the way of Jean-Paul Sartre and existentialism generally—that is, out (Ewald 1990). In fact, her complete absorption as a philosopher into Sartrean existentialism is reflected by the entries under her name in the *Petit Larousse*. Throughout the 1970s, she was consistently presented as "Sartre's disciple." If today the entry updated as "Sartre's disciple and companion, and an ardent feminist" is unexpectedly vibrant, it also captures something of the difficulty of her passage or translation from philosopher to feminist. It is into this gap between philosophy and feminism, the US and Europe, between humanism and post-humanism, Enlightenment and modernity or postmodernity, that the passage from existentialism to poststucturalist feminism, the passage from a theoretical grid constructed by a man's hands to one wielded by a woman is made possible. In this gap occupied by the difference between *The Second Sex* and *Le deuxième sexe* the author of that work becomes absorbed. Whether we ignore that philosophical heritage (as happened in the US) or whether we dishonor it (as happened in France), its careful and deliberate transformation of the existentialist problematic from the status of a "system" to that of a "point of view" (Le Doeuff 1989, 52) slips out of the picture, leaving her own contribution historically and contextually nothing short of doomed, suspended in time and space at the "transitive site of meaning's passage" (Allison 180).

The Sheer Difference of Gender

While the standard view of the relationship between Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir as one detrimental to the value of de Beauvoir's femi-

nism has been challenged by contemporary feminist discussions of *The Second Sex/Le deuxième sexe*—discussions that seek to rehabilitate the philosophical tendencies in her feminism by way of a positive application of existentialism can be found in the works of both Michele Le Doeuff and Judith Butler—her access to "philosophy" remains as parenthetical as her belonging to contemporary feminism. The inherence of "subjectivity" in the body—an idea that she borrows from Maurice Merleau-Ponty—remains problematic to a feminism that continues to oppose essentialism with anti-essentialism in the same way that it is problematic to a post-structuralism that opposes humanism and anti-humanism.

However, when we begin to straddle the divide between a European intellectual tradition that nevertheless favors a phenomenology of the body with an American pragmatism that looks to understand the particular conditions of existence that make-up woman's "situation"—an existential term—we begin to understand the value of such utterances in de Beauvoir's text as those that proclaim that "woman, like man, *is* her body" (de Beauvoir 1989, 29). For if Simone de Beauvoir has effectively "translated" the traditional existentialist and phenomenological notion of "the real" (*la réalité humaine*) into the *réalité* of gender, it is not without attention to the body. It is here that an embodied challenge to the old self-identical humanist mold takes on a certain phenomenological *ampleur*. However in the context of attempts to translate a phenomenology of *expérience vécue* into the structure of a specifically feminine conditions of existence, the move toward "the body," as contemporary feminism has shown, is not itself without problems if abstracted from the conditions of existence of "my body" (Rich 1986, 215). Adrienne Rich has carefully pointed out that "to say 'the body' lifts me away from what has given me a primary perspective. To say 'my body' reduces the temptation to grandiose generalization," it "plunges me into lived experience, particularity: I see scars, disfigurements, discolorations, damages, losses, as well as what pleases me" (215). Thus even though Simone de Beauvoir derives inspiration for this from the work of Merleau-Ponty, necessarily, "my" body in Merleau-Ponty has no gender. The eclipse of gender in phenomenology and existentialism before Simone de Beauvoir is striking in that it theorizes (on the face of it) a "body" belonging to no one, contrary to bodies in her text that, at most belong to women in general, at the very least, to Simone de Beauvoir in particular.

Thus another way to read her work is to contextualize her difference with Philosophy — expressed in the words "I did not regard myself as a philosopher"—within her view of the nature of "philosophy" as: "that conscious venture into lunacy known as a 'philosophical system' from where they (philosophers) get the stubbornness which gives their idea universal applicability" (qtd. in Moi 1994, 32). In her words, "the female condition does not facilitate the development of this kind of stubbornness" (qtd. in Moi 1991, 32). Such statements do not qualify as expressions of a deference to Sartre; they are expressions of her difference, both as a woman belonging to a class of women and as an intellectual woman who belonged to no one but herself. In translating Sartre's existentialism from a system into a point of view "trained" on her own partial and determinate field of gendered-theoretical experience, she was able to start her philosophy with where she was and in so doing was able to put gender back into philosophy in ways that historically gender has been excised from it.

For whether it is because of that affiliation or despite it, Simone de Beauvoir not only deconstructed existentialism as sexism and reconstructed it as "operative philosophy" for feminism, she was also able to mount a phenomenology of woman's lived experience and of woman's situation that "deferred" to the precepts of existential phenomenology as developed by Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre (Kruks 1990; Le Doeuff 1989), but only for the sake of establishing the philosophical and phenomenological grounds for its own theoretical departure, or "*différence*." Though her operative use of existentialism as a point of view "oriented to a theoretical intent by being trained on a determinate and partial field of experience" (Le Doeuff 1989, 52), she was able to produce a philosophical and phenomenological analysis that transformed the existentialist problematic from that of "the status of *system* (necessarily returning back on itself) to that of a *point of view*" (Le Doeuff 52).

If Simone de Beauvoir put Sartre's existential philosophy into her own terms, if she used her "female condition" as the site of an intellectual

interest, it was neither to abandon philosophy nor to fix the category of women as the ontological condition of possibility for feminism. Rather it was in order to propose that site in all its Otherness as the foundation for philosophy—the Other as *différance*, that is, as singularity; not as exotica, but as "pure difference," "sheer difference," not-necessary difference. Which is to say, the Other as in-different difference. This is precisely what Giorgio Agamben describes as "*singularité quelconque*," a "singularity not in its indifference with respect to a common (to a concept, for example: being red, being French, being Muslim), but rather in its being *such as it is*" (Agamben 1993, 1). According to Agamben, "singularity is thus freed from the false dilemma that obliges knowledge to choose between the ineffability of the individual and the intelligibility of the universal" (ibid). Consequently "this or that property which identifies it (being) as belonging to this or that set, to this or that class (the reds, the French, the Muslims) . . . is reclaimed not for another class nor for the simple generic absence of any belonging, but for its being-such, for belonging itself" (Agamben 1993, 1–2).

As we recall I began this essay with the intention of describing the eclipse of gender as an eclipse of Simone de Beauvoir's contribution to philosophy: the eclipse of a great thinker and of the historical problematic (the problematic of gender) that she brought to the table. However, there is a third sense of the eclipse of gender in the work of Simone de Beauvoir. This is a sense that has tremendous impact upon the way we read the history of modern feminism as well as upon how her work can effect the future of feminism. For if the battles over essentialism make up the central dilemma or paradox of modern feminism, it is because these battles are also waged in the name of "gender" as the essense of the feminist project. Yet even as the work of Simone de Beauvoir puts the question of gender on the map and thereby carves up the possibilitites of feminism as a question of gender, "gender" in her work does not exist: *it is never named.* In this respect her work occupies the void that gender stands for. This is critical to a repositioning of Simone de Beauvoir within the dual histories of philosophy and feminism, and within the divergencies among feminisms. For it is here, I shall now argue, that gender itself emerges as the silent remainder, the remainder of a philosophy-in-situation in which there is no truth or "essence" of gender and where "gender" as a theoretical construct of use to feminism, or even as foundational of a feminist porject, is a "truth" to be discovered afresh with each case and possibly one day left behind.

Indeed, if the greatest hindrance of the unifying idea of "gender" is that it eclipses women's specificities, that it eclipses the difference(s) among women, or the peculiarity/ies of the situations that give rise to it, then (as I will contend) the eclipse of "gender" in the work of Simone de Beauvoir lends new impetus to contemporary feminist theory. Through it gender emerges full-blown, not as "truth" or "essence," but as a singular "situation." Through a phenomenological study of the "situation" of gender (including biological, economic, historic, literary, and psychoanalytic factors and frameworks), she called up a dizzying array. "I am a woman," she writes in the "*Introduction" to The Second Sex*, "on this truth, must be based all further discussion" (de Beauvoir 1989, xxi). Marked by her desire to animate the first person singular, Simone de Beauvoir sought to express the "difference" of gender as it emerges in situations mapped by racial, economic, familial, and cultural constraints that presented no transcendental grounds of necessity, not even (I should say least of all) "biological," "natural," or "given" ones.[6]

It is indicative in this regard that she called a book on woman by the aleatory and almost indifferent signifier the "second" sex. It was a title that was suggested to her in lieu of her previous idea to call the book the "other" sex on the grounds that if (as in a joke by a friend of Sartre's) queers are the "third sex," then women must come in second (Bair xvii). In oight of the strategic value of an eclipse of gender as a tool for feminism, the in-difference of gender is remarkable in this very choice of title. The second-ness of the sexual signifier is a reminder of a kind of "whatever" (*quelconque*) sort of difference, a difference that knows no difference except in the parlance of a private joke. A reminder too that this is one that makes all the difference when denied, repressed, excluded, negated, or eclipsed by those "differences" that are instituted (though not necessarily examined) as such. These are the official differences, such as "gender" is today. For the difference between man and woman, mind and body, subject and object, amongst many others, is "difference" subtended and shaped by the constant

elision of other differences, silent differences, even sometimes unknown differences; differences that cross and intersect in ways that leave each case a palimpsest for recovery.

Scaled on the premises of her own intellectual body, Simond de Beauvoir produced gender neither as cultural nor as natural difference by as *différance*. This is "*différance*"of gender both eludes the feminist fixing of what Judith Butler calls "the ontological integrity of the category of woman" at the same time as it allows us to theorize woman's oppression differently: as something that must be reinvented continually if only because there is no fundamental cause for it. Refusing to be a slave to the "grid" in favor of reviewing the singularity of the discrete case, the example, the instance, each time afresh, her philosophy actualizes, embodies, and en-genders a philosophy-in-situation that breathes life into a text and transforms a phallocentric existential system into a theoretical tool for feminism. This, as Le Doeuff notes is a "*tour-de-force* worthy of recognition" (Le Doeuff). With a commitment to the real over the reference point, she enabled the philosophy-in-situation in which gender at once vanishes and comes into being. In this way, women's oppression could finally emerge as in Le Doeuff's words "an oppression without a fundamental cause," nothing short of "a shocking contingency, a strangeness, something non-natural to be transformed as rapidly as possible" (Le Doeuff 54). This does not mean that it does not exist or that we should condone oppression. Rather that we refuse the tyranny of a theoretical grid that would explain that oppression by virtue of a necessary relation between isolated cases abstracted into a system of equivalences including that of "gender." This is what it is as philosophers to prioritize the real, the individual, and the body without fetishizing these (as does the move in academic feminism to reduce the body to a scholarly discourse about the body that has nothing to do with bodies).

Negotiating the treacherous course between biology, psychology, and social reality, Simone de Beauvoir's philosophy-in-situation stresses the fact that while biological "facts" have no value outside the values of society, they do still have an objective reality. Thus although "body" is not a stable essence, it is still encountered by the self as an objective given (Kruks 1992, 105). It is, in other words, "one of the essential elements in her [woman's] situation in the world" (de Beauvoir 1989, 37). In this regard, by understanding that reproduction and sexuality are socially and culturally constituted phenomena, Simone de Beauvoir avoids the essentialism of biological reduction, without at the same time ignoring the fact that biological sex is always present as a given in the lived experience (*expérience vécue*) of the body of woman. For in her work "subjectivity is not given in closed contradistinction to a realm of objective entities" (Kruks 1992, 106)—as is the case with what Nancy Hartsock has characterized as the Sartrean "walled-city" conception of the subject (Hartsock 1985, 241); rather, it is *through our bodies* that we inhere in the sexed world of subject formation.[7] Thus emerges out of the body of *Le deuxième sexe*/*The Second Sex* the single most profound philosophical insight of the twentieth century and the lesson of gender. This is that "to be present in the world implies strictly that there exists a body which is at the same time a thing in the world and a point of view of this world" (de Beauvoir 1989, 7).

Beyond the Eclipse

The eclipse of Simone de Beauvoir could, on the one hand, be explained by contemporary (post-structuralist) theories of reading in accordance with which the figurative "death of the author" and birth of the "commentary" is given concrete substance and a feminine form at last. Indeed, one might argue that her work has been so thoroughly absorbed into the fabric of contemporary thought that it has become as much a part of the problem as it is part of the solution. If, for example, one wishes to pursue the eclipse of gender generally, her case presents a rather dazzling palimpsest for recovery. On the darker side, the eclipse of Simone de Beauvoir is also the eclipse of the conditions of possibility for rescuing contemporary feminist debates from the standstill at which they presently find themselves.[8] To look at those conditions of possibility straight on can serve up some alternatives for moving beyond these impasses to look at their effectivity as a moment in the history of philosophy since the Enlightenment.

If Simone de Beauvoir has surreptitiously and unmentionably slipped into philosophical oblivion, it is, I contend, because she has been evacuated, sucked up whole by the *espace blanc*—the yawning chasm—that stands between and separates "feminism" from "philosophy," "French

continental thought" from "Anglo-American" philosophy, "Enlightenment" from "post-Enlightenment" thought. As the abject link between them, Simone de Beauvoir is the invisible point of their intercalation; the repressed point of their inescapable and mutual imbrication. It is therefore our task to look at that operation of evacuation as a clue to the concealed links between these poles. In now giving voice to that "secret" of gender, that "unspoken element" that slumbers in the text of Western philosophy as both the presence of a "body" and that of a "point of view," we can envision extending the project of the Enlightenment into that of postmodernism. In her account of a gendered, embodied, sexed being-in-situation—i.e., of a sexed, gendered, embodied, and situated subjectivity that is constituted and constituting—we find the conditions of possibility for conceiving both. To view the Enlightenment as an "unfinished cultural project" (Johnson 1993, 4) to which we might continue to append our efforts is also a way of recognizing that it is within it that the work of Simone de Beauvoir is decisive. It is also to recognize that through her work, the spirit out of which phenomenology and existentialism are born finds a life that still vibrates (today more than ever before) with the possibility of ways in which gender and sexual difference can—along with "body," "experience," and "subjectivity"—be positively reworked into the fabric of the "philosophical" text. As Simone de Beauvoir is repealed back into the silences from whence she came, her gendered intellectual body continues to be the transitive and generalized site of a *différance* that knows difference differently. As Derrida has noted: "Qu'un secret puisse être declaré sans être devoilé . . . viola ce qui restera toujours à traduire, ici même" (74).[9]

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ENDNOTES

1. The "death" of Jean-Paul Sartre at the hand of post-structuralism has been variously documented (Kruks 1992, 93; Levi-Strauss 1966, 247; Ewald 1990; de Lauretis 1984, 160).
2. Generally speaking, these "new directions" have most notably been pursued in philosophy principally by Michele Le Doeuff (1981; 1989), Judith Butler (1992; 1987), and Linda Singer (1990), in cultural ctudies by Meaghan Morris (1988), and more generally by Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Monique Wittig (Dietz 1992, 81). For a current picture, see Simmons (1995). By the late 1980s, a dramatic change occurs in Anglo-American stud-

ies of Simone de Beauvoir: 1) at least ten books on her life and work (mostly by British authors) appeared between 1981 and 1990; 2) interviews by Alice Jardine, Margaret Simons, Dierdre Bair, and others re-introduced her to the North American audiences; 3) critical assessments of her thought multiplied in journals of feminist studies as well as in literary and political theory; 4) a number of scholarly publications in the US devoted special issues to Simone de Beauvoir among them, such as *Feminist Studies* (1980), *Hypatia* (1985), *Yale French Studies* (1986), and more recently *Signs* (1992); 5) Simone de Beauvoir's death in 1986 was occasion for more retrospectives on her writing and the catalyst for numerous biographical efforts—most notably Bair's major 1990 work: *Simone de Beauvoir: A Biography*.

3. While contemporary academic developments of the eighties and nineties may suggest otherwise, the treacherous course between philosophy and feminism is far from having been negotiated. One has only to recall the kinds of contentions that surfaced when Craig Owens attempted to negotiate the then "treacherous course between feminism and postmodernism." However, while these two unlikely partners have since made their tenuous peace (see the anthology *Feminism/Postmodernism* [Nicholson 1990], amongst others), philosophy and feminism are still held in tension (Finn 1982; Le Doeuff 1977). I take as strong indication of this state of affairs the fact that there are academic conferences bearing the title "Is Feminism Philosophy?" While my initial impulse is to respond with indications that "philosophy" as a discipline was born out of inquiries devoted to the very questions that concern feminism—questions of gender and sexual difference—my second one is to ask how they have become so estranged. Elsewhere, I have argued (as others have before me) in favor of the historical presence of what I call the "naturalistic phallacy," a phallacy on the basis of which philosophy has transferred its original object of inquiry (the nature of sexual conception and sexual difference) onto the subject of inquiry (the nature of a masculinized faculty of philosophical conception). An undifferentiated sexual subject, this philosophical subject (subject of the "human" sciences) has subsequently dominated the philosophical scene, leaving the "natural" matters of sex, biological conception, and gender (i.e., matters of difference) to the domain of the "empirical" and biological sciences.

   Today, we have come to identify this "philosophical subject" as the "humanist subject," a subject that a number of anti-humanist positions (including Marxism, psychoanalysis, post-structuralism, postmodernism, deconstruction, feminism, and even existentialism) have increasingly challenged. While this may initially appear to bode well for the marriage of philosophy and feminism, such strong anti-humanist strains as those of post-structuralism, postmodernism, and deconstruction in contemporary discourse do not automatically accede to the lofty status of "philosophy." In the contemporary continental histories of philosophy that I have myself used in Québec colleges to introduce French students to the history of the discipline, it is the now long buried existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre that closes the story of philosophy. This we are told is the "last philosopher"—"le dernier des philosophes de notre temps" (Russ 1985, 144), a philosopher who has been succeeded by what is referred to as the "fragmentation" of the field by post-structuralism, about which a few alarming paragraphs are thrown in by way of conclusion (Russ 1985). While, alas, such a narrative is somewhat more up-to-date than the Anglo-American histories that as a philosophy major in a Canadian university I was raised on—narratives whose clarity of presentation peaks with the chapter on British empiricism and peters out with Kant and Hegel, at which point history and philosophy abruptly end—one cannot help but wonder how such an unexpected closure to the Western history of philosophy can possibly be admitted.
4. For a full account of the deletions and "mistranslations" of Parshley's English translation of *Le deuxième sexe*, see Margaret Simons' excellent article "The Silencing of Simone de Beauvoir: Guess What's Missing from *The Second Sex*?" (1983). Simons is currently working on her own translation.
5. Waged principally by Claude Levi-Strauss, this was a battle that was won as early as 1962 when Levi-Strauss proclaimed, in the context of a chapter-long attack on Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* to be found in chapter nine of *The Savage Mind*, the post-structuralist killerblow to the Enlightenment concept of the subject by announcing, along with Michel Foucault, the newly-figured "dissolution of man" (Levi-Strauss 1966, 247).
6. The Idea that biological "sex" is given by nature whereas "gender" is the product of culture is one that comes along with the emergence of "gender" as distinct field of inquiry. One of the singly most valuable effects of Simone de Beauvoir's eclipsing of "gender" as a unifying principle is the dissoulution of the division or difference that we read between "sex" and gender," a division upon which "gender" is often parasitic and that accounts for the paradoxical and often paralysing component in feminist theory, and that manifests itself in the stalemating or rigid polarizing

of positions in a number of debates in feminist ethics and feminist epistemology. For a more in-depth look at this division in light of my reading of Simone de Beauvoir, see my forthcoming article "Lines of Flight: Simone de Beauvoir and the Escape from French Philosophy."

7. For a more complete account of the phenomenology of the body in the work of Simone de Beauvoir, see Debra Bergoffen (1995; 1996) and Sonia Kruks "Gender and Subjectivity: Simone de Beauvoir and Contemporary Feminism" (1992).
8. In the age of a feminism that is informed by the presence of continental French thought, yet adapted to the particular conditions of existence that characterize not only the experiences of women but also "the status of womanhood in Western theoretical discourse" (Marks and de Courtivron 1981, xii), Simone de Beauvoir allows us "to acknowledge the sameness of women as biologically sexed and socially constructed females, without pinning an immutable essence of womanhood onto "real historical women" whose lives may be radically divergent, shaped also by class, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and many other factors" (Kruks 1992, 107).

   Furthermore, to the extent that subjectivity is thus both constituted and constituting, oppression affects more than its immediate victims and liberatory struggles cannot be other than collective. This "intersubjectivity" of the subject that emerges (Kruks 1992, 103) is present within the text itself when Simone de Beauvoir writes: "It is not as single individuals that human beings are to be defined in the first place; men and women have never stood opposed to each other in single combat; the couple is an original *mitsein* and as such it always appears as a permanent element in a larger collective" (de Beauvoir 1989, 5). In this respect, Simone de Beauvoir is closer to Merleau-Ponty with whom she collaborated on the journal *Temps modernes* than she is to Sartre who believed that a slave in chains is as free (to constitute meanings) as his master. For Simone de Beauvoir, "situation" can give rise to conditions that impose their meanings on the subject to the point where self-reflection and freedom cease to be possible. In this, her work confirms the feminist critique of the abstract universalism of the masculine subject by proposing a feminist subject that lives a "relational experience" of self (Kruks 1992, 98 n. 16). Thus we find throughout *The Second Sex* two kinds of relations to others: a) those between social equals, and b) those that involve social inequality. In a "continuum" (Kruks 1992, 101) of responses to oppression there are variations that move from: a) the "independent" woman's attempt to resist oppression altogether, to b) those women who choose to accept it because of the security and comfort that it brings (all the while that they demonstrably live a classic Sartrean experience of "bad faith"), c) those that are unable to conceive of real alternatives and thus accept it in passive resentment, and d) those so oppressed that they have ceased to be capable of choice altogether (de Beauvoir 1991, 38; 1989, xxxii). The last being the extreme anti-Enlightenment position.
9. I wish to thank my colleagues and students at the Simone de Bauvoir Institute for encouraging my research and for giving me the opportunity to explore, share, and finesse the ideas expressed in this essay.

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