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The Other Woman.
Towards a diffractive rereading of the oeuvres of Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray.

Research master thesis, *Gender and Ethnicity*

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Abstract.

This thesis project –a project that has to be located in the domains of Continental philosophy, feminist theory, and gender studies– wishes to overcome the Oedipalized reception history, or the Oedipal feminist narratives that have been created and told about the oeuvres of feminist philosophers Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray.

I claim that this Oedipalized reception history –which will be thoroughly reviewed in this thesis– put the works of Beauvoir and Irigaray against one another in an oppositional and hierarchic manner, by first of all examining the wide-spread assumption that Irigaray should be seen as Beauvoir's rebellious daughter, and by critically looking at the idea that Irigaray's sexual (now relabeled as *sexuate*) difference philosophy then must be a flat-out refusal of Beauvoir's humanist, existentialist feminism. My project hopes to shed light on this paralyzing constructed opposition, and wishes to move towards a different kind of feminist rereading and story-telling: namely, a diffractive and explicitly an-Oedipal way of telling of stories that would look for the lines of continuity between these two philosophies, without reducing them to another; without, to put it differently, falling back into the phallogocentric, reflective logic of sameness.

The engagement to (re)read these oeuvres in a diffractive manner starts from the intuition that the feminist-philosophical differences between both philosophies have been extremely overaccentuated: as I will argue, both Beauvoir and Irigaray have been the victims of an Oedipal and Oedipalizing generational dialectics –a phallogocentric, dichotomizing dialectics that is at work in the reception history of feminist theory in general, which has made it almost impossible to look at feminist works from different generations in a continuous manner. Due to the combination of such an Oedipal dialectics, the Anglo-American (mis)construction of 'French feminism,' and the many mistranslations and misinterpretations of their works, the philosophies of Beauvoir and Irigaray have been read in an oppositional, fixating, and paralyzing manner: an Irigaray versus de Beauvoir dichotomy has been created, as if both philosophies could no longer speak to each other. Further supported by other binaries such as equality versus difference, and anti-essentialism versus essentialism, the stifled and stifling stories about these philosophies are extremely problematic, seen from a general feminist point of view, and seen from an Irigarayian perspective –a perspective that wishes to revalue the relationships between women, and mother and daughters in particular.

In my project, I first of all give a detailed overview of the feminist reception history of

the works of Beauvoir and Irigaray, and present some of the reasons why these oeuvres have been read in such a discontinuous manner. I then focus on one specific Anglo-American misreading of the philosophies of Beauvoir and Irigaray, by evaluating American feminist philosopher and queer theorist Judith Butler's engagement with these philosophies. Although I of course do not deny that Butler also has had a positive influence on the Anglo-American reception history of the feminist philosophies of Beauvoir and Irigaray, I nonetheless claim that Butler misread these oeuvres by making use of a particular Anglo-American sex versus gender terminology –a terminology that cannot adequately capture the complexities of both philosophies. As I will show, Butler in the end falls back into an Irigaray versus Beauvoir dichotomy, because she rereads both oeuvres through an 'either/or'-framework. This critique, however, does not mean that I completely want to do away with Butler's readings: I rather *work through* these readings in my thesis in order to come to another, hopefully more continuous rereading that would revalue Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray as autonomous feminist philosophers, instead of seeing them as each other's feminist-philosophical rivals.

In this project of working through stifled and stifling stories, I try to develop a Deleuzian-inspired an-Oedipal and feminist strategy of diffractive reading by looking at the feminist-conceptual origins of diffraction in the works of Donna Haraway and Karen Barad. My project then finally –slowly and tentatively– unravels what such a philosophical-feminist diffractive reading of the philosophies of Beauvoir and Irigaray might look like, if one were to move away from the constructed Oedipal rivalry between these two oeuvres, and focus on a cross-fertilizing dialogue instead…

Abbreviations.

Most of the translations of French and Dutch books and texts were done by myself, unless stated otherwise. I have tried to refer to Simone de Beauvoir's and Luce Irigaray's original books, which I have abbreviated as follows. These abbreviations will be used when these works are referred to more than once in the footnotes.

Simone de Beauvoir:

DSa	Le deuxième sexe. I. Les faits et les mythes.
DSb	Le deuxième sexe. II. L'expérience vécue.
FBS	Faut-il brûler Sade?

Luce Irigaray:

C	Conversations.
CS	Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un.
EDS	Éthique de la différence sexuelle.
JAT	J'aime à toi. Esquisse d'une félicité dans l'histoire.
JTN	Je, tu, nous. Pour une culture de la différence.
LIT	Luce Irigaray. Teaching.
PE	Passions élémentaires.
S	Speculum de l'autre femme.
SEP	Sexes et parentés.
STW	Sharing the World.
TWL	The Way of Love

Preface and acknowledgements.

After having written two theses on Luce Irigaray's *philosophie féminine* during my previous studies in philosophy –theses in which I focused on Irigaray's radical feminist and subversive critiques of the Western canons of philosophy and psychoanalysis– I decided to do things differently this time. This is not to say that this thesis all of a sudden isn't focusing on philosophy anymore: most of the authors I engage with in this project are first and foremost (feminist) philosophers, and I still consider myself to be a feminist, female philosopher –albeit a philosopher in training– as well, as you will see in the introduction. But it is true that my research interests have changed since I began studying at the gender studies department at Utrecht University, and whilst I was taking classes at the women's studies department at the University of California, Los Angeles.

My confrontation with gender studies really helped me to think differently, not only about the Western canon of philosophy in general, but also about the feminist philosophical tradition –a tradition that, alas, remained rather invisible during my years in philosophy. At Utrecht, I gained so many interesting and valuable new insights: I wasn't only confronted with many new domains and theoretical frameworks, but I also learned that thinking critically about the tools and methodologies that you are using whilst doing feminist-philosophical research, is extremely important. Next to that, I also gained a lot from staying at UCLA for a quarter, where gender studies research was tackled rather differently: sexual difference philosophy, cultural analysis, and Foucault studies were of course also taught there, yet, American gender studies departments do seem to be more preoccupied with social scientific research than with humanities-based research. It is this second confrontation that made me realize that gender studies not only is a heterogeneous, inter- or even transdisciplinary research field, but that each department probably also has its own focus, and maybe even narrative about feminist theory and its multiple and diverse traditions.

And this is where my thesis project comes back into the picture: although feminist Continental philosophers Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray were both accepted as important –and, dare I say so, *canonical*– figures at UCLA and Utrecht, I do have the feeling that –and my thesis touches upon that, too– the Anglo-American feminist tradition has originated from a Beauvoirian-like feminism. This intuitive feeling was later on confirmed when I took a sociological class on gendered bodies at UCLA that basically started with some readings of Beauvoir's *Le deuxième sexe*, and then moved towards other texts that drew more radical conclusions from Beauvoir's anti-essentialist premises. This emphasis on Beauvoir's

work surprised me: not because I thought that her oeuvre was no longer relevant, because it still is, obviously; but it rather made me think about the multiplicity of narratives that exist within feminist theory. Combined with my passion for Irigarayian studies, this idea then brought me to my thesis topic, namely a diffractive rereading of both the oeuvres of Beauvoir and Irigaray. This move towards a different kind of rereading was influenced by the fact that Beauvoir and Irigaray each had been welcomed rather differently in the reception history of feminist theory: although I wouldn't go as far to say that feminist theory –like the philosophical canon– is divided into an Analytic versus Continental tradition, the Anglo-American narratives around Beauvoir seem to be a lot more positive than the (earlier) ones on Irigaray. This has always bothered me, and because I find that both Beauvoir and Irigaray should be valued as autonomous feminist philosophers, I try to unravel the different narratives about Beauvoir and Irigaray in this thesis, whilst working towards a different, diffractive readings strategy.

This is all I am going to give away in this preface, but I sincerely hope that you –the reader– can agree with the premise of reading feminist narratives in a different, maybe even more open-minded manner, and also, once you have finished reading this thesis, are convinced of the fact that the feminist philosophies of Beauvoir and Irigaray can indeed be reread in a more continuous, feminist and cross-fertilizing way.

That being said, I also want to add that I am extremely indebted to dr. Iris van der Tuin, who was the first person to make me aware of the immensely creative, philosophical, and feminist potential of the method of diffractive reading. Next to that, I also want to thank her for being such an amazing supervisor: Iris not only patiently read, reread, and commented on all of my chapters, but she also has really challenged me to think and write in a more critical and nuanced manner. Her critical reflections, advice, and continuous support really mean a lot to me. Next to Iris, I also want to thank dr. Annemie Halsema, who –after only having met me once at a book presentation in Antwerp– trusted me enough to be my second reader, and made time to meticulously read everything. I am also grateful to my parents, family and friends who all have helped me get through these two intense, but productive years; and to everyone at Utrecht University's gender studies department. And last but not least, I want to express my gratitude to Luce Irigaray herself, whom I met at the *2012 Luce Irigaray International Seminar and Symposium* at Bristol University. I want to thank her and the other kind-hearted participants for their contributions to my work, and for our sometimes incredibly challenging, but always intellectually stimulating philosophical discussions.

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Introduction: Mothers and their (un)dutiful daughters.

A) Feminism's Oedipal(ized) drama reconsidered.

> But, well, from all that I have seen, it appears that mother/daughter relationships are generally bad. No matter what the mother does, because…the mother wants to be a friend at the same time. As she also wants to be the one to direct her daughter.
>
> **(Simone de Beauvoir and Hélène V. Wenzel, "Interview with Simone de Beauvoir," 26)**

> In order to be desired and loved by men, we have to abandon the mother, replace her, eliminate her so that we can be the same. Which destroys the possibility of love between mother and daughter. They are accomplices and rivals at the same time, so that they can arrive at the only possible position in the desire of man.
>
> **(Luce Irigaray, *Éthique de la différence sexuelle*, 101)**

Is there any better way to open a thesis in gender studies and philosophy with a reconsideration of feminism's own 'Electra complex?'[1] Although most of the pages in this thesis will be spent on trying to figure out how the feminist philosophical oeuvres of French feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) and Belgian-born feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray (1932) could and should be reread in a more overtly feminist, dialogical, and hence more productive manner, the introduction itself will only prelude this process of rereading by touching upon a very actual and extremely delicate problem in feminism, namely the mother/daughter divide and the issue of feminism's generational matricide.

This divide nonetheless can be connected to Beauvoir and Irigaray, since both thinkers have analyzed the problematic patriarchal relationships between women, and between mothers and daughters in particular, as can also be seen in the above quotes. Beauvoir often suggested that daughters almost always rebel against their mothers, and that this will not change unless women are seen as more than phallic mothers; and Irigaray has paid attention to this mother/daughter divide in all of her works by claiming that patriarchy has destroyed the possibility of relationships between women. According to Irigaray, Western culture is founded on a "matricide"[2] –a symbolic murdering of the mother that has its origins in Plato's

[1] I am putting 'Electra complex' between brackets here, since this supposedly feminine version of the Oedipus complex doesn't really exist, but in fact has always been represented in an Oedipalized manner, as will be shown later on.

[2] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et parentés* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987), 23.

phallogocentric metaphysics which completely eradicated everything that referred to the feminine, matter, and the maternal womb. This symbolic eradication of the maternal-feminine ("*le maternal-féminin*"[3]) has resulted in a cultural undervaluation of the mother figure and of a matriarchal genealogy, and has made it impossible for women to be subjects of their own; to be the daughters of their mothers, and each other's sisters. Daughters are supposed to fight for the attention of their fathers and men, and hence are stuck in a situation of eternal female, and especially motherly, rivalry.

Although these patriarchal relationships between women and their daughters have been represented as examples of the 'Electra complex' in feminist literature,[4] one could actually go along with Irigaray's thoughts in *Speculum de l'autre femme* (1974), and argue that these matricides (and sororicides) are basically completely Oedipal. The (neo-)Freudian[5] 'Electra complex' in Irigaray's eyes is a total sham anyways, since Freud's psychoanalytical model of children's sexual development and subjectivity is essentially masculine and doesn't make room for sexual difference at all. The little girl is merely a "disadvantaged little man"[6] in Freudian theory, which means that Freud's 'feminine' Oedipus complex is a masculine complex in disguise, because it works via the same phallic parameters. The (neo-Freudian) Electra is a mere pawn in the hands of her/the Father when killing her Mother, which makes the concept of an 'Electra complex' (that would feature a female autonomous subject) unimaginable. And it is exactly this masculinized way of thinking that Irigaray wants to get away from: she wants to revalue the relationships amongst women, leave the Oedipal drama between mothers and daughters behind –a drama that is primarily instigated by patriarchy– and reopen the possibility of a "body-to-body encounter with the mother."[7]

Since both Beauvoir and Irigaray thus seem to be immensely preoccupied with analyzing and even fixing these Oedipalized mother-daughter relationships, it comes as a surprise that the feminisms of Beauvoir and Irigaray have been read in a purely Oedipal manner: whereas Simone de Beauvoir is often depicted as the mother of French and European feminism (and as the (grand)mother of American feminism), Luce Irigaray is usually seen as

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[3] Luce Irigaray, *Éthique de la différence sexuelle* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1984), 93.

[4] See for instance Susan Faludi, "American Electra: Feminism's ritual matricide," *Harper's Magazine*, October, 2010, 29-42.

[5] Although the Electra complex was first coined as a psychoanalytical concept by Carl Gustav Jung, it was Sigmund Freud who had already described the existence of a feminine Oedipus complex. See Sigmund Freud, "Female sexuality," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 13 (1932): 281-297.

[6] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1974), 26.

[7] Irigaray, *SEP*, 26.

Beauvoir's disloyal or even 'undutiful daughter'[8] because of her feminism that pays attention to female specificity and difference, and that allegedly intends to move beyond Beauvoir's humanist equality feminism, whilst paying homage to the 'Fathers' (i.e. Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan).[9] The feminisms of Beauvoir and Irigaray are hence traditionally reconstructed in a dichotomized structure or binary: the former is usually seen as representing an equality feminism that wants to free women from patriarchal oppression by giving them equal rights, whereas the latter is supposed to stand for a feminism of difference that only focuses on the specificity of women, and wishes to grant women specific rights on the basis of sexual difference, instead of merely opting for the equality route. It is exactly this kind of Oedipal, dichotomized reconstruction of Beauvoir as a (feminist) mother versus Irigaray as her undutiful daughter that I want to get away from by rereading their oeuvres in a different, more dynamic manner. But before delving into the depths of the Irigaray versus Beauvoir dichotomy, it might be interesting to investigate how this Oedipal drama has asserted itself in feminist epistemology as a so-called generational and wavy project.

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[8] The concept of the (un)dutiful daughter can be found in Australian feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti's works, whenever she talks about the issue of female philosophers and their loyalty versus the philosophical canon. In "Embodiment, Sexual Difference, and the Nomadic Subject," for instance, Braidotti is worried about "the syndrome of the 'dutiful daughter'" that is being displayed by many female philosophers who are too loyal to the conservative idea that philosophy is an untouchable "master discourse." Braidotti, on the other hand, wants "women to dis-identify themselves with the discipline of philosophy as a male-dominated, Oedipalizing, theoretically hegemonic, exclusionary discourse of power." See Rosi Braidotti, "Embodiment, Sexual Difference, and the Nomadic Subject," *Hypatia* 8 (1993): 2 for the previous quotes. In a more recent article, Braidotti explicitly labels herself as "an undutiful daughter," i.e. as a feminist philosopher who works with the canon, but wishes to criticize and evaluate it from within. See Rosi Braidotti, "The way we were: some post-structuralist memoirs," *Women's Studies International Forum* 23 (2000): 727 for the quote.

[9] See for instance Élisabeth Badinter, "Femmes vous lui devez tout," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 18-24 Avril, 1986, 39, where French popular feminist Badinter makes it clear that she sees Simone de Beauvoir as her "spiritual mother," whilst accentuating the paradox that a woman such as Beauvoir who never wanted children, now has so many daughters. In her interviews with contemporary French feminists and thinkers, Catherine Rodgers also concludes that Beauvoir has been considered to be "some sort of a mother for the new generations of feminists" in the French context. See Catherine Rodgers, *Le Deuxième Sexe de Simone de Beauvoir: Un héritage admiré et contesté* (Paris – Montréal: L'Harmattan, 1998), 299. Yet, on the same page Rodgers also states that the members of the *MLF* (*Mouvement de libération des femmes*) (i.e. the main French feminist organization at the time) usually "violently rejected the image of the mother –the castrating and possessive mother– and consequentially had the tendency to depreciate the work that was done by their elders, and hence neglected their heritage." (Loc. cit) Also see Astrid Henry, *Not my mother's sister: generational conflict and third-wave feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 71 for the idea that Beauvoir is seen as the mother of American second-wave feminist Betty Friedan, who greatly admired Beauvoir's feminism. Hence, Beauvoir has been constructed as the grandmother of American second-wave feminism. An example of Luce Irigaray as Simone de Beauvoir's disloyal daughter can be found in Dorothy Kaufmann, "Simone de Beauvoir: Questions of Difference and Generation," *Yale French Studies* 72 (1986): 121-131. Kaufman mentions Irigaray (together with Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva) as rebellious daughters who "seem to be imitating the masculine model as they seek to overthrow the feminist Mother [i.e. Beauvoir], in the name, paradoxically, of feminine difference." (131) Both Rodgers and Kaufman pinpoint at a generational schism, which will be discussed in the main text, starting from page 4.

1. (Dis)continuous generations and waves: Beauvoir, Irigaray, and their Oedipalized generational dialectics.

Susan Faludi's essay "American Electra" gives us an overview of the history of American feminist activism as a project of successive waves –waves that in Faludi's eyes seem to have completely overflown each other. Her evaluation of the state of American feminism hence isn't that positive: each new feminist wave (whether it'd be the second, third, or even the fourth) has apparently introduced a "generational schism,"[10] which seems to have made feminism into "a battle of the ages,"[11] or a battleground between different generations of women. According to Faludi, American feminism has been stuck in this self-destructing pattern of generational matricide since the 1920s, and she claims that there is no way out, unless we would find a way to recuperate a pre-1920s maternal feminism. Faludi's conclusion hence is highly questionable: her nostalgic longing for a feminism that defines women as *intrinsically* maternal could be easily perverted by an antifeminist rhetoric.[12] And although her sketch of feminism's generational divide seems to be accurate, it is definitely lacking nuance: the divide here is overaccentuated, as if the feminist theorists and activists of today have absolutely nothing in common with their feminist mothers. But the situation can't be that uncomplicated and bleak, right?

Dutch feminist epistemologist Iris van der Tuin has adequately shown that this feminist generational divide needs to be connected to the epistemological usage of the wave metaphor: the metaphor *an sich* isn't that problematic, but waves are often reconstructed in "generational terms"[13] and dialecticized, as if a younger generation only could be understood as the antithesis of its preceding generation. This epistemological model of a "generational dialectics"[14] of course becomes extremely debatable when employed in a feminist context, as seen in Faludi's essay. In one of her more recent articles, "Jumping Generations," van der Tuin specifies this generational dialectics (or "dialecticism"[15]) as a classification tool of second-wave feminist epistemologists, and shows us that this kind of dialectics mainly

[10] Faludi, "American Electra," 30.
[11] Ibid., 29.
[12] Antifeminist conservatists could easily abuse Faludi's accentuation of women as mothers in order to lock up women in the private sphere again. A feminist-like gender rhetoric has also often been abused by neo-liberals to 'save' so-called oppressed women from patriarchal Third World and minority cultures. For a critique of this type of rhetoric, see Shiraz Dossa, "Bad, Bad Multiculturalism!!," *The European Legacy* 10 (2005): 641-644.
[13] Iris van der Tuin, "Feminisme als strijdtoneel. Simone de Beauvoir and de geschiedenis van het feminisme," ("The arena of feminism. Simone de Beauvoir and the history of feminism,") *Gender in media, kunst, en cultuur*, eds. Rosemarie Buikema and Iris van der Tuin (Bussum: Uitgeverij Coutinho, 2007), 19.
[14] Ibid., 20.
[15] Iris van der Tuin, "'Jumping Generations': On Second- and Third-wave Feminist Epistemology," *Australian Feminist Studies* 24 (2009): 17.

focuses on "sequential negation"[16] and on "progress narratives"[17] when telling the history of feminism. Van der Tuin rightfully connects this dialecticism to the Oedipalization of feminism: if one solely understands different generations as negating and at the same time overcoming each other, then one has never really left the Oedipal scenery. This problematic epistemological classification of feminism as the combination of conflicting, matricidal generations has inspired van der Tuin to move towards an "an-Oedipal"[18] third-wave epistemology that explicitly refuses to be dialectical. I will come back to van der Tuin's Deleuzian an-Oedipal methodology of "jumping generations"[19] in the second chapter of my thesis, but for the sake of the argumentation, some concrete examples of how Beauvoir's and Irigaray's feminisms have been Oedipalized have to be given.

When it comes to the feminist classification of Beauvoir and Irigaray, their oeuvres have usually been received as wholly oppositional, and this has a lot to do with an extremely rigid, dialectical and generational application of the wave metaphor. Philosopher Nancy Bauer, for instance, clings to the dialectical view of one feminist wave clashing against another: Luce Irigaray –who in Bauer's eyes is clearly part of a newer, younger generation of feminists– does acknowledge the feminist importance of Beauvoir, yet she also wishes to go beyond Beauvoir, and she hence constructs her feminist position by suggesting that Beauvoir's feminism is incomplete because of its lack of radicality.[20] Although this does not exactly go against Irigaray's own words, Bauer nonetheless overemphasizes the discontinuity in Irigaray's relationship with Beauvoir (as if this 'newer' feminist wave would completely over flood and replace the second feminist wave, which Beauvoir supposedly started), which forecloses the possibility of a fruitful philosophical and feminist exchange between these two oeuvres. The same faulty classification of Irigaray and Beauvoir as belonging to two clashing feminist waves can be found in Iris Marion Young's "Humanism, Gynocentrism and Feminist Politics"[21] and in Julia Kristeva's "Women's Time."[22]

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[16] van der Tuin, "'Jumping Generations'," 17.
[17] Loc. cit.
[18] Ibid., 21.
[19] Ibid., 25. Van der Tuin defines the methodology of 'jumping generations' as follows: "Jumping generations is a methodology with which both linear conceptualisations of time and space, and the linear trap of non-exhaustive dichotomies per se, can be avoided. It enables thinking the new as generative, and it avoids the discontentment with feminist epistemological categorizing." (Loc. cit.)
[20] See Nancy Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy, & Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 13-14.
[21] Iris M. Young, "Humanism, Gynocentrism and Feminist Politics," in *Hypatia reborn: essays in feminist philosophy*, eds. Azizah L. al-Hibri and Margaret A. Simons (Bloomington – Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 231-248.
[22] Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time," trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 187-213.

In her essay, Young describes Beauvoir's feminism as "humanist,"[23] and hints at a similar rigid application of the wave metaphor like Bauer's when stating that there has been a "shift in feminist thinking"[24] from this kind of feminism to a "gynocentric feminism"[25] that focuses on a different account of women's oppression than humanist feminists who consider gender differences to be merely "accidental."[26] Gynocentric feminists, on the other hand, want to analyze gender differences, and wish to revalue specific female values and experiences as a form of counterattack against masculine society. Interestingly, Young identifies Simone de Beauvoir as "the mother of feminist philosophy,"[27] and equates her position with humanist feminism, but then mainly talks about U.S. feminism and how it has shifted from humanism to gynocentrism (or cultural feminism) during the 1970s. It is only at the end of her essay that Young switches back to the French feminist scene, and labels Irigaray and Kristeva as French gynocentrics, without even mentioning their standard tag of *écriture féminine* thinkers. Although Young wants to give an overview of the advantages and disadvantages of both positions, she is prey to a strict either/or logic ("Either we want to be like men [i.e. humanism] or we don't [i.e. gynocentrism]."[28]). She not only polarizes humanism and gynocentrism (which seem to be synonymous with equality and difference feminism), but also puts Beauvoir and Irigaray against one another. Although Young states that both positions should not be seen as "mutually exclusive,"[29] her essay proves otherwise, since it only presents the most notable differences between these two strands of thought –two strands that are seen as clashing, monolithic waves. This isn't only problematic with regards to the reception of Beauvoir and Irigaray as feminist opposites, but it also has its consequences for the oeuvre of Beauvoir herself: by downplaying the importance of gender differences in humanist feminism, Young also ends up portraying Beauvoir as a thinker who is indifferent to sexual difference, which, in its turn, creates the idea that Beauvoir merely "mirrors patriarchal culture"[30] when it comes to her descriptions of the female body, sexuality, and pregnancy – something the gynocentric feminists have 'fixed,' according to Young. And all of this of course fits perfectly in the dialectical framework of waves as continuously succeeding whilst negating each other!

Julia Kristeva's description of feminist generations is equally problematic: Kristeva

[23] Young, "Humanism, Gynocentrism and Feminist Politics," 231.
[24] Loc. cit.
[25] Loc. cit.
[26] Ibid., 232.
[27] Ibid., 231.
[28] Ibid., 243.
[29] Loc. cit.
[30] Ibid., 236.

does not accept Young's gynocentric label, but she does stick to the latter's dialecticism when describing feminism as existing out of two (and, later on, three) generations. Although Kristeva describes the concept of generation in a non-temporal way, and sees it as "a signifying space;"[31] she nonetheless divides feminism into two massive blocks, namely into a first feminist generation of "suffragists and of existential feminists"[32] (which is an indirect reference to Beauvoir[33]) that held on to universalist equality principles, and a second generation (or "the more radical feminist currents"[34]) that emphasized "difference and specificity,"[35] and also adhered to a more separatist politics, whilst creating a "counter-society."[36] Kristeva thus initially confirms the descriptions of Bauer and Young, yet nuances the opposition between the two waves by including a third, almost Hegelian synthesis-like phase. This third feminist phase, however, is only set aside for Kristeva's own philosophy that highlights the "singularity of each person,"[37] and identity deconstruction. Kristeva's own position explicitly negates the emphasis on sexual difference in the second phase, which suggests that she cannot escape the dialectical imagery of clashing feminist waves after all.

Yet, there might be a way to free Beauvoir and Irigaray from this generational dialectics: Australian feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti, for instance, has rigorously criticized this Oedipal model in *Patterns of Dissonance* (1991). Braidotti in *Patterns* attacks the ways in which Beauvoir's oeuvre seems to be trapped in a rigid either/or logic, as if she could only be seen as either "the 'good' founding mother of modern feminism or as the 'bad' phallic perpetuator of humanist rationalism."[38] Braidotti does not find the Oedipalized "crusade against Beauvoirian-style feminism"[39] very productive at all, and she advises feminists to be more attentive to the problematic consequences of generational Oedipal

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[31] Kristeva, "Women's Time," 209.
[32] Ibid., 193.
[33] Julia Kristeva has always been very critical of Beauvoir's works, as can be seen in her interview with Catherine Rodgers, in which Kristeva interprets Beauvoir as an equality feminist that upholds universalist, masculine values, and thinks too negatively about the female body and maternity. See the chapter on Julia Kristeva in Rodgers, *Le Deuxième Sexe de Simone de Beauvoir*, 187-211. In a more recent essay, "Beauvoir and the Risks of Freedom," Kristeva returns to Beauvoir in a more explicit and welcoming manner, by calling her a "rebellious woman" whose work started an "anthropological revolution." (Ibid., 226) But this does not mean that Kristeva now all of the sudden has turned into a Beauvoirian feminist: she still criticizes Beauvoir for her attachments to the "Universal Man," and she even sees a "phallic masculinity" at work in Beauvoir's thought (Ibid., 228). Kristeva nonetheless praises her for "debiologiz[ing] women" (Ibid., 229) and her attempts to give women a subject status. See Julia Kristeva, "Beauvoir and the Risks of Freedom," intr. S. K. Keltner and trans. Catherine Porter, *PMLA* 124 (2009): 224-230.
[34] Kristeva, "Women's Time," 202.
[35] Ibid., 196.
[36] Ibid., 202.
[37] Ibid., 210.
[38] See Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance. A study of women in contemporary philosophy*, trans. Elizabeth Guild (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 170.
[39] Ibid., 168.

rivalries. Braidotti continues this line of thought in "Embodiment," where she again warns us for falling back into Oedipal structures when producing theory. There is only one apparent solution available for female theorists who do not want to follow in their Masters' footsteps, nor wish to devalue the philosophies and feminisms developed by women of previous generations; and that is the attitude of "dis-identification."[40] In order not to fall prey to philosophy's phallogocentrism and its Oedipalizing logic that tends to do away with female genealogies, whilst overaccentuating philosophy as an exclusively male canon, feminist female philosophers and theorists should "break away from the patterns of identification that the discipline of philosophy expects, demands, and imposes on its practitioners […]."[41]

This appeal to dis-identification has more recently been picked up by feminist theorist Astrid Henry. In *Not my mother's sister* (2004), Henry gives us a nuanced portrayal of feminism's generational conflicts, and the conflicts between the second and third waves of Anglo-American feminism in particular. Henry is well aware of the particular usages of the wave metaphor and the concept of generation in feminist epistemology: she is extremely attentive to feminism's diversity, and denies that feminism consists of unified generational blocks, or "monolithic"[42] waves (as seems to be suggested by Faludi). A new wave never really completely washes away the previous one; the narrative of feminism's history is much more complicated than that! The conflict between these different waves is indeed often portrayed in generational, mother/daughter terms, according to Henry, which is problematic, since we only have access to an Oedipalized framework to describe these matricides. But the wave metaphor itself luckily also suggests that the matricides that have been committed aren't as fatal as we would have initially expected: the image of waves of course implies a narrative of progression and negation, but it could also point at *continuity* with the previous waves.[43]

And it is this point of the ambivalence of continuity/discontinuity, or identification/disidentification[44] that is of interest to Braidotti, Henry, and myself: it is obvious that feminists of different generations hold opposing views when it comes to the meaning and contents of their feminism, and tend to renounce their mothers' feminism in order to establish "a feminism of their own"[45] (and hence try to find an identity of themselves via a disidentification with their mothers). But waves are nonetheless powerful and fluid enough in order to seep through the cracks, which first of all means that the existence of

[40] Braidotti, "Embodiment," 2.
[41] Loc. cit.
[42] Henry, *Not my mother's sister*, 6.
[43] See Ibid., 24 where Henry talks about continuity and discontinuity that is implied by the wave metaphor.
[44] See Ibid., 7 for this conceptual pair that is obviously inspired by Braidotti's dis-identification concept.
[45] Loc. cit.

waves within waves is a possibility, and this, in its turn, suggests that each generation of undutiful daughters are also partially loyal to their mothers in their disloyalty. Or as Iris van der Tuin –under the influence of both Braidotti and Henry, and with regards to Beauvoir's oeuvre– suggested:

In order to disidentify oneself with Beauvoir's feminism, one first needs to be acquainted with Beauvoir's oeuvre; one has to know that oeuvre by heart.[46]

Disidentification, as I see it, also implies a process of identification, and it is exactly this kind of ambiguity that has been expressed by Luce Irigaray in *Je, tu, nous* (1990), when speaking about her affiliation with Beauvoir. Irigaray namely starts her book by paying homage to Beauvoir:

What woman has not read *Le deuxième sexe*? What woman hasn't been inspired by it? Hasn't become, perhaps, a feminist? Simone de Beauvoir was in fact one of the first women of our century to remind us of the meaning of the exploitation of women and she encouraged each woman who, accidentally, had discovered her book, to feel less alone and more certain to not let herself be subjected or let herself be taken in.[47]

Yet, Irigaray's tone then soon changes, and after stating that she never really was "close"[48] to Beauvoir, and was basically ignored by her, she explains that the silence of Beauvoir might have something to do with her own specific philosophical and psychoanalytical background,[49] which has convinced her of the fact that identity is always sexualized. Irigaray then, as Bauer claimed, indeed partially rejects equality feminism by stating that "demanding equality, as women"[50] appears to be "a faulty expression of a real objective."[51] Since the problem of female exploitation is grounded in sexual difference, Irigaray opts for the sexual difference route, but she of course does not want to throw away all social justice principles.

Whereas Bauer sharpens the Oedipal conflicts between Beauvoir –the narcissistic and ignoring mother– and Irigaray –the undutiful, rebellious daughter– by suggesting that Irigaray

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[46] van der Tuin, "The arena of feminism," 31.
[47] Luce Irigaray, *Je*, *tu, nous. Pour une culture de la différence* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1990), 9.
[48] Ibid., 10. Luce Irigaray later declared in an interview that she works on similar issues as de Beauvoir, such as transcendence and alterity, yet, she does not see herself as the daughter of Simone de Beauvoir. See Elizabeth Hirsh, Gary A. Olson and Gaëton Brulotte, "'Je-Luce Irigaray:' A Meeting with Luce Irigaray," *Hypatia* 10 (1995): 113. This statement could of course be read in a negative manner, as if Irigaray is denouncing Beauvoir's oeuvre completely, but it could also be read as an example of how Irigaray wishes to step out of the generational dialectics that has been attributed to her and Beauvoir.
[49] See Alice Jardine and Simone de Beauvoir, "Interview with Simone de Beauvoir," *Signs* 5 (1979): 228 where Beauvoir claims to appreciate Irigaray for "trying to construct a psychoanalysis which would be feminist," but also criticizes her for lacking "audacity" (Loc. cit.) to deconstruct Freudian psychoanalysis. This critique is repeated in Hélène Wenzel, "Interview With Simone de Beauvoir," *Yale French Studies* 72 (1986): 12 where Beauvoir claims that she has found "very interesting things in Irigaray," but that she is "too ready to adopt the Freudian notion of the inferiority of women.".
[50] Irigaray, *JTN*, 12.
[51] Loc. cit.

merely goes beyond Beauvoirian feminism (after reducing it to a 'pure' equality feminism), I would like to point to the process of (dis)identification that is at work here. Instead of focusing on generational dialectics, one could highlight the fact that Irigaray works through Beauvoirian feminism, and alters and transforms it from the inside out. Or as Irigaray stated it herself:

> To pay respect to Simone de Beauvoir is to follow the theoretical and practical work for social justice that she has done in her own way; and it doesn't mean that we have to close the horizon of liberation that she has opened up for so many women, and men…[52]

There are of course notable differences between Beauvoir and Irigaray, and I want to respect the singularity of their feminisms, but I also wish to refrain from Oedipalizing their oeuvres. Irigaray undeniably affirms the continuity between her oeuvre and that of Beauvoir, and it is precisely this aspect that intrigues me and that guides me in my own research project.

2. Discontinuity continued: The Anglo-American (mis)construction of French feminism.

Before I can advance to a description of my own feminist vision, however, there is still another problem that remains to be tackled. Next to the fact that the oeuvres of Beauvoir and Irigaray have been represented as generationally antithetic, there seems to be a second reason why their oeuvres have drifted apart in the reception history of feminism, and that is the alleged Anglo-American (mis)construction of 'French feminism.' The illustriously reductive categories of 'French feminism' (a label that was mostly preserved for three specific Parisian, yet foreign-born intellectuals, or the 'Holy Trinity' of 'French feminism,' namely Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray) and 'French theory' became "distinctive cultural object[s]"[53] in Anglo-American academic circles in the early eighties, and the issues that 'French feminism' supposedly engaged with (such as phallogocentrism, *jouissance*, and sexual difference), were immediately perceived as feminism's hottest topics.

[52] Irigaray, *JTN*, 14. The (dis)continuity between Beauvoir and Irigaray is later again emphasized by Irigaray in *J'aime à toi*, where she stated the following: "It is not, like Simone de Beauvoir has said: one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman (through culture), but rather: I am born a woman, but I also have to become the woman that I am by nature." See Luce Irigaray, *J'aime à toi. Esquisse d'une félicité dans l'histoire* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1992), 168.

[53] Nancy Fraser, "Introduction: Revaluing French Feminism," in *Revaluing French Feminism. Critical Essays On Difference, Agency, & Culture*, eds. Nancy Fraser and Sandra Lee Bartky (Bloomington – Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 1. In *Revaluing French Feminism*, Fraser and Bartky want to investigate the situation of French feminism, and see what French feminists have exactly contributed to American feminist theory, ten years after the publication of *New French Feminisms*, under the editorship of Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron. See Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (New York – London: Harvester – Wheatsheaf, 1981).

However, looking back, 'French feminism' seems to be more than a mere cultural object of Anglo-American academia: 'French feminism' appears to have been "made-in-America,"[54] as has been argued by feminist historian Claire Moses and other feminist theorists, such as French materialist feminist Christine Delphy, Rosi Braidotti, and Australian French theorist Bronwyn Winter. The four of them seem to point at the fact that what we have come to see as 'French feminism' is merely an "exoticized"[55] and "eroticized"[56] image of what French feminism really looked like in the seventies and eighties. Although these feminist critics differ in their opinions about the motives behind this Anglo-American creation of 'French feminism,'[57] they do agree that this reception history of feminism in France is seriously deficient, and that the instigators of it all were mainly American and English theorists that were active in French Studies, such as (but certainly not restricted to) Elaine Marks, Isabelle de Courtivron, Carolyn Burke, and Toril Moi. Although I slightly disagree with Moses when she claims that Burke has to be found guilty of this construction as well – since she allegedly "conflated *writers* and the women's movement,"[58] but in fact gives a rather adequate overview of the different French feminist groups and activists at the time– I concur with the idea that Mark's and Moi's works have played a significant role in the decontextualizing process of the construction of the monolith of 'French feminism,' by barely

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[54] Claire Goldberg Moses, "Made in America: 'French Feminism' in Academia," *Feminist Studies* 24 (1998): 241.
[55] Ibid., 265.
[56] Loc. cit.
[57] Whereas Moses gives us a description of the process of how 'French feminism' was invented in an Anglo-American context, both Delphy and Winter go one step further: Delphy is convinced that "'French feminism' is not so much a 'construction' –a biased and imperfect version of the reality of feminism in France– as an invention: a theoretical statement or series of statements that have only a spurious relation to any other 'reality' […]." 'French feminism' furthermore is an Anglo-American imperialist, ideological invention with a very specific political agenda, according to Delphy. It was "invented in order to legitimate the introduction of a brand of essentialism, and in particular a rehabilitation of psychoanalysis," and that "questions the very bases of what defines a feminist theoretical approach." See Christine Delphy, "The Invention of French Feminism: An Essential Move," *Yale French Studies* 87 (1995): 193-194 and 216 for the quotes above. Winter goes along with Delphy: she calls 'French feminism' "an intellectual fiction," and regrets the fact that Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva have been canonized as the main French feminists because they have brought "the biologisation of women" back in feminism. See Bronwyn Winter, "(Mis)Representations: What French feminism isn't," *Women's Studies International Forum* 20 (1997): 214 and 215 for the quotes. Both Delphy and Winter blame the Anglo-American creation of 'French feminism' for re-introducing essentialism and conservatism in feminism, yet, I often have the feeling they are trying to denounce the oeuvres of Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva *an sich*. A more nuanced critique can be found in Braidotti's "The way we were," where Braidotti recalls her critique on the construction of 'French feminism' in the book *New French Feminisms*, which will be discussed in the main text.
[58] Moses, "Made in America," 253. Moses here criticizes Burke for reducing the multiplicity of French feminism to the oeuvres of Cixous, Kristeva, and Irigaray, whereas only the latter explicitly has identified herself as a feminist. Although Burke indeed spends a lot of time on describing the oeuvres of the so-called Holy Trinity, she nonetheless portrays all three thinkers in a nuanced way, and never really denies that the affinities of Kristeva and Cixous with feminism are ambiguous. See Carolyn Burke, "Report from Paris: Women's writing and the women's movement," *Signs* 3 (1978) on pages 849 and 850 where Burke states that "Kristeva too appears to reject feminism […]," and "Hélène Cixous seemed far less optimistic about the future of the women's movement […]."

paying attention to the concrete political and historical framework of French activist and academic feminism at the time.

This monolithization has had two manifest consequences: first of all, the construction of 'French feminism' has obviously flattened out the differences between the various French feminisms and groups at the time, as can be seen in Mark's essay "Women and literature in France."[59] In this essay from 1978, Marks specifically focuses on French female writers, the emergence of the *écriture féminine* movement, and concludes that there are "two very visible and divergent groups"[60] in France: those who are suspicious of the possibility of a specific women's language (e.g. Beauvoir, Marguerite Yourcenar, Catherine Clément), and those (e.g. Cixous, Irigaray, Claudine Hermann)[61] who believe that the libidinal economies of men and women differ, and hence "postulate, on the basis of this *essential* difference, a necessary difference in language."[62] Marks here does not only read the theorists that are linked to (or that she links to) *l'écriture féminine* as if they are all promoting the same, pure form of essentialism, but she also promotes a schism between Anglo-American and French feminisms, by suggesting that "[w]here American women cry out 'male chauvinist pig,' the French women inscribe 'phallogocentric'."[63] This is all pretty ironical, since Mark's ideas about French feminism are obviously already Anglo-Americanized! And the binary opposition of equality (Beauvoir) versus difference feminism (Irigaray) apparently also originated here.

Mark's essay and the in 1980 released book *New French Feminisms*, together with Moi's *Textual/Sexual Politics* (1985), have indeed presented French feminism as inherently dialectical. Marks and de Courtivron seem to be completely stuck in dialecticism: they consciously divide French feminism into "old"[64] and "new French feminisms"[65] by starting their book with the introductory part from *Le deuxième sexe*, only to then move away from Beauvoir and to present more advanced texts written by Antoinette Fouque (who's notorious for dismissing Beauvoir), Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous. Other French feminist voices are included, too, but *New French Feminisms* only "offer[s] a particular half history [of French feminism] that not only fails to raise the possibility of an alternative history but also seems to rest within Anglo-American philosophy,"[66] as Rosi Braidotti has stated. Marks and de Courtivron not only re-Oedipalize the various French feminisms and divide them into two

[59] Elaine Marks, "Women and literature in France," *Signs* 3 (1978): 832-842.
[60] Ibid., 838.
[61] Julia Kristeva isn't included here by Marks, since she sees her as a theoretical "loner." See Ibid., 837.
[62] Ibid., 840 (own emphasis).
[63] Ibid., 841.
[64] Marks and de Courtivron, *New French Feminisms*, 30.
[65] Loc. cit.
[66] Braidotti, "The way we were," 722.

camps, but also present a "'package deal' of French feminism"[67] to its Anglo-American readers by making these texts available in their translated, yet decontextualized versions.

The same is going on in Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics*, where she describes French feminism as if it solely has its origins in the works of Beauvoir, and she then quickly moves to a literary analysis of the oeuvres of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, thereby confirming their 'Holy Trinity' status as developed in *New French Feminisms*. Next to that, it is also obvious that Moi follows in Mark's footsteps, and looks at these oeuvres through a normative Anglo-American lens when describing Luce Irigaray's project in *Speculum* and *Ce sexe qui n'est pas un* (1977) as essentialist: Irigaray "only succeeds in reinforcing the patriarchal discourse"[68] by miming phallogocentric stereotypes of women, which makes her philosophy politically insignificant, according to Moi.

The discontinuity between Beauvoir and Irigaray is hence once more continued: this Oedipal tragedy isn't solely created by a generational dialectics, but is sharpened by the Anglo-American creation of 'French feminism,' and multiple biased Anglo-American misreadings of their oeuvres. It is this pattern of discontinuity that I want to disrupt, by finding an an-Oedipal, feminist reading strategy that would open up both oeuvres to each other, and make them break out of the mother/undutiful daughter, equality/difference, and constructivism/essentialism binaries. My main research question and goals will be fully explained in the second introductory part that follows, but for now I end this section with a brief reflection on my own theoretical position in this debate.

3. Opting for continuity: Feminist philosophy as a project of joint disloyalty versus the Fathers.

As a feminist researcher in gender studies, I know that one is expected to reflect upon one's theoretical position, and the political contours of the project you're presenting. Yet, for someone who perceives herself as a walking contradiction, this task of self-positioning is rather confusing: my theoretical background in philosophy –that infamous discourse of the Fathers and Phallocrats, found guilty of excluding and silencing female and other subaltern voices for ages– often clashes with my outspoken feminist attitude. I feel that when I position myself as a female, feminist philosopher, I immediately run the risk of either downplaying the importance of the philosophical canon that has obviously influenced me, or of underestimating the power of feminist subversiveness. Since I want to get away from this kind

[67] Braidotti, "The way we were," 721.
[68] Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics. Feminist Literary Theory* (London – New York: Routledge, 2002), 141.

of either/or thinking, and believe that feminism in fact could transform philosophy, I choose to accept the absurdity of my own position, and wish to follow in the footsteps of Luce Irigaray and Rosi Braidotti, two female and feminist philosophers that have been able to find a way out of this paralyzing paradox.[69]

What I admire in both of them is their stubborn, subversive attitude towards philosophy as a master discourse: Irigaray in *Ce sexe* unveils the "position of mastery"[70] of the discourse of philosophy, and time and time again stresses that we have to "derange"[71] its phallogocentric logic, and reveal "its silences."[72] By opting for the strategy of mimesis (i.e. hysterically playing with the essences or stereotypes that the philosophical tradition has attributed to women), one –the woman who wishes to do philosophy in particular– can rediscover "the place of her exploitation by the discourse, without having to let herself to be simply reduced to it."[73] Irigaray is playfully disobedient to the Fathers, and this kind of disobedience is embraced by Braidotti as well: she takes up Irigaray's strategic mimesis, and encourages women to revisit the philosophical tradition, whilst reconfiguring its masculinity from the inside out. She thinks that feminist philosophers should "get rid of 'the anxiety of influence' of the masters, to break out of the paralyzing structures of an academic style that has turned philosophy into a machine of intimidation and exclusion."[74] Braidotti cherishes a healthy daughterly distrust versus her philosophical Fathers, and in all her an-Oedipality, she makes room for women in philosophy as *subjects* and *philosophers*. Braidotti understands that the project of feminist philosophy is inherently *political*, as becomes obvious throughout *Patterns of Dissonance*. And by making Irigaray's mimesis and interests in sexual difference and female subjectivity productive for her own oeuvre in for instance *Patterns*[75] and in "Embodiment," Braidotti distances herself from feminism's matricidal dialectics: because Braidotti took on the role of the disloyal daughter of her philosophical Fathers, she does not have to reject her feminist Mothers. And by repeating and working through Irigaray's

[69] This absurd or even paradoxical position has been touched upon by Rosi Braidotti as well. She, too, sees herself as a split subject, when positioning herself as a woman and feminist in the domain of philosophy: "The woman, the philosopher and the feminist refer to different linguistic instances, or discursive registers, that encompass various structural aspects of my 'self', but never quite coalesce into full synthetic unity." See Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance*, 13.
[70] Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1977), 72.
[71] Loc. cit.
[72] Ibid., 73.
[73] Ibid., 74.
[74] Braidotti, "Embodiment," 2.
[75] See Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance*, 248-263 for Braidotti's accurate and detailed rereading of Irigaray's oeuvre.

"extreme affirmation of sexual difference,"[76] Braidotti chooses to uphold the line of continuity between her oeuvre, and that of Luce Irigaray.

To conclude the first part of this introduction, I again want to emphasize that I am influenced by Braidotti's feminist rereading of Irigaray –a rereading that convinces me of the fact that if Braidotti can overcome the generational differences between her and Irigaray, it must also be possible to disrupt the dialectical readings of Beauvoirian and Irigarayian feminism. I in fact completely share Braidotti's view that "a feminist genealogy"[77] that focuses on continuity and "cross-generational female bonding"[78] can be created and cherished. In order to reread the oeuvres of Beauvoir and Irigaray in a more continuous manner however, we have to introduce a third and last element that has made these oeuvres drift apart, namely the politics of mistranslation. I will present the latter, together with examples of several mistranslations, in a separate chapter, since these mistranslations will bring us closer to the Anglo-American misreadings of Irigaray and Beauvoir, which will then be analyzed more explicitly in the first chapter of this thesis.

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[76] Braidotti, "Embodiment," 10.
[77] See Rosi Braidotti, "Women's Studies at the University of Utrecht," *Women's Studies Int. Forum* 16 (1993): 322. In this interesting article, Braidotti not only talks about how Utrecht's gender studies (back then still labeled as women's studies) department came into being, but she also mentions the challenges that went along with this kind of institutionalization and pays attention to the impact of such a process on the relationships between women, and female gender studies scholars in particular.
[78] Loc. cit.

B) Discontinuity again: Beauvoir, Irigaray, and the politics of (mis)translation.

> I would like very much for another translation of *The Second Sex* to be done, one that is much more faithful, more complete, and more faithful.
> **(Simone de Beauvoir in "Two Interviews with Simone de Beauvoir," 35)**

> If my work –now, notice how I've put this– if my work represents difficulties of translation, I'd say these are above all difficulties of syntax, logical difficulties, more than phonetic ones.
> **(Luce Irigaray in "Je-Luce Irigaray," 98)**

The abyss between Beauvoir and Irigaray appears to be unbridgeable: due to the generational dialectical readings of their oeuvres, their feminisms have been read through an either/or framework, which in its turn increased the impression of Irigaray as Beauvoir's disloyal daughter. And because of the Anglo-American creation of a 'French feminism' –a strand of feminist thought that included Irigaray, but excluded Beauvoir– the discontinuity between their oeuvres was once more accentuated. And it didn't stop there, unfortunately: there seems to be a third factor that has sharpened the Irigaray versus Beauvoir dichotomy, namely the fact that their feminist philosophical oeuvres have often been mistranslated and misunderstood when read through Anglo-American lens. Their rather notorious positions in Anglo-American feminist thought could be brought back to the "Franco-American dis-connection"[79] and the Oedipalized misreadings of their works: whereas difference feminists, such as Young, often slate Beauvoir and her followers for being masculinist and indifferent to sexual (and other) differences, Beauvoirian feminists, such as Moi, are likely to blame Irigaray and her followers for their essentialism and for being too attentive to sexual difference.[80] As if there is nothing more to these feminisms than catfights over the primacy of

[79] See Domna C. Stanton, "Language and Revolution: The Franco-American Dis-Connection," in *The Future of Difference*, eds. Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 78. This concept was coined by Stanton in order to reflect on the fact that many American feminists were suspicious of *l'écriture féminine* theories when they first arose in the seventies and eighties. This dis-connection refers to the division between American feminism that was seen as an empiricist, activist-like and pro equality project, whereas French feminism was considered to be all about theory and sexual difference. Although Stanton in her essay wanted to bring both feminisms together, these stereotypes are still alive today, as will be shown in this thesis, in part 1.2., starting on page 37.

[80] Ironically, the feminist oeuvres of Beauvoir and Irigaray are brought back together by one critique that has plagued them both, namely the idea that their feminist positions are elitist and inattentive to the multitude of differences amongst women. With regards to Beauvoir's oeuvre, see Elizabeth V. Spelman, "Simone de Beauvoir and Women: Just Who Does She Think 'We' Is?," in Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential woman: problems of exclusion in feminist thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 57-79. And for such a critique of Irigaray, see Abigail Bray, "Not woman enough: Irigaray's culture of difference," *Feminist Theory* 2 (2001): 311-327.

either equality or difference principles! The feminist richness of both oeuvres can only be discovered when rereading them in an-Oedipal manner, but the philosophical undervaluation of their oeuvres is of equal importance to our project, since Beauvoir and Irigaray are more than mere intruders of the philosophical canon. Although one could say that both thinkers have sort of marginalized themselves by downplaying their philosophical status (Beauvoir)[81] or by explicitly defying the philosophical Masters (Irigaray), something else seems to be at stake here, too: next to the predictable sexist downplaying of Beauvoir as a pseudo-Sartrean[82] and Irigaray as just another Lacanian theorist, one could argue that an *antifeminist politics of mistranslation* has had its consequences on the reception history of both thinkers as well.

In what follows, I will hence trace some of the most problematic mistranslations of the works of Irigaray, and of Beauvoir in particular, via Gayatri Spivak's concept of the politics of translation.

1. The significance of a feminist politics of translation.

Feminist postcolonial thinker Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak could help us understand what is at stake when oeuvres are being translated: as the translator of Jacques Derrida's *De la grammatologie* (1967) and of Mahasweta Devi's fiction, Spivak like no other knows how the process of translation of French and subaltern oeuvres works, and in her essay "The Politics of Translation,"[83] she informs us about what makes a translation authentic.

As a poststructuralist theorist, Spivak sees language as something that constitutes meaning; meaning about ourselves to be precise, and, in its turn, "[m]aking sense of ourselves is what produces identity."[84] Reading and translating a text hence brings us in contact with a "trace of the other in the self."[85] The process of translating is more than solely reconstructing the words of a text into a different language; one is also confronted with the author's identity

[81] See Margaret A. Simons, Jessica Benjamin, and Simone de Beauvoir, "Simone de Beauvoir: an interview," *Feminist Studies* 5 (1979): 338 where de Beauvoir claims that "Sartre is a philosopher, and I am not, and I have never wanted to be a philosopher." Beauvoir later on stated that she is a philosopher, but that she just isn't into building abstract, systematic philosophical systems. See Margaret A. Simons, "Two Interviews with Simone de Beauvoir," transcr. and trans. Jane Marie Todd, in *Revaluing French Feminism*, eds. Fraser and Bartky, 34.

[82] See for instance Margaret A. Simons, "Sexism and the Philosophical Canon: On Reading Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 51 (1990): 487-504 where Simons informs us about how Beauvoir's oeuvre has been excluded from the philosophical canon due to the latter's sexist standards. Toril Moi has also written an interesting essay on the sexist reception of Beauvoir, in which she argued that the philosophical value of Beauvoir's works have often been downplayed by strategically portraying Beauvoir as either an unstable, hysterical woman, or as a "*midinette*," i.e. a superficial Parisian shop-girl. See Toril Moi, "Politics and the Intellectual Woman: Clichés in the Reception of Simone de Beauvoir's Work," in Toril Moi, *Feminist Theory & Simone de Beauvoir* (Oxford – Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 27 for the quote above.

[83] Gayatri C. Spivak, "Politics of Translation," in Gayatri C. Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York – London: Routledge, 1993), 179-200.

[84] Ibid., 179.

[85] Loc. cit.

and agency, and the context in which the text was written. Taking this into account, a "feminist translator"[86] then has to "consider language as a clue to the working of gendered agency,"[87] which means that texts are always marked by the gendered and cultural-political position of the author. And it is exactly this context of a text that should be taken into account by the translator. An authentic translation can only come into being when the translator "surrender[s] to the text,"[88] and takes risks when translating the original. These risks seem to be connected to the idea of language as existing out of three layers, namely "rhetoric, logic, [and] silence."[89] Spivak suggests that although one could easily translate a text by focusing on its "logical systematicity"[90] (i.e. the precise grammatical and syntactical meaning of the text), one might get a more authentic (i.e. non-ethnocentric, non-imperialist) translation when highlighting the text's rhetoric (i.e. the more poetical, cultural meaning of the text).[91]

In her essay, Spivak therefore accentuates the importance of the translator's engagement with the rhetoricity of the original text: the translator should engage in a dialogue with the situated meaning of the original text, and with the author as a situated subject, and s/he also needs "a tough sense of the specific terrain of the original"[92] in order to fully represent the meaning of the original through translation. Spivak, in the remaining parts of her essay, then reflects upon her own feminist postcolonial position as an "outside/insider,"[93] and how this affects her when translating works of subaltern women. As I understand it, Spivak sees translating as an ethical act (i.e. guarding the authenticity and otherness of the original text), and therefore as an important feminist tool to increase solidarity between subaltern and non-subaltern women. Because Spivak focuses on the possible political implications of inauthentic translations (such as translating in an imperialist, colonial manner by silencing

[86] Spivak, "Politics of Translation," 179.
[87] Loc. cit.
[88] Ibid., 183.
[89] Ibid., 181.
[90] Ibid., 180.
[91] A similar feminist approach to translation can be found in Braidotti, "The way we were," 720-722 where she discusses the problematic decontextualized Anglo-American readings of Marks and de Courtivron in *New French Feminisms*, as discussed earlier on in the main text. Braidotti, like Spivak, does not argue for a more correct or purist way of translating, but claims that "the terms of the intellectual export of ideas should be interrogated." (Ibid., 721) Translators and theorists hence need to be self-reflexive about their "position and location" (Ibid., 724), and need to know the context of the texts they are working with, or "how the concepts they work with are historically embedded and empirically embodies." (Loc. cit.).
[92] Spivak, "Politics of Translation," 188.
[93] Ibid., 197.

subaltern voices[94]), Spivak's feminist politics of translation can be used to discover what went wrong with the translations of the oeuvres of Beauvoir and Irigaray.[95]

2. The politics of feminist-philosophical mistranslations: Engendering stifled and stifling stories.

If we take Spivak's politics of translation as a parameter of what an authentic feminist translation should look like, then it becomes painfully clear what has happened to the oeuvres of Beauvoir and Irigaray: whereas Spivak suggested that an inauthentic, decontextualized translation could engender texts and text interpretations that would fortify imperialist, colonialist thought, I would like to propose that a similar politics of mistranslation has enforced phallogocentric and sexist readings of Beauvoir and Irigaray by silencing the feminist-philosophical voices of these authors.

2.1. *Le deuxième sexe*: Lost in translation ?

Beauvoir's oeuvre has been plagued by many mistranslations, but the most noticeable one, according to Beauvoir scholars Margaret Simons, Karen Vintges and Toril Moi, has been the flagrant English mistranslation of *Le deuxième sexe* (1949), executed by the American zoology professor Howard M. Parshley under the supervision of publisher Alfred A. Knopf.[96]

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[94] Spivak herself has thought about the silenced subaltern in "Can the Subaltern Speak?". In this renowned essay, Spivak criticizes the Indian Subaltern Studies group for re-essentializing subaltern people in an imperialist manner, because they are only seen as (lesser) subjects in relation to "the indigenous elite." (Ibid., 26) Their heterogeneity isn't respected, and they are represented in the same reductive manner as they were in colonial times. The subaltern subject, consequentially, cannot really speak here, because s/he isn't allowed to do so: the scholars of the Subaltern Studies group are speaking in the subaltern's name. And when it comes to the female subaltern subject, she "is even more deeply in shadow," (Ibid., 28) because of patriarchy. See Gayatri C. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *The Post-colonial studies Reader,* eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (New York – London: Routledge, 1995), 24-28. This does not mean that Spivak doesn't believe in any kind of subaltern agency; she's just wary of reductive definitions. She in fact has tried to make this essentialist category of the subaltern productive in a strategic manner, or as she stated it herself: "I think we have to choose again strategically, not universal discourse but essentialist discourse. […] In fact I must say that I am an essentialist from time to time." See Gayatri C. Spivak and Elizabeth Grosz, "Criticism, Feminism, and the Institution," in Gayatri C. Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic. Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York – London: Routledge, 1990), 11. I will come back to Spivak's essentialism on page 40 of this thesis.

[95] More information on Spivak's translational politics can be found in her preface to the English translation of Derrida's *De la grammatologie*, where she states that translations are always intertextual and open-ended: one text can have multiple and very different translations, yet the original itself always also seems to resist the possibility of a 'correct' translation. See Gayatri C. Spivak, "Translator's Preface," in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, transl. Gayatri C. Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1997), lxxxvi-lxxxvii. This idea of resistance to translation can be compared to Spivak's statement in "The Politics of Translation," where she suggests that a translation is merely a "shadow" (Ibid., 181) of the original text. Something of the original text always seems to get lost when translated; a pure copy can never be created.

[96] See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, transl. and ed. H. M. Parshley (London: Random House, Vintage, 1997).

Although all three of them have applauded Parshley's efforts, his translation nonetheless has failed on many crucial points. Simons was the first scholar to touch upon this problem in her "The Silencing of Simone de Beauvoir,"[97] where she explains some of the problematic aspects of Parshley's translation, and connects it to a broader sexist politics, or an antifeminist politics of mistranslation. According to her, Parshley has made multiple cuts in the original text: he for instance deleted Beauvoir's references to multiple important women in history, left out almost half of her chapter "The Married Woman," and did "some cutting and condensation here and there"[98] whenever he felt Beauvoir's text became too tedious. And although Parshley himself declared that he wanted his translation to be as authentic as possible,[99] Simons finds him guilty of "sexism,"[100] by leaving out crucial references to the history of women's oppression and feminism, which destroyed Beauvoir's argumentation about socialist feminism.

This sexist or masculine biased attitude is even more manifest when it comes to the philosophical contents of *Le deuxième sexe*: in his preface, Parshley reduces Beauvoir's philosophical originality by stating that her philosophy "is focused in the existentialism of Sartre,"[101] but he never really grasps the philosophical and cultural meaning of Sartre's existentialism, let alone the specificity of some of Beauvoir's key concepts. By mistranslating philosophical concepts such as *la réalité humaine* into 'the real nature of man' (which seems al lot more essentialist and masculinist than 'human existence'), mixing up the meaning of *pour-soi* ('for-itself') and *en-soi* ('in-itself'), and by mistranslating the title *L'expérience vécue* –a title that alludes to Beauvoir's phenomenological approach and should be translated into *Lived experience*– into *Woman's Life Today*, Parshley completely undervalues Beauvoir as a phenomenological philosopher.[102] And although Simons at the end of her essay surprisingly enough suddenly tempers the idea that a "sexist plot"[103] is responsible for Parshley's translation, Parshley's disinterest in Beauvoir as an autonomous philosopher does seem to stem from his biased attitude as a translator. It is of course true that Parshley was also *Le deuxième sexe*'s "most important proponent,"[104] and that Parshley was forced to make all

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[97] Margaret A. Simons, "The Silencing of Simone de Beauvoir: Guess What's Missing From *The Second Sex*?," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 6 (1983): 559-564.
[98] H. M. Parshley, "Translator's Preface," in de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 11.
[99] See Loc. cit.
[100] Simons, "The Silencing of Simone de Beauvoir," 561.
[101] Parshley, "Translator's Preface," 8.
[102] Simons, "The Silencing of Simone de Beauvoir," 563.
[103] Loc. cit.
[104] See Richard Gillman, "The Man Behind The Feminist Bible," *The New York Times*, May 22, 1988, accessed April 2, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/1988/05/22/books/the-man-behind-the-feminist-bible.html.

these cuts because the Knopf firm wanted the book to be as accessible as possible to market it as a popular scientific study on sexuality à la Kinsey.[105] Yet, by stating that "Mlle de Beauvoir's book is, after all, on woman, not on philosophy,"[106] Parshley seems to pull women and the practice of philosophy apart, and it is this biased attitude that is responsible for the many decontexualized and conceptual mistranslations in the English edition.

Simons' critique has been further developed by Vintges and Moi: both thinkers have criticized Parshley for his philosophical incompetence, but also paid attention to the problematic antifeminist consequences of his mistranslations. In *Philosophy as passion* (1996), Vintges claims that if Beauvoir was seen as a philosopher, she was usually only considered to be a masculine, Sartrean thinker who thought negatively about the female body.[107] This attribution of an antifeminist, masculine attitude to Beauvoir has everything to do with Parshley's mistranslations, according to Vintges and to Moi. The latter, in her essay "While We Wait,"[108] even speaks of the "pernicious ideological effects"[109] Parshley's politics of mistranslation has had on Beauvoir's oeuvre: Beauvoir hasn't only been misread as a philosopher, but also as a feminist. And this becomes especially clear in Parshley's version of Beauvoir's discussion of motherhood in *Le deuxième sexe*, for which she was criticized by many feminists thinkers. The stereotypical story goes that Beauvoir is completely anti-motherhood, because women as mothers would be forever trapped in immanence, and would hence never really reach a subjectivity of their own. Full transcendence for women hence excludes motherhood.

Toril Moi herself refers to such a reading of Beauvoir by Drucilla Cornell, yet, readings such as these are found on the French feminist scene, too. Julia Kristeva, who is often labeled as a difference feminist (and does not agree with this label, as we saw in our discussion of "Women's Time"), is known for valuing pregnancy and motherhood as specific female experiences that not only split one's subjectivity, but also ethically confront oneself with the existence of a child, or the Other.[110] She has criticized Beauvoir for "analyzing motherhood as a masochist obligation that was imposed on women […]"[111] –an idea that she

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[105] See Sheryl A. Englund, "A Dignified Success: Knopf's Translation and Promotion of *The Second Sex*," *Publishing Research Quarterly* 10 (1994): 5-18 for a detailed overview of the marketing strategies behind Knopf's publication of *The Second Sex*.
[106] Parshley, "Translator's Preface," 8.
[107] See Karen Vintges, *Philosophy as passion: the thinking of Simone de Beauvoir* (Bloomington – Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 21-45, and especially 38-45 for more details on how Beauvoir has been read as a masculine and Sartrean philosopher, and how Vintges disagrees with these readings.
[108] Toril Moi, "While We Wait: The English Translation of *The Second Sex*," *Signs* 27 (2002): 1005-1035.
[109] Ibid., 1013.
[110] See Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," transl. Léon S. Roudiez, in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Moi, 160-186.
[111] Kristeva in Rodgers, *Le Deuxième Sexe de Simone de* Beauvoir, 198.

finds extremely out-dated. To her, pregnant women aren't mere slaves of the species; the experience of pregnancy is rather "something that has to be situated on the border of the biological and the social,"[112] it brings nature and culture back together. It is true that Kristeva never was a Beauvoirian to begin with, but something more is going on as well: it is actually the interviewer, Catherine Rodgers, who claims that Beauvoir has "an extremely negative view of motherhood,"[113] and states that Beauvoir's and Kristeva's perspectives therefore must be oppositional. Rodgers is Oedipalizing these thinkers, and although she refers to the French Gallimard edition of *Le deuxième sexe* in her bibliography, she never really uses any citations from the original text to support her argumentation, which more or less convinces me of the fact that Rodgers might have been more influenced by the Anglo-American misreadings of Beauvoir that have built on Parshley's translation than on *Le deuxième sexe* itself.[114]

This does not mean that Beauvoir's views on motherhood are overtly positive in her original text, but Parshley indeed is co-responsible for constructing the stereotypical reading of Beauvoir as being anti-motherhood. For example, Moi has found out that Parshley has made Beauvoir's statements about motherhood more dismissive. Whereas Beauvoir, according to Moi's translation, states that "[t]here is one female function which it is almost impossible to undertake in complete freedom today, namely motherhood,"[115] Parshley's version goes as follows: "There is one feminine function that is *actually* almost impossible to perform in complete liberty. It is maternity."[116] Parshley here generalizes Beauvoir's statement, as if it is an eternal fact and motherhood will *always* equal slavery, whereas Beauvoir in *Le deuxième sexe* rather comments on the particular situation of forced motherhood and the unavailability of anti-conception in France. Simone de Beauvoir isn't necessarily against women becoming mothers; she is merely criticizing patriarchal culture for having constructed a so-called natural maternal instinct as a means to enforce motherhood upon all women, at all times. This does not mean that motherhood itself is a priori negative; it

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[112] Kristeva in Rodgers, *Le Deuxième Sexe de Simone de* Beauvoir, 198.
[113] Rodgers in Loc. cit.
[114] Or as Braidotti also has stated: "*The Second Sex* 'arrived' in France via a transatlantic detour." Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance*, 168.
[115] This is Moi's translation of "Il y a une fonction féminine qu'il est actuellement presque impossible d'assumer en toute liberté, c'est la maternité." This quote can be found in Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe. II. L'expérience vécue* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949 (renouvelé en 1976)), 487. Quoted in Moi, "While We Wait," 1024. An interesting observation has to be made here: whereas Parshley translates *féminine* as *feminine*, Moi translates it as *female*. Both options are technically possible, yet, I would go along with Parshley here, and opt for *feminine* as well, since Beauvoir is criticizing the socially constructed role of motherhood.
[116] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, transl. and ed. H. M. Parshley, 705 (own emphasis). As quoted in Moi, "While We Wait," 1024.

is rather something that is ambiguously experienced by women, as can be seen in the following quote by Beauvoir:

> There are some [women] who say that have experienced a feeling of creative power while giving birth; that they have really accomplished a self-willed and productive task; many, on the contrary, felt passive, [like] a suffering and tortured instrument.[117]

This seems to suggest that motherhood –if chosen freely– could be a project of good faith, would not always reduce women to phallic mothers, and could be combined with a life of transcendence. This has been confirmed by Beauvoir herself in an interview with Margaret Simons, where she stated that "motherhood in itself is not something negative or something inhuman."[118]

The debate on Parshley's mistranslation was picked up outside academia as well, and came under public attention via an essay written by Sarah Glazer in *The New York Times*.[119] A new translation of *Le deuxième sexe* that wanted to honor Beauvoir's original text and its philosophical and feminist message, was released in 2009 under the editorship of Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier –two Americans that have mainly written grammar books and taught at *Sciences Po* in Paris. But it hasn't exactly been applauded by Beauvoir scholars: according to Toril Moi, this is not the scholarly translation we've all been waiting for. In "The Adulteress Wife,"[120] Moi criticizes the editors for "a mishandling of key terms for gender and sexuality, an inconsistent use of tenses, and the mangling of syntax, sentence structures and punctuation."[121] Although Moi's review might get a little too personal at times (see for instance the paragraph where Moi states that the translators have worked on "many cookery books,"[122] but lack experience in translating French books into English), I do agree with her key critique: that both editors haven't exactly grasped the cultural and ideological meaning of the original text; that they have downplayed its 'Frenchness' in a way, and hence have decontextualized *Le deuxième sexe*. The same thing has been argued by Nancy Bauer, in her reply to Moi's review in the same article, who emphasized that literal translations are often not the most loyal ones. And this brings us back to Spivak's feminist politics of

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[117] de Beauvoir, *DSb*, 288.
[118] Simons, "Two Interviews with Simone de Beauvoir," 32.
[119] See Sarah Glazer, "Lost in Translation," *The New York Times*, August 22, 2004, accessed April 4, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/08/22/books/review/22GLAZERL.html?8hpib.
[120] Toril Moi, "The Adulteress Wife," *London Review of Books* 32 (2010): 3-6. Online version (without page numbers) accessed April 4, 2012, http://www.lrb.co.uk/v32/n03/toril-moi/the-adulteress-wife.
[121] Loc. cit. Moi also attacked American feminist philosopher Judith Butler for reading Beauvoir through the Anglo-American terminology of sex and gender, which is pretty ironical, considering the fact that she herself has read Irigaray through an Anglo-American lens, as was argued in this thesis on page 13. See page 51 for Moi's critique of Butler, and also see 1.3.1., pages 47-53 for my own comments on Butler's misreading of Beauvoir's philosophy.
[122] Loc. cit.

translation: although translations will never be perfect copies, a faithful translation should always pay attention to the rhetoricity of its original.

2.2. Irigaray: Altered in translation?

The issue of mistranslations has played a less noticeable role in Irigarayian studies, most likely because of the fact that the translators of Irigaray's earlier works did a fairly good job. Next to that, Irigaray also benefitted from the more progressive cultural context of the eighties: whereas Beauvoir was translated in an era where scientific empiricist research, analytic philosophy, and Kinseyian sexology were trending, Irigaray's oeuvre profited from the rise of women's studies programs at American universities –programs that ironically enough would have never even existed without the influence of Beauvoirian feminism.[123]

The first English translations of Irigaray's earlier works, *Speculum* and *Ce sexe*, came out about a decade after their original publication. They were translated by Gilligan C. Gill (*Speculum*), and Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (*Ce sexe*), who were acquainted with the philosophical, feminist and linguistic context of Irigaray's oeuvre, because of their background in French studies, French literature, and language studies. Overall, the rhetoricity of Irigaray's texts has been preserved quite well, but there have nonetheless been some specific difficulties with translating Irigaray's rather opaque texts into English, as Burke has also argued in "Translation Modified."[124] Irigaray's oeuvre was not subjected to an overtly antifeminist politics of mistranslation –her status as a feminist psychoanalytical philosopher[125]

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[123] The quasi-institutionalization of Irigaray's oeuvre in American women's studies programs in the late seventies and eighties does not mean that more secondary literature has been produced on the misreadings of Irigaray's works than on those of Beauvoir's: in contrast to Beauvoir's oeuvre –which has almost been overresearched by Anglo-American scholars, because of its influence on American feminism– Irigaray's oeuvre was usually only read in the light of her so-called essentialism. And because of the fact that there isn't so much secondary literature to be found on the theme of translating Irigaray's oeuvre (with the exception of Burke's essay, see the following footnote), I will utter my own thoughts and reflections on this theme in this chapter.

[124] Carolyn Burke, "Translation Modified: Irigaray in English," in *Engaging With Irigaray: feminist philosophy and modern European thought*, eds. Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 249-261.

[125] Psychoanalytic feminism itself was not that accepted in British and American academic circles at the time. Due to the popularity of Lacanian psychoanalysis in the French intellectual climate in the sixties and seventies, psychoanalytical feminists like Irigaray and Kristeva (whose loyalty to Lacan's model is of course debatable) were more easily accepted as psychoanalytical thinkers. But earlier Anglo-American critical engagements with Freudian thought by feminists such as Kate Millet (who was inspired by Beauvoir's criticism of Freud in *Le deuxième sexe*), or Germaine Greer, kind of halted the theoretical development of psychoanalytical feminism in the UK and the US. Freudian psychoanalysis was criticized for being overtly patriarchal: the Oedipus complex was completely masculine, women were only seen as castrated others, and feminists couldn't get over Freud's awful attachment to biological determinism (critiques that have also been uttered by Irigaray in *Speculum*). It wasn't until the publication of Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and feminism: Freud, Reich, Laing and Women* (New York: Pantheon, 1974) that Lacanian thought was introduced to an Anglo-American feminist public, and that Freud was seen as *describing* patriarchy instead of completely prescribing it. Jane Gallop's *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction* (Houndmills – London: Macmillan press, 1982) and Teresa

was never really denied or undervalued by her main translators[126]– yet, there have been tons of Anglo-American misinterpretations of her oeuvre, due to the fact that her works were labeled as partaking in the (constructed) tradition of 'French feminism' and *l'écriture féminine*.

This certainly has something to do with Irigaray's playful and subversive use of French words, ditto grammar and citations. Most of Irigaray's concepts in fact have multiple meanings that can only be detected by native French speakers, or practiced readers. Take for instance the concept of *un étalon* in *Ce sexe*: the first, most obvious connotation is that of *a standard of value*.[127] Irigaray uses this concept whenever she refers to the normative standard that has been used in psychoanalytical and philosophical discourses to characterize women as lesser than men. In these discourses that are under the control of a "phallic economy,"[128] or an "economy of the same;"[129] women, their bodies, and their sexualities, are never judged on their own merit, but are devalued as objects; commodities of men. Woman is "the Other of the Same"[130] in phallogocentric thought. However –and this has been discovered by the translators of *Ce sexe* as well–[131] *un étalon* can also refer to *a stallion*, which enhances the idea that standards of value in these discourses are already masculine. Another subtle pun can be found in *Speculum*, where one of the chapters is called "Une mère de glace."[132] What

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Brennan's, ed., *Between Feminism & Psychoanalysis* (London – New York: Routledge, 1989) are other examples of Anglo-American feminist dialogues with psychoanalysis. But psychoanalytic feminism was never as popular as it was on the Continent, and this critical attitude has probably attributed to the many Anglo-American misreadings of Irigaray as well. For a more detailed overview of psychoanalytic feminism, see Emily Zakin, "Psychoanalytic Feminism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, May 16, 2011, accessed April 10, 2012, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-psychoanalysis/.

[126] Although I do have the feeling that the philosophical content of Irigaray's oeuvre is usually more apparent in her original texts than in the English translations. When Irigaray in *Ce sexe* for instance talks about her strategy of playfully copying the stereotypical role that has been described to women in order to deconstruct philosophical and psychoanalytical discourses, "*le mimétisme*" (Ibid., 73) is translated into "mimicry" (Luce Irigaray, *This sex which is not one*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 76). Mimicry seems to be an adequate English translation, since it refers to the practice of mimicking, but it also accentuates a more biological interpretation, i.e. that of an animal copying another animal's looks or behavior as a way of self-defense. The term mimicry hence seems to obscure the philosophical, Platonic meaning of *le mimétisme*, namely *mimesis*. In *Ce sexe*, Irigaray in fact refers to the two different meanings of Plato's *mimesis*: "*mimesis* as production," i.e. a creative copying that brings something new into the picture, and "*mimesis* that would already be entangled in a process of imitation, specularization, appropriateness, and reproduction." (Ibid., 131). It is the first sense of *mimesis* as production that is central to Irigaray's strategy of *le mimétisme*, as she argues in Loc. cit.; and it is exactly this rich philosophical context that is being obscured by the translation of *le mimétisme* into mimicry –which seems to suggest pure reproduction or imitation.

[127] See for instance Irigaray, *CS*, on pages 30 and 60 (and many more). One can find the verb "*étalloner*" (*measuring the value of something*) on page 70, and Irigaray also refers to "*étalon du même*" (*standard of the same*) on page 130, and to "*l'étallon de la 'difference sexuelle'*" (*the standard of sexual difference*) on page 154.

[128] Ibid., 97.

[129] Ibid., 142.

[130] Ibid., 97.

[131] See Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke, "Publisher's Note and Notes on Selected Terms," in Irigaray, *This sex which is not one*, 222 for the idea that *étalon* has two very different meanings.

[132] Irigaray, *S*, 210.

interests us here, is that *la mère* (*mother*) and *la mer* (*sea*) are pronounced in exactly the same way in French. The title hence not only means *a mother made out of ice*, but also has the connotation of *an icy sea*. And this alludes to Irigaray's critique of the phallic description of women-as-mothers in patriarchy as closed volumes, envelopes, or icy surfaces that have to reflect man's subjectivity.

These two examples show us that Irigaray's works are full of puns that are only noticeable for those who are familiar with the broader context of her philosophy. A second reason why Irigaray's philosophy is often so difficult to translate has to do with the fact that French itself is very particularly sexually marked language. When Irigaray for instance analyzes the situation of "the exchange of women"[133] between men in patriarchy, the concept of "*marchandises*"[134] should not be translated as *goods*, because *marchandises* –as a gendered noun– already refers to women that are being traded as objects. And a third aspect that complicates everything is Irigaray's obscure politics of citation: because of the fact that Irigaray approaches the oeuvres of the philosophical Masters in a dialogical, deconstructive manner, her own thoughts are presented in the midst of these canonical texts. This peculiar politics of feminist textual disruption can be best seen in *Speculum*, where Irigaray quotes the Masters in an excessive manner, often without the use of footnotes. This form of hyper-quoting is actually a political-feminist strategy, as Irigaray tells us at the end of *Speculum*:

> Exact references in the form of footnotes or punctuation indicating quotation have often been left out. With regards to theoretical development, the/a woman functions as the mute outside that upholds all systematicity; and as a maternal, (still) silent ground that nourishes all foundations […].[135]

By excessively quoting, or strategically miming the words of the Masters, Irigaray slyly alters the meaning and logic behind the original texts, and is able to construct her own feminist philosophy that focuses on female subjectivity. This complex citational strategy has nonetheless confused many of her readers and translators, since it is often hard to distinguish her voice from the authors she's discussing. The first paragraph of *Speculum*, for instance, consists of a quotation made by Sigmund Freud's in his essay on femininity, and this move could be interpreted as if Irigaray is presenting herself as a loyal follower of Freud. In the following paragraph, however, we clearly hear Irigaray's own, rather ironically sounding voice –a voice that tells us that *Speculum* will rebel against the Freudian psychoanalytical discourse that has labeled woman as a mute "enigma."[136] Irigaray also doesn't always use

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[133] Irigaray, *CS*, 167.
[134] Ibid., 168.
[135] Irigaray, *S*, 458.
[136] Ibid., 9.

quotation marks, as can be seen in the last chapter where she deals with Plato, yet, this gives her argumentation a certain fluidity: her writing style supports the feminist-philosophical goal of *Speculum*, which is deconstructing phallogocentric discourses from the inside out. Irigaray finds her style and citational politics so convincing that the chapter “Une mere de glace” entirely exists of parts of Plotinus’ substance philosophy. She sort of expects her readers to know what her thoughts on this subject would be, and this adds a whole new level of complexity to her work.

And these linguistic complexities aren’t only intrinsic to *Speculum*: Luce Irigaray subversively plays with language itself throughout her whole oeuvre; she wants to reveal the presuppositions behind each discourse, and expose “its silences.”[137] This rebellious attitude, in combination with her citational politics, her usage of poetical puns, and the fact that French is a gendered language, has often produced multiple misreadings of her works. The rhetoricity of her works hasn’t been always been captured, and this is especially clear in some of the earlier Anglo-American interpretations of her works. Earlier on, I already stated that Irigaray has often been seen as an essentialist, and this has everything to do with the symbols of the two lips (“*les deux lèvres*”[138]) that are central to *Ce sexe*. The exact meaning of the two lips is highly debatable (are they a mere strategic counterimage of the Lacanian phallus, or a full feminine replacement of the latter?), but what is obvious is that Irigaray employs this genital and oral image to show us that female sexuality first of all cannot be defined and enclosed in a masculine sexual model that focuses on the One, or on the phallus as the sole signifier. Woman is an open volume, and the two lips are an indication of her openness and multiplicity: she is “the other in herself.”[139] And, secondly, the two lips also refer to the possibility of a “*parler femme*;”[140] Irigaray’s experimental feminine language that would disrupt phallic language, and would open up a feminine Symbolic, which, in its turn, would grant women images of female subjectivity. But Irigaray’s *parler-femme* and the symbol of the two lips have been taken quite literally, as if Irigaray is purely writing about the real, natural female body.

An example of this essentialist view of Irigaray can be found in comparative literature scholar Ann Rosalind Jones’ “Writing the Body”[141] –an essay that was published after *New*

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[137] Irigaray, *CS*, 73.
[138] See Ibid., 203-217 for a detailed exposition of the role of the symbol of the lips with regards to her symbolic of the female body.
[139] Ibid., 28.
[140] Ibid., 119.
[141] Ann Rosalind Jones, “Writing the Body: Toward an Understand of ‘*L’Ecriture Féminine*’,” *Feminist Studies* 7 (1981): 247-263.

French Feminisms, and that can be seen as partaking in the same trend of labeling Irigaray as an *écriture féminine* theorist. In this essay, the two lips are reduced to "'the two lips' of the vulva,"[142] which supports the idea that Irigaray is talking about a natural female specificity. And this makes it easier for Jones to criticize Irigaray (together with Kristeva and Cixous) as "idealist and essentialist."[143] Jones furthermore denies the political value of Irigaray's accentuation of *féminité* –which she mistakenly sees a synonym of "a bedrock female nature,"[144] or "women's physiology,"[145] i.e. femaleness instead of a cultural-symbolic femininity– for working within a male/female binary, and for flattening out the differences amongst women. The only thing that Jones wishes to use from these French feminisms is their critique of phallogocentrism; the rest of their theories is just too essentialist.

In her misreading of Irigaray as an essentialist, Jones is obviously influenced by the *New French Feminisms* anthology: she refers to Irigaray's French works in her bibliography, but only uses the English version of the chapter "Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un" from *Ce sexe* as it has been published in *New French Feminisms*.[146] This chapter seems to be as adequately translated as the 1985 translation made by Burke and Porter, but it is presented as an essay on its own, which kind of disturbs the overall rhetoricity and symbolic of *Ce sexe*. Jones reproduces this decontextualized reading by focusing on the naturalness of the two lips, thereby ignoring their symbolic value. Irigaray's oeuvre hence is unrightfully altered in translation: whereas *ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* playfully refers to the fact that women are seen as sexless, castrated others in psychoanalysis, whilst they –in their sexual multiplicity– break out of this phallic logic of the One (*un*) in Irigaray's philosophy; Jones doesn't really seem to get this wordplay, and she also disregards the ambiguous meaning of *ce sexe* in French. Jones basically reduces *ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* to *the female sex organ* (as represented by the two lips) *that is not one*, whereas it could also be translated as *the female sex*, or even *the female gender that is not one*. Irigaray's emphasis on a feminine subjectivity model is hence being left out the picture, and she is merely represented as an essentialist bodily writer. And this idea has since then travelled back to the French feminist scene,[147]

[142] Jones, "Writing the Body," 250.
[143] Ibid., 253.
[144] Ibid., 247.
[145] Ibid., 254.
[146] See Luce Irigaray, "This Sex Which Is Not One," trans. Claudia Reeder, in *New French Feminisms*, eds. Marks and de Courtivron, 99-106.
[147] Delphy's "The Invention of French Feminism" is a good example of how French theorists have been influenced by these American misreadings, but Burke's and Porter's translation of *Ce sexe* is sometimes equally non-nuanced. Not that they're labeling Irigaray as an essentialist, but they sometimes seem to accentuate Irigaray as an *écriture féminine* theorist. Take the following sentence from *Ce sexe*: "Si nous n'inventons pas un langage, si nous ne trouvons pas son langage, notre corps aura trop peu de gestes pour accompagner notre histoire." (Ibid.,

which has increased the abyss between Beauvoir –the anti-essentialist– and Irigaray –the essentialist– once more.

Interestingly, Luce Irigaray –probably because of her own background in linguistics, and because of the fact that she writes in French, Italian and English– has reflected upon the issue of translating authentically: in an interview, Irigaray responded to the question whether her works are translatable, and claimed that many misreadings and mistranslations have arisen, because she is usually not read as a philosopher; as someone who is "opening a new field of thought."[148] And in *Conversations* (2008), Irigaray tells us that she prefers to translate her own texts, since translators usually don't have "the same creativity, nor the same liberty, as the writer herself."[149]

Although Irigaray has reflected upon the issue more than Beauvoir, both of them seem to comprehend that something of their oeuvres has been lost and/or altered in translation: because of Parshley's mistranslations, Beauvoir has often been seen as a non-philosopher, and later on as a masculine thinker. And because of the difficulties to express the rhetoricity of Irigaray's works in another language than the original, Irigaray's texts have often been altered, which has caused many readers to think that she merely lyrically praises the eternal feminine. We were already stuck in an Irigaray versus Beauvoir dichotomy thanks to a generational Oedipal dialectics, which molded this dichotomy into a disloyal daughter versus mother one. And due to the misconstruction of 'French feminism,' this binary was joined by a difference/equality binary, which enlarged the polarization between these oeuvres even more. And the above mistranslations added two new dimensions to the debate: whereas Beauvoir was seen as a masculine thinker, and hence was portrayed as a phallic mother –which is pretty ironical, to say the least– Irigaray was presented as an exclusively feminine thinker. And next to this masculine/feminine binary, the tensed binary of essentialism/anti-essentialism was also introduced, which enlarged the abyss between Beauvoir and Irigaray even more!

We thus have ended up in a stalemated, unproductive situation: the oeuvres of Beauvoir and Irigaray have mostly been misread in an Oedipal, binary manner, which has not only led to theoretical unproductiveness –since the possible theoretical affinities between

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213) This is translated into: "If we don't invent a language, if we don't find our body's language, it will have too few gestures to accompany our story." (Irigaray, *This sex*, 214) This translation is of course grammatically correct, yet, "our body's language" suggests more than "son langage, notre corps […]" (*its language, our body that*…). The translation of *langage* into *language* also is quite reductive, because *langage*, as Whitford stated it, "refers to the language as it is used by a speaker." (See Margaret Whitford, ed., *The Irigaray Reader* (Cambridge – Oxford: Blackwell 1991), 18) *Langage* in the original hence seems to refer to a more figurative, symbolic language, spoken by the body, in my opinion. And this isn't adequately captured by Burke and Porter.

[148] See Hirsh, Olson, and Brulotte, "'Je-Luce Irigaray'," 98.

[149] Luce Irigaray, *Conversations* (London: Continuum, 2008), 24.

these two oeuvres have been covered up– but also reduced their political effectiveness. If Beauvoirian feminism is seen as a superficial equality feminism that only focuses on quotas, and Irigarayian feminism is portrayed as a difference feminism that emphasizes gynocentric and separatist values; feminism as a political project does not only run the risk of presenting itself as eternally internally divided, but its rhetoric could be easily perverted by antifeminists as well, who could for instance claim that we have now entered a postfeminist era because all the formal equality principles have been fulfilled. I wish to move beyond this binary, constructed Oedipal drama between Irigaray and Beauvoir that is presented in numerous misreadings, because of the previous reasons. This thesis will hence present a *non-traditional*, *an-Oedipal*, and *diffractive* rereading of the philosophies of Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray, in order to open up their feminist oeuvres for each other's perspectives, accentuate their continuities, and to let these oeuvres interact, fuse and co-evolve.

Before we can start with this cross-fertilizing rereading of Beauvoir and Irigaray however, we still have to tackle some of the more manifest Anglo-American misreadings of their oeuvres –misreadings that have had such problematic consequences that I want to label them as having engendered *stifled* and *stifling stories*,[150] because they paralyzed certain oeuvres for decades, and fixated the meaning behind these oeuvres in such a way that it is almost impossible to open them up for a more continuity-focused reinterpretation. It is to these misreadings and the stories that they have produced that I will now turn to.

[150] My concepts of stifled and stifling stories are obviously also influenced by Clare Hemmings' *Why Stories Matter*, in which she refers to problematic, dominant feminist narratives. See the first chapter of this thesis, starting from page 31, and see Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham – London: Duke University Press, 2011).

Part one: Stifled and stifling stories. Or why misreadings matter.

> If Western feminists can be attentive to the political grammar of our storytelling, if we can highlight reasons why that attention might be important, then we can also intervene to change the way we tell stories. We can interrupt the amenability of the narratives that make up dominant Western feminist stories and tell stories differently.
>
> **(Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, 2)**

We have already tackled a couple of misreadings in our introduction: think of Jones and Moi who labeled Irigaray as an essentialist, and Kristeva who –under the influence of Rodgers– saw Beauvoir as a masculine, and hence antifeminist thinker. But the full story hasn't been told yet: in this chapter, other Anglo-American misreadings will be explored, and the misreadings that will be presented here, have had a long-lasting influence on feminist theory and philosophy. This first of all has to do with the fact that they were built on the foundations of generational dialecticism, the illusion of 'French feminism,' and several mistranslations and misinterpretations; and secondly, because the authors of these misreadings were (and still are) influential and famous theorists who used very particular Anglo-American tools and concepts in dealing with these French oeuvres. All these separate misreadings matter, because they have led to a specific kind of storytelling about Beauvoirian and Irigarayian feminisms, namely to the production of stifled and stifling stories, or reductive and continuously paralyzing narratives. In order to be able to reread these oeuvres in a different manner, one has to be convinced of the fact that the stories that are being told and produced by feminists theorists about feminist oeuvres and feminist thought in general do matter and can be changed, as feminist theorist Clare Hemmings also states in the above quote and explains in her recent book *Why Stories Matter* (2011).

In *Why Stories Matter*, Hemmings informs us about what is at stake when feminists conceptualize Western feminist theory as an intellectual and political project. Her research shows us that the development process of Western feminist thought hasn't been fully captured in its diversity and multiplicity, but has been represented in a uniform, non-heterogeneous manner; or as Hemmings claimed, "the story of its past is consistently told as a series of interlocking narratives of progress, loss, and return […]."[151] Whereas the progress narratives show us that feminism has positively evolved into multiple feminisms of difference and that

[151] Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, 3.

there no longer is a political, unifying 'we, woman' category; narratives of loss nostalgically long for a feminism that used to be politically motivated and unified. And return narratives consequentially talk about how we could fix the current impasses in feminism, whilst trying to synthesize and move beyond these narratives of loss and progress by bringing some of their key points together. These three narratives differ, but they also have a lot in common: they reduce feminism's complex history, and "divide the recent past into clear decades to provide a narrative of progress or loss, proliferation or homogenization."[152] All three narratives are, according to Hemmings, stuck in a normative and generalizing logic: they try to lay down what should matter in contemporary feminist theory, practice, and politics by focusing on either what should be left behind, brought back, or returned to.

Hemmings later on in *Why Stories Matter* also refers to the generational dialectics that is at play in these three narratives: she suggests that feminists who constructed a narrative of loss are often of a previous, older generation, whereas the ones who understand feminism as progressing are often part of a younger generation.[153] Hemmings then criticizes this logic for its Oedipalizing effects, and wishes to move beyond these "generational narratives of feminist history."[154] And this isn't the only similarity with our project: Hemmings also believes that these one-sided and binary progress/loss/return narratives are correctable, which doesn't mean that one can easily escape the normative logic behind these narratives once the dynamics behind these stories have been unraveled. Starting from the idea that we –as feminist theorists and scholars– are always already partaking in this generalizing process of feminist storytelling,[155] Hemmings wishes to tell different stories than the ones that are being told in the academic journals she analyzed, by paying attention to the positive or negative affects that are evoked by these narratives, and by using a politics of "recitation"[156] and "de-authorization"[157] in order to disrupt these stories from within. She thus isn't claiming that she has found the right way to tell stories about feminism, since we are all –Hemmings included– part of the production of these progress, loss, and return narratives anyways. She nonetheless does believe in the "amenability"[158] of these narratives, and although this project does not

[152] Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, 5.
[153] See Ibid., 146-151.
[154] Ibid., 147.
[155] See Ibid., 22.
[156] Ibid., 23. Hemming's strategy could in fact be compared with Irigaray's subversive politics of citation, as we have shown on page 26 of this thesis.
[157] Loc. cit.
[158] Ibid., 7 and see Ibid., 131-159 (and basically the whole second part of the book) for a discussion of how these stories could be corrected, or at least nuanced.

explicitly focus on stories of progress, loss, or return,[159] I do first of all share Hemmings' claim that narratives –in our case narratives that have stifled and still stifle the oeuvres of Beauvoir and Irigaray– are open to intervention and re-interpretation. And secondly, I also do not want to claim that the diffractive rereading of Beauvoir and Irigaray that I will present in the last chapter of this thesis, is the ultimate, right story about these feminist-philosophical oeuvres: I just want to open these oeuvres up for a different kind of interpretation, without falling back into these generational progress and loss narratives, or return narratives.[160]

The misreadings that will be presented here have fixed the meanings of these oeuvres in different gradations: the authors of the first group of readings are so stuck in a dialecticism that they can only defend their favorite oeuvre by denouncing the other oeuvre as oppositional and unproductive. These either/or readings are usually motivated by the author's explicit choice for an equality or a difference feminist position, which means that Beauvoir and Irigaray are reread in such a superficial manner. It is exactly this kind of equality/difference pattern that will be criticized here, because it has minimalized the feminist diversity of both these oeuvres. The second group of misreadings have had even more problematic and long-lasting consequences: the authors of these misreadings have locked Beauvoir's oeuvre up in an anti-essentialist or social constructivist position, and have labeled Irigaray's philosophy as purely essentialist, and hence as threatening to feminism as a biologically, psychologically, and socially non-deterministic project; a project of change. These paralyzing labels of radical anti-essentialism and pure essentialism are the effects of a thoughtless application of the Anglo-American sex/gender distinction, as we will argue later on the chapter.

[159] The logic of progress versus loss is of course part of our discussion here as well: Beauvoir's defenders (such as Delphy) often accentuate the fact that difference feminists, such as Irigaray, are responsible for feminism's downfall, and long to re-instate a Beauvoirian feminism, whereas defenders of difference feminism (such as Kristeva) understand their denouncing of Beauvoir as necessary in order for feminism to progress.

[160] Hemmings could –and probably would– criticize my diffractive reading project for partaking in the construction of a narrative of return. I see it differently, however. Although Hemmings links these feminist return narratives to the current strand of new materialist feminisms that want to focus on the material and the bodily –a focus that could be found in this project as well, since I am looking for interpretations of Beauvoir and Irigaray that step out of the standard cultural turn interpretations– I wouldn't say that I am constructing such a return logic, and that because of a couple of reasons. First of all –and I have already touched upon that– this thesis project does not want to be completely normative, but isn't making any relativistic claims either: I am indeed using quasi-normative concepts such as 'misreadings,' and 'stifled and stifling stories;' but that does not imply that my diffractive rereading is the most superior feminist narrative out there. I just have to use certain normative concepts in order to be able to move towards my rereading. Secondly, although this project is influenced by the post-cultural turn, diffractive reading cannot be compared to a return narrative, simply because I am not returning "to what remains valuable before a cultural turn seduced us […]." (Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, 132). A return narrative, in my opinion, would not take the time to focus on and work through Butler's rereadings of Beauvoir and Irigaray. And thirdly, a diffractive reading –unlike a return narrative– wishes to step out of the binary logic of progress and loss narratives, and –instead of bringing the best aspects of each narrative together– it does not synthesize, tries to keep open a multiplicity of perspectives, through cross-fertilizing oeuvres.

1.1. Beauvoir, Irigaray, and the equality/difference paralysis.

But first things first: there are lots of Anglo-American misreadings to be found that start from an either/or logic, and end up in confirming the equality/difference binary when defending a Beauvoirian or Irigarayian position.[161] Elaine Stavro's "The Use and Abuse of Simone de Beauvoir,"[162] for example, gives us a nuanced reading of Beauvoir's feminism. Stavro's statement that Beauvoir "was not inattentive to sexual difference"[163] but in fact was criticizing female sexuality and motherhood as phallic, patriarchal constructions, has to be applauded. Her revaluation of Beauvoir's philosophy as non-masculine isn't problematic, but the overall logic behind the essay is: Stavro is so eager to save Beauvoir from her French poststructuralist feminist 'abusers' who have labeled her as "*passé*"[164] that she discredits them completely to save Beauvoir. She reduces all of Beauvoir's critics to "feminists of difference,"[165] and then falls into the well-known trap of limiting these difference feminists to the Holy Trinity. In a later essay, Stavro again protects Beauvoir from "the French differential feminists"[166] (who now also include Antoinette Fouque) by claiming that her philosophy should be seen as independent from Sartre, and hence is non-phallogocentric. The arguments that Stavro provides us with here, are again convincing: by referring to the importance of the situatedness of the female body and freedom in Beauvoir's oeuvre, she is able to portray Beauvoir as an

[161] Because I already examine the nature of the anti-essentialism/essentialism binary in full detail starting from page 37 of this thesis, and suspect that the application of the equality/difference binary on the oeuvres of Beauvoir and Irigaray already says it all, I will only briefly touch upon the origins of the difference/equality debate in this footnote by looking at some interesting references. A conceptual overview of this debate has first instance been given in Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehand, "Difference," in *50 Key Concepts in Gender Studies*, eds. Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan (Los Angeles – London: Sage, 2004), 27-30. In this piece, the authors give a rather traditional overview of the debate, by claiming that difference feminism was developed as a response to second-wave equality feminism. Rita Felski's article, "The Doxa of Difference," *Signs* 23 (1997): 1-21, on the other hand, offers us a more complicated history of the development of difference feminism by analyzing the strands of sexual difference feminism (in its first and second generation), and postcolonial feminism. Although Felski seems to be quite biased when it comes to the political validity of sexual difference feminism, her article nonetheless focuses on the multiplicity of difference feminisms, which makes it easier to break out of the equality/difference binary, because difference feminism is no longer seen as one big strand that opposes itself to equality feminism, or feminisms. Moira Gatens continues with complicating the equality/difference binary from a feminist political point of view. By discussing the masculine bias in traditional citizenship theories, Gatens not only unravels how the concepts of equality and difference have played a role in these theories, but she also shows us that the choice between these two is an "impasse," because "these strategies belong to the same problematic." What Gatens means by this, is that this binary is founded upon another binary, namely that of culture versus nature. The equality/difference binary hence is a *constructed* binary. See Moira Gatens, "Sexual Difference or Sexual Equality?" in Moira Gatens, *Feminism and Philosophy. Perspectives on Difference and Equality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 134 for the above quotes. This has also been argued by Joan W. Scott, as we will see in the main text of this thesis starting from page 36.

[162] Elaine Stavro, "The Use and Abuse of Simone de Beauvoir: Re-Evaluating the French Poststructuralist Critique," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 6 (1999): 263-280.

[163] Ibid., 271.

[164] Ibid., 264.

[165] Ibid., 265.

[166] Elaine Stavro, "Re-reading *The Second Sex*: Theorizing the situation," *Feminist Theory* 1 (2000): 135.

autonomous philosopher, but by placing her against the so-called French difference feminists, and by accentuating that the latter reject Beauvoir's feminism for "neutralizing the differences between men and women,"[167] Stavro repeats the stereotypical equality/difference binary. She is able to open up Beauvoir's oeuvre to a sexual difference perspective, yet, this is only made possible by radicalizing the alleged anti-equality feelings of the difference feminists named above. The binary logic that is at work here hence isn't deconstructed, but in fact re-instated.[168]

Arleen Dallery's "Sexual Embodiment"[169] can be seen as the reversed mirror image of Stavro's essays, with the difference that Dallery wishes to defend difference feminism (again categorized as French feminism) by claiming that Beauvoir doesn't go far enough when it comes to the theorization of sexual difference and female sexuality.[170] In contrast to Stavro, Dallery criticizes Beauvoir for "[u]sing male sexuality as the norm,"[171] by referring to how French feminists succeed at deconstructing "the phallic organization of sexuality and its code which positions woman's sexuality and signified body as a mirror or complement to male sexual identity."[172] Dallery thus defends the *écriture féminine* thinkers against the critiques of essentialism, but what is really striking here, is the fact that the main argumentation of this article rests on the same equality/difference binary as Stavro's

The supposedly (non-)phallogocentric attitude of Beauvoir is the key discussion point in these essays, but this critique of phallogocentrism is of course connected to the equality/difference dichotomy: whereas the followers of the so-called difference feminists criticize Beauvoir as a thoughtless equality feminist who gives in to the phallic logic of sameness, Beauvoir's defenders blame them for having anti-equality feelings when labeling Beauvoir as such. Both camps are hence rereading these oeuvres in a binary manner, which

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[167] Stavro, "Re-reading *The Second Sex*," 135.

[168] A similar risky approach can be found in Kaufmann, "Simone de Beauvoir," where she revalues Beauvoir's thoughts on motherhood and feminine difference by nuancing Beauvoir's equality feminism and stating that the outcome of her position does not lead to the neutralization of women as men. This process of making Beauvoir's equality feminism less radical is problematic, because Kaufmann at the same time implies that Irigaray is Beauvoir's undutiful daughter, as we have also discussed in footnote 9 on page 3 of this thesis. Kaufmann here falls prey to an Oedipal logic, but also overaccentuates the equality/difference binary, which is pretty ironical, considering that she wanted to open up Beauvoir's feminism to a sexual difference perspective.

[169] Arleen B. Dallery, "Sexual Embodiment: Beauvoir and French Feminism (écriture féminine)," *Women's Studies Int. Forum* 8 (1985): 197-202.

[170] A similar approach can be found in Tina Chanter's *Ethics of Eros*, where she literally puts Beauvoir and Irigaray against one another by stating the following: "Despite her truncated attempt to think through women's otherness, Beauvoir's final message is that sexual difference should be eradicated and women must become like men. […] For Irigaray, however, simply to eliminate women's otherness is not to overcome oppression." See Tina Chanter, *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray's rewriting of the philosophers*, New York – London: Routledge, 1995), 76.

[171] Dallery, "Sexual Embodiment," 198.

[172] Ibid., 199.

instantly paralyzes and categorizes them as either completely pro equality, or pro difference. But when we compare these paralyzing readings with Beauvoir and Irigaray's own statements on difference and equality, these misreadings immediately lose their validity. Simone de Beauvoir, for example, claimed the following in an interview with Kaufmann:

> If one insists too much on difference, even positive differences, one risks imprisoning woman again in a feminine nature. And yet if we want to think clearly and look at things in their totality, without either fear or complacency, we have to admit that there are also feminine qualities.[173]

This surprising quote complicates Beauvoir's own feminist position: she is indeed wary of falling back into a stereotypical affirmation of a specific female nature, but she accepts the existence of certain feminine features, which rules out the idea that she would be an anti-difference thinker. And the same goes for Luce Irigaray, who stated in *Ce sexe* that her project "[…] is evidently not about women having to give up equality in the sphere of social rights."[174] The real question should be: "How can we articulate the double 'demand' for equality and difference?"[175] This nuances Irigaray's attributed anti-equality feelings, and taken together, these thoughtful statements actually show us that both oeuvres should not be read through a strict equality/difference binary, because both authors express a more complex and more powerful feminist message.

And seen from a political perspective, the equality/difference binary appears to be fraudulent anyways; the opposition itself is actually fabricated, as has been argued by historian Joan W. Scott. In "Deconstructing Equality-versus-Difference,"[176] Scott engages in a remarkable exercise in feminist deconstruction: via an analysis of the Sears sexual discrimination case, she disentangles the equality/difference binary, and tells us that the two actually rely on each other. Or as Scott put it; "[…] the antithesis itself hides the interdependence of the two terms, for equality is not the elimination of difference, and difference does not preclude equality."[177] When feminisms are labeled as either being completely pro equality, or pro difference, feminist thought destroys itself by using a logic of exclusion:

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[173] Simone de Beauvoir in Kaufmann, "Simone de Beauvoir," 130.
[174] Irigaray, *CS*, 78.
[175] Loc. cit.
[176] Joan W. Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism," in *Conflicts in Feminism*, eds. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller, (New York – London: Routledge, 1990), 134-148.
[177] Ibid., 138.

When equality and difference are paired dichotomously, they structure an impossible choice. If one opts for equality, one is forced to accept the notion that difference is antithetical to it. If one opts for difference, one admits that equality is unattainable.[178]

But feminists should not be forced to choose between these self-defeating positions, and Scott pleas not to think about feminist history in such a binary manner, because "the historical arguments of feminists do not usually fall into these neat compartments,"[179] as Beauvoir and Irigaray's own statements have proved as well. Because of the fact that political arguments of equality usually rest on the existence of certain (sexual, racial, and other) differences, and political arguments of difference start from the idea of promoting social justice; equality and difference hence are logically intertwined concepts. I agree with Scott that a feminist politics should not be based on such an unproductive binary, and when it comes to the reception history of Beauvoir and Irigaray, Scott's warnings should certainly be taken into account.

But in addition to being haunted by the equality/difference opposition, the works of Beauvoir and Irigaray have also been paralyzed by the stifling tags of essentialism and anti-essentialism –two concepts that are in fact linked to the equality/difference dichotomy, as we will explain now, before delving into a critical analysis of how American queer theorist and feminist philosopher Judith Butler has reread both authors.

1.2. Beauvoir, Irigaray, and the essentialism/anti-essentialism impasse.

Feminist theory hasn't only been divided by the equality/difference debate, but has suffered even more from the essentialism/anti-essentialism binary, which can be seen as a direct consequence of the (constructed) division between equality and difference feminists, according to American feminist theorist Diana Fuss and Australian feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz. Both theorists give us an excellent conceptual overview of what was really going on during the feminist heydays of anti-essentialism (and of 'French feminism,' ironically enough). Fuss' book *Essentially Speaking* (1989) appears to be one of the earliest critical deconstruction of the idea that essentialism necessarily always implies a fallback into phallogocentrism. And Grosz' "Sexual Difference and the Problem of Essentialism"[180] offers

[178] Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-versus-Difference," 142.
[179] Ibid., 145. Also see Joan W. Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer. French feminist and the rights of man* (Cambridge – London: Harvard University Press, 1996), in which Scott reviews the history of the feminist process of rights claiming, talks about how feminists have made use of both arguments of equality and difference to obtain women's rights, and informs us about the fact that these claims have always been paradoxical. Scott in this book not only repeats the idea that feminism "is produced, differently at different moments, at sites of historically specific discursive contradiction," (Ibid., 174) but she also argues that the feminisms of Beauvoir and Irigaray are far too complex to be placed under such an equality/difference binary. See Ibid., 169-175.
[180] Elizabeth Grosz, "Sexual Difference and the Problem of Essentialism," in Elizabeth Grosz, Space*, Time, Perversion: The Politics of Bodies* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995), 45-57.

a similar kind of deconstruction, but her project is also motivated through and through by her desire to defend sexual difference feminism.

So, although they differ qua political motivations, both theorists talk about how feminism has legitimized itself as a theoretical and political project by trying to purify itself from patriarchal values. Interestingly, both Fuss and Grosz stress that the essentialism/anti-essentialism debate had a double effect: it has led to some exciting feminist insights, yet it has also made feminists suspicious of everything that reeked of essentialism. According to Grosz –who follows the equality/difference narrative when rereading feminist history– feminists of difference back then were heavily criticized by their egalitarian counterparts, because they seemingly repeated patriarchy's degrading ideas about women, namely that they were *naturally* different from men in a negative, inferior manner.[181] Arguments of sexual difference as pure difference were hence understood as copies of patriarchy's arguments of negative difference; and because essentialism in all of its conceptual forms had to be avoided, *somatophobia*, or fear of the body in its concrete material and sexed existence –which was already central to the philosophical tradition for centuries (due to the mind/body split, that started in Plato's metaphysics and fully culminated in Descartes' *cogito*)– also became common place in feminist theory.[182]

1.2.1. Essentialism explained: The different types of essentialism.

Before looking into how this impasse affected Beauvoir and Irigaray, a short conceptual reflection on essentialism and its various appearances has to be included, because of the latter's complexity. Fuss first of all defines essentialism as "a belief in true essence –that which is most irreducible, unchanging, and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing,"[183] and which usually is connected to a "pure or original femininity,"[184] whereas an anti-essentialist or constructivist (a type of anti-essentialism that has been feminism's standard reply to essentialist thought) "insists that essence itself is a historical construction."[185] Grosz describes essentialism as follows: "Essentialism entails the belief that those characteristics defined as women's essence are shared in common by all women at all

[181] Paraphrase of Grosz, "Sexual Difference and the Problem of Essentialism," 53.
[182] The issues of *somatophobia*, the mind/body, and nature/culture splits have been thoroughly analyzed and criticized by Elizabeth Grosz in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington – Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994). The mending of these splits, and the nature/culture divide in particular, has been central to all of Grosz' works.
[183] Diana Fuss, "The 'Risk' of Essence," in Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking. Feminism, Nature & Difference*, New York – London: Routledge, 1989), 1-21.
[184] Ibid., 2.
[185] Loc. cit.

times."[186] This female essence can refer to woman's nature, or even to her psychological makeup, which means that there are different conceptual types of essentialism. Biologism, for instance, is a form of essentialism that connects a woman's essence to her biological, reproductive capacities; and that limits her social role to that of being a mother and a homemaker, because she is anatomically destined to reproduce and care. Naturalism implies the same kind of determinism, and also attributes a "fixed nature"[187] to women (and men), but this kind of essentialism can also be motivated by theological or ontological grounds, according to Grosz. And although Grosz only hints at psychologism, she states that this type of essentialism also locks women up in a fixed, psychological nature.[188] What matters the most here has to do with the fact that patriarchy has used these essentialisms in its advantage in order to oppress women: women are only granted those socio-cultural roles that mirror their essence, which is highly problematic, seen from any feminist point of view. Social change becomes impossible, when our natures are portrayed in such a fixed manner.

But the irony of it all is that essentialism and constructivism, just like equality and difference, have more in common than we would expect at first sight: they both come in different forms and gradations, and seem to be theoretically interdependent, according to Fuss.[189] Both positions might for instance differ when it comes to their ideas about the natural and the body. But when constructivists argue that our bodies are the effects of normalizing discourses of power, and that bodies are hence socially constructed, essentialism secretly creeps back into their argumentation, since they presume that the natural is *always* fixed, and that the social is *essentially* constructed. The process of inventing and attributing essences to subjects appears to be a power-influenced process that operates via certain social conventions –which hence immediately unmasks the essentialism behind the so-called universal and fixed essences. Grosz seems to make a similar point: essentialism isn't only operating at the background of constructivist theories; it is actually central to feminist theories in general. Or as Grosz stated it:

> Any theory of femininity, any definition of woman in general, any description which abstracts from the particular historical, cultural, ethnic, and class positions of particular women verges perilously close to essentialism.[190]

[186] Grosz, "Sexual Difference," 47.
[187] Ibid., 48.
[188] See Ibid., 47.
[189] Paraphrase of Fuss, "The 'Risk' of Essence," 4 and 5-6.
[190] Grosz, "Sexual Difference," 55.

Feminists have to able to speak about women, but the categories that they use, should be purified from patriarchal stereotypes. Feminists should hence be wary of theories that work with "real essence[s],"[191] but there are also "nominal essence[s],"[192] i.e. linguistic categorizations, such as "a class of women"[193] that are central to feminist politics and hence cannot be thrown away that easily. Both Grosz and Fuss are convinced of the fact that feminists should sometimes *risk essentialism*, and take it on as a feminist tool or strategy to subvert phallogocentrism from the inside out. As an example of this kind of essentialism, Grosz and Fuss mention Gayatri Spivak as someone who saw essentialism as a possible political feminist investment. Spivak's alliance with essentialism has always been nuanced: she certainly never wanted to lock up the subaltern in an essentialist category in order to trap her/him in this definition, but she did want to take the risk of essentializing the subaltern, so that the situation and needs of the (female) subaltern subject could be put on the map.[194] Spivak nonetheless is fully aware of the dangers of essentialism, as can be seen in her interview with Ellen Rooney, where she stated the following:

> The strategic use of essentialism can turn into an alibi for proselytizing academic essentialisms. The emphasis then inevitably falls on being able to speak from one's own ground, rather than matching the trick to the situation, that the word strategy implies.[195]

Essentialism as a strategy can thus be taken up in the wrong way, and this should be avoided at all times, according to Spivak. What is also remarkable in this interview is that Spivak brings up Luce Irigaray, and states that she has been misread as an essentialist, whereas Spivak sees her as writing in an experimental, rhetoric manner.[196]

1.2.2. (Anti-)Essentialism applied: Beauvoir's 'anti-essentialism,' and Irigaray's 'essentialism.'

And this brings us to our key issue, namely the fact that the oeuvres of Beauvoir and Irigaray have also been read through this stifling anti-essentialist/essentialist opposition. When it comes to Beauvoir's works, the labeling of anti-essentialism doesn't really come as a surprise:[197] it was after all Simone de Beauvoir herself who associated her philosophy with

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[191] Fuss, "The 'Risk' of Essence," 4.
[192] Loc. cit.
[193] Ibid., 5.
[194] See footnote 94 on page 19 of this thesis.
[195] Gayatri C. Spivak and Ellen Rooney, "In a Word: Interview," in Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, 4.
[196] See Ibid., 17.
[197] This does not mean that Beauvoir has always been read as an anti-essentialist; the first chapter of *Le deuxième sexe* ("Les Données de la Biologie"), for instance, was sometimes read as a manifesto for biological essentialism. Beauvoir's works have been labeled as essentialist, or as completely anti-essentialist, as Sonia Kruks has also

anti-essentialism, because of her existentialist philosophy.[198] Existence also precedes essence in Beauvoir's works, and when discussing Parshley's translation with Simons, Beauvoir stated the following:

> I was infused with Heidegger's philosophy and when I speak about human reality [in *Le deuxième sexe*], that is, about man's presence in the world, I'm not speaking about human nature, it's completely different.[199]

Yet, Beauvoir's anti-essentialist self-defining is still very different from the Anglo-American misreadings that have labeled her as a *radical* social constructivist by looking at her philosophy and her famous statement of "*On ne naît pas femme: on le devient*"[200] through the Anglo-American sex/gender distinction.

But it is the oeuvre of Luce Irigaray that has been stricken the most by the paralyzing accusations of essentialism:[201] we've already mentioned Moi's and Jones' readings, but Irigaray has more specifically been attacked for being a biological and even psychic essentialist, as Irigaray scholar Margaret Whitford also stated.[202] The critique of psychic essentialism is pretty rare, and has mainly been asserted by Lacanian thinkers, such as Ellie Ragland-Sullivan and Jacqueline Rose.[203] The more standard claim that Irigaray is a biological essentialist and determinist has been taken up by many of her critics, such as Lynne Segal, Mary Poovey, Christine Delphy, French socialist feminist Monique Plaza and many others.[204] These critiques stand in full contrast to Irigaray, who –when asked what a woman

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stated. See Sonia Kruks, "Beauvoir's Time/Our Time: The Renaissance in Simone de Beauvoir Studies," *Feminist Studies* 31 (2005): 295. An example of such a reading that labels Beauvoir as an essentialist, can be found in Mary Evans, "*The Second Sex*," in Mary Evans, *Simone de Beauvoir: a feminist mandarin* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1985), 56-75. In this thesis, however, I claim that Beauvoir's works have more often been labeled as social constructivist than essentialist, because this kind of reading has been more influential.

[198] See for instance the following statement by Beauvoir where she claims to be an anti-essentialist: "When I use the words 'woman' or 'feminine,' I evidently do not refer to an archetype of any kind, or to an immutable essence; one must understand the phrase 'in the present state of education and customs' after most of my statements. It is not the intention here to posit eternal verities, but rather to describe the common basis that underlies every individual feminine existence." de Beauvoir, *DSb*, 11.

[199] Simons, "Two Interviews with Simone de Beauvoir," 34.

[200] de Beauvoir, *DSb*, 15.

[201] This is also one of Naomi Schor's points in her essay on the feminist reception history of Irigaray. See Naomi Schor, "Previous Engagements: The Receptions of Irigaray," in *Engaging With Irigaray*, eds. Burke, Schor, and Whitford, 3-14.

[202] Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London – New York: Routledge, 1991), 14.

[203] See Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986); Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, "Jacques Lacan: Feminism and the Problem of Gender Identity," *SubStance* 11 (1982): 6-20, and Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* (Urbana – Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

[204] Lynn Segal, *Is The Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism* (London: Virago, 1987); Mary Poovey, "Feminism and Deconstruction," *Feminist Studies* 14 (1988): 51-65; Delphy, "The Invention of French Feminism;" and Monique Plaza, "'Phallomorphic' power and the psychology of 'woman'," *Gender Issues* 1 (1980): 71-102.

is– stated that she would never answer such a "metaphysical question,"[205] and elsewhere in *Ce sexe* claimed that she was not interested in "producing a new theory in which woman would be the subject or object […]."[206] Irigaray does not wish to rigidly define women, and this is supported by the fact that she, throughout *Speculum* and *Ce sexe*, criticizes the Freudian psychoanalytical tradition for its 'anatomy is destiny'-motto. But Irigaray's critics nonetheless claim that she holds on to a female anatomical, bodily essence, because she supposedly links her idea of a *parler-femme* to the female body and the two lips, as can be seen in this exemplary quote by Poovey:

> Luce Irigaray […] authorizes this return to biology and essentialism in her creation of a myth of female desire and in basing 'feminine' language on the physical properties of female genitalia.[207]

The same argument has been made by Plaza and Delphy: Delphy obviously sees Irigaray as an essentialist, when criticizing her Anglo-American followers for defending her "against accusations of essentialism,"[208] whereas Irigaray herself apparently "makes no bones about it."[209] This of course all goes well with Delphy's idea that the category of 'French feminism' was invented by Anglo-Americans to spread their essentialist ideology.[210] And Plaza describes Irigaray's philosophy as a project that hopes to discover 'woman' and reveal her oppression by essentializing her: according to Plaza, "[…] the potentiality of woman's existence is posited as the essence of her mere biological reality –as if to say, when woman is no longer a social being."[211] Would this then suggest that all these misreadings have their origins in France? Not exactly: the feminisms of Plaza and Delphy actually have their roots in the Anglo-American scene, and this is revealed by the fact that Plaza, and especially Delphy make use of the typical Anglo-American concepts of sex and gender. Plaza holds on to a standard social constructivist position,[212] and the same can be said about Delphy, who claims that "[…] social construction is not something that happens when you're not looking –it is what happens all the time, in all societies, and it started happening long before we were born."[213] Delphy and Plaza are completely influenced by of a type of Anglo-American feminism that focuses on social constructivism and the sex/gender distinction. Not that there's

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[205] Irigaray, *CS*, 121.
[206] Ibid., 75.
[207] Poovey, "Feminism and Deconstruction," 55.
[208] Delphy, "The Invention of French Feminism," 188.
[209] Ibid., 189.
[210] See this thesis, footnote 57 on page 11.
[211] Plaza, "Phallomorphic' power," 73.
[212] See Ibid., 75 where Plaza states that "[…] the social mode gives an obvious form to sex and hides its oppressive systems in it."
[213] Delphy, "The Invention of French Feminism," 180.

anything wrong with that; but when such an Anglo-American conceptual scheme is applied to an oeuvre that is particularly rooted in French psychoanalysis and Continental philosophy, misreadings are bound to happen.

In contrast to these critiques, Irigaray luckily has some defenders as well; yet, not all of her advocates successfully escaped the anti-essentialism/essentialism binary. One of the earliest, more appreciative essays on Irigaray's body politic is Jane Gallop's "'Quand nos lèvres s'écrivent'."[214] Gallop –an American professor specialized in psychoanalysis and French literature– at the beginning of her essay already positions herself by admitting to feel slightly uncomfortable with the realness of the body, "unmediated by textuality."[215] She assumes that Irigaray has similar thoughts about this subject, and hence tries to defend her against her critics. Wishing to find out more about the rhetoric behind Irigaray's texts, Gallop reads *Ce sexe*, and although she wishes to focus on how Irigaray "produces the imaginary impression of female analogy,"[216] Gallop nonetheless "immediately felt the seduction of anatomical reference."[217] Yet, on the same page Gallop then states that we should not immediately jump to essentialist conclusions: although Irigaray refers to anatomical female body parts, she is actually discussing "the symbolic interpretation"[218] of both male and female anatomies, in the hopes of deconstructing the phallogocentric logic behind the psychoanalytical discourses on the (female) body and sexuality. Gallop saves Irigaray from the accusations of her critics by reading her oeuvre as "operat[ing] in the metaphoric paradigm;"[219] as "creating an effect of poetry."[220] She resists the idea that Irigaray should be read as an anatomical or biological determinist, as we can also gather from the following quote:

> Now if I suggest that what Irigaray calls '*ce multiple du désir et du langage féminins*' (p. 29 [*Ce sexe*]) is not based in anatomy but constructs it, I can then assert that the Irigarayian *poétique du corps* is not an expression of the body but a *poiésis*, a creating of the body.[221]

I appreciate that Gallop rereads Irigaray in a non-stereotypical manner, and we certainly have to give her credit for doing so. Gallop is moving beyond the standard essentialist interpretation of Irigaray's oeuvre, yet, I do have the feeling that she –maybe out of her eagerness to save Irigaray's against these accusations of essentialism– interprets her through a

[214] Jane Gallop, "'Quand nos lèvres s'écrivent': Irigaray's Body Politic," *Romanic Review* 74 (1983): 77-83.
[215] Ibid., 77.
[216] Ibid., 78.
[217] Loc. cit.
[218] Ibid., 79.
[219] Ibid., 80.
[220] Loc. cit.
[221] Ibid., 79.

perspective that could be seen as socially constructivist, as can be seen in the previous quote. Although Gallop tries to break out of the essentialism/constructivism binary, she kind of stays in this paradoxical stalemated situation by choosing a social constructivist reading over the more standard one.

Elizabeth Grosz', Diana Fuss', and Margaret Whitford's rereadings, on the other hand, seem to break out of such a stifling reading pattern, i.e. a pattern that requires that Irigaray can only be read through either an essentialist, or a social constructivist perspective:[222] in *Sexual Subversions* (1989), Grosz first of all gives an overview of Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference, and stresses that her oeuvre should be read as a critique of those discourses that defined women through phallic standards. Context matters, and Irigaray's project consequentially does not consist in presenting "true description[s] of women or femininity."[223] Irigaray rather wants "to devise a *strategic* and *combatative* understanding, one whose function is to make explicit what has been excluded or left out of phallocentric images."[224] Irigaray's imagery of the two lips is invoked "to displace male models, rather than to accurately reflect what female sexuality really is."[225] Grosz seemingly breaks out of the anti-essentialism/essentialism binary by claiming that Irigaray's essentialism is strategic, like Spivak's, and the following quote should prove that Grosz' interpretation pushes Irigaray's thought further than Gallop:

> Bodies are not conceived by Irigaray as biologically or anatomically given, inert, brute objects, fixed by nature once and for all. She sees them as the bearers of meanings and social values, the products of social inscriptions, always inherently social. *Speculum…* and *This Sex…* need to be read in the light of this mutually defining cluster of terms.[226]

One could of course read Grosz' quote, and claim that she –like Gallop– still is reading Irigaray as a fervent social constructivist, but there might be more at stake here. Even though the Irigarayian body, according to Grosz, is socially inscripted, the body itself is at least still present: matter and meaning, or nature and culture, seem to be intertwined.

Whether or not Grosz' reading is less fixated than Gallop's, what really matters is that Grosz pinpointed at Irigaray's strategic, political usage of essentialism, and hence brought

[222] Other positive readings of Irigaray undertaken in the eighties include Carolyn Burke's and Naomi Schor's essays. See Carolyn Burke, "Irigaray through the Looking Glass," *Feminist Studies* 7 (1981): 288-306, and Naomi Schor, "This essentialism which is not one: Coming to grips with Irigaray," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 1(2): 38-58. Schor's essay is extremely interesting, since she, like Fuss in *Essentially Speaking*, also deconstructs the concept of essentialism, and shows us that there are different kinds of essentialism. Both essays were later on reprinted in *Engaging With Irigaray*, eds. Burke, Schor, and Whitford.
[223] Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989), 110.
[224] Loc. cit. (own emphasis).
[225] Ibid., 117.
[226] Ibid., 112.

Irigaray's philosophy into motion, i.e. *pushed these dualistic, binary interpretations to their extremes*,[227] and –in my opinion– opened up a more innovative perspective to interpret Irigaray's oeuvre. This idea has since then been elaborated on by many other Irigaray scholars. Fuss, at around the same time, presented her own reading of Irigaray's image of the two lips, and claimed that Irigaray's essentialism is more of "a politically strategic gesture."[228] In this essay, Fuss, contrary to Moi,[229] also emphasized that Irigaray's philosophy is far more political than often thought.[230] Whitford accentuates the political subversiveness of Irigaray's oeuvre as well by stating that Irigaray is a feminist theorist of "change:"[231] Irigaray wants to free women from the rigid definitions and masculinized images that phallogocentrism bestowed on them, and grant them access to a female imaginary (which still has to be created, by intervening in the Symbolic which has been phallically structured), so that they can become subjects of their own. So, if Irigaray invokes certain anatomical images, she is trying to reveal "the concealed essentialism of philosophy."[232] Irigaray merely wishes to restructure the phallogocentric symbolic, which means that she is "*re*symbolizing […] male and female 'nature',"[233] and not re-essentializing them. Whitford has neatly summarized Irigaray's ambiguous, tactical position as follows: "One cannot get 'beyond' essentialism […] without passing through essentialism."[234] Irigaray's essentialism hence is strategic and political: she takes on essentialist images; she mimes them, in order to deconstruct them from within. By

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[227] This statement is inspired by Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, "Pushing dualism to an extreme: On the philosophical impetus of a new materialism," *Cont. Philos. Rev.* 44 (2011): 383-400. In this article, both authors explain how new materialist philosophers and feminist theorists can be considered to be breaking through, or moving beyond dualisms and dichotomized binaries by pushing them to their extremes.

[228] Diana Fuss, "Luce Irigaray's Language of Essence," in Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking. Feminism, Nature & Difference*, New York – London: Routledge, 1989), 71.

[229] Moi's reading of Irigaray in *Sexual/Textual Politics* was criticized by Grosz and Fuss for presenting Irigaray as an ahistorical, apolitical thinker. Moi, in *Sex, Gender, and the Body*, still supports these criticisms, and states that "Irigaray spends not time at all discussing the specific ways in which patriarchy oppresses women. To her, both patriarchy and the feminine work in much the same ways in Freud's Vienna as in Plato's Athens." See Toril Moi, *Sex, Gender, and the Body. The student edition of What is a Woman?* (Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 50. Although Moi in this book still is highly suspicious of Irigaray's sexual difference philosophy, *Sex, Gender, and the Body* not only includes an excellent rereading of Beauvoir's feminist philosophy (which will be discussed with regards to Butler's rereadings), but also introduces a self-critique of *Sexual/Textual Politics*, as can be seen on page 7 where Moi states that "the belief that any use of the word 'woman' (and any answer to the question 'What is a woman?') must entail a philosophical commitment to metaphysics and essentialism, is mistaken."

[230] Although Fuss argues against ahistorical and apolitical readings of Irigaray, she nevertheless accuses Irigaray of universalist tendencies: she labels Irigaray's politics as a radical politics of "consciousness-raising," (Fuss, "Luce Irigaray's Language of Essence," 68) yet, at the same time criticizes such a politics for its "tendency to universalize and to homogenize, to subsume all women under the category of 'Woman'." (Loc. cit.)

[231] Whitford, *Luce Irigaray*, 21. Margaret Whitford has also criticized those who have read Irigaray as an essentialist and as a thinker who is merely part of the Holy Trinity in her earlier work on Irigaray. See Whitford, *The Irigaray Reader*, 2-3.

[232] Whitford, *Luce Irigaray*, 94.

[233] Loc. cit.

[234] Ibid., 103.

asserting that Irigaray is employing essentialism strategically, both Grosz, Whitford and other Irigaray interpreters,[235] are able to get out of the impasse: they have attributed an in-between position to Irigaray's philosophy, and therefore deconstructed the binary: Irigaray is an essentialist in a strategic, anti-essentialist way.

The defensive reactions of the Irigaray scholars above nonetheless show us that standard narrative of Irigaray as an essentialist has been (and possible still is) pretty influential: as suggested before, the essentialism/anti-essentialism impasse has its origins in a rigid and decontextualized application of the Anglo-American concepts of sex, gender, and the so-called sex/gender distinction –which was extremely popular in the American feminist scene in the early seventies and onwards, because the distinction between sex and gender, and the social constructedness of the latter, finally allowed feminists to conceptualize theories of change. Yet, this distinction is also responsible for the stifling stories of Beauvoir as a radical social constructivist, and Irigaray as an essentialist. I will support this argument by analyzing Judith Butler's rereadings of Beauvoir and Irigaray. Although Butler was one of the first prominent American philosophers to engage with both of these oeuvres in a feminist-philosophical manner, and attacked the sex/gender distinction in *Gender Trouble* (1990), she also appears to have misread these oeuvres. Due to her immense influence on Anglo-American feminist theory, Butler seems to be co-responsible for creating these stereotypical stories about the oeuvres of Beauvoir and Irigaray.

[235] Other Irigaray scholars that have labeled Irigaray as a strategic essentialist are Tina Chanter, Alison Stone, Annemie Halsema and Rachel Jones. Chanter mainly discusses this topic in the first chapter of her *Ethics of Eros*, and emphasizes that the accusations of essentialism are a direct consequence of a thoughtless application of the Anglo-American sex and gender concepts (as I will also do in the main text). This has also been claimed by Halsema, who speaks of a "political, strategic essentialism," since Irigaray's philosophy is all about radical change and liberating women so that they can become subjects, too. See Annemie Halsema, *Dialectiek van de seksuele differentie. De filosofie van Luce Irigaray (Dialectics of sexual difference. The philosophy of Luce Irigaray)* (Amsterdam: Boom, 1998), 23. Stone agrees with Halsema on this point, and also labels Irigaray's essentialist attitude as "political, rather than narrowly strategic." See Alison Stone, *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference* (Cambridge – New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 30. Interesting is that Stone mainly preserves this political essentialism for Irigaray's earlier works, and labels her later works as proposing a non-naive, complex "realist essentialism," because Irigaray there seems to attribute "essential corporeal characters" (Ibid., 45) to men and women. This sounds strange at first, but Stone's thesis is actually plausible. I came to a similar conclusion in my previous MA thesis, in which I tried to prove that the realist essentialism of Irigaray in her later works is indeed there, but that it's basically unproblematic, because of her earlier strategic essentialist position in *Speculum* and *Ce sexe*. It is exactly because of this strategic, critical essentialist position (which is most notable in Irigaray's hysterical mimesis method) that Irigaray's later realist essentialist position can be seen as non-naïve and non-phallogocentric. See Evelien Geerts, *De maskerade van Luce Irigaray: van hysterica-mimetica tot poëtica (The masquerade of Luce Irigaray: from hysteric-mimetic to poet)*, Antwerp University, June 7, 2010 (http://uu.academia.edu/EvelienGeerts/Papers/379291/). A more recent contribution to this discussion can be found in Rachel Jones, *Irigaray. Towards a Sexuate Philosophy* (Cambridge – Malden: Polity Press, 2011), 169-171.

1.3. Judith Butler's ambiguous misreadings of Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray: Stifled and stifling stories.

1.3.1. A critical close reading and evaluation of Butler's earlier engagements with Beauvoirian philosophy: Simone de Beauvoir as a radical social constructivist.

Judith Butler's engagement with Beauvoirian philosophy was already present in some of her earliest essays, such as "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*,"[236] "Variations on Sex and Gender"[237] (which is a rewritten version of "Sex and Gender"), and "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution."[238] The content of the first two essays is basically the same: Butler starts with Beauvoir's famous *On ne naît pas femme*-quote (or rather Parshley's version of the quote), and philosophizes about the possible radical consequences this statement has when interpreted via the Anglo-American conceptual framework of sex and gender.

According to Butler, this quote implies that Beauvoir "distinguishes sex from gender and suggests that gender is an aspect of identity gradually acquired,"[239] and that Beauvoir – being the (grand)mother of American second-wave feminism– anticipated the splitting of sex (the natural, never-changing anatomical aspects of the female body) and gender (the body as it has been inscripted with ever-changing socio-cultural meaning and norms). The sex/gender distinction has been considered to be one of contemporary feminism's most important mottos, and is said to have made its first feminist-academic appearance in British feminist sociologist Ann Oakley's *Sex, Gender and Society* (1972).[240] The introduction of gender as distinct from biological sex was initially a feminist lifesaver: the conceptualization of the distinction meant that feminists were able to do away with patriarchal arguments of biological determinism by claiming that femininity, masculinity, and gender roles were socially constructed. Which

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[236] Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*," *Yale French Studies* 72 (1986): 35-49.
[237] Judith Butler, "Variations on Sex and Gender. Beauvoir, Wittig and Foucault," in *Feminism as Critique: Essays on the Politics of Gender in Late-Capitalist Societies*, eds. Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell (Cambridge: Polity Press, in association with Basil Blackwell, 1987), 128-142.
[238] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40 (1988): 519-531.
[239] Butler, "Sex and Gender," 35.
[240] As is argued by Pilcher and Whelehand, "Gender," in *50 Key Concepts in Gender Studies*, eds. Pilcher and Whelehan, 56-59. There have of course been many other notable thinkers who have tried to conceptualize a gender theory before Oakley. Femininity and masculinity were, for instance, already key concepts in Freudian psychoanalysis, and psychoanalyst Robert Stoller's *Sex and Gender: The Development of Femininity and Masculinity* (New York: Science House, 1968) has also been seen as one of the key works responsible for creating the sex/gender distinction. Pilcher and Whelehan also refer to Gatens and Butler, but I have decided to summarize their positions by making use of Gatens' and Butler's own texts. Also see Linda Nicholson, "Gender," in *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, eds. Alison M. Jaggar and Iris Marion Young (Malden – Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 289-297 for an extra overview of these issues.

meant that societal change was possible, and that women no longer had to be locked up in the traditional gender roles of mothers and housewives. The distinction itself nonetheless was later on criticized by feminist theorists: from the eighties onwards, the constructed dichotomy between sex and gender was problematized for multiple reasons.

Australian feminist theorist Moira Gatens, for instance, accused the proponents of the distinction for being extremely naïve: because of the overemphasis on the constructedness of femininity and masculinity, feminists assumed that "both the body and the psyche [were] post-natally passive 'tabula rasa'."[241] and that a simple counterprocess of "re-socialisation"[242] of patriarchal society would do the trick. But according to Gatens, "the body can and does intervene, to confirm or to deny, various social significances […]."[243] Sexed bodies matter, and are "privileged sites of significance,"[244] and the sex/gender distinction unrightfully obfuscates the social significance of natural bodies and bodily functions. The distinction since then has been further deconstructed by Judith Butler, who claimed in *Gender Trouble* (1990) that sex appears to be as socially constructed as gender –a statement to which we will return to later. What we want to examine here, however, is how Butler has reread Beauvoir and Irigaray: we already know that Butler interprets Beauvoir through an Anglo-American perspective, and thus sees her as a classic gender feminist, yet does this then mean that Butler's philosophy stands in opposition to Beauvoir's? Or is something more going on in Butler's rereadings in "Sex and Gender" and "Variations?"

Butler indeed starts out with presenting Beauvoir as a gender feminist by showing us how Beauvoir's idea of 'becoming woman' stands in opposition to 'being female:'

> [T]o be a woman, is to become a woman; it is not a matter of acquiescing to a fixed ontological status, in which case one could be born a woman, but, rather, an active process of appropriating, interpreting, and reinterpreting received cultural possibilities.[245]

Femininity is socially constructed, but the Beauvoirian idea of 'becoming woman' suggests that gender isn't merely socially constructed (i.e. that the body is inscribed by cultural meanings), but is also partially chosen as a project.[246] Butler makes Beauvoir into a voluntarist, and she claims that this aspect of being able to choose one's gender has everything to do with Beauvoir's Sartrean existentialist background –although Beauvoir,

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[241] Moira Gatens, "A Critique of the Sex/Gender Distinction," in *Beyond Marxism? Interventions After Marx*, eds. Judith Allen and Paul Patton (Sydney: Intervention Publications, 1983), 144.
[242] Loc. cit.
[243] Ibid., 149.
[244] Loc. cit.
[245] Butler, "Sex and Gender," 36.
[246] See Ibid., 36-37.

according to Butler, also differs from Sartre because of her "embodied notion of freedom,"[247] whereas Sartre was a radical voluntarist who believed in absolute freedom and choice.[248] Butler is attentive to this nuance, and by later on stating that Beauvoir sees the body as a situation, Butler really captures Beauvoir's phenomenological existentialism.

But Butler at the same time also completely *radicalizes* Beauvoir: making Beauvoir into a social constructivist by linking her anti-essentialist conceptualization of 'becoming woman' to the Anglo-American concept of gender is one thing, but stating that Beauvoir would agree with the idea that "[w]e never experience or know ourselves as a body pure and simple, i.e. as our 'sex'"[249] is something else. I actually have the feeling that Butler here is trying to keep the ontological notions of being (i.e. a passive and fixed state) and becoming (i.e. an active, changing process) apart in order to read Beauvoir's 'becoming woman' as completely disconnected from sex. But Beauvoir's philosophy actually makes much more room for bodies in their sexed state, as we will see in the third and last chapter of this thesis. Yet, the only conceptualization of the body that Butler ascribes to Beauvoir is "the body as a field of interpretative possibilities, the locus of a dialectical process of interpreting anew historical set of interpretations which have become imprinted in the flesh."[250] Butler sees the Beauvoirian situated body as "a material reality which has already been located and defined within a social context,"[251] and as "the situation of having to take up and interpret that set of received interpretations."[252] Butler speaks of 'the flesh' and 'material reality,' yet these seem to be socially constructed as well, which makes us wonder whether these entities even existed before they had been inscribed with social signification.

Anyways, in Butler's eyes, Beauvoir already seems to be anticipating Butler's own philosophy, and this means that Beauvoir, like Butler, has made a step towards deconstructing the sex/gender distinction.[253] This can be seen when Butler mentions "The Data of Biology" chapter from *Le deuxième sexe*, where Beauvoir, according to Butler, claimed that "natural

[247] Butler, "Sex and Gender," 38.
[248] This has also been argued by Beauvoir scholars, such as Vintges and Sonia Kruks. See Vintges, *Philosophy as Passion* on pages 67-71; and Sonia Kruks, "Simone de Beauvoir: Teaching Sartre About Freedom," in *Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. Margaret A. Simons (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 79-95.
[249] Butler, "Sex and Gender," 39.
[250] Ibid., 45.
[251] Loc. cit.
[252] Loc. cit.
[253] The idea that Butler in her earlier essays builds her own philosophy on that of Beauvoir has also been asserted by Stella Sandford in her essay "Contingent Ontologies: Sex, gender and 'woman' in Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler," *Radical Philosophy* 97 (1999): 18-29. Sandford even states that Butler in these essays reconstructs Beauvoir into a "Butlerian thinker," (Ibid., 21) and this appears to be the case. Sandford is also right when stating that Butler's appreciation of Beauvoir changes in her later works, which is why I have chronologically divided Butler's rereadings in the main text.

facts gain significance only through their subjection to non-natural systems of interpretation."[254] If natural facts are socially constructed as well, then Beauvoir not only anticipated the classic sex/gender distinction, but also prepared its deconstruction, or in Butler's own words; "then Simone de Beauvoir's theory seems implicitly to ask whether sex was not gender all along."[255] Butler, at the end of her essay, admits that Beauvoir didn't make this statement herself, but she nonetheless sticks to this double radicalization of Beauvoir's thought to root her own radical theory of gender performativity in the philosophies of Wittig and Foucault –theories that, in Butler's eyes, finished what Beauvoir started, and completely deconstructed the sex/gender distinction by either criticizing the binary gender system and its heteronormativity (Wittig), or by accentuating that sex is the effect of the modern discourse on sexuality (Foucault).[256]

Butler's "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" continues this line of thought, and gives us a taste of what is to come in *Gender Trouble*: on the essay's first page, Butler combines Beauvoirian thought with John Searle's speech acts theory. Butler now focuses on gender as something performative; gender is "an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts."[257] Butler again uses Beauvoir's concept of 'becoming woman' to support the idea that gender is socially constructed, but instead of labeling gender as a project, she now turns to the concept of strategy,[258] since one is expected to perform one's gender according to societal gender expectations and norms. Beauvoir's 'becoming gender' is now reformulated into performing or "doing one's gender."[259] Butler then presents most of the topics that will be central to *Gender Trouble*, namely the idea that performing one's gender can be compared to a theatrical scripted performance; that society's heteronormativity and binary gender structure should be criticized; that we should not adhere to the reductive, universalist category of 'we, women;' and that travesty can be seen as a form of gender subversion.

Butler here again radicalizes Beauvoir, which is exactly why all three essays are lacking when it comes to the presentation of Beauvoir's philosophy. Although Butler engages with Beauvoirian thought in a feminist-philosophical manner, her Butlerian, i.e. presentist take on Beauvoir appears to be problematic, and that because of three reasons: by radicalizing

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[254] Butler, "Sex and Gender," 45.
[255] Ibid., 46.
[256] See Butler, "Variations," on pages 134-142 for Butler's detailed discussion of the philosophies of Wittig and Foucault.
[257] Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 519.
[258] Ibid., 522.
[259] Ibid., 525.

Beauvoir's philosophy, the suggestion that Beauvoir's oeuvre progressively culminated into Butler's feminist philosophy, isn't far off. Next to that, Butler also completely "translates Beauvoir's anti-essentialism into the conceptual register of sex and gender,"[260] as Beauvoir scholar Toril Moi also stated in *Sex, Gender, and the Body* (2005).[261] This isn't only at odds with Beauvoir's phenomenological philosophy that begins with the question "what is a woman?,"[262] and then thinks through the ordinary experience of being a woman in all of its facets,[263] but the terminology itself is also highly problematic due to its Anglo-American nature: the idea of socially constructed genders *an sich* isn't elaborated on that much in *Le deuxième sexe*, and this is hardly surprising: even if Beauvoir had worked out such a social constructivist gender theory, she wouldn't have used the same Anglo-American terms, because she didn't have access to a French corresponding concept for gender.

The issue whether gender as a particular Anglo-American term could be accurately translated into French actually still is an important topic in feminist theory, and the question has been tackled by Rosi Braidotti, amongst others: in an essay that starts with a reflection on whether feminist theorists in Europe share the same language and concepts, Braidotti – drawing conclusions from Maria Puíg de la Bellasca's research– states that although one could translate gender into *genre* (which refers to the grammatical gender of words), it would obviously not carry the same connotations of gender as social sex. Although attempts have been made to introduce the concept of *genre* into the French academic scenery, *sexe* (in its ambiguous meanings of genitalia; natural sex; and social sex) is still more widely used.[264]

The third reason why Butler's rereading can be seen as problematic, has to do with the fact that she uses Parshley's inaccurate translation of *Le deuxième sexe*. Butler hence disregards the fact that Beauvoir in fact used very different concepts than sex and gender. Two textual examples can be given here. Butler first of all isolates Beauvoir's *On ne naît pas femme*-quote in all three essays, and hence misses the meaning of the paragraph as a whole, which goes as follows:

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[260] Moi, *Sex, Gender, and the Body*, 55.

[261] A similar statement has been made by Sara Heinämaa, in "What is a Woman? Butler and Beauvoir on the Foundations of the Sexual Difference," *Hypatia* 12 (1997): 20-39, in which she discusses how Butler has misread Beauvoir's phenomenological philosophy as a theory of gender. My project is obviously similar to Heinämaa's, since I also argue that Butler misreads Beauvoir through an Anglo-American sex/gender perspective, yet, I also pay attention to how Butler has read Irigaray's oeuvre.

[262] Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe. I. Les faits et les mythes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949 (renouvelé en 1976)), 15.

[263] This is also Moi's key argument in *Sex, Gender, and the Body*.

[264] See Rosi Braidotti, "The Uses and Abuses of the Sex/Gender Distinction in European Feminist Practice," in *Thinking Differently: A Reader in European Women's Studies*, eds. Gabriele Griffin and Rosi Braidotti (London – New York: Zed Books, 2002), 289-290 and 294-295.

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman (*femme*). No biological, psychological, or economic destiny can define the figure that the human female takes on in society (*la femelle humaine*); it is the whole of civilization that designs this intermediary product between the male and the castrated male that one describes as feminine (*féminine*).[265]

If one rereads this quote in its original context, Beauvoir is indeed best described as an anti-essentialist: it is society that produces femininity, and not just biology, psychology or the economy. Butler hence isn't wrong to label Beauvoir as a constructivist, but her claim that Beauvoir's philosophy is all about gender, and that "the female body is the arbitrary locus of the gender 'woman',"[266] is way too radical. Beauvoir's terminology in fact is much more complex: the nuances of *femme*, *la femelle*, and *féminine* cannot be replaced by such a narrow concept as gender; and what is also interesting, is that Beauvoir in this paragraph not only talks about 'becoming woman' (which Butler replaces by 'becoming gender,' and in the end rewrites into 'doing gender'), but later on also describes femininity as a set of characteristics – characteristics that have been negatively interpreted and abused by patriarchy to make women appear as lesser beings than men. [267]

The second example has to do with Butler's misreading of Beauvoir's "The Data of Biology" –which we already briefly referred to. Butler here focuses on those statements that underline her own claim that natural facts *an sich* cannot mean anything, unless they have already been socially interpreted.[268] But the first chapter of *Le deuxième sexe* is much more ambiguous than what Butler makes of it: it cannot be read through a sex/gender lens, because Beauvoir specifically focuses on the conceptual pair of *femme/femelle*, as can be seen in the following paragraph:[269]

Woman (*femme*)? That's very simple, say those who like simple formulas: she is a womb, an ovary; she is a female (*femelle*): that word is enough to define her. In the mouth of man, the epithet female (*femelle*) sounds like an insult; although he is not ashamed of his animality, he is actually proud when

[265] de Beauvoir, *DSb*, 15.
[266] Butler, "Sex and Gender," 35.
[267] Or has Moira Gatens also stated in her critique of Butler: "It is not woman, *simpliciter*, or the female body, *simpliciter*, that she [i.e. Beauvoir] wishes to criticize, but, rather, those (gendered) ways of being that attach to woman (understood both as 'symbol' and as the individual concrete existent) and the female body (the material 'ground' of the existent) and that are operative in depriving women of the opportunity to become authentic, ethical subjects." See Moira Gatens, "Beauvoir and biology: a second look," in *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. Claudia Card (Cambridge – New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 277. I fully agree with Gatens' claims, namely that Beauvoir should not be reread in an either/or manner (i.e. as an essentialist, or a social constructivist); that her philosophy cannot be grasped via the sex/gender terminology; and that Beauvoir saw nature and culture as interdependent, which means that the female natural body had a meaning of its own (without determining the female subject).
[268] See Butler, "Sex and Gender," 46.
[269] This has been claimed by Moi in *Sex, Gender, and the Body*, 61 and what follows, is a paraphrase of that paragraph.

people say of him 'He is a male!' (*mâle*). The term 'female' (*femelle*) is pejorative not because it grounds woman (*la femme*) in nature, but because it locks her up in her sex (*sexe*) […].[270]

Moi is correct when claiming that *femme* and *femelle* should not be translated into *woman* and *female*: *femelle* actually refers to the femaleness of animals, which makes Beauvoir's statements in *Le deuxième sexe* way stronger, because she argues against the patriarchal meanings that have been attributed to femininity, and have reduced woman into mere animal-like creatures, instead of the human subjects she wants them to be.

Butler overlooks these nuances, and her Anglo-American sex/gender terminology, combined with her holding onto Parshley's mistranslation, makes her misread and radicalize Beauvoir as if she's advocating a similar gender troubling philosophy. The anti-essentialist Beauvoir is now presented as a *radical social constructivist*, whereas Beauvoir herself is in fact much more ambiguous about the signification of nature, natural facts and the female biological body. Although Beauvoir at the end of the first chapter in *Le deuxième sexe* states that "biology does not suffice to provide an answer to the question that concerns us: why is woman *the Other*?,"[271] the biological female body has at least some signifying role to play –if not, Beauvoir would not have talked about the changes the female body goes through during "the crisis of puberty and of the menopause, the monthly 'curse,' a long and often difficult pregnancy, a painful and often dangerous childbirth […]."[272]

Judith Butler's earlier readings of de Beauvoir are hence misreadings because they fail to grasp Beauvoir's complicated conceptual framework and her ambiguous attachment to both nature and culture. We will come back to Butler's rereadings of Beauvoir in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), after we have examined how Butler reread Luce Irigaray in her earlier texts.

1.3.2. Butler's initial non-engagement with the oeuvre of Irigaray: Gender theory versus sexual difference philosophy.

In contrast to Butler's explicit engagement with Beauvoirian philosophy, Butler never really dealt with Irigaray's oeuvre in her earlier works: Luce Irigaray's name is nowhere to be found in the previously discussed essays, which is quite remarkable, since her philosophy will be central to *Gender Trouble*. There are nonetheless some implicit references to *l'écriture féminine* in "Variations" and "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," which tells us why Butler initially didn't want to engage with Irigarayian thought.

[270] de Beauvoir, *DSa*, 35.
[271] Ibid., 67.
[272] Ibid., 61.

At the end of “Variations,” Butler not only criticizes sexual difference philosophers for “maintain[ing] sexual difference as irreducible,”[273] and hence for clinging onto a binary gender system (which Butler wishes to disrupt), but she also claims that French feminists are basically essentialists. Butler thus seems to support the French feminism (Irigaray) versus Beauvoir dichotomy here by reading the oeuvres of the French feminists through her own gender feminist perspective: according to Butler, these French feminists namely believe that “gender is not constituted, but [that it] is […] an essential aspect of bodily life.”[274] They come pretty close to biological essentialism, and this is exactly what Beauvoir wanted to avoid, in Butler’s eyes: whereas these French feminists speak of a female “inclusive essence,”[275] Beauvoir suggested “that women have no essence at all, and hence, no natural necessity, and that, indeed, what we call an essence or a material fact is simply an enforced cultural option which has disguised itself as natural truth.”[276] Beauvoir –the now radical social constructivist– is put against the essentialist French feminists, and the same dichotomy can be detected in “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution.” Butler there approves of Spivak’s strategic, “operational essentialism,”[277] yet, she also clearly argues against any “feminist theory which celebrates or emancipates an essence, a nature, or a shared cultural reality which cannot be found.”[278] Butler later on labels this specific kind of feminism as sexual difference feminism, and implicitly reveals that she is talking about Luce Irigaray’s philosophy when claiming that she appreciates the methodology of rereading the philosophical texts of the masters in order to reveal their phallogocentrism.[279] Such deconstructive rereadings are fine, but feminist sexual difference theories as a whole are not, because they are essentialist and preserve a binary gender system.

Butler here fails to appreciate Irigaray’s philosophy, and she even accentuates the theoretical tensions between Irigaray –the essentialist– and Beauvoir –the anti-essentialist. Butler’s Beauvoirian-inspired gender feminism appears to be completely incompatible with Irigaray’s sexual difference theory. Her engagement with oeuvres have nonetheless changed in her later works, which we will now evaluate by asking whether Butler in these works has moved beyond her earlier misreadings, or has rather re-enforced them.

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[273] Butler, “Variations,” 139.
[274] Ibid., 140.
[275] Ibid., 142.
[276] Loc. cit.
[277] Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” 529.
[278] Loc. cit.
[279] Ibid., 530.

1.3.3. A critical close reading and evaluation of *Gender Trouble*, *Bodies That Matter*, and *Undoing Gender*: Moving beyond Beauvoir and Irigaray.

One of course then wonders whether Butler's attitude towards Irigaray has changed in her later works. Interestingly, both *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* deal with Irigarayian thought, and surprisingly enough, Butler in *Bodies That Matter* focuses exclusively on Irigaray instead of on Beauvoir. Does this then mean that Butler now all of a sudden has become an Irigarayian? Well, not exactly, as we can see in the 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*: Butler here defends her gender theory by again opposing it to French feminist theories of sexual difference that "made presumptions about the limits and propriety of gender and restricted the meaning of gender to received notions of masculinity and femininity."[280] Whilst acknowledging that she nonetheless was also inspired by French (feminist) poststructuralists, *Gender Trouble* –a manifesto for gender subversion– is directed against "the heterosexism at the core of sexual difference fundamentalism."[281] This critique of heterosexism is obviously also aimed at Irigaray's sexual difference philosophy, which makes Butler's engagement with Irigaray quite ambiguous in *Gender Trouble*.[282]

A short overview of the main themes of *Gender Trouble* might come in handy before we turn to Butler's rereadings: Butler in *Gender Trouble* provocatively claims that the days of the self-constructed feminist sex/gender distinction are over, since gender and sex are far more similar than we ever imagined them to be. Gender now "proves to be performative – that

[280] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, With an introduction by the author (New York – London: Routledge, 2006), viii.
[281] Ibid., ix.
[282] This does not mean that Butler, or other thinkers that have worked with Irigaray's oeuvre for that matter, haven't got the right to criticize Irigaray's philosophy, of course. Like any philosophical theory, Irigaray's philosophy isn't infallible, and when looked at from a more contemporary perspective, some problematical issues could indeed be detected. Halsema, for instance, is one of those Irigaray scholars who has dealt with the actuality of Irigaray's feminist philosophy. After having detected some limits to Irigaray's sexual difference approach, Halsema complements this sexual difference approach with a more Foucauldian and Butlerian-inspired philosophy that includes a critical analysis of power and focuses on a broader conceptualization of difference. See Halsema, *Dialectics of sexual difference*, 217-243. But –and this is important– whereas Halsema really works through Irigaray's philosophy, by pointing out its stronger points and flaws, Butler rather seems to move beyond Irigaray without having actually worked through her philosophy. Halsema really tries to read Irigaray's philosophy in its French poststructuralist context and conceptual framework. Butler, on the other hand, reads her philosophy through the concepts of sex and gender –and it is this decontextualization of Irigaray's oeuvre that I find extremely problematic. On another note, I also want to emphasize that my own reading of Butler's rereadings isn't meant to be part of some sort of moving beyond project, or of a return narrative, as I also argued in footnote 160 on page 33. Instead of moving beyond and discarding Butler's rereadings, I rather *work through*, or *move through and beyond* them in order to find some of their blind spots and ambiguities. The concept of working through here is similar to that of the Freudian notion of *Durcharbeitung*, and is taken from Sara Ahmed's *Differences That Matter: Feminist Theory and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 118, where Ahmed suggests that contemporary feminist theory should critically work through psychoanalysis as a possible feminist tool, before deciding to move beyond it.

is, constituting the identity it is purported to be."[283] Butler was already immensely influenced by the philosophies of Wittig and Foucault in her earlier days, and this is apparent in *Gender Trouble* as well: Butler's radical social constructivism is finally fully developed here, and she adds some Foucauldian touches to her ideas about gender performativity by incorporating his antifoundationalism (There is no "doer behind the deed;"[284] it is rather the case that "the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed."[285]), and by stating that sex is the discursive effect of the modern discourse of sexuality.[286] She reveals that sex itself has a discursive nature ("This very concept of sex-as-matter, sex-as-instrument-of-cultural-signification [...] is a discursive formation [...]."[287]), which means that both gender and sex in the end are constructed. Butler then puts these ideas to use in order to criticize the system of "institutional heterosexuality."[288] According to Butler, this heteronormative system came into being because gender was constructed as the cultural mirror of sex, whilst sex was (discursively) naturalized. Since sex was perceived as causing gender, and gender in its turn was understood as causing desire (towards the other gender), one ended up in a binary heteronormative culture –and here we clearly see Wittig's influence.

Seen on a political level, Butler makes two provocative claims in *Gender Trouble*: because of her antifoundationalist and anti-essentialist attachments, Butler first of all wishes to "destabiliz[e] our notions of 'Woman' as universal subject as well as liberal feminist representations of 'Woman' as political identity."[289] And secondly, Butler attaches a political significance to drag, which she sees as a "parodic repetition of gender"[290] that could destabilize the naturalized and normative discourse of gender. Feminism should no longer engage in a self-defeating identity politics, but rather "locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them."[291]

So where do Irigaray and Beauvoir fit in this philosophy of gender troubling? Butler engages in a critical dialogue with both oeuvres in *Gender Trouble*, and often plays out

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[283] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 33.
[284] Ibid., 181.
[285] Loc. cit.
[286] This is a typical Foucauldian idea. See for instance Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction*, transl. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 11, where Foucault talks about "the over-all 'discursive fact,' the way in which sex is 'put into discourse'".
[287] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 50.
[288] Ibid., p. 31.
[289] Loc. cit.
[290] Ibid., 200.
[291] Ibid., 201.

Beauvoir's social constructivism against Irigaray's sexual difference philosophy: she falls back on Beauvoir's *On ne naît pas femme*-quote a couple of times,[292] and hence confirms her earlier readings of Beauvoir as a radical constructivist. Butler still applauds Beauvoir for her anti-essentialism, yet all of the sudden also criticizes her for her existentialist-humanist attachment to an autonomous subject[293] and for her Cartesian and Satrean-like "mind/body dualism,"[294] which Butler sees as a conceptual residue of phallogocentrism. This obviously goes against Butler's earlier statement that described Beauvoir's project as "freed of the Cartesian ghost,"[295] and it disregards the common belief that Beauvoir's philosophy is anti-dualist.[296] Beauvoir isn't such a radical social constructivist anymore, but she is still one of Butler's feminist predecessors.

Could the same be said about Irigaray? Not exactly: although Butler finally starts to engage with Irigarayian thought, and gives us a nuanced reading of her feminist philosophy as developed in *Speculum* and *Ce sexe* by referring to Irigaray's critique of phallogocentrism and masculine/masculinized subjectivity, Butler nonetheless seems to make two capital mistakes in her rereading. She again uses the Anglo-American sex/gender distinction as a tool of feminist assessment: this makes it impossible for Butler to agree with Irigaray's sexual difference philosophy that focuses on the feminine and on making subjectivity accessible for women. Whereas Butler wants to focus on gender, Irigaray's philosophy still is deep-rooted in an identity politics that works with the universalist category of 'woman.' In addition to Butler's critique of this semi-essentialism, Irigaray also is criticized for her naïve beliefs in a "global phallogocentrism,"[297] which makes her philosophy too "globalizing"[298] and hence not "self-critical"[299] enough. Butler here mistakenly assumes that Irigaray's philosophy is a mere anti- or "reverse-discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor instead of offering a different set of terms,"[300] whereas Luce Irigaray on the other hand claimed in *Ce sexe* that her project is not based on an anti-logic at all.[301] This critique seems to be directed at

[292] See for instance Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 11, 45 and 151.
[293] See Ibid., 195-196.
[294] Ibid., 16.
[295] See Butler, "Sex and Gender," 37 for the quote and 37-40 for the whole discussion.
[296] As has also been claimed by Beauvoir scholars Gatens and Moi. See Gatens, "Beauvoir and biology," 281-282, and Moi, *Sex, Gender and the Body*, 194.
[297] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 18.
[298] Loc. cit.
[299] Loc. cit.
[300] Loc. cit.
[301] See for instance Irigaray, *CS*, 128, where she stated the following: "It evidently should not be about replacing masculine power with feminine power. Because such a reversal (*renversement*) would always be caught up in the economy of the same, in the same economy, in which there would surely be no room for what I am trying to designate as 'feminine'." Irigaray is also very aware of the fact that one cannot escape phallogocentrism that

Irigaray's strategic miming of phallogocentric discourses, and her idea that female sexuality, or female *jouissance*, can only be found outside phallogocentrism, as an "excess;"[302] an "elsewhere."[303] But for Butler, one cannot step outside the phallogocentric Symbolic domain or power. Put in her own words:

> If sexuality is culturally constructed within existing power relations, then the postulation of a normative sexuality that is 'before,' 'outside,' or 'beyond' power is a cultural impossibility and a politically impracticable dream, one that postpones the concrete and contemporary task of rethinking subversive possibilities for sexuality and identity within the terms of power itself.[304]

Butler's sex/gender-focused rereading of Irigaray thus ends in a philosophical disagreement. For Butler, the emancipation struggle has to take place in phallogocentric culture itself; there is no other way than to subvert and destroy this gender binary culture from the inside out. In the above quote, Butler implies that Irigaray's philosophy, in contrast to hers, lacks a critical analysis of power and power subversion in order to deconstruct the phallogocentric hegemony from within. Although Irigaray's feminist philosophy indeed has a utopian touch to it, her mimetic strategy nonetheless aims at subverting and "jamming the theoretical machinery"[305] of phallogocentrism. But what is really problematic here is that Butler plays off her Beauvoirian heritage by putting Beauvoir and Wittig against Irigaray: Irigaray's feminist philosophy is constantly compared to these (supposedly) social constructivist theories throughout *Gender Trouble*,[306] which not only devalues Irigaray's philosophy, but also re-essentializes it in a way that is extremely damaging. The Irigaray versus Beauvoir dichotomy is reconstructed once more: although Beauvoir at the end of *Gender Trouble* has lost her status of radical social constructivist and is now seen as a classic gender feminist, because of her philosophical humanism, dualism, and her idea that sex is

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easily: "But we do not escape from reversal (*renversement*) just like that. […] There is no simple practical way to jump outside phallogocratism, *nor is there any possibility to situate oneself there, from the mere fact of being a woman*." See Irigaray, *CS*, 157.

[302] Ibid., 76.

[303] Ibid., 74.

[304] See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 42. The 'outside' and 'beyond' power claims refer to Kristeva and Irigaray. Irigaray's feminist philosophy relies heavily on the notions of mimesis and strategic essentialism, which basically means that Irigaray –like Butler– wants to deconstruct phallogocentrism from the inside out, and hence does not completely rely on a prediscursive body outside power (although she does seem to claim that once phallogocentrism has been deconstructed, there is some kind of a utopian 'beyond phallogocentrism' –Butler might have a point here). Irigaray's strategy becomes very clear in *Speculum* where she analyzes the phallogocentric stereotypical image of the female hysteric, and puts herself in the hysteric's place in order to deconstruct the phallogocentric discourses of philosophy and psychoanalysis. But Irigaray never plainly reverses the power dynamics. What Irigaray in fact does is a "*renversement du renversement*," (Irigaray, *S*, 345) or a double reversal of phallogocentrism, as has also been explained in Halsema, *Dialectics of sexual difference*, 88-90. Also see Geerts, *The masquerade of Luce Irigaray*, 10-11 and 31-36 for how this double reversal is connected to Irigaray's hysterical miming.

[305] Irigaray, *CS*, 76.

[306] See for instance Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 13-18, 25, 36, 158.

"immutably factic;"[307] something that "cannot be changed;"[308] Beauvoir's constructivist feminism still is portrayed as superior to Irigaray's semi-essentialist philosophy of sexual difference.

And this line of thought is continued in *Bodies That Matter* –which Butler wrote as a response to her critics who complained that her radical constructivist position in *Gender Trouble* not only led to a reinstallment of *somatophobia* in philosophy, but also created the impression that Butler was a discursive idealist who didn't think about the material existence of bodies at all. *Bodies That Matter*'s goals are to think "the materiality of bodies"[309] and "the performativity of gender"[310] together, nuance Butler's own radical voluntarist idea that one can choose one's gender for the day, and downplay her earlier suggestion that drag is always immediately subversive. What interests us here, however, is whether Butler continues with her stifling stories about the oeuvres of Beauvoir and Irigaray.

Butler actually appears to move beyond both Beauvoir and Irigaray –as if both of their philosophies are out-dated. Butler only makes one reference to a "de Beauvoirian version of feminism,"[311] which means that Beauvoir has now become "*the* eponymous sex/gender feminist,"[312] and is unable to measure up to Butler's more advanced philosophy. In her search for "matter […] as a process of materialization,"[313] Butler spends a lot of time on rereading Irigaray's critical dialogue with Plato in *Speculum*, and she seems to appreciate her strategic miming. She even defends Irigaray against those who have read her as an "uncritical maternalist,"[314] but then rejects Irigaray's philosophy as a whole due to the fact that it is an anti-discourse, and because it merely focuses on the feminine instead of on all the other queer subjects that have been excluded by phallogocentric discourse.[315] Although Beauvoir thus seems to be a constant inspiration for Butler's own gender philosophy, Irigaray is portrayed as a thinker that is best avoided at all times, because of her sexual difference feminism, as was already suggested in *Gender Trouble*. This is only fully explained by Butler in two clarifying interviews from 1994 and 1998: in the first interview, "Feminism by Any Other Name,"[316]

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[307] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 152.
[308] Loc. cit.
[309] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York – London: Routledge, 1993), 1.
[310] Loc. cit.
[311] Ibid., 4.
[312] Sandford, "Contingent Ontologies," 21.
[313] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 9.
[314] Ibid., 45.
[315] See Ibid., 48-49.
[316] Rosi Braidotti and Judith Butler, "Feminism by Any Other Name," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 6 (1994): 27-61.

Butler and sexual difference philosopher Rosi Braidotti engage in a heated debate over the use of the concepts of 'gender feminism' and 'sexual difference feminism.' Whereas Braidotti tries to convince Butler of the fact that one can define sexual difference in a positive, non-hierarchic manner, and broaden the notion so that it could include multiple differences, Butler persists in reading sexual difference theories as if they ignore other important social differences.[317] Braidotti then complains that Butler re-essentializes sexual difference theory all over again, which is exactly what Butler has done to Irigaray's philosophy in particular, as demonstrated above. Near the end of the interview, Butler finally reveals the reason behind her problems with sexual difference theories, namely that they, in her eyes, reify heteronormativity by focusing on the sexual differences between men and women, whereas queer theorists on the other hand promote a more radical and progressive politics.[318]

In her interview with Grosz from 1998, Butler repeats these criticisms while evaluating Irigaray's philosophy: after having stated that she refused to engage with Irigaray's essentialist oeuvre in her earlier essays, but then changed her mind because Irigaray's "critical mimesis"[319] method intrigued her –as I also suggested above– Butler states that she has never been an Irigarayian because of the following reasons: Irigaray's rereading tactics are first of all too aggressive (i.e. "masochistic-sadistic"[320]); being a queer theorist, Butler finds gender to be a much more compelling, "unstable"[321] notion; and she also blames the later Irigaray for making "heterosexuality into the privileged locus of ethics"[322] by holding on to a conceptualization of an ethics of sexual difference that solely focuses on men and women.[323]

Butler's *Undoing Gender* (2004) should of course also not be left out of the picture, and it is in fact the ideal book to conclude this chapter with, because it fully underlines Butler's ambiguous philosophical relationship with both the oeuvres of Beauvoir and that of

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317 See Braidotti and Butler, "Feminism by Any Other Name," 41.

318 See Ibid., 53.

319 Pheng Cheah, Elizabeth Grosz, Judith Butler, and Drucilla Cornell, "The Future of Sexual Difference: An Interview with Judith Butler and Drucilla Cornell," *Diacritics* 28 (1998): 19.

320 Ibid., 20.

321 Ibid., 24.

322 Ibid., 28.

323 The critique that Irigaray's later works presuppose a heterosexist notion of sexual difference is also acknowledged by Drucilla Cornell in Cheah, Grosz, Butler, and Cornell, "The Future of Sexual Difference," 32, where she states that "there is an inescapable trap –I want to put it this strongly– in the move to the ontologization of the feminine and the masculine." Alison Stone also called Irigaray's later work heterosexist in her book *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference*. Another critical, but more nuanced discussion on Irigaray's supposedly heterosexist philosophy can be found in Penelope Deutscher, "The Impossible Friend: Traversing the Heterosocial, the Homosocial, and the Successes of Failure," in Penelope Deutscher, *A Politics of Impossible Difference: The later work of Luce Irigaray* (Ithaca – London: Cornell University Press, 2002), 123-141. A strong defense against these critiques can be found in Jones, *Irigaray*, 182-198.

Irigaray. Butler in *Undoing Gender* continues to move beyond both oeuvres, whilst presenting her own feminist politics of livability. According to Butler, "the question of life"[324] is a feminist and political issue, just like alterity –which was one of Beauvoir's and also is one of Irigaray's core concerns.[325] What makes one's life livable or unbearable has to do with the social (mis)recognition of one's identity and subjectivity, and the acts of (mis)recognition, according to Butler, are connected to whether one is perceived to be following societal gender norms or not. Butler's politics of livability –which still focuses on the disruptive act of gender troubling– seems to be grounded in Beauvoirian gender feminism, yet, like in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, Beauvoir is no longer seen as a radical social constructivist.[326] When it comes to Irigaray's sexual difference philosophy, Butler here is a lot more appreciative, surprisingly enough: Butler first of all emphasizes the strategic and critical value of Irigaray's mimesis when reviewing Braidotti's feminist philosophy.[327] And her appreciation doesn't stop there: Butler actually nuances her former critique of heteronormativity when stating that Irigaray's *Ce Sexe* "implicitly theorized a certain kind of homoerotic love between women […],"[328] by making use of the two lips metaphor. Butler even defends Irigaray against the accusations of biological essentialism, when she states that Irigaray's concept of sex is neither social, nor biological, but "a linguistic one that exists, as it were, on the divide between the social and the biological."[329]

Is Butler then finally breaking free from her sex/gender terminology? Although Butler surely is more positive when it comes to Irigaray's feminist philosophy, she still holds on to her Beauvoirian-influenced gender feminism as a normative standard. When it comes to her analysis of Irigaray, for instance, Butler nuances the latter's conceptualization of sexual difference as if it is merely "a question for our times,"[330] and not a fact that someone can argue for or against. Although Irigaray indeed starts *Éthique de la différence sexuelle* (1984) by claiming that sexual difference is one of the most important questions, if not the key question, of today,[331] Butler's contestation that Irigaray does not see sexual difference as something "foundational"[332] appears to contrast with Irigaray's own claims in *Éthique* and in her later works. Sexual difference namely is an issue that needs to be reflected upon (because

[324] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York – London: Routledge, 2004), 225.
[325] See Ibid., 240 and 245.
[326] See Ibid., 65.
[327] See Ibid., 200-201.
[328] Ibid., 208.
[329] Ibid., 43.
[330] Ibid., 177.
[331] See Irigaray, *EDS*, 13.
[332] Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 178.

it has been ignored in the phallogocentric discourses of psychoanalysis and philosophy), but it also the core of Irigaray's feminism and ethics of alterity: "the other,"[333] in Irigaray's ethics, is the one "who differs from me sexually."[334] Sexual difference hence seems to be more than just a question; it has a certain ontological facticity.

So, although Butler in *Undoing Gender* explicitly engages with Irigarayian philosophy, she nonetheless also moves beyond it, by first of all toning down the importance of sexual difference in Irigaray's philosophy, and by sticking to her own gender troubling feminism. Throughout her oeuvre, Judith Butler engages with both the philosophies of Beauvoir and Irigaray in a philosophical and critical feminist manner –which has to be applauded– yet, even when Butler moves beyond both paradigms, it is still obvious that she follows in Simone de Beauvoir's footsteps, instead of in Irigaray's. There is nothing wrong with that, of course, but by continuously reading both oeuvres through an Anglo-American lens, and by labeling Beauvoir as a (classic or radical) social constructivist and as the inspiration to her own gender feminism, Butler reconfirms the Irigaray versus Beauvoir dichotomy. And although Butler in the end nuances Irigaray's alleged essentialism,[335] her sexual difference philosophy still is presented as essentialist, because it is put against Beauvoir's (and Butler's) anti-essentialist gender feminism. This Butlerian, Anglo-American narrative of the feminisms of Beauvoir and Irigaray hence has paralyzed both oeuvres by putting them against one another, which in its turn has underscored the Oedipal, generational dialecticism that has already been read into these oeuvres. A different kind of reading strategy that would allow us to read these oeuvres in their own context, and in a feminist, an-Oedipal manner, hence needs to be developed.

[333] Irigaray, *EDS*, *20.*
[334] Loc. cit.
[335] Even though she misinterprets Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference by doing so.

Part two: From reflection to diffraction. Diffractive reading as an an-Oedipal feminist strategy.

Diffraction patterns record the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference. Diffraction is about heterogeneous history, not about originals. Unlike reflections, diffractions do not displace the same elsewhere, in more or less distorted form, thereby giving rise to industries of metaphysics.
(Donna J. Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millenium. FemaleMan©_Meets_Oncomouse™*, 273)

Diffraction is a material practice for making a difference, for topologically reconfiguring connections.
(Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 381)

After having worked through Judith Butler's stifled and stifling misreadings of Beauvoir and Irigaray, this thesis project wishes to engage with these author's oeuvres in a different manner: we are looking for a reading strategy that could steer clear of –or at least be attentive to– all kinds of possible misconstructions, mistranslations, and decontextualizing, oppositional misreadings of these oeuvres. We are specifically looking for a method that would not only allow us to reread these oeuvres in a more continuous manner, so that the oeuvres of Beauvoir and Irigaray could be freed from the oppositional anti-essentialism/essentialism and equality/difference binaries they have usually been read with. But we are also seeking an explicit feminist reading strategy that would take us beyond the Oedipal scenery; beyond generational dialectics, and that would open up both oeuvres to each other's perspective. Both Gayatri Spivak and Clare Hemmings have already directed us towards a different kind of reading: Spivak's feminist politics of translation has made us realize that approaching a text dialogically could help us respect its original rhetoricity, and Hemmings' engagement with feminist narratives and how these stories could be corrected, has convinced us of the fact that we can tell different stories than the Oedipal ones. Yet, in order to come to a truly different, more open and fluid reading method than the one that is central to for example critical discourse analysis (which both Spivak and Hemmings seem to propose), one has to –put in Harawayian terms– cherish "another kind of critical consciousness;"[336] a consciousness or vision that is "committed to making a difference and not to repeating the Sacred Image of Same."[337] In other words, we need to find a method that

[336] Donna J. Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millenium. FemaleMan©_Meets_Oncomouse™. Feminism and Technoscience* (New York – London: Routledge, 1997), 273.
[337] Loc. cit.

allows us to read these oeuvres in a dialogical manner without reducing them to each other; to the Same. And it is this idea of a different consciousness or vision that brings us to Donna Haraway's conceptualization of *diffraction* –a concept that will guide us in our quest towards reading oeuvres *diffractively*.

2.1. From reflection and reflexivity to diffraction: Donna Haraway's visual metaphor and strategy of diffraction.

Feminist science studies scholar Donna Haraway has touched upon the concept of diffraction in many of her works. While we cannot engage with Haraway's whole oeuvre in this methodological chapter, we will nonetheless present her intellectual trajectory in relation to her conceptualization of diffraction. Haraway –renowned for her articulation of cyborg feminism– has always been suspicious of the masculine biases in science and it is this critical stance that has made her express her ideas about diffraction as a more critical alternative to reflexivity. Although she does not yet use the term diffraction in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (1991), Haraway there does give us a detailed overview of her feminist project of situated knowledges –a project that later on became the philosophical framework of her engagement with diffraction as a metaphor, which is why we will briefly touch upon it here.

Even though Haraway refers to Irigaray as a French feminist and to Beauvoir as a gender theorist in *Simians*,[338] the importance of her critique of science and science studies as masculine biased, and of her feminist countering of pure, value-neutral objectivity as an ideal of science, cannot be denied. Interestingly, Haraway in *Simians* also engages with the concept of vision –a move that could at first be seen as ocularcentric and phallogocentric.[339] But because Haraway immediately claims that any kind of vision is always already embodied, and

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[338] See Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), 174 and 131. The idea that Beauvoir is a classic gender feminist, is later on repeated in Donna J. Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others," in Donna J. Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* (New York – London: Routledge, 2004), 65.

[339] I am mentioning this, because, looked at from an Irigarayian perspective, Haraway's attachment to vision could come across as phallogocentric: throughout *Speculum,* Irigaray criticizes Plato, and Freud in particular, for overinvesting in the power of seeing. By focusing too much on the eye and its powers, Freud, according to Irigaray, only seems to theorize what immediately can be seen. In Freud's psychoanalytical discourse, woman and her sexuality hence will remain a mystery, because she "would exhibit the possibility of a nothing to see:" (*S*, 53) woman is merely a castrated other. Freud's ocularcentrism hence is phallogocentric, because his seeing starts from the "eye-penis, […] the phallic gaze;" (Loc. cit.) he looks at everything through a masculinized lens. Whereas Donna Haraway wishes to purify seeing and vision from these phallogocentric connotations –and also appears to be fully aware of the possible dangers that are attached to this project– Irigaray wants to move away from the primacy of seeing, and focus on touching, embracing and listening in order to fully meet the other in its otherness. The ideas of touching and embracing are central to both *Ce sexe* and *Passions élémentaires* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1982), whereas the idea of listening to is touched upon in *Luce Irigaray. Teaching*, eds. Luce Irigaray and Mary Green (London: Continuum, 2008), 231-240.

science's so-called neutral "gaze from nowhere"[340] is more of a fantasy than anything else, she successfully produces a feminist concept of vision and a feminist articulation of "embodied objectivity."[341] By criticizing the "god-trick,"[342] or the presumption that vision is infinite, comes from nowhere, is "unmarked,"[343] and could capture everything, Haraway reconceptualizes vision and objectivity in a feminist manner, whilst staying away from relativism: because vision is embodied, and because of the fact that our bodies are marked by their position as well, processes of seeing and knowing are always situated and limited; we can only arrive at "partial perspective[s]"[344] and "situated knowledge[s]."[345] Donna Haraway thus proposes a feminist "politics and epistemologies of location"[346] that accentuates the embodiment, locatedness and partiality of women's experiences, knowledge and objectivity claims, and it is this feminist reconceptualization of objectivity that also plays a key role in her essay "The Promises of Monsters," which was first published in 1992 and later on reprinted in *The Haraway Reader*.

Haraway continues her project of situated knowledges in this essay by again reclaiming vision for feminist goals, and by focusing on nature as an entity of "co-construction between humans and non-humans."[347] But what really interests us here, is that Haraway refers to the concept of diffraction: when talking about the "artifactuality of nature,"[348] the concept of diffraction comes up, together with Trinh Minh-ha's idea of "inappropriate/d others;"[349] a concept that refers to subjects who are in a "deconstructive relationality, in a diffracting rather than reflecting (ratio)nality."[350] It is via the concept of inappropriate/d others that Haraway will reflect upon relationality in nature, and she does so by thinking it through via another, more critical and socially aware consciousness, or a "more subtle vision;"[351] a *diffractive* vision. This critical vision or consciousness is described as follows:

[340] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 188.
[341] Loc. cit.
[342] Ibid., 189.
[343] Ibid., 193.
[344] Ibid., 190.
[345] Loc. cit.
[346] Ibid., 195.
[347] Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters," 66.
[348] Ibid., 68.
[349] Ibid., 69.
[350] Loc. cit.
[351] Ibid., 70.

> Diffraction does not produce 'the same' displaced, as reflection and refraction do. Diffraction is a mapping of interference, not of replication, reflection, or reproduction. A diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the *effects* of difference appear.[352]

Thinking diffractively hence appears to be different from reflexivity, and it is this distinction that is further explored in *Modest_Witness@Second_Millenium* (1997). Haraway basically starts this book by denouncing reflexivity in its traditional sense: she wishes to replace it by diffraction –which stands for the diffracted difference patterns that arise when light, water, or sound waves encounter a physical obstacle in physics' experiments. Because of the fact that diffraction creates change and upholds differences, Haraway –like Lynn Randolph, whose painting she will bring up at the end of her book– will use diffraction as "an optical metaphor for the effort to make difference in the world."[353]

And this is the point where Haraway's attachments to feminist objectivity enter the picture again: she appears to be suggesting that reflexivity –i.e. a method often used in science studies to "reveal the social construction of scientific knowledge and practice,"[354] and to question "the practices of science that give us certain ways of understanding the world […] and that give us a particular understanding of science"[355]– falls short. The method of

[352] Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters," 70. This quote really reminds me of Irigaray's philosophy: although Irigaray and Haraway differ when it comes to the question whether vision and seeing could be re-employed for feminist goals; both theorists seem to have similar thoughts on the topic of reflection and diffraction. Although Irigaray only explicitly refers to the concept of diffraction ("*diffracteront*," or *they will diffract*) in *Speculum*, 177 and in *Amante Marine: de Friedrich Nietzsche* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980), 70; Irigaray nonetheless has criticized reflection throughout her oeuvre by making use of a very particular mirror symbolic. Haraway's claim that reflection merely produces copies of the Same, and diffraction on the other hand creates change and difference, can be compared to Irigaray's thoughts about mirrors. In *Speculum*, Irigaray philosophizes about different kinds of specula: the first one is the phallic speculum, which is not exactly used as a mirror, but rather as a gynecological instrument, in order to look at women and their bodies through a masculine lens. The second one refers to the phallic process in which the male subject has made women into reflecting surfaces, so that they can reflect man's subjectivity. This image of woman as a mirror is present throughout Irigaray's oeuvre, and obviously has affinities with Haraway's ideas about reflection: women here are caught up in a process of producing the Same all over again. The third mirror that Irigaray describes is a liberating, feminist speculum, which can be used by women to reflect upon their own excessive nature, i.e. that what hasn't been grasped by patriarchy, and hence can help them to become subjects of their own. This bent speculum can be compared to Haraway's optics of diffraction, because it produces images of (sexual) difference. This speculum also has a second meaning: Irigaray in her works often speaks of a "*miroir ardent*," (*S*, 180) or a *burning mirror* that could be used by the female subject to set patriarchy and its philosophy of the One and the Same on fire. A last reference to mirrors can be found in *Passions*, where Irigaray talks about "*miroirs vivants*," (*PE*, 93) or *living mirrors*. These mirrors are symbols for the female and male subjects who recognize each other, and who are now able to mirror each other's subjectivity in a diffractive way, i.e. without reducing the sexual differences between them. Also see Halsema, *Dialectics of sexual difference*, 91-94 for more details about Irigaray's symbolic use of mirrors, and for the conceptualizations of woman as a mirror for men, and woman as excess. And see Geerts, *The masquerade of Luce Irigaray*, 14-20, where I present a similar overview of Irigaray's mirror symbolic.

[353] Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millenium*, 16.

[354] See David Bell, *Cyberculture Theorists. Manuel Castells and Donna Haraway* (London – New York: Routledge, 2007), 124. In this book, Bell gives an insightful overview of Haraway's epistemology and politics of cyborg feminism.

[355] Loc. cit.

reflexivity in science studies isn't critical enough, according to Haraway; "reflexivity, like reflection, only displaces the same elsewhere […],"[356] and next to being trapped in this logic of –put in an Irigarayian terms– the One and the Same, reflexivity in its traditional sense not only seems to prefer the semiotic over the material, but also overemphasizes the dichotomy between the knowing subject and its object of research, which is exactly one of those dichotomies that Haraway wishes to deconstruct. Her project of situated knowledges and of feminist *strong objectivity* (a concept that she, by the way, borrows from feminist epistemologist Sandra Harding) requires "a practice of diffraction, not just reflection."[357] As also has been shown by the quote at the beginning of this chapter, Donna Haraway understands diffraction as a specific kind of critical consciousness; a consciousness that tries to take difference(s) into account, instead of reproducing the same all over again. Diffraction is all about difference and change.

Diffraction thus is a specific visual metaphor and a critical way of thinking, and these two meanings are elaborated on by Haraway in two interviews. In *How Like a Leaf* (2000), Haraway repeats that diffraction should be seen as an "optical metaphor,"[358] and as a critical consciousness that produces and displays differences instead of reflecting the same all over again. Diffraction makes us move beyond reflexivity, and the rigid logic of representation and identity (which both work with a subject/object dichotomy). In a more recent interview with Joseph Schneider, Haraway attaches a third, maybe even more vital meaning to diffraction, namely that of reading critically and interactively, or engaging in critical scholarship by combining different fields of study and by letting "different reading skills […] constantly interrupt each other productively."[359] This is exactly the kind of methodology we are looking for; yet, Haraway hasn't really given any more information about this interruptive-productive way of reading. And that is why this chapter will also make use of theoretical physicist and feminist philosopher Karen Barad's works, who has also written extensively about diffraction and has employed diffractive reading as her own strategy in her *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007).

Before dealing with Barad's philosophy, however, there is still one interesting topic that Haraway has worked on, and that is the discourse of psychoanalysis and its continuous emphasis on the Oedipus complex. Since we are explicitly looking for an *an-Oedipal* reading

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[356] Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millenium*, 16.
[357] Ibid., 268.
[358] Donna J. Haraway, *How Like a Leaf: An Interview with Thyrza Nichols Goodeve* (New York – London: Routledge, 2000), 101.
[359] Joseph Schneider, *Donna Haraway: live theory* (New York – London: Continuum, 2005), 149.

strategy, it might be interesting to see what Haraway's thoughts are about this matter, and discover what this an-Oedipality could be and how it could strengthen the strategy of diffractive reading.

2.2. Discovering the an-Oedipal.

Haraway already refers to the discourse and practice of psychoanalysis in the opening pages of *Simians*: she criticizes Freud for connecting his body politic to physiology (which is not an uncommon critique –a lot of feminist theorists have refused to work with psychoanalytical theory due to its alleged deterministic and essentialist assumptions), and later on in the book (specifically in "A Cyborg Manifesto"), it becomes clear that Haraway with her cyborg feminism is trying to find a way out of the paradigms of materialism and psychoanalysis – paradigms that work with genesis stories that rely on "the myth of original unity, fullness, bliss and terror, represented by the phallic mother from whom all humans must separate […]."[360] Haraway's cyborg doesn't have anything to do with these Western genesis stories; the cyborg does not "recognize the Garden of Eden,"[361] and never knew a "pre-oedipal symbiosis,"[362] nor a separation with its phallic mother. The cyborg breaks out of the dichotomies of nature versus culture, human versus non-human, and leaves the Oedipal narrative behind. This rupture with the Oedipal and the image of the nuclear family that goes along with it, is also present in *Modest_Witness@Second_Millenium*, where Haraway argues for an "'unfamiliar' unconsciousness;"[363] a different kind of relational model that is not based on the psychoanalytical Oedipal family. Is this cyborg project than post-Oedipal? Not exactly: although Haraway in *How Like a Leaf* states that she wants to keep on theorizing about the unconscious, she is convinced of the fact that the hybrid cyborg moves beyond the anthropocentric, anthropomorphic Oedipal narrative and its family structure.[364] Haraway wishes to discard Oedipal logic completely, and this is again repeated in her interview with Schneider where she states that she is definitely not an anti-psychoanalytic thinker, but that she wishes to break out of the Oedipal orthodoxy. Or in Haraway's own words:

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[360] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 151.
[361] Loc. cit.
[362] Ibid., 150.
[363] Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millenium*, 265.
[364] See Haraway, *How Like a Leaf*, 124-126.

I'm serious about figurations for psychoanalytic work that take seriously kinds of organizations and kinds of monstrosity that work otherwise from the Oedipal. I'm serious about wanting a bigger family of stories for us humans, but also for our relationalities with everybody else.[365]

Donna Haraway here suggests that she isn't looking for a theory that is anti- or post-Oedipal; she rather wishes to move beyond this narrative completely. And this actually brings us back to Iris van der Tuin's an-Oedipal methodology of jumping generations.

We have already mentioned van der Tuin's "Jumping Generations" article in the introduction, where we discussed her critique of the Oedipal generational dialectics in feminist epistemology. But van der Tuin's references to *jumping generations* and *the an-Oedipal* still have to be clarified, not only because the latter seems to be so present in Haraway's oeuvre, but also because we intuitively feel that reading diffractively (as it has been theorized by Haraway up till now) might be an-Oedipal and cross-generational. In order to support this instinctive feeling, we first of all have to shed light on van der Tuin's overall framework: in her essay, van der Tuin refers to the concept of *jumping generations*, which is both her object of research and methodological tool. The underlying argumentation of this essay comes down to van der Tuin's claim that there is a new, third generation of feminists out there who are not seduced by Oedipal generational dialectics, and who tackle perennial but still relevant problems (such as the issues of representationalism, the body and matter in general, the dichotomies of nature/culture, etc.) in a non-dialectical manner. Instead of affirming the Oedipal patterns that were so central to second-wave feminist epistemology, these theorists –or *new materialist feminists*– in fact "jump generations,"[366] and overpass both "feminist empiricism and feminist postmodernism."[367] "Jumping Generations" hence wants to prove that there is a feminism out there that is based on a "shared conversation"[368] with previous generations of feminists, without having to fall back in Oedipal dramas and the logic of progress and negation. Throughout her article, van der Tuin pleas for an academic feminism that would refrain from using Oedipal narratives, and she herself is really careful not to regress in Oedipalization as well.[369] She suggests that Oedipal conflicts between

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[365] Schneider, *Donna Haraway*, 154.
[366] van der Tuin, "'Jumping Generations'," 22.
[367] Ibid., 26.
[368] Ibid., 28.
[369] Despite van der Tuin's carefulness, Clare Hemmings has criticized van der Tuin's essay and attachment to new materialism as a possible an-Oedipal feminism. See Clare Hemmings, "Generational Dilemmas. A Response to Iris van der Tuin's 'Jumping Generations:' On Second- and Third-wave Feminist Epistemology," *Australian Feminist Studies* 24 (2009): 33-37. According to Hemmings, the new materialism that van der Tuin promotes "risks reproducing rather than challenging an Oedipal model." (Ibid., 37) Like van der Tuin, Hemmings hopes to find a way out of these feminist Oedipal narratives, yet she is not convinced of the fact that the concept of generation is critical and powerful enough to demobilize this Oedipality. I agree with Hemmings that projects such as these always at risk to affirm what they intended to deconstruct, yet I do not really see that

feminists could be avoided by "theorizing shared conversations through jumping generations,"[370] in which 'jumping' refers to leaving behind the idea of "a feminist centre"[371] of the past where all present feminisms supposedly originated from. With this specific new materialist methodology, structures of linearity and teleology are broken down, dichotomies are reflected upon and tackled, and inter- and cross-generational feminist debates are held.

But it is the explicit an-Oedipal aspect of this third-wave methodology that interests us the most here, given that we want to refrain from rereading Beauvoir and Irigaray via an Oedipal narrative. This idea of the an-Oedipal actually has its philosophical origins in Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's *L'Anti-Œdipe* (1972), as has also been explained by van der Tuin. With *L'Anti-Œdipe*, Deleuze and Guattari challenge both the traditional psychoanalytical conceptualization of desire as having to compensate certain lacks, and psychoanalysis' political conservativeness and dogmatism by relating psychic repression to social-political repression. Michel Foucault –in his preface to the English edition– even claimed it to be "a book of ethics,"[372] because of its political, antifascist nature. When it comes to their attitude versus psychoanalysis as a practice and discourse –which is what interests us here– Deleuze and Guattari reconceptualize desire, and focus on "desiring-production"[373] as something positive and non-anthropocentric. They wish to replace traditional psychoanalysis with a critical "materialist psychiatry;"[374] a "schizoanalysis"[375] that criticizes the way psychoanalytical discourse held on to the Oedipal "dogma"[376] and its accompanying "daddy-mummy-me triangle,"[377] and that analyzes the "schizophrenic"[378] instead of the "neurotic who's lying on the couch."[379] This does not mean, however, that Deleuze and Guattari promote schizophrenia as a new subjectivity model; they rather long to analyze the schizo because he "has to leap over the Oedipal genealogy."[380]

Criticizing the overaccentuation of the Oedipal in traditional psychoanalysis, Deleuze

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happening here, to be honest. Van der Tuin's argumentation is way too nuanced for her to fall back into a recreation of the hierarchic Anglo-American feminism vs. Continental feminism dichotomy, even though Hemmings seems to think otherwise.

[370] van der Tuin, "'Jumping Generations'," 25.

[371] Loc. cit.

[372] See Michel Foucault, "Preface," in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (London – New York: Continuum, 2004) xv.

[373] Gilles Deleuze – Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie 1: L'Anti-Œdipe* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972), 12.

[374] Loc. cit.

[375] Ibid., 92.

[376] Ibid., 63.

[377] Loc. cit.

[378] Ibid., 9.

[379] Loc. cit.

[380] Ibid., 95.

and Guattari contrastingly claim that they don't want Oedipus to be the standard of their schizoanalysis. The manifest attachment to the Oedipal narrative in psychoanalysis is revealed when Deleuze and Guattari playfully deconstruct one of Melanie Klein's therapeutic sessions where she already has decided beforehand to read a boy's development through an Oedipal lens.[381] The Oedipus complex hence basically has been used as a dogma; a psychoanalytical a priori. But this "diffuse and generalized Oedipalism"[382] is highly problematic, according to Deleuze and Guattari:

> By enframing a child's life in the Oedipus complex, by making familial relations into the universal mediation of childhood, we force ourselves to put the production of the unconscious itself aside, together with the collective mechanisms which are believed to lead to the unconscious: especially the entire play between primal suppression, the desiring-machines, and the body without organs.[383]

Deleuze and Guattari also do not want to engage in a "pre-Oedipal"[384] project –or even in a post-Oedipal one– because their project would then still be embedded in an Oedipal logic. They wish to reflect upon the "absolute *an-Oedipal* character of desiring-production"[385] instead. According to them, the desiring subject *an sich* does not exist; there are only an-Oedipal "flows of desire;"[386] "desiring-machines."[387] So, with their an-Oedipal materialist schizoanalysis, Deleuze and Guattari want to "analyze the specific nature of the libidinal investments in the economical and the political, and thereby show how desire in the desiring subject could be brought to desire its own repression […]."[388] In a similar move to Donna Haraway (who might have been inspired by *l'Anti-Œdipe* –although she is nonetheless overtly critical when it comes to Deleuze's and Guattari's concept of becoming-animal, as can be seen in *When Species Meet* (2008)), Deleuze and Guattari detach themselves from the Oedipal narrative and Oedipalization,[389] and focus on flows of desire instead.[390]

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[381] See Deleuze – Guattari, *L'Anti-Œdipe*, 55-56.
[382] Ibid., 60.
[383] Ibid., 59.
[384] Ibid., 55.
[385] Loc. cit.
[386] Ibid., 43.
[387] Ibid., 41.
[388] Ibid., 127-128.
[389] Oedipalization in Deleuze's and Guattari's perspective does have a different, broader meaning than the description we have used up till now: in *L'Anti-Œdipe*, Oedipalization doesn't immediately refer to the Oedipal dramas between different generations of feminists, but has everything to do with repression. The family is basically "[t]he delegated agent of suppression, or rather the one that is delegated to suppression […]." (Ibid., 145) This kind of psychic suppression is "a means in the service of repression," (Loc. cit.) and "oedipalization is therefore the result of this double operation." (Loc. cit.) Or summarized by Tamsin Lorraine: Oedipalization "is a form of social repression that funnels the productive capacity of the unconscious back into the constricting channels of Oedipal desire." See Tamsin Lorraine, "Oedipalisation," in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. Adrian Parr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 191.
[390] For a more detailed description of desire as a productive social force, see Alison Ross, "Desire," in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. Parr, 63-65.

I find this an-Oedipal turn extremely intriguing, and what caught my attention in this project of schizoanalysis, is that an-Oedipality seems to be connected to the breaking down of dualisms, dichotomies and oppositions. In their an-Oedipal "deterritorialization"[391] of the Oedipal, Deleuze and Guattari indicate that moving towards the an-Oedipal implies a deconstruction of the Oedipal and reductive 'either/or' logic.[392] Or as Deleuze and Guattari have argued:

> While the 'either/or' ("*le ou bien*") pretends to mark decisive choices between immutable terms (the alternative), the [schizophrenic] 'either…or…or' ("*le 'soit'*") points to the system of possible permutations between differences that always amount to the same, as they are shifting and sliding.[393]

Later on in the book, Deleuze and Guattari even suggest that the an-Oedipal 'either…or…or' would leave difference(s) intact;[394] the 'either…or…or' model in fact is Deleuze's and Guattari's own, positive, immanent and opened-up version of the disjunctive synthesis. The schizo thus takes on the disjunctive synthesis in an affirmative manner, and he "does not identify two contraries as the same, but affirms their distance as that which relates the one to the other as different."[395] Or as Deleuze scholar Claire Colebrook stated it: in the 'either…or…or' mode, "one can be this or this or this, *and* this *and* this *and* this […]."[396]

This aspect could be very valuable to our project: since Haraway also wants to move away from Oedipality, this an-Oedipal logic could be central to our methodology of diffractive reading, and it would efficiently tackle the 'either/or' models that have been used to read Beauvoir as either the good or bad mother of feminism, and that have made Irigaray into her disloyal daughter –i.e. Beauvoir's negative. Why could we not affirm the differences between the oeuvres of these two philosophers without letting go of their continuities, and break or 'jump' through these stifled generational patterns, so that these two could speak to each other? I will engage in such an exercise in the third and last chapter, but before doing so, however, there is still one final concept that needs to be tackled in order to fully understand what diffractive reading is about, and that is Karen Barad's neologism of intra-action.

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[391] Deleuze and Guattari, *L'Anti-Œdipe*, 388.

[392] See for instance the following quote where it is shown how Oedipality is connected to an A/-A logic: The Oedipal family "is the reign of the 'either/or' ("*du Ou Bien*") in the differentiating function of the prohibition of incest: this is where mummy begins, daddy is over there, and there are you. Stay in your place." See Ibid., 92. The 'either/or' logic that is at work here is labeled by Deleuze and Guattari as an "exclusive, limited and negative use of the disjunctive synthesis." (Ibid., 93) As also suggested by Claire Colebrook, the (male) child here hence only has two options: either become an Oedipal subject by identifying with its father, or incestuously desire its mother, and never become a subject. See Claire Colebrook, "Disjunctive Synthesis," in *The Deleuze Reader*, ed. Parr, 78.

[393] Deleuze and Guattari, *L'Anti-Œdipe*, 20.

[394] Ibid., 85.

[395] Ibid., 94.

[396] Colebrook, "Disjunctive Synthesis," 78.

2.3. Reading diffractively: Karen Barad's conceptualization of diffraction and intra-action.

2.3.1. "Posthumanist performativity:" Agential realism, intra-action and diffraction.

Philosopher-physicist Karen Barad's view on diffraction should not be left out of the picture: Barad not only completes Haraway's conceptualization of diffraction as a metaphor and methodology, but she adds something new to it, too. Barad already deals with diffraction in her essay "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter"[397] (first published in 2003), whilst laying the foundations of her new materialist feminist project.

Barad's conceptualization of diffraction is first of all connected to her criticism of representationalism: like Haraway, Barad wants to move away from the traditional representationalist ontology and epistemology where the knowing subject, the object that is being represented, and the produced representations or knowledge are seen as separately existing entities.[398] What is problematic about representationalist theories is that they work with a "geometrical optics of reflection,"[399] as if the created representations immediately mirror reality, and as if there is such a thing as pure and objective knowledge. In a move that is similar to Haraway, Barad then opts for a more feminist conceptualization of objectivity by replacing reflection with diffraction, yet she also devises a new kind of agential realist onto-epistemology that relies on the notions of posthumanist performativity, diffraction, and intra-action.

"Diffractively reading"[400] Michel Foucault's and Judith Butler's ideas about discursive practices, power, and matter, Barad not only wishes to bring matter and materiality back in the spotlight, but also hopes to deconstruct the nature/culture dichotomy and the anthropocentrism that support this dichotomy. Her posthumanist agential realism –which is highly influenced by Niels Bohr's "philosophy-physics;"[401] a quantum physics model that attacks atomist metaphysics and the dichotomous split between the subject, object, and knowledge in representationalist theories[402]– is a "relational ontology"[403] that proposes that

[397] Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," in *Material Feminisms*, eds. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington – Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2008), 120-154.
[398] See Ibid., 122-123.
[399] Ibid., 122.
[400] Loc. cit.
[401] Ibid., 131.
[402] See Loc. cit.
[403] Ibid., 130.

phenomena and discursive practices (instead of things and words) are always already in a relationship of "intra-action,"[404] rather than being non-related, ontologically separate entities. According to Barad, this agential realist model not only shows us that *matter matters*, i.e. that "materiality is an active factor in processes of materialization,"[405] and that "[n]ature is neither a passive surface awaiting the mark of culture nor the end product of cultural performances;"[406] but it also highlights the relationality between discursive practices and materiality. Or said in Barad's own words, "discursive practices are specific material (re)configurings of the world through which local determinations of boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted."[407]

Two of Barad's concepts here are useful for our own project, namely the notions of intra-activity and diffractive reading. Intra-action, according to Barad, is a more powerful notion than interaction: whereas an interactive model supposes that interaction takes place between ontologically separated objects; an intra-active model tackles the boundaries between these objects, and proposes that phenomena are always already entangled.[408] Karen Barad's intra-active ontology can be neatly summarized by the following quote:

> The world is intra-activity in its differential mattering. It is through specific intra-actions that a differential sense of being is enacted in the ongoing ebb and flow of agency.[409]

Although I would never state that the oeuvres of Beauvoir and Irigaray are always already as entangled as the intra-active phenomena in Barad's description, I would nonetheless like to claim that reading these oeuvres diffractively would stimulate the intra-activity between them. Both oeuvres could become more powerful in a feminist sense, theoretically and politically speaking, when one highlights the relationality and continuity between them. And when it comes to diffraction, Barad not only refers to this notion as a different kind of optics and consciousness,[410] but she also –maybe even more explicitly than Haraway– uses diffraction as her own critical reading method: in this essay, Barad uses performativity "as a diffraction grating"[411] as to read different oeuvres "through one another."[412] And it is this reading method

[404] Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity," 133.
[405] Ibid., 145.
[406] Loc. cit.
[407] Ibid., 138.
[408] See Ibid., 133.
[409] Ibid., 135.
[410] Barad in her essay acknowledges the fact that diffraction is a Harawayian notion, see Ibid., footnote 3 on pages 147 and 148.
[411] Ibid., 129.
[412] Loc. cit.

that is even more central to Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, which we will now turn to in order to conclude this methodological chapter.

2.3.2. *Meeting the Universe Halfway*: A diffractive, conversational methodology.

In *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Barad once again introduces us to her agential realist theory by elaborating on Niels Bohr's quantum physics and by drawing her own feminist-inspired conclusions on where Bohr's philosophy-physics could take us, ontologically, epistemologically, and politically. Via her posthumanist agential realist account, Barad focuses on what she calls an "ethico-onto-epistem-ology;"[413] or how ethical, ontological and epistemological issues intra-act with one another in reality. These issues or knowledge domains in Barad's account are no longer separated, but are taken together, which means that Barad's philosophy as a whole breaks through all kinds of dichotomized binaries –which is seen as one of the core characteristics of new materialist feminisms.

But what is really striking in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* is that it is a critical and feminist exercise in diffractive reading: elaborating on Haraway's ideas about engaging in critical interdisciplinary scholarship, Barad fully takes on a "diffractive methodology"[414] in order to bring the different perspectives of feminist theory, science studies, quantum physics, and many more domains, together. In the second chapter of her book, "Diffractions: Differences, Contingencies, and Entanglements That Matter,"[415] Barad also deals with diffraction as physical phenomenon, and shows us how only quantum mechanics can fully explain the existence of diffraction patterns in reality. Yet, what really matters here is how Barad puts diffraction forward as a feminist reading method. According to her, reading diffractively isn't a comparative method, nor is it about taking different disciplinary approaches and domains –or in our case, oeuvres– together in an additive, "bidirectional"[416] manner, or in an oppositional way. Reading diffractively rather is based on a transdisciplinary and conversational approach,[417] and thus tries to get away from the negational logic in reading

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[413] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham – London: Duke University Press, 2007), 185.
[414] Ibid., 25.
[415] See Ibid., 71-94.
[416] Ibid., 92.
[417] See Ibid., 92-93. By referring to diffractive reading as conversational, Barad touches upon a very important aspect of Luce Irigaray's own feminist philosophy. Irigaray namely is known for rereading the philosophical (and psychoanalytical) canon by "having a fling with the philosophers," ("*faire la noce avec les philosophes*," Irigaray, *CS*, 147) which stands for her hysterical-mimetic, deconstructive, yet also dialogical way of rereading the masters' texts. I would even go so far as to argue that Irigaray's reading strategy slightly anticipates Haraway's and Barad's diffractive reading method, because of its dialogical aspects: Irigaray in her rereadings always seems to make room for the original author's perspectives, and it is in her conversation with these

theories/oeuvres against one another. Barad's whole book is basically an exercise in reading diffractively, but one of the most convincing chapters is "Getting Real: Technoscientific Practices and the Materialization of Reality"[418] where she lets the philosophies of Bohr, Butler, and Foucault intermingle and fuse with one another, by looking at the function of piezoelectric crystals and how these have been employed in the practice of ultrasonography. This diffractive reading exercise not only underlines the fruitfulness of taking together Butler's, Bohr's, and Foucault's thoughts about matter, objectivity, and apparatuses; but also shows us how all these different perspectives could complement each other in an intra-active way. This chapter also illustrates how Barad's reading method transcends superficiality and reductionism: a diffractive method, according to Barad, in fact pays attention to the specificity of the argumentation and the "fine details"[419] of theories/oeuvres with the aim of escaping a hierarchic logic in which one oeuvre or approach would be prioritized.[420]

And this is exactly what we wish to achieve when rereading Beauvoir and Irigaray in a diffractive manner: we do not want to prioritize Irigaray's feminist philosophy because her feminism might seem more actual and less masculinized, or, reversely, label Beauvoir's humanist feminism as superior because it seems to be easier to put into practice. As has become clear in this chapter, diffractive reading is a more than suitable feminist reading method: it is a strategy that not only helps us with discarding Oedipal narratives, generational dialectics, and dichotomized binaries, but it also convinces us of the fact that the oeuvres of Beauvoir and Irigaray can cross-fertilize each other, without having to fear that they would eventually get caught up in a reflective logic of sameness.

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different viewpoints that Irigaray constructs her own philosophy. Even if Irigaray's reading strategy isn't as dialogical as I assume it to be, she nonetheless immensely values the dialogical approach (as can be seen in *Conversations*), and the idea of listening-to, which seems to be connected to this dialogical way of rereading and/or having a conversations (as can be seen in *LIT*).

[418] See Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 189-222.

[419] Ibid., 93.

[420] See Loc. cit. A similar definition of diffractive reading was presented by Barad in one of her most recent articles "Erasers and Erasures," where she stated that the methodology of diffraction is "a practice of reading insights through one another while paying attention to patterns of difference (including the material effects of constitutive exclusions)." See Karen Barad, "Erasers and Erasures: Pinch's Unfortunate 'Uncertainty Principle'," *Social Studies of Science*, published online 20 April 2011, 3.

Part three: The other as woman. The woman as O/other. Towards a diffractive reading of Beauvoir and Irigaray.

> The critique of texts never actually transforms texts or even necessarily produces better, more elaborated and developed texts; nor does it commonly change the opinions of adherents to the positions and claims elaborated in these texts.
> **(Elizabeth Grosz, *Time Travels*, 2)**

As has become clear throughout the previous chapters, the philosophies of Beauvoir and Irigaray have been read in a stifling manner, as if there is a deep abyss between them that could never be bridged. Up till now, we have worked through multiple paralyzing readings, discovered the reasons and logic behind these readings and narratives, and sketched out a different, more feminist method of rereading, in hopes of breaking the deadlock. Reading Beauvoir's and Irigaray's oeuvres diffractively gives us chance to step out of the whole idea that one has to simply criticize texts (or the narratives about them) in order to get somewhere. Elizabeth Grosz in *Time Travels* (2005) in fact tells us that criticizing canonical philosophical (and usually phallogocentric) texts would only lead to "defensive self-representations or gestures of counter-critique,"[421] which means that such critical feminist readings would stay in the same kind of logic one initially wished to destabilize. I agree with Grosz, and that is exactly why I try to refrain from an *anti*-Oedipal logic, and will read Beauvoir and Irigaray diffractively instead of constructing a return narrative, or merely criticizing Beauvoir for her apparent masculinist philosophy. This diffractive rereading of oeuvres is indeed more "affirmative"[422] than negative: like Grosz, I realize that every oeuvre has its intrinsic problems and deficiencies,[423] and I hence understand that both the feminist philosophies of Beauvoir and Irigaray aren't completely untouchable, but by reading these oeuvres diffractively, and hence also affirmatively,[424] I wish to focus on their positive and productive

[421] Elizabeth Grosz, *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, and Power* (Durham – London: Duke University Press, 2005), 2.
[422] Ibid., 3.
[423] See Loc. cit.
[424] Grosz' affirmative methodology in *Time Travels* (and in some of her other more recent works) comes pretty close to diffractive reading: in her affirmative readings, Grosz focuses on the "positivities, crucial concepts, [and] insights" (Ibid., 2) of the material she's reading, whilst trying to make the aspects that she finds valuable, productive. This kind of creativity and open-mindedness is central to reading diffractively, in my opinion. And that's not all: when Grosz in *Time Travels* discusses Irigaray's sexual difference theory, Grosz seems to cross over from her affirmative method to a diffractive one by bringing in Deleuze's philosophy. Although Deleuze and Irigaray might "form an uneasy alliance" (Ibid., 182) –mostly because of their strikingly different ideas about subjectivity– Grosz shows us that the combination of these philosophies and the process of reading these

aspects; on what could come into being when these oeuvres are confronted with each other.

Again, this does not mean that this diffractive reading pretends to be the only correct reading of these oeuvres: a lot of other feminist theorists already tried to close the gap between Beauvoir's and Irigaray's philosophies, and their feminisms in particular, without falling back into in 'either-or' framework. Both Renate Günter and Nadine Changfoot, for example, have tried to fix this gap: the former by constructing a "rapprochement"[425] between Beauvoir's and Irigaray's conceptualizations of female subjectivity, and the latter by showing us how equality and difference feminisms could find each other through Beauvoir's *Le deuxième sexe*.[426] And the essays by Ulrika Björk, Debra Bergoffen, and Karen Vintges should be applauded as well: all three essays in fact claim that *Le deuxième sexe* is one the most relevant feminist-philosophical books of today, because of its emphasis on the issue of sexual difference.[427] By rereading Beauvoir as a philosopher who tackled the differences between men and women, and other differences as well, Beauvoir is obviously brought closer to Irigaray, but –and here's the catch– Irigaray's position is never really touched upon, except for in Changfoot's and Vintges' texts, which means that her philosophy isn't reread through a Beauvoirian lens, which would be required in a diffractive reading. To come to a more intra-active interpretation then, one has to stop reading these oeuvres "successively,"[428] but instead "make them speak to each other,"[429] as has been argued by Iris van der Tuin in her diffractive essay on Barad and Henri-Louis Bergson.

To make Beauvoir and Irigaray speak to each other, this diffractive reading exercise will touch upon the issues that we discovered in the stifled stories tackled thus far: instead of

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philosophies through one another, leads to innovative reflections on the force of sexual difference. See Grosz, *Time Travels*, 171-183.

[425] See Renate Günter, "Fifty years on: the impact of Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* on contemporary French feminist theory," *Modern & Contemporary France* 6 (1998): 178.

[426] See Nadine Changfoot, "*The Second Sex*'s Continued Relevance for Equality and Difference Feminisms," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 16 (2009): 11-31.

[427] See Debra Bergoffen, "Simone de Beauvoir: (Re)counting the sexual difference," in *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. Card, 248-265; Ulrika Björk, "Paradoxes of femininity in the philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir," *Cont. Philos. Rev.* 43 (2010): 39-60; and Karen Vintges, "Simone de Beauvoir: A Feminist Thinker for the Twenty-First Century," in *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Critical Essays*, ed. Margaret A. Simons, 214-227 (Bloomington – Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006).

[428] See Iris van der Tuin, "'A Different Starting Point, a Different Metaphysics:' Reading Bergson and Barad Diffractively," *Hypatia* 26 (2011): 39, footnote 1. Van der Tuin's diffractive essay has obviously inspired my own diffractive project: van der Tuin not only reviews Grosz' affirmative reading in her essay (see Ibid., 22-23), but also explicitly focuses on philosophical texts. One nuance has to be made, though: van der Tuin and Grosz work with texts of male authors that have been criticized for their apparent phallogocentrism, and read these alongside feminist texts, whereas I, at first sight, seem to be working with feminist texts written by female authors. But I do the same thing in the end, since I work with Beauvoir's oeuvre –an oeuvre that has been criticized for its alleged masculinity, and I also bring in the philosophies of de Sade and Hegel, in order to get my own diffractive project going.

[429] Loc. cit, footnote 1.

confirming the latter, we will work towards a reading that cross-fertilizes and underlines the continuity in Beauvoir's and Irigaray's thought. To briefly recapitulate what these paralyzing images look like: in these stifling stories, Beauvoir's philosophy is usually either seen as completely phallogocentric, because of its masculine conceptualizations of subjectivity and transcendence, which means that Beauvoir's equality principles are masculine biased as well. Or her philosophy is read as a radical gender theory that equally bypasses the issue of sexual difference. The stifled stories on Irigarayian philosophy, on the other hand, tend to focus on Irigaray's so-called overaccentuation of sexual difference, which makes her philosophy essentialist, anti-equality, and too focused on überfeminine values.

We will try to sketch a different, more affirming picture of Beauvoir and Irigaray, by looking at their own comments on the philosophies of Marquis de Sade and G. W. F. Hegel, as a way to get our diffractive rereading going.

3.1. Beauvoir, Irigaray, and de Sade: The other as woman. Sexual difference, female sexuality, and eroticism.

3.1.1. De Sade's libertine philosophy: A non-reciprocal, objectifying 'ethics.'

Why would one start off with Beauvoir's and Irigaray's comments on de Sade when trying to reread the former pair diffractively? As stated before, diffractive readings try to stay away from a priori's and calculated conceptual frameworks, but instead wish to respond to specific problems that arise during stifling readings of certain oeuvres. We already revealed the problems behind these readings in the previous chapters, and whilst thinking through the oppositional pairs of essentialism and anti-essentialism, and equality and difference, my intuition tells me that the writings of de Sade are the ideal starting point to explore the lines of continuity between Beauvoir and Irigaray.

Simone de Beauvoir's comments on de Sade can be found in the first chapter of *Faut-il brûler Sade?* (1955). Although it might seem odd that Beauvoir devotes time to de Sade's libertinism, and interpret his antifeminist philosophy as a form of ethics, it in the end all makes sense: by analyzing the ways how de Sade tried to morally justify his libertine values, Beauvoir gives us a glimpse of her own existentialist ethics and ideas about eroticism, which are central topics in *Le deuxième sexe* and *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* (1947).[430] Her

[430] This has also been asserted by Karen Vintges in *Philosophy as Passion*, 46-49, and by Judith Butler and Bronwyn Singleton, who have commented on Beauvoir's account of de Sade, whilst focusing on the former's ideas about alterity and eroticism. Butler's essay really grasps the essence of Beauvoir's ethics of alterity, but she does fall back in an overstatement when claiming that Beauvoir sees de Sade as the paradigmatic philosopher of

analysis goes as follows: de Sade, according to Beauvoir, not only "made his sexuality into an ethics,"[431] but he also "subordinated his existence to his eroticism"[432] by following certain self-created libertine moral principles, whilst defending the latter with naturalist arguments. It is this ethical process of self-justification that made de Sade into an individual –which does not mean that Beauvoir sees him as an authentic subject that has escaped, or transcended, bad faith. Building his sexual ethics on the combination of "coition and cruelty,"[433] de Sade namely is unable to reach the state of "intoxication (*trouble*);"[434] an aspect of eroticism and carnal love that is so important in Beauvoir's own philosophy. He is a solipsist, and hence is locked up in a very autistic type of sexuality:[435] de Sade cannot experience real unity with another subject. There is no room for "reciprocal pleasure"[436] in his philosophy: although he succeeded at becoming both "for-oneself (*pour-soi*)"[437] and "for-the-other (*pour-autrui*)"[438] through his objectification in his sadistic spectacles, he of course never let himself be fully enslaved. De Sade would by no means bow to "a master,"[439] because he never partook in the process of mutual recognition anyways, in Beauvoir's eyes. De Sade did not believe in an abstract morality, which Beauvoir approves of, yet, in all his sovereign being and mastery over others, he never fully reaches authentic transcendence, and that because of his solipsism and his eagerness to reduce others to mere bodies and flesh.

Beauvoir thus confronts de Sade with how he refuses to meet the other as other, yet, Beauvoir's comments in this essay also reveal that she touches upon the issue of *the other as woman*. She alludes to the existence of sexual difference, by first of all claiming that de Sade never really celebrated "the female body"[440] in its femininity; as an example of true alterity, and by criticizing his autistic model of sexuality that doesn't make room for more feminine

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freedom. Beauvoir rather claims that de Sade never really reaches transcendence –even though he thinks he is the master of his own existence– because he never encounters the other in an authentic way. See Judith Butler, "Beauvoir on Sade: Making sexuality into an ethic," in *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. Card, 168-188. Also see Bronwyn Singleton, "Simone de Beauvoir and the Problem with de Sade: The Case of the Virgin Libertine," *Hypatia* 26 (2011): 461-477. Singleton's essay is quite interesting, because it shows us how Beauvoir criticizes de Sade's patriarchal account of sexuality. I agree with Singleton when she claims that Beauvoir isn't attacking male sexuality *an sich*, but tries to get away from a patriarchal sexual model (see Ibid., 466). Singleton also shows us that Beauvoir explicitly analyzed the value of virginity in patriarchy. I will come back to this issue on page 83.

[431] Simone de Beauvoir, *Faut-il brûler Sade?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), 18.

[432] Ibid., 21.

[433] Ibid., 37.

[434] Ibid., 38.

[435] See Ibid., 39.

[436] Ibid., 40.

[437] Ibid., 52.

[438] Loc. cit.

[439] Ibid., 92.

[440] Ibid., 43.

experiences of eroticism. It are these allusions to sexual difference, female sexuality and eroticism in Beauvoir's oeuvre that could be explored and pushed further by rereading these comments on de Sade and *Le deuxième sexe* through an Irigarayian perspective. And this diffractive, intra-active dialogue could obviously also push Irigaray's philosophy towards unknown territories.

And we can already work towards such an intra-active dialogue between Beauvoir and Irigaray here: interestingly, Irigaray, too, has written about de Sade's libertinism in *Ce sexe*.[441] Irigaray's essay is a joint critique of contemporary pornography and of de Sade's *La philosophie dans le boudoir* (1795). And although she doesn't focus on the possibility of a different, more authentic encounter between subjects as much as Beauvoir, Irigaray, too, criticizes de Sade for having constructed an objectifying and destructive model of sexuality: "the libertine master"[442] not only reduces other bodies to pure flesh, but predominantly objectifies and silences *women*. This goes well with the overall framework of *Ce sexe*, in which Irigaray argues that phallogocentrism and patriarchy have made women into exchangeable commodities; muted objects to be distributed amongst men. Irigaray's critique hence is similar to Beauvoir's, yet there appears to be one manifest difference: whereas Beauvoir ends her essay with a plea to think through the question of alterity, Irigaray's final comments encourage women to rise up, revolt against patriarchy, and explore what their own sexuality and *jouissance* could look like when these are no longer defined through a phallic gaze. Would this contrast between Beauvoir's critical stance and Irigaray's more constructive *philosophie féminine* get in the way of a fruitful dialogue? Or can we open up these oeuvres to one another through the issue of *the other as woman*?

3.1.2. Beauvoir and Irigaray diffracted: Pushing each other towards a (de)constructive *philosophie féminine*.

Beauvoir's comments on de Sade's autistic sexuality and male sexuality in *Le deuxième sexe* at first seem extremely negative: according to Beauvoir, de Sade is completely "locked up within the solitude of his own consciousness,"[443] and the male subject in general also only "wants to affirm himself as possessor"[444] of the woman as other, or the Other. In this masculine sexual model, "the sovereign subject"[445] completely separates himself from "the

[441] See Irigaray, *CS*, 197-202.
[442] Ibid., 197.
[443] de Beauvoir, *FBS*, 40.
[444] de Beauvoir, *DSa*, 215.
[445] de Beauvoir, *FBS*, 49.

other object:"[446] "he seeks domination,"[447] and sees "the love act as a battle,"[448] instead of as a possible authentic encounter with the Other. Yet, these critical comments aren't uttered for the sake of critique only: seen from an Irigarayian point of view, Beauvoir in fact works towards a different sexual economy. To be precise, Beauvoir criticizes male sexuality in its patriarchal form (which is something completely different from rejecting male sexuality *an sich*), and this can be highlighted by looking at Irigaray's oeuvre: Irigaray also rigorously deconstructed such a "phallic economy"[449] in *Speculum* and *Ce sexe*. And although Irigaray is also critical of an economy in which woman is seen as a mere "hole-envelope"[450] –or in Beauvoirian terms, as a sexless, castrated Other– she at the same time subversively pushes this phallic logic to an extreme.

Irigaray does so by revealing that male subjects are not only relying on women and their material bodies in order to construct themselves as subjects, but she shows that there is always at least some space available for women in phallogocentrism (or in its Symbolic and Imaginary) to return to themselves. Women "also remain elsewhere,"[451] which means that the phallic representation of their being and sexuality can always be altered. Phallogocentrism and its multiple discourses can be disrupted from within, through the act of mimesis: according to Irigaray, woman can subversively "attempt to find back the place of her exploitation by discourse, without letting herself be simply reduced to it."[452] This does not mean that Beauvoir's project, i.e. the phenomenological-existentialist analysis of what being, or rather, becoming a woman means, should be completely equated to Irigaray's critical mimesis method, but they could be brought into intra-action, in my opinion: Irigaray's mimesis, which in the end results in the construction of a *philosophie féminine* that acknowledges the existence of sexual difference, and provides room for a different conceptualization of female subjectivity, language and sexuality, could bring Beauvoir's analysis to a whole new level. It could actually help us highlight the constructive side of *Le deuxième sexe*, and also demonstrate that Beauvoir isn't a masculine thinker.

But first things first: there are still some other deconstructive-critical aspects of Beauvoir's philosophy that can be brought to light via Irigaray. We have already touched upon the objectification of women in patriarchy, and it is clear that Beauvoir connects this

[446] de Beauvoir, *FBS*, 49.
[447] de Beauvoir, *DSb*, 147.
[448] Loc. cit.
[449] Irigaray, *CS*, 24.
[450] Ibid., 23.
[451] Ibid., 74.
[452] Loc. cit.

issue to the fact that woman has been made into "the Other,"[453] whereas man has been and still is seen as "the Subject; […] the Absolute."[454] The reasons why woman has been made into man's negative, is exactly what Beauvoir tries to unravel in *Le deuxième sexe*, and what is interesting is that Irigaray's and Beauvoir's ideas about objectification are quite similar:[455] not only is woman "destined to be subordinated, possessed and exploited"[456] whilst passing through the hands of men in patriarchy, she is also expected to be a pure "virginal"[457] object. After having examined some myths about virginity in the first book of *Le deuxième sexe*, Beauvoir analyzes the role of woman's virginity during her sexual initiation in the second book. In a patriarchal sexual economy, woman is deflowered in a rather brutal way; she is reduced to a passive object, whereas man, because of his phallic powers, already has a certain "erotic autonomy."[458] This makes the Other into an instrument of the male subject. Or said in Irigaray's words:

> The woman-virgin […] is pure exchange value. She is nothing but the possibility, the place, the sign, of the relations between men. She does not exist on her own: a mere envelope veiling the issue of social exchange. In this sense, her natural body has disappeared in its representative function.[459]

Looked at it from an Irigarayian angle, Beauvoir's woman –as a virgin and especially after her defloration– isn't only an object: in all her passivity, woman is expected to envelope and support the male subject, and reflect his subjectivity. She is a "flat mirror,"[460] and this can be compared with Beauvoir's description of the female Other as the existent that is forced to dwell in immanence, because she, in patriarchy, is "doomed to repeat Life."[461] Seen through an Irigarayian lens, woman as the Other is only allowed to have two functions: she has to reflect male subjectivity, and be "a receptacle for (re)productions of the same."[462] She is transformed into the phallic mother that has to produce patriarchy's offspring. Woman is nothing more but mother and wife: in performing these tasks, she truly "functions as an

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[453] de Beauvoir, *DSa*, 18.
[454] Loc. cit.
[455] This has everything to do with the fact that both Beauvoir and Irigaray have used and commented on Claude Lévi-Strauss' structural anthropology. See for instance Ibid., 103-104 where Beauvoir refers to his theory of kinship, and see Irigaray, *CS*, 167-193, where Irigaray analyses his anthropology, and in the follow-up essay then reflects on what would happen if these women, "these 'commodities,'" "would refuse to go to the 'market'?" (Ibid., 193).
[456] de Beauvoir, *DSa*, 105.
[457] Ibid., 115.
[458] de Beauvoir, *DSb*, 127.
[459] Irigaray, *CS*, 181.
[460] Ibid., 150. This mirroring function of woman in patriarchy is criticized by Irigaray throughout her oeuvre, and is central to *Speculum*, *Ce sexe*, *Éthique*, and *Passions*. Also see footnote 352 on page 66 of this thesis, were I explained Irigaray's mirror symbolic.
[461] de Beauvoir, *DSa*, 97.
[462] Irigaray, S, 298.

envelope."[463] As is also clear in Beauvoir's philosophy, it is almost impossible for woman-as-mother to have a subjectivity of her own; she cannot reach transcendence as an existent, because –to quote Irigaray again– she is now "the place of the other who cannot separate himself from her."[464]

Woman-as-mother has no space or room of her own, and the previous dialogue between Beauvoir and Irigaray tells us that Beauvoir's comments on maternity and pregnancy in *Le deuxième sexe* could be framed differently: instead of confirming the stifled stories about Beauvoir's so-called masculinist philosophy that we touched upon during the introduction and part one of this thesis, we can now see that Beauvoir's critiques are part of her deconstruction of patriarchy and its objectifying sexual economy. Beauvoir mainly argues against "forced motherhood,"[465] and thanks to our diffractive reading, we now understand that it makes sense for a woman, stuck in patriarchy and immanence, to experience pregnancy and motherhood as something alienating:[466] it is only when woman can become a subject of her own, and can choose motherhood freely, that she can experience it as something truly enriching. And rereading Beauvoir through an Irigarayian perspective can push the former's feminist philosophy even further, in the direction of a constructive feminine philosophy, or *philosophie féminine*.

Just as there is a constructive side to Irigaray's philosophy –a side that by the way isn't disconnected from the critical parts of her oeuvre–[467] Beauvoir also does not solely focus on woman as the negative Other. We already pinpointed at some of the more constructive aspects of Beauvoir's *Faut-il brûler Sade?*, and we can now push Beauvoir's deconstructive critique in *Le deuxième sexe* towards a *philosophie féminine* in the style of Irigaray. This does not mean that we can completely equate Beauvoir's project to Irigaray's *parler-femme*, but if we read her comments through Irigaray's philosophy, we can reveal that Beauvoir indeed is

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[463] Irigaray, *EDS*, 17.
[464] Ibid., 18.
[465] de Beauvoir, *DSb*, 263.
[466] As can be seen throughout Beauvoir's chapter on motherhood. See Ibid., 262-309.
[467] Irigaray scholars and Irigaray herself have often divided her oeuvre into three, different, yet interconnected phases. Irigaray commented upon this in Hirsh, Olson, and Brulotte, "'Je-Luce Irigaray'," 96-97, where she stated that the three phases of her work are the following: "[t]he first [is] a critique, you might say, of the auto-mono-centrism of the western subject, the second, how to define a second subject; and the third phase, how to define a relationship, a philosophy, an ethic, a relationship between two different subjects." But the deconstructive and more constructive phases do belong together, as has also been argued by Rachel Jones (see Jones, *Irigaray*, 3-11) and by Irigaray herself in a more recent interview with Elizabeth Grosz in *Conversations*. Irigaray there claims that these phases "intertwine and interact." (Irigaray, *C*, 124). Her more deconstructive criticism and constructive project of creating a *philosophie féminine* should hence be taken together, and I think that the more constructive side of Beauvoir's philosophy could be revealed through Irigaray's own philosophy that focuses on continuity.

moving towards the creation of a more feminine model of sexuality and eroticism.[468]

A couple of points could be highlighted here: arguing against the Freudian Oedipal model of sexuality, Beauvoir first of all claims that "feminine sexuality has an original structure […],"[469] and that "woman's eroticism"[470] is "complex,"[471] because it "reflects the complexity of woman's situation."[472] This complexity not only has to do with the fact that woman's sexual experiences are probably less joyous when she still is the Other of man, but it also refers to the structure of a more feminine sexual model that is based on female sexual experiences. Female sexuality and female desire first of all seem to be less teleological than man's, whose desires die down after reaching orgasm. Woman's sexual pleasure, on the other hand, is partially psychological, and "aims at infinity."[473] Next to that, "feminine pleasure (*jouissance*)"[474] can't be precisely located: it rather "radiates through the whole body."[475] And this has everything to do with the fact that the female body has multiple "erogenous zones:"[476] according to Beauvoir, a woman's body "*is* desire and intoxication."[477]

The erogenous multiplicity of woman becomes even more manifest when reread through Irigaray: opposing the Freudian and Lacanian discourses on female sexuality that treat the latter as a mystery, Irigaray in *Ce sexe* subversively works towards a more feminine sexual model that taps into a (re)discovered female Imaginary. By referring to the image of the two lips, Irigaray concludes that woman has "at least two"[478] sexual organs, and many, many more. Female sexuality is "plural,"[479] and woman does not have to trade in her clitoral and other desires for the passivity of vaginal desire. Irigaray tries to make women aware of their sexuality and subjectivity throughout *Ce sexe*, and she basically incites them to revolt against the patriarchal order that objectifies women through the use of a phallic Symbolic and economy of sexuality and desire. Again: Beauvoir might not go that far (although she does criticize patriarchal myths about femininity, which could be seen as a full-frontal attack on phallogocentrism and its Symbolic), but by claiming that woman can also exist as a subject of

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[468] This has also been argued by Jo-Ann P. Fuchs, although she at the end of her article also states that we should move beyond Beauvoir's philosophy in order to get to a "feminist theory of eroticism." See Jo-Ann P. Fuchs, "Female Eroticism in *The Second Sex*," *Feminist Studies* 6 (1980): 304-313.
[469] de Beauvoir, *DSb*, 155.
[470] Ibid., 119.
[471] Loc. cit.
[472] Loc. cit.
[473] Ibid., 145.
[474] Loc. cit.
[475] Loc. cit.
[476] Ibid., 66.
[477] Ibid., 146 (own emphasis).
[478] Irigaray, *CS*, 27.
[479] Loc. cit.

her own, Beauvoir comes close to Irigaray's *philosophie féminine*. Furthermore, woman does not have to give up her femininity to become a subject: if she were to do that, she would also lose part of her humanity.[480] So, contrary to what has been claimed, sexual difference is kept intact in Beauvoir's philosophy, and there is more. Next to the rather Hegelian statement that women could reach transcendence by engaging in meaningful labor, Beauvoir also makes room for sexual autonomy and liberty: not only should women be able to choose motherhood freely, they should be allowed to fulfill their sexual desires without restraint as well.[481] Diffracted through an Irigarayian lens once more: Beauvoir's Other thus "should have her own envelope;"[482] woman should be allowed to become a female subject.

This diffractive dialogue has already helped us freeing Beauvoir's oeuvre from some of its most stifling interpretations, namely that she is a masculinist thinker, who ignores sexual difference. This appears to be a misinterpretation, since Beauvoir's philosophy can be pushed towards a *philosophie féminine*. Additionally, this diffractive reading exercise nuances the radical social constructivism versus essentialism binary, and the nature/culture dichotomy. Both the philosophies of Beauvoir and Irigaray are complex philosophies that refrain from presenting women and their bodies as either fully socially constructed, or as completely determined by nature: by agreeing with the fact that patriarchy socially reconstructs female bodies into objects, Irigaray nuances her so-called essentialist position, and Beauvoir, on the other hand, accepts that female bodies have certain natural qualities, too. But we can push their feminist philosophies even further, as I will show now.

3.2. Beauvoir, Irigaray, and Hegel: Woman as the O/other. Master-slave dialectics, alterity and carnal love.

We have already pushed Simone de Beauvoir's oeuvre towards a sexual difference perspective, but we can go even further: there are some problematic aspects in both oeuvres that have been left untouched, and these are exactly the topics that have brought about the equality/difference impasse. I am of course talking about Beauvoir's and Irigaray's rather different conceptualizations of woman's otherness, and of the immanence/transcendence binary that goes along with. Whereas Beauvoir in the stifling stories about her works is often accused of having created a superficial equality feminism that is grounded on so-called neutral, but in fact masculine concepts of alterity and transcendence, Irigaray's sexual, or

[480] Paraphrase of de Beauvoir, *DSb*, 474.
[481] See Ibid., 478-480.
[482] Irigaray, *EDS*, 32.

sexuate[483] difference feminism has been criticized for its radical and rather narrow conceptualization of difference.

Luce Irigaray actually touches upon these problems in "The Question of the Other,"[484] by comparing her work to that of Beauvoir. According to Irigaray, something important is missing in Beauvoir's conceptualization of alterity: she stays in the phallogocentric "model of the one and the many;"[485] a model that takes the mastery of the masculine subject for granted, whilst wishing to undo woman's otherness by making her equal to man. Beauvoir's ideas about woman as the Other are hence built on a "singular model"[486] of subjectivity, whereas Irigaray wants to move towards a different model; a "model of the two"[487] that leaves the differences between the subjects intact. Irigaray is equally provocative in "'Je-Luce Irigaray'," where she again intensifies the drama between her and Beauvoir by claiming that her own conceptualization of otherness is completely different, or as Irigaray put it herself: "She [i.e. Beauvoir] refuses to be the Other and I [i.e. Irigaray] demand to be the radical Other in order to exit from a horizon."[488] In addition to this comment, Irigaray also claimed that Beauvoir's woman as Other stays "within the dimension of immanence."[489] This not only directly goes against Beauvoir's own statements in *Le deuxième sexe*, as we have already seen, but it also doesn't go along with Irigaray's previous claims in *Je, tu, nous* –claims that implied that Beauvoir's equality feminism would lead to the "neutralization"[490] of the sexes, because her project is founded on a reductive and masculinist conceptualization of transcendence.[491]

So, although we already brought Beauvoir and Irigaray closer to each other in our previous diffractive reading, this conceptual gap still prevents us from interpreting them in a

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[483] Although Irigaray already referred to sexuate (*sexué*) difference in *Speculum*, she really only started using the concept in her later works, because these books tend to focus on sexuate rights. This has also been suggested in Jones, *Irigaray*, 4. Also see the preface to Luce Irigaray, *Key Writings*, edited by Luce Irigaray (Continuum: London – New York, 2004).
[484] Luce Irigaray and Noah Guynn, "The Question of the Other," *Yale French Studies* 87 (1995): 7-19.
[485] Ibid., 11.
[486] Loc. cit.
[487] Loc. cit.
[488] Hirsh, Olson, and Brulotte, "'Je-Luce Irigaray'," 114. Although the Other is written with a capital letter in this interview, Irigaray tends to refer to the other instead. The former seems to refer to Beauvoir's, but also Hegel's and even Levinas' conceptualizations of the Other as the Other of the Same, and not to Irigaray's other, i.e. the other as the irreducible, sexually different other. See for instance Irigaray and Guynn, "The Question of the Other," 8, where Irigaray criticizes the Western conceptualization of the Other as "the other of the same, of the subject itself."
[489] Hirsh, Olson, and Brulotte, "'Je-Luce Irigaray'," 113.
[490] Irigaray, *JTN*, 12.
[491] This can be deducted from Irigaray's statement in Ibid., 13-14, where she says that "egalitarianism occasionally invests too much energy in refusing certain positive values […]." With this claim, Irigaray seems to imply that egalitarian feminists, such as Beauvoir, are too afraid of constructing a *philosophie féminine*, and hence can only identify with masculinist values.

more continuous manner. This gap has everything to do with their Hegelian philosophical heritage, as I will show now, and it is through an analysis of Beauvoir's and Irigaray's positions versus Hegel that we can once again get the dialogue between these oeuvres going.

3.2.1. Hegelian philosophy as the key to a more continuous reading of Beauvoir and Irigaray.

The philosophical influence of Hegel on the oeuvres of Beauvoir and Irigaray has been enormous: *Le deuxième sexe* is filled with references to Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807) in particular, and he has been one of Irigaray's favorite discussion partners as well. Whereas Irigaray's relationship with Hegel has always been one of criticism, many of Beauvoir's commentators have argued that her position versus Hegelianism has been rather vague: this scholarly debate in fact revolves around the question whether Beauvoir has fully appropriated Hegel's master-slave dialectics, and equated woman as Other to Hegel's slave. If she indeed completely works within this Hegelian framework, then Beauvoir's concepts of transcendence and otherness might have also been infected by Hegel's phallogocentrism, or so the story goes. There are three general positions in this debate: some commentators, for instance, state that Beauvoir indeed completely equates woman to Hegel's slave, and that she falls prey to his phallogocentrism.[492] In a second interpretation, woman as Other never even enters the master-slave dialectic, because there is no life and death struggle between her and man.[493] And in a third interpretation, Beauvoir uses the master-slave paradigm to unveil the system of oppression without equating woman to Hegel's slave, and hence does something innovative with Hegelian thought.[494]

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[492] See for instance Alison M. Jaggar and William L. McBride, "'Reproduction' as Male Ideology," in *Hypatia reborn*, eds. al-Hibri and Simons, 249-269. This position also seems to be Irigaray's, as we can gather from her comments.

[493] See for instance Chanter, *Ethics of Eros*, 47-79; Halsema, *Dialectics of sexual difference*, 155-158; and Eva Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex and Existence: Simone de Beauvoir's 'The Second Sex,'* trans. Linda Schenck (Hanover – London: University Press of New England, 1996), 67-82. Although Chanter sees Beauvoir as a phallogocentrist (see this thesis on page 35, footnote 170 for extra information), she disagrees with the idea that Beauvoir uncritically appropriated the master-slave paradigm. Halsema's reading also accentuates this, and she focuses on the fact that woman as Other is seen as an animal, rather than Hegel's slave. According to Halsema, Beauvoir does not think that it is possible to get out of the Self/Other dialectic, although reciprocity between the sexes can be found. Paraphrase of Halsema, *Dialectics of sexual difference*, 157. A similar argument has been made by Lundgren-Gothlin, who throughout her book claims that Beauvoir does not place woman as Other in this paradigm. "Woman," according to Lundgren-Gothlin, "is seen as not participating in the process of recognition, a fact that explains the unique nature of her oppression." (Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex and Existence*, 72). At the end of her chapter, Lundgren-Gothlin nonetheless still accuses Beauvoir of androcentrism. See Ibid., 81.

[494] See for instance Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy, & Feminism*, 172-199 where Bauer follows in Lundgren-Gothlin footsteps, and hence agrees with the latter's idea that Beauvoir does not equate woman to Hegel's slave. But Bauer also adds that the male subject doesn't enter this dialectic either, and argues that Beauvoir is in fact trying to transform Hegel's dialectic. This transformative aspect has also been underlined in

So, the dispute mainly revolves around Beauvoir's interpretation of the master-slave dialectic. Although Beauvoir in the introduction to *Le deuxième sexe's* first book seemingly follows Hegel's (and Sartre's) dualist Self/Other paradigm, and later on makes the claim that women will become more free if they can partake in meaningful labor, Beauvoir's take on the master-slave dialectic is indeed rather ambiguous. Beauvoir starts by stating that "woman has always been, if not man's slave, at least his vassal,"[495] and she repeats this idea of the Other being a mere servant to man throughout the first book. And when Beauvoir is talking about the fact that woman in patriarchal systems has been regarded as the link between man and nature, and has been doomed to reproduction, she even argues that "[c]ertain passages where Hegel's dialectic defines the relationship of master versus slave would apply much better to the relationship of man versus woman."[496] This claim entails that woman, being an – according to Hegel and Beauvoir– "dependent consciousness,"[497] because of her closeness to nature and animality, really has been *mastered* by man at a certain point in time. But Beauvoir later on contrastingly notes that the real master-slave dialectic has mainly developed itself between men, or in Beauvoir's words: woman "escaped slavery,"[498] because "she, in a certain way, kept man dependent on her even though she relied on him."[499] Which means that man and woman seem to have been in a relationship of asymmetrical, but reciprocal, dependency. Plus, unlike the slave in Hegel's paradigm, woman also never demanded "reciprocal recognition;"[500] she really was and is the "absolute Other."[501] Woman then seems to be placed outside the master-slave paradigm, yet, if this paradigm isn't an example of how men have oppressed women, why would Beauvoir then even refer to it?

Starting to read Beauvoir and Irigaray diffractively could help us get out of this dilemma: from *Speculum* onwards, Irigaray namely has rigorously criticized Hegel for his patriarchal ideas about woman, the family, morality and politics. And this critical, subversive attitude towards Hegelianism has been underlined by the majority of Irigaray's

Karen Green, and Nicholas Roffey, "Women, Hegel, and Recognition in *The Second Sex*," *Hypatia* 25 (2010): 376-393. Green and Roffey claim that this transformative aspect has everything to do with Beauvoir's Sartrean heritage as well, whilst stating that Beauvoir's transformation of the dialectic is linked to her plea for mutual recognition between male and female subjects. A similar statement has been made by Vintges, and she in her interpretation also focuses on the ethical aspects of recognition (see Vintges, *Philosophy as passion*, 145 and 163).

[495] de Beauvoir, *DSa*, 22.
[496] Ibid., 97.
[497] Loc. cit.
[498] Ibid., 110.
[499] Loc. cit.
[500] Ibid., 190.
[501] Ibid., 191.

commentators,[502] which means that her dialogue with Hegel has been much less ambiguous than Beauvoir's. Irigaray's comments on Hegel's master-slave dialectic are usually accompanied by a more general critique of his Antigone interpretation –an interpretation that, according to her, disregards important issues, such as sexual difference, female specificity and maternal genealogy. Although I do not wish to dwell on Irigaray's own Antigone interpretation for too long,[503] Antigone is obviously the paradigmatic female figure to which Irigaray comes back to whenever she is criticizing Hegel's dialectic of recognition.

Irigaray's earliest analysis of Hegel's dialectic can be found in *Speculum*'s ironically titled chapter "The Eternal Irony of the Community:" Irigaray here criticizes Hegel for making woman into "[t]he woman-mother;"[504] a non-citizen, and an ethical 'agent' that isn't allowed to be self-conscious in his patriarchal philosophy. In addition to that, she also gives us an account of how Hegel interpreted the acts of Antigone versus her deceased brother Polyneices, and the patriarch Creon. According to Hegel, a dialectic of recognition arises between Antigone and Polyneices, once Antigone has defied human and state law (represented by Creon) by burying her brother. Yet, this is all a "*Hegelian dream*,"[505] because the recognition that takes place between these two sexually different, yet related subjects, is "without reciprocity:"[506] Antigone –like most women in patriarchy– is only allowed to be the "the *living mirror*, the source that reflects the development of the autonomy of the self-same"[507] in Hegel's philosophy. She buries her brother, and hence acts ethically, but she is not recognized properly for this act, nor given full subjectivity. Because of this, it makes sense that Irigaray depicts Antigone as "the antiwoman"[508] in *Speculum* and *Éthique*, because she still is "a production of a culture that has been written by only men."[509]

Does this then mean that Antigone merely is the slave of her masters, stuck in recognizing the subjectivity of Polyneices and Creon? Well, not exactly: there is a subversive aspect attached to Antigone, too. She not only is a figure of political revolt by defying state law and honoring divine, matriarchal law, but she also does not let Creon master her, and

[502] The Irigaray scholars that have paid particular attention to Irigaray's critique of Hegel are: Chanter, *Ethics of Eros*, 80-126; Halsema, *Dialectics of sexual difference*, 158-189; Whitford, *Luce Irigaray*, 118-122; and Jones, *Irigaray*, 199-213.
[503] I namely already discussed the roles of Antigone and Ismene in Irigaray's oeuvre in another paper. See Evelien Geerts, "Antigone and Ismene reclaimed: from tragic female figures to feminist-political paradigms," July 17, 2011, http://uu.academia.edu/EvelienGeerts/Papers/777499.
[504] Irigaray, *S*, 275.
[505] Ibid., 269.
[506] Ibid., 270.
[507] Ibid., 275.
[508] Irigaray, *EDS*, 115.
[509] Loc. cit.

resists against becoming a phallic wife and mother by committing suicide.[510] According to Irigaray, Antigone is “neither master nor slave:”[511] she “risks nothing”[512] and hangs herself in order to become a subject on her own terms. It is this aspect that of course intrigues us: couldn’t this bring to light what Beauvoir is trying to say in her master-slave interpretation? Might Beauvoir also be moving beyond Hegel’s dialectic by slyly deconstructing his model and claiming that woman as the Other in fact isn’t even part of this phallic dialectic? If so, this would also mean that Beauvoir’s conceptualizations of transcendence, otherness, and even recognition would be less phallogocentric than previously thought.

3.2.2. Beauvoir and Irigaray diffracted: Pushing each other towards another dialectic.

Reading Beauvoir and Irigaray diffractively when it comes to their conceptualizations of Hegelian dialectics, isn’t that self-evident, but it could be very interesting, not only from a philosophical, but also feminist point of view. It could not only help us with tackling the equality/difference binary, but such a reading would also clarify some problematic aspects in the philosophies of Irigaray and Beauvoir.

Up till now, we’ve shown that Beauvoir’s woman is indeed placed outside the master-slave dialectic:[513] like Irigaray’s Antigone, Beauvoir’s woman is not risking her life; she is not Hegel’s slave. Diffracted through Irigaray’s idea of how culture has established itself on a metaphysical matricide, or on the forgetting of the “maternal-feminine,”[514] one could say that Beauvoir uses Hegel’s master-slave paradigm to show that such a dialectic could never completely capture the relationship between men and women. These subjects have been interdependent throughout history, but because of woman’s link to nature and Life, this interdependence has never been acknowledged by man, and their relationship has been remolded into a patriarchal, single dialectic, in which woman became the radically other of man. It is this aspect of being closer to nature and Life that makes woman differ from the slave; plus, her relationship with man is much more asymmetrical than the one between

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[510] The fact that Antigone can been seen as someone who defended a maternal culture and respected life, has also been underlined in Luce Irigaray, “Between Myth and History: The Tragedy of Antigone,” in *Interrogating Antigone in Postmodern Philosophy and Criticism*, eds. S. E. Wilmer and Audronė Žukauskaitė (Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 197-211. Similar claims have been made in Luce Irigaray, *Le temps de la différence. Pour une révolution pacifique* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1989), where Irigaray also discusses the issue of civil sexuate rights.

[511] Irigaray, *EDS*, 115.

[512] Ibid., 116.

[513] As is becoming obvious now, I agree with Bauer’s interpretation. See Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy, & Feminism*, 172-199, and footnote 494 on page 88-89 of this thesis.

[514] Irigaray, *EDS*, 18.

master and slave: the latter namely still experience some symmetry (albeit a hierarchical one), because they have to recognize each other as either master or slave, in order to know where they stand, whereas man's dependence on woman has been silenced by patriarchy. This interpretation in fact suits the overall framework of *Le deuxième sexe*, in which Beauvoir not only seems to be looking for a way to make women into subjects of their own, but also hopes to establish a new form of reciprocal erotic ethics in which the alterity of the other would be respected; in which both subjects, as subjects, would recognize each other.

Diffracted through an Irigarayian perspective, it becomes obvious that we are still waiting for such a dialectic. Irigaray already hinted at the importance of moving towards a different dialectic that could take the duality of the sexes into account when stating in *Speculum* that "*a single dialectic would no longer be sufficient in order to articulate their copulation*."[515] A single dialectic will not do the trick: according to Irigaray in *J'aime à toi* (1992), we in fact need "a double dialectic"[516] that would make room for both the horizons or the different worlds of each subject, in order to really "escape from the relationships between master(s)-slave(s)."[517] This longing for a future *double dialectic* could be read into *Le deuxième sexe*: when discussing how woman could be liberated (without however having to give up her femininity), Beauvoir states that "[t]he free woman is still in the process of being born […],"[518] and that "the future remains wide open."[519] This means that such a dialectic that could embody the encounter between the two, still is in the making, largely because of the fact that woman still is looking for a way to assert her subjectivity. Woman wants "to emerge into the light of transcendence,"[520] as man has been able to do for centuries, yet, this does not mean that Beauvoir is claiming that women should become *like* men, by taking on their values: she in fact ends *Le deuxième sexe* with a critique of the continuous devaluation of femininity,[521] and with the striking statement that "certain differences between man and woman will always remain."[522] It is this confirmation of the existence of sexual difference that shows that Beauvoir probably does not want to reduce woman's otherness: it is just woman as the absolute, inferior Other that she wishes to get rid of, and this idea can be highlighted when read through Irigaray's philosophy.

[515] Irigaray, *S*, 278.
[516] Irigaray, *JAT*, 106.
[517] Ibid., 107.
[518] de Beauvoir, *DSb*, 504.
[519] Loc. cit.
[520] Ibid., 508.
[521] Ibid., 510-512.
[522] Ibid., 521.

Irigaray's double dialectic –or the "triple dialectical process,"[523] because it consists of a separate dialectic for each subject, and one, double dialectic for the both of them– has been the central topic of much of her later works and essays, such as *Éthique*, *J'aime à toi*, *The Way of Love* (2002), *Sharing the World* (2008) and "The Ecstasy of the Between-Us."[524] And this new dialectical model, of course, bases itself on the existence of two sexually different subjects. According to Irigaray, "there are always at least two worlds,"[525] and we, as subjects, are "always already affected by the existence of the other."[526] Yet, this "double human subjectivity"[527] hasn't been acknowledged in Western culture and philosophy, which has made authentic encounters between subjects impossible. Irigaray's own *philosophie féminine* –to which we have tried to push Beauvoir's project towards to as well– unveils another dialectic of recognition that bases itself on upholding the negative between the subjects. This negative should of course not be confused with Hegel's negative, as is explained in *J'aime à toi*:

> The negative in sexual difference is an acceptance of the limits of my gender (*genre*) and recognition of the other's irreducibility. It cannot be overcome, but it offers us a positive access […] to the other.[528]

The negative, or "the insurmountable place"[529] between the two, has to be respected by these subjects and has to be taken up by them; they have to guard their "limits in order to let the other be as other,"[530] and should not appropriate the other as an object, but rather acknowledge her/his transcendence. A real ethics of recognition would let the irreducible differences, the transcendence between the subjects blossom, and let a "between-us"[531] arise.

So, if we were to go back to Beauvoir's philosophy, these comments could tell us that Beauvoir's ideas about otherness and transcendence really should be nuanced: her so-called pure equality feminism in fact accepts sexual difference, and she doesn't necessarily plea for the neutralization of the latter: woman and man can still be each other's other, only not in an hierarchal way. And Irigaray's emphasis on the negative could also enlighten Beauvoir's critique of de Sade's and patriarchy's autistic sexual model again: these models do not respect

[523] Irigaray, *C*, 127.
[524] Luce Irigaray, "The Ecstasy of the Between-Us," in *Intermedialities. Philosophy, Arts, Politics*, eds. Henk Oosterling and Ewa Plonowska Ziarek (Lanham – Boulder: Lexington Books, 2011), 45-55.
[525] Luce Irigaray, *Sharing the World* (London – New York: Continuum, 2008), x.
[526] Ibid., xv.
[527] Ibid., xvi.
[528] Irigaray, *JAT*, 32-33.
[529] Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, trans. Luce Irigaray, Heidi Bostic, and Stephen Pluháček (London – New York: Continuum, 2002), 168.
[530] Irigaray, *STW*, 133.
[531] Irigaray, "The Ecstasy of the Between-Us," 53.

the otherness of the other, because they fail to grasp the importance of the negative, and rather break through the other's limits and objectify the latter. And although it is harder to push her conceptualization of transcendence towards Irigaray's transcendence as an horizon of the other that should never be appropriated,[532] we are able to say that Beauvoir isn't clinging onto a masculine conceptualization of transcendence, and that her philosophy goes towards a *philosophie féminine*-like model of female subjectivity and a double dialectic. And the cross-fertilization between Beauvoir and Irigaray obviously doesn't stop here: we can actually push both philosophies further when it comes to their ideas about erotic ethics, and Irigaray's ethics of sexual difference, in particular.

We've already discussed Beauvoir's erotic ethics, and we can now note that the carnal aspect of sexual love is definitely present in *Le deuxième sexe*: man and woman can become one, and reach "fusion"[533] in carnal love. According to Beauvoir, "[e]roticism is a movement towards the *Other*,"[534] and the "erotic attraction"[535] between two subjects can be sustained if both subjects recognize each other as equals in their difference. Beauvoir's alterity-focused perspective comes in handy when looking at Irigaray's "sexual or carnal ethics,"[536] which has a prominent place in *Éthique* and *J'aime à toi*, and many of her later works. Interestingly, this ethics is first of all an "ethics of sexual difference,"[537] and this model, which is based on a double dialectic, according to Irigaray, still has to be discovered. Once the importance of sexual difference –"one of the questions, if not the question of our time"[538]– has been grasped, it could radically alter our ontology, ethics and politics: it would not only be an impulse to start thinking about female subjectivity, but it would also enable us to work towards a new "economy of desire,"[539] in which both subjects would be able to find each other in "double

[532] This of course has everything to do with whether Beauvoir completely appropriates the Sartrean, dualist model of Self/Other and wishes to stay within that model, or not. And Beauvoir does state in *DSa*, 190 that recognition comes down to the process of "each one positing itself and the other at the same time as object and as subject in a reciprocal movement." This contrasts with Irigaray's claims in *J'aime à toi* about recognition, in which she uses the expression of 'I love to you,' instead of 'I love you' to make clear that the other should never be appropriated as an object. Or as she has stated it herself: "*I love to you* hence means: I do not take you for a direct object, nor for an indirect object revolving around you." (Irigaray, *JAT*, 172). This doesn't mean that the other doesn't have an objectivity, of course: Irigaray in *Conversations* for instance states that the other has an objectivity and subjectivity, yet, in her dialectic, the objectivity and subjectivity of the other should never be appropriated. See Irigaray, *C*, 127. The problem of Beauvoir's dualism has also been noted by Halsema in *Dialectics of sexual difference*, 156. I'm trying to get Beauvoir out of her comfort zone here, by confronting her with Irigaray's double dialectic and pushing her towards that model, although I have to admit that that is not exactly easy.
[533] de Beauvoir, *DSb*, 147.
[534] Ibid., 205.
[535] Loc. cit.
[536] Irigaray, *EDS*, 23.
[537] Ibid., 19.
[538] Ibid., 13.
[539] Ibid., 15.

desire."[540] That this carnal ethics is based on a double dialectic becomes clear when Irigaray states that such an ethics would respect the otherness and transcendence of the other subject. In this new economy of desire, "a possible place for each sex, body, and flesh"[541] should be constituted; they "each must be a place"[542] for one another, without destroying "the interval (of attraction) between the two."[543] Both subjects could truly find each other as interconnected others in this union, but this can only happen when we step outside that single dialectic, in which love exists "in the One,"[544] and where woman is only allowed to envelop man, and not herself. An ethics of sexual difference must focus on "loving as two,"[545] and should make room for a double dialectic in which subjects could envelope each other. Or as Irigaray stated it: "Between the one and the other, there should be a mutual envelopment in movement."[546] It literally "takes two to love,"[547] and, like Beauvoir's ethics, Irigaray's carnal ethics seems to be exceptionally suited for male and female subjects to recognize one another –on condition that their love has blossomed in a double dialectic.

So, reading Beauvoir and Irigaray diffractively really is getting us somewhere, yet, there are nonetheless some more obscure elements in Irigaray's ethics that should be dealt with as well. It is for instance not always clear in Irigaray's oeuvre where and how an ethics of sexual difference could come into being. Such an ethics has to unfold itself in a double dialectic, but how does this guarantee that the male subject in such a dialectic would recognize the other in its transcendence, if he used to have objectifying tendencies and powers in patriarchy? Diffracted through Beauvoir, who, in *Le deuxième sexe*, has shown us that woman as absolute Other is closer to alterity, and that there is such a thing as a feminine approach to love and eroticism that focuses on touch, losing oneself, and fusion,[548] it becomes clear that Irigaray in a similar manner builds a bridge between her *philosophie féminine* that focuses on female sexuality and subjectivity, and her ethics of sexual difference. Starting from the idea that woman is "other in herself"[549] because of her sexual plurality, and because of the fact that she had to envelop man and his offspring, woman has an intuitive feeling of what otherness is. In addition to that, Irigaray in "The Question of the Other," and in *J'aime à toi*,

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[540] Irigaray, *EDS*, 16.
[541] Ibid., 24.
[542] Ibid., 46.
[543] Ibid., 58.
[544] Ibid., 69.
[545] Ibid., 70.
[546] Ibid., 58.
[547] Ibid., 73.
[548] de Beauvoir, *DSb*, 146-147, and also see the previous part of our diffractive reading of Beauvoir and Irigaray that focuses on their *philosophie féminine* on page 81 of this thesis.
[549] Irigaray, *CS*, 28.

claims that it is also woman's more dialogical way of communicating, i.e. the fact that she is more inclined to use a "subject-subject"[550] pattern when addressing the other, that makes her more aware of otherness. Both subjects should nonetheless develop their singularity; their own identity, and "return to oneself"[551] first, in order to recognize each other's otherness, but as we have seen, woman's proximity to otherness is important in this trajectory.

A second issue that could benefit from a Beauvoirian perspective, is Irigaray's emphasis on the importance of carnal love between exclusively *male and female* subjects in her ethics: as already noted before, Irigaray was criticized by many commentators for having constructed a heterosexist philosophy,[552] because she –mostly in her constructive phase– talks about the era "of the couple;"[553] a couple that solely seems to be made out of heterosexual men and women. This is obviously a consequence of the idea that sexual difference is the most important kind of difference out there, but does this then really mean that "'I love to you,'"[554] i.e. the non-appropriating expression of someone's love for the other, could only be expressed between same-sex couples? Although it in fact might be easier to claim that Irigaray's sexual difference philosophy could be radically rewritten into a philosophy of differences[555] –which already seems to be a challenging project– we might be able to discover a queer space in Irigaray's ethics of sexual difference by bringing her into conversation with Beauvoir again. *Le deuxième sexe* in fact touches upon lesbianism and love between women in the second book, and although Beauvoir uses problematic concepts such as inversion and throws the experiences of lesbians, transvestites and hermaphrodites together, her existentialist analysis still is interesting. Beauvoir not only claims that lesbian women can live authentically, in good faith,[556] but she also makes some intriguing claims when talking about

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[550] Irigaray and Noah Guynn, "The Question of the Other," 16.
[551] Irigaray, *TWL*, 86.
[552] See this thesis on page 60 for Butler's critique, and page 60, footnote 323 for the critiques of Irigaray's commentators. Also see *J'aime à toi* on page 5, where Irigaray's critique of homosexuality becomes painfully clear. Irigaray's dialogue with Elizabeth Grosz in *Conversations* on the question of whether same-sex relationships also have a specific aspect of alterity to them, on the other hand, seems to be much more positive. But Irigaray there still claims that sexual difference is the most important difference of all, because that is the place where patriarchy has constructed itself on. See Irigaray, *C*, 133-135.
[553] Irigaray, *EDS*, 140.
[554] Irigaray, *JAT*, 170.
[555] I, for instance, agree with Halsema's statement that Irigaray should also look at other identity defining aspects, such as race, class, age, and others (see Halsema, *Dialectics of sexual difference*, 240), but instead of complementing her project of sexual difference with another one (which is, *an sich*, a good solution), I am also intrigued by Rachel Jones' project that wishes to open up Irigaray's ethics from within, by emphasizing that Irigaray sees this difference as qualitative, instead of quantitative, so that it could accept a multiplicity of differences. See Jones, *Irigaray*, 217-219. This idea has also been touched upon by Irigaray herself, who stated the recognition of sexual difference could eventually guide us towards "respect[ing] difference(s) in other relations to the other: of a different age, race, tradition, culture and so on." See Irigaray, *C*, 136.
[556] de Beauvoir, *DSb*, 174.

eroticism between women: such a same-sex love can be "truly passionate,"[557] and because their "caresses"[558] seem to be less appropriating, women find each other "in exact reciprocity."[559] Although Beauvoir doesn't deny that such relationships can be turbulent, she nonetheless praises carnal love between women as the place where alterity is respected, where each woman can be "subject and object at the same time."[560] Beauvoir's ethics of carnality hence seems to be able to integrate those who don't differ sexually, but could we push Irigaray's ethics of sexual difference towards such a more radical direction? Yes and no: although Irigaray's ethical model could probably incorporate the idea that reciprocal recognition between two same-sex subjects might occur –especially because of her claims in *J'aime à toi* that love in carnal ethics does not have to be reproductive–[561] it still would be extremely difficult to do so, because of the ontological foundation of Irigaray's ethics of sexual difference: sexual, or sexuate difference is and always will be Irigaray's starting point. But that of course does not mean that her project also has to stop there!

Our diffractive reading thus might have reached its limits here, but that doesn't mean that the cross-fertilizing dialogue between Beauvoir's oeuvre and that of Irigaray hasn't been productive: reading Beauvoir and Irigaray through one another, has really allowed us to bring these oeuvres closer to each other, without reducing their specificities. Irigaray's ethics of sexual difference in the end turns out to be quite radical, as we have just seen, and Beauvoir's feminist philosophy might also still be embedded in a dualism of some sorts, yet, this does not prevent us from saying that we have successfully broken through some of the earlier stifling stories about these oeuvres. By letting them push each other towards a more radical feminist philosophy that not only focuses on allowing women to become sexual subjects of their own, but also centers on a radical, dual model of recognition that wishes to acknowledge the transcendence and otherness of each subject, a line of continuity between these oeuvres has finally been revealed.

In the conclusion of this thesis, I will once more come back to this point of continuity, and give some final reflections on whether we could push the oeuvres of Beauvoir and Irigaray even further.

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[557] de Beauvoir, *DSb*, 165.
[558] Ibid., 166.
[559] Loc. cit.
[560] Loc. cit.
[561] See for instance Irigaray, *JAT*, 35.

Conclusion: Feminist politics. Towards another mode of recognition? Some final reflections.

Contrary to what the traditional feminist narratives have tried to make us believe, Beauvoir and Irigaray in the end seem to work towards the same goals: they are both trying to establish a feminist philosophy that bases itself on the ideas of social justice, emancipation, and mutual recognition, without however wanting to make women equal to men and neutralize sexual differences. Most of the binary labels that have been attached to the already Oedipalized Irigaray versus Beauvoir dichotomy have been tackled and nuanced throughout our diffractive rereading, and this is particularly so with the equality versus difference binary: by stimulating the intra-action between both oeuvres, we not only seem to have nuanced the alleged Oedipal drama between Irigaray and Beauvoir, but we have also pushed both oeuvres towards unknown territories. Hasn't this diffractive rereading then also created an opportunity to work through these oeuvres, and radically push them towards a politics that transcends the equality/difference binary from the start? In this concluding part, I would like to focus on this question in order to show that rereading Beauvoir and Irigaray diffractively not only brought these oeuvres more together, but also has opened up a productive space for some politically relevant feminist-philosophical reflections.

So, whilst pushing both feminist philosophies towards an explicitly non-Hegelian double and dual dialectic of recognition, we also encountered some setbacks: even though we were able to discover a carnal ethics of reciprocal recognition in Beauvoir's philosophy, it still isn't easy to reconcile her existentialist Self/Other paradigm with Irigaray's non-dualist dialectic; and although we tried to incorporate a broader framework of differences in Irigaray's sexual difference philosophy, her ethics still primarily deals with the process of mutual recognition between male and female subjects. Both projects of recognition hence have their limits, and one could in fact wonder if those limits aren't related to the internal logic of such a politics of recognition, which, *in se*, is based on a logic of identification. Beauvoir and Irigaray namely focus on identity, freedom, rights and recognition, and they both claim that women in patriarchal societies have been denied a subjectivity and hence a (cultural, political, etc.) identity of their own. And although Beauvoir, maybe more than Irigaray, also accuses women of being complicit in sustaining patriarchy, the standard view is that both philosophers are constructing their feminist-political project by making use of the concepts of negative freedom and recognition. And although Isaiah Berlin is famous for his analysis of the conceptual distinctions between negative and positive freedom, feminist

philosopher Elizabeth Grosz has also reflected upon these issues from a feminist point of view in her most recent book *Becoming Undone* (2011).

Grosz in *Becoming Undone* actually claims that negative freedom, or the "'freedom from'"[562] has been the most central concept in feminist theory and politics: according to her, feminist theorists generally focused on the fact that women have, for instance, been prevented *from* having a subjectivity model of their own; they were considered to be constrained by patriarchal culture. It is clear that this sense of freedom has its roots in identity politics, in which one tends to rely on a dualist dialectic, or, as Grosz put it in "A politics of imperceptibility," on "the structures of recognition and identification which inscribe the other onto and as the subject, and the subject as the other's counterpart."[563] Grosz doesn't claim that a feminist identity politics that focuses on the "paradigm of recognition"[564] and negative freedom should be completely discarded, yet, she finds that such projects tend to be stuck in their past actions rather than working towards a different future.[565] So, Grosz isn't attacking the value of identity politics *an sich*, but she has got a problem with the negative language and concepts behind such a project: instead of only talking about how one has been deprived of certain freedoms, and how certain identities have for instance stayed "unaffirmed,"[566] one could construct a feminist politics that works with a more positive conceptualization of freedom, or "'freedom to',"[567] and that focuses on "what one can or will do as that which is unpredictable and open."[568] Identity and autonomy might then be linked to action and taking action, which means that we could move beyond a politics that continuously pleas for more rights and more recognition, and in a way also turns subjects into rather passive recipients of rights and respect. Grosz' feminist "politics of acts,"[569] on the other hand, wants "women to partake in the creation of a future,"[570] but not by making them into the mere receivers of acknowledgment: this project goes towards another mode of recognition, or rather *beyond recognition*, by seeing "freedom as the capacity of action."[571]

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[562] Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian reflections on life, politics, and art* (Durham – London: Duke University Press, 2011), 60.

[563] Elizabeth Grosz, "A politics of imperceptibility: A response to 'Anti-racism, multiculturalism and the ethics of identification,'" *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 28 (2002): 466. I will only focus on explaining Grosz' concept of positive of freedom and her politics of acts here, and not really focus on her ideas about forces and a politics of imperceptibility, because that would require a whole new and different discussion.

[564] Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 60.

[565] See Ibid., 61.

[566] Grosz, "A politics of imperceptibility," 468.

[567] Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 65.

[568] Grosz, "A politics of imperceptibility," 468.

[569] Ibid., 470.

[570] Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 73.

[571] Ibid., 60.

This innovative political model surely challenges the current conceptualization of feminist politics and politics in general, but what interests us here, is whether we would be able to push Irigaray's and Beauvoir's feminist politics towards such a politics of acts. My final reflection on this matter would be that, although the projects of Beauvoir and Irigaray are obviously rooted in a feminist identity politics, we might be able let them move beyond recognition. Because we have let these oeuvres intra-act with one another in our diffractive rereading, we were able to push them towards a double dialectic that indeed still focuses on obtaining recognition and respect, yet, this double dialectic also presupposes a double process of recognition between subjects as each other's others, instead of between subjects as selves versus others. This is the point where Beauvoir required an Irigarayian rereading as we have seen, and Irigaray's sexual difference ethics diffracted through a Beauvoirian lens, on the other hand, pushed this model further towards a dialectic that would eventually be able to integrate the recognition of a multitude of differences. The traditional, single dialectic of recognition has been transcended here, and that, in addition to Irigaray's and Beauvoir's *philosophie féminine* that underlines a positive conceptualization of freedom, could open up their philosophies to a different kind of feminist politics. But that would require us to engage in a Groszian-inspired diffractive reading of both oeuvres –which would lead us to a whole new thesis project, obviously.

To finally conclude this thesis then, I would once more like to emphasize that telling different stories about feminist oeuvres really is possible; that Simone de Beauvoir's and Luce Irigaray's oeuvres can be saved from the Oedipal generational dialectics they were trapped in; and that the feminist method of diffractive reading not only helped us with the two previous tasks, but also is an excellent method to push oeuvres towards new, innovative, and theoretically and politically relevant feminist reflections…

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