

## SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S TWO BODIES AND THE STRUGGLE FOR AUTHENTICITY

To describe an ontology of the body that does not involve dualism, some reductionist form of materialism, or the view that experience of one's body is fundamentally a matter of interpretation, is no mean feat. It requires balancing in one unified project seemingly antithetical features of experience— activity and passivity, volition and given constraints. When such an analysis is also able to provide a ground for acute existential, psychological, and sociological observations about the experience of women, authentic and otherwise, this feat becomes all the more remarkable. In what follows, I will show how admirably Simone de Beauvoir succeeds in this in *The Second Sex*.

In the critical literature, on one end of the spectrum one finds those commentators who claim that Beauvoir considers the body a biological organism, whose structure and physiology determine women's behavior.<sup>1</sup> Julie Ward has shown why such views are unwarranted; she and critics such as Judith Butler hold instead that Beauvoir's operative sense of the term "body" is one in which the anatomical and physiological organism, i.e., the physical body, is experienced or interpreted in terms of prevailing social and economic conditions. Reading Beauvoir as saying that the physical body does exert definite constraints on human experience (Ward, "Beauvoir's Two Senses" 239), Ward equates this body with the "Cartesian *res extensa*, extended matter lacking all thought" whereas Beauvoir's "second sense [of the term 'body'] presupposes thought and consciousness, and so, is anti-Cartesian" (Ward 231-232). By contrast, Butler takes the more radical view that in *The Second Sex* even gender is an interpretation or cultural construction (Butler 255-256).

Although I am more sympathetic to the approach of Ward and Butler than to the first group of critics, it seems to me that they too miss something important about Beauvoir's analysis. The passivity of the body, an inherent part of lived experience that is both positive and negative, is not something that can or should be interpreted away. Concomitantly, Beauvoir does not so much react to Cartesianism as work from a view of embodied consciousness developed by Max Scheler, which provides the ground for the type of unified project

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Okley and Siegfried.

mentioned above.<sup>2</sup> For Beauvoir, I shall argue, the individual is not only not interpretatively free from the constraints of the body *qua* physical entity, but in human experience there is always also a constant and necessary interplay between the body as active and passive. Let us begin then with a seemingly different type of claim in a passage from *The Second Sex* that does reject the so-called balanced (heterosexual) couple as a utopian ideal<sup>3</sup>:

[I]n comradeship, pleasure, trust, tenderness, cooperation, love [the relations between a man and a woman] can be for each other the most abundant source of joy, richness and power available to human beings. (TSS 536/II 235)<sup>4</sup>

Rather than forming a closed unit, both members of such a partnership should be free and independent: “the individual should as such be integrated into a society at the heart of which s/he ... could flourish without aid” (TSS 535/II 324). Beauvoir therefore is intrigued with Stendhal’s account of a genuine male-female relationship:

Two separate beings, in different circumstances, face to face in freedom and seeking justification of their existence through one another, will always live an adventure full of risk and promise. (TSS 280/I 388-389)

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<sup>2</sup> I have discussed Scheler’s views in Mirvish, “Merleau-Ponty.” Important differences notwithstanding, Beauvoir, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty all benefitted tremendously from this aspect of Scheler’s work. For Sartre and Scheler, see Mirvish, “Sartre.”

<sup>3</sup> Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1999) 325. See also, Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 535. Henceforth TSS. I have made some changes in the translation that I have marked by adding TA to the quotation. For convenience, I am citing the English version before the French text. Volumes 1 and 2 of the French edition are denoted by “I” and “II” respectively.

<sup>4</sup> It could be argued that what de Beauvoir has to say in this context about the ideal couple also applies in principle to a union of partners of the same sex. For Beauvoir on lesbianism, see Ward, “Reciprocity.”

She remarks that Stendhal is a feminist and a romantic at one and the same time and clearly endorses his view that the woman's value lies precisely in the fact that she is a free human being—"Woman ... is simply a human being; nor could any shape of dreams be more enrapturing" (TSS 280/I 389)— while rejecting the idea that each member of the couple seek his or her *raison d'être* through the existence of the other: "more rare are those who are at once lovers and friends but do not seek in each other their sole reasons for living" (TSS 536/II 325).

Beauvoir absolutely insists on the necessity for each partner in a relationship to remain independent, emphasizing that the "ideal [relation] would be for entirely self-sufficient human beings to form unions with one another only in accordance with the free consent of their love" (TSS 527-528/II 311). But why this stress on the ideal of complete self-sufficiency? Could it not rather be argued that such partners are profoundly interdependent insofar as each helps the other grow and develop? In fact, some psychoanalytic theories consider complete self-sufficiency a neurotic notion, a form of false pride that masks a fear of intimacy.<sup>5</sup> Why then Beauvoir's insistence on self-sufficiency in the case of the ideal, balanced couple, and what exactly is the relation between this self-sufficiency and authenticity?

It seems to me that what is at issue has as much to do with a distinction between the body as active and the body as passive as with issues of freedom and responsibility. We must therefore closely examine what Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex* about the *Leib*—the active, lived body—as opposed to the *Körper*—the body as passive and an object for the Other.<sup>6</sup> Emphasizing this difference in the context of women's experience will, in turn, enable us to answer the questions raised above.

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<sup>5</sup> See Horney.

<sup>6</sup>Differences between Beauvoir and Sartre notwithstanding, there are also profound similarities. I have discussed Sartre on the lived body in the following articles: "Sartre on Friendship," "Sartre and Kohut: Existential and Self-Psychological Approaches to the Phenomenon of Conflict," "Sartre and the Problem of Other (Embodied) Minds," "Sartre: The Ontology of Interpersonal Relations, Authenticity and Childhood," and "Sartre, Hodological Space and Others."

When it comes to the lived body, Beauvoir stresses the need to get beyond the myth of woman as essentially passive flesh. The female, according to her, “is not merely a carnal object; and the flesh is clothed in special significance for each person and for each experience” (*TSS* 288/I 398). In other words, one does not act in the world as a mind or spirit that animates a mechanical body but rather as a holistic being, an intentional consciousness that is necessarily embodied: I act on my projects as a lived body, and the way such behavior is idiosyncratically expressed shows how “the flesh is clothed in special significance for each person and for each experience.”

Thus when Beauvoir writes that “[f]eminine charm demands that transcendence, degraded into immanence, appear no longer as anything more than a subtle quivering of the flesh” (*TSS* 761/II 604), she means that for the woman to be attractive or charming in the traditional sense, man as the Other not only must see her as *Körper* rather than as *Leib*, but she herself also must experience herself as such. Hence Ward’s earlier distinction between the lived body and the physical body—as “Cartesian *res extensa*, extended matter lacking all thought”—is too neat: the experience of the body as passive and object is precisely an inherent, negative aspect of woman’s traditional experience.<sup>7</sup> Intellectual women, to the extent that they buy even partially into an objectifying view of themselves, face the problem of consciously having to degrade and deny their ontological bodily status, a situation that is always doomed to failure:

[O]ne cannot by sheer will dull one’s glance and change one’s eyes into sky-blue pools; one does not infallibly stop the surge of a body that is straining toward the world in order to change it into a statue animated by vague tremors. (*TSS* 761/II 604)

Moreover, trying to be an object makes one self-conscious; the individual’s actions become false, excessively deliberate, and at least somewhat mechanical. In short, the woman in this case has to place severe constraints on her body *qua Leib* in order to try to act as *Körper*. “Woman,” Beauvoir writes,

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<sup>7</sup>Even if the subject enjoys and is flattered by being an attractive object for the Other, this experience ultimately undermines her capacity for transparent action in the world, as will be explained.

remains dominated, surrounded, by the male universe [;] she lacks the audacity to break through its ceiling ... What woman essentially lacks today for doing great things is forgetfulness of herself; but to forget oneself it is first of all necessary to be firmly assured that here and now one has found oneself. (TSS 780-781/II 625)

This suggests that woman is being held back to the extent that she remains *Körper* for man as the Other. By contrast, to be unfettered and live fully demands that instead of having her identity depend on being seen, the subject is actively involved in the world on the basis of a corporeal transparency. *Qua Leib* she accepts the body and its constraints. Engaged and involved with projects that transcend a primary concern with her image or appearance, she so turns the body into an instrument for the realization of her projects. Unlike the fixation on her own body as figure, which occurs when she is object for the Other, transparency as a *Leib* implies that bodily self-awareness can establish the ground for woman's experiencing herself as subject.<sup>8</sup> For such an individual being an object for the look no longer constitutes a major issue. This is why Beauvoir writes that the authentic woman is at one with, rather than moves against, "the surge of body that is straining toward the world."

Given our cultural heritage, it remains extraordinarily difficult for women to transcend a view of themselves as being essentially *Körper*. Among other obstacles, they have to shake free of myths perpetuated by writers who insist on seeing "woman as *flesh*," relate her to "nature," and describe her as its incarnation (TSS 280-281/I 389).<sup>9</sup> Traditionally "flesh" is hypostatized to become a *Körper*. As Beauvoir notes, from the woman's own point of view pregnancy can be a temptation to conclude essentially the same:

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<sup>8</sup>I think that a similar point can be made for Sartre. I have discussed this issue in "Gestalt Mechanisms and Believing Beliefs: Sartre's Analysis of the Phenomenon of Bad Faith," and "Sartre: Reciprocity, Sexuality and Solipsism."

<sup>9</sup>"Nature" is being used here in a pejorative sense although, as I show later, Beauvoir also uses this idea in a positive fashion.

[I]n gestation [life] appears as creative; but that is a strange kind of creation which is accomplished in a contingent and passive manner. There are women who enjoy the pleasures of pregnancy and suckling so much that they desire their indefinite repetitions ... [but they] are not so much mothers as fertile organisms. (TSS 553/II 350)

Vis-à-vis the issue of being a good mother, the real challenge is not the physiological production of the baby but rather its upbringing and thus the relation the mother as a subject adopts to her child as subject or object, a relation between two lived bodies that will crucially shape how the latter develops as a person in his or her own right. This is vastly different from pregnancy, where the fetus remains functionally a *Körper*.<sup>10</sup>

In light of the above, what does it mean to be authentic? In terms of the lived body, it means to behave in a transparent fashion, as described above. On the other hand, Beauvoir also writes that a woman with

responsibilities, who knows how harsh the world's oppression is, needs like the male not only to satisfy her physical desires but also to enjoy the relaxation and diversion provided by agreeable sexual adventures. (TSS 763/II 606)

The picture here is different from the one involving transparency, for instead of bodily self-awareness being situated in the ground of her experience, the subject now becomes aware of her own body and that of the Other as a conjoint figure. It is a shift from the world at large to a

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<sup>10</sup>Clearly a good mother during pregnancy needs to take care of herself and the developing baby as *Körper*, but this implies that she acts on herself as *Leib*. I sometimes teach a course on Medical Ethics and in the process of presenting both sides of the abortion issue show the Pro-Life video "Ultrasound: Windows to the Womb." This production relies on ultrasound pictures to try to show that after only one month the fetus is, in effect, a lived body. The vast majority of students do not buy this (literal) picture. They make the point, surely with justification, that at earlier stages the fetus' behavior is instinctual, which is to say, the behavior of a *Körper*.

world involving the reciprocal interaction of two lived bodies. When such “sexual adventures” are neither masochistic nor sadistic for either partner, neither will experience the other’s body as *Körper*. There will be no need for objectification.<sup>11</sup> Rather, the sexual act here involves desire and a striving for mutual pleasure. The body, in other words, figures as an active agent. However, at one and the same time the body also remains passive to the extent that one becomes passionate, for passion entails consciousness becoming absorbed with the flesh as such. Experientially, it makes for a zoom-like effect, an awareness of flesh— one’s own and the other’s— as overwhelming figure. Were this state to last, existence would become reduced and object-like; the desire of wanting to satisfy the other’s pleasure would have no place and disappear. Genuine sexual reciprocity thus demands the interaction of two lived bodies, which explains why Beauvoir writes that if men “would be willing to love an equal instead of a slave ... women would not be haunted as they are by a concern for their femininity; they would gain in naturalness, in simplicity” (*TSS* 762/II 605). She also emphasizes “the same is true of affection as of physical love. For it to be genuine, authentic, it must first of all be free” (*TSS* 528/II 312). In an authentic sexual relation, then, each partner acts out of freedom, which especially in the woman’s case means acting outside the socially imposed constraints that would objectify her. Each partner expresses desire for the other and for him/herself in terms of the lived body.

Thus, as regards one’s existence as an incarnate being, an authentic woman for Beauvoir is active in the world and corporeally transparent: she neither sees nor experiences herself as an object. Moreover, she expresses herself freely as a lived body also in her sexuality. Traditional male-female relationships certainly preclude this situation:

When woman is given over to man as his property, he demands that in her the flesh is given simply as facticity. Her body is not grasped as the radiation of a being as subject, but as a thing mired in its own immanence; it is not for such a body to ... be the promise of something other than itself. (*TSS* 178/I 264)<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> A similar point can be made for Sartre. See Mirvish (1994).

<sup>12</sup> This is why Butler is too naïve in her claim that as embodied consciousness some women can choose their gender. Certainly in

The intellectual woman who in a still male-dominated universe tries all the harder to prove herself, is saddled by similar difficulties: “she resembles those actors who fail to feel the emotion that would relax certain muscles and so by an [artificial] effort of will contract the opposing ones” (TSS 762/II 604).

How are we to understand the genesis of authenticity in woman as an embodied consciousness? According to Beauvoir, an adolescent girl may find a haven “in the fields and the woods” (TSS 406/II 137). In this period of her life, the societal constraints that weigh on her as a woman-to-be are already so pervasive<sup>13</sup> that it is only in nature that

[e]xistence is not only an abstract destiny set down in city records; it is the rich, fleshly future. To have a body no longer seems a blemish to be ashamed of ... The flesh is ... joy and beauty ... an organism rooted in the soil ... she is at once spirit and life. (TSS 407/II 138)

The adolescent girl feels sheer exuberance in the physicality of the body *qua Leib* as opposed to existence *qua Körper*. As an incarnated consciousness she can savor an adult, embodied future—as an accomplished athlete, for instance, or as sexually involved with others. Her joy in her body in effect marks a moment of respite for, as Beauvoir notes, in this very period her mother “saddles the child with her own destiny: a way of proudly laying claim to her own femininity and also a way of revenging herself for it” (TSS 317/II 31). In other

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Afghanistan under the Taliban or even in less extreme Iran, there was no viable sense in which a woman may choose her gender.

<sup>13</sup> Beauvoir stresses the role of the mother as the one who insists that the young girl rigidly conform to accepted societal standards. It may be argued, however, that this phenomenon has relaxed considerably so that the point is dated. On the other hand, consider peer pressure, which comes not only from actual peers, but also from magazines, TV and films. All of these factors attempt to enforce a standard of conformity that obviously includes bodily behavior. Furthermore, high heels, make-up, and the need to appear attractive, among many other objectifying features, certainly suggest that the contemporary young girl is still being constrained *qua* lived body. In fact, one could even say that often she is condemned to live alienated from her body as natural and transparent.

words, as the girl moves into adolescence and starts to become a woman, the mother's own conflicts, her resentment at having been socially feminized at the price of renouncing spontaneity, come to the fore. Even if she is genuinely concerned with her daughter's happiness and welfare and sufficiently reflective so as not to project her conflicts onto the young woman, she still "will as a rule think it wiser to make a 'true woman' of her [daughter], since in this way society will most easily accept her" (*TSS* 317/II 31). That nature allows the adolescent girl to experience her body as "joy and beauty" provides only momentary respite from the normally incessant flurry of constraining and persistent socialization.<sup>14</sup>

Where does this experience come from? What is there in the life of the young girl, prior to adolescence, that later will allow her to feel the thrill and joy of her incarnated consciousness as mirrored in nature? Beauvoir insists that as a physical being or, more accurately, as an embodied consciousness, the young girl exhibits a natural spontaneity that has to be deliberately suppressed by societal sanction. For example, in order to even walk in the socially appropriate fashion she must learn to obey a set of bodily conventions that are not necessarily in accord with the way in which she would naturally be inclined to move: "to develop grace she must repress her spontaneous movements" (*TSS* 317/I 31-32). In fact, Beauvoir goes so far as to claim that "[h]er spontaneous surge towards life, her enjoyment of playing, laughing, adventure, lead the little girl to view the maternal sphere as narrow and stifling" (*TSS* 331/II 48). The little girl's existence *qua* lived body lets her experience herself as "an autonomous individual" (*TSS* 367/II 89).

Other physical and developmental features also promote the girl's sense of autonomy and independence. Thus we learn that:

Up to the age of twelve the little girl is as sturdy as her brothers, and she shows the same mental powers; there is no

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<sup>14</sup>In contemporary terms, even swimming or running, to say nothing of team sports, demand conformity to social norms, which is why Beauvoir is correct in stressing nature as both a mirror and catalyst that allows the adolescent an initial, tangible experience of herself as a mature, physical being outside social constraints.

field where she is debarred from engaging in rivalry with them.  
(TSS 302/II 14)

This is not to argue that the girl is provided the same license as the boy to follow her transcendent inclinations, which is to say her inclination as an embodied consciousness joyously to explore and take on the world. However, the fact that prior to the development of secondary sexual characteristics there is on average no marked difference in strength between the sexes and the fact that the main onslaught of feminization by authority figures and peers occurs only with the onset of puberty, allow the young girl to act relatively unrestricted in consonance with her natural, physical, and mental abilities. She functions naturally on a par with boys.<sup>15</sup>

The young girl's spontaneity, then, is not that of an essentially disembodied mind or *res cogitans*. Instead, it is the spontaneity of the lived body, or rather spontaneity as a lived body, that allows the child to break through or transcend the constraints and sanctions of an all too pervasive feminization. Concomitantly, the strength she displays is not a phenomenon that can be calculated in mechanical terms, i.e., purely as a function of the *Körper*. To the contrary, it is inseparable from the natural grace and spontaneity that the young girl displays in behaving as *Leib*. In fact it can be said that for Beauvoir, who certainly is no dualist, the young girl *qua* lived body literally incarnates a fusion of physicality and spirit.

But there is a tension between Beauvoir's insistence that the spontaneity and strength of the girl's lived body can surmount socialization and the stress she places on socialization's pervasive power. In elaborating on this, Beauvoir describes two major forms of separation and consequent anxiety boys and girls experience. The first attends weaning, as the child must cope with a profound sense of abandonment—an experience that is partially mitigated by close physical contact with parents and through looks of love. In what amounts to a second weaning, however, a sharp distinction is drawn between girls and boys. As the mother withdraws her previously lavish caresses, she does so unequally, withholding more from her son than her daughter:

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<sup>15</sup> Beauvoir writes that: “[I]f, well before puberty ... [the girl] seems... to be already sexually determined, this is not because mysterious instincts directly doom her to passivity, coquetry ... it is because ... the influence of others upon the child is a factor almost from the start.” (TSS 302)

[the little girl] continues to be cajoled, she is allowed to cling to her mother's skirts, her father takes her on his knees and strokes her hair. She wears sweet little dresses, her tears and caprices are viewed indulgently .. people are amused at her expressions ... bodily contacts and agreeable glances protect her against the anguish of solitude. (TSS 305/II 17)

The boy, on the other hand, is denied such close physical intimacy. He suffers censure or castigation unless he affirms and asserts his separation, and thus his relative independence, from others as a lived body: "He is told that 'a man doesn't ask to be kissed ... A man doesn't look at himself in mirrors ... A man doesn't cry'" (TSS 305/II 17). Meanwhile the girl's coddling, pampering, and dressing up help create an idealized view of self that renders her essentially passive and objectified:

By means of compliments and scoldings, through images and words, she learns the meanings of the terms *pretty* and *homely*; she soon learns that in order to be pleasing she must be 'pretty as a picture' ... she puts on fancy clothes, she studies herself in a mirror, she compares herself with princesses and fairies. (TSS 314/II 28)

The boy's idealized self-image, in contrast, mandates that he assert his freedom, express free movement, and apprehend his body as a means to dominate nature (TSS 315/II 29).

As a third difference, Beauvoir discusses the significance for girls of anatomical distinctions by citing the work of, among others, Alice Balint, Helene Deutsch, Havelock Ellis, and Karen Horney. Against Freud she notes that society places a distinct value on the boy's penis as compensation for his more extreme form of second weaning. Because the penis is external and anatomically distinct, the boy can project on it the sense of a valued alter ego. The little girl—if left to mature naturally—in turn concludes that "her body is, for her, quite complete" (TSS 307/II 19). In other words, there is no automatic experience of penis envy. In fact, the little girl may remain ignorant and oblivious of any genital distinction or find this "outgrowth" (TSS 307/II 20) odd or unnatural.

With the onset of the child's fascination with excretion, a stage that has profound psychoanalytic ramifications for future development,

the now obvious genital distinction may become significant for the girl. But even if she regards the male organ as more convenient or as allowing for more independent physical manipulation, even if she does attempt to imitate the boy's behavior in urinating so that ultimately the "possession of a male sex organ [seems] desirable to many girls" (TSS 309/II 22), the male "privilege" of having a penis "is one whose value naturally decreases when the child loses interest in its excretory functions" (TSS 315/II 28).

Obdurate social pressure, however, often makes the girl learn to accept the masculine as superior, as when for example adults offer her a doll as a substitute for the penis she lacks and as an equivalent alter ego (TSS 313-314/II 27-28). Whereas the boy's self-image is being proudly externalized via his sexual organ, Beauvoir argues, the girl's doll—dressed up, coddled, and pampered—functions as a mirror that fosters a narcissistic and, more generally, passive self-image in the girl (TSS 315/II 28-29).

Given all of these socially imposed differences, can one still maintain the young subject's ability truly to experience the natural joy and exuberance of her lived body? Beauvoir does indeed think so. All the restrictions and constraints to the contrary, she writes, it

happen[s] occasionally, when the young girl is given a boyish bringing up; in this case she is spared many problems ... this is the kind of education a father prefers to give his daughter; and women brought up under male guidance very largely escape the defects of femininity. (TSS 316/II30)

But when it comes to the connections between these three stages, the first two by no means ought to be considered the sole or necessary conditions for the last.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless we have an extended

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<sup>16</sup>An interesting question that goes beyond the scope of this article is whether an adult who was denied the experience of the earlier two stages, in any viable guise whatsoever, could nonetheless become an authentic individual as defined above. Given Beauvoir's existential emphasis, one may be led to think that this would be possible for a subject with sufficient insight and effort. However, what we have seen above is that one's past is literally impressed upon one as a lived body. So although it may be feasible for the mature woman intellectually to recognize and accept what it means to live

paradigm here that explains what it means for an adult woman to act authentically vis-à-vis the lived body: she will express herself freely as a sexual being; she will also experience her body as transparent by actively attending to projects in the world, an ability that stems from her being used to experiencing—both as an adolescent and as a young girl—the natural spontaneity and exuberance associated with her body.

To return for a moment to the young child and the difficulty he or she experiences during and after weaning, the feeling of vulnerability and abandonment on being cast out from intimate physical contact with the parent. Beauvoir fills in this picture further when she writes that this young person “never succeeds in abolishing his separate ego” (*TSS* 303/II 15), although he “would fain lose himself in the bosom of the Whole [which is at] ... the origin of his cosmic and pantheistic dreams, his longing for oblivion, for sleep, for ecstasy” (*TSS* 303/II 15). This point needs to be understood ontologically: after a first weaning, the child has learnt to delineate and experience the world as a lived body that is individuated precisely insofar as it is singular, i.e., apart from others and to this extent alone. At this stage the young and now for the first time truly singular subject discovers “in carnal form ... finiteness, solitude, desertion in a strange world” (*TSS* 303/II 15). In psychological and psychoanalytic literature, this experience is taken to be prototypical for childhood.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, Beauvoir shows us that in order to be authentic the adult essentially must replay this same phenomenon over and over:

Art, literature, philosophy, are attempts to found the world anew on a human liberty; that of the creator ... one must first emerge from [the struggle to find one’s place in the world] into a sovereign solitude if one wants to try to regain a grasp upon it. (*TSS* 791/II 637)

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authentically vis-à-vis her body, to be able to act in consonance with such theoretical demands when there is no genuine, earlier basis of incarnated exuberance and spontaneity would be a very difficult task indeed.

<sup>17</sup>Lissa Rechten and I have discussed this issue in Mirvish and Rechten (1998).

Why “sovereign solitude”? For a woman the answer here is both psycho-sociological and existential. It has been emphasized how insidious society and the status quo are when it comes to the constraints of feminization. Thus as an adult the female subject has to be especially vigilant in maintaining her independence from any others who in whatever guise would tend to objectify her. If the subject is to accept responsibility as the free creator and arbiter of her own actions, she must maintain this “sovereign solitude. In fact, women have to wean themselves from their object status: “what woman needs first of all is to undertake, in anguish and pride, her apprenticeship in abandonment and transcendence” (*TSS* 791/II 637).

But what about women working with each other? Are abandonment and solitude necessary then? Beyond the psychological, sociological, and existential, there is for Beauvoir an ontological factor that ties authenticity to separateness, for in the same way that the toddler being weaned has to learn to delineate and experience the world as a singular lived body, the mature woman must learn to perceive, experience, and constitute the world from the perspective of her singular embodied consciousness. To stand as a distinct, singular being may certainly provoke anxiety. Hence the tendency in many women to act as though one is somehow conjoined to others and literally depends on one’s being in their close presence. Yet to behave authentically, the subject must accept that as a lived body she is always distinct and apart from others; intimacy—whether it be in the form of solidarity, love, or comfort— cannot be won by denying one’s uniqueness and separation as an embodied existent. To repeat my earlier point, it is *qua* lived body that one acts on one’s projects, and the way such behavior is expressed idiosyncratically shows that “the flesh is clothed in special significance for each person and for each experience.”

This point can be further emphasized by noting that for Beauvoir authentic individuation is not primarily a function of a future in which—*à la* Heidegger—death serves as our “ownmost possibility.” Instead the future is grounded in the lived body and to this extent what authentically individuates one is also the past as it is instantiated in one’s bodily actions. These actions may indeed be social, and thus common to a particular group or culture, and they may even dictate general types of responses. However, to be authentic one must accept responsibility for behavior that is uniquely shaped at any moment by virtue of one’s necessary separation from the world and others. In sum,

as a specific existent or lived body I act in specific circumstances so that it is not an acceptance of death that serves as the ultimate arbiter of the authenticity of my actions but rather life, crucially manifest in the assumption of my radical separation from others.

Indeed, to this extent for Beauvoir there are in fact three weanings for the authentic individual. Two in childhood and another in adult life where there is a constant need to see oneself *qua* incarnated consciousness as a unique and embodied existent. If this applies in general, it does especially in the case of women, who—as we have seen—are made particularly vulnerable to the temptation of denying their separateness and capacity for transcendence.

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