

**DE BEAUVOIR AND IRIGARAY:
"WOMEN: YOU ARE THE PROBLEM"(*)
Are the complicities between De Beauvoir and
Irigaray more important than the obvious differences?**

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De Beauvoir and Irigaray. In "Feminism and Psychoanalysis: the daughter's seduction", Jane Gallop draws attention to the 'and' linking two domains which might well be hostile to each other, such as psychoanalysis and politics. This 'and', she says, 'is, despite it's innocuous appearance, a very problematic word.' (P. 92) So it is too, in the title to this essay. It links two seemingly contradictory statements on sexual difference: one wanting to narrow the difference, the other calling for its assertion; one writing within a meta-physical problematic, the other intent on overthrowing and disrupting all male philosophical discourse. But to polarise them in such a way, is to create a binary opposition of the sort that both Irigaray and de Beauvoir attack in their portrayal of classical Western thought.

In her article, 'Operative Philosophy',⁽¹⁾ Michele le Doeuff exclaims how 'incisive, forceful and wonderfully clear' the introduction to **The Second Sex** is, that it 'scarcely calls for the pretensions of an exegis. "To be read and reread" would seem to be the only possible commentary.' This is just how I feel too, about **Speculum Of The Other Woman**. So what I propose to do in this essay, is to draw out what I consider to be similar themes in Simone De Beauvoir's **The Second Sex** and Luce Irigaray's **Speculum Of The Other Woman**, trying to reveal points of contact and divergence and examine the issues that emerge. I hope to find that, in spite of the apparent or initial inaccessibility of Irigaray's work and the fact that **The Second Sex** was published fifty years ago, they still have much to offer women in general.

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(1) **Ideology and Consciousness** no. 6, 1983.

Generation Gap

Twenty-five years separate the publication of the two works - a generation, and as Rose Braidotti points out in 'The Politics of Ontological Difference'⁽²⁾, 'each generation must reckon with its own problematics.' Michele le Doeuff talks of existentialism - the conceptual apparatus of **The Second Sex** as a senescent philosophy, 'fashionable in 1949 and out of favour today'⁽³⁾, and I would think very much on the wane in 1974, when **Speculum** was published. So the 'and' of the title of this essay bridges a generation gap. De Beauvoir could be Irigaray's mother, if you like. Although, if De Beauvoir's portrayal of motherhood in **The Second Sex** is anything to go by, the burden of a daughter, even one as gifted as Irigaray, would hardly have been desirable.

Mothers And Daughters

De Beauvoir **begins** her chapter on 'The Mother' with a discussion of methods of contraception and a very convincing plea for the necessity of legalized abortion, and then goes on to show how pregnancy and motherhood are a form of biological imprisonment - even death. 'Ordinary life is but a condition of existence; in gestation it 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; as soon as a baby is weaned these mothers feel frustrated. Such women are not so much mothers as fertile organisms, like fowls with high egg production and they seek eagerly to sacrifice their liberty of action to the functioning of their flesh...' (**Second Sex**: p. 513) '...the child in the maternal body.. is still only a gratuitous cellular growth, a brute fact of nature as contingent on circumstances as death and corresponding philosophically with it. (*ibid*: 514) It is the pain of child birth and suckling that is stressed. The mother 'resents feeling her nipples cracked, the glands painful; the infant seems to her to be sucking out her strength, her life, her happiness.' (*ibid*: 526) The child is a 'tyrant', the mother, in 'slavery'. Reactions to this must have been very mixed. Some women would have seen it as an expression of feelings which until then, they hadn't dared voice, but others would have felt angry or depressed. De Beauvoir seems to be almost denying or denigrating a very important area of experience for women and appears to offer little hope for wives and mothers (or their daughters!). But her style is intentionally polemical. After all, she is challenging ideas engrained over centuries. With re-

(2) *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, 1989 ed. Teresa Brennan.

(3) *op cit*.

gard to the more recent idea of the 'child-penis', she is ironical: '...envious as this manly attribute may be, no-one pretends that its mere possession can justify or be the supreme end of existence.' (*ibid*: 540)

De Beauvoir writes that the child may be an 'alter ego' for the mother - a 'lover' even, in whom she finds 'carnal plenitude'. The sexual pleasures of nursing are described, but only as a source of shame. The child is above all, a possession, 'both prey and **double**', particularly if it is a girl. It is the oppressive nature of the mother/daughter relationship that is portrayed, with the mother releasing her vengeful feelings of frustration, resentment and envy on her daughter.

'She saddles her child with her own destiny.' (*ibid*: 309) 'The older the child gets, the more does resentment gnaw at the mother's heart; each year brings her nearer her decline, but from year to year the young body develops and flourishes; it seems to the mother that she is robbed of this future which opens before her daughter.' (*ibid*: 535) Without family planning and state assistance, motherhood is something to be avoided. '...having a child is enough to paralyse a woman's activity entirely.' (*ibid*: 705) And the message for women is, that it can be avoided. Woman can transcend her body. There's no reason for her to feel that '...her ovaries condemn her to live for ever on her knees. (*ibid*: 736). It might seem a bit out-dated now, but De Beauvoir was claiming for women the power to choose whether to have children. And it is because of the rejection of this concept of choice, 'in the name of determinism and the "collective unconscious"' (*ibid*: 78) that she criticises psychoanalysis. 'It is this unconscious that is supposed to supply man with prefabricated imagery and a universal symbolism' with/in which 'he aspires to be at one concretely with the whole world apprehended in all possible ways.' (*ibid*: 77) Irigaray too, mocks Freud for his love of hollow images. 'Better than a mother, then, is the working out of the idea of the mother, of the maternal ideal. Better to transform the real "natural" mother into an ideal of the maternal function which no one can ever take away from you. (*Speculum*: 81) 'And since woman has been subjected as Mother, she will be cherished and respected first of all as mother.' (*Second Sex*: 204) That is to say, not as a woman.

For Freud, according to Irigaray, womanhood is achieved when the wish to have a penis is replaced by the desire for a child - a penis-substitute (especially if it's a boy), and woman's urge to procreate '**excludes any possibility of her seeking out other modes of sexual relationship with the father...** Thus "femininity" fades away before maternity... The child... appears merely to be a **penis-product and penis-substitute.**' (*Speculum*: 73-74) The part played by the female sex-organs is 'totally ignored'.

For De Beauvoir, it's the idealisation of motherhood that elevates woman's role as mother and the unattractive picture she paints of it is partly to bring it down to physical reality and show how oppressive it can be. It's not femininity, but woman's humanity that's absorbed into maternity. Motherhood comes in the prime of life, drains woman of her energy and so prevents self-realisation. But, she stresses, it's not an oppression from which women can't escape. Rather, they can transcend it.

For Irigaray, the problem is not just oppression or even repression, but it is the complete suppression/sublation of woman in Freud's theory that she is challenging. In trying to uncover a place for women, she makes potentially polemical statements about female desire and specificity that could be seen as belief in the existence of an essential female nature. '..the girl shuns or is cast out of a **primary metaphorization** of her desire as a woman, and she becomes inscribed into the phallic metaphors of the small male.' (*ibid*: 84) But, as Margaret Whitford points out in her article 'Re-reading Irigaray'⁽⁴⁾, 'impossibility of a primary metaphorization' is lack of a language to represent desire to oneself. 'Unless one accepts the need for women to be able to represent their relation to the mother and so to origin, in a specific way, i.e. not according to a masculine model, then women will always find themselves devalued.'

Simone de Beauvoir also raises the objection against Freud, that he based his view of women on a masculine model. She quotes him as follows: "The libido is constantly and regularly male in essence, whether it appears in man or woman." 'He declines', she writes, 'to regard the feminine libido as having its own original nature..' (*Second Sex*: 71) And later, she counters Stekel's interpretation of female reactions, with what sounds like an essentialist description of female desire. 'Instead of holding that desire is disguised in anxiety or is contested by fear, we should regard as an original fact this blending of urgency and apprehension which is female desire: it is the indissoluble synthesis of attraction and repulsion that characterizes it.' (*ibid*: 81) She is objecting to theories based on the masculine model. Irigaray is trying to go further. She wants to wrest representation of women away from men, so that women can re-present themselves as women. Irigaray stresses the embodiment of sexual difference, hoping to find the language for re-presentation in the 'bodily sexed reality of the female'. Central to this re-presentation is the 'mother-daughter' relationship. 'The conception and birth of the child repeat, reproduce the question of beginnings, to the time when her economy of the primal was established.'

(4) Brennan, *op. cit.*

(*Speculum*: 76) Here again, accusations of biological essentialism could be made. But she is trying to find a place for woman, not 'in the same "place"' as her mother. 'She will be her mother and yet not her mother, nor her daughter as mother, **with no closure of the circle or spiral identity**... She would no doubt be able to "play" her role of mother without being totally assimilated by it.' (*ibid.*) For Freud, according to Irigaray, '...a woman becoming a mother will be the Mother, totally identified with maternity through a kind of murder of her own mother and through an obliteration of that relationship of (*lieu-tenant*) of origin: phallic earth-mother.' (*ibid.*) The daughter is subsumed; women are not individuated and are therefore denied any inter-relation. And for women to be strong and independent, this inter-relation is crucial. 'But still it would be essential not to assign her simply to this function of maternity.' (*ibid.*) Irigaray is not saying that the destiny of woman is motherhood. Rather, she is trying to find a way of symbolizing the relation between the girl-child and her mother, 'which allows the mother to be both a mother and a woman, so that women... are not reduced to the maternal function.' (Whitford: *op. cit.*) 'In this way provision would be made for the subsistence of her female sexual desire.' (*Speculum*: 76) It is because this desire and the mother/daughter relation are not symbolised that women have all sorts of psychic problems. 'The nonsymbolization of her desire for origin, of her relationship to her mother and her libido acts as a constant appeal to polymorphic regressions (be they melancholic, maniacal, schizophrenic, paranoiac...)' (*ibid.*: 71) And Irigaray uses Freud's expose on 'Mourning and Melancholia' to demonstrate this! for example, she cites "the refusal of nourishment met with in severe forms of melancholia" (MM249-50).

Consider, in this regard, that anorexia is so specifically a female symptom that it can be correlated with the girl's inability to accept her sexual "destiny" and can be seen as a sort of desperate rejection of the sexual blossoming to which she is fated.' (*ibid.*: 69-70). Compare this with De Beauvoir's description of young girls in puberty who feel ill at ease with the changes taking place in their bodies, changes which attract the attention of men and make them feel ashamed of their anatomy and want to hide. 'This distaste is expressed by many young girls through the wish to be thin; they no longer want to eat, and if they are forced to, they have vomiting spells; they constantly watch their weight.' (*Second Sex*: 333) Anorexia and bulimia nervosa are now at least recognised as serious medical conditions caused by socio-cultural stimuli and which many young women have to deal with.

Now let's have a look at the painting by Suzanne Valadon, called 'The Abandoned Doll' (1921)⁽⁵⁾.

(5) The Female Nude in the Work of Suzanne Valadon in 'Looking On,' Betterton *op. cit.* p. 231.

A young girl at the onset of puberty, looking at herself in a hand mirror. Is she becoming aware of her own sexuality, her femininity? The doll lies on the floor, half out of the picture - truly abandoned. Was it the penis-child? Or is it a no longer needed alter-ego inert, passive object, to be dressed up and admired. Is the girl, ribbon in hair, now going to become a 'live doll' - an object of pleasure? (*ibid*: 308) Whatever the case, the childhood toy no longer claims the young girl's attention, and she is twisting gently away from her mother, who looks wistful. Is she asserting her independence, her autonomy? Or is it just narcissistic interest in her 'objective self, her "being-the-other"'? (*ibid*: 308) In this painting, 'Valadon is questioning the dominant tradition of the nude as spectacle for the male viewer by focusing upon women's sense of the relationship between their state of mind and their experience of their bodies in processes of changing and ageing⁽⁶⁾. There's a lot of warmth and intimacy in this re-presentation of the mother-daughter relationship.

But, back to the doll for a moment and let me once more juxtapose some quotations from Irigaray and De Beauvoir. '...the phallus assumes such worth as it does because it symbolizes a dominance that is exercised in other domains.' (*Second Sex*: 80) 'This domination excludes the little girl from any discovery of the economy of her relationships with her mother, and with maternity... And.. this "game" of dolls... is not an expression of femininity in Freud's opinion. To pretend, to act out, a relationship with the mother, with the maternal function, in Freud's opinion, is not feminine. No more feminine for that matter, than to represent oneself "as" a doll. To play with a representation of the self. **No fiction, no mimetic game is allowed the little girl if it involves herself or her relationship to (re)production.** Such games are phallic.' (*Speculum*: 77) 'If woman should succeed in establishing herself as subject, she would invent equivalents of the phallus; in fact, the doll, incarnating the promise of the baby that is to come in the future, can become a possession more precious than the penis. There are matrilineal societies in which the women keep in their possession the masks in which the group finds alienation; in such societies the penis loses much of its glory' (*Second Sex*: 80) So back to the doll?

But then comes menstruation. It is a sign of adulthood, and yet there are no accompanying privileges, only discomfort and a sense of shame, even disgust. But shouldn't it be a source of pride? 'Red blood. Woman, virgin and mother, represents the blood reserves. This natural source of profit - acknowledged as such in "prehistory" when the value of blood was recognized and even exalted above all else - is denied, censored in favor

(6) Rosemary Betterton, "How Do Women Look?" in *Looking On*, ed. Betterton, 1987.

other goods and powers when patriarchy is established. Blood becomes covered over by other forms of wealth: gold, penis, child..' (*Speculum*: 125)

The language of the stock exchange politicises menstruation, and places the lack of respect shown for woman's anatomy in a social context, as does De Beauvoir explicitly: 'Just as the penis derives its privileged evaluation from the social context, so it is the social context that makes menstruation a curse. The one symbolises manhood, the other femininity; and it is because femininity signifies alterity that its manifestation is met with shame.' (*Second Sex*: 34).

I have dealt at length with mothers and daughters and their relationship as portrayed in the two chosen works by De Beauvoir and Irigaray, and have shown that may be inkling, a germ of Irigaray's ideas can be found in De Beauvoir's work. Both stress the importance for women to achieve individual status as women, but for Irigaray, this is so that they can inter-relate as women and begin to sap the strength of the patriarchal structures that oppress them. De Beauvoir certainly envisages modifications of those structures to allow for a fairer society, but she doesn't go as far as Irigaray. For her, women's liberation and self-realisation is more an end in itself, and a means to the establishment of equal relations with men. And she says that with effort, women themselves can achieve this, whereas Irigaray seems to be saying that before they can be really effective, women need to develop their own 'language'.

Women: pleasure and subjectivity

As long as De Beauvoir is exposing the oppressed state of women, she is stirring, and her insistence that this oppression can in no way be justified, 'by reference to any nature or necessity whatever', is liberating. But 'the existentialist ethic.. prohibits posing the question of happiness. The only value is "the freedom which must invent its ends unaided."' (*Le Dœuff*: **op. cit.**) Irigaray, on the other hand, is concerned with pleasure for women, and the way Freud ignores it. 'Any consideration of pleasure in breast-feeding seems.. to be excluded, misunderstood, under the silent ban.' (*Speculum*: 16) Irigaray posits insistence on the right to pleasure as a potential challenge to the patriarchal structure. Consideration of pleasure would disrupt production and might cloud the theory and reduce the "phallic" power'. (*Speculum*: 16 & Gallop: **op. cit.**) De Beauvoir, however, rarely shows pleasure in any positive light.

For her, pleasure means acceptance of one's 'immanence'. When she speaks of women who have opportunities but are not making the most of them, she then ignores any relevant 'socio-cultural mechanisms' and 'down

comes the moral reprobation and such themes as those of complaisance, auto-complaisance, narcissism and the easy way out (etc.) are invoked'. (Le Doeuff: *op. cit.*). We saw this influence of De Beauvoir's existentialist stance in some of the less compassionate aspects of her portrayal of motherhood. 'In order to think these problems one needs another problematic than that of the subject, and another perspective than of morality.' (*ibid.*)

De Beauvoir's awareness of the particular disadvantages women have, if they try to posit themselves as subjects, is expressed in the introduction to the *Second Sex*. 'Women do not say 'We'... They do not authentically assume a subjective attitude... The reason for this is that women lack concrete means for organizing themselves into a unit which can stand face to face with the correlative unit.' (*Second Sex*: 19) 'Woman has never been given her chance in any domain.' In the first part of *Second Sex* in particular, she searches for a cause for this situation but ultimately cannot account for it, and as Le Doeuff points out, 'the very impossibility of accounting for the enfeeblement of women serves only the better to expose the aberrant character of this subjection.' (*op. cit.*)

Irigaray proposes that women don't have the concrete means to assume a subjective attitude because subjectivity is denied them. In fact, 'any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the "masculine"' (*Speculum*: 133) But woman cannot reclaim her entitlement to the subject while still 'trapped in the same credit structure', or within 'any systematicity hooked back on to itself, any closure that claims for whatever reason to be metaphysical - or familial, social, economic even...' (*ibid.*: 142) '..Why after all, should women be interested in a society in which they have no stake..?' (*ibid.*: 119) De Beauvoir differs here, in that she believes that, given the opportunity and self-discipline, women can become authentic subjects within the existentialist problematic. 'It is not sure that her [woman's] 'ideational worlds' will be different from those of men, since it will be through attaining the same situation as theirs that she will find emancipation.' (*Second Sex*: 724) But, and here De Beauvoir recognises woman's dilemma, she would find it difficult to do this and retain her femininity. 'She refuses to confine herself to her role as female, because she will not accept mutilation, but; it would also be a mutilation to repudiate her sex.' (*Second Sex*: 691) She does allow for certain differences between men and women. '...it is necessary.. that by and through their natural differentiation men and women unequivocally affirm their brotherhood.' (*ibid.*: 741) What about sisterhood?

Irigaray and De Beauvoir seem to differ most obviously then in the kind of strategic process they propose for women. Irigaray is much more radical - anarchic even - 'Turn everything upside down, inside out, back to

front.' 'Overthrow syntax.' She calls for the 'disconcerting of language' and 'a new despecularization of the maternal and the female.' (*Speculum*: 144-146) De Beauvoir remains under the spell of the 'Father' of existentialism.

Daughters and Fathers

According to de Beauvoir, women are attracted to, seduced by the prestige of manhood and look up to men, only serving to implant them even more firmly on their pedestals. (*Second sex*: 315) 'The sovereignty of the father is a fact of social origin, which Freud fails to account for.' (*ibid*: 74) '...the Electra complex is not, as he supposes, a sexual desire; it is a full abdication of the subject, consenting to become object in submission and adoration.' (*ibid*: 315) Her happiness/sense of fulfilment depends on the father's bestowal or withdrawal of approval or affection. The father's authority is supreme. His word is law.

Is Irigaray saying in *Speculum of the other Woman*, that the law is the father's defence against his instincts, and that the stability of the existing capitalist patriarchal society is founded on the illegalisation of these instincts? Yet, isn't it the cloak of the law, that's there to protect her from abuse by the father? But what is the law based on - fallacies/phalluses? How she would like to get rid of that law, which could be a cover for all forms of abuse! But, 'All this does not mean that the father necessarily makes love to his daughter - now and again it is advisable to say things very clearly - but it would be good to take issue with the cloak of the law in which he wraps his desire, his penis.' (*Speculum*: 38) Yet, if the cloak were lifted, who knows what might happen. All hell could break loose. It's sometimes difficult to give up protection/safety for fear of what's on the other side.

After all, she's not so badly off because, 'Since the father is himself the object of the love that he condemns, his prohibitions are weaker than in the case of his son-rival.' (*Second Sex*: 72) And is she not frightened that she might end up being seduced by the father - adulterated - and might compromise herself? (Gallop *op. cit.* & *Speculum*: 37-8).

So she plays safe, on the (w)hole. 'And what she comes to say while in analysis will not be very different from what she is expected to say there.' (*Speculum*: 56) Collusion? Because she is suggestible? Hysterical? Otherwise, how could she condone 'those perversities which she stoops to in order to "please"..'?' (*ibid*: 59) After all, her envy only props up the pride he has in what he has. So why does she mimic his projections of her desire and try to live up to that "femininity" he has prescribed for her - so full of contradictions? 'And the contradictions might possibly be explained by the

lack of attention or interest? Freud devotes in his passage to the social dimension of sexual relations'. (*ibid*: 120)

De Beauvoir says she finds theories put forward by 'certain psychoanalysts' fanciful and suggests 'that these theories should themselves be submitted to psychoanalysis.' (*Second sex*: 201) Is this what gave Irigaray the idea? De Beauvoir goes on to say that, '..it is likely that the physicians who invent them [the theories] are engaged in projecting their own ancestral terrors... The source of these terrors lies in the fact that in the Other, quite beyond reach, alterity, otherness abides.' (*ibid*) It is because the Other is so greatly feared that she is surrounded with taboos and her movement restricted. She is specularised, theorised and suppressed so the theory's consistency can be preserved. (Gallop: *op. cit.*)

The Other

'A basic insight produced by feminist theory of this century (we owe it to Simone de Beauvoir and it has been developed by Luce Irigaray) is that women in patriarchy are constructed as the Other - as whatever men are not. If man is active, woman is passive; if he has the phallus, she simply lacks it. Femininity is masculinity inverted' (Deborah Cameron: *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* p. 57)

The notion of woman as the Other runs all the way through *The Second Sex*. Woman is the Other as seen in relation to man. 'He is subject, he is the absolute - she is the Other.' (*Second Sex*: 16) Why this should be De Beauvoir fails to discover. No justifiable explanation emerges. Where there is One, there is always the Other, both separate from and identical to the One. The Other is a necessity to the One because '..he attains himself only through that reality which he is not, which is something other than himself. (*ibid*: 171).. But which is also a reflection of himself. The Other can exist only as long as the One is present in her. Woman is water, '..the mirror in which the male, Narcissus-like contemplates himself... because he must project himself into an object in order to reach himself.' (*ibid*: 217) De Beauvoir is showing how man sees woman as a mirror image, and in her whole analysis of the other, the emphasis is precisely on how woman is seen by man.

In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, the woman as mirror image often recurs, but the emphasis is shifted slightly on to the plight of the mirror. Irigaray seems to be elaborating on the image, making it all the more vivid, with the result that the mirror comes alive, has feelings, a personality even. She is trying to subvert the male image of woman by actually strengthening it, developing it, bringing the image alive, so that it can develop an auto-

nomy and escape from male control. ‘..everything **outside** remains forever a condition making possible the image and the reproduction of the self. A faithful, polished mirror, empty of altering reflections. Immaculate of all auto-copies. Other because wholly in the service of the same subject to whom it would present its surfaces, candid in their self ignorance.’ (*Speculum*: 136) Irigaray has made the mirror active. It is presenting its surfaces itself, not because it wants to but because it knows no other way, because it is outside all representation. It makes the perfect mirror for the speculating male wishing to contemplate himself, precisely because it has no self-image. I has no Other, no ‘altering reflections’. Irigaray would like to give it a self-image. She wants to re-embody the images of woman. In man’s feminization of his ideals, the flesh is taken out of woman and she becomes a ‘glorified substance’. The human body, especially the female body, is the main metaphor used to see and present/represent the world. The woman herself is lost. Because she is the Other, she has no identity of her own, ‘other’ than that which is projected on to her. She is both a reflection of the same and not the same, and therefore, as the Other, she is the opposite of the same, i.e. everything that the self-same is not - ‘the backside of (self) representation’ (*ibid*: 135) De Beauvoir gives a very good description of what this shadowy Other is. ‘..she is all that man desires and all that he does not attain. She is the good mediatrix between propitious Nature and man; she is the temptation of unconquered Nature, counter to all goodness. She incarnates all moral values from good to evil, and their opposites ...she is all the Other. And, as the other, she is other than herself, other than what is expected of her. Being all, she is never quite this which she should be; she is everlasting deception..’ (*Second Sex*: 229) No wonder she has problems!

In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray seems to be looking for the woman in the Other. The Other in which the woman is hidden is both the object of the speculum and the speculum itself. Irigaray wants to find a means of autonomous expression for the Other, who is always the silent object, or can only echo what she hears. ‘But what if the "object" should start to speak? Which also means beginning to "see", etc. What disaggregation of the subject would that entail?’ (*Speculum*: 135) I can see the ripples on the water. There would be a ‘split between him and his other.. the Other..’

With psychoanalysis, ‘..the Other falls out of the starry sky into the chasms of the psyche..’ (*ibid*: 136) Some of the old images are ‘pierced’, but all that really happens, is a remake of the same old model, e.g. the Oedipus myth becomes the Oedipus complex. De Beauvoir, by the way, calls for the redescription of the Oedipus complex. (*Second Sex*: 182) And it is almost as if Irigaray is answering that call, by her mimetic re-reading of

Freud, in which she is trying to find a place to make the redescription possible. As it is, whether the speculating male be Plato or Freud, his theories are based on self-contemplation, in which the female is used as object/case-study or as subject matter for an allegory, but is herself excluded from any representation within the discourse, other than as 'other' to man. Freud accomplishes the 'colonization of a new "field"' (*Speculum*: 137) He reveals and acknowledges the '...inter-dict. The lines between the lines of discourse. But he restricts himself to reframing, remarking, or "analyzing" its contours, re-stratifying its stages, so that order, good "conscious" order, may prevail. (*ibid*: 138).

The unconscious is a disordered realm of 'moving phantoms', which has to be tamed. The Other is disorder as opposed to order.

The Order of Dichotomies

'The Other - she is passivity confronting activity, diversity that destroys unity, matter as opposed to form...' There is a good principle, which has created order, light and man; and a bad principle, which has created chaos, darkness and woman," so said Pythagoras.' (*Second Sex*: 112) The Other - woman was matter - formless as opposed to the superior form with which male was associated. Margaret Whitford points out in her article, 'Luce Irigaray's Critique of Rationality'⁽⁷⁾ that this Pythagorean table of opposites corresponds with the descriptions of male and female imaginary. Whitford takes the notion of the female imaginary to be nothing but 'a description of the female as she appears in, and is symbolised by, the Western Cultural imaginary.' And she interprets Irigaray's work as an attempt to deconstruct this pairing-off into opposites, 'in order to undermine its constraining power, beginning by privileging the subordinate element.'

De Beauvoir wants to show how the pervasiveness of Otherness, with all the various binary associations attached to male and female, has worked to the ultimate deprecation of the female/Other. She also, I think, reveals the arbitrary nature of the system, by finding no justification for it. Irigaray goes further. She is trying to subvert and rework these binary associations, and to empower the female side by re-embodiment it, with the aim of disrupting the whole system. That is why she is asserting sexual difference. '...this fault, this deficiency, this "hole", inevitably affords woman too few figurations, images or representations by which to represent herself.' (*Speculum*: 71) Isn't De Beauvoir also intimating this, when she writes, 'A myth always

(7) *Radical Philosophy* 43, 1986.

implies a subject who projects his hopes and his fears towards a sky of transcendence. Women do not set themselves up as Subject and hence have erected no virile myth in which their projects are reflected; they have no religion or poetry of their own: they still dream through the dreams of men.' (*Second Sex*: 174) And yet, as Irigaray says, women only feature in these dreams as lack - "a hole". They are the 'Blind-Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry' - a dream of order based on dichotomies.

The strategy Irigaray uses to deconstruct these old dreams is mimesis, which tends to give her work an ironic tone. De Beauvoir uses forceful, evocative description to reveal the strong roots of woman's subjection. '...the Woman-Mother has a face of shadows: she is the chaos whence all have come and whither all must one day return... In the night are confused together the multiple aspects of the world which daylight reveals... Man is frightened of the night, the reverse of fecundity, which threatens to swallow him up. He aspires to the sky, to the light, to the sunny summits, to the pure and crystalline frigidity of the blue sky; and under his feet there is a moist, warm and darkling gulf ready to draw him down...' (*Second Sex*: 179) Doesn't the multiplicity, moistness and warmth of the 'darkling gulf', sound more attractive than the cold, stark, harsh, immobile, unfriendly sky?

In her deconstruction of Plato's 'Hystera', Irigaray reworks the binary distinction between the darkness of the cave and the light of Truth. 'Passing from the fluid darkness, from the shimmering imprecision of reflections, from the phantasmagorias of the *doxa* to the neat, clear-cut, immutable, unambiguous categories that characterize, divide up, classify, and order everything, every "being", according to rational intuition, in the clear and distinct intelligibility of the *nous*. But, by this conversion, has *aphron* become *paranous*?' (*Speculum*: 281) The darkness doesn't seem frightening. It seems quite attractive, and in fact, for those who manage to get out of it, the "ascent" gives rise to some reticence, doubt, suspicion. Nostalgia.' (*ibid*: 286)

The cave, as Irigaray sees it, is the original matrix/womb which 'gives birth only to phantoms, fakes or, at best images. One must leave its circle in order to realise the factitious character of such a birth. Engendering the real is the father's task, engendering the fictive is the task of the mother - that "receptacle" for turning out more or less good copies of reality.' (*ibid*: 300) The gendered division of labour! But if the origin is not original and only turns out copies, where is the origin? Is there an origin? The cave 'is made in the image of the world [and] is equally made in the image of the cave. In cave or world, all is but the image of an image.' (*ibid*: 246) So the quest for truth takes off from the fictive. Plato's whole philosophical discourse is constructed on an 'image of an image'. Shaky foundations, to say

the least. De Beauvoir shows the strength of the roots of traditional imagery and beliefs, but finds no premise for their justification. Irigaray discovers that the roots have not been so firmly planted after all, and the stability of the structure is threatened even more, when gaps are revealed. When these are filled in, contradictions and incompatibilities develop, and the whole construction is shown to be faulty.

One such gap is the 'Forgotten vagina. The passage that is missing, left on the shelf, between the outside and the inside, between the plus and the minus.' (*Speculum*: 247) In the statement which is written underneath, and is really part of this work by Judy Chicago, called 'Female rejection Drawing' (1974)⁽⁸⁾, the artist writes, 'Whenever I want to deal with the issue of vulnerability, emotional exposure or primitive feelings, the only image I can think of is a vagina, probably because those aspects of the human experience have been relegated to the sphere of the "feminine".'

The vagina is the connecting passage between the two spheres. 'Neglect of this passage will found, subtend, sustain the hardening of all dichotomies... between the "world outside" and "the world inside"... between truth and fantasy... The One and the many... With the result that all divergencies will finally be proportions, functions, relations that can be referred back to sameness. Inscribed, postulated in/by one, same unit(y), synthesis or syntax.' (*Speculum*: 246-7).

Polarising male and female in binary opposition to each other has meant the exclusion or rejection of women from many spheres, and has resulted in sameness and rigidity. 'Women are different from men but not opposite to them.' (D. Cameron: *op. cit.*) Thinking in opposites is not innate, but children do a lot of formal learning of antonyms. The middle ground is ignored; for example, all the ages between young and old, and the 'I see' of yes/no. Many opposites are also arbitrary, such as black and white. Simone de Beauvoir says in her memoirs that, as a little girl, she 'saw greys and half-tones everywhere.' (in *ibid*: p. 61) But de Beauvoir is not as concerned as is Irigaray with the importance of language in women's oppression. She, herself, commonly uses the 'unmarked he' or words, such as man, as common gender.

However, I think it would be a fair conclusion to draw, that the complications between Luce Irigaray and Simone de Beauvoir are more important than the obvious differences. Complicity - partnership in wrongdoing/an offence, not on the fence. So they are accomplices, partners in crime (not yet accomplished? - the crime, I mean!). **Krinein** - to separate

(8) 'The Body Politic: female sexuality and women artists. Since 1970, in Betterton *op. cit.*

/krima - decision. But what have they pared/cut off? Complicity - complex - folding together several parts into a complicated whole of interconnected parts. Complex little number! A complex sentence without the principal clause. No more hierarchy! No more complexes!

Irigaray's style is very complicated. As Bell Hooks says in **Talking Back**, it's 'linguistically convoluted', and that makes her work inaccessible to many. Some may say it's also irrelevant to women's everyday experiences. Irigaray herself, counters objections that 'we are not fed by fire and flames', with 'Maybe. But then neither are we by fetishes and gazes' (**Speculum**: 146) Still, both **Speculum of the Other Woman** and **The Second Sex** could well be accused of being politically and culturally specific. This is what Bell Hooks has to say about works, such as **Speculum of the Other Woman** and Kristeva's **Desire in Language**: - 'Although this work honors the relationship between feminist discourse and political practice, it is often used within university settings to establish a select intellectual elite and to reinforce and perpetuate systems of domination, most obviously white Western cultural imperialism. When any feminist theory is employed in this way, feminist movement to end sexist domination is undermined.' (Hooks **op. cit.**: p. 40).

In reaction to this, it first of all has to be pointed out that, as far as **Speculum of the Other Woman** and **The Second Sex** are concerned, they were both written partly with men in mind, and not just any men; but those Western male academics that have had, and still have, a great effect on our lives, all our lives. It is such men, who postulate grand theories that influence social and governmental policies and even affect the way people think and act in general. Since the subject matter of **Speculum of the Other Woman**, in particular, and also of **The Second Sex**, is very much centered around Western male academic discourse, so the style of writing is bound to reflect this. But what Bell Hooks is mainly concerned about, is the way such works are used. And that, I think, is very important. I hope it has emerged in the course of this essay, that both of the works discussed could very possibly be made of interest and relevance to women in general. The problem lies in the methods of communication and dissemination.

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