



Article

Beauvoirian androgyny: Reflections on the androgynous world of fraternité in *The Second Sex*

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Abstract

This article considers Beauvoir's gesture towards fraternité at the end of *The Second Sex* (1949) by focusing on her fleeting characterisation of this future as 'an androgynous world'. Generally, either Beauvoir's call for fraternité is dismissed as an erasure of sexual difference and is thus seen to be politically bankrupt, or fraternité is understood to realise sexual difference. This latter reading suggests that androgyny plays no role in Beauvoir's solution to women's oppression, while the other view often sees it as one effect of fraternité. This article takes a different position by arguing that Beauvoir affirms sexual difference *and* commits to an androgynous future. The article argues that androgyny is an affective mood that is constitutive of an openness in the field of possibility for living sexual difference. Consequently, androgyny plays not only a central role in fraternité, but also gestures to a future beyond dimorphic sexual difference.

Keywords

Androgynous, androgyny, embodiment, fraternité, freedom, sexual difference, Simone de Beauvoir

Calls to fraternité bookend the conclusion to *The Second Sex* (1949). The reference at the beginning, from Jules Laforgue's 'Sur la Femme: Aphorismes et Réflexions', exposes the dismissal of women as political comrades of men, while paradoxically, the very last word of *The Second Sex* affirms the potentiality of such camaraderie (Laforgue, 2000). It is well known that Beauvoir's gesture towards this futural fraternité is a contentious one. The affirmation and appraisal of fraternité as the solution to women's subordination contributes to the caricature of Beauvoir as an

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equality feminist and to accusations of her valorisation of masculinist values (Irigaray, 1993b). Her renunciation of the feminine (Leighton, 1975; Fouque, 1986; Irigaray, 1993a; 1993b; Kristeva, 1993) has led to suspicions that, in the end, Beauvoir's hope is that women's liberation means that women will become synonymous with men (Irigaray, 1993b), and it has been suggested that fraternité is always an alliance between men and hence incompatible with feminist politics (LeDoeuff, 1991). However, other readings of Beauvoir's work stress the recognition of sexual difference as a central feature of women's liberation. Debra Bergoffen, for instance, argues that Beauvoir offers us a philosophy and ethics of the erotic that insists on reciprocal recognition and generosity, which both require the validation of sexual difference (1997). Toril Moi also affirms Beauvoir's desire to uphold difference, claiming, 'What Beauvoir wishes to escape is patriarchal femininity, not the fact of being a woman [...] There is in *The Second Sex* a recognition that women will never be free unless they establish a sense of themselves as *female*, as well as human' (2008: 228; emphasis mine).

Are these, though, *the* options for reading Beauvoir's imagined future? Might the equality or difference framework preclude a third way of reading Beauvoir's notion of fraternité? Or more specifically, what happens when we read the difference between the first and last references to fraternité as the difference between what, in the concluding chapter of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir refers to as 'a masculine world' and 'an androgynous world' ([1949] 2010: 761)?¹ This article takes this latter question as its central focus, arguing that androgyny plays an important role in Beauvoir's imagined future, but not in the sense that sexual difference becomes obsolete. Beauvoir is explicit that 'certain differences between man and woman will always exist' ([1949] 2010: 765). Though, if we pay careful attention to the one passing distinction between a future androgynous world and the past masculinist one, Beauvoir does affirm a conception of androgyny. This claim is not meant to suggest that Beauvoir demands an androgynous future where women and men become androgynous human beings. I acknowledge that Beauvoir took it to be of utter importance that women affirm their freedom as women. Therefore, I take a different position and argue that Beauvoir affirms sexual difference *and* commits to an androgynous future.² It is my contention that understanding the role of androgyny in fraternité not only allows us to grasp Beauvoir's radical reimagining of 'woman', but also allows us to consider how fraternité fissures the operation of normative sexual difference altogether, thereby creating space for the support and recognition of ways of assuming sexual difference that Beauvoir did not thematise.

To account for these claims, I first consider why Beauvoir imagines fraternité as a liberatory political space. Here, I read Beauvoir's call for fraternité as performative. Contrary to her critics who suggest that she advocates for a political relic of the masculinist past, I argue that she stages a subversive conceptual and material conversion of fraternité. Although unthematized and marginalised by Beauvoir, I suggest that central to this conversion is a shift from masculinism to androgyny. Subsequently, in the second section, I provide a reading of Beauvoir's mention of

androgyny, but insofar as her claim of an androgynous future is fleeting, I develop her notion of androgyny. By situating androgyny in the context of her phenomenological understanding of sexual difference and in relation to German phenomenologist Martin Heidegger's notion of mood (1962), I read androgyny as an affective mood that is generative of modes of existence that are effaced in the masculine world of the past. As affective, I argue that Beauvoir's notion of androgyny is neither a gender identity nor expression, but is, rather, a structure through which we assume our existence and experience the world. As such, it is constitutive of an openness in the field of possibility for living sexual difference. Insofar as positive readings of Beauvoir's feminist politics in *The Second Sex* underscore her commitment to sexual difference, androgyny is dismissed as having nothing at all to do with Beauvoir's political project (Bergoffen, 2003, 2015). My intention here is not merely to reject such readings. Through a consideration of why Beauvoir characterises her imagined future as androgynous, my task is to open a different, but compatible way to think the future of sexual difference in Beauvoir's fraternité.

Feminist scholars have long been suspicious of androgyny and its seductive, but dangerous appeal as an ethical solution to patriarchy (Kristeva, 1987; Daly, 1990; Weil, 1992; Irigaray, 1993b, 1993c). Luce Irigaray, for instance, suggests that an ethics of androgyny 'represents a utopia of decadents plunged in their own world of fantasy and speculation' (1993c: 123). She critically asks, 'In fact, is it possible for us *spiritually* to identify with the other gender, except in some idealist utopia, some new society where sex morphology is again suppressed by more or less delusional mental states?' (Irigaray, 1993c: 123). Julia Kristeva offers a similar reading of androgyny, arguing that it is the 'sliest masquerade of a liquidation of femininity' (1987: 71). Mary Daly suggests that, 'The deceptive word is a trap' (1990: 387). These suspicions are not unfounded. Androgyny has often functioned as a guise for the masculine subject (Weil, 1992; Irigaray, 1993b). Beauvoir offers us something else, however. In thinking about androgyny in the context of Beauvoir's feminism, we find a productive and radical alternative to the feminist suspicions that androgyny effaces difference and reconstitutes a masculine world.

Beauvoirian fraternité

The conclusion in *The Second Sex* begins with a conception of fraternité that excludes women: 'No, woman is not our brother' (Beauvoir, [1949] 2010: 753). Beauvoir wonders, as she does throughout the second volume, 'whether it is an original curse' that generates such brotherhood or if it is the by-product of 'a transitory moment in human history' ([1949] 2010: 753). By this point in the text, we know Beauvoir believes it to be the latter. Already, this provides us with either a peculiar notion of fraternité or a contradictory one: women *could* be brothers. This is, of course, what Beauvoir will affirm in the very last line of the conclusion. In the space between these contrasting notions of fraternité, Beauvoir emphasises that a woman must 'shed her old skin and cut her own clothes', and discusses the necessary conditions and relations that must exist in order for a

woman to be a man's peer ([1949] 2010: 761). For Beauvoir, a woman must be 'promised the same future', must take part 'in the same studies and games' and must give up the irresponsibility bestowed to her by patriarchy, and, simultaneously, men must give up the 'mystifications meant to maintain woman in her chains' ([1949] 2010: 761, 756). The world of tomorrow, that is fraternité, is thus steeped in loss just as much as it is invested in creation.

There are various ways to examine the philosophical underpinnings of Beauvoir's reclamation of fraternité. We can ask whether she draws solely on the values of the French Revolution (Moi, 2008), elaborates on Marx's account of freedom (McBride, 2012) or repurposes Hegel's Stoic Consciousness (Changfoot, 2009), or we might claim that she is trapped in a linguistic ambiguity insofar as 'la sororité' cannot represent the political relationship Beauvoir has in mind (Kuykendall, 1989). However, Penelope Deutscher's reading of Beauvoir's philosophical commitments in *The Second Sex* demands that we consider her notion of fraternité as a hybrid of these various frameworks premised from a conversion of their perspectives for her own purposes (2008). On Deutscher's reading, when Beauvoir uses philosophical concepts in her work, she does not merely import their traditional meanings, but instead stages conceptual conversions or complex transformations of terms and values. Although Deutscher does not consider 'fraternité' as a converted term in Beauvoir's lexicon, the insistence that we take seriously the performative dimension of Beauvoir's conceptual terms suggests that we consider what 'fraternité' is *doing* at the end of *The Second Sex*. In other words, we might find out what Beauvoir means by the notion of 'fraternité' if we prioritise what she does with the term, that is, if we consider her conversion of the masculinist term.

Moi's reading of fraternité is a helpful way to examine what Beauvoir *does* with fraternité. Moi finds Beauvoir's notion of fraternité to be a positive conception of a political future for women and men and, at the very same time, a problematic denial of femininity. More specifically, Moi claims: 'Beauvoir's final *fraternité* must be imagined as situated in a space where patriarchy no longer rules, for only then can the word be given the truly universal meaning it ought to have had all along. In such a political space the word *sisterhood* will finally be taken to be just as universal as *brotherhood*' (2008: 227). The universality of this futural space relies on women's access to the 'universal values of the Enlightenment tradition', not for the sake of eclipsing sexual difference, but as a way to recognise women's difference in the wake of concrete equality, that is, an equality where women have material conditions that support their full humanity and world-making capacities (Moi, 2008: 228). And yet, although Beauvoir affirms women's difference, Moi pushes back against Beauvoir's 'failure to grasp the progressive potential of "femininity" as a political discourse', for while Beauvoir demands that 'women must assert themselves as women', she is unusually hesitant to value any reaffirmation of femininity (2008: 229). For Moi, then, Beauvoir rehabilitates fraternité, investing it with new meaning and political intention, but does not shirk patriarchy's dismissal of femininity in the political sphere.

This alleged dismissal of femininity is often the basis for the rejection of Beauvoir's political future of fraternité. For example, in 'Liberté, Égalité, Sororité: Le Troisième Mot', Cathy Bernheim and Geneviève Brisac argue, against Beauvoir, that a feminist political future must invest in sororité:

If fraternity permits men to reinforce their own identity and to meet one another under the same banner, that of Human Being, Sorority for us is a weapon which deconstructs *the* woman, that obscene gawk in the name of which we are oppressed, and puts our identity as women into question. Sorority helps us confront the universal legitimacy of the hatred of women in this male world. (1981: 5).

For Bernheim and Brisac, fraternité is mired in the hatred of women such that it is irrecoverable as a feminist political notion. But, in contrast, as Eléanor Kuykendall points out, Beauvoir's debt to 'la fraternité' is indicative of a distinctive French political relationship 'that had no counterpart in French in 1949', thus suggesting that Beauvoir's fraternité reformulates an integral political relationship central to her concrete situation (1989: 40). Or, as Beauvoir puts it, 'It is not possible to say "sororité." There is no word to say "Sisterhood," which is a very beautiful word' (1976).

Sororité is thus not an option for Beauvoir insofar as it is not a politically viable position in the world in which she lives.

At the same time, although fraternité is invested in a patriarchal history, Beauvoir does not, as *Moi* indicates, dismiss all political and ethical values as purely masculinist, but rather celebrates their universal value. In an interview with Alice Schwarzer, Beauvoir is clear that it is possible, though tricky, to disentangle universal values from patriarchal ones. She states:

Women should make use of some of the tools men have created, from a position of equality with men. I think that a degree of suspicion and vigilance is necessary here too. In creating universal values... men have often left their specifically masculine, male, virile stamp on them. They have combined the two in a very subtle and devious way. So it's a question of separating one from the other and of getting rid of this confusion. It is possible, and that is one of the tasks women face. (1984: 45)

From this perspective, women's exclusion from fraternité is historical, but not inherent to the political relationship. Moreover, Beauvoir suggests that the political future must be constructed out of one's situation and so fraternité, not sororité, must be reimagined.

We can thus understand Beauvoir's turn to fraternité as one way of making use of a tool men have created. It is an occupation of a political relation that has been coopted and perverted by patriarchy. Accordingly, the concluding gesture of fraternité makes use of the masculinist, exclusionary conception by turning it on its head. When fraternité becomes a political space inhabited by women, it becomes a different political milieu.

By envisioning women as part of a fraternal politic, Beauvoir turns patriarchy on its head as well. That is, in making feminist use of fraternité, Beauvoir creates a political space in which women have access to the concrete freedom they have been denied.

A performative reading of Beauvoir's call for fraternité makes all the more sense when we consider the conclusion's opening reference to Jules Laforgue. Laforgue, a nineteenth century French poet who clearly influenced Beauvoir, draws our attention to the contradiction and inequality at the heart of relations between men and women (Klaw, 2006). He writes, 'We say: humans, we are all brothers! No, woman is not our brother; through negligence and corruption we have made her a being apart, having no weapon but her sex [. . .] O young women, when will you be our brothers, our closest brothers without ulterior motives of exploitation?' (Laforgue, 2000: 1100; translation mine).³ Here, Laforgue solicits the transformation of brotherhood by drawing our attention to the exclusion of women from humanity. Although Laforgue is not a feminist, he was at least, as Beauvoir recognised, attentive to the myths of femininity and their implications ([1949] 2010). Of his work, she writes, 'throughout his work he expresses rancor against a mystification he blames on man as much as woman' (Beauvoir, [1949] 2010: 204). In *The Second Sex*, as Claire White makes clear, 'the poet's (often caustic) account of the mystification of femininity is nevertheless harnessed to the ends of her own argument' (2016: 111). Beauvoir 'finds in him a particularly compelling voice for her claims [. . .] Laforgue already describes the conditions of woman's radical alterity [. . .] alert to the ways in which man establishes himself as a free subject by subjugating woman' (White, 2016: 114). Beauvoir's admiration of Laforgue is nowhere more explicit than in the way she takes up his vision of the transformation of relations between women and men. Interestingly, it is in Beauvoir's discussion of myth that we first confront Laforgue's passage on brotherhood. In this context, Beauvoir cites Laforgue's question – 'O young women . . . when will you be our brothers . . .?' – the part of the passage she leaves out of the conclusion. In her discussion of myth, however, she frames Laforgue's question as a 'wish', a yearning for the realisation of women's full humanity (Beauvoir, [1949] 2010: 274). To read the end of Laforgue's passage as Beauvoir does – as a wish – suggests that his passage invites us to consider the transformation of a brotherhood that excludes women. This very wish underlies Beauvoir's own conversion of fraternité. 'Indeed, Beauvoir specifically takes up Laforgue's future-oriented vision . . . the poet's injunction to his fellow men to establish women as equals rather than idols' (White, 2016: 117).

While the poet's command is inspiration, it is Beauvoir who develops the ethical and political vision of the transformation of brotherhood. She is the one who stages the transformation of fraternité in her work. Consequently, the futural fraternité is a conceptual *and* material conversion of the fraternité of the past. But more than this, the conceptual conversion is also a way in which the future is realised out of the past, making the actualisation of women's freedom a concrete and temporal conversion as well. This solidifies Beauvoir's imagined political future as bound to the sociality of one's lived, bodily situation. The conclusion fashions this

conversion in its very juxtaposition of two conflicting conceptions and the temporal situatedness of fraternité.

In the pages between the two notions of fraternité, Beauvoir is adamant that the future must affirm equality *and* difference. She calls for an unambiguous equality between men and women, while acknowledging 'that there are differences in equality' (Beauvoir, [1949] 2010: 765). We also learn that this future requires an utter reconstruction of the modes of existence for men and women and a new relationality between them. As such, Beauvoir's fraternité requires that men and women undergo significant transformations *as men and women*. However, at the very same time that she affirms an ethical recognition of sexual difference, she also characterises the liberatory future as 'an androgynous world' (Beauvoir, [1949] 2010: 761). Insofar as it describes an explicit gendered difference between the future and the past, it is striking that this specific characterisation of the future has received little attention in Beauvoir scholarship. Although we should admit that Beauvoir never calls for women and men to become androgynous beings as the way to reconcile the patriarchal past and present, she does give us an undeniable juxtaposition between the future as androgynous and the past as masculine. Might it be that the contrast between her first and last references to fraternité are also captured in this juxtaposition?

It is my contention that Beauvoir's characterisation of the future world as androgynous is philosophically significant to her political and ethical vision. Contrary to readings of Beauvoir that see her as merely replicating masculinist values and systems, the implication of the juxtaposition between masculinist and androgynous worlds suggests that Beauvoir's fraternité is a new kind of ethical and political relationship in a new kind of world, an androgynous world. And yet, contrary to readings that emphasise sexual difference, readings with which I am sympathetic, that Beauvoir would even draw on androgyny as a descriptor of a future world in which there is an ethical recognition of sexual difference should lead us to inquire about the relation Beauvoir implies between androgyny and sexual difference. Why after all, at this point in the text, would Beauvoir describe the future world as androgynous? What is this seeming contradiction – the affirmation of sexual difference and androgyny – *doing*? If we actually hesitate at this moment in the text, what might we understand about the relation between androgyny and Beauvoir's futural fraternité?

Androgyny and fraternité

Beauvoir's brief reference to the androgynous world of the future appears as she reimagines the reproductive heterosexual couple. Beauvoir muses about what it will be like for a little girl to be raised by a mother and father who share unambiguously in freedom and who raise their little girl 'with the same demands and honors, the same severity and freedom, as her brothers, taking part in the same studies and games, promised the same future' ([1949] 2010: 761). For Beauvoir, the heterosexual couple is paramount to the solution of women's oppression precisely because it

serves as the locus of humanity's moral and political problems with respect to sexual difference. Hence, in the conclusion the reimagined heterosexual couple is the promise of a new future. Such a couple, Beauvoir claims, creates an androgynous world through two phenomena, namely a different kind of family structure and a different kind of childrearing, both of which necessitate an intense change in the different psychosexual development of girls and boys. This change also transforms the way in which sexual difference can be lived.

These points draw us back to the initial chapters of the second volume. In the 'Childhood' and 'The Girl' chapters, Beauvoir is clear that a little girl is never promised the same future as a little boy. While a little girl does, just like a little boy, grasp 'herself as an autonomous individual', and while she has an experience of herself 'in the present as a transcendence', Beauvoir understands a little girl always to be burdened by a futural passivity, a passivity that she first learns about and experiences in relation to her sex ([1949] 2010: 341). For Beauvoir, a little boy, in contrast, is encouraged to be independent and superior, and his penis comes to play a central role in this experience. Urinating, she tells us, becomes a primary experience of a little boy's autonomy. For a little boy, 'the urinary function is like a free game with the attraction of all games in which freedom is exercised . . . The stream can be aimed at will, the urine directed far away: the boy draws a feeling of omnipotence from it' (Beauvoir, [1949] 2010: 288). A little boy 'is able to establish many relations with things through the urinary stream' (Beauvoir, [1949] 2010: 289). For Beauvoir, this is not an anatomical destiny, but rather the result of the intervention of others in his existence. More specifically, Beauvoir claims that the little boy experiences his penis in this way as reconciliation for his parents' denial of touch and affection. He is offered and assumes his penis as a sign of his independence, and from 'then on, he will embody his transcendence and his arrogant sovereignty in his sex' (Beauvoir, [1949] 2010: 287). A little girl, however, is never taught to revere her genitals, and experiences her body as secretive, shameful and passive. While a little boy learns to project and live his body outside of himself, marking the world with his self, a little girl assumes her body as taboo and is 'encouraged to alienate herself in her person as a whole' (Beauvoir, [1949] 2010: 293). In doing so, the little girl makes herself into a split subject, a subject who is simultaneously an object. As a result of the social attitudes and expectations about sexual difference, the little boy's penis comes to be the first experience of *his* transcendence, whereas the secret that is the little girl's genitals are central to her development as a passive, living doll. For Beauvoir, this initial psychosexual development is an integral way in which 'the adolescent boy is actively routed towards adulthood', while the adolescent girl learns to embrace the passivity of her flesh ([1949] 2010: 341).

In the conclusion, the promise of the same future for a little girl as for a little boy intervenes in such development not to eliminate psychosexual developmental difference, but to reconfigure it. For Beauvoir, such a reconfiguration relies on a mother and father who are equals. Such equality would, Beauvoir implies, fundamentally alter the Oedipal drama encrusted into patriarchal family structures. The father would no longer be the only symbol of prestige and autonomy and a little girl,

were she to identify with her father or mother, 'would not turn to passivity' (Beauvoir, [1949] 2010: 761). Instead, 'she would be interested in what she does, she would throw herself into her pursuits' (Beauvoir, [1949] 2010: 762). These psychosexual developmental and existential changes in a little girl's situation lead Beauvoir to claim that 'the child would feel an androgynous world around her and not a masculine world' ([1949] 2010: 761). Here, an androgynous world *is* the future world, while the masculine world, the world in which a little girl becomes a woman in the passive sense that permeates Beauvoir's descriptive account in *The Second Sex*, marks the past.

Consequently, androgyny does in fact play a role in the lived experience of her imagined political future. More specifically, a little girl and a little boy will have all opportunities, the ones previously deemed exclusively masculine and feminine, open to them, and what they make of their lived situations or their bodily envelopment in the social world would also be open to them in new ways. This is why, for Beauvoir, the world, not the child, is androgynous. Or is it?

There are two reasons for a negative response to this question.

First, Beauvoir understands there to be a constitutive difference between women and men in her imagined future: a woman's 'eroticism...and her sexual world' ([1949] 2010: 765). This claim amounts to Beauvoir's phenomenological commitment to the body as the situation for experience. Beauvoir works from a phenomenological account of the *lived body* (Leib), a conception of a body only and always as it is lived.⁴ The lived body emerges from physiological processes, but it is not reducible to those processes insofar as those processes are taken up, that is, lived in an affective, social and political world. As Beauvoir insists in *The Second Sex*, this view acknowledges the relationship between *facticity* and *freedom* that is constitutive of human existence – that we have bodies with certain functions, physical traits, feelings and needs, at the very same time that we always live our bodies in specific contexts. Consequently, that there are bodily differences (and not only reproductive differences) means that our experience of the world and existence will also be different. How it will be different, though, is not determined by brute, biological differences, but by how those differences are lived in the world. As Beauvoir says, 'Woman is defined neither by her hormones nor by mysterious instincts but by the way she grasps, through foreign consciousness, her body and her relation to the world; the abyss that separates adolescent girls from adolescent boys was purposely dug out from early infancy' ([1949] 2010: 761). In this sense, Beauvoir's conception of sexual difference does not refer to mere anatomy, but considers the way difference is constituted through the entanglement of biological, affective and sociopolitical dimensions of our existence.⁵

Second, Beauvoir maintains that women and men 'will remain an *other* for the other; reciprocity in their relations will not do away with the miracles that the division of human beings into two separate categories engenders: desire, possession, love, dreams, adventure' ([1949] 2010: 766). Beauvoir buttresses this claim of reciprocity by invoking the early Marx:

The direct, natural, and immediate relationship of person to person is *the relation of man to woman*... From the character of this relationship follows how much man as a

species-being, as man, has come to be himself and to comprehend himself; the relation of man to woman is the most natural relation of human being to human being. ([1949] 2010: 766; emphasis in original)

While it may be tempting to read this passage as an affirmation of an ontological sexual difference, Marx understands human nature as biological *and* social. For Marx, human nature is the potentiality for existence, which discloses itself through the particular kind of species that human beings are. Marx understands capitalism as degrading women's existence through reproduction such that redemption of reproductive bodily difference is necessary if there is to be a total, political upheaval of capitalism. The relation between men and women invoked in this passage is thus a gesture towards the overthrow of an oppressive political, economic situation and, in turn, the potentiality of human existence to be fundamentally remade. In this citation, Beauvoir echoes Marx's affirmation of difference (between men and women) as central to a new political world built on reciprocity and recognition in order to redeem the troubling error of the past, namely the exploitation of reproductive difference. Therefore, at the end of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir's Marxism signals both a complete salvation of such difference and a total upheaval of society, an upheaval that will necessarily transform the significance of such difference, namely its potentiality to determine one's existence.

On Beauvoir's account, this upheaval is the overcoming of the past through the institution of an androgynous world. From what has just been said, it is clear that androgyny does not mean the erasure of differentiated embodiment, but it does mean the transformation of its existential significance. In an androgynous world, the lived body will take on different gestures and expressions and will disclose new possibilities. On a careful reading of her discussion of the futural child, this transformation is quite evident. In the context of this discussion, androgyny refers to an opening up of possibilities that are not predicated on mere bodily difference. Insofar as in the masculinist past, the constitution of woman, becoming a woman, is entangled with and feeds off of a particular physiology, namely a body that menstruates and can bear children, the possibilities of a woman are limited on *the basis of* such physiological difference. However, children of the future world are not bound to the masculinist 'fate' of reproductive difference. In stark contrast, according to Beauvoir, the patriarchal psychosexual drama that forces children into their destinies as (normative) women and men, as a feminine and thus passive existence or as a masculine and thus sovereign existence, is eliminated. The little girl can, Beauvoir tells us, experience her self in a myriad of new ways such that the possibilities for how she lives her situation are quite radically expanded. This expansion of possibilities for living one's situation thus renders the category of 'woman' quite ambiguous insofar as the possibilities for how one can assume oneself as a woman are significantly less constrained.

The openness in the field of possibility, which is the opening up of freedom, is because fraternité is androgynous. As it is descriptive of a world, it is helpful to think about 'androgynous' in terms of what, in *Being and Time*,

Martin Heidegger calls a mood (*Stimmung*) (1962). For Heidegger, mood is a pre-reflective affectivity that allows our being in the world and things in the world to matter and be experienced in a particular way. Whereas emotion is ontic, that is, it is an affective state directed towards a particular object, person or event, mood, Heidegger argues, is ontological – a pervasive and primordial affect that surrounds our existence. Beauvoir, in fact, explicitly refers to mood in this way when she writes, ‘the child would *feel* an androgynous world *around her*’ ([1949] 2010: 762; emphasis mine). For Heidegger, the significance of mood is that it sets the tone for and is necessary to our existence. Or, as Heidegger says, ‘A mood makes manifest “how one is, and how one is faring”’ (1962: 173). Mood is therefore the way things, people and places come to matter, how they come to gather significance and meaning for us. Without the existential affectivity that is mood, Heidegger claims, we would not find ourselves in the world, which means mood is always a fundamental element of who we can and do become. A mood opens up the possibilities of one’s world and is therefore central to freedom.

Thus, from a phenomenological perspective, that, in the future, the little girl exists in relation to transcendence requires a certain affectivity, whereas in a masculinist world, surrounded in a mood of misogyny, the ‘how one is’ of the little girl’s existence is, as we learn throughout *The Second Sex*, frustrated. Thrown into a world for men, she is open to the world as a set of deeply limited possibilities. In an androgynous world, however, surrounded by a mood of androgyny, the little girl is emboldened and her set of possibilities – how she is – is fecund, overflowing with unimagined possibilities refused by the mood of misogyny. As a mood, androgyny allows the futural child to assume a world where and a situation in which new possibilities exist. And it is clear that Beauvoir understands androgyny to change fundamentally the lived experience of sexual difference. She writes: ‘The little girl would not seek sterile compensation in narcissism and dreams, she would not take herself as given, she would be interested in what she does, she would throw herself into her pursuits’ (Beauvoir, [1949] 2010: 762). In seeking out her own pursuits, the little girl would also experience ‘her youthful eroticism more peacefully’, and with men she could finally seek ‘a relationship of equal to equal’ (Beauvoir, [1949] 2010: 762).

And yet, a paradox remains in this conception of the androgynous world of fraternité. If the future is one where becoming a woman has neither a social destiny nor requires or demands of those who become women anything in particular, then why is it that there will only be women and men? In some ways, perhaps this is an unfair question to wage at Beauvoir since, after all, her project is meant to give us a rich account of the harms and injustices of being implicated in and complicit with femininity and to consider how to resist and secure freedom for those who are compelled into a feminine existence. And yet, given that the androgynous mood opens up possibility, it would be remiss not to wonder: why are there only women and men in this future? Why is it not the case that, when surrounded by an androgynous mood, a plurality of ways of living sexual difference might be supported and disclosed? Does the little girl necessarily become a woman? Why would the

perceptual faith in duality or two types of sexual difference, a faith central to the masculinist past, be guaranteed in this emancipatory future?

Beauvoir's own understanding of the lived body seems to give us reason to think that an androgynous world would offer other modes or styles of assuming one's situation. Indeed, throughout *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir's discussion of dimorphic sexual difference refers to the way contingent bodily differences are amplified and converted into necessary structures of experience in a given social world. We learn that, as Bonnie Mann suggests, there is a parasitic relationship between bodily difference and women's subordination in a masculinist world. 'Beauvoir shows us how structures of injustice are parasitically entangled with general features of human existence, even those that seem most "natural," (i.e. most rooted in human biology) without being caused by them in any simple way' (Mann, 2014: 37). Accordingly, in Beauvoir's descriptive project, we see the way lived experience develops and intensifies the duality of masculinity and femininity in accordance with reproductive and erotic differences. But, in the conclusion, it is precisely the concrete reality of an androgynous world that could also undo the hyperbolic dimorphic modes of existence and our faith in them. In fraternité, the possibilities for assuming our bodily existence can be reworked in ways that profoundly unsettle our existing perceptual faith in and experience of dimorphic sexual difference. Beauvoir even gestures to this reworking of sexual difference when she writes: 'new carnal and affective *relations of which we cannot conceive* will be born between the sexes' ([1949] 2010: 765; emphasis mine).

What is implied, then, is that the androgynous world would significantly transform a child's experience of their embodiment, sexuality and subjectivity. This does not mean that sexual difference would be eliminated. Certainly, it may be the case that a little girl still becomes a woman (in an entirely new sense); but even on Beauvoir's own terms, the difference of a little girl's eroticism and her sexual world are not enough for her to realise herself as a woman. It thus makes sense to think that the androgynous world felt by the child in Beauvoir's futural family could realise a mode of existence that either reconfigures 'woman' in a way that exceeds its former patriarchal mode *or* that entirely exceeds 'woman' altogether. Interestingly, the text performs a conversion of the little girl in the androgynous world when Beauvoir fleetingly refers to 'the child' ([1949] 2010: 761). Although 'l'enfant' can refer to either a boy or girl child and Beauvoir does qualify this ambiguity with a feminine pronoun, it is nevertheless a curious moment in the text. The entire passage about this futural family refers to 'the little girl' except at the moment in which Beauvoir invokes the androgynous world. Insofar as the little girl becomes somewhat ambiguous at this moment in the text, we might want to press the existential weight of the affective dimension of androgyny.

Beauvoir does not explicitly take us in this direction, however. In her hands, we know that fraternité is a political space for women and men. Indeed, the recuperation of the heterosexual couple and transformation of men and women is a necessary political project. It is necessary for a woman to be free as a woman insofar as 'woman' *is* her situation, the only one from which she can respond to the injustices

she has lived. In order to realise her full humanity, a woman cannot renounce being a woman; rather she must exist for *her* self, abdicating her place in the masculinist world and assuming her situation, a situation distinct from a man's, on her own terms. This point is what sharply distinguishes Beauvoir's vision from those who reject 'woman' altogether and posit a third term as an emancipatory mode of existence. For example, Monique Wittig insists that it is only as a lesbian that one can reject the shackles of a heterosexist existence. Although Wittig draws on Beauvoir to advance this vision, she neglects to consider Beauvoir's contingent understanding of woman, that is, that becoming a woman is not a determined destiny (1992). A woman can be free if she lives in a concrete world where such freedom is possible.

Consequently, I take it to be undeniable that Beauvoir affirms sexual difference between women and men in fraternité. On the reading I have offered here, however, that an androgynous mood might open up an abundance of ways of living sexual difference does not mean that women will not and should not exist in the future. In Beauvoir's fraternité, it is the case that 'woman' becomes ambiguous, which means that becoming a woman is an open possibility. I am claiming, however, that when we shift our attention to Beauvoir's characterisation of this political space as androgynous, we find that future ways of assuming existence are ambiguous as well. The implication here is that the concrete situation of Beauvoir's fraternité is neither bound to 'man' and 'woman' in the constraining ways of the masculinist past, the central and explicit point we get explicitly from Beauvoir, nor as the only possible modes of sexual difference, the more tangential and implicit point from Beauvoir. As such, the androgynous world of fraternité is a space in which futural possibilities are more ambiguous than Beauvoir herself admits. We can thus affirm a plurality to sexual difference without denying or neglecting the very important and real emancipation of women as women. Such plurality does not mean there will be an endless multiplication of sexual difference, however. From Beauvoir's view, we are always, in some ways, constrained by facticity. And yet, insofar as fraternité names a space in which the enormous historical baggage of masculinity and femininity is modified and transformed, new ways of assuming one's existence might be realised.

Certainly, there are people who already concretely assume their existence in ways that modify and resist masculinist conceptions and affectations of sexual difference. On the account I have offered here, however, the androgynous world opens up and supports these other modes of existence just as it secures freedom for women. This point, I think, allows us to see the radical potential of the affective dimension of fraternité in relation to the sexual difference.

Beauvoirian androgyny

Several feminist scholars have said much more than Beauvoir regarding a positive conception of androgyny (Heilbrun, 1973; Singer, 1976; Trebilcot, 1982; MacLeod, 1998). As varied as they are, such positive accounts have several pitfalls

(Weil, 1992; Hekman, 2013). These accounts not only presuppose that there are distinct masculine and feminine characteristics, sometimes understood to be fundamental to human life, but they also preserve the masculinist understandings of masculinity and femininity. Moreover, because these accounts of androgyny are firmly rooted in idealist commitments to eliminating difference, moving towards an androgynous existence for all individuals, they perpetuate the masculinist commitment to sameness. That positive accounts of androgyny rely on a masculinist epistemology means, in the end, that they are just sexist accounts in disguise. Feminist suspicions of androgyny as an egregious dream of patriarchy are therefore quite understandable.

But, in *The Second Sex* androgyny is neither an ideal that erases sexual difference nor an ethical and political solution to women's subordination. By drawing attention to Beauvoir's fleeting mention of androgyny in relation to her vision of an ethical future that affirms sexual difference, we arrive at a notion of androgyny that moves us beyond the masculinist world. If we follow Beauvoir carefully, androgyny compels the pursuit and realisation of a relation to freedom that does not rely on the exploitation of facticity and the subordination of difference. Instead, androgyny is that which affectively orients us towards new ways of assuming our situations, allowing us to turn away concretely from the masculinist mood of the past. Rather than dismissing the place of androgyny in Beauvoir's future world, considering what an androgynous milieu would do to our embodied expressivity allows us to push the limits of Beauvoir's political vision. When read in this way, it is possible to see Beauvoir's philosophical and political legacy as ever relevant to the various experiences of sexual difference lived today and suggestive of experiences that have yet to be realised.

Notes

1. For most of this article, I use the 2010 English translation of *The Second Sex*. When I have a disagreement with the English translation, I use my own translation of the original French edition.
2. Those who are less familiar with Beauvoir might feel an immediate aversion to the term 'sexual difference' for its seemingly physiological connotation. However, as I will detail in the second section, Beauvoir's phenomenological conception of sexual difference should not be understood in this way.
3. The original text reads, 'Nous disons: humains, et qu'on est tous frères! Non, la femme n'est pas notre frère; par la paresse et la corruption nous en avons fait un être à part, inconnu, n'ayant d'autre arme que son sexe, ce qui est non seulement la guerre perpétuelle, mais encore une arme pas de bonne guerre – adorant ou haïssant mais pas compagnon franc, un être qui forme légion avec esprit de corps, franc-maçonnerie – des défiances d'éternel petit esclave. Ô jeunes filles, quand serez-vous nos frères, nos frères intimes sans arrière-pensée d'exploitation' (Laforgue, 2000: 1100).
4. The notion of the lived body (Leib) originally comes from the 'founding father' of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl. Husserl accounts for the lived body. Husserl distinguishes the lived body (Leib) from the physical, physiological body (Körper). Although the lived body can be taken as a physical body, the lived body is animated. It is *my* body, a

subjective experience of the body as it is lived. Beauvoir, like her contemporary Maurice Merleau-Ponty, adopts and modifies this notion.

5. This view is why many Beauvoir scholars refuse to read her conception of sexual difference as gender, a term often used to refer to the construction of bodily difference. For Beauvoir, the body and bodily difference is mediated and entangled with sociality, but it is not merely constructed through it. Iris Marion Young (2005) and Bonnie Mann (2014), two sharp readers of Beauvoir, hold onto the notion of gender. However, they use this term phenomenologically, and thus in close relation to Beauvoir's account of sexual difference, as a structure of lived experience that is taken up in our (bodily) situation. In order to underscore her phenomenological use of gender, Mann often uses the notion of 'lived gender'.

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