POLITICS WITH BEAUVOIR

FREEDOM IN THE ENCOUNTER

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I first started reading Simone de Beauvoir when I lived in London and was attracted to a table in the London School of Economics bookshop. Beauvoir's picture was in the center and several of her books were prominently (and I thought beautifully and enticingly) displayed around the photo. I bought *The Mandarins*, devoured it, and from there started *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* and breathlessly read through her four-volume autobiography. I didn't think about it at the time, but as I look back now, I suppose her books were all over the shops that spring of 1986 because she had just died on April 14. The fifteen months I spent in London were formative for me politically, intellectually, and personally. Encountering Beauvoir that day in the bookstore made a significant impact on the person I have become.

I have been reading and learning from Beauvoir for over thirty years. Every time I read and teach her writings, as I age and change and have diverse experiences, or in conversations with students, I see something new. I wanted to write my PhD dissertation (and my first book) on Beauvoir's political thought, but at the time I was counseled that it would be more prudent to write on a figure securely in the political theory canon. My idea for a second book began after revisiting Beauvoir's autobiographical writings, and it expanded to include other feminist thinkers and writers. Later, with my dear friend Patricia Moynagh, I coedited a book of essays on Beauvoir's political thinking. But I have always wanted to take the time and space to say just what it is that I find so compelling about Beauvoir's unique political vision, formed in her moment and in conversation with her contemporaries but still urgent for us today. As I see it, Beauvoir's writings, read in encounter, and in and out of context, can open us not only to intimate others but also to collective transformative projects and to the world. With her we might embrace freedom and joy whenever and wherever possible while supporting political struggles that seek to make space for the same for others.

Reading Beauvoir has taught me that freedom is experienced only in encounter and that political commitments emerge from communities formed within agonistic and affective interactions. True to these insights, this book is not mine alone but has developed out of multiple conversations of all sorts—exhilarating, friendly, polite, angry, careful, clarifying, humbling, passionate, difficult, and many that were imaginary—in encounter with my own universe of enemies, allies, and friends. Here I name only allies and friends and keep the enemies (some dead, some living, some characters in books or films) to myself, although both Beauvoir's enemies and my own play a not insignificant role in this book.

I am finishing up this project at what seems to be an especially dark moment for our planet, for non-whites, queers, immigrants, women (in particular for "unbecoming" women), the poor, and everyone marked by difference. Beauvoir's political thinking inspires my own political commitment to keep fighting, keep moving, keep living, and with others to keep making space for freedom. I could not keep that possibility open in my political life, nor could I have written this book, without my political theory friends, many but not all of whom I name in these acknowledgments. My students at Union College have also taught me; our collective thinking in several classes has left their mark on these pages.

It is gratifying to single out some of the friends who have thought with me, sharpened my arguments, and pushed me to be bolder about my claims. Bonnie Honig brainstormed titles with me, listened to me talk about each chapter (and read most of them), and volunteered her always brilliant provocations. The final result is no doubt much richer because of her attention to my work, and also because of mine to hers, in particular my teaching of her *Antigone, Interrupted* in my Cassandra, Medea, Antigone seminar. Torrey Shanks and Laurie Naranch read the entire manuscript before I sent it to Duke University Press for review, and our reading groups about new work in the field and our own projects has sustained me for several years. My former student Perry Moskowitz deserves my deep gratitude for their super-smart senior thesis on Beauvoir, which extended to an interest in my project and fueled many a conversation over coffee that year and beyond.

Many of my chapters are extensively revised versions of published articles, conference and political theory workshop presentations, or invited lectures. I am indebted to anonymous reviewers, audience members, co-panelists, participants in workshops, and journal editors who generously gave their time and talents to improve my writing. Before I knew this project was a book I wrote an article that I hoped might bring attention to the political thought of

Beauvoir by putting her in conversation with Hannah Arendt. I was teaching an advanced undergraduate seminar at Union and was struck by the many ways Arendt's and Beauvoir's theories intersected, not only because of their historical moment but also because of some shared concerns and methods. I presented drafts of this paper in several iterations, each time receiving comments that improved the manuscript. The first time was on a panel celebrating the fifty-year anniversary of the publication of *The Human Condition* at the 2010 American Political Science Association Meeting. Patchen Markell was one of my co-panelists, and to my delight, he encouraged me to continue the comparison. I am grateful for Patchen's work on Arendt, for his generous comments on that early paper, and for reading this manuscript in its entirety and giving me brilliant advice.

In March 2011 Roger Berkowitz asked me to deliver this paper at the Arendt Center at Bard College. My son, Lucas Lobe, was a student at Bard at the time, so I was especially happy and proud to be invited. I also workshopped the paper with the University of Albany political theory group where I received great comments from Torrey Shanks, Laurie Naranch, Mort Schoolman, and Peter Breiner. My friend Leroy Meyer invited me to present it as the keynote lecture at the Realia Philosophy Conference in August 2012 at the University of South Dakota. Leroy died suddenly and unexpectedly in December 2016 and he is greatly missed. Linda M. G. Zerilli graciously read this chapter and helped me refine its central contributions on the question of judgment, as did Don Herzog. Amy Elman also read it with her sharp critical eye. The article was published in *Political Theory* in 2012 as "Simone de Beauvoir and Hannah Arendt: Judgments in Dark Times." Editor Mary Dietz offered impressively detailed comments and advice and found wonderfully engaged reviewers. The essay won the 2013 Iris Marion Young and Susan B. Okin Award, no doubt due to the excellent input I received along the way from these (and other) interactions. Substantially revised yet again, this paper appears here as chapter 2.

Chapter 1, "(Re)Encountering *The Second Sex,*" began as a panel presentation with Lisa Disch and Kathi Weeks at the conference titled, "A Revolutionary Moment: Women's Liberation in the Late 1960s and Early 1970s," at Boston University in March 2014. A condensed version of this work was printed online in 2015 in the *Oxford Handbook of Classics in Contemporary Political Theory,* edited by Jacob Levy, whom I thank for his comments. I expanded the paper to present it at the Cornell Political Theory Colloquium in the spring of 2015. I thank my hosts Alex Livingston and Vijay Phulwani, my discussant Kevin Duong, as well as Jill Frank and Jordan Jochim for all the

fun I had with them and for their contributions to what has become the first chapter of this book. Jason Frank could not be at Cornell for my talk, but his work and our friendship have shaped my thinking over many years.

Chapter 3, on the Marquis de Sade and Lars von Trier, was initiated during a dinner with Bonnie Honig where we discovered our mutual fascination with von Trier's films. Together we edited a special issue of *Theory & Event* called "Breaking the Rules: Gender, Power, and Politics in the Films of Lars von Trier" that was published online in March 2015. Prior to publication, I delivered this essay twice in the fall of 2014: at the American Political Science Association Meeting and at a conference Bonnie and I organized at Brown University. A revised version of the article was published in Bonnie's and my coedited volume, *Politics, Theory, and Film: Critical Encounters with Lars von Trier* (2016), and I have revised it yet again as chapter 3. I thank Bonnie for all our energizing conversations and for the tremendous fun we had working together. I thank Bonnie again and the contributors to the von Trier volume for their generous insights, especially Davide Panagia, Michael Shapiro, Miriam Leonard, James Martel, Joshua Dienstag, Victoria Wohl, Rosalind Galt, and Lynne Huffer. Lynne's writing on *Nymphomaniac* in particular, and her 2013 book, *Are the Lips a Grave?,* were influential as I completed the final draft of this book.

Chapter 4, on Fanon and Boupacha, was delivered on an American Political Science Association panel in Chicago in 2013, where I benefited from the savvy insights of Lawrie Balfour as well as Vicki Hsueh, our discussant. One section of this chapter was drafted as a contribution to the *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Simone de Beauvoir* titled "Simone de Beauvoir on Politics and Violence." I thank Nancy Bauer and Laura Hengehold, coeditors of this forthcoming volume, for inviting me to participate and for their excellent ideas for revisions. My friend Kathy Ferguson, coeditor for a *Theory & Event* symposium in June 2012 on the new translation of *The Second Sex,* and our contributors, Linda M. G. Zerilli, Diane Rubenstein, and Sally Markowitz, helped to shape my evolving thinking on Beauvoir. I also thank Sonia Kruks for her groundbreaking work on Beauvoir. I have been in conversation with Sonia (in person and on the page) over many years.

Chapter 5 was published in an earlier version in *Contemporary Political Theory* under the title "Solidarity *sans* Identity: Richard Wright and Simone de Beauvoir Theorize Political Subjectivity," 13, no. 3 (2014). Editor Sam Chambers found sympathetic readers and offered his own smart comments. I also presented it in the University of North Carolina political theory workshop in spring 2013, which sparked a productive conversation with Susan

Bickford, Jeff Spinner-Halev, Michael Lienesch, and their graduate students. Thanks to this extensive airing of the argument prior to publication and some good luck, this essay won the 2014 *Contemporary Political Theory* Award. Chapter 6 began as a lecture at the invitation of my friend Jodi Dean to the Fisher Center for the Study of Women and Men at Hobart William Smith and was published in an earlier version in *SIGNS: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society* as "Perverse Protests: Simone de Beauvoir on Pleasure and Danger, Resistance and Female Violence in Film," in June 2016. I thank Jodi, members of the Hobart community who attended my lecture, especially Paul Passavant, and the anonymous reviewers from *SIGNS* for helpful comments on this article, revised here for inclusion in the last section of the book. Chapter 7 was first written at the invitation of Toril Moi for the Hannah Arendt symposium for Duke University's Center for Philosophy, Arts, and Literature, presented under the title "The Bechdel Task: Arendt, Von Trotta, and Representing Women's Lives," in April 2015. Toril's inspiring work on Beauvoir has long been an example for me. I thank Toril for inviting me to this lovely event, and Ella Myers, my copresenter, for her comments and conviviality. I also thank Kathi Weeks, who hosted me at her home in Chapel Hill. As the Alison Bechdel rule stipulates, we were two (named) women talking to each other, not about men! This chapter was later presented at the American Political Science Association conference in fall 2015, where I was on a panel with Davide Panagia, Mort Schoolman, Mike Shapiro, and Torrey Shanks. They and the audience members, in particular James Martel, Kennan Ferguson, and Terrell Carver, played a role in shaping this published version of chapter 7.

In addition to all the people I've mentioned, I also need to single out Michaele Ferguson, my coeditor for a book about the gender politics of the Bush Administration that we called *W Stands for Women* and published with Duke in 2007. Since beginning that book in 2005, Michaele has been a constant and provocative interlocutor on feminist theory, politics, and life in the academy. Many other of my political theory colleagues and friends also read parts of this manuscript and offered their wisdom, including Çiğdem Çıdam, Guillermina Seri, Lida Maxwell, Nancy Luxon, George Shulman, and Elizabeth Wingrove. At Union College I am very lucky to be surrounded by a group of colleagues with whom I can share ideas, a laugh, frustrations, a cup of coffee, a glass of wine, or some combination thereof. Courtney Berger, of Duke University Press, has been a partner on this project from the start. I so appreciate Courtney's commitment to me and to the book. The entire team at Duke has been incredibly professional and supportive. I am forever in debt to two brilliant readers. The careful attention these insightful and generous scholars

lavished on my manuscript and their spot-on suggestions for revisions greatly improved the final product.

My father, Tom Marso, died in February 2017 as I was finishing the page proofs for this book. My dad devoted his life to public education in a small town in South Dakota. He was the superintendent of schools for twenty-eight years (a tenure largely unheard of) where his humor and inclusiveness made him the good friend of most everyone. I loved seeing my dad take pleasure in my accomplishments, and I often turned to him for help when I stumbled. I am immeasurably grateful to him, and to my mom, for the example they set and for their faith in me.

Guthrie and Geoff Gray-Lobe, Danielle Powell, Rita Fellers, Jeff and Lynn Marso, Jim Lobe, and my extended family in New York City—May Parsey, Jonah Lobe, Eli Clifton, Mei Yee Mak, and Julia Kaye—all deserve a shout-out. Some of them are even eager to talk with me about Simone de Beauvoir, Lars von Trier, Alison Bechdel, or Chantal Akerman! My children, Lucas and Luci Lobe, now adults, are also (sometimes) willing to converse (or patiently listen to me talk) about the figures and themes in my writing. No matter what the topic, however, Lucas and Luci continually challenge and change me, and enrich my life beyond measure. Lucas's technical skills have been crucial, as he has helped me capture screen shots and bring the images up to specifications for publication. Luci's desire for happy endings inspired me to be willing to embrace my own feminist optimism in the conclusion. Seeing Lucas's and Luci's pride in my commitments, and watching them (often nervously but always on their side) as they move in fits and starts along their sometimes surprising and sometimes rocky paths, brings me enormous joy. Tom Lobe, my unfailing, critical and kind, ever agonistic but always loving life partner, plays an outsized role in everything I do, say, think, and write.

INTRODUCTION
OUR BEAUVOIR

Simone de Beauvoir is lauded as *the* exemplary feminist (indeed, as the "mother" of feminism) or lamented as typical of everything that is wrong with feminism.[1] She is celebrated or condemned for advancing a liberal individualist form of feminism.[2] She is denounced for thinking that socialism will automatically liberate women.[3] She is taken to task for not saying she was a feminist soon enough.[4] Her work was ignored by philosophy departments for decades on the grounds that she merely applied Sartre's framework to women, but feminist philosophers have rehabilitated her as the real brain behind Sartre's pen.[5] She is reprimanded for not paying attention to racial and class divisions among women and for caring only about middle-class white women.[6] She is rebuked for disavowing the body or, contrarily, for magnifying the importance of unseemly bodily functions.[7] She is admired for disdaining motherhood, housework, and other "feminine" activities or reviled for the same.[8] She is chastised for advancing gender as an essentialist category or for not paying enough attention to *l'écriture féminine*.[9] Although her famous insight, "One is not born but rather becomes a woman," has been taken up by trans and queer feminists as a rallying cry for the plasticity and hybridity of gender, she is considered by many to be thoroughly passé.[10]

These readings each claim Beauvoir as their own: to be loved, lamented, or disavowed. But they tend to miss what I will argue is at the heart of her femi-

nism, which is also what makes her politics of interest to an audience beyond feminist theory.[11] To my horror, as I was finishing this book, a feminist theory colleague said to me, "There's nothing new to say about Beauvoir!" I show in this book there is not only something new to say, but there is much that feminists, literary theorists, and philosophers, all parsing "our" Beauvoir, have not seen.[12] What has been obscured, in spite of so much excellent scholarship, is the way Beauvoir's feminist politics are exemplary of her political thinking about freedom in encounter.

ENCOUNTERS: BEAUVOIR'S POLITICS

I interpret Beauvoir as a theorist of encounter. As recorded in her autobiography and novels, sometimes in frustration but other times in acceptance or even exhilaration, Beauvoir recognized that there is *always* an "other" in relationship with oneself. Sarah Bakewell (2016, 326) characterizes Beauvoir's multivolume autobiography as depicting "herself and Sartre and countless friends and colleagues as they think, act, quarrel, meet, separate, have tantrums and passions, and generally respond to their world." This is the Beauvoir I was first drawn to in a London bookshop, and the one whose way of doing and thinking politics is urgent for us now.

For Beauvoir, to encounter others is not only a fact of existence; it is also the *only* way to produce and experience freedom. Being with others is a foundational quality of freedom. Ambiguity, contingency, situation, and nonsovereignty characterize encounters, and each produces, diminishes, or destroys freedom. Beauvoir ([1949] 2011, 6) doesn't use encounter as a theoretical framing, but her language of "duality between Self and Other" hints at the dynamic that I develop and demonstrate is central to her political practice. In the introduction to *The Second Sex* she says, "No group ever defines itself as the One without immediately setting up the Other opposite itself" (6). When she talks about the duality of Self and Other, however, she is not advocating a Hegelian mutual recognition or reciprocity, or a struggle to the death between two subjectivities. Nor is she simply noting that Self and Other (or Master and Slave in Hegel's parlance) are each *simultaneously* self and other, although she is doing that too.

Emphasizing ambiguity, Beauvoir insists that to understand how freedom is grasped or missed, we must bring the bodies of the parties into view. Emphasizing situation, she adds that we must consider the structural, social, historical, and political conditions in which the embodied Self "looks" and whether and how the embodied Other "looks back." How the two negotiate

the encounter influences individual and collective agency, as well as whether freedom itself will be produced, diminished, or denied. What happens here between the two will sway whether and which actions might be taken, whether and how freedom will be grasped, or if the opportunity for freedom will be squandered. In the encounter between men and women that Beauvoir describes, she says that cast in the role of Other, women don't make a reciprocal claim.[13] "Why do women not contest male sovereignty?" she asks ([1949] 2011, 7). What she seeks for women is not victory (in the battle of subjectivities) nor mutual recognition or reciprocity.[14] Noticing that women are trapped in their position as other, she says they don't struggle to overcome it. Devoid of this agonism, freedom is missed for both parties. Without struggle, *sans encounter*, freedom cannot emerge.

I foreground the language of encounter to supplement that of situation and ambiguity, other pivotal terms in Beauvoir's lexicon, because it better describes what is at stake in her advocacy for collective freedom. The language of situation speaks to the fact that freedom is not best understood as ontological or ethical. Focusing on ontology or ethics is too abstract and mischaracterizes the role of human will and consciousness. By highlighting situation and structure, we can see that freedom is linked to circumstance but that we still have agency. Structure does not eclipse our capacity to move; it situates and makes it possible. With others, and in situations we have not chosen, people still act and choose: within complex, sometimes violent, often diminished or challenging circumstances of multilevel and crosscutting agencies and forces, enacting change and acting in concert are still possible.[15] Choices are never fully autonomous but are crafted by our grasp on the world: our body, history, situation, power, and absolutely unbreakable bonds to others.

While situation speaks to the constraints of structure, ambiguity highlights the lived experience of embodied subjects. Ambiguity is for Beauvoir a kind of "twoness." Our lived experience is as subject and object, transcendence and immanence, freedom and body, choosing agents and trapped objects. She insists that ambiguity is an ontological fact of existence, an accurate description of our embodied perspective on the world, as well as an ethical guide for how to navigate the world without turning others into inanimate things devoid of agency.[16] Bodies also have *political* meanings, however, that mark them in relationship to other bodies, to structure, to history, to nature. Thus while ambiguity is ontological—we are all exposed and vulnerable to each other—ambiguity is also political: some are disproportionately vulnerable, marked as other, doomed to immanence and denied transcendence.

What using the language of encounter captures that the language of situa-

tion and ambiguity does not is the ontological and political fact that our lives are always entangled with others. Situation and ambiguity describe an individual's constrained and embodied grasp on the world in a quest for individual (or group) agency. Within the language of situation and ambiguity, we begin from the perspective of the individual or the group subject. To speak of encounters, we must acknowledge the social and political constraints of situation and the ethical imperative to acknowledge ambiguity, but we also see struggle and plurality. We move swiftly and decisively from the position of individual or group subject and land in encounter: *with* an other or others, *within* community, *within* the world, politically engaged. When we foreground encounters we notice that individual subjectivity and individual or group agency do not exist prior to but rather *emerge from* encounters. There are *always two or more*: responsiveness and judgment from other(s) limit and drive us as political subjects. How we maneuver and what we do within this entanglement constitutes political freedom. Our actions here enhance or diminish freedom for the two or for a larger collective.

I emphasize throughout this book that freedom cannot be experienced elsewhere than in encounters; it is completely meaningless (in fact impossible) for freedom to be experienced alone. This is what I highlight with the phrase *freedom in the encounter*. While situation and ambiguity define the potential for individual and group autonomy, agency, and action, freedom itself is possible only within encounters. We are in the world, always acting within (unchosen) structures—within nature, historical events, class (caste or group), the shifting political meanings accorded to bodies in terms of age, ability, race, sex, and gender. Our freedom, however, is not defined or measured by how much autonomy or agency we achieve against or from these situations but rather is only ever possible in relationship to others.

The encounters Beauvoir brings to our attention range from the smallest and seemingly insignificant (the praying mantis and its mate) to the intimate (between lovers, between parents and children), the explicitly political (gendered and raced colonial encounters), the aesthetic (reader and text, spectator and film), and the psychoaffective and somatic (the aging woman and the standards of beauty stamped within the consciousness of those she encounters). We do not grasp freedom in spite of encounter. Freedom emerges or is lost within collectivity: friction, movement, cooperation, care, and struggle characterize encounters between two or more.

Encounter is at the heart of everything Beauvoir wrote, but it can easily be missed when she is read solitarily. When we read her in dialogue with others,

as thinking with and against others, it is harder to miss what so many have ignored when they focus on her feminism in isolation from her relationship to other thinkers and her other leftist political commitments. Beauvoir was deeply affected not only by reading philosophers such as Hegel, Heidegger, Bergson, Descartes, and of course Sartre, but also by Marxism and other socialist traditions. She was a voracious lover of films and novels. Collette was one of her favorite authors, but she also admired Americans including Faulkner and Hemingway and of course Nelson Algren, with whom she fell in love in Chicago in 1947 and had a relationship lasting several years. To advance Beauvoir as a thinker of encounter, we also must consider her commitments to feminist, antiracist, anticolonialist, and anti-imperialist projects and movements.[17] She responded to and theorized from within historical-political circumstances during her life in France, particularly Occupation, the war in Algeria, and the 1968 worker and student movements. When we read her work as *engagée* and in dialogue with others about social and political questions, the contributions she makes to political thinking, as well as its tight links to her feminism, suddenly come into view.

This book is inspired by my attraction to Beauvoir's habit of seeking out the company of diverse others (in books, in films, and in her imagination, as well as in her life) to talk about and puzzle through urgent political questions. For example, I highlight and extend conversations in which she was involved, such as with her allies Richard Wright and Frantz Fanon on questions of anti-black racism, decolonization, and forging new solidarities. Historical events are their own kind of collective encounter within this text, and they provide the context for encounters made possible within them. I retain the context of these conversations as occurring within and because of significant historical events, but I extend them to include new interlocutors who speak more directly to contemporary dilemmas.

I also attend to conversations with interlocutors Beauvoir loathed or who drew her perverse curiosity, such as the fascist Robert Brasillach and the Marquis de Sade. Beauvoir was present at Brasillach's trial for treason in 1945, but she did not meet him. She was compelled to be there, she said, to see with her own eyes a "conscious author of genuine evil" ([1949] 2004, 248). Because Hannah Arendt traveled to Jerusalem fifteen years later also to "expose" herself to an "evildoer," I invite these two thinkers into conversation.[18] Even though Beauvoir and Arendt share theoretical proclivities, philosophical influences, and the same historical moment, sadly for us they never met nor even engaged in conversation.[19] The conversation that I construct between

them, however—on the trials of Brasillach and Eichmann, and then in the last chapter on Violette Leduc and Rahel Varnhagen—illuminates new interpretations on the judgment of evildoers and on feminist friendship.

Inspired by Beauvoir's insatiable curiosity and her willingness to pursue even severely discomfiting encounters, I imagine conversations that force us to confront unconscious desires for sadism, abuse, violence, and masochism. To this end I put Beauvoir's writings on the Marquis de Sade, a writer she called "imperious, wrathful, headstrong, extreme in all things" ([1952] 2012, 44), into dialogue with the films of the contemporary avant-garde *provocateur* Lars von Trier, also known for his dark and (some say) misanthropic vision.[20] Contrarily I create conversations that feature relationships of mutual recognition and care. Just as in *The Second Sex* Beauvoir creates surprising encounters between real and fictional women across generations, races, history, and location, my encounters move across time and genres and include characters from the films of Chantal Akerman, Martin Provost, and Margarethe von Trotta and the graphic art of Alison Bechdel.[21]

I am drawn to Beauvoir's way of showing how our lives are *always* interlinked with others, often in uncomfortable and dangerous ways, and that this is the stuff of politics, the place and moment where we grasp or deny freedom. She shows us (in theory, in history, and in fiction) that when we wish for unfettered sovereignty, we are mostly delusional.[22] But some of us *do* have more space, power, influence, and freedom than others, and she shows us this too. She is eager to condemn right-wing thinkers, for example, for the ideologies they manufacture to create and justify inequality,[23] and she spends all of volume 1 of *The Second Sex* demonstrating that motivated by their own fear of vulnerability, men who write and propagate myths about women make this language and these myths into material reality. Women really do have a circumscribed space of freedom due to the dominance and preponderance of male myths about femininity, and poor people really do have diminished life expectations because of the way ideologies of privilege create and sustain material conditions that trap whole groups of people in positions of material and psychological submission and hopelessness. Beauvoir notices that women get psychologically and materially invested in adopting and performing the myths of femininity, practicing daily habits that transform biological and historical contingencies into political and social destiny.

ENCOUNTERS: DEFINED

Theorizing politics as the process and result of encounters foregrounds the primacy of relationships, but Beauvoir never assumes these are sites of comfort, ease, safety, or peace. In relationship there is never direct, unmediated, transparent communication: there is always the inability to absorb or possess; there is a distance, an appearance of the foreign, forbidden, unfamiliar, unknowable, and threatening. What happens in the time and space of this gap is the key political moment. The distance Beauvoir insists we maintain (as well as struggle within) is akin to the Arendtian notion of the "in-between": the space between us where freedom lives, grows, diminishes, or might die. We disavow this gap and erase the in-between when we proclaim allegiance to god, infinity, humanity, nature, or articulations of collectivity that refuse to recognize distinction and diversity. These identifications deny the very possibility of encounter, effacing difference, foreign bodies, and unknown but (ethically) equal others. According to Beauvoir, the quest for plenitude and possession is foolhardy, even dangerous, and it results in oppression. When desire for wholeness, for appropriation or possession holds sway in the wish to diminish the anxiety and ennui of existence, hierarchical relationships are established. When the gap is affirmed in its ambiguity a different orientation can be nurtured. As Beauvoir (1948, 12) sees it, the space of the encounter is one of "excruciation" (we cannot possess the other) but also of "joy" (we can and should take pleasure in the fact of this impossibility). In either outcome, the encounter is a *political* moment: what we *do* in this space and in this moment, or what we unconsciously do or neglect to do, whether we enhance and affirm or deny or diminish freedom, reflects and generates our political orientation to the world. In these ways, and as I show, Beauvoir's work on encounter goes far beyond what has been characterized as "the ethical turn" in political thought. Parting ways with theorists who limit their focus to the behavior of individuals within encounter to observe or advocate an ethics of individual responsibility or choice, Beauvoir is attentive to the way encounters themselves are made possible by historical and political circumstances. She adds that individual subjectivities are themselves formed within encounters (beginning with the mother/child dyad) and that we each bring our situations and experiences to subsequent encounters.

Published in 1947, just two years before the appearance of *The Second Sex*, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* underwrites my choice to highlight the language of encounter to bring Beauvoir's political thinking into view. Although later Beauvoir said the book was dissatisfying to her because it was too "abstract"

and lacking in concrete examples (that is to say, she thought it needed more examples of encounters), her goal for the piece was to claim that existentialism, which was seen as a "philosophy of the absurd and of despair" (1948, 10) indeed has an ethical vision.[24] But she also wanted to show that existentialist ethics is grounded in the "human world established by man's projects and the ends he sets up" (11). Rather than remaining, like the "Hegelian system," on the "plane of the universal [and] the infinite," Beauvoir commends a politics "experienced in the truth of life," where one can "live in the midst of living men" (158–59).

Wresting existentialism away from teleology and philosophical determinism, as well as from an absurdist philosophy of absolute contingency, the dilemmas Beauvoir explores in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* are always located in the conflict between at least two parties, themselves shaped by their encounters with history, structures, and the political meanings of their bodies. Nevertheless she pushes us to exercise agency and seize freedom where and when possible. One of the key features of Beauvoir's thought that distinguishes her from several of her contemporaries is her attention to the mundane and everyday encounter with the same penetrating analysis she gives to encounters with obvious historical significance.[25] In Beauvoir's analysis the personal truly becomes political! She draws out the political significance of repetitive, banal, habitual activities (housework, shopping—the activities that qualify as labor in Arendt's *The Human Condition*); she foregrounds intimate and unthought encounters (sexual, in dream-worlds) to penetrate how they sustain and nourish or have the potential to undo oppressive material and psychic webs of oppression; and at the same time, she gives due attention to the way structural forces inhibit and condition these smaller, seemingly insignificant moments of friction or affability. Her attention to sensory, somatic encounters interwoven within and in the context of structural, historical, and larger forces of biology and history helps us to enlarge our sense of how several kinds of encounters overlap in politically salient ways. In my interpretation of Beauvoir, history itself is revealed as a series of encounters, some purposeful and others aleatory, becoming a site of possibility rather than a predetermined trajectory. Some encounters seem marginal and others appear epochal, but none is determined or necessary, and meaning changes when circumstances change. Often an encounter's significance is not understood until after the event, and it is never *finally* understood at all.

The language we employ to describe even the natural world and biological processes takes on the force of a material reality itself that must be affirmed, altered, or undone within encounters. As Beauvoir ([1949] 2011, 26, 33) puts

it in the chapter "Biological Data" in *The Second Sex*, for example, physiologists and biologists "ascribe meaning to vital phenomena," but "seeing in these facts the harbinger of the 'battle of the sexes'" is a political act, which in this case circumscribes the freedom of women by saying the female is, at one and the same time, a "danger" to the male of each species but also "naturally" suited for caring for children. We can recognize animals, machines, and material objects as demanding our ethical attention or as having strange forms of agency (such as the grotesque animals and trees and the chestnuts in von Trier's *Antichrist*, or boiling pots of potatoes in Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman*), but humans alone are choosing (and thus politically responsible) subjects.

Politics with Beauvoir, a politics wherein we make decisions together, wherein we choose to affirm freedom *for all* within conditions we do not and have not chosen, wherein we carve out freedom from within tight spaces and impossible choices and make that freedom grow, is the kind of politics we need right now. Of greatest urgency for Beauvoir, as I read her, is the fact that within *each and every* encounter there is a "contra," a meeting of adversaries, wherein a chance to expand or diminish freedom occurs. Beauvoir acknowledges that life is facticity and contingency, but she insists that there is room for freedom, for reflection, and to make meaningful choices that prioritize our shared world. As she insists, "It is because there are real dangers, real failures and real earthly damnation that words like victory, wisdom, or joy have meaning; nothing is decided in advance, and it is because man has something to lose and because he can lose that he can also win" (1948, 34).

ENCOUNTERS IN CONVERSATION: WITH ENEMIES, WITH ALLIES, AND WITH FRIENDS

Beauvoir acknowledges our often intense desire for unfettered freedom to do as we please, and she understands our (often collective) fantasies of sovereign action and the will to dominance. She also admits to her own ambition to win at every conversation.

She lived her life in the midst of multiple conversations, most of all with Jean-Paul Sartre. Poignantly, at the beginning of *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre*, Beauvoir (1984, 3) laments:

> This is the first of my books—the only one no doubt—that you will not have read before it is printed. It is wholly and entirely devoted to you; and you are not affected by it. When we were young and one of us gained a brilliant victory over the other in an impassioned argu-

ment, the winner used to say, "There you are in your little box!" You are in your little box; you will not come out of it and I shall not join you there. Even if I am buried next to you there will be no communication between your ashes and mine.

Beauvoir seems to say that death marks the end of her almost lifelong journey with Sartre. But she undoes this very claim when she directly addresses her dead partner. Even in the failed space of death, she attempts a conversation. As I demonstrate, Beauvoir loved boxing with words—with intimates like Sartre, but also with those she saw as enemies, those she reached out to as allies, and those similarly situated but as yet unrecognized as friends. Although this conversation with the dead Sartre is seemingly pitched as a win–lose battle ("There you are in your little box!"), Beauvoir deliberately puts herself into her little box as well. Her conversations, sometimes practically but sometimes fantastically, seek something beyond the appointing of a winner. They seek confrontation and conversion—of ourselves, of others, and of material reality—into something that looks more like freedom.

Beauvoir's practice of staging encounters within texts and seeking them out with her peers shows how conversations situate (and can reveal) interlocutors as bearing power and determining meaning (or not). These conversations shift fields of meaning, help us see and say things we previously could not, and move us toward converting material realities. This book demonstrates that for Beauvoir conversations are not pluralistic or neutral dialogues between equal or equally situated partners, and their mechanisms and effects are not abstract. Instead they are sites of affective and agonistic struggle and potential transformation, able to create material reality or diminish space and possibilities for agency or, contrarily, to nurture a desire for collective freedom and create new coalitions and sites of potential solidarities. Even in failed or negative spaces, Beauvoir's work shows, encounters occur and freedom can be seized, denied, encouraged, or discouraged within their space and moment.

Beauvoir's love for the promiscuous, risk-taking, provocative, boundary-breaking, agonistic, and raucous battle of words situated her in relationship to her contemporaries and merits our attention now, more than thirty years after her death. I have organized the chapters to echo my discussion of the architecture of *The Second Sex* in the first chapter: confronting and hoping to convert enemies and ourselves, engaging and learning with allies, and seeking to connect isolated individuals in friendship. The conversations I extend and stage take seriously Beauvoir's observation that politics is located first in ag-

onism and affectivity. After "(Re)Encountering *The Second Sex*," the chapters follow Beauvoir's conversations with two kinds of enemies (fascists and bourgeois taxonomies), extend her conversations with allies (Fanon and Wright) about colonial violence and racial hatred and discrimination, and, in the final section, take up her call to solicit and nurture connections between isolated women in need of feminist friendship.

My organizational motif—naming enemies, allies, and friends—itself makes a political intervention by invoking and reworking Carl Schmitt's friend/enemy distinction so fundamental to modern states. Like Schmitt, I focus on questions of power and antagonism as central to all political conversations, and yet I do not reinforce his logic of the political as governing how we should practice politics or do political theory. Encounter takes the place of decision and mutuality the place of sovereignty. Repeating but transforming the invocation of friends and enemies and triangulating it with the addition of allies introduces fluidity within boundaries and underlines the fact that encounters often discomfort and surprise us. They also can alter our moods and make us rethink our definitions and proclivities.

Each chapter is also an opportunity to bring diverse modes of thought into conversation with each other: antiracism with anticolonialism and antisexism feminisms, affect theory with structuralism and psychoanalysis, film with literary studies. My practice of following through on multiple levels and kinds of conversations about historical and political catastrophes and everyday habits helps us to think these approaches together in relationship rather than as isolated methodologies or as hierarchical choices that must be made (to focus on gender rather than race, for example, or name and isolate identities and measure suffering).

My first chapter, "(Re)Encountering *The Second Sex*," makes a case for reading *The Second Sex* as an encounter with enemies (the men who create myths about women, who also are put into encounter with each other by Beauvoir in volume 1), an attempt to find allies (diverse women sharing accounts of their "lived experience" in volume 2), and an appeal to create friends (readers of the text who heed the appeal and can begin conversations). *The Second Sex* serves as a repeated point of reference throughout the book. While I bring less prominent essays by Beauvoir into view and work with them extensively, *The Second Sex* never drops out and indeed plays a central role in this book. In this first chapter I situate my extended reading of Beauvoir's most well known text by putting it in conversation with one of the lesser-known essays, "Right-Wing Thought Today" from 1955. While some Beauvoir scholars have said "Right-Wing Thought Today" merits only

historical attention, I argue that considering *The Second Sex* together with "Right-Wing Thought Today" illuminates Beauvoir's sophisticated parsing of the relationships among ideology, affects, and material reality in *both* texts. Each is transformed by the other such that we can newly understand why and how Beauvoir theorizes material reality as brought into existence, as well as potentially transformed, by ideological and affective dynamics and processes. These relationships will play a central role in how this book unfolds as I move from different registers of scale—from the conversational or dialogic encounter to the collective movement and from the individual symptom to the diagnosis of social and political pathologies.

My book's structure mimics what I have discovered Beauvoir's to be in *The Second Sex*. Part I, "Enemies: Monsters, Men, and Misogynist Art," features two encounters with enemies, one in a chapter on fascists and the second in a chapter on bourgeois taxonomies. In chapter 2 I explore why Beauvoir broke with her intellectual allies in 1945 to call for the French state to execute Robert Brasillach, a fascist journalist on trial for treason. In her little-read essay "An Eye for an Eye," she confronts an enemy and says she wants to see him die. (She refused to sign the petition circulated by prominent French intellectuals and writers to limit state sovereignty over death.) Doing so she asserts the primacy of her own political judgment and claims the right to make judgments that ally with victims. Following her down this road I discuss Beauvoir in relation with Arendt, who, reporting on Eichmann's trial in 1961, wanted him to be executed. But unlike Beauvoir, Arendt sought to silence victim accounts of suffering and shift the focus to Eichmann's deeds. Wondering whether these men are "monsters" and what makes them so, the two differently theorize how to make reflective judgments on when and how collective freedom is threatened and how the embodiment, suffering, and voices of the victims might matter in making judgments.

Chapter 3 takes up another neglected text of Beauvoir's and treats it in relation to Trier's 2009 film *Antichrist*, a work that at first glance appears to further misogynist stereotypes of women as witches and bad mothers. Drawing on Beauvoir's 1952 essay on the Marquis de Sade (thought by some to also be a monster, certainly a misogynist), "Must We Burn Sade?," I consider how feminists might capaciously encounter an aesthetic object that seems positioned in enemy territory. Bodies and body parts, monsters, and foreign tongues dominate the lexicon of these two chapters in the "Enemies" section, and the grisliness of body parts that is mostly excised from Beauvoir's and Arendt's essays on the trials returns to haunt us in von Trier's film. In their trial reports, neither Beauvoir nor Arendt is able to fully confront the *jouis-*

sance of torture and the lure of evil. Though they attended the trials in part for the chance to see evildoers, their essays bring us to the brink, but stop just short, of a close encounter with the devil. Not so with von Trier. He delivers the devil and more. Maybe too much more? Our desire to control, destroy, and violate, and the question of what we *do* when we confront the foreign, the object, part-objects, and body parts, is central to both Sade's and von Trier's worlds.

Like Sade before him, von Trier has a reputation for trafficking in body parts and for doing so in a particularly misogynist way. In a 2015 interview in response to the statement "It is not absolutely necessary in order to make a good movie that someone gets the clit cut off!," von Trier responds, "But it is a start!"[26] That "someone" would be a woman, and it is one of the grisliest moments in *Antichrist*. Is this film an enemy to feminists, and how do we judge? The reflections on judgment that emerge from Beauvoir's encounter with Arendt remind us of the necessary risks involved in political judgments when we are not following rules, as the two thinkers together insist on our willingness to run these risks. Arendt's careful parsing of the distinction between morality and aesthetics mirrors Beauvoir's capacious encounter with Sade, whose work she admires for targeting "bourgeois taxonomies" as our real enemies.[27]

Having located and named the violence of fascism and patriarchy as born from abstract categories, general rules, and liberal platitudes, in part II, "Allies: Antinomies of Action in Conditions of Violence," I follow Beauvoir's quest to develop collective efforts to challenge the ills of capitalist, patriarchal, and colonial violence, forms of violence that are themselves buttressed by ideologies that spring from, create, and defy material conditions all at once. This section also introduces Beauvoir's concern with antinomies of action. She asks, for example, how we can best make political choices while acknowledging that each choice is vexed, that our encounters are not only relational but also inherently unequal, and that we sometimes inadvertently create new forms of violence even when hoping to minimize it. Nevertheless action must be taken, choices made, failures enacted, and possibly even violence employed and freedom denied to some. As she wrestles with Fanon and Wright, allies on the Left, she sharpens her opposition to racial and colonial violence and its visible and invisible wounds on bodies and psyches. With these two she struggles to move oppressed peoples from wounds and perversions to agency and collective action, searching for insight into how to form alliances in solidarities beyond identity.

Confronting enemies makes us face up to the fact that while we must

always seek to minimize violence, it is always too proximate and ready to erupt: the other (even within ourselves) often appears as a "foreign existence" and seems like an enemy. Choices made in encounters set off further reactions that diminish or enhance freedom. Talking to allies pushes these insights into new territory for Beauvoir. She met Fanon only once, arranged by their mutual friend (and Beauvoir's seven-year lover) Claude Lanzmann, to discuss whether Sartre might write the preface for *Wretched of the Earth*. By this time Fanon was dying of leukemia, but Beauvoir was impressed by his passionate alliance with the oppressed. His ideas made it into her work, and hers had certainly influenced him, though he never acknowledged as much.[28] In chapter 4 I extend Beauvoir and Fanon's exchange on colonial and decolonial violence by including Djamila Boupacha. Boupacha was an Algerian militant tortured and raped by French authorities. Although Beauvoir never met her (in a controversial decision she declined to do so when asked to by Boupacha's French lawyer, Gisèle Halimi), she wrote a bold article in *Le Monde* calling attention to how the French refined their torture techniques in the Algerian War and insisting that French citizens are responsible for perpetuating and condoning these violations. In captivity Boupacha was raped with a bottle by French soldiers and forced to admit to crimes (she later claimed) she did not commit. In the context of Boupacha's ordeal, reading Fanon's work on socioaffective ailments in encounter with Beauvoir's writings on the same shows how racialized and sexed bodies register pathologies (sometimes as perverse signs of protest) and how women's changing roles in anticolonial struggles set new gendered conflicts in motion.

What takes center stage within Beauvoir's encounter with Fanon and Boupacha are the intersections of gender and race, and the affective and often pathologized responses to structural and physical violence that spring from political meanings imposed on bodies. These same issues are discussed in Beauvoir's conversation with Richard Wright, but here I more directly tackle the question of whether and how it might be politically strategic to embrace identities born out of structural and physical violence. Wright was the most well known African American author of the mid-twentieth century due to the success of *Native Son* (1940) and *Black Boy* (1945), but he exiled himself to France in 1947. He had met Beauvoir the year before in Paris and then again when she came to the United States in early 1947 on her four-month "existentialism" tour, and he and his wife Ellen were her hosts in New York City. Beauvoir and Wright became fast friends in the United States, and Beauvoir cites Wright's work multiple times in *The Second Sex*. But Wright didn't engage as carefully with Beauvoir's work or think as much about the inter-

sections of gender and race as he might have. Reading Wright in light of the conversation I created among Beauvoir, Fanon, and Boupacha puts Wright's work on race, and Beauvoir's on gender, in a new light. Here the conversation moves outward from the diagnosis of the individual symptom and toward collective action by looking to the situations of Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana and American Jim Crow racism. Wright and Beauvoir together show why and how identity categories limit the potential for encounters of solidarity across borders and across identities.

Part III, "Friends: Conversations That Change the Rules," focuses on isolated women who need to speak to someone, preferably to each other, on subjects other than men. Like the Algerians whom Fanon treats in his clinic, and like black Americans such as Wright who search for collectivity and home in "returning" to Africa, the women of *The Second Sex* are products of histories of diminished expectations, failed aspirations, and structural and bodily violence. One of the most enduring and difficult questions of *The Second Sex*, one that many feminists turn away from, is the question of how wounded subjects might choose freedom and enact change rather than repeat the same patterns and languish in what Beauvoir, with Sartre, calls "bad faith." Wright was worried about these questions too, which might account for Beauvoir and Wright's long friendship and the many resonances between their work. Wright saw the embrace of *négritude* as a troubling move for black subjects, and Beauvoir was discouraged to see women embracing femininity, even if it meant they turned *toward* other women.

Alison Bechdel's "rule" (often called the "Bechdel test") for feminist film specifies that in order to be considered feminist, a film must feature more than one (named) woman, and these women must talk to each other about something other than men. Having learned from Beauvoir and Arendt that determinative rules belie the risks of judgment, I refigure Bechdel's rule as my interpretive task in my section "Friends" to create conversations that *change* the rules or, better yet, get rid of them altogether. As it turns out, Beauvoir and Bechdel have a lot to talk about: Beauvoir too wants women to talk to each other about something *other than* men. Returning to insights gleaned from *The Second Sex*, in chapter 6 I introduce Chantal Akerman's classic 1975 feminist art house film, *Jeanne Dielman*, to interpret two contemporary films, each that sits uncomfortably with feminist audiences: David Fincher's 2014 *Gone Girl* and Lars von Trier's 2013 *Nymphomaniac*. In my reading the films present the unconscious desires of isolated women who misdiagnose their personal ailments, dissatisfaction, and acts of murderous violence as individual symptoms rather than political effects. Beauvoir's literary practice,

extended here as a film analysis, creates what she hopes will be an affective response on the part of readers and spectators to realign our senses. Generated by the text or film, this new arrangement of the senses might inspire something like a longing for freedom.

Chapter 7 reignites the conversation I began between Beauvoir and Hannah Arendt in chapter 2. Here I argue that the gesture of feminist friendship, enacted and extended between differently situated women, might be not only life-affirming but also movement creating. I work with three texts in this chapter: the 2014 film *Violette*, which features the encounter between Violette Leduc and Simone de Beauvoir; Hannah Arendt's 1944 (auto)biography of the nineteenth-century Jew Rahel Varnhagen; and Margarethe von Trotta's 2012 biopic, *Hannah Arendt*. We will see how feminist friendship, or the gift of feminist consciousness, creates new encounters to change our ways of seeing, saying, and (re)making collective conditions. My conclusion is a happy ending. It's not the happy ending of Disney movies, romantic comedies, or Thai massages, but it does induce optimism and keep the body in view in terms of both its political situation and sensual possibilities. This happy ending calls upon us as political actors to embrace our (situated, limited, ambiguous, compromised) chance at collective freedom.

To begin this journey I first turn to *The Second Sex* to craft a (re)encounter with Beauvoir's text, but via a detour through "Right-Wing Thought Today." As noted earlier, I make this chapter the first to show how the book unfolds as encounters with enemies, allies, and friends. I identify this organization of the text and parse the formal features of Beauvoir's textual strategy to create friends via affective literary techniques in both "Right-Wing Thought Today" and *The Second Sex*. But for me this discovery (of enemies, allies, and friends) unfolded in the opposite order. It was only after reading Beauvoir in conversation with others that I began to read *The Second Sex* differently. Like "Right-Wing Thought Today," *The Second Sex* has become a completely new text for me.[29] Whereas before I saw in both works a clash between structure and agency, I now see a sophisticated explanation (and use) of how affect works. Beauvoir shows us that ideology is motivated by affects and becomes material and gets located in bodies and practices. What she hopes is that the encounter between text and readers itself might nurture new affects, particularly a desire for freedom. This can happen, however, only if we have friends (or even enemies or allies?) to talk to and struggle with. I hope you will see it this way too and be open to the encounter.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Yolanda Patterson (1986, 90) points out that Beauvoir "laughingly" dismissed the idea that feminists look to her as a mother figure, noting, "People don't tend to listen to what their mothers are telling them." Patterson writes that in spite of this, Beauvoir has been proclaimed the "mother of the women's movement, the mother of all liberated women, whether or not they knew her name or her work" (90). Sartre does not escape his duties as "father" either. Beauvoir and Sartre are scrutinized as "parental" figures of mid-twentieth-century left politics: their sexual proclivities and rules of romantic engagement as well as spheres of influence (on each other and subsequent political and theoretical camps) have been extensively, even exhaustively studied.

Often Beauvoir is reduced simply to the role of "exemplary woman" of second-wave feminism whose life lessons are to be followed or rejected. Her life is held up as an example to follow or, in versions where she is seen as the girlfriend of Sartre, to be avoided as deeply hypocritical. In *Feminist Thinkers and the Demands of Femininity: The Lives and Work of Intellectual Women* (Marso 2006), I also read Beauvoir as an exemplary feminist, but in conversation with other historical and contemporary feminist writers. I frame her work this way not to praise or criticize her choices and activities but rather to provide a genealogical perspective on the several ways diverse feminist thinkers recount their struggles with gender expectations.

2. Beauvoir's existentialist emphasis on existence as action and activity and her focus on the ways structural and psychological limitations impose constraints on individual women direct our attention to individuals situated in relationship to structures of oppression (sometimes as oppressors, sometimes as the oppressed, even both at once, depending on the context) and habits of unfreedom. But to say Beauvoir is concerned primarily with individual women or, as is sometimes said, concerned primarily with white privileged women is to misread her diagnosis and her political commitments.

3. Some decry Beauvoir's embrace of communism instead of praising (or lamenting) her attention to liberal individualism. These interpretations are closer to the mark in terms of Beauvoir's political commitments, but still not quite right. Beauvoir ([1963] 1992, 12) explains her and Sartre's early but transforming political project: "In our youth, we had felt close to the Communist Party insofar as its negativism agreed with

our anarchism. We wanted the defeat of capitalism, but not the accession of a socialist society which, we thought, would have deprived us of our liberty."

4. In this context the new wave of Beauvoir scholarship that has been produced in the past two decades is particularly welcome, although it is mostly in the fields of literature and philosophy. This scholarship takes Beauvoir seriously as a thinker worthy not only of historical but also contemporary feminist interest, one who is not surpassed by contemporary feminist work but rather anticipates and informs it. In particular Bauer 2001; Deutscher 2008; Kruks 2012b; Moi 1999.

5. As Margaret Simons notes in the introduction to Beauvoir (2004, 2), the postwar popular press called Beauvoir "la grande Sartreuse" and "Notre-Dame de Sartre." Corrections of this position are offered by Simons 1981; Fullbrook and Fullbrook 1994; and most recently Daigle and Golomb 2009.

6. See Spelman (1988), as one example; there are many from this historical moment (late 1980s and throughout the 1990s).

7. In the second volume of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir offers a descriptive phenomenology of female embodiment, or what she calls women's "lived experience." Because some of this experience is of shame or of horror (in part or whole due to women experiencing their body as an object of the male gaze) much of what Beauvoir says about women's experience is cast, at best, in an ambivalent light. Her work is the inspiration for Iris Marion Young's (1990, 2005) writing on female body experience with menstruation, having breasts, and aging, and yet Beauvoir's writings sit somewhat uncomfortably with "sexual difference" feminists such as Rosie Braidotti (1994) and Elizabeth Grosz (1994), who argue that women's otherness is unrepresentable within the male symbolic.

8. Beauvoir and Sartre never married and never became biological parents. Both decisions were deliberate. Beauvoir ([1960] 1992, 78) explains why she chose not to become a mother in *The Prime of Life*: "Maternity itself seemed incompatible with the way of life upon which I was embarking. I knew that in order to become a writer I needed a great measure of time and freedom. I had no rooted objection to playing at long odds, but this was not a game: the whole value and direction of my life lay at stake. The risk of compromising it could only have been justified had I regarded a child as no less vital a creative task than a work of art, which I did not."

9. For a reading that puts Beauvoir into the same space as feminists such as Irigaray and Cixous, see Emily Zakin's essay, "Beauvoir's Unsettling of the Universal," in Marso and Moynagh (2006).

10. In the introduction to *Transfeminist Perspectives in and beyond Transgender and Gender Studies,* A. Finn Enke (2012, 1) argues that the essays in this (edited) volume build on Beauvoir's insight, emphasizing that "there is no natural process by which *anyone* becomes woman and also that *everyone's* gender is made."

11. Beauvoir is rarely considered a political thinker. Important recent contributions in this vein are Kruks 2012b; Marso and Moynagh 2006. Deidre Bair (1990), author of Beauvoir's definitive biography, considers why Beauvoir's relationship to politics is so often mischaracterized: "She has never written anything exclusively devoted to the explication of a personal political credo, and has always denied in the strongest

language any interest or involvement in politics per se. Still, the curious thing about all her seemingly contradictory statements is how political they are and always have been. Hers is a political rhetoric that has sometimes led to charges that she advocates social anarchy, is clearly a misogynist, and has even lost touch with the realities of contemporary life for most of the women in the world" (Bair 1986, 150).

For most of her life, Beauvoir was a very political person. She admits that prior to the Occupation, she didn't pay much attention to politics, but living under Nazi domination changed all that. Characterizing Sartre's and her own feelings of responsibility after World War II, in *Force of Circumstance* Beauvoir ([1963] 1992, 12) writes, "Politics had become a family matter, and we expected to have a hand in it. 'Politics is no longer dissociated from individuals,' Camus wrote in *Combat* at the beginning of September, 'it is man's direct address to other men.' We were writers, and that was our job, to address ourselves to other men. . . . I knew then that my destiny was bound to that of all other people; freedom, oppression, the happiness and misery of other men was a matter of intimate concern to me."

Reflecting their new political awareness, in 1945 Beauvoir and Sartre founded *Les Temps Modernes*. Beauvoir remained active on the journal's board until her death in 1986. The monthly journal, and Beauvoir and Sartre particularly, were at the center of French intellectual life for several decades. Included in the journal, for example, were essays on race relations in the United States, articles condemning the French war in Algeria, analyses of life in the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc, contributions of authors from the former colonies on race, colonialism, and oppression, and analyses of the Arab-Israeli conflict. *Les Temps Modernes* was the most important intellectual gathering place for political debates and conversations on the noncommunist Left during much of Beauvoir's lifetime, although after 1968 existentialism, particularly Sartre's intellectual dominance on the Left, was significantly challenged and the journal's influence waned. Nevertheless, directing the business of the journal and meeting activists and writers kept politics, narrowly defined, prominent in Beauvoir's activities and focus. In addition to traveling all over Europe to meet with important leftist thinkers and leaders, she spent extended periods of time in the United States, Mexico, the Soviet Union, North Africa, Cuba, Brazil, China, Japan, Egypt, and Israel. In their travels Sartre and Beauvoir met with everyone from government officials to dissident groups. Often, in each of these places, she also met independently with women's groups and feminist associations inspired by *The Second Sex*.

Given this very active life focused on politics (in its narrow definition), it is really quite remarkable that Beauvoir is not more widely recognized as deeply engaged with and directly influenced by political issues and questions. This oversight might be attributed, at least in part, to the dominance of *The Second Sex* in the reception of her writings and the unfortunate and ingrained habit of failing to see feminist theory *as* political theory.

12. *The Beauvoir Series*, published by the University of Illinois Press, edited by Margaret A. Simons and Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir, comprises seven volumes and is an especially important contribution that will certainly bring attention to Beauvoir's diverse writings. Also important is the 2011 Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-

Chevallier translation of *The Second Sex*. Problems with the H. M. Parshley translation are legion, but the new translation, although it restores Beauvoir's philosophical language as well as all the excised portions, still has some problems. See Moi's (2010) essay in the *London Review of Books* for important corrections to passages in the new translation where Beauvoir's philosophical meaning is changed or missed. My references throughout this book are to the Borde and Malovany-Chevallier translation, with Moi's corrections noted when appropriate.

13. Sartre might say that women remain trapped by the male gaze because they don't look back.

14. In a compelling exposition of the way both Sartre and Beauvoir take up Hegel's Master/Slave dialectic, Nancy Bauer (2001, 149) argues that Beauvoir is able to transform it from within: "Put otherwise, the Other's freedom is to be seen as not just a threat to my subjectivity but a necessary condition of its being regularly exercised. That there is something positive about the Other's freedom is a possibility never raised by the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness*. That Beauvoir thinks we might see it this way is a function of her figuring my actions not as attempts to freeze the Other, along with his threats in my world, but as 'calls' or 'appeals.'"

15. Encounters occur within natural processes and material life (atoms move against other atoms, species within and against species, rivers meet oceans), between people and nature or other animals, between people and objects and nonorganic forces and materials, between nations and states, among people (self against other, group against group, class against class), and within the self (experienced consciously and unconsciously as divided desires, conflicted loyalties, bodily symptoms rebelling against conscious will). But only human beings choose. While some complex confrontations do not involve conscious willing people (in nature, between and within processes, and even in unconscious or habitual interactions between humans), what we make of them is a political question.

16. Sonia Kruks's (2012b) important book *Simone de Beauvoir and the Politics of Ambiguity* thoroughly explains how ambiguity features in Beauvoir's writings in several registers and compares this approach to rationalism, liberalism, and poststructuralism. I focus on encounter to capture a different dynamic in Beauvoir's work, one that highlights her struggle with others (enemies, allies, and friends) and helps us see why and how the Self/Other dynamic not only played out between subjects but in other ways too (with objects, with history, in nature, between more than two subjects) is a political dynamic that makes freedom possible.

17. I discuss Beauvoir's work on racism and colonialism in part II, on Fanon and Wright. While her anti-imperialism comes out in several contexts, one key example of this commitment was her membership in the 1966 Russell Tribunal, organized by Bertrand Russell and Sartre. The Russell Tribunal (a citizen's court, a performance of what justice would look like) investigated war crimes and acts of genocide by the U.S. government in Vietnam, although it did not have the power to impose sanctions.

18. In a letter to the journalist Samuel Grafton, Arendt writes: "When, many years ago, I described the totalitarian system and analyzed the totalitarian mentality, it was always a 'type,' rather than individuals, I had to deal with, and if you look at the

system as a whole, every individual person becomes indeed 'a cog small or big,' in the machinery of terror. . . . In other words, I wanted to know: Who was Eichmann? What were his deeds, not insofar as his crimes were part and parcel of the Nazi system, but insofar as he was a free agent? . . . And it is for this reason that the whole small cog theory (the theory of the defense) is quite irrelevant in this context. . . . I have been thinking for many years, or to be specific thirty years, about the nature of evil. And the wish to expose myself—not to the deeds, which, after all, were well known, but to the evildoer himself—probably was the most powerful motive in my decision to go to Jerusalem" (quoted in Berkowitz 2016).

19. Casting Beauvoir into another all too familiar box, that of Sartre's girlfriend (a demeaned version of "our Beauvoir"), Arendt dismisses Beauvoir as just another woman—beautiful, and thus not very smart. In response to the *Partisan Review* editor William Phillips's complaints about Beauvoir and the "endless nonsense" she spoke about America when she visited in 1947, Arendt is said to have replied, "The trouble with you, William, is that you don't realize that she's not very bright. Instead of arguing with her, you should flirt with her" (quoted in Brightman 1995, xiii).

20. *Politics, Theory, and Film: Critical Encounters with Lars von Trier*, edited by Bonnie Honig and Lori Marso (2016b), showcases interpretations of several of von Trier's films that challenge the picture of von Trier as only misanthropic and misogynist. In the introduction, focusing in particular on the claim that von Trier is a misogynist, we argue that von Trier intensifies the "clichés of our times" in ways that direct our political energies toward apprehending and repairing a shattered world.

21. Doing so I take Beauvoir's texts out of their contexts as well as reading them within historical context. Here I follow the practice of political theory exemplified in Honig (2013) and Martel (2013).

22. In *She Came to Stay* (Beauvoir [1943] 1984), for example, the heroine murders her nemesis at the end of the novel as a result of the fear that she has lost herself in their encounter.

23. See "Right-Wing Thought Today," an essay Beauvoir ([1955] 2012) published in two parts in *Les Temps Modernes* in 1955.

24. In 1963 Beauvoir ([1963] 1992, 75) reflected, "Of all of my books, it is the one that irritates me the most today." She felt the book was too abstract, too idealist, when in fact she had been trying to refute "Kantian maxims" as well as the "delusion of the *one* monolithic humanity used by Communist writers" (75). Upon reflection her judgment is that, "like Sartre," she was "insufficiently liberated from the ideologies of my class; at the very moment I was rejecting them, I was still using their language to do so" (77). Yet despite this harsh judgment of her own work, what still emerges very clearly from *The Ethics of Ambiguity* is her commitment to reject all metaphysical explanations and meanings, to show the failures, antinomies, and complications of action, and present "collective reality against the interiority of every being" (76).

25. Thinking of Beauvoir in this register, she would be a productive conversation partner with the work of Jacques Rancière. In Jason Frank's review of some of Rancière's recently translated writings (written between 1975 and 1985 and responding to the events of May 1968), Frank argues against what he calls the "evental" reading

of Rancière's work, which is focused on the exception, the revolutionary, and the rupture. As Frank (2015, 259) puts it: "What the works reviewed here most clearly reveal, and that the dominant reception in political theory obscures, is Rancière's distinctive approach to the politics of the ordinary. In contemporary political theory, the politics of the ordinary is usually associated with theorists influenced by ordinary language philosophy and Stanley Cavell, on the one hand, or those taking up Foucauldian or Deleuzian investigations into 'micropolitics' on the other (or some combination of the two). Rancière belongs to this contemporary theoretical constellation as much as he does with the one preoccupied with 'the axioms of rupture,' emergency, or the 'supposedly radical experience of the heterogeneous.'"

26. See "An Invitation from Lars von Trier—Transcript of the First TV Interview Since the Cannes Press Conference, with Martin Krasnik, Danish Journalist, Translation by Troels Skadhauge, Lars Tønder," in Honig and Marso 2016b.

27. See Patchen Markell's (2014) reading of Arendt's critique of "cultured philistinism" in the 1961 essay "The Crisis in Culture." Along with that essay Markell wrestles with Arendt's unique take on Kant in order to show how she "resist[s] the collapse of aesthetic judgment back into rule-governed morality" (68).

28. See Gordon's (2015, 32) *What Fanon Said*, wherein he laments the fact that Fanon "failed to articulate his indebtedness to Beauvoir": "Beauvoir not only offered much intellectual sustenance for Fanon's thought but he . . . was also well aware of at least two of her major contributions at the time of writing *Black Skin, White Masks*, as the presence of these books in his home library attests."

29. Bonnie Honig is the exemplar of this practice, asking why we see a text in a certain way and drawing our attention to what we don't see. In much of Honig's work, particularly in *Antigone, Interrupted* (2013), she makes us query why and how some of our most cherished works of political theory have a particular grip on us and why we can't see them in other ways. Then she opens up a new reading. This is my goal for *The Second Sex* and for reading Beauvoir's politics as encounter.

CHAPTER 1: (RE)ENCOUNTERING *THE SECOND SEX*

1. I argue that drawing an affective response from readers is a result of the formal features of Beauvoir's text but that it doesn't always work; it is an appeal to do so that emerges from the formal mechanisms of the conversations that Beauvoir introduces in her text. In these ways my reading of *The Second Sex* is in keeping with the kind of work Eugenie Brinkema (2014, xv–xvi) argues is needed as an intervention into debates on affect: "A consequence of decoupling textuality and theory—which I will argue comes from the tradition of arguing for affect by arguing against reading for form—is a suffocating dearth of material with which a theorist can press on affect in a text and an almost nonexistent ability to let affect press back against theory. The loss works both ways, for not only do critics fail to find in the details the workings of violence or intensity, but such a reading strategy closes down the paths by which textual specificity might speak back to, challenge, undermine—or perhaps radically revise—the very theory at stake in any argument."