A Thesis
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Witnessing the Work: Defining the Audience-Artist Relationship in the Ethics of Simone de Beauvoir
by
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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters of Arts Degree in Philosophy

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An Abstract of

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The following presents an existential investigation into the particular ethical demands of the relationship between the artist and her audience from the perspective of Simone de Beauvoir. While Beauvoir spends ample time discussing this interaction from the viewpoint of the artist, as she herself identified first and foremost as a literary artist, she spends surprisingly little time approaching the intersubjective experience from the eyes of the witnesses to works. A deeper look into her discussion of the audience’s role presents tensions the results of which emerge from the privilege Beauvoir gives to the artistic project as concerns the constraints of temporal situations. Whereas she insists that the limits that temporality, and more especially mortality, place upon the choices individuals make within society must be assumed in order to justify one’s existence and “disclose the truth of being,” in her ethics generally, only the artist is capable of outstripping death and achieving a sense of immortality that is not relegated to the realm of imagination alone. This view of death and the processes of time appears early in her works and continue to build throughout her career, all in respect to Martin Heidegger’s own philosophy of Being-toward-death. I will argue that Beauvoir scholars of today’s community must seek to rejoin Being-toward-death with Beauvoir’s ethics of ambiguity if we hope to overcome the problems that arise from conflicting accounts of the artist-audience relationship.
In memory of my daddy, Michael Lee, for giving me the courage to laugh at myself,
and my Baby Boy for all his affection and comfort.
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My overwhelming gratitude compels me to recognize many more than this page allows but I will do my best to offer my thanks: First, to my mother for teaching me to follow my dreams without limit, wherever they may go, my father for showing me the importance in returning to reality - a step that when forgotten leads dreams to naught - my stepmother for taking care of me when my father no longer could and for always reminding me of what exists outside the walls that the study of philosophy can sometimes build, and my sisters, Juliet and Danielle, for never letting me forget that I will always be the baby of the family.

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Chapter 1

The Lay of the Land

“In one case only it might be interesting to keep a diary: it would be if”¹

This final line within the Undated Pages which opens Jean-Paul Sartres Nausea, trail off, creating for the reader a sense of curiosity. It is not until the concluding scene of the novel that this curiosity is tempered, but even still questions remain. As the diary of Antoine Roquetin comes to a close, he listens to the playing of a familiar tune, Some of These Days, and in his imaginings this line, Roquetins unfinished thought, finds closure: if it justified ones existence. But, then, what is this to justify ones existence? In other places, Sartre says equally that it is to make ones life essential and necessary. The last experience Monsieur Roquetin shares in the pages of his diary reveal another, more vital element, needed to justify ones existence – a witness. It is with those like Roquetin, there to wonder about the creators of such songs, that would make of their lives necessary. So then: In one case only it might be interesting to keep a diary: it would be if others were to read it.

1.1 A Journey Begun

Nazi Occupation lasted from June 1940 until August 1944 in the city of Paris, and it was during this four-year span that existential philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir, greatly affected by the atrocities of this tyrannical regime, felt compelled to step into the political realm. While many Parisians chose to take up arms in the traditional sense, battling alongside one another as members of the Resistance, Beauvoir fought to bring down the German occupiers through the enlightening and motivating force of words, justifying her life through writing. Starting with her work on political pamphlets and articles written for *Combat* during the Occupation, and following the war as a member of the editorial staff of *Les Temps Modernes*, the young writer used her authorial voice as a stimulus to encourage readers to play a part in the struggle for political transformation. Following the defeat of Germany, literary endeavors continued to grow as Beauvoir’s main method of political participation, turning her focus towards the problem of colonialism and imperialism and, most especially, women’s liberation in later years.

Holding to her belief that projects rely on others in order to find success, Beauvoir labored to persuade other artists namely writers to use their creative efforts toward diminishing the power of oppressive structures. In her 1966 lecture, “Women and Creativity,” Beauvoir provides a succinct explanation of the reasoning behind her push for the politicized artist: “Conformity is the very antithesis of creativity, which has its source in the contestation of the existent reality.”

Progressive conversion springs forth from the creative imagination, and nowhere is this more readily apparent than in the work of art. In offering up the possibility of a new world envisioned in masterpieces of literature, paintings, music, film, and the like, the artist might build a path towards realizing these yet to be established circumstances in actuality.

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The hope for progress that Beauvoir inspired with this call for an artists’ revolution still draws attention in today’s philosophical scholarship. Contemporary scholar Sally J. Scholz, among others, continues the project initiated by Beauvoir which seeks to expose the inequalities that persist in today’s political arena through artistic, namely literary, means. For these authors too, freedom and liberation is first practiced and then subsequently realized through the imaginative act and its products, and this process can have a profound effect on the political spirit. “The process begins,” says Scholz, recounting Beauvoir’s feminist perspective on freedom from the aforementioned lecture, “when individual women take responsibility for the disclosure of meaning and write for emancipation.” In so doing, “The writer takes responsibility for meaning and is free.”

Though the demand for action in the name of women’s liberation may have been great in Beauvoir’s time, this process is not limited to this case of oppression alone. The responsibility to ensure the freedom of others, for Beauvoir, as well as for authors like Scholz, will always be an imperative in the face of any tyranny.

1.2 Witnessing the Work

The aid that Beauvoir and contemporary scholars have attempted to give to the realization of political freedom should not to be devalued, nor should be their success in bringing recognition to the works of artists as serious political endeavors. Art can change, has changed, the world for the better and this capability should be praised and promoted. There is a question that should be raised though in order to understand and make full use of the creative act toward the realization of Beauvoir’s notion of freedom. This is the question of the artist’s audience - her witness. What role does

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the spectator’s freedom play in the interaction with the work and, through this, the artist? Like the now finished line of Nausea illustrates, the audience is necessary if the goal of creation is to “justify one’s existence,” and so understanding just how the spectator participates in the creative act helps to achieve this aim. An avid, even obsessive reader herself, it is somewhat surprising that Beauvoir’s commentary on and from the perspective of the reader is so limited. Rarely addressing the responsibilities of the reader directly, she spends most of her efforts speaking on the author’s project. What we find upon thorough investigation of the problem of the audience is that the imaginative freedom and the power of those that encounter works of art continually fill a subordinate position to that of the artist, and in so doing the capacity for the conception of freedom that Beauvoir espouses is diminished.

Beauvoir’s life-long insistence on the situated aspect of freedom - for self and for others - comes to the forefront in her ontology and ethics. Unlike her partner, Jean-Paul Sartre, whose ontological theory asserts the centrality of the subject and conflict as the essential intersubjective relationship, Beauvoir builds an ontology wherein it is necessary to consider and ensure the equal freedom of the Other in order to maintain one’s freedom. This varied construction emerges from a differing emphasis on what Kristana Arp calls ‘ontological freedom’ and ‘moral freedom’ respectively. Ontological freedom is, according to Arp, “the type of freedom that Sartre emphasizes in Being and Nothingness,” the freedom found solely in the activity of consciousness. Moral freedom, conversely, is not merely complete possession of one’s conscious activity. It is, “the conscious affirmation of one’s ontological freedom. And it can only be developed in the absence of certain constraints.” Moral freedom requires both assumed, free conscious activity divorced from circumstance and the power to achieve the creations of the imagination within one’s circumstance, an achievement requiring the work and

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support of others.

For Beauvoir, each individual’s project must embrace and foster the ambiguity of one’s moral freedom. Their commitments must recognize the conditions of the present while transcending this temporal constraint by propelling imagination into the future. In speaking of the *project*, then, Beauvoir means to emphasize the lexical categories of both noun and verb. The forward-looking element of an individual’s project entails that it must be seen as dynamic and alterable, not merely by the originator, but by future generations, as the end of oppression is not seen in the course of a single generation. Projects can be taken up and their meanings and aims appropriated by those to come, and, if humanity is to meet the demands of moral freedom, this must be allowed in order to keep pace with the plasticity of given communities and humanity at large. The present circumstances surrounding the origin of the project and its meaning must, in some instances, be fully overcome if society is to reach the aim of moral freedom.

In the case of the artist’s project this includes the constraint of authorial intent, because, though the situation at the time must be recognized by the creator in order to embrace moral freedom’s ambiguity, later readers and spectators of the work in effect become creators themselves by recreating meaning in light of their present situations. It is not just the imagination of the artists that should be engaged toward political progress, but those that encounter their works should also make use of their imaginations in an effort to recreate meaning by seeking to bring those imaginings to fruition.

In dealing directly with the project of the artist, however, Beauvoir falls back into considerations of the more Sartrean notion of ontological freedom by privileging the intention of artists and returning to a relationship of conflict between them and those that seek to make use of their works; the author battles to be the master of meaning and to make the reader her slave, and in Beauvoir’s interpretation the author
wins. This produces a view of the writer’s relationship to the reader as the only and essential relationship for developing meaning where this meaning should be allowed to arise from the individual’s relationship to his or her own project if the reader’s moral freedom is to be respected. Here, though, it is the artist that is allowed the role of originator of meaning, while the audience is left with only the ability to reproduce what the artist has already set forth, thereby unduly restraining imagination and limiting freedom.

The motivation behind the reliance on artist intent to create meaning is in contradiction with her ethical theory, and the reason for this tension, I hold, lies in Beauvoir’s desire to develop in the creative act a place where the constraints of temporality and mortality upon the human condition have been outstripped. Her denial of the imaginative, and therefore moral, freedom of the reader/spectator can be explained as a consequence of the delineation she makes between the Heideggerian conception of Being-toward-death and her own advocating of Being-toward-freedom with which she replaces the former. I argue that these two conceptions must be seen as dual horizons that work in tandem with one another in any project, precisely because their relationship reveals the ambiguity of Beauvoir’s moral freedom; that is, that one exists always as both subject and object. In any mediation between artist and audience, then, a balance must be found which embraces the project at the communal and the individual level.\(^5\)

The ontological freedom of the imagination is what allows for a projection toward freedom for self and others of one’s life and commitments, while embodiment, temporality, and possibility of death are the most personal of situational constraints. The individual’s being in time and the ‘possibility of impossibility’ are what bring

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\(^5\)I want to reiterate here that the communal aspect of a project is often associated historically with the self as with others as an object to those others at some level in Beauvoir’s theory and that the project as individuated focuses primarily on the self as subjectivity and to a degree in isolation at least insofar as conscious activity is concerned.
awareness that a community of others is needed for the completion of the projects that aim for moral freedom. Works of art are the tangible, visible, and auditory cues that bring about awareness of this very ambiguity. When experienced by the audience, creations simultaneously call to mind the conditions under which they were produced, while inviting the on-looker (or perhaps listener) to manifest meaning for herself, engaging her subjectivity and objectivity at once. In the phenomenological experience of art we find the ambiguity of one’s human condition revealed and the possibility of attaining moral freedom is made feasible.

The analysis that follows seeks to rejoin Being-toward-freedom and Being-toward-death through the investigation of the work of art in relation to and apart from its original creator. By overcoming the inconsistency between Beauvoirs general ethical theory and her work on temporality in the artist’s project in this manner, current scholarship that focuses on her conception of the politicized artist might be strengthened. For, the project that is the creative act carries forward beyond the death of the artist, and those individuals that encounter such works are free to take them up in novel ways not merely isolated to original artistic intention. In understanding this, we find that the essential relationship in the aesthetic encounter is not the artist as producer and the spectator as reproducer. Instead the essential relationship is developed existentially from the connection of each individual with her respective project, making both artist and audience producers in their own right. In the creation and recreation of the work of art, we discover that the reader’s ontological freedom of imagination, in its ambiguous union with the ability to obtain such imaginings ‘in the absence of certain constraints’, contributes equally to the realization of moral freedom and liberation as does the artist.
1.3 The Road We Must Travel

Chapter 2 begins my examination with a basic overview of Jean-Paul Sartre’s ontology in an effort to contrast those theories of freedom found in both his and Beauvoir’s political and ethical systems of justification and their conceptions of the politicized artist. In holding to the centrality of the subject, Sartre’s understanding of ethics and the responsibility of the artist fall prey to some of the more detrimental flaws of his ontology. Namely, his ontological and aesthetic conceptions either leave the individual trapped in problems of introspection without means of realizing imaginations in the external realm, or he is oppressed by the intentions and motivations of the past, whether they are relevant to the individual’s project or not. More often than not he suffers the consequences of both. Additionally, in viewing the works of Sartre on the imagination and on the responsibility of the artist, mainly in context of his collections of essays What is Literature?, a template is provided that will help structure a cohesive and fully elaborated account of the artist’s project that is not offered in Beauvoir’s own writings.

Chapter 3 moves to the discussion of Beauvoir’s ontology in an effort to show the vast differentiation in respect to her life partner’s theory. Where Sartre emphasizes the subject in isolation, Beauvoir insists that this is an abstraction, and to achieve success in practice we must recognize the necessity of the Other. I will begin by exploring her denial of such abstractions and by investigating her claim that, “Interiority is not different than exteriority,” made in The Ethics of Ambiguity. In understanding that common divides made throughout the history of philosophy cover over the truth of being and promote oppression, Beauvoir allows for a view of self and other, mind and body, and subject and object that reveals these categories to be dependent upon and indivisible from one another. Following this, I will examine how, in realizing the necessity of the Other, we come to discover life’s intimate and altering connection
to time and death. When we embrace these truths of existence we can call our acts constructive - or creative - and our lives justified, as I will argue. To conclude this chapter, I will take up considerations of the audience directly to discern how, if at all, their project can disclose the truth of being, and therefore be considered a creative act in relation to Beauvoir’s ethical constructs.

Chapter 4 looks to Beauvoir’s direct address of the role and responsibility of the audience apart from the artist. Upon thorough investigation, a tension arises which returns the relationship of artist and audience to one of Master and Slave, mirroring the essential conflict of Sartrean ontology and aesthetics. Following this examination, I will seek to explain this contradiction by looking to Beauvoir’s theoretical war with Heidegger over temporality and mortality. In denying Being-toward-death as an effective horizon for the possibility of meaning creation, Beauvoir develops a philosophy of death which leads to contradictions with her own ethical theory of Being-toward-freedom, which is illustrated in her particular address of the artist-audience relationship. The desire to find in art a place where the artist transcends the limitations of death is the motivating force behind this usurping, but the death of the author will come and humanity’s circumstances will alter. As the situation changes through the coming and going of lives, the demands of moral freedom re-form. Works of art that survive through the ages, if they are to continue to be effective in keeping oppression at bay, must be taken up within those new circumstances and their meanings reshaped through the ontological freedom of the imagination and then used toward further alterations in reality. In order to achieve the moral freedom at which Beauvoir’s ethics aims, as I will argue, these two horizons must be rejoined in the artist’s project. More specifically, in revealing the way in which Beauvoir’s dismissal of death as a horizon of being arises from her inauthentic privileging of the artist, I will show that existence in time and death must be assumed as a vital part of any individuated situation.
I will close, in Chapter 5, by turning to the works of Edgar Degas. In looking to the phenomenological encounter of a particular work, I offer an example of an *art of success* which reveals the ambiguity at the core of the human condition in an effort to counteract the many examples of failure given by Beauvoir. Commonly understood to be a misogynist, Degas created works that can be seen to exude his attitude toward the female sex as merely bodies for the taking, forms without consciousness. Further understanding the historical context in which he worked only bulwarks this interpretation. But history has grown, and new awakenings have taken place on the subject of *Woman*, so that new interpretations can and must be made in order for his works to be taken up toward the successful achievement of moral freedom.

Using the Beauvoirian conceptions of *embodiment* and *reciprocity*, I will show how his works, thought to aid in the mystification of the Eternal Feminine, can be appropriated toward demystification and the disclosure of the ambiguity of existence if the imaginative freedom of the spectator is allowed equal participation in meaning creation, whether or not the intention of their project aligns with that of the original creator. In displaying the process of meaning creation at work in the encounter with works of art, I will further demonstrate that products of the creative act offer the possibility of discovering the same process at work in self-creation, as indication of the direction toward which this investigation might grow with further exploration.

Such examples of interpretation aid in overcoming the inconsistencies found between Beauvoir’s ontology and ethics and her work on the artistic project thereby offering stronger support for the current scholarship that relies on her liberated aesthetics. In rejoining the horizons of death and freedom in the artistic project, the desires of the artist as employed by Beauvoir, no longer suffice as the only relevant foundation for meaning creation given her own ontological and ethical theory. Instead, meaning should arise through the desire to disclose the truth of being, as an ambiguous entwining of subject and object where self and Other are mutually
dependent upon one another, and where this dependence reveals the constraints of temporality and mortality on the construction of each project for both the individuated and universal level. A work of art is successful if it offers the potential to reveal the ambiguous structure of human existence and it discloses to the one encountering it the ambiguity of her own being, revealing life to be the process of existential self-creation. The only essential relationship from which meaning should be derived, therefore, is of the individual to his project, and not to the original creator and her intended meaning.
Chapter 2

The Spectre of Sartre

Many scholars have dedicated time and attention to discovering the truth behind Beauvoir and Sartre’s relationship so that her influence on him might be better understood and her merit as a philosopher in her own right solidified.\(^1\) Moves to divorce the two thinkers seem bound to fail, however, despite those efforts to help Beauvoir stand on her own. The cause of this is largely due to the great lengths to which the two, especially Beauvoir, went to keep their philosophical offerings, and their lives more generally, intimately linked. The third installment of her autobiography, *Force of Circumstance*, is a testament to this fact, reading just as much like a biography of Sartre during the years following World War II as it does a recounting of her own experiences. The work of one undeniably affected the work of the other throughout their partnership as her autobiographies attest, and so it is important to understand when and to what degree his theories had an effect on the development of her ontology and ethics and, from this, her aesthetics. Sartre’s work on the project of the artist is one area where his influence on her work is plain, as I will demonstrate in this and the following chapters.

\(^{1}\) I refer here specifically to the works of Kate and Edward Fullbrook, especially their co-authored book *Sex and Philosophy: Rethinking De Beauvoir and Sartre* (Continuum Books; New York: 2008), as well as comments made by Hazel Barnes in the footnotes of *The Literature of Possibility: A Study in Humanistic Existentialism* (Tavistock; London: 1961).
2.1 Beauvoir and Sartre: Life Partners

For the sake of this investigation, there are two ontological considerations that are commonly addressed in the comparative scholarship of Beauvoir and Sartre that should be addressed here as well. First, the notions of freedom that each author presents are commonly distinguished as ‘situated’ and ‘radical’ respectively, or in the case of Arp, as ‘ontological’ and ‘moral’ respectively. It is necessary to understand the various nuances of their definitions of freedom in order to obtain a proper understanding of how the employment of these ideas might affect the audience’s place within said freedom. Second, where Sartre holds that the essential relationship between the subject and others is one of conflict, Beauvoir professes a theory generally understood as recognizing the possibility of reciprocity and notes it as a necessary element in the realization of her understanding of freedom (i.e. moral freedom).

Once these two tenets have been fully elaborated, I will be better equipped to show that Sartre’s ontology and, following from this, his understanding of the artist’s project holds the author as subject to be central to the development of meaning. From this, conflict arises as the only possibility for intersubjective interaction, including that of artist and spectator. Conversely, Beauvoir insists that a mutual recognition must be achieved, and conflict overcome, in order that any possibility of meaning take hold and eventually aid in the fulfillment of freedom. In this way, Beauvoir creates a strong support for a theory that understands both the imaginative (e.g. ontological) freedom and the ability to obtain those imaginations within one’s situation (e.g. power) as necessary in reaching moral freedom for both artist and spectator. In the following chapter, I will examine her ontology and ethics closely as well as elaborate precisely how Beauvoir handles the role of the spectator/reader within the artist’s project, showing that though she provides a foundation for worthwhile participation in freedom via this commitment reciprocity, the attention she pays to the spectator
falls short of achieving a relationship of reciprocal recognition with the artist.

2.2 The Reality of Radical Freedom

In order to discover in what way Sartre’s ontology affects his conception of the imagination of the witness and thus his considerations of the artistic project, it is first necessary to address one particular interpretation, or some might say accusation, made of his ontological theory of consciousness. This is the understanding that the presentation of consciousness offered by Sartre ignores or, at the very least, mischaracterizes the role of situation in the structure of consciousness and therefore freedom. If the conception of so-called ‘radical’ freedom, developed in his preeminent work Being and Nothingness, does indeed present this problem, his existentialist idea of freedom does not offer a satisfactory conceptualization, as it leaves little room for worthwhile action. Further, as the imagination is for Sartre one of the “two great irreducible modes of consciousness” alongside perception, imagination then becomes subject by proxy to the problems of skepticism and solipsism frequently asserted of his larger theory of consciousness.

Iddo Landau presents a version of the most common criticism against Sartre’s claim that the transcendent aspect of consciousness, the for-itself, remains radically free from external determination because we are, “free to confer meaning on [...]situation(s) in a variety of ways, according to [our] fundamental projects in life.” Landau, alongside a long line of other critics, holds that this comes out of a diminished and pragmatically inapplicable understanding of freedom which delineates the idea of freedom to obtain from that of freedom to choose. Sartre says himself, “situatedness

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limits...only freedom to obtain,”⁴ whereas nothing limits our freedom to choose. For Landau, this is simply not true.

Citing Sartre’s popular example of the freedom of a slave which says, “Of course the slave will not be able to obtain the wealth and standard of living of his master; but these are not the objects of his projects,”⁵ Landau illustrates that the slave is in fact greatly limited in his ability to choose between alternative projects. As he says, “people’s situations limit to a significant extent the projects they can choose,” and not only those they can obtain. Returning again to the example of the slave Landau states at length:

The slave cannot select the projects of a mountain-climber or a real-estate agent. Nor can he bona fide choose, in his circumstances, the project of becoming governor of Alabama, president of the United States, a professional botanist, classics scholar, or violinist. The slave does have some freedom in his projects (he can choose, for example, between the project of being an inwardly submissive slave and of being a resentful one), but he does not have absolute freedom to choose projects and confer meanings on his situation. He is thus limited not only in his practical freedom, but also in his ontological freedom.⁶

Here we see where Sartre’s denial of the external effects of situation, which do in fact limit the freedom to choose and to obtain, creates unsatisfactory sense of freedom.

A similar pattern of criticism can be found in Dagfinn Follesdal’s objection to Sartre’s freedom on the basis that it is “full of inconsistencies and difficulties.”⁷ What both of these thinkers criticize is that Sartre’s construction of freedom is no freedom at all if it remains devoid of practical applications; e.g., in what sense could a slave be free to be a real estate agent if she is never in a position to do this? Moreover, as

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⁴Ibid. p. 465  
⁶“Sartres Absolute Freedom,” p. 466  
Follesdal states, Sartre’s notion of intention is crucially limited. An act of consciousness, in order to participate in an ethical project, must have an object of intention. This idea of intention is meant not only in the traditional Husserlian phenomenological conception of intended object upon which one reflects. Intention may also mean “the more conventional, practical sense in which it is used in ethics, whereby one says that one’s intentions in doing something are such and such. Sartre does not distinguish between these two senses.” As the responsibility of the writer on which Sartre centers his essay *What is Literature?* is almost entirely an ethical responsibility, overlooking this distinction would be of great detriment to his formation of a consistent aesthetic theory. So too when it is understood that for Sartre images are “themselves acts...spontaneous through and through.” Acts, as Follesdal rightly asserts, must be projected out with some end in mind if we are to accord with existential demands.

Some scholars have attempted to show that there are flaws in the popular interpretation of Sartre’s ontology as espousing *absolute freedom*, by addressing his employment of the terminology of situation throughout the evolution of his work. Thomas A. Busch asserts that there is a progression in Sartre’s thought on subjectivity which is not “a simple rejection” of *Being and Nothingness*, but is nonetheless centered on the idea of situation alongside, and perhaps even more so than, the subject. Citing pertinent lines from this canonical text, for instance, “No factual state whatever it may be...is capable of motivating any act whatsoever,” Busch acknowledges interpretations that, “leave Sartre open to being read...as a philosopher of an exaggerated subjectivity.” We can then read Sartre as denying that subjectivity is significantly determined by others or history, and therefore situation is seen as having

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8 “Sartre on Freedom,” p. 402
9 “Sartre on Imagination,” p. 144
12 “Sartres Hyperbolic Ontology,” p. 194
little effect on the process of meaning creation. Despite this, Busch goes on to declare Sartre’s vocabulary is meant “hyperbolically and not literally.”

Busch notes that we begin to see a relegation in Sartre’s later work of the dislocation of past from present, instead recognizing more fully the role of historical context in self-construction in works such as *Saint Genet* and his writings on Flaubert. We no longer see Sartre’s theory as one that advocates the *for-itself* as choosing “beyond nationality and race,” but instead he sees, “situatedness as a strongly structured historical reality.” Additionally, Busch states, “Sartre has insisted, in *Being and Nothingness*, that the free subjectivity is always situated.” Busch here asserts that in some manner Sartre has always recognized this element and its significance in the experience of consciousness, though he had not fully elaborated its effect because, “His analysis of situatedness was de-emphasised by his preoccupation with establishing autonomy and overcoming determinism.” That is, in his early works, Sartre is primarily concerned with divulging the structure of ontological freedom, addressing practical freedom, e.g. freedom to obtain, in later texts. By building these connections, Busch hopes to surmount the problems that manifest in Sartre’s centrality of the subject. In noting his evolution of thought, we may have what is necessary to overcome any similar issues in Sartre’s dealings with the artist and his project. But, as Busch himself notes, “the threads that tie together the early and late works are slender.”

Matthew C. Eshleman takes up this line of thought by addressing comparable problems, perhaps hoping to further strengthen the ties that bind Sartre’s ‘radical’ freedom to ‘situation’: however his final assertions contain a conclusion unique to current scholarship. While he too asserts that Sartre transitions from an idea of

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13 Ibid. p. 198
14 Ibid. p. 194
15 Ibid. p. 200
16 Ibid. p. 200
17 Ibid. p. 195
radical freedom to an idea of freedom as constrained by situation he claims that this transition does not occur through the evolution of his work over time. Instead, Eschleman says that the alteration of radical to situated freedom takes place within the pages of *Being and Nothingness* itself. “Sartre,” he insists, “has already rejected absolute freedom in the second half of *Being and Nothingness.*”

18 Eshleman follows the development of the argument and notes, “During the abstract phase of his analysis, in isolation of Others, Sartre considered being-for-itself to be pure possibility and the ego to be solely self-constituted. After introducing social reality, Sartre offers a new definition of the psychological self.”

19 This new situated self, found within the pages of *Being and Nothingness*, is, “produced by the limiting consciousness [i.e. by the Other] and assumed by the limited consciousness.”

20 There are two notable issues with re-workings like those of Busch and Eschleman, however. The first, in relation to Busch’s reading of Sartrean ontology, is the concern over the exact connotations implied in Sartre’s use of terms such as ‘situation’ and ‘situated’. As Follesdal notes of Sartre’s failure to distinguish between two senses of ‘intention’ here he likewise fails to distinguish between two significations of ‘situation’, a fault which Busch does not remedy in his analysis. As regards Eschleman’s argument, questions arise as to the precise method and expanse of the limitation Others enact on one’s process of self-creation. He hints at this issue saying, “A great deal more could be said about...what precisely Sartre means by limit,”

21 but he does not elaborate on this point, choosing instead to declare with finality that interpretations of Sartre’s ontology and freedom as radical have been misconstrued. Full consideration of the specific lengths to which others influence the freedom of the subject show,

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19 Ibid. p. 68

20 *Being and Nothingness*, p. 286

21 “Normative Justification, p. 72
however, that Sartre’s conception of freedom “does not come in degrees,”\textsuperscript{22} though as Eschleman would like to argue it does, and that his is, counter Eschleman’s belief, an absolute theory even still.

\section*{2.3 Situation & Conflict, Essentially}

In his introduction to \textit{What is Literature?}, Steven Ungar remarks that Sartre’s employment of the terminology of situation in reference to Flaubert and the Goncourts is “inexcusable and embarrassing.”\textsuperscript{23} What is inexcusable here is Sartre’s failure to maintain a consistent discernment of his own terminology. Ungar points out a new definition of \textit{situation} for Sartre in this later work which equates to something along the lines of ‘a given historical context’. But this is not the definition with which Sartre has previously worked when using such terminology, especially not in his ontological theory. Traditionally, when Sartre calls into question the influence of situation on consciousness, what is presented is not an external stimulus but, instead, an internal object of consciousness that is created by that consciousness. The situation is not, for Sartre, external objects and circumstances; situation is the meaning \textit{constituted} upon consideration of those circumstances in the reflective act of consciousness of the subject alone.

Taking up common elements of experience that are employed to show the determinative nature of existence, Sartre explains how one’s place, environment, past, fellowmen, and death are not limiting, external forces on freedom. Though it may seem this way, these circumstances only become limits through the conscious, interiorized creation of them as obstacles. Prior to the constitution of meaning by the conscious activity of the subject, these elements are, as Sartre labels them “absurd fact” and

\footnote{\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., p. 72}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{23}Steven Ungar, \textit{Introduction to What is Literature? and Other Essays}, by Jean-Paul Sartre (Harvard University Press; Cambridge, 1988) p. 9.}
are therefore meaningless, holding no power over the subject’s ability to choose for herself. Hans Herlof Greland, recounting Sartre’s views, states this explicitly saying, “Each of us chooses our own situation, its meaning and possibilities of action, when it is constituted in the conscious experience.”24 As such, the way in which Sartre understands situation in his earlier works is not a “strongly structured historical reality,” as Busch has said, but is in fact in direct contrast to this conception of situation; it is only another rendition of absolute freedom. Sartre himself says as much: “Thus I am absolutely free and absolutely responsible for my situation.”25 There is little room in this declaration to understand situation simply as historical context, as this involves recognition of the external creations of others and the constraints they place on the process of producing meaning.

Understood as historical context, situation becomes a determinative force, which, if accepted, is at odds with the system of philosophy Sartre presents in his early ontological works and the understanding of freedom addressed therein. Under the original interpretive use, situation, far from being an external pressure, is nothing more than a different label for the same old saw of absolute freedom Sartre has played throughout. When Sartre speaks of situation in his earlier books, he speaks of the very ontological (e.g. absolute) freedom Arp notes as being definitive of his theory. It is this use of the word on which scholars like Busch focus when speaking of his earlier ontological underpinnings, and not his later political and ethical musings for which Sartre never provided the promised systematic foundation. In making a case for a renewed understanding of his theory based on Sartre’s early use of the terminology of situation, Busch only argues for the very thing he hopes to contend - radical freedom. In speaking on Sartre’s later usage of ‘situation’, Busch necessarily contradicts his claim that the evolution of Sartre’s subjectivity should not be “understood as a simple

25Being and Nothingness, p. 653
rejection,” when in fact, as Ungar is bereft to see, for Sartre situation has taken on an entirely new meaning for subjectivity, one that goes beyond the interiorization of circumstances to develop meaning.

The emphasis on the introspective certainty through absolute freedom that Sartre seeks, especially in his earlier works, increases when he addresses recognition of others. It is in this area that we see additional problems with the role of situation in Sartre’s theory as it appears in Eshleman’s analysis. Eshleman quotes from the final division of *Being and Nothingness* saying, “We see now, when we included the Other’s existence in our considerations, that my freedom on this new level finds its limits also in the existence of the Other’s freedom.” This, alongside several additional statements on the limitations of one’s freedom provided by the existence of others would seem to imply that Sartre has accepted humanity and the world created from human actions as external influences on the creation of meaning for subjectivity, previously absolutely free by way of the ‘for-itself’. This, then, would be a direct denial of radical freedom as the overarching tenet of Sartre’s ontology.

What is overlooked here, however, is the essential nature of conflict in relation to these limits that is stressed in the encounter with the Other in the ontology of Being and Nothingness. For Sartre, the main threat to one’s subjectivity is the “Gaze” of the other and the effects it might have on the formation of one’s situation. It is with the other’s look that I cease to be a subject, instead materializing as an object before the eyes of this other. “With the Other’s look the ‘situation’ escapes me,” Sartre declares, and then, “To use an everyday expression which better expresses our thought, I am no longer master of my situation.” This overtly Hegelian language indicates that in this theory the situation and its meaning can be fully possessed either by one subject or the other, never both. So the idea of absolute freedom has

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26 “Sartres Hyperbolic Ontology,” p. 200
27 *Being and Nothingness*, p. 525
28 Ibid. p. 355, Emphasis added.
not been removed with the Other’s entrance, but meaning-creation instead becomes a possibility for only one - the Master.

This conception is further elaborated when speaking of the situation in relation to one’s fellowman. Initially Sartre acknowledges that we, as subjects, come into a world already invested with meanings and that this is closer to a “state imposed on us,” over which we have little control, than to an instance of freedom enacted through the creation of meaningful situations. There then seems to be room to allow for an interpretation of Sartre’s ontology in Being and Nothingness that is more fairly understood as ‘limited’ or ‘situated’ rather than radical or absolute. While Sartre does admit that there is a limiting force upon the subject’s freedom in the existence of the Other, as Eschleman points out, this is not because the activity of the other is limiting. Instead, constriction arises because the Other is precisely the limit. This is what Sartre intends when he claims, “freedom [of self] can only be limited by freedom [of the Other].”

This obstacle that is the other exists as such because, I am, for him, solely object, and in making me thus he negates my freedom. “It is this alienating process of making an object of my situation,” and thus of my free, subjective meaning as subject Sartre says, “which is the constant and specific limit of my situation, just as the making an object of my being-for-itself in being-for-others is the limit of my being. And it is precisely these two characteristic limits which represent the boundaries of my freedom.” It is this understanding of limitation that makes my relationship to the other one of conflict, because the Other cannot be known as anything other than object as the Other cannot know me as more than object: “I strive to determine as object the subject who denies my character as subject and who himself determines

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29Ibid. p. 656
30Ibid. p. 673
31Ibid. p. 672
me as object.”

It is the desire to establish consciousness as ‘radically free’ that pushes Sartre to declare the essential relationship of self and other as one of conflict. “The essence of the relations between consciousnesses,” he declares explicitly, “is conflict.” In holding to the idea that the encounter with others unavoidably culminates in an experience of conflict, Sartre’s ontology becomes a project that can retain the absolutely autonomous subject as its central force - undetermined by external circumstance. The primary creator of meaning in any authentic mode of being, then, is the individual’s purely transcendent subjectivity, the for-itself. The encounter with the Other, makes of the individual an in-itself, a mode of being which is pure objectivity and void of (ontological) freedom. In order to maintain his transcendent aspect, the individual must overcome the gaze of the other that threatens his freedom. Elsewise, the Other’s look becomes, “simply the death of my possibility. A subtle death” Here we see where Sartre diverges from Hegel and, more importantly, Beauvoir in his denial of reciprocity as a possibility for overcoming conflict. As Sartre states directly: “So long as consciousness exists, the separation and conflict of consciousnesses will remain.”

If the essential relationship between Self and Other is one of absolute conflict without chance of reciprocity, then, in the encounter with the Other only one party can come out the other side of the conflict as winner and one as loser, or in more Hegelian terms, as the Master and the Slave. Debbie Evans takes up this consideration noting that; “Sartre cannot accept that the other can determine me in my being-for-others,” that the meaning assigned to a given situation can arise from the external coercion of the gaze of the Other. Evans further adds, “In terms of the Master-

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32 Ibid. p. 310
33 Ibid. p. 555
34 Ibid. p. 354
35 Ibid. p. 329
Slave relation, it is clear that he [Sartre] has specifically identified himself with the *Master.*”

Here, Sartre’s is the story of Hegel’s Master and Slave retold in stunted form. For Sartre, it is the Master that obtains the ontological freedom of the *for-itself.* And though Sartre will go on to recognize that the Slave, even in giving up his freedom, never really lost it in the first place, what the Slave in this situation holds onto in his analysis is nonetheless overwhelmingly unsatisfactory, as authors like Landau underscore. Dissatisfaction arises from Sartre’s failure to take into consideration the freedom to obtain alongside the freedom to choose - ontological freedom and power. More specifically, the extensive work on ontological freedom supplied by Sartre in earlier works like *Being and Nothingness* does not provide a framework which can answer to the problem of limitations on action outside of consciousness. Even when situation takes on new meaning as a truly limiting historical and social context, as with his later works like *Saint Genet* and *What is Literature?*, the essential relationship of self and other still remains as one of conflict, and therefore a consistent mechanism is never supplied for taking the workings of one’s imagination and bringing them to fruition.

### 2.4 Sartre’s Master Artist

Nowhere is this oversight more apparent than with Sartre’s works on the artist’s project. To continue with Evans line of reasoning from above, we find that, while recognizing Sartre’s adherence to conflict at the heart the intersubjective relationship, she declares the same sort of transition in Sartre’s thought concerning situation and reciprocity as was found with Busch, this time within his work on the artist’s project:

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37Ibid. p. 100.
In 1948...Sartre published his well-known essay, *What is Literature?* What is particularly striking in this work is the evolution of his thought concerning a privileged intersubjective relationship: that existing between writer and his reader. The subject-object duality that had characterized the alienation of human relationships in *Being and Nothingness* is now replace by a dialectic of reciprocity.\(^{38}\)

I argue a closer look at the relationship of the writer’s freedom in connection with that of the reader, contrary to Evans, reveals that conflict continues to remain the essential relationship of intersubjectivity. While it is true that Sartre professes an equal recognition of the reader’s freedom, there is a subtle, but still effective element at work that, despite this acknowledgement, leaves the freedom of the reader oppressed. “It is the joint effort of author and reader,” Sartre declares, “which brings upon the scene the concrete and imaginary object which is the work of the mind. There is no art except for and by the other.”\(^{39}\) What perhaps goes unnoticed at first is the necessary component of the author/artist in the creation of meaning for a work of art. Recognizing this, however, demonstrates how the essential relationship of conflict still persists in Sartre’s later work and thus that the subject, here the artist, continues to remain centralized in his ontology while his conception of situation remains devoid of its full content.

“Since the artist must entrust to another the job of carrying out what he has begun,” Sartre believes, “since it is only through the consciousness of the reader that he can regard himself as essential to the work, all literary work is an appeal.”\(^{40}\) There are two things we might notice here. First, Sartre sees the work of art as something that must be “entrusted” to the reader and that the reader must “carry out what he (the artist) has begun”. I understand this to be the same encounter of conflict seen in the ontology presented in *Being and Nothingness*. That is, the artist seeks to be

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\(^{38}\)Ibid. p. 110


\(^{40}\)Ibid. p. 54
the Master of Hegel’s dialectic while the reader is placed in the role of Slave, where
the artist seeks to have his project win out at the possible annihilation of the reader’s.
Though the reader is now seen as an aid to one’s transcendent projects rather than
an obstacle or limit, she still remains predominately an object at the artist’s bidding.

Intimately tied with this understanding is Sartre’s assertion that the artist can
be made “essential to the work” and its meaning. It would seem from this, that
if the artist in relation to her project is held as the essential origin of meaning,
possible alternate meanings that may be derived from the project of the reader are
lost. Through this, the artist becomes a producer, while all that witness the work
there after can at best hope to be reproducers. This astute observation is made by
Paul Ricoeur, who says that Sartre “reinforces the primacy of the original in spite of
[his] efforts to acknowledge the specificity of the imagination.”41 To be sure the artist,
as original creator, always retains historical import. After all, without Shakespeare
there would be no Romeo and Juliet. But without Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev
and choreographer Leonid Lavronsky, the ballet inspired by the original would never
have seen the stage. To claim, as Sartre does in his theories of the author and reader,
that the original version retains greater significance simply because it is the original
intent of the creator leaves the audience wanting for more.

What is most striking is that such considerations of the artist and spectator are
not limited to Sartre’s later works. Similar understandings appear in Being and Noth-
ingness as well in his discussion of the subject’s fellowman and the role of language
in the constitution of meaningful situations. Each individual enters the world of
language wherein words exists as saturated with pre-given definitions, but meaning
only comes through the free act of sentence construction by the subject, according to
Sartre. These meanings are then dictated to others as laws to be obeyed:

The apprehension of the *true* meaning (i.e. the one expressly willed by the speaker) will be able to put other meanings in the shade or *subordinate* them, but it will not surpass them. *Thus speech, which is a free project for me, has specific laws for others.* And these laws can come into play only within an original synthesis.\(^{42}\)

Again, we see that freedom remains a possibility for only one individual in this interaction, the Master speaker. Additionally we see the idea that the originator of the creation, here the sentence, takes precedence over those to whom she gives her art, and that the spectator is commanded to take up the meaning which the artist instills as the *true* meaning against all those others the spectator/listener might find.

Such considerations like the one Sartre offers in reflection on Vercors’ retelling of an interview with Hitler where he suggests that, “In a half-century it will no longer excite anyone,”\(^{43}\) are reasonable if the central force of meaning remains in its original form with the artist as Master. And so his suggestion that, “works of mind should be eaten on the spot,”\(^{44}\) seems accurate. If the meaning of a work is derived from the present situation and from the lived experience of the artist, then it would seem the essential relationship out of which meaning is found would have to be one where the artist’s intention is central as Sartre’s musings throughout his oeuvre insist.

But does this not leave his aesthetic theory prey to the same problems as were found in his ontological holdings where the subject is built up as central? Without an acknowledgement of an aesthetic creation whose meaning can be derived apart from the original intention of the artist, the act of reciprocity assigned to Sartre by Evans is diminished, as is the freedom to be found through reciprocal relations. This is so because Sartre subordinates the imaginative creations of the audience – that is the products of her ontological freedom – which might arise in relation to her own particular project to that of the artist, and through this limits her power to see these

\(^{42}\) *Being and Nothingness*, p. 663, Emphasis added.

\(^{43}\) *What is Literature?*, p. 75

\(^{44}\) Ibid. p. 75
imaginings made in reality.

As Sartre’s philosophy has failed to offer a conception of aesthetics which allows for the reciprocity that he is said to champion in his later works on the artist’s project, we must look to another source to discover in what way imagination of the witness and the creative act thereafter can participate fully in the pursuit of freedom. This is the subject presented in the next chapter, where I turn to the ontological and ethical offerings of the philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir.
Chapter 3

The Creative Audience

In the preceding chapter, I examined the understanding of radical freedom in Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophical theorizing. His singular focus on ontological freedom within the experience of subjective consciousness was shown to lead to a view of intersubjective interaction that is inevitably cloaked in conflict. In closing his investigation off to the external influence arising from historical context and the Other, Sartre leaves us with an unsatisfied longing to know how we should act in the world. In short, he fails to provide an ethics of action.

Without the equal consideration of the Other and the situations he creates, our commitments are lost to the dominion of Master and Slave. For any aesthetic project then, the mediation between the artist and those encountering her works, as they both strive to develop meaning, culminates in domination and oppression. Hegel's description of such a relation stands in just this way. The Master, our artist for Sartre, “is the power dominating existence, while this existence again is the power controlling the other [the bondsman], the master holds, par consequence, this other in subordination,”¹ he says. It is through this association that Sartre believes he has achieved Roquetin’s goal; he has justified his existence by making himself the essential. Such a relation to the unessential Slave, for the Master, “embodies the

¹G. W. F. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Mind, trans. Terry Pinkard, Section 190
truth of his certainty of himself.”² But to inhabit this realm is to exist in delusion. Hegel speaks:

Just where the master has effectively achieved lordship, he really finds that something has come about quite different from an independent consciousness. It is not an independent, but rather a dependent consciousness that he has achieved. He is thus not assured of self-existence as his truth; he finds that his truth is rather the unessential consciousness, and the fortuitous unessential action of that consciousness.³

What Sartre forgets, Beauvoir embraces, that there is no satisfactory freedom except by and through the equality of the Other: “It is possible to rise above conflict,” she observes, “if each individual freely recognizes the other, each regarding himself and the other simultaneously as object and as subject in a reciprocal manner.”⁴ And, in fact, this account of freedom requires that we move beyond considerations of ontological freedom because, “The other’s freedom alone is capable of necessitating my being.”⁵ We must, therefore, assume all those situations which comprise the external influences of the world, most especially the Other, along with our internal capacities adding what Sonia Kruks calls effective freedom⁶ (Arp’s power) to ontological freedom in order to rise to the plane of Beauvoirian moral freedom.

To do otherwise is to cover over the truth of being, that “interiority is not different than exteriority,”⁷ that the external effect of the Other produces an internal change as well. It is in the disclosure of being where we find, in Beauvoir, the “original condition of all justification of existence,” and it is this that gives us freedom. “To wish for the disclosure of the world and to assert oneself as freedom are one and the

²Ibid. Section 192
³Ibid. Section 192
⁴The Second Sex, p. 158
⁶Sonia Kruks, Situation and Human Existence (Unwin Hyman; London: 1990) p. 90.
same movement.”

We discover, then, that the Master needs the Slave to make his life essential - but needs him in a particular way, in equality, that the Slave too is known as essential.

In examining Beauvoir’s ontology and ethics against the backdrop of Sartre’s conflict-based theory, we discover that she offers a new balance in the mediation between artist and audience. In her work, a more fully elaborated answer to the question of the extent of limitations others place on the subject is brought to light. A foundation is provided for building an artist-audience encounter that allows the witness to the work the same freedom in the process of meaning-creation as is provided the artist. This foundation relies on overcoming the gap between self and other and similar divides, such as those Sartre offers, so that communication becomes possible. As I will demonstrate, the emphasis on communication as an appeal, which is central to Beauvoir’s ethics, opens the door for the realization of reciprocity and freedom through the disclosure of being. The artistic act, as one form of communication, presents just such an opportunity.

3.1 Ontological Foundations of Moral Freedom

To disclose being, to justify existence, to become essential - how are we to understand this decidedly esoteric language so that we might have hope of setting eyes on its entanglement with freedom and, moreover, so that we might then act ethically in the world? For as Beauvoir says, “There can be no ethics outside of action.” The answer lies in this very melding of internal and external, in the dismissal of bifurcated abstractions which, as Sartre has exampled, offer few satiating answers. Freedom and justification are only possible if we do away with the divided notions of self and

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9Ibid. p. 22
other, Spirit and Life, subject and object, for-itself and in-itself, acting instead in a manner which acknowledges the ambiguity of existence that is the interdependent consanguinity of inner and outer. Where Sartre held transcendence to be in the for-itself alone, for Beauvoir to exist as freedom is to invite the in-itself to rejoin the for-itself, to put the exterior and interior in conversation so to speak.

From this symbiotic connection we can deduce that subjugation is not only brought about through shackling the body but it is equally possible through the enslavement of the mind, as the two are interconnected. To exist in a state of immanence is simply “to be petrified into a thing,” to live as a passive and stagnant pure in-itself, and stagnation can be found both in the functions of the body as well as the workings of the mind.

Beauvoir’s preeminent example of this view of immanence and transcendence and the dialogue of for-itself and in-itself is found in her examination of the oppression of Woman in The Second Sex. It is through the situation of embodiment that woman has been most obviously trapped in immanence. As body, woman is made immanent through her maternal role: “The domestic labors that fell to her lot because they were reconcilable with the cares of maternity imprisoned her in repetition and immanence.” So too is her world fixed through means of sexual objectification:

10 These Hegelian terms are used in The Second Sex, trans. H.M. Parshley (Vintage Books; New York: 1952) to contrast the essentialized understanding of man and woman respectively. (p.162, 183) They stand in place of something like the traditional dualist divisions of mind and body, often associated with Cartesian interpretations of dualism, though Hegel’s use differs in many ways. My particular choice of words is made so that an emphasis on Beauvoir’s denial of such a division - where she employs the Heideggerian conception of Mitsein to overcome the chasm between the two Hegelian concepts - can be made. It is worthwhile to note further that for the four pairs noted here, that the former terms and the latter terms map onto one another and I will often use them as equivalents, as they have been historically and philosophically linked as such. For example, the self as Master is usually thought of as the subject to the Slaves object, or as the Spirited rationality exists in lieu of the unthinking body of Life.

11 The Second Sex, p. 303

12 Ibid. p. 71; It should be noted that motherhood here is not considered as an essentially immanent practice either for myself or Beauvoir. It is rather the stagnation of existence found in the mindless repetition of the function which makes of it an immanent one. Beauvoir criticizes the practice of motherhood historically because, as she says, “giving birth and suckling are not activities, they are natural functions; no project is involved.”
Sexual pleasure...represents the stunning triumph of the immediate; in the violence of the instant, the future and the universe are denied; what lies outside of the carnal flame is nothing; for a brief moment of this apotheosis, woman is no longer mutilated and frustrated. But once again, she values these triumphs of immanence only because immanence is her lot.\textsuperscript{13}

The present, no longer speaking to the future, becomes the defining aspect of the female as is related visually through her form. But man, who is equally embodied has, according to Beauvoir, historically subsisted in transcendence. This demonstrates that it is the stasis of the meaning of embodiment that locks woman away in immanence, not the body itself though we are apt to conflate the two. If we assume our embodiment toward the future, then transcendence can be realized in the corporeal realm, because, as I will show, it is one’s approach to temporality through involvement with others that determines the authenticity of a life’s work.

Likewise, the movements of the mind can become either a victim of immanence or an instrument of transcendence. As mind, woman’s immanence comes, not with the exclusion of consciousness, but with the denial of a creative consciousness. In the case of woman, the subordination and submission of one’s imaginative acts to that of man’s keeps woman, as the Other, in a state of childlike irresponsibility. She is made “a nave victim of the mirage of the for-others,” where, “human inventions, words, customs, and values are given facts, as inevitable as the sky and trees.”\textsuperscript{14}

This deluded view keeps at bay the creative force of the female, allowing man to take command of the world, creating it in his own image. Giving the Hollywood starlet as an example, Beauvoir says, “The movies, especially, where the star is subordinated to the director, permit no invention, no advances in creative activity.”\textsuperscript{15} This is not to say that conscious activity is lacking, only that it is engaged to no end. Theirs is

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p.376
\textsuperscript{14}The Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 35
\textsuperscript{15}The Second Sex, p. 637
the life of the child who “plays at being, at being a saint, a hero, a guttersnipe,”\textsuperscript{16} where the future is of no concern and actions have no effect, because, “They are not engaged in genuine projects.”\textsuperscript{17}

To exist as genuine transcendence is to engage the world as a creative force. To be creative is not simply to envisage dreams, but also to seek those dreams out in reality, for the desires of now to call out to the possibilities of then and find a response. As Kristina Arp reflects, the authentically moral person “attempts to create a reality that reflects human aspirations.”\textsuperscript{18} Successful fulfillment of projects requires one’s ontological freedom continually engage in the process of imagining and re-imagining, and that the project make use of one’s effective freedom such that moral freedom is the final goal. The recognition of life’s ambiguity as subject and object, Spirit and Life, is the first step that allows for actions to become constructive - to disclose being and to justify our existence - because inner thoughts and outer movement rely on one another to keep the conversation going. As Arp notes, “Humans can transcend their material origin in thought,” through the imagination, “but they can never escape it,” because as she adds, “Consciousness depends on the body.”\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Interiority is not different from exteriority}. So, though neither mind nor body is necessarily defined in immanence, the oppression of one’s effective freedom will bring about the limitation of one’s ontological freedom. Equally to inhibit the movements of the mind will eventually chain the gestures of the body.

\textsuperscript{16} The Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 36
\textsuperscript{17} The Second Sex, p. 637
\textsuperscript{18} Bonds of Freedom, p. 35
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. p. 48-9
3.2 Beauvoir’s Philosophy of Time

To understand the mutual reinforcing relationship of existence as subject and object is, necessarily, to call into consideration temporality as my language has already indicated. Concerns of temporality affect the way in which one must act in order to ensure moral freedom. As imaginative subject we ought to project our conscious creations into an unending future; as embodied objects we are finite beings whose mortality means our futures have limits. Beauvoir states plainly that the future is “the meaning and substance of all action,” but the exact meaning of our action arises from the boundaries of the future that our individually determined projects create.

Conversely, the boundary of moral freedom at which all projects must aim if they are to be genuinely pursued appears as a horizon which we struggle to approach eternally, as the face of freedom and oppression alters with each coming generation. I quote the following from *The Ethics of Ambiguity* at length as Beauvoir’s example encapsulates the dynamic of these bounded futures:

The limits cannot be marked out *a priori*; There are projects which define the future of a day or of an hour; and there are others which are inserted into structures capable of being developed through one, two, or several centuries...When one fights for the emancipation of oppressed natives, or the socialist revolution, he is obviously aiming at a long range goal; and he is still aiming concretely, beyond his own death, through the movement, the league, the institutions, or the party that he has helped set up. What we maintain is that *one must not expect that his goal be justified as a point of departure of a new future*...we must not expect anything of that time for which we have worked; *other men will have to live its joys and sorrows*. As for us...the tasks we have set up for ourselves and which, though exceeding the limits of our lives, are ours, must find their meaning in themselves.  

From this we see that the meaning of our projects and the effects which they have

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20 *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 127
21 Ibid. p.127-8, Emphasis added.
on the world must, given our relationship to temporality and mortality, be approached and developed on two concordant levels - as communal and as individuated. The project of emancipation and the insurance of freedom (in the Beauvoirian sense) is a communal one, but the “tasks”, as Beauvoir refers to them, by which men and women choose to participate in this longer-term action, for example as an artist or as a politician, is determined on the individual plane. Additionally, we must not insist that others hold onto the goals that we have developed and determined. Though this means that we must chance our projects being dismissed or ignored by them, what is certain is that both communal and individual aims entail the support of others if they are to find success. If our aims deny collaboration then, as Arp avows, “Any idea of the future that I construct completely on my own must remain a fantasy.”

Arp relies mainly on The Ethics of Ambiguity to illustrate the need for others in order that one may work toward realizing her imaginings for the future in reality’s situation. But Beauvoir posited these notions - and the requisite overcoming of conflict they entail - in her earlier essay, “Pyrrhus and Cineas”. “Our freedoms support each other,” she says, “like the stones in an arch.” Such an ontological framework demands that we approach the other with equal footing to ourselves, for we all are needed, none more than any other, to keep the arch standing. “Respect for the other’s freedom is not an abstract rule,” Beauvoir insists, “It is the first condition of my successful effort.” To respect is not to demand assistance from others for your own project, dragging them behind you chained by your own desires. To respect others is, instead, to appeal to them as an ambiguous entity like your own - as subject and object crafting the discussion together in mutual freedom through individuated choice.

22 The Bonds of Freedom, p. 71
24 Ibid. p. 136
It is of little surprise that Beauvoir turns to language and the image of dialogue as the preeminent means of understanding what this balanced mediation of self and other looks like. “One speaks only to men,” she says, not objects. Thus, “Language is an appeal to the others freedom since the sign is only a sign through a consciousness that grasps it.”

Unlike Sartre who, as we have seen, feels that there is a justifying source in language which arises from the ontological freedom of the self unaffected by others, Beauvoir does not exhibit this level of certainty in communication. Sally Scholz offers a commanding analysis of Beauvoir’s skepticism toward correspondence theories of language saying, “Words do not and cannot shape into static form that which is variable and fluid.” This evolutionary aspect of words is the result of communication being necessarily that - communal. “The word [communication],” Scholz says, “reveals to the individual that human existence is not solitary.”

And as “language is what makes meaning possible,” this means it is the community within which the individual resides that creates meaning, never the individual alone. The artistic act becomes, from this, a place wherein we might experience this process uncovered, learning of the other’s presence through the works. The products of traditional creative projects: paintings, manuscripts, symphonies, and the like are the tangible, visual, and auditory cues that serve as mediators in our attempts to communicate by supplying reminders of the existence of others and of the flow of time.

There is fear in this, though. To reach out to the other in freedom is to risk. It is to put yourself in danger of being denied your project and its desired meaning in the process of communal mediation that follows your plea for help, as the previous remarks show. If we wish to disclose being and to justify our existence we must face

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25 Ibid. p. 133
27 Ibid p. 215
this danger head on: “Our being only realizes itself by choosing to be in danger in
the world, in danger before the foreign and divided freedoms that take hold of it.”\textsuperscript{28} To do otherwise is to settle on conflict - to exist as Master and Slave - and to thwart
the creation of meaning as we attempt to return to freedom.

But the Master feels the \textit{look of the slave} and he is exposed in his self-deceit. Denying the risk, he persists in the ruse. When the ruse becomes oppressive violence
is commanded, and only then can we refuse the point of conciliation - one does not
negotiate with terrorists. Any project that insists on covering over the ambiguity
of being - resting on its dualistic laurels - must be struck down. “By virtue of
the fact that the oppressors refuse to co-operate in the affirmation of freedom, they
embody, in the eyes of all men of good will, the absurdity of facticity.” As such,
Beauvoir insists, “others will here have to be treated like things, with violence.”\textsuperscript{29} In
the following section I will examine the mediation within this particular relationship
from the perspective of the audience in order to show how Beauvoir’s ontological
and ethical theories improve upon Sartre’s offerings, allowing us to keep the lines of
communication open and to foster a hope for progress and productive change.

\subsection*{3.3 The Project of the Audience}

To disclose being, we see now, is first to move away from false abstractions - to
know that, though we look at one side of the coin, the other side never ceases in
its attachment, and if it did the coin as we know it would be lost. It is further to
understand that temporality forms our projects at the individuated level and simulta-
neously at the communal, both hailing toward the future. Finally, the disclosure of
being asks that for any project to succeed, others must be recognized as equal and

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{28} “Pyrrhus and Cineas,” p. 133
\textsuperscript{29} The Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 97
\end{flushleft}
necessary and invited in to our lives. Risk and danger are in the invitation because, in accepting, the other can alter your project, in declining, they may doom it to failure. For those that renounce this truth of being, violence is commanded in order to end oppression. With actions taken to bring existence’s ambiguities out of the darkness of mystification, the project becomes one of authentic transcendence and is, therefore, creative. Can we say, from this, that to encounter art is to participate in a genuine project, to transcend beyond passive repetition? Can we disclose being when we trace the lines of Rodin’s Le Baiser with our eyes alone? That is, can the act of experiencing art be creative and engaged?

If we were to imagine individuals encountering a work of art - a man reading Don Quixote seated in his study or a woman visiting the museum gazing at Monet’s Water Lilies let us say - it seems to us that these practices employ only the consciousness without extending beyond into the space and time of the situation; they appear to forget the body, and they escape into atemporal existence. “We love the activities that are placed within suspended time, like festivals and reading, for their essential unseriousness,” 30 reflects Anne Carson. When we read a novel or contemplate a painting, we are given the opportunity to deny life as it is lived - to deny the constraints and demands of temporality. Like the child who plays at being a hero, we can play at being the characters of a novel or at being in Giverny first-hand to see those flowers dance along the water to the sway of the ripples. This unseriousness that Carson sees leads us to believe that such moments, in refusing the flux of the hours, are not effectual, not creative. Empty words is an almost unheard conversation if you will. They do not appear to reach for the future, the ‘then’, or acknowledge the full force of the current, the ‘now’. They do not risk it all for the disclosure of being.

Of course, in some instances, this analysis may be correct. Often we turn art into mere entertainment, going to these fantasy worlds these works offer only to escape.

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We are passive spectators feeling no effects from the visual or auditory stimulus we encounter. One New Critic\textsuperscript{31} scholar, John V. Hagopian embraces this approach to art wholesale, lumping together the medium of literature with the so-called plastic arts\textsuperscript{32}, saying:

Brancusi’s \textit{Bird in Flight} can be used as an excellent battering ram, just as T. S. Eliot’s \textit{Waste Land} can be used as an excellent sermon. But neither use is appropriate to the object’s artistic function; as art objects they are meant to be \textit{looked at}- not used.\textsuperscript{33}

Quite rightly, William V. Spanos offers this evaluative rejoinder in response to Hagopian:

\begin{quote}
[New Critics] tend to “look at” the work as if it were a static visual object, an un-moving whole without sequence and thus, unlike life, devoid of those qualitative distinctions which involve some kind of relationship between one moment in time and the next (change) that give motion to or, better, that dramatize experience or, what is the same thing, move the perceiver, make him a participant rather than a passive spectator or, at worst, a voyeur. In short, they tend to abstract or to dehumanize [literary] art.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{31}A movement which dominated the practice of Anglo-American literary criticism in the decade between 1940 and 1950, New Criticism is described as an approach that “insisted on the intrinsic value of a work of art and focused attention on the individual work alone as an independent unit of meaning. It was opposed to the critical practice of bringing historical or biographical data to bear on the interpretation of a work.” Additionally, any reference to the intent of the author or the emotional response of the audience was removed from the process of meaning determination in New Criticism. Such an insistence no doubt promotes the escapist approach to the encounter of art by holding that works present a world of meaning all their own thus removing the necessary ethical demand Beauvoir makes of the artist and all individuals by requiring temporality be assumed in one’s commitments. (http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/411305/New-Criticism)

\textsuperscript{32}It is not an altogether unfamiliar practice to create a hierarchy of artistic mediums and from this to declare that certain forms of expression bring the individual closer to the disclosure of being, as Beauvoir would call it, or, perhaps a more proverbial phrasing, to the realization of truth. Hegel, in his \textit{Lectures on Fine Arts}, distinguishes the symbolic, classical, and romantic forms of art, associating with each various mediums, each progressing in priority. Heidegger, in his \textit{The Origin of a Work of Art}, names \textit{poesis} as the ultimate form of artistic expression. I do not wish to make such a distinction between the forms. Indeed, as far as Beauvoir’s criteria for a genuine and transcendent project is concerned, I can make no distinction between any individuated choice of commitment. A normative analysis of projects relies, not on what commitment is selected writer, painter, plumber, teacher, etc. but instead on how this project is concerned with ontological, effective, and moral freedom. This final point shall be elaborated in this and the following sections as I discuss the particular example of Beauvoir’s project as author.

\textsuperscript{33}John V. Hagopian, “Literary Criticism as a Science,” \textit{Topic}: 12 (Fall, 1966), p. 52, Author’s emphasis.

\textsuperscript{34}William V. Spanos, “Modern Literary Criticism and the Spatialization of Time: An Existential
This attitude mistakenly rejects time and rejects the Other; taking such an approach to art is to forget, as Beauvoir points out, that “the meaning of a situation,” as presented in a work, “does not impose itself on the consciousness of a passive subject.”

But this is not only a shortcoming possible for the audience. All can become subject to this inadequacy, as Beauvoir’s own struggle with her work as a literary artist shows.

She reflects on this issue in the third volume of autobiography, *Force of Circumstance*, saying, “For three years, I had devoted myself to my private life,” in regards to her time spent writing *The Mandarins*. She had forgotten others and existed as though she lived apart from time. “But old directives began to awaken in me,” she continues, “to be useful in some way.” She is clear that it is others, before unrecalled, that bring her back to “the stream of History,” to the flow of time. 

Earlier though, citing her diary in *The Prime of Life*, she presents her work with the novel in an ethically positive light and it is the autobiography and what will be her work on *The Second Sex* that become problematic. “I want to finish my novel,” she tells Sartre, “Feel the urge to live actively, not sit down and take stock of myself.” The self-analysis he has suggested two days prior centers too much on the ‘I’, with little concern for external forces. This will not do; she needs to be a consciousness creating, to embrace her effective freedom; she needs others and she needs time.

It is of note that she feels she must return to her diary accounts to make this point. The diary, as a form of communication, offers the greatest temptation to reside purely interiorly by exploiting language, by lying to the audience in an effort

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35 *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 20
to justify existence in a self-supporting manner. It is perhaps the most likely to trust in the ploy of Master and Slave for Beauvoir. Though it requires the other in order to make of the author an essential being (Roquetin’s musings in *Nausea* have shown us this), the diary often demands that the audience give up their interpretive powers; in it the writer attempts to declare “this is who I am for now and for always” and what the reader might find in the text counts for nothing. Beauvoir’s character Chantal in *When Things of the Spirit Come First* demonstrates this attitude, as Scholz has pointed out. “Chantal uses the diary to try to justify her existence to herself and, in essence, reveal a purified existence,” Scholz remarks, but her trick is transparent because, “The reader [...] sees the multiple ways she lies to herself.” But opacity persists for Chantal, for Roquetin, and even for Sartre because they ignore Others and the intimate relation to time uncovered in our encounters with them.

Beauvoir’s struggles with her authorial approach examples how no project is essentially immanent or transcendent, but instead its authenticity is determined by the attitude and methodology of the individual in the pursuit of her goals. She further contrasts authentic and inauthentic attitudes by criticizing the engagement of the body without the mind often found in women’s “fancywork”:

Fancywork was invented to mask [woman’s] horrible idleness; hands embroider, they knit, they are in motion. *This is not real work*, for the object produced is not the end in view...This is no longer a game that in its uselessness expresses the pure joy of living; and it is hardly an escape, *since the mind remains vacant.*

The same criticism is made of women writers who treat words as a disjointed puzzle that they put together without consideration for the picture they arrange for the future. Their fingers move across the blank page filling it with lines empty of meaning. They do not take action; they are acting, still playing at being. Admitting that a

\[38\] Writing for Liberation: Simone de Beauvoir and Woman’s Writing,” p. 339.
\[39\] *The Second Sex* p. 658, Emphasis added.
great number of women do find the time to write, Beauvoir asks the most important question: “Why is it then that of this number there are so few that amount to much?” True she lacks support, without patrons or family encouragement, but more than this she lacks ambition, that primary concern for a future world which drives creativity. “In order to want to write, that is to say to want to refashion the world in a particular way, to want to take responsibility for it in order to reveal it to others, you need to be incredibly ambitious.” To make use of the body alone, to put words on a page, is not enough to have written. To write - to act at all - you must engage the mind and the body toward the future and towards others.

Asked to reflect on the abstract expressionist movement in painting, Frank Lloyd Wright, a great artist himself, described the works as nothing more than “finger paintings.” Of course, Wright was wrong. What makes these works more than child’s play, is that they represent the movement of the body as it is invested with thought, emotions reflected on and toiled over and then turned into motion to be captured on a canvas. If one were to watch the Hans Namuth films of Jackson Pollock as he works, she would see the artist standing over the image, in various stages of completion, gazing downward for some length of time. He is considering, thinking, imagining. Then suddenly he takes to his buckets of paint and attacks, as he says, “from all four sides.” His brush is only the tip of his instrument, which begins in the mind and travels through him out of his limbs into the external world. At times balanced on only one foot and hurling the rest of himself toward the very center of the painting, Pollock’s body makes manifest the forward projection of his thoughts.

To return again to our gazing woman encountering the famous Water Lilies: She does not merely “look at” the work; she sees. She goes to the painting, (or the novel or

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41 Ibid. p. 25, Emphasis added.
the overture) and engages her consciousness by imagining a future through what she experiences. She then enters into conversation with the world around her - she sees, she speaks. She finds, perhaps, tranquility there, a slowness that is missing from her life. She recalls the streets outside, the speed and the activity there, and she wonders what it would be like if we slowed down. Perhaps, she thinks, we might see the bodies within the cars passing by or the faces of the pedestrians all around, and, suddenly they are humans again with lives like hers. She leaves the museum and she smiles at the passersby. Like Pollock hurling his body at his own painting, this woman has thrown herself into her own future, making for herself possibilities. In this act alone she creates, in the same way as Monet or Pollock, by re-creating herself, her world, through communication. She has approached the project of encountering art in an authentic mode. She has made her act transcendent by recalling the world of time and others, by folding the present into the future; this is what the artist must do, what the audience must do, what all must do.

Beauvoir recognizes the creative force of the audience. Speaking as an artist, Beauvoir declares, “A book is a collective object. Readers contribute as much as the author to its creation.”43 As the reader she demonstrates this collaboration. Reflecting on her encounter with Pavese’s La bella estate, she recounts how reading offered her the chance to experience “the re-creation of a world that envelops my own, that belongs to my own...which leaves its mark on me forever with all the reality of an experience I have lived through myself.”44 So it is with all moments of art encountered, as interiority is not different from exteriority. Inner alteration brings exterior transformation. Though at times art can be used by the audience as a means of escape into the mind, a lure that even Beauvoir at times gave into,45 or a denial thereof, still
it can, “be kept from becoming degraded to the status of entertainment only by being identified with mansk very existence,” if it embraces the ambiguity of interiority and exteriority, of self and other, of Spirit and Life.

3.4 Tensions Rise

Though mystification is a constant threat if we rely on conflict as the essential intersubjective relationship, oppression can be surmounted if our projects embrace the force of the time and engage in dialogue the voice of the other with mutual respect. This is the case for the artist, as Beauvoir has exhibited in her own work as a writer, as well as for the audience, as I argue here. This has much to do with a work of art being an attempt to communicate with others. To be understood, both the audience and artist must embrace the situation as it stands which has made their mode of communication meaningful in a particular way. At the same time they must remember the fluidity of language and be open to the chance of alteration; because communication is mediation between the self and the other, language, as Scholz notes, is always “acting on the world and acted on by the world,” changing because people change. The artist speaks to her audience in creating the piece through the canvas or across the page; the audience re-creates in their reply.

But there is something very different in this form of communication. When the writer writes or the painter paints, true they write or paint to be read or to be seen by someone, but by whom? What or whom is the intended audience? And again, when we come to the reader or the museumgoer, where is the artist? Surely not there at least not typically so. In both instances, those with whom the artist or audience wishes to communicate are notably absent. This absence draws attention to a certain

gives to art “an inhuman purity.”
46Ibid. p. 49
47“Simone de Beauvoir on Language,” p. 213-4
freedom given to each party, the freedom to call to their presence whomsoever they choose. Taking Voltaire’s *Candide*, Beauvoir elaborates upon this freedom in her essay “Pyrrhus and Cineas” by returning to the young aristocrat’s closing observation that, “We must cultivate our garden.” In response she asks, “What is my garden?” Or, taking the words of Christ’s disciples, she wonders, “Who is my neighbor?” And to this question she forms her own answer: “One is not the neighbor of anyone; one makes the other a neighbor by making oneself [*se faisant*] his neighbor through an act.”

How are we to choose who resides in our community? Who is included in our audience if we are the artists? Who must be considered if we are the audience? Beauvoir gives two explicit answers - it must be someone and it cannot be everyone. To think the project involves no one but the self is to go against the very structure of freedom; it is to deny the arch of others and to think existence consists of a single boulder. It is further to reject the change that comes with others and to ignore our temporal being that allows the change to be observed, to mistakenly believe the project is self-sufficient. To demand that your project be received by the infinity, conversely, is to relegate it to meaninglessness by denying that the project is individuated and still to deny the constraints of time. “Multiplying the ties that bind me to the world by infinity,” Beauvoir decrees, “is a way of denying those that unite me to this singular minute, to this singular corner of the earth[...]Here also, there is no longer desire, nor fear, nor hardship, nor joy. Nothing is mine.”

In the space between zero and infinity, the choice of community is determined by the demands of the present situation and ones individuated commitments which work toward the eternal insurance of moral freedom for self and others. If we believe, as Beauvoir did, that the current circumstances refuse women equal consideration as

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48 “Pyrrhus and Cineas,” p. 91
49 Ibid. p. 93
50 Ibid. p. 101
both subject and object, our words should choose to speak to those with the desire and power to address this, including those words within the work of art. As a spectator, we should go to works seeking a meaning that reveals the truth of Woman’s equality, and often times this means we must remove artistic intention from our considerations, exiling the artist from our garden.51 This is the risk the artist takes, that their desires and ideas will no longer be invited to the conversation. One must not expect that his goal be justified as a point of departure of a new future...other men will have to live its joys and sorrows. Beauvoir does just this in her examination of male writers in \textit{The Second Sex}. She shows the works of Montherlant, D.H. Lawrence, Claudel, and Breton to be oppressive in their intent to mystify femininity and cover over the truth of existence.52 As such, they and their meanings deserve banishment.

This is not to say that in all cases the artist must be left behind, only that their inclusion in the project of the spectator is a decision for the spectator herself given the various demands of her goals and aims, given the conversation she wishes to have. But as we have seen with Sartre, to make the artist essential to the meaning of a work is to deny the audience a freedom rightfully theirs and is to exist in a deluded world. Rather they should be viewed, as Heidegger presents them, “almost like a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge,” if this is what freedom requires.53 Of course the audience should be careful of excluding the artist altogether for inauthentic reasons, as in, for example, denying the importance of the creators of certain minority groups as a means of quieting already oppressed voices.

Current museum practice, which all but encapsulates our experience of “fine art” today, sometimes exacerbates the problem in emphasizing the import of privileged

\footnotesize{51 Chapter 5 offers a particular example of just this mode of mediation. 
52 \textit{The Second Sex}, pp. 224-68 
groups of artists by offering a great deal more information on the individual in relation to their works displayed, often dedicating entire exhibits to one (usually white) man. Additionally, it is common to find museum shops filled with likenesses of the most revered artists - Van Gogh, Monet, Dali, Da Vinci - while those creators that come from minority groups are often forgotten or ignored. In short, they give value to the individuals as subjects themselves that are already historically privileged, while minorities remain firmly in the category of Other. This sort of practice cannot be justified under Beauvoir’s ethical structure, as to do so would deny the meaning the artist presents through pure objectification without consideration of his or her subjective existence, to say that they should never have been in the conversation to begin with. I do not wish to condone such acts in this investigation. Nonetheless, the audience should be given the freedom to venture away from the artist if this is needed to maintain the ambiguous balance of ontological and effective freedom, to find meaningfulness in a new conversation. If artistic intention is made requisite in order to develop meaning, then the audience’s ontological capacity has been unjustly limited and their mode of expressing effective freedom is likewise hindered.

In the following chapter, I move to considerations of Beauvoir’s direct address of the reader/audience in relation to the artist. I will show that, despite all the demands of her own ethical structure, which seem to support a view of the artist-audience relationship that has the possibility of reciprocity like any other project, what she offers in explicit language returns the conversation to one of unbalance and conflict, an aspect singular to the project of the artist in her works.
In Chapter 3, I relayed the way in which Beauvoir’s ontology and ethics presents a new understanding of the artist-audience relationship, one where existence is justified by entering into a dialogue of mutual respect with those others necessary to one’s project. I offered Sartre’s view of this encounter initially in an effort to demonstrate that the conflict he notes as essential to the interaction emerges because his is not one of communication but of dictation to an inert and ineffectual audience. While many may view the reading of a novel or the viewing of a painting to be a passive and uncreative act, as Anne Carson indicates when she labels such activities “unserious”, I have shown that this is not the case. Indeed, the audience participates in the project as well; in understanding that the audience discloses the truth of being by re-creating the discourse, the abstracted dualisms prevalent in Sartrean ontology can be overcome.

When the myth of the divide between concepts such as subject and object or self and other is demolished, the audience is allowed the opportunity to recognize the need of others. Embracing the existence of the other as equally necessary for one’s project further reveals the constraints of temporality on one’s project. Being in time, as discovered in our being with others, exposes a two-fold identity to our projects: as individuated and self-determined particular tasks with bounded futures and as a
part of the communal and infinitely existing project of ensuring moral freedom for
generations to come.

In the current chapter, I move to the notable absence of the audience’s perspective
in Beauvoir’s work in an effort to bring to light a tension in her view that creates a
dilemma for her aesthetic theory. This tension must be overcome if current scholarship
wishes to make use of her ethics to evaluate the artist and audience relationship today.
While Beauvoir developed an ethics that promotes the assumption of the limitations
and constraints of temporality, she is often given to privileging the aims and intentions
of artists, relying on their desires at the time to construct the realm of discourse and
leaving the audience’s perspective unaddressed.

This privileging, I hold, is a consequence of her views on mortality specifically.
In denying the limitation of death as effective of meaning, Beauvoir removes the au-
dience from the dialogue instead creating an environment of dictation in the same
vein as Sartre. No longer seeking to disclose being by treating existence as a con-
versation entailing mutual respect, Beauvoir’s attitude now covers over the truth of
being which results, all too often, in a return to the Sartrean ontological conception of
intersubjectivity as essentially one of conflict thus silencing the voice of the witness.
Disregarding the viewpoint of the witness is not a simple misstep, but is an intentional
decision that hopes to avoid the risk that the work of art may be handed over and
the artist’s goals may cease to direct the conversation with her desires still unfulfilled.
This understanding, however, produces a contradiction with her greater theory which
is found in relation to her work on embodied existence as I will demonstrate.

I will begin my examination of this problem in Beauvoirs theory by offering several
instances across her lifetime where she adopts an understanding of temporality that
contradicts her greater ethical theory when it comes to the project of the artist.
Following this I seek to show that this inconsistency results from her early denial
of the Heideggerian conception of Being-towards-death, which appears in its earliest
and most thorough form in her 1941 essay “Pyrrhus and Cineas,” in favor of her own model of Being-towards-freedom. Additionally, I will rely on Shannon M. Mussett’s evaluation of Beauvoir’s later work, *La Vieillesse*, often thought to be a turn in Beauvoir’s understanding of mortality and its meaningfulness for human creation, to demonstrate that her investigation of the place of the elderly in society is instead another instance of what Heidegger might deem a *flight from death*.

Beauvoir routinely struggled with mortality on both a philosophical and personal level throughout her life. When scholars look to her earlier efforts and her perspective and project as an author, they can find that, instead of understanding it as the “possibility of impossibility,” Beauvoir treats death as an impossibility—that is as irrelevant to the discourse on the meaning of our projects - in response to Heidegger’s view that an inauthentic mode of being treats death as ”not really our own, but an event experienced by others,” (i.e. as an actuality). In her study of old age, she no longer holds to the idea of death as ineffective, but she continues an inauthentic relationship with mortality nonetheless by expecting an actualization of death in old age, making it into an event once again. I hold that it is her persistent philosophical difficulties with mortality that form a contradiction with her ethics and

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1 Though I will not explore the personal problems Beauvoir had with death, via for instance psychological evaluation of the loss of her close friends like childhood companion ZaZa, I do not hold with those like Ursula Tidd who believe such examinations to be counterproductive to the feminist project in total [see Tidds “For the Time Being: Simone de Beauvoirs Representation of Temporality” *The Existential Phenomenology of Simone de Beauvoir*, (Kluwer Academic Publishers; Dordrecht: 2001) p. 108]. Though, of course, such discriminatory approaches can and have been made, Beauvoir’s own reflection that we ”are marked by our past but not determined by it.” (Force of Circumstance, p. 456) leaves room for claims that Beauvoir does allow such personal experiences to affect her later commitments and decisions. Indeed, Beauvoir draws routinely on the Husserlian origins of her phenomenological existentialism which begins by bracketing off all objective understanding, turning instead to the first instance of lived experience as individuated as the starting point for the discovery of truth which emerges from the following intersubjective creative practices. [see Eleanore Holvecks *Simone de Beauvoirs Philosophy of Lived Experience: Literature and Metaphysics* (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc, London: 2002) for more on Beauvoir’s Husserlian methodology.]


with themselves thus resulting in her uni-level perspective as an artist that denies the conversational aspect of existence, making a return to conflict in the relation to the audience inevitable.

By recalling that any and all projects are both individuated - a conception that Beauvoir draws directly from Heidegger’s *Mitsein* to counteract the difficulties arising from her adoption of Hegelian theories - and communal, as presented in the preceding chapter, I will argue that Being-towards-death and Being-towards-freedom are both horizons for projects which must be similarly realized and embraced for mutual respect within intersubjective interaction to arise and for reciprocity to be achieved. The subsequent and final chapter will then take this re-joining and offer a particular example of an authentic creative mediation as attempted from the perspective of the audience in order to solidify this need to recognize Being-towards-death as the second of a pair of dual horizons necessary to any project.

### 4.1 The Subjugated Audience

In her 1946 article for *Les Temps Moderne*, “Literature and Metaphysics,” Beauvoir elaborates on her claim that every book is a collaborative effort between author and reader cited in the preceding chapter, explicating just how the two go on “an authentic adventure of the mind.”

4 Her view, here, of the author’s position within the text does show the respect she demands of the relationship between self and other, asking that the authors presence “be well hidden,” expressing that the author’s voice being too loud threatens the success of the work by taking the reader away from the communication:

> Just as a dream breaks into pieces if the dreamer has the slightest per-

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ception that it is a dream, the belief in the imaginary vanishes as soon as one considers confronting it with reality; one cannot posit the existence of the novelist without denying that of his protagonist.5

It is this viewpoint that allows Margaret A. Simons to assert in her introduction to the piece that, “An authentic metaphysical novel,” in Beauvoir’s eyes, “appeals to the reader”s freedom,” thereby, “reconstituting our experience on the imaginary plane and imitating life’s opacity, ambiguity, and temporality.”6

Upon closer inspection, however, we find that, though the author or artist should remain hidden, she can never disappear. Instead, she is seen as necessary and essential, just as in Sartre’s understanding, in the creation of meaning always commanding the conversation, a puppet-master quietly pulling the strings. As Beauvoir declares, “Everything depends [...] on the quality of imagination and the power of invention of the author.”7 The imagination and the invention of the various audiences are not examined, revealing them to be the unessential for Beauvoir. The adventure of the mind is no longer one of collaboration or discussion; the artist leads us along paths already selected. “The reader quite often refuses to participate sincerely in the experiment into which the author tries to lead him,” she says, “instead of letting himself be taken in by the story, he tries ceaselessly to translate it.”8 But what freedom is there here if the audience must follow the artist along, if they cannot build a conversation out of their own situations and engaging their imaginative powers of re-creation, if they must be a slave to the mind of the artist?

The same turn to authorial desires to discern meaning is found in Beauvoir’s autobiography, Force of Circumstance, written almost two decades later. Though she recognizes that the meanings found within a work may evolve with the readers, this

5Ibid. p. 270-1
8Ibid. p. 276 Emphasis added.
is an admittance of defeat. Speaking of the time following the publication of Sartre’s Nausea, she observes, “His books, even if they were read, would not be the ones he had written; his work would not remain.” This process she labels a “catastrophe.”

When the audience goes astray, challenging and altering the structure of the conversation, they do wrong. Speaking once again of Sartre’s method, Beauvoir denies the desires of the author’s readership stating that, “It is impossible to understand from the outside the conditions in which a man’s work develops; the person in question knows better than anyone what he needs to do.”

Collaboration with the other has slipped quickly away and no longer is the exterior situation of the other seen as intimately joined through discourse with the interior motivations of consciousness.

Beauvoir’s reliance on authorial intent leads to problematic results following interpretation. By turning again and again to the circumstances of the past, meaning becomes trapped in situations long outlived and the witness to the work becomes disenfranchised. In The Second Sex, though the female artist would seem to offer some hope for liberation, in the end the works they present give no aid to the battle against oppression because Beauvoir does not disconnect them from the time of first creation. At first, she holds that, “the women who seek through artistic expression to transcend their given characters,” are the only ones whose career, “far from hindering the affirmation of their femininity, reinforce it.”

It is these women who “transcend the yoke of men”.

Furthering this discussion, Beauvoir directs her discourse toward the women who “seek [their] salvation in literature and arts.” Woman is historically denied her transcendence in reality, denied a place in the discourse that aims at the future, and as such the female artists finds, “she can recover it only in the realm of

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9 Force of Circumstance, p. 48
10 Ibid. p. 301; It is of interest that this reaction is in response to demands from Sartres audience for him to complete his ethical treatise, a task which he never does complete. As I pointed out in Chapter 2, such a task would be all but impossible given his reliance on ontological freedom and his view of the Other in Being and Nothingness.
11 The Second Sex. p. 781
12 Ibid. p. 782-3
the imaginary,” by creating a conversation in her art. She ‘assert(s) herself against given conditions which she bears rebelliously,” says Beauvoir, “to create a world other than that in which she fails to attain her being.”13 With these declarations she builds up the female author/artist as a woman in whom others might put their hope for liberation.

The particularizations of these ideas, however, are tinged with disappointment. It is in this direct dealing with a number of female authors that we can see in what way her aesthetic theory becomes an obstacle for her ethics by denying the creative power within the experience of art apart from its original creation and creator. She selects among the many Colette, George Elliot, Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf, and the Bronte sisters as archetypes of great women writers. A formidable list to be sure, but despite their brilliant literary works and their accomplishments all fall short of offering truly liberated examples of feminine literature. At final analysis they amount to no more than ‘banal clichés’ in lieu of spontaneity and tiring works instead of ‘a literature of protest’. “They do not have enough strength left to profit by their victory,” she asserts, leaving them unable to “break all the ropes that hold them back.”14 No matter what these female authors may do, they can never measure up to the strength of men. She illuminates this idea directly saying “the splendid Middlemarch still is not the equal of War and Peace; Wuthering Heights, in spite of its grandeur, does not have the sweep of The Brothers Karamazov.”15 With this, the woman’s greatest means of finding her being through the imaginative re-origination of discourse becomes trapped by reality.

The failure Beauvoir finds in these female authors increases the tension in some conceptions at the heart of her aesthetic theory. “Art, literature, and philosophy,” she

13Ibid. p. 783
14Ibid. p. 789
15Ibid. p.789
says, “are attempts to create the world anew.”\textsuperscript{16} Additionally she speaks of the creator in \textit{The Ethics of Ambiguity} saying that (s)he, “leans upon anterior creations in order to create the possibility of new creations.”\textsuperscript{17} The use of \textit{anew} and \textit{anterior} recalls the future-minded conceptualization on which Beauvoir’s ethics are centralized. Despite this, Beauvoir continually refers to the artist’s situation and desires in order to glean the meaning of his or her artistic works. In so doing, she chains interpretations to the past and the situation of the world during the time of first creation, subordinating the freedom of recreation in the audience’s project. She continually allows the author and his or her past to dictate the conversation, and that is why the imaginations of female artists will never find liberation since such was lacking in contemporaneous reality.

The struggle among considerations of temporality between past, present, and future are numerous in Beauvoir’s writings on the artist’s project and are often in direct conflict with the aspects required for the disclosure of being. The act of the artist she says is one where, “time is stopped,” and, “clear forms and \textit{finished} meanings rise up.”\textsuperscript{18} Artistic creations, it seems, are the one outlet humanity has to realize life as an absolute, to in a sense complete the conversation. She claims also that the novel allows for the creation of characters defined by their ability to “transcend time,” a character whose “present is tantamount to eternity.”\textsuperscript{19} The audience or artist may, for a moment, imagine his or her own escape from such temporal constraints, but Beauvoir’s moral freedom demands the recognition that such an abstraction only engages one’s ontological freedom. But Beauvoir in this instance does not deal with this element and time in art is, in these understandings, either frozen so that all interactions with the work hold to the original context or completely overcome all sense of

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid. p. 791
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{The Ethics of Ambiguity}, p. 28
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. p. 69
temporality so that that what remains is the present *ad infinitum*. Either way, all ties to the future have been disregarded.

In establishing works of art in such a way, Beauvoir removes them from the essential phenomenological experience of time in flux, stunting the discourse that would allow for mutual respect, successful projects, and greater still reciprocity. This is an element she likewise desires to apply to herself by instilling aspects of her identity in characters such as Anne in *The Mandarins* and Francoise in *She Came to Stay*. She develops herself as a character apart from temporality in autobiographical works as well. As Jo-Ann Pilardi notes, Beauvoir created “fictitious literary characters...even in her autobiographies,”\(^{20}\) making the author’s veil of secrecy transparent at best, if it exists at all. This dependence on the imaginative yearnings of the original creator works to limit the freedom of the audience by disallowing acts of re-creation. Not only this, but the conversation that the artist desires must be continually replayed, repeated though it may be disconnected from the needs of the situation and others in the conversation. In this way, Beauvoir returns the intersubjective relationship between artist and audience to the interaction of Master and Slave, where conflict is essential and unending and the audience is trapped in immanence like the women of *The Second Sex*.

Beauvoir’s issues with the role of time within the artist’s project arise from a desire to find in the creative work a point where the individual feels his or her existence to be absolute, fixed, and unending along with the products of their creative acts and the conversations on meaning that surround them. Such a sentiment is displayed in Beauvoir’s own reaction to the reception of her books when she says, “In those moments when the dream I dreamed at the age of twenty - to make myself loved through my books - comes true, nothing can spoil my pleasure.”\(^{21}\) This pleasure, she

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\(^{21}\)*Force of Circumstance*, p. 328
notes, arises from the ability to relieve herself from the threat of death. Speaking of the writer Beauvoir declares explicitly, “death will not stop him,” and then more generally, “My death stops my life only once I am dead, and in the eyes of others. But for the living me, my death is not.”\textsuperscript{22} The creations that our acts produce, under this view, make it possible for the individual to transcend death and those effects which finitude might have on the development of meaning. When everything, and most especially the meaning of a work, depends on the freedom of the artist’s imagination, the artist may feel justified in seeking to wholly possess the work for all of time. And in eternal possession, the artist obtains a sense of transcendence likened to immortality. This is, however, to ignore Beauvoir’s own requirement for the disclosure of being: that we acknowledge this transcendence is one only of ontological freedom within imagination and that the situation limits our effective freedom to see this through in the world.

Beauvoir warns against such a sense of absolute and eternal possession in her ethics saying, “It is always impossible to realize positively the idea of possession [...] one tries then to establish ownership in negative fashion. The surest way of asserting that something is mine is to prevent others from using it.”\textsuperscript{23} But to make such an attempt is to give into delusion that possession is a zero-sum game, and that the subject is thoroughly divorced from the other. If the artist looks to claim ownership of his or her works and their meanings, we have returned to conflict, where the artist is Master and the audience Slave. Objects and their meanings, to comply with a Beauvoirian ethics, must remain within the constraints of temporality and mortality; elsewise we deny the opportunity for reciprocity and subordinate the freedom of imagination and thus the voice and power of individuals to come.

\textsuperscript{22} “Pyrrhus and Cineas,” p. 113-4
\textsuperscript{23} The Second Sex, p. 174
We must not forget as Beauvoir says, “Everything that comes from the hands of man is immediately taken away by the ebb and flow of history,” even the work of art. Limits to the way in which the subject, both artist and audience, can take part in the discourse on meaning for works of art arise through our existence with others in time. As I will demonstrate in the following sections, the limitations of time include that of death, and this has much to do with our situation as embodied. In denying this constraint in the artistic project, Beauvoir silences the voice of the audience and contradicts her ontologically based ethics, for as she reminds us we need the encounter with the other to reveal to us our embodiment in all its finitude.

### 4.2 Death Outstripped

I turn now to Beauvoir’s work on the Heideggerian conception of Being-towards-death. As Shannon M. Mussett notes, “Beauvoir ultimately rejects the early Heideggerian emphasis on being-toward-death in favour of being from and toward freedom.” This rejection is what allows Beauvoir to view the experience of one’s death as ineffective as far as Being is concerned because death is not a choice, and therefore is not something intentionally assumed by the individual toward the disclosure of being. In other words, death is irrelevant to the conversation. She says:

> What man chooses is what he makes; what he projects is what he founds, but he does not make his death; he does not found it. He is mortal. And Heidegger has no right to say that his being is precisely for death.\(^{26}\)

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\(^{24}\)“Pyrrhus and Cineas,” p. 109


\(^{26}\)“Pyrrhus and Cineas,” p. 114. Author’s own emphasis. The use of “is” should be contrasted with that of “becoming” often used to indicate that existence be viewed as continually in flux, where to be is to be solidified.
To grasp fully why such a rejection is problematic for Beauvoirian ethics on her own terms it is beneficial to return to the basis of her ontological theory. From this examination we can see that the priority given to being-towards-freedom arises from the Hegelian influences seen throughout her philosophy.

Indeed, Beauvoir’s more Hegelian roots are cited as a primary aide in overcoming her own problems with death and its constraints. In *Letters to Sartre*, one correspondence tells of the relief Hegel’s theories bring her in the face of oncoming death within the framing of the artistic endeavor. She says, “I was also struck, when thinking about it, by how correct that Hegelian idea was of enveloping the totality in our individual becoming.” This she terms “the viewpoint of universal life,” which she goes on to describe as, “a viewpoint that excluded the limitations of death and the being-to-die character of life.” And, then, she says, “Basically, such a viewpoint is real.” It is in the work of art specifically where the individual might capture and maintain this viewpoint.²⁷

It is her adoption of Hegelian conceptions alongside Heideggerian theory, however, that permits the creation of her existential ethics of ambiguity. In denying this element of Heideggerian influence, Beauvoir destabilizes her foundations by forgetting the instantiation of one’s project as finite and constrained by the particular situation into which we are thrown without choice. Embodiment, which plays a primary role in the path toward realizing the ambiguity of existence, is just such a constraint as it brings with it the assurance of our biological demise, the limit of life. By folding Heidegger’s philosophy of death back into Beauvoir’s distinctly Hegelian conception of being-towards-freedom through an examination of embodiment, we can return to the disclosure of being, to a communication of mutual respect, thereby achieving reciprocity in the artist-audience relationship and justifying existence.

In order to offer the most intelligible analysis of Beauvoir’s adoption of Heidegger and Hegel in her ontology, I will utilize the elucidations of Nancy Bauer, whose work on the subject presents the most concise and transparent reading I have yet to encounter. Considering Beauvoir’s adoption of Hegelian conceptions first, Bauer states that though there may be a fundamental ontological hostility between self and other arising from the desire to solidify one’s *for-itself*, the transcendence of ontological freedom, as complete and superior to that of another this “does not entail for Beauvoir...the impossibility of non-hostile human interaction.”28 For Hegel, what can save humanity from this discouraging state, according to Bauer, is the denial of this desire and the acceptance of role of the *in-itself* so that “each party,” then, “acknowledges the fundamental humanity of the other.”29 That is, individuals can give over their transcendence in the name of communal aspirations. Bauer explains that Beauvoir’s Hegelian influence, however, is not seen as a final adoption of his theory in its entirety. By embracing the Heideggeian conception of *for-itself* alongside the Hegelain adoption of *in-itself*, Beauvoir creates a marriage of ideas that offers a path toward liberation within an existential ethics.

Instead of denying the desire of the *for-itself*, the need to overcome objective existence in the eye of the other, what is needed according to Beauvoir is the equal assumption of one’s existence as entailing a level of transcendence, as well as one’s existence as in part immanence. The significance of the role of the *for-itself* in the experience of human consciousness in relation to interaction with a society that recognizes the individual as *in-itself* is where Bauer finds Beauvoir’s use of Heideggerian ontology. This relationship, as Bauer states in the simplest terms, “is to accept oneself and others simultaneously as both subjects and objects,”30 as I have examined in


29 Ibid. p. 66

30 Ibid. p 86
detail. In order to do this, each individual must embrace the Heideggerian concept of *Mitsein*. “My being-with others,” Bauer says of Beauvoir’s *Mitsein*, “is foundationally important insofar as it endlessly provides me with the means, the cultural resources, to hide my ambiguity from myself.”

Through the gaze of others, the self can come to view itself as object, giving over for a moment one’s subjectivity. Paradoxically, the individual must maintain subjectivity to consciously reflect on the revelations found in the presence of the Other. It is this other that allows us to mark out the boundaries of the self, letting us come to realize our existence as individuated.

For Heidegger, the individual’s separateness is grasped through a grappling with the possibility of his or her death, as what he terms one’s *ownmost*. In the Heideggerian interpretation, others work to aid in developing a disingenuous relation to one’s death. We flee death by giving ourselves up entirely to others, to the they-self. Beauvoir, conversely, reinforces, as she is want to do, the need of others to discover the truth of existence that is our death to come. Her equally opposing conclusion, as has been shown, is that our death is not our own but only an experience for others precisely because it is not a choice that the individual must make toward the future. Only others still living will have the challenge of assuming the meaning of another’s death toward their own future-minded aims.

It is in reference to this interpretation that I label Beauvoir’s view of death as one of impossibility, an impossibility for meaning. The denial of *being-toward-death* that Mussett highlights in “Pyrrhus and Cineas,” does not then directly address Heidegger’s view of death as a possibility, specifically as the possibility of impossibility. This conception requires that the individual’s death be intentionally assumed in relation to one’s projection in the world. In other words, death as an ever-present

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31 Ibid. p. 86-7
33 Ibid. p. 252
34 Ibid. p. 262
possibility of limitation entails that the choice of how we approach this limit is also constantly at hand. Thus, death can be seen as necessary in meaning creation as it is integrated in Being as becoming and is thereby concerned with the future on the individuated plane.

Some of Beauvoir’s elements find counterparts in Heidegger’s philosophy of death. This is to be expected as his offerings in Being and Time are given explicit acknowledgement on more than one occasion as greatly influential for her own theories. This is nowhere more the case than in her adoption of the concept of projection. The forward-looking element of Beauvoir’s ethics is derived from a similar, nay identical strain in Heidegger’s ontology. “It is essential to the basic constitution of Dasein,” he says, “that there is constantly something still to be settled.”35 Elsewhere, Heidegger will call this “something” the not-yet of Being, calling to mind the temporal resonance of the future. Additionally, Heidegger leaves room for the consideration of a person’s death by others and the importance of the meaning within that experience. “The end of the entity qua Dasein,” as he understands it, “is the beginning of the same entity qua something present-to-hand.”36 As present-to-hand, the deceased is nothing more than pure object whose subjectivity has since vanished, while the living are provided an instrument to continue forward in time. What is most important is that, once death has taken the subject away from the world, only those who remain still retain the sense of being-with and that of the “not-yet.” As for the deceased, Heidegger says they have “abandoned our ‘world’ and left it behind.”37

The moment of one’s biological perishing marks the final boundary of the individuated project; it is this that leads Heidegger to call death rightly an “end.” Life as projected has ceased; the assumption of one’s project, of one’s choices, has ceased as

35Ibid. p. 286
36Ibid. p. 281; Heidegger’s emphasis.
37Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. Joan Stambaugh (State University of New York Press; Albany: 1953) p. 222
well. The fact that choices stop with one’s biological end does not mean that the process of death is devoid of any power as far as meaning creation is concerned. This is so because, if we are to rely on Heidegger, death is not merely and event or actuality. It is instead a possibility which might come about at any moment. “In being towards death,” Heidegger declares, “Dasein is dying factically and indeed constantly.” More directly, in the words of Zorn, “we are dying as long as we exist,” and for this reason death and its possibility is enveloped in all our individuated projects, setting a possible limit on our actions at all times which must be considered as a quintessential element of our embodied situation.

4.3 Ontological Significance of Embodiment

The fact of embodiment is notably absent from Heidegger’s dealings with death. Death for Heidegger is largely considered from the perspective of the end of conscious activity, the end of the existence of a questioning being, not a biological being. As Christian Ciocan indicates, in ignoring the issues of embodiment Heidegger “obstructs the prospects for an ethics interrogation.” He explains this barrier saying:

If the body effectively mediates Dasein’s access to the world and to others, the absence of an ontological characterization of bodily nature leads, from a certain angle, to ontological solipsism.

These criticisms, expectedly, echo those made of Sartrean ontology for the same ignorance of situations, like the body, in his development of a theory of freedom. Heidegger, however, does not totally abolish biological being as important to future analysis and is explicit in his mention of this:

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38 *Being and Time*, trans. Macquarrie and Robinison, p. 303
39 “Heidegger’s Philosophy of Death,” p. 10-11
The medical and biological inquiry into demising can attain results which can also become significant ontologically if the fundamental orientation is ensured for an existential interpretation of death.\textsuperscript{41}

In Beauvoir’s work on the experience and effects of embodiment of women and the elderly, one may find this ontological relevance for the formation of an ethics that Ciocan seeks.

Her contemporary, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and his work with phenomenology largely influenced Beauvoir’s dealings with embodiment. For both, the body was the \textit{basis of being}, and was for Beauvoir specifically “the basis for freedom,”\textsuperscript{42} according to Suzanne Laba Cataldi. In \textit{The Second Sex}, Beauvoir illustrates the importance of the body in the disclosure of being which is the justification of existence and the realization of freedom. The most determinative way in which the Other provides the resources for knowing the self as object, mentioned by Simons previously, is through the presentation of the body-object and the manner in which this appearance forces upon the self a recognition of death. Taking up her constant trope once again of Man as Master and Woman as Slave, Beauvoir states, “Born of flesh, the man in love finds fulfilment as flesh and the flesh is \textit{destined for the tomb},”\textsuperscript{43} that is by way of the flesh of woman. Hoping to overcome his death, man denies the transcendent aspect of the feminine by making her pure body, as was exampled in Chapter 3. Through this denial he is capable of building himself up as pure transcendence, thus escaping death.

Through embodiment of the Other, the self discovers its own embodiment and embodiment is death. Of this she leaves little room for question: “The ejaculation,” as the ultimate example of body realizing body, “is a promise of death.”\textsuperscript{44} Our em-

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Being and Time}, trans. Stambaugh, p. 229
\textsuperscript{42} Suzanne Laba Cataldi, “The Body as the Basis for Being: Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty” \textit{The Existential Phenomenology of Simone de Beauvoir}, ed. Wendy O’Brian and Lester Embree (Springer; New York: 2001) p. 91
\textsuperscript{43} \textit{The Second Sex}, p. 186. Emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{The Second Sex}. p. 183
bodiment ensures our death and this is precisely why there is a need for others as equal and a need for an ethics. As has been stated, others are required for the individual’s aims to find fulfilment. But this need entails a risk that those others might ignore or alter the individual’s desires; it is a dangerous venture to communicate with the other but such a chance cannot be disallowed if we are to respect the equality of all others and open up the possibility of reciprocity.

This experience of embodiment is all the more effective in respect to the aged exterior for Beauvoir, because it is an even more potent reminder of death. Mussett remarks on Beauvoir’s change in attitude concerning one’s demise saying “the lived experience of time, and our being-for-death are all rethought in light of what it means to grow old,” and therefore Beauvoir has, “given us a more complete ethics of ambiguity by taking seriously forces that work to curb the individual’s freedom.”

The ethical concern develops from the key role of the experience of others in old age. The individual comes to view herself as ageing only after the Other has determined her as such. This exterior label is then adopted interiorly as the two are symbiotic in nature. Further, to know one’s self as ageing, for Beauvoir is to know the self as dying. Following this, the meaning of one’s projects alters accordingly. As Mussett reflects, “If our experience of time changes, then what defines action necessarily changes too.”

Though Beauvoir does establish such an alteration of meaning, the manner in which she does so again proves problematic for her greater ethical theory and it further elucidates the issues in her evaluation of the artist/audience relationship.

As Mussett goes on to establish Beauvoir offers an analysis of old age which is vastly contradictory to her views on temporality in her early ethical works. This contradiction arises from Beauvoir’s altered conception of death as definitive for the

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46 Ibid. p. 242
projects of a particular point of life only. “For the aged person,” Beauvoir holds, “death is no longer a general abstract fate: it is a personal event, an event that is near at hand.”\textsuperscript{47} Such a view is problematic on a number of counts in relation to both Beauvoir’s own ethics as well as her dealings with Heidegger’s notion of being-toward-death. Musset points out the first contradiction with a Beauvoirian ethics: “It should not matter \textit{when} the actual conclusion of life falls, because the future is always indeterminate,”\textsuperscript{48} as was presented in her earlier writings, especially “Pyrrhus and Cineas.”

Nonetheless, Beauvoir now establishes death as ever-present, as lurking behind every corner: “One has exchanged an indefinite future - and one had a tendency to look upon the future as infinite - for a finite future,” Beauvoir reflects, “In earlier days, we could see no boundary-mark upon the horizon: now we do see one.”\textsuperscript{49} This revealed boundary-mark is the limit that is Heidegger’s being-toward-death. In this manner, death becomes a (if not \textit{the}) major determinative factor for the meaning of every project. The experience of old age reveals to Beauvoir the absolute and fixed finitude of existence, and this puts a restriction on the meaning of the projects of the elderly unseen in her work with the artist’s project.

This limit, given the circumstances of society, forces the activities of the elderly to reside in empty echoes of already enacted tasks. This sense of oppression leads Beauvoir to found a more fully developed, and highly negative ethical critique of those activities that are entrenched in the past. “The elderly man,” she holds, “[as] unproductive and powerless, sees himself as a left-over from a former age. That is why he so readily turns towards the past: that was the time that belonged to him, the time when he looked upon himself as a first-class individual, a living being.”\textsuperscript{50} The

\begin{itemize}
  \item Ibid. p. 236
  \item \textit{The Coming of Age}, p. 378.
  \item Ibid. p. 435
\end{itemize}
criticism against this form of life is lodged at, not the individual under consideration, but the society which dominates his behavior.

This nostalgic view of one’s own life comes not from an interior, existential analysis of individuated becoming, but instead springs forth from existence within society and the limiting gaze of the Other as with the relation of Man and Woman before. “We are told by others that we are old,” Mussett insists.\footnote{Ageing and Existentialism, p. 246} From this Beauvoir concludes that death is still not a genuine and free choice made by the individual, because the fact of our death is a decision made by others to limit the meaning of life. Beauvoir holds that “age is not experienced in the for-itself mode,”\footnote{The Coming of Age p. 292} but is instead something pushed onto each individual by the external force of society. As the ageing process “is evocative of death,”\footnote{Ageing and Existentialism, p. 246} death can likewise be seen as a limit forced upon us from the outside as far as meaning creation is concerned. It is for this reason that the larger community is to blame for trapping this segment of society in the past. “Because of their nearness to death - the supreme abject - the elderly all to easily serve the purposes of self-definition for those with the power in society,” according to Musset. “One is young, strong and in control,” she says, “precisely because one is not old, decrepit and powerless.”\footnote{Ibid. p. 246} It is the fault of the community that the elderly must relegate themselves to musings of bygone days. Thus the life of the elderly returns to immanence by living in repetition.

Some surprising conclusions follow from viewing societal effects in such a way. First, by holding that it is the look of others that coagulates the actions of the elderly, Beauvoir may continue to espouse the idea that death is not our own. In fact, the acceptance of death as a limit to one’s freedom turns out to be a lie that the individual never fully assumes; it is only that the power of the Other is so strong

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{51} “Ageing and Existentialism,” p. 246
\textsuperscript{52} The Coming of Age p. 292
\textsuperscript{53} “Ageing and Existentialism,” p. 246
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid. p. 246}
that the chains cannot be broken and, so, the older generations are left with no other option than to act out their lives in pretence, taking “refuge in habit.” 55 To take death on as a meaningful limit to our projects is, in Beauvoir’s eyes, an ethically corrupt choice but one against which the elderly have no other option.

Alongside this, her view of the demise that comes with embodiment still allows Beauvoir to deny death as a possibility, instead seeing it as an event to come, an actuality. That is, though death is seen as a constant threat, this is only so at a certain point in life. This is in contrast to Heidegger’s declaration that death is constantly enfolded into the experience of Being, no matter one’s age. To treat death as an experience to come at some determinate point in the future is to “expect death and exist inauthentically,” according to Zorn. 56 While Mussett neglects to see Beauvoir’s position as an inauthentic being-toward-death on a Heideggerian account because it treats it as an end, she does highlight the conflict within Beauvoir’s own theory that arises from such a conception. “Instead of elaborating on the myriad of ways that death can be closer or farther away from everyday experience,” Mussett criticizes, “she makes age the supreme death sentence.” 57 Heidegger would no doubt raise the same concerns, perhaps interpreting the Beauvoirian philosophy as an everyday flight from death into the they-self. 58

Finally, this event continues to be unwelcome. She indicates that if the elderly had the power to they might overcome the limits death puts on them from the outside once again if the force of society was diminished. For this reason she makes a half-hearted call-to-action to the community that enslaves the aged at the close of her investigation. “Old age exposes the failure of our entire civilization,” she says before concluding, “It is the whole man that must be re-made, it is the whole relationship between man and

55 The Coming of Age, p. 466
56 “Heideggers Philosophy of Death,” p. 11
57 “Ageing and Existentialism,” p. 245-6
58 Being and Time, trans. Macquarrie and Robinson, p. 252
man that must recast if we wish the old person’s state to be acceptable.”

Therefore, at no time does death, as a limit emergent from our embodiment, understood as effective in the discourse of meaning.

This elaboration of Beauvoir’s view of death further explains how her problems with the relationship between the audience and the artist emerge. Despite her recognition of embodiment as a limiting force upon the freedom of the individual as with the relationship of man and woman, Beauvoir stops short of accepting the death that embodiment brings as an ultimate boundary of meaning on the individuated. Death as meaningful is only considered as inauthentic. The consequences of her refusal to recognize the force of biological demise from the artist’s perspective is the diminution of the importance of the second half of Arp’s definition of Beauvoirian moral freedom - that we understand the limits our situated existence places on our aspirations, that we know the bounds of our power and effective freedom. Without recognition of this balance of power, the artist is concerned only with her ontological freedom, her subjective, conscious transcendence. As we saw with Sartre, to hold a stunted conception of artist-self as without others, leads to the disenfranchisement of the witness to the work. This sort of existence does not ask that the audience be engaged and active; it removes them from the communication of re-creation and allows the artist to dictate the meaning of the work. To deny death in the conversation is then to relegate their relationship to conflict, to unbalance the practice of mediation.

This is the existential ethic, an ethic of ambiguity, that communal existence elucidates our individuation. Death, then, is central in the meaning of life, because humanity’s finitude, discovered through interaction with the Other, brings awareness of existence as object and the instantiation of life’s projects as individuated along with the phenomenological experience of subjectivity in the activity of consciousness. All must assume this truth of being - this certainty of death as biological perishing.

\[59\] *The Coming of Age*, p. 543
that it is “not to be outstripped”\textsuperscript{60} at all moments in order to justify existence and disclose the ambiguous nature of being. As Heidegger says, “Cases of death may be the factual occasion for the fact that Da-sein initially notices death at all.”\textsuperscript{61} Though his language seeks to de-emphasize the import of this first perception, an ethical evaluation such as Beauvoir’s leans on it for a full discernment of the structure of freedom. Therefore, existence as Being-toward-freedom must recognize Being-toward-death in order to comply with Beauvoirian ethical demands, because an existential ethics requires an understanding and assumption of not only the truth of ontological freedom (as with transcending death in imagination), but also one’s effective freedom which is determined by the situations surrounding the life of the particular individual; these situations include embodiment first and foremost as the \textit{basis of being} and the \textit{basis of freedom}.

In the final chapter I offer a particular example of what an ethical aesthetics that coheres with her ethical theory on the disclosure of being might look like. I turn to an evaluation of Edgar Degas’ Impressionistic paintings of ballet dancers to demonstrate, using Beauvoir’s conceptions of embodiment and reciprocity, how the \textit{one case where it might be interesting to create art is if others were to experience it}.

\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Being and Time}, trans. Macquarrie and Robinson, p. 250
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Being and Time}, trans. Stambaugh, p. 238
Chapter 5

An Ethical Aesthetics in Particular

I would be remiss if I ended my investigation of the artist/audience relationship without a particular application of my more general assertions made thus far. In this division I will make use of another Heideggerian method, the understanding of Being through the work of art primarily, in order to further explicate the equality of the audience in the creative experience of art. Turning to an Edgar Degas’ *Dancers in Blue* (see Figure 5-1), I present the perspective and following interpretation of certain audiences that relies, not on the desires of the artist, but uses the situation of their own present to develop meanings toward freedom. Specifically, I look to the painting to see in what ways the audience can encourage and understand Beauvoir’s conceptions of embodiment and reciprocity through the conceptual analysis of *Woman*.

What is woman? - For each page of writing Simone de Beauvoir gives in response to this inquiry in *The Second Sex*, French Impressionist painter, Edgar Degas, answers in kind with painted canvas. Both Degas’ and Beauvoir’s commitment to the task of discovering what lay at the heart of the Eternal Feminine was “repetitive and obsessive,”¹ as Anthea Callen says of the former. This compulsive devotion to a single subject on which both creators fixate allows for an in-depth cross comparison of their revelations on conceptions of the feminine. More importantly, such an exploration in

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the particular may provide a template for the way in which the audience can assume their freedom equal to and apart from the artist whose work they encounter.

In returning to Heidegger’s conceptions, we may find a better means of realizing, through aesthetic participation, the “reciprocal recognition” Beauvoir holds is the realization of freedom. The first step we must take is to divorce our interpretations from the intentions of the artist and his time. For as Heidegger says, “The artist remains inconsequential as compared with the work, almost like passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge.” Only away from the convictions held by artists like Edgar Degas, is there an ability to reclaim the work in the present age and find meaning that, instead of oppressing the creativity of the spectator, frees her. So now: “Let us go to the actual work and ask the work how and what it is,” in order that we might ask again: What is Woman?

5.1 Framing the Problem

Heidegger begins “The Origin of the Work of Art” with an exploration of the work as mere thing. “Our aim,” he says, “is to come to know the thing-being (thingness) of the thing.” We are then concerned first with the canvas, the paint applied thereon, and most especially the frame that holds the work. The framework of Degas’ Dancers in Blue visibly highlights how the thingly character, the tangible object, remains open to possibility through the suggestion of a world. Heidegger’s esoteric definition of world is “the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into Being.” That is, a work of art worlds when it offers possibilities in such a way that do not close off the

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2“The Origin of the Work of Art,” p. 167
3Ibid. p.150
4Ibid. p. 151
5Ibid. p. 170
chance of rediscovery (unconcealedness in Heideggerian terminology) yet to come. *Dancers in Blue* displays just how a work of art may create the possibility of a world while remaining always at the hands of the frenzied earth, all that is, “irreducibly spontaneous,(that) is effortless and untiring.”6 This structure is necessary if works of art are to partake in ethical processes by allowing the audience the freedom of re-creation. The truth of art and ethical demands emerges from works that, “let(s) the earth be an earth,”7 and this is comes forth even in the thingness of Degas’ work. Like many of his later works, the construction of Degas’ *Dancers in Blue* presents a casing that cuts off his subject. The body of the dancer at the far right is interrupted, obstructed by the backstage architecture. This painting then, “projects beyond the picture rectangle,”8 and the spectator experiences a sense that there is more going on here, more to be seen; there is an elusive context that demands definition from the spectator. The dancers action, her life, continues off the stage, and it is this idea that takes center stage. In order that we may offer up Beauvoir’s aesthetics as an activity toward freedom it is necessary to recognize that the reality presented in imagination through the artist’s eyes and words has a life beyond the page in her hands or the paint on his brush. This life is found in each possible event of re-creation and preservation made by future spectators and readers. Like Beauvoir says of any form of action, there should be no “sharp separation between present and future, between means and ends.”9 In order to hold this understanding though the making of a work of art must be taken as an action like all others in Beauvoir’s ethical theory. To further establish this, a look at what is inside the framing of Degas’ work is needed.

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6Ibid. p. 171
7Ibid. p. 171
9*The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 131
5.2 Embodiment and Freedom

Beauvoir insists that the conception of Woman is defined through situation, and the first manner in which a person is situated is through the embodied experience as I have previously shown; for Woman this is above all the case. “Where the (individual) fails,” Beauvoir declares in response to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “is when he must see his body as object among others.” Failure and inability in this instance force one to view the self as object more than any other experience. For Beauvoir, the embodied experience of woman has been historically defined by this disability and her limitations, making every woman entirely object where society, namely man, is concerned. Suzanne Laba Cataldi notes, “Beauvoir’s phenomenology of female experiences, perceptions, and possibilities sets forth a complex and studious account of disadvantaged bodies - bodies whose ‘disabilities’ and ‘pathologies’ are attributed (more) to women’s situation, to our social and historical disempowerment.”

The social and historical position of women in 19th century France was undoubtedly limited. The world that Degas inhabited at the Palais Garnier Opera House reflected the social situation beyond the stage in its own hierarchical structure. Women without male chaperons were relegated to their own isolated seating section, and ballerinas were known as something like high-class prostitutes, interesting only for what their bodies could offer sexually. Despite the degree to which the women of his time were entangled in their limitations and disadvantages, Degas chose most often to rep-

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11“Body as Basis for Being: Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty,” p. 89. It is curious that Beauvoir will admit the limitations of embodiment for the case of femininity historically connecting such disadvantages to biological experiences like pregnancy and menstruation (see The Second Sex p. 30, 168, 348, 369, 399) - things easily argued to be not chosen - while also holding that this subjugated position is in part the choice of the woman (The Second Sex, p. 56). Their seems to be an analogy here to her work with the experience of ageing as a recognition of limitations with biological explanations, yet she holds that this limitation (e.g. death) is not a choice made by the individual and so responsibility for how to approach death may be dismissed as a concern for society and not the individuated subject.
resent the magnificent and refined abilities of the ballerina on stage and in rehearsal. In painting the intricate in highly trained talents of these women, Degas’ paintings display a physiological freedom and control that is offered up for the possibility of considering the female form as one, not of disablement, but master of her own body. By “positing herself for herself”\(^\text{12}\) at the corporeal level through the consideration of aesthetic form, as either artist or audience, she is given the potential to mirror this imagining in relation to political and social freedoms as well.

Richard Kendall explains that, “The depicted female figure is called upon to define her own identity,”\(^\text{13}\) through her bodily control. Further, Kendall notes that Degas took “pains to give each woman her own physiological and temperamental identity.”\(^\text{14}\) This meaning can be found inside the paintings of Degas whether or not we consider his personal experience of women or his ideas of femininity at the time he created. Take again his *Dancers in Blue*: an attitude of extreme focus is displayed in the paintings main dancer as she perfectly controls the point of her toe while she prepares her dégagée. The emotion of the dancer on her right, conversely, is much more impromptu, glancing at her arm as though its movement has caught her off-guard. The differentiation of the dancers’ bodily placements and their relative concerns creates a sense of autonomy. From the physiological and emotional autonomy displayed in *Dancers in Blue* emerges an element of subjectivity in the representations of these dancers, which makes room for consideration of women more generally as subject.

In order to consider this mode of interpretation, Heidegger’s activity of artistic preservation is essential. “This letting the work be a work,” is what Heidegger calls, “the preserving of the work.”\(^\text{15}\) This says that art, to be art, must necessarily allow

\(^{12}\) *The Second Sex*, p.576

\(^{13}\) “Signs and Non-signs,” p. 194.


\(^{15}\) “The Origin of the Work of Art”, p.183
for a replenishing spontaneity and a continual “setting up of worlds.” Creating and concurrently experiencing art then is the first step in unconcealing truth. That is to say, art reveals the possibility of worlds through imagination and is projected forward through artistic spontaneity. Because the possible worlds presented in the unconcealing may then be established in actuality, art can participate fully in the realm of the ethical, pushing humanity toward the horizon of freedom, which Beauvoir recognizes directly in her declaration that our interior experiences cannot be divorced from our exterior situations. If we understand that the truth revealed in the artistic act is a truth constructed from emptiness in the same manner as the consciousness of the subject we see that for art too may be “marked by [its] past but not determined by it.”

Should the constraints of the past be all that is allowed for meaning creation as Beauvoir examples in her discussion of Virginia Wolfe, Jane Austen, and the like, the ballerinas depicted in Degas become immortalized as beautiful bodies, objects to be amassed through sexual conquering in the hallways of the opera house. If, however, artistic creation is seen as an offering of possible forms of preservation that might emerge through the freedom of the audience, and not simply as the solidification of meaning divulged in artistic intent, then the representation of bodily autonomy is open to the chance of social autonomy for the represented as well. No longer are Degas’ ballerinas seen as generic female forms, but they are now subjects with far greater freedom open to them through transcendent activity. Beauvoir’s considerations on embodiment recognize the way in which, for women, this situation has long been attached to disability, but in art we find the first means of imagining embodiment as a means of transcendence and not the curse of pure immanence. With a recognition that the worlds presented in artistic works are still open to the turbulent, changing earth underlain comes the potential for reciprocity on which Beauvoir’s

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16 Force of Circumstance, p. 416
ideas of freedom rest in her ethics.

5.3 Finding Reciprocity

To understand the possibility of reciprocity and the potential for ethical commentary exhibited in *Dancers in Blue* two modes of inspection will be beneficial. First, by placing this singular work in relation to the complete *oeuvre* of Degas as well as the evolution of his artistic attitude, a change on the scale of a grand conversion is discovered. Following this, interpretation will be divorced from artistic intent in order to see just what political progress may be achieved by the act of the audience. Recognition that artistic motivation may be wrapped up in the original creation does not disallow alternate readings of meaning either contemporaneous with creation or far into the future. For every suggested world must recognize that the earth underlying, "is not a uniform, inflexible staying under cover, but unfolds itself in an inexhaustible variety of simple modes and shapes."\(^{17}\) Alteration of intention must be allowed in aesthetics and ethics alike in order to achieve freedom through reciprocity.

The radical evolution of Degas’ work is not seen in his subject matter but, rather, in how the subject is presented. The ballerinas of *Dancers in Blue* possess an advantage the dancers of Degas’ earlier pieces did not - recognition of their subjectivity and their exquisite ambiguity. The year of creation for this canvas is listed as 1893, late in Degas’ career. Whereas earlier pieces were typically presented in full-frame, displaying the meticulous details of persons and the architecture of his beloved opera house, as with *Dance Class* for instance, those paintings of the *Dancers in Blue* era see the removal of background narrative. *A group of dancers and nothing more. And yet*\(^{18}\) - by moving closer to his subjects, Degas presents a new conception of both literal and

\(^{17}\) "The Origin of the Work of Art," p. 172
\(^{18}\) Ibid. p. 163
metaphorical understanding. The framing now excludes most of the surroundings and context, and only the dancers are clearly depicted. The women, then, are no longer objects amongst many others - mirrors, costumes, architectural structure, etc. - but instead can become subject. The lack of detail, too, creates an air of ‘ambiguity and inference’ that demands a sort of reflection and reconsideration, not only of the representation but also what is represented - Woman.¹⁹

Another change in presentation can be seen in a common theme explored by art historians: the notion of presence and absence in Degas’ work. Like the background has been stripped away, there is another component that is notably absent from later works like Dancers in Blue - the masculine figure. This absence has encouraged debate and dissention in the art history community. “The figure of the lurking abonnée,” those well-to-do men who took part in the privileges of the ballet underworld, “with all its connotations of sexual commerce, is conspicuous by its absence in Degas’ later work,”²⁰ Kendall observes. In his early paintings, Degas’ dancers were always chaperoned, either by instructors and musicians or by those abonnées seeking sexual satisfaction. In several works, Degas went so far as to paint himself in as the male observer, possibly filling the role of sexual predator.

While certain historians insist that the masculine observer is never removed, remaining present in the role of spectator outside the frame, there is room to refute this point of view. Anthea Callen insists that, “Man’s very invisibility, his absence from the main body of work, testifies to the overwhelming importance of his presence in it,” and as such the women represented are always, “instantly classified as other.”²¹ In contrast, Kendall asserts that, “While it can be argued that the furtive male observer is still present in the person of the artist (and the spectator), Degas’ elimination of

¹⁹ “Signs and Non-Signs,” pp. 189-191.
²⁰ Ibid. p. 192
²¹ The Spectacular Body, pp. 75-76.
the abonnée figure inevitably redefines the sexual climate of his late work.”22 Under Beauvoir’s model of aesthetic analysis, however, we are not offered any template or guide for this type of re-imagining. The question posed by Heather Dawkins, “Was Degas a misogynist and his pictures evidence of his attitude towards women, or could they be understood in less disturbing ways,”23 cannot even be asked. The key here is that there remains, as there always has been and must be, an openness to redefinition, in the project of the artist and historian alike.

Whether Degas was a misogynist functioning as a “sadistic voyeur, torturing and punishing”24 his subjects or if he was instead an artist slowly realizing, through close and continuous observation, the full value of Woman, is only a matter for consideration if the critic or audience so decides. Within the act of creation is the moment of first preservation formed by the artist, which neither entails a call to the absolute nor demands an interpretation dependent on this artistic intention. To seek an absolute through artistic creation in the case of Degas would in fact leave the situation of his ballerinas forever frozen as sexual objects, puppets of the abonnée. New moments of preservation, acts of re-creation like the feminist movement in the Degas scholarship of the 1970s, are what make possible the interpretations that view the dancers of Degas as being, “depicted as they might experience themselves,”25 without the reliance on man for definition. An aesthetic theory that recognizes that the worlds created in a work are possibility, and not facticity, is what opens it to inclusion in ethical practice. This aesthetic theory is what allows for the discovery of reciprocity in Degas as well as Beauvoir though she struggled to fully recognize such herself.

22 “Signs and Non-Signs,” p. 193 Parenthetical additions are my own.
25 “Managing Degas,” p. 137.
## 5.4 Conclusion: Artistic Creation as Self-Creation

In exploring the particular work of Degas we see how a creation can be a pathway to imagining a reality where the chains of societies oppressions might be overcome, where the ‘ropes that hold them back’ can in fact be broken. Embodiment, once a trap for women, is found in Degas’ dancers to be a means of reclaiming Being, not only in the imaginary but also in reality. Reciprocity can be found in the spectator’s invested contemplation of the representation and then in encounters with what is represented becoming a gateway to self-formation. The evolution of Degas’ consideration of his women from objects among the many to subjects displays the way in which artistic creation is self-creation. For Heidegger, the creation of artistic works is the primordial experience that forms the basis for understanding the architecture of the world; this architecture includes necessarily possibility and actuality, earth and world, and this is what holds up the projects of creation and re-creation/preservation as equal. Both means of acting in the world alter that world through the mutually dependent play of inner and outer, self and other, subject and object. Through the encounter with a work of art we find, not just the failures of the artist to understand the ontological truth of the subject’s existence, but we find the truth behind this. This is only possible, however, if we release artistic meaning from the grips of the artist and give over the work to the coming generations of spectators and readers. Those encountering works of art can disclose the truth of being, that existence entails both transcendence and immanence and both must be assumed in order to maintain freedom. And, indeed, the artist must look to the audience to justify her existence, because any relationship with the Other is an act of mediation between the ambiguous elements of life as individuated and communal. After all, *in one case only it might be interesting live life: it would be if others were to live it with me.*
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