

3. *Simone de Beauvoir*

“The whole world is a stage, people merely the actors” - Shakespeare

The quote by Simone de Beauvoir can be understood as stating that there is a gap between the individual and the role it plays in the social structure, this time directly talking about gender. It is a quote that proposes subjectivation. A similar idea is seen in works of Shakespeare, the idea that everything we do is but an act.

I shall not do a classical analysis of the quote but will rather try a subversive approach. I will analyse how an individual becomes a subject in the social structure and the social structure itself, with which we will understand the manner in which Beauvoir outlines the sex and the gender in the quote. But I will also continue and try to actualize the quote to philosophy and analyse what should the role of philosophy be then.

Problems of the Cogito: Descartes with Lacan and Wittgenstein

Descartes invented methodical doubt in order to find an absolute reality from which he can build his belief system. He thought he had found it in the Cogito, the thinking subject, to which he came with two ways. First of all, very analytically speaking, even when he doubted everything, he could not have doubted the fact that he is doubting, which results in the proposition: *Dubito ergo Cogito, Cogito ergo Sum*. Second way of getting to the Cogito was to say that if there is an evil spirit playing a trick, a scam on an object, the object recognises itself as the subject of the scam and must therefore exist.

This classical view was then challenged many years later by another French philosopher, Jacques Lacan, who simply said that the subject is split. He proposed two ways in which the subject is split. The first is the split between the statement and the position from which the statement is being said and the second is the split between the inner self or the biological matter of an individual and between the role in the social structure that this individual plays.

The first split led Lacan to change the original Cartesian formulation from “*Cogito ergo Sum*” to “*Cogito:”Ergo Sum*””. This split means that there is a difference between a position that the subject resides at and the statement that the subject produces. Perhaps you can better

understand this if we take a look at the liar's paradox that originates in ancient Greece, where, to simplify, a subject says "I am lying", which seems as a clear paradox, until we introduce Lacan. With Lacan the solution is simple, yes, the subject was speaking the truth, he is lying, but that only means that he is identifying with a position of a liar. The statement itself was true, but the statement means that he is recognising himself as a liar.

The second split that Lacan proposes is the split between the biological matter, the inner self, and between the role in the social structure that it plays. We can explain this with Wittgenstein's last work: On certainty, where he realizes that there is a clear difference between saying "I feel pain" and "I, Ludwig Wittgenstein, feel pain", where in the first sentence the signifier "I" is empty but in the second it identifies itself with a role in the society, the identity of Wittgenstein. It is exactly the identification in a role in the societal structure that allows for action, to put it differently, to act, an individual needs to assume a role in the society from which they can perform a certain act. Interestingly we can see the exact thing in Hamlet, famous drama by Shakespeare. The moment in drama that changes everything for Hamlet, the main protagonist, the moment when he can finally act is exactly the moment where he says "I, Hamlet the Dane". Perhaps a woman can only act as a woman once she recognises herself in this role.

To conclude, Simone de Beauvoir seems to be on to something. The classical subject, the Cogito, is apparently torn in two. Let us now see what implication does this have on our epistemological position.

Between Substance and Relation

I believe there is a break in philosophy, the break between the philosophy of substance, and the philosophy of relation. Philosophy of substance is the classical, premodern philosophy of mostly ontological question "what is?". In the philosophy of substance, truth is connected to some primordial substance. Philosophy of relation on the other hand, is the philosophy that asks "How do things exist? How do they come to existence?" Whereas the philosophy of the substance operates with ontological truth, the philosophy of relation goes to the symbolic. This is not to say that I counter philosophy of substance per se, I simply state that before talking about how something is, we should firstly talk about how it starts to exist for us, as we obviously cannot perceive things out of our symbolization, as they are not meaningful to us. Let us see what do I mean with that.

If we remember Kant and his second Copernican turn, we can acknowledge a very important contribution. He says, when he defends pure *Anschauung* that we cannot perceive an object outside of the correlation with our thought. We can never perceive it outside of, to quote, its *transcendental narration*. This is how philosophy of relation precedes the philosophy of substance. Hegel is even more radical and he says that what classical philosophy said to be the impotence of the subject, somehow unable to grasp the truth of the object or substance,

is actually the impotence of truth itself which is not whole, contradictory and paradoxical. Let us explain this with three examples from philosophy.

De Saussure is known for his lectures on linguistics, where he spoke of linguistic signs, how every sign in a language is two fold. First of all there is the signifier, the word that means the object, and then there is the object, the signified. Two things are important, first of all there is no logical connection between the signifier and the signified, the connection is totally arbitrary and violent. Second of all, he says, we cannot perceive an object directly, we can only ever operate with the signifier, quite similar to the point Kant makes.

Second example is the example of Foucault, who coins the term archeology of knowledge. He says that rather in some primordial substance, the truth and the meaning should be sought in the power relations of the time where it was created, which is exactly what Nietzsche says in his Genealogy of morals, where he talks about good and bad and how the meanings were created only by the power relations and nothing more. Nietzsche uses two words, *Versprung* and *Herkunft* to differentiate between the essentialist origin of a word and the genealogy of a word, exactly the difference Foucault mentions, but interestingly English does not have the difference between those two words, and English native speakers have a hard time differentiating between them, which could be seen as a reason behind them clinging on to analytical philosophy.

Last example is the example of Voloshinov, who talks about different meanings of same words, how in capitalism for instance, the word freedom means totally different thing than in communism. This leads him to say that the language is the arena of class struggle, where meanings must be coined.

So what is the point of philosophy of relation then? It is very simply antiessentialist and antiphenomenological. We can see that it is in fact the position of the object in the Symbolic order, the system of differences, that creates meaning. The object and the subject are not agents of the language, they are products of the language. It is not about the object and its metaphysical attributes anymore. It exists at a position, and that position gives it meaning and importance. To relate to the direct example that de Beauvoir proposes, and to paraphrase Malabou, even the gender "woman" could be understood just as a position in the structure that an object assumes. The question now, to satisfy the essay title, is **how** the "becoming" of a subject works like.

Symbolic and Imaginary identification

When the essay title asks for the "manner" of characterization, it really asks for the term subjectivation, which can mean two things. First of all it is the process of creation of the subject from the individual, the inner self, the biological matter, and second of all it is the creation of truth out of the object.

Imaginary identification is the identification with the attributes. You like a person because of their beard. You see Acropola in the Athens and you say this is a bunch of ruins. The only thing that you see here are the attributes of the object.

Symbolic identification though, is the identification with a position within the symbolic order. This is when you are in the museum of archeology in Athens and you look at the wall of Greek history and there is a window in the wall, and you can see Acropola through the window. In that moment Acropola is more than a bunch of ruins. Acropola assumes its position in the Greek history, is surrounded by its story, its meaning is given to it by the story, that you read on the wall. It is important that only here you gain meaning, only when imagining the object in its position do you get the truth. This is also where, as said earlier, you gain the capacity to act, as we have seen in Neo in the Matrix. He could only see the Matrix once he recognised himself as the One with the power to do so.

To make this perfectly clear, and to satisfy the theme of this gathering, the war and the peace, I want to compare two biggest mass murderers of the 20th century, Hitler and Stalin. When Hitler gave his speeches, he always stood at the end to receive the clapping of the audience, as he was their sublime object, they identified with the idea of the supreme leader, who is such because of his attributes. But with Stalin, he clapped in the end of his speech as well. The reason why this happens is because he knew that they are not clapping to him, but to the position and the history of this position, to the idea that he stood in front.

This explanation is exactly what we were talking about with the split of the subject and the relation in earlier parts. But now let's realize something very obvious, that Saussure already mentions earlier. There is a gap between the imaginary and the symbolic. One can never fully synchronise the imaginary and the symbolic. And this is exactly what led Lacan to say that the subject can never truly enter language. This is also why he says: "I think where I am not". This is the split. An individual will never be fully able to enter and assume the position, for instance (to link back to the title) to their gender.

We can now see that the sex could be understood as the biological matter, the individual prior to subjectivation, but then gender, and the role and the meaning of gender could be understood only as symbolic identification. This is how a woman, a biological matter, assumes her role in the society, she becomes a woman, she recognises herself as a woman, she assumes a position of a woman. Gender does not exist per se. It exists as a set of roles and rules in our society. We see that we alienate into the gender only when we recognise it, only when we assume its position. And if you criticise me and say but a girl is a woman even before she is born, yes precisely, once they learn that her genitalia, her biological matter is that of a female, they recognise her as a girl, they symbolise her as a girl, and this is she becomes a woman, she is identified in the role, perhaps even before she is physically born. She is identified when she enters the societal structure, when she is assigned a

position. Now let us ask ourselves, what happens when we fail to enter and assume our position totally and completely?

Subjective and Objective reality: Wittgenstein as Lacan's patient

Wittgenstein writes in "on certainty" that there are two sets of realities, the subjective and objective reality. Subjective reality is very straight forward. This is the reality we can talk about, argue about, have a discourse about. This is for example the very simple question of whether a chair is brown or red.

Everyone thinks that objective reality with Wittgenstein is as classical philosophy thought of it, something that cannot be doubted. Alas! This is not the truth. Objective reality is the reality which must not be doubted. This are the axioms that we all have to subconsciously believe, this is the formal logic we all take to be true, the definitions, the violent connection between the signifiers and the signified etc, and of course the position that we play in the social structure. What happens if it were to break? Lacan comes to help with five phantasmatic pathologies, clinical images of subjects unable to enter and grasp and believe the objective reality.

The first is the psychotic, the subject that completely detached from reality. He never entered objective reality and he is not able to understand us, as we aren't able to understand him. To use a famous quote by Nietzsche: "Those who were dancing seemed crazy to those who did not hear the music." Second is the paranoiac, who sees that objective reality is broken, but instead of believing it finds a scapegoat, a trickster that is trying to scam him. This is the example of Nazi Germany, where despite having a broken economical system, they found a scapegoat, an alien, that is playing with them, and they found the scapegoat in the Jews. Third is the perverse, the one who knows that objective reality is broken but still continues to act as though everything is alright. Anthropological research has shown that the Greek did not actually believe that their gods exist, but still acted as though they were. Niels Bohr, famous scientist is also an example. He has had a horseshoe for luck at his home and when asked by his friends whether he really believes in that he replied: "No of course I don't believe it, but I have heard that it can work even if you cannot believe it."

Fourth example is a very modern Narcissus, who like the psychotic was not able to enter the objective reality, the language, but instead of becoming a madman builds the whole world around the assumption of the grand Ego, the great I, the picture of the perfect himself, and we can see this happening with the late Capitalism, permissive capitalism, that does not enforce anything. The last example would be the hysteric, those who are never satisfied, who always say why? Who always want something else. This I think is the example of philosophers, and this is also an example of the perfect subversive force, a person that is

always asking questions. I want to paraphrase Marx here and say: "Hysterics of the world, UNITE!" As they are the perfect revolutionaries, always demanding change.

The importance of this is that precisely because every woman is not born a woman but becomes such and because in general we have to become our roles even though we cannot, practically every person is an anomaly in this or that direction.

This is then is how the individual becomes a subject, how a biological matter becomes a woman. But we have seen that the symbolic code is perhaps the most crucial part in this process, so let us now analyse the structure itself.

Zero Signifier: The story of 12 camels

So far we have talked a great deal how it is the symbolic structure that gives the subject the meaning by giving them the position. But if we have such a consistent structure of language, structure of symbols, societal structure, surely there must be some sort of a meaning that starts the chaining of the signifiers, that starts the structure? Can we take the quote of Simone de Beauvoir even further now and can we tell something more about the world, now that we know how a individuum identifies and assumes a position?

This start of chaining. the Lacanian concept of the master signifier, the signifier, that starts the whole sequence. But if there would actually be a first meaning, a primordial meaning, then everything we did would be meaningless, as we would be back at the philosophy of the substance. Fortunately Lacan makes a point, that the master signifier should be actually called the zero signifier, as it has no meaning whatsoever. It could also be called the positivised gap, the positivised manque. Wittgenstein said that the language is like a town that is regular and straight like an american town in the suburbs but gets confusing and messy in the middle, like a labirynth. This must be illustrated with an Arab story.

There lived a father with three sons and one day he decided to give them 11 camels. He told them the eldest gets one half, the second gets one fourth and the last one gets one sixth. Of course this is impossible to do without killing the camels in the process. The three sons then called the judge, to tell them what to do. And the judge said, I am very rich, I shall give you one camel, and then you can split them. So the eldest got six, the second got three and the youngest got two camels. One camel remained, and was given back to the judge. The point is that the zero signifier, albeit changing the meaning a little bit, was the only thing that made the process of language possible, without ever having to have any meaning, as it played no role in the process rather than the role of simply being present. This is very important because now we shall talk about the fight against mysticism

Art in relation to the object

Let us now analyse how different artistic productions understand the object, and how subversive they are and how they relate to the quote of Simone de Beauvoir, especially how they fight the mysticism.

First artistic production is the movement of the realism. Realism is very naïve as they (quite similar to the philosophy of substance) understand the object as an external truth, a truth that can be caught. When they then cannot depict the truth, because as we know the truth is not whole, they blame the individual who is incapable of the artistic act, the individual who is impotent.

Second movement I want to analyse is the movement of the modernism. Modernism is the time where they have lost the object, in the sense of, they recognised that the object is gone. They are already on the side of philosophy of relation, they recognise that there is no primordial meaning, that the zero signifier is empty, but they will fight this with the Freudian fetish. They are going to mask the fact that the object is gone. They are going to look for it in secondary symbolic codes. This is why modernism is the era of big stories, capitalism, communism, which were there to substitute and fill the gap of the initial meaning. This is why this is the time of surrealism, dadaism etc... they were so desperate to find the object.

Last movement is the movement of post-modernism. Here they lost the object completely, that everything is just the chaining of the signifiers. The reaction to this realisation is the Marx's fetish. I pretend that this is the natural object that it is worthy because of its in itself but in reality it is the object of the structure, worthy due to its position. Modernists put regular objects in the place of art, they put cans of tomatoe soup, they put toilets galleries. People are seen questioning this saying: this is not art I can also do this. And this is what postmodernism does. It shows that something becomes something only when a part of the position. They show the object in all its bizarness, they show that the sublime object is sublime only because of its position. And this is funnily the most subversive act in scattered late capitalism, where you no longer have united workers, where production cycles are located all around the world, this is the most subversive act and to link back, this is the realization that de Beauvoir has. A woman is a woman only because she is put in a position of a woman.

Through the analysis of the quote we have now come to a point where we recognise that there is a structure that gives meaning to everything in the structure, that we gain our identity entering the structure, that we become psychologically damaged when we fail to enter the structure, but what does this structure mean for philosophy?

Materialism versus Idealism: Bahtin, Freud, Althusser

Like the break between substance and relation, materialism and Idealism also presents a conflict in philosophie. Idealism could be in its most radical form presented as total universalism, where a primordial structure preceeds and dictates all materialistic practices, while materialism au contraire radicalises itself into total relativism where every practice is just a consequence of the historical circumstances in which they happen.

I believe though that I can transcend this conflict and perform a dialectical synthesis, with which we are going to understand exactly how Beauvoir could be understood, is it the social structure that preceeds identification in a gender, or is it the gender itself that is the practice. We shall achieve that by looking into three moments in the continental philosophical tradition.

First of all we have got the language. We know from De Saussure, that language can be understood as a system of differences, as a very idealistic system. But on the other hand we know that the language is but an act of speech, a materialistic practice, furthermore we know that language is in no way a static form; it evolves, which even Saussure agreed with in the later seminars, but no one seems to read them these days. How can we join these seemingly opposing views? Bahtin says that the language exists as an illusion of a system in the subconscious of the native speaker, which means that it exists as a system in the thought of the speaker while in reality it is just a material practice. But beware! Levi-Strauss famously says that illusions should be researched for their key contribution to functionality, with other words, without the illusion of the system, one cannot speak, which links back to the previous chapter about objective and subjective reality. This is exactly what we mean, the objective has to be imagined, but as an illusion.

Second synthesis is the Freudian claim that there is no psychology of the Ego that he makes in his book group psychology and the analysis of Ego. He says that neurosis, par exemple, is a societal illness. His point here is that in the ego, we can see the structure of the societal system, a very idealistic gesture. But when we say that the structure itself is created by the individual Egoes, we reach the synthesis in saying that there is mutual codependency. The individuals create the society and the society then creates the individual Ego.

Lastly we analyse the Althusserian concept of ideological interpellation. Althusser Says that every subject is interpellated into the ideology, alienated into the symbolic, which is precisely the symbolic identification we spoke about earlier. But here we can see an interesting dualism of analysis. On one hand the theory of ideology suggests that every individual can be understood through his class, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, that this class consciousness determines the subjects, which is called the ideological determinism, but au contraire early psychoanalysis says that every individual is a creation of their own personal life, of their own trauma in their childhood. Althusser unites these two views by saying that

every specific individual is interpellated into the ideology, when he recognises himself in a role in the society, when he is called to this role.

The point here is that idealism and materialism can be boiled down to either the discourse of the real, where the discourse creates the real that we talk about, but on the other hand the materialism could be boiled down to the materialistic of the discourse, about how the discourse comes from material practices, but I think we need to move away from that.

We need to go to the real of the discourse in the sense of, analyse the consequences of the discourse. Instead of saying we have the language, let's talk about the world, let us say, we have the language, now let us see what this means for the world.

Philosophical interpretation

We now know the shocking truth of the subject's becoming of the subject, but now let us ask what does this mean for philosophical interpretation and philosophy as such. There is a conflict in Lacanian philosophy, between Badiou and Cassin, who argued about the point of philosophical interpretation, both quoting Lacan word for word.

Badiou said that interpretation should bring about the plurality of meaning, that interpretation should put a dent in reality, break the reality and show how truth is not whole. Cassin disagrees, and says that interpretation should bring about the one meaning, should do away with plurality of meaning. They have quoted Lacan's 2nd and 15th seminar respectively. The question now is, was Lacan himself paradoxical?

To answer this we need to go to another Lacanian, called Laclau. He was a linguist and sought the first meaning, the so called zero signifier that I explained earlier, and he presupposed that there has to be a meaning of the master signifier. There are two options then. If there is only one meaning, then Cassin would be right. Philosophical interpretation shows the master signifier, shows the one meaning. This is very authorian, as it only allows for one true meaning AND it leads us back to the philosophy of substance. This is not politically subversive. The alternative is that there is a plurality of meanings, that there are many possible master signifier, Badiou's idea. That is also useless, as it brings us down to total relativism, not allowing for theoretical productivity.

Of course we are smarter than that. Through Laclau we can see the precise mistake of them all. They all presuppose an original meaning, what we have refuted and proven to be the exact contrary earlier. The zero signifier is of course the positivised manque, but the question now is, what then is the point of philosophical interpretation? Lacan offers the answer himself by stating that philosophy should formalise the paradox, should say the paradox and point to the gap around which everyone is flowing. This is precisely why the

theory, in order to be true, needs to be already broken and paradoxical itself. If such is the truth itself, as even Hegel knew, theory should be such as well. This is also why any possible contradiction in this essay is not the impotence of the subject but rather the impotence of the truth itself.

The question then is what is the role of philosophy, when we take the latest findings into account. Althusser says that philosophy should not be a theological project that produces new truth but should rather analyse the conditions of the belief, that philosophy is the study of the ideology. Isn't this precisely what Marx says in his 4th thesis on Feuerbach, where he demands the very same thing? Ducrot says that to understand a statement, one has to see the position from which the statement is coming, from the very statement in itself.

If we scrutinised Badiou earlier, here we bring him as an example. Badiou writes that philosophy must not quilt with the truth making processes, that is the job of the four truth making processes: politics, science, love, and art. Philosophy needs to be the scene upon this truth making processes take place, but should not get involved, it should analyse the positions from which statements are being produced.

How to change the world; Karl Marx and the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach

Many people understand the eleventh thesis wrong. They say it is a naïve call for political action, a call to alienate ourselves from philosophy and go overturn capitalism. But it is the contrary. If we read the theses on Feuerbach together with the Parisian Manuscripts, we can see that Marx says that the theoretical question can only resolve itself when the social antagonism is resolved as well.

Earlier we have said that the truth is unwhole, not whole and broken. Isn't this exactly the conflict that Voloshinov talks about, the definition of the words etc. This is why Socrates never came anywhere with endless questions on the essentialist definition of freedom. Isn't this also why both Hegel and the classical Parmenides both agree that if the theory is unaligned with the world; too bad for the world. The theory is broken because the world is broken as well. And what Marx is saying is that only when the social antagonism progresses, the theory can progress as well, which is why his radical political gesture is actually a gesture in favor of the theory.

Conclusion

What I have shown you in this essay is how the subject becomes a subject, how the biological matter becomes a position in the societal structure, which is exactly what Beauvoir meant with her quote on women becoming their gender only through symbolic identification.

What we have shown in this essay is that the quote from Beauvoir challenges the classical understanding of the subject, as the subject becomes a subject because he identifies and is recognises itself in a role. But this quote helped us uncover a deeper truth about the structure and led to a question of what even is philosophy and what is its role. We have realised that philosophy should try and formalise the paradox because philosophy will only progress once the world progresses as well, which is why we philosophers should always be hysteric, always demanding something more.