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The Way of Love: Practicing an Irigarayan Ethic

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The Way of Love: Practicing an Irigarayan Ethic
De weg van de liefde: ethiek beoefenen met Irigaray

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Abbreviations

Bibliographic references to all repeatedly cited works by Irigaray are noted and in Standard English translations where available. In the case of all citations from translations from the French, English pagination precedes the pagination to the French original, a slash separating the two.

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Introduction

Since the 1974 publication of her early philosophical work, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Luce Irigaray has generated texts whose complexity, ambiguity, and bold critique may be honored deservedly as a dynamic and stunning contribution in the field of contemporary Continental philosophy. Her writings weave artfully the disciplines of philosophy, psychoanalysis, and linguistics in a style that has transformed our thinking, with her now signature ellipses, opaqueness, and deliberate confounding of gendered expectations. Her questioning of the Freudian “feminine” and her cutting analysis of Lacan’s work on the law of the father and phallus instigated her expulsion from the University of Vincennes. Ironically, the agency of writing and speaking as a woman, “*écriture féminine*” caused a stir that attempted to mute or dismiss her voice. Indeed, the bitterest criticism came throughout the 1980s with the feminist reception of work, dubbed “essentialist,” and worse, a repetition of the phallogocentrism she attempted to disrupt. But as her readership has expanded, feminists argue a more nuanced reading of her work revealing a strategic or political essentialism,¹ calling into question the essentialism/anti-essentialism binary itself.²

In a sense, the force of her style, to write in her own voice, to speak without a compulsion to obey the stricture of the academy, to expose the androcentric thinking of the

¹ See Diana Fuss, “Luce Irigaray’s Language of Essence.” *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989) 55-72; Tina Chanter, “Tracking Essentialism with the Help of a Sex/Gender Map,” *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray’s Re-writing of the Philosophers* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 21-46; Naomi Schor, “This Essentialism Which Is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray,” in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, eds. Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University, 1994) 57-78.

² I discuss in detail the debate over her essentialism in chapter two, section three “*Irigaray, Essentialism, and Difference: The Question of Nature and Culture*.”

discipline itself and its insistence on unity, solidity, and binary thinking in service of a Self-Same, has exposed her to the greatest censure. Yet, I assert it is the places of censure, the exposure of philosophy's "unwritten" assumptions, and her refusal to obey the master discourse, which has caused her work to be so fertile and fecund. More than just an academic rebelliousness, her work is a burgeoning oeuvre in its own right.

Feminists such as Margaret Whitford, Elizabeth Grosz, Tina Chanter, Penelope Deutscher, and Rachel Jones have reintroduced the academy to the rigor and legitimacy of her work in correlation to the major philosophers she analyzes, particularly for English-speaking audiences, and have demonstrated the profound need to read her work in context, with psychoanalysis and with Continental philosophy.³ Indeed, the strategy of her mimetic style makes little sense without the dialogue she invokes with these traditions. Indeed several collected works⁴ do more than just introduce or resituate her texts, but they engage, extend, and transform the way her work can be read.

Her work continues to gain traction in a number of regions around the globe and in disciplines other than philosophy. Since 2003, Irigaray has held a summer seminar at the University of Nottingham with researchers completing doctoral degrees in her work. As the seminar website explains,

³ Each of these philosophers have written multiple works on Irigaray but I will offer their most thorough treatments of her work. See Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversion: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989); Chanter, *Ethics of Eros*; Penelope Deutscher, *The Politics of Impossible Difference: The Later Work of Luce Irigaray* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2002); and Rachel Jones, *Irigaray: Towards a Sexuate Philosophy* (Malden: Polity, 2011).

⁴ See Carolyn Burke et al., eds., *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Maria C. Cimitile. and Elaine P. Miller, eds., *Returning to Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy, Politics, and the Question of Unity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007); Elena Tzelepis and Athena Athnansiou, eds., *Rewriting Difference: Luce Irigaray and the "Greeks,"* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010).

The participants in the seminar come from different regions of the world, they belong to different cultures, traditions and fields of research – Philosophy, Gender Studies, Religious Studies, Literature, Arts, Critical and Cultural Studies, etc. The themes of their research include, for example: the treatment of personal or cultural traumatic experience; the resources that various arts can offer for dwelling in oneself and with the other(s); the maternal order and feminine genealogy; the interpretation and embodiment of the divine today; the contribution of sexuate difference to personal and social development; new perspectives in philosophy etc. In each of these fields, diverse domains, approaches and methods are represented. To date, the participants have come from Australia, Vietnam, Korea, China, India, Sri Lanka, South Africa, New Zealand, Canada, Latvia, France, Belgium, Pakistan, Spain, Italy, Ireland, Iceland, Romania and from different regions and universities of the U.S.A. and of the U.K.⁵

Clearly, her writings extend globally, as the mounting translations of her works indicate, and her reach continues to expand the borders of her own foci. It is with the verve of multicultural living, and the potential hope and violence that such living augurs, that I orient the aim and importance of this thesis: toward the furtherance of Irigaray's ethical claims regarding citizenship and issues of gender, poverty, ecological sustainability, and religious tolerance.

⁵ "Working with Luce Irigaray: Where postgraduate researchers work in collaboration with Luce Irigaray—Invitation to the Seminary," accessed November 29, 2014, <http://workingwithluceirigaray.com/the-seminar/>.

Spirituality, ethics, and religion remain important fields of interest in her work and she indicates so in her self-edited work *Key Writings*. Giving the religious dimension its own section, she writes of her growing sense of the importance of religion's cultural influence. She believes it is vital that we explore the religious aspect if we are to situate ourselves with respect to it. She explains, "I am afraid that, by neglecting such a task, we harm our subjectivity and the relations with our cultural environment and with the others(s)." ⁶ While her early works center on Western themes, figures, and tropes, her later spiritual writings have moved toward the Indian or Hindu tradition (*Between East and West*), particularly focusing on the pre-Vedic era of female and male deities. She observes the spiritual exercises of this teaching through the practice of tantric yoga and writes of its potential to help elaborate the intersubjectivity of her phenomenological critique. Irigaray's project of elaborating sexual difference began within the corridors of Western philosophy, often critiqued for their opaqueness and density, but more recently her writings have become less formal (fewer footnotes), and with a possible effort to be more accessible to general readers and listeners in diverse disciplines, such as law, education, architecture, art, and religion. Her writings on religion may seem disconnected from her earlier work, but have, I believe, greater impact and clarity when read as an elongation of her philosophical and psychoanalytic works. ⁷

⁶ Irigaray, KW, 145

⁷ For a positive elaboration of the philosophical, psychoanalytic, and religious connections in Irigaray's work, see the more recent examples: Elizabeth Grosz, "Irigaray and the Divine," in *Transfigurations: Theology and the French Feminists: Conference Entitled "Feminist Theologies and French Feminisms: Possibilities and Problems": Selected Papers*, ed. C. W. Maggie. Kim, St Ville Susan M., and Susan M. Simonaitis (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1993, 2002), 199-214; Anne-Claire Mulder, *Divine Flesh, Embodied Word: Incarnation as a Hermeneutical Key to a Feminist Theologian's Reading of Luce Irigaray's Work* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 142-147; Gail M. Schwab, "Beyond the Vertical and the Horizontal: Spirituality, Space, and Alterity in the Work of Luce Irigaray," in *Thinking with Irigaray*, ed. Mary C. Rawlinson, Sabrina L. Hom, and Serene J. Khader (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 77-97.

While other works regarding Irigaray have focused on her spiritual theology,⁸ this thesis points toward the outcome of this spiritual and sexually differentiated humanism—a refashioning of human morality and ethical relations. The thesis offers a general philosophical introduction to her work in order to present her main themes and relate her to the psychoanalytic, philosophical, and religious influences she encounters. I suggest her work in religion has particular importance given the sometimes perceived cultural clash between secularism and religion. Instead of privileging modern secularism and dismissing religion as parochial and anti-feminist, Irigaray offers a feminist re-reading of religion that bridges the concerns of secularism (tolerance) and religious communities (respect for the sacred). I argue that her work has an even broader impact and in this thesis I expand the scope of her work into the fields of ecological feminism, animal liberation, and the ongoing debate of how a multi-cultural and global public can understand the relation between the religious and the civic.

I will suggest Irigaray's philosophical contributions can be understood as an ethically enriched and deepened humanist extension of the philosophical tradition of phenomenology and French existentialism, as well as Feuerbach's humanist project, with the sexual difference twist that is always her signature. I understand her religious writings to transcend any specific sacred tradition or text. Instead, she freely incorporates the ideas,

⁸ Select examples include Ellen T. Armour, "Irigaray: Thinking Difference(s)," in *Deconstruction, Feminist Theology, and the Problem of Difference: Subverting the Race/gender Divide* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 103-135; Grace Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 11-18, 88-107, 253-7, 270-5.; Morny Joy, "What's God Got to Do with It?," in *Divine Love: Luce Irigaray, Women, Gender and Religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 7-35; Morny Joy, Kathleen O'Grady, and Judith L. Poxon, eds., "Part One: On Luce Irigaray," in *Religion in French Feminist Thought: Critical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2003), 11-82; Penelope Deutscher, "Disappropriations: Luce Irigaray and Sarah Kofman," in *Resistance, Flight, Creation: Feminist Enactments of French Philosophy*, ed. Dorothea Olkowski (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 153-78.

themes, and motifs of the sacred in order to sustain her primary thesis of female subjectivity and human intersubjectivity in an ethically sensitized global context. Therefore, she is ultimately one who seeks the flourishing of humanity in its sexed fullness and believes the ethico-spiritual flowering of a sexually differentiated humanity ought to be an integral component of female self-affection and self-representation, as well as a strategic and affirming self-limitation of the genders. Rather than being bound to a religious tradition, she tightly weaves her content as a critique and engagement with the Western philosophical tradition, unraveling the psychoanalytic symbolic and imaginary that malevolently secures a mono-sexuate culture. As her task is to exemplify the self-affection and self-representation that she seeks, I will note that her writings deliberately employ the psychoanalytic, phenomenological, and existential influences of western culture. Yet she does seek not to reify these positions, but to engage them critically and extend them with a more inclusive sexuate ontology and ethics.

1. Trajectory of the text

In the first chapter I will suggest that Irigaray's version of sexual difference is directly rooted to three dominant philosophical traditions: psychoanalysis, post-structuralism, and phenomenology. I provide an introduction to Irigaray's work focusing on the three phrases in her work that point toward an affirmation that is paradoxically bound to self-limitation, destabilizing the nature and culture divide, and an active or strategic passivity to one's gender.

In the second chapter I further introduce Irigaray's investigation of the psycho-libidinal-linguistic subject whose male singularity and ideal she destabilizes through her critical examination. I will suggest that her opposition has been to a kind of universalism

that refuses to share the world, or ethically recognize difference and that the more challenging phase of her work continues to be an elucidation of the difference within difference— a crucial concern as I seek to develop and expand a unique Irigarayan ethic. In this chapter I will also address the charges of essentialism and suggest that despite a poor initial reception of her work, she aids feminists in gaining the freedom and equality women and those deemed “other” have sought politically by questioning the limits of equality and demanding that equality be analyzed via difference, rather than sameness. I will suggest that by refusing to remain confined within the binary of essentialism/non-essentialism, Irigaray keeps open our thinking not only on sex, identity, and human becoming, but also on all the diverse kinds of differences we encounter globally. And by re-examining the constructs of “nature” and “culture” she will advocate for their rethought ethical connection, rather than the domination of nature by culture.

While much has been written elaborating Irigaray’s relationship to psychoanalysis and deconstruction, in the third chapter, I will focus on the existential and phenomenological intersection in Irigaray’s work. I will argue that existential phenomenology and its definitive theorists have been critical interlocutors for her philosophy that integrates mind and body, nature and culture, facticity and freedom, but uniquely focusing upon the question of one’s sex. I will suggest that Irigaray’s contribution to the philosophical tradition and how her distinctive claim of sexual difference extends the embodied critique of philosophers such as Heidegger, De Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas. In pairing her work with Heidegger, I will demonstrate how her project is ontological in that she is attempting to think the unthought ground of what is. This chapter demonstrates the ontological aspects of Irigaray’s work and I expand the importance of

these claims that Irigaray makes, particularly when applied to ecological feminism, in the last chapter.

In chapter four, on Irigaray's thinking about religion, I will survey her destabilization of the sacred/secular or the material/immaterial and trace her supposition for divine women, incarnating not a deity, but "God among us." While the other is not "god" it is the ethical respect for the irreducible alterity between gendered subjects that becomes the sacred material space, which confounds traditional binaries or religious discourses. Her rejection of an absolute transcendental singular God gives way to the possibility of God or the Divine showing up in the experienced mutuality between people. In this section I will focus on Irigaray's use of the negative as an affirmation of female subjectivity through strategic self-limitation, and how a spiritual reading of her sensible transcendental re-reads the Western tradition's understanding of nature, culture, and sex, infusing these notions with breath and a horizontal transcendence that reformulates vertical transcendence. I will use this embodied hermeneutic of the negative to re-read primary accounts of gender, sex, and religion in the Christian tradition, particularly in the Hebrew myth of origins and the virginal account of Mary.

In chapter five I show the relevance of Irigaray's work for ecological feminism, animal liberation, and a practical expression of religious diversity. As historically woman's identity has often been compared with the oppression of nature (Mother Nature) and the animal body, it is fruitful to take her work into these fields that so far are less analyzed. While some work on Irigaray and issues of ecology and sustainability are gaining traction, I

would say it a less analyzed aspect of her work.⁹ Ecological feminism and animal liberation can appeal and perhaps gain traction with Irigarayan theory in that both are seeking ways of liberation and flourishing that exceed Western subject-object relations, patriarchal domination, and hierarchical thinking. I will suggest that her work also offers a theory of ethical responsibility beyond the framework of a social contract or rights language. I will argue this ethical framework is vital insofar as “rights” language, when expanded toward the environment and animals often remain contingent upon the establishment of “personhood,” which Irigarayan theory may expose as a “neutered concept” meant to hide singularity of power and privilege. Her work demands that we recognize sexual specificity, Irigaray’s theory most clearly offers effective critique of how we can rethink rights and responsibility in a sexual specific manner. I expand that reflection beyond a feminine elaboration and consider how her work can also help us respect religious difference in increasingly global civil societies.

In this thesis I explore how Irigaray’s critique, theorization, and new socio-political order can reveal the mono-logic of sexual indifference within the history of western culture and render a socio-spiritual-political re-reading that permits an ethics of sexual difference to expose the blind spots, ocular posture, and the rich possibility of living in a multi-cultural civil society. I will then mobilize this sacred understanding toward the practical ethical dilemmas beyond human citizenship and reveal the fruitfulness of Irigaray’s

⁹ See Tomaž Grušovnik, “Breathing with the Natural World: Irigaray, Environmental Philosophy, and the Alterity of Nature,” in *Breathing with Luce Irigaray*, eds. Lenart Škof & Emily A. Holmes (London and New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013) 113-129; Sara Štuva, “Breathing with Animals: Irigaray’s Contribution to Animal Ethics,” *Breathing with Luce Irigaray*, 130-146.

scholarship to address broader issues of civic and global flourishing such as the environment and animal welfare.

I believe Irigaray's philosophy provides a powerful and practical impetus toward the attention to self-limitation, the shared breath of beings who love, and the cultivation of civil society with global sustainability. I too understand the phenomenological tradition to provide a wealth of resources for theology, philosophy, and socio-political ethics, permitting mind and body to form a collective understanding of the self without bifurcation. Additionally, I have training in counseling and am attuned to how the human self is more than mere rationality. I teach at an urban American two-year institution with students who are predominantly of color, come from low socio-economic communities, with rich local and indigenous sources of knowledge. I have discovered that students from diverse backgrounds can read and extend Irigarayan philosophy, and develop and articulate the need for difference to be cultivated globally and for dominant cultures to limit their ownership of power and the truth. Like Irigaray I believe divinity is enigmatically revealed in the guarding of sacred ethically charged spaces between individuals and cultures. I suggest that Irigaray's valuable contribution brings nature and culture together, the body in play with the mind, and the sexes together in wonder and felicity. Such a bringing together of difference forms a communion that resists facile or naïve associations. Rather, Irigarayan difference asks that we reveal the symbolic, historic, and socio-political areas of oppressions which cannot be essentialized, bringing to scale a fuller democracy for global sustainability that respects the multiplicity of differences in a changing and complex world.

Chapter One: The Invisible Made Visible

1. *Introduction: Sexuate Difference*

In this chapter I perform two important tasks for this dissertation. First, I introduce Irigaray's work on sexual difference because her emphasis on the necessity to see difference, not as oppositional but as inviting co-partnership is crucial in developing an Irigarayan global ethic. I suggest she turns the notions of the specular, belonging to a gender, the negative, and desire away from their phallocratic deployment and posits them anew to locate female sexuate identity as its own positive difference. By inverting the notions from within to reveal a concealed affirmation for female identity, she reveals self-limit as felicity, passivity as empowerment, and paucity as plenitude. Second, I indicate how Irigaray's work in sexual difference extends the philosophical traditions of phenomenology, post-structuralism, and psychoanalysis with which she intersects, offering her distinctive thesis for sexual difference in a broader frame of ethical and ontological concerns. I explain how her work acknowledges philosophy's psychoanalytic context and critically engages its discourse and symbolic, pushing a greater inclusion for a body of morphology of female sexuate identity. I read her work in phenomenology and psychoanalysis as forming a necessary foundation for her ethical claims concerning nature and culture, critically explaining how oppositional binaries conceal female sexuate identity and her unique project to elaborate a self-representation and affection for her own sexuate identity. I elaborate how the philosophical traditions form a critical foundation from which her spiritual writings and claims must be engaged to form a holistic ethical understanding of her assertions in order to address the critiques of essentialism and naïve spiritualism. By

elaborating the concealment of woman in the Western Christian philosophic tradition, Irigaray can find a point of resistance, non-opposition, and self-representation, in order to affirm a place and identity for woman other than container or placeholder for man, Other of the same, or object within the male gaze. I introduce Irigaray's work by examining the three phrases by which she distinguishes her oeuvre.

2. Phase One: Critique of Western Philosophy and the Privilege of the Male Subject

Irigaray has described her work in three periods or progressions. In the first period she focused her critique on the Western philosophical tradition and its privileging of the male subject. In the second she theorized on female subjectivity. Her third and present work has been to think the two critiques together, constructing a possible intersubjective relation founded upon love that would provide the basis for a new socio-political order.¹ I believe it is necessary to see her present work in relationship to her past. Indeed, I suggest that her past work can become a trope, or a turning of an original phrase or moment, to elaborate a change in metaphor and meaning. In this thesis I suggest that Irigaray turns the notions of the specular, of the negative, and of desire to employ a critique of male subject-centered Western philosophy, and at the same time, affirm female subjectivity, and postulate a possible fecundity of these differences. By turning these terms with a style of discourse that refigures them from within, she can herald sexual difference as an affirmative possibility for the flourishing of difference in all its cosmic specificity and create

¹ See Heidi Bostic, "Luce Irigaray and Love," *Cultural Studies* 16, no. 5 (September 2002): 603, note 1. Irigaray reiterated this schema in June 2001 during a conference on her work sponsored by the Centre for Cultural Analysis, Theory and History in Leeds, England.

an opening for divergent expressions of humanity that yields felicity, mutual flourishing, and greater social, thea/logical,² and political recognition.

In this section I will explore the first periodisation of her work and examine how her initial work on sexual difference explains and minimizes critiques regarding her spiritual writings, namely, that they are neither essentializing accounts of female sexuality, nor are they utopian renderings of a female goddess cult. Rather, they speak directly to the Western tradition and the inextricable connection between Western philosophy, ethics, and religion, uncovering its assumed logic of male sexuate identity and sublation of female subjectivity.

2.1. *Speculum as a Trope for our Age: Extending the Analysis of Blindness*

In her earliest published work on sexual difference, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray takes a refractory examination of the cultural symbolic mirror, which assumes a male subject and views³ the world through his normative gaze,⁴ positing himself as the positive subject and everything else as a position constitutive of this male subject center. Indeed, the male gaze and hand form the basis of perception of man's relationship to woman and others.⁵ Therefore, woman, a blind spot, is the other of the male; she is a

² Ellen Armour states, "Feminists working out of neopagan goddess traditions often label themselves theologians to mark their break with a discipline traditionally centered on a male deity. Feminist theologians working within Jewish or Christian traditions tend to retain the traditional spelling even though they challenge their field's dominance by male images of deity." Ellen T. Armour, *Deconstruction, Feminist Theology, and the Problem of Difference: Subverting the Race/Gender Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) 189, n. 9.

³ The relationship between the ocular gaze and metaphysics of being is an essential claim in an Irigarayan critique. Indeed, she argues that what the male subject sees is equal to what is and vice versa. See Irigaray, S, 261-2.

⁴ The man's eye is also a substitute for his penis, enabling him to view a woman's parts as a source of profit. Irigaray, S, 145. In a complex play between the male subject as a replacement for the sun and Plato's *Republic* and *Timaeus*, she posits the male gaze or pupil, the light of the son/sun, and the illusion or refraction of the mirror as representations that collude to deny difference. See especially Irigaray, S, 133-151.

⁵ See Irigaray, WD, 123.

malformed man,⁶ a man without a phallus (castrated), and therefore a negative of the positive man.⁷ Irigaray dubs such ideology as sexual indifference and a model of this indifference may appear something like the following:

Figure 1. Sexual Indifference

Light, Civil, Law, Language, Subject: Male: a
 -----(sea/mother/mirror/ice/nature/matter)-----
Darkness, Nature, Earth, Hysteric, Object: Female: -a

In the model, the male is over the female and the mirror divides and refracts the man, forming a binary opposition between the two. Irigaray identifies how women play a double role of negativity, being the object to his subjectivity, *and* being the thing that refracts his gaze of the world as a normative centrality for the man and the woman. Woman is the female in the model, and she is the mirror, an intentional Freudian double entendre in her writing: she is a frigid sea (*un mer*) of ice (*la glace*), massive and voluminous, a threat to the male gaze.⁸ At the same time, she is a mother (*une mère*) who functions like a mirror (*la glace*) reflecting the world back to the normative male position, thus becoming a person

⁶ Cf. Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, Book II, Section 3, 737a 25, Michael Nolan suggests that the famed phrase: "the female is as it were a deformed (or castrated, mutilated, or defective) male" may suggest that the female is not "defective" in the English sense of the word, but that in the biological sense, she departs from the male type in a natural manner that permits her to have children. See Michael Nolan, "Passive and Deformed? Did Aristotle Really Say This?" *New Blackfriars* 76 (May 1995): 237-257. But Sister Prudence Allen argues there is evidence of a broader connection between the principles of generation and specific attributes of male and female identity. Specifically, there is evidence of a devaluation of female identity given Aristotle's description of the male's seed acting (form), which is ontologically prior to the female principle of potentiality. He renders the opposites of hot and dry as superior to cold and moist, and as he writes that the female is weaker and colder in nature, one can suggest "... he seems to consider the male as naturally superior. . . . [and that] Aristotle's philosophy devalued woman in relation to man." Prudence Allen, "The Female Is, As It Were, a Deformed Male," in *The Concept of Woman* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1997), 99.

⁷ She explains the female negative position as: "be/become, have/not have sex (organ), phallic/nonphallic, penis/clitoris or else penis/vagina, plus/minus, clearly representable/dark continent, logos/silence or idle chatter, desire for the mother/desire to be the mother, etc. All these are interpretive modalities of the female function rigorously postulated by the pursuit of a certain game for which she will always find herself signed up without having begun to play." Irigaray, S, 22.

⁸ She expands this idea in *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*.

whose sexual identity in relationship to the male defines her.⁹ Woman, and her domain, is the substratum¹⁰ through which the male acts upon the world. As an object, her embodied objectivity corresponds to the earth, matter (*hyle*), or the uncultivated soil, which must be tilled and impregnated with his seed,¹¹ and she conceives his children, upholds his domestic life, thus, freeing him to dominate private and public spheres. In a post-Marxist sense, she is like a bank, a passive repository that holds his valuable product and will eventually yield a fruitful interest on his investment.¹² With Freud as a modern exemplar of *the* male subject she writes, “But as a result of using psychoanalysis (his psychoanalysis) only to scrutinize the history of his subject and his subjects, without interpreting *the historical determinants of the constitution of the “subject” as same*, he is restoring, yet again, that newly pressed down/repressed earth, upon which he stand erect, which for him following tradition through in more explicit fashions, will be the body/sex of the mother/nature.”¹³ Woman is the object in the mirror, and she is also the mirror through

⁹ Irigaray, S, 168, translator’s note. Irigaray investigates the Sixth Tractate, “The Impassivity of the Unembodied” in Plotinus’ *Enneads*, purposefully her chapter title in French, “*Une Mère de Glace*” plays with the double meaning of the word *glace*, ice/mirror. The double movement allows her to push the meaning of the words, indicating the sea is a mirror/ice, or the mother is the mirror/ice. The double meaning permits the reader to see the woman in the mirror, as part of the reflection, or be the mirror/ice itself, or understand her position of passive objectivity within its frozen barrier and forced refraction that she also constitutes.

¹⁰ Taken from Aristotle’s term, *hypokeimenon*, inferring an original substance of that which persists through change. With *eidos*, or the imminent form, it is a co-principle of being, but is also a term dictated by its function: that which other things are predicated and which is not predicated of anything else. While the ancient sense of the terms permits anything to be subject or an “underlying essential kernel,” the term is altered and imbued with post-Cartesian doubt, whereby a subject is the human thinking subject, and other thinking things and persons in the world are objects. See Francis E. Peters, “hypokeimenon,” in *Greek Philosophical Terms* (New York: NYU Press, 1970), 92; Aristotle, *Physics*, I, 190a-b, *Metaphysics*, 1028b-1029a; Descartes, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, iii 355-6.

¹¹ She notes, “. . . man is *the* procreator, that sexual *production-reproduction* is preferable to his “activity” alone, to his “pro-ject” alone. Woman is nothing but the receptacle that passively received his *product*. . .”. Irigaray, S, 18.

¹² Again she writes how the systems of reproduction and production, or biology and economics, are combined to favor a male homo-economy. She explains, “Matrix—womb, earth, factory, bank—to which the seed capital is entrusted so that it may germinate, produce, grow fruitful, without woman being able to lay claim to either capital or interest since she has only submitted “passively” to reproduction. Herself held in receivership as a certified mean of (re)production.” Ibid., 18.

¹³ Ibid., 139-140.

which he sees himself.¹⁴ Woman is the sea who is the mirror and holds the mirror refracting his subjectivity. It is worth quoting her at length:

So this sea where he is, or at least seems to be, lost, that overwhelm him on every side and so puts his life in danger, what is she? Considered coldly, she consists of an *extended corporeal thing*. Probably immense. Which explains why the gaze at least is drowned, saturated in her . . . he can cut the sea into any number of pieces, subject her to any number of visual angles. . . . The “I” can subject the sea to a whole range of techniques that will transform her into an *object of use*. Nature can at the very least be useful to the “subject” as he moves about. Nonetheless, he must harden his heart to the glorious assault of her colors, to the fascination of her sheer size, to the seduction of her smells and sounds. . . . Let him therefore call upon his will, which *also has no bounds*, and disdain such ultimately secondary modes of being in order to concentrate on the sea’s essential attribute: extension. . . . The “I” thinks, therefore the thing, the body that is also nature, that is still the *mother*, becomes an extension of the “I” ‘s disposal for analytical investigation, scientific projections, the regulated exercise of the imaginary, the utilitarian practice of technique.¹⁵

She is the substratum for the male Subject. Woman is “prime matter:” the thing upon which a *hypokeimenon*, the subject, views and classifies with rigorous analysis in order to

¹⁴ See note 5.

¹⁵ Irigaray, S, 185-6.

check its excessive power.¹⁶ As man dominates woman, he also dominates nature (Greek, *physis*), keeping the chaos and formlessness of nature at bay as he overcomes in order to yield the light of civilization, culture, language, and the machination of society.¹⁷ The negatives of this positive male-centered world, such as irrationality, non-cultivation, or lack of progress and technology, have been attributed to woman's sphere, which must be kept silent and docile in order to maintain the natural and historical order of male subjectivity. Irigaray dubs what Freud diagnosed as women's hysterics as "the necessary remainder."¹⁸ She explains, "She borrows signifiers but cannot make her mark, or re-mark upon them. Which all surely keeps her deficient, empty, lacking in a way that could be labeled "psychotic," a *latent* but not actual psychosis, for want of a practical signifying system."¹⁹

I suggest we should understand Irigaray as a transcendental philosopher, or one that is making an argument for how the cosmos and nature function. Like the pre-Socratics, she is drawn to the elements and retraces critical and formative mythologies and philosophies to uncover a seemingly impossible dimorphic subjectivity that has yet to emerge in the history of philosophy: the couple. This postulation of a non-oppositional affirmative difference will later turn out to be of prime importance in working out a political, animal, and environmental ethics.

¹⁶ She writes, "Whereas the beginning of epistemology, the philosopher was still marveling at such things as air, fire, and water, now they must be submitted to a rigorous scientific analysis so that their excessive power can be checked. They must be put in their place, within a general theory of being so as to lessen our fascination with them." *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁷ Catherine Keller has made the important connection between the formlessness or chaos of creation in the Hebrew myth and its interpretative correlation to female being's power and unfathomable multiplicity that man seeks to shape and control. See Catherine Keller, "Mystery of the Missing Chaos," in *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 3-24.

¹⁸ Irigaray, S, 71.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Indeed, according to Irigaray the male subject disdains or indifferently dismisses any constellation that eclipses his presence such as the dyad of the mother and daughter. Rather than joining in the male-centered adoration of the mother and son, or man and woman as his object, she theorizes that woman can be subject and other women can be subjects with her. The model would look something like the following:

Figure 2. Sexual Difference

Man: m Other men: $m^1 + m^2 + m^3$ Woman: w Other women $wc + wx + wr$

In this model the man may desire to be replica of the same, adhering to an essential unity, but the female other has a notion of sexual identity that is woman, or a corresponding ideal that is in play, but she is free to alter each version as each person uniquely enacts that identity with herself and others. Annemie Halsema has noted that Irigaray's development of two universal subjects with asymmetrical sexual identities alludes to Hegel's dialectical process of the particular individual to the universal.²⁰ In Irigaray's case, the universal is not one, but two, and thus, particular individuals will belong to the universality of one's gender. Irigaray deliberately develops the phrase "belonging to one's gender," a loaded term given the sex-gender debate within feminism.

2.2. Sacred Sexual Difference

Irigaray's prevailing thesis is that sexual difference runs through every institution and sphere of life, including the religious or spiritual as well as the political. She notes that the efficacy of religion, when linked with affect, can in some obscure way hold together the totality of the self, the community and culture.²¹ But she criticizes that this religious

²⁰ See Annemie Halsema, "Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler on the Body," *Luce Irigaray and Horizontal Transcendence* (Amsterdam: Humanistics University Press, 2010) 19-28.

²¹ Irigaray, KW, 171.

efficacy, while intended to be a light of truth, has kept many of its followers blind from the self, others, and the prevailing global condition.²² Recall that revealing blind spots has been the significant theme of her *Speculum* and global humanity is the scope of her universal claim. One religious blind spot she uncovers is the glaring misrepresentation of God and divinity in service of male patriarchy. Presently she understands Western religion as traditionally portraying God as a wholly other “absolute unknowable entity of the beyond.”²³ The function of such a God is “. . . to unify individual identity—the male’s in particular. . . . God . . . functions as a kind of idol of the spirit, resistant to perception by the senses, requiring that we rise up to him through our faith, and through our renunciations that make us unknown to ourselves—or even our own enemies—as opposed to giving us confidence in our divine possibilities.”²⁴ Such a religious system, observes Irigaray, is grounded in a philosophical structure of opposition that casts the individuals according to gendered oppositions that determine prescriptive roles. If male subjectivity operates with woman as his negative, male dominated religion operates something like the following:

Figure 3. Religious Sexual Indifference

Male: a Ideal-Form Male God: A
 -----(female substratum)-----
Female: -a Ideal-Form Male God -A

In this model, the male monotheistic God condemns difference as idolatry, and serves to unify the male with an infinite ideal of Sameness.²⁵ Woman, who falls under the headship of the male, will “complementarily”²⁶ work toward the same end. To be clear

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 172.

²⁵ Irigaray, TSN, 17.

²⁶ Complementarity of sexual difference is a typically Christian theological positions (although there are Islamic and Judaic variants) that identifies men and women have different but equal essences, and a ‘natural’

Irigaray, with many feminist theologians, rejects any form of complementary religious ideology that regards a woman's essence as equal to a man's, yet remains ensconced in sexual constructions that are socially determined and naturally defended. Such a position, while seemingly benign, has had a potent ability to exclude women and others from sharing the world in meaningful ways, especially in religious or spiritual discourses. Indeed, Christian theology has historically wrestled with supposed Aristotelian claims such as, do women have souls, are they defective males, and is their principle function childbearing?²⁷ Whether such reasoning is historically warranted or theologically correct is beyond this thesis; Irigaray realizes, right or wrong, such a sacred imaginary of women and their bodies has become imbued with meaning in theological discourses that wish to keep power and authority with the male sex. Rather than tackling church theology through discursive claims of seemingly authoritarian texts, Irigaray suggests how sexual difference could interrupt the present sexually indifferent dispersal of identity and subjectivity that informs western religion, and, instead, imagines a spiritual awakening from within. By appropriating the remainder or the negative of religion, that which religion naturally rejects in favor of its supposed opposite, she posits an affirmation of spiritual life that is in accord with her dimorphic structure of human subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Like her model of sexual difference, she isn't attempting to start a new cult or an alternative goddess religion. Instead, she, like many faithful before her, offers a unique reformational perspective that seeks to discover and reclaim what is within the tradition and its sacred

sexual division creates gendered roles that are viewed as normative and ordered within the great chain of being. Male headship thus serves as a means to ensure male public service in institutional affairs such as church and state, while women serve in private spheres of family life, nurture, and education. For an elaborated Christian position see John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006).

²⁷ See note 4.

texts. Her claims contest a hermeneutic formation that is in accord with sexually indifferent ways of knowing and being and how these philosophies shape our theologies. A sexually differentiated model of religion may appear something like the following:

Figure 4. Sexually Differentiated Model of Religion

Male: a Ideal Male Divine Possibility: A

Female: b Ideal Female Divine Possibility: B

The line or space between the two sexes is now erased, permitting air and breath to flow between the two. There is an ideal horizon for each sex and neither one is relative or predicated of other, they are both alterities to each other, asymmetrical, and therefore speech and sharing of knowledge becomes critical for the two to inhabit the same space, given their unique positions.

2.3. Asymmetrical Contraries of Sexual Difference

Irigaray, a prolific reader of Western philosophy, writes her notion of sexual difference within the discourse of its canonical figures and the work the tradition proffers. Her terms and definitions are inextricably credited to the history of Western philosophy, while contesting its lack of sexual difference. I read her thesis of sexual difference as a position of female subjectivity that exceeds the sameness of male metaphysics. To render the sexes as something other than opposite finds resonance with the work and writing of Aristotle's logic of opposition, affirming his work while pushing its sexual discourse. I suggest Irigaray's theory of sexual difference can be understood as an asymmetrical contrary, where neither subject is constitutive of, nor predicates the other, a sense of opposition that I read Irigaray suggests has been conflated with positive and privative oppositions.

First it is helpful to review Aristotle's logical modes of opposition, which I suggest Irigaray's philosophy acknowledges and challenges as she develops her transcendental double dialectic of difference. Aristotle writes that there are four senses in which the term opposite is used: i) as correlatives to one another, ii) as contraries to one another, iii) as privatives to positives, and iv) as affirmatives to negatives.²⁸ Aristotle briefly explains, "An instance of the use of word 'opposite' with reference to correlatives is afforded by the expressions 'double' and 'half'; with, reference to contraries by 'bad' and 'good'. Opposites in the sense of 'privatives' are 'blindness' and 'sight'; in the sense of affirmatives and negatives, the propositions 'he sits', 'he does not sit'."²⁹ Medieval scholar Robert Sweetman explains succinctly the nuances of these senses:

The first three posit relative oppositions. The first opposition is that between mutually conditioned phenomena. Aristotle's example is the opposition between the concepts of double and half. You cannot think half without presupposing the concept of double and vice versa. They go together, inexorably. Contrariety is the opposition at play in any continuum. Opposite poles we might say on the continuum between white and black (the colour spectrum is Aristotle's example of a mediated continuum where white and black stand at the poles of the colour continuum and the other colours exist at various mediating positions between white and black. There are also in his view unmediated continua and his example is the continuum of odd and even numbers. The continuum only knows the two poles; there are no media to be

²⁸ *Categories*, 11b.-10.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

found between the two contrary poles, only the poles themselves for in his view numbers only come in two types: odd numbers and even. What makes contrariety a relative opposition within the framework of a continuum is that the phenomena that constitute the poles of the continuum, while as different as possible within the continuum are yet members of the continuum. In other words they are maximally different within a deeper unity. In Aristotle's language one is speaking of species within a genus, or individuals within a species. It is contrariety that Hegel is so sensitive to, not the static contrariety of Aristotle's ontological tree of ascending species and genera with being as the culminating unity, but rather the dynamic contrariety of things-in-time. So the synthesis which takes up the thesis and antithesis into a deeper unity is futural with respect to the thesis and antithesis it sublates, etc.³⁰

I understand Irigaray to say that men and women have been located wrongly as two ends of the same relative continuum of opposites, and whether mediated or unmediated, the continuum presupposes that they belong to the same deeper unity, namely, male centered humanity. In Aristotelian terms, Irigaray's critique is that this continuum of contraries has been fused with the opposition of positive and privation, man being the positive and woman its privation (absence of male sex). Aristotle states unequivocally that in the opposition of positive and privation, "It is a universal rule that each of a pair of opposites of this type has reference to that which the particular 'positive' is natural."³¹ In his example blindness is a privative of the positive sight and we limit the attribution

³⁰ Robert Sweetman, email message to author, May 18, 2011.

³¹ *Categories*, 12a-25iii.

privation to that which is capable of some particular faculty or possession when, at the time, it should naturally be present. The two opposites are not relative to each other since they cannot reciprocate: "Sight is not called the sight of *blindness*."³² While these terms don't have reciprocity they are rooted in a universal reference to the positive. The positive becomes the standard by which the absence, or privation is determined. Irigaray translates this mode of opposition into thinking about equal rights between men and women. She suggests that to have rights like a man, to be treated like a man, reduces woman to a privation or a reference to a false positive: male subjectivity.

Moreover, depicting woman as a man's opposite in the sense of positive and privation connotes an added layer: moral inferiority. Sweetman states, "By adding that the continuum operates as if it were the same time the contrast of a positive and its privation . . . it operates as if there were a moral ought associated with the one pole (the male) and absent from the other (the female). . . . In Irigaray's reading the continuum male and female is freighted with moral significance by virtue of its conflation with a second form of opposition, the opposition of positive and privation."³³

In her critique woman is wrongly placed in opposition to man: as a contrary to man, as a privation of man, and as the negation to his affirmation. The impact of this logic funnels into Christian theologies like complementarianism, where women function as man's opposite, or the privation of male subjectivity. In the softest sense, this means helping man in the areas he is weakest; in the hardest sense it is to be the rejected male constitution. This scheme permits man to remain the preferential pole, and the preference has natural

³² Ibid., 12b-24.

³³ Ibid.

and moral implications. Indeed, to abandon the pole of opposition as man's opposite, whether contrary or privative, has labeled women bereft of reason and moral sense. Adding the religious power of authority and divine obedience, for a woman to abandon one's pole seems improbable, immoral, and ungodly. Irigaray argues vehemently that woman has her own rhythm and right, and she must elaborate her own self, relational context, spiritual meaning, political agency, and inherent contradictions without remaining the supporting pole to any continuum that subtly or overtly forces her reference to be male sexuality and subjectivity (two terms which become synonymous in the Post-Freudian era). Therefore, rather than one continuum with two poles (male and female), one might suggest that in an Irigarayan reading, there are two continua, male and female, and these continua are asymmetrical to one another, that is that they are not relative nor predicated upon one another. Each sexuate identity has its own poles, and only the participants within that continuum can determine and moralize the poles, a project, she urges, that women must actively and consciously own.³⁴

By conflating these oppositions with a sexual determination that serves a single sex, we also conclude that given these oppositions only one truth claim is possible. She explains,

Nature has a sex. . . . All traditions that remain faithful to the cosmic have a sex and take account of natural powers (puissances) in sexual terms. They are also regulated by alternation that do not truly contradict each other. Spring is not autumn nor summer winter, night is not day. This is not the opposition that we know from logic in which the one is opposed to or contradicts the

³⁴ See Irigaray, S, 91-93, 103, 124.

other, where the one is superior to the other and *must put the inferior down*.

There is a rhythm of growth in which both poles are necessary. . . .³⁵

In these lines Irigaray infers the mode of opposition known as unmediated contraries, or opposites that have no intermediate (Aristotle's examples are health and disease, or odd and even numbers). She claims that patriarchy sublates one pole as it hides behind the law of contradiction, thus obscuring other modes of opposition that reveals the multiplicity of sex, nature, and difference without affirming one over and against the other. She argues that such a logic of contradiction has sexually determined the location of women as man's negative or privation. Wedding the logic of positive and privation with affirmation and negation yields the following assertions. The man is (positive). His negative (privation) is the woman: man is not a woman.

Irigaray posits that nature is bi-polar and the opposites that we believe engulf the sexuate identities of man and woman have presupposed their very meaning within a central unity of male sexuality. The opposition between the sexes does not predicate woman; rather, woman precipitates any form of opposition. In terms of language, the enunciation's subject and verb has been the constitution of the man and woman is merely a privation of man's subject position, agency, and speaking position.

Irigaray is criticized because she refuses to accept a reversal of this hierarchy (as the poles are imbued with moral meaning such as superior or inferior) or sexually nonspecific enunciations that would somehow step out of such a polarity such as neutered "one" or "someone." Simply flipping the poles of active, superior, positive female with passive, inferior, privative male, such as masochistic behavior, keeps the sexes within a

³⁵ Irigaray, SG, 108.

philosophy of the same, what she understands to be the root of oppression and patriarchy. Yet, the pervasiveness of binary oppositional rationality of the sexes also implies that it is impossible to step out of this suspicion of a deeper unity that always serves male sexual interests.

Rather than naively advocating an equal/same track for women, or remaining locked within the power of phallogocentrism, she urges that we should develop a “middle voice” which helps to internalize the tensions of present polarities. A middle voice signals self-affection and such cultivation “. . . allows for the preservation and the becoming of attraction and desire between the two, by saving the difference between the two.”³⁶ The middle voice demands that each self goes back and forth between the self and the outside, not an alternation of polarities, but a conscious development of a passage from the outside to the inside of the self. Such a passage is possible as a relation between two, something she criticizes that we have passed on to a unique God, who humans meet only in another world.³⁷ Therefore, Irigaray demands an enunciation and set of logical relations unique to each sex, genre, or sexuate identity, terms that she uses interchangeably. She suggests a growing and specific trajectory that serves the theorization of female subjectivity and the ability of the sexes to own a desire specific to one’s sexuate identity, and thus, share knowledge and the world.

Rather than wait to cross over to Jordan, or wait for the Messiah to come, she says we can elaborate the conditions of possibility for such a miracle now, and with hope of greater justice yet to come. She advocates not a utopia, but the hard work of internal and

³⁶ Irigaray, T, 228.

³⁷ Ibid., 229.

external ethics. But without a culture of two, the only position of enunciation within which Irigaray can question these sexually determined logical oppositions is within the pole of the negative or privative, a dangerous task she strategically owns in order to not only react to the male pole as his natural, negative, opposite, but to elaborate a possible discourse outside of its relative reach. Rather than minimizing the force of phallogocentrism, she consciously and actively reappropriates the pole in order to jam the meaning of such a continuum, while elaborating or pointing to another series of continua that women must theorize and categorize, ideally with the blessing and communion of men. She cannot escape the logic of sexually infused opposition, but she can mimetically point toward its oppression, exclusive claims, and the possibility for expanded means to articulate difference. While woman has been forced to specularize man and be his privation, Irigaray has insisted she is elsewhere, in exile, as appearance or simulacrum, but that she still “subsists.”³⁸ This doubled location of negation and existence elsewhere yields what some have observed as a “doubled discourse . . . an oscillation that never rests in affirmation or reaction.”³⁹ Her doubled location is more than a simple reversal of phallogocentrism, but a conscious displacement, typified in grammatical endings in which she ends a declaration with an interpolation, marking a question, turning an utterance back on itself.

Irigaray isn't making a simple isomorphic comparison between body and language, or nature and gender; rather, she insists that we confess how these poles have been rendered in service of a masculine unity.⁴⁰ To strategically conflate the pole of female

³⁸ Irigaray, ML, 88, 91, 92, 118.

³⁹ Sally Robinson, “Irigaray: Mimicry, Contradiction, and the Subject of Feminism,” *Engendering the Subject: Gender and Self-Representation in Contemporary Women's Fiction* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1991) 91.

⁴⁰ She questions Freud's conclusions, “Of what social customs must we beware of understanding the influence? What influence is capable of forcing women to remain in ‘passive situations’....But might one not envisage the possibility that one might prescribe ‘the other,’ that is to say by legitimating, even by producing

sexuality is to displace her and expose the brutalizing way the dialectic has been used to sublimate, sublate, and control difference. Irigaray posits that the multiplicity of a woman's erogenous zones contests against a singular subjectivity that corresponds with male heterosexualism,⁴¹ and reveals a plurality to a woman's sex. Contesting the two dimensions of a singular continuum of human subjectivity she argues there are at least four dimensions: "from left to right, from right to left, from before after, from after before, the threshold of inside to outside of the body."⁴² If within a woman's body there is a hetero-plurality, both active and passive in her own sexual organs, then the hope of a true heterosexuality (versus heterosexualism⁴³) rests upon the cultivation of this/these difference(s).⁴⁴ The cultivation of difference becomes a central thesis for spiritual life to flourish for men and women.

2.4. *Kore and the Allegory of the Cave*

Irigaray achieves the displacement of woman from the pole of opposition to men by pointing toward its most overt positives, thus questioning its supposed privations. While *Speculum* exposes the fetish for the visible, it also notes the movement of the male gaze

the discourse, the ideology, which determine it as a factor? The question would doubtless be unavoidable were it not that these 'social customs' are left in an evocative imprecision so general, so devoid of commitment, as to lose all impact." Irigaray, S, 19.

⁴¹ I use heterosexualism to denote the sexual practice that portrays man as the active sexual agent and woman as his passive object, a practice Freud labeled a 'natural basis of desire.' True heterosexuality, in the Irigarayan sense, connotes difference and fecundity between the sexes, permitting differences such as female homosexuality as situated outside of regression into early masculinity complex. See Irigaray, S, 98-104.

⁴² Irigaray, ML, 115.

⁴³ See Heidi Bostic's argument that Irigaray does not promote a normative heterosexualism or connote a particular opposite sex as a regulating life partner choice. Bostic, 'Luce Irigaray and Love,' 603-610.

⁴⁴ She writes, "The multiplicity of woman's erogenous zones, the plural nature of her sex, as a differentiating factor that is too rarely considered in the male/female polarity, especially as far as its implication for 'signifying' practices are concerned." Irigaray, S, 103, n. 106.

with the preference for high places versus low lands,⁴⁵ for Dionysian ecstasy versus Persephone's abyss,⁴⁶ or Apollo's sun versus Artemis's wooded shade.⁴⁷ This vertical preference moves upward toward light, or away from the dark origins, creating a vertical hierarchy that has one-way movement toward higher ground. In an organic example, the visible foliage is considered the sum of the plant, despite its invisible roots. She suggests that present cultural movements of up and down merely constitute a negation of negation⁴⁸ that dissociates men from the immediacy of the senses of heritage.⁴⁹ What is left in the dark low lands becomes the story of origin, or the womb of the mother.

In the second section of *Speculum*, Irigaray directly challenges Western philosophy assumptions of ideal Truth, light, and reliance upon the male gaze to articulate truth via the speculum or mirror of the female body. Irigaray uses Plato's kore and the allegory of the cave as an inclusio of her refractory examination. In the allegory of the cave, she re-reads the story as man's bodily repression of his origin/mother in the search for ideal truth, made clear through the light of the Sun/son (as opposed to the dark continent of woman). As Allison Weir articulately explains, "Irigaray agrees with Plato that men are unable to know reality; but she argues, giving a feminist twist to materialist critiques of Platonic idealism, and to the Nietzschean-Freudian critique of the will to Truth, as a will to power, that the reality men are unable to know is the reality of human origin in female bodies."⁵⁰ The cave, which for Plato is a prison for the body, is also the origin of all bodies, and

⁴⁵ She writes, "Man seems to go to the top and stay there and leave the others, women for example, to occupy the low ground, while the path between heaven and earth is lost. In case they forget that they are obliged to go back down to their roots if they are to grow." Irigaray, SG, 108.

⁴⁶ Irigaray, ML, 114-115; 145.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 149, 152.

⁴⁸ She says that the fulfilled spirit appears as a negation of negation. Irigaray, SG, 109.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Allison Weir, *Sacrificial Logics: Feminist Theory and the Critique of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1996) 92.

Irigaray reads the cave as symbolizing the womb and man's escape from his origin. Weir critically nuances that what Irigaray posits isn't a facile critique of mind over body, but the unwillingness of Western philosophy to reflect on embodiment. She explains, "Unable to reflect, the man is unable to find a path that might link the two worlds—the Ideal and the merely real."⁵¹ The passage way or connection between these two worlds is the repressed vagina, phallogocratically analyzed as a sheath for the penis, or the mirror-image inversion of the male body. The eye, also a concave mirror, confirms the truth of unified male Being and its multiple copies or fakes. But Irigaray uncovers that it is deliberately repressed because of what it signifies: feminine specificity.⁵² Recall the double discourse of Irigaray's specificity, one that oscillates between affirmation and reaction; it is not here (man's negation) and it is elsewhere, exiled, sub-sisting. Again, *Kore*-Persephone personifies this doubled location: "Persephone has experience of the two veils, the two blinds, the two edges, the two cracks in the invisible. And the to-ing and fro-ing between the (feminine) one and the other. Crossing ceaselessly, aimlessly back and through the frontier of these abysses. From below and from on high."⁵³ Persephone, in crossing through death to Hades, is able to access all four dimensions of Irigaray's alternate continuum, one that moves both up and down, and side to side.

Despite the breadth of her corpus that now exists, *Speculum* remains one of Irigaray's most respected pieces of academic work. I believe *Speculum* is still so highly regarded because of the rigor, systematic care, and nuanced work within a clear, academically notated work that she produced. Use of citation, I suggest, permits the sharing

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Irigaray, S, 253-256.

⁵³ Irigaray, ML, 115.

of knowledge that Irigaray posits as a condition of possibility for human flourishing, but which she presently tends to omit as a way to challenge the rigidity of academic discourse. Using the specular as a *leitmotif*, she deconstructs its power and resituates the force of the gaze. Woman, an outlier of the symbolic order, has been rendered invisible, but Irigaray exposes the system that renders her thus. By mimicking or conflating the mirror, she turns the male gaze on itself, revealing its dependency upon this ocular posture, and thus, revealing what the visible refuses to see: the female subject. She also turns the mirror on herself, or the woman, revealing the need to elaborate a subjectivity and faithfulness to female specificity that is not a prop to the definition of Woman within patriarchy. In a reversal of history, she examines the corpus of Western philosophy from Freud to Plato, providing a bevy of citations that allow the reader to journey with her research and examine the primary texts and join in her analysis and conversation of how Freud's sexual conclusions were complicit with Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus's compositions of the cosmos, nature, its mechanics, and way to access these notions was theorized.

Irigaray's first period exposes the repression of female specificity, which imbues the female body in service to the male mind, and posits absolute being as the highest transcendental order, an order that man serves to articulate through a symbolically phallic language. She rallies against Lacan's sexual determinism and his absolutizing symbolic order, and in her later work begins to posit a theoretical account of female subjectivity outside of the phallocratic ordering. Irigaray seeks to reveal the blind spots and mimetically, historically, and actively loosen the surety of the concave lens of the male eye and Enlightenment's claim to absolute knowledge, in order to contest the logic of Sameness

that denies multiplicity, fluidity, excess, volume, female specificity, humanity's origin, and the mother-daughter dyad.

3. *Phase Two: Elaborating Sexual Difference*

In this section I examine Irigaray's construction of female sexual identity, a notion that she later terms as "belonging to my gender." I examine the key terms and evaluate the feminist reception of her work, particularly her often-misunderstood strategic recovery of the negative as an affirmation of female desire and identity.

3.1. *Irigarayan Contribution to Sexual Difference*

Irigaray is clearly not the first philosopher to oppose binary oppositions per se or to render an account of sexual difference. Her unique contribution is to point toward the link between binary opposition and patriarchal culture as it has been formed from the symbolic and cultural imagination of male morphology. Using the tools of post-structuralism, post-Lacanian psychoanalysis, linguistics, and literary theory, she reveals the "blind spot" of dissymmetrical power relations that underlie the construction of woman as the Other of the dominant male subject.

Irigaray, in an interview, claims that *Speculum* explicitly drew attention to the cultural and symbolic tyranny of 'phallogocentrism'⁵⁴ or, 'auto-mono-centrism,' a critique which marks her first period of work.⁵⁵ The unified male self, symbolized by the male

⁵⁴ Phallogocentrism involves the combination of several male dominated morphological ideals. The term encompasses the notion of the male phallus as the centering or master signifier of reality, together with the Enlightenment notion of *logos* or reason. Promoters of patriarchy have embraced phallogocentrism, argues Irigaray, as a means to exclude a female morphology from having access to reason since she has no access to the phallus, a psychical and biological lack that results in 'penis envy.' Since *logos* is combined with the phallus, male morphology thus privileges reason as being intrinsically linked to a masculine culture with its access to phallic signification. See Irigaray, S, 28; TS, 162-3,

⁵⁵ Irigaray states that in her first phase, of which *Speculum*, *This Sex*, and to a certain extent, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* are a part of her attempt to show how a single subject (traditionally masculine) has "... constructed the world and interpreted the world according to a single perspective." Irigaray, JLI, 97. Her three stages consist of "... first a critique ... of the auto-mono-centrism of the western subject; [second] how to

phallus, must defensively repress the mother, and subsequently all others. Irigaray links the preservation of a unified self with the dread and repression of mother, negativity, difference, and nonidentity. Irigaray's project turns these "abjected" positions and constructs a symbolic and cultural imaginary built around female morphology, revealing the false dichotomy of the binary and a new economy that renders these terms no longer abject, but rather, positive affirmations of another sexual identity. Irigaray's work is a critical departure in its emphasis of permitting woman to define their own subjectivity, rather than having it defined relative to another sexuate economy. Most importantly, she removes woman's status as Other of the male subject, an absolute affirmation she calls suspect given its incessant repetition and unthought treatment. First challenging the status of woman as an accessory to male subjectivity, and then permitting women to determine her own subjectivity, mark a critical contribution of her philosophy. Irigaray chooses to permit the sexes to elaborate their own subjectivity and confirm identity through the surprising maneuver of self-limitation. She adheres identity with its very shifting or fluid movement in nature and culture, and she reappropriates the passive with a decisive and strategic activity of belonging to a gender. I explain these paradoxes in the next section.

3.2. Sex, Gender, and Sexuate Identity

For Irigaray, I suggest, the terms *sexe*, *genre*, and more recently, *sexuate*,⁵⁶ are critically redeployed to confound traditional meanings and, instead, protest their use in service of patriarchy while positively imaging a way to speak of alterity or difference in sex, gender, and sexuality. I suggest that Irigaray's use of these terms has been to recover the

define a second subject; [third] how to define a relationship, a philosophy, an ethic, a relationship between two different subjects." Irigaray, WWC, 145.

⁵⁶ See section *Sexuate Identity*.

negative, or non-affirmative position of male subjectivity, and to mobilize this negativity to assert an affirmation of female becoming, rather than its typical use as an extension of male subjectivity and agency. In the Aristotelian sense, she confounds the original use of privative pole and opens a meaning beyond its intention. Like Morny Joy, I argue that Irigaray's recovery of the negative is a deliberate and conscious choice,⁵⁷ aware of the historical oppression and confinement of these poles. With this full disclosure she actively and deliberately contests the sexual determination of the symbolic and philosophic system, while positing a female subjectivity and specificity that exceeds current constitutions.

But Irigaray's redeployment of these terms has received a varying reception. Most feminists are wary of identifying or stating a sexual difference between men and women, or naming sexual markers that differentiate men from women because they realize how powerfully these differences have been used to relegate women from the ability to reason, earn fair wages, and participate fully in culture and society.⁵⁸ By holding apart the poles of sex and gender, the concept of gender has been released from a biological destiny, which may be articulated as one's sex. Gender, as its own concept, can now account for the "traditional" differences, which were assumed as biologically or sexually determined. These "differences" are actually mere social constructions that were employed to cause women to be materially as well as culturally oppressed within a patriarchal culture that favors the male sex and the male culture over and against the female sex and all that has been culturally categorized as part of female culture. By loosening the connection between one's

⁵⁷ Morny Joy, "Love and the Labor of the Negative," in *Resistance, Flight, Creation: Feminist Enactments of French Philosophy*, ed. Dorothea Olkowski (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000) 114.

⁵⁸ See Rosi Braidotti, "Sexual Difference Theory," *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, eds. Alison M. Jaggar and Iris Marion Young (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998, 2000) 298.

gender and sex, one may reasonably conclude that a certain 'sex' does not necessitate a certain 'gender,' although obvious and prominent cultural constraints still exist. Gender is a cultural representation that the sexed body assumes. What truly occurs, argue writers like Judith Butler, is that we 'perform' our gender, and this performance determines our 'sex.' Butler questions the concept of sex altogether, querying if the threshold of determining one's sex is natural, anatomical, chromosomal, or hormonal? At the same time, Butler assesses the scientific discourse that purports to establish such notions as pure 'fact.' Indeed, Butler argues that sex must be collapsed within the same critique of gender in the following:

It would make no sense, then, to define gender as the cultural interpretation of sex, if sex itself is a gendered category. Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pregiven sex (a juridical conception); gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. As a result, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as 'prediscursive,' prior to culture, a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts.⁵⁹

Butler argues that that these two poles actually allow us to critically regard sex again, and discover that sex is as culturally saturated as gender. Sex is not a pre-discursive notion that is prior to culture, but operates within the same discursive regimes of power

⁵⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 11.

within which one's gender exists, and the very notion of a pre-discursive natural sex, is a culturally imbued reasoning.⁶⁰

Irigaray's use of sex and gender should make the reader aware that her landscape isn't a gender/sex divide in service to Anglo-American feminist mappings, but rather the Freudian context of ego and bodily ego development.⁶¹ I suggest an analysis of the notion of "sexuate identity" offers a clearer affirmation of difference that acknowledges the limits of social constructions of gender and the play of nature, without absolutizing either. But in order to develop her notion of sexuate identity, one must traverse with her arguments and claims that directly attend to the history of philosophy and self and bodily experience of subjectivity in the Freudian constellation of bodily ego.

Irigaray's translation of the French word, '*sexuelle*' has typically been translated as 'sexual', a common and understandable translation. Recently, Irigaray has distinguished that her deployment of '*sexuelle*' should be more accurately translated as 'sexuate', an identity with specific rights and responsibilities that corresponds to one's gender.⁶² Therefore, she is postulating a theory of 'sexuate' identity instead of 'sexual' identity.⁶³ A 'sexuate' identity differs from a 'sexual' identity in that a sexuate identity is, according to Irigaray, a global identity informed by the morphology of the body, and within a relational context, depicts how the body comes into the world.⁶⁴ She uses the French term '*genre*' to

⁶⁰ For a more comprehensive and careful discussion of the sex and gender distinction between Butler and Irigaray see Alison Stone, *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 87-126.

⁶¹ Freud made the now infamous claim, "the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego." See Freud, "The Ego and the Id," in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, trans. James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 364.

⁶² Irigaray, ILTY, 4.

⁶³ Luce Irigaray, "Listening, Thinking, Teaching" (teleconference address, Stony Brook University, New York, NY, September 23, 2006).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

depict the belonging of men and women to a universal that accords with their differing body morphology and relational context, and as Penelope Deutscher astutely observes, loses its sense when translated into the English “gender.”⁶⁵

3.2.1. *Gender As Self-Limitation*

Irigaray explains that ‘sexuate identity’ rules out forms of totality that subjugate bodies (especially the female body) or lead to ownership of the subject by another. But gender for Irigaray, while not subjugating either sex, does limit its domain and its grasp: “The *mine* of the subject is always already marked by a disappropriation: gender. Being a man or a woman already means not being the whole of the subject or of the community or, of spirit, as well as not being entirely one’s self.”⁶⁶ But self-limitation doesn’t mean a closure of self, but rather, it is a paradoxical opening to the world in that a limit by its nature doubles as point of contact, in separating it allows for connecting. Self-limitation is owning one’s unique sexual difference, which simultaneously makes possible mutual connection with another without submissive fusion or oppositional hostility. Irigaray is seeking the bodily and cultural belonging proper to each gender, but this sexuate identity is an identity that simultaneously reaches out to the entire world. Irigaray begins to form the sexuate identity and responsibilities and rights of each sex by a unique self-limitation, rather than socially or culturally imposed limitations of gender.

To be specific, gender has typically referenced only the cultural conscription for a sexuate or sexual identity. Male and female genders have been understood as halves of the human whole and I have already elaborated extensively on the pole or half allotted to

⁶⁵ Penelope Deutscher, *A Politics of Impossible Difference: The Later Work of Luce Irigaray* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002) 74.

⁶⁶ Irigaray, KW, 10.

women. Sexual identity has been reduced historically to a biological aspect or ‘natural immediacy’ of the self or sexual desire and attraction linked to reproduction and reproductive capacities. Butler has argued that one’s gender and the categorization of one’s sex are both social constructions, premised upon lived bodies, and individuals ‘perform’ the gender and sex that they are assigned. But Irigaray’s sexuate identity does not ignore or depend solely on a purely sexual identity (an idea of desire or sexual attraction) or a cultural inscription of gender. Her sexuate identity and notion of gender are concepts connected with the body (natural, sensible, carnal) and also the cultural and relational context in which bodies are shaped or oriented in the world. Gender orients a self-limitation that paradoxically opens the subject to one’s self and the world.

But what is the source of gender if it differs from Butler’s pure social construction? When asked to discuss the term human nature, Irigaray points out that the word ‘nature’ for her is ambiguous and that she takes her cue from the Greeks, for whom the word didn’t exist but correlated the term more to a ‘coming to appear’ — “to be born in a certain sense—growing . . . terms which are far more concrete.”⁶⁷ She develops her understanding of gender in relation to this concept of nature as appearing, growing. She continues in the same interview stating, “Maybe it would be better to talk about the human species as being divided into two genders, using a word that means ‘genus,’ ‘generation’ or ‘family’ among the Greeks and leave the word ‘nature’ for more speculative, philosophical or theological traditions.”⁶⁸ She states that one’s gender isn’t a half of humankind; rather than prescribed

⁶⁷ Irigaray, WD, 95.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

percentages or portions, she argues that only those within the gender can ascribe the limits of that gender.⁶⁹ Those who ascribe to the gender male or female may determine the limits.

As stated previously, she implies that one's gender becomes one's genus, or the relational context that allows for the appearance or growth (generation) for self and the human species. While the battle between the sexes has endemically assumed the language of violence or limit, Irigaray's formulation for gender or sexuate identity erupts in growth, generation, regeneration, or flourishing for the human species. The sexes aren't in a battle, they are in love and love fecundates life itself. Reproduction is not a by-product of love, but love itself is a nourishing regenerative for the couple. A child is not needed to verify love; the couple can generate their own energy of love, or a culture of love that is in touch with nature. As she states, "Such a cultivation of relationship between the genders can be transposed into community relations. Instead of seducing (one another) to expend (one another's) energy, man and woman, woman and man contribute, one another alike, one to the other, what it takes to cultivate their desire for one another."⁷⁰ Limitations are no longer socially inscribed stereotypes of gender in service to male sexual desire, but they are free and intentional limits in order to contribute and cultivate the growth or generation of civil society.

3.2.2. *Gender As Passive Belonging*

To become one's gender is to find the sexuate identity that is 'proper' to each body. Gender is no longer a cultural inscription of a role based loosely upon one's sexual identity; gender is, according to Irigaray, something I belong to: "I belong to a gender. I am

⁶⁹ Irigaray, KW, 220.

⁷⁰ Irigaray, ILTY, 138.

objectively limited by this belonging. . . . It is necessary and sufficient for me to respect the gender I am.”⁷¹ She continues, “. . . becoming one’s gender also constitutes the means for returning to the self. The gender cannot enter into the realm of pure knowledge, pure understanding. Belonging to a gender cannot be known or assumed as the truth, the truths of classical philosophy were.”⁷² The truth of gender is both a receiving, a ‘passivity,’ and an owning, a ‘fidelity to the being I am.’⁷³ Instead of aligning to certain cultural facts, or biotic impulses, she casts belonging to a gender as a posture that fosters respect and cultivates a contribution to the genus of human identity.⁷⁴ According to Irigaray, we can constitute human identity through an axis of vertical relations (genealogical: those that differ vertically in relationship to self, but belong to the same gender, such as grandmother, mother, daughter), and horizontal relations (alterity: a wholly other sexuate economy and identity with a differing relationship to time and space). Gender is a place of belonging or faithfulness more than a correspondence between body and role. Gender becomes an intentional self-limitation and the ability to receive the “being that I am.” The question of being and who the self is become a critical juncture for this belonging.

3.2.3. Gender as Sensible Immediacy

Additionally, she makes a distinction between “natural immediacy” and “sensible immediacy.”⁷⁵ I understand the former as aligning with a traditional rendering of gender through biotic attributes and the latter as formed through sensible, sensuous, and fluid or shifting notions of nature and culture that are active, alive, and generative. Gender cannot

⁷¹ Irigaray, KW, 10.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 10-11.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

be a complicity with essential stereotypes of men and women since the very biotic attributes and cultural inscriptions are shifting, sensuous, and fluid. She wants a 'sensibility' appropriate to her gender, but this is not the patriarchal notion of a 'natural' sensibility where physiology becomes identity. Instead, she insists that identity, while informed by physiology, is not determined or appropriate only to physiology, but must be in touch with the sensuous body as it cultivates (a deliberate word play of the term 'culture,' turning 'culture' into an active verb, signaling a positive and nourishing action) identity that is sexuate and proper to each gender. She urges, "It is a matter of demanding a culture, of wanting and elaborating a spirituality, a subjectivity and an alterity appropriate to this gender: the feminine."⁷⁶ For Irigaray, to take on the task of demanding a culture appropriate to two genders is a task that is as spiritual as it is political, an important point I take up later. These notions of sexuate identity and gender are not reducible to mere sexual identities (the myth of a biological given that accords with sexual desire or sexual object of desire) or physiology that stands in place of identity.

Instead she is attempting to postulate an *ontology* of sexuate identity that must be able to carry the weight of the universal claims she insists sexual difference can bear; viz, a concept that can engage the global nature of bodies, subjects, differences, and culture. As Irigaray elaborates, sexuate identity distinguishes between the subject of *énonciation* and the subject of *énoncé*.⁷⁷ To put it in a more Heideggerian framework, a sexuate identity is concerned about ontology and not just the ontological, but it is an ontological sexuate identity of ontic beings that must be in touch with the notion of ontology. The question of

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Luce Irigaray, "Listening, Thinking, Teaching" (teleconference address, Stony Brook University, New York, NY, September 23, 2006).

being involves the sexuate identity of beings, but sexuate identity is not reducible to 'natural immediacy;' it is a 'sensible immediacy' that allows sexuate beings to be more than the sum of their physiology. To overly simplify, her question of sexuate identity as the basis for sexual difference brings *Dasein* back into the fore as the question of our age, but *Dasein* is no longer a neuter question of being. It asks the question of being with regard to the sexuate identity and gender of beings, but is more than Freudian sexual libidinal coding. In conclusion, Irigaray's sexual difference is shaped through the critical paradox of self-limitation, a receptive belonging that keeps cultivation of a civil society at its fore, rather than biotic attributes of Freudian-libidinal markers, and a sensible immediacy of shifting and sensuous notions of nature and culture.

4. *Phase Three: A Way of Love*

Irigaray's third phase focuses on intersubjectivity between these two asymmetrical, dimorphic, universal genders, cultivating sexuate identities that permit love *to each other* to be the new avenue or road to redemption. Again, we will note the curbing of a desire to dominate, a self-imposed or self-informed limit, and a flourishing that resists any enlargement of one subjectivity to the demise of another.

It is helpful to remember that Irigaray began *Speculum* arguing that a dissymmetry exists between the phallocratic order and the excess where female non-being is presently located. She has used this position of non-being to deconstruct the binary opposition of patriarchy, while at the same time arguing for female subjectivity to emerge. But in order for women to come out of the "dark continent" that Freud describes as female sexuality, she cannot simply reverse the binary dualism, placing woman as the subject and man as the object. There is a dissymmetry that keeps the two apart.

According to Irigaray, one cannot locate female sexual identity by reversing the sex of the subjects within the dialectic. Instead of reversing, Irigaray inverts the dialectic; this strategy of inversion is one she observes Marx performing upon Hegel, Nietzsche performing upon Platonism, even describes the problems of the return, which Heidegger develops, as a problematic of inversion.⁷⁸ In her case she says, “. . . it was more a question of inverting myself.”⁷⁹ She explains, “I was the other of/for man, I attempted to define the objective alterity of myself for myself as belonging to the female gender. I carried out an inversion of the femininity imposed upon me in order to try to define the female corresponding to my gender: the in-and-for-itself of my female nature.”⁸⁰ She states that she carried out a partial process of limitation or negation relative to her natural immediacy, and relative to the representation she had been given of what she was as a woman, the other of for man, the other of male culture. She concludes, “Hence I attempted to sketch out a spirituality in the feminine and in doing so, of course, I *curbed* my own needs and desires, my natural immediacy, especially by thinking myself as half and only half the world, but also by calling into question the spirituality imposed on me in the culture appropriate to the male or to patriarchy, a culture in which I was the other of the Same.”⁸¹ Irigaray’s critique of male sexual identity isn’t its existence, but its overreach, its distortion of the female gender as derivative of itself, and its spiritual alignment with the transcendent claims of God as its natural and spiritual will to power. By inverting the representation given her, Irigaray self-represents herself for herself, as she reaches out for a relationship

⁷⁸ Irigaray, *ILTY*, 63.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 64. *Italics mine.*

of mutuality in which both her needs and desires are met, as well as the others, in order to consciously develop a relationship of intersubjectivity with another gender, a maneuver she identifies as the negative of the dialectic.

4.1. Irigaray's Strategy: The Negative

I suggest that in order to understand how Irigaray deconstructs and dismantles logocentrism from within, while positing a positive location for female subjectivity and desire, it is critical to understand her deployment of the term “the negative.”⁸² I sketch Irigaray's use of the term “the negative,” as implying multiple senses: first, an affirmation of certain activities, rather than idealized qualities, that give expression to women's desire and subjectivity; second, a deliberate and strategic self-limitation of a sexed individual in order to develop an intersubjective and interpersonal encounter between two universal genders; and third, attentive development of a divine ideal for one's self, gender, and the everyday wholly other whose alterity and gender supports one's own spiritual becoming. Rather than a focus on divine ecstasy located in the beyond, the divine is located in the interpersonal relationship of difference between men and women.

4.2. Rewriting the Negative

In the traditional interpretation of Hegel and the Lacanian heritage, desire and the negative connote a sense of paucity. A woman's desire within logocentrism is desire or

⁸² The negative is a strategic affirmation of what the female signifies in the psychosexual history of philosophy and often signals a kind of limit to any one subjectivity. Namely, if the penis is the positive point of signification and reference for meaning, then the vagina is the “negative” or “lack.” Annemie Halsema has also written on the Irigaray's use of the negative connecting her usage with Hegel's dialectic, explaining, “It is an affirmative limit which is necessary for the growth of gendered identity—namely through acceptance of the boundary formed by one's gender—and that is also necessary for recognition of the irreducibility of the other, in other words for considering the other as *other* . . . in more general terms finiteness . . . the task for human beings is to cultivate their finiteness.” Annemie Halsema, *Luce Irigaray and Horizontal Transcendence* (Amsterdam, NE: Humanistics University Press, 2010) 21.

negativity for what she lacks: unity of being, rational consciousness, phallic power, and a will to power. As Morny Joy explains, “In contrast to Hegel, where negativity (as a necessary movement of the dialectics) will be integrated in the interests of a final mode of self-consciousness or universality, Irigaray seeks to transform radically this triumphalistic procedure.”⁸³ She will rescue negativity from its employment as a device that “. . . artificially introduces alienation in the service of a higher (yet equally suspicious unity).”⁸⁴ Irigaray describes Hegel’s negative as one that annihilates, “the mastery of consciousness (historically male) over nature and human kind.”⁸⁵ Irigaray principally rejects the claim that women can only be located within the scheme of binary oppositions constitutive of male subjectivity and desire. Within this scheme, a woman can only remove herself from the location of passive object by pursuing the same location as the philosophical subject man. Therefore, a woman, pursuing desire and agency to exercise her self-consciousness, simply reverses the role of object for subject and the result is a sameness in identity and consciousness: instead of men, now women war for the same will to power as patriarchy and the movement toward a higher or transcendent unity is affirmed. Rather than being the pawns, they become the agents seeking unity and aspiring toward the same identity as the male subject.

But Irigaray argues that female sexuate identity is asymmetrical to phallogocentrism and male sexuate identity and has a natural and universal objectivity that must emerge for humanity to flourish and happiness to be realized. Therefore, one cannot

⁸³ Morny Joy, “Love and the Labor of the Negative,” *Resistance, Flight, Creation: Feminist Enactments of French Philosophy*, ed. Dorothea Olkowski (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000) 113.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Irigaray, ILTY, 13.

merely switch the poles of male and female because they do not correspond to a reversal process; they are not relative one to another. Instead, she posits that within patriarchy and the male sexuate economy, true female sexuate identity presently lies on the margins of such a logic and gaze, and is an excess that can undermine male-centered patriarchal epistemology, ontology, and ethics. Conflating or “jamming the works of the theoretical machine”⁸⁶ of patriarchy, Irigaray can insist that female sexuate identity exists and that female desire and the negative can be re-appropriated as an “un-willful drive.”⁸⁷ She employs mimesis, “the strategy of revisiting, reappraising, and repossessing the female-subject position by women who have taken their distance from Woman as a phallogocentric support point,”⁸⁸ to assert a positive political will that proposes “. . . desire as the positive affirmation of one’s longing for plenitude and well-being . . . felicity, or happiness.”⁸⁹ Morny Joy notes the dangerous task Irigaray undertakes,

For in one sense she wants to keep in play the deconstructive dismantling of any abstract binaries, especially that of nature/culture. At the same time, she poses a nonessentialistic alternative with a definite strategy for its attainment. Negativity will remain, but rather than being a confrontational element, it will now imply a stage of self-analysis and critical appropriation that has distinctive implications for both women and men.⁹⁰

Woman’s desire and the negative is no longer a notion signposting to what she lacks, it is a positive notion of fulfillment, plenitude, and flourishing for female sexuate identity.

⁸⁶ Irigaray, TS, 107.

⁸⁷ Rosi Braidotti, “Sexual Difference Theory,” 305.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 304.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 306.

⁹⁰ Morny Joy, *Resistance, Flight, Creation*, 115.

But ironically, fulfillment comes from limit, plenitude from recognition of an irreducible other, and flourishing from the flourishing of two genders that are responsible for their own becoming and constitute the whole of humanity.

Joy nuances that the acknowledgement of sexual difference involves, but does not imply, a simple acceptance of the irreducibility of the other and its resistance to preordained categories. She writes that there must be "... an acknowledgment that women will no longer conform to definitions of femininity that do not respect a women's integrity and her responsibility for her own becoming."⁹¹ The becoming is not an innate identity but "that form of universality, which within the Hegelian dispensation, acknowledges that the final stage of individuality can be expressed as a reaffirmation of the primary abstract formula at a personalized level."⁹² Irigaray explains, "Each woman will, therefore, be for herself woman in the process of becoming, the model for herself as a woman for the man whom she needs, just as he needs her to ensure the transition from nature to culture. In other words, being born a woman requires a culture particular to this sex and this gender, which it is important for the woman to realize without renouncing her natural identity."⁹³ Lest one think this means subjective relativism, romantic naturalism or biologism, or an arbitrary self-determination, Irigaray carefully adds, "That does not mean she can lapse into capriciousness, dispersion, the multiplicity of her desires, or a loss of identity. She should, quite the contrary, gather herself within herself in order to accomplish her gender's perfection for herself, for the man she loves, for her children, but equally for civil society,

⁹¹ Ibid., 114.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Irigaray, *ILTY*, 27.

for the world of culture, for a definition of the universal corresponding to reality.”⁹⁴

Irigaray clearly has an objective perfection that each sex is responsible to attain within the interiority of the self, but corresponding to the reality of a collective and universal gender.

In *I Love to You*, Irigaray explains the negative, not as a set of idealized qualities, but as an active participation in the labor of love, where each sex upholds its limit and refuses an egological position that insists one sex is the whole of the human genus. She explains the negative as, “the limit of one gender in relation to the other.”⁹⁵ She says the negative in sexual difference means, “. . . an acceptance of the limit of my gender and recognition of the irreducibility of the other. It cannot be overcome, but it gives a positive access—neither instinctual nor drive-related—to the other.”⁹⁶ She is careful to articulate this self-limit not as a sacrifice or an ascetic posture. In another passage she candidly states one can recognize the negative in the self: “‘I am sexed’ implies, ‘I am not everything.’”⁹⁷ While limits have been formed, such as the Oedipal theory of sexual drives, Irigaray notes, they have been formed wrongly in opposition to the other gender,⁹⁸ and such thinking remains locked in a dialectic of master and slave, where one can only win at the other’s expense. Irigaray laments the history of sexes, which has been a division of labor based upon sex, and thus, a battle of the sexes, and a warring of absolute spirit whose master and horizon is death. She explains the labor of the negative on man’s terms: “death as the rallying place of sensible desire, the real or symbolic dissolution of the citizen in the community and enslavement to property and capital.”⁹⁹ Irigaray’s use of the negative offers a new horizon,

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 51.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 23.

the cultivation of life.¹⁰⁰ Rather than a division of a rivalry between the sexes, she offers a way to create an alliance, or a way of happiness or felicity for all men and women, which does not annihilate the self.¹⁰¹ The negative begins within the interiority of the self, returning the self back to the self, placing the responsibility of becoming on the person. As she writes, "... this negative created a space for potential meeting or listening within me."¹⁰² The return to self is meant to permit a woman to develop a sense of identity and an ideal faithful to herself, and then to women as a collective.¹⁰³ By appropriating the negative, she permits the negative of limit, finitude, and renunciation to form a critical symbolic discourse that can cultivate a personal sensibility that is appropriate to a sexed man or woman, while at the same time, faithful to a universal gender. Faithfulness to one's gender means incarnating our happiness as living women and men and she adds, "Equality neutralizes that dimension of the negative which opens up an access to the alliance between the genders."¹⁰⁴ But the formulation of a female generic, or gender, must be developed before a possible felicity or alliance between the genders can emerge in history.

4.3. Nature and Culture: The Double Dialectic

Irigaray believes Hegel considered his own time and system as capable of realizing the end of History and dubs his theory as the most powerful of Western philosophies.¹⁰⁵ Unquestionably the power of his theory still influences our present notions of marriage,

¹⁰⁰ She writes, "It may be possible for a harmony and growth respectful of life to exist through a constant balancing between attraction and retention. And this would maintain and retain an energy of return for each man and woman, an energy that serves life and culture, prevents ill-considered and short-lived forms of growth, and protects and retain what has been gained, particularly with respect to life and civilization." Irigaray, *ILTY*, 55.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

family, and civil society. Feminists have noted the dire effects women experience when traditionally they are assigned to the private sphere and men to the public. Irigaray adds how men also suffer from this erroneous division between public and private, nature and culture. She writes,

This division of tasks between home and the public realm could not be sustained without depriving woman of a relationship to the singular in love and of the singularity necessary for her relationship to the universal. The home—the couple or family—should be a locus for the singular and universal for both sexes, as should the life of a citizen as well. This means that the order of cultural identity, not only natural identity, must exist within the couple, the family, and the state. Without a cultural identity suited to the natural identity of each sex, nature and the universal are parted, like heaven and earth; with an infinite distance between them, they marry no more. The division of tasks between heaven and earth, suffering and labor here below, recompense and felicity in the beyond, begins as a period in our culture that is described in mythology and inscribed into philosophy and theology.¹⁰⁶

What each sex needs, rather than the diminution of one sex for the other, or their fractured participation in differing spheres, is the universality¹⁰⁷ of each sex to emerge

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 13.

¹⁰⁷ Morny Joy notes that the final stage of Hegel's dialectic is variously described in his works, but the individuality of self-consciousness ultimately attained (as *Geist*/spirit) is also understood as an enrichment or precision at a more refined level of the initially posited general universal. In this essay, I with Joy, refer to this stage by the word "universality" to distinguish it from universal statements and universalism, which, Joy notes, is a crucial and controversial aspect of Irigaray's work, when she states that women should attain the perfection of their gender or the universal. I agree with Joy that when Irigaray refers to women attaining the universal, what she has in mind is actually a mode of universality as described above. See Joy, *Resistance, Flight, Creation*, 241, n. 3.

corresponding to their natural immediacy, or an idealized version of each gender that is in touch with nature. The natural and the sensible do not determine culture, nor does culture determine the natural. The two, nature and culture, mobilize in a non-oppositional dialectic for each sex, which forms a double dialectic, “a dialectic of the relation of woman to herself and of man to himself, a double dialectic therefore, enabling a real, cultured and ethical relation between them.”¹⁰⁸ By contemplating and respecting the differences of the natural body, men and women can move beyond instinct or drive to consciousness of the body of each sex. While the Hegelian paradigm depicts consciousness and freedom as separate and divided from nature, Irigaray understands their alliance, but not their fusion, as the critical passageway for each sex to bring together natural immediacy appropriate for each sex with its universality or ideal.

4.4. *The Spiritual Labor of Love*

This sensible attraction or carnal love, which cannot be reduced to biological consummation or reproduction, yields a physical and spiritual labor of love. Obviously this love is not a “facile fusion of romantic sensibility” since “. . . such hackneyed conventions simply feed into an absorption that obliterates necessary distinction.”¹⁰⁹ The love Irigaray invokes is firmly grounded in the reality of actual men and women and their natural necessities to breathe, feed, clothe and house themselves.¹¹⁰ True *Geist* or spirit ought to incarnate a love between actual men and women that addresses and redresses these necessities. We do not sit and wait for a *deus ex machina*, but incarnate such a divine ideal between and among actual men and women. She understands spirit to be the means for

¹⁰⁸ Irigaray, ILTY., 62.

¹⁰⁹ Joy, *Resistance, Flight, Creation*, 115.

¹¹⁰ Irigaray, ILTY, 50.

matter to emerge and endure in its proper form or forms,¹¹¹ and the celestial being the manifestation of our degree of spirituality in the “here and now.”¹¹²

While traditional thought dictates that man came from God, and woman from man, Irigaray places little importance upon a transcendent ideal divine God, and instead prioritizes the every day other, a wholly other which for her is divine. As Halsema explains, “The consideration of the other’s transcendence implies that one accepts one’s limits, both in the field of knowing and feeling. The self starts respecting what escapes its grasp, i.e., the mystery of otherness.”¹¹³ The transcendence of the other forms the basis of why the negative as self-limit is an affirmation of human alterity and difference. Halsema notes how in Irigaray’s work, as the self respects what is beyond its grasp, we turn to other men and women to aid our spiritual becoming. As we turn to the other, we move in the direction of “horizontal transcendence.”¹¹⁴

Irigaray has taken what phallogocentrism covered over, repressed, dismissed, or abhorred, and has recovered, reappraised, and repossessed the negative, or the limit of one’s self constitution that recognizes another gender, as a positive feminist strategy that permits an affirmative reconstruction of political will and female subjectivity and agency from a position of alienation and exile. While Derrida also noted this position of marginal power and phallocratic excess, in *Spurs* he was content to leave women there.¹¹⁵ Irigaray

¹¹¹ Ibid., 15.

¹¹² Ibid., 14.

¹¹³ Halsema, *Luce Irigaray and Horizontal Transcendence*, 57.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ In *Spurs* Derrida suggests that the location of woman as truth and untruth, offers a particularly potent site from which to deconstruct the specular economy, a site that within his scheme prefigures the economy of gift rather than appropriation. He leaves women in a state of undecidability, which can be potent, but risks losing sexual specificity. For example he writes, “Although there is not truth in itself of the sexual difference in itself, of either man or woman in itself, all of ontology nevertheless, with its inspection, appropriation, identification and verification of identity, has resulted in concealing, even as it presupposes it, this undecidability.” Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 103-4. For

recovers the negative and forms a rallying point for political agency and positive constructive or strategic ontology of female subjectivity.

In chapter two I suggest that the dialectic of the negative is central to a critical theory of two universals. I connect the negative to Irigaray's account of how two genders recognize self-limitation and self-representation in their interaction. In *Speculum*, Irigaray traced the "blind spots" in order to reveal how the female body was not only used as a passive object, but also, to contest this position. The negative, I suggest, functions as a pole that constitutes a vital part of the cosmic world, a way for each gender to generate positively a natural-cultural-social identity individually and collectively. In chapter three I develop how the dialectics of the negative can also interlock with the question of proximity, or why ethics is continually a relationship *with* or near others who are different and how these differences can be respected. In chapter four, I will retrace the primary mythologies of the Christian tradition of sexual difference and deploy the negative to mobilize an excess within these primal accounts that can positively account for female subjectivity, while resisting the absolutizing stance of phallogocentrism. While *Speculum* offers a critical unpacking of Greek *genesis* or origins, and uncovers the forgotten mother/daughter dyad, I will also offer a critical and, hopefully, co-redemptive understanding of the Hebrew Genesis account, the formative mythology of the Judaic, Abrahamic, Christian, and various 'other' traditions.

critical appraisal of his position see Peggy Kamuf, "Deconstruction and Feminism: A Repetition," in *Feminist Interpretations of Jacques Derrida*, ed. Nancy Holland (University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997) 103-26; Ellen T. Armour, "Deconstruction's Alliance with Feminism: Possibilities and Limits," *Deconstruction, Feminist Theology, and the Problem of Difference: Subverting the Race/Gender Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) 79-102. For Irigaray's concern for sexual specificity in the deconstruction of text, see Irigaray, TSN, 121-136.

I have elaborated in detail my reading of sexual difference as the philosophical trope for our era because in this thesis I intend to extend and intensify Irigaray's insistence that difference need not be oppositional and explore how this emphasis can be employed in developing an approach that leads to a way to honor all kinds of differences in a global ethics of co-partnership. In this section I have explored how a primal two can signify difference for the self, the couple, the family, and the community. I have introduced the three phases of her work and how her two universals resist the trap of making woman simply an "other" of man. I have suggested that her dialectic of the negative offers a way for positive identification for both genders, whereby proximity is possible and ethical relations can be re-thought. In the next chapter I develop what a positive self-representation for women might be and how it can affirm diverse differences.

Chapter Two: Sexual Difference—Beyond Essentialism

1. Introduction

The central thesis of this dissertation asserts that Luce Irigaray is a philosopher whose work challenges how we currently share a world via sameness, offering an ethic of difference as a challenge to a singularity of power, identity, and meaning, proffering a more material and viable path for proximity or nearness. The psycho-libidinal-linguistic subject of power that Irigaray opposes is one that services a sexual echo-nomy¹ of a masculine ideal, for which all the disciplines of the modern world conspire to deny any destabilization or erosion of this monolithic source of power and meaning. I suggest that Irigaray's difference is one that evokes difference within difference. That is, to destabilize the universalism of male subjectivity forces all other unexamined reserves of power to delimit and share the world with the many "others" (whether animals, plants, stones, air, water, fish, etc.) who exist and demand a significant and meaningful way to contribute toward and with the global experience.

A significant obstacle toward Irigaray's stated goals has often been a lack of acceptance of her work from other philosophers and, indeed, feminists. Feminists in particular have been wary of her language, imagery, and political claims that seem to objectify some of the most negative tropes of the feminine that feminists often seek to overcome toward the end of women's liberation from patriarchy. In the 1980s Irigaray's work was labeled essentialist, that is her work theorizing *le féminin* fixes or defines woman

¹ Irigaray uses this term as a variance of economy, but one deliberately inserts the word "echo" for "eco" to underscore the woman's inability to mediate via signs, as there is no appearance of sign which corresponds with woman. Therefore, the masculine ideal is "echoed" repeatedly. See Irigaray, EP, 55; ML, 77; TSN, 198.

via her anatomical, biological, or socially constructed differences. Critics suggested that Irigaray's work reified these identified differences that historically damage and culturally oppress women and others deemed "different," which is another way of saying "other," "aberrant," "lesser," or negatively outside the ideals established for human flourishing.

Feminist philosophers claiming a more contextualized reading of Irigaray's claims have worked to inform readers of Irigaray's nonessentialist philosophy and her excesses that challenge an essentialism/antiessentialism binary. It is not my goal to restate these well-established arguments challenging the charge of essentialism. Instead, I examine the strategy of Irigaray and deconstruct its assumed premise: the very objectification and reification of *le féminin* ought to be inspected materially and theoretically to erode the power of patriarchy and challenge its binary (which is to say singular) hold, and reestablish a greater global flourishing. I hope to contribute a reading of how her work philosophically challenges theories of secondary differences as caught within the matrix of patriarchal sameness. I believe these claims are philosophically worth exploring as the future of Continental philosophy and American philosophy depends upon careful examination of any ideals to which we aspire, utopias we might envision, and will to power we may conceal. Her concerns of imminent versus transcendent subjective positions sweep the history of philosophy and remain crucial as we identify what forms of oppression we need to curtail, what forces of justice we ought to affirm, and how we can mutually share a world where we hold incommensurate positions. In a time when Western attitudes seem more polarized than ever, I believe Luce Irigaray is a philosopher who continues to challenge feminists and non-feminists vis-à-vis the discourse of philosophy, relocating its thrust, and

deconstructing its unthought representations (woman) and the correspondence of woman's exile with sexual relations, happiness, and mutual prosperity of global humanity.

Specifically, I suggest that Luce Irigaray challenges universalism, or the withholding of power and meaning by a chosen few at the expense of others, via difference. She seeks to divest universalism of sameness, of its control, and to insist that we must relish the bountiful diversity of our world, and to delimit ourselves, strategically spoiling the very terms that "spook" us into submission of the unquestioned self-same socially constituted, philosophically unthought, linguistic ideal of man/truth/God. Her strategy hasn't been to reverse the course of this architectonic structure of the universe or bring more people/others within its fold, but to break it apart and deconstruct its most assumed strengths within its own structural terms and norms. The most repressed ideals are the ones that can destabilize this locus of centralized unthought power. Irigaray has suggested that the most repressed, anathematic, deliberately buried threat to this power is the idea of woman, who must remain within this structure as the womb, ground, mirror, essence, and guardian of this self-same centric structure that is always suspicious of its erosion. To clarify, the idea of woman for Irigaray shouldn't be confused with material women; it is a philosophic-psycho-sexual-linguistic notion that assaults the universal ideals that presently control all "others," or what Irigaray sketches as "difference."

Irigaray is understandably difficult to follow in that she uses the strategy of mimesis (parody, echo) to deconstruct these terms and meanings, while insisting that a reconstruction of shared meaning to redefine these terms and ideals must also occur, not as they are presently situated, but after the deconstruction of a singular universalism has been forced to acknowledge its very -ism and the blatant cover up of its counterfeit

universality at the expense of the humans repressed within its system. Her reification of *le féminin* occurs as a strategic essentialism that parodies the self-same centric structure, but also seeks a horizon beyond its control.

Her “strategic” essentialism of *le féminin* has schemas that can provide a robust philosophical framework from which to deconstruct and carefully reconstruct the theories of feminist practice, namely, genuine equality, liberation, and contribution toward those deemed “other,” for other humans but also—of special concern in our thesis—for the myriad nonhuman others in our world. She deconstructs the most loathsome difference between the sexes in order to put forth a feminism that is more demanding, deeply engaged across disciplines, and able to speak with multiple political and religious contexts with respect and alterity. Irigaray’s work is singular in its attempts to strengthen the need for diverse differences with a fundamental refusal to see the universe via a monolithic psycho-sexual-religious-social-political-economic lens, bordering these differences without barricading others out, or confining individuals within.

In order to dismantle power of the self-same linguistic psycho-sexual subject, which the very posture of an essentialist charge services, I first scrutinize her claims within the psychoanalytic matrix of Freud and Lacan. Psychoanalysis, a methodology she clinically practiced, is particularly important for her not only to diagnose therapeutically what is wrong with philosophy, but also, to identify how the development of sexual terms, ideals, and norms hides the difference and alterity that, Irigaray argues, masquerades as female subjectivity. Second, I explore the question of essentialism and elaborate more fully Irigaray’s unique notion of nature and culture as active forces in constituting identity and difference. I suggest that in deconstructionist fashion, her style has important proximity to

Derrida, but is uniquely feminist. I suggest that Irigaray is singular in that she weds the style of deconstruction with the concerns of feminism, importantly asking what is unthought, concealed, and hierarchically oppressive within feminism as a discourse of philosophy. As I outline the problem of essentialism, I will revisit some of the notions I posited in chapter one and apply them to reveal Irigaray's project as dislocating the binary of essentialist/nonessentialist along with other closures of thought regarding sex, identity, and human becoming.

I address the questions of essentialism and difference because they connect clearly to the nature/culture divide and this binary opposition is relevant in relation to Irigarayan ethics, particularly as I relate her ethics to ecofeminism in chapter five. I conclude with a discussion of how to understand Irigaray's work as a philosophic discourse on the way toward a global ethic and how her argument of sexual difference extends the history and worth of philosophy as a meaningful way to construct positive identities of difference and alterity, as it deconstructs its own exclusions and sameness.

2. Irigaray and Psychoanalysis: The Freudian Lacanian Libidinal Self

Irigaray's sexuate philosophy introduces a litany of psycho-sexual terms, which some have construed as a sexual reification of female anatomy and a reduction of female subjectivity to a fixed meaning. But I suggest that Irigaray, like Kristeva, is descriptively seating her philosophy within the psychoanalytic tradition—not as a mere faithful disciple, but as an unruly daughter who defies the law of the father (the Oedipus complex) and heralds the death of the buried maternal, and the mother-daughter relationship that undergirds and is victim to the patriarchal vision of the Oedipal fate. While mining the psychoanalytic tradition for its insight into human subjectivity and sexuality, she at the

same time, defies its canons and creeds by often exceeding the discourse of both Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. I read Irigaray's relationship with Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, as a sexual reformation that seeks to transform the tradition at the ideological level, rather than dismantle the tradition altogether. She doesn't contest the ability psychoanalysis has to reveal our psycho-sexual selves; she contests the monosexual identity that it purports to reveal.

For Freud, feminine sexuality is the enigmatic 'dark continent' and he actually analogized it to the continent of Africa: fertile, unknown, and waiting for colonization from authority.² Unsurprisingly, she contests his conclusions that the libido is necessarily male, and that there is in fact only one libido (the masculine libido), and that women are the passive receptors of an active male sexuality, suffering from permanent 'penis envy'; however, she writes that Freud was careful to make no claim to have understood the enigma that he described as the sexual development of women.³ The normative critiques of female sexuality she most strongly challenges would perhaps be directed toward Jacques Lacan. It could also be argued that Lacan influences Irigaray's writing, although he is never directly mentioned in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, her most explicitly psychoanalytic account, and his absence is conspicuous. Lacan is seminal for Irigaray's work for several reasons as Elizabeth Grosz outlines:

These three key areas in Lacan's work – the interlocking domains of subjectivity, sexuality, and language define broad interests shared by many

² See Sigmund Freud "Femininity," in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, vol. 22 (London: Hogarth, 1953-1974) 130.

³ Irigaray, TS, 48

French feminists. His decentring of the rational, conscious subject (identified with the ego), his undermining of common assumptions about the intentionality or purposiveness of the speaking subject's 'rational' discourses, and his problematizations of the idea of a 'natural' sexuality, have helped to free feminist theory of the constraints of a largely metaphysical and implicitly masculine, notion of subjectivity – humanism. He has thus raised the possibility of understanding subjectivity in terms other than those dictated by patriarchal common-sense.⁴

Carolyn Burke suggests that the writing of Lacan might be considered more of an intertextual weaving, rather than a direct authority, in Irigaray's work; he is the paterfamilias of the psychoanalytic family who refuses to acknowledge the independent wisdom of his daughters, such as Irigaray, defiant in her rebellion. His precepts begins to represent for Irigaray the Law of the Father, "le Maître" (the Master), and the phallogocentric order that resists a female sexuality independent of the phallus's economy. And thus, Irigaray begins a re-reading of phallogocentrism, finding it in collusion with a logocentrism,⁵ positing itself as 'truth,' and pushing the notion of 'woman' back in the conceptual machine of phallogocentrism. Later, she writes of Lacan,

⁴ Grosz, Elizabeth, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 148.

⁵ Carolyn Burke contends that Jacques Derrida's (1973) essay "La Question du style" is a provocative influence, hovering in the background of both *Speculum* and *This Sex Which Is Not One*, amplifying the charge that Lacanian discourse is phallogocentric. In this essay, Derrida suggests that Friedrich Nietzsche might have sought, in spite of himself to "describe a femininity that is not defined by a male desire to supply a lack." Derrida argues that Lacanian theory weds *phallogocentrism* to *logocentrism*, implying that psychoanalytic discourse is guilty of identifying the phallus with the *Logos* as transcendent and unexamined grounds of signification, of assigning meaning. For Derrida, *logocentrism* implies an attitude of nostalgia for a lost presence or longing for some first cause of being or meaning and results from the human desire to posit a central presence as the locus of coherence and authenticity. Therefore, the phallus becomes "the signifier of all signifiers." See especially pp. 247-49, in *Spurs* pp. 62-65. See Carolyn Burke, "Irigaray Through the Looking Glass," in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. Carolyn Burke et al (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 37-56. See also chapter one, note 32.

Nor did I want, as some have thought or written, to enact the parricide of one of my supposed masters. Not at all. I wanted to begin to define what a woman is, thus myself as a woman—and not only *a* woman but as freely belonging to the female gender or generic—by carrying out a partial process of limitation or negation relative to my natural immediacy and relative to the representation I had been given of what I was as a woman, this is, the other of/for man, the other of male culture.⁶

Insisting that she is not a vengeful daughter of psychoanalysis, she resources the psychoanalytic tradition to reveal its collusion with a philosophy of sexual indifference. Freud, her starting point for *Speculum*, is historically reversed as she concludes with Plato. As her subsequent works detail, her most significant dialogue partners include Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Lévinas.

Psychoanalysis, vis-à-vis philosophy, is a relevant discourse in which Luce Irigaray has come to see society perpetuating a culture of sexual indifference. She even declares psychoanalysis as “a possible enclave of philosophic discourse.”⁷ Irigaray focuses on several key aspects of psychoanalysis to explore a philosophic basis for her symbolic and imaginary conceptualization of sexual difference. These terms become key in order to properly organize her thinking and conceptualize her framework of the relational matrix that she notes must be a nuanced aspect of her philosophic claims, a relational context she

⁶ Irigaray, ILTY, 63-64.

⁷ Irigaray, TS, 160/155.

argues that moves her away from a pure biological or anatomical construction of woman and man.⁸ The next few sections are dedicated toward their explanation.

2.1. *The phallus*

In the post-Freud Lacanian reading, biology becomes less salient because of the distinction between the phallus and the penis. The penis, a biological organ, is not the same as the phallus, the “Master signifier.”⁹ Irigaray expounds,

Lacan specifies that *what is at issue as potentially lacking in castration is not so much the penis – a real organ – as the phallus, or the signifier of wish*.¹⁰ And it is in *the mother* that castration must, first and foremost, be located by the child, if he is to exit from the imaginary orbit of maternal desire and be returned to the father, that is, to the possessor of the phallic emblem that makes the mother desire him and prefer him to the child.¹¹

For the mother the phallus represents her lack, her desire for completion of what the father both represents and possesses. Thus, the phallus connotes both female and male desire.

The phallus, representative of the penis, signifies the basic purpose of language – to plug up the hole at the center of all being. Masculinity is therefore subordination to the reign of the

⁸ In her 1994 interview, “‘Je—Luce Irigaray’: A meeting with Luce Irigaray,” Luce Irigaray explains the closure of a purely genealogical vertical relationship of mother-son which augurs mastery as a replacement for generative ability. Luce Irigaray offers a horizontal relationship between the two genders involving the negative and irreducibility of difference as a movement away from the previous closure. She states, “. . . it’s not simply a question of anatomy: it’s a question of the relation between subjects. The relation of the little boy to his mother is different from the little girl’s relation.” Irigaray, WWC, 158.

⁹ See Theresa Brennan, “Psychoanalytic Feminism,” in *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Alison M. Jaggar and Iris Marion Young (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998) 272-79.

¹⁰ Jacques Lacan, “Propos directives pour un congrès sur la sexualité féminine,” In *Ecrits* (Paris, 1966).

¹¹ Irigaray, TS, 61.

symbolic, the Law of the Father (and fear of castration), which is the foundation of social order.¹² Irigaray problematizes the reign of the phallus in the following:

The phallus, quite to the contrary, functions all too often in psychoanalysis as the guarantee of sense, the sense of senses(s), the “figure,” the “form,” the ultimate signifier through which the ancient metaphors of onto-theology would be set straight. Off with the masks. The suspicion is unavoidable that the Same is being postulated again in this ‘new’ signifying economy, organized under the control of the said Phallus.¹³

While Lacan has established a phallomorphism as the reigning transcendent signifier, Irigaray subverts and displaces his phallocratic economy with what Diana Fuss describes as an isomorphism. According to Fuss, throughout *Speculum* and *This Sex*, Irigaray actually defies the logic of the gaze with the logic of the touch, keeping woman in touch with herself, and shifting the focus from the sight to touch.¹⁴ Irigaray challenges Freud’s Gaze, calling it “. . . at stake from the outset.”¹⁵ The little girl, the woman, supposedly has “*nothing* you can see” which leads her to problematize Freud’s penis-sight economy and sexual void left to woman as “*Nothing to be seen is equivalent to have no thing. No being and no truth.*”¹⁶

Because man’s sexual imaginary is phallomorphic, Irigaray understands Western culture to have privileged a mechanics of solid over the mechanics of fluids: therefore

¹² See Drucilla Cornell, *Beyond Accommodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction, and the Law* (New York: Routledge, 1991) 53.

¹³ Irigaray, S, 40/44

¹⁴ Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

¹⁵ Irigaray, S, 47/53.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 47, 48.

features such as production, property, order, form, unity, visibility, and erection dominate.¹⁷ The female imaginary is therefore more approximate to the property of liquids: continuous, compressible, dilatable, viscous, conductible, and diffusible.¹⁸ Irigaray's female imaginary critiques directly Lacan's refusal to listen to women speak of their own pleasure, their *jouissance*.

2.2. *Desire*

For Lacan, language fills the gap because it communicates, and enables us to communicate with one another, overcoming the loneliness at the core of each of us.¹⁹ But the reality of the universe is that it only overcomes this emptiness temporarily and to a limited extent. Words are never powerful enough to get it right. The difference for Lacan between what we want to say (the need) and what we actually say (the demand), he calls desire.

It is a movement, a transpersonal energy directed to others in a desire of another to constitute itself as conscious-desire and the desire of an "other":

It must be posited that, as a fact of an animal at the mercy of language, man's desire is the desire of the Other. [This formulation] concerns a quite different function from that of the primary identification . . . for it does not involve the assumption by the subject of the *insignia* of the other, but rather the conditions that the subject has to find the constituting structure of his desire

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ See especially Irigaray's essay, "The 'Mechanics of Fluids,'" TS, 106-118.

¹⁹ Brennan, *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, 272-79.

in the same gap opened up by the effect of the signifiers in those who come to represent the Other for him, in so far as his demand is subjected to them.²⁰

Judith Butler has described Lacan's desire as "... the moment of longing that consciousness may be said to suffer, but which is only 'revealed' through the displacements, ruptures, and fissures of consciousness itself."²¹ As the subject cannot locate the imaginary libidinal unity with the mother's body, desire becomes its own object attempting to overcome this lack through the father's linguistic expression. In Judith Butler's words:

The subject can no longer be understood as the agency of its desire, or as the very structure of desire itself; the subject of desire has emerged as an internal contradiction. Founded as a necessary defense against the libidinal fusion with the maternal body, the subject is understood as the product of a prohibition. Desire is the residue of that early union, the affective memory of a pleasure prior to individuation. Desire is thus both an effort to dissolve the subject that bars the way to that pleasure and the contemporary evidence of that pleasure's irrecoverability.²²

Desire is not about a biological urge; it refers specifically to a psychical reality. Desire exists in a space between the biological and the social. Freud referred to this place as the *andere Schauplatz* or, the "other scene" of mental life. Here, the psychical governs. Freud theorized that the desire to have something like *the* sex organ would lead girls in the desire to have something like it, and this desire would form the basis for "normal

²⁰ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* (London: Hogarth, 1977) 264.

²¹ Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987) 187.

²² Ibid.

womanhood.” Desire is inscribed in a sexual economy of sameness. Luce Irigaray observes that the desire for the little girl, the woman is more of an “exile,” “an extradition,” “an exmatriation,” a displacement of the origin.²³ Rather than concede desire for the phallic economy as normative to libidinal life, she explains,

What really occurs, of course, is that the representation, the signifier of one stage in woman’s libidinal economy (and not the least important since it is the one in which she was perhaps marked from her first stage by her remark) is proscribed. But let us say that *in the beginning was the end of her story*, and that from now she will have one dictated to her: by the man-father.²⁴

The desire for sameness takes over, as long as a *single* desire is in control.²⁵ This leads Irigaray to question,

What fault, deficiency, theft, rape, rejection, repression, censorship of representations of her sexuality bring about such a subjection to man’s desire-discourse-law about her sex? Such an atrophy of her libido? Which will never be admissible, envisionable, except insofar as it props up male desire. . . . Woman’s fetishization of the male organ must indeed be an indispensable support of its price on the sexual market.²⁶

²³ Irigaray, S, 43.

²⁴ Irigaray, S, 43/47

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 53/61.

Again in “Je—Luce Irigaray,” she explains that men and women must examine the history of hom(m)osexuality²⁷ and rape that is the real and cultural legacy of sexual relations without difference, an urge to violate the other that she urges all people to examine.²⁸ But what she finds singular in our society is that men do not have to listen to themselves talk, effectively disregarding difference.²⁹ That is to say, the relationship between the sexes has been marked by the male subject’s appropriation and violation of the other. She is careful to distinguish these sexual relations as different than a theorization of sexual choice, which she would signify as ‘homosexuality’ or ‘gay and lesbian rights’, a different arena of theorization than to which she is referring as sameness, appropriation, and rape.

Irigaray continues her critical engagement with desire as she laments, “All desire is connected to madness.”³⁰ If we understand desire as wisdom, moderation, and truth, all that is left for the other to bear, according to Irigaray, is the burden of madness, which it does not want to recognize in itself. Desire for the woman is ultimately a profound realization of her lack and the object of desire for the male sexuate subject.

2.3. *The Symbolic*

The symbolic represents a system of representation that according to Irigaray, cannot ‘translate’ woman’s desire. It is the junction, according to Whitford, where the body, psyche and language meet. It was Lacan who exploited the concept of the symbolic, dismantling Descartes’ rational ego, and introducing sexuality as legitimate academic and

²⁷ The deliberate placement of the “m” in parenthesis indicates the play with the French translation for man, *homme*. Hom(m)osexuality must be distinguished from homosexuality, with the former meaning the symbolic reign of phallic signifiers to determine sexual norms. See Irigaray, *S*, 98, and Elizabeth Grosz, “The Hetero and the Homo,” *Engaging with Irigaray*, 341.

²⁸ See Irigaray, *WWC*, 163-4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Irigaray, *IR*, 35.

political discourses. Instead of the thinking being (*res cogitans*), Lacan posits the speaking being, spoken through language itself—a discursive/linguistic order constituting human socio-cultural and sexual activity.

In *To Speak Is Never Neutral*, Luce Irigaray suggests that the alphabet corresponds to a non-relation between the same and the other.³¹ The discursive/ linguistic order constitutes and affirms indifference. The symbolic order becomes possible when the Father forbids both the mother and child from satisfying their desires fully, directing them to the necessity of language, the symbolization of desire, and desire succumbs to demand.³² The feminine is thus symbolically insignificant.

Irigaray begins to suspect the phallus (Phallus) of representing a contemporary god, jealous of his prerogatives:

We might suspect it [the Phallus] of claiming, on this basis to be the ultimate meaning of all discourse, the standard of truth and propriety, in particular as regards sex, the signifier and/or the ultimate signified of all desire, in addition to continuing, as emblem and agent of the patriarchal system, to shore up the name of the father (Father).³³

The symbolic functions to affirm male sexual desire and frames the male speaking subject as the only legitimated speaking being. Irigaray must challenge the

³¹ She explains, “Each letter of the alphabet constitutes . . . one set, or sub-set, comprised of *one* and *only one* element. The intersections among these sub-sets are, in proper functioning of (alphabetic) writing and reading, null and void. At the literal level there is not give and take of same and other.” Irigaray, TSN, 121. She speculates on the difference in symbolic force between the alphabet and graphism. She observes that letters are spaced apart in an absolute distinction from each other, graphisms justify questions, waverings, and hesitations of meaning permitting the writer to submit to rhythms, the gaze, and size or nature the available medium, the sharpness of the stylus, and the fluidity of the inscripting medium.

³² Irigaray, TS, 61.

³³ *Ibid.*, 67

potency of the symbolic from within, “jamming the works of the theoretical machine,”³⁴ and conflating the excesses within the scheme. Often she explores the exclusive grip of the symbolic through illegitimated forms of speech, such as hysteria, madness, or mad desire. She also explores what is outside of the border of discursive legitimacy, such as graphisms, images and icons, or the remainder or excess of discursive/symbolic phallogocentrism.

2.4. The Death of Mother

In a short chapter titled, “The Bodily Encounter with the Mother,” Irigaray notes that the male sex understands its desire as, “wisdom, moderation, truth,” it has left the other sex, “. . . to bear the burden of the madness it did not want to attribute to itself, recognize in itself.”³⁵ According to Irigaray, desire and madness come together as both sexes relate to the mythos of motherhood. To remember the mother is to upset the symbolic economy of reproduction and the maternal in the social order. For the purpose of this thesis, Irigaray’s analysis of motherhood is important as it connects to ethical questions of contraception and abortion rights. According to Irigaray’s critique, scientific, political, and legal discourses and practices privilege men to manage and to define women and their social roles.³⁶ Her analysis of motherhood is meant to give critical space to define this relation anew, thus reconceiving our ethical quandaries concerning what it is to be a good mother, and one with a civic identity of her own.

Irigaray begins to query about the desire of the mother herself—the woman-mother: “Desire for her, her desire that is what is forbidden by the law of the father, of all

³⁴ Ibid., 107.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

fathers: fathers of families, fathers of nations, religious father, professor-father doctor-father, lover-fathers, etc.”³⁷ She is phallic in that her relationship has value as long as it is tied to reproduction, maternity, and as an object of desire. Why are these mothers shrouded in darkness, blackness, lost? Because there is a murder more archaic than the murder of the father in Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*: the buried act of matricide. The mother has been buried under the phallocentric reduction of maternity, crippling both the mother and, eventually, the daughter. Irigaray exemplifies the death of mother through the murder of Clytemnestra in the *Oresteia*.

According to Irigaray, Clytemnestra signifies a break with the symbol of virgin mother, venerated especially in European Christian culture. An engrossed lover, she will kill her husband in a crime of passion. Agamemnon, returning from years of war in pursuit of the ideal Helen, has sacrificed his and Clytemnestra’s daughter, Iphigenia, in order to ensure military success. He arrives home with a female slave, and Clytemnestra, assuming her husband was dead, has taken a lover of her own. Irigaray notes that the tragedians often present the murder of Agamemnon as fueled by Clytemnestra’s jealousy, fear, and frustration, ignoring the sacrificed daughter who lost her life so men could resolve their disputes. She goes on to note that the oracle of Apollo, Zeus’s cherished son (God the father), stirs her son, Orestes, to demand her death in return. Orestes, following the rule of the God-Father kills his mother, and he and his sister Electra go mad.

Irigaray notes that Electra, the daughter, remains mad, but Orestes, the matricidal son, must be saved from madness in order that he may “establish the patriarchal order.”³⁸

³⁷ Ibid., 36.

³⁸ Ibid., 37.

One can sense Irigaray's wariness of Orestes' savior, Apollo, in the following: "Apollo, a lover of men rather than women, the narcissistic lover of their bodies and their words, a lover who does not make love much more than Athena, his sister in Zeus, who helps him to recover him from his madness."³⁹ The madness, notes Irigaray, follows him everywhere he goes, and she identifies this "troop of enraged women" as the Furies.⁴⁰ But rather than simply portray these mad furies pejoratively, Irigaray will cast their voices as, "revolutionary hysterics" who oppose the supremacy of patriarchy itself.⁴¹ Irigaray translates the story into its contemporary familiarity:

The mythology underlying patriarchy has not changed. What the *Oresteia* describes for us still takes place. Here and there, regulation Athenas whose one begetter is the head of the Father-King still burst forth. Completely in his pay, in the pay of the men in power, they bury beneath their sanctuary women in struggle so that they will no longer disturb the new order of the home, the order of the polis, now the only order.⁴²

What we are left with, laments Irigaray, is the death of mother, a son left unchecked, and a double sense of burial: "the burial of the madness of women – and the burial of women in madness."⁴³ But with the death of the mother is the coming of the goddess virgin, an ideal woman, like Athena, from the father and one who will obey his law and critically "forsake the mother."⁴⁴ A similar death of mother will be unsung, unlamented in Oedipus when he understands the horror of infringing upon the law of the Father. For Irigaray these

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

narratives are symbolic exemplars of the phallus replacing the umbilical cord, and anything associated with the mother's body.⁴⁵ I suggest that Irigaray's work is significant in that she uncovers how the portrayal of mothers as mad creates a false sense of need for supposed male temperance, order, and patriarchal power. In our cultural attempt to rescue the children from the mother's madness, we forget the sacrifice of the daughter that the father willingly made to settle his own religious ritual or political disputes. Are we still a society that sacrifices our young girls, and wonders why the women go mad?

Additionally, Irigaray notes, the contempt of the mother is also contempt for her body. The father fears a regression back to the primal womb (Plato's cave, perhaps?), and will use language (the symbolic) and a forename will replace what Irigaray dubs "the irreducible mark of birth: the navel."⁴⁶ To ensure the severance from the mother, she notes the way we culturally scorn her body, particularly the womb and the breast. She describes the womb as the "first house to surround us" and the place where we first "sojourn" and become bodies; in the oral phase, the breasts nourish.⁴⁷ Yet, any return back to the mother and her body is perceived as "dangerous."⁴⁸ I understand Irigaray's work to signal that this cultural portrayal of phallic anxiety, dark madness, and generative power that must be concealed continues to silence women and perpetuates their lack of language to combat their own erasure from the field of positive sexual representation. Irigaray maintains, "The substratum is the woman who reproduces the social order, who is made this order's infrastructure: the whole of our western culture is based upon the murder of the mother."⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Ibid., 38-39

⁴⁶ Ibid., 39.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 40.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 47.

Irigaray turns Freud's castration anxiety around as an unconscious memory of the sacrifice which sanctifies phallic erection as the only sexual value – an erection that the postulate and name of the Father cannot even keep erect. She contends,

Unless this remains unthought – this murder of the father signifies a desire to take his place, a rival and competitive desire, but a desire to do away with the one who artificially cut the link with the mother in order to take over the creative power of all worlds especially the female world.⁵⁰

One may wonder who actually fears more—the mother without sexual identity whose fear is dominated by the instrument of the power; or the man who fears his phallus will be revealed as impotent, and must remain continually watchful of any threat to his symbolic order? Both sound exhausting. Irigaray clearly underscores the elevation of the phallus to symbolic law and order of the cosmos, and the consequent shrouding of the female origin, her sexualities, and her place as mother. What I also believe is important in the death of mother is the lament, the cry, fury, left to the woman. If language is the father-tongue, which she says can never a mother-tongue, what language is left to women, other than hysteria? Hysteria can be understood not only as the guttural reaction of fury, shame, and haunting; it can also be understood, she argues, as subtle subversion to resist the phallic language, and engage in something that resists assimilation, symmetry, and absorption in the symbolic economy. Again Irigaray argues,

But I have never heard the word 'hysteria' being used in a valorizing way in these progressive circles. Yet there is a revolutionary potential in

⁵⁰ Ibid., 41-42.

hysteria. Even in her paralysis, the hysteric exhibits a potential for gestures and desire. . . . A movement of revolt and refuse a desire for/of the living mother who would be more than a reproductive body in the pay of the polis, a living, loving woman. It is because they neither want to see nor hear that movement that they so despise the hysteric.⁵¹

But one wonders if Irigaray wants the mad desire of mother to be legitimated within the symbolic order as reasonable, rational; or, if she wants to insist on this madness as a form of subversion to the phallus, and continue in its hysteria? One can see how hysteria becomes an alternate form of communication, resisting the 'rationality' that powerfully affirms the association between language and reason. Yet, I concur with Margaret Whitford that Irigaray's aim isn't to substitute the rational with the irrational, thus upholding the binary. Instead she is " . . . *restructuring* . . . the construction of the rational subject."⁵² In order to do so, she will challenge the "imperialism of the unconscious"⁵³ and extend the notion of the imaginary.

2.5. *The Imaginary*

If Irigaray's aim is to restructure the construction of the rational subject, her place of analysis begins in the unconscious, going back to the pre-discursive. She will retrace Freud and Lacan's theory that a child has two vital moments of identity formation 1) the development of the imaginary body, 2) the selection of sexual difference through language. Lacan developed the imaginary as a psychoanalytic concept from his reading of Freud and

⁵¹ Ibid., 47-48.

⁵² Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) 53.

⁵³ Irigaray, IR, 81.

Freud's theories of the Ego and of narcissism.⁵⁴ According to Grosz, "The ego operates within an imaginary order, an order in which it strives to see itself reflected in its relation to others."⁵⁵ The infant, physically dependent, begins to form its identity in the mirror-stage, as it gazes at the mirror (which can be a person, presumably the mother) and sees an idealized or unified version of itself, a stark contrast to the infant's fragmented experience of lack. This more ideal version serves as a "... narcissistic structure of investments which transform the image of otherness into a representation of the self."⁵⁶ For Lacan this sole identification of the child to its mother can only lead to a negative cycle of projecting, internalizing unconscious phantasies, and thus the need for the symbolic order. Lacan's symbolic order is predicated upon a unitary imaginary body; in the symbolic order the father-master is the phallic signifier, the coherence of language and its external definitions render a clear, social identity and sexual difference.⁵⁷

According to Irigaray, the Western imaginary has been a male imaginary, where woman is a "prop,"⁵⁸ reduced to "muteness or mimicry."⁵⁹ But she suspects there could be space for a repressed female imaginary to be made visible and she explores the possibility of a multiple, fragmented-nonlinear, rather than an unified-progressive, imaginary body.⁶⁰ She speaks of a multiplicity of female desire and language understood as "shards,"

⁵⁴ See Lacan's essay, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" *Ecrits: A Selection*. Tr. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 1-2, 4-5

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989) xviii.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ I do want to note Margaret Whitford's observation of the prevalence of the French imaginary related to Jacques Lacan's work, yet, she argues it would be a mistake to read Irigaray simply taking over his analysis of the imaginary. Whitford contends that Irigaray's use of the term ought to be read against a broader intellectual milieu. According to Whitford, the imaginary has Lacanian and pre-Lacanian currency, and is importantly picked up by phenomenological discourses and psychoanalytic discourses, all of which contextualize, Irigaray's usage of the female imaginary. See Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray*, 54-7.

⁵⁸ Irigaray, TS, 25

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 164

⁶⁰ Irigaray, TS 28, 164.

“scattered remnants,”⁶¹ and a sexuality that is “plural.”⁶² With such a different imaginary body, to sexually differentiate via language would be an entirely distinctive or asymmetrical order from Lacan’s, one predicated on a different imaginary body. Starting from the point of a multiple, decentered subject, female subjectivity thus exceeds Lacan’s framework.

Irigaray employs the imaginary to speak and symbolize the sexual woman’s body in non-phallic and non-maternal terms. The concept of the imaginary Irigaray has posited makes possible a female imaginary, corresponding to the morphology of the female body (the two lips), with its own space-time modalities, where women are no longer exiles wandering the land of a phallocratic economy, but are able to find a house of their own. They are no longer in ‘deadly immediacy’ (the absence of symbolic representation), but rather, they speak, discovering the divine that will end their incessant comparison to one another. The daughter will have someone to identify with, providing a boundary between the two and “skin” of their own, creating a symbolic object of exchange to mediate, to move, and to breathe freely.

2.6. *The Mirror*

In *Speculum*, Irigaray questions the psychosexual imaginary of Freud (and included in this critique is implicitly understood Lacan), and develops her thesis through the concept of the mirror. Lacan’s mirror stage determines the child’s future identification: “It conceals, or freezes, the infant’s lack of motor co-ordination and the fragmentation of its drives.”⁶³ Grosz explains the result:

⁶¹ Ibid., 30

⁶² Ibid., 28

⁶³ Jacqueline Rose. *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne*, 30.

The mirror stage positions the child within a physical, psychical, and familial space, but it does not empower the child to act as an agent or subject in a larger linguistic and economic community. In other words, while the child remains bound to the other as its *double*, it cannot participate in social or symbolic exchange with others.⁶⁴

The child must break the cycle of imaginary projection, or enclosure with its mother, in order to create room for a “third, independent term.”⁶⁵ Irigaray articulates how the relationship to the mother, the desire to return to the origin, will differ drastically for the boy and the girl:

Therefore, if you are a boy, you will want as soon as you reach the phallic stage, to return to the origin, turn back toward the origin. That is possess the mother, get inside the mother who is the place of origin, in order to reestablish continuity with it and to see and know what happens there. And moreover to reproduce yourself there. If you are born a girl, the question is quite other. No return toward, inside the place of origin is possible unless you have a penis. The girl will herself be the place where origin is repeated, re-produced and reproduced, though this does not mean that she thereby repeats “her” original topos, “her” origin. On the contrary, she must break any contact with it, or with her, and making one last turn, by a kind of vault – up one *more* branch of the family – she must get to the place where origin can be repeated *by being counted*.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, 50.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Irigaray, S, 40.

Irigaray understands all of western discourse to display this effect, the male projecting his own ego on to the world, which then becomes a mirror allowing him to see his reflection wherever he goes. The reflection doubles his distance and alienates his relation to the body, a 'disinterested' neutered space; she criticizes the illusion of a space of pure reflection that reflects everything except him.

Are we to assume that a mirror has always already been inserted, and speculates every perception and conception of the world, *with the exception of itself*, whose reflection would only be a factor of time? Thus extension would always already be re-staged and re-projected by the subject who, alone, would not be situated there. Does the subject derive his power from the appropriation of this non-place of the mirror? And from speculation? And as speculation constitutes itself as such in this way, it cannot be analyzed but falls into oblivion, re-emerging to play its part only when some new effect of symmetry is needed in the system. By some recourse to the imaginary, perhaps, that is both other and the same?⁶⁷

Where is the woman? She as the body/matter becomes the medium of the materials of which the mirror is made, thus never seeing reflections of herself. Grosz rightly acknowledges that "She asserts that psychoanalysis can only represent the imaginary and the symbolic from the point of view of the boy; it has no means available to elaborate what the imaginary and symbolic may be in the girl's terms."⁶⁸ Irigaray's *speculum* is an offering

⁶⁷ Ibid., 205-6

⁶⁸ Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, 170. It is noteworthy that Irigaray employs her critique largely against Freud's account of "Femininity." In *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. ed. James Strachey, vol. 22 (London: Hogarth, 1969) 117-118.

of another reflective identity. Not the self-distancing platonic mirror, but a self-touching speculum, curved, distorted, a medium of women's self-observation and self-representation.⁶⁹

For any hope of renewal, the male imaginary must recognize its own unconscious, cease to use the mother as a prop, and the female imaginary needs to find a voice of her own.⁷⁰ It was this daring, this presumption afforded by language that she could discover a symbolic place for the girl, which removed her from her former university.

While sharing a commitment to anti-humanism and unlocking the archaic force of the pre-oedipal, Irigaray develops her thesis through the mother-daughter relationship. According to Grosz, she is more interested in elaborating a theory of enunciation that seeks to make explicit the sexualization of all discourses. Irigaray, while arguing against a deeply phallogocentric psychology, critiques psychoanalysis from within, not merely railing a polemic of attacks against Freud, but rather, pointing out what is missing, absent, unheard – namely, she turns psychoanalysis on itself to pose questions of sexual difference.

Irigaray uses psychoanalysis to formulate and develop a philosophy that reveals patriarchal and phallogocentric power, power that the Oedipus drama in many ways hands over to the masculine gender, including the power of religion and politics. The law of father has become mixed with the divine law or creed and like the gods granting fire to Heraclitus, the psychoanalytic gods, writes Irigaray, have granted linguistic power to men. "Without divine power," she contends, "men could not have supplanted mother-daughter relations. . . . But man becomes God by giving himself an invisible father, a father

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Whitford, *Luce Irigaray*, 70-74.

language.”⁷¹ Like the biblical passage in John 1, man becomes God by becoming the Word, and then as Word made flesh, she argues, linguistic code solidifies the progenerating power of semen through *logos*, which desires to become all-embracing truth. Phallogocentric patriarchy colludes with logocentrism to produce what Derrida dubs ‘phallogocentrism,’ the sexual and linguistic core of psychoanalysis and the basis for the diagnosis of female dysfunction. She writes that men appropriate linguistic code to attempt to do at least three things: “1. prove they are fathers; 2. prove they are more powerful than mother-women; 3. prove they are capable of engendering the cultural domain as they have been engendered in the natural domain of the ovum, the womb, the body of a woman.”⁷²

Irigaray suggests that the power of the symbolic has colluded with the monosexual identity formation of psychoanalysis to perpetuate further sexual indifference. Psychoanalysis thus exemplifies through its matrix of sex, language, and genealogy the absence of sexual difference. While she critically engages the field, I argue, she has not abandoned its tenets, but like her other projects, seeks to uncover, redefine, and redistribute the value of sexual identities within this matrix. She brings to the conscience the unconscious background of the mother-daughter relationship and reformulates the concept of the imaginary to be the condition of possibility for a female sexual identity. She also minimizes the totalizing effect of the symbolic and the assumed deification of *logos*, arguing instead that true incarnation abounds when intersubjectivity is present.

2.7. *Body Morphology*

⁷¹ Irigaray, LSG, 120.

⁷² Ibid.

Irigaray's sexual difference weaves a philosophy of the body with ethics—for this Belgian woman, bodies matter. At the same time, body anatomy is not her main focus; rather, it is body *morphology* that she theorizes, a body in relation to language. As elaborated, she is quite critical of Freud and his reduction of female desire to female anatomy and the woman's lack of the male sex organ. In an interview in *This Sex*, she explicitly states, "Another 'symptom' of the fact that Freud's discourse belongs to an unanalyzed tradition lies in his tendency to fall back upon anatomy as an irrefutable criterion of truth."⁷³ Irigaray exerts tremendous energy to philosophize a theory that embraces the reality of the female subject without assuming that subject is reducible to his or her anatomy.

But the morphology, or perhaps "horizon"⁷⁴ of the body, becomes an existential reality for sexual difference and she combines a philosophy of the body that keeps nature and culture in touch with each other. Female subjectivity has frequently been reduced to anatomy in phallogentric literature that either sublimates or valorizes female sexuality. Irigaray's project complies with neither concept of the female subject. As Elizabeth Grosz

⁷³ Irigaray, TS, 70-71.

⁷⁴ Horizon is an important notion Irigaray often associates with a gendered ideal. She refers to the term in *Sexes and Genealogies*, one her most direct spiritual elaborations. Spatial relations, like a horizon, are important for her account of sexual difference, particularly rethinking the vertical and the horizontal. A horizon is typically understood as "The line at which the earth's surface and the sky appear to meet." "horizon." *Oxford Dictionaries*. Oxford University Press. <https://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/horizon> (accessed June 18, 2015). For Irigaray's purposes, earth, often associated with mortal and material relations (immanence), represents the horizontal, while the sky, often associated with immortal or celestial notions (transcendence), represents the vertical. A horizon thus becomes the place where these two meet, or where the vertical and the horizontal form a critical axis. She will argue that each gender needs its own horizon. She writes, "In order to become, it is essential to have a gender or an essence (consequently a sexuate essence) as *horizon*." Irigaray, SG, 61. See also horizon associated with gender in SG, 62, 63, 66, 67, 163, She also Penelope Deutscher's essay analyzing the vertical and horizontal in Irigaray's work, "'The Only Diabolical Thing About Women...': Luce Irigaray on Divinity," *Hypatia* 9, no. 4 (1994): 88-111, doi:10.1111/j.1527-2001.1994.tb00651.x. For a more detailed discussion of Irigaray and the divine horizon see Peta Hinton, "The Divine Horizon: Rethinking Political Community in Luce Irigaray's 'Divine Women,'" *Hypatia* 28, no. 3 (2012): 436-51, doi:10.1111/hypa.12014.

points out, she is interested in the ‘blind spots’ that run throughout phallographic discourses on femininity, female identity, and the maternal function.⁷⁵ Grosz explains that Irigaray’s work is not a *true* description of women or femininity—true in the sense that it is superior to *false*. These sorts of claims, argues Grosz, are exactly what patriarchal culture conditions as the possibility for truth to be valued. As such, as articulated in chapter one, the two notions are the positive or privation of each other,⁷⁶ creating binaries of opposition. Her aim, insists Grosz, is to make explicit what phallographic images exclude—what exceeds the mirror. She is not positing a truth about women or the female subject, but rather, as previously noted, exposing an isomorphism between male sexuality and patriarchal language, a mirroring or entwining of phallographic discourses and oedipalised forms of male sexuality. While caught in the language and saturation of patriarchal language symbols and a patriarchal imaginary, Irigaray attempts to exceed performatively or mimic (exploiting the Greek term *mimesis*) what patriarchy posits in order to resist its solidification of female identity and possibly discover something new: female subjectivity. I argue that to read her work and conclude that she essentializes female identity misses the strategy of her writing and misinterprets the mimetic play. I elaborate on this argument in the next section.

3. *Essentialism and Difference: The Question of Nature and Culture*

In chapter one I noted Irigaray’s supposition that nature and culture form a dialectic with each sex, which creates a double dialectic. Irigaray takes the reality of difference seriously, for it causes her to return to the aim of her political project: “. . . how to distribute

⁷⁵ Grosz’s excellent essay on Irigaray in *Sexual Subversions*, 100-139.

⁷⁶ See chapter one, section 1.1.3, *Asymmetrical Contraries of Sexual Difference*.

this difference.”⁷⁷ Unless this reality is thoroughly recognized, women will not be free of exploitation, for this she reasons, “Women cannot be liberated from a reality other than a sexual one because this is the starting point from which they are exploited.”⁷⁸ The notion that all exploitation begins with sexual exploitation is a pivotal and volatile concept for Irigaray. First, it becomes apparent that Irigaray isn’t a philosopher only interested in ahistorical theory, but here she is engaged in the economic, social, and, cultural struggle of women, and she is theorizing toward feminist outcomes⁷⁹—towards an all-inclusive global ethic.

But her claims for a primal sexual difference are especially disturbing for many feminists who have rightly observed other dominant differences of discrimination and exploitation that are always at play with one’s sex, such as, economic class, social status, ethnic identity, race, age, religion, and sexual orientation. In her later works, like *I Love to You*, she points unequivocally to the pervasive scope of sexual difference. She writes,

Without doubt the most appropriate content for the universal is sexual difference. Indeed, this content is both real and universal. Sexual difference is an immediate natural given and it is a real and irreducible component of the universal. *The whole of human kind is composed of women and men and of nothing else.* The problem of race is, in fact, a secondary problem—except

⁷⁷ See Irigaray, WAW, 155.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ In her work, *Je, Tu, Nous*, and *Thinking the Difference*, Irigaray writes for a more general readership addressing issues of practical political concern for women’s rights. She writes, “All the following issues of women’s lives ought to be made the concern of and written into civil law: temporary concessions on contraception and abortion; partial and provisional protection from and penalties against public and domestic violence against women; the abuse of female bodies for the purpose of pornography or advertising; discrimination in the sexist definition and use of the body, or images, of language; rape, kidnapping, murder, and the exploitation of children who are—it seems it has to be repeated—the fruit of female, not male, labor etc.” Irigaray, JTN, 78-9.

from a geographical point of view?—which means we cannot see the wood for the trees, and the same goes for other cultural diversities—religious, economic and political ones.⁸⁰ (my italics)

Anglo-American feminists, particularly the second wave feminists, worked diligently to raise awareness that the category of “woman” is a social construction premised upon the female body, and the social ascription of roles and cultural norms assigned to masculine and feminine ideals are not biologically given; they are, in fact, social constructions.⁸¹ Gender, as a social construction, now becomes distinct from the assumed truth of biological sex.

3.1. *The Wrong-Headed Charge of Essentialism*

I address the critiques of essentialism by first considering the multiple levels upon which essentialism is charged. Just as Irigaray’s writing technique and insistence for sexual difference is deliberately fluid, open, and resistant to unity and closure, so her response to essentialism is unsurprisingly similar. First, I examine how she constructively uses language, and the fluid way she writes without certain Anglo-American distinctions such as sex versus gender. Second, I note how her proximity to Derridean deconstruction renders her project open and able to withstand any closure that might reify a static notion of woman. Third, I address the theory that she may be a “strategic” essentialist in order to disrupt the binary opposition of essentialist/non-essentialist binary pair, which is itself in

⁸⁰ Irigaray, ILTY, 47.

⁸¹ A myriad of thinkers have written on the development of gender as a social construction. A notable, but not exhaustive list, includes Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1949,1989); Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984); and Monique Wittig, ‘One is Not Born a Woman’, *Feminist Issues* 1:2 (1981): 47-54.

service to patriarchal assumptions. Finally, I address concerns over the semantics of body morphology, elaborating how one must read *with* Irigaray, drawing from her insistence that cultural change must happen at the level of language and subject relations, not just quantity of goods. In her words, we suffer from a lack of comprehension of the relations between “individual bodies, social bodies, and the linguistic economy.”⁸² Furthermore, “Language represents an essential tool of production for this liberation.”⁸³ She uses her training as a linguist, psychoanalyst and philosopher to develop the terms morphology, nature, rhythm, and *le féminin*, and when contextualized properly, I argue these terms may be understood as moving beyond essentialism.

3.1.1. *Essentialism of Sex and Gender*

Writers like Tina Chanter observe the way the sex/gender distinction dominates the feminist landscape and becomes an almost assumed lens through which many feminists critique Irigaray’s writing.⁸⁴ However, this becomes a serious misreading of how Irigaray employs such terms. To hold these two terms apart is, in a way, to reify the nature/culture divide. As Chanter rightly observes, the sex/gender distinction lines up sex, nature, and biology on one side, and gender, which is socially constructed, culturally informed, and

⁸² Irigaray, JTN, 72.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Chanter notes that sex and gender are two categories that carry with them metaphysical, ontological, political and ethical implications. She writes that men and women are defined according to their biological sex, which implies that women and men have fixed identities, empirically established by reference to their bodies, which serves as a kind of unchanging ground. Contrastingly, gender formation is construed as a result of processes of learning, social expectations, peer pressure, and local and family values. These are all culturally specific and reveal that sex is not a universal transcendent, but a malleable process that to some extent, can be altered or manipulated. Chanter argues, “The sex/gender distinction has been so influential that it is almost taken for granted, with the result that it sometimes acts as a silent center.” Chanter, *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray’s Rewriting of the Philosophers* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995) 26.

historically produced, on the other.⁸⁵ Irigaray's project disputes this rigid line that separates culture from embodiment.

Irigaray is often misread because of the unconventional way she uses the French terms *sexe* and *genre*, which cannot be literally translated as the English concepts of sex and gender. Irigaray deploys the term *sexe* to replace the more traditional rendering of the term *genre* (gender), which often connotes a grammatical gender (*il/elle*), a style of discourse, or the *genre humain* (humankind).⁸⁶ She may use the terms *sexe* and *genre* interchangeably, which is confusing since most consider the French term *sexe* to refer to sexual organs. Her use of *sexe* can mean sex, gender or sexuality.⁸⁷ Additionally her use of the term *sexual* and *sexuate* are used strategically to convey a carnal reality, but not necessarily a sex act. In fact, it is the very normativity of connecting sex acts to human subjectivity that Irigaray challenges.

3.1.2 Essentialism?

Jacques Derrida, like Irigaray, also challenges the notion of essentialism and as his work is often associated with Irigaray's, it is important to explain the relation between their arguments. While never explicitly referencing Jacques Derrida as a focal point for her writing, Irigaray's work evidences clear signs of continuity with deconstruction and evokes Derrida's *différance*. Like Derrida, she contests the inequality of the binary opposition, where one term conceals the other, privileging one and possessing its opposite. Deconstruction permits a new eruptive concept to emerge, often relying on the strategy of

⁸⁵ Ibid., 25.

⁸⁶ See Irigaray, JTN, 31, Tr. Note 3.

⁸⁷ See Michelle K. Owen, "Gender," Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories, ed. Lorraine Code (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

reversal followed by displacement of conceptual hierarchies like identity/difference, subject/ object, and male/female. In order to conceal or possess and suppress the latter, the former term often creates fabled accounts of the lesser term, and such has been the plight of woman.

In *Of Grammatology* Derrida introduces the term *logocentrism*, defining it as the metaphysics of phonetic writing.⁸⁸ He means that any system of language can make meaning present, reaching a kind of metaphysical 'closure'. As Ellen Feder and Emily Zakin explain, "Logocentrism does not presume that truth is present but that it can be made present, . . ." and the work of deconstruction shows that "... logocentrism is always in and with what he calls 'difference,' the play of signifiers (of presence and absence) upon which is predicated any discourse."⁸⁹ But by 1972, with the publication of *Margins of Philosophy*, *Dissemination*, and *Spurs*, he expands the term by four letters, making an economical, but vitally important modification of logocentrism to phallogocentrism, implicating Lacanian phallogocentrism with logocentrism. For Irigaray, his wedding of these words implies that psychoanalytic discourse is guilty of identifying the phallus with the *Logos* as transcendent and, therefore, unexamined (and unexaminable) grounds of signification, of assigning meaning.⁹⁰ Logocentrism, the positing of a first cause of being or meaning, colludes with the male sex: God and man come together as a locus of coherence and authenticity that

⁸⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976) 3, 10. See also the invaluable introduction by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Of Grammatology*, lxviii, lxxxi, lxxxii.

⁸⁹ Ellen K Feder and Emily Zakin. "Flirting with the Truth: Derrida's Discourse with 'Woman' and Wenches." *Derrida and Feminism: Recasting the Question of Woman*, eds. Ellen K. Feder, Mary C Rawlinson, and Emily Zakin (New York: Routledge, 1997) 47.

⁹⁰ Peggy Kamuf. *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) 314; Carolyn M. Burke, "Irigaray Through the Looking Glass," in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, eds. Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 42.

remains unthought. In Carolyn Burke's 1981 essay, "Irigaray Through the Looking Glass,"⁹¹ she suggests that Derrida and Irigaray challenge the doubled centrism by creating new sexual fables of the process of signification. She explains, "Derrida proposes an account that replaces phallogocentrism with a 'hymenal' fable: one that involves both sexes and sexual difference in its metaphorical representation of the creation of meaning. Irigaray, by contrast, omits the male sex and valorizes female sexual sufficiency, in a fable that can be described as 'vulval' or 'vaginal'."⁹² Indeed, Irigaray's popularly referenced essay in *This Sex* emphasizes the plural styles of female sexuality and expression, as typified in the multiple lips that are constantly "in touch" with each other and the diffuse locations of sensuality. What is pressing to observe is that both Derrida and Irigaray have offered fables of their own in order to contest Lacan's, but these are in fact fables, deconstructive texts meant to create "... limited analogies without an absolute claim for their ontological status. . . . Words are being used without their authors' subscribing to the premise that the models to which they refer might actually exist. The referential status of language is put into question . . . antiauthoritarian."⁹³ *This Sex Which Is Not One* and *Sexes and Genealogies* can be understood as deliberate discursive attempts to move away from hard theoretical writing to a softer, more fluid engagement with ideas at the level of myth, fable, or poem. Both Irigaray and Derrida share this concern to speak in ways that resist a position of mastery, making much of the position of the subversive "other."

But according to Burke, what sets Irigaray apart from other French feminists like Monique Wittig and Helene Cixous is that "Irigaray does not invent (or reinvent) for us

⁹¹ Originally published in *Feminist Studies* 7:2 (1981): 288-306.

⁹² Burke, *Engaging Irigaray*, 43.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 44.

female characters, heroines, or myths in opposition to patriarchal culture. Her deconstructive procedure is puzzling, because she is chiefly concerned with questioning familiar modes of thought and interrogating the concept of logic and the rules of discourse. Once we realize that this procedure is, in part, her content, we are on the right track."⁹⁴ Her style of questioning, ellipse, and trailing thoughts deliberately leaves authorial intent, conclusions, or closure at bay.

Indeed, Elizabeth Weed notes Irigaray's deliberate echo of Derridean terms and style⁹⁵ of displacement of woman's sexual identity challenging the discourse of the male logos:

How, then, are we to try to redefine this language work that would leave space for the feminine? Let us say that every dichotomizing—and at the same time redoubling—break, including the one between enunciation and utterance, has to be disrupted. Nothing is ever to be *posited* that is not also reversed and caught up again in the *supplementarity of this reversal*. . . . There would no longer be either a right side or a wrong side of discourse, or even of texts, but each passing from one to the other would make audible and comprehensible even what resists the recto-verso structure that shores up common sense.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Ibid., 45.

⁹⁵ Similarly, Derrida writes "The question of the woman suspends the decidable opposition of true and non-true and inaugurates the epoch of the epochal regime of the quotation marks which is to be enforced for every regime of quotation marks which is to be enforced for every concept belonging to the system of philosophical identity. The hermeneutical project which postulates a true sense is disqualified from this regime." See Jacques Derrida, "The Question of Style," in David B. Alison, ed., *The New Nietzsche* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985) 188. Derrida's *La Question du style* first published in *Nietzsche aujourd'hui* (1973), was revised and expanded in *Eperons/Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) 107.

⁹⁶ Irigaray, TS, 79-80.

Similarly, Ellen T. Armour has also noted the close proximity between Irigaray and Derrida's valuation of "woman," whereby the conclusion of both thinkers disrupts current gender structures, resisting a traditionally essentialist reading of Irigaray and providing feminism with a valuable ally in Derrida. Armour suggests that both Irigaray and Derrida take a similar position on Lacan's infamous declaration, "woman does not exist." She explains, "For both, I think, 'woman does not exist' means whatever 'woman' is or becomes, whenever she is or becomes, 'she' is not subject to the order of the 'is,' to metaphysics as such."⁹⁷ According to Armour's account, both Irigaray and Derrida uncover the workings of phallogocentrism in order to break through to another economic order. Woman, for Derrida and Irigaray, is undecidable and outside of phallogocentrism, and both want to keep her as undecidable. The location of these different approaches, argues Armour, permits one to read these two as supplements to one another, rather than rivals or antinomies.

Although Derrida and Irigaray do have some differences, like Derrida, she deconstructs woman's object status within metaphysics and psychoanalysis. Whereas Derrida prefers to dream of a "sexuality without number"⁹⁸ for fear that specifying man and woman traps us in old stereotypes, Irigaray dares to envision a "feminine imaginary" that looks towards a new as yet unknown be(com)ing of woman, theorizing towards a *specificity*⁹⁹ of feminine subjectivity and identity. Her specificity isn't an essentialist

⁹⁷ Ellen T. Armour, "Questions of Proximity: 'Woman Place' in Derrida and Irigaray," *Hypatia* 12:1 (Winter 1997): 65.

⁹⁸ Jacques Derrida, "Choreographies," in *Points....: Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Elizabeth Weber (Stanford, CA : Stanford University Press, 1995), 108. See also, John D. Caputo, "Dreaming of the Innumerable," in *More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000) 127-150.

⁹⁹ Irigaray uses this term to construe a specificity of feminine nature, identity, and subjectivity. See Irigaray, *S*, 25; *TS*, 85; *DBT*, 134; *WL*, 10; *BEW*, 128;

reconstruction vis-à-vis patriarchy, it is a challenge to the system of discourse that establishes the binary pair, and it is a redistribution of how we understand this untruth, error, which has been woman's identity. She urges that we ought to theorize an evolving sexual culture of difference that redistributes claims of truth, language, and being in proximity to and with the other sexual dialectic. The undecidability becomes her well spring as she moves toward intimacy, nearness, proximity, and love. Irigaray's theory shifts from undecidability and fable toward an "amorous exchange"¹⁰⁰ between these developing sexual differences. It isn't difference per se that she is after; it is the possibility or wonder of proximity, nearness, and love in the interval between these differences. Consider her translated poem in the epigram of chapter three, *Teaching*:

Difference, alone, allows intimacy.
 To kiss you, there is the threshold of the shared:
 Pure proximity
 That nothing brings under control.
 Touch that is strange to something other than itself.
 Ecstasy from the time
 To be built again after such an opening
 Where I arrive at you
 Finding and losing myself
 In this inappropriable
 Nearness,

¹⁰⁰ The term appears in, "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother," IR, 43-44. It is another way of positing the bodily exchange between men and women that is devised outside of the economy of sexual desire only.

As much birth as mourning.

Access to the other

Who I shall never be,

Who will never be me.¹⁰¹

Irigaray transposes the question of being with the question of difference; the question of presence with the question of the concealed invisible; and the question of truth with the question of love. All these transpositions develop a sense of genuine nearness or proximity.¹⁰² Her work is not merely a critique of language and a deconstruction of philosophy; it is a road map toward appropriate or ethical nearness with the self and others, constituted via difference. In *This Sex* she reminds the reader that *le féminin* always remains “several,” resisting the exchange-value economy of ownership and property with “nearness.” She explains, “Woman derives pleasure from what is *so near that she cannot have it, nor have herself*. She herself enters into a ceaseless exchange of herself with the other without any possibility of identifying either.”¹⁰³ Proximity is about one’s nearness to one’s own body and one’s nearness to others, others who are Other without the phallic symbolic of language, representation, and meaning pre-determining the outcome of this amorous exchange. Irigaray’s proximity is open to wonder, surprise, and an excess of meaning. She is not stepping outside of meaning or reifying or conceding to the phallic economy. Instead, she uses her position within the phallic economy as a bonus,¹⁰⁴ rather

¹⁰¹ Cited in Irigaray, T, 24, as (Luce Irigaray, *Everyday Prayers*, 28 October. p 74).

¹⁰² Some examples of her movement toward nearness and proximity can be found in the following passages: “Being placed side by side does not suffice for reaching nearness.” WL, 68;

¹⁰³ Irigaray, TS, 31.

¹⁰⁴ Irigaray, ML, 87.

than a lack, and with this Nietzschean transvaluation of femininity,¹⁰⁵ asks the question of proximity and nearness as a positive understanding of the other.

To put it in religious terms, it is a question of incarnation and Immanuel, God with us. It is not the male phallic God of the phallogocentric inheritance, but a divine horizon whereby true difference yields a question that moves toward and with others. Her feminine specificity of undecidability is open, but it is open so it may be free to discover a collective sense and limitation of its own, a limitation without closure, one that is self-determined and specified with particular others.

3.1.3 *Essentialism as Strategy?*

Throughout her career, but especially during the eighties and early nineties, Lacanian feminists and social/maternal feminists united to charge Irigaray with positing an essentialism of woman. Diana Fuss outlines how some of Irigaray's readers have interpreted her as a non-essentialist in the traditional sense, and suggest Irigaray employs a "strategic" essentialism as a tactic to expose that woman has been the ground of Aristotelian male essence (matter), while having no access to it herself: "it is the essence of woman to have no essence."¹⁰⁶ Thus, Irigaray's woman, or *le féminin*, is a deliberate provocation. Irigaray's woman challenges that woman's essence is not her usefulness to the male subject to complete his form. In this reading, Irigaray's "essentialism" is not so much a pit she falls into, but as Fuss declares, "... a key strategy she puts into play ... a lever of displacement."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ See Ellen Mortensen, *The Feminine and Nihilism Luce Irigaray with Nietzsche and Heidegger* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1994). 22.

¹⁰⁶ Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989, 72.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Gayatri Spivak explains how Irigaray's deconstruction of woman may be understood as remaining outside the essentialism/anti-essentialism discourse itself and she places the focus on how we read her text. As she explains, "The real in deconstruction is neither essentialist nor antiessentialist. It invites us to think through the counterintuitive position that there might be essences and there might not be essences. . . . Deconstruction is not an essence. It is not a school of thought; it is a way of rereading."¹⁰⁸ Spivak clarifies regarding Irigaray, "It is only if she is read as the pure theoretical prose of truth—whatever that might be—that she may seem essentialist when she talks about women. . . . Why do we become essentialist readers when we read someone like Irigaray?"¹⁰⁹ She asks that we cease to ignore the "... aggressive role of rhetoricity in her prose"¹¹⁰ and engage the harder task of reading faithfully.

While I appreciate Fuss and Spivak's comments, I suggest that Irigaray is in no way an essentialist, and I think it is a mistake to talk of her as advocating a "strategic" essentialism. It not only gives a wrong impression, but brackets her major concern to move beyond essentialism, as I will argue in the next section.

3.1.4 *Essentialism of the Body?*

But other feminists still insist that within Irigaray's writing a ground of woman's definition or closure exists. Toril Moi contests Irigaray's play with *morphology* as different than *anatomy* and insists, "Irigaray's theory of 'woman' takes as its starting point a basic

¹⁰⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 11.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 163.

assumption of analogy between women's psychology and her 'morphology' . . . which she rather obscurely asks to be different from her anatomy."¹¹¹

However, in my view, I judge that readers of Irigaray like Elizabeth Grosz and Margaret Whitford are on track to suggest that reducing Irigaray's critique of morphology to biologism is either a false misreading or deliberate ignorance on the part of her critics.¹¹² Jane Gallop also warns of too literal a reading of Irigarayan anatomy, suggesting that she is involved in a process of remetamorphizing the body, which retains an insistent illusion of referentiality.¹¹³ I agree that morphology cannot be reduced to mere biologism, but must be nuanced as a concept that is in touch with female anatomy, but not reducible to it. I understand the following as compelling reasons why Irigaray's body morphology cannot be reduced to anatomy.

I suggest that Irigaray postulates body morphology as a notion connected to the symbolic and the imaginary, arguments that take place at the level of privileging psychoanalytic claims of closure and woman's non-existence. Irigaray's woman is a possible positive reconstruction of a non-oedipal and non-phallic account of woman that resists the closure of woman's essence via metaphysics and psychoanalysis. Like Kristeva, she understands the grip of metaphysics and language, and she postulates *le féminin* via a sexual subtext of the abject, the unseen, or the concealed. But unlike Kristeva, these locations offer a possible positive reconstruction of an identity other than the oedipal/phallic determination of woman. Her strategy is to exceed the sexualized closure of language, and stay connected to meaning. She is a feminist who deconstructs and rallies for

¹¹¹ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985) 143.

¹¹² Whitford, *Luce Irigaray*, 58-9, 150-2.

¹¹³ Jane Gallop, "Quand Nos Lèvres S'Écrivent: Irigaray's Body Politics," in *Romanic Review* 74:(1983): 77-83.

a positive feminist reconstruction. Indeed, intelligible meaning is an important issue within Irigarayan scholarship, as she is a philosopher concerned with transcendental claims, working to make them sexually inclusive and clear, rather than myopically exclusive. But clarity ought not be confused with closure.

According to Grosz, Irigaray's use of body morphology, as opposed to female anatomy, suggests that bodies do not exist as some "pre-given material reality,"¹¹⁴ but rather, they function to constitute actively the world and human experience as evocative or signifiable. She writes, "Bodies are not conceived by Irigaray as biologically or anatomically given, inert, brute objects, fixed by nature once and for all. She sees them as the bearers of meanings and social values, the products of social inscriptions, always inherently social."¹¹⁵ Irigaray goes beyond theory, connecting the historical reality of people's social oppression with a rigorous theory that aims toward greater inclusion, collective identity and self-representation.

Certainly, her philosophy of body morphology regards the social or cultural inscriptions of meaning on the body. Indeed, her Freudian background and training as a psychoanalyst in many ways demands that she be alert to how bodies are read, interpreted, and culturally inscribed. As Judith Butler suggests, one ought to be attentive as to how bodies perform according to these values and inscriptions. But as Alison Stone has also argued, and I agree, Irigaray, at the same time, defines body morphology as something that exceeds a sheer cultural inscription or social value. Bodies aren't simply the paper of culture's ink. Nature must be more than culture's artifact. If Irigaray has a robust

¹¹⁴ Grosz, *Sexual Subversion*, 112

¹¹⁵ Ibid..

philosophy of culture's inscription and the power of patriarchy, she has an equally robust philosophy of nature to resist the closure of patriarchy.

3.2 *Irigarayan Rhythm and Nature*

According to Stone, some of Irigaray readers,¹¹⁶ sensitive to Irigaray's resurrection of nature, have problematically theorized nature and culture as intertwined. These feminists, agreeing that Western culture and society pervasively devalue and denigrate nature relative to culture, and that women's bodies are linked to nature, conclude that women's situation can be most readily improved through cultural or symbolic change that recognizes culture's dependence upon and continuity with nature. Namely, culture has defined nature this way, and nature is passively responding. But if these two concepts are continuous, questions Stone, this also implies that there must be some natural basis for current patriarchal culture, and that this culture is unchangeable. Not wanting to be pushed into such an undesirable corner, feminists insist on culture's independence of, or under-determination by, nature. This affirmation, argues Stone, "... threatens to perpetuate the symbolic devaluation of the female, insofar as the female is aligned with nature."¹¹⁷

I agree with Stone when she argues that this strategy, while politically advantageous, continues the privileging of culture over nature, simply flip-flopping the present situation instead of calling into question its structural hierarchy. As Stone convincingly writes, "If we rethink nature as active and self-changing, then we can recognize (and promote social recognition of) culture's natural roots without implying that

¹¹⁶ She cites that both Elizabeth Grosz and Moira Gatens as feminists seeking to avoid the split between nature and culture by intertwining nature with culture. This intertwining, while more genuinely attempting to reconcile these concepts, still leaves many questions for Stone, such as how can culture be modified through natural tendencies that direct this change? See Stone, *Luce Irigaray*, 130-31.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 130.

women's and men's respective symbolic standings are fixed and cannot be changed for the better."¹¹⁸ The nature that Stone reads Irigaray's work as positing is active, dynamic, striving for expression, while at the same time not limiting that expression. Rather than abandoning the natural to the overwhelming tide of culture (à la Butler), Irigaray argues, "... from the natural we should start over in order to refound reason."¹¹⁹ I concur with Stone that Irigaray posits what one could be called in Derridean fashion a *quasi-transcendental*¹²⁰ of/for nature, a multiplex normative of directions, thus limiting and pointing the way, but without specifying fixed structures, once for all essences, or unalterable positivities. The natural does not involve universally pre-given forms of matter, but it is what she identifies as a *rhythm*¹²¹ that comes to bodily expression in two different kinds of fluid and diverse sexuate bodies. As Irigaray explains, bodies have ties to the natural, but these ties must be refined and cultivated.

Irigaray's idea of rhythm is of paramount importance in my efforts toward an Irigarayan ethic involving a wide-ranging panoply of interacting differences. She says, "Women do not have the same sexual economy as men," and she appeals to differences such as "homeostasis, entropy, and release," explaining, "Their internal regulation is much stronger, and it maintains them in a constant irreversible process of growth."¹²²

Contrastingly, a man's rhythmic temporality corresponds to Freud's description of the

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 131.

¹¹⁹ Irigaray, ILTY, 37.

¹²⁰ Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics*, 278, note 2. Caputo writes: "A 'quasi-transcendental' is a condition for the possibility—and impossibility of a thing. As opposed to a straightforward transcendental condition, which sets forth the borders within which a thing may appear, a quasi-transcendental is the condition of a field without closure, for effects that overrun their borders." See also John Caputo, ed., "The Gift," *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997) 141-2.

¹²¹ This is Stone's analysis of Irigaray's position on nature. She argues that is not so much a thing as it is a rhythm of life.

¹²² Irigaray, TD, 25, JTN 115.

sexual model for both sexes, marked by “irreversible momentum” or “ruptures” and operates on the thermodynamic model of tension, discharge, and return to homeostasis.¹²³ Differently, “Women’s temporality is complex hormonally, and this has an effect on a body’s organization and general equilibrium.”¹²⁴ The two distinct temporalities, she observes, are linked to cosmic rhythms and to the time of universe.¹²⁵ Naturally, seasonal shifts tend to mark or indicate changes in time. Agrarian life moves according to the shifts of spring, summer, fall, and winter, with implicit changes of food, lifestyle, and light. She notes that the urban landscape now alters our sense of seasonal change, creating a repetition of days and moments that is “nullifying” and “entropic.”¹²⁶ These two temporal rhythms and associations with time correspond to the two sexual economies and ontologies that she has vigorously described. Articulating the male temporal rhythm, she discloses, “In fact this economy’s temporal rhythm more or less accords with a traditional model of male sexuality. It’s not the only model possible, but it has just about so in our culture.”¹²⁷ What is the other model(s) possible? She connects difference with the alternative female sexual model that she insists is possible, and that the male sexual temporal rhythm ought to appreciate sensibly:

Female sexuality . . . is more related to becoming, more attuned to the time of the universe. Which means a woman’s life can’t be reduced to a series of facts. . . . A woman’s life is marked by irreversible events that define the stages of her life . . . puberty (which boys can also experience), losing her

¹²³ Irigaray, TD, 25.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Irigaray, JTN, 114-5.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 114.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 114-5.

virginity, becoming pregnant, being pregnant, childbirth, breast-feeding—
 events that can be repeated without repetition: . . . *body and spirit have
 changed*, physical and spiritual development is taking place.¹²⁸ (italics mine)

In the same passage she writes of three examples: mothering, menstruation, and menopause. She explains that mothering, or child rearing, connects a woman intimately to the process of growth and development of humans and their consciousness. Menstruation connects a woman to the cosmic cycles of lunar, solar, tidal, and seasonal periods. Finally, menopause is the irreversible change in hormonal equilibrium whose cosmic change provides social meaning with freed time for social, cultural, and political life. For Irigaray, these are not simply material or corporeal changes; they are fundamentally spiritual as well. The holistic well-being of a woman shifts with time and reproductive cycles that rise, recede, and cannot be reversed. The swells of a woman's movement and her being are intricately co-extensive with the biological changes of her body and the social meaning that they have. She has a unique temporality or rhythm, and yet she is still free to interpret the social meaning of the body and these shifts.

But Irigaray notes that a woman's temporality has been sublimated to the temporality of the male economy. This maneuver, which fails to address or listen to the female temporality, has natural and cosmic consequences. She insists, "Women are affected more fatally by the break with cosmic equilibria. It is therefore up to them to say *no*. Without their *yes*, the world of men cannot continue to develop or subsist."¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Ibid., 115.

¹²⁹ Irigaray, TD, 26.

I understand Irigaray's aim to be a critique of patriarchal culture, which resists all theorization of nature *and* the body. What is unique or uncanny is her insistence to bring theorization of nature into play with culture, the body with the mind. Indeed, she notes that the current sexual economy of momentum and unhampered power sacrifices the health and being of bodies, nature, the cosmos, and anything deemed 'other' to the male subject and his culture. In fact, such an economy that fails to attend to these vital contributors of the cosmic equilibrium will cease to function and fail upon its own unchecked monstrosity. Its very right to rule without dissent will cause its self-collapse. Such an economy is untenable and unstable and other subject positions, whose contributions provide equilibrium to the cosmic order, are needed and critical for global stability and cyclical, sustainable, and ethically responsible growth. Irigaray contends that women must become willing and able to engage in subject-object relations and engage culturally and politically in the cultural milieu. In so doing, they enjoy more than a passivity or contentment with object relations, the object of the male sexuate subject, and they cease to impose this status on other women.¹³⁰ Critically, women must assume a subject-speaking posture (*I-she*) and men must also listen to women when they assume these subject positions.

Irigaray posits that bodies indicate these truths through the senses of the body in hearing, sight, smell, taste, and touch, and she laments the malaise that results when these senses are utilized in patriarchal fashion to create sensible conditions which disregard the contribution of women. She offers a few examples. A chief concern of Irigaray is not the lack of ability for women to speak, but the alarming fact that the male is not listening to her.¹³¹

¹³⁰ See Irigaray, TS, 198-204; KW, 146.

¹³¹ As the speaking subject, she poetically addresses the male 'you' in the following: "You do not hear. Nothing from outside the place where you already are reaches you any more." Irigaray, EP, 10.

Such loss of hearing, loss of the sensible capacity, is a chief indicator of the need to honor sexual difference. In her concern for a global ethic she cites pollution of noise, air, blindness, and loss of the sensible ability as the consequences of amassing technology, resulting in toxic tragedies like Chernobyl.¹³² By listening to nature, and the call for balance and equilibrium, the 'we' could become mediated sensible observers, thinkers, and lovers, where the embodied difference constitutes an ethico- spiritual awakening that can save the individual, as well as corporate, communal, and ecological selves. Irigaray is critically concerned that too often culture alone, not nature, creates civil identities, or put another way, civil codes do not correspond to nature.¹³³ Civil codes do not correspond to what constitutes a man or a woman, and as such, they are in Irigaray's estimation, negatively neutered.

If we offer her theory of sexual difference as indicating a non-essentialist two-pronged quasi-transcendental universal that sets forth the general conditions of possibility and impossibility without foreclosing on possible changes, mutations, and transmutations, it not only opens up the space for real existent individuals, but mandates the need for every creature to be(come) themselves, embracing their freedom and responsibility to develop their sexuate identity in ways unique to themselves. Irigaray posits nature and culture as active, self-changing, fluid and unfolding quasi-transcendentals that set general parameters in which men and women shape their identity as individual men and women. Neither is dependent upon the other or co-extensive with the other, and therefore, each requires each sex to investigate its relationship with both spheres in order to found a culture that is in

¹³² Irigaray, TD, 3. Currently, we could also cite the contemporary crisis in Japan: the effect of the earthquake, tsunami, and de-stabilization of nuclear reactors and the deadly threat of radiation to the Japanese people.

¹³³ Irigaray, ILTY, 131.

touch with the sensible immediacy (nature) of each gender. To cement these identities isn't her concern, but to elaborate a civil culture that allows these fluid identities in their difference to flourish is a vital part of her project towards a global ethic.

3.2.1 *Nature, Difference, and Limit*

Rather than privileging nature or culture, or problematically intertwining them, I suggest we may read Irigaray as articulating a theory of sexual difference which envisions the horizons of nature and culture as active, changing, and dynamic, continuing to rhythmically evolve, mutate, and modify as they interact. What has been posited as a body need not be the final *telos* of the body. Bodies can take on many incarnations, notions, forms, and what some might call deformities, abnormalities, and variances.

For Irigaray patriarchal culture is hom(m)osexual, or in service of the same. For her the presence of the couple offers another avenue for a disruption of the same and the honoring of difference. Irigaray, critical of monosexuality, seems attracted to the infinite limit that one can radically reclaim in order to ensure difference and create a boundary for intersubjectivity. The gesture of limit, or the dialectic of the negative becomes a critical method for her theory of intersubjectivity and how subjects can in the interval caress, touch, and love without fusion or fissure. She suggests we need, "a love remaining in harmony with the natural living universe that serves us a place of existence and of regeneration."¹³⁴ As articulated in chapter one, self-limitation is the labor of the negative, whereby we each recognize and honor our distinctiveness as the self-limitation which functions at the same time as both boundary and connection with other selves.

¹³⁴ Irigaray, BEW, 55.

I have posited her insistence on two as an unfolding dimorphic structure of fundamental difference that finds representation in sexed bodies. Irigaray explains, “The natural, aside from the diversity of its incarnations or ways of appearing, is at least *two*: male and female.”¹³⁵ The diversity of human subjectivities is the natural result of recognizing that the two-fold universal call is actualized in the on-going, continually mutating multidimensional physio-biotic-psycho-social processes which make up the contingency of our finite existence. If one ignores the twoness of sexual difference, one is doing injustice and ignores the multiplicity and unfolding of the universe. In other words, as I read Irigaray, the question of sexual difference is inextricably connected to her ethical concern to foster on a global level a collaborative, partnership approach to differences of every kind as an alternative to hierarchical approaches that traditionally and historically too often have been variations of a male monosexual hegemony.

3.2.2 Difference and Diversity

Irigaray is highly concerned that the history of philosophy posits female sexuality as something to be sublated (Hegel), transcended (Sartre), or outside the phallus (Lacan). The binary structure of philosophy renders woman caught within a subject-object model and this sameness can be concealed in the language of equality or diversity that diverts the question of fundamental difference:

To promote only diversity, as is often the case in our times, runs the risk of remaining in an unchanged horizon with regard to the relations with the other(s). We then entrust this problem to customs, moral rules or religious feeling without questioning our culture about its capability of meeting with

¹³⁵ Irigaray, ILTY, 37.

the other as such. Furthermore we are unable to open ourselves all the time to others different than us. We need to return to ourselves, to keep and save our totality or integrity, and this is possible only in sexual difference. Why? Because it is the most basic difference, this one which secures for each one bridge(s), both between nature and culture and between us. It is starting from this difference that the other sorts of otherness have been elaborated.¹³⁶

It is not that she opposes advocating for equality or diversity, but that these terms tend to not probe the embodied self, its relations with others, and the foundation of the culture of difference. At the heart of this discussion, Irigaray sets herself apart as a philosopher tackling the foundations of power within discourses, subjectivity, and the history of philosophy, more than a feminist advocating for issues like equality, diversity, or multiculturalism. For Irigaray, these questions remain bound within the question of difference, and once all discourses question the sexual monologic of sameness, then we can actually parse out what diversity, equality, and multiculturalism mean via difference, or the differences within difference. Irigaray, I suggest, is not dismissive of these concerns; she is more demanding, questioning the structures that undergird and the assumptions that mask what is at the heart of these concerns, namely, alterity. For Irigaray, equality means equity between two wholly other beings who are asymmetrical to one another. Her feminism strikes at the very heart of the question of being, nothingness, becoming, and the dialectical

¹³⁶ Andrea Wheeler, "About Being-two in an Architectural Perspective: Interview with Luce Irigaray," *Journal of Romance Studies* 4, no.2 (2004): 93.

movement, asking for a stronger ethic, a transvaluation of sexual identity and relations, a co-cultivation of civil society, and a widening of horizontal transcendence.

True difference, argues Irigaray, yields a recognition of self-limitation, or the negative of one's gender. When men and women respect the difference, they can permit the limit of each gender to challenge the Hegelian sublation of the negative. Instead the negative acts as a constitutive affirmation or positivity of one's self-limit. Again, the self-limitation of the negative is not a sacrifice, but a way of self-representation, self-definition, or development. Self-limitation, based upon our natural embodiment, permits self-limitation to open the space for the other to form his or her own self-development, and definition, which in turn allows for a mutually intimate meeting in the interval. These representations aren't fixed, but are again fluid, unfolding, and in touch with nature and culture.

Her philosophy of nature grants nature the ability to be constituted by what has been said of it, as well as what we hope nature can become. Nature is not a handmaiden to culture, nor is nature the over-determined master; nature is in relationship of difference with culture, and as we seek cultural change, we must also expect natural change. I propose that Irigaray's notion of nature and culture suggests an evolution of both spheres as they commune together, respecting their divide, but affirming the fecundity between them.

4 *Conclusion: Beyond Essentialism*

Irigaray has infamously stated that "Sexual difference is one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue, of our age,"¹³⁷ performing the doubled task of feminism: to uncover what a certain training in Western philosophy forces her to see, while

¹³⁷ Irigaray, E, 5/ 13.

uncovering what this posture represses, oppresses, and claims is invisible, namely, that there is nothing to see.¹³⁸ I have suggested she adds an active third position: to rally for this invisible, repressed difference or alterity (female subjectivity) to come into its own being. I also suggest that she notes a limit of time: our age. If each age can only temporally consider one issue, then this is her issue for her age.¹³⁹ I suggest that she does not think that sexual difference will fix or repair all other forms of repression, but within her time, this is the oppression that she understands as most pressing, vital, and able to open positively other forms of difference and closure. This ontology is not reducible to a simple sexual identity (natural or biological sexual desire as identity), but is radically informed by the sexuate morphology, culture, and relationships formed in the lived identity. She is not willing to reduce the complexity of nature or culture as they inform a sexuate identity.

Earlier I noted that Irigaray was concerned with the 'material reality' of sexual difference. Differences, she argues, between men and women exist and concealment of this difference has had deleterious effects on women in particular. If biological or physiological anatomy isn't the essential difference between men and women, what is? Alison Stone exhaustively examines Irigaray's assertion that each sex has its own rhythm, universal nature, and transcendent shape.¹⁴⁰ The idealized version of each sex isn't something that one can pin down, but it is a project that is connected to space, time, and the question of being. Therefore the differences between the sexes will yield differences in how each sex temporally shifts, occupies or offers space, and becomes and belongs to a gender. The

¹³⁸ John Kelly Gadol, "Some Methodological Implications of the Relations between the Sexes," *Women, History and Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1ff.

¹³⁹ I understand her to be saying that within her bodily existence, her task has been to limit strategically her work in order to open up others areas of justice and distribution, not to close or render the work complete.

¹⁴⁰ See Stone, *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference*, 87-126 and her earlier essay, "The Sex of Nature: A Reinterpretation of Irigaray's Metaphysics and Political Thought," *Hypatia* 18, no. 3 (2003): 60-84.

rhythm that Irigaray postulates is different than a concrete positivity of a fixed identity, or a reduction to an essential biological or romantic view of nature. An Irigarayan definition of the female gender must yield an ideal that accords to the elements that the female gender accords with: the diffuse, multiple, and voluminous.¹⁴¹ I suggest that her images of sexuate identity are not meant to reify identity into a static normative identity, but are intended to be new modes of being and thinking, beyond essentialism, oriented by nature and culture, that signify space, place, and time for difference. We must offer space and place and give time to consider intimacy with a different economy. By using the “undecideable,” “excess,” “or silent invisible” of the phallogratic economy, she can contend with patriarchy while philosophically theorizing a transvaluation of a different economy. The morpho-logic of the female body informs a new mode of approaching difference, but does not constitute identity. To shift our thinking and being, or the metaphysical project, away from the ec(h)onomy of sameness is her first gesture toward that definition.

In this chapter I have argued that Irigaray’s strategy of positing *le féminin* exceeds the binary opposition of the essentialism/anti-essentialism debate. Rather, Irigaray argues that the limit of finite passive boundaries of the body together with the active process of cultivating one’s gender constitutes one’s identity. To cultivate one’s gender has been understood as the process that each individual performs in relation to his or herself with the larger collective communities in which people are located. People constitute their identities by passively recognizing the affirmative boundaries of one’s self and power, while situating the self in a relationship of intersubjectivity to others, a respect for the

¹⁴¹ See Hannecke Canters and Grace M. Jantzen, *Forever Fluid: A Reading of Luce Irigaray’s Elemental Passions* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2005).

transcendence of another gender who is wholly other. Reading Irigaray as an essentialist is a mistake given that it concedes to the power of the very binary opposition she is continually disputing. Releasing difference from being judged and elaborated in fixed opposition, not only allows sexual difference to take on a burgeoning still to-become meaning, but it opens Irigaray's way towards a sustainable global ethic in which differences of all kinds weave together in a cosmic rhythm of collaboration and partnership.

Chapter Three: Irigaray's Fling with the Philosophers: An Amorous Exchange

1. Introduction

Many scholars already agree that Irigaray's reading of phenomenology grounds her deconstruction and construction of *le féminin*.¹ Just as past phenomenologists have wrestled with the ontological project and assumed significant positions in the history of philosophy, Irigaray reworks a similar heritage, critiquing many of the same commitments, and is thus vulnerable to similar criticisms of Euro-centrism, post-colonial exclusion, the assumption of freedom of choice, and the promotion of self autonomy or realization.² But it is important to locate Irigaray as a feminist philosopher who takes up the question of ontology and the ontological. But rather than pursuing a Heideggerian scrutiny of language, she routes the elements as needed supplements to reveal the appropriate diminution of the singular. Just as Heidegger approaches the question of Being and thinking about Being, Irigaray approaches the question of sexual difference. Both underscore the strategy of nearness, proximity, and distance to attenuate this thinking. Irigaray's substance is often in her approach: proximity, nearness, temporality, and self-limit, namely, the negative.

In this chapter I suggest that Irigaray's approach to the question of difference provides a potentially fruitful strategy for Continental philosophy to provide a stability of

¹ See Tina Chanter, *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray's Rewriting of the Philosophers* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993); Annemie Halsema, *Luce Irigaray and Horizontal Transcendence* (Amsterdam: Humanistics University Press, 2010); Patricia Huntington, *Ecstatic Subjects. Utopia and Recognition: Kristeva, Heidegger, Irigaray* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); Ellen Mortensen, *The Feminine and Nihilism: Luce Irigaray with Nietzsche and Heidegger* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1994).

² See Mary L. Keller, "Divine Women and the Nehanda *Mhondoro*: Strengths and Limitations of the Sensible Transcendental in a Post-Colonial World of Religious Women," in *Religion in French Feminist Thought: Critical Perspectives*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 68-82.

ethical proximity with one another which is crucial in the development and practice of a wide-ranging Irigarayan ethic. The stability Irigaray offers isn't the certainty of positivism, nor is it a nihilism or relativism that only leaves 'will to power', but it is a refiguration of present terms that asks subjects to affirm differences via a negative dialectic of difference and proximity to the one and the other. Irigaray's negative permits the best concepts of Heidegger and post-war French existentialism to yield a difference that seeks mutual felicity *for* and *with* humans and nonhumans.

Luce Irigaray's work aspires to make changes at the broadest and most potent levels of ethico-cultural change, but often she turns to the natural or material world to transpose her cultural message given the imperial control of language and the symbolic order with its myopic gaze. The natural evidence that most accords with her theory are the elements that resist the solid, visible, and erect preferences of the male subject economy: the fluid, the invisible, and the amorphous. Her response was a planned tetralogy. *Marine Lover* directed toward Friedrich Nietzsche engages the element of water. *Elemental Passions* offers a series of free-flowing meditations (narrative and non-narrative) of the journey of a woman exploring sexuate relations anew, perhaps a celebration of the fecund earth. An unpublished work directed toward Karl Marx engages the element of fire.³ Finally, *Forgetting the Air* is directed toward Martin Heidegger and engages the element of air.

The elements offer Irigaray the ability or language/non-language to challenge the material/immaterial and literal/figurative divide by elucidating elements often supposed as immaterial, but doing so in very material ways. The four-pronged Empedoclean schema

³ Mary Beth Mader, "Forgetting the Feeding: Luce Irigaray's Critique of Martin Heidegger." In *Between the Psyche and the Social: Psychoanalytic Social Theory*, eds. Kelly Oliver and Steve Edwin (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002) 36.

presents a way to characterize growth and decay that organically attends to a way of becoming that she believes the Western tradition misses.⁴ She writes of their dismissed importance: "We still pass our daily lives in a universe that is composed and is known to be composed of four elements: air, water, fire, and earth. We are made up of these elements and we live in them. They determine, more or less freely, our attractions, our affects, our passions, our limits, our aspirations."⁵ Heidegger also offers his fourfold (*das Geviert*), as a way of thinking about the world as earth and sky, mortals and divinities. The two schemas represent the structures of thinking that attenuate language, and both challenge the dominance of the Cartesian subject. But each thinker will differ in his or her accent on the thinking and language. It is the unthinking of the less privileged elements (the liquid elements: air, water, fire), often disclosed as immaterial, that Irigaray rethinks in her phenomenology. Rather than being formed via language and the male psycho-social libidinal self, we may begin to rethink an ontology that has material reality, without grounding our truth in a material/immaterial divide, or a fact/fiction manner of asserting male phallic language. Rather than master and slave, conqueror and conquered, we may consider differences as interwoven alterities that are born, grow and decay, sometimes reborn anew, presences and absences that are intricately connected. The organic scheme has tones and resonances that accord with Heidegger and I will examine the two comparatively to show the influence and departure from his scholarship. Read with these Heideggerian inflections, I suggest Irigaray posits an ontology that one may not reduce to

⁴ See Irigaray, SG, 57.

⁵ Ibid.

an essentialism of nature, as I also claimed in the last chapter and that is important in our concern with a global ethics.

Irigaray charges that Western metaphysics, from the pre-Socratics to Heidegger have privileged a particular element resulting in an imbalanced perspective that closes, rather than opens, truth and being. In this chapter I analyze her philosophical response to Heidegger and to the existential phenomenologists Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and Simone de Beauvoir, in order to show the main philosophical influences upon Irigaray's work and the way she deals with them. I suggest that Irigaray takes seriously the aims and positions of these philosophers, but her intention isn't to dutifully follow or defiantly debunk these theorists, but to take up the posture of Heidegger's *alètheia*.⁶

2. *Transforming Metaphysics: Heidegger*

As noted, Irigaray contends, "... each age has one issue to think through and one only. Sexual difference is probably the issue in our time."⁷ In *I Love to You*, she adds these words, "Our era is faced with the task of dealing with this issue, because, across the whole world, there are only, men and women."⁸ The words resound with the claims of Martin Heidegger and the preponderance of a singular question that each age is able to ask.

Already Irigaray is engaging in her own self-limitation. She is limited in time, task, and sexuate identity. She is limiting herself to think ontologically, as Heidegger has done, shifting the question from the Being of beings, to sexual difference in the world. Not only is Irigaray theoretically indebted to Heidegger, his project contextualizes her own work and

⁶ Heidegger identifies *alètheia* as "unconcealedness" drawing attention to the problem of pure translation, that any change in phrase or speech is transported into another truth and clarity, or obscurity. See Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009) 12.

⁷ Irigaray, E, 5.

⁸ Irigaray, ILTY, 47.

orients one to her feminist position.⁹ She is willing to forgo the urgency with which feminism demands a flurry of agency or activity, to pursue the thinking of the pivotal issue of her day. In this section I analyze Irigaray's writings with Heidegger, via language, and consider how her critique extends into the thinking, dwelling, and language of Heidegger on her way to envisioning a full-orbed philosophical ontology and ethics.

2.1. *Between Heidegger and Irigaray*

Heideggerian scholars agree that Heidegger's abiding topic is "... the radically inverted meaning of being, grounded infinitude, which stands over against the metaphysical ideal of being as full presence and intelligibility."¹⁰ Yet throughout his career, Heidegger never lost sight of the fact that all his meditations on being, time, and truth were in fact *words*. One can argue reasonably that the themes of language and being have been two of the most important tropes in Irigaray's academic career, given her work in linguistics and Continental philosophy. It is no wonder that her occupation with Heidegger coalesces and diverges in important ways.

A number of scholars are rightly drawing attention to the philosophical merit of comparing Heidegger and Irigaray's work. One of the first, Tina Chanter suggests, if, for Heidegger, the Platonic and Aristotelian tradition eclipsed not only Being, but also the question of being itself, then for Irigaray also, the absence of sexual difference is already supposed by the question of sexual difference.¹¹ She notes that Heidegger's task in *Being and Time* was to prepare philosophers to ask the question of Being; likewise, Irigaray's task

⁹ She explains in the preface of *The Way of Love* that her work is faithful to Heidegger's teaching, but shifts the frame or the emphasis toward a different space. See WL, xii.

¹⁰ Thomas Sheehan, "Kehre and Ereignis: A Prolegomenon to *Introduction to Metaphysics*," in *A Companion to Heidegger's Introduction to Metaphysics*, eds. Richard Polt and Gregory Fried (New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press, 2000) 3.

¹¹ Chanter, *Ethics of Eros*, 128.

in *Speculum* prepares contemporary philosophers to ask the question of sexual difference. As Chanter helpfully suggests, the grounding project of Irigaray's sexual difference isn't a biological essentialism, but the Heideggerian ontological project with its phenomenological commitment to the priority of the lived body. Chanter explains, "That is, bodily experiences in the material world cannot be understood in abstraction from the context and meanings that inscribe experience in all their particularity."¹² Therefore, there is no pure material biology or matter that *is* fact, but all our "*is*" statements are already tainted with a presupposition of the fact at hand.

Like Heidegger, Irigaray desires to draw attention to the present life, the sensible and concrete aspects which ought to be raised to the level of wisdom, *vis*, philosophy. Like Heidegger, she engages the whole human, not just the mental aspect of the person. Like Heidegger, she attempts to try to find where we could make an experience of speaking.¹³ But unlike Heidegger who found such an experience taking place in poetic language and the articulation of thinking and poetic saying, she posits that it exists in a "present dialogue with an other different from myself."¹⁴ In this relation between the one and the other we experience what speaking means. Irigaray comments that descriptive and narrative language fails us when we approach the task of welcoming, celebrating, and cultivating the one with the other and her task is present and future oriented. Like John the Baptist, we must prepare a way for ethical proximity, in us and among us. The *Way of Love* rings almost

¹² Tina Chanter, *Ethics of Eros*, 129.

¹³ In the English translation, she writes in the preface that the dialogue is four-way: the author, the translators, Heidegger, and the reader. She has chosen deliberately to translate language as "speak," "speaking," and "speech," in order to be faithful to Heidegger's approach to language. Irigaray, WL, x-xi.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, xi.

like the prophet Isaiah,¹⁵ asking for a cultural scenography or landscape of preparation for the kind of language we would need to accomplish such a task.¹⁶

Heidegger critiqued the Enlightenment metaphysical tradition as over-representing thinking as positivism. The exemplar of this tradition is René Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*, a philosophy Heidegger proposed to phenomenologically destroy.¹⁷ Descartes provided an epistemology for the existence of self, things, and people and believed he ontologically proved the existence of God.¹⁸ According to Heidegger, Descartes distinguishes the "I think" from the "corporeal thing," placing "Nature" and "spirit" in opposition and positing a subject/object duality, or the "corporeal thinking thing" from the "corporeal substance or nature." *Dasein* bridges this opposition by putting us in touch with our "dealings" with the everydayness of things that are at-hand (Nature), such as writing, sewing, or hammering.¹⁹ While Descartes separated the "I" and the "world" and "God," Heidegger brings the "I" in relationship with the ready-at-hand by highlighting its serviceability, its function to service as "equipment," rather than a thing itself to be investigated without a function. The obviousness and reliability of the hammer concealed it from the philosopher.

Similarly, Irigaray poses the question of sexual difference as an obvious, reliable, and thus concealed notion. Chanter clarifies that the association between the way in which *Dasein* exists in the world fails to be analogous to water "in" a glass since *Dasein* "encounters" objects as already embedded in a system where its projects and tasks are

¹⁵ The prophet Isaiah describes the manner in which the land or path that must be prepared to make way for the return from exile. See Isaiah 40:3-4; 62:10-12.

¹⁶ Irigaray, WL, viii.

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) 123.

¹⁸ Rene Descartes. "Meditations on First Philosophy." *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, vol. 1, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 147.

¹⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 97.

defined.²⁰ She writes, “The care Heidegger takes to distinguish the container-type relationship, which pertains to objects from *Dasein*’s mode of existence in its ‘concernful absorption’ foreshadows, albeit faintly, the thematic attention Irigaray gives to the ‘place’ woman provides.”²¹ For Heidegger, the network or matrix of relationships that surround a subject’s relationship to its surroundings deserves careful attention. Similarly, argues Irigaray, the male subject’s relationship to the woman/provider/sustainer informs the relationship that defines both. *Dasein*’s corrective broadened the hermeneutical circle to include, centrally, the question of Being and its clearing or opening. But according to Irigaray, Heidegger’s metaphysics of presence isn’t an opening, but a closing.

As Heidegger says, “‘There is’ [‘Es gibt’] truth only insofar as *Dasein* is and in so long as *Dasein* is.”²² But according to Irigaray, the neutered use of “es/it,” conceals the sex of subjects and thus the lighting of *Dasein*. Woman is present but symbolically absent in Heidegger’s ontology. As such, metaphysics begins with the man and closes in on his sex.

2.2. *From Being to Nearness*

From Heidegger’s early work, *Being and Time*, to his later work in the 1960s, there is a shift that Krzysztof Ziarek²³ identifies as a strategy that moves him away from the project of destroying metaphysics, to abandoning it altogether, from the ontico-ontological project of difference to the event (*Ereignis*).²⁴ One can understand this shift²⁵ as having continuity

²⁰ Chanter, *Ethics of Eros*, 137.

²¹ Chanter, *Ethics of Eros*, 137.

²² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 212/226.

²³ See Krzysztof Ziarek, “Proximities: Irigaray and Heidegger on Difference,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 33(2000): 133-158.

²⁴ The event as a Heideggerian trope is receiving renewed interest as is evidenced in the book Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012).

²⁵ I want to be careful and differentiate what is deemed the turn (*die Krehe*) in Heidegger’s work and his change in thinking (*die Wendung im Denken*). From his early work in the 1930s to his later work scholars demarcate a shift in Heidegger’s content and style, observing that it becomes more abstruse and lyrical in

with his prior claims in *Being and Time* regarding Dasein's 'thrownness,' something we anticipate, as Dasein's being is movement. Dasein's finite being exists as it anticipates its absence. This anticipated absence gives finite presence, meaning the ultimate source remains intrinsically hidden as it discloses the being of entities. Such disclosure Heidegger calls *Ereignis*. In typical Heideggerian fashion he plays with the term, typically translated "the event," and uses it to mean movement, connecting the adjective *eigen* ("one's own") with *Ereignung*, or movement as the process of being drawn into what is one's own.²⁶ When beings are claimed by death we are pulled forth into our mortal becoming, drawn into our own absence, and by this way, the world is engendered and sustained, what Heidegger calls Appropriation.

In *On Time and Being* and *Identity and Difference* Heidegger explains "the event as Appropriation," a way to give metaphysical ideas non-metaphysical meaning. He states that Being had formerly been thought in terms of beings as "... *idea, energeia, actualities*, will, and now, appropriation."²⁷ According to Heidegger, these terms as interpretations of Being do not leave metaphysics. He urges, "But if we do what was attempted, and think Being in the sense of the presencing and allowing-to-presence that are there in destiny—which in turn lies in the extending of true time which opens and conceals, then Being belongs in Appropriating."²⁸ Heidegger clarifies that this is not a simple inversion, but time and Being are the gifts of Appropriation. In *Identity and Difference* he states it is a key term in the

form and thought. At this recorded shift, he elucidates theme such as "appropriation" and the "history of being." But it is unclear if this shift and other shifts are what he calls the turn. See Thomas Sheehan, "Kehre and Ereignis," 3-16; 263-274.

²⁶ Thomas Sheehan, "Heidegger, Martin (1889-1976)," *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) IV, 307-323.

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002) 21.

²⁸ Ibid.

service of thinking and no longer means what we would otherwise think of as a happening or occurrence. He writes,

It is now a *singular tantum*. What we experience in the frame as the constellation of Being and man through the modern world of technology is a prelude what is called the event of appropriation. This event, however, does not necessarily persist in a prelude. For in the event of appropriation the possibility arises that it may overcome the mere dominance of the frame to turn it into a more original appropriating. Such a transformation of the frame into the event of appropriation, by virtue of that event, would bring the appropriate recovery—appropriate, hence never to be produced by man alone—of the world of technology from its dominance back to servitude in the realm by which man reaches more truly into the event of appropriation.²⁹

Heidegger's emphasis on transformation provides a critical opportunity to think in terms that open time, space, and futurity, resisting metaphysical closure via the notions of opening and concealing, presence and absence. Undoubtedly, these are critical terms and notions that Irigaray evokes in order to postulate her notion of sexual difference as an ontology that can organically emerge without the repetition or closure of metaphysics. Ziarek contends that approaching Heidegger and Irigaray on the topic of proximities clarifies the shift in Heidegger's work and Irigaray's important relationship to it, particularly the strategy to analyze Irigaray as a philosopher apart from the identity-difference debate, entangled within the dispute of essentialism. Instead, the rubric of

²⁹ Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1969, 2002) 36.

proximity highlights the importance of space-time³⁰ in both works. It is in this stream that I want to extend Ziarek's analysis, which also contends that the relationship to space, intimacy, and finitude of self with others offers a profitable way to approach Irigaray and Heideggerian scholarship together.

To briefly summarize Ziarek's points, he contends that Heidegger's themes of ethics, technology, the event, futurity, and poetic language can be surveyed easily within Irigaray's critiques. Specifically, Heidegger's revision of his thoughts on being and Irigaray's response to it yield a new view that can be described as, "a non-metaphysical economy of relating predicated on the ethico-discursive notions of proximity and nearness. . . . a new mode of thinking relation: one that would be attuned to nearness rather than difference, to the interval rather than the opposites, and to the transformative opening rather than negation."³¹ According to Ziarek, while Heidegger remains vested in the closure of philosophy and a "new or other thinking,"³² contingent on the reevaluation of language (particularly the proximity between thought and poetry), Irigaray, as argued, is rewriting the symbolic and imaginary, creating space for women to create their own social identities, and inaugurating a futurity of thinking that corresponds with sexual difference. Her style or technique is overtly poetic, lyrical and deliberately disruptive of traditional meaning as she employs the method of mimesis. But to exceed or abandon metaphysical claims, both seem to suggest thinking about difference via the rubric of proximity or nearness (*Nahe*). To avoid retracing Ziarek's incisive paper, I will stray and offer my own interpretation of the critical points of proximity to language and difference that I observe in both Irigaray and

³⁰ She alludes to this re-thinking of space-time in *Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 7.

³¹ Ziarek, "Proximities: Irigaray and Heidegger on Difference," 134.

³² Ibid.

Heidegger and what the correspondence might imply to strengthen Irigaray's assertion away from essentialism and place it within the full context of Continental philosophy.

I recognize her focus on the "interval" as a deliberate and valuable move in her effort away from a binary thinking of opposites. The thrust of the interval is a way to mediate difference via space and time. I will examine her work with Heidegger in *Forgetting the Air* and in *The Way of Love*, choosing the latter work in particular given its reference to the concerns of globalization,³³ a central topic of this thesis.. I will conclude this discussion with a closer examination of the interval in Diotima's speech in *Ethics of Sexual Difference*. I argue that Irigaray uses the strategy and approach of proximity to return to the discussion on identity-difference with a distinctive return to the project of difference, not reinscribing the discourse, but invoking a third dimension, the touch of the one with the other.

Repeatedly in *The Way of Love* Irigaray uses the terms "approach,"³⁴ "proximity,"³⁵ and "nearness"³⁶ to detail her content, which implies her emphasis is not only on the distance concomitant with sexual difference, but on focusing on the "interval"³⁷ as the place of proximity, as the in-between place of nearness where meeting in the middle is possible. Her philosophy is current, active, speech making in the present and the future, resisting

³³ The book jacket states, "Globalization represents an opportunity but also a danger for humanity. Sameness has been the key to the construction of Western cultures and societies. Difference – beginning with sexual difference – can open up for us an era of inter-communication, from our most everyday exchanges to the universal interweaving of a democratic *global* community." Irigaray, WL, second cover; italics mine.

³⁴ Irigaray uses the term 32 times in the text. For examples see Irigaray, WL, ix, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 26, 27, 39, 42.

³⁵ She uses the term 23 times the text and devotes a chapter titled, "On the Way to Proximity." For textual examples see: Irigaray, WL, 18-22, 26, 32, 33, 53, 57, 60, 68, 120, 133, 150-1, 153-4, 159, 166.

³⁶ Ibid., ix, 68.

³⁷ She uses the term five times in this text. See Irigaray, WL, 18, 19, 65, 66, 142. She gives the term/concept particular attention in an *Ethics of Sexual Difference*, specifically the essays, "Sexual Difference," and "Place, Interval: A Reading of Aristotle, *Physics IV*." See Irigaray, E, 5-19; 34-55.

previous codifications and repetitions. Her speech acts will be encircled with silence and listening-to: “We have to listen to the present speaking of the other in its irreducible difference with a view to the way through which we could correspond to it in faithfulness to ourselves.”³⁸ Irigaray’s clearing will make space for the other.

Irigaray’s shift from words to proximity or space also dovetails and supplements a sexuate twist with Heidegger’s reflection on space, nearness, and distance. In these sections I will analyze the similarities of both writers and their relationship to thinking as it pertains to difference, language, space, proximity, mortals, and non-mortals. I will be examining two of Heidegger’s essays: “Building Thinking Dwelling,” and “The Way to Language” and Irigaray’s critical responses and supplements and challenges to Heidegger’s claims. Again, I argue that she is not dismissive of Heidegger’s concerns, but a philosopher in her own right who extends or unfolds the horizon of Heidegger’s thoughts. She argues a sexuate subjectivity of the female other in order to subvert metaphysics and gain the one with the other, with which we may refound the project of a futural philosophy.

2.2.1. *Air: The Unthought Ground of Thinking*

In the next sub-sections I will investigate the important connection Irigaray makes with two of Heidegger’s formative works and her critical responses. Heidegger’s early ruminations on art, technology, modern sciences, metaphysics and poetry evolve into later discussions of ‘everyday’ things in familiar locations, such as bridges and houses, a notion he calls the fourfold (*das Geviert*) of earth, sky, mortals, and divinities. In “Building Thinking Dwelling” Heidegger suggests that man’s Being rests in his capacity to cultivate and safeguard the earth. *Bauen*, or *to dwell* signifies the way “we human beings *are* on the

³⁸ Ibid., xi.

earth.”³⁹ The German word *bauen* in all its varieties: *buan*, *bhu*, *beo* are versions for *bin*, or the imperative *to be*. In contrast to Descartes; I think, therefore I am, Heidegger will relate thinking (*denken*) with building and dwelling, via earth and sky, divinities and mortals. Listening to language, rather than language servicing man, Heidegger urges we can hear three things:

1. Building is really dwelling
2. Dwelling is the manner in which mortals are on the earth.
3. Building as dwelling unfolds into the building that cultivates growing things and the building that erects buildings.

Already we can hear sources of many of Irigaray’s concerns: listening, the manner in which we inhabit the earth, and the cultivation of growing things, a sense of the organic representation of essences. Heidegger goes on to say that we are dwellers “on the earth” which already means “under the sky.”⁴⁰ And he indicates that both of these things also mean, “remain before divinities” and include, “a belonging to men’s being with one another.”⁴¹ He concludes by positing a *primal oneness* of the fourth: earth and sky, divinities and mortals. To dwell means to stay with things, such as bridges, what he calls a *site* for the fourfold, and by this site we can determine the place and paths by which a space is provided for. Heidegger indicates that space, or *Raum*, is “. . . a place that is freed for settlement and lodging. . . something . . . freed . . . within a boundary.”⁴² The Greek term *peras* for boundary is “. . . that from which something *begins its essential unfolding*,”⁴³ such

³⁹Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Collins, 1977, 1983) 349.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 351

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 356.

⁴³ Ibid.

as a horizon. Things, insofar as they are locales, give spaces their essential being. Between these things are measurable distances, the Greek word *stadion*, which in the Latin, is a *spatium* or “an intervening space or interval.”⁴⁴ The term interval will also be a threshold or unfolding for Irigaray, not of Being, but of the one to the other, the unfolding of intersubjectivity. Importantly, Heidegger urges, “Spaces open up by the fact they are let into the dwelling of man.”⁴⁵ Thus, building is the founding or joining of spaces, a distinctive, letting-dwell. We grasp something, but do not touch its essence. We can bring forth through *techne* or technique, the Greek concept of letting things appear in this way or that way, as something present among the things that are already present. But Heidegger laments the technology of power misses dwelling and its basic character of Being, in keeping with which mortals exist. Building and thinking must both belong to dwelling.

Like Heidegger, Irigaray has also offered her own fourfold: air, water, earth, and fire. As Heidegger retraced the pre-Socratics in order to retrieve a proximity to Being, so Irigaray retraces the same thinkers in order to retrieve a proximity between the one and the other, unconcealing the elemental from Heidegger’s own thinking and Being, namely the air, the true opening that remains unthought. Or as Irigaray states regarding Heidegger, “To air he owes his life beginning, his birth and his death, on air he nourishes himself; in air, he is housed; thanks to air he can move about, can exercise a faculty for action, can manifest himself, can see and speak . . . the *a priori* condition of all his *a prioris*?”⁴⁶ As she opens her rumination in *Forgetting the Air* Irigaray quickly draws attention to the assumed ground upon which Heidegger walks, the sure-footed privilege of the earth in his

⁴⁴ Ibid., 357.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 359.

⁴⁶ Irigaray, FA, 12.

philosophy, and inasmuch as he does not leave the earth, so he also does not leave metaphysics.⁴⁷ Being and thinking, she asserts, are made of the same element—air. Certain elements are prone to be forgotten in a singular sexuate ontology that cannibalizes the other elements to guarantee its unquestioned status. Particularly the liquid elements of fire, water, and air are forgotten, as Being or philosophy dies of asphyxiation, lack of air.

Heidegger describes his quest toward the question of being, the opening or clearing, and the house of language as a path, implicating the ground as a solid path whereby one may travel. His fetish with the ground (ground of being) offers a vital metaphor whereby Irigaray resituates solidity. The ‘ground’ of sexual difference is actually ‘groundless’, where no solid border marks or traces a path toward language. Language, prefigured in a psycho-sexual libidinal self, must confront the body from which it speaks, thinks, and writes. If man dwells in the house of language, than language is formed or spoken only through bodies. Irigaray charges Heidegger with forgetting (*oblivion*) the element of air, a term she deploys as replete with a physical and metaphysical-counteracting sense.

Air is not only the material substance that humans breathe, but it is also the invisible or supposed neutrality by which metaphysicians prescribe a universal discourse for philosophy. Within the monosexual ontology, Irigaray utilizes air to signify the invisible, the feminine, and the passage from the one to the other. Heidegger’s obsession with Greek *arche* is ironically missing the *arche* of all humans: the mother-child dyad. Instead, nature (*physis*) is mediated via *logos*, meaning the physical being is also a fabrication of man. She argues, “That the living body as *Gestell* always leaves traces in these fabrications. . . .

⁴⁷ She writes, “. . . perhaps one must remove from Heidegger that earth on which he so loved to walk. To take away from him this solid ground, to rid him of the ‘illusion’ of a path that holds up under his step . . . to bring him back not only to thinking but to the world of the pre-Socratics.” Ibid., 2.

Doesn't Heidegger's move amount to making *physis* out of *techne*?"⁴⁸ *Arche* submits to man's *architechne*, man's language, in an artificial unfolding or blossoming of Nature. But according to Irigaray, what mediates this *arche* is air: "Air would be the arch-mediation: of the *logos*, of thinking, of the world—whether physical or psychical."⁴⁹

Thus, when and how is there for Heidegger a clearing (*gibt es die Lichtung*)? Irigaray's exploration of the unthought opening that preconditions thought attempts to delineate a 'metaphysics of the same' (language, being, and the psycho-sexual subject-object), and rather than "oblivate"⁵⁰ or negate metaphysics, she attempts to think otherwise, and with it. Instead of positing a 'there is' (*es gibt*) she will approach the element that sub-tends the history of metaphysics and Being and beings. As Irigaray explains, when we clear the forest of the trees for Heidegger's clearing there is still the air: "The meeting that can take place in this clearing is always already an experience 'in a vacuum': in a space determined and delimited by the forgetting, the privation of a matter necessary for the existence of living beings. . . . In a hollow, a hole, an excavation, a location, and a place that are opened up by breaking into nature."⁵¹ It is precisely this non-place, invisible to the discourse of Being, language, and logos that Irigaray can subvert and use as a location with which to approach metaphysics. The nothing, remainder, remnant is again her bonus. The negation is her affirmation. As she explains, within this interspace, the emptiness and fullness of movement of going-toward can be commemorated with a silent distance.⁵²

⁴⁸ Ibid., 87.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁰ Not typically a verb, but a culturally coined term from the French *oblivion* (to forget), Irigaray's reworking of Heidegger's attention to a kind of thinking that is forgotten. The mutated 'oblivate' first appeared in the Harry Potter novels as a memory charm that causes one to forget. See J.K. Rowland, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Arthur A Levine Books: 2001-2005).

⁵¹ Irigaray, FA, 19.

⁵² Ibid. 155.

Paradoxically, silence permits the nothingness of the elements to speak, and in this vacuum we can approach one another. Words do not mediate; the invisible air mediates.

2.2.2. *The Way of Love: Proximity and Difference*

As we turn to words, silence, and language more directly, I again address Irigaray's second dialogue with Heidegger, published in 2002, in an English translation titled, *The Way of Love*, that converses directly with his German text, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (1959), or in English, "On the Way to Language." In this work Heidegger begins to unfold his infamous phrase: "Language is the House of Being. In its house man dwells."⁵³ Heidegger has already declared that language is the clear-concealing of being itself, meaning that being is perpetually coming to or underway to language.⁵⁴ His interest in the meaning of language demonstrates one of his strongest bonds between analytic philosophy and his academic work.

Irigaray's engagement with the question of language and being is tinged with her rejection that the collective unconscious or social imaginary has already been defined or closed via the pregiven symbolic, eliminating any genuine emerging present or future. As Patricia Huntington suggests, her thesis has been to take seriously the implication of Lacanian theory "that reality—taken as including the excess, the possible, the unthought—harbors the seeds of genuine social change."⁵⁵ Both Irigaray and Heidegger turn away from the metaphysics of language toward *poiesis*. I suggest that Irigaray, reflecting Heideggerian influence, turns away from the Cartesian-Husserlian subject-master, as well as existential atheistic humanism, toward a future and social imaginary that postures her negative, self-

⁵³ Martin Heidegger, "Letter on 'Humanism'," *Basic Writings*, 217.

⁵⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, ¶34, 161-64/203-10.

⁵⁵ Patricia Huntington, *Ecstatic Subjects, Utopia, and Recognition*, 137.

representation, and transcendental gender as richer forms of sociality that bind humans together collectively as a precondition for *Sittlichkeit*. Thus, Irigaray will argue via *poiesis* for the unthought, depleted, suppressed, forms of phallogentric symbolization, for Divine Women, not beings who are divine and women, but as productive ways for women to be “agents and coauthors in the production of meaning.”⁵⁶ Women need their own divine or world interpreted through female morphology rather than the phallus, recasting matter so that spatio/temporal relations indicate woman as subject and not simply object/other.

2.2.2.1. Poetry

When we speak of truth, Heidegger alerts us to the special relationship of truth and language, particularly averting the closure of a truth through a language of metaphysics. Heidegger’s recovery of truth as the clearing and concealing of beings as Being receives attention through poetic language⁵⁷ and Irigaray recovers a similar strategy. She writes, “In this world otherwise lived and illuminated, the language of communication is different, and necessarily poetic: a language that creates, that safeguards its sensible qualities so as to address the body and the soul, a language that lives.”⁵⁸

Both she and Heidegger are immensely concerned with safeguarding. Heidegger will safeguard the provenance of all artwork and all thinking that participates in the strife of the world and earth, “allowing all things the darkness they require and their proper growing time.”⁵⁹ Irigaray will safeguard “those components of the mirror that cannot reflect

⁵⁶ Huntington, *Ecstatic Subjects*, 138.

⁵⁷ Heidegger writes, “All art, as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of beings, is as such, in *essence*, poetry.” “Origins of the Work of Art,” *Basic Writings*, 197.

⁵⁸ Irigaray, WL, 12.

⁵⁹ Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 142.

themselves,”⁶⁰ “oneself in order to preserve a return an exchange,”⁶¹ and the ‘you’ to whom she approaches.⁶² Both Heidegger and Irigaray believe they are safeguarding the conditions necessary for futural change, disclosure of a concealed truth, providing space and time for the unfolding to unfold.

Irigaray suggests it is not necessary to destroy the existing philosophical corpus, considering it nothing, but instead, assesses the imposition of a sole order, “this truth would have had interest in pronouncing itself only in some coteries.”⁶³ It is logical that she begins with “The Sharing of Speech.” She opens with the subsection, “On the way to Proximity,” indicating her close examination of language with space.

Irigaray’s understands words as already indicating flesh: the flesh of the one to whom words are addressed, the flesh of the one who calls them (the lips), and the invitation for exchange that they make possible. Irigaray’s has been using words and language to open passageways of meaning between the one and the other via language structures of metaphor and re-metaphorization, mimesis, and metonym. These are the excesses of metaphysical language. With Heidegger, she suggests that music or painting could be another way to escape the objectionality of a thing. Of these topics she writes, ‘It would be nothing but an invitation to share. Not yet closed upon some meaning, but opening from the one to the other—a between-two.’⁶⁴ She speaks of a ‘virginal’ meaning, one that is not a priori communication in an already constituted or coded meaning. Like Heidegger she examines discourse, the Saying, and the said. But her accent is on the

⁶⁰ Irigaray, TS, 151.

⁶¹ Irigaray, WL, 53.

⁶² Irigaray, TBT, 48.

⁶³ Irigaray, WL, 12.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

exchange with the other that these notions indicate and she insists, “For there to be an exchange, it is essential that the other touch us, particularly through words.”⁶⁵

Heidegger also refers to an experience we have with language touching our “innermost nexus of our existence.”⁶⁶ These experience draw attention to our relation with language, which he demarcates from gathering information about language, of which he notes analytic philosophers supply and *is* metaphysics. Language, he argues, bring us to experiences which we undergo *with* language, thus language brings us back to itself, not everyday speaking.

But for Irigaray, language brings us to the other and to the self. She cautions that our present mode of touching with words reduces “. . . proximity to confusion, to fusion,”⁶⁷ and she clarifies the need for an interval or a medium, what she identifies as, “. . . first of all nature . . . air, water, earth and sun, as fire and light. Being par excellence—matter of the transcendental.”⁶⁸ Her interval sounds in many ways akin to Heidegger’s fourfold. Heidegger’s bridges connect the one and the other and the question of how they dwell together is preconditioned by the landscape of words in which they meet and how their proximity can be safeguarded. Irigaray critiques our current valuation or measurement of how to approach the other and the terms of equality: “In this way it occurs that proximity becomes very easily subjected to political—or scientific—rules which alienate relations between citizens.”⁶⁹ We easily slip into relational modes of speech that are paternal, which most can agree are poor ways to know proximity or approach another. And when we figure

⁶⁵ Ibid., 18.

⁶⁶ Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971) 57.

⁶⁷ Irigaray, WL, 18.

⁶⁸ Irigaray, WL, 19.

⁶⁹ Irigaray, WL, 20.

the transcendental as the God-man-father, what she terms “meta-man,” we have a theory “. . . compatible with the domination of the world by all technologies which aim to get a general view of it from on high, the most obvious example being that of satellites sent to observe the earth and its planetary system . . . an appropriating mastery . . . a relation of closeness.”⁷⁰

Heidegger notes similar unease, “Metalanguage and sputnik, metalinguistics and rocketry are the Same.”⁷¹ But Irigaray is concerned that even Heidegger’s fourfold uses pre-established measures or dimensions that signify a single way of dancing and playing in this world. She urges, “No saying . . . guards in its said the parts of the world in their proximity. Each pronounces a part of it and it is in calling for alliance with the other that a saying is created in which silence becomes essential.”⁷²

2.2.2.2. *Silence*

Both Irigaray and Heidegger valorize silence, but how they posture these terms have similarities and differences. In his “A Dialogue on Language,” between the Japanese and the Inquirer (it is interesting that Heidegger also turns eastward to locate a conversation partner) Heidegger records a conversation between two individuals who do not share the same native language. Well into the conversation both agree that even Plato’s dialogues are not true dialogues, in that they miss the important attribute that a dialogue must always remain coming. The Japanese character states, “The course of such a dialogue would have to have all its own, with more silence than talk.”⁷³ And the Inquirer responds, “Above all,

⁷⁰ Ibid., 20-21.

⁷¹ Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, 59.

⁷² Irigaray, WL, 22.

⁷³ Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, 52.

silence about silence. . . .”⁷⁴ The two refer to talking and writing about silence as “producing the most obnoxious chatter,” while to be silent regarding silence would be “authentic saying . . . and would remain the constant prologue to the authentic dialogue of language.”⁷⁵

With similar concerns but different accents Irigaray writes,

No word can name it once and for all. . . . It is little by little that words can draw near to the transcendental, if they do not close up upon themselves.

The transcendental also exists – perhaps? – in the fracture of a word of which each one keeps a part. Meaning is then sensed but never conceived in only one word. *A silence, an impossible to say*, moves each one toward an inappropriate signification. Too quickly occupying this silence—or the between-two—by a gesture, gestures, risks veiling the meaning of it: between the two something exists that belongs neither to the one nor to the other, nor moreover to any word. And this something must, in part, remain indeterminate.⁷⁶

She directs speech toward the other, but when it reaches the other, it returns back to one’s self, richer, allowing us to learn from the other. For Irigaray, speech then removes itself from the computation of the modern day, and focuses on the conversation partner and the exchange that is occurring between-two in the present, communicating and discovering with the other, rather than schooling or teaching the other what we mean. On this subject Irigaray and Heidegger are most alike, as Heidegger writes, “a language, which speaks by saying, is concerned that our speaking, in listening to the unspoken, corresponds

⁷⁴ Ibid., 53.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Irigaray, WL, 22-23; italics mine.

to what is said. Thus silence, too, which is often regarded as the source of speaking, it itself already a corresponding. Silence corresponds to the soundless tolling of the stillness of appropriating-showing Saying.”⁷⁷

It is worth noting that for Irigaray and Heidegger the notion of appropriation or movement that draws one forth into one’s own (*Ereignis*) has similar but nuanced differences. While Heidegger heralds this movement as “the disclosure of Appropriation,”⁷⁸ Irigaray tends to write of appropriation in a negative sense where one appropriates another. But as Rachel Jones observes, Irigaray positively invokes a sense of Heideggerian appropriation when she writes of cultivating a ‘proper’ or ‘appropriate’ relation to one’s own sexuate kind (*genre*).⁷⁹ But rather than understanding one event, there must be an asymmetrical two that correspond to each sexuate gender. It is the between-two that the appropriate or proper is often (con)fused into appropriation of the other, a conclusion she seeks to rewrite. But with Heidegger, she suggests that such appropriative relations to one’s gender allow men and women to be brought into being, which is to be articulated as sexuate subjects. It is the constitutive mortality of the other that discloses the difference.

In this sense I suggest Irigaray’s philosophic work is appropriative or a disclosure of the event of Heidegger’s philosophy. It is an offshoot of its own; a movement from his work, and her growth and cultivation as a philosopher in her own right aligns closely with Heidegger, but distinguishes into its own. The appropriative or proper gender has been

⁷⁷ Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, 131.

⁷⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. and introduction Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) xxi.

⁷⁹ See Rachel Jones, *Irigaray: Towards a Sexuate Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2011) 181.

analyzed in chapter one and two, and now I turn to the safeguard or guarantee of the proper, the interval or mediator between the two.

3. *Dichotomies, Daimons, and Difference*

In this section I will attend to the importance of dichotomies, particularly as they relate to her ethics. According to Luce Irigaray, female sexual identity does not authentically exist (this is of course not to say that females do not exist) because sexual indifference remains the status quo of female identity. As I read Irigaray, she argues that we cannot move on to a politics of recognition, because female sexual identity does not even exist to be recognized. We must first be concerned with the missing ontology of at least two subjects of difference. Without this primal difference, we are stuck with a sexual ontology that resists the evidence of the natural, spiritual, and social world. In order to oppose the evidence of two subjects and retain intersubjectivity without difference, Irigaray observes that subject-object relations have become the dominant paradigm for sexual indifference, rather than subject-to-subject relations, or subject-with-subject relations. The sole subject (the male sexual subject) stands in the place for universal identity⁸⁰ and in relation to this subject exists mostly a world of objects.

She describes two poles that govern the sensations of this passively lived experience that partitions intersubjectivity: the pole of the subject and the pole of the object.⁸¹

Sensations within this polarity are divided into a dichotomous logic: pleasure/pain,

⁸⁰ For example, Irigaray cites linguistic patterns such as the French masculine *Ils* standing in place for the plural subject they. She also writes elaborate passages using her linguistics background to document the difference in speech patterns between men and women and what these differences could possibly mean to the speaking subjects and to whom they are communicating. See her chapter, "Two of Us, Outside, Tomorrow?" in *I Love to You*, 79-95 and her complete work dealing with the science of language *To Speak Is Never Neutral*, trans. Gail Schwab (New York: Routledge, 2002).

⁸¹ Irigaray, TBT, 23; KW, 18

hot/cold, active/passive, masculine/feminine, and she writes, “along with other dichotomies which exile the body from its organization in a whole and from its incarnation through words.”⁸² Sensibility, argues Irigaray, has been reduced to sensation, and any sensation that challenges this dichotomy has been rejected.

A second infamous dichotomy that Irigaray works to debunk is the binary of transcendence/immanence. According to a similar binary logic, the transcendental has been the aim of the male subject, much to the detriment of immanence. The Hegelian gesture consciously keeps these poles apart. The celestial must be safeguarded from the terrestrial. Several writers⁸³ have noted Irigaray’s ‘sensible transcendental’ or her philosophical maneuver that confounds the division material/ immanent/ terrestrial/ woman from the immaterial/ transcendent/ celestial/ divine-man. Specifically, her essay in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, “Sorcerer Love: A Reading of Plato, *Symposium*, ‘Diotima’s Speech’,” develops a deliberate conflation of these categories. In a paradoxical maneuver, Irigaray creates a path between heaven and earth. Diotima, like the very notion of Eros, is a *daemon*, or an intermediary that connects or keeps in touch, the sensible and the transcendental. As she writes,

Therefore, between knowledge and reality, there is an intermediary that allows for the encounter and the transmutation or transvaluation between

⁸² Irigaray, KW, 18.

⁸³ Agnes Bosanquet, “Luce Irigaray’s *Sensible Transcendental*: Becoming Divine in the Body,” *Transformations* 11: (2005). Accessed February 10, 2012, http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_11/article_01.shtml#top; Carolyn M. Tilghman, “The Flesh Made Word: Luce Irigaray’s Rendering of the Sensible Transcendental,” *Janus Head* 11:2 (2009): 39-54; James H. Olthuis, “Taking the Wager on/of Love: Luce Irigaray and the Caress,” *Gazing Through the Prism Darkly: Reflections on Merold Westphal’s Hermeneutical Epistemology* (Fordham University Press, 2009) 150-162.

the two. Diotima's dialectic is in at least *four terms*: the here, the poles of the encounter, and the beyond—but a beyond that never abolishes the here. And so on, indefinitely. The mediator is never abolished in an infallible knowledge. Everything is always in movement, in a state of becoming. And the mediator of all this is, among other things, or exemplarily, *love*.⁸⁴

Love resists absolutizing any pole or specific location, but keeps the poles in movement, touching and being touched. Much like her notion of the caress, there is an intertwining of polarities, so they can no longer be figured as a mere dichotomy, or hierarchy of certain location. Conceptually, she constantly moves toward difference between two notions, but difference that doesn't polarize, but rather moves concepts to sensuously touch, to be in touch, to be touchable. This is not an enmeshment of notions, but a way to keep the universal realm of ideas or knowledge in touch with the immediate world of immanence or nature. As iterated in the previous chapter, it is a question of proximity of differences. Immanence is no longer in a subordinate position to the transcendental.

Irigaray's work might not be a politics of recognition as much as it is a politics and ethics of mutuality with a redistribution of valuation.⁸⁵ Since women have been assigned to the position of immanence and men to the position of the transcendental, Irigaray challenges the supposed hierarchical value of each position, finding neither point superior, but interdependent, or interwoven. This redistribution doesn't absolutize the categorization of these terms, such that women should always be figured as immanent

⁸⁴ Irigaray, E, 21/28.

⁸⁵ I realize this is a term used commonly with concepts of economics and while I do not want to make an overt connection between sexual difference and economic issues in this section, I do want to point out how Irigaray's work reorders and subverts traditional hierarchical claims of subjects from a top-down approach to a horizontal plane of intersubjectivity, where subjects are with other subjects in alterity, difference, and equity, which is not the same as equality or sameness.

concepts. Her work brings this polarization to the fore, redistributing the value of the position and how we value, while questioning and keeping open the threshold between the two. Irigaray's eros, god, or *daemon* isn't a guardian to keep nature in its place and the divine unsullied by nature; rather, Irigaray's notion of an intermediary works to keep difference in touch, while challenging the way we figure such a chasm between the two. She works to develop these concepts of intersubjectivity (despite the fact that Western logic up to Hegel had previously rendered these concepts as dichotomous), revealing that the masculine/female binary logic falls prey to the same subordination of position as subject object relations. She concludes that subject-to-subject intersubjectivity has been unthought. Western philosophy and psychoanalysis have been so caught up in the ontology of sameness, our sensible perception (to employ a phrase from Merleau-Ponty) has perceived according to a logic of sexual indifference. We have created a sensible world, depriving it of true difference, since any acknowledged difference has been conceptualized only as the subordinate to the dominant sensation or claim. Difference ought to give way to greater differences. Irigaray isn't out to destroy sameness, merely divest it of its singularity as the centric location of all. Irigaray suggests that the second pole is not the subordinate pole, feeding and sustaining the dominant pole; it is a pole of its own that must emerge from the shadows to provide a wholly other sensibility or rationality to our logic. Without this redistribution of true difference, we miss being the bridges or mediators for a 'sensible transcendental' that not only waits for god to come, but as she describes, conjures god up among us and with us.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ See Irigaray, E, 129/124.

If a sensible transcendental grants incarnation, the Christian notion of God among us, then an Irigarayan sensible immediacy focuses on the question of this 'us.' Who is the 'we' that God is among? Historically, the Christian God has been one that is removed or mediated to women via men. For Irigaray, the answer is clearly a 'we' that embraces radical sexuate alterity.

Irigaray has not often employed the term 'sensible immediacy'⁸⁷ in her work and its sparse use probably indicates its correlation to other concepts in her writing. I suggest that her later development of the term 'sensible immediacy' corresponds with her earlier study of the elements, such as *Marine Lover*, *Passions élémentaires*, and *L'oubli de l'air*. I propose this isn't a new concept, but a continuation of her earlier work. In her later work on intersubjectivity, Irigaray grounds her ethics in a sexuate ontology that questions the material existence of the natural world and how we have perceived it. The notion or philosophical development of terms like 'sensible' and 'immediacy' has a rich context within the phenomenological tradition of philosophy, and Irigaray's writing indicates that she is well-versed in the conversation. One her greatest strengths is her evident breadth of reading and her careful scrutiny of Western philosophy.

Given the diversity of phenomenology, Irigaray will extend her own theory of the sensible over and against other claims that articulate subject-object relations. In this section I will select the French existential philosophers whose work parallels and explains Irigaray's key differences: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Lévinas, and Simone de Beauvoir.

⁸⁷ This term seems to appear later in her writing, specifically in the essay, "The Wedding Between Body and Language" in *Two Be Two* and in the same essay also appearing in *Key Writings*.

4. *Existential Phenomenology*

At first glance, existentialism and phenomenology, particularly the later emergence of French existential phenomenology associated with Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and Beauvoir, seem “to constitute one of those rare strands of modern Western philosophy that converge productively with feminism.”⁸⁸ Existential phenomenology has gained philosophical interest from feminists like Iris Marion Young who note that this strand of philosophy offers a unique approach to theorizing subjectivity, aiming to speak from a point of view of the constituted subject’s experience.⁸⁹ These two strands, originally two distinct traditions, later meshed together by Heidegger, form a tradition that opposes abstract, rationalist thought, and instead, explicates concrete, “lived experience,” and importantly for feminist philosophers, the experiences of embodiment and emotion, key tenets for developing personal politics. While acknowledging many of the second-wave feminist concerns, feminists, like Irigaray, critique the idea that the canonical figures remain ensconced within a masculinism that unquestionably accepts the generic accounts of “human existence” which are in fact, tacitly, male experiences. Irigaray’s engagement with each of these existential and phenomenological writers can be understood as interest and lament as she explicates and affirms her central thesis of sexual difference vis-à-vis their work and how it has been obscured or denied. Irigaray’s dance with each of these theorists has differing outcomes, but her honed attention toward this most fruitful tradition can be observed.

⁸⁸ Sonia Kruks, “Existentialism and Phenomenology, in *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, eds. Alison M. Jaggar and Iris Marion Young (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998, 2000) 66.

⁸⁹ Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: “Throwing Like a Girl” and Other Essays*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 8.

Yet the question remains, how should we understand Irigaray's contribution of sexual difference with the account of existential phenomenology? After carefully surveying her interaction with Heidegger, one must also wrestle with her dealings with existential phenomenology, its humanistic orientation toward freedom and choice, and its impact on feminism. How does she maneuver the Heideggerian and Sartrean streams of Continental philosophy? How does Luce Irigaray's account of sexual difference via the tradition of existential phenomenology differ from other feminist accounts? In particular, how does her theory establish a branch of its own that has promise for envisioning and developing a global ethic in which diverse creatures can be affirmed and honored in a planetary wide co-partnership, as opposed to a monosexual anthropocentric hegemony? I will examine these issues and conclude with my reading of how her philosophy can aid in moving toward such an ethic.

Historically Luce Irigaray developed as a philosopher in the context of these thinkers, and living in the same environment of post-war Europe means the cultural climate and intellectual atmosphere forms and shapes her thinking. With this in mind, I suggest that it is not so much that this particular tradition is one with which she has chosen to contend philosophically, but rather, she relates intellectually and culturally to the thinkers that she has learned to philosophize from, and with whom many of us are still thinking. Her intellectual contribution permits her and us to make sense of the Continental phenomenological-existential project and shape it anew.

In these sections I outline briefly her interaction with Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Lévinas, two thinkers whose focus on language, bodies, and ethical relations run parallel to her concerns. I conclude with a portion devoted to Simone de Beauvoir. Her chief critique

of existential phenomenology will be the critique of the history of philosophy, the primacy of thinking within a male morphology, or the imperatives of the male body. Irigaray's interactions with these philosophers will reveal how she can philosophize with and beyond this paradigm. Her work will signal the ways a female morphology has existed, been suppressed, and returns in ways that phallogocentrism deems "unspeakable." She will reveal the exploitation of the female body as the philosophical building material of ontology and will give language, voice, and philosophical entrée to such an ontological "she," or a topology of *le feminine* within this intellectual stream. My aim is to uncover how the ontological project of thinking being has emerged through the existential-phenomenological stream and how Irigaray's participation in these traditions affirms her continuation of this intellectual tradition. By reading these thinkers with Irigaray, we can discern what may advance feminist philosophy and how Irigaray's contribution clarifies her role as a feminist and a Continental philosopher in her own right.

4.1. Merleau-Ponty

Irigaray's important interest in Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology became evident in her early essay that appeared in *Ethique de la Différence Sexuelle* (1984), "The Invisible of the Flesh: A Reading of Merleau Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 'The Intertwining—The Chiasm.'" What is noteworthy in her explication of Merleau-Ponty is her attention to French existentialism early in her career, and her choice to address Merleau-Ponty directly, rather than Sartre or de Beauvoir. It could be read that her attention toward his work might have been directed with the hope of finding greater synergy and traction given his attention to the flesh or embodied experience and their common aim to break the constraint of oppositional thinking and reshift thinking away from empiricist, rationalist,

idealist, and physiologist reductions of the human self and experience. What seems apparent in the criticism of Irigaray is not what Merleau-Ponty did say, but the lack of sexual specificity he offers the ontological projects, the invisible, and what remains unanalyzed in his work and the work of masculinist philosophy. Is he, as Elizabeth Grosz queries, “misogynist through neutralization,” a person who refuses to see sexual specificity, a result of strategic blindness or explicit denunciation?⁹⁰

With theorists like Grosz, I argue that his work and Irigaray’s concerns and criticism can point toward a productive feminist theorization. In fact, Grosz implies the greater possible theorization between Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray as she explains:

It is significant, however, that in the case of Irigaray at least, her comments regarding Derrida and Deleuze are scathingly critical. She seems deeply disturbed by the metaphors of becoming-woman that is pervasive in their writings, functioning as it does as a general emblem of political and theoretical radicality, untethered from any connection with women in their concreteness, that is, in terms of femininity as it is lived by women. Her relation to Merleau-Ponty is considerably more “amorous,” more in keeping with her stated project of “having a fling with the philosophers.”⁹¹

According to Grosz, Merleau-Ponty’s work offers feminists three critical notions that can advance feminist theory. First, the ability to adjudicate experience, not relying upon it as an unexamined source of truth, but as a product of social-political-historical entities that can be constructed and affect these same entities, a notion that is simultaneously active and

⁹⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, “Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray in the Flesh,” *Thesis Eleven* 36 (1993):37.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

passive. Second, by making experience the touchstone for analysis, the object by which to begin analysis, he then makes experience the very subject of philosophy's theorization, moving it away from private caprices and psychological musings, to the very substance and platform for assessing theory. Third and finally, he locates experience as the intermediate position between mind and body. In Grosz's words, "He links the question of experience not only to the privileged locus of consciousness, but demonstrates that experience is always necessarily embodied, corporeally constituted, located in and as the subject's incarnation."⁹²

Alison Jaggar's early work, *Feminist Politics*, explains the importance of Merleau-Ponty's insights, as she offers her critique of radical feminist epistemologies that fail to distinguish between the description and explanation of women's experiences. While we are indebted to radical feminists for bringing these experiences to the fore, we must also, Jaggar argues, situate women's feelings and emotions within the social constructions they are framed within, scrutinizing and examining these experiences.⁹³ Merleau-Ponty's account offers feminists this valuable theorization. With Merleau-Ponty's necessarily embodied subject, he moves accounts of knowledge away from ideological determination or mere physiological materialism, toward an account that offers each subject a perspectival and limited account, partial access of subjects to objects, in short, suggesting the question, does the body of knowledge that we possess broadly, actually reflect the sexual specificity of men's interests and pursuits? Implicit within this observation is the very negative that Irigaray highlights in her work, the inability to make absolute

⁹² Ibid., 41.

⁹³ See Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, 380-1.

transcendental claims of sexual universality or neutrality. Human experiences are not universal with secondary experiences of race, age, ability and so on. Rather, Merleau-Ponty's account suggests that embodied specificities of the subject "... inform the type of subject it is, constituting the very contours, nature, and features of that subject."⁹⁴ The malleability of the subject to the objective and the objective world to the subject are exchanged much more fluidly.

4.1.1. *The Chiasm*

Merleau-Ponty's key term "flesh" in his unfinished work *The Visible and the Invisible: The Intertwining—the Chiasm* (1959, trans. 1968) marks a significant disruption in binary thinking of mind and body, inside and outside, subject and object, or self and others. As the title suggests, the body is figured as a chiasm, from the Greek term *chi*, signifying a crossing-over of subjective and objective experience. The work itself is a crossing over; originally intended to be a book on truth, he converted it into a work on perception (visible) and truth and language (invisible).⁹⁵ In this work he examines the reversibility of flesh revealing the ambiguity of sight and touch—the indeterminate boundaries of these senses.

His favorite exemplar of this doubling or folding over of flesh and being is the example of two hands touching, where people can experience the sensation of touching and being touched, the reversibility of subject and object, where the body is both phenomenal and objective at the same time. Both subjects and objects share flesh, and visibility makes us aware of this ability we have to shift our reflection. In a critical gesture he moves beyond

⁹⁴ Grosz, "Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray," 42.

⁹⁵ Thomas Baldwin, Introduction to *The Visible and the Invisible*, by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, (New York and London: Routledge, 2004) 247.

Sartre's gaze, suggesting a crisscrossing of perception and touching: the seer can be seen touching, and the seen can also see and touch, offering a critically subjective stance that is not solely controlled by the original subject. The body, he posits, is two-dimensional, the body as sensible and sentient (objective and phenomenal body), double belonging that he says teaches us that "each calls out for the other."⁹⁶ But this notion of flesh seeing and touching is not isolated to humans; in a radical shift he declares that objects in the world can also see and be seen. The crossing over between outer and inner, between subject and objects, between mind and body, is a reversible, ambiguous chiasm. As he says,

The visible about us seems to rest in itself. It is as though our vision were formed in the heart of the visible, or as though there were between it and us an intimacy as close as between the sea and the strand. And yet it is not possible that we blend into it, nor that it passes into us, for then the vision would vanish at the moment of formation, by disappearance of the seer or of the visible. What there is then are not things first identical with themselves, which would then offer themselves to the seer, nor is there a seer who is first empty and who, afterward, would open himself to them—but something to which we could not be closer than by palpating it with our look, things we could not dream of seeing "all naked" because the gaze itself envelops them, clothes them with its own flesh.⁹⁷

In this account Merleau-Ponty articulates how two senses alert him to the body's unique position as a thing among things: seeing and touching. The body touches and sees and it is

⁹⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 254.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 249.

seen and touched, thus indicating how the being of one body participates with the being or flesh of the world. He explains, “. . . each of the two beings is an archetype for the other, because the body belongs to the order of the things as the world is universal flesh.”⁹⁸ The visible seer (the sensible) and the invisible (the intelligible) are fluid, non-identical, and moving movements, their distinctions are evident, but they are not precise locations, as much as they might be gradations. The hinge or access point is the flesh. He describes flesh as “not a thing, but a possibility, a latency,”⁹⁹ arguing there is no term in traditional philosophy to designate it. He suggests it is not “matter,” or “psychic material,” nor a fact or a sum of facts.¹⁰⁰ Instead of matter or mind, he turns to the old term “element,” which he understands to be that midway point between the spatio-temporal body and the world of ideas. In his words flesh is “an ‘element’ of Being.”¹⁰¹ The flesh is not an obstacle between seer and the seen, it is instead, “their means of communication.”¹⁰² He explains this in the following: “The thickness of the body, far from rivaling that of the world, is on the contrary the sole means I have to go unto the heart of the things, by making myself a world and by making them flesh.”¹⁰³ He knows this flesh is not object as it suffers when wounded, removing flesh and body from the category of instruments. The universal flesh of the world with the flesh of the body do not envelope one in other, but as he says, they are intertwined: “There is reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other.”¹⁰⁴ This reciprocity or intertwining of flesh, sensuous as it is sensed, with the theorization of a

⁹⁸ Ibid., 254.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 250.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 256.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid. 252.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 253.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 255.

return to the elements ought to make Merleau-Ponty's account a paramount theory for Irigaray's advancement of the female sexuate body/self/subject and her theorization for intersubjectivity. The return to the elements of water, air, earth, and fire as an incarnate principle of Being should make Merleau-Ponty a promising philosophic partner.

4.1.2. *Reading Irigaray with Merleau-Ponty*

But her essay in *Ethics* can be read as critical of Merleau-Ponty's visual dependence (a central marker of phallogocentrism which she describes at length in *Speculum*). She charges Merleau-Ponty with two important critiques: first, he theorizes that subjectivity, and hence intersubjectivity, is solipsistic, and second, he mistakenly conflates the senses of the visible with the tactile.

The first charge of solipsism can be read as a charge that his phenomenology is the sensuous experience of a single male seeing and touching the world. Thus, the conclusions he makes have entrée as a universal theorization of subject-object relations. As can be read from her early work in *Speculum*, Irigaray has labored to draw attention to the speculative economy and she argues that the two senses do not obey the same "laws or rhythms of flesh."¹⁰⁵ They cannot be part of the same chiasmus because as she critiques, the visible needs the tangible, but the tangible does not need the visible, they are not reciprocal senses. The criss-crossing is nullified by touching's primacy, which the maternal-feminine subject and other demonstrate as well as the doubling of lips that women embody. The tactility of the womb is a precondition of sight.

Other feminists have noted similar critiques of Merleau-Ponty's work. In her notable essay, "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility,

¹⁰⁵ Irigaray, E, 162.

and Spatiality,” Iris Marion Young suggests that Merleau-Ponty’s lived body is a description of the masculine experience with no recognition of the difference a woman’s body and gender connotes. Similarly, Judith Butler argues that Merleau-Ponty’s occlusion of sexuality from human experience makes sexuality co-extensive with existence. Particularly, she critiques his ocular heterosexual bias: “Viewed as an expression of sexual ideology, *The Phenomenology of Perception* reveals the cultural construction of the masculine subject as a strangely disembodied voyeur whose only sexuality is strangely non-corporeal. Significant, I think, is the prevalence of visual metaphors in Merleau-Ponty’s description of normal sexuality.”¹⁰⁶ In a similar manner, Irigaray’s critiques of Merleau-Ponty have resonance with these feminists. Elizabeth Grosz understands Irigaray’s three basic critiques of Merleau-Ponty as the following: 1) he privileges the dominant place of vision in his writings that overpowers all other perceptual models, and accords with a phallic economy in which the feminine figures as a blind spot or lack, 2) he associates notions of flesh with attributes of femininity, and 3) he seemingly ignores the maternal body and experience.¹⁰⁷ Like Butler and Young Irigaray uncovers a masculinist assumption in a work that addresses perception and embodiment through the eyes and experiences of a heterosexual male, ignoring the issue of sexual difference in phenomenology.

In another essay, Irigaray faults Merleau-Ponty for remaining within the same master-slave paradigm as Sartre.¹⁰⁸ Specifically, she writes that Merleau-Ponty’s

¹⁰⁶ Judith Butler, “Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description: A Feminist Critique of Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*,” in *The Thinking Muse: Feminism and Modern French Philosophy*, eds. Jeffner Allen and Iris Marion Young (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989) 93.

¹⁰⁷ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward A Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994) 104.

¹⁰⁸ See Irigaray, KW, 4, and “The Wedding Between the Body and Language,” in TBT, esp. 20-22, and KW, 15-17.

development of perception does little in “acceding to the other as other.”¹⁰⁹ She charges that he considers sexuality an ‘ambiguity’ and ‘indeterminacy,’ and challenges that his notion of sexuality does not ‘... favour the emergence of intersubjectivity but, rather, maintains a duplicity in subjectivity itself in such a way that all of its actions, its sentiments, its sensations are ambiguous, murky, and incapable of being turned towards an other as such.”¹¹⁰

Much of this criticism centers on his discussion of the phenomenology of sexuality. Irigaray understands his theory of perception to reinscribe a dichotomy between subject (self) and object (the other), while she, in contrast, theorizes a dialectic between subject and object that considers proximity, nearness, and intersubjective exchanges that are sexually differentiated. She seems to read Merleau-Ponty’s use of perception as a means to objectify the other and she urges, “Perception represents a possible path for sensing the other, respecting this other as subject, and it also allows me to remain a subject while perceiving the other. Perception can establish a link between the reception of a fact exterior to me and an intention toward the world, towards the other.”¹¹¹ Rather than cultivating a society where ‘sensible perception’ can flourish, through a tradition of the sensible and exchange of words between those who love each other,¹¹² she posits, “This elementary economy of sensation is too abstract for the life of the flesh, for its harmony, for intersubjectivity, and causes intersubjectivity to decline into simple ‘experience.’”¹¹³

Sensibility for Irigaray is bound to a culture of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Whether

¹⁰⁹ Irigaray, TBT, 22; KW, 16.

¹¹⁰ Irigaray, TBT, 21; KW, 16.

¹¹¹ Irigaray, TBT, 22; KW, 17.

¹¹² Irigaray, TBT, 23; KW, 18.

¹¹³ Irigaray, TBT, 22; KW, 18.

the notion is the other, perception, or Lévinas's caress, she is adamant that sensibility must be focused on the task of intersubjectivity, sensing the other as a true other, and not as ambiguous sexual other (à la Merleau-Ponty) and immediacy, the pole given to woman, no longer be the suppressed object, but a subject in her own right.

The critiques from Irigaray, Butler, and Young question the subjective specificities of Merleau-Ponty's subject, if that they are not, in fact, the sexual subjective specificities of men and their lived experiences and corporeal relations. But this should not cause us to be dismissive of Merleau-Ponty's claims, especially with Irigaray's notion of sexuate difference. As Margaret Whitford observed early in Irigarayan scholarship and Irigaray testifies to herself in the beginning of "The Invisible of the Flesh," she and Merleau-Ponty share common aims: "Like Merleau-Ponty, Irigaray is interested in pre-discursive experience . . . and how conceptualization of experience bring with it certain ontological commitments."¹¹⁴ Irigaray writes quoting him,

Up to this point, my reading with interpretation of the history of philosophy agree with Merleau-Ponty: we must go back to that moment of prediscursive experience, recommence everything, all the categories by which we understand things, the world, subject-object divisions, recommence everything and pause at the "mystery, as familiar as it is unexplained, of a light which, illuminating the rest, remains at its source in obscurity".¹¹⁵

It seems that her criticism of Merleau-Ponty is a pushing or advancing of his phenomenology, not a dismissal of its original aim, intent, and scope. She notes objections

¹¹⁴ Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*, (London: Routledge, 1991) 54.

¹¹⁵ Irigaray, E, 151.

that signal missteps, perhaps, in the dance, rather than a failed dancer. I believe Merleau-Ponty's insights with Irigarayan scholarship are powerful theoretical discernments in at least three ways.

First, by respecting the laws, logic, and rhythm of the tactile sense, Irigaray expands his argument away from conflating these two senses and provides theoretical difference distinguishing sight and touch. She signals failure to theorize tactility as a forgetting of the maternal-feminine, and hence, the co-origin of all subjectivity. And by expanding subjective experience or flesh to include sexual difference, she offers a way that multiple bodies can en-flesh the subjectivity and its reversibility with the phenomenal world. Her charges of murky ambiguity seem to be targeted at his understanding of the flesh of the subject with another subject, not so much the notion of flesh as a critical theoretical mid-point. By allowing difference in flesh to be further theorized, the mid-point or "element of Being" still offers a robust theory of human ontology and epistemology that refuses a generic rationalist, empiricist, or materialist account alone. In many ways she is positing a more profound notion of the flesh than even Merleau-Ponty could envision.

Second, it seems the murkiness of Merleau-Ponty's flesh is also the very condition of possibility for her to distinguish how this flesh could be different sexually. As Grosz again notes, Merleau-Ponty's flesh functions within feminist theory much like "Lacan's phallus," "Derrida's *différance*," or "Deleuze's becoming-woman," and she calls these concept-metaphors that allow feminists to investigate and challenge prevailing notions of metaphysics by providing the tools of destabilization and openness that they have needed to attack patriarchy.¹¹⁶ But feminists' very utilization of these metaphors may in fact efface

¹¹⁶ See Grosz, "Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray," 53.

feminist interests as they reinscribe them with priority, reinforcing phallogocentrism. What Irigaray's project offers is a mode for feminists to self-represent these interests in ways that also challenge patriarchy, remain open, but are sexually differentiated to, for, and with women's theorization. This ambiguity of the sexual female other who is also subject appears to be the precarious dance that she herself is maneuvering, demanding women exist in some specificity that augers theorization at the level of universal ontological claims, but refusing to posit that notion essentially. But it is Merleau-Ponty's notion of flesh as overcoming mind-body duality that provides Irigaray with a unique co-challenger, allowing body-subjects to be living fluid beings whose attributes of sex no longer remain physiological facts about them, as Grosz notes, like one's eye color,¹¹⁷ but these attributes are in fact alive with agency or 'flesh' of their own, nature and culture together, a central thesis of Irigaray's claims. Again, the rhythm of these differences sounds the cue that escapes the notice of the speculative economy, which might signal why a heterosexual male body-subject would omit their difference.

Third, the abyss of Merleau-Ponty's chiasm seems to be similar in intent and scope to the bordered protection of the interval in Irigaray's schema, or the "to," which Irigaray further develops in *I Love to You*. Like Merleau-Ponty, she desires a way for these two subjects to cross-over without fusion or fission. She and Merleau-Ponty share a theoretical concern to allow a profound space to be present, and Irigaray moves that space toward intersubjective relations and this theorization of space and proximity with body-subjects and the world seems a mutual notion. Irigaray will include that distinction between subjects and other subjects, particular sexual subjects and the return of woman to herself.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

4.2. Lévinas

Irigaray's exchange with existential phenomenology includes Emmanuel Lévinas's essay on the caress, as found in his chapter "Phenomenology of Eros" in *Totality and Infinity*. Like Lévinas, she is concerned that we think eros prior to the same ontological overlays that defines and frames the discussions of the erotic today.¹¹⁸ To reconsider love Irigaray and Lévinas reflect on the notion of a radical "other."

4.2.1. *The Other*

The other for Lévinas is "forever unknowable" and signifies an excess, opening, which even in our attempts to kill or control, the other remains elusive to the parameters of subjectivity, thus the Levinasian ethical prohibition to kill the other. For Lévinas we are hostage to the responsibility to welcome the other with our ethical action, prohibiting hurt, and adding a second layer, a call to help the other.

Irigaray's relation to the other, as delineated in *I Love to You*, and her response to Hegel's articulation of the dialectic, is postulated negatively. The negative or self-limit of a subject is what enables her or him to go towards the other as other. The very alterity of each other draws them to each other: "I go towards that which enables me to become while remaining myself"¹¹⁹ and she will advocate the couple as the basic social cell."¹²⁰ Ethical relations of the couple have largely remained within heterosexual erotic discourse (as in Hegel's discussion of the ethical) or completely ignored for homosexual lovers (as in Plato's *Symposium*). But within Lévinas's writing a reader can discern immediately, as he states,

¹¹⁸ Irigaray, E, 185.

¹¹⁹ Irigaray, ILTY, 104.

¹²⁰ Irigaray, "Flesh Colours," KW, 113

“Love aims at the Other,”¹²¹ how love relations signify the theorization of an ethical and ontic other. Irigaray’s first essay directed toward Lévinas appeared also in *Ethics of Sexual Difference*, in the essay, “Fecundity of the Caress: A Reading of Levinas” and is read as broadly generative and critical.¹²²

Irigaray’s chief critique, as already eluded, is Levinas’s masculinist language in theorizing the ethico-ontic other. Indeed, as Krzysztof Ziarek observes, Levinas’s rhetoric reveals his masculine assumptions, articulating an ethics of the other as “obsession,” “hostage,” and “responsibility.” Whereas, Irigaray’s language “. . . places the emphasis on the potentiality unfolding from the other’s difference, so that the other’s invisibility does not only ex-posit the subject but, primarily, enables both the one and the other to become, to ‘be two.’ Alterity is thus expressed through feminine rhetoric, which foregrounds change, potential, and a new economy of sexual relations”¹²³ Critical to Irigarayan scholarship is the insistence that this sexual distinction grounds ethico-ontic relations. The female other, too often rendered invisible, makes visible the relationship “between us.” If sight does not clue us to the ethical female other, how can we be two? As previously stated, her work elaborates the sense of touch or tactility as positing or signifying the maternal-feminine. She describes the sensual pleasure of birth as evidence to our origin: “Still carnal. Voluptuous without knowing it. Always at the beginning and not based on the origin of a subject that sees, grows old, and dies of losing touch with the enthusiasm and innocence of

¹²¹ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991) 256.

¹²² See especially Tina Chanter, “Levinas and the Question of the Other,” in *Ethics of Eros*, 170-224; Jones, *Irigaray*, 214-16,

¹²³ Krzysztof Ziarek, “A New Economy of Relations,” in *Returning to Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy, Politics, and the Question of Unity*, ed. Maria C. Cimitile and Elaine P. Miller (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007) 64.

a perpetual beginning.”¹²⁴ Before the solipsism of subject-object relations in the masculine, one that seeks to control its objects, she understands sensual pleasure as a way to “reopen” and “reverse” this conception and construction of the world.¹²⁵

In *This Sex*, Irigaray suggests that the logic of the visible perpetuates women’s lack or absence, but women’s erotic pleasure is alternatively apparent via touch. She writes, “Within this logic, the predominance of the visual, and of the discrimination and individualization of form is particularly foreign to female eroticism. Woman takes pleasure more from touching than from looking, and her entry into a dominant scopic economy signifies, again, her consignment to passivity: she is to be the beautiful object of contemplation.”¹²⁶ With Emmanuel Levinas she will find a philosophic partner whose focus is the wholly other, whose theorization of the invisible, and concern for proximity will offer potential collaboration and critique from her.

4.2.2. *The Caress*

Given her theoretical interest in erotic touching as a disruption to the scopic economy, it is unsurprising why she is alert to Lévinas’s theorization of the caress. If touch alerted Merleau-Ponty to texture, to the palpable, Lévinas frames touch as a caress; it does not turn me toward an intra-psychic sense of subject-object relations, but toward the wholly other. Unlike a grasp, the caress thwarts subject-object relations displacing the unquestioned “I.” In contrast, the fragility or tenderness of the caress turns me toward the other or ethical subject relations. For Lévinas desire points me toward the exteriority of the other, a desire beyond satisfaction, that does not posit an absolute transcendental Other,

¹²⁴ Irigaray, E, 185.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Irigaray, TS, 25-6.

but the irreducible other. He explains, "... the caress seeks what is not yet, a 'less than nothing,' closed and dormant beyond the future, consequently dormant quite otherwise than the *possible* which would open to anticipation."¹²⁷ This play of time and space means I cannot possess an other or an object, and he states that the caress seeks neither person nor thing, thus confounding the former oppositions and *telos* of philosophy's past.¹²⁸ The caress will guarantee ethical proximity, a Heideggerian trope Irigaray carefully details in her work, and as I have already elaborated, extends ~~notions~~ ethics with a rethinking of the metaphysics of space and time. Lévinas explains, "In the caress proximity remains proximity. . . . Sight is . . . an openness and a consciousness . . . is called vision; but even in its subordination to cognition sight maintains contact and proximity. The visible caresses the eye."¹²⁹ Levinas takes the ethical posturing of touch and suggests vision may also have this ethical posture of proximity. In this way Levinas recasts vision, hearing, and touch as the awakening of the approach of the neighbor.

The notion of the caress as proximity means that sensibility will be interpreted as proximity rather than knowledge possession. We have language "contact," and logos is not the thing to be claimed, but will instead harken to a "beyond the visible."¹³⁰ The caress is not an attribute of existence, but "a way" to a no man's land between being and non-being. The caress dislocates the certitude of Descartes' "I" with the question of the "non-I." He differentiates that caress from the body-object of physiology or the action of the "I can," it is

¹²⁷ Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 258.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 259.

¹²⁹ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993) 118.

¹³⁰ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Otherwise than Being Or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburg, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998, 2004) 100.

sensible, but denuded of form, offering itself as “erotic nudity.”¹³¹ In this fragile state the other, the Beloved, is beyond object, face, and “existent,” abiding in what he terms “virginity.” The “Eternal Feminine” is recast as the virgin who will signify a fleeting, ungraspable, reconfiguration of the master-slave dialectic. Instead of conqueror and conquered, the virgin will be both untouchable and desirable, “. . . a fragility at the limit of non-being wherein is lodged not only what is extinguished and *is no longer*, but what is not yet.”¹³²

Irigaray begins her essay in *Ethics* to Lévinas by expressing the differences between his phenomenology of the caress and the one she is attempting to think. She faults Lévinas for framing the caress from the subject standpoint of himself, as a man, and not two in reciprocity. Second, she claims that her gesture of caressing bears no resemblance to the demonstration of carnal love that Lévinas develops. While Lévinas writes that the feminine is essentially ‘violable and inviolable’ like a notion of the fragile ungraspable virgin, Irigaray disputes,

I think of virginity, instead, as your repose with yourself, in yourself, you as irreducible to me, irreducible to what is common in community. Rather than violating or penetrating the mystery of the other, rather than reducing his or her consciousness or freedom to passivity, objectuality, animality or infancy, the caress makes a gesture which give the other to himself, to herself, thanks to an attentive witness, thanks to a guardian of incarnate subjectivity.¹³³

¹³¹ Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 258.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Irigaray, TBT, 27; KW, 21.

What permits intersubjective relationships, the call or welcome to use Lévinas's term, is difference. Proximity acts as the kind of safeguard that Lévinas intends with the caress, when differences between the two are acknowledged, self-limitation from the onset. The attraction between the two is not hetero-erotic, it is the eros of "energy," mystery, and sensibility that must be sexually differentiated between these others. The conditions of possibility for the caress are imbued within her negative: "... this negative allows me to go towards you."¹³⁴ Irigaray's constant criticism of phenomenology shouldn't cloud her enthusiasm for an existential phenomenal subject, but rather, indicates that this subject is presumed to be one, instead of two. She is critical of Lévinas' portrayal of this caress as a male lover caressing his beloved, a woman. The unending deferral of the lover and his virgin beloved, she suggests, fails its ethical intention: "The caress does not attain the more intimate dwelling place,"¹³⁵ because the first dwelling place of woman is elided. She writes, "No nudity brings back to light the intimacy of that first house of flesh."¹³⁶ The potential that Lévinas elaborates in this fecund encounter with a female beloved, falls flat as another disappointing allusion to woman as child, animal, or virgin. The potential of his touch "that goes beyond touching" has lost the memory of flesh.¹³⁷ She is faceless and veiling herself from visibility and night. The act of love is greater than the she and actually swallows her up, virginity and violability remove her from the state of innocence that attaches the beloved to her mother, ethics cannot be reversed nor has it a way to think this reversal back to the maternal. Where is the trusting, fragile, agency of the female lover in Levinas's

¹³⁴ Irigaray, *ILTY*, 104.

¹³⁵ Irigaray, *E*, 188.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 191.

account? Irigaray imagines, “There the female lover is not subjected to alternations of fire and ice—mirror or frost that the male lover would have to pass through to reach the beloved. Given back to her own movement . . . she revives herself in her own flame and does not simply receive it from the other.”¹³⁸ A woman is not a passive flower waiting for her bloom to be plucked, in order for the lover to contemplate, but as she says, “Both contemplate and bloom.”¹³⁹

I observe two important critiques that Irigaray will develop from this initial dance with Lévinas. First, with Lévinas, Irigaray will herald a rethinking of the visible and its potential to reframe ethical relations. What is surprising in this essay is her positive connotation of the visibility of the female other and her critique of Lévinas’s faceless beloved, a facelessness she reads as woman’s continued absence in subject-to-subject relations. Such lack of visibility has allowed the female other to be annexed in order to be captivated, depriving relations of true intimacy and growth that Lévinas purports as the basis of ethico-ontic thinking. From her early work which rejected the visible as referential to the scopic economy, Irigaray begins to reconceive the visible with a material sensibility. In her work on Heidegger, she conceives of the “density of air,” and her attention to the elements in *Elemental Passions* and *Marine Lover*, as Kelly Oliver notes, moves vision from the service of patriarchy, offering it as a materiality that may give us new ways to think about the visible from a feminist perspective.¹⁴⁰ The look or Sartrean gaze will become a

¹³⁸ Irigaray, E, 194.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ See Kelly Oliver “Vision, Recognition, and a Passion for the Elements,” in *Returning to Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy, Politics, and the Question of Unity* eds. Maria C. Cimitile and Elaine P. Miller (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007) 121-135.

look of love, and Levinas's caress as "the way" will later become for Irigaray her titled project, *The Way of Love*.

Second, Irigaray will not depart from Levinas's erotic concerns, she will provide their fundamental sexuate difference to make the fecundity generative and proximate. She, like Levinas, will theorize proximity, but proximity will include sexually differentiated subjects, in order to safeguard the wholly other. This safeguarding of a female subject will also suggest the question of a female transcendental figure. While the call of Levinas's transcendental Other keeps the lover from enmeshment or fusion with the beloved, so Irigaray will theorize a transcendental figure that will help women discern the difference positively and anew. If for Levinas the encounter with the Other calls the individual into being, meaning ethics precedes ontology, then for Irigaray she will theorize a transcendental other as well as immanent other that respects the difference between these sexuate subjects. But I agree with Rachel Jones, that for Irigaray, the caress is the more fruitful origin for this transcendental other, as carnal beings reveal the incarnation of ethical fidelity within and between them.¹⁴¹

Her re-reading of phenomenology is not intended to dismiss this tradition, but reveal what is being covered, namely, a sexuate ontology of at least two subjects, which permits true intersubjectivity to flourish. Sensibility that is reduced to experience without an account of sexuality that concedes difference misses the locus of meaning that phenomenology was intended to reveal. As she writes,

For this reason, the sexuate body and the sexual relationship are not
bewitchment or possession, submersion and nausea (as Sartre writes in

¹⁴¹ See Jones, *Irigaray*, 198; cf. Irigaray, E, 217.

Being and Nothingness), they are not ambiguity (according to the language of Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception*, 'The Body in its Sexual Being'), and the feminine body, or of the feminine, is not equivocation (as Lévinas maintains in *Totality and Infinity*). Such bewitchment, possession, ambiguity and equivocation signify a two which expresses both the existence and absence of two subjects as well as of intersubjectivity.¹⁴²

Irigaray establishes her notion of sensible immediacy within the context of the phenomenological tradition, which takes seriously notions of the 'sensible' and 'immediacy.' She evidences concern that sensibility not be reduced to mere 'sensation' or 'experience,' but that sensibility remain sensuous, in touch with the subject of a wholly other in order to maintain the regeneration and renewing of the wholly other Lévinas intends. Her criticism or addition to the conversation is that sexuate ontology reveals a sensible immediacy that signals two subjects that make intersubjectivity possible and dismisses the pseudo-intersubjectivity of subject-object relations, where the female subject-object remains an ambiguity, object, animal, or virginal figure on the brink of dissipation.

She is trying to think of sexual relations outside of the exchange-value economy she outlines in *This Sex* and conceives of a proximity and nearness where woman can be in relation to herself and the other without fear of being owned, violated, sacrificed, or entombed. She also lifts immediacy out of its subservient position and redistributes its value with the polarity of transcendence. In many ways, Irigaray's writing about the immediate or natural world reveals the transcendence she believes occurs within this pole,

¹⁴² Irigaray, TBT, 28; KW, 22.

confounding its oppositional stance to the transcendent. In much of Irigaray's writing, transcendence is not found in another plane apart from earth and its natural domain, but transcendence becomes incarnate amongst us, a sensible transcendental, when we acknowledge an 'us' as the guiding ethic of the world, and not a one.

4.3. *Simone de Beauvoir*

Sartrean existential phenomenology came under attack, particularly in the 1980s, from the poststructuralist or "postmodern" turn in philosophy and feminism, but has recently regained interest as theorists seek insights from the tradition to move beyond the impasses that postmodernism seems to present to some.¹⁴³ Feminist critiques of existential philosophy identify key limitations of each philosophy for feminist purposes. First, existential philosophy's exemplar, Jean-Paul Sartre famously argued that human consciousness is free, choosing its actions, characteristics, and emotions,¹⁴⁴ and that existence precedes essence.¹⁴⁵ The focus on freedom and choice can be a difficult assertion for feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir, who must also show how women are constrained and require emancipation from the tyranny of patriarchy. Critics debate her entanglement in the seemingly contradictory claims that women are free, but at the same time, culturally not free.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ See, for example, Sonia Kruks, *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); Debra B. Bergoffen, *Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologists, Erotic Generosities* (Albany: State University of New York, 1997).

¹⁴⁴ See Jean Paul Sartre, "Being and Doing: Freedom," *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washing Square Press, 1943, 1992) 559-707.

¹⁴⁵ Jean Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, trans. Carol Macomber (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007) 22.

¹⁴⁶ For the complexities of Beauvoir's relationship to existentialism see, Penelope Deutscher, "The Notorious Contradictions of Simone de Beauvoir," *Yielding Gender: Feminism, Deconstruction, and the History of Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) 169-193.

Initially one may read Irigaray as having a critical stance toward Sartre, and de Beauvoir by extension. For example, she suggests that Sartre, in *Being and Nothingness*, identifies the body of the other as a 'facticity' that he can see and touch, or a consciousness transcendent to the body. Within this scheme, she critiques, "... the only possibility of entering into a sexual relationship would be—he writes—to enchant the other, to make their consciousness descend into the body, to paralyze their liberty in the factuality of the body. . . . Touching the other, caressing the other, then becomes a means of appropriating their liberty in the factuality of the body."¹⁴⁷ The other for Sartre, according to Irigaray, must be trapped within the sensibility of body, in order to protect the subject from the other. Instead of mutuality arbitrating a relationship, fear and control become the dominant motifs. Irigaray's critique of Sartre's notion of sensibility reveals her own belief that the body of the self or the other need not be subsumed with only one winner.

A reader may also observe how little of Simone de Beauvoir's work is actually cited within Irigaray's work. Although *Speculum of the Other Woman* may be understood as a continuation of de Beauvoir's project, particularly the question of the woman as the Other, but Irigaray indicates her development of the other is in direct opposition to de Beauvoir's. She explains, "Rather than refusing, as Simone de Beauvoir does, to be the other gender, the other sex, I am asking to be recognized as really an other, irreducible to the masculine subject. I can now see just how much the subtitle of *Speculum* may have irritated Simone de Beauvoir: *Of the other as woman*."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Irigaray, KW, 4.

¹⁴⁸ Irigaray, DBT, 125.

Both Irigaray and de Beauvoir will grapple with the notion of subjects and objects, but their methodology, assumptions, and view of transcendence will reveal important and divergent shifts in Irigaray's thinking as an existentialist and phenomenologist. While opposites on the question of the Other, I suggest she and de Beauvoir share critical concerns as they remain theoretically different. I will briefly sketch de Beauvoir's notion of subject-object relations and will demonstrate how Irigaray relates to it. For the purpose of this thesis, this section is important to indicate why Irigaray's ethics may be particularly useful to ecofeminists, or groups whose political interests rely on respect for issues outside of a male-dominated ideal of political freedom and transcendence, such as animals and ecologies.

4.3.1. *Feminism and Language*

De Beauvoir's reception as a philosopher has often been unrecognized due to her choice to reflect her thoughts in essays and metaphysical novels, exemplified in her inaugural 1943 work in this genre, *She Came to Stay*. Many believe her 1946 *Literature and the Metaphysical Essay* and her 1965 and 1966 *Que Peut la Littérature?* and *Mon expérience d'écrivain* reflect Husserl and Heidegger's emphasis on the lived experience and the way language reveals meaning. If for Heidegger it was poetry that challenged the privileged position of abstract discourses, then it was ethical and political literature for de Beauvoir. But for de Beauvoir she challenged not only the philosophical status quo, she also challenged the patriarchal status quo. It is unsurprising that Luce Irigaray, reading Husserl, Heidegger, and de Beauvoir would also highlight similar reflections on the lived experience and pit similar challenges toward discursive philosophy and patriarchy. Many have critiqued Irigaray's *féminine écriture* as reflecting an essential notion of feminist writing,

but, understood within the legacy of Heidegger and de Beauvoir, one may also understand it as a way to destabilize the privilege of abstract philosophical discourse as the discourse par excellence with which to convey meaning about our world.

4.3.2. *Freedom, Will, and Choice*

De Beauvoir's philosophy emerged at a time in post-war Europe where freedom and a person's subjectivity could be radically oppressed by a political occupying other. Her work appears at a time of national violence, gender violence, and religious decline. In *She Came to Stay* she dedicates with the words of Hegel "each consciousness seeks the death of the other." The question of a subject's freedom, of the Hegel's master and slave relations, is put to the question, can another truly limit my freedom, impinge on my ability to choose in a meaningless and absurd world devoid of traditional mores? For de Beauvoir the question can be understood in her work, *Ethics of Ambiguity* where she leans on the Cartesian distinction between one's outer versus inner self, a protected inner self that no external presence can truly touch. She writes,

It is rather well known that the fact of being a subject is a universal fact and that the Cartesian *cogito* expresses both the most individual experience and the most objective truth. By affirming that the source of all values resides in the freedom of man, existentialism merely carries on the tradition of Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, who in the words of Hegel himself, "have taken for their point of departure the principle according to which the essence of right and duty and the essence of the thinking and willing subject are absolutely identical."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Philosophical Library/Open Road: 1949, 2011) 17

She explains that man is not placed in a world given to him, a world that is foreign to him, but rather, “it is the world willed by man.”¹⁵⁰ She scorns Hegel’s loss of the individual for the collective “Life of Mankind.”¹⁵¹ Rather, she asserts again Sartre’s definition of man in *Being and Nothingness* as “that being whose being is not to be, that subjectivity which realizes itself only as a presence in the world, that engages freedom, that surging of the for-onself which is immediately given for others.”¹⁵² She cites Husserl’s phenomenology as a way to limit any “errors of dogmatism” or absolute understanding of the external world given the nature of flesh and bone and one’s existential passion, instincts, desires, stating that the genuine man will reject any foreign absolute. She notes, “He will understand that it is not a matter of being right in the eyes of a God, but being right in his own eyes.”¹⁵³ But challenging Dostoyevsky’s claim, “If God does not exist, everything is permitted,” she clarifies that the existentialist project is one that takes on the seriousness and responsibility of one’s freedom and will. Her project does not dodge the weight of human action behind the contingency of an inhuman objectivity outside of man and his freedom. She is not transcending the empirical body for Kant’s universality, or the right of the individual for Hegel’s ethical sustainability. Instead she counters that the right of one individual man is not the totality of value, but rather, “. . . the plurality of concrete, particular men projecting themselves toward their ends on the basis of situations whose particularity is as radical and as irreducible as subjectivity itself.”¹⁵⁴ She submits that her

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁵² Ibid., 9.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 14.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 18.

ethics of ambiguity will “. . . refuse to deny *a priori* that separate existants can, at the same time, be bound to each other, that their individual freedoms can forge laws valid for all.”¹⁵⁵

Embedded within this distinction of particular individual freedoms and collective law seems to be the crux of Irigaray’s claim. Should this discernment of particular concrete groups be sexually differentiated? Would the embodied, languaged experience of sexual others offer substantively different ambiguities as groups seek to define aims and goals that refuse to transcend beyond the empirical body, the temporal moment? If human wills are, as Marx alluded, not apparently free, but reflections of the objective condition by which people are defined, should the revolt also consider the negation of sex? For the existentialist, de Beauvoir insists that the decision to even join a political party or a revolution resides within the surge of the individual in flesh and blood. The idea will not carry the movement, but bodies that choose their freedom and will. She notes Hegel’s observation that a choice can only be moral if we can also choose not to realize it. Rather than abandoning ethics once the choice is made, or as Hegel understood the Spirit moving past nature, for her, ethics will only be moved by embodied individuals that do as she observes Marx coaxing: “bite into the world.”¹⁵⁶ De Beauvoir refuses to convey ethics abstractly, but will move it toward action, the world present as we are present in it. Freedom as a given means isn’t the end game, but rather, freedom converges with existence in reality, taking our freedom and making it moral in the world.

If we are free and moral when we choose ethics that align with particular bodies and in particular places in time, then it seems Irigaray’s distinction of sexual difference would

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 22.

be a welcomed clarification of how actions are or are not ethical. Like de Beauvoir, Irigaray also traces how man's journey from child to almost divine being would give him pause to bequeath his god-like status to become simply "a man with all his anxiety and doubt."¹⁵⁷ Perhaps sexuate difference is another anxiety that people dread in the choices it demands, the distinction of wills and bodies it further asks us to consider, the lackluster ability to propel a mighty collective like "the Life of Mankind" or the Idea by which it is easier to rally political action around, the pompousness of what de Beauvoir observes as the "serious man." But what of the woman? Both Irigaray and de Beauvoir will have differing notions of how this notion can extend existential ethics.

4.3.3. *Woman as Other*

De Beauvoir uses the term Other throughout the *Second Sex* to signify the female's secondary position in society and in her own way of thinking. Her project queries why this is so. In her reading of the Hegelian dialectic, woman is a contingent identity predicated upon man's subjectivity. She is the necessary object to his subject position, which is free and absolute. Thus she is inessential, a deviant, and continent. As the object to the male's subjectivity, she is herself incomplete. According to Beauvoir's account, in order to become a subject, and not the Other, women must regain their freedom or liberty, rather than their happiness, and transcend the immanence of their facticity. She writes in the *Second Sex* that she assumes the posture of existential ethics:

Every subject posits itself as a transcendence concretely; through projects; it accomplishes its freedom only by perpetual surpassing toward other freedoms; there is no other justification for present existence than its

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 46.

expansion toward an indefinitely open future. Every time transcendence lapses into immanence, there is degradation, of existence into “in-itself,” of freedom into facticity; this fall is a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if this fall is inflicted on the subject, it takes the form of frustration and oppression; in both cases it is an absolute evil.¹⁵⁸

As elaborated, primal to existential thought is the notion that humans are creatures who are free, and freedom of choice is the basis of morality. Simply, good acts increase one’s freedom, while bad ones limit it. Facticity or the “in-itself” in existentialist philosophy can be any object in the world, or a given fact about us, such as biographical history of embodied state. Typically these are things that fall into the category of material objects that have a pre-determined essence. In contrast the for-itself are beings with consciousness who have no inherent pre-determined essence, a creation of the present, able to reflect on the past and make choices that project us into the future. De Beauvoir is interested in the tension of ambiguity between these two poles. What constitutes the meaning of the “in-itself” is the “for-itself,” or human consciousness. That is to say, objects exist as the human subject synthesizes them according to that person’s aims and attitudes; therefore, it is unthinkable to conceive of an object or a fact with some kind of pure meaning, or a changeless essence. This unity of the in-itself and for-itself is an inseparable unity. Beauvoir’s work reveals how these supposed facts paint a specific cultural portrait of what constitutes being a woman, such as the pain of menstruation.¹⁵⁹ But the inherent

¹⁵⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (Random House: 2010) 16.

¹⁵⁹ Beauvoir writes that for women menstruation “. . . limits their work capacity and condemned them to long periods of impotence.” The ancients viewed it as a “horror of feminine fertility,” and “Just as the penis gets its privileged value from the social context, the social context makes menstruation a malediction.” *Ibid.*, 72, 170, 329.

conundrum or tension for a woman is that she will discover that her autonomous freedom is situated in a world where men "... force her to assume herself as Other," and thereby "... freeze her as an object and doom her to immanence, since her transcendence will forever be transcended by another sovereign and essential consciousness."¹⁶⁰ She asserts, "Woman's drama lies in this conflict between the fundamental claim of every subject, which always posits itself as essential, and the demands of a situation that constitutes her as inessential. How, in the feminine condition, can a human being accomplish herself?"¹⁶¹

According to Beauvoir a woman's very identity is bound up in a non-identity; therefore she can never be subject since she must remain frozen as someone else's object. For a woman to escape this condition she must assert her fundamental subjectivity and assert her freedom to transcend. She writes, "Art, literature, and philosophy are attempts to found the world anew on human freedom: that of the creator; to foster such an aim, one must first unequivocally posit oneself as a freedom . . . [W]hat woman primarily lacks is learning from the practice of abandonment and transcendence, in anguish and pride."¹⁶²

The crux of the tension revolves around a pervasive feminist impasse: the relationship of embodiment/nature/immanence and the degree of freedom and power that women possess to influence and determine reason/culture and thus, transcendence. Historically, women's supposedly 'weaker' bodies have been fraught with culturally abhorrent associations, such as the unclean blood of menstruation, the public shame of breastfeeding, and the anxiety of pregnancy and childbirth. The division between the public and private spheres of life have often been to women's economic and social disadvantage

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 17.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid., 748.

as they have remain cloistered within unpaid domestic labor or lower earning 'pink' collar positions.¹⁶³ Meanwhile the homogenous male counterparts were welcomed as public wage earners and had access to the corridors of public law, education, and privilege. While feminists do not debate the access all people should have, regardless of sex, gender identity, race, and sexual orientation, to private and public resources, the resulting equality has also been a tacit reaffirmation of the division between nature and culture, nature being ascribed to the private sphere of embodiment and care of those bodies (infant care, child rearing and education, care of the sick or diseased, elder care) and culture to the public sphere (labor associated with reason, the mind, or physicality without dependence on others).

To put it in terms of Beauvoir's account, for women, and other people deemed Other, to be equal required the ability to transcend the pole of immanence/embodiment/facticity, and feminists have seemingly felt obliged to abandon any associations with 'nature' and bodies as a fixed and stable identity. Instead, they distance themselves from a fixed identity that biology determines and affirm societal construction of these bodies and their meaning, therefore locating culture as the culprit of any fixed female identity, and thus, its limitations and exclusions. Any return to nature, women's immanence, or hyper focus on embodiment can sometimes be interpreted as a female essentialism. Is one born a woman, or does one culturally learn, as Beauvoir famously quoted line suggests? Is woman a biological fact, or are these facts subject to cultural formation? Are there differences between the sexes, and if we affirm these

¹⁶³ The situation was and remains typically worse for women and men of racial, ethnic, sexual, or religious incongruity within a homogenous dominant culture.

differences, do we merely confirm the private/public schism that has so limited and confined women's participation and ability to determine their own autonomy and identity? And a greater question at stake seems to be, are the democratic values of freedom, choice, and liberty the highest ideals for women, and extensively, humanity, to gain and pursue? I suggest Irigaray's work on woman as other confirms Beauvoir's observation of woman's "frozen" object condition, but her universal of two genders also offers an important way to regain subjectivity without abandoning the differences which are often key to groups and their ethical demands. I expand Irigaray's ethics in the final chapter.

4.3.4. Subjects, Objects, Ambiguity, and Proximity

What I find most interesting in de Beauvoir's work in comparison to Irigaray's concerns are her views of ambiguity. Much of the discourse about these two has been around the notion of essentialism, but just as the notion of proximity between Heidegger and Irigaray elaborated a more fruitful conversation about her philosophy, I wonder if a reflection on ambiguity and de Beauvoir might also provide a greater avenue of insight that shifts beyond essentialism, as my last chapter contends. I suggest that both de Beauvoir and Irigaray seek a philosophy that defines an essential notion of woman vis-à-vis patriarchy's supposition that she is an object of male subjectivity. The very ambiguity of ethics calls de Beauvoir to action, to choice, to ethics. But for Irigaray, this ambiguity can exist only within a patriarchal scheme, and may possibly protect women from this definition as other, but any attempt at subjectivity continues to correspond to language, choices, and embodied experiences vis-à-vis male reflections, patriarchy's values, and fails to bring genuine difference into play. By actually calling attention to this difference, the very ambiguity that is female essence, Irigaray destabilizes this role without reconstructing

a new one, but allows the negative to be the trope for embodied women in specific times and places to give it the definition their ethics demand. Again, Irigaray's call for a feminine transcendence differs from de Beauvoir in that it is a spiritual or immaterial horizon, not the god-like status of men with a token female figure, but a confounding of transcendental spirituality over and against immanent relations. These particular relations can be the spiritual proximity or call to ethical action by which collective groups can understand their positive political projects, that makes much of these differences, thinking them anew. Read this way, Irigaray is bringing de Beauvoir's philosophy to its logical conclusion that ambiguity requires a greater investigation into the bodies that makes the choices, not looking for the essence, but the ethical posture, for true intersubjectivity.

Irigaray's task has been to expose the lack of genuine relations between the binary pair of subjects (male) and objects (female). Conceived in this way, how can a passage even be possible? Since both subject and its predicate object are actually constituents of the self-same male subject, her first maneuver has been to separate these two in order to allow a true passageway to be developed. The supposed neutrality of the sexual subject is in fact the male sex/body and any pretension otherwise only exacerbates the problem and this is why sexual difference is so vital.

Her notion of body/nature and mind/culture often receives a similar binary critique, that the very point of critical analysis reifies these positions. But if Irigaray follows in the existential phenomenological tradition of de Beauvoir, any fact of the body is also a fact of culture, and any fact of culture is also a fact of the body, specifically, the sexed body. If we must keep these spheres in touch, body/nature and mind/culture, then the examination of sexual difference must honor this indivisible analysis that de Beauvoir

offers. There are facts about women's bodies (essentialism) that have been damaging and culturally abused, but there are also no facts about women's bodies since there is no such thing as a pure fact apart from its natural sphere and cultural sphere. Any fact is a fact perceived by a person that carries a natural or cultural interpretation. Rather than denying this hermeneutic of cultural and natural bias, we must confess it, and diagnose our own self-limitation and self-representation in relationship with others. We are free but our freedom ought to move in concert with the awe and wonder of irreducible difference that others represent.

To circle back to Irigaray's conversation with Levinas, a fact about woman is only a broken piece of a saying, the said that hearkens to a collective Saying that is proper or appropriate for women. But these are natural/cultural facts that must in turn remain indeterminate as we share this speech regarding the 'facts' of women, a posture that requires listening, silence, and communicating. Instead, we may explore words that permit the unthought, excess, and denigrated notions of woman, outside the fetishization of woman as man's object, to emerge. A pure natural or cultural fact is already synthesized and human existence can only approach such facts in indeterminate fragments of 'truth' that unfold. The most appropriate ways to contest these supposedly 'pure facts' may be to subvert any metaphysical claims about women via poesis, music, song, and art, permitting words that are lyrically strategic to figure a new kind of calculation of facts.

5. *Conclusion*

In this chapter I have demonstrated Irigaray's selection of key Continental philosophers with whom she seeks to engage critically toward the aim of advancing her theme of sexual difference and its inherent need to be philosophized. I suspect that her

choice also acknowledges her relationship to these individuals and by her choice, she is also indicating what is worth analyzing in their ideas and approaches and how sexual difference may advance their scrutiny of metaphysics by deliberately conceiving particular others whose sex matters. I have suggested that these critiques are not meant to overthrow or dismiss phenomenology and existentialism, but may be read as critical supplements and a co-extensive outworking of these initial claims. Instead of inverting metaphysical claims, or storing will to power, she works from within the boundaries of language, thought, and writing in order to draw attention to the human subject the elements that sustain and cultivate language and thought, our collective identity, and the ethical life we can share. She envisions a non-oppositional way of amorous exchange in the interval that allows both parties to remain themselves even as they are in authentic connection with each other, a way to exchange meaning and ideas without sacrificing 'objectified' humans and nonhumans and using them as the exchange. This emphasis on the interval as a third factor, as a critical meeting-in-the-middle place to approach others as partners regardless of difference, in fact, because of our difference, begins to open the way to envision what this would mean for ethical interaction on a global scale involving the full gamut of worldwide diversity.

Chapter Four: Irigaray's Love as Word and Flesh

1. Introduction

In this chapter I explore how “word” (*logos*) and “flesh” (the body) function in Irigaray’s writing to expose a “logic of the same” within religious thinking. I suggest she redeploys these notions from within a male psychoanalytic symbolic and imaginary to construct a positive sexuate difference. As I have focused in previous chapters on Irigaray’s ability to destabilize other binaries, in this section I explore her examination of the sacred and the secular and the way in which she challenges a traditional dichotomy between the spiritual immaterial realm of abstract ideas and the experienced world of material objects. I suggest that Irigaray’s philosophy offers a unique and vital contribution of a unique spiritual discourse in that she renders an alternative to dualism and monism, insisting on a plurality that refigures old conceptions of humanism, monotheism, and cult religions. This discourse, in the last chapter, I will employ to imagine and inspire an Irigarayan ethic of mutuality—love—on a grand scale, or as the final section indicates, “a new eschaton.”

First, I suggest Irigaray’s call for divine women refigures a transcendental or universal claim that resists absolutization, idealism, or political utopia. Instead, her reading of divine women makes possible a way to think transcendently or universally about relations that do not result in domination, but rather, augur mutuality. In order to argue that her treatment of the phrase “divine women” is not a consort version of patriarchal religions or male-dominated polytheisms, I develop her notion of radical alterity to guide the process of word and flesh as a spiritual rethinking of traditional theology and explore how her terms break apart from binary ways of defining the religious human condition (immanent/transcendent, inner/outer, sacred/secular). Her resistance to a singular sexuate

dogma is the condition of possibility for the respect of difference so that we may dwell together with others, a communion that is premised upon radical sexual difference.

Second, I explore Irigaray's re-reading of body and word within the Christian tradition. I suggest that Irigaray's interpretation of word and flesh can re-deploy the Christian theology of incarnation and Eucharist as a feminist metaphor for a new symbolic imaginary that resists a will to power, while regarding the self, the other, and the divine.¹ I problematize the inherently masculine readings of traditional Christian incarnation and Christology, a notion that Mary Daly has denounced famously as Christolatry,² and argue that merely mirroring a female Divine Other functions as a philosophy of the same within Christian theology, the very gesture Irigaray critiques. To truly respect alterity, I suggest, even our notion of the divine must be sensible while it is meaningful, and the play cannot be normativized into a standard format that reduces difference to sexual markers, or privileges nature over culture, or vice versa. Sexual difference must remain a source of opening, rather than closure. Namely, sexual difference must be a horizon³ of possibility that has real existential force, but resists a metaphysical wholeness or absolute totality. Cautious of sexual indifference's will to power, her disperse, effusive version of female divinity aligns with her development of sexual difference for women as real, and realizable, without being whole, total, or subsuming. Again she will destabilize the infinite/finite binary and argue for

¹ Irigaray is certainly not the first to re-appropriate Christian incarnation theology for feminist political purposes. But her work is unique in that she offers a libidinal philosophical critique and elaborates a spiritual account of incarnation which seeks to suggest symbolically and imaginatively what a different metaphysical approach could augur. For a notable example of a feminist theology of Christian incarnation that go beyond traditional renderings see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's critique of incarnation with kyriarchal (her neologism) power and her suggestion that Jesus may be the incarnation of Divine-Wisdom. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 21-3, 145, 148, 160.

² Mary Daly. "Beyond Christolatry: A World without Models," *Beyond God the Father. Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 69-97.

³ See chapter 2 "Sexual Difference: Beyond Essentialism," footnote 74.

a “real” identity developed within a metaphysical structure of the negative, or lack, as presence in the midst of absence. Yet, I also note that, for her, sexual difference cannot be so open that it becomes meaningless or nonsensical, or a better projection of the human self. It is within this space of finite wonder that she develops her infinite horizon of sexuate otherness, a horizon I argue cannot be a feminine theistic absolute.

Finally, I suggest that within the human and divine context, sexual difference is best understood through the medium of re-engendering ethical relationships, a thesis with which I conclude this chapter. I underscore that Irigaray’s philosophy of religion is not a mere private practice, but one that offers a robust theory of intersubjectivity, starting with the self, that can ethically and spiritually relate *to* and *with* diverse others. In this section I explore Irigaray’s re-reading of the Virgin Mary as an exemplar of ethical-spiritual relations which bring flesh and word together in an incarnation that corresponds to a universal attentive to “spirit,” “life,” and “breath.” These will become important ethical parameters in the final chapter where I suggest Irigaray’s theory offers an alternative ethical framework over and against normative ethical theories which rely on freedom, abstract reason, duty, utility, or a history of rights protecting European propertied males. I explore her notion of gender and how it can offer a new kind of reading for Christian and post-Christian traditions of western thought.

2. *Divine Women*

In this section I survey Irigaray’s figuration of divine women and explain how her claims bring together in new ways the divergent arenas of philosophy, religion, and theology to argue collectively for sexuate difference as a spiritual affection that any tradition may exercise as a new orthodoxy or a speculative philosophy. Irigaray suggests that the religious

is that which joins or links together.⁴ If her aim has been a spiritual alliance of difference, then the religious ought to be a crucible of change.

But if religion is a deeply personal and cultural expression of our lives, our beliefs, values, and our aspirations, how can an Irigarayan reading unfold a generative feminist critique? Irigaray's first contribution has been to analyze the origin of feminist exclusion and hatred, not to vilify religion, but to imagine it anew. As a philosopher, Irigaray seems to understand religion as a positive cultural discourse (more than a mere private practice), and although stereotypically anti-feminist in its cultural instantiations, she, nonetheless, understands religion as a fruitful and potent discourse for her feminist unfolding of sexual difference. In various religious traditions, such moments of impossible possibility have been portrayed via terms like "redemption," "shalom," "struggle," or "advent" to hearken moments whose future is possible, but human labor and faithfulness is required if it is to be. It seems such a paradigmatic discourse of ideality or universality is consistent with her work toward sexual difference as a universal or transcendental notion. But her unique twist has been to change the very definition of ideality, transcendence, and universality away from the realm of absolute metaphysics aligned with masculinist suppositions of truth, being, and knowledge, and toward unexamined notions which structure immanence, bodies, and the natural phenomenal world. Therefore, it is unsurprising that her version of religion would be connected to bodies, and that such thinking would be inclusive of celestial and earthly indicators, involving human responsibility, ethical deliberation, and love premised upon mutuality.

⁴ She states, "One of our actual religious tasks would be to find how to join earth and sky, body and soul, or spirit, and even also cultures, sexes, and generations." Irigaray, KW, 149.

As with her philosophical writings, Irigaray's foray into the discourse of the religion resonates with her non-identification with any one tradition, movement or orthodoxy, rejecting any label or "-ism." While her Catholic religious tradition is explored, she also pursues philosophies where she believes the chasm between spirit and wisdom may be not so far and deep: the Eastern philosophies. But her Western matrix of images and terms may infer a Western-oriented critique of philosophy, theology, and religion as she includes boldly her own twist of the virgin, contra Emmanuel Lévinas, and describes a Johannine advent that, one could easily argue, harkens back to Jacques Derrida's "*viens*." Yet, it is her spiritual humanism, or her conversation with Feuerbach that is a different kind of departure from the sacred/secular split, and she shapes this conversation with her own milieu of terms, symbols, and claims. What I suggest is vitally important to note when reading Irigaray's works on religion is her declaration that her works must be read as *philosophical* texts, namely, an intervention into specific canons of thought by which we define our values.⁵ Indeed to change the political, ethical or perhaps even the religious, contexts of women's lives is to interrogate the philosophical categories of thought and how these definitions and values are formed. It is the closure of women's finite existence per the absolute infinite of man's ideal that presupposes her discussion. If she rejects Simone de Beauvoir's feminine "Other" as not really escaping this male-controlled dialectic, then she is equally concerned with its function in the religious context as well. Irigaray will argue for a radical "Other" in order to escape this pseudo-Other and its horizon of thought that she believes limits women from accessing philosophically a liberation, as there is no corresponding social-cultural political reality. It is this consideration of a "new horizon"

⁵ Irigaray, WWC, 141.

culturally and politically that leads her to rethink women and the infinite.⁶ Radical Otherness as a dual or multiple position, guarded with a sacred “mystery” that cannot be sublated or surmounted into a Hegelian dialectic, makes her religious maneuvers philosophically centered and religiously dissimilar from traditional religious discourses. Because her philosophy has yet to be realized, her transcendence has no “equal” cultural signifier. She hints that this transcendence will be unlike the “vertical transcendence” that she believes presently ensconces the cultural imaginary of Western thought, a hierarchical culture where the genealogy of parent/child, or man/woman is realized in the Freudian-Oedipal triangulation of a successful wife replacing her husband’s mother and he then becoming her new son (a diagnosis she terms matricide). In contrast, Irigaray will trace a “horizontal transcendence”⁷ between two irreducibly different beings, naturally and culturally asymmetrical to one another, allowing her idiom of “sexuate difference” to inspire a new socio-cultural construction of the way we define, value, and cherish beings and becoming.

As I have written previously, much of Irigaray’s work has been to diagnose how patriarchy became the over-arching word, metaphor, and absolute imaginary landscape of our lives and culture. She understands this to be the death of the mother, or the signifying figure of difference that must be denied for a sexuate singular master discourse to prevail. How have women been cast within religious discourses so that pseudo-identities and sexes fill in for the missing generative sexuate identity she claims continues to subsist, but not fully exist? Several diagnostic answers are given.

⁶ Irigaray, DBT, 155; TBT, 111, SW, 47.

⁷ The expression appears throughout her works, but receives a notable treatment in TBT, 18; C, 130; ITY, 118.

First, the male has claimed language as his sacred domain and only means by which to gain transcendent access, or spiritual revelation. Speech, writing, dogma, or words become the most potent and guarded spiritual rites and revelations to the detriment of other notions such as silence and breathing. In many ways, Irigaray personifies these differences in the cultures of West and East,⁸ as the Western religions fetishize text, canons, and creeds. It is not that the East does not possess these spiritual artifacts, but she notes within these cultures, there is also an acceptance for breath, silence, and an ontological commitment she has been tracking carefully for decades: sexuate difference. If the West has prized materiality, solidity, and language vis-à-vis the male body and all that corresponds to his identity, then the unwanted remainder is what persists and subsists of otherness, difference, or alterity. These symbols, tropes, and forgotten or excluded motifs are things she believes reference a possible subjectivity that is not constitutive of the Western, rational, propertied, colonizing (warring) male master and his female slave. While she has traced this difference philosophically, she traces these moments spiritually as well. Breath, air, or spirit will become her spiritual tropes that permit us to think the unthinkable—difference. In the West, she tracks breath as Spirit, and in the East, she notes its more overt practice and the reverence students have for those who are masters in a way that might be outside the language game. Breath, air, or spirit might be the philosophical enigma whose potency and obscurity might be our new salvation and yield an age of true coupling, or the appearance of the radical other.

⁸ I do want to note the difficulty of making an artificial division between eastern and western religions, particularly when considering a religion like Islam which has a global purview, but relies heavily upon textual revelation and the words of the prophets, undermining any clear division of west as text saturated and east as more spiritually effuse.

Second, woman has been cast as sacred virgin or mother, revered when she fulfills these sexuate identities in relation to patriarchy and she is equally vilified as whore or monster when she deviates or her use no longer fulfills the male patriarch's desire (sexual or reproductive). To be a virgin has been a role that relates to a woman's purity *for* a man, and to be a sacred mother is to be a mother *for* the son, less the daughter. Irigaray reads these images anew, breathing into these dead or dying roles a self-determination that is truly feminist. Rather than giving those tropes and images up to men, she resurrects these women *de novo* and wonders what a sacred virgin might be like apart from her patriarchal dominator? Could the virgin be a spiritual guide, rather than a product to be exchanged on the market place of men's desire?

Third, Irigaray develops the notion that a woman's deification beyond patriarchy's control might be a possible strategy for woman to think this impossible possibility of otherness or difference. Her treatment of the notion of divine women has been a controversial maneuver that has caused some⁹ to understand her religious language or discourses as more "essentializing" than her philosophical work that seemed open, effuse,

⁹ Amy Hollywood is particularly critical of the manner in which she fails to understand the fetishization of belief, especially insisting on the primacy of sexual difference itself, meaning we must deconstruct phallic male subjectivity, while believing in the structural possibility of sexual difference as female, which can also be deconstructed, but also must be believed as a realm of ideality that corresponds to the material body. She writes, "... Irigaray cannot elide the gap without undermining the very external supports for subjectivity (in language, culture, and society) required by women if they are to become subjects. ... Irigaray ultimately succumbs to fetishism and demands belief in sexual difference itself (even as she continues, in other places, to demand the deconstruction of belief, arguing for its essentially fetishistic—and hence in Irigaray's view, phallic—structure)." See Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002) 150. Serene Jones is also critical of Irigaray's portrayal of the divine woman, arguing, "To use Irigarayan language, it would seem that female desire has consumed God. Caught once again in the old game of symmetry, God is merely the screen necessary for self-knowledge, the mirror that reflects the narcissistic gaze of the subject, the hand that must touch the phallus (or her lips) for the purpose of self-identification." See Jones, "This God Which Is Not One: Irigaray and Barth on the Divine," in *Transfigurations: Theology and the French Feminists*, eds. C.W. Maggie Kim, Susan M. St. Ville, and Susan M. Simonaitis (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002) 138.

and strategically agile. I argue that her work in these religious texts has not changed in philosophy or posture, but that difference as radical disruption within religious discourses becomes a much more difficult conversation given the primacy of religion as a language idiom whose control and sacred authority is almost solely male, a plight of both East and West. Therefore, her foray as a woman into these forbidden places can be more easily maligned, given her more ambitious aim to advance sexuate difference into the realm of the sacred, a region whose hostility toward the “other” has been recorded candidly. Irigaray’s obtuse writing and poetic imagery and use of myth within these discussions add other layers of complexity that make her work difficult, at best, to explicate. But it is in these very difficult or remote or hostile places where Irigaray’s work has tremendous possibility to engender new imaginings. It is a task she takes seriously. As she writes, we are already determined by religion, and it is crucial for us to think this dimension in order to situate ourselves in respect to it; therefore, any disregard of religion, she argues, creates a cascading harm toward our subjectivity and our cultural relations to our environment and others.¹⁰ Part of what makes Irigaray’s work unique is that she does not abandon religious imagery, symbols, or tropes, even as she has removed herself from Catholicism proper. But like her relationship to patriarchy, she takes the remainder or residue or excess of religious language and fashions it anew, with a subversive reading that renders the original meaning as a positive portrayal of women’s subjectivity, identity, and existence, challenging the ways we define and think the terminology itself. And it is not *for* women (as an essential category), but what woman signifies in her philosophy—difference that unfolds within specific or particular relations, to people, cultures, and bodies. Therefore, it cannot be an

¹⁰ Irigaray, “Introduction: Part IV: Spirituality and Religion,” KW, 145.

“essential” woman or gender, but rather, a place for universal difference that has a particular instantiation in women, and if in women, then in others, to determine or engender themselves within this new ontological and ethical age of difference. This difference is her advent, not women or goddess, but the particular acceptance of a/the woman to signify embodied difference as a radical disruptor of sameness. The logical culmination of her work since *Speculum* has been to think man/woman with a radical twoness, and will now be explored via a philosophical interrogation of religion and its theologies.

2.1. *From Fish to Bird*

What makes Irigaray’s work important in philosophy of religion is her reconstruction of female spirituality in conversation with philosophy. But rather than placing the accent upon the divine, I read Irigaray’s divine women as an accent on *women* and what the philosophical category of woman signifies positively as a rethinking of the divine. Indeed, as woman has been portrayed as closer to nature, a categorization meant to remove her from the holy, the celestial, and the sacred, Irigaray will re-read such a relation to nature as a positive account of divinity. I think divine and infinite are two ways she interlaces terms to signify a beyond the finite, but original in Irigaray, is that it is an infinite *with* the finite. They are not oppositional concepts, the finite and infinite, but the relationality of these terms is to be understood via different sexuate economies, ontologies, and differences. Her task will be to reveal the disruption of traditional theologies of finite and infinite relations, of man and his divine, in order to reveal the existence of a disruption to this logic of sameness—namely, divine women. Within this invisible sacred sense of female sexuate difference, her notions for the infinite and the divine are awash in terms, images, and myths of an alternative

sexuate ontology. Particularly significant is her return to love stories where she asserts that such double avatars of divinity may exist (woman's corporeal avatar and man's symbolic avatar), such as the tale of *Melusine, Chevalier au cygne* (swan knight), and the "The Little Mermaid," in *Sexes and Genealogies*. In such stories a woman is part fish, an animal of the sea, and then a bird of the air. What is unique is the portrayal of a woman juxtaposed to the two elements Irigaray has taken pains to explore: water and air. The women in these myths are telling in their habitations. As transforming animals of water and air they are never the symbolic image of Western celestial life as culturally perceived, such as a grand theophany, a seraphic messenger, or even a suffering male servant. In her investigation of the opacity of the subject and God she investigates this story of transmutational and transfigurational living forms and love between flesh, spirit, and body. It is the blurriness of these distinctions, wherein she discovers woman's divine disruption. It is the senses of touch¹¹ and hearing,¹² not sight, that permit us awareness of this divine presence of woman. But her juxtaposition of divine women isn't an inversion of divine God or men, or even a renaissance of animal worship.¹³ Rather, it is a counter-narrative within a narrative of religion that harkens that difference may persist and subsist, and may flourish if we can hear, listen, caress, and dialogue with this "other" sacred way.

What is also important for this thesis is her positive association of woman and animal. In traditional Christian religion, the animal (and woman) serve as the lesser variants

¹¹ She writes, "We regress and we progress, way beyond the sense of sight, from the most primitive to the subtlest realm of the tactile. Everything is given to us by means of touch, a mediation that is continually forgotten." Irigaray, SG, 59. Elsewhere she notes that Jesus's crucifixion is itself a sense of touch, what she calls the mediatory sense par excellence. Irigaray, ML, 178.

¹² In the introduction to the section on art Irigaray writes, "In diverse traditions, the feminine is characterized by the ear and the masculine by the eye, And in religious feminine rituals music is more important than words." Irigaray, KW, 101

¹³ She is careful to say she is not instigating a return to self-deification and animal totems. See Irigaray, SG, 60.

of the ultimate ideal, God.¹⁴ Between animal/woman and God, the man aims to leave his animal instinct (or girlish behaviors) and finds his infinite God. The abstract infinite is often portrayed as the location of greatest moral worth. To leave the animal condition of instinct is to depart from a place of moral incoherence and to move toward an ethical state, grounded in metaphysics. But Irigaray's transfiguration of the bird-fish will allow the animal to become the guide and reveal the ethical damage of such a divine arrangement which deprives us of forming a proper sense of gratitude for natural world.¹⁵ Her call is for a transfiguration of the human as human and all the living arrangements that surround and nourish the human (including the animal and woman). In a section titled "Neither animal nor god, but not yet man," she explains how man traditionally uses language (the symbolic) to reassert his superiority over animals,¹⁶ whom we assume lack language. In this rendering language is the discourse by which men appeal to god(s). But she notes the irony that the way men prostrate before a master God is more like how animals in a herd follow the leader, or circulate around the queen of a hive.¹⁷ The human bent toward conquering has meant that humans have desired to differentiate ourselves from the animal, but it has been this very gesture of desiring to abandon the animal (caught within the binary), by which we have invoked the very barbarism that is regularly associated with animality.¹⁸ She writes, "He uses his mental surplus to his additional mental neurons to go beyond the animal behavior,

¹⁴ In *Conversations* she explains, "Sexual difference has remained at an instinctive level while our mind has been trained for very subtle realities. We have thus become split between an animal body and mind longing for ideal, absolute God, without any real unity of our being. Furthermore, most of the time, the animal part has been in store for woman and the spiritual or divine part for man." Irigaray, C, 136.

¹⁵ Irigaray, IB, 115.

¹⁶ She writes in *The Way of Love* that we assume man is animal with language who uses this capacity to state his needs and desires, rather than understanding language as the capacity by which we can transform our "... instincts and needs into shared desires." Irigaray, WL, 39, 62,

¹⁷ Irigaray, IB, 75.

¹⁸ In the *Way of Love* she queries if the animal is more advanced in communication than the human, such as the bird's song, whereby one modules its singing dependent upon what the other is saying. Irigaray, WL, 40.

subduing and consuming still more, at the risk of his life.”¹⁹ While her sexual trope underscores that humanity is composed of two separate beings, she draws the parallel implication that this twoness permits a broader understanding of and language with the natural world as well. If we can remove sexual difference away from the destructive binary of animal (woman)/divine (man), then we can cultivate a sexual difference which bring the animal and divine into contact. She concludes, “This consideration for a human difference, and not only for a natural or an animal difference, between man and woman could lead us to respect difference(s) in other relations to the other: of a different age, race, tradition, culture and so on.”²⁰ In this version, language becomes a passageway between two, rather than a place movement toward a master God (away from the animal), and such a modification of language, a way to approach another, would make language “other and new.”²¹

Using traditional religious themes of sin, redemption, and revelation, she will interrogate and rewrite the very terms and meanings that separate women from the divine, and demand we listen and cease our concealment of difference. What is helpful is that her call isn’t a reconstruction of a new regime, but rather a re-enchantment of ourselves to hear and sense what already is within the stories, myths, and religious discourses of those who have eyes to see only the masculine symbolic as divine.

2.2. Irigarayan Sin and Redemption

For centuries the religious traditions have asked, what is wrong in the world? Within the Christian tradition the question narrows as followers ask what sin is and can suffering and death be sourced in the first act of sin? What is the relationship between sexuality and

¹⁹ Irigaray, IB, 61.

²⁰ Irigaray, C, 136.

²¹ Irigaray, WL, 41.

sin? The spiritual problem of evil, in an Irigarayan account, is the lack of two subjects in proper relationship to each other and how one suppresses the other's becoming. Irigaray mobilizes sacred terms that veer away from traditional usage. She offers a hermeneutic that reinterprets the great events of Christianity with a perspective "*feminine*," listening to the spirit instead of the letter.²² Again, Irigaray draws attention away from the fixation of letters and language (the father) toward the breath, air, or spirit (elemental) of that which sustains language and utterance (the mother). While traditional Christian theology focuses on the writings about sin, Irigaray will listen to the prompting of the spirit and envision a spiritual alliance of difference.

If metaphysics has been the project of an absolute singularity of essence and sex, her first maneuver has been to loosen the knot of the grip of metaphysics and search for the unraveling which may yield difference. Irigaray explains this singularity: "Instead of becoming what he is, man has wanted to become what he is not. Leaping from animality to divinity, he has not cultivated his humanity. Of which reality and value cannot appear to him in the denial of her—or Her—in the ignorance that he represents only part of humanity, and that humanity can be cultivated only by two, and in the respect for differences between the two parts."²³ According to Irigaray, the flourishing of humanity, its felicity and generative growth as species, is contingent upon the recognition that human cultivation requires inclusivity of all its members. Even the question of evil and sin has been aligned to this understood metaphysical singularity and Irigaray, instead of dealing with "*the* problem of evil" which again reinstates a singular metaphysics, posits referents within the context of

²² Irigaray, KW 146.

²³ Irigaray, IB, loc. 1024 of 2057

ethical relationships. In the introduction to her section on spirituality and religion in *Key Writings*, she suggests that the ‘sin of a woman’ that may be contrary to the sin of a man is that she may fail to turn back to herself or choose not to remain faithful to feminine values in talking and acting.²⁴ In her essay, “The Redemption of Women,” she states the sin of woman surrounds an issue of fidelity, or lack being of faithful to herself, her sex, her words, and interweaving this with their bodies to yield a living spiritual flesh, what she earlier called, a sensible transcendental.²⁵ In fact, any submission of one gender to another is a violation of the greatest commandment to love one’s neighbor.²⁶

The Christian tradition renders the story of Adam’s and Eve’s temptation in the garden as the source of “original sin.” But the emphasis has often shifted to Eve, not Adam, as notions of evil in opposition to God are personified as “temptress,” “idolatress,” and “whore,” all feminine in their construction. But Irigaray spies in this account of an early paradise, outside of God’s celestial story, the relation between him and her, and her and him. If the sin was the temptation to be “like God,” she argues,

Surely evil, sin, suffering, redemption, arise when God is set up as an extraterrestrial ideal, as an otherworldly monopoly? When the divine is manufactured as God-Father? . . . With no store of ‘supra-sensatory’ knowledge to separate them from the innocence of fleshly communion. . . . Destined for the errance of guilty desire, dwelling in bodies that henceforward

²⁴ Irigaray, KW, 146.

²⁵ Ibid., 151.

²⁶ Ibid., 157.

are masked or veiled. Allotted different tasks and punishment: toil for him and her the pains of childbirth.²⁷

The earth, originally the source of paradise, and flesh with two sexes, is the original good she hears in the story, while the denigration of flesh, and punitive gender roles are understood as results of curse. An obvious sign of the curse is the emphasis on the genealogy of patriarchs who are now the sole guardians of the Word transmitted to male heirs alone.

It has been suggested that sin is the twisting or parasitic deformation of the good. If everything in creation began as 'good' then the story of sin is secondary. As Irigaray's references to sin are not directed toward God, they are directed towards one's self and one's gender. It is lack of faithfulness to authenticity with the self and the other. In an Irigarayan context one may translate that to the twisted or parasitic deformation of primal sexual difference. By locating sin as a rejection of sexual difference,²⁸ Irigaray also connotes a possibility of redemption as well. The spirit, or breath (elemental), ensures our difference, our autonomy and, according to her words, to sin against this spirit is absolute. As she explains, "Sinning against the spirit can arise from infidelity to a proper identity or from depriving the other of the intentionality appropriate to his or her gender."²⁹ Different than a patriarchal Christian tradition, Irigaray's reading of a "proper identity" is not a strict essence but about owning one's unique singularity. As articulated in my earlier chapter, she is not an essentialist theorizer. Rather, a "proper identity" is one that is attentive to the elemental differences that create conditions of possibility for difference to flourish. This notion of

²⁷ Irigaray, ML, 174.

²⁸ Irigaray, KW, 146.154-55, 165.

²⁹ Irigaray, ILTY, 147.

sinning against the spirit connects with her reading of original sin: “to have mistaken the reason of man for the universal.”³⁰

3. *The Male Word: Sexuate Theism*

If the male gender presides with the Absolute Deity, then it is unsurprising that so much of the language of Western metaphysical religion associates the female gender as the negative of the positive Absolute God: the erroneous lying woman, heretical witch, temptress, or adversarial demonic whore. As Mary Daly noted early in her career, if the second Adam is the absolute power of salvation, Eve remains the “temptress” for all ages.³¹

Several feminists have attempted to expose the harm of an Absolute Theistic Deity whose male gender is understood and interpreted as a gender preference for men to give sacred rites, hold authority, and issue power. Pamela Sue Anderson describes three notable feminist attempts to offer a feminist strategy via diverse approaches: Mary Daly, Sarah Coakley, and Grace Jantzen.³² Mary Daly, an early radical American feminist in the 1960s and 70s, argued to move beyond male theism, suggesting we overthrow patriarchal religions, rallying for shifts that we have seen partially fulfilled today, but that, at her historical juncture, seemed incredible, such as women clergy and gays openly serving in the church. Rather than restructuring the political arrangement of ecclesiology in order to shift a social consciousness, Sarah Coakley has sought to gender theology, exposing feminine “soft spots” within analytic philosophical texts.³³ In contrast, Anderson notes that Grace

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 44-68.

³² Pamela Sue Anderson, “Feminism” in *The Routledge Companion to Theism* eds. Charles Taliaferro, Victoria S. Harrison, and Stewart Goetz (Routledge, 2012) 470.

³³ See Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy, and Gender* (Malden, MA: Oxford, Blackwell, 2002).

Jantzen has sought a thoroughly Irigarayan approach,³⁴ urging that we not only move away from patriarchal theism, but disrupt the hierarchy altogether, *Becoming Divine*, as her titled work implores Irigaray's earlier essay title "Divine Women." It is worth noting this "Irigarayan" approach which Jantzen invokes, and it may signal the usefulness of Irigaray's foray into the religious. Yet, Irigaray, and her interpreters use of the terms "divine" and "women" has also augured critique and caution of essentialism. In this section I want to trace Irigaray's work and return to how her call for "divine women" offers a fruitful feminist strategy within the field of philosophical religion and theology.

What makes Irigaray's work unique in comparison to her feminist counterparts is her claim for a metaphysical rethinking of religious difference, a critique at the level of ontology. Irigaray argues that, like the question of Being and Heidegger, we cannot conceive the tectonic shift in philosophy or religion from the already existing representations available to us today linguistically.³⁵ Much of Irigaray's early work has been the diagnosis of the singular sexuate male subject and his privileged relationship to language, a status women only have as an "echo" of male control. Women are the other of the same within this view. Male desire, language, and control constitutes a woman's identity, a place which is no place that has provided no "gender"³⁶ for woman. Instead, man has used woman as his container, his mirror, and in religion, his virgin, consort, or mother, positions with no innate

³⁴ An Irigarayan approach, a phrase Anderson employs, connotes the importance of Irigaray's work in philosophy of religion as her method has inspired other interpreters and thinkers to expand her notion of divine women beyond her original early essays.

³⁵ Irigaray, TD, 50. She cites examples of how difficult it is to form job titles for women and what these unusual linguistic anomalies signal isn't women's liberation, but often, the level of access permitted or denied to women by men.

³⁶ I use this term as Irigaray uses it to mean a "genre" or "gender," which is different than how we think sex/gender. For Irigaray gender means a universal category that has a particular constitution related to culture *and* nature, which means a negative or limit to each particular gender. Her idea of gender means each gender needs others to engender a fullness of humanity, that no one sex can dominate others. See Irigaray, ILTY, 51, 63-64; LSG, 150;

status, but more a function or means to deify the man. A positive construction of a female gender offers woman a negative or limit that signifies difference, without which she will lack in both finite relationships and a relationship to the infinite.

Thus, in sacred sexual indifference, man must represent the sum of all, “He is father, son, spirit.”³⁷ She writes that God helps man define his gender, “helps him orient his finiteness by reference to infinity.”³⁸ One impulse might be to replace patriarchy with a new matriarchy, complete with goddesses instead of God. This is not Irigaray’s call for divine women. She is careful to say that women do not need to deify themselves, “. . . to regress to siren, goddesses, who fight against men gods,” but as she states, “I think we must not merely instigate a return to the *cosmic*, but also ask ourselves why we have been held back from becoming *divine women*.”³⁹ Like her political work, Irigaray’s position has not been to “bash” men, but to ask why the most powerful forms of investigation, such as philosophy, deny women entry, placement, and dialogue. Correspondingly, why has the thinking of the infinite, in relation to a woman’s particular asymmetrical being and becoming from a man’s ontology, been denied or abandoned by men and women? For Irigaray the term “divine women” signifies something other than the same, which is what a mere reversal would grant. She is not seeking a divinity that is a woman. Within the Hegelian dialectic of ethical consciousness, which *I Love to You* overtly references and *Divine Women* problematizes, she understands man’s greatest fault as, “. . . to deprive one gender of its ethical consciousness and of its effectiveness as a gender.”⁴⁰ To be effective, the female gender needs its own

³⁷ Irigaray, SG, 61.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 120.

infinite in order to define her own finiteness, rather than the one handed to her by man and his infinite. She is seeking a gender for women with its own reference to infinity, individually and collectively, or particularly and universally. Such a pseudo-gender for woman has been to place herself finitely within man's infinite array, as his self-sacrificing mother, wife, or non-autonomous virgin daughter. She has to be double, shadow or complement to a man's duty and identity. There is no passageway between these genders as the female gender is suppressed from existence, and women die performing their male gender duties and identities as mothers, wives, and virgins. Through disparate positions Hegel and Irigaray note the irony of how Sophocles' Antigone personifies such a self-sacrificing duty to remain entombed within the singular gender of man and his relation to the infinite or divine. Indeed, Antigone would rather defy the state, thus acting like a man, in order to ensure the proper burial of her brother, the divine law or sacred rite given to women in order to uphold men.

Historically in the Christian tradition, any act of religious subversion from such a deadly role of being a woman within a man's gender was limited to small enclaves like feminine mystics such as Julian of Norwich or Mechthild of Magdeburg or Teresa of Avila, who may have been prior, but at the time, took no such role or duty, but remained spiritual as they remained physically separate from men's duties. But these women still relate to a man's infinite, his God, his Son. In *Marine Lover*, Irigaray interrogates "The Crucified One," rejecting what she called the historic Christic model where the God-man mediates between the word and flesh, or between language and bodies.⁴¹ She notes the traditionally passive and non-mutual relationship of the women to the Christ—they hear his teachings but are

⁴¹ Irigaray, ML, 165.

not heard, they see him, but are not seen. His thoughts are directed toward the Father, not them. As interpreters place emphasis on his crucifixion in the flower of life, she notes that death becomes desirable, and the “pain of sacrifice” stirs the senses and blurs the mind from those who attend to living and suffering in daily life.⁴² She critiques the Apollonian artistic effigy of Jesus as one fraught within a binary opposition between “. . . forces of On High and here below, of Heaven and earth, of Truth and error, of Good and evil, of God and idols, of divine and human nature, of Life and its mortal errancy . . . of all those pairs of opposites that continue to tear the world apart.”⁴³ In such a rendering only one winner in the dialectic game perseveres, the master conquers the slave, and the winner is “the presumed, imputed, or credited signature [which] is that of the Father.”⁴⁴

Irigaray rejects an absolute male God and instead suggests a twoness to the accounts of the rendering of the notion of God. She observes two theophanic forms that may be overlooked, such as the porous airiness of the cloud that leads Israel by day, or the space within the ark that is vacant signifying God’s presence as invisible, or she writes, “In the between that has yet to occur” and wonders if this may be a “. . . memorial to a nearness that dwells and remain in the air.”⁴⁵

It is unsurprising to Irigaray after the bloodshed, besiegement of the temple, and its eventual emptying of God’s glory during the exile, that God’s presence would return in an astonishing semblance—“the womb of a woman.”⁴⁶ If the warriors, kings, and the priesthood failed to be counted as faithful, she queries if the virgin-girl is the only one who

⁴² Irigaray, ML, 184.

⁴³ Ibid., 168.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 175.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

has understanding of the divine. Is this co-creation of divine nature, or God returning to God, returning to earth? She writes, "The presence that had been buried and paralyzed in the text of the law is made flesh once more in the body of a woman, guardian of the spirit of the divine life."⁴⁷ Again, I want to highlight her use of "proximity" or "nearness" to signify a presence other than a masculinist conception of divinity. She writes that within traditional Christianity "God is found only in Distance," and the relationship with the Father is one of separation, respect that removes man from God, what she dubs, "the Difference."⁴⁸ In contrast she writes the story of Mary's annunciation is a divine which is "near at hand," so near she writes, "it thereby becomes unnameable. Which is not to say that it is nothing. But rather the coming of a reality that is alien to any already-existing identity. Relationship within a more mystical place than any *proximity* that can be localized. . . . The deepest depth of the flesh, touched, birthed, and without a wound."⁴⁹ I treat more fully the "Annunciation" and figure of Mary later, here I want to highlight preliminarily this attention to proximity. I understand Irigaray to be advocating a salvation outside the bounds of a sacrificial logic, a divine conception of nearness or respectful proximity rather than distance or difference, and an infinite conceptualization of the "near at hand," a phrase which may hearken to Heidegger's notion of the ready at hand. Rather than a sacrificed son as the only image of salvation, within this story she reads another en-fleshed space for the divine, carried through the genealogy of a woman's body. Much like Derrida's "messiah,"⁵⁰ she writes that

⁴⁷ Ibid., 176.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 171.

⁴⁹ Ibid, italics mine.

⁵⁰ For a thorough explanation of Jacques Derrida's conception of an apocalyptic Messiah "coming" and "to come" see John D. Caputo, "The Apocalyptic: Viens," *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997) 69-76.

this divine is one that is “. . . still to be revealed, which doesn’t mean it can never be expressed. But it is always aborted as soon as it is announced.”⁵¹

Although traditional readings understand Mary’s body as a chalice or container for the will of the Father, and her annunciation an excess of the Father’s declaration, Irigaray reads the story of the birth of the son with a different accent, the accent of a son born of a woman’s body and what this signifies: “God’s presence reappears in a different way. Having returned to earth, conceived and born by an attentive love, he manifests the miraculous power of that love. Never a slave to the law, making every text contradict itself, elusive in any formula adopted, escaping any prevailing cult or idolatry. . . .”⁵² Irigaray reads, following Nietzsche in the *Antichrist*, sec. 32, the Christ as a person who was to instantiate a new *way of life*, not a new faith, a certain “practice” of life that “. . . knows not sin, opposition, distance, judgment, penitence,”⁵³ which are all ways of saying “no” to the present understanding of love as sacrifice and a Father’s Word. She is also mindful that Nietzsche’s Dionysus was also a child, surrounded by maternal figures. In this version of the savior she signals his proximity to the flesh of the mother’s body, an ethos of vulnerability or childlike-ness connected to a woman’s genealogy, and the corporeal connection, a practice of life which displaces the primacy of the word and traditional religion.

She notes how the traditional rendering of Christ was to resolve all things: “The ‘Good News’ is exactly this: love can reconcile antagonisms. Metabolize them without being torn apart.”⁵⁴ But this unification with the divine glorifies the very absorption into the

⁵¹ Irigaray, ML, 171.

⁵² Ibid., 176.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 177.

divine that she critiques and the Christic figure loses all sense of what she calls "... the practice of eros."⁵⁵ The Christ figure obeys his father to the point of death and the lesson of all-consuming sacrifice is what we inherit. As she continues her reading of Nietzsche's account of Christ's flesh, she questions the divine connection with the resurrected body, rather than with the body of flesh.⁵⁶ Her emphasis will be to re-read these accounts without nostalgia, but an expectation of things to come—a respect for difference and the markers of difference most neglected in religious discourse: woman, flesh, mother, and breath.

Anne-Claire Mulder suggests that Irigaray's incarnation will not be a Christ incarnating God (male flesh becomes divine and remains within the symbolic), but an incarnation of how sexually different subjects can incarnate the flesh and word. She suggests reading Irigaray's incarnation of Christ as a dialectical relation which allows us to think of two sexed subjects, neither of which is a complement or supplement of the other—a true respect for the negative. She writes, "The idea of a dialectical relation between flesh and Word safeguards this duality, and therefore enables me to keep thinking of incarnation as a contingent coherence of instinct, heart and knowledge bounded by the location of the subject in time and space. It enables me moreover to present incarnation as an ongoing process of unifications, thereby giving form to the process of becoming."⁵⁷ Mulder's account of Irigaray's incarnation as a dialectical relation between the two sexed subjects addresses Irigaray's suggestion that cultural matricide has resulted in a loss of origins, thus the quest for the divine origin, instead of the maternal. By bringing the woman back into relation with

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ She says, "Who interpreted him in this way? Who abominated the body so much that he glorified the son of man for being abstinent, castrated? And why is it necessary for Christ to die and rise again in order for men to believe he is God? Why could his presence in the flesh not be perceived as divine?" Ibid.

⁵⁷ Anne-Claire Mulder, *Divine Flesh, Embodied Word: Incarnation as a Hermeneutical Key to a Feminist Theologian's Reading of Luce Irigaray's Work* (Amsterdam: Universiteit Van Amsterdam, 2006), 204.

the man as a subject in her own right, the Christ figure no longer has to incarnate the metaphysical absolution of flesh and word for all men and women.

Clearly, Irigaray rejects an incarnation and resurrection of another “supra-sensory” God, or a crossing-over to another life, which closes off the space-time in which the divine can occur and within and between bodies.⁵⁸ Her remedy will be the development of gender with an infinite horizon for each. The refusal to do so is the hatred of the “other” and of the self as the other.⁵⁹

The spiritualization of two genders would mark, according to Irigaray, “. . . *the place where spirit entered human nature*, the point in time when the infinite passed into the finite, given that each individual of a gender is finite potentially infinite in his or her relation to gender.”⁶⁰ The use of spirit (*Geist*) within this conversation of Hegel’s natural and ethical consciousness means more than the words alone convey. Indeed, Irigaray is critiquing a historical, natural, ethical, and ideological dismissal of a finite group of sexed people categorically subsumed and premised upon the predilection for a self-perpetuating male identity, genealogy, and his infinite relationship to God (preference for vertical transcendence), where woman is a mere by-product of that narrative and (his)tory of philosophy and religion.

Indeed, man’s vertical transcendence as a spiritual orientation perpetuates this sublation of difference, precluding dialogue and foreclosing difference. This is why her incessant theorization of a woman’s gender, genealogy, and infinite is not an essential

⁵⁸ She writes, “Might the effect of the Christian message depend upon the degree in which it is being constantly repressed? With the ‘Good News’ of the incarnation being constantly misunderstood, censored, rejected, forgotten. Always aiming to be overcome in the anticipation of a resurrection after death, in the hope of another life?” Ibid., 185.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Irigaray, SG, 139.

language for women's status as goddesses or matriarchs. Instead, divine woman signifies a radical disruption in the flow of a singular sexuate idealism that found its own self-justification for egregious ethical action via its universal philosophy of right. In contrast, her horizontal transcendence explores the ways beings can relate without the compulsion for vertical hierarchies that dismiss. Instead, the horizontal transcendence she considers is a communion of many physically and culturally asymmetrically different "saints." Her transcendence isn't all welcoming and therefore all-encompassing (another kind of wholeness). Instead, the negative will require each gender to be critically reflexive, meaning that it is determined, defined, and revalued as sexually asymmetrical beings return back to themselves. They then safeguard the individual from the collective, and within this safety, create the conditions of communal life without absorption or isolation from their own gender and other genders. The negative of each gender and their affirmed differences will become the basis for their connection. Therefore, understanding ourselves sexually, or as natural-cultural-social beings who constitute our identities individually and collectively, we create ideals or universals of/for each gender. These genders, which are not equivalent to cultural gender stereotypes, are closer to the term "generative" or life-giving, and make up the basis for humanity. Faithfulness to a multiplicity of properties and roles within a woman, and yet remaining singular to her gender appears, for Irigaray, to be the spiritual task for women. But a sexuate monopoly of spiritual becoming overtakes this difference in several ways: the preference for words (rather than silence), and the hatred of mother (rather than reverence for father) and the preference for the immaterial soul (rather than the material body).

3.1. The Dominance of Words

One way Irigaray proposes that sexuate (gendered) subjectivity remains singular religiously is via the fetishization of language and words in spiritual practices and legal enforcement. She calls such a privileging of language “subject-object language” which she differentiates from a “language of intersubjectivity of relations between subjects.”⁶¹ The former she understands to control malevolently religious thinking and the latter she argues urgently needs to be developed. Within a paradigm of subject-object language women will despise their own bodies in comparison with “spirit,” “language,” or “logos,” terms she argues that were developed only for those who benefit from such thinking.⁶² Given her remarks on the gendered markers within language (male, female, and neuter words), Irigaray argues that we are already forced into a sexed preference for male markers (particularly in her native French). The dominant spiritual tradition within the West that still fills our cultural matrix of the divine is theism, or a belief in an absolute God. She explains, “This same sex has in fact taken over the most highly valued truths: *God* in most, or even all, languages today is a masculine noun.”⁶³ Man takes up all the important markers with his gender and leaves the remainder for a woman’s gender. The supposed neuter, via terms like duty or objective detachment from sexual bias, are actually neutered laws in service of male gender, as most laws protect his divine authority, rights, and property, of which woman is the double, shadow, or object of his gender. Any departure from such male-controlled gendered thinking in religion is still in relation to the term or idiom of male theism (God), such as atheism, non-theism, or polytheism. Undoubtedly one of the most

⁶¹ Irigaray, KW, 160

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Irigaray, SG, 173. She also writes that sun is also a masculine noun, and in countries where the moon is important, it too is masculine.

powerful organizations of Western theism is Christianity, a tradition rested upon and advanced by words, texts, and dogmas. It is not surprising that dominant sexual relationship within this tradition is singular: the Father and the Son and sacredly guarded with its sexual preference for the male gender.

In *Sexes and Genealogies* she explains this connection between the male gender, God, and word: “We women, sexed to our gender, lack a God to share, a word to share to become. Defined often as the dark, even occult mother-substance of the word of men, we are in need of our *subject*, our *substantive*, our *word*, our *predicates*: our elementary sentence, our basic rhythm, our morphological identity, our generic incarnation, our genealogy.”⁶⁴ In these lines Irigaray weaves together the Aristotelian division of substance from form, flesh from word, and female from male incarnation. Arguing for a radical alterity of female otherness, as previously argued, isn’t an essential identity, but a performative disruption of subjectivity itself. Via the negative, she forms a subjectivity out of subsistence of identity, the no place, non-location of women’s identity within a patriarchal metaphysical structure. In the same way, her call for divine women may be understood as a disruption of the word, its sexual wholeness, and its absolute God, in order to permit a negative of female incarnation in the most positive sense to emerge. The phrase “divine women” connotes a finite horizon of alterity, difference in cultural and physical morphology, and difference of rhythm, a deliberate trope she uses to evidence a physical or material difference that may exist or subsist that patriarchal regimes of power tend to ignore.

3.2. *Mother to Monster*

⁶⁴ Ibid., 71.

A second powerful motif she understands to condemn or deny sexual difference is the cultural and mythological hatred of the mother, or a vertical genealogy of mother to daughter that stands in the way of the necessary Oedipal triangulation of man's infinite. Irigaray speculates that the symbolic forgetting of mother is typified in the cutting of the umbilical cord, or the physical bond between child and mother (body), a cord the father (language) often severs. What is left is the hole in the belly of the body, a hole to remember the sacrifice of language over body. Mother, like the earth, becomes the substratum for the male to delineate a sacred space or hole in the earth to offer sacrifices. Women are tolerated in these sacred spaces as non-active by-standers. Throughout history and across religious boundaries, reproductive rights have been revered and guarded. Fertility gods and goddesses often require alarming sacrifices in order to ensure the rhythm of life continues unhindered. While the power of reproduction is venerated, Irigaray argues, the bodies of women who embody reproduction have largely, at best, been tolerated, dismissed or forgotten, and at worst, murdered.⁶⁵ In the psychoanalytic cultural tradition, which we in the West particularly inherit as part of our cultural milieu, the penis or phallic symbol has become the point of all envy and the center of language, the instrument of power to dominate maternal power. Why is maternal power so feared?

⁶⁵ In *Je, Tu, and Nous* Irigaray writes that women are in need of a civil law which protects their lives and identities. She claims that they are often treated as "hostages of the reproduction of the species." But their right to life is often ignored. She calls for penalties for domestic violence, partial and provisional protection of abortion rights, protection from abusive pornography, and examination of the use of a woman's body, image, and language as form of discrimination. She notes the kidnapping, murder, and exploitation of children, often referred to as the "fruits" of a woman's labor. These reasons form a partial list of why she argues women need greater civil representation of their own. Irigaray, JTN, 78-9.

Mythologies of human becoming, from the ancient to the Greek, portray woman as a monstrous deity, a feared thing. In the Babylonian mythology of the *Enuma elish*⁶⁶ Tiamat, a bloated female dragon, symbolizes chaos and the origin of all life. When her saltwater mingles with the fresh water of her lover and child, Apsu, the co-mingling becomes the substance from which the gods, her children, originate. In order to avenge her husband's murder at the hands of his children, she attempts to kill her rival children through the efforts of her new consort and son, Kingu. Marduk, another young god, opposes her power and in battle, slices her in half like a clamshell. From the two halves of her dead carcass he orders the separation of the sky and sea. Her tears become the source of the life-giving Tigris River that flows through the ancient region. Other mother-goddesses-murderesses include Euripides' Agave, the mother of Dionysus who, cursed by her husband Zeus, in madness, tears apart her son thinking him a wild beast. As already recounted, *The Odysseys'* Clytemnestra murders her husband, Agamemnon, who at the conclusion of his nearly twenty-year absence sacrifices their daughter, Iphigenia, in order to make safe passage home. Their son Orestes must kill his mother in order to reclaim the rule of the father.

The fear, hatred and mythology of motherhood and woman, according to Irigaray, are *not* the true stories of woman or mother. She urges, "it is a matter of urgency not to submit to a desubjectivized social role, that of the mother, governed by an order subordinated to a division of labour – man produces/woman reproduces – which confines us to a mere function."⁶⁷ At the same time she is careful to say that one does not have to renounce being a woman in order to be a mother, nor does one have to renounce being a

⁶⁶ From *The Seven Tablets of the History of Creation*, trans. Leonard William King, sacred-texts.com, 1902. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/ane/stc/stc04.html> (August 2010)

⁶⁷Irigaray, IR, 42

mother in order to be a woman. What she does suggest is that women reappropriate these cultural images, “engendering” or “bearing” something other than children into the world: “love, desire, language, art, the social, the political, the religious.”⁶⁸ She wants women to be intimately connected to their female genealogies, which include mother, grandmother, great-grandmothers and daughters, giving the symbolic and cultural relationships between and among women new life and new meaning. These genealogies are a vertical transcendence, but one toward their gender or generative humanity, rather than an absolute theism or the(a)ism. To reclaim and reappropriate these relationships would be tantamount to “shaking the foundations of patriarchy.”⁶⁹

“Why can’t a woman cut her own umbilical cord?” seems to be a question Irigaray posits. Clearly, the ties of dependency cannot nor should they be held indefinitely, but the first breath of the baby could be a unique moment for self-autonomy of the mother and the child, where dependency moves into interdependency, and borders are established in order to assure the flourishing of two individuals who are free at last to breathe together. Ensuring the species does not merely mean engendering children, but the preservation of human life implies, “life endowed with consciousness, with soul,”⁷⁰ and this task belongs to women as well as men. A woman’s role isn’t to bring bodies into the world for men to educate; it is the commission of both men and women “to engender children who are both natural and spiritual.”⁷¹ The spiritual tasks are the interior places for self and thus the

⁶⁸Ibid., 43.

⁶⁹ Irigaray, Luce, ““Women-Mothers, The Silent Substratum of the Social Order,” *IR* ed. Margaret Whitford, (Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 50.

⁷⁰ Irigaray, BEW, p. 78

⁷¹ Ibid.

flowering of difference in human genders and relations with other others, sentient and non-sentient.

3.3. *The Sacred Body and Breath*

According to Irigaray our ethic of disregard for mother and confusion of self with other can correlate to our breathing. She notes the weakness of our breath; she claims our breathing encroaches on others and becomes confused with others. In so doing, we fail to safeguard our own life. Instead, she argues that we aggregate into groups, where we begin to participate in a sexual division of breathing, particularly in the family: “This breathing remains closer to nature—to the mother, to woman, to the family—or closer to culture—to social or civil life, more tied to the father, to the masculine world in our tradition.”⁷² This division then further severs the body from the spirit. She laments a separation between the corporeal and spiritual life, and insists both participate in the flourishing of one’s life and becoming, particularly when associated with breath.⁷³

She laments this spiritual quest that leaves the body behind, as she writes, “The culture that we have been taught says that it is necessary to despise the body in order to be spiritual; the body would be the nature that we have to surpass in order to become spirit, in order to become soul.”⁷⁴ Rather than overcoming the body, she urges a transformation of the breath, and instead of breathing to survive, she suggests a breathing that connects the words we speak to our heart and thoughts.⁷⁵

⁷² Ibid., 75.

⁷³ Ibid., 75.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 76.

When Irigaray writes about the tradition that separates the body from the practice of the soul, I suggest she refers to a Western Christian tradition that she believes mistakenly syncretizes Christian belief with Greek theology and philosophy, primarily the dualism of body and spirit or body and soul. Gnosticism,⁷⁶ a doctrine of salvation by knowledge, influenced early Christianity, heightening a disdain for the material body while elevating a reverence for the immaterial soul. Only those who were spiritual had the spark of the spirit to apprehend the gnosis, the secret spiritual knowledge necessary to free the spirit from its imprisonment in the material human body, where it is subject to the needs and passion of the flesh.

Gnostic myths (like many religious mythologies) are difficult to clearly interpret as they can dismantle and aid feminist outcomes. The myths revolve around the female figure of Sophia, the emanating eternal life whose desire cast her out of Pleroma (Gnostic heaven) and gave birth to God. As one source writes, "Sophia is thus simultaneously part of patriarchal myths that devalue women (she is the cosmic 'fall' just as Eve is the material 'fall') and represents liberation from them."⁷⁷ The link between knowledge and the divine has been a discussion of fervent feminist debate, and writers like Michèle Le Doeuff have noted the link between original sin and the desire for knowledge, a position that has historically limited women's access to knowledge based upon religious authority.⁷⁸ Knowledge was considered elsewhere, and women lacked the spiritual and material authority to harness, gather, comprehend, or disseminate it.

⁷⁶ See Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979 and PHEME PERKINS, *Gnosticism and the New Testament*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

⁷⁷ "Gnosticism, Christianity, and Sophia," Last access November 1, 2010.

<http://www2.kenyon.edu/Depts/Religion/Projects/Reln91/Gender/Gnosticism.htm>

⁷⁸ See Michèle Le Doeuff, *The Sex of Knowing*. Trans. Kathryn Hamer and Lorraine Code. (London: Routledge, 2003, 1998).

But Irigaray's work brings the body to the fore as the central point of spiritual ideality and the breath as the passageway between exterior and interior, between natural or material substance and spiritual substance, between affection for the self and affection for the other. Indeed she will confound the logic of the same with a cultivation of perception, touch, love, sexuality, and sensuous language. I want to suggest that an Irigarayan reading affirms women's knowing as it revalues the material maternal body out of the wreckage of the phallogocentric symbolic and imaginary, which she deconstructs to reveal a positive horizon for women and their subjective ideality. Irigaray's notion of breath is a vital contribution in that it affirms the body as the site of spiritual knowing and becoming. The body and its breath are the porous and circulating location of interior and exterior knowledge of the self, the other, and the world. And such spiritual and material knowing is the *site par excellence* for knowing, being, and becoming that resists the logic of the same.

4. *Multiplicity of Affection: Love of Self and Love for Other*

But as argued, Irigaray's writings on religion are not merely private spiritual practices, they are ways to establish ethical-spiritual relations with others. In this section I expand the importance of Irigaray's definition of the self a crucial component by which we can ethically relate to others. As mentioned, Irigaray's chief work is to develop the possibilities for the other gender to articulate itself, philosophically and religiously. I surmise that Irigaray supposes infinite relations to correspond with a sense (or affection) of self, a self in relation to others and a self alone. Originally, Irigaray senses a multiplicity within each person, an interior affection for the self and an affection for others. Particularly, she examines how an adolescent would develop this different sense of gender and she lists the following: "It is rise to the time of love: having a body to sanctify body: to sanctify for

oneself, and for the other; It is to know how to hold dialogues with one's gender and with the other gender respecting their corresponding limits; It is to receive the grace of potentially being two in oneself: in love, in pregnancy, and becoming capable of sharing this grace with an other . . .".⁷⁹ In this passage I hear Irigaray invoking how a young person can sanctify, or set apart, one's own body, but for one's self and for an other. True to her spiritual analysis, we learn to speak anew, using words to bridge rather than enclose; and we are capable to receive and extend a gracious twoness.

What will safeguard this passageway between self and other, gendered same and gendered other, and love between self and others, will be an unfolding according to a "unity of belonging to a gender,"⁸⁰ or, Irigaray writes, ". . . the *woman* that she is."⁸¹ Rather than an infinite male God, she is seeking a female infinite or universal on the level of sexuate difference. To be clear, this isn't a romanticism of nature or a woman's body. She writes without the development of a gender, woman would be subjugated to nature, to the evolution of her body, and man's gender.⁸² To develop a sense of gender is beyond simple biological destiny or anatomical essentialization, as some have criticized her work to convey. The sustaining of this alternate gender means the sustaining of other ways of speaking, knowing, and being, such as dialogue rather than dogma. If we do not underscore and safeguard these differences, we are in danger of vilifying, denying, and dominating them, the Hegelian master-slave paradigm of self and other she is seeking to move beyond. Indeed, recognizing the differences is the basis of human fertility, not human reproduction,

⁷⁹ Irigaray, KW, 160.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

but fertility difference that creates the conditions of possibility for love to and with others and the self.

But since the female “she” as subject “I” continues to be denied, much of her project is to help women understand and sustain this “I/she” subject in order that full intersubjectivity may flourish. But the “I/he” model is one that masters over others, hardly the answer for budding intersubjectivity. Instead, she argues that women need an interior life that safeguards and sustains them, especially given the powerful culture of masculine ideals, heterosexual attraction, pregnancy, and the strength of maternal love. A man’s interior life, signified often by the term “soul” connotes an interior life that transcends toward the heavens and seeks fulfillment and unity with a God/Father/Son/Spirit. But Irigaray’s interior relation isn’t other-worldly; it is connected to the phenomenal world of mind and body. It is an orientation to the world through minds and bodies that are generatively (gendered) asymmetrical to one another.

It is now unsurprising that her trope for gendered spirituality at the level of universality will reconfigure old terms, echoing a residue of the past, but subverting them in new ways. Such an exemplar of her strategy details well with regard to her work on the virgin and the annunciation.

4.1. Rethinking the Virgin

Irigaray writes that we need a new kind of virginity, a safeguarding of the twoness in one body. Her virginity is not in relation to men’s sexual desire, or the commodification of women’s sexual reproduction as a form of exchange. Rather, her virginity is “ . . . a return of the feminine to the self, a spiritual interiority of woman, capable of staying woman and of

becoming more and more woman . . .”.⁸³ She continues to explain this kind of virginity as, “It is to give oneself a feminine mind or soul, an internal *dwelling*, which is not only physical but also spiritual: linked to breath, to speech, to the mind (*italics mine*).”⁸⁴ I want to note the use of her word “dwelling,” which may be a nod to Heidegger’s dwelling. Much of Irigaray’s work has been to theorize the idea of place or space for a sexuate ontology of difference. The first place for woman, has been to understand or develop a place for herself within herself (twoness in one body), or an interior place or spiritual dwelling that requires attention and priority, a place where women can return to themselves, which permits exterior relations to be fostered without fusion or fissure to and with others. These are places of spiritual shelter.

Therefore, physical space isn’t enough, political space isn’t enough. Spiritual space involving breathing, words, and the mind help make this place of interior life. It is a dwelling that requires women to have a political right to a physical space and the spiritual wherewithal to nurture it within themselves as well. It is not possible to share in love with a partner or children, without this first faithfulness to the interior life of the woman. It is not possible to argue for political rights with others if women do not develop their interior self and, in response, they must be faithful to its “otherness” or sacred pathways beyond the symbolic male divine avatar. To borrow from Aristotle, the political animal requires the depth to be a spiritual animal, and all the genders, rooted in exterior and interior relations, create a fullness of life, diversity, and sustainability. It is an invisible and earthly interior soul sustained via the breath and the mind. It is this spiritual interiority or centeredness that makes mutuality authentic and rights meaningful. Culturally and politically, much of

⁸³ Ibid., 161

⁸⁴ Ibid.

this interior life can be ignored since its markers are internal (they resist the economy of ocular privilege) and are silent, sustained via a strategy of invisibility: breathing and the relation between breath and the mind.

4.2 A Virginal Relation to Breath

Spiritual feminine virginity thus becomes a new way to understand the annunciation in the Christian tradition, where formerly, a woman understood the story as Mary receiving word from a divine messenger of her immaculately conceived pregnancy, and thus glad for her divine stature as the mother of God. Instead, Irigaray re-reads this as a woman selecting to have a child (gives birth with her body) once she can share a language with the other, which first requires a kind of “spiritual interiority” (“faith to herself in love, in generation”) within herself for such a sharing to occur.⁸⁵

In *Sexes and Genealogies*, Irigaray resists the typical portrayal of Mary as the silenced mother, the divine vessel of the Christ.⁸⁶ Instead, she connects her spiritual mystery away from the son-man, and with the more ancient story of being a woman, the “m” or “ohm” from which all life flows from the lips/tongue (perhaps an intentional allusion to her section in *Martine Lover* titled “Veiled Lips”?), which may be read as distinguished from the western fetish for the male sacred phallus/word. As previously noted,⁸⁷ in *Marine Lover* she suggests that the divine for Mary, occurs “near at hand,” which she contrasts with “God . . . found only in Distance.”⁸⁸ Irigaray observes Western theology’s attempt to keep her a “receptive-passive female extra,” or a “chalice,” but Irigaray heralds her as a “divine source.”⁸⁹ Irigaray

⁸⁵ Ibid., 152..

⁸⁶ Irigaray, SG, 115.

⁸⁷ See section 3 *The Male Word: Sexuate Theism*

⁸⁸ Irigaray, ML, 171.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 172.

does not elide that, within the tradition, Mary is also immaculately conceived, capable of prophecy, and it is her flesh that is chosen, which Irigaray wonders, may be due to her ability to perceive (“listens silently,” “feel the music of the air trembling”).⁹⁰ Irigaray portrays a woman engaged in her bodily senses and thus aware of the proximity to herself, and thus to the proximity of the other, even the divine other. She describes the virgin as “sensitive,” “open,” aware of even the most delicate vibrations, and thus capable of guarding the spiritual or divine life, a co-creator of a fleshly Christ.⁹¹

In an important essay, “The Redemption of Women,” which first appeared in *Le Souffles des Femmes*, and is reprinted in *Key Writings*, Irigaray offers a substantive re-reading of the Catholic perspective on incarnation, thus speaking directly to her own religious origins, while attentive to other religious traditions as well. She writes the essay in order she may, “. . . progress towards a more accomplished feminine identity.”⁹² But rather than reflect on the son, she turns our attention to the mother. She re-reads the iconography of the annunciation of Mary with the markers of the Eastern yoga tradition in order to uncover what Western thinking may try to exclude, a feminine interiority, a universal apart from the universal transcendence of the Absolute Father. She writes:

In the tradition of yoga, one would say that the *chakra* designated by the iconography of the being that of the heart, breathing, but also in some of hearing and speaking, is situated at the junction between the shoulders, there where the ray of the sun, the word of the ‘Father’ or of the angel, song of the bird touch, directly or indirectly, Mary’s body. Mary often has the hands

⁹⁰ Ibid., 172, 173, 175-6.

⁹¹ Ibid., 176.

⁹² Irigaray, KW, 151.

crossed on this place. The spiritual child would be therefore be engendered both by the body and by words. This concerns two *chakras* in the body especially: that of elementary vitality and that in which breathing, heart, hearing, word, and even sight gather.⁹³

In a patriarchal Christian rendering, the inflection is on the Divine Father mediating the word, identifying himself with the masculine gender, engendering the divine child/son. But in Irigaray's re-reading Mary's virginal breath, not the word, anchors the account: "To be chaste would be to keep the *chakra* of breathing free and alive, to keep a part of breath available for a relation of interiority with the self and for a language of communication and exchange with one's own gender and that of the other gender: a language of desire, not only of needs."⁹⁴ Mary emerges as an agent, able to "hear" the message, to "sing" her response, and to "ponder" all these things in her heart.

In order for Mary to be a divine mother, the Catholic tradition teaches she had be begotten without sin, which signals a daughter (Mary) who requires a mother (Anne), often overlooked in Christian genealogies that often record patrilineal heritage alone. What Irigaray also notes is the record of Mary's friendship with other women, such as her cousin Elizabeth, as part of the annunciation story, thus affirming Irigaray's triangulation of female matrilineal relations, gendered relations with others of the same gender, and an interior life of the woman. The annunciation no longer becomes a story of patriarchal mediation of fathers and their language. With an Irigarayan twist, it becomes a new telling of how women can engender their virginity and love for self, other, the divine. Irigaray's version of chastity

⁹³ Ibid., 162.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

would be to render one's self chaste to keep the *chakra* of breathing alive and free the self and connection with others. She speaks of desire that moves beyond needs.⁹⁵

Irigaray suggests that Mary is the chosen mother, not because for her virginal relationship to a physiological hymen,⁹⁶ but because of her virginal relationship to breath and the exchange of words that occurs before and after the announcement. In *Between East and West*, a later account, she writes,

Mary, the Tradition teaches us, would atone for Eve's offense. I understand the message in this way. Eve wants above all to know, which includes knowing things that have a relation to the divine. Now God cannot be reduced to knowledge. Wanting to appropriate knowledge of the divine, Eve consumes a breath that is irreducible to knowledge. Conserving her virginal breath, free and available, Mary retains a relation to life, to the soul, to love, particularly divine love, that is neither appropriation nor consumption of the self, nor of the other, nor of God.⁹⁷

Irigaray's reading of the Eve and Mary relationship positively notes how the corporeal is spiritual. Irigaray has identified the soul as tantamount with the breath, and to lose one's breath can be understood as losing her soul.⁹⁸ Women leave their homes, their husbands, to recover their beloved, the natural and spiritual source of divine life. The unique cultivation of natural breathing as a spiritual orientation allows a physiological

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 152.

⁹⁷ Irigaray, BEW, 78.

⁹⁸ In the introduction to Part IV: Spirituality and Religion in *Key Writings* she says, "Our traditions tells us that the woman lover in the *Song of Songs* leaves her home to search for her beloved. This is also the case for feminine mystics—and for almost all women—who run the risk of so losing their breath, their soul." Irigaray, KW, 147.

function to take on a religious meaning. Mary conserves her breath in a way that allows for her life and soul to be seen together, and therefore life and soul must be guarded for the self, the other, and the divine. The self is not lost or sacrificed, but like breathing, a portion retained for the self, through the body and exhaled and shared with the other, both human and divine. Irigaray observes that women may be the best spiritual mediators in a multicultural era because of their “. . . capacity for sharing before and beyond any image, word, ritual or representation.”⁹⁹

If Irigaray is correct, then beginning with Eve and extending to Mary is a consecration of breath, life, and spirit that offers the reader a glimpse of humanity with deity in bodily form, without a theo(a)phany outside of human experience. In both female exemplars we see life, breath, and spirit cooperating in corporeal form and motherhood becomes a secondary function of the woman (*ishah*) or the young girl (virgin), neither of them referencing the man as the source of that ground of being. Instead, it is the air (elemental), breath (*ruach*), or spirit (*pneuma*) that distinguishes their position and role in the story of humanity. Could breathing well become the new indicator of sanctification, a form of spiritual renewal from within, which veers away from the language of patriarchal orthodoxy, but permits a neo-orthodoxy of body in relationship to the elemental to be the central stage for the drama?

5. *A New Eschaton*

In the Christian tradition, Irigaray provides insights into how we can re-read the stories of patriarchy anew. Her quibble has not been to dethrone the absolute God of theism *per se*, but to discover how different relations to infinite universals help orient us to the

⁹⁹ Ibid.

world, to ourselves, our human responsibilities and why these differences should be sustained, cultivated, and recognized, lest we build a kingdom of political rights and lose our spiritual sexuate souls. God is dead as much as the masculine ideal seeks to overtake the whole of the religion. But Irigaray reads persistently, even in the Christian account, a subversive hum, rhythm, or echo of another way to read these sacred texts.

Much of her work notes an advent of the age of the Spirit and the bride, a Johannine reference to a new age where alliances will be made without regard to social constructions of marriage that presently exist. Irigaray has created such a compelling case of the vice-grip of male sexuality that one wonders if woman can be without reducing herself to the reflection of the male gaze. Can Alice stop seeing herself in the looking glass, holding the glass, or being the looking glass? Does bi-multi-sexuality exist, and if so, where, what, and how? To do so, one must remove the phallus as the master signifier, which has startling ramifications for religion and theology, a discourse she argues that colludes with metaphysics to yield a unification of Being, a first cause, a first principle, a Deity which subsumes all others.

Can non-phallic-centric religious discourses emerge as significant cultural discourses, and if so, what does it mean for women, science, and philosophy? In an interesting and often misunderstood maneuver, Irigaray does not replace phallic religion with nonphallic religion, thus creating an alternate female master signifier. As stated, matriarchy does not replace patriarchy. Instead, she considers the possibility of two religious discourses, one unifying and phallic and another that is multiple, diverse, and perhaps the abyss of the waters of chaos, the very notion that those who perpetuate the dominance of a master signifying religious discourse abhor. She allows the mystery of

darkness, plurality, and heterogeneity to exist *with* the discourses we already know. She isn't trying to replace or reverse phallic religious discourses with an alternate, or female religion for male religion. But as I have argued previously, she is not advocating a switching of places within the universal, but the notion of the universal itself. In her words, "For it is not a matter of changing this or that within a horizon already defined as human culture. It is a question of changing the horizon itself—of understanding that our interpretation of human identity is both theoretically and practically wrong."¹⁰⁰ As I read Irigaray, we wrongly define human identity, and our present notion of the divine serves this erroneous view of human identity.

Fundamentally, she is a genealogist, looking for an ancestry or origin. She traces another position that may exist and asks individuals and communities for mutuality, respect, and attention to the divide between two genders. She asks that the different genders, which she names masculine and feminine, respect, and touch in mutual alliances that yield common flourishing. By respecting these differences, female autonomy, differing ontologies and trajectories, organic and nonorganic matter can flourish and share the world and universe. I believe she identifies these genders as being male and female in order to demand that embodiment be central in metaphysics, reducing the dominance of the mind over the body, and, thus, giving a phenomenological feature to her work, which is psychoanalytically framed.

5.1 *Be(coming) to/in Love*

Irigaray's account of gender at the level of universal is a criticism of the Hegelian ethical structure itself. While Hegel's ethical structure aimed at a "singular, individual, but

¹⁰⁰ Irigaray, ILTY, 20.

not the contingent individual,” Irigaray suggests that “This noncontingent individual is traditionally the province of woman, guardian of gender.”¹⁰¹ Within the Hegelian ethical family, women become the divine guardians of contingency and the natural family, pure passivity, and a male singular individual must abandon natural contingency in order to become an active citizen of the State. Like Antigone, woman is entombed within this structure that denies her singularity and distrusts any behavior that leaves the realm of natural immediacy (unless she behaves ironically as Antigone does, behaving “like a man” in order to strengthen her role in the realm of natural immediacy and contingency). If we fail to sexually differentiate the structure of the universal itself, women are left with a gendered identity that she claims leads toward a false liberation, where one achieves feminist ends if women attain, “. . . an undifferentiated state of universality to be shared in a masculine or neutral world.”¹⁰² She identifies such a neutral and asexual community as “disturbing . . . a society (which has lost) sight of the line separating life from death.” She identifies a culture of life as sexed, but a culture of death she claims needs no such sexual distinction.

I understand Irigaray to establish a universal positive feminine sexuate ontology whose horizon is life, creation, and fidelity to one’s body and the socio-cultural differences that transform that existence. If Heidegger’s project articulated authentic existence as “being-toward-death,” Rachel Jones characterizes Irigaray’s project of sexuate ontology as a “being-towards-life”¹⁰³ which begins with a person’s relation to the mother. I would add

¹⁰¹ Irigaray, SG, 112.

¹⁰² Irigaray, DBT, 37.

¹⁰³ Rachel Jones notes the Heideggerian approach of Irigaray’s project, a thesis I also suggest frames Irigaray’s work. Jones explains, “To elucidate Irigaray’s concept of *genre*, it is worth returning briefly to her relation to Heidegger. For Heidegger, an authentic mode of existence, that is, one characterized by the fullest inhabiting of what it means to be, involves taking up an active relation to the possibility of one’s not-being and appropriating the (always ungraspable) possibility of one’s own death as one’s own in what he calls ‘being-

that if we consider Irigaray's emphasis on love and becoming, it may be more Irigarayan to rephrase "being-towards-life" as a "be(coming) to/in love," which ultimately recognizes her thesis that sexuate life moves beings "on the way to love,"¹⁰⁴ as we are "in life/love" respecting the space between us. Living beings, not men and women in the abstract, originate from a mother's body, and thus, the bodily and cultural experiences of being born male or female (taking into account one's body and specific genealogy), being naturally and spiritually like or unlike the mother, figure distinctively into constructing a "relational identity" which informs how we love, procreate, desire, and think. Being born a woman is as Simone de Beauvoir noted, a "passive" construction of woman as Other. But Irigaray refigures this passivity into an active "fidelity" where gender is "regulated on the basis of my natural identity," but is also "spiritualized" in order to create, "... a liberation of the reality of sex and gender from subjection to a metaphysics or religion that leaves them to an uncultured and instinctual fate."¹⁰⁵ It is this bridge between nature and culture that she will forge. It is necessary for any genuine alliance between the sexes to affirm this difference. She argues "Man has not pulled himself out of his immediate-being-there to consider himself as half of humanity."¹⁰⁶ She writes further, "The subjectivity of man and that of woman are structured starting from a *relational identity* specific to each one, a relational identity that is held between nature and culture that assures a bridge starting from which it is possible to pass from one to the other while respecting them both." Irigaray's proposition is of course to

towards-death'. However, as we have seen, Irigaray's sexuate ontology takes birth, rather than death, as the horizon of Being." Jones, *Irigaray*, 191-192.

¹⁰⁴ On the Way to Love is of course her titled work and brings back the ethic of love toward self and the other. In the next chapter we will see that be(com)ing together with others in love includes diverse non-human others.

¹⁰⁵ Irigaray, ILTY, 39.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

retain “natural immediacy” and spirit. This alliance of particularities, would replace our traditional notion of marriage or love between man and woman, where natural or drive-related attractions culminate in contracts of property and divisions of tasks according to cultural partitions of sexual labor that produce children in service of the State.

She argues that genital sexuality is actually a ‘partial’ sexuality that is a slave to technique. She explains, “Partial sexuality touches, hears, sees, breathes, and tastes of ‘technique,’ of something prefabricated, reliant on technical means. . . . Today man would like to be equal to a machine, . . . a sexuality of drives, an energy governed by tensions and discharges, in good or bad working order. . . .”¹⁰⁷ Rather than love as physical or natural inclination toward sexual activity, love, in an Irigarayan scheme, indwells the person as divine, helps the individual to not overly regard immediate attraction and allows the person the capacity to become.¹⁰⁸

Simply, two subjects constitute the world, according to Irigaray, who both regard the other as wholly other, not other of the same. The chief problem is when both sexes are faithful to their gender and one sex dominates the other, obliterating or ignoring another alterity, and failing to tend to this difference of mutuality. Indeed, according to Irigaray, man has concealed sexual indifference through his many dwellings: woman, language, house, or city. His longing for a first and last dwelling prevents his ability to access the threshold of flesh. According to Irigaray, he cannot live or meet with the other as, “His nostalgia for a first and last dwelling prevents him from meeting and living with the other. Nostalgia blocks the

¹⁰⁷ Irigaray, E, 143.

¹⁰⁸ Irigaray, ILTY, 150.

threshold of the ethical world.”¹⁰⁹ She concludes that man uses the “currency-tool” to reside and dwell with the other, but the money cannot furnish life.¹¹⁰

To turn away from a “being-toward-death” and cultivate a “be(coming) to/in love,” her resolutions will deal with the countless themes of life, starting with the autonomy of male and female genders. She argues the male cannot cling to the maternal body and call himself master of humanity, nor can he subsume her body as his substratum for creation. With female gender autonomy, he cannot assign the female the following roles: to reproduce babies; to keep his dwelling tidy and supplied; to guard the dead as a mute tomb for the sign-body, or keeper of the hearth; to become a kind of mechanical doll for lovemaking with no affect save seductiveness; and to become the incarnation of man’s or mankind’s fantasies, a living sculpture, or goddess.¹¹¹ I would add that the freedom of autonomy is what is at stake. Some of the listed items may be necessary and positively assumed as domestic labor that can have meaning.¹¹² But what is not necessary is for one sex to prescribe for the other sex is its identities, behaviors, or customs for life. What is needed is an alliance or exchange of shared lives where the intentions and limited particularities of the sexes can agree to come together for a good that is common but not singular.

But the exacerbating problem is that we are trapped within a discursive world whose symbols, laws, and language ignore the natural, cultural, and spiritual reality of a female other that is other. According to Irigaray’s research, the effects of sexual indifference are felt in at least two profound ways: first, the poor mental health of our humanity and its psychic

¹⁰⁹ Irigaray, E, p 142.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ I am paraphrasing her list for brevity. See Irigaray, E.146.

¹¹² I refer to the excellent article of Wendell Berry, “Feminism, the Body, and the Machine,” *What Are People For?* (New York: North Point Press, 1990), 178-196.

neurosis of a severed or schizophrenic self, where a man's dis-eased memory forgets the flesh and moves toward the machine.¹¹³ Second is the social crisis or those competing to have access to discourses that produce truth.¹¹⁴ Third is the end of culture or the death of God.¹¹⁵ For Irigaray, the death of God means a cessation of abuse by those who use absolute transcendental signifiers to kill the becoming of peoples.¹¹⁶ To posit a truth claim, an individual often attempts to distance his or her bias, such as sex, and defers to a neutral or neuter "one." In this supposed neutral stance, women are kept at the threshold, retrieving the utterances of speech that are almost devoid of meaning: "they chatter, gossip, laugh, shout. . . . Whatever the deep significance of this denunciatory practice may be, women wish to achieve a praxis of meaning."¹¹⁷

To share means for Irigaray that we understand and identify what has been ours, what the other may possess, and what it means to hold some of these things together. As woman has remained in the communication of man, a message rather than a messenger, she has attempted to reproduce or mimic the closure of the male ontology and his language. Irigaray notes with lament that the ultimate speech direction of the male has been aimed toward God, rather than the female other. The world is a world of language and the male God orders it (at the behest of the male subject). She says, "The creator is at the beck and call of his creature or his creation. . . . No longer by his will, his want. Man has built himself a

¹¹³ Irigaray, E, 136, 142-144.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 137.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 140.

¹¹⁶ She writes, "Does the 'death of God' not mean, therefore, the end of the security lodged with, of the credit accorded to, those who thus suspend meaning in the letter? Those who immobilize life in something that is merely the trace of life? The preachers of death who paralyze the becoming of peoples? Those who indefinitely repeat the identical, because they are unable to discover difference?" Irigaray, ML, 169.

¹¹⁷ Irigaray, E, 138.

world that is largely uninhabitable. A world in his image?"¹¹⁸ But Irigaray argues that while male language dominates, we have forgotten the voice of those who speak the words. Words cannot be spoken without voice, or the air and body that transmit the words. She says,

In our culture, the voice has been abandoned to song, as if speech could remain without voice. From the voice of Yahweh to that or those of Antigone, or Persephone, of the Erinyes, the voices have been silenced. The text of the law, of all laws, holds sway in silence. With no trace inscribed in the flesh. Outside of current dialogue. Is law merely the memory of a passage? Awaiting an incarnation? Or reincarnation?¹¹⁹

If God and women have been held within the closure of the male subject, woman has not created her world, her truth, or her mode of questioning the truth, world and the whole. She is merely an object appealing to another object. She is as effective as Echo, trying to speak or ask a question of her own but trapped within the communication of the male speaking subject. For Irigaray, woman, faithful to her gender, has a different basis of language, and therefore has a different relation to being, human and divine. For Irigaray, God has been merely "He who forms the transcendental keystone of discourse used by a single gender, of a monosexual truth,"¹²⁰ and for this reason, he should die.¹²¹ Instead, she anticipates the divine return of which Nietzsche and Heidegger obtusely penned, "... the

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 143

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 141.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 140.

¹²¹ In "Divine Women," Irigaray traces the writing of Feuerbach and proposes that he understands God as sick or human faith in God waning because there is no faith in the mother of God. She explains, "Feuerbach writes that without the woman-mother (but he seems to take little account of the difference between woman and mother, hence there is no correspondence with a possible state of identity for the woman as woman) there is no God. The mother of God is the keystone of theology, of the Father-son-spirit relationship. Without the mother of God, there can be no God." Irigaray, SG, 69.

divine return as festival, grace, love, thought.”¹²² This kind of advent is the incarnation or reincarnation of divine women.

6. *Conclusion*

As already elaborated, Irigaray has critiqued the Christic incarnation and instead offers an incarnation of flesh and word in and between sexually different subjects. In this final section I elaborate further how this incarnation furthers ethical relations. The idea of incarnation is one that is used in religious and cultural studies, and its both secular and sacred deployment can help bridge the divide between these positions. In a nonreligious sense, anthropologists use the idea of incarnation to denote a discourse to image the constitution of human identity and subjectivity. I ‘incarnate’ an identity, or as Irigaray explains in “Divine Women,” the serpent-woman is an ‘incarnation’ of Melusine, but she is not just a serpent-woman, she is an intersection of bodily matter and discursive order. Incarnation theology allows us to wrestle with God in flesh, but the flesh, I have argued, is naturally and culturally inscribed with meaning, the divine is informed by sexual difference, but not determined therein. The human and the divine must also be “both/and,” rather than, “either/or.” As Irigaray has conceptualized through her symbolic imagery of female sexual libido, there must be a caressing and touching, but never a subsuming of one against the other. For true difference to be maintained, even notions of the divine and the wo/man must be allowed to find their way home, but not determine what that home may be or look like. Sexual markers, while culturally relevant and vitally important to the human experience, lack uniformity. Rather, they are distinct and rich nuances of difference that are vital to individuation and community flourishing.

¹²² Ibid.

Irigaray's examination of the Christic incarnation questioned the submission of the flesh to the Word, and instead asked for the Word's faithfulness to the flesh.¹²³ I think Irigaray's critique questions any orthodoxy that targets or diminishes the world. Simply, orthodoxy ought to nourish us physically and spiritually. With a similar ethos of care for flesh and the Word faithful to the flesh, Irigaray's incarnation is critical of an authoritative declaration of God's truth, mimicking God's gestures, in order to please him, become him, toward an effusion without regard for life itself. Life, as conveyed via the mother, is sadly diminished for the preferable spiritual guise of the power of the father. She suspects within such a discourse, not the glory of God, but the power of the patriarchs, censoring the message of the proliferation, transfiguration, and resurrection of *bodies* in and with the Word. Those patriarchs rightly fear the disclosure of the censored truth that the Christian message might be an invitation to "become shared flesh."¹²⁴

I suggest we must allow the messiness of sexual difference to be with our understanding of distinct rights for certain people. We must resist these markers as pre-determinates of what it is or is not to be a woman, or a man, or intersexed in our world, whether that world be noumenal or phenomenal. I believe Irigaray's scheme when paired with Christian incarnation theology, moves beyond a traditional rendering, offering the space between two distinct selves as sacred or divine. Irigaray has called this sacred space love and reminds the reader that love is a *daemon*, an intermediary, a chiasm, a volume, a fluidity, an irreducible space that creates space. I want to extend her imaginary of love between two lovers whose bodies inform a sexual desire and create a space of love between

¹²³ Irigaray, ML, 169.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 170.

and among them that is sacred and secular. That is to say, it is actual and spiritual, as well as, something that the body can experience with the mind, evoking the best within each of us, namely, the true self, or what some may call, the soul.

In my mobilization of Irigaray's theology, the soul or spirit is that which responds to the breath of life and behaves according to the call of love. It is typically apparent to humans when housed within bodies that breathe and becomes visible when love is present with the self and with the other. In my rendering of Irigaray's work, God is love, but love is not God. Love is the relationship that brings human and divine together, and love allows the sexual difference of human and the divine to experience the love of the other in bodily form, dwelling among and with, allowing the veil between heaven and earth to be torn.

Irigaray's spiritual divine incarnating love between sexually different persons without sacrifice becomes a foundational approach for her ethics which I elaborate more fully in the final chapter. Her spiritual re-reading of theology points toward a way of spiritual nearness with the self, others, and the divine between. When paired with the negative, it directs spiritual affection away from an absolute metaphysical being (God), and instead, allows us to mediate affection and spiritual expression, through sexually different symbols, words, and rituals, rather than a sacrificial mediation. She offers us an ethics of belief without grounding that belief in a single story. This ethics without singularity, an ethics of immaterial belief that connects to corporeal bodies and social symbols, will become an expansive and effusive ideal or ethical principle by which we can assess our moral claims. Irigaray's humanism is one that takes seriously the existential human experience but can also conceive or imagine ideals that are specific to and effusive of the diverse sexuate bodies that exist, and their relation to the human and non-human world.

Irigaray's critics note a potential contradiction when she argues for a divine for women while rejecting an absolute transcendental signifier. That to me is a mistake. As I read Irigaray, "a sensible transcendental—the dimension of the divine par excellence"¹²⁵ which comes into being when, in the interval, "we discover the divine between-us"¹²⁶ is a quasi-transcendental calling for actualization in as many forms and incarnations as there are people of flesh and blood.

I think Irigaray is useful when we allow her recommendations for self, others, and gender to take root, and grow wildly. As she writes, "This divine is still to be revealed. Which doesn't mean it can never be expressed. But is always aborted as soon as announced. Never expected or recognized in its coming into the world."¹²⁷ No person comes from a singularity of sexuality; indeed bodies themselves are historical constructs or artifacts which have meaning only within a cultural matrix of sociology, psychology, and religious belief. Thus, Irigaray is helpful in drawing attention to the body, not as a biological essential or static natural thing, but a site of power and life, an ethic to guide us, repose us to ourselves and one another. Sexual plurality is needed; therefore, plural sexual images are needed within a community of love. That is not to say a heterosexist ideology must be a normative ideal or the logical outcome of Irigarayan thinking. But that sexual difference is a desire to embrace a wholly other and engender something that unites love and words of commitment in a community context. But to say that difference is sexed and that sex and gender are terms which have markers both biological and sociological means is a call to responsible and thoughtful naming of sexual markers which must be expanded, charitably offered, and

¹²⁵ Irigaray, ESD, 115

¹²⁶ Ibid., 13

¹²⁷ Irigaray, ML, 171.

communally and individually named in trust and love. To be clear, Irigaray's term of sex is different than the Anglo-American feminist debate regarding sex and gender (see chapter 2), and Irigaray's sexual difference is more a critique against metaphysics, as I have explored previously. It is a knowing otherwise, or wisdom attentive to the cultural artifact that is the body, and bodies that nourish life, which is more than reproduction, but rather, an engendering of a culture of respect for difference and love with difference.

Irigaray has been careful to refuse to say what sexual difference is, and in a Derridean manner, as a quasi-transcendental has left it open, in play, in the flux, but has rendered it to be corporeal, psychically and socially experienced, spiritually valuable, ethically necessary, linguistically relevant, and politically powerful. Her call for divine women is distinctive in the academy and has spawned new deployments and trajectories as others refine and expand her notion, but her early work into the field of religion continues to inspire others to transgress the boundaries of word and flesh, or secular and sacred, and listen to an "otherness" deep within and all around. These are the lessons an Irigarayan approach still offers to teach those who will listen. Indeed, Irigaray's be(com)ing-towards-love will be the motivating dynamic in my elaboration of an Irigarayan ethic, not only for interpersonal relationships, but for institutional and international relationships, and in particular for relating to the host of non-human others—animals, stars, trees, etc.—that make up our universe. That will be the focus of the final chapter.

Chapter Five: Irigarayan Ethics: A Global Ethic of Love

1. Introduction

In this final chapter I propose that Irigaray's texts offer a substantial theoretical framework that can aid us to think through creatively a span of ethical and socio-political issues. In chapter one I argued that the scope of Irigaray's sexual difference is universal and as such, I contend in chapter two that her claim has implications for how we constitute psychosexual identities, particularly in relation to the realms of the imaginary and the symbolic. In chapter three I also suggested that her universal claim of sexual difference elongates Heidegger's phenomenological critique of metaphysics and offers an way to ethically "approach" others individuals based upon respect for difference. In chapter four I developed her claim within and therefore, her work isn't "feminist" in the limited sense that it is work that only pertains to women's realities. It is "feminist" in the broader sense that it seeks to subvert a logic of domination from within our present culture, namely, 1) hierarchical thinking, 2) binary oppositions, and 3) subject-object relations. By subverting this logic of domination, Irigaray's work refocuses the ethical and socio-political realities not only of women, but of all humans, and nonhumans categorized as "other" and figured within such conceptual models. According to Irigaray, socio-political constellations fail inasmuch as they fail to think the connection of sexual specificity with the sustenance of civil society and rights. It is not simply that *there are* hierarchies, dichotomies, or subject-object relations within our universe that she protests, but it is the systemic domination and disappearance of the "other" that she notes and traces as a genealogical matricide of the "otherness of

woman” as a subject in her own right.¹ This otherness is twofold: it is the other of man’s subjectivity (absolute transcendental religion, signification, and singular desire), and a neutered other, whose lack of sexuate indication makes the occlusion of the other less detectable and more palatable when thinking of civic life and responsibility.

I suggest her philosophic work makes a significant contribution in several diverse fields: 1) environmental ethics, 2) socio-political life, and 3) religious diversity in democratic society. I aim to delineate the beginnings of an Irigarayan ethic to demonstrate how “Irigarayan” concepts can have practical application and offer a consistent conceptual model to describe and prescribe how sexuate difference might inform and challenge our thinking about present ethical issues. I analyze her work within environmental ethics via two subfields: ecological feminism and animal liberation. I develop a generative account of how her theory goes beyond present environmental ethical theory and offers a unique perspective regarding the dilemmas associated with ecological thinking. In the introduction I referenced that Irigaray’s spiritual ethical relations offer important claims about how we can respect the differences of living in a multi-cultural and global religious and civic world. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of otherness in religion and the significance of her work to establish a new sense of rights and responsibility and expanding the force of difference beyond just a feminine elaboration, but a broader way of love, the focus of the third period of her work.

2. *Sexuate Difference and Ecofeminism*

¹ See Irigaray, “The Question of the Other,” DBT, 121-41.

Environmental ethicists often critique moral principles, actions, and policies according to various natural or organic memberships of species. They question how we justify certain moral behaviors that put other biotic members at risk in order to “preserve” certain members. Typically demarcation lines are drawn between the ideologies of anthropocentrism, sentient-based thinking, biotic individualism, and holism or deep ecology. Much of what is at stake between the groups are varying viewpoints of how to approach the problem of environmental degradation. Do we conserve and manage natural resources, or do we preserve them according to some pristine state and for whom do we conserve, manage, or preserve? Most critics understand that ethical reasoning often presupposes human agency and thus the critical species of our ethical concern (anthropocentrism). Others ask that we question that assumption. Peter Singer² and Tom Regan³ argue, and ask for animals to have “moral interest” since they can also experience pain and pleasure and may have inherent or nondemand market value versus instrumental or demand value. Biocentric individualists will argue for specific organisms, suggesting that we may need to give trees moral standing, or allow a river to be awarded damages,⁴ and that philosophically assessing an organism’s “life project,”⁵ may be more helpful than assessing an entire species. Finally holistic ecology, often attributed to Aldo Leopold’s famous essay, “The Land Ethic,”⁶ poignantly appeals to ecosystems as a biotic pyramid of a whole land

² Peter Singer, “All Animals Are Equal,” *Philosophical Exchange* 1 (1974): 103-16.

³ Tom Regan, “The Case for Animal Rights,” from *In Defense of Animals*, ed. Peter Singer (Blackwell, 1985) 13-26.

⁴ Christopher D. Stone, “Should Trees Have Standing?” *University of California Law Review* 45 (1972): 450-501.

⁵ Gary Varner, “Biocentric Individualism,” *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*, ed. David Schmidtz and Elizabeth Willott (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) 90-101.

⁶ Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” in *A Sand County Almanac* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1981) 237-65.

system whose many parts can only be understood as a holistic ethical concern. Ecological feminists have become a growing area of specialization in the field of environmental ethics as they argue that the patriarchal domination of women and other social groups are parallel to man's exploitation of "nonhuman nature." Some feminists have argued that the views of feminism and environmentalism are mutually reinforcing in that they both involve the development of worldviews and practices which are not based on models of domination.⁷

I suggest that Irigaray's work aligns with *and* departs from the concerns and social and political aims of environmental ethics, particularly ecological feminism (ecofeminism) in important ways. I see in Irigaray's work a uniquely Continental philosophical approach that can help reinforce the values and practices ecofeminists desire. But I also observe that her work advances ecofeminism, asking feminists to "think the difference," ecologically, a critique she directs toward various groups concerned with women's liberation.⁸ I suggest that thinking the difference may be an important theoretical model to advance their aims and principles. Particularly she critiques liberal claims of equality as a utopian strategy that cannot liberate women since she argues their exploitation is based upon sexual difference, and thus, their solution can only come through sexual difference.⁹ But her criticism is not to dissuade the important work of both feminist and environmentalists. Rather, her critique is meant

⁷ See Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Ecofeminism: Symbolic and Social Connections of the Oppression of Women and the Domination of Nature," in *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, ed. Carol J. Adams (New York: Continuum, 1993)

⁸ In an interview with Christine Lasagni Irigaray explains that she has regularly worked with women or groups of women who belong to liberation movements and has observed problems or impasses that can't be resolved except through the establishment of an equitable legal system for both sexes. In the absence of such social structures groups settle for a "pseudo-order" where aid given to a country in crisis can create a "generous alibis" for the masters who control the situation. See Irigaray, JTN, 81-82,

⁹ Ibid., 12.

to bolster thinking regarding human and nonhuman beings that intersect with the natural/cultural construct of “woman.” First, in order to explain their shared aims, I note Karen Warren’s framework of how ecofeminists posit the historical and intellectual tradition of patriarchy as the following:

... argument A . . . : (A1) Humans do and plant and rocks do not have a capacity to consciously and radically change the community in which they live. (A2) Whatever has the capacity to consciously and radically change the community in which it lives is morally superior to whatever lacks this capacity. (A3) Thus, human are morally superior to plants and rocks. (A4) For any X and Y, if X is morally superior to Y, then X is morally justified in subordinating Y. (A5) Thus, humans are morally justified in subordinating plants and rocks. . . . argument B: (B1) Women are identified with nature and the realm of the physical: men are identified with the “human” and the realm of the mental. (B2) Whatever is identified with nature and the realm of the physical is inferior to (“below”) whatever is identified with the “human” and the realm of the mental, or, conversely, the latter is superior to (“above”) the former.; (B3) Thus, women are inferior to (“below”) men; or, conversely, men are superior to (“above”) women. (B4) For any X and Y, if X is superior to Y, then X is justified in subordinating Y. (B5) Thus, men are justified in subordinating women.¹⁰

I suggest Irigaray’s work is capable uniquely to deconstruct the relation between “nature” and “woman.” First, her work aligns with ecofeminists in that she dismantles

¹⁰ Karen J. Warren, “The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism,” *Environmental Ethics* 12 (1990): 127.

how differences have been used to identify “a lack” that women supposedly suffer, a “lack” that could also be in varying degrees said of animals, plants, and rocks. Typically, the lack pertains to cultural abilities that men have historically and philosophically championed in the Western world: rationality, language, physical dominance, technological prowess, the preservation of private property, and the protection of a free market for exchange. By identifying the “male subject” as the only “supposed subject,” with the capacity for subjectivity, all ways of knowing and being in the world have been orchestrated toward and for this absolute male ontology, economy, and ethical system.

Irigaray’s contribution to this ongoing debate is to reveal that environmental anthropocentrism is really another variant of phallogocentrism, or that woman’s disproportionate oppression is connected to a cultural construction of language, sexuality, and rationality. Ecofeminists have already recorded how historically, little of the resources, security, and opportunity of animals, plants, water, and rocks, which men have sought to reap and extract, provide support and long-term sustenance for the flourishing of women and those understood as the “other” of the European rational, propertied, male subject. The “other” may include the religious other, the foreigner, the immigrant, the child, the racial-ethnic other, the economic other, aged other, abled-other, and sexuate other. Globally, environmental degradation affects to a greater extent the lives of women, children, and people of color more, as they bear the larger share of the cost of environmental consumption.¹¹ Women’s bodies and reproduction have even been

¹¹ See V. Rukmini Rao, “Women Farmers of India’s Deccan Plateau: Ecofeminists Challenge World Elites,” *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*, ed. David Schmidtz and Elizabeth Willott (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) 194-201; Kristin Shrader-Frechette, *Environmental Justice: Creating Equality, Reclaiming Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 3-18.

targeted as a site to control and resolve the alarming spikes in population.¹² Few women, globally, have any political control or say about these things, even though their occupations and livelihood may be more intricately connected to resources formerly understood as “common,” such as water¹³ or air quality.

But Irigaray’s work does more than just challenge patriarchy; she unfolds with precision the philosophical associations with nature and why sex/gender distinctions prevail, and why they matter. In articulating an active ontology of two sexuate subjects, she also creates a theoretical framework of relations between nature and culture where both are mutually valued and *active* in their asymmetrical relation, shaped by sexuate humans, and actively shaping sexuate humans. Just as women within Irigaray’s scheme are neither passive, nor the other of the man, neither is nature a passive object of culture’s activity. She demonstrates why sex, particularly sexuate ontology, is an irreducible construct for any theorization of environmentalism that urges a preservation, conservation or inherent respect for nature.

2.1. *Continuum Between Nature and Culture*

While never prescribing to equate women with nature as B1 supposes in the quote by Karen Warren, Irigaray would describe the historical way B2 and even B1 has been constituted as a construct “feminine,” thus radically shaping women’s identities and lives, and will continue to do so, tacitly and explicitly in damaging ways, if their sexuate ontology remains unthought. Without dismantling the power and pervasive

¹² See Gita Sen, “Women, Poverty, and Population; issues for the Concerned Environmentalist,” in *Feminist Perspectives on Sustainable Development*, ed. W. Harcourt (London: Zed, 1994), 216-25.

¹³ “Globally women produce approximately 80 percent of the world food supplies, and for this reason women are most severely affected by food and fuel shortages and the pollution of water sources.” See Greta Gaard and Lori Gruen, “Ecofeminism: Toward Global Justice and Planetary Health,” *Society and Nature* 2 (1993): 14.

historical and intellectual theorization of B1 and B2, the conclusion will necessarily follow, as will A2 and A3 remain oppressed as all expressions of “otherness” connected to the female constituted ontology. Rather than arguing how alike these men/culture, women/nature (including animals, plants, rocks) are, she challenges the patriarchal intellectual tradition that creates such a hierarchy of values and a logic of domination that fails to respect, affirm, and even safeguard these differences by examining language as a phallic discourse (language), oedipal consciousness (sexuality) as a developmental tool for patriarchal socialization, and dialectical reasoning (rationality) as a site to sublate and synthesize the ethical “other.”

Both Irigaray and ecofeminists can agree that hierarchical thinking and a logic of domination have been historically and intellectually sustained to justify a twin domination of woman and nature. What Irigaray offers is a philosophical underpinning to ecological feminism, by arguing the priority of ontology as a necessary condition for our ability to think ethically. In this latter respect, I read her as offering a distinctive philosophical and phenomenological perspective to the environmental debate, questioning an unthought andro-centric transcendentalism that creates binary opposition. Without dislocating “transcendental” man and the necessary binary opposition that is correlative to this sexuate ontology, there is no true difference or fecundity that makes all kinds of reproductions possible (outside of sexual reproduction). If overconsumption and scarcity is a looming environmental threat, then Irigaray’s work uncovers the logic that destroys truly generative thinking between sexes, among differences, and ways that different ontologies may actually have relations of exchange without exchanging the “other.” In *Thinking the Difference* she writes of

overconsumption as tied to an ideology of man without “limit” or “men amongst themselves.” Yet, the limit isn’t an idea or an abstract principle; it is grounded in lived beings, an absolute alterity of another subjectivity, and she writes, “Only women can play this role. Women are not genuinely responsible subjects in the patriarchal community. That is why it may be possible for them to interpret this culture in which they have less involvement and fewer interests than do men, and of which they are not themselves products to the point where they have been blinded by it.”¹⁴ And yet women, while objects within patriarchy also in another sense, “accomplish” patriarchy in that they comply with its terms. Thus the task becomes one that requires men and women to think in terms of an ethics of sexual difference. She includes the differences between the ontology of man and woman, and the differences within ontologies, thus rethinking new conceptualization of woman to nature, rocks, plants, and animals, as a possible path of alternative ethical living and believing. Culture, therefore, isn’t nature’s enemy; it is its unthought partner, and nature is culture’s unthought adversary as well. As humans come together with “limited” genders we fail to think about environmentalism as a cultivation of how nature and culture must be thought as distinct and co-extensive active partners together. Specifically, people’s sexuate identities have historical and social lived perspectives, and our language and discursive symbols can already narrate what we can say and how we depict alterity. For humans to cease privileging culture and excluding nature, we need a culture infused with the nondiscursive as important symbolic and imaginary horizons. This is why religion, politics and social communities must think the difference together, for nature to cease to be human culture’s “object” and dismantle

¹⁴ Irigaray, TD, 6.

phallocratic orders from within the very language and symbolic cultures which ignore the most violent representations, and thus evade responsibility.

Irigaray offers a continuum between valuing nature and culture, by not dismissing the important differences of these two realities (one is not subservient to the other), but also, she refuses to see them as separate, unrelated, or antonyms. By targeting dichotomous thinking that dominates as inherently “masculinist,” she rethinks the orientation with which we approach the two. For Irigaray, nature typically intersects with sex/gender distinctions because we are part of nature because we are embodied. Traditionally, Irigaray understands culture to signify unembodied notions of technology, institutions, academic or intellectual achievements, or human activities of commerce, industry, law, and language. Sexual difference is on the brink of nature and culture because it is a natural phenomenon that relates to social-cultural differences. Irigaray does not so much aim at reconsidering nature, as she does to rethink the relationship between them. She appeals to the human body as a site of knowing that nature and culture must be thought together, and it is the denial of the body, the cultural maternal body, that sustains a denial of what our bodily senses tell us. She writes,

The body has much more of a relationship with *perception* than with *pathos*. A body breathes, smells, tastes, sees, hears, and touches, or is touched. These bodily attributes are endangered. But how can we live without bodies? What does this extinction mean? It means that men’s culture has polluted our air, food, sight, hearing, and touch to such an

extent that our senses are on the verge of destruction. Yet we can neither live or nor think without the mediation of our senses.¹⁵

A significant metaphor for Irigaray is often the sensuous touching of two bodies, or flesh, as separate notions that come together and apart for their mutual joy. Without bodies, there is no culture, and culture can only be experienced through bodies. Irigaray writes toward an understanding of how our values that we cultivate touch our air, our water, our soil, and our bodies, and how our bodies, soil, water, and air, can cultivate our culture. Less privileged senses, such as hearing,¹⁶ tasting, and touching are important ways of knowing truth, as sight has often been the privileged way male economies conceive of the world. Sight permits a distance between others, privileging a certain kind of visibility, tending toward, she suggests, domination, distance, and totalization. Sight¹⁷ or the visible hides things like air quality and noise pollution, which may be undetectable to the naked eye. When we rely upon the few senses to give us knowledge of our world, we lose our other bodily senses, and we lose our ability to communicate with each other in multisensory ways. Our sense of taste is also bombarded with food that is chemically fertilized, genetically modified, and hormonally injected. We are in peril of sustaining a masculine culture in which domination of nature is central and the cost is loss of life itself.

¹⁵ Ibid., 22.

¹⁶ She records doctors' testimonies that we are losing our hearing as we are assaulted by machinery, aircrafts noise, and perpetual noise without rest. Ibid.

¹⁷ She also references how our sight is even at risk with the glare of harsh and widespread public lighting and the penetration of ultra-violet lighting exposure to our eyes. Irigaray, TD, 23.

An interesting note that Irigaray observes, of which Ramachandra Guha¹⁸ critiques Northern or European environmentalists for eliding, is the growing and obvious threat of nuclear armament and the increasing global militarization of consumer elites. How can we speak of conserving and preserving nature when the greater threat is an unchecked culture of militarized security that can destroy within seconds? As Irigaray's essay in *Thinking the Difference* is contextualized in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster, Irigaray, perhaps before others, understood the connection of what we cultivate as a culture and our values that gird our institutions, laws, and public policy as a necessary correlative to how we conceive nature. Her conception of nature, like woman, is a fluid and active construct, and it constitutes our understanding of culture. Often we personify "nature" as a female archetype that is out to destroy, ruthless, and leveling. Is this perhaps a reflection of the brutality of the culture and nature we have created coextensive to one another? If nature, like an ill-tempered woman, can be caricatured as the source of global change, we can evade the material reality of institutions, policies, and economic practices that continue to overburden natural resources, manipulate them as commodities to be exchanged, and conserve and consume them for global elites.

2.2. *Voice: Multiplying Language*

Irigaray, like ecological feminists, theorizes language as a site of sexual oppression, but she goes on to also warn against the danger of false liberation via the language of equality or accepting rights without interrogating the language that orders how we represent rights—what I signaled earlier as her critique of a new ideological

¹⁸ See Ramachandra Guha, "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique," *Environmental Ethics* 11 (1989): 71-83.

“opiate” of the masses. She shares with many ecofeminists an emphasis of alternative voices or narratives with which to compete against the discourse of domination that presently prevails. Yet, she does more than include; she asks how we listen to the other, and she is wary of allowing inclusion to substitute for subjectivity amongst women.

In an essay on speech titled “From the Multiple to the Two,” Irigaray suggests that while we listen to others we must also be attentive to how we build relations of what is “between” these voices, attentive to how our bodies may presuppose words as closure or “unfolding.”¹⁹ She draws attention to the symbolic language of the Father where words close and are not meant to draw another nearer, where “. . . proximity is then defined through an object and not by a movement of approximation between subjects.”²⁰ Instead, she affirms Heidegger’s appeal to the poet, or saying other than words where everything that cannot be thus expressed, passes to song. She suggests that tone, intonation and awareness of meaning shift from information passing to sharing communication. Therefore, a saying cannot belong to one; it must belong to two, the unfolding of language will require subjects committed to a sharing between communicators. The way Western philosophy already shapes women’s participation in the language means multiple voices may speak with no communication between or among them.

Part of the task of ecofeminists has been to validate and recognize the voices and narratives of women who are working against the triple threat of poverty, gender, and

¹⁹ Irigaray, WL, 24.

²⁰ Ibid., 26.

degradation of natural resources.²¹ In order for their voices to be heard, we need to cultivate a culture that listens and affirms other “voices” and ways of “knowing” or “being.” Irigaray’s work has been to constitute a way for our phallogocentric language to “listen” and “hear” otherwise. Her discursive critique of language as codified within a logic of domination of male subjects reveals a strategy for escape. By conceiving of language “with” or “to” others, rather than “at” them, Irigaray argues for spaces of silence and legitimacy for women’s “hysteria” as a site of political and social lament. Her discursive strategy slows dialectical speeches down, permitting spaces of poetic language to interrupt and dislocate arguments that claim “neutrality” or “rationality alone.” Her theory gives an account as to why personal narratives of women’s lives in relations to their bodies may also be conceived as a source of knowledge that informs us about vital truth claims in our world, and the negative, or limit of each of our personal account.

It also moves language away from an upward trajectory of absolute meaning or power of the father, and bases universality in the experience of being born of a woman in a body, a connection as argued that becomes the groundwork for mutual kinship and respect for difference. Her work shifts the language away from objects and instead asks humans to understand language success based upon physical spaces like “proximity” or “nearness.” By emphasizing distance or space between relations to others as a measure of good ethics, she situates people in the world, and relations to others as an orienting conception of self and the self with the gendered other of the same gender and the

²¹ For a further articulation of narrative voice as a method for ecofeminists see Warren, “The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism,” 125-46.

different gender. She examines fissure and fusion as ways to understand ethical relations that defy consumption or indifference toward the other. Additionally, ecological feminists' exclusion from mainstream Western environmentalist debates²² may be a symptom of the greater problem Irigaray has supposed: we do not have a culture where there is a possible place for exchange between different sexuate ontologies and economies.

Second, Irigaray's work shifts values away from hierarchical thinking toward an inclusive multiplicity of values by revealing how present language of inclusion and equality as "neutral" actually services male-values. By revealing the actual conditions of possibility for inclusion, she creates the theoretical paradigm necessary for multi-cultural values to be expressed. By exposing how binary thinking is not really a twoness of subjects, but a logic of domination where male bias controls a self-same other, including the female other, the natural other, the animal other, foreign other, religious other, and so on, she disrupts this monologic of domination with an ethical mandate to create an ontology where actual twoness exists and flourishes, abandoning "artificial" homosexuality as the logic du jour. She suggests that the condition of not dominating an "other" is the condition of multicultural, multi-value thinking for our world and diverse beings in our world. Her refusal to reduce diversity to monosexual hierarchies

²² I note that most discourse on contemporary environmentalism, particularly in North America tends to highlight conservation of resources, preservation of wilderness, or economic concerns of global climate change for its largely Western consumers and government agencies. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's analysis remains mostly locked within a cost-benefit analysis model that equates important human values with a parity of economic values. For further discussion, see Dale Jamieson, "Ethics, Public Policy and Global Warming," *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 17, no. 2(1992): 139-53; Martha Nussbaum, "The Costs of Tragedy: Some Moral Limits of Cost-Benefit Analysis," *Journal of Legal Studies* 29 (2000): 1005-36.

contingent upon male identity, being, and patriarchal religions is her groundwork for promoting a theory free of male bias.

2.3. Maternal-Feminine: A Critique of Artificial Life

Additionally, Irigaray's theorization of the maternal-feminine as a repressed metaphysical underpinning of our culture offers ecofeminists a unique consideration of how to talk about "life" apart from the cultural expectation that reproduction is an essential feature of being a woman and that being a mother is necessary to become a woman fully.²³ Irigaray's maternal-feminine is a mimetic critique of how the language of mother and the feminine are connected. Her mimetic style deliberately acquiesces to the expected artifice of the maternal as the sole signification of what it is to be feminine. By disrupting key accounts, such as Freud's essay on the feminine, she exposes an exiled agency within the maternal and dislodges the "truth" of the maternal in order to "... recover the place of her exploitation by discourse."²⁴ Her work challenges the way natural birth has been assigned to women (maternity) and cultural birth to men (paternity), with preference given to the symbolic process of becoming civilized (male), and relegating human flesh as something feminine or animal. To become part of the body politic is a male process of human subjectivity. Similarly, phrases like "mother nature" may draw upon the same cultural inscription of a woman as the maternal body, relying upon a sexed motif to explain organic systems and their reproduction and force. This sexed division raises the difficulty of politicizing a force that is maternal, where the civilized male will ultimately determine what is best for mute nature.

²³ In her dialogue with Spinoza she refers to the envelope in which woman is contained as a woman for man and as a mother for a child/nature, thus, doubly removed from herself. See Irigaray, E, 83-94.

²⁴ Irigaray, TS, 76.

According to Irigaray, nature and a woman's gender share a similar ideological relationship to man (a relation of subordination to dominant male identity)—they are both perceived to surround and nourish him like an environment.²⁵ As stated,²⁶ gender for Irigaray is more than the female sex, it is a term which encompasses life or the ability to “engender” to develop life in others. It is not merely reproductive life she attributes, although maternal and natal are prominent tropes of bodily experience and knowing in her work that she seeks to legitimate in a new way apart from their phallic appropriation. Rather, I understand her using gender as a way to question philosophically what gives “authenticity,” “flourishing,” or “felicity” to existence. What are the idioms, values, or paths that unfold life positively beyond the masculine logic of framing life and existence?²⁷ A philosophy of male engendering gives a life toward death, or what I have described as a “being-towards-death.” Commonly cited, Socrates’ famous quotation is that philosophy is preparation for death.²⁸ She explains this connection between a sexuate ontology of logos as one towards death in the following: “The logos will lead towards him, a logos that mimics the living but does not know death. Exiled from sensory, and even emotional, experiences, man tries to find it again through excess—exploits, heroism, fame. The sage then rebels against passion: he searches for himself in withdrawal, reflection, self-knowledge. The injunction ‘Know thyself’ is prepared, as is the taste of the philosopher for death.”²⁹

²⁵ See Irigaray, IB, loc. 1093 of 2057.

²⁶ See chapter one, section 3.2 “Sex, Gender, and Sexuate Identity.”

²⁷ This is why my examination of her work in comparison to Merleau-Ponty, Levinas and de Beauvoir’s work was included in chapter three, I seek to delineate that Irigaray’s account of existentialism has a vital sexually specific component of what constitutes an ethical life. She makes this sexual difference key in order to formulate a robust and universal account of ethical humanism.

²⁸ Plato, *Phaedo*, 61c-69e.

²⁹ Irigaray, IB, loc. 1087-1090.

Woman, as a dissymmetrical being to man, must resist appropriation for his sex, and her resistance to this appropriation is the greatest chance for a being-towards-life. As she states, “Truth can be engendered only by the two genders.”³⁰ She critiques that a culture in the masculine has mimicked the natural world, but without the engendering of two genders, what has been achieved is only artificial replication, such as cloning, as man attempts to transcend nature, and cloning is a sign of man’s singular gendered way to find growth and movement with life.³¹ A proliferation of replicas of life now mask or conceal the truth of life. If as Socrates declared, “Unexamined life is not worth living,”³² Irigaray might quip, man’s philosophy has kept him far from life and close to an examination of death, artificial life, and the concealment of life. Her insistence for two genders is more than a call for political equity; it is a demand for the conditions of ontological reality (difference) that give us the ability to examine life and offer truth statements about it. Her argument for gender is, I suggest, an argument for life and expansion of life in all its forms—natural and spiritual, individual and collective.³³

2.4. *Being Towards Life—Birth and Living*

Most environmentalists, economists, and social scientists agree that human population growth continues to surface as a rising threat, or that we have an impending “population problem.” Ecofeminist Gita Sen writes on the complexities of adjudicating scarce global resources and the sexed experience that birth and population control

³⁰ Ibid., loc. 1099-1100.

³¹ Contrast this “artificial life” of the masculine to my account I rendered in chapter four of Irigaray’s spiritual ethical intersubjectivity of the self and the safeguarding of the self in relation to the other through the physical and spiritual markers of life, breath, and spirit. See chapter four, section 4 “Multiplicity of Affection.”

³² Plato, *Apology*, 38a.

³³ In this passage Irigaray describes difference as the motor of the dialectic’s becoming and mean we are able to renounce death as sovereign master and give our care toward the expansion of life. Irigaray, ILTY, 62.

commonly falls to poor women to control, or that governments and activists may seek to control poor women's bodies as they attempt to manage birth rates.³⁴ I suggest that a theory of birth or natality seems a location where ecofeminist activism and Irigarayan scholarship can collude well to affirm women's health and reproductive rights in coordination with ecological sustainability. In chapter two, "The Death of Mother," I have already referenced the importance of the maternal figure as vital for thinking difference positively, particularly as we consider women's reproductive health and abortion rights. In this section I argue that population policies, like the ones Sen critiques, tend to be "top down" in their orientation and largely unconcerned with violating the basic human rights and needs of a target population (typically poor women). I suggest that population policies can mirror the same pitfalls of racism, classism, and gender bias of larger global concern, and that the impetus toward population control may reflect more a fear of death, than a philosophy of life.

Grace Jantzen has identified a theory of "natality" as a way to elaborate Irigaray's discussion of a philosophy toward life, or how it is possible to find an ordering of life and reproduction that also has the theoretical capacity for people to critique the phallic representation of the maternal-feminine. Jantzen utilizes Hannah Arendt's notion of natality,³⁵ a second birth, which ultimately links members in a community of responsibility, with Irigaray's notion of the maternal-feminine genealogy that everyone who is born, was born of a woman. Borrowing from Arendt's work on natality, Jantzen

³⁴ See Sen, "Women, Poverty, and Population: Issues for the concerned Environmentalist," 216-25.

³⁵ I recognize that a larger discussion around Arendt's work as feminist is debated. For the purposes of this thesis I am mainly deploying her notion of "natality" as a way to concentrate on birth as a political or social category of investigation.

underscores how birth functions as a central political and philosophical category, figuring philosophy less as meditation upon death, as Plato maintained, and instead a meditation on birth which is a fact of our being. Jantzen quotes Bhikhu Parekh's explanation of Arendt's work on birth as that which "... dignifies uniqueness, human plurality, joy, appearance, new beginning, hope, creativity, and unpredictability."³⁶ While Arendt's version of natality functioned to signal an originary position of beginning, and thus an originary relationship between human beginning and freedom, Jantzen notes the possibility of natality to signal a possible shift in the imaginary, the theoretical focus of Irigaray's work, writing, "It affirms the concreteness and embodied nature of human lives and experience, the material and discursive conditions within which subjects are formed. . . ."³⁷ Reconceiving the notion of birth also focuses philosophy away from thinking about "other worlds," and instead centers the imagination on a continuum of connection with all others who have been born, emphasizing kinship over the abstract idea. These remarks are congruent with Irigaray's appeal for an ethics of sexual specificity (the maternal-feminine) and why this specificity is necessary to rethink the nature/culture divide in order to laud life and its expansion. It is worth quoting Jantzen at length:

It is a respect of this connection with all other human beings that an imaginary of natality would be at fundamental variance with misogyny. This is not a matter of romantic exaltation of women as mothers; still less is it a reduction of 'woman' to the function of mothering. Rather, it is the shift

³⁶ Bhikhu Parekh, *Hannah Arendt and the Search for a New Political Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1981) xi.

³⁷ Grace Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999) 146.

of *Gestalt* that recognizes that the weaving of the web of life which each person enters in virtue of our natality means that we are connected with all other persons, female and male. Our sexuate selves, born of women, are the basis both of our similarity to and our difference from other sexuate selves, the foundation both of empathy and of respect for alterity. . . . Another result of focusing on natality rather than death is the recognition that our interconnection in the web of life includes not only other people but also animals and ultimately the whole physical world. Western thought, much abetted in this by the philosophy of religion, has not been anxious to acknowledge our deep dependence on the ecosystem or our close connection with other animals, taking instead an attitude of mastery or dominance and ultimately escape. . . . A whole different perspective opens up from an imaginary of natality.³⁸

I suggest Irigaray's sexual difference opens up the imaginary of "natality" or a marked embodied beginning of a life that has as an 'earthly' or 'natural' potential to be infinite. But whereas Arendt's persons are infinite as they live in the memories or stories of other humans,³⁹ Irigaray's persons are infinite as they relate to the structural limit between the genders and this endless becoming of one's own sex and self-representation with one's gender and the other gender.⁴⁰ Natality thus disrupts existence as merely "mortal" or as Arendt identifies it, "rectilinear" movement of humans, which is at odds

³⁸ Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, 150-1.a

³⁹ Arendt uses the term remembrance to signify a condition of being in history and of being remembered by those in time and space. See *The Human Condition*, 9, 95.

⁴⁰ See particularly Irigaray, "Fulfilling our Humanity," KW, 186-94.

with a cyclical natural order.⁴¹ I suggest Irigaray also disrupts the rectilinear conception of the human and instead offers a sensible transcendental infinite that is structural (feminine *genre*) and has its own self-representation (female *genre*), but, the limit and its potential becoming or “natal” moment, depend on an elaboration of such a culture.

According to Alison Martin, Nietzsche famously questioned philosophy’s exaltation of death (particularly Plato’s record of Socrates’ trial), answering instead with life. He memorably questioned the Christian message of Jesus of Nazareth’s death as a necessary sacrifice, and instead claimed it is rather, “. . . a consequence of the *ressentiment* of a human culture that has to establish a life-denying orthodoxy to be human at all.”⁴² Martin continues that the concept of natality, and thinking surrounding it, challenges the necessary conception of life as, “. . . a temporal and earthly fall from grace with various promises of a return in the eternal . . . the attempt to marry heaven and reason.”⁴³ Contrastingly, natality exposes the “horror of the non-existence of a promised land.”⁴⁴ Irigaray’s work contributes to this discourse in that she not only critiques the significance attributed to death in Western philosophy, but she resituates birth and becoming in human culture. As Martin interprets Irigaray,

The feminine has always been where men house what they are not, or more psychoanalytically, what they *fear* as a threat to their unified selves (difference, becoming, and ultimately, death). The limit of death has been the issue of consideration of being, then, whether that is in the apparent

⁴¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 19.

⁴² Alison Martin, “Report on ‘Natality’ in Arendt, Cavarero, and Irigaray,” *Paragraph* 25 (March 2002): 32.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

nonchalance of classical metaphysics in its definition of real being as beyond death, or in the heroism of Hegel's sublation of death, or finally in Heidegger's endurance of death as the own most possibility of being there.

For Irigaray, rather than death as the limit, the sexuate other is the limit, or negative, to this universal enclosure of structural sameness (masculine *genre*) and its self-representation (male *genre*). Again as Martin says well, "The limit of being is henceforth an end, but not in the sense of a dissolution. It is rather an end to which being is directed as a movement towards, or becoming, that is endless."

I understand Irigaray's work on sexuate gender as an important way to elaborate a possible imaginary of natality, exemplifying the fruitfulness of her claims. When applied to the question of overpopulation, Irigaray's work redirects the way we conceptualize poor women as perpetuators of the "population problem," and that respecting sexual difference means respecting the women themselves, that the right to their existence becomes the focus. Sexual difference is a necessary limit to the human aspiration for the infinite, rather than the finite bodies of poor women. Rather than perpetuate an "othering" of women as mothers, natality confronts us with the universal experience of being born of a woman, and the loss of right whereby to demand a mastery over the same women or over others. It also accords us a way to work with women toward reproductive health and sustainability—that the economic imperative for poor women to have children in order to survive must be addressed as a distinctive category for analysis in population policies. The desire to live securely apart from an imperative to bear children should be answered for all people as a vital condition of civic life.

What the problem of population reveals is the locus of phallic power, a phallic power Irigaray has worked tenaciously to reveal, whereby women have little economic and physical security, a condition exacerbated in the poor world. Women's reproductive power remains ensconced within a symbolic order or their ability to reproduce for the order itself, to ensure male survival and patriarchal control of resources. Overpopulation is not a problem women perpetuate; it is the exposure of women's domination within a system whereby their reproductive capacity is commoditized as the ideal in order to secure their own livelihoods in this precarious world of economic injustice. Rather than a source of nourishment, the maternal body is the problem, denying mothers their subjectivity within and beyond their maternal role.

Spiritually, one could say that natality highlights the mother's body as vital when considering the worth and dignity of all peoples. Natality reminds us of the flesh of the woman and her divine, a spiritual becoming that reminds us of our ancestry, our connection to women. To be born of a woman could symbolize (like Mary) our need for spiritual interiority, to temper the religious regimes that call for obedience to words, dogmas, and rituals that seek to define women and their worth.

2.5. Critique of Other Differences

Arguably, the greatest distance between French feminist theorists, like Irigaray, and ecofeminists may be her questioned ability to address issues of poverty and class, age, ability, and other sexual affections with her robust theory of a gendered sexual ontology. If her theory focuses so much on sexual ontology, does she preclude and exclude issues connected, but different than sexual oppression, such as issues of race and ethnic oppression, class, and imperial oppression, ageism, ableism, or homophobia?

What about women whose relationship with nature is complicated by living with the triple threat of gender, poverty, and race? Can Irigaray listen to these women, whose gender may be the same as hers, but whose experiences may lead them to understand economic issues of equity to outweigh other concerns philosophical and environmental?

It is my claim that Irigaray's theory provides the groundwork for such dialogue to occur. I suggest that she sets up a dialogical framework of the body where she notes people are not only talking and listening, but two bodies are doing both simultaneously, that we, with all our senses engaged, not privileging a singular location where we risk appropriation, can keep the divide of difference open, welcome, and not hostage to our own desires. Her ethics of sexual difference is a socio-ethico-political commitment to end hostile narcissism (self-same subjectivity) and it asks us to take into account that we are all part of a gendered community, which is to say, a commitment to irreducible alterity of difference as difference.

Grounding difference in the sexuate body honors the bodies of those who make such a commitment possible, and reminds us of the ethical ground upon which we can recognize our own limits, and upon which we can respect our differences. To recognize the limit we have to respect the natural, and her argument values nature without reducing civil life to the natural. Instead, she asks us to rethink the transition between nature and civil life in order to make a fuller democracy of difference possible.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ See specifically chapter two, section 3.2 "Irigarayan Rhythm and Nature" where I detail the relation between nature, difference, and limit. In this same chapter I explore the tensions between the poles of nature and culture and how Irigaray relates to this binary opposition.

Some feminists, even those committed to her work and scholarship, charge that Irigaray rarely or explicitly elaborates on these secondary differences.⁴⁶ It has caused critics to see her framing these as secondary differences, thus hierarchically inferior in value or importance.⁴⁷ It is easy to read her statement on secondary differences, such as race, economic, or cultural difference, as conferring greater priority to the problem of sexism and less to problems of racism, ageism, ableism, colonialism, or other cultural differences. If this is so, then Irigaray may fail to theorize ecofeminist's concern for the particular threat of women in poor countries where ecological resources are often unjustly distributed, and the brunt of ecological degradation is disproportionately experienced.

Yet, I suggest she doesn't center her argument on sexism as the primary point of women's oppression, but rather, offers a critique of the universal itself. As argued, sexual difference offers a "living universal"⁴⁸ based upon persons' real needs, desire, abilities. While sexism is a symptom of sexual indifference, sexual difference is greater than an overcoming of antagonism between the sexes—it is a positive affirmation of embodied human identities apart from the mono-sexuate identity of only essential or simple

⁴⁶ Morny Joy provides an excellent concluding chapter to her book where she surveys how Irigaray's work has influenced other women philosophers and critical analyses and creative experiments with her work. See Morny Joy, "Conclusion: A World of Difference," *Divine Love: Luce Irigaray Women, Gender and Religion* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006) 142-160. Penelope Deutscher also notes Irigaray's later comments that racism, cultural exclusion, and the marginalization of other oppressed groups may be linked to an impoverished relation to gender identity that diverse people experience. Deutscher observes that in *Between East and West* she suggests that a philosophy of sexual difference is depicted as already a philosophy of multiculturalism. But Deutscher also suggests that philosophy of race or cultural difference is not given similar status as is her work on sexual difference. Therefore, a reader can conclude that Irigaray's methodology allows us to expand toward race and cultural differences as genres in which diverse bodies can participate in without defining these categories as static and fixed, but Irigaray does not give this direction priority in her own work. See Deutscher, *A Politics of Impossible Difference*, 192-3.

⁴⁷ Irigaray writes in *I Love to You* that the sexual difference is without a doubt the most appropriate content for the universal and "The problem of race is, in face, a secondary problem . . . and the same goes for other cultural diversities—religious, economic, and political ones." Irigaray, ILTY, 47.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 50.

nature, or only culture (sexual neutrality). Human identities of race, age, and sex offer embodied complexities that challenge the nature/culture split, and she believes sexual difference clarifies why these abuses of power are unjustified. She seeks a resolution without abandoning the specificity of various body morphologies, phenotypes, temporal age, or the perception of being a cultural minority. Despite her initial rejection of secondary differences,⁴⁹ she later clarifies that sexual difference cannot be reduced to a simple critique of sexism and writes that racism and sexism are "... forms of power which, in fact, share the same roots: a flaw in the relation between the state of nature and civil identity which makes civil coexistence impossible."⁵⁰ She contends, "The question of women is not, then, in this respect, any different from the question of racism. ..."⁵¹

Her focus isn't on sexism as the exemplar of what ails civil life, but how to pass from nature to civil life without abandoning the relation with nature,⁵² and thus, sexism, racism, and other forms of abusive power are symptoms of this failed transition. She diagnoses within European civil society a regression into a simple state of nature—"on belonging to a particular age-group, sex or race."⁵³ She suggests that dividing into these simple "natural" groups halts communication between people and increases aggression. She addresses these "natural" categories of belonging—race, sex, and age—and criticizes what she deems ineffective steps to understand their influence and potential for

⁴⁹ See note 47.

⁵⁰ Irigaray, DBT, 46.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 53.

increased aggression in civil life, such as covering them up as “ economic and cultural constructions,” or neutralizing these differences at the expense of human identity.⁵⁴

Many political theorists in Western democracies have favored overcoming the state of nature with ethical principles based upon neutered or abstract law, such as perhaps, a social contract, universal moral law, or the free market. Irigaray contends, “. . . forcing races, sexes, and generations to conform to a single model of identity, culture and civilization means subjecting them to an order which does not respect their differences.”⁵⁵ She compares this “single model” to new forms of colonialism and evangelism, or “benevolent paternalism” of a wealthy patriarch where not only money, but civil society now conform to this supposed compassion. She agrees with Hegel’s statement that nothing is worse than paternalistic pity-compassion in politics—it implies that the gap between the rich and the poor is growing. She explains, “The enlarged community would then develop on the basis of the compassion felt by the richer members. . . . But I am not sure that the poorest will accept such aid, nor that aid of this sort actually contributes towards safeguarding them and their growth. . . . Even if the well-intentioned amongst our politicians are unaware of it, this gesture risks maintaining a vertical hierarchy in the civil community.”⁵⁶

She is especially critical of a purely economic market approach to maintain civil life arguing that the economic sphere attempts to conceal the importance of people’s natural identities, where “. . . the quality of goods seem to mask those of individuals, and

⁵⁴ She writes, “Faced with such a development, either we return to a natural form of coexistence whether familial, tribal, or ethnic and in another mode, religious, cultural or state-related, or we mould this state of nature according to abstract norms which deny it and fail to dissolve its potential for violence.” *Ibid.*, 54.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 54, 58.

ownership seems to take the place of desire to exist, and of care for life itself.”⁵⁷ But she observes that the presence of groups like immigrants, women, and adolescents in the labor force exposes the inadequacy of the job market and revised wage and labor laws to answer these larger social dilemmas of how citizens should relate to one another as citizens, or how to achieve “natural or private coexistence.”⁵⁸ She notes a worker protest in France where women were on strike to achieve recognition of their social status, rather than an increase in wages.⁵⁹ And yet she submits that while we lack civil codes that take into account the safeguarding of unique human singularity, within the economic sphere we have developed detailed, concrete, and prolific laws protecting individual property rights. While property is a part of a healthy civil life, and some goods undeniably protect life, she argues, “But the goods necessary to life have multiplied to such an extent that they have ended up taking the place of life itself.”⁶⁰

She lists how we have clumped the “other” into a group, which includes the primitive, the child, the mad person, the disabled person, the worker, and the woman.⁶¹ Such a generalized approach to “the other” conceals the rights of each of these individuals and instead, allows dominant groups to ameliorate inadequate relations via the avenue of pity-compassion toward the “others” and this supposed compassion, she injects, is the first to be abandoned for the sake of the economy. Securing rights for individuals, she argues, is an issue of life, which has been historically relegated to the private or natural sphere of the family. Following Hegel’s explanation of the ethical life

⁵⁷ Ibid., 57.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 56.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 55.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 57.

⁶¹ Ibid.

as bound to the private family sphere, she contends that an ethic of life has been reduced to procreation of children, maternal sacrifice, and paternal desire. But an ethic of life ought to include the natural law (not to be confused with natural instinct or desire), or a “cultivation” of nature, and offer citizens ways to understand themselves as natural citizens, in order to protect the rights of individuals.

She urges that a democracy should offer a way for citizens to relate to one another and understand their politico-ethical relations in addition to tradition, family, or religious culture—she asks for a natural law and civil rights for individuals which averts vertical hierarchies of benevolence or private relegation. Natural law ought to be the domain of the state:

For me, the way to overcome such a hierarchy is through recourse to the rights to civil identity: a positive, affirmative right enjoyed by every person irrespective of sex, race or age. To enjoy the right to exist, to be oneself, male or female, in a sovereign manner, outside a master-slave relationship, could be protected by a civil code which placed the emphasis on the individual’s right to identity.⁶²

She details the need to develop duties and obligations we have to ourselves, given our unique human singularities, and to our community. She had already detailed such rights specific to women in *I Love to You* as four rights including: physical and moral inviolability, right to voluntary motherhood, right to a culture appropriate to female identity, and a preferential and reciprocal right for mother and child(ren), particularly a

⁶² Ibid., 58.

guarantee against violence and economic poverty and inter-cultural marriages.⁶³ She expands these specific rights to a broader framework explaining, “A civil right like this entrusts women, for example, but also other races and young people, with the obligations to behave as adults capable of rationality and of coexistence.”⁶⁴ She includes duties such as education and our subduing sensibility and unmediated instinct—moving beyond natural norms.⁶⁵ She believes such a civic code offers a passageway from a state nature to civil life that ultimately develops more than Europe’s economic growth and development, but the growth of the individual, the family, and cities, a point of relation between citizens.

She understands a civil identity to be paramount as people are between various identities, such as natural, economic, social, political and cultural. And importantly, she believes a civil identity, rather than an identity based upon a relation to goods, is a way citizens can recognize democratically the unemployed, those who own no property, the marginalized, adolescents, and the aged.

My own approach to Irigaray’s work on these secondary differences is to read her as a philosopher, critic, thinker and activist of difference, a project which interrogates the ontological nature of Being as sexed or sexuate. It is difficult to locate specific groups as supposedly “secondary” categories of difference because her task has been to theorize an ethico-political “between two” so differences could emerge without a rudimentary natural determinism or cultural neutrality. To answer the question of why people deserve rights when they culturally identify with a “natural” particularity of lived

⁶³ Irigaray, *ILTY*, 132; *DBT*, 60.

⁶⁴ Irigaray, *DBT* 59.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 58, 59.

experiences (such as color, age, or sex), is rooted in the sexual—they were born from a woman’s body and began to breathe. Birth is not abstract, it is actual, sexual, and guarantees status as citizens and our right *to become*.

Penelope Deutscher suggests her work is an oscillation between possible and impossible politics.⁶⁶ She suggests that sexual difference is a possible and impossible task; it has never existed because of the overwhelming metaphysical oppression of unity, oneness, sameness, and closure. But sexual difference can exist as a hypothetical possibility whose horizon we can imagine and whose possibilities of multiplicity our diffuse bodies represent. It is not that Irigaray’s work wants to assert natural law and therefore rectify the status of the law, but the gesture itself reveals the lack of sexual difference we cultivate, her appeal to actual and the impossible creates a political oscillation (Deutscher), and I would submit her work is an ellipse between the possible and impossible. I think the ellipse is particularly congruent with Irigaray’s work on intersubjectivity given that an ellipse returns to the sender. I read Irigaray as permitting people a way to offer their individual differences and ask for political expression of these natural particularities, but it is not the political which is the end or horizon of justice. It is the moment of return to the people to then inhabit and shape law to cultivate constantly the shifting and active natural particularities of citizenship. Law does not finalize, but law permits natural particularity to find cultural expression and herald new formulations of the natural; civil flourishing is an active amorous exchange between nature and culture.

⁶⁶ Deutscher writes, “I take one of the most useful aspects of Irigarayan philosophy to be her theorization of sexual difference in terms of a constant swinging movement between impossibility and possibility.” Deutscher, *A Politics of Impossible Difference*, 190.

As Lacanian difference has been defined as a lack, atrophy, negative of a metaphysical whole male, she reconceives difference⁶⁷ as something each individual can recognize positively within his/her own body, and then work toward new collectives or communities where these difference can be affirmed, developed, and safeguarded (rather than conceived as opposite, complementary, of alike another body). To be sexually constituted is an embodied and specific way to argue for philosophical political twoness,⁶⁸ or for difference as a structural and political reality that respects natural evolutions, a respect between nature and culture necessary for a democracy. For Irigaray, it is a philosophical structural twoness that makes possible a critique of abuses of power like sexism, racism, and ageism. She offers a civil law in touch with nature, but not reducible to how we have conceived of natural norms or instincts. Her deconstruction of language itself is meant to point subjects back to alterity and to alert subjects to their finite position within space and time, thus the need for the other and his/her conception of other positions. Her project was to make such a limit possible and for relations to be formed to allow humans to work collaboratively on such a project safeguarding individual rights within a multinational, multicultural, and multiracial society like Europe.⁶⁹

It is the recognition of the limit in ourselves and the recognition of a sexually specific other, a vulnerable other in need of juridical and civil protection, which democracy relies upon for full civic engagement and life. She writes, "If we take respect

⁶⁷ For Derrida this difference is excess, for Irigaray it is an excess with a sexual specificity which is fluid, deferring, and calls for others.

⁶⁸ While Derrida resists twoness for multiplicity, I read Irigaray as transgressing the order of the two away from any sedimentation of the two, rethinking the couple within phallogocentrism. She ostensibly redeploys the two in service of sexual difference, a constant deferring and opening of human becoming.

⁶⁹ Irigaray, DBT, 67.

for the individual as such, with his/her qualities and differences, as our starting point, it is possible to define a form of citizenship appropriate to the necessities of our age: coexistence of the sexes, of generations, races, and traditions. . . . Solving the problem of civil coexistence between the sexes and the genders seems the most complex way of organizing coexistence between different identities within the horizon of an equality of rights.”⁷⁰

Additionally, she underscores our own self-determination and community determination, the ability for men and women of different backgrounds and cultural differences to narrate and define communally their own experiences. She offers the philosophical wherewithal to respect and theorize such experiences for a life-engendering community, where life unfolding is the universal ethic that her version of humanism offers, humans-toward-life. I suggest she is not after universal sexuate identity; instead, she envisions a living quasi-transcendental universal⁷¹ which secures human difference. She writes, “In this way, universal values lose their rigid and normative character. All that exists is a framework protecting relations between individuals, within which specific qualities play a part so long as civil coexistence is guaranteed. The relationship is primordial, and training in citizenship is concerned with relationship rather than ownership.”⁷² What is missing isn’t a politics of pure recognition (do you see me/I see you), or a politics of property (what goods can I/we secure?), but it is a politics of relations between citizens, a labor of the negative⁷³ how they can mediate

⁷⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁷¹ See chapter two, footnote 120.

⁷² Ibid., 10.

⁷³ The term Irigaray uses in *I Love to You* and in *Democracy Begins Between Two*, to describe the positions of individuals who inhabit differences but must relate to one another in civic and ethical life. She writes, “A training in

difference without closing the other within our own subjectivity and making the other co-extensive with my goods to be secured. Therefore, as I participate in my genre, I do not adhere to a fixed identity or position, but I contribute to a spectrum of differences within difference. She explains, "Working on European citizenship, I can see that the demand for women's rights is part of a vaster whole where the right to difference has become incontrovertible."⁷⁴

Her philosophy offers ecofeminists a valuable way to communicate how relations within an economic sphere alone are inadequate to address human dignity and secure human flourishing of people poor in relations to goods. This kind of alternate economic ethic, which refuses to see the issues of poverty, immigration, and age as "natural" and thus private affairs, offers ecofeminists a powerful ally in the fight for recognition outside the economic game. Rather than analyzing goods and services as an indicator of human flourishing, she asks us to consider an ethic of life itself. She offers a valuable limit on the quantity and quality of goods we offer and asks us to interrogate the question of life.

Her philosophy also offers us a pragmatic way to approach differences within a democratic dialogue, where identity is specific, but not fixed or hierarchically determined. Her negative, thus becomes the dialectic model where the relational space is elliptical, rather than circular, meaning there is space for impulse, resistance, withdrawal and restraint.⁷⁵ Individual rights and liberties cease to be the sole rubric

citizenship is thus a priority if we are to make this new historical horizon a reality; a training in respect for oneself but also in respect for the environment, for the other and for the others, both alike, and different from us." Ibid., 8.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁷⁵ Irigaray, WL, 100.

with which we assess or measure the fullness of life. Sacrificing the mother's desire (or nature) for the sake of others ceases to be the defining ethic. Instead, life lived in examination with others becomes a more complex, rich, and dialogical praxis. We now engage in a non-sublating dialectical process of considering, engendering, or sustaining life principles and practices.

Irigaray's privileged point of sexual difference has been to secure a "between two" which democracy, she insists, must secure before votes can be tallied. Without a security between the presumed majority power and a pathway for a difference to be developed, all differences will be subsumed. While democracy has been a humanist project and is assumed as such within Irigaray's work, I suggest her notion of difference is radical enough to consider beyond the scope of just human liberation.

In this section I have returned to themes I developed previously in this thesis, particularly the divide between nature and culture and the elaboration of a sexually specific existentialism that suggests a spiritual-ethical theory of life and breath as guiding principles. I have applied them toward the advancement of ecofeminist aims and have underscored Irigaray's ability to also include other diverse differences. I expand now these differences to the animal realm.

3. *Sexuate Difference and Animality*

In her later work Irigaray devotes more of her writing toward ways we can think and cultivate the difference ethically and spiritually for a new kind of intersubjectivity that engenders difference. Irigaray has written only a brief essay on the non-human animal, titled, "Animal Compassion," and this section is meant to broaden Irigaray's theory beyond even her own seemingly anemic development of this kind of relation. In

this section I suggest that given Irigaray's critique of pity-compassion and the substitution of the economic sphere for ethical relations, one can read her own animal compassion as a renewed consideration of political sentiment, towards a safeguarding of non-human animals from human domination and exploitation. While I believe it would be a misreading to understand her claims regarding women's sexual rights as directly transferrable to non-human animals, do suggest that her orientation toward alterity and the limit offers important ethical principles which may be applied toward the question of animal liberation and welfare.

I understand Irigaray's work, along with other feminists, to be a most helpful untangling of the way we have used language to signify animal welfare, such as speciesism,⁷⁶ anthropocentrism, rights, and suffering, terms which have their meaning rooted firmly within the paradigmatic human condition. The prevailing discourse remains bound to a logic of equal rights, or the self-same, whereby the dominant group becomes the standard for equality of rights for the other. An Irigarayan theory gives us an added impetus to "dehumanize" animals and consider a relation between animals and humans each in their otherness working towards a partnership of mutual respect. Irigaray's work can be understood as a continued effort of cultural feminists to critique patriarchy, domination, and sexism within the animal welfare debate. I outline their contribution and her unique input to the debate.

3.1. The Critique of Cultural Feminism

⁷⁶ A term Richard Ryder first coined in the 1970s and Singer and Regan popularized in their book *Animal Liberation*. Speciesism draws attention to the way humans understand their species as superior to nonhuman animals, and thus, justify cruel and oppressive behaviors towards non-human animals, analogous to unjustified racism or sexism. See Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: HarperCollins, 1975, 1990, 2002). 185.

Josephine Donovan criticizes both the natural rights and utilitarian approaches to animal treatment as biased toward masculinist moral rationalism and calculation,⁷⁷ arguing that cultural feminism may have a more viable theoretical basis for animal treatment than is presently available.⁷⁸ She contends that Tom Regan sought to overcome Kant's assumption of rationality as a uniquely constitutive feature of man. Instead, the natural rights perspective favors rights for animals which are "inalienable." Animal ethics is not a matter of sentimentalism or "womanish emotion," but justice, a principle of individual rights based upon rational Enlightenment principles. Donovan ultimately concludes both natural rights and utilitarianism rely on a Cartesian/Newtonian mechanistic calculation of life which is an order of how to be dominated. Instead she offers exemplars of feminist counter-hegemonic resistance and alternative epistemological and ontological modes to replace the patriarchal/scientific domination mode which natural law and utilitarian position reinforce.

Additionally, Rosi Braidotti suggests that Peter Singer's utilitarian demand for animal equality is a self-contradictory assertion, as it consists in anthropomorphizing animals, as humans would extend to them equality or equal rights. She insists on a biocentric egalitarianism, and argues that Singer's attempt to "humanize" animals

⁷⁷ I am thinking of the work on animal rights in the Western tradition which continues to develop rights within the framework of the rational tradition (for example, Mary Anne Warren's discussion of animal rights as weak/strong based upon constitutive features of autonomy, reason, communication) and the social contract which individuals like Martha Nussbaum critique as a kind of political arrangement which has favored property rights of European men over and against capabilities of diverse groups. See Mary Anne Warren, "Difficulties with the Strong Animal Rights Position," *Between the Species* 2, no. 4 (Fall 1987): 433-441; Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership: The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (Belknap Press: 2007)

⁷⁸ Donovan cites Mary Midgley as such an exemplar who notes animal's rich social and emotional complexity. She notes that historically woman have been less guilty of active abuse, they have at the same been complicit in the in that abuse, mainly through their consumption of luxury items. See Josephine Donovan, "Animals Rights and Feminist Theory." *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animals Ethics: A Reader* eds. Josephine Donovan and Carol J. Adams (New York, Columbia University Press, 2007) 58-86.

confirms the binary distinction human/animal whereby the human covers the animal other and denies the animal its specificity.⁷⁹ Braidotti cites Italian feminist and animal activist Luisella Battaglia who cautions that non-human animals need to be dehumanized. She suggests that humans have given them wrong identities rather than accepting their differences and specificity.

3.2. Irigarayan Intersubjectivity with Animals

I read Irigaray's work as a theoretical position capable of "dehumanizing" animals away from paradigmatic human equality, and thus advocating for fuller liberation. Irigarayan ethics relies upon difference that refuses to diminish the other, decentering the male subject and his relation to objects. Instead she conceives of a dimorphic elliptical relation "between" where air fills the chasm between potential subjectivities, both of whom are naturally particular, individual, and their particularity is a limit which calls for the alterity of the other. As elaborated in chapter one, section 4.3 "Nature and Culture: The Double Dialectic," nature is dimorphic⁸⁰ and sexual difference is for Irigaray a primal difference, a natural structure. Therefore, natural beings can teach Western cultures the truth of this other difference outside of the mono-sexuate. And natural beings, such as animals, are vital guides and messengers in Irigaray's work to the "truth" of sexual difference so buried and repressed in Western language and philosophy. Irigarayan difference also reveals the asymmetrical natural differences of body, morphology, and existence. Her theory of difference offers a 1) vital critique of hierarchical relations with animals, where all things are measured with the same scale,

⁷⁹ See Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011) 89.

⁸⁰ Again, Irigaray writes that the natural is at least two. Irigaray, ILTY, 37.

and 2) she promotes an inclusion based on the “animality” or “non-humanness” of the other. The specificity of the other challenges concepts like the collective name “animal other,” which takes the immense range of animal differences and classifies them all under the name “animal.” Difference, strangeness, or foreignness offers humans a path of relations between these vulnerable or fragile others, and she outlines an ethic beyond ingestion, hospitality, or human exchange. Irigaray’s work is a unique phenomenological contribution toward animal welfare and offers an ethical rethinking of virtues like compassion, hospitality, and grace from the purview of one committed to a culture of sexuate difference.

3.2.1. The Animal Guide

To date, much of animal ethics relies upon subjects (humans) speaking about/for the seemingly “non-languaged” animal objects. Irigaray warns of this appropriation and domestication of animals at the level of language and experience and the assumed monosexual subject’s mastery/sublation/penetration of the animal world. She writes,

Has he not, in fact, exhausted the earth, prevailed by his cunning over the wild animal, over the birds and the fishes, subjected to his work the horse and the ox, invested the all-comprehending through speech, and also the government of cities and the victory over the cosmic storms? Has he not domesticated all, or almost all, by his cleverness, only to arrive at nothing? And, surveying from on high the world, his world, does he not already find himself excluded from it?⁸¹

⁸¹ Irigaray, BEW, 1-2.

Her own posture toward animals has been to assume a vegetarian practice, “a silent non-aggression pact between us”⁸² and she dislikes domestication of animals.⁸³ In a brief essay, “Animal Compassion,” she offers autobiographical narrations of relations with actual animals she has encountered: a butterfly, sparrow, rabbit, cat, and hornet. It is important to her that she does not speak of animals in the abstract as imaginary, allegorical, or symbolic,⁸⁴ but writes of actual encounters with animals, thus bearing witness or offering partial testimony, to the truth of the animal. She queries with wonder, “How can we talk about them? How can we talk to them? These familiars of our existence inhabit another world, a world that I do not know.”⁸⁵ Instead she offers a narration meant, “to bear witness through relating,”⁸⁶ a kind of relation with the animal body she speaks of as “fragile,” and vulnerable. In continuance with her work on human subjectivity and the dimorphic structure between human subjectivities, one could extend that between the human and the nonhuman there is a chasm or interspace filled with air between these worlds, but animals can be our guides to the signals of difference.

It is the ‘other-worldly’ difference of animals, their negative in the dialectic to the human that offers a point of important inclusion and knowledge, an elliptical return to humans if we choose not to master, subdue, or appropriate them. Her first narration for this point is a butterfly. She recounts one such relating experience she had, a childish delight at viewing a flowering bush covered in butterflies. She writes of the related pleasure when, after she spent a patient season of waiting, a butterfly chose her, and it

⁸² Irigaray, AC, 198.

⁸³ She writes that her least favorite way of relating with animals is domestication and attempted to very briefly have animals in her home, preferring to relate to animals in their home, “living in their territory.” Ibid., 198.

⁸⁴ She distinguishes her approach from Nietzsche, but her animals were there, physically present. Ibid., 200.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 195.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

was her immobility, her stillness, which ushered the return. She later discovered the Greek word for butterfly means “soul,” and she notes the activity of these souls as they fly and rest in a terrestrial paradise. The butterfly manifests Irigaray’s spiritual accent on the carnal spiritual, and after eating well the nectar of the flower, they flap their wing in what she receives as a beatitude. The fleeting joy of their momentary presence (by a window, on a sill) is their generosity, a thankfulness for the fragility of the relation, a gratefulness for the given, which animal capture destroys.

For Irigaray birds offer her particular spiritual guidance toward sexuate difference as a structural possibility. It is the myth of *Melusine*, the fish-bird, which heralds the possibility of the transmutational and transfigurational states which erode sexual indifference.⁸⁷ In *Between East and West* she signals the song of the bird, as opposed to music, as “. . . singing in harmony with the state of the universe, of celebrating nature such as it is in the moment.”⁸⁸ Her exemplar of the bird locates a present, fleeting relation with nature, rather than against or over. Winged creatures, perhaps because of their relation to the element of air, are uniquely situated guides that alert humans to the signals of sexuate difference: the natural, the pre-discursive, the physical, the maternal, and the elemental.

She narrates about her experience with a sparrow perched on her sill in Paris while a storm raged, whose presence invoked in her a sign of life and comfort lavished. Irigaray develops a thesis that animals may be spiritual guides to other kinds of material knowledge and ways of dialogue to which Western philosophy leaves us wanting in our

⁸⁷ Irigaray, SG, 58.

⁸⁸ Irigaray, BEW, 57.

human becoming; their difference orients us within our own world anew. She writes that birds lead one's becoming: "The bird's song heals many a useless word, it makes the breath virginal again and helps it rise. The birds' song restores silence, delivers silence. The bird consoles, gives back to life, but not to inertia. The bird animates breath while safeguarding its materiality, . . . the pathway to restore but also transubstantiate the body, the flesh."⁸⁹ It is in "dehumanizing" the animal other via an ethic of difference that we are "rehumanized" in our material becoming. It is birds' tonal range which offers new mental musings, their observance of the cycles, such as the rising of the sun, the joy of spring, which communicate an understanding of being in the world when words fail. The bird is a guide from a disassociated mind, back to the body, to breath. She writes, the bird animates breath and it is ". . . more than overly logical speech," and that their vocalizings lead our breath from, ". . . elementary vitality to the most ethereal of the mental, beyond."⁹⁰ The bird signifies her spirituality, a spiritual assistant and master in many traditions, whose tonal range is like the mantra, ". . . raising the breath without ever cutting it from its corporeal site, from the intimacy of the flesh."⁹¹ Given birds' abilities to emulate spiritual breath, she observes that birds seem advanced in amorous dialogue, and could serve as guides in the kind of dialogues she has described in her work—one reliant upon breath, song, and the poetic.⁹²

Irigaray offers affectionate memories of rabbits and speaks of her demand, punctuated with a hunger strike, to return to her garden and tend it, after news that a

⁸⁹ Irigaray, AC, 197.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 197-8.

⁹¹ Ibid., 198.

⁹² Ibid.

rescued rabbit had died. I understand her to advocate for a knowing beyond mere argument. Instead, she observes the value that animal guides can offer, but our system of rationality often precludes us from noticing. From the motif of the garden to the city, she observes within this “adult society,” the pain of work, and a greater suffering from the human community where compassion is rare. It was in the painful recounting of the reception of her first book, when illness took her, and that caring for a rabbit’s life brought her out of the “phantasm of death” and its perpetual survival, became for her “a sign of welcome.”⁹³

3.2.2. *Animal Hospitality: Outside Exchange*

Yet, all of Irigaray’s animal exemplars aren’t easily cherished animal companions, and she notes the demanding squirrels and her night with the hornet, the uninvited guest. After an uneasy sleep she confronts her fear and her bias of thinking the species prone to systemic harm. It is the butterfly, the sparrow, the rabbit *and* the hornet that offer her help, help to overcome the arrogance of human hospitality. The uninvited guest destabilizes the practice of hospitality in service of the master and calls attention to the human assertion for possession, property, and mastery of our own domain. The various animal relations signal a moment where the guests become the patrons of the stay and the looming threat of appropriation.

For Irigaray, animals are the messengers who send themselves, and she credits the animal as having a superior perception of certain phenomena that humans, with their mental powers, are incapable of noticing because of our repression of the senses. She explains,

⁹³ Ibid., 196-7.

Capable of perceiving a call where human beings hear nothing, and of providing a comforting presence where more rational arguments would have neither appeased nor healed the suffering or distress. When a human body of affectionate gesture would not have been able to have the simplicity of an animal presence. As pure as that of an angel. . . . Who feels, also the danger or the trail that the other is going through.⁹⁴

It is this knowledge outside of discursive argument that the animal can perceive, possibility, a human contempt of emotion and the ignorance of our arrogance that our sexually dysfunctional culture dismisses as “womanish” or “irrational.” She retells a moment of vertigo in a tall building and a cat who mediates between her and the window. The cat offered her a gesture of presence rather than words of comfort, a sage choice. For Irigaray animal presence awakens us to our suffering and the animal alongside, mute to us but speaking wisely, offers humans the compassion and insight of what their sense tells them, a reversal of the compassion that animal welfare groups often attempt to argue humans need to offer to animals. Irigaray’s point is that they are our guides to a renewed understanding of the virtue of compassion, a compassion without paternalistic pity, a benevolence without the possibility of market exchange, or relations without domination.⁹⁵ As we have enshrined and ensconced compassion in human language, we believe human understanding can capture it, but animal presence

⁹⁴ Ibid., 199.

⁹⁵ Irigaray addresses briefly the brutal violence animals can exhibit toward one another, but rebuts that if left in their habitat and territory, they are generally inoffensive there. She does cite human domestication as an increase in aggression and possibly this could also be applied to encroachment of their territory as a source of fear. She believes that with less fear they have less aggression. Ibid.. Her statement is one of conjecture but is also a way of attempting to decipher the role of human violence, rather than conceive of animals as merely normatively violent.

awakens us to the ways we can learn compassion anew in the wild of nature, beyond the moral constraints of human obligation or exchange.

For Irigaray, respecting the wholly other animal isn't for the benevolence of the human, as Immanuel Kant portrays, but the animal gives to the humans a sense of limit, boundary, and, with that boundary, a sense of relationship with. To be clear, sexuate difference cannot be applied to animals, substituting the animal other for the female other. Rather, sexuate difference awakens us to the ways we have thought of animals only as an addendum to human flourishing and have denied necessary limits or boundaries with animals. The female other and the animal other are not the same, and that is the point.

Irigarayan ethics asks us to examine our own blind spots of symmetry and appropriation with the animal other (which are not analogous to the female other) and the way we establish boundaries based upon only our own needs, desires, or aims. Instead, we can turn to the animal as a source of knowledge, of our physical senses, the rhythms of nature, and gestures without words. She laments the way we have appropriated the animal body in our pursuit of domination and invokes a hope for universal hospitality, such as the Buddha suggests. When animals brush against us, enter our homes, our human habitats, we may protest the "invasion" and may revert to our sense of property ownership and absolute possession of certain spaces. But the animal teaches us hospitality without possession. It is the being-there in which the animal body reorients all in the world who share this world with the animal other, and she speaks of a reanimation when we reject our economy of debt for an economy of gratitude and compassion.

This way of love requires space, a respect for nearness, and the need for distance; only with such ethical proximity may we approach, meet, and welcome the animal other in their difference. Faithful to ourselves and to them, this friendship, she says, is the accomplishment of our humanity. Proximity, such as the sharing of breath, rather than liberal rationality, becomes the basis for continued welfare. We must consider the limit of our human territories, safety, economies, and consumption of ecological resources. We must think the limit in order to think the difference ethically. We cannot engage in the question of proper relations because we are a species/subject which refuses to acknowledge our ethical limit.

In this section I have argued that respecting the difference allows us to particularize different beings beyond the collective term “animal” and that the particularities of these creatures should cause us to “dehumanize” the animal. It is vital that animals be thought without the human exemplar as paradigmatic, for such thinking has aided or justified our ability to dominate, commodify, and exploit animal suffering. Irigaray’s work is unique in animal welfare philosophy in that she also understands animals as guides that can “rehumanize” people. Analogous to the way connecting in the interval with another human allows a human to become more him or herself, Irigaray is suggesting that connecting with animal others will also help us in our own becoming. Namely, the animal can be a guide to bring us back to our own bodies, to spiritual breathing, and to a greater basis for animal compassion outside of human pity or benevolence.

4. *Why Religion Matters*

In this final section I outline how a diverse democracy, which secures its citizens via the language of rights, can consider a place for religion that respects difference. Irigaray writes that we are "... unable to eliminate or suppress the social phenomena of religion," and rather than seek to dismiss it, we ought to "... rethink religion, and especially religious structures, categories, initiations, rules, and utopias, all of which have been masculine for centuries."⁹⁶ These religious structures deserve our attention, as her later work explores, because religion may be a vital force to shape a democratic culture that respects alterity and difference.⁹⁷ This section relates specifically to her third phase and her emphasis on love, resistance to domination, and insistence on self-limit and mutual flourishing.

According to Irigaray, the question of religion is all the more paramount in an era of globalization, and we must be able to "... situate ourselves in our tradition in order to create possible bridges with other traditions."⁹⁸ She suggests that as we shift ourselves within our own traditions, we form a limit⁹⁹ in correlation with our sexed bodies, and this integration of belief and body will become the basis for her investigation of religion. Namely, I suggest that her thesis of the negative,¹⁰⁰ or self-limit, defined naturally and culturally, is the safeguard and borderland that ensures that individuals and communities can live and worship in difference. Religion, rethought via difference, offers a reverence for a diffuse, non-dominating intersubjective religious life that exists apart

⁹⁶ Irigaray, SG, 75.

⁹⁷ By later work I wish to highlight her work after *I Love to You* (1996), where I believe she makes a turn away from simply critiquing androcentric thinking and begins to formulate positive representations of feminine gendered or sexuate identity.

⁹⁸ Irigaray, KW, 145.

⁹⁹ Irigaray explains "It is movement and transformation that limit the empire of my ego." See Idem, 9.

¹⁰⁰ See Chapter 1, section 4.1 "Irigaray's Strategy: The Negative."

from the overwhelming Self-Same male religious structures of God or Being. This means that the various religions don't merely "tolerate" each other or wage war against each other—both practices still regrettably too active in our day—but that they actively cultivate a partnership together in which each religion grows and deepens in its own identity in encountering different faiths.

She suggests that religious structures commemorated by rituals of sacrifice, scapegoating, and substitution fail to think the difference. In contrast, she points toward a religious universal horizon she calls a "cosmic temporality and rhythm,"¹⁰¹ or a sacred regard for natural shifts in time, growth, and cyclical life, the conditions of life itself where finite and infinite are brought together. As argued in chapter four, she is careful to clarify that this shift toward nature is not an "unmediated naturalness," or an obligation for women to have children and regress into animality, signs of what she calls "a failure to respect nature."¹⁰² Rather she is seeking an "art of the sexual, or sexual culture," where civil law safeguards and corresponds with a respect for nature and sexed bodies.

Moreover, Irigaray's version of religion is also uniquely feminist in that she is attempting to formulate an understanding of religion that moves beyond the trap of phallogentrism.¹⁰³ She opens the door for religious communities to reflect on how Western patriarchal notions of transcendence, truth Ideals, and Being may overdetermine religions whose practitioners may desire to move away from Western identity and practice. She also raises our awareness of the dangers of assimilating

¹⁰¹ Irigaray, SG, 75

¹⁰² Ibid., 3.

¹⁰³ The phallus signifies the ultimate symbol of subjectivity, normativity, and the central point of reference. Female pleasure or *jouissance* is posited as a way to refuse the sexuate of objectivity of male desire and subjectivity. See Irigaray, TS, 39, 60-2, 67, 183, 188.

alterity. Her case in point is the woman as “other,” and in order to be an irreducible other, we must abandon attempts to speculate or “gaze” in order to interrogate or assimilate the other into an economy of the Self-Same. Specifically, she offers a spiritual humanism with democratic political rights for particular individuals, such as ethnic and religious minorities seeking basic rights of existence. Since her philosophical structure is one of a natural dimorphic structure of human experience, she offers a way for citizens to relate to diverse others without constricting those relations, but offering a practical guide of being-toward-life. Therefore, people can eschew religious practices which cull, threaten, or violate lives of diverse people, calling into question the reliance of religious language as a legitimate basis to overcome primal rights of existence. Her hope, especially in *Democracy Begins Between Two*, was to offer a way multinational and multicultural people could secure political protection apart from an absolutist point of sexual indifference, particularly in securing the protection of woman as subjects in their own right to demarcate this co-civil society.

4.1. The Religious Other

Rather than citing religion as the problem, it is a culture of sexual indifference that continues to plague religious discourse and other discourses or languages where male domination occurs. Rather than reducing religion to violence, she identifies violence as posited within a logic of the Self-Same subject, or intolerance for irreducible alterity. In teasing apart the logic of sameness from the discourse of religion, she posits religion anew as an interior relation to one’s own “natural” or living giving temporal rhythm, as well as a location for collective ethical relations with others. I want to draw

three formative suggestions that I think Irigaray's work helps point us toward as we rethink democratic civil life.

First, we can extend the domination, oppression, and repression of the female "other" to the religious other who exceeds the logic of the Self-Same history of Western metaphysics. Recall, Irigaray cited a repression of the origin of life, as man abandoned Plato's cave for the immaterial realm of the forms. Her retelling warns of the blindness of the womb that gives birth and offers the passageway between the material and the immaterial. We can similarly ask, how do our cultures deny different cultural and religious practices that give life to people in favor of an ultimate ideality, and how have we failed to think the passageway between the material and immaterial? Irigaray's work might situate us toward spiritually revaluing practices that nourish, like a womb, and perpetuate life, such as food preparation, water purification, and the rights of those who grow and produce food, such as the bronze laborers Plato easily glosses in favor of the philosopher-king. I am specifically thinking of Vandana Shiva's insistence that culturally perceived poverty or lack of Western "enlightenment" creates a paradigm where the practices and livelihood of women and children who produce food globally are now at risk.¹⁰⁴

Second, Irigaray's work also warns against the Western privileging of the ocular scientific gaze. With so much trust in what we can see and interrogate, have we created a culture that is intolerant of what cannot be seen? In religious practice I am thinking of rites or beliefs where things are left deliberately hidden, or veiled, such as obvious

¹⁰⁴ Vandana Shiva, "Impoverishment of the Environment: Women and Children Last," *Ecofeminism* eds. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva Zed Books, 1993) 70-90.

cultural artifacts like the hijab,¹⁰⁵ or the sweat lodge, where we begin to develop an intolerance for such symbols in our democratic societies.

Third, Irigaray's analysis of woman's consciousness, assimilated into the universal consciousness, warns us against developing a Self-Same universal citizen over and against the singularity of the individual, the family, and cultural practices that shape and give value to citizens. Her work also warns us from sacrificing, scapegoating, or substituting certain religions on the altar of democratic peace. The move to obliterate religion in favor of secularism is, in many ways, a perpetuation of a culture of scapegoating in favor of universal Self-Same. No religion is a monolith and even within the most absolute religious discourses, there are pockets of dissent, subversion, reformation, and reorientation within faith communities where sacred and ethical align.

While Irigaray's reflections apply most aptly to those who mirror her own religious journey, of post-Catholic to spiritual humanist, those from other spiritual traditions may find her religious claims less compelling. It is also somewhat true that her use of the word "gender" or sexuate loses traction and legitimacy with global feminists and postcolonial, critical race feminists who hear the word "gender" as referring only to one's physiological sexuality, rather than a culture of multiple desire, which is where I

¹⁰⁵ I am hesitant to mention these culture artifacts because they are not my own and I am aware of the diverse debates that occurs amongst those who practice the veil, hijab, burqa, and niqab. My point isn't to imperialize or Orientalize the conversation between Westerners and Muslims, but merely to interrogate a Western response of intolerance toward symbols that veil or keep hidden from the assumed enlightenment of the Western gaze. I want to be careful not to culturally essentialize people whose relation to the veil is complex, diffuse, and whose interests and values can be divergent. For a fuller discussion see Nazirah Zein-Ed-Din, "Removing the Veil and Veiling," trans. From the 1928 edn. by Salah-Dine Hammoud, *Women and Islam: Woman's Studies International Forum Magazine* 5: (1928):221-7; Arjune H. Wingo, *Veil Politics in Liberal Democratic States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

think Irigaray's work is meant to signal a category that is diffuse as the bodies that philosophize.

Yet, these drawbacks do not in any way diminish the importance of her work in the struggle for democratic life that materially and immaterially substantiates human flourishing in body, mind, and spirit. I think her offering of a non-sacrificial logic that pertains to embodied persons and their legal and cultural recognition offers people who wish to remain religious a possible avenue for exploring what practices, rites, and beliefs already offer such divergent divine modes, and she has given philosophers and theologians the wherewithal to receive such gifts of practice and life that many already offer our world, and which may be our best means to democratic peace.

5. *Conclusion: The Way of Love*

In this final chapter I have examined Irigaray's socio-politico-ethical claims and have applied her theory toward contemporary moral problems, such as environmental ethics and animal liberation, noting how *sexuate difference* is a theory that can "think the difference" of our most assumed behaviors which appropriate natural resources and the animal other for our own interests, desires, and aims. I have also argued that Irigarayan ethics asks us to define our own limits (as our bodies inform us that we have such limits) and then to consider proper relations *with* ecological and animal others with such limits as a safeguard for ourselves and the other. *Sexuate difference* has been expanded beyond the case of women's liberation, and has been used to break down a metaphysics of sameness or logic of the Self-Same in order to create a conceptual "twoness" which allows for the rupture of multiplicity, rather than restatement of one plus one plus one, a false multiplicity.

I have argued that Irigaray's work in religion also offers democracy a way to think ethically and spiritually without necessarily assuming religion must be complicit with the oppression of diverse others and resorting to a hegemony of secularism alone. Indeed, it is her work on disrupting absolute Being that makes possible diverse modes of spiritual expression that are compatible with flourishing and becoming of diverse others, an infinite which is in touch with nature and culture.

Irigaray's structures, I have suggested, offer us robust and practical ways to engage and reformulate the question of the citizen, how we conceive of ourselves individually, and how we safeguard ourselves collectively. While profoundly theoretical, her work is also ordinary and political, while it is attentive to all the conditions that are necessary for a free and equal state—namely, difference as difference and the protection of being-toward-life.

Finally, I read this difference as a celebration of wonder in its full exquisite array, a wonder that resists the urge to domesticate and assimilate into the Self-Same. To connect in wonder with, or the be-tween, is the way of love she offers us culturally and personally. In her own words, philosophy is again "the wisdom of love,"¹⁰⁶ or to know love, not simply the privileged location of mental wisdom (mind) which western philosophy claimed to be the way of love.¹⁰⁷ But this reorientation to a way of love makes sense of her political insistence for the impossible—a striving towards a bodily wisdom (body) in which be(com)ing woman and be(com)ing man can be(come) together in the divine of Love. To close with love is the opening of life.

¹⁰⁶ Irigaray, WL, 2.

¹⁰⁷ Irigaray, WL, vii.

Samenvatting

Deze dissertatie verdedigt de these dat Luce Irigaray's werk over seksuele differentie vanuit de continentale traditie een rijke analyse geeft van menselijke subjectiviteit, ethische verantwoordelijkheid en het welbevinden als burger. Irigaray besteedt specifiek aandacht aan ecologisch feminisme, dierenwelzijn en religieus pluralisme in democratische samenlevingen. Haar werk is bijzonder omdat zij, alhoewel zij het accent legt op seksuele differentie, geen essentialisme ontwikkelt dat toont wat het inhoudt om vrouw te zijn, maar stelt dat vrouw-worden als ander (en niet eenvoudigweg als ander van het zelfde, dat wil zeggen van de man) een voortdurend proces is en een ethische roeping, een riskante onderneming in het "tussen" waarin man en vrouw interactief in wederzijdsheid en respect de weg der liefde bewandelen. De limiet, of het negatieve tussen de geslachten vormt hierbij de ethische grens/verbinding door middel waarvan zij relaties met mensen en niet-mensen onderzoekt. Deze grens maakt het mogelijk om de juiste relaties te leggen tussen bepaalde en begrensde zelden in een economie van liefde, in plaats van tussen gezaghebbende, autonome of absolute subjecten in een economie van wederzijdse ruil.

Hoofdstuk 1 gaat in op Irigaray's eerste fase, haar analyse van de spiegelende blik van het zichtbare (in *Speculum of the other woman*) en van de manier waarop de vrouwelijke subjectiviteit gebonden is aan een objectstatus. Als moeder, vrouw en dochter is de vrouw de spiegel of het glazen oppervlak dat het zichtbare mogelijk maakt, terwijl zijzelf onzichtbaar blijft voor het mannelijke subject. In deze betekenis, als spiegel, is zij een onzichtbaar subject; vanuit het oogpunt van het mannelijke subject bestaat zij niet. Zonder een "werkelijke" ander zijn verschillen slechts varianten van het zelfde, van het mannelijke subject. In haar tweede fase neemt Irigaray de moeilijkere taak op zich om erop te wijzen dat de vrouw meer is dan de pijler binnen de economie van de blik van het mannelijke subject. Zij leest dan de noties die in de filosofie het meest over het hoofd gezien zijn om een mogelijke latente subjectpositie te ontdekken – in het sensibele, het veronderstelde "passieve" en in "het negatieve". In haar derde fase ontwikkelt zij een vruchtbare strategie om een mogelijke intersubjectiviteit tussen de geslachten te genereren.

In hoofdstuk 2 wordt Irigaray's psychoanalytische analyse van het Freudiaans-Lacaniaanse libidinale zelf onderzocht. Hierin komt Irigaray de tweedeling van essentialisme/anti-essentialisme te boven en neemt de lezer mee naar een mogelijk nieuw imaginair. Haar werk kan gelezen worden als een evocatief verslag van de natuurlijke wereld ongeacht de culturele duiding ervan. In deze lezing van natuurlijk ritme in plaats van substantie, nabijheid in plaats van essentie, is het mogelijk om seksuele differentie te relateren aan andere karakteristieke verschillen (zoals ras, leeftijd, seksuele oriëntatie, cultuur).

Hoofdstuk 3 verkent Irigaray's gerichte kritiek op westerse filosofen en suggereert dat zij vanuit een liefdevolle houding uitwisselingen heeft met Heidegger, Levinas en De Beauvoir. Haar positieve aandacht impliceert een voortzetting van hun werk in plaats van een verwerping ervan en toont zowel centrale vertrekpunten in Irigaray's eigen werk, als vruchtbare momenten die hun projecten verder brengen.

Hoofdstuk 4 onderzoekt Irigaray's groeiende aandacht voor religieuze mythen, figuren en praktijken, en toont dat haar humanisme geworteld is in een spiritueel project van geseksueerde ontwikkeling. Irigaray's werk betekent juist een unieke beweging van haar existentialistische en communistische voorouders vandaan, omdat zij het belang toont van het articuleren van een spirituele horizon terwijl zij tegelijkertijd haar betrokkenheid houdt bij gelijke salariëring van beide seksen, bij de reproductieve gezondheid van vrouwen en bescherming van het milieu. Ze richt zich op de figuren van Maria en Eva om de verhalen van schepping en verlossing te herlezen, waarbij zij de moeder-dochter dyade naar voren brengt. Ze geeft de maagd en annunciatie een nieuwe context en combineert de Katholieke moeder met de vitale Hindoe adem. Met de praktijk van goed ademen roept ze een nieuw tijdperk op, een spirituele transcendentie tussen twee geheel verschillende personen, een incarnatie "tussen" ons. De aandacht wordt gevestigd op de vraag naar verschil die buiten het bereik van het Europese feminisme ligt, en haar stellingen worden in verband gebracht met andere tradities.

Tot slot wordt in het laatste hoofdstuk Irigaray's filosofie ethisch verrijkt met feministen die aan ecologische duurzaamheid werken en zich inzetten voor arme vrouwen wier arbeid het meest geraakt wordt door afbraak van het milieu. In dit gedeelte wordt Irigaray's filosofie uitgewerkt als een zijn-tot-leven, in plaats van een zijn-ten-dode. Haar filosofie, zo wordt betoogd, staat ons toe om vollediger de vraag hoe goed te leven te stellen zodat we

de bronnen kunnen delen die ons welzijn bevorderen, zoals water, lucht, gezonde voeding, betekenisvol werk. Dergelijke bronnen bieden ons fysiek en spiritueel een goed leven. De vraag naar goed leven wordt bovendien verbreed naar dierlijke anderen. Irigaray's korte essay "Animal Compassion" wordt in dit hoofdstuk gelezen als een manier om ons tot een denken te brengen dat niet meer zozeer gericht is op hoe dieren zich verhouden tot mensen. Gastvrijheid ten aanzien van dieren wordt gezien als een uitdaging om te groeien in mens-zijn door het menselijke paradigma juist te buiten te gaan. De dissertatie besluit met de suggestie dat Irigaray's politiek van differentie democratische samenlevingen kan helpen om zich bezig te houden met vragen rondom insluiting, gastvrijheid en respect voor verschillende mensen, nu we in toenemende mate een multinationale en globale wereld worden. Irigaray's werk is des te actueler en betekenisvol wanneer we dagelijks de behoefte ervaren van een vertoog dat de manier waarop we verschillen kunnen respecteren juist opent en uitbreidt, dat verder gaat dan symbolische gebaren en beweegt in de richting van een substantiële bescherming van allen.

Irigaray's ethiek en politiek leveren zowel seculiere als principiële principes op die universeel zijn en die gevonden kunnen worden in de lichamen van mensen die goed ademen en in de soort praktijken die we ondernemen om de aardse bronnen te verdelen met menselijke en niet-menselijke anderen. Haar werk staat het ons toe om onze wereld zowel materieel als inventief te onderzoeken en verbeelden, en roept ons ertoe op onszelf, anderen en deze wereld die we met liefde delen, met meer verantwoordelijkheid te benaderen.

Vertaling Annemie Halsema

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