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Sexual Ethics Beyond Sexual Difference:
Luce Irigaray and the Ethics of "Women's" Writing

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By

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M.T.S., Duke Divinity School, 2003
B.A., Emory University, 2000

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Comparative Literature and Religion
2012

Abstract

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By Wesley Nan Barker

This dissertation suggests that the experience of non-subjectivity presents an opportunity for imagining an ethical personhood beyond the reductive economy of a selfsame subjectivity. I propose that an ethics of open-ended multiplicity can emerge through the indeterminacy afforded by deconstructing the binary of sexual difference. To frame the question of ethics as a problem of sameness to be overcome, I read Luce Irigaray's work, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle,* as a feminist response to Emmanuel Levinas. By dissimilating the feminine from masculine language, Irigaray's work answers Levinas's insistence on radical alterity through the question of the feminine. I contend that Irigaray's mimetic writing deconstructs the feminine such that the feminine becomes an indeterminate space of materiality, infinity, plurality, and relationality beyond the discursive boundaries of a concrete notion of "woman" that might otherwise be suggested by her language of sexual difference. This project therefore moves beyond Irigaray's specific language of sexual difference as the condition of alterity. I claim that Irigaray's writing offers a space of indeterminate beings where alterity is preserved through relationship with the flesh of one's irreducible others. I conclude by suggesting that writing through the indeterminacy of an identity like "woman," as Irigaray has done, embraces the uncertainty and irreducibility of radical alterity. When one writes through that uncertainty, one's writing enacts an ethical openness beyond the binary of male-female difference that disrupts the totalizing and, as Levinas would say, "allergic" way of relating to the differences of this world.

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For My Mother,

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INTRODUCTION

In a speech given at the Catholic Theological Union on February 29th, 2012, Womanist theologian Diana Hayes suggested the continued need for women of African descent to tell stories that subvert stereotypes that constrain their lives. The discursive boxes in which Hayes sees black women being placed still need to be challenged. Black women's telling of their own stories in their own words institutes a self-definition that has historically challenged the limits of their being defined as an outsider or other. For Hayes, black women's stories are a way to replace stereotypes with reality; they overturn the assumptions and stereotypes resulting from being defined according to someone else's language and someone else's perception. The stories are subversive because they are real; they reflect a reality of bold and courageous women that dominant discourse has veiled with stereotypes of animalism and ignorance. According to Hayes, Womanist theology actively preserves the memories of a painful past as a means of self-definition for women. Hayes contends that the desire for self-definition attempts to think through the multiple, interlocking layers of oppression women of color face.[1]

Hayes's call for self-definition to some degree reflects modern and even postmodern insistence on contextuality and plurality; however, the need for self-definition is also a reaction to the radically destabilizing potential deconstructing differences can have on a living, breathing person trying to make sense of life among the ruins of ancient truths. Her claims expose a tension between the lived struggles of those marginalized by discourse and the lofty aims of a a theory that must claim discourse's

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[1] Diana Hayes, Catholic Theological Union Augustus Tolton Pastoral Ministry Program, "Standing in the Shoes My Mother Made: Womanist Theology," http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s (accessed April 3, 2012).

power is arbitrary in order to subvert it. The deconstruction and proliferation of differences characteristic of postmodern thought reflect a desire to overturn totalizing truth claims that silence dissent. There is, therefore, an ethical imperative behind much deconstructive work. Deconstruction typically aims to preserve difference at all costs, because the persistence of difference is necessary to disrupt totalizing systems. The desire for self-definition contrasts to the notion of absolute difference. If there is nothing but difference, then the distinction between self and other are blurred. Self-definition names a project of self-identification or becoming self through one's own self-consciousness. Such a movement risks establishing an individual totality. A world in and for oneself.

Self-definition on the one hand and an obligation to constantly undefining oneself on the other would seem incompatible. However, this project attempts to explore this tension as a possibility for thinking about an ethical future. This project responds to the need for a personhood not defined by artificially imposed limits, a need that self-definition satisfies. At the same time, it insists on the preservation of absolute alterity and the deconstruction of a subjectivity that prioritizes self-determination in favor of one that prioritizes self un-determining.

This dissertation thus tries to locate a more ethical concept of personhood, one that allows the difference of one's others to be completely irreducible and yet keeps these infinite differences relatable. Women's discursively determined bodies do not reflect the diversity of their lived embodied/fleshly experiences. But women manage to speak beyond their discursively determined bodies. Those who are othered are able to think

through and draw on the wisdom of their flesh in ways that disrupt assumptions about what it means to be other. To explore the wisdom of the other, I turn to the question of woman. Specifically, I consider the question of woman as an embodiment of otherness in normative discourse and the "other" wisdom that emerges from writing through the irreducibility of her alterity. To open the space for thinking of woman as irreducibly other, I read Luce Irigaray's suggestion that the feminine is the difference projected onto woman by a male subject as leading to an idea of woman as destabilized/indeterminate/ absent from discourse.

Born in Belgium and trained in psychoanalysis and philosophy in France, Irigaray began her career critiquing the primacy of the phallus as the symbol of unity and identity in psychoanalytic and philosophical discourse. Soon attaining a masters degree in philosophy and literature, Irigaray entered the Freudian School of psychoanalysis in Paris. Irigaray's studies at the Freudian school were influenced by, of course, Freud and the premier scholar of psychoanalysis of that time, Jacques Lacan. Lacan's famous work *Écrits* discussed the mirror-phase of childhood development. According to Lacan, the point of independence and self-recognition occurs when a child first sees himself (*sic*) in a mirror and recognizes himself as a being separate from his mother. According to Lacan, this moment in which the child recognizes his independence from his mother is also the moment he enters into a symbolic realm in which the world becomes ordered for the independent child. Lacan discusses this symbolic realm in highly gendered terms

suggesting that the symbolic realm, which is one's source for categorization, analysis, and sense making, is masculine.[2]

While Irigaray's first dissertation had been an exploration of dementia, her second dissertation responded directly to Lacan's above association of the symbolic with the phallus and male speech. Later published as *The Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray's dissertation interpreted Lacan's association of the symbolic realm with maleness as having real effects on the lives of women. Irigaray's work has since attempted to expose the masculinity of discourse to show that the non-neutrality of discursive and symbolic representations of men and women's "universal" becoming. Irigaray's work has often involved emphasizing the differences among men and women; however, she does not emphasize or establish such differences as a way to essentialize women's differences as radical/cultural feminists including Mary Daly has done. Rather, Irigaray's work exposes the differences between sex and gender and focused on how the categories of the feminine could not be divorced from a worldview or the symbolic system of discursive production that prioritized masculinity.

Irigaray evidences the effects of a masculine symbolic arises through the different ways men and women talk about love. Specifically, the idea of the dominance of a male discursive subject gains support from the structural differences Irigaray observes in language used by men and women. Drawing on her own work as an analyst, Irigaray summarizes the results of her studies on the language of patients diagnosed with schizophrenia and dementia as well as the utterances of "certain groups of neurotics."

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[2] Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Écrits* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd, 2006).

According to Irigaray, the differences between the utterances of women and men studied demonstrate an overt reflexivity in spoken discourse, which reveals the prioritization of oneness in the symbolic realm of the masculine symbolic. Irigaray documents the structure of sentences given by male research subjects as follows: "Je me demande si je suis aimé ou : Je me dis que je suis peut-être aimé."[3] In contrast, women typically phrased the topic in terms of an actual question, asking, "Tu m'aimes ?" [*Do you love me*?].[4] The interrogative statement characteristic of the male subjects expose a reflexive doubt. His phrasing does not engage an other addressee or listener. The self-doubt of his "wonder" can only be resolved by the subject (I) itself. Rather than asking a question of an addressee, the subject's statement goes out only to return to him: "se réfléchit sur qui le produit, ou reproduit."[5]

Whereas the men's statement is reflexive (réfléchi), the question posed by female subjects "présente le message comme ambigu, inachevé" [presents the message as ambiguous, unachieved].[6] The women render themselves objects in the grammatical structures they use. The addressee, the "*you*" in the "D*o you love me?*" is the subject on which the "*me*" relies for a response, a "oui" or "non." The "yes" or "no" would give meaning to her question. Woman's identity is therefore bound to the response of the subject of her inquiry, the "you" in "*Do you love me*?" Irigaray describes both of these utterances as "inachevé " [incomplete or unachieved]. The masculine is incomplete from

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[3] Notice the *Je* or *I* is the subject in this utterance. "I wonder if I am loved or I tell myself that maybe I am loved" (Author's translation). Luce Irigaray, Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle, Critique (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1984), 128.
[4] Ibid.
[5] As Irigaray says, men's statement is reflected on that which it produces, or reproduces" (Author's translation). Ibid.
[6] Ibid.

the side of the addressee and the feminine from the side of the addressor. This incompletion, opposite for the sexes, "Posent la question de la différenciation des pôles d'énonciation" [poses the question of the differentiation of the poles of utterance]. [7]

A polarity of self and other divide the world into an us and them, a subject and an object. Just as the division of the utterances "hinders communication," the separation of the world through the utterance of the *I* and *you* "représentent deux parties inégales du monde qui ne peuvent ni échanger ni s'allier" [represent two unequal parts of the world that are capable of neither exchange nor alliance].[8] Irigaray interprets the "two unequal parts of the world," neither meeting nor communicating, as a reflection of the incommensurability of masculine and feminine desire within the symbolic realm.[9] For Irigaray, this incommensurability verifies that the symbolic realm of speech, communication, and sense-making is indeed masculine; however, the purpose of her work is to show that this prioritization of masculinity deprives woman of the freedom to define herself as a subject. In the two statements on love, the "I" and "you" are uttered by man and woman respectively. Man claims the *I* for himself. The identity of his subjectivity is secured by his doubt that only he can assuage. In contrast, woman posits her *I* in the form of a question that can only be answered through the "you" that is the subject of her address. This explains why Irigaray correlates the woman's "Do you love me?" with "*qui suis-je ?"* [*Who am I?*].[10] She searches for her identity through the you that is her other—man.

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[7] Ibid., 129.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Man's desire always returning to itself and woman's desire always in motion towards the other.
[10] Ibid., 128.

Both utterances affirm the masculinity of the subject and both reflect the different movements through which man and woman speak. Man, as subject can divide the world into an *I* and a *you*. His *you* is the feminine who is an object unnecessary to his becoming since he does not need her response. Or perhaps we should say that the utterance hides her necessity precisely because she is eliminated from the reflexivity of the address. On the other hand, the feminine utterance establishes her other, or her "you" as subject. She cannot utter as subject. This is why there can be "neither […] exchange nor alliance."[11] The *I* and *you* never meet in the different utterances of man and woman. Irigaray writes, "en fonction d'une référence singulière au monde" [in function of a singular reference to the world] men and women refer and relate to that world differently.[12] The you (other) always refers to the world to find her becoming. The I (self) refers all the world back to himself.

The split between the I and you has been so "badly managed" that the question of love between the sexes deteriorates into "identité…fossilisée" [fossilized identities].[13] In these utterances there is no love between man and woman. We could say that the masculine utterance, because it does not engage the addressee, has no need for the feminine in his search for love. Again, since only he can satisfy his doubt as posed in the utterance "I wonder if I am loved," only he can determine whether or not he is loved. His identity is therefore "fossilized" [fossilisée] in the movement of his self-same love and the identity of the *I* in the *I* itself. In contrast, woman's identity is solidified in the search for herself as man's object. Earlier in this text, Irigaray has suggested that woman moves

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[11] Ibid., 129.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.

towards the other without return. Irigaray writes, "la femme tend toujours *vers* sans retour à elle comme lieu d'élaboration du positif."[14] Her utterance mirrors this exhibition of her love for man. She is bound to a question, and her other, her "you," is the subject who answers the question that provides her identity.[15]

Irigaray moves from her empirical data to an abstract philosophically-inclined musing wherein she poses possibilities and questions about the relationship of language to sexual difference. She claims that the lack of voice in language is an "index of sexedness in speech," associating the silenced voice with the feminine. The silence of the feminine voice guarantees the subjectivity of the masculine "I." Even when woman speaks, masculine language obscures her voice such that her utterances also return to man as subject; the "you" in "Do you love me?" The circularity of her language secures the masculinity of the subject position.

The prioritization of the masculine worldview in the symbolic realm implies the feminine is ultimately a masculine construction. And if there was no real feminine, then what and who was woman? For many, Irigaray's work affirms the dangerous association of woman with lack that characterized psychoanalysis. By this critique, there is no place for women to ever write or speak on their own, no discourse for self-determination. Yet Irigaray wrote and continues to write in a way that embraces the feminine almost to the

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[14] "Woman," says Irigaray, "always tends to move towards without return..." She uses *vers* without an object. There is no destination for woman, because she never stops moving. She never settles or returns to herself as a positive elaboration of place (Author's translation). Ibid., 16.

[15] In a playful display of confidence that also attests to the performativity of this text as a lecture, Irigaray challenges, "Anyone who denies that discourse is sexed is advised to carry out a statistical investigation of taped materials and analyze the results." Then she identifies this "anyone" as a "he" who, if he disagrees is likely repeating the patterns of the masculine utterance. "If he still claims to discern no difference, then his own interpretation would have to be analyzed to see how it reproduces one of the patterns…or perhaps especially, in the denials." Ibid., 136.

point of re-blurring the line between sex and gender. Using intensely visceral metaphors associated explicitly with the feminine and characterizations of women's bodies such as the womb and the vagina, Irigaray suggests there is something inherently and perhaps universally different about woman. But what is different is determined by discourse; therefore, Irigaray is merely playing with feminine difference, pushing it to its limits, not essentializing that difference. If there is no feminine apart from masculine construction, what is woman? And if woman is always in question, writing through woman is to write through a question, through an indeterminacy.

Irigaray's strategy of exposing the prioritization of a masculine imaginary has often involved her use of explicitly gendered metaphors of femaleness. As a result of her use of feminine metaphors as philosophical interventions, many critics have seen her work as reaffirming the masculine symbolic in which woman is figured. At the very least, her sense that the feminine can provide a point of intervention in masculine discourse risks essentially linking woman with otherness. However, Irigaray's use of gendered imagery to evoke a sense of woman function to constantly subverting the idea of the feminine. Irigaray's writing embraces the feminine as an always already contested space; therefore, the sexed metaphors through which she writes are always an embodiment of some long forgotten, absent and perhaps never present, woman. Irigaray's woman is in some sense a fiction, ever narrated and ever produced through her writing. Her mimetic writing embodies this space of discursive uncertainty in ways that subvert a model of subjectivity based on self-determination, oneness, or sameness. It is in her mimesis that Irigaray's project marks a critical departure from an effort to simply

reclaim woman. For Irigaray, what one is reclaiming by reclaiming woman is constantly undermined by her radical absence from discourse. This discursive nuance gives her work an edge over a simple notion of self-determination, because even as she insists on women's becoming, she is undermining the *concept* of a female self.

A generous reading of Irigaray examines how Irigaray's writing exemplifies what it means to occupy the space of the other as a space of knowing beyond reduction. I suggest Irigaray knows in uncertainty. She knows otherwise. Her embodied writing idea that one can only know through certainty and reduction. Therefore, she resists the self-same reduction as an illusion. She presents a way of knowing herself in relation to her world through her indeterminacy. Through the question of woman, a personhood emerges in which one embodies the space of uncertainty as the possibility for concretely/ materially knowing oneself in relation to one's others. Her mimetic writing reveals the call for self-definition can be recast in ways that do not recapitulate the singularity of a selfsame *I*.

Rather than focusing on individual autonomy as prior to the needs of others, Irigaray's mimetic writing moves through uncertainty and indeterminacy to express a self-unknowing. This self-unknowing reconnects the self and other in the mutual reality of their infinite difference within themselves and with their others. As a claim in unknowing and in the irreducibility of one's difference in oneself and with one's others, writing through uncertainty goes beyond self-definition towards a self-undefining. This self-undefining allows marginalized others to deconstruct the discursive boxes in which a hegemonic discourse has placed them. And yet, self-undefining engenders and even

relies on a space of irreducible alterity because the discontinuity between discourse and flesh is the condition of its possibility. The insistence on self-unknowing is an openness and offering. Irigaray's writing therefore is a way of writing otherwise, through the uncertainty of indeterminate woman rather than through cognitive knowing. The openness that occurs in this writing beyond the determinacy and reduction prioritized by a masculine symbolic holds together the obligation to preserve the alterity of the other and nourish one's deconstructed self.

SYNOPSIS AND CHAPTER OUTLINE:

This dissertation focuses on several inter-related and intertwining questions drawn from a reading of Luce Irigaray's *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*. First, the project considers *the question of practical, ethical response* in the face of the destabilization of truth claims by postmodern emphases on discursive contextuality. In other words, how does think and act ethically without enacting a finalizing judgment on the difference of the other? This question is at least in part motivated by the author's years of feeling disturbed by the wholesale acceptance of demarcations of sex, gender, race, and class demographic surveys as quantifiable ways of knowing in American culture and politics. Polls and questionnaires that seek to limit life to a checked box silence the complexities of human existence in ways that convince survey participants that their experiences must fit an existing category, or else, be "other." While such determination and simplification of people's lives is potentially harmful to all, those most at risk are the ones who did not create or self-identify through the construction of these categories. This project therefore

marks a small intervention in this question of the crisis of identity and ethical action in a pluralistic postmodern world.

Second, this project explores the *question of sameness* as a movement towards identity that promotes insulation and isolation. The increasingly pluralistic reality of the 20th and 21st centuries calls for an affirmation of not a reduction of differences. The model of sameness, then, stands in contrast to an ethics that promotes human flourishing by insisting upon absolute alterity. Drawing on Levinas's insistence on a non-allergic relationship to the other as one that opens rather than reduces the difference of the other, an ethical personhood would be one that safeguards the infinite difference of all others while keeping the possibility of relationship to those infinite differences.

Third, this project considers the *question of woman* as indeterminate while acknowledging that many experience "woman" in real, though different, ways. It Irigaray's writing as exhibiting thinking through her own flesh in ways that reveal a wisdom that exceeds the limits of her theory. A careful reading of Irigaray that refuses to separate the form from the content of her writing reveals that Irigaray's mimesis embodies the feminine to give birth to a "woman" whose personhood emerges in relation to the infinite differences between flesh and discourse. Irigaray accomplishes an incisive critique through an embodiment of her ethical insistence on radical openness. Irigaray's mimetic writing as an embodied practice of "thinking" that both plays within and further engenders the space of difference essential to preserving alterity. Irigaray creates a destabilized and indeterminate idea of "woman." Once destabilized, the idea of "woman" becomes a place of infinite difference. Therefore, "woman's" infinite difference, as

offered in Irigaray's writing, is precisely the ever-flowing "ground" of "woman's" becoming. Her agency or freedom are tied to difference, but not simply the difference of the other. Becoming through the shifting ground of an uncertain or destabilized identity can lead to a personhood that arises through the experience of one's own otherness in the face of others. Infinite difference becomes the possibility for understanding oneself in relation to one's others.

Chapter 1: Chapter 1 examines Irigaray's feminist intervention into the problem of sameness as defined in the work of Levinas. This chapter proposes that the model of the selfsame subject, a subject which knows itself through an erasure of the difference of its other, is an unethical relationship. Such a totalizing relationship determines the other through static and oppositional categorization of the other's difference, effectively oppressing and silencing the other. In this totalizing relationship the other is understood in relation to the self rather than on its own terms. For Irigaray, this totality persists insofar as the question of sexual difference has not adequately been thought through. Irigaray claims that by positing an ethical moment prior to subjectivity and sexual difference after subjectivity, Levinas ignores the fact that women have never been subjects in accordance with the self-same model he wishes to overcome. This secondarization of sexual difference in Levinas's ethics results in a secondarization of woman. The secondarization of woman means that woman is mediated by a language of the feminine that is not her own. And an ethical relationship as the basis for personhood

cannot exist until one takes into account the way woman has been denied access to discourse as a subject.

Chapter 2: Chapter 2 explores Irigaray's suggestion that the feminine has been used in the construction of a symbolic realm, of thought and discourse, that interpret or represent all difference in terms of a masculine subject. Exploring the use and/or omission of the feminine in major western philosophical arguments, Irigaray reveals that the feminine is not the voice of woman, but a voice mediated through a masculine imaginary. The feminine is the language man gives woman to negotiate her subjectivity in relation to his. Irigaray reveals that what is perceived as sexual difference, those characteristics determined as masculine versus feminine, is actually an indicator of sameness. Sexual difference, then, is not different. This chapter ends with Irigaray's suggestion that space is necessary for difference to exist; therefore, the project of thinking through sexual difference will involve deconstructing the oneness of the symbolic realm and making space for the other to be.

Chapter 3: This chapter suggests that Irigaray uses mimetic writing to disrupt the singularity of discourse in an effort to make space from which the feminine can be reborn. In order for an ethics to exist, for a subjectivity to arise that does not reduce the difference of the other, the erased difference of woman must be revealed, a space for woman must be created. This distancing occurs through a process of dissimilation. Irigaray enacts this process of dissimilation by writing mimetically. I contend that in mimesis, Irigaray engenders catachrestic moments that subvert the linearity and sense-

making enclosures of language. Through these disruptions, Irigaray's mimetic writing speaks women's erasure, establishing a distance between what is expected and what is given, even in the absence of a language of and by women. Mimesis, then, is the possibility of creating a distance that is required for women to dissimilate themselves from masculine discourse so that they might re-imagine themselves from this space beyond the self-same.

Chapter 4: Chapter 4 continues the examination of mimesis in Irigaray's work with a specific focus on the role of materiality in engendering the difference that disrupts the singularity of sameness. Irigaray's embodiment exceeds the movement of sameness because it is an embodiment that fashions the relationship between the flesh and discourse as irreducible. The concrete gives rise to differences that have not yet been thought in discourse. Irigaray's mimetic writing, then, allows her to ground the deconstruction of sexual difference in the flesh without reducing the limits of understanding the flesh to the limits of discourse. She embodies the space of an indeterminate woman as a means to gesture towards a way of knowing that is not reducible to the limits of discourse, as the possibility of expanding the limits of knowing. Without refiguring the relationship between discourse and flesh, dissimilation would deconstruct the idea of woman and man, leaving a concept of personhood arbitrarily constructed through the abstract realm of signs and representation. While such a deconstructed concept of the subject would resist sameness, it would not value the ways people's lived experiences exceed the language of representation. Therefore, Irigaray's

emphasis on re-embodying discourse as part of establishing ethics is a reminder that while "woman" is indeed uncertain and discursively indeterminate, women's flesh and oppressions and repressions of her flesh are quite real and also overflowing with possibility. By emphasizing the concrete as a possibility for a more ethical subjectivity to emerge, Irigaray prevents the deconstruction of sexual difference from leaving woman entirely groundless. In fact, by drawing flesh and word together, Irigaray exhibits a thinking through the flesh as the possibility for ethical relations between subjects.

Chapter 5: Irigaray leads her reader to a possibility of understanding the embodiment of an indeterminate space as a possibility for knowing oneself or establishing a subjectivity that is not totalizing, but she collapses then reduces that potential indeterminacy to a determinate heterosexual coupling. Irigaray re-instates the language of sexual difference to create stability and a ground for women's becoming. But I suggest pausing in the indeterminacy facilitated through Irigaray's mimesis and catachresis. One need not return indeterminacy to a specific flesh, such as a sexually differentiated flesh, in order to establish personhood. I find a possibility of ethical personhood in the midst of this instability, by turning to Judith Butler's notion of self unknowing. Butler suggests that moments of unknowing and uncertainty are opportunities to experience an openness to the other to suggest that a subject can indeed be re-conceived as non-allergic and welcoming of the infinite difference of beings. Drawing on the necessity of embodied knowing that Irigaray contributes to a re-imagined subjectivity and on Butler's sense that remaining suspended in the uncertainty of the subject is a resistance to the self-same or self-assured subject, I argue that the spaces where one's embodied experiences disrupt

normative ways of knowing reveal the failures and limits of a self-assured, self-same subject. Through this revelation, one can seek out opportunities to know oneself and one's others in the concreteness of life's infinity. Finally, the work concludes by suggesting that practices of writing through uncertainty can disrupt the totality of self-other relations towards a way of being in relation to the infinity of the other.

CHAPTER 1
ETHICS AND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE: THE PROBLEM OF SAMENESS FROM LEVINAS TO IRIGARAY

Feminist psychoanalyst and philosopher Luce Irigaray (b. 1932) has written, "Il est vrai que, pour que l'oeuvre de la différence sexuelle ait lieu, il faut une révolution de pensée, et d'éthique. Tout est à réinterpréter dans les relations entre le sujet et le discours, le sujet et le monde, le sujet et le cosmique, le micro et le macrocosme."[16] These lines from her early collection of lecture-based essays *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle* [*An Ethics of Sexual Difference*] first published in 1984, are a glimpse of Irigaray's claims that women have been silenced by a philosophical trajectory that implies that the idea of the universal subject can be a neutral (and neuter) subject. *Éthique* involves an emotionally charged series of challenges to one celebrated philosopher after another, through which Irigaray deconstructs the possibility of thinking or positing a universal subject or neutral discourse. What appears to be neutral discourse is for Irigaray burdened by a gendered bias; furthermore, the notion of neutrality is built on a blindness to this gender bias that constitutes an erasure of difference, specifically feminine difference.

As I propose in this chapter, in Irigaray's *Éthique* the erasure of difference on which neutrality is constructed is bound to a philosophical problem of sameness and reduction. When sameness, unity, or wholeness, is pursued indiscriminately, differences

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[16] Irigaray proclaims the breadth of her project of establishing sexual difference as requiring an overturning of existing systems of thought and ethics: "The truth is that for the work of sexual difference to take place, there must be a revolution of thought and ethics. Everything needs to be reinterpreted in terms of the relations between the subject and discourse, the subject and the world, the subject and the cosmic, the micro and the macrocosmic (Author's Translation). Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 14.

are often seen as impediments, hurdles to solidarity.[17] Differences impede clarity, conciseness, and the systematicity of thought. The ethical problem is that in positing a universal subject, difference is seen as the enemy. Irigaray pushes against models of subjectivity that are bound to an ideal of sameness precisely because in such models the ideal synthesizes only what the other offers in relation to realizing the ideal whole--casting aside the difference that would disrupt the unity of the ideal. Theories of subjectivity built around ideas about neutral universal subjects prioritize sameness to the extent of turning a blind eye to the difference that has to be erased for the ideal of the neutral universal subject to come into being.

A sacrifice has been made in the assertion of a neutral universal. For Irigaray, the universal, the one, or the whole is masculine; therefore, the feminine becomes the sacrificial lamb that enables the ideal of the masculine subject to be whole in himself.[18] Therefore, Irigaray binds the erasure of feminine difference to a problem of prioritizing the indivisibility/unity of masculine sameness as the building block for subject formation.

This dissertation concentrates on how Irigaray's 'feminine' writing makes the space for absolute difference and thereby offers an ethical alternative to the above problem of reducing difference to sameness; however, understanding the philosophical framework from which Irigaray's critique of sameness emerges is essential to unpacking her use of the feminine as a remedy. The greatest clue for understanding the complexity of how Irigaray reads the problem of sameness comes in the form of her choice to end

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[17] This emphasis on the movement to unity and a universal totality suggest the indelible influence of German Idealism and interpretations of Hegel on modern notions of subject formation.
[18] By Irigaray's critique, the subject that is always returning towards identity or wholeness with itself, is always a male subject.

Éthique with a critical homage to philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995). Throughout *Éthique*, the reader hears the echo of Levinas's warnings about sameness and the need to overcome sameness in order to have a viable notion of ethics.[19] So while Irigaray is always implicitly in conversation with philosophers like Hegel and especially Heidegger, Irigaray's own developments in ethics most closely align with the work of Levinas. Irigaray inscribes Levinas's critique of sameness in her own writing by using Levinas's analysis as a model for critiquing the movement of sameness and its ethical repercussions. Drawing on Levinas's work, Irigaray reveals that every assumption about a universal subject and its experience involves an erasure and absorption of difference. To establish a more ethical space in which difference can thrive, Irigaray's writing effectively creates space where there was none by dissimilating the feminine from what she sees as the masculine singular around which subjectivity is traditionally ordered.

Because Irigaray's critique of sameness exhibits an undeniable gratitude for Levinas's ethical project, I would like to begin thinking about Irigaray by considering the problem of sameness in Levinas's work. I first explore how and why Levinas condemns the prioritization of sameness, identity, and certitude of the self/subject as an impediment for ethics. After establishing why a subjectivity structured around the unity of sameness, or the selfsame, is problematic for Levinas, I turn to the important question regarding the relationship of gender to the selfsame. I conclude this chapter by returning to Irigaray to explain why until one thinks through the question of sexual difference (understood as an

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[19] This connection to Levinas has been noted by many of Irigaray's most astute readers as resonating in much of her work. Irigaray has engaged Levinas and his work throughout his career.

annihilation of the difference of the feminine), one cannot attempt to overcome a relationship in which the world is/exists only for the subject.

THE PROBLEM OF THE SELFSAME

The selfsame describes a movement of thought that seeks to erase difference in a way that makes the self eidetic or cohesive with its image of itself. As a problem of sameness the selfsame is a model of thought and discourse that engenders a totalizing relationship between the subject and its world. In the selfsame, entire systems of experiencing the world and one's existence in that world become a function of a self or subject constructed through erasures of difference. Everything moves towards a wholeness. And even if one claims that unity is not uniformity, the very idea of an ideal towards which one moves is an ideal that imposes a singular or universal truth. In this model, the world exists for the subject that orders it. The subject's ability to think the world, to bring the world into thought, provides that subject with power. By being able to separate himself from his thought, the subject can objectively observe the world--standing outside of himself to exact his reason and describe life, death, the universe, God, etc. The subject who is selfsame is master of his universe and even his God.[20] This process of reducing

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[20] Though Descartes is responsible for this separation of the material *res extensa* from the *res cogitans*, or thinking thing, the emphasis on metaphysics leading up to the seventeenth century was paving the way towards a fully, rationally divided subject before his cogito ergo sum. In many ways, Descartes was simply describing the operation of metaphysical thought by drawing attention to the fact that those before him were guaranteeing their existence through their philosophy. Indeed German Idealist, Georg Wilhelm Hegel (1770-1831) left his indelible mark on this conversation by proposing this autonomous subject becomes itself by moving through that which is different from itself in order to return once more to itself with, and through, certainty. In other words, because the subject comes to itself by knowing itself apart from its other the other is a means to the subject's ends.

difference is much like processes of colonization and assimilation occurring on a discursive or even pre-discursive level.

Much of Levinas's work addresses the ethical dangers of a selfsame model of subjectivity. His essay "Trace of the Other" details how a selfsame model of the subject orients the self towards the other in an inherently violent and totalizing way. For Levinas the I is both origin of the phenomenon of identity and identity itself. In other words, what it means discursively to claim the position of the I is to begin this process of understanding oneself in relation to the world. Yet Levinas argues that this identification is not simply a restating of the self. Rather, the restating of selfhood is an egoism. It is a return of the self to the sameness of the self. Put differently, the I is tied up in an entire process of self-identification. Visualize the moment one utters the word I as a circumscription of the self. Within the very moment that *I* comes out of one's mouth it is already bound up in a process of subjectivity, of who I am. This is the original identification of the I. To utter the I is to inscribe oneself in one's own universe.

Beyond the question of the I's relationship to itself is its relationship to the universe it sees as outside itself or exterior to itself and how knowledge of that outside universe arises. For Levinas, with the selfsame subject, in true cognition, the other, or as he says 'alien being,' "enters into the sphere of true knowledge" and does not disrupt this original identification.[21] In other words, the sphere of knowledge is already set by the subject, and that which is outside of the subject, or not identical with the I is that which enters into the sphere of knowledge without disrupting how the I sees itself. Any threat

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[21] Emmanuel Levinas, "The Trace of the Other," in *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy*, ed. Mark C. Taylor(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 345.

that the alien being might pose to the ego, or to the I's identity is absorbed by the self's sphere of knowledge.

Consider for example the Nazi relationship to the Jewish people with regard to the question of the Volk. For a Nazi general, to be of the volk was part of what it meant to be an I. Therefore, what the volk is and how it is defined is important. A Jewish person who had lived in the areas of Germany for hundreds of years could not be counted among the true German volk. The German Jew in this instance is the alien being who enters into the Nazi sphere of knowledge for what it means to be volk. What volk is belongs to the sphere of knowledge, and truth is constituted based on that sphere. Under the selfsame model of the subject, the Jew, regardless of how German he or she may be cannot disrupt what the Nazi understands to be volk. Therefore, to continue to know itself apart from the other, the idea of volk may slightly shift or become more closed, based on , for example, blood or religion and not just one's nationalism. In a sense, the "alien being" can enter into the field of knowledge. A Jewish person can be "known" by the Nazi, but the Jew is not known in and of his or her self-determination. From the Nazi perspective, the truth of Jewish identity becomes contingent upon the Nazi sphere of knowledge that knows the Jew only insofar as the Jew does not disrupt Nazi identity. The Nazi thinks he knows the truth of Jewish existence, but he knows Jewish existence only in terms of his own Nazi identity understood apart from the Jew he has previously reduced in the movement of his self-consciousness towards identity. In this instance, Jewish existence is entirely based on comprehension of Jewish identity in the Nazi sphere of knowledge.

For the Nazi in the example, the world becomes about what I see or what I perceive.[22] In this scenario the other is encountered, but its difference is absorbed into the totality of the self's egoism. As Levinas writes, this alien being "commits itself with knowledge," and once committed to the sphere of knowledge, the alien being is no longer radically other and unique. Now the alien being is the other of the selfsame subject, like the Jew defined in terms of a Nazi self. The other is rendered part of the thinking subject's world. To this effect, Levinas writes, "Though it surprised the I, a being that is in truth does not alter the identity of the I…The traces of the irreversible past are taken as signs that ensure the discovery and unity of a world."[23] The other is used to assert the unity of the world according to the subject.[24]

If at one point the alien being shines forth, it is soon cast into the shadows of the subject's egoism. As Levinas sorrowfully suggests, "Alterity enlightens, but it is always already forgotten."[25] Once the alien being becomes the other of the selfsame subject, its alterity is rendered a mark of the irreversible past. For the subject constructing its sphere of knowledge this loss of alterity is part of the movement towards unity and sameness. It is in unity that everything becomes intelligible for the subject and towards unity that the

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[22] This movement of the *I* in relation to its other is exemplified by the empiricism of the early Enlightenment. Certitude, including the certainty of oneself, could be established by one's perception of the world.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Tina Chanter writes, "Levinas never tires of refusing the Hegelian gesture of negation, whereby the alterity of the other is surpassed and rendered identical with the I, only to succumb to yet another encounter with otherness which in its turn is sublated in the I." Tina Chanter, *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray's Rewriting of the Philosophers* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 213.
[25] Emmanuel Levinas, "The Trace of the Other," in *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy*, ed. Mark C. Taylor(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 346.

selfsame subject moves.[26] The alien being becomes at once naturalized and yet "retains a foreignness with respect to the thinker."[27] By being both naturalized and foreign, the difference of the alien being can be assimilated in a way that no longer threatens the identity of the subject, and the alien being remains other so the subject can know itself as different and unique. Of course now the difference of the alien being is only the difference permitted by the subject for its own edification. One way to understand this process is to consider that once incorporated into the subject's sphere of knowledge the foreignness of the alien being becomes fetishized. In Prague, Hitler established a museum that would eventually house all the relics of an "extinct" Jewish race once they had been eliminated. Thus, according to Levinas's above critique, the selfsame subject becomes itself and recognizes itself as subject by establishing what is the other or different from itself. Referring to this allergic subject, literary theorist Clair Nouvet writes, "both his selfhood and his humanity [...] result from a proud self-assertion which, unwilling to confront the hypothesis that the self might be a mere figure, is therefore all too willing to reassure itself by projecting this figural status onto the 'other,' and the other alone."[28] The subject, fearful that he might not be the singular and certain master of his surroundings, projects that fear onto the other.

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[26] Additionally, for Levinas, the understanding of the other reduced to the irreversible past puts emphasis on the future, a priority of time that "constitutes knowledge as comprehension of being." Levinas writes, "The idea of being with which philosophers interpret the irreducible alienness of the non-I is thus cut to the measure of the same. Alterity enlightens, but it is always already forgotten." According to Levinas, the "being of beings" is always approached in dualisms that give priority to the future; "light and obscurity, disclosure and veiling, truth and nontruth." This subject arises through the selfsame. It uses the difference of the other to ensure the totality or wholeness of its singularity. Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Claire Nouvet, "An Impossible Response: The Disaster of Narcissus," *Yale French Studies* 79 (1991): 131.

According to this system, the other becomes the receptacle into which the subject heaps his self-doubt. The subject is sure of himself (sic) because he is not "other." Furthermore, he proves that he is rid of the differences that would jeopardize his selfhood by establishing that the other is everything and everyone that is not like him. The space of difference between self and other is polarized into a hierarchy. The difference of the other is therefore reduced or arranged based on the movement of power to establish a dominant subject position. The subject that assures itself of its identity violates the other by erasing the other's difference. A model of subjectivity that does not trouble the autonomy of the I will continue to subsume alterity behind the "I." As long as the I remains autonomous, nothing can exist beyond that "I" that is not part of the unity of that I's identity--No God that is not man, no other that is not the Same. Nothing in the world can continue in otherness; rather, all otherness returns to the self.

This relationship to the other is not only problematic for the other but it is problematic for the subject as well. A selfsame subject is a debilitated subject, deprived of access to the uniqueness of its own difference that could emerge fully if alterity were allowed to persist within its united world. For Levinas the reduction of difference in thought consistently attempts to sublimate alterity by rendering all experience as a "constitution of being."[29] Depicting all experience in terms of the constitution of being means reducing otherness to the movement of self-consciousness in its return to the

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[29] It is important to note, as the reader will soon encounter, that Levinas's emphasis on the face to face encounter with the other as prior to being would seem contradictory. Tina Chanter explains Levinas's differentiation between philosophical metaphysics and the metaphysical desire of the face-to-face encounter. Chanter explains it thus: "In Levinas's discourse, being is displaced from its primary and foundational status--not altogether dispensed with." Chanter, *Ethics of Eros,* 189.

selfsame of the subject's identity.[30] The subject isolates itself in a totality. It is disconnected therefore from the other beyond the limits it has set for the other. The subject's universe is singular and self-sufficient.

The isolation that stems from the fear of the other is the condition of the subject's subjectivity. The subject ensures its identity or its sameness by reducing the differences it encounters vis à vis either an assimilative interiorization or an exteriorization of those differences.[31] Theologian Wendy Farley explains this assimilation of the differences of the other in reference to the isolation of the subject's totality as the absolute oneness of the "One." She writes, "Assimilation means that something that may have appeared to be exterior to the One is reinterpreted, reframed, repositioned so that its meaning, value, and reality are now understood entire in relation to the One."[32] The subject isolates himself from the world by positing the everything that he is not is outside of himself.[33] If the identity of the I is posited (as in for example Sartre and Hegel) as oneself for itself, then "The identity of the I would thus be reducible to a turning back of essence upon itself, a return to itself of essence as both subject and condition of the identification of the Same."[34] The subject is maker of its own world that it uses to understand its wholeness

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[30] Furthermore, it is precisely because philosophy converts every experience "into a 'constitution of being,'" that thinking about being becomes sufficient to constitute being. Because thought remains wedded to the sufficiency of thought about being, Western philosophy also remains bound by the limitations of immanence. According to Levinas, this reliance on the immanent results in a philosophy of atheism and uninterrogated human autonomy.

[31] In this argument, I hear echoes of Levinas who speaks of a similar movement in terms of the dualisms that give priority to the future.

[32] Wendy Farley, *Eros for the Other: Retaining Truth in a Pluralistic World* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 19.

[33] I would also add that, to use Levinas's terms, the conceptualization of the other for the totality means that the other is understood not as a concrete 'being' but as an abstraction or thought about the being of beings. Thought about being is sufficient for being in this scenario because subjectivity is reduced to consciousness. In an Hegelian identity the ego is equal to itself and marks the return of being to itself through the very concept of being.

[34] Emmanuel Levinas, "Substitution," in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Simon Critchley Adriaan T. Peperzak, and Robert Bernasconi(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 84.

and singularity, or as Farley might say, it's Oneness. This subject isolates itself in a totality. It is disconnected therefore from the other beyond the limits it has set for the other. The subject's universe is singular and self-sufficient. This isolation that stems from the fear of the other is the condition of the subject's subjectivity. The alterity of the other or the alien being that shines forth is swallowed up in the black hole of the subject's universe. An alternative to the selfsame will be essential not only for the other to flourish but for a flourishing, relational model of subjectivity beyond "Oneness" and the isolation of totality.

BEYOND SAMENESS: GROUNDING SUBJECTIVITY IN AN ETHICAL MOMENT

Prescribing his vision of the ethical relationship between the subject and its other, Levinas writes, "The relationship between the same and the other, my welcoming of the other, is the ultimate fact, and in it the things figure not as what one builds but as what one gives."[35] Levinas's statement challenges the reduction of the other to a medium of one's becoming (or building block in the construction of total self-consciousness). Levinas suggests that the appropriate relationship between one's self and one's other will involve giving to the other not using the other.

For Levinas, the ethical response entails understanding that one's relationship to the other involves several defining elements of proximity to the other.[36] First, the ethical relationship to the other is as a relationship based on desire for the other in their

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[35] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991; reprint, 3rd), 77.

[36] This is by no means giving the full account of the complexities of Levinas's philosophy, but it does suggest the structure of relationship to the other that one can see in Irigaray's ethics.

otherness, not the necessity of the other to one's own becoming. Secondly, when one sees the other as desire rather than as necessity, one recognizes one's responsibility for the other. Third, this responsibility must be understood specifically as a passive encounter with the other. Responsibility is not an active pursuit of knowledge of the other, but a disposition of absolute passivity that allows the other to present itself in itself. Fourth, responsibility is unique, such that one's position is not a substitutable or transferable obligation. Finally, for Levinas, the entire ethical encounter with the other is an immediate encounter of the other's difference before the recuperation of difference in consciousness; therefore, the ethical encounter is pre-discursive.[37]

DESIRE RATHER THAN NEED

In his essay "The Trace of the Other," Levinas argues that philosophy suffers from an "insurmountable allergy" to the other who cannot be thought or conceptualized.[38] The other that challenges identity presents a problem for a self that is realized through the selfsame. To provide an alternative to a model of subjectivity that emerges through the selfsame movement, Levinas creates a theory of the human subject grounded in the possibility of an ethical response to, rather than the annihilation of, the difference of

[37] These attributes of Levinas's understanding of the human subject in relation to its other attempt to hold together the question of ethical obligation with human freedom, which is precisely what Irigaray will attempt to do with regards to the question of the specific freedom of woman.
[38] Levinas, "The Trace of the Other," 353.

others.[39] Responding ethically to difference means maintaining the unique difference of one's others rather than exploiting that difference to create the oneness of the self. As Levinas declares in *Totality and Infinity*, maintaining radical alterity is "the first ethical gesture."[40]

Levinas interrogates the subject to understand how one can come to know oneself ethically through responsibility rather than through a violent reduction of the difference of the other. The "knowing" subject relates to the other in terms of need and, as Levinas sees it, such knowing is reductive.[41] Levinas writes the following: "The subject is 'for itself'--it represents itself and knows itself as long as it is. But in knowing or representing itself it possesses itself, dominates itself, extends its identity to what of itself comes to refute its identity."[42] To know the other in terms of the self is a consumption of the difference of the other that challenges the self's identity. A known other is an other

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[39] There is a difference between acknowledging the way subjectivity seems to work and advocating that model. The historical context in which the selfsame model of the subject plays out is a perfect example. For instance, the developments in Heidegger on the formation of the subject remained bound to this selfsame movement such that one's existence becomes in effect an isolated totality that disabuses the other of its potential unique selfhood. Levinas greatly revered the work of Martin Heidegger, even calling Heidegger's Being and Time one of the greatest works of philosophy in *Ethics and Infinity,* his interview with Phillip Nemo. But Heidegger's support of Nazism and the tenets of National Socialism were beyond troubling to Levinas. He feared that there was something within Being and Time that enabled such affiliation. Immediately after praising the value of Sein und Zeit for "its supreme steadfastness" Levinas writes the following in "As if Consenting to Horror": "Can we be assured, however, that there was never any echo of Evil in it? The diabolical is not limited to the wickedness popular wisdom ascribes to it and whose malice, based on guile, is familiar and predictable in an adult culture. The diabolical is endowed with intelligence and enters where it will" Emmanuel Levinas and Paula Wissing, "As If Consenting to Horror," *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (1989): 488. And more explicitly condemning of those philosophies enabling Nazi ideology in "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism" Levinas writes the following in the prefatory note: "This article expresses the conviction that this source stems from the essential possibility of elemental Evil into which we can be led by logic and against which Western philosophy had not insured itself. This possibility is inscribed within the ontology of a being concerned with being [de l'être soucieux d'être]--a being, to use the Heideggerian expression, 'dem es in seinem Sein um dieses Sein selbst geht'" [in its being, it goes about its own being (Author's Translation)]. Emmanuel Levinas and Sean Hand, "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 1 (1990): 63.

[40] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 174.

[41] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans., Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2004), 61-64.

[42] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 87.

that is removed from the immediacy of the sensible and abstracted in thought. "An individual inasmuch as it is known is already desensibilized and referred to the universal in intuition."[43] Chanter writes that for Levinas, "To know is to bring something under a concept, to relate it back to me, to make it familiar, to objectify it, to incorporate it into my own identity."[44] This is a means of understanding the other in terms of the whole while understanding oneself as part of that whole yet also separate from it.[45] Levinas explains this relationship of the subject to the other, which he deems unethical, as a relationship of need as opposed to desire. A subject that relates to its other in need is the thinking subject.[46] That which is outside of him is approached in terms of utility.[47] But, in removing us from the immediacy of sensibility, this relationship of need, which is characterized by the constant reduction of the difference of the other in thought, deprives us of the enjoyment in the immediacy of the sensible.[48] Recall the alien being whose light has been snuffed out by a selfsame subject who incorporates any moment of wonder or radical alterity of the alien being into its own sphere of self-edifying knowledge. In contrast, a relationship to the other in desire would mean that the other is not for my use. In desire, the other is one with whom I am suspended in awe and wonder. The wonder of desire exists because there is an irreducible difference between us. Desire is a relationship that demands the preservation of our infinite difference.

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[43] Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, 62.
[44] Chanter, *Ethics of Eros,* 185.
[45] Emmanuel Levinas, "The Ego and the Totality," in *Emmanuel Levinas: Collected Philosophical Papers* (Dordrecth, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), 25.
[46] This suggestion that the thinking subject is the needful subject recalls the notion of an Hegelian system in which the subject becomes itself in a movement beginning with thought that relies on the immanent, material world for that ideal to become fully manifested in consciousness.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, xxviii.

As characterized above, the selfsame is a relationship that extinguishes the possibility and/or the immediacy of wonder. While such a system prioritizes human freedom in the process of becoming a subject, the question becomes how does one think of or maintain human freedom in a way that does not reduce everything to the movement of individual human consciousness? How can one think of obligation to one's others without that obligation suggesting a slavishness? How can human freedom and this obligation arise from within such that we might live with appreciation of the immediacy of existence without making that immediacy the necessary pawn in the mediation of individual becoming?

Levinas's solution to this loss of the immediacy of the sensibility of the other, and the subsequent deprivation of the enjoyment of life associated with this loss, is to replace a relationship of need with a relationship of desire for the other. Levinas establishes an ethical encounter that embraces the difference of the human other as the condition of subjectivity. He is arguing then for a subjectivity that arises through one's responsibility to and for the other. This responsibility is based in valuing the difference that inspires desire for the other. By differentiating desire for the other from the need for the other he conceives an ethical relationship between self and other to replace the unethical erasure or annihilation of difference. Levinas writes, "In desire the ego is borne unto another in such a way as to compromise the sovereign identification of the I with itself, an identification of which need is but the nostalgia, and which the consciousness of need

anticipates."[49] This relationship with the other in desire is one in which the other remains other.

The ethical relationship Levinas describes continually questions the *I*, emptying me of myself and "uncovering for me ever new resources" by revealing a richness of resources beyond anything the "I" could have realized in isolation.[50] In desire the richness of the other's difference is no longer subsumed by the *I*. The other's "resources" no longer belong to me. I have no right to claim or keep them because they cannot be absorbed into the *I* without being lost. "The desirable does not fill up my desire but hollows it out, nourishing me as it were with new hungers."[51] As Levinas suggests, desire is not about the movement of my own self-consciousness. One cannot continue to desire if one fills that desire through possession. In desire the other reveals my lack in a way that makes me love (not despise) what I am not. Whereas necessity is a one-way movement of assimilation and utilization, desire is a movement between self and other that engenders and is nourished by the space created because of difference.

In Levinas, therefore, desire allows one to recognize that one is in an irreducible relationship with the other.[52] Irreducible and thus unthematized, the other remains in and retains the integrity of its difference. Desire allows one to recognize the other as different from the self, allowing that other to be different. This difference allows one to gain a sense of one's self in the context of the immediacy of the other's difference. In *Totality*

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[49] Levinas, "The Trace of the Other," 350.
[50] Ibid., 351.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Note that the metaphysical desire previously described differs from the love relationship that Levinas says is a closed relationship between lovers. In his discussion of this "intimate society" of the erotic relationship, Levinas writes, "The intersubjective relationship of love is not the beginning, but the negation of society." It is a love only between two--a dualistic love in which one's love is always intimate between me and you at the expense of another. Ibid., 31.

and Infinity, Levinas writes, "I can recognize the gaze of the stranger, the widow, and the orphan only in giving or in refusing; I am free to give or refuse, but my recognition passes necessarily through the interposition of things."[53] In a relationship of desire, the immediacy of the other not reduced to consciousness (remaining unthought) is the other for whom I am responsible. Chanter, interweaving a quote from Levinas's "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism" writes, "Levinas defines the subject not as that which 'before all else wishes to be and thinks itself free,' but rather as an always prior commitment, a fundamental responsibility."[54] As the quote suggests, Levinas makes proximity to the other in a pre-discursive encounter with the irreducible difference of the other the ground of the subject's becoming and the ground of the subject's freedom.

RESPONSIBILITY

The encounter with the other allows Levinas to establish subjectivity in ethical terms. In *Ethics and Infinity* Levinas claims responsibility is the "primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity."[55] Responsibility is the demand or obligation of one's presence before the other as other, and the ethical response is the encounter with the other that does not strip that other of its alterity. Levinas suggests that the real presence of the other, of the face of the other, forms the starting point for ethics by presenting "me" with a specific responsibility to that other.[56]

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[53] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 77.
[54] Chanter, *Ethics of Eros,* 179.
[55] Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity,* 95.
[56] Ibid.

In his essay “Substitution” Levinas further describes responsibility as that “to which one is elected and by which one finds oneself answerable for everything and everyone, even for one’s persecutors.”[57] Levinas’s subject depends on the other not as one to move through and either assimilate or extricate but as that which allows the subject to recognize one’s agency in and through a relationship of responsibility for the other.[58] Thus, there is still freedom in Levinas’s notion of responsibility, but that freedom emerges by the free choice to relate to the world in a way that acknowledges one’s responsibility. This amounts to a freedom through responsibility to the other.

Levinas’s emphasis on a free subjectivity through responsibility distinguishes ethical from unethical subjectivity. In what would be considered an unethical subjectivity, a subject comes to know itself in an egoism through which it reduces the differences of its others to become self-identical with the subject. By contrast, an ethical subjectivity is one in which the self maintains its autonomy by being responsible for choosing to maintain the differences of its others.

Responsibility: Passivity

To elucidate what responsibility entails, Levinas asserts a passivity of the self prior to consciousness. Levinas claims that in ethics, the self is absolute passivity. For Levinas, absolute passivity is not comprehensible simply as something in opposition to activity the way passivity might normally be understood. What he is describing is not correlative to

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[57] Levinas, "Substitution," 79.
[58] In his essay “Substitution,” originally a lecture given in 1967 served as a foundation for *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas explains the notion of one’s presence in the face of the other as unsubstitutable. “Substitution” goes farther than Totality and Infinity by questioning the very notion of “identity.”

the common sense of the binary of activity and passivity. Rather, Levinas's passivity is an absolute obligation rather than an activity. It is a disposition of being approached before any possibility of agency. Levinas writes, "The most passive, unassumable, passivity, the subjectivity or the very subjection of the subject, is due to my being obsessed with responsibility for the oppressed who is other than myself."[59] Levinas describes this passivity by saying, "The total passivity of the Self, suggested by the idea of creation, is a recurrence to the self, on the side of the self. A does not come back to A, as in an identity, but withdraws behind its point of departure."[60] In other words, the self is not located in consciousness of the self as if awareness or consciousness alone were sufficient for constituting subjectivity. Rather, the conditions for subjectivity emerge from an encounter with the other before any cognition of the other or reduction of the other to thought. The subject does not become itself because of itself. "A does not come back to A" because the subject is not the source of its own becoming.[61] It is the ethical moment wherein the other approaches the pre-subjective, pre-self-conscious self that is "behind the point of departure" of the subject and the source of its becoming.

The nature of this responsibility through which the self emerges comes into clearer focus when we examine Levinas's insistence on the absolute passivity of the self. For Levinas, the absolute passivity of the self is the possibility for one's responsibility for the other. This responsibility implies an immediate recognition of the fragile condition of the other's existence. Consider the 2007 story of Wesley Autrey, man who, upon witnessing a man suffering from seizures and stumbling into the path of an oncoming

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[59] Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, 55.
[60] Levinas, "Substitution," 89.
[61] Ibid.

train, flung himself off the subway platform to rescue the imperiled stranger.[62] Autrey's actions were a response to the immediacy of the stranger's life or death. This moment that was seen by many as an act of heroism, but to the "hero" who was later interviewed, his actions at the time were about the immediacy of a sense of self prior to any cognition. As Alphonso Lingis suggests in the translator's introduction to Otherwise Than Being, the relationship to alterity is an actual experience prior to all experience in which one "find[s] oneself under a bond, commanded, contested, having to answer to another for what one does and for what one is."[63] The stranger, seizing in the face of an oncoming train presented for Autrey a validation of his freedom to choose—to choose to act or not to act. The "hero" was confronted by an obligation prior to any legal obligation or moral law. As Autrey said of the event, "I don't feel like I did something spectacular; I just saw someone who needed help."[64]

In Levinasian terms the absolute passivity of the self is not an alienation; rather, "The word "I" means to be answerable for everything and for everyone."[65] Far from self-isolation, the process of becoming a subject means to be uniquely responsible to the other as the other presents itself. As indicated by the immediacy of the obligation that Autrey felt, the passivity of the self is not a situation of inaction or removal but one the absolute freedom echoed in Autrey's statement, "I had to make a split decision."[66] Autrey's words display a sense absolute responsibility under obligation. The *I* is a claim of responsibility not an egoism, the *had to* suggests the obligation, and the *split decision,* hails of the

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[62] Cara Buckley. "Man is Rescued by Stranger on Subway Tracks." *New York Times*, 03 January 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/03/nyregion/03life.html?_r=1 (accessed April 1, 2012).
[63] Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, xxviii.
[64] "Man is Rescued by Stranger," 2007.
[65] Levinas, "Substitution," 90.
[66] "Man is Rescued by Stranger," 2007.

immediacy of the situation. Therefore, in its passivity, "Subjectivity is being hostage."[67] Chanter, interweaving Levinas's language in Otherwise than Being writes, "In the 'passivity or patience of vulnerability' the I is already for the other, not for itself, as 'in a tearing away of bread from the mouth that tastes it, to give it to the other' (OB: 64; AE: 81)."[68] My absolute passivity is what frees me from myself and allows my obligation before the other is anterior to my ego's attempt to separate us. I am myself for the other. This is also the condition of freedom for Levinas, because as he sees it, this absolute passivity frees the self "from every Other and from itself."[69] It is precisely because there is no self-identical, no equality of the self to the self that there is an inequality like the inequality of sacrifice.[70] In Levinas's notion of the ethical subject, one gives to the other without return. This is a substitution that cannot be undone, because nothing is given back.

Responsibility: Substitution

The possibility of an ethical subjectivity so far discussed is one that is based in desire, not need. So, when I find myself facing the other, my self emerges passively in response to the obligation that the other puts me under. This obligation is an obligation of responsibility. Desire allows me to respond to the obligation by embracing my

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[67] Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, 127.
[68] Chanter, *Ethics and Infinity* 187.
[69] Levinas, "Substitution," 90.
[70] Levinas writes, "Substitution" frees the subject from ennui, that is, from the enchainment to itself, where the ego suffocates in itself due to the tautological way of identity, and ceaselessly seeks after the distraction of games and sleep in a movement that never wears out. This liberation is not an action, a commencement, nor any vicissitude of essence and of ontology, where the equality with oneself would be established in the form of self-consciousness. An anarchic liberation, it emerges, without being assumed, without turning into a beginning, in inequality with oneself. It is brought out without being assumed, in the undergoing by sensibility beyond its capacity to undergo. This describes the suffering and vulnerability of the sensible as the other in me. The other is in me and in the midst of my very identification." Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, 124-125.

responsibility to the other, but another critical component of Levinas's ethical subjectivity explains how this responsibility does not collapse into a one-way movement of dominating desire.

Levinas qualifies what makes one responsible for the other by claiming one is unique in one's responsibility to the other. In Levinas's terms, one is responsible for the other because one is substitutable for the other. One is substitutable not in an identical way, that is, in a way that leaves the I undisturbed; rather, one is bound to the other before any command to be responsible in discourse. Prior to any understanding of oneself as subject or any cognition, the other and I are inherently connected in our responsibility for each other. I have a responsibility to the other, and the other holds me accountable and makes me irreplaceably responsible in my passivity. Lingis explains Levinas' sense of substitution very clearly: "For Levinas substitution is the ethical itself; responsibility is putting oneself in the place of another. Through becoming interchangeable with anyone, I take on the weight and consistency of one that bears the burden of being, of alien being and of the world."[71] It is through the responsibility for the other that one becomes a subject. Ethics is the moment of substitution, and substitution is the moment in which the face of the other summons me in my absolute passivity as the condition of my subjectivity. Prior to self-conceptualization, I experience alterity without mediation. The face of the other is unthematizable to consciousness in the sense of consciousness as the sphere of knowledge created through the selfsame movement of an I.

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[71] Ibid., xxix.

Levinas's ethical moment is designed to prevent the 'alien being' from being absorbed into the sphere of consciousness such that comprehension of the other's being would be limited by the one singular I doing the comprehending. So, the ethical moment for Levinas occurs when the face of the other calls the self-consciousness of the same into question. Chanter summarizes Levinas's sense of responsibility in the following:

> The I understands itself on the basis of a meeting with the other--not because it is challenged by another I who has equal claim to its property, due to some known or assumed essential similarity of human beings to one another. The I is challenged by the other only in the sense that the other arrests the rhythm of life precisely because it disrupts the familiarity of what Levinas calls "living from," that is, nourishing oneself, attending to the needs of daily life. The other introduces something new, approaches as radically other, and resists absorption into the I's habitual reduction of the alterity of things to itself, through consumption, labor, work, and knowing.[72]

The other puts the I into question because it shakes my complacency in a needful way of living, a way of "living from." In "Transcendence and Height," Levinas suggests that the other confronts me in a way that requires I pay attention to that which is beyond my need. I am able to understand my needs as shared with the other.[73] "The putting into question of the self is precisely a welcome to the absolutely other"[74] and this putting into question places the self under a unique obligation to respond—a responsibility that belongs to the *I* singularly. This putting into question is the condition of responsibility that I am—to be I. As Levinas writes, "To be I signifies not being able to escape responsibility."[75] This responsibility, which is not an act of reflection, "empties the I of its imperialism and

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[72] Chanter, *Ethics and Infinity,* 189.
[73] Ibid., 190.
[74] Emmanuel Levinas, "Transcendence and Height," in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Simon Critchley Adriaan T. Peperzak, and Robert Bernasconi(Bloomington: Indiana University, 1996), 17.
[75] Ibid.

egoism.[76] The responsibility to the other is double. It is a responsibility to and for. In other words, I am responsible for the other in such a way that I am irreplaceable, but I am also responsible "to" the other because the other has obligated me by virtue of its existence, and I must submit to that obligation.

Levinas's claim that one's responsibility to the other is the possibility of subjectivity hinges on this sense that one is irreplaceable and therefore one's responsibility is inescapable. In Otherwise Than Being Levinas writes, "The responsibility for another, an unlimited responsibility [...], requires subjectivity as an irreplaceable hostage."[77] For Levinas, responsibility for the other means that the subject cannot escape its ethical obligation. It is the irreplaceability through which one recognizes itself as a subject that must respond. In other words, I cannot pass off to someone else my responsibility before the other. The other obligates me.

Responsibility: The Prediscursive Ethical Moment

A final aspect for understanding the way Levinas's notion of responsibility to the other resists the return to sameness resides in his notion of the ethical moment as prior to a/the? discursive production of the subject. For Levinas, then, ethics precedes the formation of the subject as the condition of becoming a subject. The ethical moment is prior to any possibility of being or thought about being. Because the ethical moment is pre-discursive, it is the condition from which subjectivity can emerge. Because it is prior to discourse, subjectivity emerges through a response to the irreducibility of alterity. In

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[76] Ibid., 18.
[77] Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, 124.

other words, prior to discourse the other is not comprehended through cognition but only through a phenomenal encounter with the other—specifically through an encounter with the face of the other. Prior to thought, the face-to-face encounter presents me with an undeniable affirmation of the difference of the other.

In Levinasian terms, the face of the other obligates me prior to self-consciousness. It addresses me from beyond--an address prior to discourse. It is a command, as Lingis writes, "to answer for the wants of another and supply for his distress."[78] Prior to discourse, difference could remain truly different. Unthought and unincorporated in a system of rationality and cognition, prediscursive difference would be a difference not yet reduced into something communicable or assimilable. In sum, the relationship to the other in this pre-discursive moment does not occur through a reduction of difference to sameness but through an experience of the unthematizable alterity of the other.

The prediscursive ethical moment elaborates an experience of difference prior to any assimilation or reduction of that difference in the sense-making realm of discourse and thought. Therefore, in this prediscursive face-to-face encounter, Levinas theorizes a space in which the self and other meet prior to thought. Levinas's formulation implies a self prior to the economization of difference that occurs in thought (through discourse). He writes, "The face opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation, which no 'interior-ity' permits avoiding. It is that discourse [the primordial discourse of the ethical moment of obligation] that obliges the entering into discourse, the commencement of discourse rationalism prays for..."[79] As Levinas suggests, the prediscursive encounter

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[78] Ibid., xxviii.
[79] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 201.

with the face of the other is the possibility of subjectivity emerging out of an ethical moment prior to any entrance into the world of language and discourse, anterior to thought or cognition. This moment ahead of thought is a moment based in the phenomenological experience of the difference of the other. Levinas therefore establishes an ethics grounded in the encounter with difference as difference. This is an experience in which the subject emerges through the experience of alterity rather than through a reductive process of comprehension using predetermined or preconceived categories for organizing being.

THE FIRST VIOLATION: WOMAN AND THE NON-NEUTRAL SUBJECT

The model of the subject that Levinas criticizes is the subject that relates to life on its own terms--a subject that constructs the universal through its own egoism. Against this model Levinas elaborates a model of the subject that answers the seemingly unavoidable challenges of the selfsame by positing a subject that emerges prior to comprehension and discourse's ipseitic baggage. He therefore fashions a theory of the subject grounded in an ethical relationship in which one's subjectivity was bound to the irreducibility of the other to the reductive processes and categories of cognition.

Because of his emphasis on the uniqueness of each and every meeting with the difference of the other, Levinas's model of the subject would seem far from presenting a universal subject. After all, Levinas's ethical encounter occurs in the space of proximity of the unique face-to-face encounter with the other. Thus it would seem that the only universal in his theory is the universal experience of responsibility in the face of the other. However, as Luce Irigaray contends, even the Levinasian subject remains trapped

in the selfsame movement towards universals. Specifically, Irigaray claims, Levinas's pre-discursive self is always already universally masculine.[80] Irigaray suggests that sexual difference is an immediate experience of the difference of the other.

In *Éthique* Irigaray thus directly challenges Levinas's construct of the moment of the ethical encounter. She posits woman in the place of the other whose irreducible prediscursive difference has been approached by man with need rather than desire, comprehension rather than wonder, fear rather than responsibility, and self-determination rather than absolute passivity. Krzysztof Ziarek suggests that Irigaray's challenge to the pre-discursive self challenges Levinas on the basis that his prediscursive subject cannot just be an encounter with the face of the other but an encounter with the sex of the other. Ziarek writes, "In an important way, Irigaray's notions of proximity and wonder, critical to her project in An Ethics of Sexual Difference...form a response to the Levinasian rethinking of ethical relation as a radical proximity in Totality and Infinity and Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence, a response that resignifies proximity specifically in terms of sexual difference."[81]

For Irigaray, ethics is not about an encounter of Levinasian proximity with any other prior to discourse. Rather, ethics requires a relationship to the other in the other's absolute difference from the self. For Irigaray, it is the materiality of sexual difference

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[80] Critics of a pre-discursive ethical moment suggest that to speak of a pre-discursive moment is at best naive. For critics such as Irigaray, discourse defines the limits and parameters of thought and therein the way one thinks about oneself in relation to one's others. To conceive an ethical relationship prior to discourse is to imply that one can think about a relationship one's other without the restrictions that discourse creates. Saying such a relationship exists is one thing, but thinking through that relationship, what it looks like and what it accomplishes, puts that ethical relationship to the auspices of thought without considering the ways thought shapes the vision of that ethic.

[81] Krzysztof Ziarek, "Love and the Debasement of Being: Irigaray's Revisions of Lacan and Heidegger," *Postmodern Culture* Vol. 10, no. No. 1 (1999), 11.

that provides that opportunity of the encounter for wonder, responsibility, and unsubstitutability that Levinas deemed proximity. In this section, I will explain how Irigaray uses the question of the feminine in discourse as a mean to expose the inconsistencies in Levinas's model of ethics.

THE "FEMININE" AS THE MARK OF SEXUAL DIFFERENCE FOR A MASCULINE SUBJECT

It is at the question of discourse that Irigaray challenges Levinas's work. Discourse describes the means through which the subject constructs itself and understands itself in relation to the world. By perceiving the other prior to any preconceptions about oneself or one's other, Levinas's ethics attempts to overcome this inherent bias that occurs when our encounters with the other are mediated by our discursive constructions. Still, the very idea of a universal prediscursive subject assumes a neutral space of "engaging" with the other.

According to Irigaray, the assumption of neutrality overlooks the reality that neutrality itself is a mark of an erasure of difference. Specifically, the notion of prediscursive neutral difference turns a blind eye to the erasure of woman that has gone into the discursive construction of sexual difference. In language, sexual difference implies there is a masculine and feminine, such that there can be a neutral third term. Yet Irigaray's entire project in *Éthique* challenges this idea that the feminine and masculine can be used to posit a neutral third term. Irigaray claims that the feminine is actually the discursive mark of the erasure of women's difference in the becoming of a masculine subjectivity. Contrary to providing the absolute difference of two ends of a pole such that

one can point to the middle as a place of neutral territory, Irigaray claims the feminine and masculine belong to a masculine subjectivity, only one end of a binary. When desire is only for oneness – and a masculine oneness at that – all the weight or charge of a pole is in one end of the binary. With the weight in one end, the space between them, the middle, is no longer neutral or the point of balance.[82]

Basing her understanding of the formation of subjectivity on the movement to oneness or absolute self-consciousness, Irigaray argues that the reason discourse emerges as a masculine stems from the reality that woman has always been in the position of the other over and against which the masculine subject has defined himself or become one in and of himself. Any prediscursive moment is always already marked by the silencing of woman as the condition of discourse. For Irigaray, Levinas's prediscursive moment of ethics takes for granted the notion that both the self and the other prior to subjectivity are neutral. Irigaray's work suggests that women are never the self or the other prior to discourse; therefore, Levinas's prediscursive encounter is always already an encounter of male selves. Even more problematically for Levinas, because this meeting is one of male selves, the proximity in his ethical encounter is not one of difference but of sameness.

In her final chapter of *Éthique*, "Fécondité de la Caresse," Irigaray suggests that in all Levinas's efforts to establish a possibility of an alterity that was relational, he

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[82] I am drawing on Irigaray's discussion of physics as the demonstration of the double desire of the sexes. Irigaray claims that the problem is that men's desire has been for sameness and women's desire has been for both oneness (of which she is deprived) and otherness (to which as woman she is already placed by man). Therefore, the poles have an unequal charge. One pole has both desire for self and desire for the other, like a positive and negative charge. The other pole has only desire for self, a single charge. Irigaray writes, "Without positive and negative, in the one and in the other, the same always attracts while the other subsists in motion because it is without a proper place." (Author's Translation). Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 16.

returns woman to the sameness of man.[83] In "Fécondité" Irigaray reads Levinas's use of Eros as a model for ethics prior to subjectivity—and a model that does not prioritize the visual but instead uses the experience of lovers touching in darkness as the space where they give each other subjectivity. Unlike a disembodied transcendental notion of Agape, eros insists on an embodied experience of alterity (including the absolute alterity of the divine). An embodied experience of the other's difference suggests that difference is experienced through relationality rather than through a condition of anxiety about the unbridgeable gap between self and other. For Irigaray, Levinas's use of the metaphor of lovers as one that speaks to the embodiedness or bodiliness of experiencing alterity provides a foundation for an ethics that privileges "knowing" the other without the mediation of discourse.

Initially in "Fécondité de la Caresse," Irigaray appears to the reader as though she is in complete agreement with Levinas's emphasis on Eros.[84] Specifically, Irigaray embodies the tactility of Eros in her writing. This sense of materiality and sensuousness can be witnessed from the beginning of her essay in which she appropriates a description of the pre-ontological Eros as though narrating an autobiography in which she speaks in the first person, becoming a "character" in a primordial narrative: "Avant que l'oralité

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[83] While one could read Irigaray as a straight critique of the priority of maleness, she can also be read as an embodiment of the position of the feminine critic trying to speak as woman within a discourse that has already rendered her the trace of an irreversible past. After all, it is the trace of the other that allows the other to be known. And as Derrida suggests, recovering a trace is not recovering anything at all. Recovering a trace is recovering a radical absence. Jacques Derrida, "At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am," in *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Peggy Kamuf(New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

[84] Chanter notes that Irigaray's seeming embrace of Levinas's work testifies to the influence of his work upon her ethics; however Chanter is also clear that Irigaray is never simply adopting the philosophy of Levinas. Chanter writes, "To be sure, Irigaray replicates the moves that Levinas produces, but at the same time she steps back from the scheme he endorses (see Berg, 1982: 14-15). Performing, in my view, an urgent and necessary role, Irigaray is neither content to simply dismiss Levinas as a thinker whose attempt to rethink the other has no relevance for feminism, nor is she satisfied with the unquestioning or slavish devotion to the texts of the male tradition" [emphasis added]. Chanter, *Ethics of Eros,* 216.

soit, le tact est déjà [. . .] [I]l m'approche sans me traverser, me redonnent les bords de mon corps et m'appellent à me souvenir de la plus profonde intimité."[85] Irigaray inserts herself in the moment of touch that is as she says prior to orality. She says, "he approaches me [il m'approche] and he gives me back the borders of my body [me redonnent les bords de mon corps].

Echoing the Biblical "in the beginning" Irigaray writes, "l'horizon d'une histoire se retrouve ce qui était au commencement: ce naïf ou natif d'un toucher où le sujet n'existe pas encore."[86] Touch is possibility prior to subjectivity. Touch exists before the subject has been figured. Irigaray's words have a play of passivity and poetics that convey a sense that Levinas and Irigaray are two lovers embracing whose bodies are clothed in the cloth of their words.

> Les amants se confèreraient – avant toute procréation – la vie. L'amour les féconderait l'un l'autre dans la genèse de leur immortalité. Renés, l'un pour l'autre dans l'assomption et l'absolution d'une conception définitive. Chacun accueillant la naissance de l'autre, cette tache d'un commencement où elle ni lui ne s'étaient pas encore rencontrés—infidélité originelle. Attentifs à cette faiblesse que ni l'un ni l'autre n'a pu vouloir, ils s'aiment comme ces corps qu'ils sont. Non irrémédiablement déchus d'être nés dans des temps et des lieux différents ni d'avoir vécu antérieurement à leur alliance et leur génération communes.[87]

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[85] Before orality comes to be, there is already touch [. . .] He approaches me without crossing over me (my boundaries), he gives back the borders of my body and calls me to the remembrance of the most profound intimacy (Author's translation). Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 174.

[86] Irigaray's words suggest the following: "The horizon of a history is found in that which was in the beginning: in this naive or nativeness of touch, in the subject which does not yet exist. (Author's Translation). Ibid., 173.

[87] Irigaray's quote suggests that the there is a time in which lovers approach each other in wonder prior to any summation or conception in thought (which she suggests in the term procreation). She suggests, "Lovers confer life to each other prior to any procreation. Love fecundates them, the one and the other, through the genesis of their immortality. They are reborn, one for the other, in the assumption and absolution of a definitive conception. Each one welcomes the birth of the other, this task of a beginning where neither she nor he has yet met-- original infidelity. Attentive to that weakness which neither one could have wanted, they love as the bodies they are. Not irremediably diminished by having been born in different times and places nor by having lived prior to their alliance and mutual generation." (Author's translation). Ibid., 177.

Irigaray works out the potential of Levinas's notion of Eros, offering words that resonate with a desire and promise fitting of a love poem. The encounter between the lovers seems as though it is overflowing with desire rather than need as well as a sense of giving or generosity rather than the taking of an assimilative relationship.[88] After all, Irigaray writes that these bodies "love each other as the bodies they are." She is implying that there is a moment that transcends mediation through context, and that moment is latent with ethical possibility between two "un-conceived" bodies. Furthermore, their subjectivity emerges from a place they have created together as a couple. As Irigaray claims, the sexes, of which she means two, are reborn, one for the other [Renés, l'un pour l'autre] …[e]ach one welcom[ing] the birth of the other [Chacun accueillant la naissance de l'autre].[89] Irigaray's words thus imply that the erotic relationship is a way of fulfilling Levinas's call that the ethical response to the difference of the other is one in which the becoming of an *I* and *you* are transformed into a *W*e. As the above passage reveals, Irigaray insists on the mutual generation and alliance that transcends time and place. At this point, the reader finds Irigaray's understanding of Levinas's prediscursive encounter as an "arousing" possibility for ethics.

Indeed the passage above suggest that the erotic scene marks the possibility of an encounter between the sexes prior to subjectivity wherein both lovers are empathetic with the other[90] in a way that reflects an insatiable yet not consumptive [sans consumer] attraction to the other "remain[ing] on the threshold"—at the condition of possibility for

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[88] Levinas has written that "To recognize the Other is to recognize a hunger. To recognize the Other is to give." Levinas, Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority, 75.
[89] Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 177.
[90] Irigaray suggests Eros is "At that nonregressive in-finity of empathy with the other." Ibid., 186.

their dwelling or having a place/space together.[91] Irigaray calls upon this non-consumptive potential of Levinas's "Phenomenology of Eros" writing, "L'eros peut advenir à cette innocence qui n'a jamais eu lieu avec l'autre comme autre. A cet in-fini, non régressif, du pathétique avec l'autre."[92] The prioritization of the sensory experience of erotic love is one in which touching engenders the fullness of self discovery alongside one's other. As Chanter suggests, "[Irigaray] sees that for Levinas 'the touch of the caress' leaves the other intact even while seeking its alterity, it 'weds without consuming' and 'perfects while abiding by the outlines of the other.'"[93]

Irigaray's homage to Levinas reveals her reliance on his work and her gratitude for his emphasis on the materiality of ethical relations, but by the end of the essay, Irigaray contends that Levinas's early association of the feminine with Eros in Totality and Infinity does not end in a mutuality of lovers. Irigaray examines this shortcoming by attending to a shift in Levinas's use of the feminine from Totality and Infinity to Otherwise Than Being. The feminine in Totality and Infinity promised hope for an ethical relationship based on mutuality; however, in Otherwise Than Being, Levinas replaces the language of the feminine and the eroticism engendered by sexual difference with a "neutral" or non-gendered transcendent other as the condition of Eros. In Otherwise than Being, the Other that is absolutely other is ultimately a transcendent other that enables the possibility of the an ethical moment of becoming together rather than the movement of oneness.

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[91] "A cet appétit de tous les sens irréductible `a une consomsation nécessaire. A ce goût indéfinissable d'un attrait pour l'autre qui n'aura jamais son assouvissement. Qui restera toujours au seuil, même après avoir pénétré dans la maison. Que demeurera demeure avant et après toute demeure déjà habitée." Ibid, 174.
[92] Eros could be the coming of innocence of that which has never been in the place of the other as other. Ibid.,173.
[93] Chanter, *Ethics of Eros,* 221.

It is Levinas's collapse of absolute alterity into a transcendent Other rather than the materiality of a sexually different other that becomes Irigaray's point of contention. The materiality of lovers is replaced with the metaphysics of transcendence, draining Eros of its tactility and sensuousness. Levinas displaces the feminine with a neutral Eros, eliding the difference of the feminine into a universal category of becoming. For Irigaray, this shift in Levinas's writing has two crucial effects. First, it squanders the promise of ethics in the physical encounter between the sexes. Second, it displays the sort of erasure and forgetting of difference that is the hallmark of the theories of becoming that Levinas's notion of Eros attempts to overcome.

Irigaray's embodiment of the position of Levinas's feminine other enables her critique. Her critique of Levinas is that woman has been silenced and her relationship, that eroticism that carried so much possibility, has been plunged into an "abyss." After all, Irigaray has spent this essay as though writing from the position of the feminine lover in Levinas's erotic encounter. She has taken on the position of the feminine other such that she can cry out not from a neutral space but from the space of the fully invested, marginalized other. Bemoaning the loss of the female lover covered over by Levinas's neutral universal, Irigaray laments:

> Et de l'amante ? Grâce pour ce qui n'a pas encore été assez futur ni assez fidèle dans l'instant, à ce qui est resté inachevé, en reste. [. . .]

> La chair du pétale rose – senti du muqueux régénéré. Entre le sang, la sève, le pas encore de l'efflorescence. Deuil joyeux d'un hiver passé. Nouveau baptême printanier. Retour au possible de l'intimité, de sa fécondité, fécondation. [94]

Irigaray's strategy of textually embodying the feminine other in Levinas's erotic encounter and then showing how she is forgotten when Levinas's thought 'evolves,' is a brilliant move to show that the feminine is deployed as though devoid of the materiality of her flesh.

Irigaray's approach reveals that the feminine has been used in a way that completely dissociates the feminine voice from the flesh of woman. Irigaray's move suggests that until one questions the extent to which the feminine is (not) the voice of woman, any elaboration of the subject will always be masculine. Woman is erased in the positing of neutrality. To institute the promise of Levinas's erotic encounter, an ethics that takes into account the material or corporeal reality of discourse and its effects is needed. There is a specific forgetting of corporeality that takes place when discourse of sexual difference is neutralized of its feminine other: the forgetting of the body of woman. Levinas, by eliding the difference of the feminine into a universal neutral concept of Eros enacts the separation of the feminine from the flesh of woman. Because of this elision of difference, Levinas's pre-discursive ethical encounter is no longer an erotic encounter of wonder between the sexes. Rather, the pre-discursive encounter is

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[94]In this excerpt drawn from a longer passage in which Irigaray suggests that the ethical potential of eros has been squandered with the forgetting of the feminine. She asks, "And what of the (feminine) lover?" to signal the moment that Levinas disrupts the immediacy of eros with the concept of a radically transcendent Other [Autre] who is discontinuous from the male and female lovers. The words seem as though she is praying for the lost feminine lover. Irigaray continues, "Grace for what is not yet been far enough into the future or been faithful enough in the moment, [grace] for that which remains unachieved, in remainder." But Irigaray does not end with lament. In fact as the next paragraph shows, she summons the feminine in her flesh, "the flesh of a rose petal—sensation of the regenerated mucous. Between blood, sap, and the not yet of efflorescence." That feminine flesh is the possibility of a "joyous mourning of a winter past. The new baptism of springtime. The return of the possibility of intimacy, of its fecundity, of fecundation." (Author's Translation). Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 185

now an engagement of Eros devoid of any consideration of sexual difference. To figure the relationship between the sexes after the ethical moment is to forget the absolute irreducibility of the difference between the sexes.

The corporeality of Irigaray's text and critique suggest that sexual difference has traditionally not been the space between man and woman but rather the mark of man's othering of woman. Faulty assertions of neutrality and universality bear witness to the ways the differences of women are silenced or overlooked in order to posit a selfsame subject. A neutral space would require a difference between two subjects. Because the feminine is always object of masculine becoming in the selfsame economy, woman cannot be a full subject; therefore, neutrality can never be a truly neutral space.

For Irigaray, the selfsame model of the subject which arises through the reduction of differences is not only unethical as it is for Levinas, but it is unethical in a specifically sexed way. The feminine is thus like the "alien being" in the selfsame model of subjectivity. Her difference is reduced to a trace of an "irreversible past" while the difference attributed to her becomes part of the unification of the I. The feminine that has entered the sphere of knowledge and is comprehended through discourse is not representative of a sexually different subject. The feminine is representative of man's projection of his other. His actual sexually differentiated other, woman, has been deprived of the voice to speak her own personhood, and the feminine that speaks for her has been denuded of her flesh. Woman has been occluded from his discourse of sexual

difference, because her difference must be contained and determined according to his needs.[95]

Before the very possibility of a pre-discursive self and other, an other (woman) has already been erased. Because woman's difference is erased in the use of sexual difference as a discursive category to differentiate and thereby elaborate male subjectivity, even Levinas's attempt to overcome the economy of sameness by positing subjectivity after a pre-discursive ethical moment, continues to display the same allergy to the other that he attempts to overcome. Levinas's positing of an ethical moment prior to subjectivity does not take into account that woman has been erased prior to any elaboration of subjectivity. In a fascinating essay discussing the corporeality of Irigaray's text, David Boothroyd explains Irigaray's sense of the limit to Levinas's pre-discursive and pre-ontological ethics as based in the blindness to sexual difference. Boothroyd characterizes Irigaray's position as such: "[B]efore I theorise or postulate sexual identity as such, sexual difference--my-sex--figures in relation to the other (sex)."[96] Sexual difference should be an absolute difference because it is unique to the materiality of the individual. There is no relationship to the other prior to sexual difference; therefore, the positing of a relationship with the other that is disembodied of that difference is enacting an occlusion of the absolute, irreducible difference of the other.

Boothroyd understands Irigaray as arguing that to figure the relationship between the sexes after the ethical moment is to forget the absolute irreducibility of the difference

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[95] When I suggest that woman is man's sexually differentiated other, I am referring to the status of woman in the context of Irigaray's work. It is not my position that sexual difference be understood in such binary terms. In fact, I see the continuance of the binary in Irigaray's work as its shortcoming. I will address the need not to universalize sexual difference as male-female difference in the final chapter.

[96] David Boothroyd, "Labial Feminism: Body against Body with Luce Irigaray," Parallax 2, no. 2 (1996), 76.

between the sexes. A neutral pre-ontological self overlooks this difference because the neutral is always a masculine-neutral. As a result, Levinas's subject that emerges from the ethical moment is always a masculine-neutral, male subject. The selfsame's totalizing model of self and other cannot be overcome until the very idea of a neutral, universal subject is overturned. A pre-discursive ethics thus overlooks the way that discourse has figured and veiled the material differences between men and women. [97]

SECONDARIZING SUBJECTIVITY, SECONDARIZING SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

Levinas's ethical formulation attempts to secondarize subjectivity to an encounter with radical alterity rather than prioritizing subjectivity as a movement within consciousness, relating to the other in terms of the self's knowing and becoming. For Irigaray, then, the problem with Levinas's work is that the experience of alterity is already prefigured by a masculine self. Thus Irigaray claims that in rendering sexual difference secondary to the formation of the subject, Levinas's encounter with a universal, neutral other, is actually an encounter of man with man's self posited as his other. Levinas' encounter is one of proximity to sameness not radical alterity. Irigaray demonstrates that without first thinking through the erasure of sexual difference that secures the very idea of neutrality, one cannot posit an experience of radical alterity. So by secondarizing subjectivity and sexual difference to the ethical moment, Levinas makes room for only one sex prior to

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[97] Like Levinas's ethical moment, Irigaray wants a possibility of unmediated relationship with the other, but she wants this immediacy to be understood in terms of the relationship between the sexually different. She wants to return to a material analysis—an analysis of touch as the immediate experience of the other in a communion that is not consummation.

discourse--male. Subsequently, Levinas's universal subject renders sexual difference secondary, ironically preserving the sameness of the subject he seeks to challenge.[98]

Not only is woman's non-subjectivity ignored in the Levinasian prediscursive moment, but the result is that woman is deprived of the possibility of ethical action.[99] This secondarization of sexual difference as a secondarization of the woman exposes itself in the final paragraph of "The Trace of the Other." Levinas's exclusive use of masculine pronouns to describe God immediately associates the immemorial trace with masculinity, perhaps thereby returning it to immanence or making masculinity pre-ontological. Criticizing the vexing logic of the primacy of masculine language in light of the secondarization of sexual difference, Derrida asks the following. "How can one mark as masculine the very thing said to be anterior, or even foreign to sexual difference?"[100] One would think that the only way to maintain the radical alterity of the third term while keeping sexual difference secondary would be to speak about that third term as sexually undifferentiated or neuter. Yet Levinas chooses neither option; rather, he uses the masculine language of the Bible to identify God.

If sexual differentiation occurs after the ethical moment, and if (as Levinas's language suggests) masculinity exists during (or prior to) the ethical moment, then the "others who stand in the trace of illeity,"[101] or that trace of the irreversible past of the

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[98] The alterity of the feminine is in fact doubly erased from Levinas's ethical moment, and in his reading of Levinas, Jacques Derrida seems to suggest that her double erasure is complicated by of the fact that he must speak for the feminine as the masculine philosopher. Yet Derrida is also challenging the discursive limits by playing with gendered language as though to reveal multiple iterations. Jacques Derrida, "At This Very Moment."

[99] In "The Fecundity of the Caress" Irigaray draws attention to Levinas's specific employment of masculine language to refer to the pre-discursive subject and its other. By drawing attention to this detail, Irigaray is making the case for the assumed neutrality of the masculine in Levinas's work.

[100] Jacques Derrida, "At This Very Moment," 40.

[101] Levinas, "The Trace of the Other," 359.

subject's identity, the very others to whom our ethical responsibility is tied, cannot be feminine others in Levinas's ethics. As Levinas's masculine language of the pre-ontological ethical moment reveals, the masculine body signifies the unmarked body, and the masculine face is therefore the "unmarked" face. Even more devastatingly, because woman is not the other in this scenario, the face is not female. Therefore, woman can never be violated according to Levinas's ethics. The feminine's injustice marks a double bind in which she is trapped, always rendered secondary and always mastered by her other, which is male. The feminine can neither perform nor receive the ethical, because she is marked, and her marking occurs only after the ethical.

The double-bind in which woman finds herself is evident in Irigaray's critique of Levinas. In her "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas," Irigaray challenges Levinas's equation of woman with the feminine as evidence that he has not considered the ways sexual difference veils the non-neutral subject in a cloak of "neutrality." She asks, "Who is the other, if the other of sexual difference is not recognized or known? Does it not mean in that case a sort of mask or lure? Or an effect of the consumption of an other [Autre]?"[102] Irigaray's questions are biting, almost caustic. The feminine is not the other. Woman is unrecognizable within the existing language of sexual difference as masculine and feminine are beholden to a male subject. How then can woman exist? Who is she? Is woman an abstract ideal? Is she a transcendent other without a body? Indeed, Irigaray claims that this is the position in which philosophy has placed woman. By rendering her silent, discourse has placed her in the position of God. This position of power makes her

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[102] Luce Irigaray, "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas," in The Irigaray Reader, ed. Margaret Whitford (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992), 180.

ever more dangerous and threatening to his existence. Placed in the beyond she is more threatening and must be continuously silenced.[103]

Irigaray pursues the question of sexual difference because she sees this question as starting at a point that is philosophically necessary for the more-than-reversal of phallocratic discourse. Irigaray has called "une révolution de pensée, et d'éthique" [A revolution in thought and ethics].[104] This revolution of thought demands a reimagining of the subject and its relation to discourse, its world, and the cosmic (and Irigaray says specifically both macro and microcosmic).[105] The subject is never neutral for Irigaray. It is always written in the masculine form, regardless of whether a neuter exists grammatically.

The possibility of a neutral language, philosophy, or even a universal truth are inextricably bound to a notion of neutrality always already conceived through the reductive economy of the selfsame. Irigaray reveals that man has no "other" subject and that his real other, woman, is unrecognizable or unrepresentable in the discourse of sexual difference. Moreover, the subject without an other is never neutral. Irigaray writes, "L'homme a été le sujet du discours : théorique, moral, politique. Et le genre de Dieu, gardien de tout sujet et de tout discours, est toujours masculin-paternel, en Occident."[106] Man has been the subject of all discourse for Irigaray. For the selfsame movement to be

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[103] There can be no other for Irigaray unless we recognize a material other from which we might then approach a notion of the transcendent.
[104] Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle,* 14.
[105] Ibid.
[106] "Man has been the subject of discourse: in theory, morality or politics. And the gender of God, guardian of every subject and every discourse, is always masculine-paternal in the West" (Author's translation). Ibid.

overcome, for a true openness to the other to exist without domination and reduction, we must first consider the question of sexual difference.[107]

In sum, the economy of sameness is an economy of masculine sameness for Irigaray.[108] Overlooking the non-neutrality of subjectivity is the fundamental flaw Irigaray attributes to the works of her philosophical interlocutors including Levinas in *Éthique*. The logic behind Irigaray's critique is as follows: any ethics that does not first consider the question of sexual difference, understood as that veiling of the feminine in language and through the history of discourse, cannot escape the economy of the selfsame. It is Irigaray's insistence on the discursive violence against the feminine that occurs prior to any attempt to stand outside of this economy or to speak of a radically Other that forces us to reconsider the ethics of identification. The identity of the human subject has been established at the expense of the difference of the other, and difference itself is a question of sexual difference because of the way discourse limits all of thought.

THE NECESSITY OF THINKING THROUGH SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

Using Levinas's critique of the selfsame to critique Levinas himself, Irigaray uses the feminine to reveal the inconsistencies of any model of ethics and subjectivity that does not take into consideration the feminine as the mark of sexual difference. Despite her

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[107] Though it is not within the scope of this project to discuss the issue of space and time for Irigaray, it is important to note that for Irigaray, sexual difference must be considered with respect to the question of space and time. Irigaray claims that the interiorization of time and exteriorization of space are reflected in masculine and feminine discourse and must therefore be re-examined. Ibid, 15.

[108] In The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger, Irigaray gives us a sense of the closure of the masculine economy of sameness writing, "Between the one and the other, between a male one and a female one, there is, at least at present, no passage. Being would be a waiting whose opening has closed itself up in a circle--likewise in oblivion--so that the thinker can remain at rest there." Because the one is always male such that there is no female one, the subject remains the creator and sustainer of his own worldview. He does not open himself to the intervention of the other woman. Luce Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, trans., Mary Beth Mader (Austin: University of Texas, 1999), 23.

departure from Levinas, Irigaray's work in *Éthique* consistently reflects Levinas's efforts to overcome the totalizing aspects of a selfsame subject. Chanter writes, "Both Irigaray and Levinas challenge the logic of metaphysics whereby one cannot conceive of otherness without referring back to the concept of the same as the guiding principle."[109] Irigaray's theory of ethics has been deeply influenced by Levinas's challenge to metaphysics reduction of alterity.[110] But unlike Levinas, Irigaray is clear that the normative concept of sexual difference that assumes the neutrality of the subject simply perpetuates the erasure/silencing of woman. Such a concept of sexual difference, when secondary to the formation of the subject, can never reimagine the economy of the sameness. Therefore, sexual difference itself must be reborn, or perhaps reincarnated, from the traces of its irreversible past. Because sexual difference must be reimagined or reborn, finding a way to reconstitute woman from her erasure and silencing is a necessary step in establishing an ethical way of being in the world.

For Irigaray, the first step to reconstituting woman from her erasure involves exposing the fallacy of the universal subject by drawing attention to the ways it ignores the question of sexual difference. In her first essay in *Éthique*, Irigaray writes that the significance of the question of sexual difference has been "continuously concealed" [sans

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[109] Chanter, *Ethics of Eros,* 173.

[110] Irigaray was particularly influenced by Levinas's reconfiguration of the relationship between immanence and transcendence in her formulation of the "sensible-transcendental" as a way to describe the possibility of the divine that arises in and through sexually differentiated subjects. Chanter writes, "Here as elsewhere in Levinas's texts, it is possible to discern a pre-figuring of what Irigaray calls the "sensible transcendental," a concept that she explains in terms that are very similar to Levinas's explication of the paradox of an other-worldly freedom and materiality, or what he will later refer to as sensibility." Ibid., 180.

cesse occultée],[111] even amidst the proliferation of discourses.[112] Irigaray writes that the significance of sexual difference is overlooked and hidden by all those discourses that think they can posit a neutral subject, e.g. science and technology. The neutrality of the subject and its discourse has been taken for granted. As a result, sexual difference is rarely put into question.

To disclose the concealment of sexual difference from dominant discourse, Irigaray examines philosophical uses of the language of masculine and feminine in the elaboration of sexual difference. Irigaray seeks to prove that the neutral subject is constructed at the expense of women's subjectivity by revealing the ways women's voices have been occluded in and through the language of the feminine. For Irigaray, uncovering this erasure of women from the annals of Western philosophy means mining the language of sexual difference to determine how the feminine has been used in the elaboration of a male subjectivity. She writes, "Je devrais me reconstituer à partir d'une déassimilation...Renaître à partir de traces de culture, d'oeuvres déjà produites par l'autre. Cherchant ce qui y est — ce qui n'y est pas."[113] Irigaray announces the need for reconstituting herself from the traces of culture for something that is absent--traces of what Levinas would perhaps call an irreversible past. The next question that would follow from Irigaray's dutiful and moral "ought" becomes "How are we to think through

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[111] Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 13.
[112] It is arguable whether Irigaray challenges sexual difference so much as she raises the question of how sexual difference is constituted to say that it is insufficiently understood. We will discuss the depth of her disruption later in this work. From either perspective, for Irigaray, sexual difference's insufficiency resides in its mistreatment of the female as other—which is reflected in the absence of the feminine in language as well as the voice of woman in philosophy.
[113] Calling for the need to dis-assimilate woman, Irigaray claims "I ought to reconstitute my-self on the basis of a dissimilation. . . . Be reborn from the traces of a culture, of works already produced by the other. Searching what is there—for what is not there" (Author's translation). Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 17.

something that 'is not there'?" Women need their voices to be heard, and yet how can women recover their voices if there is nothing but the trace of their having been silenced to uncover?

Women's voices, then, can only be reclaimed by reconstituting themselves through the marks of their absence, marks that are evident in breaches of the totalizing and universal narrative of the world as produced by man. Without a means to reconstitute themselves, the silenced are rendered completely absent. The move from silence to absence is a move from an initial compromising violence to an absolute annihilation of the other. If the difference of the other is not recognized, then the other is not really other: the other would already be the same. Referring to the status of Levinas's other in her "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas," Irigaray asks, "Who is the other, if the other of sexual difference is not recognized or known? Does it not mean in that case a sort of mask or lure? Or an effect of the consumption of an other [Autre]? But how is transcendence defined?"[114] As suggested in the above questions from "Questions for Emmanuel Levinas," in discourse, woman exists only as a trace or the mark of her absence. Irigaray believes it is necessary to dissimilate and reconstitute woman by exposing the ways the non-neutrality of sexual difference has not been sufficiently interrogated. Woman is secondarized because she is not subject. Then woman is silenced when the language of the feminine is used to veil her non-subject status. Irigaray therefore turns to the language of the feminine to dissimilate woman because the feminine bears witness to the trace of the erasure of women's difference. The idea behind

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[114] Irigaray, "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas," 181.

Irigaray's words suggests that women's alterity might be reconstituted by exposing the feminine as the mark of women's erasure. By paying attention to sexual difference, Irigaray can expose the feminine as the mark of women's erasure, effectively reconstituting herself from something that is not there, or perhaps available only as a trace.

The following chapters will demonstrate that Irigaray's ability to answer the challenges of the selfsame resides in the actual work of her writing. Through mimetic writing, Irigaray engenders catachrestic moments, moments un in discourse, to the feminine from the masculine. These catachrestic moments draw attention to the "trace of an irreversible past" of the feminine so as to elaborate a way of women's becoming that is not a mere reflection of the selfsame model of subjectivity.[115]

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[115] Tina Chanter writes, "To act as a subject it is necessary, according to Levinas, to have already encountered infinity." I will suggest that a subject can only encounter infinity if the infinite alterity of all others is preserved. Such alterity can be preserved only through a subject that becomes in relation to difference rather than because of difference (as though difference was a building material to edify the phallic I). Such an ethics must arise through an insistence on the infinite difference and particularity of each and every experience as that which connects us. Tina Chanter, *Ethics of Eros,* 182.

CHAPTER 2:
SECONDARIZATION OF WOMAN: THE LACK OF DIFFERENCE IN SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

The previous chapter examined Emmanuel Levinas's suggestion that the reduction of difference to sameness that occurs through a movement of self-knowledge is a fundamentally unethical way for relating to one's others. I then suggested that Luce Irigaray, in agreement with Levinas, believed overcoming such reduction of difference in knowledge or self-consciousness will require a prediscursive encounter, an encounter with the other that has not yet been subject to the movement of conscious knowing. Such a prediscursive encounter is the possibility of being before one's other in absolute alterity, without reduction of the other through thought. The absolute alterity of the other is, for Levinas, beyond our knowledge of things, beyond the notion of essence and beyond being. The absolute alterity of the other comes as a call to which one is responsible. From this call, Levinas suggests that one ultimately becomes a subject or knows oneself in responding to this call. Responding to the call of the other is an ethical moment of decision in which one either embraces the difference of the other as the condition of one's existence or unethically annihilates that difference out of fear. Ethics, then, not Being nor speculative thought, is the foundation for authentic human subjectivity. But Levinas' prediscursive encounter implies that before discourse emerges, there is a neutral and universal (perhaps innocent) proximity of self and other. The problem with the Levinasian model, for Irigaray, is that the very idea of a neutral, universal, prediscursive movement neglects an erasure of difference through which the very idea of neutrality, universality, and indeed prediscursivity emerge.

The idea that there can be a subject that is neuter or neutral suggests that men and women are equally represented in and through language such that a neutral territory of becoming can be posited. According to Irigaray, such notions of neutrality conceal the reality that the feminine in language does not describe a difference representative of women's ways of knowing themselves as subject. The idea of sexual difference that allows one to posit universality and speak of a neutral subject has been an illusion of difference marked by the language of the feminine. This language of the feminine has preserved the primacy of man's subjectivity and has had deleterious effects on the possibility of women's subjectivity. The feminine, rather than marking the space of women's subjectivity, has instead defined woman in ways that serve man as the universal subject. Woman's presence, her existence, her voice, her body, have been marked by a feminine that renders her a servant rather than a subject. Ironically, the feminine has prevented woman from existing as a? subject for herself since sexual difference has been elaborated in accordance with a single male sex.

If ethics is to prevail by grounding subjectivity in openness to the other rather than reduction and assimilation of the other's differences (à la Levinas), that ethical moment will require a consideration of sexual difference as a prediscursive difference that has been neutralized of its difference through the masculine discourse of

universals.[116] It is precisely because the non-neutrality of the subject and its discourse has been overlooked – specifically the ways this non-neutrality is rooted in the occlusion of women – that Irigaray suggests in the opening lines of *Éthique* that the question of sexual difference is the question of our age.

With a tone resonant of proselytization, Irigaray engenders a sense of urgency in the first few paragraphs of *Éthique* claiming that sexual difference is the issue of "our age" and the issue we must think through.[117] She writes, "La différence sexuelle représente une des questions ou la question qui est à penser à notre époque."[118] This pronouncement makes clear, at the outset of her text, that the need for a new understanding of sexual difference will guide her work. But thinking through sexual difference is not just an obligation--it is the very possibility of an ethical world. Irigaray continues, "La difference sexuelle constituerait l'horizon de mondes d'une fécondité

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[116] I would also note that a prediscursive sexual difference would be as infinite as the others who present themselves before us in their differences; perhaps what is seen as sexual difference might even be expanded beyond anatomy to incorporate the becoming of flesh unhindered by the boundaries of scientific discourse.. Those infinite possibilities of sexual difference are only later codified in discourse. Irigaray sees the pre-discursive sexual differences in terms of two ontological categories of difference (which she refers to as man and woman); however, I read these categories not as a determined set of differences defining men and women but as the traces of an irreversible past that has been covered over by masculine discourse. Therefore, sexual difference as the difference between man and woman is actually insisting on an absolute alterity prior to discourse. In place of Levinas's face of the other, Irigaray presents the sex of the other as that which is completely irreducible to assimilation and identification.

[117] Irigaray repeats phrases indicative of the singularity and uniqueness of sexual difference; moreover, she raises the explicit historical significance of sexual difference for our age. For instance, the first line reads, "La différence sexuelle représente *une des questions ou la question* qui est à penser *à notre époque* [emphasis added]." Ibid.

[118] "Sexual difference would constitute the horizon of worlds more fecund than have yet to come." Author's translation. Luce Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, Critique (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1984), 13.

encore inadvenue."[119] This vivid language of promise and hope inspires the reader to embark on this journey to provide the conditions of thinking through sexual difference that would allow sexual difference to constitute new horizons of thought about difference.[120] For Irigaray, thinking through sexual difference is the essence of possibility for an ethical future.

From the opening lines of her work emphasizing fecundity and newness, it is evident that Irigaray understands the project of thinking through sexual difference as a fundamentally ethical endeavor to overcome sameness. Only when the feminine is reconstituted from the absolute difference of woman, a difference hidden beneath a discourse of the feminine that is not her own, can one conceive of a truly differentiated notion of sexual difference. *Following the ethical current that flows through Irigaray's work, this chapter explores Irigaray's critique of feminine representations in the works of Plato and Spinoza to reveal how the discourse of sexual difference occludes women by veiling them in the language of a feminine that is not of their own making. The chapter concludes by suggesting that the exposure of the lack of difference in discourse of sexual difference testifies to Irigaray's claim that sexual difference, as a question of the status of*

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[119]Irigaray's use of the conditional tense in this sentence evokes a hopeful tone that this horizon of fecund worlds would be possible if we are to engage the work of sexual difference. We can also read this language of possibility as a language of obligation. While the function of the conditional in this phrase denotes an action that depends on meeting a prior condition, the conditional can also be used to designate an obligation or duty. Therefore, we might read Irigaray's hopes for sexual difference to usher in a new age as simultaneously a call to action. In this text, the reader would be obligated to think through sexual difference as the question of our age. As Irigaray proclaims, each age has one question to think through, and, for us as Irigaray's readers, that question is sexual difference. Ibid.

[120] In the spirit of a new, non-reductive, non-masculine way of thinking, Irigaray never provides a definition of sexual difference. Using the language of a threshold and horizon to evoke her sense of an ethics of sexual difference, Irigaray reveals that thinking through sexual difference means thinking through sexual difference as a medium or an interval for the future. If we honor Irigaray's hope for sexual difference to be understood as a threshold to a new age, we have only the question of sexual difference as our guide for envisioning that new horizon; therefore, this chapter works towards Irigaray's sense of sexual difference negatively, by exposing the ways it has been inadequately thought and written.

the feminine, must be thought through in order to imagine a place for the absolute difference required to ground a fecund, ethical world beyond sameness.[121]

MEDIATION OF WOMAN IN SEXUAL DIFFERENCE: THE CASE OF DIOTIMA

MEDIATION AND THE FEMININE VOICE

Both Levinas and Irigaray suggest that ethics emerges from an experience of the immediacy of the irreducible difference of the other. In the cognitive knowledge of the other, the difference of the other is mediated by the limits of the self's consciousness. Therefore a mediated other is an other whose difference has been reduced. Mediation is the condition of difference within the economy of sameness, and Irigaray argues that because the subject of discourse is man, the condition of woman in discourse is always

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[121] Irigaray continues her declaration of the significance of sexual difference for *notre époque* writing that sexual difference remains an issue that, as Carolyn Burke translates, "still cries out in vain for our attention" [*de plus en plus insistante.*]. In the original French, the text reads, "*Mais, que je me tourne vers la philosophie, la science, la religion, cette question se trouve sans cesse occultée, sous-jacente, de plus en plus insistante.*" The question, the more and more insistent it is finds itself constantly covered up. Its calling out for recognition is concealed, like a cry that is not heard (though perhaps not totally in vain/*en vain*, a term the translator, not Irigaray uses). Still, Irigaray's use of *sans cesse occultée* indicates the concealment of the feminine in discourse. After all, the *question* is already a question of the feminine. In French, "*question*" is a feminine noun. I draw attention to the gender of the French word, "*question*" to suggest that Irigaray understands sexual difference as a question of the feminine. She says "*cette question"* as though to remind us that sexual difference is not only a question but a feminine question—a question of the feminine. Moreover, Irigaray does not say that it is "cette question de la différence sexuelle" that cries out. It is simply "*cette question,"* thereby calling greater attention to the gender of the question itself. The question insists on its femininity but the masculine subject subsumes the feminine question beneath his discourses. Irigaray will ultimately argue that man has been the subject of discourse such that any interrogation will reflect this masculine bias—the subjective privilege to forget. With every raising of the question of sexual difference, the feminine gender of the "question" is always already forgotten. In other words, the question of sexual difference is marked by the forgetting of the feminine within the very moment philosophy asks a question. Thus, though philosophers have raised the question of sexual difference, it has forgotten the feminine as the mark of the question of sexual difference itself. Sexual difference still cries out because the question of the place of the feminine has not been adequately considered. Note the reflexive "se trouve" in which the (feminine) question finds itself. The question that cries out in vain cannot claim its own space. It is placed in this world where its voice is rendered silent because there is no subjective space from which to articulate a discourse. Additionally, no question ever precludes the question of sexual difference. A question is always marked by sexual difference just as sexual difference is always marked by a question of the feminine.

one of mediation. Irigaray supports her claim that the absolute difference of woman has been annihilated by showing that the feminine is the mark of her erasure.

In *Éthique,* one example in which Irigaray exposes the occlusion of a woman's voice and subsequent mediation of her difference arises in her reading of "Diotima's Speech" in Plato's *The Symposium*. Irigaray's essay "Sorcerer Love" [L'Amour Sorcier] on *The Symposium* examines the language and place allotted to the feminine character of Diotima amidst Socrates' and his companions' discussions on love. Irigaray references the reporting of Diotima's words through Socrates to engage the question of the sexual difference with respect to the mediation of the feminine voice. The mediation of the feminine is central to Irigaray's argument that the difference of the feminine is erased in masculine discourse in a way that exhibits the unethical totalizing reduction of difference to sameness.

To highlight this mediation, Irigaray begins by reminding the reader that when Socrates gives woman a voice in the dialogues on love, he does so in her absence.[122] In *The Symposium,* Plato narrates a series of conversations aimed at defining love. After his companions at the table (all male) give their definitions of what love is and isn't, Socrates provides his response. But Socrates responds to the question on love by recounting what he has heard from the female sorcerer Diotima. Socrates praises Diotima's wisdom and then brings her into the conversation about love by telling the story of his encounter with

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[122] Furthermore, by speaking in that space man has given her, woman secures for man his identity and existence. We could argue that Socrates uses Diotima to support his own argument and to secure the synthesis of his dialectic. This becomes an increasingly convincing reading if we cross-reference it with Irigaray's reading of Spinoza, wherein she claims that man posits woman as an envelope that belongs to him and guarantees his existence. Irigaray writes, "Men have such a great need that women should exist. If men are to be permitted to believe or imagine themselves as self-cause, they need to think that the envelope "belongs" to them." As I will discuss later, this moves into the relationship between place and the possibility of existence as philosophical subject. Ibid., 84.

her. He relates his memory of this encounter to his companions. Herein lies the displacement--Socrates is reporting for Diotima who is not physically present at the table.[123] The feminine is entirely absent from the text save through the trace of the masculine voice of Socrates. Therefore, we might say that Diotima's speech on love is never in her own words. Rather, her narrative is always reported in the masculine name of Socrates. *Her* voice can only be summoned through *his* name. Without Socrates to speak in her absence, Diotima's story would never have been heard. Socrates gives the floor to Diotima and then speaks for her. For Irigaray, this represents the way man creates a space for woman's absence/erasure and forces her to use the "gifts" of his language to dwell in that space where, properly speaking, she does not exist.

Thus, in *The Symposium,* Socrates grants woman a space to speak only to cover her in his own words and pass those words off as hers. For Irigaray, this mediation exemplifies the authority of the masculine to determine feminine speech. Socrates not only hands the right to speech (though mediated) to a woman, but, we could argue, he actually gives the *possibility* of speech to woman. For example, in French, Irigaray's text reads that Socrates, "donne la parole à une femme." He actually gives *la parole*, or speech, to a woman. In other words, he gives her the chance to speak in the symposium, or as Carolyn Burke and Gillian Gill translate, "he gives the floor to a woman."[124] Since Diotima is physically absent and Socrates is reporting for her, he actually gives her

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[123] Plato is reporting for Socrates who is reporting for Diotima who is never actually present. In some ways, Plato's name is like the omniscient name of God that oversees and ensures the physical absence of Diotima and the mediation of her voice. This is not unlike Irigaray's discussion of the positing of God to thwart the power of man's nostalgia for woman. The double displacement of woman annihilates her voice and forces her to dwell in the envelope that man has made for himself.

[124] Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans., Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1993), 20.

words, and he gives her the ground for her mediated presence through these words. This is not a generous giving. Irigaray's use of the language of giving ironically plays upon the ethical significance of the gift, signaling that Socrates puts his words in the place of Diotima's. This "donne" is a violent placing of the words in the place of her absent mouth.[125] Diotima's words are hidden behind the veil of Socrates', and the "Discours de Diotime" therefore belongs to the speech of Socrates.[126] Not only has Diotima's presence been mediated by Socrates, but her words are also mediated by the limits of "la parole" given to her. Furthermore, using the phrase "la parole" Irigaray heightens the reader's awareness to the absence of a truly differentiated feminine language in philosophy.[127] The term "la parole," the feminine grammatical form of speaking, is possible because it is given to Diotima by Socrates. Even the feminine speaking belongs to man.

BENEATH THE VEIL OF THE FEMININE: TRACES OF WOMAN'S DIFFERENCE

Though the feminine is mediated by a masculine speech, there are what we might see as glimmers of hope that a different voice of the other can emerge in spite of this covering of the feminine voice. Irigaray claims that Diotima's depiction of love begins in a way that suggests woman's voice emerges and speaks differently from the masculine

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[125] After all, her body is nowhere to be found. Irigaray reminds the reader that Diotima is not at the banquet.

[126] The full title of this essay is "L'Amour Sorcier: Lecture de Platon, *Le Banquet*, 'Discours de Diotime.'" The idea of Diotima's "parole" and "discours" read in relation to the mediation of her feminine voice suggests an ironic use of these terms. Irigaray's immediate emphasis on Diotima's physical absence from the banquet and her repeated insistence that woman has no language renders it impossible for us to read Diotima's speech as her own.

[127] After claiming the absence of a place for woman, Irigaray writes in the first person, "Je me cherche, tel cel qui a été assimilé." For woman to speak she must find herself, and Irigaray admits that she must herself from maleness to discover a way for the sexes to relate that is not reductive—to foster a double-desire between the sexes. Desire figured in the self-same assimilates all difference and cannot provide a concept of nonreductive love. The self-same cannot support a language that could figure a non-reductive desire. This is why Irigaray must look for a new language through its absence, its silence and its exclusion Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 17.

movement of sameness. The inconsistencies or disruptions they provide attest to the traces of woman. Specifically, Irigaray makes the case that Diotima's initial teachings about love contrast with the Hegelian dialectic that understands the subject as moving through the difference of the other in its own becoming. This model of dialectic, that form that Irigaray contends dominant narratives of Western philosophy hold dear, involves an opposition of terms where tension is resolved through one of the terms conceding or passing into the other term, thereby creating a synthesis, agreement, or assimilation of the terms. This dialectic is symptomatic of the selfsame economy discussed in the previous chapter, and it epitomizes the reduction of differences for the sake of sameness.[128] The move towards synthesis characteristic of dialectical argument reflects the prioritization of oneness and unity of a selfsame worldview.

Bracketing the reality that Diotima's words are spoken by Socrates, Irigaray suggests that Diotima's speech on love does not follow the Hegelian dialectic. For example, in contrast to the reductive dialectical process, Diotima's speech on Eros posits love as an intermediary between two other terms without synthesizing those terms. When Diotima rejects the definition of Eros as a beautiful, good god, Socrates responds by positing Eros as ugly, bad and mortal. In another refusal of binary definitions, Diotima proclaims that love is neither ugly nor beautiful, good nor bad, mortal nor immortal. Eros, "says" Diotima, is a daemon—an intermediary great spirit between mortal and immortal.[129] Nancy Evans remarks, "Diotima teaches that there lies a middle term

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[128] In Irigaray's text, the movement of the self-same arises under different names including "économie de l'*intervalle,*" "économie du désir," and "réduction à un même." But all of these terms share a structure based on the reduction of difference and the stultification of the interval between terms. Ibid., 16, 102.
[129] Plato, *The Symposium*, trans., Christopher Gill, reissue, illustrated ed. (Penguin 2003), 2:201e-204c.

between any two opposite terms. Contraries like good and bad, or beautiful and ugly, are not necessarily contradictories; something in between, *metaksu*, lies between them." In this exchange with Socrates, Diotima thus refuses the model of dialectical thinking engendered by reductive definitions of good or bad, ugly or beautiful, etc. Instead, she elaborates love on the basis of a *metaksu*, of a middle way or mediation.

In Diotima's teaching, love acts like a third term that refuses the flat opposition of Socrates' dialectic. As a third term, one passes between the two traditionally opposing terms without giving up the path itself and without "la *destruction* ou *destructuration* de deux termes pour établir une synthèse des deux..."[130] Irigaray paraphrases Diotima's words, stating that for Diotima love is, "le conducteur et le chemin, les deux. Médiateur par excellence."[131] Insofar as Diotima offers an alternative to a destructive dialectic, she raises the possibility of love's fecundity. Her dialectic does not necessitate the destruction of terms for the sake of defining another term; therefore, the difference between the two terms is always in a state of becoming. In Irigaray's words, "Tout est toujours en mouvement, en devenir. Et le médiateur, en est, entre autres, ou exemplairement, l'*amour*. Jamais accompli, toujours devenant."[132] Love does not have to have a reason or objective. Love between lovers is for the sake of love itself. Love as path or intermediary "l'amour est fécond avant toute procréation."[133] Irigaray's emphasis

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[130] Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 27.Irigaray, in writing of "the destruction or destructuration of two terms in order to establish a synthesis of two" is referring to a Hegelian sense of the two as neither of the original terms. Therefore the translators translate this phrase as, "destruction or the destructuration of the two terms in order to establish a synthesis that is neither one nor the other" Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 20.

[131] Irigaray's paraphrasing of Diotima's words is actually Irigaray's paraphrasing of Plato's recording of Socrates' reporting of Diotima. Perhaps the lack of voice Irigaray gives to Diotima here protests the illusion that these ever were the words of a woman. Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 28.

[132] Ibid.

[133] Ibid., 32.

on the intermediary function of love, as revealed through Diotima's discourse, associates the feminine with that which is intermediary, indeterminate, and dis-interested or without an agenda.

REABSORPTION OF WOMAN'S DIFFERENCE

Though there are moments like those above in which it seems that Diotima manages to pull back the layers of masculine language that constrain her tongue, Irigaray is quick to remind the reader that any celebrations of the wisdom of the feminine will be short lived. Diotima's musings on love emphasize a non-reductive and non-teleological notion of love in a way that suggests Diotima's difference is available to Plato's and Socrates' audiences, but Irigaray quickly points out the effects mediation has on Diotima's speech and presence.

Irigaray, as though recovering a lost narrative of a real woman Diotima implies that Socrates' reporting of Diotima's speech distorts the method in Diotima's depiction of love. Irigaray writes as though narrating the story of a Diotima who was in fact a woman, not just a disembodied mouthpiece of the masculine. She suggest that the difference of Diotima's feminine voice proves too disruptive for masculine discourse--so much so that the transmission of Diotima's wisdom through a masculine discourse becomes unstable and inconsistent. Irigaray draws the reader's attention to a shift in Diotima's rhetoric that undermines Diotima's initial argument, and Irigaray attributes that shift to the co-optation of the feminine voice. Specifically, Irigaray contrasts Diotima's initial discussion of Eros with the description of love later in Diotima's discussion with

Socrates. Irigaray demonstrates that Diotima's initial statement characterizing love as intermediary is transformed into a definition of love that reflects the triumph of a metaphysical hierarchy.

After having invested time in explaining the intermediary function of love that would have us read the "union" between the sexes as "generation" in and of itself, Diotima transitions to a determinate definition of love between the sexes as grounded in animality. The conversation about love between men and woman becomes a discourse about procreation, and the new trajectory of Diotima's method abandons its previous insistence on the fecundity of becoming. Where Diotima had once spoken of the divinity of the union of man and woman, her voice is now drowned out with a conversation about children.[134] To the reader once hopeful for Diotima's alternative/resistance to the prevailing structure of dialectical thinking, the loss of love's fecundity resonates with cries of a defeated revolution.

The harsh reality that Diotima's words are undermining her wisdom about the intermediary function of love becomes more real as Diotima begins to speak of the difference between the fecundity of the body and that of the soul. Regarding the love between the sexes Diotima states, "'when men's fecundity is of the body, they turn rather to the women, and the fashion of their love is this: through begetting children to provide themselves with immortality, renown and happiness, as they imagine, securing them for all time to come.'"[135] Fecundity of the body is the realm of women, but women serve as

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[134] Irigaray focuses on Diotima's reference to the "union" of man and woman as generation. Quoting Diotima in *The Symposium,* Irigaray writes, "'*The union of a man and woman is in fact, a generation; this is a thing divine; in a living creature that is mortal, it is an element of immortality, this fecundity and generation*' (206; p. 256). This statement of Diotima's never seems to have been heard. Moreover she herself goes on to accentuate the procreative aspect of love." Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*.
[135] The Symposium: 208-9 quoted in Ibid., 29.

a means to an end for men's desire for immortality. For a love between the sexes, nothing can be more beautiful than procreation. Gone is the union of the sexes as a daemon and the divine attributes of this interval once heralded by Diotima. The child secures a figural immortality for man and woman, and this passing on into generations is the greatest achievement of their love. The reduction of the interval to a goal of immortality through reproduction renders that once intermediary function of love invisible and inconsequential.

Diotima's new teaching has reduced the love between the sexes to a question of procreation, and this assault on an intermediary love continues with her association of love to a hierarchized immortality. In Socrates' *reporting* of Diotima's speech, Eros becomes part of "la quête télèologique d'une réalité estimée la plus haute et souvent située dans une transcendance inaccessible à notre condition de mortels."[136] In keeping with the goal-oriented notion of love as driven by a desire for immortality, Irigaray differentiates carnal fecundity from fecundity of the soul. Answering her own question as to the "'proper offspring'" of the soul, Diotima says, "'*It is wisdom, along with every other spiritual value.*'"[137] The differentiation between carnal fecundity and the fecundity of the soul establishes a hierarchy of love. Not only is love between the sexes bound to a procreative end, but love also becomes part of an order. The hierarchy reads as follows: pursuit of spiritual beauty is superior to the pursuit of a collective good, which is in turn superior to the generation of family, which is superior to the possible love between the

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[136] Love becomes part of a "teleological quest" where the goal is put off or "situated in a singular transcendence inaccessible to the condition of mortals." Irigaray suggests that Eros has been put off and re-transcendentalized in a way that would run contrary to a feminine sense of Eros as emerging through the flesh. Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 35.
[137] The Symposium: 208-9 quoted in Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 29.

sexes. This ordering or structuring of love has the effect of limiting the value of love to its end. Love no longer acts as an intermediary. Instead, love becomes complicit in the hierarchization of its own fecundity. Referring to the subordination of carnal procreation (*procréation charnelle*) to the good and the beautiful (*belles et bonnes*), Irigaray writes, "C'est ainsi, d'ailleurs, qu'il adviendra que *l'amour entre hommes est supérieur à l'amour entre homme et femme.*"[138] This hierarchy of the love's pursuits results in a denigration of the fecundity of sexual difference—a veiling of the difference that could foster a generative union of man and woman irrespective of procreation.

Irigaray has marked the shift in Diotima's discourse to expose the ways the feminine, even as it reveals itself as otherwise (as in the case of the feminine offering an alternative to dialectics), is always absorbed by the limits of a masculine system. If Diotima's early sense of love offered hope for a mutual love between the sexes, that hope dies when "la beauté selon le corps et selon l'âme se hiérarchise, et l'amour pour les femmes devient le lot de ceux qui sont féconds selon le corps et qui attendent l'immortalité de leur nom, perpétué par leur filiation, incapables d'être créateurs selon l'âme."[139] As Irigaray suggests, the hierarchization of body and soul leads to a denigration of love for women and by women. Woman is bound to the carnal world and the hierarchy of soul over body permanently fixes her fecundity within a materiality that is deprived of its relation to the spirit except as perpetuated by her offspring.

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[138] Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 37.

[139] Irigaray suggests that hope fades when love becomes part of a hierarchy of loves in which the beauty of body is deemed less desirable than the beauty of the soul. Love of women, who are trapped in the masculine association of the feminine with carnality, are resigned to being creators of the body and perpetuators of their name through their offspring. They remain "incapable of being creators of the soul" (Author's translation). Ibid., 35.

MISCARRIED METHOD

The moment Diotima posits a hierarchy between body and soul in relation to love, her wisdom falls prey to philosophy's dialectical desires. Describing Diotima's methodological "miscarriage,"[140] Irigaray writes, "A partir de ce moment, elle va entraîner l'amour dans une schize entre mortel et immortel. L'amour va perdre son caractère démonique."[141] The moment Diotima divides love into mortal and immortal, she abandons the intermediary function she has until now celebrated. The metaphysical language of causality and hierarchy has infringed upon Diotima's initial insistence on love as intermediary. Her discourse of love sheds its intermediary function and becomes a means to an end. Referring to this teleological love that we witness in the second part of Diotima's discourse, Irigaray points out the transformation of Diotima's use of love. Irigaray writes, "Dans la deuxième partie de son discours, elle a utilisé l'Amour lui-même comme *moyen*. Elle a redoublé sa fonction d'intermédiaire , l'a soumis à un *télos*."[142] Irigaray explicitly states, "Diotima's "speech", as reported by Socrates, involves inconsistencies in method that further expose the self-same dialectic's annihilation of difference.

Chanter suggests that the language of "miscarriage" in reference to Diotima's speech implies Irigaray understands Socrates as a midwife. Chanter believes Irigaray highlights "Diotima's inability to bring to fruition the thought that, on Irigaray's account,

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[140] Burke and Gill translates Irigaray's "échoue" as "miscarries" in Irigaray's statement regarding the failure of Diotima's method. I am playing off of the translators' use of the term in invoking the idea of a miscarried or aborted method to draw attention to natality as primary to Irigaray's way of reading. Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 29.
[141] After this miscarriage, Diotima splits love between mortal and immortal. Love loses its intermediary, daemonic character (Author's paraphrasing). Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 33.
[142] Ibid., 39.

she had begun to bear."[143] But the failure of Diotima's method is not a fault on Diotima's part. The failure has been enacted upon her. Every time Irigaray mentions the incongruity of Diotima's method, she reminds the reader that Diotima's speech is reported by Socrates.[144] Irigaray wants the reader to recognize that the miscarriage of feminine has everything to do with the mediation of the feminine voice. Perhaps Diotima's early notion of love no longer resembles itself because it has been corrupted by Socrates and translated into a language and system of thought where her notions are incapable of articulation.

In a chapter that discusses Irigaray's reliance on Martin Heidegger for her interpretation of Greek philosophy, Chanter considers the double movement of Irigaray's use of Diotima as presenting both the possibility of a philosophical transgression and a recapitulation of the self-same.[145] Citing the *Éthique,* Chanter writes, "[I]n her reading of Socrates' speech in Plato's *Symposium,...*Irigaray portrays Plato, with Diotima as his mouthpiece, both as having caught sight of love as some kind of "intermediary" (SL:32; E: 27) and as having lost sight of this intermediate character of love." [146] When we pull away from Diotima's narrative and contextualize it within the entirety of *The Symposium,*

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[143] Tina Chanter, *Ethics of Eros,* 161.
[144] In addition to her initial cautioning that Diotima does not speak for herself, "Elle ne parle pas elle-même," Irigaray implies that Socrates' report constitutes a veiling of Diotima's intention. For example, Irigaray says that Diotima's statement about the possible fecundity that is the union of man and woman seems to never have been-heard, "Cet énoncé de Diotime ne semble jamais avoir été entendu" (32). And in her first signaling of the inconsistency of Diotima's method, Irigaray raises the possibility that Socrates has distorted Diotima's words. "*Socrate rapporte ses propos.* Peut-être les gauchit-il sans le vouloir ni le savoir" (34). Finally, Irigaray expresses some disbelief at Diotima's shift to a teleological and hierarchical love writing, "C'est, manière assez étonnante, l'avis de Diotime. Du moins traduit à travers les paroles de Socrate" (37). Diotima's move to collapse the intermediary function of love into a telos seems so "astonishing" that Irigaray passive aggressively reminds us that these are the words "at least" as Socrates translates them. Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 32-37.
[145] Ibid., 159.
[146] Chanter uses SL as a citation for "Sorcerer's Love," the English title for the translated essay on Diotima's speech in *Éthique.* ES is the abbreviation for "Ethics of Sexual Difference," the translated title of the first essay in *Éthique.* Tina Chanter, *Ethics of Eros,* 161.

we find that Diotima's speech raised the possibility of a non-reductive way of thinking about love, but her dialectic was ultimately defeated. Her voice becomes one piece of a larger system or structure. Instead of a perpetual becoming, love becomes part of a dialectical argument. Perhaps we could reason that without a presence at the banquet, Diotima's daemon could not survive the metaphysics of Socrates' dialectic.

Irigaray's reading of *The Symposium* reveals that Diotima's voice is quieted and the possible resistant structure of her thought squelched. Her dialectic cannot survive in accordance with the terms of philosophy's violent reduction of the space between terms —a reduction that places terms in contentious opposition rather than in a communion of difference. The inconsistency of Diotima's method reveals that her voice has been taken over, and this co-optation serves to bolster the male philosopher's discourse. Given Socrates' use of Diotima's mediated presence, the male philosopher ultimately usurps the feminine to edify his own philosophy.[147] The unsustainability of Diotima's dialectic reveals that the difference the feminine might represent is taken over in the elaboration of the difference man needs her to represent. Sexual difference becomes a construction of difference after the difference of the feminine is silenced. Sexual difference is not different. The feminine is not the representation of man's other. Rather, the feminine has been co-opted by the masculine to serve the male subject.

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[147] It is important to note that Irigaray does not go into lengthy discussions of the significance of the mediation of the feminine to the rest of her text or to ethics. She simply provides an example—laying it bare before us as if to obligate the reader to think through the silencing without the comforting limits of a "point." This suspension of the example speaks to the significance of the interval to thinking more ethically. By not summarizing or re-contextualizing the example within the framework of her own proclamations regarding sexual ethics made earlier in the text, Irigaray leaves a distance between her text, the texts of her interlocutors and the text created by the reader's reading. This distance prevents us from easily returning the example back to Irigaray's thoughts. I understand this distance as a reflection of Irigaray's desire for a way of thinking beyond the self-same—a way of thinking through difference rather than sameness.

DIOTIMA'S MEDIATION AND ELABORATING MASCULINE DESIRE

It is important to note that Diotima's voice is mediated within the framework of a discourse on Eros that contributes to a Platonic theory of the erotic. Her voice is used not only within the discourse of the Symposium, but in service of an entire theory of Eros that Plato is presenting to his reader. The symbolic order of the phallus dominates Plato's text as the men of the symposium speak of love in the context of a philosophical discourse that entwines wisdom with erotic love primarily between male teachers and their male students.

The erotic scene in Plato's *Symposium* exists primarily if not exclusively between and among men. As suggested earlier, even the character of the woman Diotima is mediated through a "feminine" voice that erases her presence. Therefore, Plato's use of Diotima, though ostensibly paying homage to the feminine, reflects the double erasure of the feminine *within the distinct framework of masculine desire*. Though the feminine voice is used in the elaboration of eros, woman does not sit at the table where love exists or is taught.[148] She is removed, and her physical absence mirrors her discursive absence. She is even excluded from the scene of sexed love, though she is able to announce a masculine eroticism. In this sense, the feminine evidences the erotic, but that feminine is always already the mark of a masculine concept of sexual difference and desire.

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[148] Chanter complicates "lineage of eros" by attending to the genealogy of Irigaray's thought. In an extensive footnote to her essay on Irigaray's reading of Diotima's speech, Chanter suggests parallels between Irigaray's reading of Diotima's speech and Nietzsche's "Why I Am So Wise," in *Ecce Homo.* See note 56 in Chanter, *Ethics of Eros,* 300.

Irigaray's depiction of Diotima suggests that the feminine is heard only insofar as she bolsters a masculine notion of eros. From the co-optation of Diotima's voice to achieve the desired description of love, we witness woman's double-erasure as the source of man's achievement. Irigaray has written:

> The feminine appears as the underside or reverse side of man's aspiration towards the light, as its negative. The feminine is apprehended not in relation to itself, but from the point of view of man, and through a purely erotic strategy, a strategy moreover which is dictated by masculine pleasure, even if man does not recognize to what limited degree his own erotic intentions and gestures are ethical.[149]

Though Irigaray's above words are part of a text directed at Emmanuel Levinas, they are nonetheless reflective of her argument that woman is used in the elaboration of male desires. The feminine is his projection of the desires he wants to control or manage.

Irigaray's suggestion that Diotima is used to elaborate a masculine desire can also be seen in David Halperin's *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality.* Drawing on Irigaray's concepts of the mediation of the feminine, Halperin focuses on the specific way Diotima's gender functions to elaborate the erotic in Plato's text. Halperin reads Diotima not simply within the context of her speech but within the larger context of the ways the feminine was used in Ancient Greek Philosophy. Halperin argues that the association of woman with passive role was a common reflection of gender stereotypes in classical Athens. This passivity on the part of woman was seen as the possibility of her erotic wisdom. In this way, Plato's invocation of Diotima enabled him to elaborate his philosophy on love differently. Halperin writes, "By the very fact of being a woman...Diotima signals Plato's departure from certain aspects of the sexual chaos of his

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[149] Luce Irigaray, "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas," 178.

male contemporaries and thereby enables him to highlight some of the salient features of his own philosophy."[150] Halperin hypothesizes that Diotima's feminine voice seemingly allowed Plato to differentiate his erotic theory from those of his contemporaries.

However Halperin also notes that the valorization of this passivity of the feminine is ultimately a valorization of a masculine-constructed feminine attribute. Halperin makes the point that the use of the reproductive and reciprocal sexual character of feminine love allowed Plato to fashion a theory of the erotic that was indeed more feminine than the philosophies of his contemporaries. This reciprocal notion of love was in contrast to what Halperin characterizes as the traditional model of the pederastic relationship that fed on hierarchy. A philosophy of reciprocal love rather than love that dominated was part of Plato's distinction from prevailing depictions of love between men. Yet the definition of the feminine and the projected femininity of Diotima remain impossible to locate outside of the masculine framework of desire.

Halperin claims that the historical function of sexual difference in philosophy alerts the reader to the difference between the gendered discourse attributed to woman and the question of woman's real presence. The real presence of difference is undermined. Halperin reveals a discrepancy between the projected difference of the feminine and the real difference of woman. Halperin concludes his essay with a clear sense of the complicated movement of sexual difference within the limits of inquiry. His words seem to describe the central discursive riddle that Irigaray is attempting to navigate

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[150] David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love*, New Ancient World Series (New York: Routledge, 1990), 129.

by raising the question of the feminine. Referring to the significance of Diotima's function as a trope to the question of sexual difference Halperin writes the following:

> Nothing in herself, "woman" is that pseudo-Other who both makes good what men want and exempts them from wanting anything at all; she is an alternate male identity whose constant accessibility to men lends men a fullness and totality that enables them to dispense (supposedly) with otherness altogether.[151]

The "pseudo-Other," a term Halperin borrows from Julia Kristeva, refers to the veiled sameness that imposes itself as the perceived other to male difference.[152] In the above quote, Halperin marks "Woman," in quotes to highlight the pseudo-Other that is expressed in every invocation of woman or the feminine in discourse. "Woman" such as Diotima provides a way to secure the masculine identity without the existence, properly speaking, of a truly other. This is the radical absence with which Irigaray repeatedly wrestles throughout her text on ethics. Diotima's status as woman testifies to the use of the feminine in discourse. But because the feminine is not different from the masculine, because she is simply a shadow of the masculine or a projection of what he is not, the possibility of locating the actual woman, Diotima, becomes impossible. She reveals the impossibility of speaking of woman within the confines of a masculine discourse. How does one ask about woman if there is no woman present, or if she has never been present in discourse?

Woman's absence has its own disruptive power. In the absence of real difference, the certitude of the masculine symbolic is disrupted. Halperin is able to incorporate a critique of the erasure of woman in the feminine as a disruptive moment for the certitude

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[151] Ibid., 151.
[152] Ibid., 145.

of both men and women. In accordance with Irigaray's insistence that the feminine is not truly different and is not reflective of the "other" voice that belongs woman, Halperin suggests that Plato's use of the feminine could undermine the efforts to elaborate a *different* philosophy within a masculine paradigm. Because Diotima's feminine voice does not belong to her, Plato's use of the feminine to differentiate himself from his male counterparts is undermined. Plato's use of the feminine simply reveals the other side of the same masculine philosophy. The feminine is not the possibility of reciprocal love. She is the mark of its concealment. Plato's attempt to use the feminine to differentiate his philosophy of the erotic has ended with him repeating the same erasure of the other's difference that would actually have enabled his philosophy to be different itself.

Between the masculine and feminine in the philosophical conceptualization of love there is only a self-same reduction. The feminine voice reported by the masculine narrator results in woman's lack of necessary presence, and the silencing of this voice is doubled through the co-optation of her wisdom. Socrates' dialectic absorbs the originality of her wisdom. Though he praises Diotima's wisdom on love Socrates proceeds to relate her story in such a way that her method becomes inconsistent and incommensurate with wisdom. Moreover, if we juxtapose Socrates' praise of Diotima with her silencing, we observe the masculine self-love at work within the use of Diotima's speech. The self-same movement, through which Diotima's speech is rendered part of the wisdom of Socrates, reflects the masculine love of self as a love of sameness (l'amour du même) that Irigaray suggests is represented in "l'amour d'une production par

assimilation et médiation d'elle(s)."[153] Furthermore, Diotima's voice is used in the elaboration of Plato's erotic theory as a means to differentiate himself from his others. He needs what he knows of her and projects onto her in order to establish his wisdom. In the example of Diotima we witness her role in establishing a masculine love of self, a masculine eroticism. Both Plato's and Socrates' desires to communicate their teaching occurs through this type of mediation of the feminine that Irigaray perceives specifically as a self-same, economic and masculine love. In Diotima's speech, the love given in the feminine is still the reflection of a masculine desire for a higher love that is best suited to the discussions and company of men.[154]

Under a mediated silence, the feminine has no voice other than the voice that man has given her; therefore, no real difference exists between the masculine and feminine. The feminine becomes a type of voice within the masculine. She is "indifferenciée" [undifferentiated]. Indeed, we cannot even ask "Who is She?" because the "She" is pseudo-Other. If born out of this silencing of the feminine, sexual difference cannot recognize the lack of real difference between the feminine and the masculine that determines the limits of both terms. Such a concept of sexual difference perpetuates the forgetting of that silence by ignoring the reduction of the feminine to the sameness of a masculine discourse, annihilating any trace of its ethical irresponsibility.

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[153] Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 100.

[154] Such a reading of the use of sexual difference and its implications for love between the sexes does not dismiss the question that claims Halperin's title, "Why is Diotima a Woman?" Halperin concludes his chapter on Diotima by putting the question of the feminine under question. While this questioning of the question of the feminine might seem at first an applicable critique of Irigaray's work, I read Irigaray's strategies of writing as evidence that she is fully aware of the impossibility of speaking of the feminine within discourse. Therefore, her use of the feminine, if not provisional, remains critically under question and contested at all times. It is also because of the constrained language of "feminine" and "woman" that I situate Irigaray's reading of sexual difference within the context of overcoming the self-same.

The fundamental problem of sexual difference resides in its inception within this movement of the self-same that characterizes man's relationship to woman—a relationship based entirely in self-love without a love of the other. Under a mediated silence, the feminine has no voice other than the voice that man has given her; therefore, no difference exists between the masculine and feminine voices. Mediation collapses the feminine difference into sameness. The feminine becomes a type of voice within the masculine. She is "undifferentiated." If born out of this silencing of the feminine, sexual difference cannot recognize the lack of real difference between the feminine and the masculine that determines the limits of both terms. Such a concept of sexual difference perpetuates the forgetting of that silence by ignoring the reduction of the feminine to the sameness of a masculine discourse, annihilating any trace of its ethical irresponsibility.

MEDIATION AND SECURING THE PLACE FOR MAN'S EXISTENCE

MEDIATION AND PLACELESSNESS

One of the consequences of woman's mediation involves the privation of a language of her own in which to create a space in which she can dwell as a subject. Irigaray has written that "Language is the tool, the *techne,* which the speaking subject uses in order to exist in a world, to dwell in it and to continue to construct it as human."[155] By way of Irigaray's reading, in discourse, woman is deprived a place/ language from which to decry the ways she is used in the elaboration of masculine

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[155] Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 38.

sameness. Her placelessness is at once the symptom and condition of the mediation of her voice.

As the previous examples of Diotima and her word analysis attest, Irigaray's man represents the universal subject and therefore determines the structure of subjectivity, the rules of discourse, and the ordering of space and time in the construction of his world. Since the limits of discourse and the possibilities for thinking are simultaneously bound to the way in which the subject constructs and conceives himself and his surroundings, thought moves in service of the subject from whence it is deployed. If in fact man is the universal "I" and discourse and thought are "les privilèges d'un producteur *masculin*" [the privileges of a masculine producer] then the powers accorded to the subject become the powers of men.[156] Irigaray connects the operation of masculinity in discourse to the subject position and its mastery over its own reality/illusion/delusions writing "cet univers est sa construction." Irigaray continues, "Le *il* est une transformation, une transposition du *je*."[157] The "I" [*je*] is that marker of the subject position, and Irigaray signals the masculinity of that "I" which thinks its own existence. In accordance with the self-same economy, the movement of all thought is characterized by this movement of the subject back to itself. Therefore, Irigaray is asserting that the self-same movement is decidedly masculine.

If the subject position has belonged to man, and the subject has the power to determine the place of objects in his world, woman does not determine her own place in

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[156] Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 88.

[157] Irigaray's words are based on her analysis of how her male and female patients have spoken differently about love. She suggests that man constructs a universe through his speech in which he is a subject of an object. "[T]his universe," Irigaray claims, "is a construction." She continues by suggesting that the subject is always masculine, a *he.* Therefore the *he is* "a transformation, a transposition of the *I*" (Author's translation). Ibid, 130.

the world. [158] Rather, man determines the place of woman based on his own desires.[159] Man's exclusive rights to subjectivity render woman placeless in the "proper" (read masculine) sense of place and hence without a means to constitute her own subjectivity. Her language, her thoughts, her desires are always mediated by man. In Diotima's mediated presence, Irigaray exposes the lack of place for women and the relationship of this lack to the power of the masculine to determine the parameters of place.[160]

Just as Socrates "gives the floor" to Diotima, man has created a space for woman, rather than woman creating a space for herself. Woman is therefore always a woman by man's decree—forever mediated by his desires and fears for/of her. Within the creation of a space for woman, man determines how that space will be conceived and how it fits within the order of his world. For Irigaray, man has been the subject of all discourse.[161] Since man has been the "subject of discourse" and the "gender of God" (*genre de Dieu*),

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[158] Literally "*Le sujet*" is always masculine in French. The masculine gender of sujet is indicated by the article "le." The link between Irigaray's theory and her language is undeniable. To say that the subject of discourse has been man reveals itself as much in language as it does ideas.

[159] Irigaray explicitly writes that woman has no place save the one man ascribes her. She makes this point through psychoanalysis by describing man's nostalgia for the womb and his subsequent fear of woman's power as the impetus for putting her in a "place" where she cannot threaten him. "Le maternel-féminin demeure le *lieu séparé de* << *son* >> *lieu,* privé de << *son* >> lieu." Additionally, in her reading of Aristotle's sense of place, Irigaray charges the philosopher with fashioning a concept of place that can never be offered to woman—rendering his concept of place incomplete. Ibid., 18.

[160] Irigaray consistently critiques the most seemingly self-evident philosophical concepts as mere tools for edifying a subject that is pre-determined as masculine. For instance, the absence of place is a lack Irigaray attributes to the conceptualization of space and time within the limits of a masculine economy of desire that reduces time and space in the service of subjectivity and the ordering of the world. Woman is without a place because there is no concept of place that can speak to a subjectivity based on double-desire and love for the other. Woman's desire for the other renders her placeless because place is conceived statically. In other words, the concept of place in Western thought is bound to a subject's *becoming* master over his surroundings—a sort of perceived stability. Time and space, indeed the ordering of the world, are the domain of the subject: "Le sujet, maître du temps, deviant l'axe de la gestion du monde, avec son au-delà d'instant et d'éternité." Ibid, 15.

[161] Irigaray writes, "The gender of God and the subject of discourse, are always masculine-paternal in the West." The means for ordering of the universe that, in psychoanalysis, is the realm of a masculine symbolic; therefore, it is man who determines women's spheres of influence. Irigaray suggests in this passage that masculine-paternal discourse leaves the "minor arts" for women, such as "cooking, knitting, embroidery, and sewing." Only in "exceptional" cases does she participate in "poetry, painting, and music." Ibid, 14.

Irigaray concludes that only the minor arts (*arts dits mineurs*) are left for woman. She writes, "Ces arts, quelle que soit leur importance, ne font pas la loi aujourd'hui."[162] From the notion that man has been the subject of discourse, Irigaray has moved to a description of the places allotted for woman to serve as "subject." Woman's place as subject is predetermined by the space given to the feminine in discourse.

Not only does the subject determine the place for itself and thereby order the objects in accordance with its own sense of self as master of its place, but in determining this world order the subject ascribes value to the objects in the world. Hence man has the power to determine woman's sphere and render her engagements less significant. For instance, as Irigaray suggests, the arts constituting woman's place or sphere do not make the laws, either juridically or discursively.[163] Man's rule is the law of the land. Woman is left with the remains of what man has appointed her, and the God who oversees man's appointments is also always figured masculine in language. The links between the subject, place, law and the assignation of value are inseparable. The subject masters space and time in order to construct a place for itself and the woman, without a place has no means of speaking save through man's language and his structuring of the laws of thought and the laws of existence. Man constructs a place for woman that will contribute to his order and his power.

The effects of the mediation of woman and the absence of a place of her own are not limited to women. For Irigaray, man's placing of woman limits her to the fulfillment of his world, and his placing of her represents a relationship to the difference of woman

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[162] The minor arts "which would be of importance to women, do not make the laws today" (Author's translation). Ibid.
[163] Woman is not judged by her laws but by the laws of man.

as a difference of need. Relating to woman through mediation means that man is relating to woman out of necessity and is therefore dependent on her for his existence. In a self-same movement of subjectivity, man's mediation of women as other is necessary to the unity of his self consciousness and therein his concept of his existence.

MEDIATION AND THE PROBLEM OF PLACE IN SPINOZA'S EXISTENCE OF GOD

One of Irigaray's most compelling, though not entirely unproblematic,[164] portrayals of the consequences and conditions of woman as necessity occurs in her essay on philosopher Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics*. In her essay on Spinoza, entitled "L'Enveloppe" [The Envelope] Irigaray directly challenges necessity as an ethical ground for subjectivity, and reveals how this relationship of necessity leaves woman placeless and God a delusion of masculine self-same consciousness. For Spinoza, a 17th century Enlightenment philosopher, God was an abstract reality of which all creation was a part. Irigaray examines a specific aspect of Spinoza's proof of God's existence associated with the significance of place. She calls attention to the way that interrogating the inherent masculinity of the subject would affect Spinoza's ethics of place as the foundation for

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[164] Notable feminist readers of Spinoza including Sarah Donovan and Moira Gatens have suggested that Irigaray's essay on Spinoza does not engage Spinoza's thought enough to be considered a mimetic or performative piece. They suggest Irigaray is more or less providing a direct critique. And while I think Donovan and Gatens are right to point out Irigaray's shortsightedness in this essay, I think Irigaray's project is not to provide a flawless reading of Spinoza but to suggest the implications of his definition of God for a self-same model of subjectivity. See Moria Gatens, ed. *Feminist Interpretations of Benedict Spinoza*, Re-Reading the Canon (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University, 2009).

human existence. Ultimately, Irigaray exposes that Spinoza's definition of God and the security of man's own existence are given in the exclusion of the feminine.[165]

Irigaray's essay on Spinoza begins with a section aptly subtitled, "Definitions,"[166] and opens with the following quote by Spinoza: "*By cause of itself, I understand that, whose essence involves existence; or that, whose nature cannot be conceived unless existing.*"[167] According to Irigaray, Spinoza's definition separates God and man by virtue

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[165] From Plato, Irigaray moves to a reading of Aristotle, through an essay entitled "L'amour de soi," to a reading of Descartes and only then to a reading of Spinoza. In this trajectory, we witness Irigaray's deployment of critiques methodologically similar to those she levels on Plato's *Symposium.* Irigaray transitions from Plato to Spinoza moving from a discussion of love to a discussion of place and the space and time of the "between" or the interval. It seems as though the challenge to keep the intermediary function of love brings her to a question of the intermediary itself and the need to re-imagine place in order to allow the intermediary to remain dynamic. Such is the critique of place Irigaray undertakes in her discussion of Aristotle. Then, she turns to an essay not ascribed to any particular interlocutor. Not coincidentally, this undedicated essay is entitled Love of Self (L'amour de soi) as if Irigaray is following her critique of place by making a place of her own within her text. In "L'amour de soi," Irigaray speaks of the difficulty of establishing a love of self in the feminine given the feminine has no place or language from which to claim her subjectivity. Irigaray's choice of title becomes a reminder to the reader that her work is always attempting to create a space for difference. Irigaray creates this difference in support of her call that two are necessary for love. Two differentiated subjects are required for one to love the self beyond the self-same. For love of self not to be a love of sameness, another must be present. Irigaray suggests that for love, it is necessary that there be two. As Irigaray says, "Pour aimer, il faut être deux. Savoir se séparer et se retrouver" (73). These penultimate words of "L'amour de soi" return the question of the intermediary to a matter of love and the necessity of a sexually differentiated subject that could provide the space in which love could remain in the dynamic space between the two. Irigaray ends the love of self with a suggestion that love requires the two that can come together, and Irigaray takes up the nature of this coming together in the following essay on "L'admiration" in Descartes. Irigaray explores the Cartesian sense of wonder as the philosophical possibility for maintaining an irreducible difference between the sexes. "L'admiration," or wonder, "est l'impulsion du mobile en toutes ses dimensions" (76). Irigaray continues to suggest that the Cartesian sense of wonder, if read through sexual difference, could be the possibility of a love that does not return to the same. Wonder, then, would be the required orientation between lovers to prevent them from reducing the space of attraction to a conquest or exercise in domination. Wonder would be the passion of the intermediary. From this passion of the intermediary, Irigaray draws in the language of the transcendent, which will lead to her discussion of the relationship between the place and the existence of God. Irigaray has moved from Plato to Spinoza to bind the intermediary function of love to the possibility of two subjects that can sustain that intermediary function through an irreducible admiration for the other. And while Irigaray will use Spinoza's essay to reveal how man has used God to secure his own existence, Irigaray has already hinted that the possibility of God exists in a reformulation of place through loving, sexed subjects. Irigaray's trajectory from Plato to Spinoza is a single thread amidst the many interweaving threads that form the fabric of Irigaray's text. This thread will continue throughout Irigaray's text, becoming much less linear and increasingly complex and knotted than I have narrated thus far. Ibid., 73-76.

[166] It is fitting that the envelope begins with "definitions," because the notion of definitions implies a certain determinacy. This signals the irony of ethics with respect to the reduction of thought. I understand Irigaray's use of these titles to point to the irony of ethics within the self-same. It is also important to note that the notion of creating a place of one's own dwelling as the means to return to oneself, or be at home with oneself, is an allusion to Hegel's understanding of the unification of the subject in his consciousness. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans., E. S. Haldane, vol. Vol. 1 (New York: The Humanities Press, 1955), 152.

[167] Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 83.

of their relationship to essence and existence. In God, essence and existence are one. How one is and that one is are coinciding. Irigaray reads Spinoza as suggesting that existence is ultimately contingent on having a place in oneself. Using a metaphor of an envelope to designate the positing of a place for oneself, Irigaray paraphrases Spinoza writing, "*ce qui se donne son enveloppe* par réversion dehors de son essence, existe *nécessairement.*"[168] By Irigaray's reading of Spinoza, if one can provide their own place or envelope, they ensure their existence. This power of self-sufficiency is reserved for God.

According to Spinoza, only God provides His own place. Only God is "*en soi, par soi*" [in self, for self], requiring no concepts from which his existence is generated.[169] As "cause of itself," God provides *His* own envelope—essence and existence are part of his self-cause. Something exists necessarily if its essence and existence are one. Irigaray continues to summarize, distort, and reword Spinoza saying that "We" [nous] on the other hand "n'existons pas *nécessairement* parce que nous ne nous donnons pas à nous-mêmes notre enveloppe."[170] Put differently, Irigaray is reading Spinoza as claiming that humans do not exist *necessarily* because we are not in ourselves. This move by Spinoza is one

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[168] "*That which gives itself its own envelope* by turning its essence outward, must *necessarily* exist" (Author's translation). Ibid, 85.

[169] This question of God being "in self by self" places God at the beginning of a chain of causes. Irigaray discusses this issue of causation and knowledge of effects. She quotes Spinoza as saying, "*the knowledge* [cognition] *of an effect depends upon and involves knowledge of the cause*" (85). Irigaray warns that such confidence in the knowledge of effects could act to veil the knowledge of the cause. Our reliance on knowledge ends up enveloping and closing off the limits of knowledge. "As it reveals its existence to us, we envelop-veil it with the knowledge of its effects, on the basis of which we seek knowledge of its cause (s)" (91). This understanding of causality and effects mimics the limitations of the self-same economy. The knowledge of effects becomes the space for placing and limiting the knowledge of causes and securing the verity of that initial knowledge of effects. Ibid., 85-91.

[170] "We do not exist necessarily because we do not give ourselves our own envelopes" (Author's translation). Ibid, 85.

that would, if the subject were neutral, mean that humans cannot exist independently and therefore need an other to create the dwelling that is their conscious existence.[171]

For Irigaray, this idea that a relationship of dependence is the possibility for human existence is problematic. By Irigaray's understanding, in the absence of the absolute difference of woman, the relationship of dependence on the other becomes a relationship within sameness. While Spinoza may have wanted only God to be self-cause, Irigaray points out that without thinking through sexual difference man actually becomes his own self-cause, his own God, because he covers over and/or manipulates the difference of the feminine in order to construct a place for himself. Therefore, in the absence of sexual difference, Spinoza's definition of God puts woman, as the condition of man's discursive existence, in the place of the one on whom man is dependent. And that dependence means woman presents a constant threat to man's existence such that she must be controlled. Man must mediate woman's existence in order to deny woman her creative power, because if she were his creator God, he would not be self-cause or one in himself. Man must become like God to ensure that she is not his God. The following section works more carefully through this transition from dependence on God, to anxiety towards one's other, to the need to mediate the other to be master/God of one's universe and pacify the anxiety of existence.

FROM DEPENDENCE ON GOD TO THE ANXIETY OF NECESSITY IN SPINOZA

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[171] Ibid., 85.

In "L' Enveloppe," Irigaray quotes Spinoza at length and comments on his words, even following some of the quotes with bulleted axioms as though fusing her presuppositions with his intentions. Thus when Irigaray considers the structure of Spinoza's definition of God, she reads his definition intentionally in relation to the movement of sameness. For example, when Spinoza writes, "'*Everything which is, is either in itself or in another*" Irigaray extends his language of "in itself or in another" to the idea that man creates a space for himself in order to guarantee his existence at the expense of the feminine.[172] The reader senses that Irigaray elides Spinoza's definition of God with her own notion that man attempts to secure the necessity of his own existence through a sort of emptying of woman's body.[173] She ultimately takes his definitions and suggests the implications of these definitions within a context of her own assumptions about the mediation of woman's difference. Irigaray's point of writing in this indirect way is to consider the implications of philosophical presuppositions that are made without considering sexual difference. By inserting the question of woman back into the equation, she demonstrates and supports her call to think through sexual difference.

For example, in Spinoza, only God exists in and of Himself; therefore, human existence depends on an other for its limits. While the notion of dependence on an other could engender solidarity, it also has the potential to create anxiety and resentment. Irigaray reads the implications of dependence in terms of how dependence or necessity

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[172] Ibid., 88.

[173] Irigaray adds an exclamation that we might hear as an aside in her performance of this text as a lecture. Regarding man getting his envelope from woman, Irigaray writes, "l'homme *reçoit* cette enveloppe. Par nature, il est vrai! [man receives that envelope. By nature, it is true!"]. What are we to make of this playfulness? Perhaps her exclamatory reference to nature implies an association of receiving the envelope to the act of sex where woman's body opens to man's phallus like an envelope. This reading gains support with Irigaray's frequent metaphors linking the body and its membranes with the limits of thought about sexual difference. Ibid, 86.

plays out in the self-same movement of subjectivity. She notes that woman is an envelope for man "in fetal existence" [*existence foetale nécessaire*] and as "lover" [*amant*] in procreation.[174] Using these bodily examples of envelopment, Irigaray concludes that man, "by nature," [par nature] receives his envelope from woman.[175] According to Irigaray, the self-same model of subjectivity responds to the necessity of the other with fear. In its fear, the self-same subject rejects the mutuality of interdependence in favor of an illusion of autonomy and independence.

FROM GOD TO GOD-MAN

For Irigaray, necessity creates an anxiety about one's existence that pushes man to see himself as self-sufficient or as his own cause. This desire for oneness in the self-same is like a desire to know oneself as one's own cause--a desire to be God. This sort of god-complex exacerbates the reduction of women's difference because the masculine self relates to the feminine other through domination. If woman's existence as a physical envelope, as womb and as vagina (and also as metaphorical envelope—i.e., the undifferentiated feminine as the space for securing a masculine identity), guarantees the necessity of man's existence, then man *must* construct the envelope that she will be for him. He *must* have power over the envelope that he will require.

If man's need of woman as his envelope creates the condition of anxiety, man absolves that anxiety by contouring the envelope to his liking, to the self he sees himself

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[174] Ibid., 85.

[175] For Irigaray, one result of Spinoza's definition of God and the necessity of place is that it creates a hierarchy of necessity between men and women's existence. "Man would thus exist more necessarily than woman because he gets his envelope from her." Irigaray writes, "L'homme existerait plus nécessairement que la femme du fait qu'il reçoit son enveloppe d'elle." If necessarily existing requires having a place that is of one's making, woman in an economy of sameness does not exist as necessarily as man. Ibid, 85.

as.[176] Man's need of the maternal-feminine instills a power in the idea of woman. Irigaray writes that man is "secretly or obscurely, a slave to the power of the maternal-feminine which he diminishes or destroys."[177] Woman's necessity becomes an obstacle to the autonomy of the masculine subject. Woman is doubly threatening. She is threatening in the ways her difference could disrupt his desire for sameness, and she is also threatening because her body is the actual place from which man emerges. She is necessary as something to move through, and she is necessary as a place to forget. The generative power of woman's fecundity proves too dangerous to man's subjectivity to remain free. He controls the feminine and the fecundity of her difference in order to assure himself that he does not need her to exist. He creates a space for her so that she needs him to access the immortality of a transcendent realm of his creation. He must be her intercessor.

In a condition of necessity "She [woman] does not have to exist as woman." For man, woman only needs to exist as the woman he needs her to be.[178] Therefore, woman does not necessarily have to exist; she only has to exist as an envelope, though not as an envelope for herself. Irigaray writes, "*Donc* le maternel-féminin existe nécessairement comme cause de la cause de soi l'homme. Mais pas pour elle-même. Elle existe forcément mais comme condition *a priori* (dirait Kant) de l'espace-temps du sujet

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[176] In subsequent chapters we will discuss the resemblance between man's enclosing of woman's power to his need for God. In addition, we will explore the possibility of the feminine as occupying the space of God whose power must be checked by the positing of a masculine God.
[177] Ibid., 10.
[178] Ibid., 85.

masculin."[179] Irigaray's reference to the maternal-feminine plays with an association between the feminine and motherhood and with the womb as an a-priori cause of man's existence. Irigaray's words are quite clear here in suggesting that the feminine as a *maternel-féminin* is constructed by man as the un-observable and unverifiable "a priori condition"[180] of masculine subjectivity or self-consciousness, and prior, therefore, to any philosophical ontology of sexual difference.

The selfsame rears its head again. Just as Diotima's words were reported by Socrates in service of the becoming of his work on love, so too does Spinoza's finite man rely on the feminine for his becoming. And in this instance, the masculine subject makes of woman a place for himself. If Socrates had shut Diotima up to dwell silently through his words, Spinoza's man has enclosed woman within herself but without use of herself as envelope. She is unable to envelop herself in "l'enveloppe qu'elle peut « donner »" [in the envelope that she is able to give].[181] Because the subject must reduce its surroundings to vehicles for its own becoming, place directly reflects the self-same movement Irigaray deems masculine. "Pour leur permettre de se penser ou s'imaginer cause de soi, ils ont besoin de penser que l'enveloppe leur « appartient »."[182] The rule

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[179] Irigaray notes that the maternal-feminine is prior to the possibility of a masculine self. Irigaray's words translate, "*Therefore* the maternal-feminine exists necessarily as the cause of the self-cause of man's self. But not for herself. She must exist, but as an a priori condition (as Kant might say) of the space-time of the masculine subject" (Author's translation). Ibid, 87.

[180] By suggesting the maternal-feminine is a priori, and referring to Kant, Irigaray is drawing on Kant's notion that one cannot reason backwards to first causes to know them in pure reason. As a Kantian a priori cause, the maternal-feminine would be impossible to know. While this entails a forgetting, it is also the possibility of keeping the feminine in a space beyond knowledge, which will be the possibility of understanding the feminine beyond cognitive, reductive knowing (perhaps like a theology of the feminine).

[181] Ibid, 86.

[182] "For men to be permitted to think or imagine themselves as the cause of themselves, they need to think that the envelope "belongs" to them" Ibid.

over the place of woman not only secures man's existence but also takes him one step closer to existing "sans la caution de Dieu" [without the security of God].[183]

Adding support for an ethic based in desire rather than need, Irigaray suggests woman's necessity to man's becoming keeps woman in the position of mediation. If one raises the question of sexual difference with respect to existence, one would find that woman is, "Cause jamais dévoilée sous peine qui son identité se déchire, s'abîme."[184] In other words, man needs woman in order to exist, but he does not need her to exist as woman. He needs her to exist as the lace for his self-same identity. He even forgets that she does not exist, leaving her completely erased from his relationship to conception and causation. As long as woman is approached through necessity, she will continue to be known or mediated in relation to that man for whom she provides an envelope. Therefore, Spinoza's philosophy becomes yet another reflection of the need to think through sexual difference before ethics can be posited.

From her reading of Spinoza, it seems Irigaray sees place, currently constituted, to be based on an ability to take for ones self, and woman has no way of claiming or taking anything that is not always already ascribed to her by a masculine world. If the subject is always masculine, as Irigaray accuses, then the master of place and the ruler of all domains is always man, and the process through which one makes use of space and time in service of place is always a masculine process. The subject is master of his universe and author of his place and the place of others; therefore, discourse and its effects belong to a masculine economy where the subject returns all things to itself.

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[183] Ibid.
[184] "A cause that is never unveiled, under distress that its identity might split and perish" (Author's translation). Ibid.

In order to recover the feminine and dissimilate her from a world of mediation, the question becomes whether one needs a place from which to distance oneself and avoid the continued assimilation. And if so, how is woman to speak such a place into being within a discourse that is not her own? Irigaray asks this question only to answer by raising the near impossibility of the placelessness that is woman's place in man's world. "Le deuil de rien est le plus difficile. Le deuil de moi dans l'autre est quasiment impossible."[185] How does woman even begin her endeavor to distance herself from man in order to differentiate herself? In "L'Amour Du Même, L'Amour De L'Autre" [Love of Same, Love of Other], Irigaray claims the impossibility of a female subject under the parameters of subjectivity that exist for man, the master of discourse. Woman must use man's language; therefore, the process of dissimilation from man will require a new language and a new concept of subjectivity that is radically different from the way it has been constructed in the West. Indeed this question of place as an aporia is the condition of Irigaray's task as a writer.

SEXUAL DIFFERENCE AS A QUESTION OF THE FEMININE

The question of sexual difference for Irigaray, then, clearly is a question of the status of the feminine. In her first essay of *Éthique* entitled, "La Différence Sexuelle," Irigaray explicitly links sexual difference to the limits of discourses controlled by man. Stating that all discourses, including philosophy, religion, and science are ordered according to

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[185] Irigaray writes that without a place of her own, woman is deprived of a system of representation for ordering the world. In the absence of a means of representation that is recognized in the world, woman would be mourning her lack; moreover, she must access and recover her lack through the masculine symbolic that nearly inscribes her. Therefore, Irigaray writes, "Mourning nothing is the most difficult. Mourning the self in the other is almost impossible." Ibid., 17.

man who has had the power to determine their rules and limits, Irigaray suggests that everything is defined in terms of a masculine ideal.[186] Language in most of its uses, and certainly in its contribution to discursive limits, moves with the circularity of the self-same. Indeed man is the subject, and he posits his subjectivity by erasing the difference of the other.

The same allergy to difference critiqued by Levinas is at work in man's use of the feminine (and in it the erasure of woman) to establish his self-assuredness as the subject. Thus, Irigaray writes that without a language for women, women are barred from "la construction du lieu entre l'*en soi* et le *pour soi*" [the construction of a place between the *in-itself* and *for-itself*]; therefore, woman has no immediate access for becoming a subject in man's world.[187] If what is needed to overcome this dichotomy is a place from which to think or imagine differently, woman must find a new path to subjectivity.[188] She must find a new way to ground herself that does not follow the logic of the masculine self-same. For Irigaray, one must recover the question of sexual difference as a question of the occlusion of the feminine to challenge the triumph of the self-same in thought about the human subject and its relation to the other.

In conclusion, sexual difference has been either ignored or inadequately conceived in philosophy precisely because there was only one subject position from which the question of sexual difference was posited. Even the idea of sexual difference itself is most often conceptualized at the expense of the feminine. Irigaray's examples of

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[186] Man has been the subject of all discourse. Ibid.
[187] Ibid., 105.
[188] In reference to the in-itself and the for-itself, woman without the ability to speak her existence is never a thing "in-itself" nor can she speak for herself because she is not a subject and therefore never a for-itself.

philosophy's mediation of the feminine and its constant reliance on the self-same to exact its wisdom conceal their own abuses by positing their neutrality. Woman's voice has been mediated through a feminine language that is not her own. The feminine is not her voice; therefore, man's use of the feminine to elaborate its wisdom and to guarantee his existence enacts a double-erasure of woman's existence. She is silenced with no language through which to speak this injustice. The masculinity of subjectivity, of its possibility through the construction of place, the use of language and the limits of discourse and thought, has rendered the feminine silent and undifferentiated. Sexual difference is far from different. Irigaray reveals that sexual difference is the same. It is a male subject's projection of his own difference that he then marks as masculine (self) and feminine (other).

The neutrality claimed by the masculine form is evidence that the masculinity of subjectivity has forgotten the silencing of the feminine. The double forgetting—the blindness to the annihilation of the feminine difference in order to create a concept of sexual difference that substantiates a masculine subject—has been illustrated by philosophy's attempts to use the feminine as though it had any idea of what she was and what she would have to say. The secondarization of the feminine denotes the double forgetting, the erasure of a silence and of a voice that has never spoken.

This double-silencing or erasure of woman from sexual difference means that sexual difference is not different. From the double-silencing of the feminine voice within philosophical discourse (Diotima) to the construction of a concept of place that reduces the feminine to an envelope for man's existence, philosophy has rendered sexual

difference a veil for undifferentiated masculine identity. As one more derivation of the masculine self-same an undifferentiated feminine cannot provide woman with a space for becoming. As a question of the allergy to the other this question of the feminine as a trace of the erasure of woman's voice and place is an ethical issue. An assessment of the self-same as unethical based on its annihilation of difference paired with the revelation of the annihilation of a feminine prior to any concept of a self or subjectivity, discloses the significance of sexual difference as the most fundamental ethical issue.

Thus sexual difference must be thought through, because to think of subjectivity prior to sexual differentiation is to concede to a false notion that sexual difference actually exists. This is to concede to the manufactured illusion of sexual difference rather than to dissimilate and reclaim the difference of sexual difference that the self-same erases. As Irigaray's depiction of sexual difference reveals, sexual difference renders the feminine a marker for an always already erased other (woman). Thinking subjectivity prior to thinking through sexual difference amounts to a secondarization not simply of sexual difference but of the feminine as the mark of that difference and therein the complete erasure of woman's absence from the scene of subjectivity.

Because the feminine is secondarized and not merely silenced, because she has no language for her voice, and because this violence enacted upon her has been veiled by love for a God that does not relate to her, humanity remains deprived of an experience of absolute difference that could ground ethical relations. Unless one finds a way to think through the space of difference without returning difference to sameness, unless the

difference of the feminine becomes available as a site of knowledge, there can be no ethics of 'difference' that is not always already an ethics of sameness.[189]

[189] One of the dangers of a transcendent God resides in its ability to remove sexual difference from the question of ethics.

CHAPTER 3
MIMESIS AND CATACHRESIS: MAKING SPACE FOR ONESELF WITHOUT TAKING FROM THE OTHER

> Entre l'un et l'autre, il devrait y avoir enveloppement mutuel dans le mouvement. Car l'un et l'autre se déplacent dans un tout. Et souvent l'un et l'autre détruisent le lieu de l'autre, croyant ainsi avoir le tout ; mais ils ne possèdent ou ne construisent qu'un tout illusoire et détruisent l'ensemble et l'intervalle (d'attraction) entre les deux. Le monde est anéanti dans son symbole essentiel : la copule de l'acte sexuel. Il est ouvert en abîme et non entrouvert pour la génération, la poursuite de la création. [190]
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> Between the one and the other, there should be mutual enveloping in movement. For the one and the other move in a whole. And often the one and the other destroy the place of the other, believing, thus, to have the whole; but what they possess or construct is entirely illusory, and they destroy the meeting/body and the interval (of attraction) between the two. The world is annihilated in its essential symbol: the copula of the sex act. It is opened into an abyss, and not open [a space] for generation, the pursuit of creation (Author's Translation).

In the above excerpt from her essay on place in Aristotle, Luce Irigaray presents the dangers of creating a vision or ideal totality or whole that deprives the other of their own place from which to exist within that whole. There must be a place for the self and the other in order for them to move freely and together, to "tournaient ensemble, accouplés" [rol[l] around together, [as if] to mate][191] Irigaray's words reverberate with her charge that relying on the feminine to represent the difference of woman is problematic because the feminine is also the means through which man elaborates his own subjectivity. Throughout her philosophical and psychoanalytic writings, Irigaray argues that the feminine, far from being one side of sexual difference is actually the mark of sameness of a single sex. By this account the feminine gives the illusion that sexual

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[190] Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 58.
[191] Ibid.

difference exists in discourse. In contrast to an ideal of mutual envelopment in which "the one and the other move around within a whole," Irigaray's reading of sexual difference implies that subjectivity is built through a sacrifice of a place for difference of the feminine. A concept of the feminine is always already dictated or predetermined by the masculine subject's frame of reference--himself. The place for feminine difference is almost irretrievably paved over with a layer of masculine concrete, leaving her difference and its erasure imperceptible.

A place for the other that is *of* the other that allows the self and the other to move about openly and freely is the possibility for an ethical relationship. But the ethical model of openness to the difference of the other, an openness that does not attempt to conquer the other or assimilate the other, cannot occur until one examines this violence against woman as the occluded other. For Irigaray, the reality that the discourse of sexual difference is actually a representation of sameness is the proof that identity and assimilation, not openness and wonder, have been the basis for understanding the world and our human others.[192] The feminine other, assimilated, is deprived of a place from which to contribute to the construction of a world mutually with the self. In this model of a masculine subject in relation to its feminine other, there is no preservation of true difference that might otherwise ground a Levinasian ethical model of the subject.[193]

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[192] In other words, Irigaray has argued that language has already decided who the subject is, and everything apart from that subject is still a function of the subject's creation. And for Irigaray, this subject that rules the world of discourse is always a masculine subject. Any other to this subject is already inscribed in the masculine subject's discursive universe--from the assignment of domestic spheres to the language of the God, the subject was always masculine. Ibid., 14.

[193] Irigaray is asserting that prior to any concept of subjectivity we have the discourse that enables that concept, and prior to discourse, we have only the encounter with the other as Levinas suggested. However, Irigaray claims that the ethical response to that encounter has already been determined and given in language as a violence against the other, and that other to the masculine subject is woman. For a more in-depth analysis of Irigaray's reception and interpretation of Levinas see "Levinas and the Question of the Other" in Tina Chanter, *Ethics of Eros,* 170-186.

If as Irigaray suggests, man destroys the place of woman, claims to be the whole, [se pretend le tout], and "construit son monde en cercle clos" [constructs his world into a closed circle].[194] Woman is rendered a mediated or secondary subject, denied the possibility of imagining the world: "Ne participant pas a la construction de l'amour, ni de la beauté, ni du monde."[195] And if therefore woman has no place within a "neutral" discourse that can attest to her secondarization, how does she manage to find a voice? Inscribed in a discourse where the masculine subject secures his selfhood by dictating the limits of his other (woman), women are bound to speak like men (or in the feminine in which men have them to speak). Their status as other means that they must speak this way in order to be heard. Because women's voices are made available within the confines of a discourse that obscures those voices, the process of reclamation involves more than just listening to what is given. But women do not have to concede defeat in acceptance of this ventriloquist system. Irigaray contends women's voices must be heard with attention to the ventriloquism that is the condition of being woman.

Irigaray's depiction of the placelessness of woman and her mediated voice could imply the totalization of women's voices; however, Irigaray's writing resists the closure of the whole around a single one. Writing to give voice to the absent woman requires gesturing to a space beyond the totalizing economy of the selfsame, and this writing beyond masculine sameness is what I argue Irigaray has created by writing mimetically in the feminine. Irigaray parodies or mimics the language of the feminine in a way that exposes the masculine-imposed limits of the feminine. I therefore contend that Irigaray

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[194] Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 59.
[195] Woman, as Irigaray says, has no part in the construction of love, or of beauty, or the world (Author's Translation). Ibid.

reimagines a feminine subjectivity by thinking through and disrupting an always already produced and reproduced masculine concept of the feminine.

Specifically, mimesis is the means by which Irigaray inhabits the feminine place masculine discourse has allotted her in order to exploit the limits of his place and show that his place for her is part of his "illusory whole." Far from suggesting that reclaiming sexual difference is a straightforward and unproblematic process of speaking in the feminine, Irigaray uses mimesis as a means to address the complexities of the erasure of woman's difference that occurs within sexual difference. According to Irigaray's assessment of discourse as masculine, mimesis is the necessary condition of writing as woman; however, mimesis is simultaneously the possibility for exposing as illusion the wholeness/totality of the one. Mimesis capitalizes on the fault lines of the whole, reopening the whole to the outside it attempts to seal off. The limits to closure (that mimesis harnesses) are experienced as catachresis--inconsistencies or paradoxical moments in language. Following the process by which mimesis inhabits and then disrupts discourse, this chapter suggests that through a strategy of mimesis Irigaray engenders catachrestic moments that exploit the limits of discursive containment of

women's voices. These catachrestic moments dissimilate the feminine from illusions of the feminine that are used to elaborate a totalizing masculine worldview.[196]

MIMESIS AS A NECESSARY CONDITION OF WOMAN

ANTIGONE

As the last chapter's discussion of the mediation of Diotima's voice reveals, Irigaray hints at the inevitably mimetic state of the feminine in her reading of Diotima, but she creates an even more explicit connection between mimesis and the ethics of sexual difference in her discussion of another woman of Antiquity—Antigone. As if to indicate the severe consequences of women's deprivation of speech, Irigaray follows her critique of the systems of language and logic with her feminist description of the tragic Antigone. Antigone's existence is owed to the incestuous act of Oedipus and Jacosta, and Antigone's life will be tragically scarred by this sin that was not her own. Later in life, under King Creon's rule, Antigone is sentenced to death for burying her brother who was a traitor in Creon's eye. Her act of civil disobedience is also an act honoring her brother. The opposition established by the language of law places Antigone in a zero-sum position. Antigone is sentenced to be "buried" alive in a cave. Here, we could argue,

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[196] Irigaray's mimesis is more generally part of an ethical performance to highlight differences silenced in discourse and to see these differences as markers of resistance to a system of representation bound to sameness. I contend that in Irigaray, the language of masculine and feminine is not based in an originary male or female difference. Both male subject formation and the formation of the female subject through masculine discourse are bound to a movement that uses the other in the self's becoming. The self-same male subject is therefore not authentic, but rather an impersonation of what "maleness" is. Thus, in Irigaray's positing of categories of male and female prior to discourse, their sexes remain undefined and limitless. Because Irigaray's vision of sexual difference emerges from the imitation of something that is not original, both male and female difference will remain undetermined possibilities. As Judith Butler writes with regards to gender, "gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original," so what seems natural or normal is all a matter of imitation. This includes male subjectivity, because it is constructed on an imitation of the feminine and the masculine. Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss(New York: Routledge, 1991), 21.

Antigone has a dwelling, but it is one that is not her own, one which will be her death. Drawing on Hegel, Irigaray writes:

> Antigone est mise hors de la ville, « extradée » de la cité, privée de la maison et des rituels domestiques les plus élémentaires (le service des morts, des dieux, et la préparation de la nourriture), interdite de parole, de mariage, de maternité. Emprisonnée dans une grotte à la périphérie du monde des citoyens, elle ne peut ni sortir ni entrer chez elle. Tout acte lue est impossible. Il ne lui reste qu'à accomplir ce que le roi, l'Etat, n'osent faire ouvertement mais à quoi ils contribuent jusqu'à l'enterrement : se donner la mort.[197]

Antigone is in a state of hopeless abandonment "without refuge."[198] Alluding to the impossible, confusing, and/or paradoxical space of women's becoming, Antigone represents the woman who suffers a fate that challenges the relationship between ethics and law. Antigone cannot be woman as she is defined, nor can she be other to that woman. She is trapped, or imprisoned, and her only act of resistance is to kill herself (give her self death?) though she is already dead by the law of the king. As Antigone's paradox reveals, ethics has been denied the feminine. Antigone, used in the elaboration of an ethical scene, is the sacrificial feminine. And yet, her status as woman is as complicated as that of Diotima. Antigone is used in the elaboration of an ethics just as Diotima was used to explicate a theory of Eros. The use in the feminine to extrapolate an ethical theory hides the body of Antigone in a cave.[199]

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[197] Antigone, Irigaray claims, has been "extradited" from the city. She has been deprived of a home and domestic rituals. She has been deprived of the most fundamental rituals including "the ability to hold services for the dead, for the gods, and for the preparation of food." Antigone is "forbidden to speak, to marry, to be a mother." Irigaray explains that Antigone, "imprisoned in a cave on the outskirts of the world of citizens, can neither enter nor leave her home." Trapped in a world that strips her of freedom, Antigone is in a state of virtual paralysis. "Every act is impossible for her." All that remains for Antigone is "to accomplish the law that the king, and the state, not dare do openly but that they contribute to together until the burial." All she can do is "give herself death." Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 105.
[198] Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 78.
[199] Antigone's cave is also an allusion to the famous metaphor of the cave in Plato to which Irigaray refers in "Plato's Hystera." See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans., Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

In *Éthique,* Irigaray's mimesis demonstrates that the place ascribed woman is one that closes her identity within a particular dwelling. That dwelling, like Creon's cave, is a place constructed for her by man that she might reflect to him the identity he desires. The feminine becomes the mirror for man's ego, and she is trapped behind this reflective glass. She sees him, and he sees himself, but she has no mirror that is not already man. Irigaray alludes to an unintentional identity that leaves Antigone without the means to create an existence of her own. The impossible space of existence shrouding Antigone's life is analogous to the confusion created by woman trying to speak in the absence of a feminine discourse. Antigone serves as an ominous warning to women regarding the consequences of not finding a new language wherein they may construct a new world. They will be forever trapped in a tragic double jeopardy. Such is the problem of discourse for women and the necessity of dissimilation.[200] Sexual difference must be different in order for ethics to arise, in order for the other to enter into and transform discourse and thought. It is not only the difference of woman that is at stake but the absence that woman marks.

MIMESIS: BEYOND MIMICRY

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[200] If Irigaray's reflections on Diotima summon her affinity for and desire to go beyond the works of Heidegger, Antigone serves a similar purpose with respect to Hegel. Tina Chanter reads Irigaray's Antigone as Irigaray's reading of Hegel's Antigone. Chanter explains Hegel's Antigone to reveal why Irigaray perceives Antigone's position as one of lack or of occlusion from the ethical decision. Introducing the thought behind Irigaray's reading of Antigone, Chanter writes the following: "Hegelian philosophy serves as Irigaray's paradigm of the system that carves woman out of the public sphere, and imprisons her in a private one. Antigone is granted leave to die a slow death, in an enclosure where she is allowed only to commune with nature. If Creon literally sends Antigone to such a fate, Hegel accomplishes the same task figuratively when he refuses to recognize in Antigone's ethical consciousness anything but a natural harmony with divine spirits. Hegel's refusal is supported by a systematic bifurcation of male and female that adumbrates male as rational, universal, political, and actual, while allocating to the female, the irrational, the particular, the familial, and the potential." Chanter, *Ethics of Eros,* 15.

Irigaray's example of Antigone pushes Antigone's femininity to its limit in a way that exposes the occlusion of woman from a foundational narrative of ethics. As exemplified in Irigaray's reading of Antigone, the placelessness of woman depletes philosophies of their potential and undermines their veracity. Antigone draws attention to the placelessness of woman and yet her exposition is also the space from which one begins to rethink the wholeness of an ethics that doesn't first consider woman's erasure from discourse. It is from within the ethical system that occludes Antigone that Irigaray hears Antigone cry out. For Irigaray, Antigone is representative of the placelessness of woman and how through mimesis she must manage to speak from within that placelessness.

In an interview published in 1977's "This Sex Which is Not One, under the title "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine," Irigaray claims that mimesis, or mimicry, is the condition "historically assigned to the feminine."[201] And in *Éthique,* referring to her study of men's and women's utterances to demonstrate the different relationships men and women have to language, Irigaray writes the following: "Et quand il lui faut être « claire », sur le mode traditionnel de la clarté de la vérité, elle essaie de faire « aussi bien que », « comme », ce qui est déjà produit du monde."[202] The feminine is not the language of women. The feminine is the language through which women mimic masculine discourse. Mimesis is a literary device based on mimicry, on taking on the position or voice of another as a means to convey some indirect meaning. It is, in a sense, a form of parody and imitation.

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[201] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans., Catherine Porter, 6th ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 76.

[202] Irigaray says, "And when she must be "clear", in the traditional mode of clarity and of truth, she And when she is obliged to be "clear," in the traditional mode of the clarity of truth, she must try to do "as well as," "like," that which has already been produced of the world" (Author's translation). Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle,* 131.

But, as Irigaray suggests above, mimesis is specifically important to the question of woman. Her example of Antigone as well as the above quote suggest that for Irigaray, woman does not speak from her own voice; mimesis as the condition of her existence is the tool from which she must dismantle the enclosure/house of discourse. Mimesis, at once a literary device and a philosophical journey into the complexities of repetition and representation, also allows the absent other to challenge discursive limits from within those limits. Irigaray claims that mimesis involves assuming the role of the feminine "to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it."[203] Mimesis is therefore a powerful tool because in its exposure of the self-same it actually creates a space for difference to reveal itself and resist the self-same.

In a passage alluding to the power of mimesis and arguing against those who misinterpret Irigaray's feminine writing as a recovery of a voice of some particular idealized woman, Chanter, quoting Irigaray's *Je, Tous, Nous*, discusses the radical nature of Irigaray's project:

> Such a task is not merely a matter of disentangling and retrieving from the tradition the positive ways in which women have identified themselves as women, and discarding the negative images. A more radical approach is required: it is a question of creating new models and images for women that do not succumb to the constraints of patriarchal discourse in which women can only represent themselves through "the loss of [their] sexed subjective identity" and the adoption of "what they believe to be a neutral position."[204]

Chanter's words herald the sophistication of Irigaray's project. Irigaray's goal is not simply to allow women to become different from men or similar to men because neither agenda changes the overarching structure of sameness. Allowing women to become

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[203] Irigaray, *Speculum*, 76.
[204] Tina Chanter, *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*, Re-Reading the Canon (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 172.

different or similar to men is simply a reversal of the same order. To characterize Irigaray in such a way would be to reduce her work to a characterization of the debate between cultural-essentialist feminists espousing the uniqueness of women and liberal feminists espousing equal rights on the basis that women and men are the same.

Irigaray's mimetic work is more than a celebration of women's differences or demonstrating her capacity to a masculine ideal of power and knowledge. More than "disentangling and retrieving from the tradition the positive ways in which women have identified themselves as women,"[205] Irigaray looks to the ways women have been determined and their differences silenced in service of a non-neutral masculine subjectivity. Revealing the sameness that pervades the "feminine" is, for Irigaray, also the opportunity for women's voices to emerge from their discursive banishment. In order to be heard, woman must use the feminine language in which her difference is inscribed.[206]

Further testifying to the complexity of Irigaray's mimetic project, Elizabeth Grosz writes of Irigaray, "Like the Derridean 'double science' of deconstruction, her work is duplicit, double-dealing: she must use the prevailing discourses against their explicit pronouncements and claims."[207] In keeping with Grosz's and Chanter's sentiments, I find that Irigaray's reconstitution of woman tends to involve a glimpse of promise followed by

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[205] Ibid.
[206] Though Irigaray claims mimesis represents a necessary condition of women's writing, the acceptance of that condition carries its own power. Mimesis, then, is a necessary condition because "woman" marks an exclusion from the dominant discourse--not because "woman" designates an essential body. Woman has been marked by the feminine, and the feminine is a masculine projection of the difference of his other; therefore, "woman" must use the feminine to voice the erasure of her difference from discourse.
[207] Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Winchester, Mass: Unwin Hyman Inc, 1989), 113.

a frustrating jolt that reminds the reader that though woman is mentioned or images of woman recovered, these images remain bound to a masculine worldview.

The work of recovering women's voices is only part of the move towards ethics. Recovery must be situated in such a way that it exposes the workings of the masculine subject in its move towards totality. And perhaps most importantly, the recovery of the feminine as a mark of woman's erasure needs to foment and expose cracks of resistance to show that masculine discourse may be moving towards inscribing the world in its fortress, but the walls have not completely sealed off the other world that its inhabitants have forgotten. Mimesis as parody is never merely a reversal of roles; rather, it is a way of using what is given to gesture to what is erased.

MIMESIS AS A STRATEGY OF DISSIMILATION

Mimesis may be a written parodic performance based in necessity, but it is parody with purpose. For Irigaray, mimesis is not only a symptom of writing as woman, it is also the possibility for dissimilating the feminine and writing towards a horizon of sexual difference. As demonstrated below, Irigaray's questions about how woman is to reconstitute herself from within a language that is not her own will lead her to the paradoxical reality of the feminine—that she must dissimilate the feminine in order to find the space from which to exist. In an exhibition of this frustration and sadness checked by her determination, Irigaray writes the following:

> Pour s'éloigner, il faut pouvoir prendre ? Ou dire ? Ce qui revient de quelque façon au même. Pour prendre, un lieu-contenant immobile est nécessaire ? Une âme ? Ou un esprit ? Le deuil de rien est les plus difficile. Le deuil de moi dans l'autre est quasiment impossible. Je me cherche, tel ce qui a été assimilé. Je

> devrais me reconstituer à partir d'une déassimilation…Renaître à partir de traces de culture, d'œuvres déjà produites par l'autre. Cherchant ce qui y est—ce qui n'y est pas. Ce qui les a permis, ce qui n'y est pas. Leurs conditions de possibilité, ce qui n'y est pas.[208]

According to Irigaray, the rebirth of the feminine requires the recovery or unearthing of her absence in discourse. "Dissimilation" [déassimilation] describes the making of space for difference from a place where there was no difference--where difference had already been assimilated. In the case of sexual difference, dissimilation is the distancing of the language of the feminine from its reduction to sameness in discourse. The feminine must be dissimilated in order for women to reconstruct themselves in accordance with their own difference, not the difference prescribed to them. And mimesis is the possibility for this recovery of the feminine.[209]

Because Irigaray's writing is a performative element of her theory, I would like to take a moment to attend to the significance of the ellipsis in Irigaray's quote to suggest how it frames the role of mimesis with regards to reconstructing the feminine through the question of place/space. In the quote above, I read the grammatical intervention of the

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[208] In order to distance oneself, must one be able to take? Or speak? That which comes to the same in a sense. In order to take, is an immobile place-container necessary? A soul ? Or a spirit? Mourning nothing is the most difficult. Mourning myself in the other is almost impossible. I search myself for that which has been assimilated. As if I could reconstitute myself by a dissimilation...be reborn from the traces of a culture of works already produced by the male other. Searching that which is there for that which is not there. What permitted them, for what is not there. Their conditions of possibility for what is not there. Author's translation. Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 17.

[209] But in many ways, it is not only what Irigaray is writing but the fact that she is writing from a space that she claims as a mediated space that is of the utmost important. Holding to Irigaray's understanding of the question of sexual difference as a question of the mediated feminine means that the reader must constantly keep in mind the reality that Irigaray is necessarily writing through the feminine mimetically as an aporia.

ellipsis as marking a space and time between the moment of revelation and resistance.[210] Irigaray has suggested that the work of recovering the feminine will require that space is made from which she might reconstitute herself. Creating the space for dissimilation is necessary because discourse, in the reduction to sameness, closes the space of difference. Irigaray discusses the closure of discourse as a function of a masculine subject, writing, "Tant le discours est tissu serré qui, revenant sur le sujet, l'enserre et le capte en retour."[211] Discourse imprisons the subject in walls of its own making by returning all difference to the subject. Dissimilation, on the other hand, opens discourse, and this opening of discourse that Irigaray achieves through sexual difference is essential to a non-totalizing ethic of difference. Dissimilation helps to create that space. And that space, in Irigaray's quote, is marked by an ellipsis. The ellipsis is Irigaray's signal that

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[210] In *Sexes and Genealogies'* "Belief Itself," a presentation for a conference on Jacques Derrida, Irigaray uses the ellipsis to draw upon the ethics of the space and time that allows for meaning to play. In her opening lines to "Belief Itself," Irigaray cleverly draws upon the play of her presence as the speaker, and the time in which she will give her message. She claims that what she will say will remain "primary," and "loose," because of the 'lack of time" she has to deliver her words. And yet, in an allusion to Derrida's work, Irigaray insinuates that she cannot really speak of a lack of time as though there was time left over (Derrida will mirror this scenario using the voice of an absent woman's letter in his introduction to *Donner le temps* nearly a decade later). Irigaray signals that the space-time allowed her words is where they become more robust, or perhaps fecund. Irigaray's use of the ellipsis in both texts to mark the space-time of an interval between words and their reception. She suggests that "energy" is built up in the constraint of words by a sense of urgency or immediacy that rules the conditions of meaning and limits their possibilities. She uses the ellipsis to gesture towards a place for the words to have time to "play" or "cathect" and "unfold"—a place for which she has no time to give. Space and time as currently conceived do not allow for this interval. Instead, time and space constrain words and participate in their reduction. Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans., Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
[211] Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 116.

her mimetic writing is trying to make space for woman--that mimesis is partially an act of dissimilation.[212]

The pause between dissimilation and rebirth [Renaître] will remain indefinitely as a witness to the journey of woman in the masculine world of discourse, echoing Irigaray's claim that woman is constantly moving and yet at stagnant "like a voyage without end" [tel un périple sans arrêt].[213] If it is as Irigaray writes "often difficult" [parfois difficile] for women to find or give themselves a "*periphery*, circumference, a world , [or] a home" [c'est de se donner une *périphérie*, un pourtour, un monde, une maison] where they might conserve the energy exhausted in this movement and save that energy for the "self-engendering" [s'engendrer] necessary to "creating a horizon for oneself" [se créer un horizon], then dissimilation is integral to creating that space.[214] Irigaray must dissimilate the feminine in order to pause in the space where one can engender a redifferentiated feminine.

Mimesis is the possibility and the perpetuation of the ellipsis. Because mimesis involves a parody or mimicry, that to which it gestures cannot be reinscribed by an undisturbed discourse. Mimesis dissimilates in a way that disturbs the totality of discourse. The act of dissimilation through mimesis is therefore an act of resistance to totality by exposing the limits of discourse to seal off the erased other entirely. Even if

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[212] The question of the ellipsis and the need for space is also what will enable an ethic of desire rather than one of necessity. If as Levinas suggests necessity leads to the reduction of difference, desire is the possibility of beholding the other in wonder--allowing the other the space from which to approach the self as an absolute other. Irigaray has suggested that sexual difference belongs to a dynamic space of desire between differences where desire is thought as "le désir devrait se penser comme une dynamique dont les schémas se modifient, peuvent se décrier au passé, parfois au présent, jamais se programmer de façon définitive pour le futur." Desire should be thought as dynamic, and though it can be described in the past [*peuvent se décrier au passé*] and sometimes in the present, [parfois au présent]. The ellipsis marks the space of presence between past and future. Ibid., 16.
[213] Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*.
[214] Ibid.

she only remains as a trace of her erasure, even if she can only therefore be heard through mimicry, her 'punishment' cannot fully inscribe her. For Irigaray, mimesis is the possibility of that necessary movement of dissimilation because mimesis engenders catachrestic moments and exposes the limits of discursive containment.

MIMESIS AS RESISTANCE: THE NEED FOR DISTANCE TO HAVE AN ECHO

Mimesis disrupts sameness insofar as it exploits the limit between the construction of feminine difference and the difference of the feminine that is veiled by that construction. This limit between the constructed and the veiled is often revealed as a moment of discord where the tension cannot be explained without a further reduction or annihilation of the difference of the other. This is a moment of catachresis--a moment in which the differences of the other that have been excluded from discourse reveal that discourse cannot completely block them out. In the moment that a tension between the irreducible veiled difference and the reduced stated difference emerges, we witness a crack in the totality of the system. That which cannot be comprehended immediately, or that which threatens the totality of discourse's sense-making abilities can be dismissed as marginal or abnormal, an abomination.

Mimesis is a way of revealing this chink in the armor of discourse. As with the example of Antigone, in Irigaray's work, mimesis shows that women do not have the same relationship to discourse and the construction of their subjectivity through discourse that men have. In order to overcome the constant return to sameness that characterizes a totalizing relationship between self and other, Irigaray harnesses the mimetic potential to

create space or distance where there was once only sameness. She uses mimesis to allow the feminine to emerge from somewhere other than her prescribed place. Because mimesis allows women to speak within discourse while championing their status as 'outsiders' within, mimesis becomes a resistance and a strategy for encountering the limits of feminine representation and a woman's ability to speak her self.

I will now turn to feminist postcolonial critic, Gayatri Spivak to examine how the catachrestic moments are created through mimesis, and how these moments create the space necessary for a rebirth of the erased other. While Spivak's essay focuses on the complexities of the subaltern/postcolonial position as well as the gendered position, I draw on Spivak to demonstrate how those who are deprived of their voice within discourse, like Irigaray's woman, can still emerge from the limits of discursive closures.

Spivak's essay, "Echo," analogizes the tragic story of the nymph Echo with the ways colonized subjects are forced to speak within a discourse that is not their own. Spivak reads Ovid's Echo to demonstrate that this crisis of representation can be seen in the inability of a normative masculine discourse of justice and punishment to account for the marginalized subaltern and female other it seeks to punish. Speaking within a discourse that is not one's own results in a crisis of identity. This constrained space of identity is, in Ovid's text, marked by a catachresis, that discursive imposition upon marginalized persons that cannot constitute an invincible totality that would fully annihilate the difference of the other. In fact, it is in Spivak's exposure of this catachresis that I read the failure of Echo's punishment by the gods as reflecting the inability of concepts like justice to enact complete discursive closures for women.

In her critique of Echo and Narcissus, Spivak draws attention to Echo's inability to perform the role assigned to her by legend, or rather, scripted for her by the gods. In Ovid's work, Juno discovers that Echo's excessive talkativeness has been distracting her and thereby masking Jupiter's affairs. Echo was, as Ovid writes, *garrula*. She was a talkative girl. And she talked to Juno excessively in order to keep Juno from discovering Jupiter's sexual escapades with the other nymphs. When Juno discovers that Echo's talkativeness has been masking Jupiter's affairs, she punishes Echo, condemning her to make only "brief noises of the fewest words."[215] Ovid suggests "Echo could only repeat the words she hears at the end of a sentence and never reply for herself."[216] Within this punishment, Juno is telling Echo that she can no longer speak for herself. The words she utters from here on will only be responses. Spivak paraphrases the punishment: "Talkative girl, you can only give back, you are the respondent as such."[217] An originary word will never again fall from her lips. From here on, Echo can only give back. She can only respond. Juno's punishment assumes that Echo spoke for herself at some point, but prior to Juno's damning, Echo had been speaking for Jupiter, protecting his pleasures and his desires. While her incessant talking had not directly been a response to someone else's words, they were a response to another's desires, the desires of the *pater familias*. The punishment Echo receives overlooks the fact that Echo's chatter was in service of Jupiter. The words she spoke were by his order. This assumption about the appropriate punishment marks an initial miscalculation that will bring about the catachresis. The

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[215] Ovid, "Echo and Narcissus" in Book III, *Metamorphoses,* trans., Horace Gregory (New York: Signet Classics, 2009), 73.
[216] Ibid.
[217] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Echo," *New Literary History* 24, no. 1 (1993): 23.

punishment responds to the crime in a way that misrepresents the punished; therefore, Echo's punishment of obligatory and limited response encloses her in a discourse that misrepresents and erases her reality from the beginning of the narrative.

Echo's punishment of an uncontrolled response to the words and desires of the other, like the post-colonial subject, or like "woman" in a patriarchal regime, becomes an obligation. And yet, while Echo is forced to respond, others may see her response as made of her own volition. Unfortunately, she can never warn the 'other' that her words are not intentional and that they do not speak her desire. After all, she can only echo. Spivak suggests that in a similar way, the subaltern or woman does not speak with his or her own voice. Those persons not accounted for in hegemonic discourse can only speak the language of those to whom they are other. The discourse and language that has been imposed upon them does not provide the space for the desires or their utterances of the subaltern. Like Echo, woman is forced to occupy a position from which she returns the desire of a hegemonic discourse. Through her status as the other that returns that desire, she both constructs and affirms the normative "self" that silences her desires. Each time someone speaks to Echo, she must respond. Echo is subjected not only to the other's representation, but she must return that representation like a mirror that affirms an image. This is the condition of woman in the self-same--to return to man that image of himself through the movement of his self-consciousness.

Echo's situation seems hopeless, but possibilities for something that resembles resistance and responsibility do exist. When the punished Echo encounters Narcissus, a dialogue of proximity begs the question of the difference between Echo and Narcissus

and creates a catachresis or a crisis of response. In Ovid's narrative, Echo had been following Narcissus, burning with desire for him. "She longed to lure him with soft words…but being what she was she could not make sounds come."[218] The only way Echo could speak her desires was through the words that Narcissus would offer her. "Her desire and performance are dispersed into absolute chance rather than an obstinate choice, as in the case of Narcissus."[219] And momentarily, by repeating Narcissus, she was able to speak her desires. When Narcissus cries out, "Come," Echo responds, "come," returning his desire but uttering an unintentional truth to the extent that the forced utterance spoke to her own passions for Narcissus.[220]

Narcissus becomes frustrated by Echo's repetition and finally asks Echo why she flies from him. Echo, forced to utter the words in which her own desires are veiled in words that are not her own, must say "fly from me." But this is the point at which discourse fails. Because Echo cannot reply "me fugis" in the imperative when Echo asks 'Why do you run/fly from me?' Ovid writes, that Narcissus "receives the same words as he speaks." This is the moment of catachresis, the moment that cannot be inscribed. As Spivak proposes, when Narcissus calls out "me fugis," Echo cannot respond directly because the grammatical form of "me fugis" cannot simply be changed from an interrogative to an imperative and remain the same form, an echo.[221] So Narcissus receives the same words that he utters, but Ovid does not allow Echo to utter these words,

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[218] Ovid., "Echo and Narcissus," 73.
[219] Spivak, "Echo," 27.
[220] As with an understanding of women's voices as trapped within a discourse that forces them to imitate or mimic, when the words that represent Echo's desire are spoken, they are not speaking her desire but only echoing the desire of Narcissus.
[221] Ibid., 23.

because to utter these words would be to utter an impossibility. Instead Ovid speaks the words himself.

An aporia occurs in the inability of Echo to respond. Echo is forced to speak herself in a language that is not only not her own but also not available to her. After all, to respond as an echo, she would have to utter a phrase that cannot exist according to the language that has defined her imprisonment within the role of respondent. At this point, Echo can neither speak for herself, nor can she respond. Her position designates a double suspension or double bind. As Spivak writes, "Caught in the discrepancy between second person interrogative (fugis) and the imperative (fugi), Ovid cannot allow her to be, even Echo."[222] Now the tools of the master's house are forced to negotiate some means to restore the order of the punishment—to restore Echo to an echo. Because Ovid must report Echo's speech for her, Echo's voice is not her own. The reporting of Echo's speech is a masculine representation of her voice. Echo's status as an echo resides in the moment of doubt with regards to voice. Echo's "subjectivity" becomes a subjectivity framed by uncertainty.[223] She cannot speak the echo, and Ovid must compensate for her paralysis of identity. After all, to respond as an echo, she would have to utter a phrase that cannot exist according to the language that has defined her imprisonment within the role of respondent.

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[222] Ibid., 24.

[223] Spivak figures Echo's uncertainty as marking a space of *différance.* The grammatical failure that is revealed by its overt veiling of Ovid reporting for Echo. Echo's position is one beyond that of a respondent who is different in the sense of a strict opposition. She cannot be understood as a simple echo or respondent to male desire without revealing that her position as respondent is not of her own making. She is not willingly placed in this position, and her unwillingness, or the fact that she did not ask to be in this place but was rather punished by her placement, is only apparent in the moment of her punishment's marking of its own failure to contain the fullness of her experience as the marginalized/punished. The *différance* is that seeming impossibility that is at once the condition of Echo's existence and also the condition of her resistance. Spivak writes, "Here is the figuration of Echo's "reward." Her punishment fails (in order) to mark *différance.* Ovid covers it over with telling; we open it." Ibid., 26.

The question of voice, identity, and existence is risked with any attempt to recover the feminine. In other words, the use of the feminine is complicated because it has been reported in a way that separates it from the woman who is behind the echo. It separates Echo from her echo and woman from her own voice. The Echo or woman behind the voice cannot be heard. She does not have the voice to claim her body, and the voice that reports her silences and veils her body. The beginning of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as quoted by Spivak reads, "My mind is bent to tell of bodies changed into new forms."[224] Echo's body is changed the moment she loses originary speech. Ovid says, "Up to this time Echo still had a body, [s]he was not merely a voice."[225] But since Ovid's words report for her, to another extent Echo has not changed at all because the voice in the text was never her own.

This relationship of bodies being changed into new forms by virtue of a discursive suspension of the question of voice is precisely what is at stake for Irigaray's text. The feminine is like a disembodied Echo. The feminine is a voice without flesh. Woman and Echo remain, but they have been covered up and used in the elaboration of Ovid's narrative and Narcissus's subjectivity. For Irigaray, the question of body and discourse are deeply connected; however, the possibility of recovering a new concept of body where the feminine has access to her body is like the contradiction of Echo's textual existence. Echo is mourning the loss of something that was never hers—an embodied voice. Her punishment was simply a more blatant affirmation of her former voiceless position.

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[224] Ibid., 17.
[225] Ovid quoted in Ellen Mortensen, *The Feminine and Nihilism: Luce Irigaray with Nietzsche and Heidegger* (Stockholm: Scandinavian University Press, 1994), 15.

Doubly deprived by her body and her voice by Juno and Ovid, Echo has never known a form that was not always already changed into something displaced from her. Irigaray addresses this aporetic condition in which women's body is deprived of access to even to her lack or the punishment prescribed her. "Le deuil de rien est le plus difficile. Le deuil de moi dans l'autre est quasiment impossible."[226] Irigaray's work encounters the dangers of a project that attempts to re-claim some semblance of a feminine difference so radically forgotten that it does not, "properly" speaking, exist. Irigaray's position is *le deuil* of Echo. She is trying to embody and remember a difference that has never been allowed to exist.[227] Mortensen writes, "[T]he story might be seen as an exemplification of Irigaray's analysis of the female subject's traditional relationship to language, which could be characterized as a tragic one."[228] The female subject's relationship to language is tragic because, according to Irigaray, language has been used to construct a dwelling for men from which their subjectivity can emerge. But for women, language has used woman to construct man's dwelling and to place her in his place.

Despite this tragedy, I contend that the story of Echo also points us to the resistance within language that occurs from the space of an absent, disembodied voice. Catachresis reveals that Echo is the possibility of a distance that her existence creates. Echo is of course, like Diotima, the used woman in a philosophical discourse; however, as Spivak notes, a literary feminist reading of Echo allows us to rethink the way her

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[226]Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 17.
[227] The coming of this body is represented by angelic messengers who transgress all enclosures. Their swiftness knows no boundaries; therefore, we might suggest that a body announced in discourse and represented by messengers irreducible to that discourse is a body that lives and breathes in the place of angelic gestures—the place created by the dynamism of the intermediary between differences (sexual) in concept of difference yet to be experienced.
[228] Mortensen, *The Feminine and Nihilism,* 55.

mediated presence questions the question of woman. Indeed, whereas Diotima's miscarried dialectic calls attention to the disconnect between the veiled feminine and the radical absence of a sexually differentiated other, so too Echo's mis-carried words fold the space-time between her mediated presence and the consequences of her absence.

Echo's failed response reveals that the subject's universe is not a closed totality. As one who can only respond, Echo stands for the "difference" that Narcissus needs her to be to ensure his existence. He needs her to answer his call in his voice, even if that means erasing hers through Ovid's reporting of her. Even when woman gives back to man as his other, she gives back in a way that reveals his subjectivity is constituted through his own desires--thus completing the enclosure of his vision himself, enclosing him in his own desires. But attention to Echo's erasure reveals Narcissus's address and disrupts the delusion that he, as male subject, is really positing his subjectivity in relation to a different other. The grammatical failure that must be reabsorbed by Ovid's report attests to the inability of a totalizing system (whereby the other is bound to mimicry) to completely absorb the difference of the other or to irrevocably render the other/Echo/ woman a mere figure or projection.

Herein lies the catachresis as the possibility of Echo's resistance. Echo's inability to respond to Narcissus results in an inability of Narcissus to fulfill her echo.[229] Thus, when Ovid reports that Narcissus receives the words he has uttered, Spivak suggests that Narcissus, in Echo's deferred response, does not receive the perfect reflection of his desire. Narcissus, who had thwarted the desires of others through his non-

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[229] Spivak, "Echo," 23.

responsiveness, receives an unintentional non-response from Echo.[230] Echo's deferred response, which is a "truth not dependent on intention," undoes the promises of narcissistic self-knowledge in which one receives back the perfect image of the self one has put forward for the other to return.[231] In the catachrestic abuse of Echo as the unintentional respondent, Narcissus cannot immediately experience the response to his desire.

Echo's mimicry created a catachresis such that Narcissus cannot receive the image of himself he wants. Echo becomes an indication of Narcissus's absence of self-knowledge, or rather, the limits of self knowledge.[232] She therefore, rather than being used in the formation of his subjectivity, gives back to him in a way that makes her capable of resistance. The failure of Echo's punishment to prevail indicates that discourse cannot fully inscribe her voice. The catachresis, or moment that cannot be inscribed, is like the trace of Echo's lost voice (of an irreversible past).

Echo reveals that her punishment, the erasure of her voice, is not a punishment that can completely totalize her and deprive her of resistance. Ovid had to report for Echo because her status as woman would have created a grammatical failure. This need for adjustment and renegotiation of the story of Echo testifies to the way the absent Echo makes herself heard as a disruption. The feminine may indeed be an echo of masculine discourse; however, the body of woman/Echo cannot be completely erased in discourse without some sort of disruption that reveals cracks in the system that veils her.

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[230] Ibid., 24.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Ibid., 24-25.

Echo's reward is her "failure"—her failure to speak that marks the catachresis that is the possibility of resistance. Echo is temporarily silenced by her punishment, but she cannot be completely silenced because, as the catachrestic moment reveals, her sexual difference suspends her punishment. The grammar attributed to her because she is marked as the sexually different feminine is the grammar that must be concealed and that doubly silences her. The feminine grammatical form cannot be reported if Narcissus's words are to be echoed. And yet, woman/Echo cries out in spite of the gods' attempt to have her only repeat or give back to man what he needs.

Catachresis becomes necessary to repositioning ethics in relation to woman, and mimetic writing is the writing that constantly illuminates catachrestic moments. Spivak mimetic reading Echo draws attention to Echo's occlusion by Ovid, but this mimetic reading also institutes a catachresis that suggests Echo's silenced voice can still resist. She resists because in her flesh, she refuses to be fully inscribed. Her flesh exposes that she is other to discourse in a way that discourse must cover or veil. Just as Antigone cries out her own impossible situation in Irigaray's text, writing through the feminine reveals that the totality of the self-same cannot completely obliterate cracks of resistance.

MIMESIS AS CATACHRESIS

I read Irigaray's use of mimesis as an attempt to create or foster the space and time for a feminine becoming within the echo of masculine discourse. Though the feminine must respond as an echo by re-presenting man's speech in a way that is fitting for the limits in

which she is inscribed, her echo or representation is never a true mirror.[233] Her difference cannot be entirely covered over; therefore, her reflection or echo of his words will not return to him without some remainder that must be swallowed up or annihilated. Echo's position is like the position of a woman who's means of expression are repressed to the point of being "incomprehensible" within prevailing limits of expression except as pathologies. Echo's punishment is like the pathologization of those whose expressions are unrepresentable within prevailing discourse. Echo is silenced, deprived of her voice and rendered an echo of the voices that can be represented with impunity. Echo is silenced like the hysteric whose voice is stripped of its truth when her expression is pathologized. And yet, as feminist readings of the hysteric and Spivak's reading of Echo suggest, these silenced feminine voices testify to the masculinity, or the undifferentiated sameness, of traditional means of representation, means of representation that understand truth as disembodied and standing apart from the voices that are vehicles of its mediation.[234]

But insofar as the silenced voices reveal themselves as something to be silenced or feared, they reveal the sameness within representation. They cry out from their silence in a way that ruptures discourse, whether as a grammatical disruption or a psychological condition. I therefore agree with Elizabeth Grosz's assessment that Irigaray's mimetic position as a writer is like that of the feminist-read hysteric. Grosz writes, "Irigaray

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[233] Irigaray, *Speculum*, 263.

[234] Referring to the significance of voice for agency, Irigaray refers to the association of sound (*phōnē*) with truth (*alētheia*). Irigaray writes, "Truth and *phōnē* sustain and determine their mutual domination, at least when it is a matter of ensuring the present existence, the presence of the existence of the *alētheia*." Irigaray points out that truth is given an "eternal presence" whose power is carried out in sound. The absolute or totalizing idea of a singular truth is assumed in masculine representation such that the sound that reverberates in the echo is a mere medium of that truth. Irigaray claims that that the echo is only possible as a reflection. Therefore, the question of voice is covered up by this system. Ibid., 264.

shares the hysteric's *excessive* mimicry, the conversion of her passivity into activity by taking on, in the most extreme forms, what is expected."[235] In other words, for Irigaray, mimesis functions as a means of resistance in a way that mirrors the type of resistance we have elaborated in Spivak's reading of Echo.

In Spivak's retelling of Echo's passivity, her resignation to the position of an echo because of an outwardly imposed punishment, becomes the space of her resistance. Echo's resistance reveals itself in the exposure of its veiling—in the attention to what is not said when Ovid speaks for her. So too Irigaray's critique of philosophy dissimilates the work of the feminine from that of the philosophers by "Cherchant ce qui y est—ce qui n'y est pas."[236] Irigaray has occupied the space of Echo. Her body, when it inhabits the discourse to which it is assigned, reveals that the words to which she gives her flesh are as yet unthought incarnations—incarnations that are foreign to the body of philosophy.

And just as Spivak's Echo unsettles the grammar of gender, Irigaray's mimesis disrupts the relationship between discourse and meaning through the question of woman. Echo's inability to perform the duty ascribed her gender reveals itself in the grammatical failure that keeps her voice silent. The impossible condition of the feminine voice must be revealed in its impossibility in order to understand the complicity of all discursive structures in her silencing. Just as there is no inside or outside of Juno's punishment for Echo, there is no inside or outside of discourse from which Irigaray can speak a differentiated feminine voice. We could say that Echo will always be deprived of

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[235] Grosz, *Sexual Subversions,* 138.
[236] Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 17.

response because the voice with which she speaks is restricted by her body as feminine and as exile. However, creating from within that bounded space is possible.

Insofar as mimesis engages the lack of difference in sexual difference from the perspective of the disembodied and silenced other, mimesis stands as a means of representing that which the self-same erases. Mimesis allows women to take on the space to which they have been assigned in a way that is rebellious. Between masculine and the undifferentiated feminine we find sexual difference in the form of a forgotten or a doubly-erased feminine. Playing with the divisions instated through philosophy's blindness to the undifferentiated feminine it uses as its other, mimesis offers a way to write and think within the confines of a masculine discourse and to play by its rules while presenting an outcome (or in this case perhaps a non-outcome) that disrupts the order of things. If we understand mimesis itself as a strategy, then we can observe the ways in which inhabiting the (undifferentiated) feminine voice can speak back—using philosophical understandings of the feminine to speak back to philosophy and expose its blindness.

MIMESIS AND THE DESTABILIZATION OF "WOMAN"

In Irigaray's work, mimesis, though it appears as a condition of writing born of necessity for woman, serves as a means to disrupt the discourse that narrates the limits of the feminine. If to be heard woman must speak mimetically, mimesis, by engendering catachrestic moments, is the means by which woman can give voice to the the discursive

violence she suffers. Explaining the strategic significance of mimesis, Irigaray writes the following:

> To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself--inasmuch as she is on the side of the "perceptible," of "matter"--to "ideas," in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/ by a masculine logic, but so as to make "visible," by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language.[237]

Irigaray notes the strategic aspect of relying on the discourse of the feminine and the language of "woman." In fact, Irigaray suggests feminists write deliberately in the feminine to expose the violence against the other that occurs in discourse. Mimesis is thus a way to write through the secondarized position of woman. Because the feminine has been returned to sameness, mimesis is the means by which woman can speak the ways the feminine has been used to silence or erase her real difference.

Mimesis allows woman to insist that she exists, even if "woman" is radically absent. She lives beyond a mere figure of masculine projection of her difference. Woman's non-identity with the feminine is the source of revealing that the feminine is not her own creation. Therefore, mimesis reveals that women cannot be completely silenced. Differences do manage to seep through because women's bodies do exist, even if "woman" does not. Mimesis is also, therefore the possibility for women to speak from beyond their silencing and disrupt the totality in which a self-same/undifferentiated sexual difference is inscribed.[238]

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[237] Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 76.

[238] Elizabeth Grosz writes, "Irigaray actively affirms a project challenging and deconstructing the cultural representations of femininity so that it may be capable of representation and recognition in its own self-defined terms." Grosz, *Sexual Subversions,* 101.

Discussing the specific political significance of sexual difference as a strategy that involves mimesis, Rosi Braidotti writes, "Mimesis is a process of constant renegotiation of the forms and the contents of female identity, a sort of inner erosion of the feminine by women who are aware of their own implication with that which they attempt to deconstruct."[239] To grasp the specific discursive transgressiveness of mimesis in Irigaray's text, we must read mimesis in relation to thinking through sexual difference. In other words, we must examine mimesis in terms of Irigaray's attempt to unveil the lack of difference between masculine and feminine. Plus we must read her mimesis in terms of her efforts to create a space of difference from which a truly differentiated discourse for both sexes (as she sees it) can emerge. Susan Kozel notes the difference between Irigaray's use of mimesis and its simplified association with analogy and mimicry.

> In classical Greece it was the word for artistic representation. Mimetic theory was used to draw a distinction between art and life: the art object was seen to be an imitation of life [...] However, the mimesis found in the work of the Belgian-born feminist Luce Irigaray [...] is based on a principle of repetition or analogy which is not one of identical reproduction or simple imitation. There is always a moment of excess or a remainder in the mimetic process, something that makes the mimicry different from that which inspires it, and which transforms the associated social and aesthetic space.[240]

Kozel hits upon a key difference in the work of Irigaray that many of Irigaray's critics fail to overlook. Namely, Irigaray's use of mimesis always occurs within the context of her critical awareness of the secondarization of the feminine in thought and in ethics. Insofar as Irigaray's work gestures towards the complexities of ethical representation within the economy of the self-same, her mimetic strategies incorporate a constant movement or

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[239] Rosi Braidotti, "Comment on Felski's "The Doxa of Difference": Working through Sexual Difference," *Signs* 23, no. 1 (1997): 35.
[240] Susan Kozel, "The Diabolical Strategy of Mimesis: Luce Irigaray's Reading of Maurice Merleau-Ponty," *Hypatia* 11, no. 3 (1996): 101.

play even within the use of the feminine. Referring to Irigaray's explanation of the masculine need of the feminine to secure his own existence in *Speculum*, Toril Moi writes, "The blind spot of the master thinker's discourse is always woman: exiled from representation, she constitutes the ground on which the theorist erects his specular constructs, but she is therefore also always the point on which his erections subside."[241] The feminine is inextricably bound to Irigaray's sense that the feminine is always already the masculine mark of sexual difference.

Because woman is bound to mimicry within a masculine discourse, because she is doubly silenced or concealed, locating the voice of women is almost impossible. Irigaray suggests dissimilation through mimesis is essential to woman finding herself apart from her absence in discourse. Writing mimetically becomes a means to expose and disrupt the assimilation of difference that occurs in discourse. Mimesis is a strategy for engaging the limits of patriarchy. Elizabeth Grosz suggests that because of the few resources women have, they "must become familiar with the patriarchal discourses, knowledges and social practices which define and constrain them" in order to resist patriarchy.[242] This is how Irigaray uses mimesis. Though Irigaray portrays woman as bound to speak mimetically, mimesis becomes a means for exploiting the limits of discourse and thereby

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[241] Toril Moi, "Patriarchal Reflections: Luce Irigaray's Looking-Glass," in *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 135.
[242] Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, 133.

exposing the need for difference.[243] For Irigaray, mimesis is not simply about mimicry but about adopting expectations "to such an extreme degree that the end result is the opposite of compliance: it unsettles the system by throwing back to it what it cannot accept about its own operations."[244] She demonstrates a familiarization with patriarchy to the point that mimicry becomes a political act rather than a passive resignation to repeat and abide by the strictures that limit the feminine.

The mimetic use of the feminine at once exposes the exclusion of the feminine and offers a space from which the difference of woman that the feminine conceals can break through. By challenging the link between woman and the discourse used to speak of woman, Irigaray ultimately undermines the certainty of woman.[245] Grosz writes, "Irigaray does not aim to establish a new language for women but to utilise the existing language system to subvert the functioning of dominant representations and knowledges in their singular, universal claims to truth."[246] Irigaray draws attention to the way the

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[243] Drawing on Irigaray's own psychoanalytic elaboration of hysteria, Grosz explains Irigaray's discussion of mimesis in terms of hysterics. Hysteria is a manifestation of what it means to "not fit neatly into" prevailing structures of existence or being. Grosz writes that Irigaray's mimesis is therefore, like hysteria, a sort of rebellion. "Irigaray herself is the hysteric insofar as she wants to make woman's body *speak,* be representable, articulate itself. Like the hysteric her techniques and procedures are pre-eminently *seductive.* Her critical technique, her amorous flirtation with phallocentric texts is hysterical prick-teasing, phallo-deflation. It is the only way that she is able to both inhabit and challenge phallocentrism without being entirely absorbed by her investments and history in it." This is why Irigaray's use of the feminine is mimetic. It is "feminine in the extreme." Ibid., 137.

[244] Ibid.

[245] The mimetic process in Irigaray has been referred to as a double mimesis by Naomi Schor among others. In a footnote in her essay "This Essentialism Which is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray," Schor describes Irigaray's use of mimesis as double. She refers to a quote in Irigaray's *Speculum Of the Other Woman*, where Irigaray claims that, in Plato, mimesis is at once a production and a type of mimicry always already caught up in production and reproduction. In other words, Irigaray does not see mimesis as a simple one-way production or act of mimicry. She is well aware that mimesis is always bound within its own play. When we read Irigaray's work as a double mimesis, we grasp the sense in which her text does not have some pre-configured concept of the woman that acts mimetically. Naomi Schor, "This Essentialism Which Is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray," in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. Naomi Schor, Carolyn Burke, Margaret Whitford(New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 76.

[246] Grosz, *Sexual Subversions,* 127.

feminine is not representative of woman while using the feminine to create the space for revealing that disconnect. In so doing, Irigaray creates a paradoxical and uncertain atmosphere around "woman." By undermining the certainty of the language of the feminine that is used to define women, Irigaray's mimesis disrupts the truth or totalizing image that traditional systems of representation put forward. Giving voice to woman's 'exploitation by discourse,' Irigaray constructs a space where woman is at once necessarily inscribed in a discourse that is not her own and yet also the condition for renegotiating her own legitimacy by transforming that system.[247]

Because mimesis does not re-essentialize a new truth of women's language or subjectivity but rather opens a space for an indeterminate future, mimesis allows Irigaray's writing to prevent her theory from irretrievably falling back into the economy of sameness. Irigaray's mimetic writing strategies use the feminine to dissimilate and re-differentiate sexual difference through a discursive space that resists reduction. With mimesis, Irigaray utilizes to her advantage the constrained space of trying to write the feminine in a discourse where there is only masculine language available. She uses the differences of woman that are erased or subsumed by the feminine to expose the reductive discursive structures that limit woman's access to subjectivity. Or as Grosz puts it, "She aims excessively to overburden existing forms of language and dominant

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[247] The feminine is there such that man can recognize himself apart from an other of his own making. David Halperin refers to Plato's "staging of 'femininity'" as "mimetic transvestism." Halperin writes, "What is crucial for Plato's strategy is not that Diotima present a woman's perspective but that she *re*present it in a form that is recognizable to men." The idea that mimesis seizes upon something formally familiar in order to offer a *re*presentation is precisely what Irigaray undertakes in mimetically engaging her interlocutors. Only for Irigaray, the mimetic transvestism is double. Irigaray's mimesis is the condition of writing within the masculine. She is veiling herself in the clothing of a masculine discourse and way of speaking. But she is in the condition of writing as a never-present woman for whom the feminine is always already a veiling. She is doubly veiled. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality,* 146.

discourses with their own ambiguities [...] including the sexually coded positions of enunciation."[248] Exposing the self-same in discourse, Irigaray writes a text that begins the process of dissimilation of the feminine in sexual difference and therefore participates in the ethic she seeks to create. Mimesis is for Irigaray a strategy of resistance to construct a more ethical model of human becoming.

To effectively use mimesis as a tool for revelation and resistance, one must look to those rules and mechanisms that erase difference as opportunities for disruption. Therefore, Irigaray suggests that woman might "find herself "[se retrouver] by searching for "images of herself" [les images d'elle déjà] "in the conditions of production of the work of men" [les conditions de production de l'ouevre de l'homme]. This leads us to consider the glimpses of woman's erasure by searching within the very discursive structures that have sealed her off.[249] Searching for woman through the places marking her erasure, as though searching for a trace that some crime has occurred, presents no easy task.

Irigaray's proclamation that discourse is inherently masculine and there is no language sexed as female implies that a feminine writing cannot exist within the parameters of a writing that erases or hides difference. Irigaray must write through the space of an absent woman to write differently. She must write through the feminine as a means to acknowledge her erasure as woman. To write through the feminine raises the question of what constitutes the conditions of possibility for her absence. It is at this question of writing differently when difference is erased in writing that forces us to

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[248] Grosz, *Sexual Subversions,* 127.
[249] Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 17.

examine Irigaray's performative contribution to reframing the impossibility of writing woman in the feminine.[250]

MIMESIS AS CATACHRESIS-- "KNOWING" SELF AND OTHER OTHERWISE

To know in the sense of knowing as definitive and determinate strips away the possibility of the infinite. Beyond the movement of sameness are horizons of experiencing the infinite that constitute a way of *knowing otherwise*, a way of knowing oneself through interdependence and connection rather than through allergy and domination. Levinas's ethics tried to overcome this prioritization of Being as knowing because if to be was to know, a self was dependent on the other, in need of the other, to secure one's existence. To know through desire and not need meant that one could know oneself uniquely in relation to one's other as being together. Such a relational idea of being means that one becomes through an experience of one's responsibility to and for one's other. This responsibility is contingent on the experience of the other as absolutely not the self. The space between the self and the other is a space of absolute alterity. And this interval, this moment of wonder that separates the experience of the other is infinite precisely because of that alterity. The experience of the absolute alterity of the other is a moment irreducible to the movement of cognitive knowing or self-conscious being.

Mimesis, by engendering catachresis, creates the space from which to stand outside of a model of knowing synonymous with the movement of self-consciousness.

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[250] The means Irigaray uses to dis-assimilate the feminine and re-differentiate the question of sexual difference are multiple and mutually informing. As chapter 1 demonstrated, Irigaray's engagement with philosophers' silencing of the feminine even in their use of the feminine revealed Irigaray's attempt to use the feminine to expose the systematic veiling of the feminine and her effort to claim a redifferentiated feminine space through dissimilation. However, transforming the implications of particular philosophical concepts designates just one interrogation of the conditions of possibility for the forgetting of the feminine.

Catachresis exposes the limits of discursive enclosures. Therefore, in catachresis mimesis engenders an experience of subjectivity in desire--a subjectivity in openness and continual wonder. The space of desire that mimesis facilitates is one that allows alterity to constitute a place or dwelling for self and other. As an experience of becoming through that interval or space beyond the closure of discourse, mimesis therefore presents an other way of knowing--a knowing beyond the limitations and reductions of cognition. Mimesis is knowing oneself in relation to one's other via an experience of absolute alterity. Experiencing the limits of the enclosures of discourse is an experience of oneself beyond the limits of discourse. It is an experience of one's self as other, and yet that otherness is known by relating to those who struggle with their own discursive containment absolutely differently. Therefore, in mimesis, one is able to voice one's experience of subjectivity as always an experience of becoming through and in the limits of discursive closures.

CHAPTER 4:
REBIRTH: IRREDUCIBLY SEXED BODIES AND DISCURSIVE POSSIBILITIES FOR AN ETHICAL FUTURE BEYOND THE SELF-SAME

In her 1996 work *I Love to You,* Luce Irigaray has written, "The whole of human kind is composed of women and men and nothing else. The problem of race is, in fact, a secondary problem. . . and the same goes for other cultural diversities—religious, economic, and political ones."[251] In this relatively late work of her oeuvre, Irigaray makes no apologies for privileging sexual difference as the ultimate irreducible and yet universal reality in human relations. Such privilege renders race, ethnicity, and other ways of being secondary. Irigaray bases her argument about the priority of sexual difference in the idea that sexual difference is a fundamentally irreducible difference that is an immediate experience of difference prior to discourse. In her account, sexual difference is a difference in which one is irreplaceable to the other, even in the absence of cultural constructions (which is why race would not be included for her).

The problem evident to Irigaray's readers lies in her unflinching privileging of sexual difference; ironically, this privileging smacks of reasserting a new whole or universal into which everyone's difference can be inscribed. In some ways, this privileging is positing another totality against which the differences of others are perceived as entirely culturally and discursively constructed differences. This is a radical statement that could potentially be used to deconstruct identities and to advocate a vision of humanity realizing its full potential through a totality of the couple (or two) rather than a totality of oneness. But the other implications of Irigaray's privileging of sexual

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[251] Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History*, trans., Alison Martin (New York: Routledge, 1996), 47.

difference are quite disturbing. If sexual difference is the only irreducible difference, then Irigaray denies her others the fullness of their experience as others in ways that, even if seen as culturally constructed, are immediate within their specific context. Privileging of sexual difference as male-female difference as Irigaray does risks inscribing her work in a heterosexist dynamic—a dynamic that deprives same-sex relations and/or transgender relations of an ethical dimension.

While these critiques against Irigaray's work are serious and legitimate, there is room in Irigaray's ethics to establish a generous reading of her project that would highlight the potential bubbling at the surface of her work rather than its limits. As suggested in the previous chapter, Irigaray's mimetic work dissimilates the feminine by exposing the limits of her inscription within discourse. These limits appear as catachresis, or a mistake that must be covered, swept under the rug. As 'mistakes,' 'paradoxes' or 'contradictions' within discourse, catachrestic moments are irreducible to thought. They remain at once outside of the self-same system of reduction of difference even as the break into it. For Irigaray, the possibility of the rebirth of woman emerges from these catachrestic exposures of her erasure in discourse. The feminine voice that is reborn from Irigaray's mimesis is a voice that is only visible in such catachrestic moments and therefore remains beyond reduction as a condition of its existence. Irigaray's writing, then, embodies an indeterminate woman from the space of catachresis, a woman beyond sameness.

By writing mimetically, Irigaray writes from the space of the radically absent woman, and she thereby gestures toward a way of knowing beyond the reduction of

difference in the movement of self-same consciousness. It is Irigaray's embodiment of that uncertainty through a writing that goes beyond metaphor to the viscerality of enfleshed existence that gives mimesis its power. Irigaray has made her critique by writing through a sense of woman that she herself disrupts all along the way. She does the opposite of the self-same subject that knows itself through a reduction of difference. Because Irigaray insists on the importance of the materiality of the flesh to an ethical way of knowing, one can read her mimesis as an embodiment of the discursively indeterminate/uncertain flesh of woman as the possibility for ethics. It is the flesh that provides the surface or space that engages the limits of discourse as catachresis. Catachresis opens discourse to infinite possibility, and the flesh is the condition of that infinite. *Therefore, this chapter analyzes Irigaray's attempt to re-embody discourse and suggests that her mimetic embodiment of woman figures woman as an indeterminate and irreducible space that could be a path towards an understanding of openness to alterity as a concrete/enfleshed ethical practice.*

REMEMBERING THE FLESH AND RE-MEMBERING DISCOURSE

DISEMBODIED DISCOURSE

Discussing why "sexual difference has not had its chance to develop," Irigaray writes, "It is surely a question of the dissociation of body and soul, of sexuality and spirituality, of the lack of a passage for the spirit, for the god, between the inside and the outside, the outside and the inside, and of their distribution between the sexes in the sexual act."[252]

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[252] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 15.

The separation of flesh and spirit (and the disembodiment of discourse and thought) annihilate intermediary spaces of difference that exist between masculine and feminine. This elimination of difference has allowed man to place women and limit their station in life. Redifferentiating woman through a source of her own becoming requires that she find a place of her own. And establishing this place demands a rejection of this separation that deprives one sex of its own freedom. Just as thought needs the body, the body needs thought. These two spheres must be held together, and until they are, no ethical relationship of the sexes, no sexual act that is not already an act of sameness can occur, whether physically or philosophically.

The forgetting of woman has been enabled by a dismemberment of the material body from discourse. Irigaray's mimesis, by emphasizing the disconnect between discursive difference and real difference, reveals that the body has been separated from thought, thereby disembodying the philosophical concept of sexual difference. This disembodiment has paved the way for discourse to relinquish itself from any responsibility to the wisdom or knowledge represented in the flesh. Discourse disconnected from the flesh is responsible only to itself and the representation of its truths. Grosz writes, "The masculine is able to speak of and for women because it has emptied itself of any relation to the male body, thus creating a space of reflection, of specul(aris)ation in which it claims to look at itself and at femininity from the outside."[253] The separation of the body from thought or from the mind perpetuates an illusion of "objectivity," as though masculine discourse speaks neutrally and from an outsider's

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[253] Grosz, *Sexual Subversions,* 128.

perspective.[254] These discursive divisions between bodies and minds have perpetrated a hierarchy between minds and bodies in discourse. In this hierarchy, minds not only reign supreme, but minds become the sole proprietors of access to knowledge.

The mind's shedding of its body propagates the annihilation of difference in "sexual difference." Disembodiment impedes an ability to think through sexual difference towards an ethic of sexual difference by allowing thought alone to be the means of securing its own ends. In other words, disembodied thought, enabled by a lack of attentiveness to the relationship between material bodies and discourse, prevents subjectivity from reciprocally encountering the difference of an other. Thought becomes the justification for itself. It determines the limits of the material world and the differences that are representable. The material differences of the other (i.e., woman), are cloaked by discourse that portrays only its own interpretation of the other's differences. Ewa Ziarek discusses the implications of this forgetting of the body for Irigaray:

> For Irigaray, the forgetting of sexual difference manifests itself not only in the disregard for the specificity of feminine embodiment, desires, and genealogies but also in the disembodied character of linguistic analyses, in the erasure of the drama of enunciation evident in the privilege given to predication, in the separation of the subject of knowledge from carnality and desire, in the infatuation with formalism and with its obverse side, the crippling nostalgia for the maternal body, and, finally, in the rigid separation between the immanence of flesh and the transcendence of the spirit. Even more striking is the originality of Irigaray's intervention, which links the question of sexual difference with the temporality of the body.[255]

Referring to the "disembodied character of linguistic analyses" Ziarek calls attention to the implications of the forgetting of the feminine on the way philosophy has understood

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[254] Ibid.
[255] Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, "Toward a Radical Female Imaginary: Temporality and Embodiment in Irigaray's Ethics," *Diacritics* 28, no. 1 (1998): 61.

the relationship between discourse and thought as an uninterrupted unity.[256] This transcendentalizing of language and thought contributes to the splitting of the subject into body and spirit. The subject becomes disembodied from itself in thinking. Ziarek contrasts this disembodiment to Irigaray's work, which she sees as an insistence on refiguring the infinite of the transcendent through the finitude of the flesh. According to Ziarek's reading of Irigaray, the forgetting of the feminine creates a world of necessity and fetishization rather than the specificity of desire in and with the other.

Discourse unencumbered by a body is aloof and unwilling to perceive a knowledge that would arise from outside of itself, a knowledge of lived material existence. The absence of body is part of the lack of difference in sexual difference. It allows masculine discourse to posit a feminine irrespective of woman's flesh. And because the discourse is always already masculine, without an openness to the wisdom of the flesh it erases, it operates as a totality closed in on itself. Disembodiment gives way to a false sense of independence or separation from the other. In particular, disembodiment separates man from his reliance on woman. He renders her an object of his desire for sameness by returning her to some place for his own becoming. As Ziarek points out in the above quote, disembodiment contributes to the nostalgia for woman as

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[256] Ziarek also argues that Irigaray's notion of embodiment and its relation to language follows a linkage between "discontinuous temporality of becoming" and ethical responsibility to the other. It is within this juxtaposition of ethics, becoming and embodiment that Ziarek locates Irigaray's complex sense of sexual difference. Ziarek uses the notion of the discontinuous temporality of becoming to remove essence from Irigaray's sense of becoming. But because of Irigaray's insistence on embodiment, which she draws from Lacan, the historicity of the discontinuous temporality of being does not fall into absolute disembodied contingency. This is the crucial difference between Irigaray's work and that of an unyielding deconstructivist position. "What is at stake, then, in Irigaray's work, is an attempt to reconnect the creative and disjunctive temporality of the social imaginary-the emergence of new modes of being-with the becoming of sexed bodies." Ibid.

the "maternal body." Therefore, Ziarek is pointing the link between the disembodiment of discourse and the forgetting of woman in particular for Irigaray.

In her discussion of love of sameness among men, Irigaray implies that forgetting gratitude to the body is an erasure of the debt we owe the body for the gift of being. She continues this sentiment writing, "L'amour du même entre homes signifie souvent un amour dans le même, qui ne peut se poser comme tel sans le maternel-naturel-matériel."[257] Love among men is a love in the same that forgets the conditions of its possibility for the masculine. Instead of a love with the other in which self and other live or dwell together, love becomes a love of the "production by assimilation and mediation of the feminine" [Il représente l'amour d'une production par assimilation et médiation d'elle(s)].[258] *Forgetting* the body allows the subject to present itself as part of an undifferentiated universal. Remembering the body involves embracing the specificity of difference that would allow love between the sexes to be more than mechanical or empirical.[259]

RE-MEMBERING THE IRREDUCIBILITY OF THE FLESH

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[257] Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 100.
[258] Ibid.
[259] Love between sexes must encompass a holding together of thought and of bodies as dynamically interconnected in order for that love to allow transcendence to be a part of immanence—to allow the infinite possibility of words and bodies to dwell together. In her reading of Spinoza, Irigaray suggests that the separation of thought and body is necessary for Spinoza to avoid an unethical limiting of one person's thought over another's body or one person's body over another's thought. Irigaray quotes Spinoza's separation of thought and body writing, "'*Mais un corps n'est pas limité par une pensée, ni une pensée par un corps*.'" She interjects the question of sexual difference into this discussion of the limits of body and thought in relation to the infiniteness [infini] and limitlessness [illimité] of God to suggest that sexual difference has been removed from the question of the infinite and the limitless. If body and thought remain separated in their effects upon each other, and if "le *discours* et la *pensée* comme étant les privilèges d'un producteur *masculin,*" then sexual acts cannot be thought beyond their mechanical production. Likewise, sex acts could never be acts of love. Ibid., 88.

Disembodiment has hindered the ability to think through sexual difference; therefore, an ethic of sexual difference must be an embodied ethic or a bodily practice that re-imagines the undifferentiated totality of thought perpetuated by an illusion of sexual difference. If, as Irigaray suggests, philosophical concepts of sexual difference have assimilated the feminine, the possibility of the sexually differentiated material body of woman is absent from discourse. What is required is a way to conceive of the body as necessary to the possibilities and structures of thought itself and vice versa. Irigaray writes bodies into a discourse of existence that historically has forgotten the body's significance to the possibility of discourse. Through a mimetic strategy that complicates the language of the feminine and of the body of woman even as it uses that language to confront the limits of discourse, Irigaray insists on the mutually informing relationship between discourse and bodies as a way to perceive and then push the limits of thought. Though the body has been separated from thought, attention to the body can reveal the disembodiedness of discourse. And from this capacity to announce its absence, the body becomes a site of resistance and the foundation for knowledge. Irigaray uses the normally restricted or ignored space of the body as philosophy. And she allows the body to intervene in order to create a way of relating to difference that resists categorization and reduction.

Explaining the relationship between Irigaray's conflation of the body with the possibility of an ethics beyond sameness, David Boothroyd writes the following:

> In her account of sexuate embodiment, the body is *both* the object of interpretation and that which does the interpreting. This interpretation is, so to speak, written along the contours of the body's surfaces and is given its specific topography by them. The emphasis on the body in the first instance serves to reverse the priority afforded to 'consciousness', 'the mind', or 'spirit', in relation to Reason in philosophy but it serves also in the articulation of the

> feminine and female identity beyond a simple reversal of this metaphysical opposition. Irigaray's metaphorization of the body redresses the scopophilic and disembodied universalist perspective, which views men and women as the same; as part of the same 'humanity' or 'species'.[260]

The "metaphorization of the body" is a disruption of sameness because it re-prioritizes the body at the same time that it disrupts the immediacy of the connection between the feminine and the body. In other words, Irigaray does not simply re-conflate the body with the feminine such that the re-prioritization of the body is equatable to the prioritization of the feminine.[261] She wants to revalue the body as part of a way to reject simple metaphysical opposition that enables a concept of a universal or "one" according to which all subjects can be understood. As Grosz references Irigaray's metaphor of the vagina to explain the relationship between representations of the body and the metaphorization of the body in Irigaray's mimesis. Grosz writes, "The two lips is a manoeuvre to develop a *different* image or model of female sexuality, one which may inscribe female bodies according to interests outside or beyond phallocentrism, while at the same time contesting the representational terrain that phallocentrism has hitherto annexed."[262] Grosz highlights the complexity of Irigaray's analysis, focusing on Irigaray's reliance on bodily metaphors within the context of her mimetic project. Irigaray's use of mimesis evidences an emphasis on the human and the concreteness of material being as the possibility for openness to the other. Irigaray's mimesis opens the space for two rather than one.

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[260] David Boothroyd, "Labial Feminism: Body against Body with Luce Irigaray," *Parallax* 2, no. 2 (1996): 70.
[261] Irigaray does not want to render the feminine once more exclusively to the material or the bodily in a way that maintains the metaphysical opposition between the material and the spiritual and between woman and man.
[262] Grosz, *Sexual Subversions,* 116.

By writing through the feminine mimetically and by claiming that "woman" is irreducible, Irigaray is always writing through an uncharted space. What is known of woman is given through her difference from the dominant discourse. Outside of discourse, her difference is unintelligible. This uncharted space does not belong to a particular notion of woman; rather, this uncharted space is designated discursively by woman just as woman is designated discursively by the feminine.[263] Writing as woman and yet writing through the feminine to disrupt the idea of woman suggests that woman lies beyond the concept or beyond the realm of intelligibility. The difference marked by woman remains irreducible because it cannot be captured by the feminine, and yet by interrupting the masculine discourse, the difference of woman brings itself to light, even if only as a glimpse of possibility. Irigaray's writing, then, exemplifies her vision of ethics. She claims the ethics of her text and embodies those ethics by writing to give voice to the difference that stands outside of discourse. She has claimed the space of her sexed body as woman to manipulate the discursive limits used to describe and conceptualize her body.[264] Occupying "woman" strategically through mimesis allows Irigaray to use the difference of woman who is outside of representation to break into discourse while remaining unrepresentable.

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[263] I am not holding onto the idea of woman as other. Rather, I am suggesting that the other can be marked discursively by woman. I would argue, however, that the other can be marked by many other names based on historical contexts--race, class, sexuality--these are categories in which others are most often constituted. Again, I contend that Irigaray's notion of woman is useful as a strategy for interpreting the relationship of the discursively othered to the othered bodies veiled in and through that discourse.

[264] From this space of resistance, the sexed body also discloses that the conditions for its resistance are predicated on a particular reception of that body in discourse. In other words, woman reveals that she resists insofar as she enters into discourse as a feminine that does not speak for her. The resistance of the sexed body is contingent on discourse, and this contingency further unravels any sense that the sexed body is conceptual except insofar as it enters discourse. As a strategy, that sexed body remains at the limits of discourse and outside of the symbolic order.

Writing through the body of "woman" as a dynamic strategy is different from writing through the body of woman as a static concept or a biological certainty. Referring to Irigaray's essay "Women's Exile," Grosz contends, "In [Irigaray's] understanding, languages and discourses do not reflect a pre-existing material reality; they function to actively constitute the world of human experience as meaningful or representable, an effect of forces and relations of power."[265] According to Grosz both materiality and discourse are mutually intertwined for Irigaray. They both contribute to the "construction of a meaningful reality."[266] Therefore, neither the biology nor discourse are reducible to the other.

Distinguishing between the language of flesh and body may be helpful for delineating the extent to which I see mimesis as a successful strategy for engendering ethical relationships. I turn to the language of flesh to denote that the embodiment to which I refer is not the embodiment of the body in discourse, i.e., the feminine body. Rather, I understand Irigaray's mimetic embodiment as belonging to the body that cannot be thematized by normative conceptions of the body, e.g. woman's body in masculine discourse, the queer body in a heterosexist polity, or the colonized body in a "free" society. The erased difference of woman, the difference of woman that is not captured or transmitted through the language of the feminine, is a difference that manifests as a tension between flesh and words. This tension is the result of the failure of the disembodied self-same to absorb all difference in its path. Disembodied discourse cannot make sense of this flesh that exceeds its discursively identified body. Woman, for

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[265] Ibid., 112.
[266] Ibid.

example, may designate a discursive identity, but the differences of her embodied life and the experiences of her flesh are not captured in the name woman that labels her body. These differences of the flesh are the ones through which embodiment gives mimesis its power.[267]

Because mimesis is tied to the embodiment of woman as part of a question or strategy for interrogating the ethics of discourse, Irigaray's example of mimetic writing offers a way to think of the embodied practice of writing as an alternative way of knowing to the discursive reductions of difference that characterize prevailing modes of thought. Through a knowledge that her flesh speaks differently than the discourse in which her body is inscribed, writing through the question of woman disrupts any certainty associated with the category of "woman." Mimesis serves to deconstruct identity and casts that identity in terms of the unthought difference othered by discourse. Analogically, one might say that mimesis deconstructs the idea of woman and reintroduces woman in terms of the differences of her flesh that have been silenced. The

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[267] I speak of the difference of the flesh as that which is not captured in language. This idea that the flesh imparts a way of knowing beyond the traditional sense of comprehension will allow us to understand the what I refer to as "the space of constraint" that offers an other wisdom beyond empirical knowledge. Offering a similar argument in "Gender and the Infinite," feminist philosopher of religion Pamela Sue Anderson calls for an understanding of the sex/gender distinction as conceptual. Anderson suggests that we need to move beyond understandings of the difference between sex and gender as one of biology versus culture, and she proposes a conceptual distinction to enable a phenomenological account of the body. "This level assumes that the body is intuitively apprehended before it is understood or interpreted" (Anderson, 195). A reading that distinguishes certain intuitive experiences of what Anderson terms, the "lived body" as different from those experiences of the body inscribed in discourse is essential to my own project; however, I caution the reader to note that this distinction is not one of opposition. The distinction between the different ways of experiencing embodied life as the possibility for and imposition of knowledges is mutually informing. Pamela Sue Anderson, "Gender and the Infinite: On the Aspiration to Be All There Is," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 50, no. 1/3 (2001): 195.

result of this reintroduction would be a new sense of woman that arises from the infinite particularities of persons' experiences with the limits of the identity of woman.[268]

Through mimesis Irigaray's writing reflects the struggle of writing as a woman who has been stripped of direct access to discourse. Irigaray's work demonstrates that the presence of the sexually different flesh of woman can reveal the unsexing of bodies that occurs in thought. By revealing that woman has been radically silenced/absent in discourse, Irigaray demonstrates that discourse has belonged to a single sex. The body in discourse is always a male body. Woman's body is determined by the language of the feminine which belongs to man. Therefore, woman's body is not her own. The inability of discourse to allow sexed bodies becomes apparent when Irigaray writes the sexed body as a philosophical interlocutor. This section examines Irigaray's reference to sexed bodies as an embodied writing that pushes the limits of a self-same discourse.

Because women's bodies have been discursively determined through a language that is not their own, their discursively determined bodies do not speak the wisdom of women's flesh. Irigaray's work thinks through an ethics of sexual difference by writing through a flesh that lays bare more difference than that ascribed to it by a masculine

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[268]I approach the non-essential link between woman and the feminine as revealed through a discursive-body disconnect. But a similar argument about the non-essentialness of Irigaray's use of woman is available through a psychoanalytic approach as well. Ewa Ziarek writes of a "discontinuous temporality of the body" which I see as having the same effect as a continuous and inevitable disconnect between flesh and the limits of discourse that occurs when one acknowledges that discourse is not capable of fully totalizing lived experience. Ziarek insists that the "discontinuous temporality of the body," which I argue is revealed in the constant disruption of the relationship between the feminine and woman in which Irigaray's mimetic writing must be contextualized, engenders a dynamic concept of woman that cannot be narrowed into a particular essence. Ziarek writes, "The female imaginary opposes the idea of "one universe" not because it inscribes the essential fluidity of the female body, but because it reflects the discontinuous temporality of the body. It is the temporality of the body, not the inert essence or unchangeable attributes of the female body, that questions both identity thinking and, as Castoriadis has taught us, the concept of "identitary time." Ewa Ziarek, "Toward a Radical Female Imaginary," 64.

discourse. Mimesis allows that silenced difference of the flesh to cry out from beneath its veiling by discourse.

RE-MEMBERING DISCOURSE WITH BODILY LANGUAGE

Re-membering discourse, giving discourse a body, is essential to understanding how ethical action can emerge from deconstructive practices that whittle down the possibility of absolute truth. Through a re-embodiment of discourse, Irigaray gestures towards a relationship between language and the flesh as mutually informing rather than as a closed circuit in which masculine discourse completely determines the limits of the flesh of his others. In Irigaray's case, establishing a link between the concrete flesh and a way of knowing oneself as a subject in a non-reductive and non-allergic manner is necessary for a subjectivity of and for women to arise. Reclaiming the significance of the material world de-transcendentalizes masculine discourse, removing it from its throne. By writing the body in her work, Irigaray offers a way of *thinking* through the materiality of the flesh, and this embodied thought is the path for conceiving of difference as the foundation for an ethical subjectivity.[269]

In *Éthique,* Irigaray's use of visceral and bodily metaphors is part of reminding transcendentalizing discourse that it has ignored its connection to the material world. Whereas many writers, most notably Judith Butler, have spoken of the impacts of

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[269] An ethical subjectivity is a subjectivity that embraces rather than annihilates difference. This is a subjectivity where the conditions for becoming subject actually emerge through difference; preserving difference, then, is essential to subjectivity. Furthermore, embodiment is essential to safeguarding difference. Thought must be embodied for sexual difference to exist, because only through embodied thought can we overcome the reduction of bodies to their prison in a disembodied masculine discourse. Therefore, an embodied way of knowing is necessary in order for sexually differentiated bodies as subjects in their differentiated ways of representing wisdom and knowledge.

discourse on bodies and the ability of bodies to resist and in some cases transform discourse, Irigaray's writing becomes a textual witness to this intertwining. Irigaray employs deeply material tropes as a means of re-embodying discourse. She is literally giving discourse a new "mind," re-*minding* discourse of the flesh to which it owes its possibility to be exercised. Like the air one breathes, the flesh is necessary to existence. Without the flesh, discourse would not exist. But for Irigaray, it is important to note that the flesh that is remembered is sexed flesh. It is the sexually differentiated flesh that she argues has been undifferentiated/rendered same in discourse. Therefore, it is not simply that discourse must be understood in terms of the materiality of existence. For discourse to not be caught in the economy of sameness, in that constant movement of reduction of difference, discourse must become sexually differentiated. And for discourse to become sexually differentiated it must be linked to the sexed flesh that has been forgotten in disembodied discourse. For this sexed flesh to be recovered, Irigaray must reintroduce the flesh of the absent woman, the woman whose flesh has been silenced by a discourse that fears her.

FLESH

Irigaray reintroduces the flesh of woman in her writing by employing visceral language as an intervention in discourse.[270] Her constant references to the body are an embodiment of the attributes of the feminine who is often associated with materiality.

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[270] Enfleshed references are the possibility for speaking about woman's absence in ways that validate the significance of the flesh for philosophical existence. In this way re-embodying discourse gives power to women's flesh. Using flesh to speak about the absence of flesh is a mimetic means to raise the significance of flesh to a non-totalizing relationship among subjects.

And yet Irigaray uses these material metaphors to speak philosophically. She takes on the feminine and then allows the feminine to misbehave, to speak in ways that masculine discourse never intended the feminine to speak. Using visceral language to draw this connection between the ethics between the sexes, access to discourse, and the construction of ways of knowing, Irigaray writes, "Le langage, pour formel qu'il soit, s'est nourri de sang, de chair, d'éléments matériel. Qui et quoi l'a nourri? Comment payer cette dette?"[271] Irigaray here disrupts the transcendentality of language by associating its loftiness with a real physical cannibalistic violence. And Irigaray makes it explicit that the transcendentalized language that feeds on the other is a masculine language, denoted in French by the masculine form "le langage."

"Le langage" is masculine language. It is the language of speech—language that can be both heard and voiced. *Le langage* does not belong to the language of the feminine tongue [la langue]. Feminine language may indeed be voiced but not heard within the parameters of masculine language. There is a discrepancy between spoken language and what is heard, between what is uttered and what is interpreted. The language that can be both spoken and heard is the language of power. As if the entire world should speak only one language, this language renders silent those voices that might speak other languages, even if only in secret. Irigaray's use of "Le langage" actively references this privilege of a masculine system of values. It refers to a language that manifests its power by consuming the differences of its others and erasing any trace of their flesh.

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[271] Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 122.

Irigaray uses visceral language to suggest the relationship between masculine language and the destruction or dismembering of the body. Masculine language feeds on flesh and blood, and when Irigaray asks how language has been nourished and who has provided this nourishment, we must attend to the absence of "la langue."[272] In other words, she suggests one must examine the suspected absence of an embodied feminine language as evidence that a disembodied masculine language has "devoured" her flesh. Perhaps *le langage* has fed on the flesh of woman's tongue? Perhaps indeed her tongue has been torn and wounded such that she can only cry out from the back of her throat. Her tongue, torn and eaten, has not been remembered. She has been dismembered and her dismemberment forgotten. The flesh of woman has nourished "le langage." If visible or heard, perhaps the flesh of la langue threatens to reveal the crimes of *le langage*.

From Irigaray's use of "le langage" we realize that the voice of a woman is behind her rhetorical questioning. Irigaray's use of "le langage" reveals that she knows well how masculine discourse is nourished. How will this debt be repaid, she asks? *Le langage* owes woman for its strength, but it has dismembered her, murdered her. Can the debt he owes repaid? Or must the cycle of debt be entirely overturned such that the feminine reclaims a body, a flesh, and reclaims a "la langue?" Irigaray continues to address the question of economy indirectly by alluding to psychoanalytic interpretations of man's fear of the debt he owes his mother for the gift of his body.

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[272] The use of flesh and blood to denote the feeding of language also invokes the mother-son relationship. Man is feeding on the body, or perhaps suckling from the breast, of the mother. He consumes her flesh through the creation of a system of values that will annihilate her own access to her body by stripping her of the ability to create a meaningful world in her own tongue.

Irigaray's rhetorical questions and the voice of a woman behind them imply that the economic relationship between *le langage* and its other must be overturned. No reparations are sufficient. Repayment would simply reinscribe women's silence in a way that validates the system that silences her. The question of debt in the economy of thought will continue to build and tarnish relations between the sexes as long as the flesh of woman is denied "la langue" with which and in which to speak. Behind Irigaray's questions, the reader recognizes her mimetic use of the feminine. Woman's absence marks the space from which the rhetorical question about what has nourished "le langage" gets its critical import. It would seem that Irigaray is making the case that masculine discourse has consumed the body of the woman it erases. It is the absent body/flesh of woman that, through mimesis, makes this annunciation possible.

Emphasis on the materiality of bodies designates a necessary component of the process of both dissimilation and redifferentiation/rebirth in sexual difference because attention to bodies allows us to see the workings of the self-same to hide bodies under the same veil of assimilative discourse that renders feminine subjectivity impossible. Contrary to the material body, the discursive body is a body that is economized by language. The discursive body is disconnected from its flesh. Its difference is reduced to sameness because the material flesh is rendered silent. The discursive body is a body whose difference has been covered over by the language of masculine and feminine, or male and female. This disembodied language knows nothing from the materiality of the flesh it claims to represent. The discursive body, designated by feminine or masculine language, must be disrupted in order for the un-assimilated flesh of women (and men) to

emerge. Irigaray's carnal references to the flesh of woman as that which has nourished masculine language reveal that the language about bodies has silenced the wisdom of their flesh. Allowing flesh to speak means locating an embodied discourse from which the flesh can interpret its difference.

An emphasis on the flesh is a way to witness the process through which the masculine discourse assimilates the feminine, but it also gestures toward a way out of this assimilation. Irigaray uses the language of the flesh to counter the prevailing organization of the subject in relation to its world. The masculine subject has separated itself from its flesh and the flesh of its others. This separation is indicative of the subordination of the material body to philosophy; it perpetuates an exploitative relationship between the subject and the material world. Separation of discourse and flesh create worlds of economic exchange that value production and instrumentation rather than "germination, birth and growth" [la germination, la naissance, la croissance].[273] Reuniting discourse and flesh is a necessary step to understanding the infinite materiality of the world as an alternative to the totalizing view of sameness that would forever return woman to the characteristics ascribed her by a male subject. Without flesh, the infinite would be abstraction and unrelatable. Without flesh, woman would continue to remain a discursive impossibility and her flesh forgotten for as long as the separation between discourse and flesh remains.

I perceive Irigaray's above metaphorization of flesh as part of this literal and figural remembering or re-embodying of difference. Irigaray uses this language of the

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[273] Ibid., 99.

flesh to call attention to that which has been cut off from the interpretation of existence. She reveals that the flesh has been used as fodder in the manufacturing of truths. But Irigaray also uses the language of the flesh as the means to interpret the violent silencing of the difference of the feminine. The flesh becomes the method of interpreting and understanding anew. In other words, Irigaray uses the flesh to transgress the limits ascribed the flesh. She uses the flesh as a way of thinking and representing ideas differently from the selfsame. The flesh represents a way of knowing silenced by discourse, and it is the means through which metaphor is possible. To resituate the body as a site of knowledge, Irigaray uses the space between the material body and the discursive body as a means for critiquing philosophy and fostering a non-economic discursive horizon. The disruptiveness of her metaphors have to do with their ability to exploit this limit between what is known in the body and what is given in discourse and cognition. Her metaphor of the flesh, then, is instrumental in efforts to think through the difference of the body that has been rendered silent.

MATERNAL-FEMININE/WOMB

Throughout much of her work, Irigaray speaks of the womb as a primordial place of creation and a place that reminds man of the difference of woman that he must overcome. But many argue that Irigaray's emphasis on the womb as the representation of a pre-discursive/unthought feminine reinscribes woman in a masculine imaginary. To witness the extent to which Irigaray's use of visceral metaphors successfully disrupt sameness, it

is helpful to perceive these metaphors in terms of the irreducibility sexual difference that is so important to Irigaray's ethics.

For many of her critics, Irigaray's constant interweaving of the language of the body in particular to make philosophical critiques suggests that Irigaray conflates the feminine with materiality. To her critics, Irigaray's explicitly feminine metaphors seem to enact an immediate forgetting of the silenced difference of woman that she advocates. Irigaray's association of the feminine with the material is according to Irigaray herself symptomatic of a masculine. But Irigaray does not use materiality to reduce the feminine to a specific type of body or to render her a baser existence. Irigaray reintroduces materiality into thought in a way that elevates materiality. She emphasizes the material mimetically to dislodge the association of the concrete or the real as necessarily limited or finite. Materiality as a way of thinking puts forward the possibility of irreducibility or infinity usually reserved for the transcendent arising from the flesh of beings.

As I have suggested earlier in this chapter, contrary to the notion that Irigaray's use of visceral metaphors essentializes sexual difference, Irigaray's use of mimesis disrupts the connection between the flesh of which she speaks and the words used to speak that flesh. Irigaray's writing plays with the space between the flesh and discourse in a way that resists the idea of an essential truth of bodies that can be captured by discourse. Irigaray's mimetic writing actually indicates a radical absence of the feminine that destabilizes the category of woman. This is an absence that would seem to render each use of metaphors of the female body almost provisional. According to Grosz writes, "It must be stressed that [Irigaray's] work is not a *true* description of women or

femininity, a position that is superior to *false,* patriarchal conceptions."[274] Instead, for Irigaray, the difference that arises is the difference of a forgotten feminine.[275] "Irigaray's discussion of the female body [...] must always be situated in the context of the prevalent texts in the history of phallocentric representations."[276] Mimesis allows Irigaray to represent the assimilation of the feminine as part of the self-reflexivity of the masculine. If one understands Irigaray's specific references to sexed bodies as contextual and therefore irreducible to a universally determined male or female body, one can see the ways these references are an attempt to think philosophy differently.

Irigaray's language of the maternal-feminine is one of the most prominent examples of the ways her mimetic use of bodily language allows her to use the feminine to reveal the forgotten feminine. Irigaray's persists within and inhabits that space of the forgotten feminine that she has engendered in order to locate a way of knowing beyond sameness. Irigaray's insistence on the maternal-feminine, a seemingly essentialist association of woman with her masculine-ascribed function, reveals the complexity of Irigaray's mimesis. The feminine that is reflected in Irigaray's critique always already carries the marks of her undifferentiated self (she is "irrational" and non-linear, bodily,

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[274] Grosz, *Sexual Subversions,* 110.

[275] It is plausible, that the difference would be that which was abandoned within the positing of a false dichotomy of masculine-feminine within the self-same. Thus, the difference would be prior to any ontology and yet brought forth through the language of sexual difference. We would therefore not be abandoning the real effects of the undifferentiation of the feminine but rather using the undifferentiation to suggest a space behind sexual difference and prior to ontology by first speaking through sexual difference —not unlike a feminist revision of Levinas. It is important to ask why the difference that has been forgotten would be the feminine. Is Irigaray really insisting on an ontology of the feminine separate from man? It would seem so. But perhaps more importantly than positing an ontology of the feminine through the lack ascribed the feminine would be an insistence on the feminine as other. Might Irigaray be suggesting that masculine discourse actually take the feminine seriously as its other? And that only through considering the difference of the feminine as that which is not dialectically opposed to the masculine but as something wholly other can there be an ethical relationship with sameness and difference—a love of self and love of other grounded in the love of the dynamism and fecundity of life where we share in experiences and share in our differences—a new concept of sameness and difference and of self-other relations?

[276] Ibid.

and maternal); however, these characteristics become the space from which the feminine resists man's return to sameness. Contrary to the instinctive character associated with motherhood, the maternal-feminine stands as Irigaray's example of knowing through the body. This is not a purely reactionary or innate knowing; it is a way of interpreting and relating to difference by thinking about and listening to the body.

Irigaray's extended use of the maternal-feminine metaphor is part of her mimetic strategy; therefore, her references to knowing through the womb are not simply pointing to some essential concept of woman. Huffer succinctly and sympathetically reads Irigaray's use of the maternal radically by referencing Irigaray's ability to use the maternal to reveal the "asymmetry [that] exposes the cracks in the logic through which the very terms of that analogous opposition between acting and understanding are constituted."[277] The maternal reveals the limits of thought. Irigaray's references to the womb become a marker of the forgotten place of feminine difference. Throughout *Éthique*, Irigaray uses the womb to symbolize a place without visibility, a place that holds the power of nostalgia for something lost, and a place through which to rediscover a way of knowing through a figurative rebirth. The womb is a way of knowing because it speaks to an experience of borders and boundaries as permeable and touching beyond inside and outside, an experience in darkness. This is a way of knowing that contrasts masculine ways of knowing that meticulously put everything in its place and, like nation-states, focus on closing off borders to artificially impose and limit differences. Irigaray's

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[277] Lynne Huffer, *Maternal Pasts, Feminist Futures: Nostalgia, Ethics and the Question of Difference* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 59.

point is that the womb knows differently. The womb calls attention to the body and invokes a direct association of the maternal with ethical possibility beyond sameness.

The knowledge given in and through the womb remains in play, without the reduction to a concrete outcome or postulation. The knowledge given in and through the example of the maternal womb is a knowledge that is ever flowing, nourishing the different bodies without a sense of one being alien from the other. The womb is a space where mother and child are together in their difference as the condition for both their beings. This maternal way of knowing through the body is non-dialectical, and it therefore manages to represent its irreducibility rather than to assert one comprehensible aspect of itself at the expense of all others. "As a figure of difference caught in a logic through which the disruptive potential of that difference is effaced," Huffer explains, "the mother provides a way for thinking about the potentially *asymmetrical* relationship between strategy and thought, between political positions and theoretical moves."[278] Huffer alludes to the fact that the maternal is the figure associated with ethics as it is in the work of Levinas. And yet the structures of self-same logic would render this association of the mother with ethics risky, reducing motherhood to the ethical in a way that veils the diversity of the experience of being mothers and in a way that easily allows the maternal to cloak the diversity of feminine difference. Huffer acknowledges the complexity and the danger with which the language of the maternal-feminine is used in Irigaray's work. But Huffer ultimately claims that the contentious metaphor Irigaray uses

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[278] Ibid.

is, by virtue of its contentiousness, providing a way of thinking about why logic attempts to take the metaphor out of its openness and irreducibility.

Similarly, David Boothroyd contends that the maternal-feminine that is reflected in Irigaray's language of the womb and mucous for instance, is a complex effort to use the feminine to indicate the irreducibility of difference that is covered over by the very logic that constructs the ideas about the feminine. Boothroyd, in differentiating the maternal-feminine from an essential woman writes the following:

> This *maternal-feminine* organises, in Irigaray's inimitable 'double-style' which combines erotics with exegesis, her own writing of the (female) body. The body morph which supports this account of sex/gender (sexe) is not, as some of those critics who accuse her of essentialism have said, the anatomical female body, but the corporeal-discursive morph, the *maternal-feminine*--which is a *matrix* in a double sense. As Diane Elam has argued: there is no escape from anatomy for feminism, but this is not because of the irreducibility of the natural but on the contrary because our understanding of human anatomical nature is as constructed as any other discourse and cannot function as an origin.[279]

Boothroyd's body morph is like my sense of the flesh-discourse relationship in Irigaray's text. Indeed, as I have suggested, Irigaray is writing a female subjectivity by writing through the flesh. But in writing through the flesh, she is not giving us the same woman of the feminine. She is giving us a sense of the space between the real flesh of woman and the discursive limits of sexual difference by writing mimetically. Irigaray is focused on the space between flesh and discourse, or perhaps, in Huffer's terms between "acting and understanding" as the place where the workings of sameness become most evident. And it is this use of the sexed, feminized flesh to expose the unethical movement of

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[279] Boothroyd, "Labial Feminism," 76.

thought in its reduction differences that makes Irigaray's writing a performance of her ethical theory.

In Irigaray's texts, bodily metaphors expose the disconnect between discourse and materiality. Therefore to call woman "maternal-feminine" occurs in the midst of revealing that the feminine is under question such that the question becomes one of woman's absence. Maternal-feminine is about a symbolic space of possibility between the absent woman and a language that would emerge from making a space for herself as a newly imagined subject. It is a space between flesh and word that values those characteristics that have been devalued, twisted, or erased by discourse, such as the maternal. In this way, Irigaray's conflation of the body and philosophical concepts is an effort to critique the metaphysical division that has deprived thought of relationship to the body. And though she is making this critique through an association of the feminine with the body, she is not conflating the absent woman with the material. "Woman" represents a possibility in a future where metaphysics is disrupted.

MUCOUS

Another example of Irigaray's use of the irreducible body as a means to overcome the logic of sameness is evident in her references to mucous. Irigaray uses the metaphor of mucous as an allusion to the philosophical notion that the experience of absolute alterity has to be embodied. Mucous explains a type of space or intermediary between self and other that at once facilitates the sensory experience of one's flesh while affirming the touch of the other as the condition for experiencing one's self. Through the example of

mucous, Irigaray reorients thought in terms of the knowledge presented by flesh. For example, Irigaray's use of the language of mucous and the fluidity it engenders challenges the linearity of logic and the movement of the self-same. Irigaray asserts the need to rethink mucous beyond its role as a substance from which man constitutes himself from woman's womb and towards a way of thinking differently. Mucous as a source of pleasure and mutuality insists on knowing and experiencing the self with the other. Difference, therefore, would be essential to becoming. Knowing the self would emerge through the experience of this mutuality of the flesh.

Margaret Whitford suggests references to mucous are constitutive of Irigaray's disruptive strategy: "The universe of the mucous is fluid: the stable universe of 'truth' becomes unstable."[280] Irigaray claims that thinking through the mucous might pose an alternative or "le renversement de la dialectique" [the reversal of the dialectic].[281] The idea that mucous could be an alternative to the dialectic arises because mucous flows and moves without the same sense of destruction or absorption of difference. The metaphor of mucous indicates a certain relationship to knowledge that differs from the unethical return to sameness characterized by discourse's desire to conceptualize and thematize difference. Mucous is always an intermediary. Unlike dialectics, mucous does not involve a logic of reduction. Irigaray writes, "A la transparence du concept pourait s'opposer la non-transparence, ou l'autre *transparence*, du muqueux. Jamais simplement disponible, jamais simple matière à portée de mains ou d'outil différent, pour

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[280] Whitford, *Philosophy in the Feminine,* 163.
[281] Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 108.

l'accomplissement de l'oeuvre."[282] The mucous represents abundance and possibility for Irigaray. It represents an other way of knowing that cannot be rationalized in terms of a linear progression. "[Mucous] lends itself to the representation of the unthought"[283] Its boundaries are permeable rather than rigid. It is open to movement from all directions. It is constructive but not in a way that it can be recuperated or used in exploitative production. Mucous builds organically and offers, but it does not construct violently like the dialectic.

Irigaray warns that to ignore mucous as a way of thinking is to ignore its fecundity. She writes, "Ce défaut de noces avec le muqueux entraîne la dissipation de son abondance, de sa disponibilité, de sa fête, de sa chair ou la déréliction et la répétition du ou des gestes de l'amour..."[284] The abundance of the mucous resides in its ability to speak that space of the absent woman without reducing that absence to a concept. In "Fluid Thinking: Irigaray's Critique of Formal Logic," Marjorie Haas discusses the significance of Irigaray's use of mucous for gesturing toward the redifferentiation of discourse:

> Irigaray's work rests on the premise that the generative, sense-giving structures of Western culture (e.g., law, language, logic, and economy) provide no representation of feminine existence, except insofar as it is commensurable with masculinity. More problematically, these structures are such that it is impossible to fully represent feminine otherness within them. All that is available is the

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[282] The mucous offers an other transparence that conceptualization to which conceptualization would be opposed. The mucous is never simply available, never a simple matter of hands or different tools, or the accomplishing of works." Ibid.
[283] Whitford claims that mucous represents the unthought for multiple reasons ranging from its interiority (which prevent it from being a clear reflection/mirror) to its irreducibility to procreation (it is involved in pleasure irrespective of procreation) to its simultaneous inseparability from the body and lack of "fixed form." Whitford, *Philosophy in the Feminine,* 163.
[284] Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 108.

> small space of representation assigned to women's bodies: the symbolic images of flow, fluidity, indefiniteness.[285]

Irigaray's use of the "symbolic images" attributed to the bodies of women is a means to transform what has been assigned as unphilosophical. She uses that which has been deemed unphilosophical to think beyond philosophy's limits. Haas continues to defend Irigaray's use of the language of a sexed female body as part of Irigaray's attempt to overturn the logic of identity, writing, "Irigaray uses these images as a lever, encouraging us to push our thinking and speaking in new directions and bring about a transformation in consciousness."[286] The body is a site of new knowledge that incorporates the becoming not only of woman but of the becoming of difference more generally. Haas indicates a truly revolutionary power in Irigaray's work. To suggest that the body creates a "transformation in consciousness" is to herald the possibilities that the union of body and discourse might have for re-imagining thought.

Grosz echoes this sense that Irigaray's work calls for an entirely different way of knowing, suggesting that Irigaray's project is not about an addition of the feminine voice to philosophy but about a restructuring of the philosophical limits through a mimetic use of the feminine. "Femininity cannot simply be added to existing discursive frameworks for there is no space for such an addition."[287] As Grosz explains, "Different ways of knowing, different kinds of discourse, new methods and aspirations for language and knowledges need to be explored if women are to overcome their restrictive containment

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[285] Marjorie Haas, "Fluid Thinking: Irigaray's Critique of Formal Logic," in *Representing Reason: Feminist Theory and Formal Logic*, ed. Rachel Joffe Falmagne and Marjorie Haas(Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), 72.
[286] Ibid.
[287] Grosz, *Sexual Subversions,* 126.

in patriarchal representations."[288] Irigaray's insistence on corporeality is part of this new way of thinking. It is a thinking through the flesh as part of her overarching challenge to the system of sameness. Sameness separates us from our own bodies and disembodies our others, rendering the other an abstract concept. When the other is disembodied and abstract, I can too easily overlook their needs. Flesh is the reminder that the other is a real other, not an abstraction.

THE SENSIBLE-TRANSCENDENTAL: FROM RE-MEMBERED DISCOURSE TO EMBODIED ETHICS

Irigaray's visceral metaphors insist on the irreducibility of thought and discourse to the materiality of the body as a way to perceive the body as a site for irreducible knowing beyond sameness. The above examples reveal that for Irigaray, re-embodying discourse is necessary to thinking differently. But this re-embodiment of discourse as the possibility of thinking or knowing otherwise touches on another integral piece of Irigaray's critique: disembodiment is also part of the problem that metaphysics poses to women's subjectivity.[289] An ethics of sexual difference requires re-embodiment of language not simply so discourse can remember the body, but so the body can be elevated to a site of knowledge. This body knows in a way that transgresses the divisions of mind and body that have separated subjectivity from ethics, allowing the self's becoming to be

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[288] Ibid.

[289] Margaret Whitford claims that overcoming the division between the material world and the transcendental one is essential to Irigaray's project. Whitford writes the following: "An ethics of sexual difference, that is, an ethics which recognizes the subjectivity of each sex, would have to address the symbolic division which allocates the material, corporeal, sensible, 'natural' to the feminine, and the spiritual, ideal, intelligible, transcendental to the masculine. A sensible transcendental is the condition of an ethics of sexual difference, necessary if the fate of Antigone is not to go on repeating itself." Whitford, *Philosophy in the Feminine*, 149.

a solipsistic endeavor. Disembodiment of language indeed separates the mind from the spirit in ways that have been harmful to women. The metaphysical division between the transcendent and immanent worlds is behind the alienation of minds/spirits from bodies.

Overcoming the metaphysics propagated in discourse and the logic of the self-same is essential to establishing a subjectivity that embraces multiplicity and difference. Therefore, Irigaray's embodied ethic involves not only the deconstruction of thought and the body but, thereby, a challenge to the interplay of the material and the transcendental in the deconstruction of the immanent-transcendent divide. Irigaray coins the term "sensible transcendental" to explain her re-imagining of the traditionally divided spaces of the material immediacy of the immanent world from the mediated spiritual other-world of transcendence. Irigaray extends her use of visceral metaphors to establish the notion of the sensible transcendental. The material metaphors combined with an emphasis on characteristics typically accorded to the transcendent are her means for grasping the irreducibility of flesh. And, for Irigaray, understanding the flesh as irreducible is a way of perceiving its infinity and divinity.

The sensible transcendental is the culmination of Irigaray's re-embodiment of ethics. It is a space from which subjects become in an ethical way because it is a space where thought and flesh are united such that they refuse to be reduced to sameness and are therefore irreducible. Using the language of Irigaray's *Sexes and Genealogies*, Chanter describes this sensible transcendental: "With this concept Irigaray wants to avoid a "closed universe" in which the absolute 'kills, saps vitality,' and 'destroys its first

roots.'"[290] The sensible transcendental is the means through which Irigaray can re-embody discourse because it "conflates categories that traditionally philosophers have kept apart."[291] Irigaray conflates the most visceral images of immanence with the most abstract concepts of transcendence, including an association of the earthly and heavenly through the language of mucous and angels and the lips of the vagina with subjectivity. Both of these metaphors, and indeed all of Irigaray's visceral references, are ways to attest to the link between the limits of thought and discourse and the limits of human becoming; however these references are also challenges that demonstrate what Chanter calls "the conflation of abstraction and materiality in order to insist on the need to retain the otherness of the other."[292]

ANGELS AND MUCOUS

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[290] Chanter, 180.
[291] Ibid.
[292] The reader must note that Irigaray's emphasis on deconstructing the boundaries of immanence and transcendence reveals her reliance on Levinas for understanding the relationship between metaphysics and sameness and the need to overcome metaphysical divisions in order to establish ethics. For instance, Irigaray's sensible transcendental echoes Levinas's emphasis on an openness to the alterity of our human others as the means for safeguarding/ensuring the alterity of the divine. Irigaray is using the sensible-transcendental as a way to think about the infinite of immanence and the fleshiness of divine possibility. Irigaray's effort to make the sensible transcendental an ethical space occurs by interweaving the infinite with the finite, the concrete with the abstract, and the divine with the human. Therefore, Irigaray, like Levinas, wants to claim the possibility of relationship to the radical alterity of the divine through the concrete experiences with our human others. Chanter also contends that Irigaray's sensible transcendental is a clear reflection of her reliance on Levinas, and she refers to Irigaray's efforts to hold together the immanent and the transcendent as an attempt to preserve difference. Chanter writes, "Irigaray draws on the conflation of abstraction and materiality in order to insist on the need to retain the otherness of the other." Chanter's point is that Irigaray's indeterminate writing style exhibits a relationship between the concreteness of materiality and abstractness of thought. In Irigaray's case this uneasy relationship between two traditionally separated spheres is the condition for understanding sexual difference as irreducible to prevailing concepts about difference and prevailing assumptions about bodies that make those differences seem natural or inevitable. Openness to the irreducibility of sexual difference is the space from which subjects become, and it is also the possibility of divine presence in our lives. Irigaray wants a way to prevent ethics from being about responsibility to a divine other that is always already a masculine construction of difference, not real alterity. The sensible transcendental engenders a way of thinking about the infinite difference of the world as part of the irreducibility of one's becoming subject, rather than as a dangerous obstacle to one's self-assuredness. And this is a vision that shares with Levinas the sense of responsibility for preserving difference as the linchpin of ethical subjectivity. Ibid.

Returning again to Irigaray's metaphor of mucous, one witnesses that mucous speaks to a disruption of logic because of its characteristics of mutuality, fluidity, and permeability. Furthermore, through these characteristics, mucous presents a way for understanding both the material and the transcendent differently, beyond opposition. In mucous, Irigaray breaks down the borders of immanence and transcendence, creating a possibility of wholeness. But her wholeness does not occur as a movement of singularity. It occurs in mutuality through the experience of the flesh of one's other as an irreducible difference. The visceral metaphor is the possibility for re-imagining the transcendent and the immanent together.

The flesh (specifically in its sexual difference) becomes the possibility of radical alterity usually reserved for the transcendent. For example, Irigaray analogizes angels and mucous in their potential functions as intermediaries. She heralds a new relationship between bodies and spirits, writing, Le muqueux se figure sans doute du côté de l'ange ' l'inertie du corps privé de son rapport au muqueux et à son geste, du côté du corps déchu ou du cadavre."[293] The mucous of the body, like the angel, announces consummation and the representation of sexuality. Like the "angels who are rapid messengers transgressing...all enclosures" [Les anges, messagers très rapides, et qui transgressent ...toutes clôtures] the mucous permeates the boundaries of bodies and the porosity of their flesh.[294] In contrast, the body that moves without relation to mucous is a body that is figuratively dead and unable to gesture without reduction, because without

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[293] "The mucous should no doubt be pictured as related to the angel, whereas the inertia of the body deprived of its relation to the mucous and its gesture is linked to the fallen body or the corpse." Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 17.
[294] Ibid.

mucous, there is no intermediary. And without the intermediary, the experience of the other is reduced to one of enclosure or enveloping into oneness. Theoretically speaking, we can read this body deprived of its mucous as a body that is fully reduced and enclosed within a totalizing system of the self-same, deprived of any relationship to the difference of the other. The fullness of relationality that would be part of a love for the other and a love between subjects has been squelched by the dominating movement of an economy of thought and selfish desire that forgets the angelic space between bodies and their flesh.[295]

In light of Irigaray's sense of the angel as intermediary of sexual difference, one can surmise that without the angel, the mucous in the sexual encounter cannot figure a communion between the flesh. Whereas the self-same attempts to solidify borders and deprive the body of its relationship to its mucous and to the porosity of the flesh of the other, the angel as intermediary, opens the body to a space prior to the notion of closure

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[295] Grosz also discusses the intermediary function of angels in Irigaray's text as the possibility for ethical relations between the sexes and the possibility of the divine therein: "Although angels signify the possibility of a bridge between mortal and the immortal, the terrestrial and the divine, male and female, they are usually disembodied, sexually neuter, intangible, incorporeal. They move between one and another while being identified with neither." They are "ideals of a meeting or middle ground between the sexes." The divine is achieved through an ethical approach to alterity which for Irigaray can be achieved in a sexual encounter wherein the differences of the sexes are approached but not fully capturable by one sex or the other. The angel as intermediary is a symbol of such a meeting of bodies in their irreducibility. Therefore angel and body being found together is a reference to Irigaray's sense of the ethical alterity of God as emerging through an affirmation of the human. "The *embodied* angel may be able to represent the possibility of a divine union, without residue or leftover" and thus "represents the possibility of *sexual ethics."* The intermediary is not abstract but bodily. It is the possibility of the divine through and in the human experience of the difference of one's others. Grosz, *Sexual Subversions,* 151-161.

or opposition.[296] Irigaray writes, "Une éthique sexuelle ou charnelle demanderait que puissent se trouver ensemble et l'ange et le corps. Un monde à construire ou reconstruire...."[297] Angel and body must be found together to reconstruct the world. In sexual acts, the intermixing of fluids and the dis-integration of physical boundaries through the porosity of membranes attest to the potential for bodies to "speak" beyond the limits of discourse. Sexed bodies provide a model for thinking the generative capacity of difference. Bodies and their sensations become sites of knowledge from which to transform thought. For Irigaray, this union of body and mind would allow a fecund experience of the divine—"Un dieu porté par…la respiration des amants" [a god carried by…the respiration of lovers].[298] The body's mucous offers the possibility of union without the complete engulfment of assimilation; therefore, an ethics of sexual difference is also a theological ethics that prevents the returning of God to man and yet allows the human to experience the divine through a "transfiguration du sang, de la chair par leur langage et leur éthique."[299]

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[296] Returning again to "Belief Itself," Irigaray writes of the two angels facing one another upon the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant: "They shelter what may take place because they are two and are turned toward one another. Coming from opposite directions, to meet one another, they halt the return from sameness to sameness before any determination or opposition of presence or absence can be made." The angels face each other from opposite directions. There is between them a space of encounter, yet neither takes back the other to the direction from whence they came. Irigaray reads the position of the angels as that of guardians of the divine covenant—a promise of the divine—"of a divine presence that has yet to be made flesh." This promise by which they face each other, "alike and different," is the promise of a future. "Neither God, nor difference of the sexes, nor difference between man and animal seem decided upon once and for all, already made flesh." This is a critical point for saving Irigaray from essentialism. The inscription of difference upon the flesh awaits a divine presence. Irigaray seems to suggest that there could in fact be something prior to sexual difference, but that any notion of a flesh that is prior to sexual difference cannot be approached until "[sexual] difference has first been respected and fulfilled." Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 64.

[297] Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 23.

[298] Ibid., 124.

[299] This transfiguration of blood and flesh would have to occur outside of the economy of language and thought such that flesh and blood are no longer sacrificed but given the space to create and embody language and give flesh to words and words to flesh.

TWO LIPS

As evident from Irigaray's interweaving of the language of the body and angels above, Irigaray's use of visceral language distinctly re-associates the body and spirit as the horizon for a new theological and philosophical imagination. Irigaray's writing strategies are part of the work of sexual difference and offer a way not only to re-member the sexed body but use that re-membered body to re-imagine the space of immanence and transcendence. As if to overtly remind the reader that the erasure of the feminine in traditional discourse on sexual difference encompasses a separation of the body from its sex and desire, Irigaray links the human experience of divine love to a sexual encounter. The porosity also of bodies' membranes enables the passage of fluids between bodies without destroying the integrity of the borders. Membranes permit the movement of fluids in a way that is life giving. Not only is porosity necessary to the functions of the living body, but also, this porosity enables reproduction through the co-mingling of the fluids of sexed bodies between sexes. The possibility of a sexual relationship that heeds the fecundity of the body's mucous is the real and metaphorical opening for refiguring the divisions of heavenly and earthly and making love between sexes possible.

For Irigaray, the sexual encounter, signaled by the scene of communion across the most intimate mucous [la communion à travers le plus intime du muqueux] is more than a metaphor. The body does not represent a type of love. Rather, in an attentive love, the communion that occurs across the mucous membranes in the sexual encounter evidences the real presence of a difference that is allowed to flow across borders in an ethic of sexual difference. This difference is at once substantive and imaginary. The difference

between lovers' fluids is at one material and symbolic of their desires—a desire that remains in flux. At the same time, the image of this fluid communion gestures to Irigaray's insistence that a relationship between differentiated sexes demands a reciprocated openness to the other without return. Just as mucous is the conduit for the communion of the borders of different bodies, in an ethic of sexual difference relationships between the sexes would involve a freedom to relate to the other without assimilation being the condition of relation.

Irigaray specifically invokes the female sexed body simultaneously to incorporate the dissimilation of the feminine and the rebirth of an irreducible concept of woman in a new ethical horizon. Drawing on her own earlier work in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray references to the two sets of lips of female anatomy, lips of the mouth and genitals, as a means for understanding the possibilities for speaking a place not sealed off by economic assimilation or reduction. In *Éthique s*he writes "If women are to establish or make possible a love among us, or a love for the feminine among us, women need to double and play what we are twice over, lovingly."[300] Irigaray is referring to her earlier emphasis on the irreducibility of women's subjectivity. Referring to Irigaray's work in *Speculum*, Grosz writes, "Her image stresses the multiplicity, ambiguity, fluidity, and excessiveness of female sexuality; it evokes a remainder or residue of *jouissance* left unrepresented in a phallic libidinal economy."[301] Though Grosz is referring to specific psychoanalytic implications of Irigaray's "two lips," there is a clear connection between the psychic and the representation of women's repression in language. The phallic

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[300] Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 105.
[301] Grosz, *Sexual Subversions,* 115.

libidinal economy is manifested in the self-same system of representation in discourse for Irigaray. Therefore, the two lips serve as a way to disrupt a single or monolithic representation of women subjects.

Amidst the imagery of the two sets of lips she suggests that the association of sex and language are the conditions of a life in an ethical horizon. Irigaray critiques Merleau-Ponty's philosophy on the basis that his work prioritizes the visual. She again turns to her metaphor of the two lips to speak of another way of encountering the difference between self and other.[302] Irigaray writes, "Visible et tactile n'obéissent pas aux mêmes lois ou rythmes de la chair" [The visible and the tactile do not obey the same laws or rhythms of the flesh].[303] Irigaray suggests that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological account of touch depends on a visual separation of things touching and being touched. For Merleau-Ponty, the lips represent a union that is visible.

Irigaray's point is that seeing the other requires a recognition of the other by the one who sees. Moreover, for Irigaray, the one who sees is always man. So for instance, Irigaray takes Merleau-Ponty's statement that "the body only sees because it is part of the visible" and notes that because the absence of difference in what philosophy deems difference (that pre-discursive allergy to the other that is marked by the language of an undifferentiated sexual difference) the body sees only what is the same. Irigaray,

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[302] Irigaray is also pushing the Levinasian ethical concept of the absolute passivity of the self. Lips, because they always touch and are always being touched, defy the separation between self and other and the notions of active and passive. Like Levinas's prediscursive self, the lips have a sort of absolute passivity "more passive than passive"in Irigaray's words. Unlike Levinas's face, the touching of the two lips do not have to be seen. The face requires recognition, and because the face of woman is veiled by sameness, a prioritization of the visual means that woman's face will never been seen in its difference. Only the sameness of male face will be the site of ethics. Irigaray writes, "And I am always being veiled, unveiled, violated by the other in this face. And the parts of my body that I cannot protect from my look." Irigaray, *Éthique De La Différence Sexuelle*, 152-171.

[303] Author's translation. Ibid., 152.

beginning by quoting Merleau-Ponty writes the following. "« Mon corps ne voit parce qu'il fait partie du visible. » Si je ne peux voir l'autre dans son altérité, et s'il ne peut me voir, mon corps ne voit plus rien dans la différence. Je deviens aveugle dès qu'il est question d'un corps différemment sexué."[304] Merleau-Ponty's concept of touch ignores the feminine touching and the feminine jouissance of her self-touching because her touching is not recognizable to man. Her touching is different from the touching he understands--the touching outlined in the male subject of Merleau-Ponty. The feminine touching of the two lips of the genitals, on the other hand, does not require recognition by a seer. Their touching is immediate and constant. Irigaray therefore criticizes Merleau-Ponty's invocation of the language of lips as revealing the inability to see the feminine experience of her two genital lips.

The two sets of lips represent boundaries of a body that are at once still part of that body and the possibility of its relationship to the world.[305] Even if traditionally understood the lips of the mouth mark the doorway to speech and the lips of the vagina present the passageway of reproduction, for Irigaray, the possibility of language and sex come from the crossroads of these lips. The two lips are the possibility of that single body's life and the possibility of giving life to another. The lips mark the place or the threshold between the breathing of air and the possibility of conception; however, they are irreducible to those happenings. They designate invisible openings or entrances into a body that is porous because of its mucous. The lips touch like praying hands, intimately

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[304] Ibid, 157.
[305]I have discovered that my reading of Irigaray's use of the two lips in *Éthique,* falls very close to Lynne Huffer's admittedly interested/invested reading of Irigaray's *Speculum.* Huffer, *Maternal Pasts*, 59.

touching without restricting the other: “Toucher plus intime que celui d’une main s’emparant de l’autre.[306]

Irigaray refuses to reduce the function of these openings to mere orifices or spaces for separating the inside and outside. Instead, she relates to the lips as thresholds for relationship to the world and to the self. These sets of lips are possibility without determination. In other words, as thresholds, the two sets of lips of the feminine transform the relationships between inside and outside. The sexed female body figures a new dynamic of space and time beyond dichotomous boundaries, thereby transforming the arrangement of self to the world. Moreover, Irigaray’s insistence on the two lips of the female sex signifies the relationship between sex and discourse as a condition of possibility for an ethics of sexual difference. Thus, not only is the question of the feminine in language necessary to ethics, but the actual body of woman is also at stake.

The exact determination of the relationship of the feminine to the female sex remains irreducible throughout Irigaray’s text. Irigaray is more interested in disruption of existing reductions of woman than on redetermining woman.[307] As Grosz writes, “The two lips are never one, nor strictly two. They are one and two *simultaneously*: where one identity ends and another begins is never clear.”[308] Grosz suggests that the lips are not representational of women’s sexuality but “combatative.”[309] In other words, the two lips are a way of resisting the “oneness” that has been part of the prevailing model of the subject. Thus two lips are yet another demonstration of Irigaray’s use of the flesh to

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[306] Ibid., 151.
[307] Grosz, *Sexual Subversions* 113.
[308] Ibid., 115.
[309] Ibid.

challenge the unethical reduction of difference, the reduction to oneness that has deprived women of their own subjectivity. Grosz is suggesting that the two lips are always part of Irigaray's ethical project. Their purpose "is to reveal the implicit assumptions, and the sexual positions constituted and affirmed in dominant representations, and to ease their hold over the terrain, so that different representations may be possible."[310] The lips are always resisting and marking something new apart from what they seem to represent.

Irigaray's intertwining of the philosophical and the corporeal and the immanent and transcendent through a visceral and sensual poetics prevents the reader from grasping a singular reduced concept of woman. Possibility without reduction is demonstrated in Irigaray's work. In other words, Irigaray creates an entry for these discursive limits to intermingle and commune like the mingling of fluids in jouissance that are the possibility of life. And still this communion is not an engulfment. There is no merging of terms into a third term—only an allowance for the multiple possibilities of difference represented in those limits to come to light/life. The entirety of Irigaray's text is written as though it is an invitation into a body. The particular body of the text is not engulfing because it is not a totality. Her text is like the two sets of lips insofar as it offers a possibility of relating to the limits of discourse without reducing that relationship to a concept. The two sets of lips, one associated with jouissance and the other with language, become irreducible representations of the threshold of life. Realizing the fullness or the full potential of these lips requires a concept of love that does not put off its divinity in another realm.

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[310] Grosz later writes, "Rather than the singularity, monologism and univocity of masculine self-images, Irigaray advocates undoing their self-evidence." Ibid., 116, 127.

Speaking from two sets of lips, Irigaray creates a space where the crossroads of these discursive limits converge and commune. In the absence of some consumable idea or work, Irigaray's text demands a patience. Perhaps her text requires the patience of an attentive or divine love that welcomes desire. She calls for a divine love as necessary to realizing the fecundity of sexual difference and she likens the realization of such love to the threshold exhibited by the two sets of lips of the female sex. In broaching the relationship between the discursive feminine and the sexed female body, Irigaray re-members the question of the feminine as a question not only of the problem of language but as a question of the unrealized potential of sexually differentiated bodies. The body of her text figures a sexed body, and the sexed body breathes a radically imagined life into her text.

By conflating traditionally disparate worlds, Irigaray exhibits an ethical possibility for understanding alterity as emerging through the concrete experiences of lived being. In particular, as the following examples will demonstrate, true difference or the possibility for alterity (like that Levinas wanted to preserve) can only occur when the world is not imagined in terms of Oneness. Like Levinas, Irigaray suggests that irreducible difference is necessary before the relationships between subjects can be ethical. But unlike Levinas, Irigaray suggests that there can be no two until woman is dissimilated from the singularity of masculine sameness. Women must be reborn in difference for there to be difference between subjects. Such difference, sexual difference, between subjects must exist if concrete encounters with a truly different other are possible. Without a truly differentiated notion of sexual difference, there is no other on

which the Levinasian encounter with the divine depends. Therefore, in the absence of a redifferentiated notion of "woman" there can be no other in discourse, and there can subsequently be no real divine (only the divine of sameness).

By re-embodying discourse in a way that reimagines the relationship between spirit and flesh or material and transcendental, Irigaray allows a redifferentiated "woman" to emerge. This "woman" does not belong to the self-same model of subjectivity. The becoming of women subjects in Irigaray's work is a radical becoming. The woman subject that Irigaray advocates is a woman subject that does not belong to the self-same model of subjectivity nor to the self-same masculinized feminine rendering of "woman." Chanter writes, "[S]he wants to develop a notion of women as subjects that does not succumb to the metaphysical constraints of masculine subjectivity, one that is not defined in terms of the unitary, fully present, mastering subject, one that does not refer back to the one as a repetition of the same."[311] Irigaray's woman emerges via a thinking through her own silenced/othered flesh as a new ground for subjectivity. She emerges through the irreducible space of difference that, though marginalized and rendered absent, could not be completely silenced in masculine discourse.

WORD AND FLESH RE/MEMBERED

One goal of thinking through sexual difference in this dissertation is to show that the sexed body is a body that, though named in language, is irreducible to masculine and feminine, male or female. Irigaray, speaking mimetically, is always speaking through a

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[311] Chanter, *Ethics of Eros,* 176.

language of representation that is indirect, through a language where her presence as a woman subject is mediated. Yet this mediation is revealed and thought through the very flesh that utters its mediated voice. In Irigaray's work, the body gestures beyond its discursively determined sex towards a difference normally silenced in discourse and erased from thought. This is why Irigaray is able to write. The body of woman is absent from discourse except through a self-same feminine. But Irigaray manages to write through that absent body to make a philosophical critique of sameness. Her body insists on her presence in a way that discourse cannot completely erase. By disrupting the link between the feminine and woman, Irigaray suggests that woman is a symbolic space and a possibility. So when Irigaray writes mimetically from woman, she is writing from an indeterminate space. What's more, by writing mimetically, Irigaray continuously destabilizes link between the feminine and woman and opening. So her writing is providing her a paradoxical dynamic/unstable ground from which to challenge the self-same. Because her writing disrupts woman, writing as woman is writing in a way that claims the indeterminate space as a way of knowing beyond the self-same.

Irigaray's mimesis is therefore an embodiment of the irreducibility of the flesh of woman. Indeed, all of Irigaray's references to bodies in *Éthique* must be read in light of the re-membering of the undifferentiated woman that her text performs. Woman's flesh has been stripped of its difference so that woman's body could emerge just as man wants/needs it to be. I suggest Irigaray re-members woman because she actually gives flesh back to woman. She gives flesh back to woman by re-grounding the transcendentality of discourse in the materiality of life. The flesh of woman becomes the possibility for a way

of knowing that resists the division of worlds created by the self-same. Woman's flesh speaks beyond the limits of her discursively determined body and exposes the reduction of difference that occurs when language is allowed to operate on an otherworldly level, disconnected from the material enfleshed existence. [312]

By understanding Irigaray's work as a constrained performance of embodiment within the limits of discourse allowed her, one can see Irigaray using the embodied space of an irreducible woman/feminine to re-imagine sexual difference in a way that allows a radical notion of bodies as sites of knowledge. Irigaray is writing through the space of one who has no place to claim as her own. She must make her space by writing in spite of her absence from discourse. But through the act of writing, she claims the indeterminateness of woman as the possibility of disrupting the self-same. In the practice of mimesis, the body of woman speaks beyond--and despite-- its discursive limits. The body of a woman speaks through its experience of being absent and uncertain. Irigaray gives presence to that uncertainty without speaking through the language of sameness that has been used to establish and ensure presence. The body beyond the limits of discourse is the body that can reveal its absence and subsequently its real presence beyond the language of sameness. Irigaray, then, opens a way for thinking about an ethics of sexual difference as a necessarily embodied act that would change the horizon for imagining the difference generated between words and bodies—arguably dissimilating the limits of sexed bodies within the prevailing discourse of sexual difference, gender, and sexuality.

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[312] To argue for the gesturing of Irigaray's work is to make a claim about the work of her work—the movement, the strategy, and the ethical integrity of her writing.

RECLAIMING THE BODY AS KNOWLEDGE: RE-SEXING BODIES THROUGH DISCURSIVE INTERRUPTION

Discursive limits to approaching the question of sexual difference reveal themselves when one's text embodies the struggles of representation. Born from the inability of discourse to fully annihilate the difference of the body, a sense of tension dominates *Éthique* and exposes philosophical concepts of sexual difference as undifferentiated. Irigaray's embodied writing is revealed through the exhibition of a constraint/difficulty of expression that is actually an inability of discourse to comprehend the breadth of experiences of embodied life.

Irigaray's text struggles to express an alternative knowledge through struggle itself. Her manipulation of the limits of expression at once validates the reality of the discursive constraints upon the body while empowering the body to express the transformative capacity of its constraints. This stylistic "strangeness" with respect to her philosophical approach echoes the situation of a destabilized notion of woman. Dissimilating woman from masculine discourse leaves the concept of woman uncertain. Yet through this uncertainty, woman is reborn through reuniting of discourse and flesh. Her flesh becomes a way of knowing. Despite her indeterminacy in a disembodied discourse, woman emerges anew in an embodied way of knowing, in a way of knowing beyond sameness that locates its irreducibility in the flesh.

To say that Irigaray's text embodies her ethic is to insist on the inseparability of her words from her struggle to represent that which has never occurred to date; the struggle to represent an as-yet-unthought possibility of woman. Embodiment is a

particularly appropriate term for the work she performs because amidst the limits of thought, the material body/flesh can reveal some forgotten or othered wisdom that displaces the prevailing limits of truth. The realities of lived being muddy the clear waters of truth because flesh lives and breathes in ways that cannot be reduced to a singular word or set of words. Irigaray's text lives and breathes in a similar way. It moves irreducibly with un-cited references and allusions through a series of philosophical concepts connected by a thread of sexual difference.

It is as though her text makes its way in the darkness of the womb, only this time, the womb's abyss is not the chaotic figure of woman in Greek theatre. This time, in this work on ethics, Irigaray breathes life into the text through a non-chaotic yet still irreducible darkness. The embodiedness of Irigaray's writing appears through the mimetic struggle to represent a possibility of non-reductive, incomplete or non-totalizing representation, through a text that opens itself to the difficulties of life by risking the "clarity of truth." The difficulty of wading through the discursive unfamiliarity of Irigaray's work obligates the reader to associate a new ethical horizon with resistance to easy comprehension. Irigaray's text acts as an offering to the reader wherein she lays bare her hopes for those with ears to hear. Her text asks for the reader's patience because only through patience can the strangeness of Irigaray's work disclose its brilliant struggle to speak a new ethical horizon. Remembering the difference that is forgotten is precisely the work that Irigaray undertakes in her text by re-membering the undifferentiated feminine—by using the body of woman to reveal the differences from which she was severed in order to exist in man's world.

Irigaray rejoins discourse and bodies in her text. She reintroduces the absent body of "woman" by writing mimetically through the feminine. In Irigaray's text, the absent body of woman intervenes in philosophical discourse. Irigaray pushes the limits of the link between the feminine and the absent body of woman. In her act of mimetic writing, she reveals that her body does in fact speak and write even in the absence of a certain sense of "woman." Because "woman" does not exist, she is a symbolic space from which the possibility of infinitely diverse bodies emerges. In this way, Irigaray manages to use the disparate realms of flesh and discourse to negotiate the opposition between a radically other decontextualized non-subject and a totalizing self-same subject that annihilates the difference of its other. Ziarek makes the argument for Irigaray's successful navigation of the crisis of becoming in postmodernity writing the following:

> For Irigaray, the ethics of sexual difference has to enable different trajectories of gendered becomings without forgetting the obligation to the other. In fact, Irigaray argues that the responsibility to the other who differs sexually is the very source of such becomings. Irigaray's ethics maintains neither the rigid separation between freedom and obligation, as is the case in Levinas's work, nor their symmetrical reversibility, as is the case in Kant's ethics. By contesting the oppositions between carnal passions and ethical obligations, between the respect for the other and the becoming of the self, Irigaray allows us to think through the disjunction between the two main ethical trajectories of postmodernism and to find the means to negotiate between them.[313]

Irigaray's attempt to write through that radically absent silence fosters a way of thinking the discursive-material relationship towards a future beyond presence and absence. Mimesis allows women to claim a space amidst the uncertainty of woman's actual presence. For Irigaray, though woman is absent from discourse, she is not exclusively an indicator of lack. Lack is how masculine discourse has characterized her. The language

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[313] Ewa Ziarek, "Toward a Radical Female Imaginary," 60.

of presence and absence are markers of her status by masculine discourse. Irigaray wants to reconstruct woman from the place of being rendered as lack. She wants to establish a space from which an alternate subjectivity for women can emerge apart from sameness and the reduction of difference of the other. The discrepancy between women's lived existence and their discursive rendering is what empowers Irigaray's mimetic writing to resist the disembodied model of the subject that distances itself from its others in an unethical way.

Now the danger in this is that in the absence of woman, claiming a space as a woman suggests that "woman" actually exists, that something is somehow signified by the term woman. This is what Butler fears is the shortcoming of Irigaray's work. After all Irigaray's destabilization of sexual difference, she continues to rely on the idea that woman must be recovered. If woman must be recovered from her erasure, then she remains in relation to man. And while this is a relational not oppositional arrangement between men and women under Irigaray's vision (men and women become together), Irigaray has reified the sexed distinction even as she has disrupted the certitude of descriptors for the sexes. Why? Why does Irigaray keep this language when she could easily add one line suggesting that the language of "man" and "woman" are just place markers for horizons of sexed being that we have yet to imagine? Why does she not make the connection between the radicalism of her disruption of the feminine as an interrogation of the status of "woman"? I think Irigaray's concern with pushing too far is that she does not in fact want to disrupt or dislodge woman. Irigaray wants to deconstruct the masculine tradition, but she has no desire to undermine women's

struggles by deconstructing the strides they have worked hard to make. Irigaray's theoretical stop is a reality check. The question of woman is a dangerous one. There is certainly a way to read Irigaray's work as destabilizing woman. Because she destabilizes the feminine and keeps woman in the realm of possibility, Irigaray actually does disrupt woman.

In her use of mimesis, Irigaray actually embodies the space of a radically absent woman. She writes as a woman even as she deconstructs the certainty of what "woman" is. Irigaray is real. She is writing in her body. But her body, as the body of woman, is a destabilized body. It is a body whose clear definition in discourse has been disrupted by the revelation that the feminine is a projection of sameness upon her. She writes as a woman as she deconstructs a determinate notion of woman. Irigaray, then, embodies the space of an uncertain and destabilized absent other/woman. I use the term uncertain positively to mark that space of indeterminateness. By embodying the uncertainty/ indeterminateness of woman, Irigaray's mimetic writing is the possibility for claiming a space for knowing in the midst of being a non-subject or un-selfassured, unknowing subject.

Because mimesis is tied to the embodiment of woman as part of a question or strategy for interrogating the ethics of discourse, Irigaray's example of mimetic writing offers a way to think of the embodied practice of writing as an alternative way of knowing to the discursive reductions of difference that characterize prevailing modes of thought. Through a knowledge that her flesh speaks differently than the discourse in which her body is inscribed, writing through the question of woman disrupts any

certainty associated with the category of "woman." Thus, mimesis serves to deconstruct identity and casts that identity in terms of the unthought difference othered by discourse. Analogically, one might say that mimesis deconstructs the idea of woman and reintroduces woman in terms of the differences of her flesh that have been silenced. The result of this reintroduction would be a new sense of woman arising from the infinite particularities of persons' experiences with the limits of the identity of woman.

Mimesis as writing from the embodied space of unthought difference fosters new ways for understanding the limits and possibilities that "woman" can have for thinking about a more ethical future. I believe we can turn to Irigaray's mimetic use of "woman" as a way to think about a subjectivity that integrates the space of difference as the condition for its becoming. Thinking through the question of woman gives us a model for disrupting a subjectivity that has identity as its goal. Within mimesis one finds a means of writing through the disavowed or erased difference to imagine possibilities of relating to difference beyond discursive reductions. Writing through the space of unthought difference can be the occasion for disrupting sameness and the practice that gives rise to an ethical, non-assimilative relationship with the other. A notion of constructing our human subjectivity from the embodied space of unthematizable difference would be a subjectivity that is nourished by the mysterious and boundless wonder of life.

CHAPTER 5:
FROM OTHERED TO OTHERWISE: "WOMAN" AND THE POSSIBILITY OF ETHICAL WRITING

In his essay "The Trace of the Other," Emmanuel Levinas criticizes Western philosophy for suffering from an "insurmountable allergy" to the other. This "insurmountable allergy" is ultimately a fear that the differences of the other threaten the unity of self-consciousness.[314] According to Levinas, the subject that relates to its other through allergy isolates himself from the world by positing everything that he is not is outside of himself. The subject is sure of himself because he is not "other," and he proves that he is rid of the internal differences that would jeopardize his selfhood by establishing that the other is not like him. Under this unethical model of subjectivity, different voices (and faces) are marginalized through a constant thematization of the world in accordance with normative frameworks for understanding existence.

Challenging this allergic model of subjectivity in which the other is a vehicle for the self's becoming, Levinas and his readers have focused on ethics as an obligation to one's other – whether that other is wholly Other or, by contrast, radically immanent. Responding to the ethical obligation is the way one comes to know oneself as the subject in relation to one's other. But what are the implications of being obligated to respond to someone in order to become a subject? Critics of an ethics in which the subject emerges through an unavoidable obligation to the other suggest that such an ethic assumes the possibility of a self that can ever be experienced pre-discursively, prior to the constraints

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[314] Emmanuel Levinas, "The Trace of the Other," in Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986), 353.

of representation. For marginalized persons whose selfhood is always already on shaky ground, it seems a luxury to make claims about the existence of such a self as the possibility for an ethical subjectivity. Cornel West succinctly expresses the exigencies facing marginalized persons' desires for selfhood in a postmodern ethical framework writing the following: "Identity in the highly developed world is often a subject of leisurely conversation and academic banter. In the poor developing world, identity is a matter of life and death."[315] If one's entire life has been defined in terms of non-normativity, as different or even invisible from a dominant worldview, then postmodernity's potential relativizing all differences could erase the memory of specific historical atrocities. Challenging the ethics of selfhood therefore risks obscuring the reality that selfhood has been a privilege not afforded to all.

I agree with Levinas that radical alterity is the foundation of ethics and that the allergy to difference is the prognosis that must be treated in order to preserve radical alterity. The allergy to difference cannot be overcome if the selfsame model of the subject remains in place. A model of subjectivity that insists on the preservation of difference is necessary for alterity to exist. But insisting, as Levinas does, on a universal experience of selfhood prior to discourse results in a subject that emerges exclusively through obligation to the difference of the other. Such obligation undermines marginalized persons experiences as others, because they become caught in a realm of obligation and response, like Echo. Marginalized persons, trapped in an ethic of obligation, become perpetually denied the freedom of developing their own personhood.

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[315] Cornel West, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight against Imperialism* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 130.

To address this question of ethics in a plural yet unequal world, I want to claim a space in which one can develop a personhood without that personhood becoming an isolated movement of self-definition of one's own worldview or one's own sense of history. I want to answer the following question that I see as the fundamental question of ethics today: "How can one be responsible to the other while still allowing the freedom and space to become a subject as an other?"

I find the beginnings of an answer to this in the work of Luce Irigaray. In *Éthique,* Irigaray has called attention to the ways the feminine has been used in philosophy to veil the occlusion of women in thought about subjectivity and human existence. She has used language associated with women's bodies as a means to expose women's silencing and open a space between existing determinations of femininity and a future of women's self-arising personhood. And while I agree with many of Irigaray's critics that her persistent reliance on the language of sexual difference risks dangerous recapitulation of the masculine worldview, I contend that her mimetic writing must be read in conjunction with her efforts to deconstruct sexual difference. My reading focuses on how Irigaray's mimesis does not simply inhabit the feminine as an essential idea of woman but rather as the promise of an infinitely irreducible difference between the sexes. I examine the irreducible difference indicated in Irigaray's ethical subjectivity, and bracket the specificity of sex to claim that Irigaray provides an opening for an ethical personhood more radical than the one her theory conceives. Read in terms of irreducibility, Irigaray's model of subjectivity establishes alterity in terms of a mutuality

of becoming, a becoming in which one develops one's personhood in desirous relation to rather than in obligation to one's others.

In place of certainty and conviction, I believe that Irigaray's mimesis dissimilates the feminine and thereby destabilizes the symbolic realm through which flesh is discursively determined and limited. By destabilizing discursive determinations of flesh, dissimilation effectively undermines any specificity of male and female flesh. I contend that embracing this disruption found in Irigaray's writing, affirms Levinas's prioritization of alterity as the foundation of ethics. Furthermore, Irigaray's affirmation of alterity occurs within the context of thinking through the question of a marginalized non-subject that Levinas has ignored. To construct a personhood beyond the reductive economy of a selfsame subjectivity, this chapter therefore suggests that the non-identity or uncertainty of Irigaray's destabilized woman is an opportunity for imagining a more ethical personhood.[316] The destabilization of the feminine deconstructs the masculine-feminine binary and the bodies discursively constructed through that binary. Embracing uncertainty and indeterminacy of one's otherness signals the possibility of a non-allergic personhood; a personhood in which one's own becoming is not secondary to that of the other but, rather, interrelated to the other's becoming. A relational becoming through indeterminacy embraces the moment the binary of sexual difference is deconstructed and offers a space of open-ended multiplicity.

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[316] Fionola Meredith rethinks selfhood by attending to the ways poststructuralism destabilizes notions of both presence and the subject. She rethinks the dichotomy imposed by poststructuralism versus liberalism that face women as mediated subjects. She writes, "I attempt a reappropriation of the category of experience in dialogue with post-structuralist thinking." She suggests poststructuralism constrains subjects with the sense that they must be either/or--that they must either accept their non-subjectivity or an see themselves as the absolute singular subject of the unethical selfsame worldview. This is a false distinction for Meredith. Fionola Meredith, *Experiencing the Postmetaphysical Self: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 2-3.

WOMAN AS OTHER

In *Éthique*, Irigaray recasts Levinas's critique of the allergic subject in terms of the relationship between the sexes. According to Irigaray, the allergy to difference by which subjects know themselves is a projection of male desire and male determination of his own identity and that of woman. Woman, as other to man, presents a difference that could undermine his myth of oneness, his unified worldview. Thus, women have been victims of the allergy to difference, and the experiences of women attest to the pains and frustrations that an allergic existence imposes on life. Women's experiences have often been denigrated or silenced because they have been interpreted as lesser ways of knowing and being. Women have been othered within the prevailing models of subjectivity because the self-assured subject at the root of all this erasure of difference is a masculine subject. From Irigaray's philosophical perspective, woman has been erased from the annals of philosophical existence.

In the masculine model of subject formation, the parameters of woman have been determined by the characteristics of the "feminine," and the "feminine" is man's projection of what he is not. The feminine is man's projection of his difference. The characteristics that define "woman" as subject are limited to what a masculine worldview can perceive her as being. The language of masculine and feminine are projections of this model; the consequence is that woman has no language of her own. Woman, then, has been doubly erased. Woman has no means to voice how her experiences differ from the masculine, normative model of existence. The language she has been given to speak, the language of the feminine, is the man's projection of his own difference. The feminine

has arisen through the masculine subject's allergy to difference, and the result has been the alienation of woman from herself. This is the same system as described by Levinas, but it takes into account that woman has never been the self-assured subject with her own others. She has always and only been other.

Like Levinas, Irigaray conceives of ethics in terms of preserving radical alterity. She suggests that for alterity to exist, there must be space for difference. And to create the space for difference there must be two. For Levinas, this space for difference, or in his terms proximity, occurs in the irreducibility between self and other. The self is obligated to the other in an unavoidable, unsubstitutable way. But for Irigaray, there can be no other and no difference until one answers to the question of women's erasure in sexual difference. In the place of the singular, Irigaray's ethics calls not for self and other but for the sexuate couple. For Irigaray, women must create their own symbolic realm from which to become subjects. This will, by her analysis, establish the irreducible "two" or "couple" that provides the space for alterity.

IRIGARAY AND CRITIQUES OF ESSENTIALISM

There are two major points of contention within Irigaray's ethics and its ability to move beyond the selfsame. First, as suggested above, Irigaray privileges the difference between men and women as the irreducible difference that can ground an ethics of alterity. Women occupy the place of the other that must be recovered or reborn from the place of their erasure, as though women constitute some category distinct in some determined way from man. By suggesting some essential difference between men and

women that would allow their meetings to be irreducible, this privileging of the sexuate couple implies that all other differences are secondary to sexual difference. Ultimately Irigaray's prioritization of sexual difference ascribes ontological value exclusively to male-female difference.

To this point Judith Butler has criticized Irigaray for not going far enough in the deconstructive project. Butler suggests that Irigaray's constant association of women's becoming with an alternative view, or an other way of knowing/writing to man's subjectivity, connects women to the space of otherness in ways that redefine but do not overturn the dualism between man and woman. In this line of reasoning, though Irigaray creates an air of uncertainty about woman, readers cannot overlook her insistence on "women's" becoming in a male-female coupling as part of ethics. In her critique of Irigaray's chapter in *Éthique* on Merleau-Ponty, Butler writes that Irigaray "enacts the theory of flesh that it also interrogates, installing itself in a hermeneutic circularity from which it cannot break free and in whose hold it appears quite willfully to stay."[317] For Butler, even if Irigaray's project is attempting to undermine and disrupt the priority of masculine sameness, Irigaray constructs a subjectivity that reenacts the movement to sameness or reduction of difference. Irigaray thus reinscribes the flesh of woman in the language of determinism when she privileges the specificity of a male-female couple as the foundation for alterity.

The second point on which Irigaray is critiqued focuses on her writing. Women subjects, by Irigaray's account, are never truly identical to themselves because their

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[317] Judith Butler, "Sexual Difference as a Question of Ethics: Alterities of the Flesh in Irigaray and Merleau-Ponty," in *Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Dorothea and Gail Weiss Olkowski (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 108.

identity as "women" is not of their own construction. Women have been constructed in terms of their otherness within a masculine symbolic. The calamity for woman is that to secure her selfhood, she must exhibit the characteristics that identify and define her as "woman"--characteristics that have been determined from a masculine perspective. Irigaray's way out of this existential crisis of woman has been to inhabit *mimetically* the language of the feminine in which women have been confined. She has insisted on using metaphors of wombs and vaginas as ways to make a space that is distinctly women's. Irigaray's embrace of this undifferentiated or masculine-ascribed "feminine" has therefore been contested as essentialist.

Some of Irigaray's critics have argued that the use of such metaphors reenforces masculine associations of women with materiality (as opposed to the transcendent) and recapitulates masculine reductions of women's personhood to their roles in reproduction. For instance, while Irigaray's metaphor of the maternal-feminine aims at elevating women's experiences of motherhood as a non-cognitive (and therefore non-reductive) way of knowing, it risks reinscribing women within the totalizing discourse that has limited the value of their experiences to their offspring. For feminists who find the association between the maternal and women to be the product of a patriarchal worldview, the use of a maternal-feminine or women's vaginas as a theoretical framework is highly problematic. Regarding the notion of motherhood as a way to return to woman, Monique Wittig in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* writes, "Not only is this conception still imprisoned in the categories of sex (woman and man), but it holds

onto the idea that the capacity to give birth (biology) is what defines a woman."[318] For theorists that reject the liberating potential of mimetic embodiment of the feminine, the very idea of speaking of the maternal is like conceding defeat to a masculine imaginary or patriarchal worldview that has equated women with motherhood, rendered women vessels for reproduction, and devalued them as agents of creative production and ingenuity.

According to those who question the efficacy of Irigaray's critique, systems of knowledge (ways of knowing) are tied to a construction of the feminine that effaces her difference; women's speech will always be a matter of reproduction of masculine language. Mimesis as a repetition in which one's disruption is merely a moment that is quickly covered over or effaced would seem to render women's position one of absolute lack. Ovid, as mentioned in Chapter 3 for instance, covers over the failure of Echo's punishment with his own words. Indeed Echo's flesh subverted the totality of her punishment's discursive confinement; but the man, Ovid, wrote over her omission in order to better represent his story, his narrative. If the symbolic realm is masculine, and if women must speak so as to be heard, then women are speaking, like Echo, within a masculine discourse and framework of representation. As such, women would seem to remain in proximity to the masculine symbolic, doomed to carry out their sentence within a masculine prison-house of language.

To this point, theorist Toril Moi examines Irigaray's insistence that mimicry is the condition of woman's voice. For Moi, the necessity Irigaray attributes to mimesis forever

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[318] Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

banishes woman to a space of lack.[319] Moi therefore suggests Irigaray's understanding of women's placelessness in relation to discourse is totalizing. In Moi's reading, Irigaray's deconstruction of sexual difference, understood as putting the feminine into question, posits the place of woman as a place of subjection to a masculine totality from which there is no point of escape. Moi and others argue that this leaves woman a complete abstraction. In this sense, even if woman is dissimilated, she is essentialized as a radically absent other.

Irigaray's critics reveal the limits of her writing for establishing an ethics of alterity. I agree with critics like Butler who locate the major point of contention in Irigaray's blatant prioritization of sexual difference as the single irreducible difference of human relationships. But the critics who focus on the essentialism in Irigaray's writing are, I think, missing the excess that could ultimately save her project from re-ontologizing sexual difference. In what follows, I suggest that Irigaray's mimetic writing deconstructs the feminine such that the sexuate coupling of her ethic would be indeterminate and therefore beyond a notion of sexual difference.

SEXUAL DIFFERENCE: BEYOND ESSENCE

Throughout this dissertation I have argued for a reading of Irigaray's mimetic writing as constantly effacing the limits of discourse and therefore opening a space (or an ellipsis?) from which to create a new dwelling for her existence.[320] It is this space, whether we call

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[319] Toril Moi, *What Is a Woman?: And Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
[320] To borrow from Carole Boyce Davies, perhaps we could say Irigaray is rewriting home. Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (New York: Routledge; reprint, 1999), 50-51.

it catachresis, an ellipsis, uncertainty, etc, that Irigaray's deconstructed notion of sexual difference aims to preserve. In light of Irigaray's destabilization of woman, the interval or space she is making in discourse is not necessarily one that preserves a specific interval of difference between two set terms like man and woman. Because the feminine has been dissimilated, woman becomes irreducible to discourse. And once irreducible to discourse, Irigaray's sexuate couple can be read more generally as the coupling of flesh.

In spite of Irigaray's essentialist language of the feminine there is power within Irigaray's dissimilation. I suggest that Irigaray's use of visceral metaphors disrupts rather than maintains the status quo that prioritizes cognition and reduction of difference in the movement of subjectivity.[321] I claim Irigaray's language of male-female difference and her reliance on metaphors of women's bodies should be read as oriented towards a future of sexual difference wherein one sex is never the marker of the other's difference but that sex itself is infinitely differential and irreducible. As suggested previously, for Irigaray, there must be two beings if there is to be a space between them that would constitute difference. Before Irigaray's couple is returned to the language of some newly figured male-female binary, man and woman must be different. Irigaray differentiates the feminine through a process of dissimilation. She achieves this by writing mimetically, embodying the feminine to disrupt the totality of discourse that circumscribes her. Dissimilation through mimesis involves mimicking representations of woman to disrupt the totality of discourse, and this disruption destabilizes the certitude of the feminine. Thus, Irigaray's "woman" becomes, in Halperin's words, an "irreducible fiction," or as

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[321] In the previous chapter, I made this argument based on a particular reading of mimetic strategy as an embodiment of the indeterminate space of a flesh that stands at odds with or at the limits of discourse.

Lynne Huffer suggests, an "impossible truth." Beyond the symbolic realm of reductionist sense-making, "woman" comes into being by claiming her liminal position with regard to cognitive "knowledge."[322]

Refiguring of sexual difference in terms of a radical indeterminacy, contemporary feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti has transformed the question of reliance on feminine metaphors as discursive representations of sexual difference into a de-ontologized category of analysis. According to Braidotti, Irigaray's embodiment of the feminine to deconstruct sexual difference is "radically anti-essentialist." Providing a transformative image of sexual difference, Braidotti writes, "sexual difference brings into representation the play of multiple differences that structure the subject: these are neither harmonious nor homogeneous, but rather internally differentiated and potentially contradictory."[323] Braidotti continues, "Therefore, sexual difference forces us to think the simultaneity of potentially contradictory social, discursive, and symbolic effects."[324] I fully embrace Braidotti's charge that sexual difference involves a constant risking of the limits of language. This risking occurs as part of a willingness to rethink thought itself, but it is a risk that does not remove itself from the ethical. Sexual difference, in order to remain ethical, must be thought radically. If one conceives of sexual difference as a strategy for thinking "the simultaneity of potentially contradictory social, discursive, and symbolic effects," then sexual difference becomes a means of analysis grounded in the irreducibility of difference not in particular instantiations of masculine-feminine

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[322] Huffer, discussing her reading of Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman,* writes, "it is precisely through the economy of metaphor that the feminine shape of this impossible truth produces the collapse of woman and mother." Huffer, *Maternal Pasts, Feminist Futures,* 59.
[323] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).
[324] Ibid.

difference.[325] Once destabilized and ultimately undermined as a uniform, static concept, sexual difference can in fact resist the violence of the selfsame.

A radical reading of Irigaray affirms her destabilization of the feminine in a way that undermines the specificity of sexual difference, opening the door for an alterity that could be indeterminate, infinite, and therefore ethical. Imagine Irigaray's embracing couple as two naked beings, their sexual determinations indeterminate. Their flesh is touching, but they remain different in their touching. In a sense, they experience the fullness of themselves, their own ecstasy, through this touching. Their differences enable them to experience the mutuality of their relationship. Each one's flesh gives pleasure and comfort to the flesh of the other. At the same time, one's own flesh becomes more available, more intimate, more real to oneself in and through this experience of touching the difference of the other. Picture a film close-up of two intermingling fleshes where the boundaries of the flesh are clear, but identifying what "part" of their flesh you are witnessing is unclear, indeterminate. And the point of the close-up image is to raise a question about what the viewer is seeing. What parts of the body are touching? Who knows? All one sees is flesh, unbounded by the discourse of bodies in its eroticism. In this image, the boundaries of the flesh are clear but indescribable. The borders of one's flesh are the conditions of possibility of touching, ensuring both the difference of their "twoness" and their mutuality. This flesh does not have to be male or female. It does not have to be sexually figured, racially figured, nor ability figured. Described in this way, without reducing the fleshes to the specificity of a heterosexist couple, Irigaray's

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[325] Rosi Braidotti, "Identity, Subjectivity and Difference: A Critical Genealogy," in *Thinking Differently: A Reader in European Women's Studies*, ed. Gabriele Griffin and Rosi Braidotti(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

insistence on touching flesh as the possibility of difference provides a beautiful image of human flourishing.

It is the model of infinite flesh, touching, knowing each other through their own flesh and the flesh of their other that I would like to recover from Irigaray. Before she recasts the flesh in terms of a heterosexist coupling, the image of the flesh that Irigaray provides is one of radically deconstructed persons, consistently subverting the discursive limits of their flesh. Such infinitely indeterminate flesh that redefines its boundaries through touch rather than through discourse opens, for me, the possibility for an ethics beyond sexual difference, an ethics of the radical alterity of the flesh as the starting point for refiguring personhood, otherness, and for imagining the divine.

If both sides of the couple are deconstructed, then they have relationship, connection, and infinity. Their context and their flesh can be diverse, encompassing questions of race, hybridity, sexuality, etc. But I cannot overlook the reality that Irigaray, as her critics have noted, has shut that door to infinite alterity by prioritizing sexual difference above all other differences. Irigaray gives us this infinite flesh only to abandon it. She takes the above model of touching flesh and encases each of those fleshes in the discursive boxes deemed man and woman. By prioritizing sexual difference, Irigaray has insisted that the site of radical irreducible difference is not the touching space "between" an indeterminate flesh (like the one her mimetic deconstruction has created), but rather the specificity of male and female sexed flesh. She has taken the infinite possibility implicit in her writing and returned that infinite to

the masculine worldview. And yet, I do not want to lose sight of the beautiful opening that Irigaray's writing has created.

UNCERTAINTY AS A WAY OF KNOWING OTHERWISE: BEYOND SAMENESS

Taking a step back from the door Irigaray has shut, I return to Irigaray, but not to in the same way that she has given to this reader. I return to her work in a way that refuses to reinscribe the infinitely differential man and woman that I see offered in her mimesis. I refuse to prioritize sexual difference over all other difference in a way that encloses difference in a new totality of the heterosexist binary or couple. The ethical model that I see as truly promoting human flourishing is one that emphasizes the infinite in our midsts. And a radical reading of Irigaray's "woman" as indeterminate allows the reader to witness the potential for mimesis to move beyond an essentialized or easily effaced repetition of sameness towards a more ethical way of knowing. To explain how mimesis, as writing through uncertainty (not simply reversal), can ground a more ethical subjectivity, I turn to feminist philosopher, Judith Butler.

As suggested earlier, Butler critiques Irigaray on the basis that Irigaray returns the indeterminate flesh to sameness by prioritizing sexual difference. She therefore sees Irigaray's writing as enacting an unresolvable enclosure of ethics within a heterosexist discourse. Though Butler turns away from Irigaray in her own work, she remains devoted to theorizing a more ethical personhood within a similar philosophical genealogy to that of Irigaray. I find Butler useful because she imagines a personhood beyond both sameness and obligation by focusing on indeterminacy. Butler's concept of self-

unknowing offers a way to re-imagine personhood through the space of uncertainty--a space to which Irigaray's dissimilation of the feminine (and consequent destabilization of woman) has led her reader. Butler has explored in depth the possibilities for re-imagining an ethical model of the subject that does not abandon oppressed peoples to a non-subjective existence. For Butler, Levinas's ethical theory, which suggests that even the victimized and oppressed have a responsibility not to repeat that violence, is too harsh on those for whom selfsame subjectivity is wishful thinking. She thus proposes a new understanding of subjectivity that attends to this crisis of representation imposed by the power of discourse. Butler suggests that the limits to difference provide a subject's identity and self-understanding. These limits constitute the closure to difference that deprives humanity of its diversity. In keeping with developments in Levinas' thought, Butler contends that closure to difference may provide self-understanding or self-knowing, but this becoming of the self occurs by narrowing the fullest experience of human existence.

Searching for a more ethical way of becoming, Butler suggests looking towards one's feelings of self-uncertainty as the source of connection to others. The ethical sense of self-unknowing or uncertainty is evident in what Butler calls an "opacity" of the self that results from the inability to fully comprehend ourselves.[326] Opacity of the self is that part of the self that has not yet been comprehended or that exceeds the edited versions of ourselves allowed in discourse. In *Giving an Account of Oneself,* Butler writes, "I find that my very formation implicates the other in me, that my own foreignness to myself is,

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[326] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, First Edition ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 20.

paradoxically, the source of my ethical connection to others."[327] Butler's theory of the subject as arising in the absence of self-understanding attempts to balance the need to address the realities of oppression with the ethical need to challenge the primacy of the self-assured subject. She directly responds to the ethical concerns of sameness raised by theorists including Levinas, and yet Butler also asks the question of mutuality that arises from the disinherited voices of Levinas's others.[328] If discourse silences marginalized persons, marginalized persons must ask how to transform their utterances such that they are no longer the object of the question. Perhaps the "Do you love me?" of Irigaray's patients would be transformed into a "We love, together."

As an effort to overcome the movement of sameness, Butler's claim to self-uncertainty can be helpful for re-imagining a more ethical subjectivity that speaks from the position of the "othered" beyond the specificity of an essentialized concept sexual difference. Uncertainty or un-knowing becomes a category for privileging infinite difference and indeterminacy of others over the certitude of subjectivity (which requires the reduction of the indeterminate in consciousness). Butler writes, "Moments of unknowingness about oneself tend to emerge in the contest of relations to others, suggesting that these relations call upon primary forms of relationality that are not always available to explicit and reflective thematization."[329] Butler rightly contends that the

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[327] Ibid., 84.
[328] Butler's early writing on self-unknowing appears primarily in her work *The Psychic Life of Power.* In this text, she elaborates on Lacan's concept that there is always an element of unknowing or something inaccessible to consciousness that is behind who we are as subjects. We cannot access this aspect of ourselves through cognition. It is, as Lacan suggests, a "foreclosure," prior to any completion or singularity of the self. For Butler, these traces of self-unknowing in Lacan challenge the notion of the unconstrained liberal humanist subject who, in its autonomy, knows the world as it sees the world. Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 7-8.
[329] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 20.

crisis of experiencing oneself as a non-subject is an opportunity for understanding oneself in ethical relation to difference.

Recognizing an opacity or an uncertainty of the self is fundamental to understanding ourselves as arising relationally from the space of irreducible difference. By privileging uncertainty, Butler opens Levinas's ethical moment not to an absolute experience of oneself as uniquely responsible to the other but as uncertain and destabilized in relation to one's other. Unknowing or opacity implies a distance or otherness within the experience of selfhood. For marginalized persons, discursive limits exacerbate this experience of unknowingness; however, as Butler suggests, privileging the infinite indeterminacy of unknowing over the sameness of knowing empowers the margins to be the horizons of ethics.

IRIGARAY'S ETHICS: FROM UNCERTAINTY TO OTHER-WISE

As Butler's theory of un-knowing or the opacity of the self suggests, embracing the irreducibility of one's own difference means embracing the irreducibility of all difference. The uncertainty or indeterminacy of one's selfhood gives rise to a way of "knowing" oneself in relation to the infinite differences of oneself and one's others--"knowing" oneself without being a self-assured subject. The act of writing through one's different experiences of life without freezing those experiences into a thematizable identity such as sexual difference embraces the opacity of the self and resists the allergic notion that life can only be experienced as a subject that knows itself by enclosing the other.

In writing, embracing indeterminacy becomes a paradigm for rethinking the relationship between subjectivity and knowing. It calls the reader to be a part of the subject's becoming in a relational way because the reader/other is essential to keeping meanings open-ended. I believe that Irigaray's writing exemplifies this way of knowing oneself and one's others through uncertainty, or positively read, the infinite possibility of irreducible difference. Understood in terms of Butler's above theory of ethics, one can read Irigaray's writing through the uncertainty, destabilization, and opacity or "woman" as a way of knowing beyond sameness--*a way of writing otherwise*. Writing otherwise is a writing that embraces the indeterminacy available when one writes towards the other as a way of honoring one's own irreducible differences. In writing otherwise, indeterminacy is transformed from a place of anxiety to a place of resistance.

Irigaray's oeuvre presents this ethical vision of writing otherwise because her mimetic writing destabilizes woman in a way that risks sense-making and exhibits openness in the place of declarations. Rather than collapsing into oneness through linear expressions of truth statements, Irigaray's writing constantly eludes reduction in a way that invites the reader to be a part of realizing the potential of her text. Through mimesis and catachresis, her textual production resists the linearity of sense-making that is characteristic of the economy of sameness. In mimesis, Irigaray picks the path of the uncertain and unstable as the source of her wisdom. As such, Irigaray's writing exhibits a style that transgresses the conventions of sense-making of the phallocentric masculine symbolic. In the absence of knowing, she creates a text in which one is always foreign to oneself and to the text. And yet, one is always intimately bound to her words and in

dialogue with them. In Butler's words, it is precisely insofar as one is uncertain or "foreign" to oneself that one can know oneself in relation to rather than in opposition to others.[330] Therefore, Irigaray's writing through indeterminacy or opacity is a writing otherwise--a writing in, through, and for the sake of allowing the infinite to be as irreducible as life itself.

Irigaray's writing style, understood as reflecting the mimetic condition of the feminine, associates the feminine with irreducibility in a way that valorizes that irreducible feminine as necessary to ethics. In other words, Irigaray's writing harnesses the embodied experience of discursive erasures as the possibility for confronting the isolating and reductive logic of sameness. She ultimately converts the openness that could be associated with a hole or lack and makes it the invitation into another way of knowing the self and the world through textual production. And while Irigaray may call such writing "women's writing," that writing is always occurring as both disruption and invitation to play with the limits of sameness. Furthermore, as the possibility for thinking beyond the language of sameness, Irigaray's writing is also the opportunity to manifest relationality and openness through writing. Therefore, within the condition of self-unknowing inflicted upon those who are othered by dominant discourse, one can perceive a power to remain open to the other as part of one's own becoming.

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[330] By revealing the ways the feminine has been used to elaborate a masculine worldview, Irigaray's theory allows us to question what it means when we talk about women. In the spirit of Irigaray's deconstruction of the feminine which leaves the feminine an uncertain or paradoxical reference, I would argue that we can understand the "women" as representing all bodies silenced by discourse. "Women" would be a term that defines the infinitely differential space that the undifferentiated or masculinized feminine silences. Sexual difference could exist only in a space and time where "women," as those who create from beyond the limits of masculine ways of knowing and relating to the world, foster ways of knowing otherwise than through reduction.

A paradigm of writing otherwise as a writing towards the other – towards openness, the infinite, and possibility – engenders a relational model of personhood by allowing those who are marginalized to speak through their indeterminacy and uncertainty. Indeterminacy becomes an opportunity to reject the selfsame that tells people they must be certain and self-knowing/self-assured in order to be subjects. Embracing and embodying indeterminacy in one's writing is a paradigm for rethinking the relationship between subjectivity and knowing. It calls the reader to be a part of the subject's becoming in a relational way because the reader/other is essential to keeping meanings open-ended. In writing otherwise, the previous subject who thinks, knows, writes, and establishes selfhood through a process of sealing off doubt and inconsistency is transformed into a becoming thinker, knower, and writer.

A NARRATIVE ACCOUNT OF WRITING OTHERWISE

Writing otherwise is a practice and a process of understanding oneself in relation to the irreducible difference of the other. It occurs through the struggle to give voice to the particularities of one's experiences without universalizing those experiences and essentializing what it means to be an "other." I would like to give flesh to this idea of writing otherwise with an example from my own life. My struggle to write in a theological discourse that seemed restrictive and even oppressive was transformed by the knowledge that my friend Min-Ah Cho, in a completely different way, was also struggling with the challenges of writing in negotiation with her own sense of identity and subjectivity. The writing that emerged from our encounter exhibited the uniqueness

of our voices as decisively theological because it witnessed to our struggles to write otherwise.

For some time, Min-Ah and I met every Tuesday to talk about our dissertation writing and woes. We would discuss everything from the structure of our work to the frustrations of finding a theological voice. In the course of our conversations, the power of our differences to expose new ideas proved invaluable. From our academic frames of reference to our political sympathies to our cultural backgrounds, our differences were numerous. I was coming from a white, Southern U.S., Protestant-Jewish inter-religious upbringing with a dogged attachment to postmodernism. Min-Ah was negotiating her experiences as a South Korean national, a convert to Catholicism, and a critic of the universalization of non-Western cultures and perspectives. We displayed these differences, sometimes unwittingly, in our thoughts, on our bodies, and in our encounter as colleagues. We were confronted by the difficulties of writing, and we struggled to overcome the deep tensions between what we desired to say and how to voice our desires in the genre of the dissertation. The particularities of our difficulties were different and reflected our senses of ourselves as writers, as scholars, and as subjects. Though we were writing under many of the same conditions, we experienced those conditions quite differently based on the contexts we brought with us. Still, we were able to draw on the difference of the constrained space of our writing to find the strength to write that difference.

A new type of validation arose. As I struggled to conceptualize my insights on the ethics of difference that fleetingly pulsed in and out of my head, Min-Ah kindly offered

her thoughts on my work. My encounters with Min-Ah validated my struggle by way of openness not by assimilation. Her thoughts and perspectives were not mine, and my thoughts and perspectives had not been hers, but the difference between our experiences of writing created a space for us to give voice to our desires. Our differences that we could not voice on our own became the conditions of possibility for our encounter to be generative. In the moments when our differences pointed to something we could not quite formulate, I realized that my efforts to say and to write something meaningful would always be a failed project if performed solipsistically in isolation from the other. I had to be true to my sense that writing needed to be open and inviting to the other. Writing could provide a space where the other could be encountered non-violently. Rather than being paralyzed by the fear that my writing would be misconstrued, I needed to positively affirm that I was never in complete control of my writing and how it was received.[331]

By denying the other a space in which to move in and out of my own thought I had been perpetuating the illusion of self-sufficiency in my becoming a thinking and writing subject. I desperately desired to be the unified, self-knowing subject capable of writing as unaffected by the limits of my experience. As a result, I felt theologically empty and frustrated, as though I had nothing to offer. I had cut myself off from the interdependence of existence. Through Min-Ah's reading of my project and the difference she brought to it, I found *a* theological voice. Put differently, my newly-found

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[331] Jacques Derrida's *The Postcard* is a lovely demonstration that the reception of one's writing cannot be controlled. One can write, but one does not know if, when, or how that address will be received. But this impossibility of controlling the end of one's writing is also the source of its resistance to an allergic model of writing. Ultimately, one's writing cannot rid itself of the differences of its others. Shifting one's perspective to embrace this openness, rather than fear it as destabilizing, is what writing otherwise engenders. It is a risky and vulnerable writing for the sake of being open to the other.

theological voice arose from a momentary interweaving of our distinct experiences with our sense of our limits. My uncertainty, a feeling which I had feared, reflected a truth of experience. But I could not see that truth until I opened myself to my other.

Though Min-Ah and I found ways to write, I emphasize that our encounter was not one of solidarity by identity as women. Rather, it was our shared struggle to write that allowed us to come together, despite the struggle being different in many ways. We did not have the same experiences, and we knew that to pretend otherwise could result in the co-optation of one or both of our voices by the other in accordance with the ways our contexts reflected our different relations to power and to knowledge.[332] Rather than an identification and a notion that we shared a particular experience of writing our dissertations, this encounter opened a space for engaging with the difference of the other as other.

Our shared but not identical experiences allowed me to perceive the differences of my own voice beyond being simply an "othered" voice, subordinate to the theological tradition. The differences that emerged between Min-Ah and me in our encounter allowed us to hear our uncertainties as cries of an "othered" existence. My sense of uncertainty and the feeling that my self-assurance was slipping away from me became the possibility for validating my struggles as indicative of my attempt to fit into some idea of what a good academic was. I had feared that the uncertainty of my identity would leave me completely groundless and unable to speak with authority. I had been afraid to let what Butler refers to as the "moments of unknowingness" about myself emerge for fear that I

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[332] I borrow the interplay of these terms from Michel Foucault's work and in particular the English translation of his notion of pouvoir-savoir. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

would lose hold of the already tenuous experience of writing as a woman in the confines of a discourse that made me feel alienated.[333] I finally allowed my uncertainty to emerge as another way of knowing that was more valid and more ethical than the way of knowing I had so long attempted to mimic. It was through this moment that I realized I was also other within myself. Min-Ah and I were two others, coming together to create a space where our writing could flourish.

Perhaps most importantly, in the observation of this space of our differences we walked away with a sense of ourselves as agents, as people with something to say. Our "moments of unknowingness," as Butler would say, became the possibility of experiencing ourselves as different and yet interdependent subjects. The journey to find our voices did not conclude with our partings. With greater confidence in the validity of our different experiences, we could risk opening new spaces for encountering new differences. A renewed sense of optimism meant that these new encounters, which would invariably expose new tensions, would ultimately reveal themselves as possibilities for other wisdoms.

The space where Min-Ah's and my differences came together was a productive space where writing otherwise occurs, where our struggles to write engendered a space for the differences of our voices to arise because of our openness to each other. The difficulties of writing revealed our confrontations with the limits of dominant discourse. But writing from the space of our experiences of being "other" to that dominant discourse was the possibility of writing towards a new horizon. My struggles to write, when

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[333] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 20.

engaged in relation to an other allowed me to see our infinite differences. The infinite difference between us transformed my sense of unknowingness and uncertainty into an opportunity to love and heal with Min-Ah. Perhaps I have been drawn to Irigaray's work because I found within her words a semblance of this type of struggle laced with hope: she exposes the reductive workings of this system of subjectivity, and for the most part she finds ways to write contrary to that system. She has written in a way that expands possibilities for knowing and meaning. She writes in a way that calls attention to diverse, other ways of knowing (non-reductively) as the way for reimagining what it would mean to have a subjectivity that honors the irreducibility of sexual difference. Irigaray's writing constructs a subjectivity that harnesses the uncertainty of irreducibility as the lifeblood of ethical possibility.

WRITING TOWARDS DESTABILIZATION OF WOMEN AS THE POSSIBILITY FOR ETHICS

As my readings of Butler and Irigaray imply, the extent to which "others" are unknown to themselves and to each other can become an empowering possibility for resisting sameness. Writing otherwise is what happens when those who are marginalized resist the idea that the infinite diversity manifested as "uncertainty" can be squelched and reduced to a totalizing shadow of the normative subject. Whether excised is woman, colonized, black-skinned, intersexed, or queer, the limits of one's being depends on the forms of representation authorized by predominant power structures. From Angela Davis' expositions of experiences of black women to Iris Marion Young's using difference to

reframe the question of justice and identity politics, the cohesiveness of the category of woman has been disrupted and has expanded the breadth of feminist inquiry.[334] As feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins has noted in her work on intersectionality, the universalization of women's experience overlooks the reality that most people fluidly occupy multiple identities at any given time.[335] As Hill Collins and Marion Young's work suggests, people's painful experiences of the limits of discourse to account for their existence are not exclusive to the sex of their flesh. Persons are multiple, plural within themselves and to each other.

The fluidity of the borders of one's experience of personhood are like the fluidity of Irigaray's metaphor of mucous that at once transgresses and affirms the porous boundaries of the flesh: they are opportunities for self-knowing through relationality. Evidence of this type of embodied writing through indeterminacy occurs in *Borderlands,* Gloria Anzaldúa's famous theoretical and semi-autobiographical reflection on a community of Mexican-Indian women living at the Mexican-U.S. border. Anzaldúa reveals that the uncertainty of oneself as belonging to a singular identity is the

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[334] See Davis' groundbreaking work in Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983) and Young's discussion of the difficulties and promises of relying on the category of identity in Iris Marion Young, *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[335] Intersectionality, the notion of subjects situated at intersections of various marginalized or peripheral statuses, requires we consider differences among marginalized identities within any discussion of oppression. By contending with the shifting centers of power that inform persons' historical realities, intersectionality highlights the institutional interconnectedness of oppression without flattening particular differences under a universal category. Intersectionality revealed that individuals are not raced, classed, and gendered; rather, they are material beings that occupy all of these categories at a single moment. The people at the intersections of identities disclose the failures of understanding categories as monolithic structures with uniform members. Patricia Hill Collins interprets intersectionality as a dynamic intermingling of categories of existence revolving around centers of power. She explicitly defines intersectionality as, "An analysis claiming that systems of race, economic class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization" Patricia Hill. Hill Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 278.

opportunity for reimagining a subjectivity as continuously emerging through the blended or hybrid experience of identity. Anzaldúa writes the following:

> A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead: in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal."[336]

The above lines evoke a beautifully disturbing sense of the diversity of the other. Others are non-normal, but those who constitute the non-normal become, for Anzaldúa, the fabric of a new subjectivity. Anzaldúa suggests that what she calls the mestiza experience of living at the literal and figural crossroads of identities creates a consciousness that challenges a subjectivity built on rigid concepts of identity as monolithic.

Referring to Anzaldúa's mestiza consciousness and the experience of hybridity, feminist theorist Moya Lloyd writes, "This consciousness, however disorienting, is not debilitating; it is positively creative. Its creativity lies precisely in breaking down absolutes (Anzaldúa: 80)." [337] While Anzaldúa's notion of the mestiza is not to be decontextualized, it does speak to the means by which writing through one's experiences can disrupt the singularity or the rigidity of identity. This disruption reveals that there are those for whom the rigidity of identity acts more like a prison than a self-assurance. Anzaldúa gives voice to the complex ways in which one can be othered. She reveals the diversity of the experience of being other and through her writing claims her space within

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[336] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands-La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 2nd ed. (Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 25.
[337] Moya Lloyd, *Beyond Identity Politics: Feminism, Power,& Politics* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc., 2005), 57.

that diversity.[338] Exploring this constraint that a closed identity imposes is an act of resistance to the model of self-assurance through the certainty of identity.

While the content of Anzaldúa's above text suggests the philosophical prospect of hybridity, her actual writing displays the embodiment of the liminal mestiza experience of the American Southwest borderlands. Anzaldúa's text enacts disruptions of linearity and determinacy similar to Irigaray's mimetic work. Reading Anzaldúa is not simply an intellectual practice, it is an engaged sensory experience evoked through her intertwining and blending of English and Spanish to suggest an indigenous language of persons on the borders of existence. The movement between languages might seem indecisive, yet in actuality, this "indecision" is a rejection of the duality that the two different languages would impose upon her identity. Thus, Anzaldúa's writing is at once an embodied practice and artistic expression of her own constraints as a person who resists the dominant or normative imagination that would inscribe her identity. A sense of becoming pervades her writing in a way that invites the reader to be present in her experience--as though, to draw on Irigaray's prioritization of the couple required for difference to exist, the reader is perhaps necessary to her own becoming.

I believe that ethics involves a preservation of radical alterity in the face of all attempts at reduction, and the way to preserve alterity comes through the experience of the indeterminacy of one's flesh and the flesh of one's others. For ethics to preserve the radical alterity that is its core, we have to value indeterminacy as possibility. Exhibiting this embrace of the indeterminate, the writings of Irigaray, Anzaldúa, and my personal

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[338] Anzaldúa gives voice to other women's experiences and her own not only in her narrative but through her actual writing techniques and practices. Anzaldúa writes through the languages she speaks as a woman of the borderlands.

encounter with Min-Ah demonstrate that voices of "others" arise as proof that one need not write in the traditional voice to be heard. Marginalized voices, like that of Spivak's Echo, cry out for recognition in ways that demand an openness to difference. Those who are "other" than the dominant subject assert their personhood through the proclamation that their voices are unique to their particular experiences and not just different as "other." Just as Echo's punishment becomes the possibility of her reward, when the marginalized write otherwise, they effectively explode the limits and certitude of their "otherness." The experience of being other thus becomes a chance to write differently. Perhaps most importantly, the possibility of infinite difference within oneself becomes constructive when that infinite difference is seen in relation to, perhaps touching, the difference of the other.

Evidence of writing otherwise is revealed in the struggles of women to write in ways that disrupt the notion that "women" represent a monolithic group. This disruption takes seriously the potential silencing of the difference of the other that is enacted by asserting a common identity, such as "women." These disruptions of what it means to be "women" have presented opportunities for experiencing personhood and relationship with others through silenced, denigrated, negated, or unthought spaces of existence. Such ethical writing that risks the certainty and self-assurance of a closed interpretation of an identity such as "Black," "woman," or "feminist," for the sake of listening to the infinite diversity beneath the surface of a simplified depiction of life. Writing otherwise does not abandon the significance of experiencing life through these marginalized identities.[339] To

[339] Indeed, such identities are ways to establish truth claims and address the realities that one is oppressed based on identity regardless of whether or not one wants to establish a subjectivity that exceeds the language of identity.

the contrary, it is in fact one's experiences of personhood in accordance with certain marginalized identities that allows one to interpret uniquely one's experience as other. Writing otherwise challenges the idea that these identities or ways of naming the experience of being other can *fully* capture the depth of one's particular experience.

Attention to the experience of uncertainty, opacity, or non-subjectivity is exactly what occurs when Irigaray writes mimetically. Her writing moves from necessity to taking on an ethical significance when perceived as disruption for the sake of openness to the other as intertwined with one's own personhood.[340] In Irigaray's work, the sexes, whose difference will be the ground for alterity, are not absolute and determined in discourse. Her sexes emerge from their relationship to the difference of the constantly shifting interval of flesh and discourse. Therefore, Irigaray's writing is always a matter of claiming uncertainty and at the same time writing through that uncertainty as a philosopher of some othered wisdom: the wisdom prior to cognition. I emphasize this irreducibility of the sexes within themselves not because I think Irigaray can easily be absolved of the dangers of relying on a method that reinscribes a dichotomous and heterosexist arrangement of the sexes but because, to my mind, irreducibility is the most liberating and radical dimension of Irigaray's work.[341]

Because of her destabilization of woman, Irigaray's deconstruction of sexual difference opens the way for her readers to consider the differences among women as

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[340] I say perceived, because I do not place the responsibility solely on the writer but perhaps more importantly on the reader.

[341] Women do not need men to tell them that they are infinitely irreducible. Irigaray has found a way to suggest sexual difference is both irreducible and relational. The irreducible woman and the irreducible man do not gesture so much to the old guard of sexed differences as they do to the possibility of a relational understanding of difference. Still, I think we can only defend Irigaray to a point. It would seem there are other ways of figuring an ethics that insist on both irreducibility and relationship without relying on the language of heterosexual coupling.

ways of undermining the masculine system of representation that would have us close off the relationship between signification (feminine) and the signified (woman) in some biological determinism. Irigaray embraces destabilization and uses that instability to create a space of her own becoming; furthermore, she offers that space to her reader as a gift.

In Irigaray's work, I see a beautiful struggle to transform the destabilization of woman. Dwelling in the infinite space of destabilization goes beyond the desire for one's subjectivity towards a vision of personhood as inseparable from one's ethical responsibility to the other. Reading Irigaray's elusive writing as the gift of a writing otherwise, one can view her disruption of the stability of "woman" as a way of non-cognitive "knowing" through the enfleshed constraint of liminal or marginalized or unthought existence. And she lays this unknowing bare, naked, before the reader. The constraints of her flesh are exposed. Irigaray's decisive "uncertainty" or unknowing as a deconstructed woman becomes an invitation for exploring experiences of life as contributions to the fabric of "woman's" (un)defining.

CONCLUSIONS: THEOLOGICAL HORIZONS

In life, the versions of ourselves that discourse can represent are not complete. These representations are always partial, like edited versions of ourselves that we communicate to our others and to ourselves. But within what seems to be the inevitability of the often painful negotiations of our desires, our needs, and our struggles with the limits of recognition, we find opportunities for resistance. The voice of difference as revealed in writing otherwise is a voice that cannot be fully interpreted, and yet that voice is no less real, no less valid. It is a voice of what lies behind these edited versions of ourselves. Sometimes that voice appears as a silence or an omission; at other times, that voice appears as a body, wounded by the unfathomable depths of its unconventional desires. It is, insofar as the differences voiced through writing otherwise remain truly different and beyond the closure of identification, that writing otherwise resists the allergy to difference.[342]

Tenaciously affirming that indeterminacy as a site of knowledge means valuing the infinity within the finite world of flesh. Therefore, absolute alterity exists through a non-consumptive relationality. A non-consumptive relationality refers to a relationship without reduction, a way relating that preserves the infinite indeterminacy of the flesh. Such a relationship holds the flesh of the other without trying to confine that other, and without confining the self in ways that would consequently limit the scope of relationship to the other. The other wisdom that arises when we move toward our others openly

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[342] Fionola Meredith suggests that an understanding of experience as ever-changing and, as she quotes poet Louis Macneice, "'incorrigibly plural,'" is the means for subverting the closure that sameness and reduction attempt to enact. See in particular Meredith's discussion of the challenges deconstruction poses for claiming experience as more than a linguistic construction in her chapter, "The Post-structuralist Erasure of Experience." Meredith, *Postmetaphysical Self,* 108.

demands that we risk the security of our own self-assuredness and claim instead our unknowing as our possibility for becoming. Because of this risk, writing otherwise often means writing from the dizzying experience of being other, like that of the mestiza experience or Irigaray's writing as a woman within phallocentric discourses of psychoanalysis and philosophy.

Trying to assert one's particular voice in the midst of that painful experience of non-subjectivity is not easy. It calls upon those difficult moments and exposes one's wounds as the spaces where suffering creates life-giving wisdom. But the willingness to struggle in spite of the seemingly totalizing enclosures of discursive existence can result in the most beautiful relational form of becoming.[343] From the pains of alienation, one can know the alienation of one's others in a life-giving way. In this struggle, writing otherwise enacts an ethical openness to the other because it draws on one's particular experience without universalizing it. Rather than separating us from our others as unrelatable because we are irreducibly different, this type of writing maintains that infinite diversity, or what the traditional model of the subject perceives as uncertainty or instability, is itself the possibility of relationship with the other. Without that risk, we will not see our other as other, only as a pseudo-other given in discourse.

Not risking ourselves would be like an essentialist reading of Irigaray that reduces "woman" to the feminine characteristics ascribed her by a masculine discourse. But without risking our reliance on certainty, we never really find a way to relate to the honesty of our other's naked flesh or her unthought body. Not risking the certitude of

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[343] I encountered this process of becoming in my vulnerability before Min-Ah.

woman would be to allow the feminine to veil her flesh and limit the uncertainty her difference presents. Therefore, I suggest that writing otherwise is a practice of embracing the uncertainty of one's selfhood as a testament to the limits of the self-same and a proclamation that our lived experiences express a wisdom that flourishes when the infinite diversity of the flesh of our others is safeguarded.

I believe ethics is about a non-consumptive, wondrous, erotic, sensible, material love for the other balanced with the love of oneself that meets its fullest expression in this love for the other. And writing otherwise engenders the type of relationality, fostering the infinite space between two infinitely different touching fleshes that can ground ethical action. As feminist thinker Adriana Cavarero beautifully writes, one's "'life-story is different from all others precisely because it is constitutively interwoven with all others.'" Writing otherwise is a dynamic and open space for encountering this uniqueness and interdependence of existence as the possibility for experiencing the infinity of alterity. Perhaps writing through uncertainty is as exhausting and paradoxical an experience that often accompanies living as a "woman." But when one writes through that uncertainty, one's writing enacts an openness and vulnerability that disrupts the totalizing and allergic way of relating to the differences of this world. Writing otherwise exhibits a courage to call attention to one's constraint as a moment of disclosure. Vulnerably writing through that constraint gives voice to the unheard differences without trapping those differences in a particular identity. Through this risky endeavor to reveal unthought differences, one continuously points to the way rigidly adhering to particular identities or sets of named

differences closes us off to the differences of ourselves and our others, depriving us of the joys of life's unfathomable mysteries.

Investigating the contradictions and tensions of opaque existence offers a nonallergic way of relating to the differences within ourselves and the differences between ourselves and others. Writing otherwise is writing through the intensity of experiencing one's difference in relation to the recognizable parameters for being in the world. And such writing reflects the pains and frustrations of experiencing differences that are incomprehensible within one's frame of reference. Allowing all differences to be voiced allows us to claim the validity and the beauty of the differences within as contributing to the fabric of an interdependent life.

We do ourselves a great violence when we confuse moments of self-unknowing and uncertainty with weakness. It is all too easy to allow the "uncertainty" of ourselves as subjects to become an internalized failure when, in fact, we must see our uncertainty as spaces of resistance. Reading Irigaray's mimetic writing as a resistance to rather than recapitulation of totality embraces her ethical commitment to overcoming sameness within the constrained realities of speaking and making sense within a logic of sameness. As Elizabeth Grosz writes, "Patriarchy does not prevent women from speaking; it refuses to listen when women do not speak 'universal', that is, as men."[344] Bracketing the language of patriarchy and understanding the model of the universal subject as encompassing all sorts of norms such as race, class, sexuality and social location, Grosz reminds us that not being heard is not the same as not being able to speak. The

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[344] Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, 126.

uncertainty that arises at the limits of available representations of subjectivity and our experiences of ourselves as persons with something to say flags a failure of static discursive closures to connect us to the realities of life.

The sense of uncertainty or unknowingness of ourselves as subjects are failures of the unethical system of subjectivity, not of some existential failure to fit the model of the "knowing" or all-knowing subject. The allergy to difference that bolsters a reductive subjectivity fails all of humanity by separating us from the infinity of concrete plurality of differences that manifest in our experiences of life. Or as theologian Wendy Farley suggests, "A rejection of the plurality of reality [...] reflects an unmaking of the world, a praxis of fabrication" or what Farley also calls an "illusion."[345] In other words, the world available to us in representation is never the full world. And living in this partial or illusory world is particularly disorienting and destabilizing for those beings who recognize their experiences are incommensurate with this illusion.

To avoid the totalizing violence of the allergy to the other that enables racist, heterosexist, sexist, and ethnocentrist practices, we must reimagine the language of "woman" or "women's writing" as a space in which the tensions of our differences expand the limits of our knowledge. "Woman" changes and develops through the continuous emergence of differences within, and the diversity of "women's" voices are indicative of the broader struggle to make sense of life in a world that relies on sameness and identification to establish personhood. Acknowledging the limits of our identities allows us to lay claim to the resistance to unethical totalization our lives enact every day.

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[345] Farley, *Eros for the Other,* 17.

From this space of resistance, we recognize that the differences of others are as at once infinite and constrained as our own.

This type of validation of our uncertainties proposes an alternative subjectivity--a subjectivity based in the experience of unthought differences that exceed the limits of knowing. This is a subjectivity grounded in difference rather than sameness, uncertainty and openness rather than certainty and closure. The crisis of identity is an opportunity for understanding oneself in ethical relation to difference. Writing through that constrained space of an uncertain identity is the possibility for perceiving our reliance on sameness to construct subjectivity. Because the uncertainty of identity is revealed through the concreteness of lived experience, it suggests the diversity of human relationships is the condition for one's sense of self or personhood. This is an orientation to difference not out of fear or allergy wherein differences would somehow be mutually exhaustive and render beings incapable of relationship. This is an orientation towards difference as a potential for relating to our others without making those others like us the condition for our relationship.

Writing otherwise, as "exploring each voice as a presence, as a sign of an intensely lived being-in-the-world, without attempting to graft some essentialist and reductive, quantifiable and qualifiable difference onto that voice," is a way to understand our own struggles with writing in relation to other women's writing and their struggles to write.[346] It is an ethical orientation towards the processes of writing as a woman and the encounters with other women's works. It is a way to give presence to women's voices

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[346] Jeannette Gaudet, *Writing Otherwise: Atlan, Duras, Giraudon, Redonnet, and Wittig* (Atlanta, GA: Rodopi Bv Editions, 1999), 9.

past, present, and future without trapping those voices in some universalization of what it means to be other. It challenges us to value the spaces of uncertainty that we confront when our voices seem lost or repressed as possibilities for discernment and relationship with our others. It can free us to find ways to navigate the experiences of being silenced and the responsibility to hear and celebrate the voices of our others. It is a way to find ourselves, not through the other, but with and because of the other. By uncovering voices as an irreducible presence, writing otherwise safeguards the differences of the other and can inform a more ethical way to employ the term "woman." It is an ethical orientation with respect to the works of others and ourselves. Writing otherwise describes an ethical practice that honors the irreducible diversity of all people's experiences as the source for claiming the uniqueness of one's own voice in relation to one's others.

The most intimate experience of personhood arises when we open ourselves to the wisdom of our constrained experiences of living. We must confront the limits of our imagination and find a way to let a new knowledge arise through the lived experience of difference within ourselves and with our others. Risking the ground of our identities and writing through the constrained space of what we do not cognitively know but intuitively feel or sense, constitutes an openness to the incomprehensible difference of life. As Irigaray's deconstruction of sexual difference has revealed, writing through the unthought differences of everything that our identities do not say about us and everything our identities suppress within us is a writing that that engenders nonallergic human relationships.

From writing otherwise as a strategy for opening onto nonallergic living, we can move towards a more ethical theology, a theology where the infinite difference of the divine is reflected in the infinite uniqueness seen with compassion and comfort through encounters with our human others. In and through our relationships with each other we come to be and come to experience the possibility of the infinite. Claiming the inexhaustibility of our differences allows us to witness what Carter Heyward calls the "sacred energy in our midst."[347] Writing that embraces the infinite differences given in life is a writing that suggests a fully embodied relationship with the infinite divine. If openness to the divine begins with an openness to the infinite that surrounds us, then we must write otherwise to welcome the divinity of difference.

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[347] Carter Heyward, *Saving Jesus from Those Who Are Right: Rethinking What It Means to Be Christian* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999), 93.

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