

**Becoming Beauty: The Implications of  
the Writings of Luce Irigaray for  
Feminist Art Practices**

**Hilary Robinson**  
*~*

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds  
Department of Fine Art

July 1998

"The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others."

# **Abstract**

This thesis aims to identify aspects of Luce Irigaray's work which are of significance for feminist discourses of art, including art practices and critical analyses of art works by women. Her writings have been analyzed and employed in academic fields, such as Literature, Philosophy, and Theology, but rarely to date from within art history, criticism or theory. This thesis establishes the wide-ranging implications of her work for these disciplines.

The thesis is in two parts. Part 1 outlines Luce Irigaray's analyses of phallogentrism's representational structures, and her arguments for developing representational structures appropriate for women. It aims to outline Luce Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference in so far as it impacts upon the production of meaning in the realm of the visual, and visual aesthetics. The first two chapters focus upon mimetic practices, including mimesis, masquerade and hysteria. They identify the maintenance mimesis in phallogentrism, and the productive mimesis which develops structures of resistance. Chapters 3 and 4 attend to Luce Irigaray's analyses of the visual, including phallogentric structures of sight and visible representation. The possibility of a syntax in the Symbolic appropriate to women is explored.

Building upon this, Part 2 engages moments of contemporary art practice by women with further aspects of Luce Irigaray's thinking. Her concept of morphology is explored in relation to work by Laura Godfrey-Isaacs, Jenny Saville, Bridget Reilly and Rachel Whiteread, in order to establish possible mediative function of art works. Luce Irigaray's understandings of gesture are read in conjunction with



work by Louise Bourgeois. Finally, Luce Irigaray's arguments about women's genealogies, and concepts of the divine, the universal, and the transcendental appropriate to women, are tested against the representation, 'woman', in Irish visual culture, and moments of resistance in works by Irish artists Rita Duffy, Louise Walsh, Pauline Cummins, and Fran Hegarty.

The thesis concludes that, through careful attention to the structures and use of terminology developed by her, it is possible to identify areas where Luce Irigaray's work can be productively juxtaposed with and interrogated by current feminist theories of art in order to develop those practices, increase the legibility of art works by women, and provide spaces of discourse in which artists can work in the future.

# Contents

List of Plates

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Translation: a note

Style: a note

1

21

23

Part 1

25

Chapter 1. Mimesis part 1: mimicry, masquerade, hysteria

26

'Mimesis': a polysemic term

28

Mimesis in Plato

29

Non-productive mimesis

32

Mimicry and mime

34

Masquerade

40

Hysterical mimicry

47

Chapter 2. Mimesis part 2: the practice of mimesis

53

Productive mimesis

53

Luce Irigaray's practice of mimesis

63

Luce Irigaray's oeuvre as/is mimesis

69

Chapter 3. The visual and the visible part 1: analysing the  
phallogocentric visible

77

Critiques of phallogocentrism's realm of the visual

80

Phallogocentrism: woman has no appropriate Symbolic syntax

89

Disrupting phallogocentrism

98

Visible representation in phallogocentrism

108

Chapter 4. The visual and the visible part 2: creating structures  
for a Symbolic syntax appropriate to women

125

Mirror, speculum, burning glass

125

Reflection, self-image, beauty

145

Looking, listening, attentiveness

155

Part 2

183

Chapter 5. Morphology, materiality, signification

184

Morphology

184

A red herring: 'essentialism'

188

Difference/différance

192

The morpho-logic of the lips and of the mucous

196

The morphology of the mucous: a possibility in the materiality of art  
practices?

208

Chapter 6. Retraversing gesture	235
Louise Bourgeois: <i>Cells</i>	235
Present critical analysis of Louise Bourgeois's work	237
Reading gestural process: between psychoanalysis and artworks	243
Louise Bourgeois's gestures in the <i>Cells</i>	257
Chapter 7. Becoming women: woman-to-woman genealogies	265
The representation 'woman' in Irish visual culture	266
Rethinking the divine, the transcendental, and the universal	279
Mother-daughter genealogies	289
"The mother"/"my mother" in Hiberno-English: a cultural reserve?	295
Conclusion	306
Bibliography	315

# Plates

Plate 1. Following page 106.

*The Sportsman's Dilemma*, n.d. Print. Courtesy Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Plate 2. Following page 113.

François Boucher, *Miss O'Murphy*, 1752. Oil. 59 x 73 cm. Alte Pinakothek, München.

Plate 3. Following page 114.

Suzanne Santoro, *Per Una Espressione Nuova/Towards New Expression* (Rome: Rivolta Femminile, 1974). Front cover.

Plate 4. Following page 117.

Cynthia Mailman, *Self-Portrait as God* from Sister Chapel, 1977. Acrylic on canvas, 108" x 60". Collection the artist. Photograph from Norma Broude and Mary Garrard (eds), *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact* (New York: Abrams, 1994).

Plate 5. Following page 119.

Yolanda M López, *Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe*, 1978. Oil pastel on paper, 30" x 24". Collection of the artist. Photograph from Amelia Jones (ed), *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* (Los Angeles: UCLA, 1996).

Plate 6. Following page 132.

Hans Holbein the Younger, *Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve ('The Ambassadors')*, 1533. National Gallery, London.

Plate 7. Following page 133.

Henry Kettle, *Sleeping Venus Uncovered by Amor*, c.1770. Cylinder anamorphosis, oil on panel 14 1/2" x 19". Collection Schuyt, Amsterdam. Photographs from Fred Leeman, *Hidden Images: Games of Perception, Anamorphic Art, Illusion* (New York: Abrams, 1976).

Plate 8. Following page 134.

Anish Kapoor, *Drawings for Descent into Limbo*, n.d. Photograph from *Documenta IX, Kassell*, volume 2, ed. by Roland Nachtigäller and Nicola von Velsen (Stuttgart: Edition Cantz, 1992).

Plate 9. Following page 135.

Anish Kapoor, *Untitled*, 1995. Aluminium, c. 48" high. Courtesy ICA, London.

Plate 10. Following page 143.

Berthe Morisot, *Psyche*, 1876. Oil on canvas, 25 1/2" x 21 1/4". Thyssen Bornemisza Collection, Lugano. Photograph from Kathleen Adler and Tamar Garb, *Berthe Morisot* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1987).

Plate 11. Following page 164.

Janine Antoni, *Loving Care*, 1993. Performance at Anthony D'Offay Gallery.



Photograph from *Janine Antoni: Slip of the Tongue* (Glasgow and Dublin: CCA and IMMA, 1995).

Plate 12. Following page 217.

Laura Godfrey-Isaacs, *Lumpish* (detail), 1991. Oil on canvas, 56" x 56". *Exposure* (detail), 1991. Oil on canvas, 56" x 56". *Sensation* (detail), 1991. Oil on canvas, 18" x 18". Photographs courtesy of the artist.

Plate 13. Following page 222.

Rachel Whiteread, *Untitled (Airbed)*, 1992. Plaster and polystyrene, 22 x 120 x 194 cm. Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London.

Plate 14. Following page 222.

Bridget Riley, *Arrest II*, 1965. Acrylic on linen, 76 3/4" x 75". Karsten Schubert Gallery, London.

Plate 15. Following page 228.

Jenny Saville, *Plan*, 1993. Oil on canvas, 274.5 x 213.5 cm. The Saatchi Gallery, London.

Plate 16. Following page 236.

Louise Bourgeois, *Cell (Glass Spheres and Hands)*, 1990-1993. Mixed media, 86" x 86" x 83". Collection of the artist; courtesy Robert Miller Gallery, New York. Photograph from *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory, Works 1982-1993*, ed. by Joanna Ekman (New York: Abrams, 1994).

Plate 17. Following page 236.

Louise Bourgeois, *Cell III*, 1991. Mixed media, 111" x 130 1/2" x 165". Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation, Toronto. Photograph from *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory, Works 1982-1993*, ed. by Joanna Ekman (New York: Abrams, 1994).

Plate 18. Following page 236.

Louise Bourgeois, *Cell IV*, 1991. Mixed media, 82" x 84" x 84". Collection of Ginny Williams, Denver. Photograph from *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory, Works 1982-1993*, ed. by Joanna Ekman (New York: Abrams, 1994).

Plate 19. Following page 236.

Louise Bourgeois, *Cell (You Better Grow Up)*, 1993. Mixed media, 83" x 82" x 83 1/2". Collection of the artist; courtesy Robert Miller Gallery, New York. Photograph from *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory, Works 1982-1993*, ed. by Joanna Ekman (New York: Abrams, 1994).

Plate 20. Following page 236.

Louise Bourgeois, *Cell (Three White Marble Spheres)*, 1993. Mixed media, 84" x 84" x 84". Collection of the artist; courtesy Robert Miller Gallery, New York. Photograph from *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory, Works 1982-1993*, ed. by Joanna Ekman (New York: Abrams, 1994).

Plate 21. Following page 262.

Louise Bourgeois, *Figures*, c.1947-1955. Painted wood, each c.66" high. Private collection, New York. Photograph from Deborah Wye, *Louise Bourgeois* (New York:

Museum of Modern Art, 1982).

Plate 22. Following page 262.

Louise Bourgeois, *Spiral Woman*, 1984. Bronze and slate. Bronze 11 1/2" x 3 1/2" x 4 1/2"; slate, 1" x 34 3/4" diameter. Collection of Elaine Dannheisser, New York. Photograph from *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory, Works 1982-1993*, ed. by Joanna Ekman (New York: Abrams, 1994).

Plate 23. Following page 270.

Rita Duffy, *Territory*, 1996. Pigment and graphite on gesso boards, 15 panels each 24" x 30". Courtesy of the artist.

Plate 24. Following page 276.

Republican murals, Short Strand and The Ardoyne, Belfast, n.d. Photographs by the author.

Plate 25. Following page 277.

*Sheela-na-gig* (Co. Cavan), n.d. Stone. National Museum of Ireland, Dublin.

Plate 26. Following page 278.

Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh, *Sounding the Depths* (detail), 1992. Cibachrome, sound, and video installation. Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin. Photograph courtesy of the artists.

Plate 27. Following page 294.

*Santa Maria e Santa Anna*, C15th. Pigment on wood, c. 48" high. Museo dell'Estuario, Torcello, Venice.

Plate 28. Following page 299.

Louise Walsh, *Monument to the Low-paid Women Workers*, 1993. Bronze, 84" high. Photograph by the author.

Plate 29. Following page 303.

Frances Hegarty, *Turas (Journey)* (detail: video still), 1990-1995. Video. Courtesy of the artist.

# Acknowledgements

My first acknowledgement must go to the work of Luce Irigaray, which has been politically and intellectually challenging and revitalizing at a time when I have found the women's movement not to be so. Alongside this a huge acknowledgement must also go to Professor Griselda Pollock, who has supervised my work with great patience, focus, generosity and charm: in her wider work as a researcher, writer and educator she is a wonderful and seemingly tireless example for myself and many other women.

David Crone, Head of School, Fine and Applied Arts, University of Ulster, provided the crucial semester sabbatical to allow time for writing up. The Faculty of Art and Design library staff at the University of Ulster have been extraordinary in their support and help in tracking down obscure books and articles: particularly Marion Korshidian.

Others have read or listened to sections of my research, and made useful comments, whether short or long, including: David Brett, Whitney Chadwick, Mary Condren, Katy Deepwell, Alison Rowley, and neither last nor least Louise Parsons, who also offered sustenance and great company through the travails of returning to studentship. Marion Gentilehomme and Nancy Proctor provided draft translations of untranslated articles. The Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Annaghmakerrig, Co. Monaghan provided perfect surroundings at key times during the writing process, and a School of Irish Studies award helped me appreciate my visits there even more.

And of course: my parents, Olive Robinson and Ivor Robinson, loving and supportive.

And Alastair MacLennan. Always.



## Introduction.

What I am going to try and talk about today, often in the form of questions, stands at the meeting point of the properties of *physical matter* and an elaboration of *sexualized subjective identity* that has still to be thought through and put into practice.<sup>1</sup>

At once with this statement by Luce Irigaray we could be in a woman artist's studio. We could be contemplating her practice. We could be at a site - the meeting point of the properties of physical matter and an elaboration of sexualized subjective identity - which is the site of her enunciation through that practice. This thesis aims to propose that certain key concepts and arguments in the work of Luce Irigaray are productive in the search for feminist critical analyses of contemporary art practices by women. The challenge for feminist artists and critics is to find means to articulate their difference as women engaged with those practices. Present art critical discourse being theoretically and structurally wanting, it is necessary to build feminist analyses and terminology which can not only be brought to bear upon present theoretical and critical discourse but also facilitate the legibility of artworks by women in ways which have not been possible to date. This thesis, then, is necessarily strategic and political. My arguments are informed by my training as a painter and subsequent work as an artist, and by my work in art criticism, arts administration, and as an educator in studio-led Fine Art courses. Some of the ideas which emerge from it will find their way back, as questions, into that possible place of a woman artist's studio, her practice, and the

---

<sup>1</sup> Luce Irigaray, 'Flesh Colours', in *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 151-165 (p. 153)/'Les couleurs de la chair', in *Sexes et parentes* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987), pp. 165-179 (p. 167).



site of her enunciation.

Two main impulses shaped the focus for the thesis. The first was concern about the state of feminist art criticism and about the status of feminist art practice in the 1990s; the second was the conflict between my pleasure and interest in reading some of Luce Irigaray's philosophical writings and my confusion when reading her essays on art. My initial concern was that artists such as Mona Hatoum, Rachel Whiteread, Louise Bourgeois, Jana Sterbak, Janine Antoni, Rebecca Horn, and many others - artists working in diverse media with diverse aims, but with clear recognition of themselves as gendered female - may have had critical appraisal by feminists, but they have not, by and large, seen deeper shifts within theories of art produced by feminism which can accommodate (or are provoked by) their practices. Additionally, a number of younger women artists in Britain have emerged onto the national and international art scene who appear to have nothing to say, in their work or beyond, about feminism (even though the surface style of much of this work relies heavily upon feminist work of the 1970s) and about whom feminist criticism has appeared to say nothing. A malaise begins to be delineated.<sup>2</sup>

Turning to the writings of Luce Irigaray is not a direct response to

---

2 At least in part this is a result of (and helps to perpetuate) very real problems. For example, the continuing low employment rates of women in art schools creates problems for feminist practitioners and critics, and perpetuates the isolation of women students from knowledge, analyses, and theories of their history and present context as women. In publishing, a crisis in our only feminist art magazine, and, in other journals and in books, a lack of reflection upon the history and progress of the work of feminists involved with art practice and criticism, has left those of us who would identify amongst that number with little clarity about our tasks and strategies for the coming years, while being aware that there is still so much work to be done. Feminist activity among tutors in universities and art schools, possibly as a result of the pressure to publish, is increasingly focused on theoretical and academic production, often it seems at the expense of activist and practical strategies to deal with these issues in day to day interaction with colleagues and students, or by such simple strategies as supporting women artists by writing short reviews of their work for art magazines.

this malaise, and in doing so I am not suggesting that her work contains in any transparent form the solution to these problems. It is rather that there are elements in her thinking concerning women's subjectivity, the enunciation of that sexed subjectivity, and mediation between subjects, which are not only exciting philosophically, but are also important for theoretical and critical discussions of contemporary art. It is my contention that, although it does not engage with it directly, much of Luce Irigaray's work cuts across many of the tired areas in present day art criticism and could reconfigure the discussion among feminist theorists about how to develop ways of reading the practices of contemporary women artists.

Such possibilities were not at all apparent to me in my initial reading of two articles which are among the few instances where Luce Irigaray discusses visual art. Having read sections and essays in *This Sex Which is Not One*, *Speculum Of the Other Woman*, and *The Irigaray Reader*<sup>3</sup> with great interest and pleasure, my reaction to 'A Natal Lacuna' (with a commentary by Margaret Whitford, 'Woman with Attitude') and 'How Can We Create Our Beauty?' was one of disappointment and confusion.<sup>4</sup> In 'A Natal Lacuna' Luce Irigaray considers the work of artist Unica Zürn as a "failure". She says that Zürn, in her desire to produce a "descriptive reality" of

---

3 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985)/*Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1977); *Speculum Of The Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985)/*Speculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1974); *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwells, 1991).

4 Luce Irigaray, 'A Natal Lacuna', trans. by Margaret Whitford, *Women's Art Magazine*, 58 (May/June 1994), 11-13; 'How Can We Create Our Beauty?', in *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, trans. by Alison Martin (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 107-111/'Comment créer notre beauté?', in *Je, tu, nous: pour une culture de la différence* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), pp. 121-126 (hereafter cited as 'How Can We Create Our Beauty?'/ 'Comment créer notre beauté?'); Margaret Whitford, 'Woman with Attitude', *Women's Art Magazine*, 60 (September/October 1994), 15-17.



her “psychic truth”, has produced an art which is “ugly”, a symptom of her own fragmented psyche. This, argues Luce Irigaray, is a result of Zürn’s failure to “give birth to herself” as a woman. She uses this “failure” to argue that “it is difficult for a woman to be born”, and for the importance for women of producing wholeness and “beauty”, particularly through “her own morphology”. Margaret Whitford’s commentary concentrates on the aspects of Luce Irigaray’s essay which touch upon visual art, and includes an explanation of Irigaray’s understanding of the death drives and their relationship to creativity. She suggests that Luce Irigaray’s concept of “beauty” is woman’s identity for herself, and reads Irigaray to be calling for women to create figurative, idealised representations of women. She then states that Luce Irigaray has, therefore, a conservative approach to art. In referencing Luce Irigaray’s work beyond ‘A Natal Lacuna’,<sup>5</sup> Margaret Whitford finds material to reinforce this thesis.

My confusion was immense. I had certainly not thought of Luce Irigaray as potentially conservative in her understanding of art; indeed, my initial reading (albeit on an intuitive, rather than considered level) found that her work would have much to offer in its discussion of language and representation. Key to the project was realising the difficulties of inter-disciplinary work. Neither Luce Irigaray nor Margaret Whitford have a background in the visual arts. Luce Irigaray is a psychoanalyst and philosopher, and Margaret Whitford a philosopher. In her writings Luce Irigaray, in particular, has worked in a richly interdisciplinary way, and, in writing about her, Margaret Whitford has had to follow suit. Yet the underlying

---

<sup>5</sup> Including *Speculum; Je, tu, nous*, and essays in *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993)/*Sexes et parentés* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987).

problem of 'A Natal Lacuna' for an audience of artists and critics (a problem perpetuated by Margaret Whitford's article also) is precisely the failure to understand or show knowledge of the practices of visual art in general and the necessary corollary, feminist analyses and developments of visual art as manifested through practices, histories and theories. Thus neither of these articles provide the interdisciplinary reading necessary to facilitate access - and thus the construction of models of practice - for contemporary practitioners and critics. My criticisms identified particular problem areas: the prioritising of the literary arts over the visual arts; the lack of attention to the specificities of visual art practices; and the stress upon the artwork as product only, without consideration of the processes involved in its making.<sup>6</sup>

When I read 'How Can We Create Our Beauty?' shortly afterwards, I could begin to identify the source of my difficulties as twofold: terminology, and politics. Luce Irigaray was using terminology which either was not used in contemporary criticism or, if it was, then with a different meaning. Her politics, too, were unfamiliar, different from the politics of the women's movement (either activist or theoretical) with which I was familiar in Britain and Ireland. 'How Can We Create Our Beauty?' is published in *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, a book of short polemic essays, each designed to focus on a particular aspect of Luce Irigaray's thinking in order to introduce it to a wider audience and demonstrate its politics. I realised that it could work as an indicative reading, pointing to areas in Luce Irigaray's broader

---

<sup>6</sup> These were written up as a short, polemic response to the two articles. Hilary Robinson, 'Irigaray's Imaginings', *Women's Art Magazine*, 61 (November/December 1994), 20.



work which would be of importance for developing radical discourses and practices of art.

Luce Irigaray begins 'How Can We Create Our Beauty?' by positing her argument in words which are a challenge to many of us who are involved with contemporary art practices. This terminology can even appear naive for a number of reasons. Most of us making or working with art will have taken on board, for instance, Adorno's discussion about the impossibility of lyricism after Auschwitz; or the way an avant garde-ist principle of 'épater les bourgeois' has disintegrated into post-modernist horror-chic; or a feminist-realist impulse to 'tell it like it is'; or possibly even the desire for catharsis which can only be achieved at the resolution of a certain order of narrative. At first, Luce Irigaray appears either to ignore or be unaware of the impact of each of these for contemporary art practice. She writes:

Very often, when looking at women's works of art, I have been saddened by the sense of anguish they express, an anguish so strong it approaches horror. Having wanted to contemplate beauty created by women, I would find myself faced instead with distress, suffering, irritation, sometimes ugliness. The experience of art, which I expected to offer a moment of happiness and repose, of compensation for the fragmentary nature of daily life, of unity and communication or communion, would become yet another source of pain, a burden.<sup>7</sup>

Luce Irigaray uses the rest of the essay to outline in four main points why she thinks women make images of pain, and how women could create beauty. First, she puts herself into the discussion by pointing out that she too deals with pain in her work, but states that she attempts to do so in what she calls "a literary style" to cushion any potential sense of dereliction in the reader. At the

---

7 Luce Irigaray, 'How Can We Create Our Beauty?', p. 107/'Comment créer notre beauté?', p. 121.

same time she will look for a positive - something which women, "who have a tendency to identify only with what they lack, their shortcomings"<sup>8</sup>, sometimes criticize her for. She says that showing the negative:

... is positive and necessary given that it was meant to stay hidden. The portrayal of suffering is, then, for women an act of truthfulness. It's also akin to an individual and collective catharsis. [...] Daring to manifest publicly individual and collective pain has a therapeutic effect, bringing relief to the body and enabling them to accede to another time. This doesn't come as a matter of course, but it may be the case for some women.<sup>9</sup>

She likens the effect of this representation of anguish to the masked figures subjected to fate in Greek tragedy.

Luce Irigaray's second point is that having children is a most wonderful creativity. However, within the "male social order" there is a particular obligation to do it; and further, a distinction is made between creation, which is reserved for men, and procreation, which is deemed of a lesser order. She suggests that "there would seem to be confusion now between the beauty of the work [of childbirth] and its definition within a between-men civilization in which women no longer have a recognized right to engender spiritual values".<sup>10</sup>

The third point is stated bluntly: "as women, we have thus been enclosed in an order of forms inappropriate to us. In order to exist, we must break out of these forms."<sup>11</sup> This may have one of three consequences: first, it may destroy us: "instead of being reborn, we annihilate ourselves". Second, it may show us what flesh, and

---

8 Luce Irigaray, 'How Can We Create Our Beauty?', p. 108/'Comment créer notre beauté?', p. 122.

9 Luce Irigaray, 'How Can We Create Our Beauty?', p. 108/'Comment créer notre beauté?', p. 122.

10 Luce Irigaray, 'How Can We Create Our Beauty?', p. 109/'Comment créer notre beauté?', p. 123.

11 Luce Irigaray, 'How Can We Create Our Beauty?', p. 109/'Comment créer notre beauté?', p. 123.

therefore what colours, we have left: "I think colour is what's left of life beyond forms, beyond truth or beliefs, beyond accepted joys and sorrows. Colour also expresses our sexuate nature, that irreducible dimension of our incarnation."<sup>12</sup> The third possible consequence of breaking out of the inappropriate order of forms which encloses us is that women may re-discover their identity and forms, forms which are "always incomplete, in perpetual growth, because a woman grows, blossoms and fertilizes (herself) within her own body".<sup>13</sup>

The fourth and final main point of 'How Can We Create Our Beauty?' concerns the representation of a "female divine". The between-men culture disallows women's expression of meaning. Just as a child is not an abstract or arbitrary sign, so too for women "meaning remains concrete, close, related to what is natural, to perceptible forms."<sup>14</sup> In what is called pre-history, women participated in civil and religious life and were represented as woman goddesses (not only mother goddesses). Today, lack of divine representation leaves women in a state of dereliction, without means of designating or expressing self, identifying and respecting mother-daughter genealogies.

From this essay, then, there are three salient points for discussion: 1) the very broad issue of flesh, body, their representation, and female morphology; 2) the nature of female creativity, and in close relation, subjectivity; and 3) the representation of what Luce

---

12 Luce Irigaray, 'How Can We Create Our Beauty?', p. 109/'Comment créer notre beauté?', pp. 123-124.

13 Luce Irigaray, 'How Can We Create Our Beauty?', p. 110/'Comment créer notre beauté?', p. 124.

14 Luce Irigaray, 'How Can We Create Our Beauty?', p. 110/'Comment créer notre beauté?', p. 125.



Irigaray terms the “female divine” and its inevitable adjuncts, “universality” and “transcendence”. Running through these discussions, as they fold out into Luce Irigaray’s wider writings, are two others: 4) the necessity for productive acknowledgement of female genealogies (two-way interchange between mother and daughter, and its concomitant, exchange between women) and, 5) in very close relation to this, a notion of fulfilment or “becoming” for women. Without any of these, women’s beauty is not possible: indeed, these in conjunction would be productive of and allow for the performativity of women’s beauty. It is thus clear that anything approaching ‘an Irigarayan aesthetic’ will not be found in the reproduction of certain methodologies in the studio, or adherence to one or another ‘style’ of imagery. Luce Irigaray’s discussion of beauty therefore, and my discussion here, is *not* about defining a new aesthetic, *nor* is it an essentialist notion of a female aesthetic which has been overshadowed by a male aesthetic, and which only requires a light to be shone on it in order to become visible. For Luce Irigaray, “beauty” for women is a potential state of being which can only come about as a result of rethinking political and cultural discourse. Her discussion of beauty is about making possible an order of discourse which would in and of itself, and inevitably, be productive of beauty. It is a discussion which requires the reader to think differently: to rethink what might be productive of beauty, and what might constitute the transcendental and the universal.

In trying to identify the threads in Luce Irigaray’s work which can help us rethink the political and cultural discourse of contemporary art practice and criticism, there are a number of things that this thesis will not do. Three in particular should be mentioned. First, it



will not relate her work to that of other philosophers and psychoanalysts, nor map out her indebtedness to them. Second, it will not chart the detailed chronology of the development of her thinking. There are others who are far more qualified to do both of these jobs than I, and I acknowledge the importance of their work for my own.<sup>15</sup> The third thing I shall not be doing is using Luce Irigaray's work to 'explain' women's art works; nor shall I be using art works to 'illustrate' Luce Irigaray's writing. I hope to avoid these two simplifications by instead firstly outlining the analyses, structures, and strategies which she teases out as conducive to the development of representational structures which are appropriate for women, rather than those which maintain the languages of patriarchy; and secondly by looking for moments in contemporary practices and works which can be read through an understanding of strategies that Luce Irigaray identifies as manifested by women in patriarchal culture. In doing this I aim to avoid proscribing or prescribing particular practices (whether representational, contextual, or of media); but rather to open up discourses of possibility of and for contemporary art practices.

To date, most of the analyses and applications of Luce Irigaray's work - from the major studies to short reviews - have been carried out within the disciplines of philosophy, theology, and literature. Margaret Whitford's *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* is still the key introduction to the writings of Luce Irigaray.<sup>16</sup> It outlines the breadth of Luce Irigaray's thinking in terms of its concepts and its philosophical contexts, and demonstrates how her

---

15 The major publications I have used will be outlined below. The many other publications I have used will be found in the bibliography, and are footnoted as appropriate.

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

work has moved beyond that of those who have informed her work. Published in 1991, it suffers only from its lack of comment on Luce Irigaray's on-going publications and from the developing subtlety of Irigarayan scholarship - to which Margaret Whitford herself is contributing. Tina Chanter's book *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray's Rewriting of the Philosophers* is the only other single author book in English devoted to Luce Irigaray's work.<sup>17</sup> Its aim is to sift through Luce Irigaray's difference from the position of De Beauvoir and her explicit engagement with works by Hegel, Heidegger, Levinas, and Derrida. As such, *Ethics of Eros* has a philosophico-historical framework and focus. The final book-length text on Luce Irigaray's work is the invaluable anthology *Engaging With Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, which as a whole demonstrates the radical breadth of its effect.<sup>18</sup> While a few essays here had previously been published elsewhere, most had not. I found those by Elizabeth Weed, Naomi Schor, Rosi Braidotti, Philippa Berry, Carolyn Burke, Dianna Chisholm, Elizabeth Hirsch and Luisa Muraro particularly interesting and useful for stretching my own thinking, whether in agreement or not.

While these texts and others will be footnoted as appropriate through the thesis, I would like to mention some analyses of Luce Irigaray's work which have been helpful or challenging. Elizabeth Grosz's incisive work upon Irigaray (and upon her critics) has been useful, as has her unravelling of the relations between mimicry,

---

17 Tina Chanter, *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray's Rewriting of the Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 1995).

18 *Engaging With Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. by Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).



hysteria, camouflage, anorexia, and the visual.<sup>19</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's comments on essentialism, and the possibility of a strategic essentialism have been invaluable for offering a grounded approach to reconsidering this contentious area. Her insistence upon noting the historical and geographical significance of academic texts even as they assume a transcendence, and her inter-testing of theory and strategy, are also liberatory.<sup>20</sup> While a search through any humanities database will supply many articles referring to Luce Irigaray, many of these I have found to be either highly focused towards a particular academic field, or relatively narrow in their reading of Irigaray's work. A substantial number of articles or chapters have been very interesting in their reading of Luce Irigaray, but tangential to my own purposes here. Such articles have however been important in helping me put together an overview not only of Luce Irigaray's work, but of strategies for reading her. I could mention here two very different examples of this: Henry Louis Gates, jr., 'Significant Others', exploring the tensions between her analysis of the 'otherness' of women in patriarchy and other forms of 'otherness' - in particular the gay male gaze, and the gaze of a white man upon a black man; and Christine Delphy, 'The Invention of French Feminism', which exposes that category as a construction of Anglo-American academia.<sup>21</sup> Cathryn Vasseleu's 'Illuminating Passion: Irigaray's Transfiguration of Night', while not concerning

---

19 Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*, (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1989); *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*, (London: Routledge, 1995); *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

20 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'In a Word: Interview', interview by Ellen Rooney, in *The Essential Difference*, ed. by Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 151-185.

21 Henry Louis Gates, jr., 'Significant Others', *Contemporary Literature*, 29.4 (1988), 606-623; Christine Delphy, 'The Invention of French Feminism: An Essential Move', *Yale French Studies*, 87 (1995), 190-221.



itself with visual art, was important in helping me retrieve Luce Irigaray from the tag of being 'anti-visual'.<sup>22</sup> Very few works indeed have attended to the visual or to visual arts - and it is notable that two which instantly come to mind are both written by philosophers rather than art theorists: Margaret Whitford's 'Woman with Attitude' (which I have already mentioned above), and Christine Battersby's 'Just Jamming: Irigaray, Painting and Psychoanalysis', which is very useful in differentiating Luce Irigaray's structuring of the subject/image relation from that of Jacques Lacan.<sup>23</sup> It is located in an anthology of feminist art criticism from diverse positions; and while it is supportive of Luce Irigaray's project, it nonetheless wants to take her arguments further as a result of looking at the evidence of actual artworks. A third, Rosemary Betterton's *An Intimate Distance*, does come from an art critical context.<sup>24</sup> Luce Irigaray's writings are referenced at particular points through the book, but while this is useful as a pointer, it does not engage with sifting through the work, but takes a more restricted reading. I could find few others. It was this lack of engagement from within art theory that convinced me of the importance of undertaking the project in this form.

One thing that emerged clearly (if negatively) from the work on Luce Irigaray was how few of the commentators had read further than *This Sex* and *Speculum*, and how many relied upon the

---

22 Cathryn Vasseleu's 'Illuminating Passion: Irigaray's Transfiguration of Night', in *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight*, ed. by Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 129-137.

23 Christine Battersby, 'Just Jamming: Irigaray, Painting and Psychoanalysis', in *New Feminist Art Criticism: Critical Strategies*, ed. by Katy Deepwell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 128-137.

24 Rosemary Betterton's *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body*, (London: Routledge, 1996) is useful as a pointer, it does not engage with sifting through Luce Irigaray's writings, but takes a more restricted reading.

comments of others in a manner that became more confusing than enlightening, with even basic terminology and concepts being misused. This approach is summed up in one recent book, whose author seems to make a virtue out of not reading Luce Irigaray's actual work: "In what follows I shall refer rather more to the writings of those feminists who see themselves as broadly propagating Irigaray's ideas than to her own works, which are generally found to be too obscure to interpret with confidence. It is, in any case, the kind of theoretical moves being made in feminist theory which are my concern more than the accuracy with which these may be attributed to certain theorists".<sup>25</sup> Because this approach seemed common (if seldom explicitly stated), I resolved to read Luce Irigaray's own works as closely as possible in order to fathom her meanings and use of terminology. Her work is 'a-academic' and highly resistant to academic procedures. I found it necessary to trace her use of particular terms across different works in order to determine her use of them - not a project which would be feasible for writers of shorter articles as her writing is never indexed.

This has influenced the structure of the thesis, which is in two parts. The first part (Chapters 1-4) aims to reach an understanding of Luce Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference in so far as it impacts upon the production of meaning in the realm of the visual, and, consequently, the visual aesthetic. Therefore it comprises a close reading of Luce Irigaray's work as it relates to the practices and structures which inform the production and reception of visual representation. The second part (Chapters 5-7) aims to determine

---

25 Jean Curthoys, *Feminist Amnesia: The Wake of Women's Liberation* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 143.



possibilities for feminist art criticism to increase the legibility of contemporary art by moving into a space distinct from critical spaces prevalent today (for example, those which hold that meaning resides in the artist's biography; or in the medium of the work; or in the overt image). This is a site of interchange between the structural properties of formal procedures and the structural processes of subjectivity. The second part of the thesis therefore offers greater focus on a resonance between, on the one hand, particular structures and arguments within Luce Irigaray's writing, and on the other hand, particular art practices and art works. This is not because Luce Irigaray offers prescriptions for art practice, but rather that each contains moments which, when read in partnership with the other, can aid the legibility of both.

The first two chapters are linked, and explore in turn Luce Irigaray's analysis and practice of mimesis. Mimesis, and related terms, are crucial concepts for analyzing how we learn to behave in a manner appropriate for our social structures, and how we create art. These chapters identify two aspects of mimesis: non-productive, and productive. The first is discussed in relation to mimicry and mime, which maintain patriarchal structures as they are through generations. "Masquerade" is identified as the practice of femininity as constructed by patriarchy. It maintains women as "other of man's same" within patriarchal structures. Luce Irigaray's use of the term is contrasted with that of recent commentators in cultural studies, interpreting Joan Riviere's 1929 outline of masquerade. Hysteria is discussed here also, as the mark of a site of resistance to the masquerade which is femininity; ultimately however it is non-productive, as its strategy to achieve the power of self determination is one of mimeticizing femininity



to the extreme of paralysis, muteness, or even death.

Sites of resistance or “reserve” other than hysteria, mark what I call a “productive mimesis”. In Chapter 2 this is identified as a practice, rather than a disembodied theoretical position. In order to (re)gain the site of their subjectivity (which in a phallogocentric economy can only yet be hypothesized), women have to retrace the site of their exploitation knowingly and strategically. Luce Irigaray’s work is identified here as both practice and analysis of productive mimesis. A model from Paul Ricoeur helps us to see how productive mimesis is a praxis, moving constantly between social prefiguration, textual configuration, and (in the act of reading and interpreting) practical transfiguration. This retrieves Luce Irigaray’s work from being regarded in purely academic, textual terms, and repoliticizes its analysis.

Chapters 3 and 4 are also linked, in that they both follow Luce Irigaray’s analyses of the realm of the visual and visible representation. Phallogocentric structures are predicated upon the visibility or non-visibility of the penis; phallogocentric ways of seeing thus hinge on seeing it or not seeing it, not upon seeing it or seeing the vulva (seeing difference). Phallogocentric representations are built upon the site of this partial sight and its blind spots. I argue that within what I call “phallogocentrism” women are thus confirmed not as ontologically different, but, once again, as other of the same. They are thus configured not as subjects, but as representations, with no access to appropriate signifying systems in the Symbolic. Luce Irigaray’s use of the term “syntax” is introduced. This enables the distinguishing of inflections, significations, and sites of enunciation in the Symbolic. These are

presently phallogocentric; but the term 'syntax' marks the possibility of appropriate signifiatory structures for women.

In Chapter 4 the possible re-configuration of the structures informing our practices of sight and seeing are discussed. The notion of the reserve is re-introduced. If phallogocentric structures allow man to use his representation of woman to reflect himself back to himself, he can only do it firstly if he employs the structure of a flat mirror; and secondly (because he prioritizes sight) as a result of not realizing that touch underlies all other senses. The mirror has a silvery backing touching the glass - the reserve of the mirror. The movement through the surface of a flat mirror to its backing disrupts the illusion of the frozen surface and evokes the concave space of the mirror more suited to woman - the 'burning mirror' of the female mystics. For women, the prioritizing of sight by phallogocentrism deprives them of a sense of their own beauty, replacing it with the 'beauty' supplied by the representation, 'woman'. Women do not have their own sense of a divine beauty, a corresponding ideal representation that is theirs. I argue through these chapters that Luce Irigaray is not anti-visual, but that she is anti-phallogocentric, and as such wishes to restore a relationship of interdependence between sight and touch. She also stresses a revaluing of other senses. Listening becomes important in establishing relationships between subjects. Phallogocentric structures allow men who looking only for their same, and reduce all else to object status, to value sight-dependent subject-object relations. Insistence upon sexual difference (rather than only upon relations to the same) means that subjects realize they are limited by other subjects: therefore, structures of inter-subjective relationships are needed. For

women, if they are not to remain in relationships of immediacy, gift-objects of communication and practices of listening have to be developed in order that these relationships may be mediated. This has great implications for the role and function of the art object, its presentation, and for its consideration of an attentive audience of subjects (I return to this term in preference to 'viewer'). Buddhist models of attentiveness, drawn to our notice by Luce Irigaray, are explored in relation to this.

Part 2 (Chapters 5, 6, and 7) identifies areas of contemporary practice by women which are little or poorly served by the discourses of art, and which are made legible only in problematic terms. Chapter 5 argues that a consideration of Luce Irigaray's understanding of "morphology" could help us re-negotiate the functions of media in practices of art. I argue that some critics have misread this term as referring to anatomy, whereas it is a means of understanding the relationships between forms - for example, between subjectivity, body, and language. Thus, although each subject will have her or his own morphology, each gender will also have a morphologic appropriate to it. I then offer a reading of Luce Irigaray's use of the terms "the lips" and "the mucous" as an engagement with a morphologic of mediation appropriate to women. The emphasis in developing this as a theoretical structure for the analysis of art practices is not to employ any media as metaphors for mucus, but to consider them as sites of mediation which could possibly reveal a morphologic appropriate to women. An article by Joan Key on works by Bridget Riley and Rachel Whiteread, and one by Alison Rowley focusing on Jenny Saville, are identified as moments of present critical practice which demonstrate why such a theoretical development is timely. Reconfiguring their arguments



in Irigarayan terms, Key and Rowley are seen to identify uses of media which can be read as informed by a morphologic of the mucous, and moments where instead they collapse back into mimeticizing a phallic morphologic.

In Chapter 6 I look at the practice of gesture in the making of artworks. The focus is upon Louise Bourgeois's recent work and the way in which her processes have been accounted for by critics. Many critics have read into her work the influence of her childhood experience of emotional betrayal by her father and her continuing anger about this into her old age. Luce Irigaray's paper 'Gesture in Psychoanalysis' outlines the suppressed, but gendered, practices of gesture in the practice of psychoanalysis, before moving on to consider Freud's main analysis of gesture in childhood, which was of a boy trying to master the absence of his mother - little Ernst playing with a cotton reel. Luce Irigaray argues that girls make different gestures when they miss their mothers: not the throwing and retrieving of an object like little Ernst, but intersubjective games with dolls, or the marking out of subjective space with their bodies, with whirling or spinning 'dances'. I argue that in Louise Bourgeois's work we may see, instead of anger at her father, grief at the trauma of her mothers' displacement. I draw upon her own comments about her mother to inform this reading of her interest in spinning and her delineation of space in the recent *Cell* series.

The final Chapter attends to Luce Irigaray's argument that we will only fully "become women" - attain our subjectivity - once we have a "transcendent", including notions of a female "divine" and of a "universal" appropriate to the morphologic informing it. Once again, the subject "woman" that one might become is distinct from

the representation “woman” constructed by phallogentrism. This is tested against discussion of the cultural context in Ireland, where women have been reduced to mother status in different levels of representation, and where symbolic representations of nation and of woman have been to a large extent conflated through configurations such as, for example, Mother Ireland. I then identify a structure within the Irish use of the English language which, I argue, allows for a constant flow between the body and person of a woman who is a mother, and the transcendent, definitive, Mother. Luce Irigaray’s arguments about the necessity of honouring mothers as women without reducing women to their relationship to mothering are explored. There is an urgent need to honour and represent female genealogies in order to aid the achievement of “becoming woman”, and Luce Irigaray offers pragmatic and strategic advice about the psychic and symbolic representation of the mother-daughter couple. Finally, moments in particular artworks by contemporary Irish women artists are indicated where this may be discerned in the representation of women’s genealogies and a female universal.

Each chapter will develop terminology from an understanding of Luce Irigaray’s use of terms. These will then be carried forward in subsequent chapters to be used in the development of other terms or further refined. A key example of this is the term ‘woman’, use of which will be explicitly developed throughout the first part of the thesis. ‘Feminine’ has been avoided for two reasons. Firstly, the lack of equivalent usage in French and in English means that to use it as understood here would complicate rather than clarify - see for example Margaret Whitford’s glossary note for ‘féminin’: “translated as feminine or female, depending on the translator. [....]”

The question of nature or culture is an interpretive one, and accordingly the interpretation has been left to the reader".<sup>26</sup> My second reason for avoiding the term explains why I find this degree of openness unhelpful. 'Feminine' has frequently been used to name qualities which are not only constructs, but which can be adopted by both sexes. Thus for example, Hélène Cixous's exemplars of writers of the 'feminine' include James Joyce and Jean Genet.<sup>27</sup> In avoiding the term I am also following the example of most of Luce Irigaray's translators after *Speculum* and *This Sex*. To reconfigure the gap left, Luce Irigaray's use of the term 'syntax' is introduced in Chapter 3. This accounts not only for uses of language, but indeed for the production and understanding of all signifying systems in the Symbolic (gestural, political, visual...). At present the dominant syntax is phallogentric, but there is the potential for the development of a syntax appropriate for women. Additionally (as will be described in the main body of the text) I have restricted use of the term 'femininity': its use by Freud is outlined by Luce Irigaray as a product of a phallogentric syntax, and is not a quality of women's making.

### Translation: a note.

Translation is a politically and culturally creative practice, and one which may be constructive and destructive to the textual

---

26 Margaret Whitford, 'Glossary', in *The Irigaray Reader* (p. 17).

27 Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981), pp. 245-264 (p. 255). See also Judith Still, 'Feminine Economy', in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, ed. by Elizabeth Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 90-92.



intention of the writer whose work is being translated.<sup>28</sup> Luce Irigaray's work with its significant and diverse textual strategies "represents difficulties of translation", as she has said, both of its thinking and also of its use of language.<sup>29</sup> Anyone who is not fluently - bi-culturally - bi-lingual is at the mercy of/indebted to the translators of the texts almost as much as to Luce Irigaray herself: the translation can affect to a huge extent the reception of a work, and thus the development of thinking in the second language.

In writing this thesis I have depended upon the standard translations of Luce Irigaray's work. Wherever it has been possible, I have cross-read the original French, checking translations (a few interviews and essays have been inaccessible in French). References to both English language and French language publication are included as a matter of course. Where I have felt unsure about the translation, I have either included the French in brackets, or modified the translation. The aim in modification has always been to provide the more literal translation, rather than an interpretive version; and/or to honour Luce Irigaray's repetition,

---

28 See for example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The Politics of Translation', in *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, ed. by Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 177-200; Sherry Simon, *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission* (London: Routledge, 1996), particularly pp. 101-107 on the translation of Luce Irigaray's work; and Carolyn Burke, 'Translation Modified: Irigaray in English', in Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford, pp. 249-261.

29 Luce Irigaray, "Je - Luce Irigaray": A Meeting with Luce Irigaray', interview by Elizabeth Hirsh and Gary A. Olson, trans. by Elizabeth Hirsh and Gaëtan Brulotte, in *Women Writing Culture*, ed. by Gary A. Olson and Elizabeth Hirsh (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 141-166 (p. 146). For other comments of hers upon translation in general and of her work in particular, see *Je, Tu, Nous*, pp. 54, 57, 58, 72; *Je, tu, nous*, pp. 63, 66-67, 67-68; *I Love To You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History*, trans. by Alison Martin (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 60; *J'aime à toi: esquisse d'une félicité dans l'histoire* (Paris: Grasset), p. 102; *Thinking the Difference: For a Peaceful Revolution*, trans. by Karin Montin (London: Athlone Press, 1994), p. 58; *Le temps de la différence: pour une révolution pacifique* (Paris: Le Livre du Poche, 1989); 'Questions to Emmanuel Levinas', in *The Irigaray Reader*, pp. 179-189 (p. 186). Marion Gentilehomme, who helped me with the translation of one article, exclaimed 'But she's not even writing French!'.

echoing, or fidelity to particular terminology. Modification is always footnoted. In sections where I am attending to particular terminology, I include the original terms in French throughout.

### Style: a note.

This thesis follows to a large extent the style of the MHRA style book.<sup>30</sup> In particular, I have followed their advice on the layout and style of footnotes and bibliography, including their recommendation of 'ibid.' but not of 'op.cit.'. Four exceptions to the MHRA style need noting. Firstly, as so many texts by Luce Irigaray are cited, giving (where possible) both the original French and the English translation, I have not used 'ibid.', in order to allay any potential confusion. Secondly, Luce Irigaray has expressed her dislike of being referred to as 'Irigaray'<sup>31</sup>: it is her given name, Luce, which marks her gender, rather than the supposed neuter of her family (i.e., father's) name. I have respected this in referring to her by her full name throughout, and have extended this to other women to whom I refer. Thirdly, Luce Irigaray's own writing is full of particularities of punctuation which add to the text, including ellipses, parentheses, and italics. Because of this, in quoted passages, my own ellipses are marked thus: [...] leaving her ellipses as: .... ; and insertions of the original French are bracketed thus: {}. I have ensured that all words in italics in the translated passages correspond to Luce Irigaray's own italicizing. For clarity's sake I have sacrificed these stresses in any French language insertions,

---

30 *MHRA Style Book: Notes for Authors, Editors, and Writers of Theses*, ed. by Derek Brown and others, 5th edn (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1996).

31 Luce Irigaray, 'Je - Luce Irigaray', particularly p. 151.

placing all French in italics. Finally, where I have developed new terminology, I have underlined the word or phrase in its first usage.



# Part 1

## Chapter 1

# Mimesis Part One: Mimicry, Masquerade, Hysteria.

I search for myself, as if I had been assimilated into maleness. I ought to reconstitute myself on the basis of a disassimilation.... Rise again from the traces of a culture, of works already produced by the other. Searching through what is in them - for what is not there. What allowed them to be, for what is not there. Their conditions of possibility, for what is not there.

Woman ought to be able to find herself, among other things, through the images of herself already deposited in history and the conditions of production of the work of man, and not on the basis of his work, his genealogy.<sup>1</sup>

Within Luce Irigaray's writing a cluster of terms implying some form of repetition are used: mime, masquerade, mask, mimicry, hysterical mimeticism, mimesis, reproduction, representation, and the phrase "as if" (usually placed in quotation marks or in italics) are among the most prominent. They appear strongly in *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977; 1985) and *Speculum: Of the Other Woman* (1974; 1985), and are scattered through later publications such as *Je, Tu, Nous* (1990;1993). Reading Luce Irigaray critically with these terms in mind, one can see how embedded these concepts are in her work - not only as topics for investigation, but also in her practice as a writer and philosopher. Some commentators on Luce Irigaray have attended to these terms. Because of their overlapping definitions of the words, however (and the subsequent effect concerning in which instances each one might be appropriate, and how they can be used), some confusion emanates from the

---

<sup>1</sup> Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London: Athlone Press, 1993), pp. 9-10/*Éthique de la différence sexuelle*, (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1984), p. 17.

collection of these texts. For example, Elizabeth Grosz comments “Irigaray mimics the hysteric’s mimicry. She mimes mime itself;”<sup>2</sup> Margaret Whitford says “Irigaray adopts the strategy of mimicry or mimesis;”<sup>3</sup> Naomi Schor talks of “the old mimesis, sometimes referred to a masquerade,”<sup>4</sup> and Judith Butler uses the word ‘mime’ in a way that could be interchangeable with ‘mimesis’: “Through miming Irigaray transgresses the prohibition against resemblance at the same time that she refuses the notion of resemblance as a copy. [...] Her miming has the effect of repeating the origin only to displace that origin as an origin.”<sup>5</sup>

Evidently, this cluster of concepts is of the utmost importance for visual art, not only for the making of resemblances within the art object, but also when considering art as a set of practices with traditions and histories from which practitioners learn and within which they situate themselves. My aim here is to sift through this varied terminology and its deployment by Luce Irigaray as investigation and as practice. Starting from Luce Irigaray’s indication of Plato’s dual definition of mimesis as both non-productive and productive, my discussion will involve a definition of mime as non-productive (mimesis); of mimicry as having short-term potential, but ultimately self-defeating (this will include attention to hysteria); and then, in the second part, mimesis as

---

2 Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1989), p. 136.

3 Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 70. Henceforth cited as *Luce Irigaray*.

4 Naomi Schor, ‘This Essentialism Which is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray’, in *Engaging With Irigaray*, ed. by Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 57-78 (p. 67).

5 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 45.



productive strategy. In a new move I will make use of Paul Ricoeur's investigation of Aristotle's triple-stranded understanding of the concept of productive mimesis within the aesthetic realm, and present it as an aid to understanding the productive nature of Luce Irigaray's writing, her own aesthetic, and her understanding of visual representation.

### 'Mimesis': a polysemic term.

As Paul Ricoeur indicates<sup>6</sup> and Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf admirably demonstrate at length<sup>7</sup>, 'mimesis' is polysemic. Gebauer and Wulf provide an historical reading of this:

A spectrum of meanings of mimesis has unfolded over the course of its historical development, including the act of resembling, of presenting the self, and expression as well as mimicry, imitation, representation, and nonsensuous similarity. The accent may lie in similarity in sensuous terms, on a nonsensuous correspondence, or on an intentional construction of a correlation. Some writers have emphasized the intermediary character of mimesis; they locate it in medial images, which occupy the space between the inner and the outer worlds.<sup>8</sup>

They refer to "the vagueness of the concept" which "has been turned to advantage" by writers such as Benjamin, Adorno, and Derrida, and state that:

It is not arbitrariness that has characterised the use of the concept, but a peculiar intuition, which often appears in the form of an adaptation to broader historical changes. There is less a lack of conceptual discipline in the history of mimesis than a resistance to theory building. As a concept, mimesis betrays a distrust of the instrumentalities and procedures of theory kept 'pure' of the contamination of human practice.<sup>9</sup>

---

6 Paul Ricoeur, 'Mimesis and Representation', *Annals of Scholarship*, 2 (1981), 15-32.

7 Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *Mimesis: Culture Art Society*, trans. by Don Reneau (London: University of California Press, 1995).

8 Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *ibid.*, p. 1.

9 Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *ibid.*, p. 2.

Throughout their book, Gebauer and Wulf treat mimesis not as an hermetic philosophical theory with a discrete history and development, but as an activity where theory and practice are in such proximity as to be virtually inextricable. Thus, each philosopher to whom they grant substantive space can be seen as using mimesis strategically. While they do not mention Luce Irigaray's work (indeed, none of their substantive discussion is devoted to women philosophers - let alone feminist ones), as will become clear this is an appropriate framework through which to begin an understanding of Luce Irigaray's use of mimesis.

### Mimesis in Plato

In the space of four pages of *This Sex*, Luce Irigaray offers her contrasting understandings of 'mimesis' and 'masquerade'. For 'mimesis' she draws her understanding from Plato, stating quite clearly that 'mimesis' is (at least) two:

In Plato, there are two mimeses {*mimesis*}. To simplify: there is mimesis {*la mimesis*} as production, which would lie more in the realm of music, and there is the mimesis {*la mimesis*} that would be already caught up in a process of imitation, specularization, adequation, and reproduction. It is the second form that is privileged throughout the history of philosophy and whose effects/symptoms, such as latency, suffering, paralysis of desire, are encountered in hysteria. The first form seems always to have been repressed, if only because it was constituted as an enclave within a 'dominant' discourse. Yet it is doubtless in the direction of, and on the basis of, that first mimesis {*mimesis*} that the possibility of a woman's writing {*une écriture de femme*} may come about.<sup>10</sup>

The "second form" of mimesis - for which I shall coin the terms non-productive mimesis or maintenance mimesis - is thus bound up

---

<sup>10</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 131/*Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1977), pp. 129-130. Henceforth cited as *This Sex/Ce sexe*.

with verisimilitude, investigation of original truth, repetition, replication. The first form of mimesis - which I shall call productive mimesis - involves a subtle double movement, which is here touched upon in the reference to “the realm of music”: just as the musician reads the piece of music they play, so too he or she will give their reading *of* that piece of music - their interpretation of it, imbued with particular nuances (this is precisely the area of the Radio 3 series *Building a Library*, where differing interpretations of ‘the same’ piece of music are painstakingly compared). New meanings emerge from this process; and indeed it is here that Luce Irigaray locates “the possibility of a woman’s writing”. Luce Irigaray does not expand upon this Platonic model of mimesis *as a model*, but she does, as I shall be demonstrating below, expand (upon) it through her practice.

Adding to the significance of the Platonic model for Luce Irigaray, Gebauer and Wulf situate it within cultural history:

In Plato, mimesis is bound to the transition from oral to literary culture. His assessment, in that context, is ambivalent: on the one hand, he recognizes its significance; on the other, he fears its power, which is difficult to calculate. In any case, the widespread notion that Plato developed only a critical view of mimesis attends too narrowly to the facts. In his conception, mimesis is also the force that creates images and therefore underlies aesthetics. Plato sometimes designates even the works of philosophers as mimetic and calls for the creation of a society related mimetically to the eternal world of the Ideas.<sup>11</sup>

This reading of Plato, complementary to Luce Irigaray’s reading, is significant here because of its placing of Platonic mimesis at a transitional cultural moment, the moment of shift from oral to literary culture. This is a crucial historical moment for Luce Irigaray, as it is linked to three related transitions: to our present

---

11 Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *Mimesis*, p. 6.



differentiation of history (as that which is recorded in writing) from pre-history (as that which was transmitted orally); to the separations of the realms of body from mind, nature from culture; and to the imposition of patriarchy upon cultures where female genealogies had integrity:

At one time mother and daughter formed a natural and social model. The mother-daughter couple was the guardian of the fertility of nature in general, and of the relationship with the divine. [...] This couple preserved the memory of the past, and thus the daughter respected her mother, her ancestry. This couple was also concerned with the present: the earth produced food in peace and quiet. It was possible to foresee the future thanks to women's relationship with the divine, with oracular speech. [...] The beginnings of patriarchal power as we know it - which means the power of the man as the legal head of the family, tribe, people, state and so on - coincided with the separation of women from each other and especially the separation of daughters from their mothers.<sup>12</sup>

The disregard for what is termed, rather vaguely, Prehistory can be explained by the way in which patriarchy is mistaken for the only History possible. In examining Prehistory, specialists group very diverse facts and periods together and often reduce these historical expressions to the current function of myths (viewed as hidden in History) or that of fairy tales and legends. To consider the meaning of mythical representations of reality as merely incidental is concomitant to repressing and destroying certain cultural dimensions that relate to the economy of difference between the sexes. Such an approach leads to a partial, reductive, and fruitless conception of History.<sup>13</sup>

It is in this context interesting to note Plato's view that mimetic processes could proliferate beyond control and deviate from 'truth' into 'illusion'; and that "his attack is aimed primarily at the

---

12 Luce Irigaray, *Thinking the Difference: For a Peaceful Revolution*, trans. by Karin Montin (London: Athlone Press, 1994), pp. 12-13/*Le temps de la différence: pour une révolution pacifique* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche/Librairie Générale Française, 1989), pp. 30-31.

13 Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, trans. by Alison Martin (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 24/*Je, tu, nous: pour une culture de la différence* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), p. 24. Henceforth cited as *Je, Tu, Nous/Je, tu, nous*. Irigaray is also scathing about a similar model in the history of psychoanalysis, where history is regarded as that which is written (always referring back to the "Father", Freud), and publishing is given priority over an ethical relation of speech and attentive listening with the analysand. See 'The Poverty of Psychoanalysis', trans. by David Macey, in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 79-104/'Misère de la psychanalyse', in *Parler n'est jamais neutre* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985), pp. 253-279.

performative mimesis of oral recitals, with their religious roots and educational aspirations.”<sup>14</sup> This is not to suggest any clear-cut binary oppositional mapping of the patriarchal and pre-patriarchal onto Plato’s main distinction of two forms of mimesis, but rather to indicate a recognition of the power of mimesis at transitional moments in cultural history, a power which Luce Irigaray wishes to utilize.

### Non-productive mimesis

Although Luce Irigaray does not expound upon the Platonic model, she does expose its workings:

One need never pay off the debt, either in the past or in the future, if one can only attain the ideal of sameness {*l'idéal (du) même*}, which of course defies deterioration of any kind. [...]

And no shame is attached to being an employee of the head of the family, or even his slave, for ‘working the land’ is already to do as he does {*faire comme lui*}. [...] Miming the father’s attributes {*le mime des attributions du père*} is achieved here and now. And is the triumph of his logos alone. [...]

But we are almost forgetting that the whole Universe is already under the Father’s monopoly. And that in these meetings it is at best the inscription of his eternal truths that he revives by repeating (them) {*en (les) répétant*}. Thus, man is swindled of the price of his own work. For he is now and always nothing but the more or less effective doubling of an omnipotent Phallus. Nonetheless, he submits to this fate and is even ready to die in order to perpetuate such an empire. The important thing is that history go on.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, social and cultural relations are maintained as normative within patriarchy through maintenance and policing of what I have called non-productive mimesis. This is managed through generations (father-son), across class divides (master-slave,

---

14 Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *Mimesis*, p. 310.

15 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum Of The Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 351-353/*Speculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1974), pp. 440-142. Henceforth cited as *Speculum/Speculum*.



employer-worker), and in religion (god-man), copying faithfully in order to replicate 'truth'. This resonates through Luce Irigaray's writings in her term '*hom(m)o-sexualité*' (usually translated 'hom(m)o-sexuality'; a word play referring to 'man/same-sexuality'). Its structures can be likened to those that exist in central areas of learning skills and child development: the child has to be able to recognize another person as being of the same general type, desire to 'be as', and to evaluate the extent to which his or her own actions are a successful imitation.<sup>16</sup> It is a structure of assimilation to the cultural environment against which Luce Irigaray chafes:

At the level of *culture*, it seems that we are brought up (whether consciously or not) to be trained in repetition, to adapt to a society's systems, and educated to do like, to be like, without any decisive innovations or discoveries of our own. [...] Can we free ourselves from [...] almost fatal repetition at the cultural level?<sup>17</sup>

Non-productive mimesis here is "almost fatal" for women because, with 'man/same-sexuality' as both dominative and normative - man being the 'same of the same' - woman is elsewhere. Not as 'woman', but as what Luce Irigaray calls "otherness of sameness" {*autre du même*}.<sup>18</sup> She cannot be 'the same as'; nor, in a patriarchal culture, can she securely identify with a genealogy of women. Her function is that of the mirror, reflecting back to man, as a result of her 'otherness', his 'sameness'; what I will term other of the same. She has to adopt - and assimilate to - femininity. The "almost fatal" nature of this move is therefore twofold: firstly, it requires her adaption and assimilation to a hom(m)o-sexual

---

16 Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 90.

17 Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous*, p. 37/*Je, tu, nous*, p. 41.

18 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 152/*Ce sexe*, p. 148.



culture; and secondly, as the necessary corollary (because she is not 'the same as'), it requires her replication of a 'femininity' which is not of her making: it is a 'femininity' erected by 'the same' to be its 'other'. It is because of this function that I have dubbed it maintenance mimesis or non-productive mimesis. It maintains the given cultural structure; and while it *is* productive of an identity appropriate for the subject assimilated to a patriarchal culture, it is *not* productive of Luce Irigaray's horizon of possibilities where women can become women. Discussing Luce Irigaray's readings of Nietzsche, Ellen Mortensen makes a link between this form of mimesis for women and the story of Echo:

Echo's function in Ovid's mythical poem is to accompany the movement of Narcissus's self-reflection, to adorn and to deploy his self-representation, while keeping the integrity of the image intact. In this sense woman's femininity, defined within a narcissistic echo-nomy, ensures the smooth workings of the mimetic machinery.<sup>19</sup>

The levels of repression required are enormous. It is here, in reference to woman's relation to this 'femininity', that Luce Irigaray begins to use the terms mimicry, mime, masquerade, and hysteria.

### Mimicry and mime

Before attending to Luce Irigaray's use of the term mimicry, I would like to affirm one of its every-day resonances: that of childhood mimicry. Children take the act of copying from non-productive mimesis, and actively, visibly and audibly use it in the

---

19 Ellen Mortensen, 'Woman's Untruth and *le féminin*: Reading Irigaray with Nietzsche and Heidegger', in Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford, *Engaging with Irigaray*, pp. 211-228 (p. 214).

repeating of the actions and words of others. The difference is in the aim, which is not to learn or to assimilate, but to assert power over the person being mimicked. This is the same whether it is being done playfully, to bully, as stubborn resistance or expression of anger; whether against other children or against adults. Although the result for the child can be both a maintenance of a position in a pecking order, and an intimation that the power of the other will one day be exceeded, the affects upon the other are likely to be exasperation, recognition of impertinence, and temporary withdrawal. The results for the child, therefore, are short-term gain remaining as but a trace in the long term.<sup>20</sup>

Luce Irigaray uses the term 'mimicry' at two key moments in *This Sex*. In the inter-relation of these passages she appears to be performing a self-mimicry; each passage however indicates in a differing direction, one towards mime, the other towards productive mimesis:

There is, in an initial phase, perhaps only one 'path', the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of *mimicry* {*le mimétisme*}. One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it. Whereas a direct feminine challenge to this condition means demanding to speak as a (masculine) 'subject', that is it means to postulate a relation to the intelligible that would maintain sexual indifference.

To play with mimesis {*la mimésis*} 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.<sup>21</sup>

In a first phase, there is perhaps only one path, and in any case it is the one to which the female condition is assigned: that of *mimicry* {*le mimétisme*}. But the mimetic role itself is complex, for it presupposes that one can lend oneself to everything, if not to everyone. That one can *copy* anything at all, anyone at all, can receive all impressions, *without appropriating them to oneself*, and

---

20 There are links here with theories of the carnivalesque. See Laura Mulvey, 'Changes: Thoughts on Myth, Narrative and Historical Experience', in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 159-176 (pp. 167-169).

21 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 76/*Ce sexe*, pp. 73-74.



*without adding any*. That is, can be nothing but a possibility that the philosopher may exploit for (self-) reflection. [...] If she [“the philosopher’s wife”] can play that role so well, if it does not kill her, quite, it is because she keeps something in reserve with respect to this function. Because she still subsists, otherwise and elsewhere than there where she mimes {*elle mime*} so well what is asked of her. Because her own ‘self’ remains foreign to the whole staging. But she doubtless needs to reenact it {*la rejouer*} in order to remember what that staging has probably metabolized so thoroughly that she has forgotten it: her own sex.<sup>22</sup>

The first of these passages carries the resonances of the assertion of childhood mimicry: “form of subordination”, “a direct feminine challenge”, “demanding”, “to play”.... and leads toward an understanding of productive mimesis. The second appears initially more passive: “the female condition is assigned”, “presupposes that one can lend oneself”, “receive all impressions, without appropriating them”, “without adding”, “be nothing but a possibility that the philosopher may exploit”.... This process is then named as “mime”. Its difference from non-productive mimesis (being the same as, or, of the same) resides in the fact that the femininity that woman mimes is *not of her own making* - and thus that, even as she mimes, she is always elsewhere. So, mimicry is used by Luce Irigaray as perhaps the only option for women within patriarchy, but one that is double edged. On the one hand, it offers the opportunity for strategies of resistance. These strategies have to be undertaken with great delicacy and deliberation, because on the other hand it involves the almost fatal repression of ‘becoming woman’. Indeed, Diana Chisholm refers to Luce Irigaray’s concept of “a symptomatic mimicry of patriarchy’s fetishes and projections, which is potentially both terroristic and terrorized.”<sup>23</sup>

---

22 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, pp. 151-152/*Ce sexe*, pp. 147-148.

23 Dianne Chisholm, ‘Irigaray’s Hysteria’, in Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford, *Engaging with Irigaray*, pp. 263-283 (p. 269).



Another current usage of the term 'mimicry' is found in biology, where it means camouflage, or having the colouring of the environment. This usage also refers to the assimilation of an individual to its environment, and also has two readings, or effects. The first is the use of camouflage for protection. Margaret Whitford indicates that this may add to our understanding of Luce Irigaray's use of the term: "Irigaray may be arguing, I think, that women also need to protect themselves against (re)assimilation and destruction by the masculine economy."<sup>24</sup> This is fine up to a point: but camouflage is not only used by the preyed-upon for protection, but also by the predators (tigers, the army....).

Elizabeth Grosz takes this discussion in another direction, to a second understanding of mimicry in animals, to the work of Roger Callois on the relation of the subject to space.<sup>25</sup> His paper 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia'<sup>26</sup> influenced Lacan's development of the theory of the mirror stage and Merleau-Ponty's work on the phenomenology of lived space. For Callois, 'psychasthenia' is the lure exerted by space on the subject. In order to be confirmed in its identity, a subject or organism has to be secure in its perspective upon its body's relationship to the space it occupies (this is in distinction from the assimilation to the environment which occurs in learning processes, but is a necessary aspect of the development of identity). In some psychotics there is no ability to locate themselves in space. Callois finds an analogy to this in the mimicry of insects. Their mimicry may produce the opposite of protection:

---

24 Margeret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray*, p. 72.

25 Elizabeth Grosz, *Space Time and Perversion*, pp. 87-91 and pp. 189-190; *Volatile Bodies* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press), pp. 46-48.

26 Roger Callois, 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia', *October*, 31 (1984), 17-32.

Callois cites one insect whose resemblance to leaves makes it prey to zealous hedge-clippers, and another whose resemblance to the leaves it feeds upon makes it often prey to cannibalism. Also, he indicates, mimicry in insects is visual, while many predators rely upon smell; some insects practice mimicry even though they are not vulnerable to predators.<sup>27</sup> For Callois, mimicry is an excess to strategies of survival, a product of a dislocation of identity and “a captivation of a creature by its representations of and as space [....]. The mimicking insect lives its camouflaged existence as not quite itself, as another”.<sup>28</sup>

This seems closer to Luce Irigaray’s use of the term mimicry - at least in the second instance quoted above, with its component aspect of mime. The subject compromises, represses or adapts its perspective on its own identity in favour of an *apparent* (literally visible, perceivable, and of the appearance) assimilation to its environment - in this case, the virtual world of ‘femininity’ as erected by the structures of patriarchy.

There is a close analogy with the visual performance of the mime artist. The audience does not actually see the wall the mime artist walks into, the door he or she opens, nor do they actually see the dog that the mime artist is miming, but through his or her stylised movements of exaggerated gesture, it is *as if* the wall or the door or the dog were there. The audience marvels because it is *as if* it can see the wall or door, or a dog instead of a person. What is demonstrated is indeed a captivation of the mime by his or her

---

27 Roger Callois, *ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

28 Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion*, p. 190. Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf liken Callois’s understanding of mimicry to Freud’s death drive. *Mimesis*, p. 282.



representations of and as space. Aspects of this are traceable in the earliest history of mime: in Doric Sicily the mime gave to the audience representations of daily life “distinct in terms of content from tragedies and comedies [...]; he [*sic*] simplifies, emphasizes and caricatures”.<sup>29</sup> According to Gebauer and Wulf, Derrida’s interest in the mime artist (in turn, a reading of Mallarmé) is that “what he [i.e. the mime; *sic*] represents does not exist outside of his representation [...] In the mime’s representation, the distinction between fiction and reality also collapses”; the scene “is more the illustration of the idea than a real action.”<sup>30</sup> Derrida weaves links between the mimetic and the ‘between-character’ of the hymen.<sup>31</sup>

To return to the present discussion of Luce Irigaray’s terminology: when a woman is seen in our present culture it is not as the sexuate subject who is able to become woman because of the horizon of possibilities that are hers (in divinity, civil rights, the Symbolic....). Rather she is seen ‘as’ ‘a’ ‘woman’, *already miming* the ‘femininity’ of our culture. Mimicry, and particularly its component aspect of mime, is a strategy fraught with risk. Luce Irigaray will identify this as a risk of hysteria, a condition which is itself contiguous with mime:

Hysteria is silent and at the same time it mimes {*elle mime*}. And - how could it be otherwise - miming/reproducing {*mimant-reproduisant*} a language that is not its own, masculine language, it caricatures and deforms that language: it ‘lies’, it ‘deceives’, as women have always been reputed to do.<sup>32</sup>

---

29 Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *ibid.*, p. 29.

30 Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *ibid.*, pp. 300-301.

31 Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *ibid.*, p. 301. They reference Derrida, ‘The Double Session’, in *Dissemination*, trans. By Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 209 and 213.

32 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 137/*Ce sexe*, p. 138.



But Luce Irigaray begins to move her account of mime in a circular motion back closer to the more resistant structure of the first meaning of mimicry. There is a possibility of deflecting the collapse into hysteria indicated in this second aspect of mimicry, found in the movement of the woman always already miming this femininity. This has to mean that “she still subsists, otherwise and elsewhere than there where she mimes. [...] Her own ‘self’ remains foreign...”. But (and this is crucial): “She doubtless needs to reenact it in order to remember what that staging has probably metabolized so thoroughly that she has forgotten it: her own sex.” Reenacting - or replaying - what has been forgotten does not speak of an unmediated truth, but of a painstaking (re)building. Luce Irigaray is not suggesting that either a unified subjectivity or an eternal feminine is uncoverable with a simplistic stepping into and out of character. The term “self” remains “‘self’.”

### Masquerade

Luce Irigaray returns the terminology to the realm of the psychoanalytic through the concept of ‘masquerade’. The term is best recognised in feminist theory because of its incorporation into critical theory (particularly within film theory) since the mid 1980s. Here, it is found as a developing set of readings of the psychoanalyst and translator of Freud Joan Riviere’s essay ‘Womanliness as a Masquerade’, first published in 1929.<sup>33</sup> The paper is a discussion of a particular case history. The analysand was a professional woman “engaged in work of a propagandist nature,

---

33 Joan Riviere, ‘Womanliness as a Masquerade’, in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. by Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 35-44.

which consisted principally in speaking and writing". Despite her success in her job, she experienced anxiety after each public appointment, and sought reassurance from father figures among her colleagues, primarily through inappropriate flirting and seductive behaviour.<sup>34</sup> Through the dreams and analysis of this woman, Riviere deduced:

Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it - much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods. The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the 'masquerade'. My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing. The capacity for womanliness was there in this woman - and one might even say it exists in the most completely homosexual woman - but owing to her conflicts it did not represent her main development and was used far more as a device for avoiding anxiety than as a primary mode of sexual enjoyment.<sup>35</sup>

It is this paragraph (particularly the first three sentences) overlaid with Lacan's understanding of masquerade, which has prompted interest to the extent that the paragraph has become part of the canon of cultural theory.<sup>36</sup>

Jacqueline Rose suggests that for Lacan "Sexuality belongs [...] in the realm of masquerade" and "masquerade is the very definition of 'femininity' precisely because it is constructed with reference to a male sign."<sup>37</sup> It is a unified concept of 'femininity', behind which is

34 Joan Riviere, *ibid.*, p. 36.

35 Joan Riviere, *ibid.*, p. 38.

36 I do not wish to provide what would have to be a lengthy, technical, and ultimately tangential reading of Lacan's work on this area nor of the commentators upon Lacan. For more detail see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1990); John Fletcher, 'Versions of Masquerade', *Screen*, 29.3 (1988), 43-70; Jacqueline Rose, 'Introduction II' in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*, ed. by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 27-57; Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986); and Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990).

37 Jacqueline Rose, 'Introduction II', p. 43.



nothing but lack. Lacan incorporated the masquerade into his structures of fetishism and castration, and particularly the distinction between 'being' and 'having' the phallus - the former being the prerogative of women, and the latter, of men. Judith Butler says that Lacan explains that "the 'appearing as being' the Phallus that women are compelled to do is inevitably *masquerade*"<sup>38</sup> while John Fletcher argues that for Lacan, "The masquerade comes to signify the alienation involved in the substitution of 'appearing' for 'being'."<sup>39</sup> (One of the few substantive passages of Lacan that Luce Irigaray quotes is this one, where Lacan relates the 'being' and 'having' of the phallus to the masquerade; she does so in order to demonstrate his closeness to Freud's castration theory.<sup>40</sup>) Butler mentions the greatly differing interpretations of Riviere's and Lacan's structures of masquerade, listing six different positional questions, followed by another seven aimed at Lacan directly.<sup>41</sup> She is herself, however, reductive in her reading of Lacan's 'masquerade', offering an 'either/or' option:

... in relation to the problematic of expression and performativity. In other words, the question here is whether masquerade conceals a femininity that might be understood as genuine or authentic, or whether masquerade is the means by which femininity and the contests over its 'authenticity' are produced.<sup>42</sup>

Even more reductively, Luce Irigaray is the only writer Butler mentions in this connection, and she links her firmly to the second position.

38 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 77.

39 John Fletcher, 'Versions of Masquerade', *Screen*, p. 53.

40 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 62/*Ce sexe*, p. 58.

41 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 47-48.

42 Judith Butler, *ibid.*, fn. 18, p. 159; see also p. 47.



Fletcher's paper 'Versions of Masquerade' is centrally concerned, he says, to "retrieve the distinctive scenario of the masquerade, as first formulated by Joan Riviere, from its assimilation to the Lacanian theorisation of femininity or the Freudian account of fetishism and their deployment in feminist theory."<sup>43</sup> He suggests that Stephen Heath's paper 'Joan Riviere and the Masquerade'<sup>44</sup> (published alongside the republication of Riviere's paper in 1986 and which provided an indicative focus for many subsequent readings of it) in its reading of the pivotal paragraph quoted above:

... ignores the crucial opposition maintained [...] between "a device for avoiding anxiety" and "a primary mode of enjoyment", which frames and regulates her apparent equation of femininity with the masquerade *tout court*. The force of the equation, I take it, is to indicate that the same attributes and behaviours are involved in each, but that they are caught up in and serve a different psychic economy.<sup>45</sup>

Fletcher's account of Riviere thus has some level of initial correspondence with the two strands of Luce Irigaray's 'mimicry' as I have outlined them above, which could indeed be understood in turn as "a primary mode of enjoyment" and "a device for avoiding anxiety". His reading marks a distinction from Heath's, which, taking its cue from the first section of the key paragraph, holds that "In the masquerade the woman mimics an authentic - genuine - womanliness, but then authentic womanliness *is* such a mimicry, is the masquerade [...]; to be a woman is to dissimulate a fundamental masculinity, femininity is that dissimulation."<sup>46</sup>

---

43 John Fletcher, 'Versions of Masquerade', p. 53.

44 Stephen Heath, 'Joan Riviere and the Masquerade', in Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan, *Formations of Fantasy*, pp. 45-61.

45 John Fletcher, 'Versions of Masquerade', p. 54.

46 Stephen Heath, 'Joan Riviere and the Masquerade', p. 49.

Luce Irigaray's understanding of masquerade, however, maintains a crucial difference from Lacan and from the readings of Lacan and Riviere indicated above, one which is rooted in her conception of 'femininity'. For Luce Irigaray, 'femininity' is erected by men in both patriarchal and phallogocentric structures to mark the other of their same. It is neither an essential aspect of woman's identity (even when taken to be so by those patriarchal or phallogocentric structures), nor is it structured by women as reaction to/against patriarchy or phallogocentricity. She links the masquerade explicitly at one point to Freud's concept of femininity:

What do I mean by masquerade {*mascarade*}? In particular, what Freud calls "femininity". The belief, for example, that it is necessary to become a woman, a "normal" one at that, whereas a man is a man from the outset. He has only to effect his being-a-man, whereas a woman has to become a normal woman, that is, has to enter into the *masquerade* {*mascarade*} of femininity.<sup>47</sup>

And during her commentary on Freud's theory of castration she notes:

In other words, the "fact of castration" will leave woman with only one option - the semblance, the masquerade (of) {*la mascarade (de)*} femininity, which will always already have been to "act like" {*faire comme*} the value recognized by/for the male.<sup>48</sup>

These passages place Luce Irigaray's concept of femininity - and thus masquerade - at a step removed from Heath's reading of Riviere, that "to be a woman is to dissimulate a fundamental masculinity, femininity is that dissimulation". So although the masquerade of femininity will always already have been to 'act like' the value *recognized* by/for the male, it is important to note that this 'femininity' was *assigned to* woman as an inferior copy of man's relation to the origin. The masquerade is woman's playing of

---

47 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, pp. 133-134/*Ce sexe*, pp. 131-132.

48 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, n. 31 p. 49/*Speculum*, n. 37 p. 55. Translation modified.



the script of femininity provided by man; and the script provides what Luce Irigaray calls elsewhere “all the masquerades {/es *mascarades*} of ‘femininity’ that are expected of her.”<sup>49</sup> ‘The masquerade of femininity’ is contiguous with ‘the masquerade: femininity’, and both are constructed through masculinity. She will always already be acting out the masquerade (of) femininity; and as we have seen above, she will always already be elsewhere. Luce Irigaray does not suggest that one is prior to the other.

All this leaves hanging the question ‘why?’. If woman is always already elsewhere than enacting the masquerade (of) femininity, and inscribed into this is the possibility of resistance, then why is woman always already masquerading? Within the dominance of phallogentrism it is an inevitability:

Psychoanalysts say that masquerading {*la mascarade*} corresponds to woman’s desire. That seems wrong to me. I think the masquerade has to be {*qu’il faut*} understood as what women do in order to recuperate some element of desire, to participate in man’s desire, but at the price of renouncing their own. In the masquerade {*la mascarade*}, they submit to the dominant economy of desire in an attempt to remain ‘on the market’ in spite of everything. But they are there as objects for sexual enjoyment, not as those who enjoy. [...] In the last analysis, the female Oedipus complex is woman’s entry into a system of values that is not hers, and in which she can ‘appear’ and circulate only when enveloped in the needs/desires/fantasies of others, namely, men.<sup>50</sup>

Masquerade is not woman’s desire. Passing through the Oedipal phase, woman enters a value system which requires that she renounce the possibility of her own desire. In order to recoup desire - albeit a participation in man’s desire - woman enacts the masquerade required of her. At least in this way she will have some pleasure from remaining ‘on the market’.

---

49 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 27/*Ce sexe*, p. 26.

50 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, pp. 133-134/*Ce sexe*, pp. 131-132.



This last phrase could lead us into the political; and in a similar paragraph, Luce Irigaray outlines a corresponding structure of masquerade in patriarchy. Commenting on the liberal aim of modifying current social structures to allow women the same economic, social, political rights as men, she points out that:

... on the exchange market - especially, or exemplarily, the market of sexual exchange - woman would also have to preserve and maintain what is called femininity. The value of a woman would accrue to her from her maternal role, and, in addition, from her 'femininity'. But in fact that 'femininity' is a role, in image, a value, imposed upon women by male systems of representation. In this masquerade of femininity {*masquerade de la féminité*}, the woman loses herself, and loses herself by playing on her femininity. The fact remains that this masquerade requires an *effort* on her part for which she is not compensated. Unless her pleasure comes simply from being chosen as an object of consumption or of desire by masculine 'subjects'. And, moreover, how can she do otherwise without being 'out of circulation'?<sup>51</sup>

It is interesting to reflect Luce Irigaray's conception of the masquerade back upon Fletcher's rounding off of aspects of his discussion of Riviere. He writes:

There is no essence of 'womanliness'. In Riviere's argument it must be produced out of something very like its opposite. Riviere's distinction comes down to one between the mask of femininity as reaction-formation, renouncing and reversing wishes, and the mask of femininity covering the refusal to renounce them. In both cases it is the same mask. [...] This is not the Lacanian conception of a lack or a non-identity. Behind Riviere's mask there is always something else.

The importance of Riviere's conception of the masquerade is that it constitutes a transgressive doubleness, an inscription of alternative wishes. The potential for a critical distance from the mythemes of femininity (passivity, responsiveness, deference, flattery, etc) is lodged already within it and the narratives it might generate.<sup>52</sup>

This echoes Luce Irigaray. For Luce Irigaray there is no essence of 'womanliness'. It is produced from something very like its opposite - the 'femininity' of patriarchy and phallogentrism. Woman has no choice but to respond to these structures by enacting the

---

51 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 84/*Ce sexe*, p. 80.

52 John Fletcher, 'Versions of Masquerade', p. 55.

masquerade. A renunciation of her desire is involved; so to is the fact that she is already elsewhere - she is neither lacking, nor subject either to the 'eternal feminine'. In what seems a bleak scenario, the possibility for resistant strategies are embedded within the structure - even if masked by the mask itself. For Luce Irigaray, once again, the strategies for resistance can follow differing paths: primarily, hysterical mimicry or productive mimeses.

### Hysterical mimicry

If for Luce Irigaray woman's adoption/adaption of 'femininity' is a mimetic process, in which women masquerade that which they are required to be, then hysteria is a strategic redoubling of that mime, taking it to the nth degree in order to attempt to wrest back some control over their destiny, identity and sexuality. Hysteria can be seen as a calculated continuum of the masquerade 'femininity'.

In the devastating essay 'And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other'<sup>53</sup> Luce Irigaray demonstrates the structure of phallogentrism which demands the disruption of female genealogies, of mother-daughter relationships. What she writes is not the voice of the hysteric, but rather she indicates through the daughter's voice the immanence of hysteria in this structure, the not-yet-hysteria which is the result of phallogentrism and

---

53 Luce Irigaray, 'And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other', trans. by Hélène Vivienne Wenzel, *Signs*, 7.1 (Autumn 1981), 60-67/*Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1979).



'normalisation' through psychoanalysis. It is worth quoting a substantial passage:

And if you lead me back again and again to this blind assimilation of you - but who are you? - if you turn your face from me, giving yourself to me only in an already inanimate form, abandoning me to competent men to undo my/your paralysis, I'll turn to my father. [...]

He leaves the house, I follow in his steps. Farewell, Mother, I shall never become your likeness.

I do gymnastics. I practice the body exercises suited to my disorder. I'll become a schooled robot. I move my body; completely unmoved. I advance and move about to the rhythm prescribed for my cure. Will, not love, regulates my gestures, my leaps, my dancing about. Each hour of the day finds me applying myself: trying to obey the doctors' orders. I concur totally with their diagnosis of my condition. I give them my complete attention, all my energy. I'll be the living demonstration of the correctness of their principles. Animated, reanimated by their understanding.

See from afar how I move with measured steps, me, once frozen in anger? Aren't I good now? A nearly perfect girl? I lack only a few garments, a little jewelry, some makeup, a disguise {*travestissement*<sup>54</sup>}, some ways of being or doing to appear perfect. I'm beginning to look like what's expected of me. One more effort, a little more anger against you who want me to remain little, you who want me to eat what you bring me rather than to see me dress like you, and I'll step out of the {*ton*} dream. Out of my disorder. Out of you in me, me in you. I'll leave us. I'll go into another home. I'll live my life, my story.

Look at how healthy I am now. I don't even have to run after a man, he comes toward me. He approaches me. I await him, immobile, rooted. He's very near. I'm paralyzed with emotion. My blood no longer circulated very well. I hardly breathe. I leave.

I can't tell you where I am going. Forget me, Mother. Forget you in me, me in you. Let's just forget us. Life continues ....<sup>55</sup>

The mother that the little girl wants to be like is already inanimate, causing the little girl to turn to her father and the fathers of psychoanalysis. She schools herself in the gestures required of her, desiring their approval, concurring with their opinion. This makes her womanly - all she needs in addition are the

54 *'travestissement'* carries the connotations of transvestism and of drag, thus emphasising that this disguise of 'femininity' is a masculine construction of femininity. Irigaray had earlier noted 'The fact that certain men want to "act like" women thus raises the question whether they thereby take back for themselves that "femininity" which was assigned to woman.' *Speculum*, n. 31 p. 49/*Speculum*, n. 37 p. 55. This could also apply to those aspects of 'femininity' deemed appropriate for male artists. See Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius* (London: The Women's Press, 1989).

55 Luce Irigaray, 'And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other', pp. 62-63/*Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre*, pp. 12-13.



appropriate accoutrements of dress and make-up. Her desire to be like the mother has turned to anger that the mother wished to feed her, rather than wanting her daughter visibly to mimic, to masquerade, 'femininity'. The daughter's sexuality has become passive to the extent that she actively masquerades, but then waits to be chosen by a man. The separation from the mother is complete.... but of course the daughter ends up having repeated the same masquerade as her mother. The phenomenon of hysteria is shown by Luce Irigaray as an inevitability in the structuring of 'femininity': "*Hysteria is all she has left. [...]* And hysterical miming {*le mime hystérique*} will be the little girl's or the woman's effort to save her sexuality from total repression and destruction."<sup>56</sup> Mimicry, 'femininity', and hysteria, are so closely related and intertwined as to be almost contiguous. Where two are found, the third will not be too far distant:

Hysteria: it *speaks* in the mode of a paralyzed gestural faculty, [...] as *symptoms* of an 'it can't speak to or about itself' ... And the drama of hysteria is that it is inserted schizotically between that gestural system, that desire paralysed and enclosed with its body, and a language that it has learned in the family, in school, in society, which is in no way continuous with - nor certainly, a metaphor for - the 'movements' of its desire. Both mutism and mimicry {*le mimétisme*} are then left to hysteria. Hysteria is silent and at the same time it mimes {*elle mime*}. And - how could it be otherwise - miming/reproducing {*mimant-reproduisant*} a language that is not its own, masculine language, it caricatures and deforms that language: it 'lies', it 'deceives', as women have always been reputed to do.<sup>57</sup>

In order to demonstrate the strategic choice of hysteria, Elizabeth Grosz indicates anorexia as a contemporary example: "a defiant taking-to-extremes of these ideals [...] a not always successful attempt at self determination."<sup>58</sup> Certainly the anorexic

---

56 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, pp. 71-72/*Speculum*, pp. 85-86.

57 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, pp. 136-137/*Ce sexe*, p. 134.

58 Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, p. 136.

determines to become the perfectly thin body, maintaining an absolute control over diet and exercise in a mimetic parody of the effort required of young (white) Western women.<sup>59</sup> I think hysteric mimicry could be underlying other eating disorders, such as bingeing (sugar and spice and all things nice, that's what little girls are made of), and bulimia. It is possible to reaffirm the placing of this discussion the realm of the visible, the realm of the aesthetic and the realm of mimicry, with Lynda Nead's demonstration the absolute control required of the borders and orifices of (representations of) the female body in our culture. It is "an aesthetic that has structured the representation of the female body in western art since antiquity".<sup>60</sup> Drawing upon Kenneth Clarke, Jacques Derrida and Mary Douglas, Nead shows how, across the breadth of Western culture's activities, "the female body is defined as lacking containment and issuing filth and pollution from its faltering outlines and broken surface" and how art constantly (re)submits it to regulation and "repair".<sup>61</sup> Luce Irigaray confirms the hysteric's relation to a dominative aesthetic:<sup>62</sup>

Enigmatic "somatizations", hysterical "dreams" in which we are supposed to see "the caricature of a work of art", as Freud puts it in *Totem and Taboo*. Woman's special form of neurosis would be to 'mimic' {*serait une 'mime'*} a work of art, to be a *bad (copy of a) work of art*. Her neurosis would be recognized as a counterfeit or parody of an artistic process. It is transformed

---

59 Surveys in the USA have shown a difference in attitude to body image between young white women and young black women, with a high percentage of the white women expressing a desire to lose weight and be thinner, while black women were expressing the importance of having 'thickness' on them and a physical presence (see Elizabeth Nickson, 'Learning Curves', *The Guardian*, 8 April 1996, section 2, p. 7). Luce Irigaray does not consider racial difference within hysteria; but neither does she mention anorexia in this context; it is Elizabeth Grosz's exemplar, which is, I think, valid in certain dominant Western contexts.

60 Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 5-6.

61 Lynda Nead, *ibid.*, p. 7.

62 See Josephine Donovan, 'Everyday Use and Moments of Being: Toward a Nondominative Aesthetic', in *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective*, ed. by Hilde Hein and Carolyn Korsmeyer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 53-67, for a discussion of the dominative and the nondominative in aesthetic praxis.



into an aesthetic object, but one without value, which has to be condemned because it is a *forgery* {*condamnabile parce que relevent de la simulation. Stigmatisée en tant que faussaire.*}. It is neither 'nature' nor an appropriate technique for re-producing nature.<sup>63</sup>

In discussing "the primacy of boundaries in social configurations of the female body", Nead turns to Giovanni Battista Moroni's painting *Chastity*, to a photograph by Robert Mapplethorpe of the body-builder Lisa Lyons, and finally to anorexia:

Here again the body is seen as image, according to a set of conventions, and woman acts both as judge and executioner. But rather than anorexia being seen as a distortion of physical needs, it can be posed instead as a confusion of psychical perceptions and, more exactly, as a confusion of form and its boundaries. For the anorectic, there is always excess matter deposited over the surface, the form of the body. The goal is to get rid of that surplus and to reveal the essential, core self - to get back to the original boundaries.<sup>64</sup>

This carries echoes of the earlier discussion of mimicry and Callois's identification of the dislocation of the insect's visual identity. In the discussion of hysteria, however, the intention, desire and will of the hysteric is important. Luce Irigaray locates in this "a revolutionary potential in hysteria"<sup>65</sup> (and at one point describes the Erinnyes in the *Oresteia* as "women in rebellion, types of hysterical revolutionaries who rise up against the patriarchal power that is being established"<sup>66</sup>). It is a potential which Grosz summarises:

Hers [the hysteric's] is a mode of defiance of patriarchy, not the site of its frustration. In this sense, the hysteric is a proto-feminist, or a least an isolated individual who, if she had access to the experiences of other women, may locate the problem in cultural expectations of femininity rather than in femininity itself. The hysteric's defiance through excess, through

---

63 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 125/*Speculum*, p. 156.

64 Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude*, pp. 10-11.

65 Luce Irigaray, 'Women-Mothers, the Silent Substratum of the Social Order', trans. by David Macey, *The Irigaray Reader*, p. 47.

66 Luce Irigaray, 'Body against Body: In Relation to the Mother', in *Sexes and Genealogies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 7-21 (p. 12)/'Le corps-à-corps avec la mère', in *Sexes et Parentes* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987), pp. 19-33 (p. 24).



*overcompliance*, is a parody of the expected.<sup>67</sup>

It is for this reason that the phallogentric response of attempting to 'cure' the hysteric by training her in a more appropriate adaptation to 'femininity' is itself a false 'cure', treating "the wrong subject, the woman, her repressed (recuperable) desire, as if 'she', not the symbolic relation, were the locus of illness."<sup>68</sup> The woman is thus not returned to her 'self', her genealogies; the cause of her resistance is not attended too. Luce Irigaray's response as an analyst to hysteria is to attempt a working through of it, at least in part *in the realm of the aesthetic*:

Hysteria stands between woman and mother, women and mothers. It is in tension between them. Hysteria must not be destroyed but allowed access to the imagination and to creativeness. For the hysteric access to such an identity is effected through a sexualized art, a colored and sonorous art, an art whose libidinal resources blossom in duality and reconciliation, within one woman, between mother and wife {*femme*}, and among women. Thanks to such an art, the hysteric should be able to regain her perceptions - her virginity, her gender - and keep hold of them.<sup>69</sup>

While recognising the revolutionary potential of hysteria, Luce Irigaray has no wish to valorise the hysteric, maintain her condition, or move all women towards a state of hysteria. Instead, Luce Irigaray adapts the hysteric's strategies of resistance into a productive mimesis. How Luce Irigaray defines this, how she deploys it in her own writing, and how it structures her whole project, will be the subject of the next chapter.

---

67 Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, p. 135.

68 Dianna Chisholm, 'Irigaray's Hysteria', p. 272.

69 Luce Irigaray, 'Flesh Colors', in *Sexes and Genealogies*, pp. 151-165 (p. 164)/'Les couleurs de la chair', in *Sexes et parentés*, pp. 165-179 (p. 179). This attention to hysteria through the visual and the aesthetic will be important in future discussions.

## Chapter 2

### Mimesis part 2: Productive mimesis; Luce Irigaray's practice of mimesis; Luce Irigaray's oeuvre as/is mimesis.

#### Productive mimesis

As I have indicated in the previous chapter, Luce Irigaray identifies within Plato two forms of mimesis, which I have called non-productive or maintenance mimesis, and productive mimesis. She identifies productive mimesis as the process through which women might develop appropriate languages in the Symbolic: "it is doubtless in the direction of, and on the basis of, that [productive] mimesis {*mimesis*} that the possibility of a woman's writing {*une écriture de femme*} may come about."<sup>1</sup> She has also identified within the structures of hysteria both mimicry and a place of resistance: "hysterical miming {*le mime hystérique*} will be the little girl's or the woman's effort to save her sexuality from total repression and destruction."<sup>2</sup> Gebauer and Wulf provide an account of mimesis that makes more understandable how it is possible for Luce Irigaray to make a political and resistant move between hysteria and mimesis:

It becomes evident that the concept of mimesis necessarily loses its intellectual centrality with the rise of rational thought. [...] The change itself

---

1 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 131/*Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1977), pp. 129-130. Hereafter referred to as *This Sex/Ce sexe*.

2 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum Of The Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 72/*Speculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1974), pp. 85-86. Hereafter referred to as *Speculum/Speculum*.



allows us to recognize a second characteristic of mimesis: while modern rational thought refers to the single isolated cognitive subject, mimesis is always concerned with a relational network of more than one person.<sup>3</sup>

There are striking correlations between mimesis (as explained here) and hysteria. While Gebauer and Wulf do not in this introductory comment define "rational thought", when reflected back through their book it could imply *both* the related historical rise of 'rationality' in ancient Greece and its re-affirmation in the Enlightenment, *and* the acquisition of 'rationality' in the individual. Thus it can be related through the moment of cultural transition from oral to written histories to Luce Irigaray's location of the development of patriarchy, and also to the accession of the subject to the Law of the Father, to the phallogocentric Symbolic. Both hysteria and mimesis are grounded in the social, and have elements of desire for approval/love: the person performing the mimesis desires to continue, and fit into, particular social patterns; the hysteric is adopting the gestures of 'femininity'. Both have elements of resistance: in productive mimesis (such as the musician), the aim is to develop, add to, or exceed a given situation which has been found insufficient to allow for the articulation of subjectivity; the hysteric wishes to regain and retain her subjectivity through absolute control of that 'femininity', exceeding it through becoming the best at it (for example, the thinnest, in the case of anorexia). Both, then, will maintain a critical distance from established logic and rationality - in the case of hysteria, a critical distance which is increased by the linking of men, masculinity and rationality on the one hand, and women, femininity, and irrationality on the other. (Maybe in this

---

<sup>3</sup> Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *Mimesis: Culture Art Society*, trans. by Don Reneau (London: University of California Press, 1995), p. 3.



positioning of mimesis, we can begin to see why male artists feel able, structurally, to call upon aspects of 'femininity' while declining the compromised subjectivity and relation to the Symbolic allowed women.)

Gebauer and Wulf continue their paragraph:

The mimetic production of a symbolic world refers to other worlds and to their creators and draws other persons into one's own world. As is apparent in this constellation, mimesis implies the recognition of mediation between worlds and people; it does not designate a subjection to received model, but rather an acceptance of traditions and the work of predecessors. It also implies a recognition of power: the inclusion of others introduces power, if only in symbolic terms, into one's own personal world, into the interpretive and perspectival modes developed there. The history of mimesis is a history of disputes over the power to make symbolic worlds, that is, the power to represent the self and others and interpret the world. To this extent mimesis possesses a political dimension and is part of the history of power relations.<sup>4</sup>

While there are aspects of this which are useful, such as the introduction of the move from the social to the political, it also contains the limits of Gebauer and Wulf's gender-free ('universal') understanding of mimesis. Implied here is an unproblematic relation to a Symbolic - an unproblematic *access to it and representation in it*. But the mimesis of the hysteric is doomed to be a mimesis of powerlessness, mimicry of a 'femininity' which was never 'hers'. This then calls into question the "mediation between worlds and people". Without wishing to designate all women as hysterics, but remembering the embeddedness of hysteria in the structures of 'femininity', the questions for women are: is this a mimicry of mediation? If women have no mediation between themselves, then what is the mediation they mimic? If, as Luce Irigaray argues, women's genealogies are utterly disrupted, then there *are* no (cultural) traditions or predecessors. Women

---

4 Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *ibid.*, p. 3.

mimic either men, or their disempowered, hysterical 'predecessors' - "predecessors," because these women were always already (what else could they do?) mimicking something not 'theirs'. Through her work Luce Irigaray argues for the development of structures which will allow for the reaffirming and integrity of female genealogies, and the related development of structures of mediation and the Symbolic. At present the majority options are either the mimicking of a 'femininity' not of our making, or mimicking men and the phallic Symbolic - which are, of course, (two sides of) the same (coin). To get out of this bleak spot, we must pass through the resistant moment of hysteria and through productive mimesis. I would like to repeat a passage of Luce Irigaray's I quoted earlier concerning mimicry, and to follow through its subsequent discussion of mimesis. It breaks down into three paragraphs.

1.

There is, in an initial phase, perhaps only one 'path', the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of *mimicry* {*le mimétisme*}. One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it. Whereas a direct feminine challenge to this condition means demanding to speak as a (masculine) 'subject', that is, it means to postulate a relation to the intelligible that would maintain sexual indifference.<sup>5</sup>

Luce Irigaray is suggesting that women have two strategies of response to their subordination. The second would equate to an 'equal rights feminism', maintaining 'sexual indifference'. It is an approach which would be akin to Lucy Lippard's identification of the desire for a bigger slice of a poisonous pie,<sup>6</sup> or to a denial that

---

5 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 76/*Ce sexe*, pp. 73-74.

6 Lucy Lippard, 'The Women Artists' Movement: What Next?', in *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art* (New York: New Press, 1995), pp. 80-83 (p. 81).



gender is of any cultural importance. The first option is the strategy which Luce Irigaray has learned from the hysteric. As she notes elsewhere “there is always, in hysteria, both a reserve power and a paralyzed power [...] the possibility of another mode of ‘production’, notably gestural and lingual; but this is maintained in its latency. Perhaps as a cultural reserve yet to come?”.<sup>7</sup> As the hysteric mimics ‘femininity’, so too Luce Irigaray suggests that there is a possibility of tapping into this reserve cultural power through a deliberate mimicry of the role allotted women. This would be a knife-edge strategy: one does not wish to fall into the self-defeating paralysis of the hysteric.

## 2. Luce Irigaray continues this passage:

To play with mimesis {*la mimésis*} 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 {*répétition ludique*}, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language. It also means ‘to unveil’ the fact that, if women are such good mimics {*miment si bien*}, it is because they are not simply resorbed in this function. *They also remain elsewhere*: another case of the persistence of ‘matter’, but also of sexual pleasure.<sup>8</sup>

The suggestion here is that the differentiation of the woman who “play[s] with mimesis” from the hysteric’s self-defeating mimicry is that the hysteric, in attempting to wrest control of the production of her ‘feminine’ subjectivity, also allows herself to be reduced to it. Instead, the mimesis has to occur in the realm of the playful, and can do so for two reasons: the first is that women undertaking it understand it in political terms (“trying to recover

---

7 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 138/*Ce sexe*, p. 136.

8 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 76/*Ce sexe*, pp. 73-74.



the place of their exploitation”); and, subsequently, that because the “cultural reserve yet to come” remains embedded in their strategy, they therefore always remain/retain it elsewhere than in the ‘feminine’. The hysteric’s strategy, on the other hand, is one of an isolated individual, rather than collectively political (feminist); her stubborn reserve is “resorbed” into her perfection of her act of mimicry.

Naomi Schor suggests that Luce Irigaray’s concept of mimesis “might be described as an instance of what Derrida has termed paleonomy: ‘the occasional maintenance of an *old name* in order to launch a new concept” and that “mimesis comes to signify difference as positivity, a joyful reappropriation of the attributes of the other that is not in any way to be confused with a mere reversal of the existing phallogentric distribution of power”.<sup>9</sup> If this approach to femininity is an example of paleonomy, then I don’t think we can understand it as “a joyful reappropriation of the attributes of the other”, even (particularly) if this is differentiated from a reversal of phallogentrism. Schor’s concept smacks of potential embracing of victimhood, accepting the Freudian concept of anatomy as destiny, and the strategy of producing ‘positive images’ which remain in the phallogentric Symbolic. Surely Derrida’s concept implies a knowing strategy, rather than the indiscriminate acceptance of otherness. He does in fact refer to the “strategic necessity” of paleonomy, and continues:

Taking into account the fact that a name does not name the punctual simplicity of a concept, but rather a system of predicates defining a concept, a

---

<sup>9</sup> Naomi Schor, ‘This Essentialism which is not One’, in *Engaging With Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. by Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 57-78 (p. 67).

conceptual structure *centered* on a given predicate, we proceed: 1) to the extraction of a reduced predicative trait that is held in reserve, limited in a given conceptual structure (limited for motivations and relations of force to be analyzed), *named X*; 2) to the delimitation, the grafting and regulated extension of the extracted predicate, the name *X* being maintained as a kind of *lever of intervention*, in order to maintain a grasp on the previous organization, which is to be transformed effectively. Therefore, extraction, graft, extension: you know that this is what I call, according to the process I have just described, *writing*.<sup>10</sup>

This “X” is very close to being a model of Luce Irigaray’s mimesis (in writing) of ‘femininity’ which does indeed name both patriarchy and phallogentrism as the system of predicates which name it. The “extraction of the reduced predicative trait” is a necessity for the maintenance of a critical distance, to remove women from their place of immediacy, and to prevent women’s reduction once again to that place of her exploitation. ‘Femininity’ is then used by Luce Irigaray - grafted and extended - with precision as a lever of intervention. As we have seen, it is “in the direction of, and on the basis of” this practice that Luce Irigaray says “the possibility of a woman’s writing may come about”.<sup>11</sup> This is why I feel the term productive mimesis is more appropriate than the notion of positivity.

It is also important to note (in the context of my project) that Luce Irigaray uses the analogy of visibility - mimesis making visible that which was meant to be invisible - even if the visible here remains cited as ‘visible’. Following her thorough critique of what she terms phallogentric “specul(ariz)ation” in *Speculum*, it tells us that Luce Irigaray is not leaving the realm of the visible, visible languages, and metaphors of visibility to phallogentrism: they are

---

10 Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 71.

11 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 131/*Ce sexe*, p. 130.



to be worked through using the strategy of productive mimesis as much as speech and writing. Indeed, the visible is far too urgent a matter within Luce Irigaray's critiques to be left to the old specul(ariz)ation. Its blind spots, its dreams of symmetry, of its representations of woman as the other of the same, are all areas where women can enact a productive mimesis, exposing the lacunae in its texts. And if this working of the visual is at best parallel to Luce Irigaray's "*parler-femme*",<sup>12</sup> with its indication of verbal speech, then maybe it develops something more like a witnessing-woman. I would like to coin this phrase because of its multiplicity of appropriate (and appropriately contiguous) readings. 'Witness', like 'perceive', combines the visual and the intellectual; but the phrase can also indicate 1) the woman and women who witness(es), 2) an active witnessing of the construct 'woman', and 3) the performative mode of a woman bearing witness.

3. Luce Irigaray's final paragraph in the passage under consideration reads:

Elsewhere of 'matter': if women can play with mimesis {*la mimésis*} it is because they are capable of bringing new nourishment to its operation. Because they have always nourished this operation? Is not the 'first' stake in mimesis {*la mimésis*} that of re-producing (from) nature? Of giving it form in order to appropriate it for oneself? As guardians of 'nature', are not women the ones who maintain, thus who make possible, the resource of mimesis {*la mimésis*} for men? For the logos?<sup>13</sup>

Continuing her discussion of productive mimesis, Luce Irigaray returns to the body and to reproduction. As Rosi Braidotti suggests, Luce Irigaray's productive mimesis "allows women to revisit and repossess the discursive and material sites where 'woman' was

---

12 Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe*, p. 133.

13 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, pp. 76-77/*Ce sexe*, p. 74.



essentialized, disqualified or quite simply excluded",<sup>14</sup> and the site of the mothering body is surely the most poignant of all of these. This is the move of Luce Irigaray's which has raised the hackles of her critics most of all. In 1985 Toril Moi, for example, argued that Luce Irigaray "falls for the temptation to produce her own positive theory of femininity. But [...] to define 'woman' is necessarily to essentialize her".<sup>15</sup> In conflating 'femininity' and 'woman' Moi seems to be making an essentialising move herself in order to construct her argument (indicating the slippery elusiveness of the whole problematic). Rosi Braidotti, however, follows her own comment on Luce Irigaray's outline of mimesis by insisting that "working through the networks of discursive definitions of 'woman'" produces processes of female subjectivity and of a "gendered female feminist community." It forms an "ontological leap forward" where the collective "we, women" can empower the subjective becoming of "I, woman":

This leap is forward, not backwards towards the glorification of an authentic archaic feminine power or of a well-hidden 'true' essence. It does not aim at recovering a lost origin or a forgotten land, but rather to bring about here and now a mode of representation that would take the fact of being a women as a positive, self-affirming political force. It is an act of self-legitimation whereby the 'she-self' blends her ontological desire to be with the conscious willed becoming of a collective political movement. This distinction between the will and desire marks a separation of register, of levels of experience, which must be underlined and never confused. [...] The distinction between identity and subjectivity is to be related to that between will and desire.<sup>16</sup>

This is a more productive framework through which to approach Luce Irigaray's comments on mimesis and reproduction. Luce Irigaray consistently refuses to reduce women to mothers, and

---

14 Rosi Braidotti, 'On the Female Feminist Subject, or: From "She-Self" to "She-Other"', in *Beyond Equality and Difference: Citizenship, Feminist Politics, and Female Subjectivity*, ed. by Gisela Bock and Susan James (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 177-192 (p. 187).

15 Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 139.

16 Rosi Braidotti, 'On the Female Feminist Subject', p. 186.

therefore refuses to construct either 'woman' or 'mother' as a site of origin for women; such a reduction itself being a displacement of woman's subjectivity and her relation to origin. As Alys Eve Weinbaum points out, "reproduction ventriloquizes mimetic repetition on the biological level. Indeed, the term - reproduction - itself assumes a paleonymic function. [...] 'Reproduction' signifies [...] the biological process that both Western metaphysics and capitalism use to reduce women to mothers".<sup>17</sup> Luce Irigaray's use of rhetorical-ironic questions and the citing/siting of the terms "matter", "first" and "nature" serve to *outline the possible productivity* of mimesis in relation to reproduction, and *also to perform* mimesis in relation to that same reproduction. After noting the paleonymic function of 'reproduction', Weinbaum continues:

For it is this term that best expresses women's potential to disrupt the violent and essentializing codification of their biological selves. In turning to her own body as biological ground, that same body, which is said to be the source of subordination, is repeated or reproduced with a difference. It is no longer the body assigned to woman to buttress the representation of male sexuality, but a body that allows woman to articulate her own subjectivity and that of other women.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, Luce Irigaray is invoking, in this use of the term 'reproduction', what Braidotti calls the "female embodied self" in order to sustain "the project of redefining female subjectivity".<sup>19</sup> If 'woman' is not reduced to 'mother', then the act of reproduction (as mimesis) cannot provide her 'essence', nor can its representation show us her relation to origin: she is always already elsewhere. The problem is located in the reduction of 'woman' to

---

17 Alys Eve Weinbaum, 'Marx, Irigaray, and the Politics of Representation', *Differences*, 6.1 (1994), 98-128 (p. 112).

18 Alys Eve Weinbaum, *ibid.*, p. 112.

19 Rosi Braidotti, 'On the Female Feminist Subject', p. 186.



'mother'.

### Luce Irigaray's practice of mimesis

As the paragraph on reproduction demonstrates, Luce Irigaray does not use mimesis as a purely theoretical tool: rather, it is embedded in her practice, and not always easily identifiable, available for study, or amenable to academic modelling. Indeed, the mimesis we detect in her writing is likely to be only the tip of the iceberg, and, I would guess, to provoke much of the exasperation felt by her critics.<sup>20</sup> Mimesis is rooted in practice, and is irreducible to theory: it "eludes theory formation. It is a product of human practice and must always be regarded as the issue of a deed, as a part of practice."<sup>21</sup> Further, the practice of a productive mimesis is never purely cerebral, but can always be found, either substantively or as a trace, in the body:

The aspect of production expresses the nature of mimesis as activity undertaken by actors, as a deed. This [...] is articulated variously with the passage of time: as an act of painting or writing, as a making with one's own hands, as a generation of sounds with the voice or with musical instrument, or in reading aloud, or, ultimately, in reading silently, which retains scarcely any physical component at all. But there remains always a physical residue, which makes its presence felt in typically physical processes of depletion, such as fatigue [...] Mimesis brings into play a practical knowledge, a *sens pratique*.<sup>22</sup>

This effect of mimesis can be found threaded through Luce Irigaray's writing, for example in her antipathy towards, and

---

20 Elizabeth Weed mentions "how Irigaray can quite effectively 'exasperate' through her discourse", citing Jean-François Lyotard's reactions to her in a colloquium. 'The Question of Style', in Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford, *Engaging with Irigaray*, pp. 79-109 (p. 108).

21 Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *Mimesis*, p. 316.

22 Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *ibid.*, pp. 315-316.



refusal to adopt, the cerebrally abstract (for example, in 'Flesh Colors'<sup>23</sup>); and her refusal also to produce or use clearly extricable theoretical models. (The exception to prove this rule is the pedagogically-intended<sup>24</sup> *I Love To You*, where she does on occasion cite models of practice. This can be reflected back upon the pedagogical aspects of mimesis, but also requests reflection upon the model cited - notably, Buddha's fusion of mind and body in his contemplation of the flower.<sup>25</sup>)

Luce Irigaray's comments on her own usage of mimesis lead into comments on mimicry and her narrative of "the philosopher's wife/woman" {*la femme du philosophe*}<sup>26</sup>. They occurred during the defence of her thesis (*Speculum*)<sup>27</sup>, in response to a question about what method she had used for her research:

A delicate question. For isn't it the method, the path to knowledge, that has always also led us away, led us astray, by fraud and artifice, from woman's path, and to the point of consecrating its oblivion? [...] In order to reopen woman's path, in particular in and through language, it was therefore necessary to note the way in which the method is never as simple as it purports to be, the way in which the teleological project [...] the method takes on is always a project, conscious or not, of turning away, of deviation, and of reduction, in the artifice of sameness, of otherness. In other words, speaking at the greatest level of generality so far as philosophical methods are concerned: of the feminine.<sup>28</sup>

So academic methodologies in themselves distract from "woman's path", enacting a form of fraud and artifice for women. The

23 Luce Irigaray, 'Flesh Colors', in *Sexes and Genealogies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 151-165/'Les couleurs de la chair', in *Sexes et Parentes* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987), pp. 165-179.

24 Luce Irigaray, *I Love To You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History*, trans. by Alison Martin (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 11-12/*J'aime à toi: esquisse d'une félicité dans l'histoire* (Paris: Grasset), pp. 29-31. Hereafter cited as *I Love To You/J'aime à toi*.

25 Luce Irigaray, *I Love To You*, pp. 24-25/*J'aime à toi*, pp. 49-50.

26 Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe*, p. 148. Translated as "wife" in *This Sex*, p. 151.

27 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 148/*Ce sexe*, p. 145.

28 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 150/*Ce sexe*, pp. 146-147.

“teleological project” (of ‘academic objectivity’?) in posing as a straightforward path is in fact embroiled in the complications of ‘the same’ and ‘the other’. Thus the teleological project is a masquerade, is ‘feminine’.

Thus it was necessary to destroy, but as René Char wrote, with nuptial tools. The tool is not a feminine {*féminin*} attribute. But woman may re-utilize its marks on her, in her. To put it another way: the option left to me was to *have a fling with the philosophers*, which is easier said than done ... for what path can one take to get back inside their ever so coherent systems?<sup>29</sup>

In this event, the only thing possible is to use the attributes of ‘femininity’ (which are given to woman, and are almost all that she has); to explore the marks they have left upon her, and to use them to party with the philosophers. This is not totally out of kilter with Audre Lorde’s assertion “For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master’s house as their only source of support”.<sup>30</sup> To attempt a teleological project would be to ‘speak (as a) man’, request the support of the master’s house, and ignore any potential *parler-femme*; to use a separatist strategy would be to leave the meta-discourse of our culture intact. If the patriarchy requires mime of women, and phallocentrism requires masquerade, then that is what they will get with a vengeance. Luce Irigaray presents herself as mimeticising “the philosopher’s wife/woman”. Diana Chisholm says that here Luce Irigaray “has acted the part of the cultural terrorist”,<sup>31</sup> before continuing:

---

29 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 150/*Ce sexe*, p. 147.

30 Audre Lorde, ‘The Master’s Tools will Never Dismantle the Master’s House’, in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), pp. 110-113.

31 Dianne Chisholm, ‘Irigaray’s Hysteria’, in Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford, *Engaging with Irigaray*, pp. 263-283 (p. 270).



I read this voice as a trope, a parody-mime, that voices woman's silencing or exposes woman's being overspoken by men's logic of the Same. Such a 'voice' does not emanate directly from the repressed female body but functions as a metaphorical disease in a body of male discourse, riddling it with hints, allusions, parables of women's sexual difference.<sup>32</sup>

She will inhabit the phallogentric texts of the philosophers, fulfil her role of the other of the same, reflecting the same back to himself: "Reproductive material and duplicating mirror, the philosopher's wife/woman {*femme*} also has to underwrite that narcissism which often extends onto a transcendental dimension".<sup>33</sup> The rhetorical/ironic questioning is but a prominent aspect of this.

It has been suggested that Luce Irigaray not only *writes on* the philosophers, but that she *writes* the philosophers.<sup>34</sup> I think this is to underestimate the project. Luce Irigaray appears to have taken to heart Virginia Woolf's analysis that "women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size",<sup>35</sup> that is, she does it to such excess that the *gaps and blind spots* are revealed at 'twice their natural size'. The reason that mimesis, rather than miming, can do this is that element of reserve: "having a fling with the philosopher also entails safeguarding *those components of the mirror that cannot reflect themselves*: its backing, its brilliancy, thus its dazzlements, its ecstasies."<sup>36</sup> As she says elsewhere, "marks and masks are

32 Dianne Chisholm, *ibid.*, p. 272.

33 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 151/*Ce sexe*, p. 147. Translation modified.

34 Elizabeth Weed, 'The Question of Style', p. 84.

35 Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Hogarth Press, 1949), p. 53.

36 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 151/*Ce sexe*, p. 147.



different {*hétérogène*} in their relations with signs":<sup>37</sup> through utilising the marks of 'femininity' Luce Irigaray enacts a mimesis of the *representation* of 'femininity' - in order to undo it... in order to begin the opening of some space for a developing woman's Symbolic, the '*parler-femme*', the 'witnessing-woman':

Neither falsehood nor appearance and beauty are 'foreign' to truth. They are proper to it, if not its accessories and its underside. And the opposite remains caught up in the same. It grounds the economy - or economy - of sameness. With a flip of the coin, it forms the basis for its representations. Foreign, for its part, beckoned toward an outside. But it was *forgotten*.

Mimesis is not to be outflanked this way. Certainly not by 'woman' - double. [...] By 'femininity' least of all.

But woman? Is not to be reduced to mere femininity. Or to falsehood, or appearance or beauty. Short of staying out of it and projecting at (from) a distance that other of the self to which truth is, from the outset, hostile: falsehood, as well as beauty and appearance, ... Although femaleness has taken it/them as part of her forms, although she cannot do without it/them if she is to pass for what is: the truth.

This operation also will be attributed to woman. Or is it to femininity? As a preparation for 'woman'. Who may be said to play with it as with a setting, framing, mounting, glazing. Until the time she? gets out? If in fact she ever plays. But so many things are attributed to whoever remains foreign to self-definition. Who risks - the abyss.<sup>38</sup>

It is at the point not only of realising that "Irigaray's mimesis is a way of retracing backwards the multilayered levels of signification, or representation, of women",<sup>39</sup> but of realising the extent of the convolution of forms of this risk, that many of Luce Irigaray's commentators - and supporters - such as Weed, Chisholm, Xu and Berg appear to experience a hiatus (I say this while acknowledging my indebtedness to their insights). There is an inevitable tension between the academic teleological project of

---

37 Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 80/*Amante marine de Friedrich Nietzsche* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980), p.86. Hereafter cited as *Marine Lover/Amante marine*.

38 Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, pp. 77-78/*Amante marine*, pp. 83-84.

39 Rosi Braidotti, 'Of Bugs and Women: Irigaray and Deleuze on the Becoming-Woman', in Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford, pp. 111-137 (p. 124).

their (my) texts and Luce Irigaray's project; a tension exacerbated, I feel, if the discussion of Luce Irigaray's strategy is restricted to analyses of her texts which are most immediately 'on' the philosophers. The productivity of her texts is then restricted to an academic endeavour, and (despite occasional word play<sup>40</sup>) her mimesis becomes containable as an abstract methodology, '*parler-femme*' becomes an '*épater les académiciens*'. 'Femininity' is deconstructed, displaced; 'woman' is de-essentialised; 'essentialism' rebutted or strategised... but a gap remains, a 'hole' in the academic lens, which is not (yet) canny enough to be a mimesis of the 'hole' in the scopophilic lens of the dominant economy.<sup>41</sup> The gap is that '*parler-femme*' is practice - and concomitantly, mimesis is practice; a developing Symbolic is practice; 'her' subjectivity is practice; Luce Irigaray's oeuvre is practice. As such, it is irreducible to theory; which returns us to the earlier discussion of mimesis as being irreducible to theory.

Before attending to Luce Irigaray's practice as mimesis, there is one final point. As practice, it is a web of *strategic* practices. While Luce Irigaray has warned that "philosophical discourse [....] constitutes the discourse on discourse" and is thus precisely the area which should be challenged,<sup>42</sup> this does not mean that the discourses for which philosophy sets the agenda - the discourses of its discourse - this does not mean that these 'supplementary' discourses are unworthy of attention. Indeed, their inclusion is crucial if the investigation of philosophical discourse is not to

---

40 For example, Dianne Chisholm's wonderfully witty musings on whether Irigaray is a 'con' (Fr.: cunt, orifice, hole) artist or an 'ex'-centric - or even an 'ex-con' who has managed to escape. Dianne Chisholm, 'Irigaray's Hysteria', p. 264.

41 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 26/*Ce sexe*, pp. 25-26.

42 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 74/*Ce sexe*, p. 72.



remain abstract. While it would be naive to concentrate on these, leaving the meta-discourse of philosophy untouched, says Luce Irigaray, focus on the “limited or marginal issue”<sup>43</sup> is also strategic, and from *Speculum* onwards is included in her work. The two main strands that emerge are ethics, folding back onto women’s political collectivity, women’s rights and civil rights; and her own struggle towards a Symbolic, an articulation of subjectivity and mediation through the ‘*parler-femme*’, the practice of (the) witnessing-woman. The gap in the present academic lens can only be articulated if one understands Luce Irigaray’s oeuvre *as/is* mimesis, rather than taking mimesis as academic methodology, of relevance only to her work ‘on’ the philosophers.

### Luce Irigaray’s oeuvre as/is mimesis

Paul Ricoeur offers us a developed analysis of mimesis which can be used to rescue Luce Irigaray’s practice of mimesis from any reductive understanding as being a methodology. His paper ‘Mimesis and Representation’<sup>44</sup> aims to disentangle mimesis from its quite general understanding as a closed and limited form of representation - to ensure it is “removed from the enchanted precincts of re-presented presence.”<sup>45</sup> It allows for a reading of Luce Irigaray’s poetics - her oeuvre - not as an object to/for study, but as productive of an horizon of possibilities within which the reader is implicated.

---

43 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 74/*Ce sexe*, p. 72.

44 Paul Ricoeur, ‘Mimesis and Representation’, *Annals of Scholarship*, 2 (1981), 15-32.

45 Paul Ricoeur, *ibid.*, p. 16.



Ricoeur follows two paths. The first is to move from Platonic mimesis which is “interpreted in terms of a redoubled presence, works of art and of language being taken for weakened copies of things, whereas the things themselves borrow whatever tenor of meaning they have from their intelligible models, the Ideas”,<sup>46</sup> and to concentrate instead upon Aristotle’s development of productive mimesis, found primarily in his *Poetics*: “For Aristotle, *mimesis* only takes place within the area of human action, or production, or *poiesis* [Gr.: making]. [...] Far from producing a weakened image of pre-existing things, *mimesis* brings about an augmentation of meaning in the field of action, which is its privileged field. It does not equate itself with something already given.”<sup>47</sup> Ricoeur’s second move is away from a semiotic understanding towards one based upon hermeneutics:

... [semiotic] theoreticians build upon an abstraction [...] by considering only the internal laws of the literary work. It is the task of hermeneutics, on the contrary, to reconstruct the set of operations by means of which a work arises from the opaque depths of living, acting, and suffering, to be given by an author to readers who receive it and thereby change their own action. For a semiotic theory that abstracts from this whole span of meaning, the work is constituted as an interior that alone is relevant. [...] For hermeneutics [...] there is neither an inside nor an outside to the work - the distinction of inside and outside being a methodological artifact - instead there is a concrete process in which the textual configuration conjoins the practical prefiguration and the practical transfiguration.<sup>48</sup>

This immediately warns us away from seeing our task as readers of texts as an abstraction, but rather to look for continuities between the text and that which is exterior to it. Ricoeur develops these three categories (practical prefiguration, textual configuration, and practical transfiguration) from three of Aristotle’s terms:

---

46 Paul Ricoeur, *ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

47 Paul Ricoeur, *ibid.*, p. 16.

48 Paul Ricoeur, *pp. ibid.*, 17-18.

*poiesis* (making, action), *sustasis* or *mythos* (the synthesis of incidents into a story) and *mimesis* (the imitation of an action), which “thus form a chain that has to do with *praxis*, where each term must be understood in terms of its relations to the others.”<sup>49</sup> He names these *mimesis*<sub>1</sub>, *mimesis*<sub>2</sub> and *mimesis*<sub>3</sub>.

These categories may in some instances go some way towards explaining the problem I had identified in the previous section: the gaps in many of the commentaries on Luce Irigaray’s use of *mimesis*. A semiotically influenced reader (according to Ricoeur) will place texts (in this case, Luce Irigaray’s) in the category of *sustasis*, or textual configuration, and will feel most at home when she assumes that this is also what Luce Irigaray is doing: hence the over-attention given to those of Luce Irigaray’s texts where she deals directly with texts by others:

Modern semiotics offers one type of answer which rests solely on isolating the text. [...] Thanks to writing, and also thanks to emplotment, the narrative text acquires a semantic autonomy that cuts it off in three ways. First, from the presumed intention of its author; second, from the capacity of its first audience to receive it; third, from the socio-cultural conditions of its genesis. *Mimesis*<sub>2</sub> is the emblem of this triple autonomy.<sup>50</sup>

Far from decrying *mimesis*<sub>2</sub> (and referring to it sometimes as “emplotment”), Ricoeur is arguing for it to be seen as a mediation between *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> and *mimesis*<sub>3</sub>, rather than in isolation. Defining *mimesis*<sub>2</sub> “as the configuration of action”, Ricoeur also provides it with an historicity: “This configuration is governed by a schematization that is historically structured in a tradition or traditions, and it is expressed in individual works which stand in varying relations to the constraints generated by this

---

49 Paul Ricoeur, *ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

50 Paul Ricoeur, *ibid.*, p. 21.



schematism.”<sup>51</sup> His further descriptions and analyses of it make one wonder further if the focus of discussions of Luce Irigaray’s mimesis upon her texts ‘on’ other philosophers is both a mis-focus within her work and a mis-focus upon mimesis. Ricoeur’s comment, for example, that “the poetic function suspends this concern for an external reference and turns language back on itself in order to celebrate itself”<sup>52</sup> is redolent of Luce Irigaray’s use of language in the texts where she is expressly working towards the articulation of the ‘*parler-femme*’, the articulation of subjectivity.

A further encouragement towards the integrative understanding provided by Ricoeur’s mimesis<sub>2</sub> (emplotment, configuration of action, textual configuration...) is provided by Luce Irigaray’s comments on her use of ‘inversion’, which can be understood in this context as mimesis. Referring to it as a method used by Marx on the works of Hegel, and by Nietzsche upon Plato - i.e., their inversion of something exterior to themselves - she says that for her it was more complex:

In my case, it was more a question of inverting myself. I was the other of/for man, I attempted to define the objective alterity of myself for myself as belonging to the female gender. I carried out an inversion of the femininity imposed upon me in order to try to define the female corresponding to my gender: the in-and-for-itself of my female nature. This process is extremely difficult to carry out and explains most of the misunderstandings about my work and thought.<sup>53</sup>

If we consider this ‘femininity’ as text, in the Symbolic; and the female body likewise (taking our lead from Luce Irigaray’s use of the term ‘morphology’ in relation to bodies, not only as a

51 Paul Ricoeur, *ibid.*, p. 25.

52 Paul Ricoeur, *ibid.*, p. 21.

53 Luce Irigaray, *I Love To You*, p. 63/*J'aime à toi*, p. 108.



metaphor<sup>54</sup>, but also in its sense within linguistics, referring to the formation of words) *as well as*, and *at the same time as* they operate in the real, then the full play of Ricoeur's three strands of mimesis can be woven through the complexities of Luce Irigaray's project. The 'texts' on which she works - those by Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, Freud, etc - are then placed as components of the wider text of 'femininity' in mimesis<sub>2</sub>, while practice (Ricoeur's 'practical') and women are still present in the discussion of mimesis<sub>1</sub> and mimesis<sub>3</sub>. The full understanding of mimesis<sub>2</sub> within Luce Irigaray's oeuvre, then, will be her project to write her subjectivity ("define the objective alterity of myself for myself as belonging to the female gender"), part of which process entails writing through the "femininity imposed upon [her]". It is thus not restricted to her work upon other philosophers.

We can begin to see that Ricoeur's three strands of mimesis move laterally through Luce Irigaray's work, rather than delineate discrete aspects of it. Indeed, to take just one aspect of her mimetic practice: if her working through of the texts of others in order to write her subjectivity can be located within mimesis<sub>2</sub>, then the texts themselves are substantively within mimesis<sub>1</sub> and her comprehension of their nature and her politicised response to them are within mimesis<sub>3</sub>.

For Ricoeur, as I have said, mimesis<sub>2</sub> is a mediation between mimesis<sub>1</sub> and mimesis<sub>3</sub>. Mimesis<sub>2</sub> cannot occur without some form of intelligibility, born of wider, specific, cultural understandings:

---

54 Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 58-59. This will be discussed in full in a later chapter.

Mimesis<sub>1</sub> is this pre-understanding of what human action is, of its semantics, its symbolism, its temporality. From this pre-understanding which is common to poets and their readers arises fiction, and with fiction comes the second form of mimesis which is textual and literary. [...] Fiction would never be understandable if it did not configurate what is already figured in human action.<sup>55</sup>

Without wishing to expand upon the details Ricoeur's discussion which leads to this conclusion, it is, nonetheless, possible to see that this is the aspect of mimesis wherein lies the embeddedness of 'femininity' in our culture. Related to this is not only Luce Irigaray's identification of philosophy as the key field of investigation, but also an aspect of her work which I feel is undervalued by her commentators: her development of possible structures of ethics and civil rights - in Ricoeur's terms, the necessary 'practical prefiguration' to the 'textual configuration' of mimesis<sub>2</sub>. Rather than functioning as a simple cause and effect (this structure produces those texts), it is their interplay that means that the productivity of textual configuration (in this case, women's subjectivity articulated through an appropriate Symbolic) actively requires and provokes productivity in the realm of practical prefiguration in order to guarantee its intelligibility. '*Parler-femme*' would be meaningless without attention to the structures of civil rights and ethics.

Ricoeur's final strand concerns practical transfiguration:

Generalizing beyond Aristotle, I shall say that mimesis<sub>3</sub> marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader. Therefore it is the intersection of the world unfolded by fiction and the world wherein actual action unfolds.<sup>56</sup>

Underlying this is an acceptance of "the problematic of the

---

55 Paul Ricoeur, 'Mimesis and Representation', p. 20.

56 Paul Ricoeur, *ibid.*, p. 26.



reception of a work as an integral part of the constitution of its meaning".<sup>57</sup> Here, then, we find not only the reader herself (Luce Irigaray in her act of reading), but also, in her reading, the spur towards the feminist project, which becomes manifest in mimesis<sub>1</sub> and mimesis<sub>2</sub>. Ricoeur argues that this demands a re-thinking of representation as "imitation copy": "It is no longer what is accidental to action that is re-presented or made present anew but what is essential".<sup>58</sup> In seeing mimesis<sub>2</sub> as "configuring act", and keeping the flow between the three in the realm of praxis, this third strand is available as an "action about action." Thus the world is not so much re-described through mimesis, as re-signified.<sup>59</sup> Once again, this helps us understand the practice of mimesis in Luce Irigaray's work as not only restricted to her re-investigation of the philosophers, but also as productive effect. I am thinking here particularly of an image evoked (in for example *Je, Tu, Nous, Sexes and Genealogies*, and *I Love To You*) of the woman reader (listener, viewer) making sense of what she is reading (hearing, seeing) through an active sense of female genealogies, and its concomitant, on the horizon, a sense of the universal for women as half of humanity, rather than subsisting as the 'other' of the whole. This image of the woman reader (listener, viewer) is of course not only Luce Irigaray, but also a possible 'myself' which Luce Irigaray evokes in me, as her reader.

Ricoeur ends his paper with a "modest conclusion". It is "the wish that the concept of representation, upon which converge

---

57 Paul Ricoeur, *ibid.*, p. 27.

58 Paul Ricoeur, *ibid.*, p. 27.

59 Paul Ricoeur, *ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

philosophy's most serious attempts to question itself, rediscovers the polysemy and mobility that will make it available for new adventures of thinking."<sup>60</sup> At the end of this investigation of productive mimesis I feel we are now ready to look at Luce Irigaray's consideration *of* representation and the ways in which her broader work is productive of new considerations *for* representation, in a way which is not reductive to illustration, positive images, or the discourse of hysteria. Instead I hope to weave into the discussion, as appropriate, the three strands of Luce Irigarayan productive mimesis: civil rights and ethics for women, the Symbolic for women, and the universal for women.

## Chapter 3

### The visual and the visible 1: analyzing the phallogocentric visible.

Luce Irigaray has been described, most prominently by Martin Jay, as being anti-visual or anti-ocular.<sup>1</sup> My aim in this chapter and the following one is to undo this misreading of Irigaray's work by demonstrating that what she argues against is not visuality as such, but the phallogocentric structures of our culture, in which the phallic gaze and structures in the Symbolic order appropriate to man are over-valued at the expense both of other senses (in particular, touch) and of a Symbolic appropriate to woman. Luce Irigaray's analysis is that phallogocentrism is constructed upon readings of the realm of the visual - what is or is not seen allows for the construction of castration anxiety and of woman as 'other of man's same'. This then determines the representation of women and the construction of 'femininity' in the Symbolic order. One might coin the term phallogoculocentrism to describe this process.<sup>2</sup>

Luce Irigaray's project has consistently had at its heart the problematic of woman's access to a Symbolic, and the need to create the conditions wherein what I shall refer to as a Symbolic

---

1 Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 526-542.

2 I note that Martin Jay coins the term "phallogoculocentrism" in the title of his chapter on Irigaray and Derrida - both less elegant and less persuasively descriptive than the thread of "phallogoculocentrism", for reasons which will become clear. Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, p. 493.



syntax appropriate to women can develop, not only in speech, but also in visual systems of gesture and representation. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan defines Lacan's concept of the Symbolic order as "a mediative function [...] which separates the Imaginary from the Real, creates loss and forms the necessary distance from the other's *jouissance*"; it does not, however, have any gender specificity in and of itself, and she argues against "feminists [who] still think of the Symbolic order as masculinist, synonymous with the father's name or some phallic law".<sup>3</sup> She may have been thinking of Luce Irigaray. Certainly, Irigaray would see the Symbolic order in our culture as the "mediative function" of a phallic Imaginary interacting with the Real. Rosalind Minsky has outlined Luce Irigaray's critique as arguing that "women are condemned to a cultural wilderness unless the female imaginary - consisting of phantasies around the female body - can be symbolised, thus allowing women to become subjects in their own right rather than simply objects of symbolic projection", and that the only way women can enter the Symbolic at present is as "ersatz men".<sup>4</sup> What Luce Irigaray is working towards is a dually-structured Symbolic order: a Symbolic which is structured through difference, and is productive of - and can accommodate - a 'double syntax':

Might we not say that it is because it has produced and continues to 'hold' syntax that the masculine maintains mastery over discourse? [...] This syntax of discourse, of discursive logic - more generally, too, the syntax of social organization, 'political' syntax - isn't this syntax always [...] a means of masculine self-affection, or masculine self-production or reproduction?

---

3 Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, 'The Symbolic', in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, ed. by Elizabeth Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 420-423 (p. 423).

4 Rosalind Minsky, *Psychoanalysis and Gender: An Introductory Reader* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 194. Minsky differs from Ragland-Sullivan in writing the term 'imaginary' with a lower-case initial letter - which is also the style used by Luce Irigaray's translators. I shall follow the original when quoting, but use the capital in my own text, in order to distinguish the psychoanalytic term from colloquial usage.

[...] The 'other' syntax, the one that would make feminine 'self-affection' possible, is lacking, repressed, censured: the feminine is never affected except by and for the masculine. What we would want to put into play, then, is a syntax that would make women's 'self-affection' possible. A 'self affection' that would certainly not be reducible to the economy of sameness of the One, and for which the syntax and the meaning remain to be found.<sup>5</sup>

Developing the concept of syntax within the structure of the Symbolic enables the distinguishing of inflections, significations, and sites of enunciation. These are presently phallogentric; but the term syntax marks the possibility of appropriate signifiatory structures for women. It is this possibility of shifting the structure of the Symbolic which marks an important difference between Luce Irigaray's thinking and that of Jacques Lacan, as Rosalind Minsky outlines:

Unlike Lacan, she does not see the dominant male Imaginary (as the Symbolic) as unchangeable. This, she thinks, limits the potential of the Symbolic to the current masculine accounts of it. She argues, in a visionary mode, that women need to use their imaginations and creativity to construct a future Imaginary of their own with which they might create a new Symbolic. She argues that a radical transformation of the Symbolic and the social order could replace existing ways of thinking with a previously unimagined configuration of categories and syntax generated by two different Imaginaries, one related to the mother and women as themselves, and one related to men who would have abandoned their projections onto women.<sup>6</sup>

I would differ from Minsky only in re-asserting that the argument is not that women should "create a new Symbolic", but develop through sites of reserve an appropriate syntax. If phallogentric discourse is analyzed as a syntax within the Symbolic, then the Symbolic is dual and not in and of itself monolithic or phallic.

In this chapter I shall outline Luce Irigaray's critiques of the phallogentric visual and its lack of a syntax appropriate to woman,

---

5 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 132/*Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1977), pp. 130-131. Hereafter cited as *This Sex/Ce sexe*.

6 Rosalind Minsky, *Psychoanalysis and Gender*, p. 198.



and the effects of this upon visual representation - representation which is visible. In the following chapter I will explore the structure of the mirror and the speculum in Luce Irigaray's work; the link between the reserve of the mirror and the mimetic reserve described in the last section; Luce Irigaray's analysis of women's self-image and beauty; and finally the possibility of an inter-subject attentiveness - between women, between mother and daughter, between men and women - which emerges into the visible and extends our present notions of how the gaze, representation, and the reception of representation - viewing - might be configured.

### Critiques of phallogentrism's realm of the visual.

In his self-avowedly "Icarian overview, [...] unabashedly synoptic metanarrative" of the role assigned to the visual in twentieth century philosophy in France,<sup>7</sup> Martin Jay accords Luce Irigaray a particular place in his overall structure. The only woman named on the contents page, she effectively becomes (despite nods towards diversity) the representative of a "French feminism [which] added still more fuel to the antiocularcentric fire".<sup>8</sup> Denying her work any substantive context of feminist theory and practice, Jay instead places her as a direct follower of Jacques Derrida, giving her a sequential position in the chapter which is dedicated to the two. He thus manages to perform that disruption of female genealogies (in this instance, intellectual and political

---

7 Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, p. 542.

8 Martin Jay, *ibid.*, p. 498.



genealogies) which Luce Irigaray identifies as central to patriarchal structures; and at the same time he collapses her work back into the questionable category of 'French feminism'.<sup>9</sup> For example, he names "French theorists" such as Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Hélène Cixous, whose "various claims for a special women's relationship to language were frequently couched in antiocular terms"; and states that Luce Irigaray's work "implied that visual experience was inevitably caught in a dialectic of domination in which women were always the victims".<sup>10</sup> He treats "oculocentrism" and "antioculocentrism" as quasi-essentialist categories in his section on Luce Irigaray, rather than acknowledging that she is critiquing the overvaluation of particular structures of sight which are - and because they are - in intimate relation with structures of phallogentrism and supportive of the patriarchy. Luce Irigaray's political project and the political (and social, cultural) implications of her project are thus her 'nothing-to-see' in his 'blind-spot'. To collapse an anti-oculocentric critique into an anti-ocular position is as reductive as collapsing an anti-phallogentric critique into an anti-male position.

In her essay 'Illuminating Passion: Irigaray's Transfiguration of Night',<sup>11</sup> Cathryn Vasseleu goes some way to responding to Jay's analysis of Luce Irigaray. She returns us to the fact that Luce

---

9 See Christine Delphy, 'The Invention of French Feminism: An Essential Move', *Yale French Studies*, 87 (1995), 190-221. Delphy outlines the category of 'French feminism' as a construct within Anglo-American women's studies which is unrecognisable in France, pointing out that of the "Holy Trinity" within this category of Cixous, Kristeva and Irigaray, "the first two are completely outside feminist debate in France". Delphy, p. 192.

10 Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, pp. 528, 529, 538.

11 Cathryn Vasseleu, 'Illuminating Passion: Irigaray's Transfiguration of Night', in *Vision in Context*, ed. by Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 127-137.

Irigaray's critique of oculo-centrism is contingent upon her critique of phallogentrism and patriarchy: "there is no denying that much of Irigaray's criticism is directed toward the privileging of the visual in Western culture, which she argues is tied to the perpetuation of a monological masculine subjectivity";<sup>12</sup> and while acknowledging some similarity between Luce Irigaray's thought and Jacques Derrida's, she indicates a significant difference of focus between the two:

Like Derrida, Irigaray regards light as the founding metaphor of metaphysics. [...] [But] in Irigaray's naming of Western philosophy as photology, the weight of her argument does not fall on the elaboration of [this metaphor]. Her argument is instead directed toward the figuration of a complicity between photology and phallogentrism.<sup>13</sup>

While Vasseleu's aim of exploring Luce Irigaray's interest in light is tangential to my present project, these comments, along with her insistence that "Irigaray addresses illumination as an ineradicable passion"<sup>14</sup> and her observation that "Jay's discussion omits aspects of Irigaray's interest in the representability of feminine subjectivity and eroticism",<sup>15</sup> are useful. Firstly, they return Martin Jay's comments to gendered political structures, with the effect that his comments can then be seen as symptomatic of aspects of those structures (the 'blind spots' mentioned above). Blind spots can be noted in related areas: while Jay notes in passing Luce Irigaray's citation of Buddha's gaze at the flower,<sup>16</sup> he omits any mention of her evocations of a woman's visual pleasure in, for instance, *Elemental Passions*, which are

12 Cathryn Vasseleu, *ibid.*, p. 129.

13 Cathryn Vasseleu, *ibid.*, p. 130.

14 Cathryn Vasseleu, *ibid.*, p. 131.

15 Cathryn Vasseleu, *ibid.*, p. 129.

16 Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, p. 538. Luce Irigaray's treatment of Buddha's gaze will be discussed in the next chapter.



clearly not the writings of a woman who is anti-ocular. Secondly, Cathryn Vasseleu's comments indicate that Luce Irigaray has identified links between these phallogentric and patriarchal structures and the threaded areas of light, illumination, visibility, representation, the Symbolic, and sexuality.

In *Speculum* (the book Jay mainly discusses) and all her other work, Luce Irigaray is attacking, and negotiating strategic responses to, phallogentrism and its role as a founding structure in Western patriarchy. A passage in *Speculum* outlines the relationship between classic psychoanalysis and the phallogentric gaze:

By rights, though, the question should still be raised of the respective relationships between the gaze { *du regard, des regards* } and sexual difference, since, he [Freud] tells us, you have to see it { *il faut voir* } to believe it. And therefore, one must lose sight of something to see it anew { *ne pas voir pour revoir* }? Admittedly. But all the same... Unless all the potency, and the difference (?) were displaced into the gaze(s) { *le(s) regard(s)* }? So Freud will see, without being seen { *verra, sans être vu* }? Without being seen seeing { *Sans être vu voyant* }? Without even being questioned about the potency of his gaze { *son regard* }? Which leads to envy of the omnipotence of gazing { *ce regard* }, knowing? About sex/about the penis. To envy and jealousy of the eye-penis, of the phallic gaze { *regard* }? He will be able to see { *voir* } that I don't have one, will realize it in the twinkling of an eye { *clin d'œil* }. I shall not see { *ne verrai pas* } if he has one. More than me? But he will inform me of it. Displaced castration?<sup>17</sup>

Fundamental to phallogentrism is a dependence upon sight and the visual before all other senses, and the siting through sighting of woman as 'other of the same'. In the above passage Luce Irigaray demonstrates how this is embedded in both the theory and the practice of psychoanalysis. The phallogentric gaze sees the presence or absence of the penis before all else, and upon this (mis)sight builds its justificatory theory of castration. Additionally, the phallic gaze (Freud's gaze) is not to be gazed

---

17 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum Of The Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 47/*Speculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1974), p. 53. Hereafter cited as *Speculum/Speculum*.



upon, and thus remains unquestioned - not only potent, but in this way invested with omnipotence. Sitting behind the analysand, Freud sees that she does not have a gaze, in a conceptual structure of psychoanalytic practice which echoes the establishment of the 'fact' of woman's castration in the structure of psychoanalytic theory. The above passage continues:

*The gaze {le regard} is at stake from the outset. Don't forget, in fact, what "castration", or the knowledge of castration, owes to the gaze {le regard}, at least for Freud. The gaze {regard} has always been involved.*

Now the little girl, the woman, supposedly has *nothing* you can see {à voir}. She exposes, exhibits the possibility of a nothing to see {à voir}. Or at any rate she shows nothing {un rien [...] à regarder} that is penis-shaped or could substitute for a penis. This is the odd, the uncanny thing, as far as the eye can see {à perte de vue}, this nothing around which lingers in horror, now and forever, an overcathexis of the eye {de l'œil}, of appropriation by the gaze {le regard}, and of the *phallogomorphic* sexual metaphors, its reassuring accomplices.

[...] Woman's castration is defined as her having nothing you can see {rien à donner à voir}, and her having nothing. In her having nothing penile, in seeing {de voir} that she has No Thing. Nothing *like* man. That is to say, *no sex/organ* that can be seen {qui se montre} in a *form* capable of founding its reality, reproducing its truth. *Nothing to be seen {à voir} is equivalent to having no thing. No being and no truth.* The contract, the collusion between one sex/organ and the victory won by visual dominance {la maîtrise par le regard} therefore leaves woman with her sexual void, with an 'actual castration' carried out in actual fact. She has the option of a 'neutral' libido or of sustaining herself by 'penis-envy'.<sup>18</sup>

According to Freudian psychoanalysis, because woman has "nothing that is penis-shaped", woman has nothing. She is deemed to have no thing of her own, no being or truth of her own, no ontology; instead, she is deemed simply not to have the ontology of man. Thus she is 'other of the same', rather than accepted in and respected for her difference. The phallogentric gaze 'discovers' all this, and can account for it and confirm her as 'other of the same' through the structures of castration theory and penis-envy. Thus also the omnipotence of the phallogentric gaze is confirmed. The 'blind spots' of psychoanalysis and of phallogentrism are woman's body

and woman's sexuality. This, then, is the location of essentialism in the phallogentric economy: that the whole edifice of phallogentrism is built upon whether the penis can or cannot be seen and what is deduced from that, not upon whether the genitals seen are male or female. Phallogentric desire thus turns upon the sight of the penis. As Luce Irigaray says, "Auto-eroticism has become more autonomous, more powerful. And *invisible* as well, since it has entrusted itself to the eye and occupied the very site of sight."<sup>19</sup>

Two effects of phallogentrism's relation to the gaze must be mentioned. The first is found in Luce Irigaray's use of the term "hysteroscopy":

Yes, man's eye - understood as substitute for the penis - will be able to prospect woman's sexual parts, seek there new sources of profit. Which are equally theoretical. By doing so he further fetishizes (his) desire. But the danger of the mystery remains, however large a public has been recruited of late for "hysteroscopy".<sup>20</sup>

This appears to be a useful way of negotiating the difficulties which British feminism encountered in the 1970s when employing psychoanalysis in order to understand the phenomenon of pornography. Before images of women's genitals were routinely presented in 'high street' pornography, the concept of fetishism was used to account for the stylised and prop-laden imagery available in both pornography and art. Lisa Tickner wrote that "whilst the image of woman as fetishized object, repository for male sexual fantasies and fears, is 'acceptable' in our society, the image of the vulva itself which the fetish seeks to displace, is

---

19 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 95/*Speculum*, p. 116.

20 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 145/*Speculum*, p. 180. Translation modified.



'obscene"',<sup>21</sup> going on to say that such an analysis was not available in cultures such as the Japanese Ukiyo-e tradition, where directories of courtesans included portraits of their faces and vulvas. Laura Mulvey wrote: "it is man's narcissistic fear of losing his own phallus [...] which causes shock at the sight of the female genitals and the fetishistic attempt to disguise or divert attention from them".<sup>22</sup> Working from a Freudian model, she analyzes fetishism as "a disavowal of woman's lack of a penis, and therefore should always involve avoiding the direct sight of the female genitals".<sup>23</sup> Such analyses of fetishism - widely interpreted as concluding that the fetish *replaces* the sight of woman's 'castrated' genitals - were bound to require reevaluation upon the proliferation of images of women's genitals, alongside fetishistic props, in pornography in the UK from the late 1970s on. As John Ellis indicated in 1980, Laura Mulvey's 1973 position "seems to be unable to account for and analyze the ways in which current visual pornography is obsessed with women's genitals".<sup>24</sup> If we follow Luce Irigaray's analysis of phallocentrism's 'blind spots', and allow that the phallocentric gaze, rather than refusing to look at the 'horror' of women's genitals, instead *does not see what is there*, then such imagery can be more fully understood. John Ellis summarizes this as "I know (woman has no penis), nevertheless

---

21 Lisa Tickner, 'The Body Politic: Female Sexuality and Women Artists Since 1970', *Art History*, 1.2 (June 1978), 236-251 (p. 243).

22 Laura Mulvey, 'You Don't Know What is Happening, Do You, Mr Jones?', *Spare Rib*, 8 (1973), 13-16, 30 (p. 15).

23 John Ellis, 'Photography/Pornography/Art/Pornography', *Screen*, 21.1 (Spring 1980), 81-108 (p. 99). He is referring to Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16.3 (Autumn 1975), 6-18, which had been written in 1973, as was 'You Don't Know What is Happening, Do You, Mr Jones?', quoted above.

24 John Ellis, *ibid.*, p. 98.

(she has, through this fetish)'."<sup>25</sup> Fetishism 'completes' women's genitals for the phallic gaze, rather than replacing, or displacing, them. Fetishistic discourses of representation, as Griselda Pollock has said, produce "terms of a hierarchical difference premised on assigning a lack to a perfectly whole body".<sup>26</sup> Women's genitals are thus 'seen' in as much as they are looked at, but 'seen as' (and thus signify her as) lacking. Such a 'hysteroscopy' as we have experienced in pornographic imagery, rather than contradicting the fetishistic structure as outlined by Laura Mulvey, will constantly reinforce (in the phallogentric gaze and mind) woman's lack of ontology, that she is other of man's same, and confirm man in his hom(m)osexuality, the auto-erotics of phallogulologocentrism.

A second effect of phallogentrism's relation to the gaze is indicated by the following:

Surely man favors the visual {*visible*} because it marks his exit from the life in the womb? His victory over the maternal power and his opportunity to overcome a mother whom he experiences as amorphous, formless, a pit, a chasm in which he risks losing his form?<sup>27</sup>

Classic psychoanalysis has been remarkably disinterested in the space (physical, psychical, and chronological) between conception and the emergence of the 'subject' at birth. The first drives of the infant are said to follow birth; the inter-uterine, pre-birth experience appears not to be of import. This gap has become increasingly obvious not only through suggestive passages (on the placenta, on mother/daughter, on inter- and intra-subjectivity) in

25 John Ellis, *ibid.*, p. 100.

26 Griselda Pollock, 'Missing Women: Rethinking Early Thoughts on Images of Women', in *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, ed. by Carol Squiers (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991), pp. 202-219 (p. 219).

27 Luce Irigaray, 'Divine Women', in *Sexes and Genealogies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 55-72 (p. 59)/'Femmes divines', *Sexes et Parentes* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987), pp. 67-85 (p. 71).



Luce Irigaray's work, but more explicitly in the work of Julia Kristeva,<sup>28</sup> and that of Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger.<sup>29</sup> It also appears to be a gap which can be accounted for by the dependence of phallogentrism upon particular forms of visual access and understandings of what is seen. (One example might be the anecdotal gap between the way in which fathers-to-be are moved by 'seeing' 'their' babies moving in the womb - in effect, seeing the external effect of that movement - and their reactions to visible changes in their partner's bodies and effects such as morning sickness. Why does one make the baby-to-be more 'real' than the other?). Proliferating manifestations of 'hysteroscopy' other than pornography, such as increasing numbers of hysterectomies, caesarian births, and pre-natal scans, would be significant in this respect, but are really beyond the scope of this present project.

The above quote from Luce Irigaray<sup>30</sup> is also of interest for the added insight it offers regarding the constant reduction of women to mothers by patriarchal ideology. If, for phallogentrism, man's birth is birth into the realm of the visual (for the 'subject'), birth into visibility (of the 'subject' and his penis by others), birth into victory over maternal power, and birth from that place which he can see marks the otherness of his sameness, then *in the patriarchal structures informed by the phallogentric gaze* woman/women will always already be mother; the female other

---

28 For example, 'Revolution in Poetic Language', in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 89-136, and 'Stabat Mater', in *The Kristeva Reader*, pp. 160-186.

29 For example, Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, *The Matrixial Gaze* (Leeds: Feminist Arts and Histories Network, 1995), and 'Matrix and Metramorphosis', *Differences*, 4.3 (1992), 176-208.

30 "Surely man favors the visual {*visible*} because it marks his exit from the life in the womb? His victory over the maternal power and his opportunity to overcome a mother whom he experiences as amorphous, formless, a pit, a chasm in which he risks losing his form?"

will always be (m)otherness of his sameness, in his hom(m)osexual economy. The effect of this upon current understandings of woman's relation to origin will be discussed below.

Phallogulogocentrism: woman has no appropriate  
Symbolic syntax

Writing this becomes a struggle. Words fail. Within phallogocentric thinking there is no space, no comprehension, no air or water or warmth for a syntax in the Symbolic which is appropriate to women. If for phallogocentrism the man's ontology is the only one which signifies, hingeing on the metaphor of having or not having the penis (verifiable through sight), and the formulation 'woman' is produced only in negative relation to this possession, then so too will be her entry into the Symbolic order: what has come to be known as 'phallogocentrism'. Here, the penis is raised in the Imaginary to a relationship with the phallus as a signifier in the Symbolic. What is crucial here is that identification with the word, the structure and use of the word, is developed on *visual investigation* of having/not having the penis: what I would call phallogulogocentrism.

Luce Irigaray mimeticises Freud in order to expose his 'blind spot':

The little girl does not submit to the "facts" easily, she keeps waiting for "it to grow", and "believes in that possibility for improbably long years." Which means that no attempt will be made by the little girl - nor by the mother? nor by the woman? - to find symbols for the state of "this nothing to be seen", to defend its goals, or to lay claim to its rewards. *Here again no economy would be possible whereby sexual reality can be represented by/for the woman.*<sup>31</sup>



Once again the woman reader of this interrogation of Freud swims wildly between despair at the bleakness of the scenario given, and a grim laugh that Freud thought such a scenario credible, desirable, and the only one possible. In *Speculum* Luce Irigaray repeats at several points her analysis of woman's relation to the phallogocentric Symbolic syntax and the seen/not seen of the penis, each time coming at it with slightly different emphasis, or another twist:

[The main concepts of psychoanalysis] are too narrowly derived from the history and historicization of (so-called) male sexuality. From that process by which consciousness comes into being and woman remains the place for the inscription of repressions. All of which demands that, without knowing it, she should provide a basis for such fantasies as the amputation of her sex organ, and that the "anatomy" of her body should put up the security for reality. [...] She will therefore be despoiled, without recourse, of all valid, valuable images of her sex/organs, her body. She is condemned to "psychosis", or at best "hysteria", for lack - censorship? foreclosure? repression? - of a valid signifier for her "first" desire and for her sex/organs.<sup>32</sup>

If phallogocentrism 'sees' woman as other to man's sameness, then it follows that its concept 'woman' is representation of this. As such, 'she' does not represent her own ontology, and has no Symbolic syntax. As such, 'she' *does* represent (though maybe he cannot see it) his 'blind spot': she "remains the place for the inscription of repressions". Inscribed into *his* conception of her/of her body are *his* repressions, *his* 'horrors'; written into the visible of representations of her/of her body; written into *his* visibility; *his* representations. Buoyed up by this, patriarchy denies her access to symbolic structures; or, in 'liberal' regimes, permits limited access only insofar as she denies difference, *masquerades* as 'the same as', masquerades herself as 'other of the same' ("A man minus the possibility of (re)presenting oneself as a man = a woman".<sup>33</sup>). All else is either unseen or unsee-

---

32 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 55/*Speculum*, pp. 63-64.

33 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 27/*Speculum*, p. 27.

able, denied visibility or accorded only the space of latent or actual 'hysteria'. Hence Rosi Braidotti: "To sum up Irigaray's theory of sexual difference as a political and epistemological project, I would emphasize [...] the belief that *the subject Woman* is that which has been excluded in the masculine system of representation, because she is in excess of it and as such she is unrepresentable."<sup>34</sup> Denied her ontology and an appropriate syntax in the Symbolic, woman's subjecthood is also deniable: *the subjects, women*, are elsewhere from the 'woman' constructed by and represented in phallogocentrism. This echoes the findings of the chapter on productive mimesis. Luce Irigaray, however, warns us away from proposing a universal female subject: in relation to writing she has stated "if you think the feminine is diverse, as I believe, because subjectivity is diverse, then evidently style is diverse - short of its being a pure and simple technology. But then I don't know if it's possible to talk about a concrete subject, a feminine subject."<sup>35</sup> From now on, where it is necessary to distinguish, I will use the terminology 'woman' and the subjects, women (the latter in preference to Rosi Braidotti's singular "the subject, Woman").

It is the intersection of 'woman' and being the subjects, women, in the lives and languages - the self-representations - of actual women that Luce Irigaray's overall project aims to disentangle. The

---

34 Rosi Braidotti, 'Of Bugs and Women: Irigaray and Deleuze on the Becoming-Woman', in *Engaging With Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. by Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 111-137 (p. 123) (emphasis mine).

35 Luce Irigaray, "Je - Luce Irigaray": A Meeting with Luce Irigaray', interview by Elizabeth Hirsh and Gary A. Olson, trans. by Elizabeth Hirsh and Gaëtan Brulotte, in *Women Writing Culture*, ed. by Gary A. Olson and Elizabeth Hirsh (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 141-166 (p. 151).



problem remains in the phallic Symbolic syntax insofar as the phallic gaze cannot see the subjects, women, and as a result can only construct representations of 'her' - 'woman'. The subjects, women, therefore are nothing in the flaw that is its blind spot, unrepresentable:

A fault, a flaw, a lack, an absence, outside the system of representations and autorepresentations {*de représentations, d'auto-représentations*}. Which are man's. By a *hole* in men's signifying economy. A nothing that might cause the ultimate destruction, the splintering, the break in their systems of "presence", of "re-presentation" and "representation" {*de la "présence", de la "re-présentation", et "représentation"*}. A nothing threatening the process of production, reproduction, mastery, and profitability, of meaning, dominated by the phallus - that *master signifier* whose law of functioning erases, rejects, denies the surging up, the resurgence, the recall of a heterogeneity capable of reworking the principle of its authority.<sup>36</sup>

On the back of this 'nothing' that 'woman' is, is the reserve of the subjects, women; always already elsewhere, the subjects, women, are the danger in his blind spot, the danger of the 'mystery' that he has made. Placing this problem in the Symbolic is not a theoretical ruse for avoiding the messy, awkward, glorious world of the practical, the material, the empirical; but rather to attend to its function (as indicated at the start of this chapter) as a mediation between the Imaginary and the Real. How can women (including women artists) begin to articulate their experience - for example, through political, collective, strategic activity, and through the making of art - if the symbolic means available to them (and comprehensible) are not fully appropriate? It is politically urgent to identify where and why this may be the case, in order to develop strategies to counter the situation. The mimetic structures identified in the last chapter enable us to remain consciously in that place of reserve in order to develop strategies in the structures of this reality towards a Symbolic syntax which is more

appropriate. This is why Luce Irigaray is able to name the danger that the subjects, women, are to phallogocentric “systems of ‘presence’, of ‘re-presentation’ and ‘representation’” while appropriating terminology descriptive of the realm of the Symbolic order.

The phallogocentric account of ‘woman’s’ relation to origin is important for mapping the difference between ‘woman’ and the subjects, women. Cathryn Vasseleu once again prompts us to remember that this is indeed a phallogocentric account:

Irigaray’s analysis of phallogocentricity is of a metaphoricity that ensures that any engendering of maternal origin is never to come to light. Irigaray emphasizes that feminine participation in representation is subsumed within an exclusively patrilineal economy, where it remains supplementary to a fantasy of masculine autogenesis.<sup>37</sup>

Luce Irigaray describes how, in phallogocentric structures, once the little boy enters the phallic stage he desires to return to the place of origin - the mother - “in order to reestablish continuity with it and to see and know what happens there” and reproduce himself.<sup>38</sup> Phallic ‘knowledge’ is dependent upon sight - hysteroscopy - and, acting upon that knowledge, confirmation of man’s own ontology depends upon maintenance mimesis of the fathers. The structures of male heterosexuality, to re-iterate, depend upon desire to be the same - hom(m)osexuality - not upon desire for difference; and upon the sight of the other of the same.

Luce Irigaray develops this thread:

No return to, toward, inside the place of origin is possible unless you have a penis. It is indeed otherwise that the girl, the woman, will find an economy of original desire/desire for the origin. She will herself be the place where origin

---

37 Cathryn Vasseleu, ‘Illuminating Passion’, p. 130.

38 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 41/*Speculum*, p. 45.



is repeated, of her re-production, of reproduction itself {*la répétition de l'origine, de sa re-production, de la reproduction*}, though this does not mean that she thereby repeats 'her' original topos, 'her' origin. On the contrary, she must break any contact with it, or with her, and, making one last turn, by a kind of vault - up one *more* branch of the family tree - she must get to the place where origin can repeat *by being counted*.<sup>39</sup>

Woman cannot have a similar relation to origin because, within the phallic economy, as we have seen above, she is always already (m)other of the same: that is, she is site of origin for man. She is site of his maintenance mimesis, his reproduction of the same. She, who has not got one and is not one, cannot be counted in the economy of one + one + one + .... except by playing her role in maintaining man's genealogy. Shortly after this comment, when discussing woman's 'nothing to see', Luce Irigaray mentions in a footnote Freud's comments on women's genitals in his paper 'The uncanny': that, while women's genitals are considered *unheimlich* (uncanny, literally unhomely) by neurotic men, "this *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former *Heim* (home) of all human beings". Luce Irigaray comments on this statement: "The woman-mother would be *unheimlich* not only by reason of a repression of a primitive relationship to the maternal but also because her sex/organs are strange, yet close; while 'heimisch' as a mother, woman would remain 'un' as a woman".<sup>40</sup> I deduce from this that Luce Irigaray is indicating another instance of the reduction of women to mothers; it is the 'neurotic' man who cannot do this, who sees woman's genitals as the 'uncanny' of the phallic, while the 'normal' man can incorporate the sight of woman's genitals into the phallogocentric economy. (In the absence of Luce Irigaray's further investigation of him, then, two cheers for the 'neurotic' man. Maybe he could hint a way forward for the

---

39 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 41/*Speculum*, p. 45. Translation modified.

40 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, fn. 29, p. 48/*Speculum*, fn. 35, p. 54.

reconsideration of 'masculinity', as the hysteric does for 'femininity'.)

The discounting of woman's relation to origin has effects within phallogocentric representational systems:

Freud is still party to a certain logos and therefore to a certain economy of 'presence', and he will be able to picture {*se représenter*} the little girl becoming a woman only in terms of *lack, absence, default*, etc. To take an example or paradigm, Freud can discuss the little girl's relation to the place of origin only as a vacancy, a taking leave of the mother: as rejection, or hatred of the mother. That is to say, as a fault in the re-representation {*représentation*} of origin.<sup>41</sup>

Just as there is no parallel figuration and no symmetry between the two sexes in their relation to origin, so too there is no reciprocal arrangement in their relation to the present economy of representation. If woman is 'seen' as 'castrated', as not having something (which means, according to Luce Irigaray, having no ontology of her own, and thus no signifiers in the phallic Symbolic), then so too her relation to origin will be seen as negative. How can she love the fact that she is like something that has nothing, that is nothing but the gap where something should be? In discussing Elizabeth Grosz on Luce Irigaray, Margaret Whitford indicates the devastating effect of this:

*All relations between women, and particularly the most intense and intimate ones, are affected by the patriarchal rupture of the primitive mother-daughter bond. One can only identify with a phallic or castrated mother, i.e., with a mother as defined by the patriarchal economy. To become a woman in patriarchy means in effect abandoning the mother.*<sup>42</sup>

Luce Irigaray has described this eloquently and even more forcefully as not being a *displacement* of the woman's origin-desire, nor an *abandonment*, but "an exile, and extradition, an

---

41 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, pp. 41-42/*Speculum*, pp. 45-46.

42 Margaret Whitford, 'Reading Irigaray in the Nineties', in Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford, *Engaging with Irigaray*, pp. 15-33 (p. 28).



exmatriation, from this/her economy of desire. [...] Woman would thus find no possible way to represent or tell *the story of the economy of her libido*.”<sup>43</sup>

With no syntax in the Symbolic appropriate to her, and with a total disruption of her genealogies, woman is in a state of dereliction. Hysteria - actual or latent - is once again a structural inevitability: in attempting to wrest control of her subjectivity, her womanliness, her sexuality (as outlined in the section on mimesis), the hysteric finds herself in a non-symbolised space - the space of hysterical paralysis, hysterical muteness, hysterical babbling, incomprehensible in the present Symbolic order, incomprehensible as it has no syntax appropriate to it, and without any collectivity of action lending potential mediation among women, to women, and in response to which phallogentrism has no ‘cure’ other than a re-training in the syntax and languages of the phallic economy:

But this fault, this deficiency, this ‘hole’, inevitably affords woman too few figurations, images, or representations by which to represent herself. It is not that she lacks some ‘master signifier’ or that none is imposed upon her, but rather that access to a signifying economy, to the coining of signifiers, to their exchange, is difficult or even impossible for her because she remains an outsider, herself (a) subject to their norms. She borrows signifiers but cannot make her mark, or re-mark upon them. Which all surely keeps her deficient, empty, lacking, in a way that could be labelled ‘psychotic’: a *latent* but not actual psychosis, for want of a practical signifying system.<sup>44</sup>

Instead, there is a distanceless proximity between the woman and her utterance, and thus between women: “this distanceless proximity between women - between mother and daughter? - distanceless because no symbolic process allows us to account for

---

43 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 43/*Speculum* p. 47.

44 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 71/*Speculum*, p. 85.

it."<sup>45</sup>

This is obviously of great relevance when women's ability to make meaning through visual arts is under consideration. Within Western economies of representation, we have patriarchal structures, accountable under the strict regime of phallogocentrism. As a sub-section, in 'Fine Art' we have the seemingly mutable languages of representation within the art markets (including the art schools, the journals, etc) of modernity. But as the slightest examination reveals, these structures, while feigning a liberating openness and multiplicity, are unforgivingly patriarchal at all levels - from their structural organization through to the visible and material symbols of the works they trade. They are riven with father-son power struggles dressed in the clothes of the market's desire for novelty (the avant-garde), which mask the fundamental maintenance mimesis through which continuity is ensured. The sons are taught; stars validated; markets guaranteed. The position of women attempting to make meaning - develop a Symbolic syntax - comprehensible within these structures is compromised to an extent hard to underestimate. The art world requires that its artists produce work which can be accounted for within the structures of maintenance mimesis, and at the same time be seen as developing a visual language unique to the individual artist. It is this surface appearance of symbolic openness that appears both seductive and terrifying to the young women who are the majority of art students; it is the structure of maintenance mimesis that ensures them restricted success, whether in real terms

---

45 Luce Irigaray, 'The Limits of the Transference', trans. by David Macey, in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 105-117 (p. 107)/'La limit du transfert', in *Parler n'est jamais neutre* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985), pp. 293-304 (pp. 295-296).



(recognition) or in producing an appropriate Symbolic syntax: as Luce Irigaray says, “she borrows signifiers but cannot make her mark, or re-mark upon them.”

### Disrupting phallogocentrism

There are points of utter, unflinching bleakness in Luce Irigaray's analysis of the situation in which women find themselves in relation to the Symbolic order. However, as with mimesis, Luce Irigaray analyzes, in order to identify, places for resistance, moments of reserve - “the cultural reserve yet to come”; far from performing what might be called a ‘victim feminism’, “she is envisaging the most far-reaching sociosymbolic reconstruction”.<sup>46</sup> Some of the complexities of this in relation to the Symbolic are already clear: a woman's negative relation to phallogocentrism being a negative which is not simply a symmetrical opposite; her genealogies and relation to origin being utterly disrupted; her body, her sexuality, her ontology being unseen and unspoken; the strategy of productive mimesis being one of the few open to her; her “cultural reserve yet to come” being literally unspeakable, lacking an appropriate Symbolic syntax.

Women's strategies within the realm of representation will need to be multi-layered, multi-threaded:

For what is important is to disconcert the staging of representation {*le montage de la représentation*} according to *exclusively* ‘masculine’ parameters, that is, according to a phallogocentric order. It is not a matter of

toppling that order so as to replace it - that amounts to the same thing in the end - but of disrupting and modifying it, starting from an 'outside' that is exempt, in part, from phallocratic law.<sup>47</sup>

"Disconcert", "disrupt", "modify": these are terms which prefigure the tone of the later book *I Love to You*, with its aim of creating a dialogic space for both genders, an accommodation between a syntax in the Symbolic appropriate to men and a syntax in the Symbolic appropriate to women, and a space of attentiveness for the male/female couple. Although Luce Irigaray appears to have been welcomed as a theorist for lesbian separatism,<sup>48</sup> I feel that this is too simplistic a reading of her earlier work. The emphasis on woman to woman relationships throughout Luce Irigaray's work is strongly inclusive of lesbian women, of woman-to-woman love, of woman-to-woman sexuality, of woman-to-woman intersubjectivity; but as demonstrated in the above passage (and others), Luce Irigaray did not, even in these earlier works, envisage a world without men, without a syntax appropriate to men. A world without patriarchy, yes; a world where the economies of representation are not the dominion of phallocentrism, yes; but still a world where women and men would, at some level, have to reach some accommodation with each other. (Connected to this is her expression of distrust of what has become known as 'feminism', which, however, never detracts from her rigorous anti-patriarchal stance, and her insistence that men have to change.) As she says in *Je, Tu, Nous*, "what is important [...] is to define the values of belonging to a gender, valid for each of the two genders. It is vital that a culture of the sexual, as yet nonexistent, be

---

47 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 68/*Ce sexe*, p. 67.

48 Margaret Whitford, 'Reading Irigaray in the Nineties', p. 27.



elaborated, with each sex respected".<sup>49</sup> In *I Love to You* she describes herself as "a political militant for the impossible, which is not to say a utopian. Rather, I want what is yet to be as the only possibility of a future".<sup>50</sup> While in that book she discusses the possibility of raising children ethically, of mothering *and* fathering in an accommodative ethical framework,<sup>51</sup> it is clear that, for Luce Irigaray, respecting women includes respecting love between women, be that social, familial, sexual, or in the realm of the 'divine'.

"Disconcert[ing] the staging of representation according to exclusively 'masculine' parameters", therefore, should not be confused with substituting 'masculine' representations with 'feminine'. To do so, even in the name of a matriarchy or a sorority, would be to use the same structure of domination as those found in phallographic orders - indeed, could be to perform a maintenance mimesis upon phallogentrism. Instead, Luce Irigaray has placed the term 'masculine' in citation marks, implying that the term is as available for scrutiny and reordering as is the term 'feminine'. The phallographic order, then, is not a monolith, but contingent upon its own representational orders, contingent upon phallogulologocentrism. As I demonstrated in the last chapter, Luce Irigaray would concur with Audre Lourde that the master's tools would not

---

49 Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, trans. by Alison Martin (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 12/*Je, tu, nous: pour une culture de la différence* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), p. 11. Hereafter cited as *Je, Tu, Nous/Je, tu, nous*.

50 Luce Irigaray, *I Love To You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History*, trans. by Alison Martin (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 10/*J'aime à toi: esquisse d'une félicité dans l'histoire* (Paris: Grasset), p. 26. Hereafter cited as *I Love To You/J'aime à toi*.

51 This is at least in part, I think, because that book resulted from requests from the mixed-sex FGCI (Federation of Young Communists of Italy) - hence its pedagogical air; and from reflections upon her own encounters with mixed-sex meetings of the PCI (Italian Communist Party). See the 'Prologue' of *I Love to You*, pp. 1-17/*J'aime à toi*, pp. 11-37.

destroy the master's house; here she is saying that the job has to start "from an 'outside' that is exempt, in part, from phallogocratic law". I would take this 'outside' to refer to the 'cultural reserve yet to come'; it remains within citation marks because phallogocratic law does not recognize anything (as being) beyond its control, and because the 'cultural reserve yet to come' is as yet virtually unsymbolised in an appropriate way. Tina Chanter points out:

While in one sense - by virtue of her exclusion from it - woman is already 'outside' representation, in another sense, her exclusion does not automatically provide her with the resources to interpret it from another standpoint. Reinterpretations of the place that woman is (such as Irigaray presents in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*) have to be worked at, produced, and crafted. As Irigaray says, "There is no simple manageable way to leap to the outside of phallogocentrism, *nor any way to situate oneself there, that would result from the simple fact of being a woman.*"<sup>52</sup>

It is Rosi Braidotti's identification of "the subject, Woman" in Luce Irigaray which is important to be recalled here, "excluded in the masculine system of representation" as she is, "in excess of it and [...] unrepresentable. This Woman, revindicated as the rallying point of feminist-minded women, also opens the possibility of elaborating an-other system of representation."<sup>53</sup> Luce Irigaray's strategy of productive mimesis is at the heart of growing a Symbolic syntax of the subjects, women. As Rosi Braidotti says:

... [it] amounts to a collective repossession by women of the images and representations of 'Woman' as they have been coded in language, culture, science, knowledge, and discourse and consequently internalized in the heart, mind, body, and lived experience of women. Mimetic repetition as a textual and political strategy is the active subversion of established mode of the representation and expression of women's experience. In this respect the redefinition of the subject Woman/women as both representation and experience amounts to no less than a change of civilization, of genealogy, of a sense of history. Feminist countergenealogies are the inroads to a new symbolic system by women.<sup>54</sup>

---

52 Tina Chanter, *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray's Rewriting of the Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 171. The quote from Luce Irigaray is from *This Sex*, p. 162/*Ce sexe*, p. 157.

53 Rosi Braidotti, 'Of Bugs and Women', pp. 123-4.

54 Rosi Braidotti, *ibid.*, pp. 120-121.



This collective repossession by women of the representations of 'Woman' requires, according to Braidotti, a moment of "a strategic form of essentialism", which she defines as "the temporary strategy that defines as Woman the stock of cumulated knowledge about the female, sexed subject - whose traits, qualities, and representation affect every woman. For each woman is the empirical referent of all that has been symbolized as femininity, the female subject, and the feminine."<sup>55</sup> Once again, this is not a simple act of reversal. As Luce Irigaray says in the passage quoted by Tina Chanter above, "there is no simple manageable way to leap to the outside of phallogocentrism, *nor any way to situate oneself there, that would result from the simple fact of being a woman.*" The subjects, women, are not the same as "the stock of cumulated knowledge" about 'her' ('woman'), nor 'her' supposed "traits, qualities, and representation". As I have demonstrated above, the moment of 'essentialism' in phallogocentrism is dependent upon the sight of the penis, not upon the possession or otherwise of male or female genitals. Repossessing representations in order to perform the productive mimesis upon them thus entails passing through this phallogocentric moment of 'essentialist' categorisation. It is risky; but should hold little fear for women with collective cognisance of the structures of mimesis and the mimetic reserve.

Luce Irigaray points out that the deductions made by the phallic gaze upon seeing woman's genitals - even upon mis-seeing them as 'nothing' - are not inevitable:

This nothing, which actually cannot well be mastered in the twinkling of an

---

55 Rosi Braidotti, *ibid.*, p. 124.

eye, might equally well have acted as an inducement to perform castration upon an age-old oculo-centrism. It might have been interpreted as the intervention of a difference, of a deferent {*un diffèrend*}, as a challenge to an imaginary whose functions are often improperly regulated in terms of sight {*dominé un peu abusivement par le regard*}. Or yet again as the 'symptom', the 'signifier,' of the possibility of an *other* libidinal economy, of a heterogeneity unknown in the practice of a discourse about the designated libido. Now the 'castration complex' in becoming a woman will merely close off, repress? or censure? such possible interpretations.<sup>56</sup>

Oculo-centrism could have been castrated - had its position of centrality and dominance removed - had the sight of the 'missing' penis been seen not as the sight/site of something missing, of nothing, and thus as the site of the other of the same, but instead seen as the sight/site of difference, the site of man's difference and woman's difference. Woman's genitals would be seen, as are man's also; they would not be seen merely as not-man's, not-penis, no-thing.

What is at stake here is not sight, not the ocular, but *its structural function* at the centre of the phallic economy. Resulting from her critique of phallogocentrism, Luce Irigaray suggests that the ocular be divested of its centrality, and that touch - devalued in the phallic economy - be revalued. As shown earlier in this chapter, Luce Irigaray states that man's overvaluation of sight arises in part from his entry into the realm of the visual - birth - being marked also as his shedding of what he experiences as the amorphous formlessness of the maternal body. In order to maintain his 'manliness' (to be able to identify with the phallic construction of masculinity in the Symbolic order), to maintain 'woman' as the other of his same, the phallic subject then subjects women to the realm of the visual through the structures of phallogocentrism:

---

56 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, pp. 48/*Speculum*, pp. 54.



Within this logic, the predominance of the visual {*regard*}, and of the discrimination and individualization of form, is particularly foreign to female eroticism. Woman takes pleasure more from touching than from looking {*du regard*}, and her entry into a dominant scopic economy {*économie scopique*} signifies, again, her consignment to passivity: she is to be the beautiful object of contemplation {*le bel objet à regarder*}.<sup>57</sup>

If a critique of the representation 'woman' as "the beautiful object of contemplation" is one of the mainstays of feminist cultural theory, then the other two points in this passage - "the discrimination and individualization of form", and woman's pleasure in touch - are not so common, and bear some thinking about. Once again, there will be distinct implications for art practice.

In the context of a passing reference to Luce Irigaray, Rosi Braidotti has said that "in many respects, Irigaray's project can be seen as an attempt to replace the visual with the tactile, seeing with touching."<sup>58</sup> I would respond that the word 'replace' here can be misleading. Certainly, Luce Irigaray does not wish to replace the phallic structures of seeing with similar structures for touch. She does, however, disrupt the position of sight as the originating sense:

We regress and we progress, way beyond all sense of sight, from the most primitive to the subtlest realm of the tactile. Everything is given to us by means of touch, a mediation that is continually forgotten. Anything that emerges into the visible realm {*comme visible*}, the images of man and the world, remains for awhile in history, but this visual birth {*une naissance*} does not fulfil all our native potentialities.<sup>59</sup>

Before this "image of man" emerges into the visual - before he enters the present phallic syntax of the Symbolic order - he is in

---

57 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, pp. 25-26/*Ce sexe*, p. 25.

58 Rosi Braidotti, 'Body-Images and the Pornography of Representation', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 1.2 (1991), 137-151 (p. 148).

59 Luce Irigaray, 'Divine Women', p. 59/'Femmes divines', p. 71.

the realm of touch; he sets up the visual as prime in order to differentiate himself from a pre-natal and pre-Symbolic, maternal, context. Equally, touch is literally the 'unseen' of sight, in so far as sight is dependent upon the inter-relation through touch of the component parts of the eyeball and eye socket. In this, touch can be understood as the 'reserve' of sight, unsymbolised. As women begin constructing a Symbolic syntax appropriate for their subjectivity, so the relative importance of sight and touch will shift: "This 'style', or 'writing', of women tends to put the torch to fetish words, proper terms, well-constructed forms. This 'style' does not privilege sight {*le regard*}; instead, it takes each figure back to its source, which is among other things *tactile*".<sup>60</sup>

Fundamental to the primacy of the phallic gaze is a continuation and exaggeration of the move from the empirical experience of matter (as in the experience of touch) towards the differentiation of form (which is what the phallic economy requires of sight): "the gaze - and the theory, the *theória* - must be protected by being resolved into a phallomorphic representation, into phallic categories. By being considered, for example, only 'in regard to' {*au regard*} the shape of the male sex organ".<sup>61</sup> Cathryn Vasseleu brings this back to the phallic economy of representation: "The exclusion [of women from representation] is achieved in the differentiation between form and matter, in which matter remains the site of an unthematizable materiality. Though masculine identity is formulated in opposition to matter, the feminine as matter cannot be thought".<sup>62</sup> I would broadly agree that this would be Luce

---

60 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 79/*Ce sexe* p. 76.

61 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 80/*Speculum*, p. 97.

62 Cathryn Vasseleu, 'Illuminating Passion', p 130.



Irigaray's position, as long as we take "the feminine" here to be the subjects, women.<sup>63</sup> This whole discussion will inform later discussion of process and materiality of art works.

Yet there is further reason, I think, to question Rosi Braidotti's suggestion that Luce Irigaray's aim is to "replace" sight with touch. While she does indeed disrupt the *relative valuation* of sight and touch, she suggests also that things and experience *in the realm of the visual* can be seen and interpreted differently; and in order to make her point she uses the visual representational analogies of the rebus and the pictograph in a discussion of dreams (plate 1):

Yet the fact that the dream can be interpreted only as a 'rebus' should have persuaded the 'reader' to turn it in all directions and positions, and not favor one type of inscription that would already prescribe a meaning to it: a linear, teleologically horizontal or vertical displacement, over a surface as yet unwritten, which it brands by cutting it up according to rules of repetition and recurrence, obeying processes that already paralyze the 'body's' system of gestures within a given graphic order, etc. Why not rather have recalled those 'pictures' {*images*} made for children, pictographs in which the hunter and hunted {*chassé(e)*}, and their dramatic relationships, are to be discovered *between* the branches, *made out* from *between* the trees. From the spaces between the figures, or stand-in figures. Spaces that organize the scene, blanks that sub-tend the scene's structuration and that will yet not be read as such. Or not read at all? Nor seen at all? Never in truth represented or representable, though this is not to say that they have no effect upon the present scenography.<sup>64</sup>

Through this visual analogy Luce Irigaray provides a thumbnail sketch of many strands of her thought: phallic dominance; the '*parler-femme*' yet to come; maintenance mimesis; hysteric paralysis; the unseen of the visible; the 'nothing-to-see' that is 'woman'. Thus she reminds us not to throw the baby of the visual

---

63 It also depends upon a continuum between thought and the Symbolic; a moot point, tangential to the present discussion. Luce Irigaray clearly outlines a link between becoming the subject, woman, and access to an appropriate symbolic; from which one could infer a continuum of sorts between thought and the Symbolic. See, for example, *Speculum*, p. 124/*Speculum*, p. 155.

64 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, pp. 137-8/*Speculum*, pp. 170-171.



# THE SPORTSMAN'S DILEMMA.



The Sportsmen go out Shooting and find some Game, when they suddenly lose both Dog and Bird. The Puzzle is to find them.  
[E. Smith & Co., London.]

man. Luce Irigaray outlines the passage of this *The Sportsman's Dilemma*  
n.d. Print  
structures: Courtesy the Bodleian Library, Oxford University

the given of the place of origin, the original dwelling, even if not only the  
Warren but the mother can be unveiled to the right, what will be made of the  
suspension of the mine? Except itself even more the right to look at  
everything, at the place where he finally believes he is working to reduce an  
Eros. Even if it should be a transcendental desire. What will be, what will  
they have seen as a result of that dilation? And what will they get out of it? A  
dilation quite as Eros, since the transcendental keeps its secret. Between  
empirical and transcendental a suspense will still remain invisible, will escape  
inspection, then, now, and in the future. The space-time of the risk that  
remains will be consumed, catch fire, in the fire in the light in the optical  
failure, the impossibility of gazing on their encounters in flame, the split  
(schizo) founding and restructuring the difference between appearance and  
transcendental (especially phallic) evidence will turn into. Deconstructive/ex-  
colonized crisis of ontico-ontological difference. What market of reading of  
economy will ensue? To tell the truth, no one knows. And, to say with truth,

65 Luce Irigaray has re-enacted the analogy of the photograph in a more recent  
interview: "If the culture is founded on a certain inscription of the gender order, and if that  
which returns at night under the guise of the dream becomes itself as a sort of photograph,  
don't there the lines of a truth that appears with photographs over the fact already just  
technically represented [...] I know that a truth is, each writing is there, photographs are  
generally more favourable to the feminine principle and a culture of the feminine." (Luce  
Irigaray, p. 137)

66 Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous*, p. 137, in *Sexes et Genres*, p. 137.



out with the bath-water of the phallic economy; but rather to disrupt the phallic economy *within* the visual: to disrupt phallogocentrism.<sup>65</sup>

The effects of disrupting the phallogocentric will of course not only be found among women, nor in an essentialist, separatist 'woman's Symbolic'. The Symbolic syntax appropriate to women and that appropriate to men, and the representation of men and women in their difference, will not occur with one syntax in isolation from the other: "You can't change one without changing the other. Yet while it's impossible to radically separate one from the other, we can shift the emphasis of cultural transformation from one to the other, above all we must not wait, passively, for language to progress".<sup>66</sup> Thus, there will be a resultant crisis of ontology for man. Luce Irigaray outlines the passage of this through phallogocentric structures:

For even if the place of origin, the original dwelling, even if not only the woman but the mother can be unveiled to his sight, what will he make of the exploration of this mine? Except usurp even more the right to look at everything, at the place where he firmly believes he is working to reduce an illusion. Even if it should be a transcendental illusion. What will he, what will they, have *seen* as a result of that dilation? And what will they get out of it? A disillusion quite as illusory, since the transcendental keeps its secret. Between empirical and transcendental *a suspense will still remain inviolate*, will escape prospection, then, now, and in the future. The space-time of the risk that fetishes will be consumed, catch fire. In this fire, in this light, in the optical failure, the impossibility of gazing on their encounters in flame, the split (schize) founding and restructuring the difference between experience and transcendental (especially phallic) eminence will burn also. *Exquisite/ex-schizoid crises of ontico-ontological difference*. What manner of recasting all economy will ensue? To tell the truth, no one knows. And, to stay with truth,

---

65 Luce Irigaray has re-enforced the analogy of the pictograph in a more recent interview: "If the culture is founded on a certain repression of the graphic order, and if that which returns at night under the guise of the dream presents itself as a sort of pictograph, isn't there the trace of a much more generalizable pictographic order that had already been historically repressed [...] I know that cultures in which writing is more pictographic are generally more favourable to the feminine subject and to a culture of the feminine." 'Je - Luce Irigaray', p. 157.

66 Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous*, p. 32/*Je, tu, nous*, p. 34.

you can only fear the worst. For you may fear a general crisis in the value system, a foundering of the values now current, the devaluation of their standard and of their regimen of monopolies.<sup>67</sup>

If through hysteroscopy man can gaze at will upon his site of origin - in the name of exploration, reduction of mystery - he is still gazing at an illusion. Woman transcends man (just as man transcends woman<sup>68</sup>) but the phallic gaze cannot recognize this. It does not recognize the subjects, women. In this non-recognition - this impossibility of seeing what is happening in the encounter - resides the risk for phallic, patriarchal man. Structures will change as the present values crumble.

### Visible representation in phallogocentrism

As components of the Symbolic order, visible representations are of course products of, comprehensible in, and producers of, the same dominative orders as other components, notably verbal languages and representational systems. Luce Irigaray's constant returns to the economy of representation as the most urgent and productive site of struggle prioritises the *structures* of that economy, rather than attending only to the disposition of a particular type of representation.<sup>69</sup> The inclusive result of this can be seen in *Je, Tu, Nous* where she outlines pragmatic steps which can be taken to help "get out of this vicious circle of the patriarchal phallogocentric order [...] through subjective relations

---

67 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 145/*Speculum*, pp. 180-181.

68 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, pp. 103-105/*J'aime à toi*, pp. 161-164.

69 Thus, while her linguistic research focuses on verbal representation, her delimitation of representational structure does not.



between mothers and daughters".<sup>70</sup> These steps are within pictorial representation, gestural representation, spatial representation, verbal representation, representations through other forms of visibility (such as mirrors) and through concrete objects, particularly ones made by women.<sup>71</sup>

My reading of Luce Irigaray leads me to argue that within phallographic systems particular and urgent attention to representation in the visible is necessary. Women's attempts to construct an appropriate Symbolic syntax through visible representations have qualities verging on the poignant and the heroic, but with deeply political potential. The phallogocentric order, structured as it is upon a primacy of sight, is productive of an apparent ease of mediation through visual languages. This results from its projection of qualities of transparency onto the image, rather than treating as problematic both that which images might represent, and methods of seeing and reading those images. Seeing is believing, as Luce Irigaray has pointed out in relation to the founding metaphor of phallogocentrism: castration theory, based upon man seeing or not-seeing the penis;<sup>72</sup> thus images are endowed with a common-sense non-questionability, a claim to verity. In particular, the brutality towards women often represented by images (including the brutality of denying women's ontology and subjectivity) frequently remains unquestioned; or, if it is questioned from within the women's movement, the response elsewhere can be one of incredulity. But the 'real', the 'truth', the 'norm', and the

---

70 Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous*, p. 47/*Je, tu, nous*, p. 53.

71 Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous*, pp. 47-50/*Je, tu, nous*, pp. 53-56.

72 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 47/*Speculum*, p. 53.

'inevitability' of visual images are of course those traits *as developed within* and defined by phallogentrism; women's relation to them is determined by their production in and relation to a phallic syntax. Hence, the psychic brutality towards women frequently represented by, or produced by, visual imagery is an inevitable result of woman's excision from her genealogies and her lack of an appropriate Symbolic syntax. Thus it is also more far-reaching than might be expected by those who discuss only particular categories of images, and (ironically) only in terms of them being transparent representations, 'offensive to' or 'degrading of' women.<sup>73</sup> This position is significant politically; but the picture is (pictures are) more complex.

In the course of discussing civil rights for women, Luce Irigaray includes the right to feel at ease in public places and in the privacy of their homes; and in doing so she stresses specifically the role of visual representations:

We now know what horrors such ease hides. We know to what private or public violence women have been subjected and are subjected, on the pretext of an easier life for them - direct violence or violence mediated to varying degrees by images {*images*}, symbols, etc.<sup>74</sup>

This develops from her position in an earlier, and often-quoted, paragraph (part of which I have already cited above), where she links the visual at all levels with phallogocratic logic:

Within this logic, the predominance of the visual {*regard*}, and of the

---

73 I include my past self here: in the informal activist anti-pornography group I was a part of in the early 1980s, and in related sections of the movement such as Women Against Violence Against Women, this was the terminology developed. For example: "This rapidly expanding sector of the economy [i.e., pornography] relies on the degradation and humiliation of women to provide 'entertainment' for men", Central London WAVAW, 'What is Pornography?', *Spare Rib*, 118 (1982), 52-55 (p. 55).

74 Luce Irigaray, *Thinking the Difference: For a Peaceful Revolution*, trans. by Karin Montin (London: Athlone Press, 1994), p. 82/*Le temps de la différence: pour une révolution pacifique* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche/Librairie Générale Française, 1989), p. 96.



discrimination and individualization of form, is particularly foreign to female eroticism. Woman takes pleasure more from touching than from looking {*du regard*}, and her entry into a dominant scopic economy signifies, again, her consignment to passivity: she is to be the beautiful object of contemplation {*le bel objet à regarder*}. While her body finds itself thus eroticized, and called to a double movement of exhibition and of chaste retreat in order to stimulate the drives of the 'subject', her sexual organ represents *the horror of nothing to see* {*du rien à voir*}. A defect in this systematics of representation and desire. A 'hole' in its scopophilic lens. It is already evident in Greek statuary that this nothing-to-see has to be excluded, rejected, from such a scene of representation. Woman's genitals are simply absent, masked, sewn back up inside their 'crack'.<sup>75</sup>

At the centre of this passage is representation in the visual. The phallogocratic economy is predominantly scopic; there is the question of the relation of touch and the visible, discussed above; 'woman' is the object of visual contemplation; her genitals are not only 'nothing-to-see', but they *represent* 'nothing-to-see'. Thus, her genitals are excluded from "such a scene of representation" as the realm of 'art' - that other production of beautiful objects of contemplation.

There is a paradox here, that this exclusion of women's genitals from 'art' should exist alongside the hysteroscopy discussed earlier. If 'woman' is phallogocentrism's representation of the subjects, women, (who of course cannot be seen by it) and one of the ideal manifestations of this representation, 'woman', is "the beautiful object of contemplation", then this is what phallogocentric man will re-reproduce, as the ideal, and a carrier of his meaning, in his 'art'.<sup>76</sup> I would like to refer to this as the representation, 'woman', further developing my earlier distinction between 'woman' and the subjects, women, and indicating that 'woman' is a

---

75 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, pp. 25-26/*Ce sexe*, pp. 25-26.

76 In a further turn, this helps ensure latent hysteria, as we have seen: "woman's special form of neurosis would be to 'mimic' a work of art, to be *a bad (copy of a) work of art*". Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 125/*Speculum*, p. 156.

series of phallogocentric representations.<sup>77</sup> If women's genitals and their significance - that the subjects, women, have her/their own relation to origin, and a potential appropriate Symbolic syntax - cannot be seen, then they will not be shown. If what phallogocentric man sees when he sees her/their genitals is the "horror of nothing to see" and what Luce Irigaray calls elsewhere the "danger of the mystery"<sup>78</sup> of this 'nothing', then they can have no place in his *re-representation* in 'art' of 'woman' as "the beautiful object of contemplation". If they did, there would be an intolerable tension between his attempt at an act of contemplation and, on the one hand, the representation, 'woman's' loss of status as a passive object, and on the other the continually anxious investigation by his hysteroscopic gaze. The two are, of course, contiguous; the one will signify the other, and the one cannot exist without the other. In understanding their interdependence, phallogocentric man may well *name them* as the virgin and the whore, rather than seeing them both as his/the representation, 'woman': once again seeing and naming ('oculo-logo') without reflecting upon the sources of that act of seeing ('oculo-logocentric').

It is in relation to this interdependence being made manifest in works by artists from Courbet to Kitaj that we find many examples of high anxiety in comments by art writers.<sup>79</sup> Lynda Nead cites

---

77 Actual women act out and live through these representations - become these representations - in their everyday lives through the structures of mimesis, as discussed in earlier chapters. This is policed in the everyday by patriarchal implementation of phallogocentrism.

78 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 145/*Speculum*, p. 180. Translation modified.

79 When the interdependence of hysteroscopy and the beautiful object of contemplation is made explicit by a woman, however, then the reaction, rather than anxiety to accommodate, can be one of anger or censorship. One example of this would be the general critical denigration of the untitled installation by Zoe Leonard in the 1992 Documenta, in Kassel,



many in *The Female Nude*; one of the most apposite coming from Kenneth Clark:

To my mind art exists in the realm of contemplation, and is bound by some sort of imaginative transposition. The moment art becomes an incentive to action it loses its true character. This is my objection to painting with a communist programme, and it would also apply to pornography. [...] There are one or two doubtful cases - a small picture of copulation by Géricault and a Rodin bronze of the same subject. Although each of these is a true work of art, I personally feel that the subject comes between me and complete aesthetic enjoyment.<sup>80</sup>

Another example from Clark (not cited by Nead) concerns Boucher's painting *Miss O'Murphy* (plate 2). While showing an awareness of the contiguity between the representation, 'woman', and hysteroscopy, nonetheless Clark sees, names, and omits to reflect upon the source of that act of seeing to the point of absurdity:

Freshness of desire has seldom been more delicately expressed than by Miss O'Murphy's round young limbs, as they sprawl with undisguised satisfaction on the cushions of her sofa. By art Boucher has enabled us to enjoy her with as little shame as she is enjoying herself. One false note and we should be embarrassingly back in the world of sin.<sup>81</sup>

This omission includes neglecting to reflect upon the material practices of composing a painting (*her* choice of pose?), the generally known material realities of Louise O'Murphy's life as the teenage daughter of an emigrant Irish cobbler, whose sisters were prostitutes and who was herself 'the King's mistress' (*her* cushions and sofa?), let alone desire (*her* desire?), and saying nothing of "undisguised satisfaction" (imagine the effect of that pose on her back after, say, five minutes...).

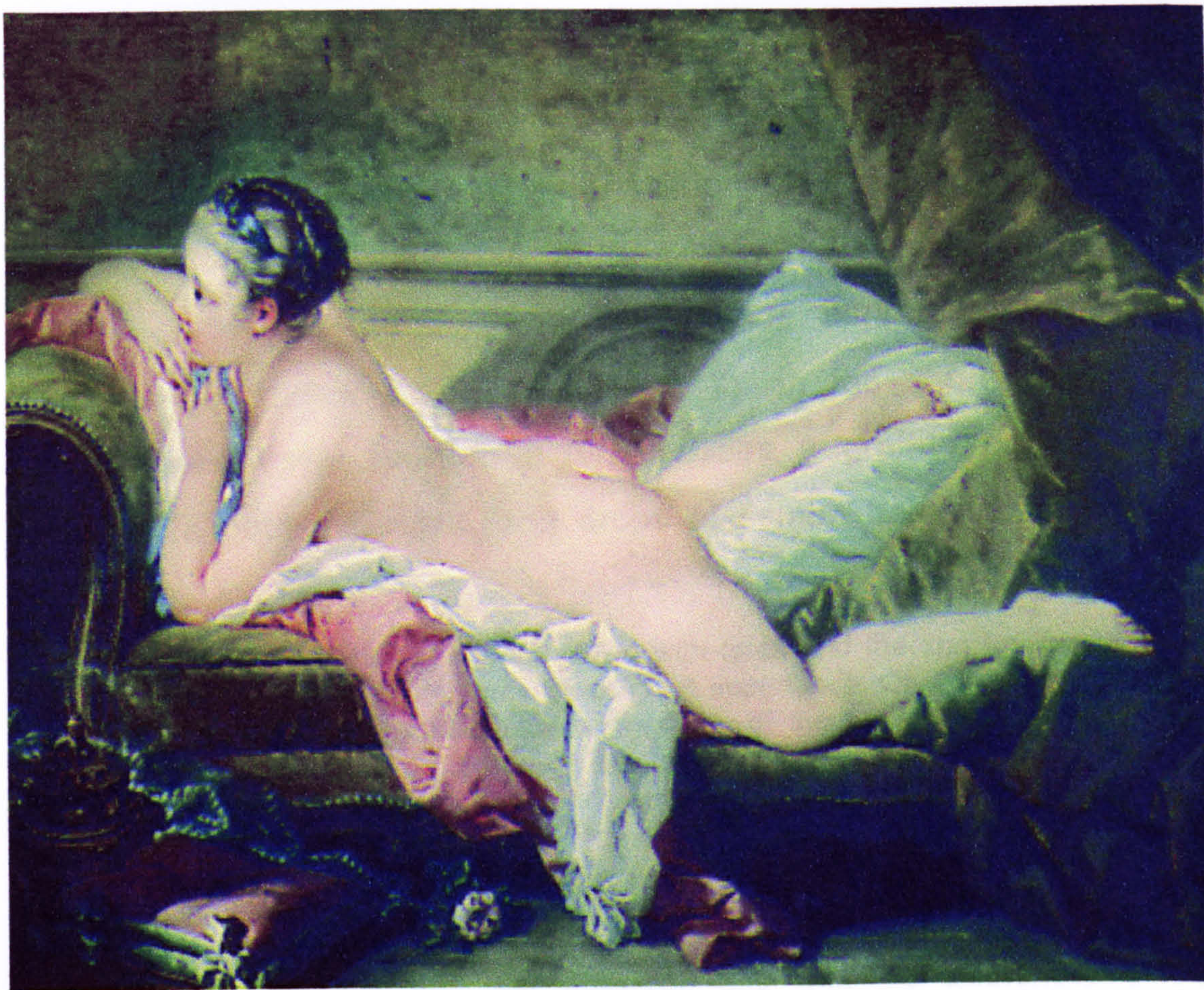
---

Germany. (In the rooms of one wing of the city's Neue Gallerie, containing C18th portraits, Zoe Leonard had removed the portraits of men and re-arranged the portraits of women, juxtaposing them with increasing numbers of black and white photographs of women's genitals; the first room was nearly all portraits; the final room nearly all photographs.) For example, Peter Schjeldahl wrote "with flabbergasting literal-mindedness, Zoe Leonard invaded a collection of [...] paintings. [...] It was a gesture of blasphemy - an offense that, unlike heresy, is open only to believers. [...] Leonard's furious intervention...". 'The Documenta of the Dog', *Art in America*, 80.9 (1992), 88-97, 77 (p. 96).

80 Kenneth Clark, in *Pornography: The Longford Report* (London: Coronet, 1972), pp. 99-100. Cited by Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 27.

81 Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art* (London: John Murray, 1956), p. 140.





Francois Boucher  
*Miss O'Murphy*  
 1752. Oil, 59 x 73 cm.  
 Alte Pinakothek, Munich

22 Suzanne Sarda, *Les arts de l'Érotisme Néoclassique Vers l'Expression* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1974), p. 100. The book was first published in France in 1977, but other editions were published in Speculum in France in 1974. I do not wish to suggest any direct influence on my work.



Luce Irigaray's comments on the excision of women's genitals from the scene of representation in phallogocentric 'art' are echoed in slightly earlier comments made by Suzanne Santoro in her artist's book, *Towards New Expression* (plate 3). In the short text in this image-based work, Santoro first discusses a graffito on a wall in Rome of a penis, a vulva, and drops of semen being collected in a cup:

The penis and the semen were drawn with force and the cup for the care and preservation of the semen was given great importance. On the other hand there was the subordinate and mystified presence of the female genitals, the usual crack-hole, hole-crack. [...] When I saw how this subject had been treated in the past, I realized that even in diverse historical representation it had been annulled, smoothed down and, in the end, idealized. [...] We can no longer see ourselves as if we live in a dream or as an imitation of something that just does not reflect the reality of our lives. [...] The substance of expression is unlimited and has no established form. Self expression is a necessity. Expression begins with self assertion and with the awareness of the differences between ourselves and others.<sup>82</sup>

Santoro's aim through the bookwork is (as the title suggests) to begin to work towards what we might call (after reading Luce Irigaray) a syntax appropriate to women. She does this through the delicate and spare selection, editing, and juxtaposing of photographic images in this intimately-scaled book (each page is approximately 16 cm. x 11 cm.). The images are of the vulva; the labia; the clitoris; of women's genitals seen from the front, with the outer and inner lips visible above the 'Y' formed by the tops of the thighs; of the 'Y' as represented by artists such as Cranach and Raphael, missing the representation of the lips; of Greek statues; of shells; and of flowers. Suzanne Santoro makes explicit her aim of encouraging women towards expression through an appropriate

---

82 Suzanne Santoro, *Per Una Espressione Nuova/Towards New Expression* (Rome: Rivolta Femminile, 1974), unpaginated. *Ce sexe* was first published in France in 1977, but other similar comments appeared in *Speculum* in France in 1974. I do not wish to suggest any direct influence one way or the other.



PER UNA ESPRESSIONE NUOVA

TOWARDS NEW EXPRESSION

SUZANNE  
SANTORO

RIVOLTA FEMMINILE

Suzanne Santoro  
*Per Una Espressione Nuova/Towards New Expression*, front cover  
(Rome: Rivolta Femminile, 1974)  
Courtesy Chelsea School of Art Artist's Books Collection



### significatory system:

The placing of the Greek figures, the flowers and the conch shell near the clitoris is a means of understanding the structure of the female genitals. It is also an invitation for the sexual self expression that has been denied to women till now, and it does not intend to attribute specific qualities to one sex or the other.<sup>83</sup>

Notoriously, the Arts Council of Great Britain (as it was then called) removed *Towards New Expression* from an exhibition of artist's books touring Britain in 1976-1977, after it had been selected and included in the published catalogue.<sup>84</sup> In an article written about the affair, Rozsika Parker contrasts this censorship with the inclusion of Allen Jones's artist's book *Projects*. It was about Jones's work that Laura Mulvey had expounded her theory of fetishism (as referred to above), and Rozsika Parker cites this in order to explain why the ACGB were able to include the Jones book while justifying their exclusion of Suzanne Santoro's "on the grounds that obscenity might be alleged. [...] We are willing to defend obscenity on the grounds of artistic excellence but considered that in this case the avowed intention of the book was primarily a plea for sexual self expression."<sup>85</sup> Bypassing the skewed logic of this (as Parker points out, presumably the work was "artistic[ally] excellen[t]" enough to merit its initial selection), and the vexed question of the definitions of 'obscenity' in a patriarchal legal system,<sup>86</sup> I think we can expand Rozsika Parker's understanding of the censorship as resulting from phallogocentric man's need to remove women's genitals from his

---

83 Suzanne Santoro, *ibid.*

84 Rozsika Parker, 'Censored', *Spare Rib*, 54 (1977), pp. 43-45.

85 Robin Campbell of ACGB, quoted by Rozsika Parker, *ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

86 See also Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude*, particularly pp. 25-33, on this definition.

sight. Drawing from Luce Irigaray's insights about hysteroscopy on the one hand, and the need to develop women's sexual subjective identity (the subjects, women) and its necessary concomitant, a Symbolic syntax appropriate to women on the other, we can see Suzanne Santoro's work as being part of that broader, cultural, and ontological threat to phallogentric man which Luce Irigaray identifies. It is this not because it images women's genitals, but because it is a strategic response, developed from within the political, collective site of the women's movement,<sup>87</sup> to what Luce Irigaray identifies as the "need [...] to work out an art of the sexual, a sexed culture";<sup>88</sup> "an art of the sexual that respects the colors, the sounds, and the forms proper to each sex".<sup>89</sup>

Luce Irigaray takes the discussion of the representation of women's bodies back further than the "Greek statuary" of the passage quoted earlier, to representations of women-goddesses:

In those ['pre-historical'] days women were represented {*représentent*} as goddesses: not only as mother goddesses - the only ones subsequent eras accepted - but also as women goddesses. This is particularly evident in the fact that women-goddesses are beautiful, slim, and their sex marked by a triangle (as for mother-goddesses) in which the lips are drawn; all this was to be wiped out by what followed. Their divinity doesn't depend upon the fact they can be mothers but upon their female identity, of which the inter-enter-opening of the lips {*l'entre'ouverture des lèvres*} are an affirmative expression.<sup>90</sup>

Luce Irigaray indicates that these representations of goddesses were not reduced to representations of mother-goddesses. A concept of the divine in a Symbolic syntax appropriate to woman is

87 Rozsika Parker, 'Censored', p. 44.

88 Luce Irigaray, 'Each Sex Must Have its Own Rights', in *Sexes and Genealogies*, pp. 1-5 (p. 3)/'La nécessité de droits sexués', in *Sexes et Parentés*, pp. 13-18 (p. 15).

89 Luce Irigaray, 'Flesh Colors', in *Sexes and Genealogies*, pp. 151-165 (p. 165)/'Les couleurs de la chair', in *Sexes et Parentés*, pp. 165-179 (p. 179).

90 Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous*, pp. 110-111/*Je, tu, nous*, p. 125. Translation modified.



not located in its representation of her ability to be a mother, but in its representation of her *as a woman* - with an image which sounds similar to some in Suzanne Santoro's book. It would be easy to assume that the kind of artworks which might be a contemporary development of this form of representation would include many of the goddess images produced from the 1970s onwards as a result of the women's movement. However, a large number of these enact a simplistic reversal upon the phallic languages we have been taught - a more general trap, of which Luce Irigaray is aware:

From a feminine locus nothing can be articulated without a questioning of the symbolic itself. But we do not escape so easily from reversal. We do not escape, in particular, by thinking we can dispense with a rigorous interpretation of phallogocentrism. There is no simple manageable way to leap to the outside of phallogocentrism, nor any possible way to situate oneself there, that would result from the simple fact of being a woman. And in *Speculum*, if I was attempting to move back through the 'masculine' imaginary, that is, our cultural imaginary, it is because that move imposed itself, both in order to demarcate the possible 'outside' of this imaginary and to allow me to situate myself with respect to it as a woman, implicated in it and at the same time exceeding its limits.<sup>91</sup>

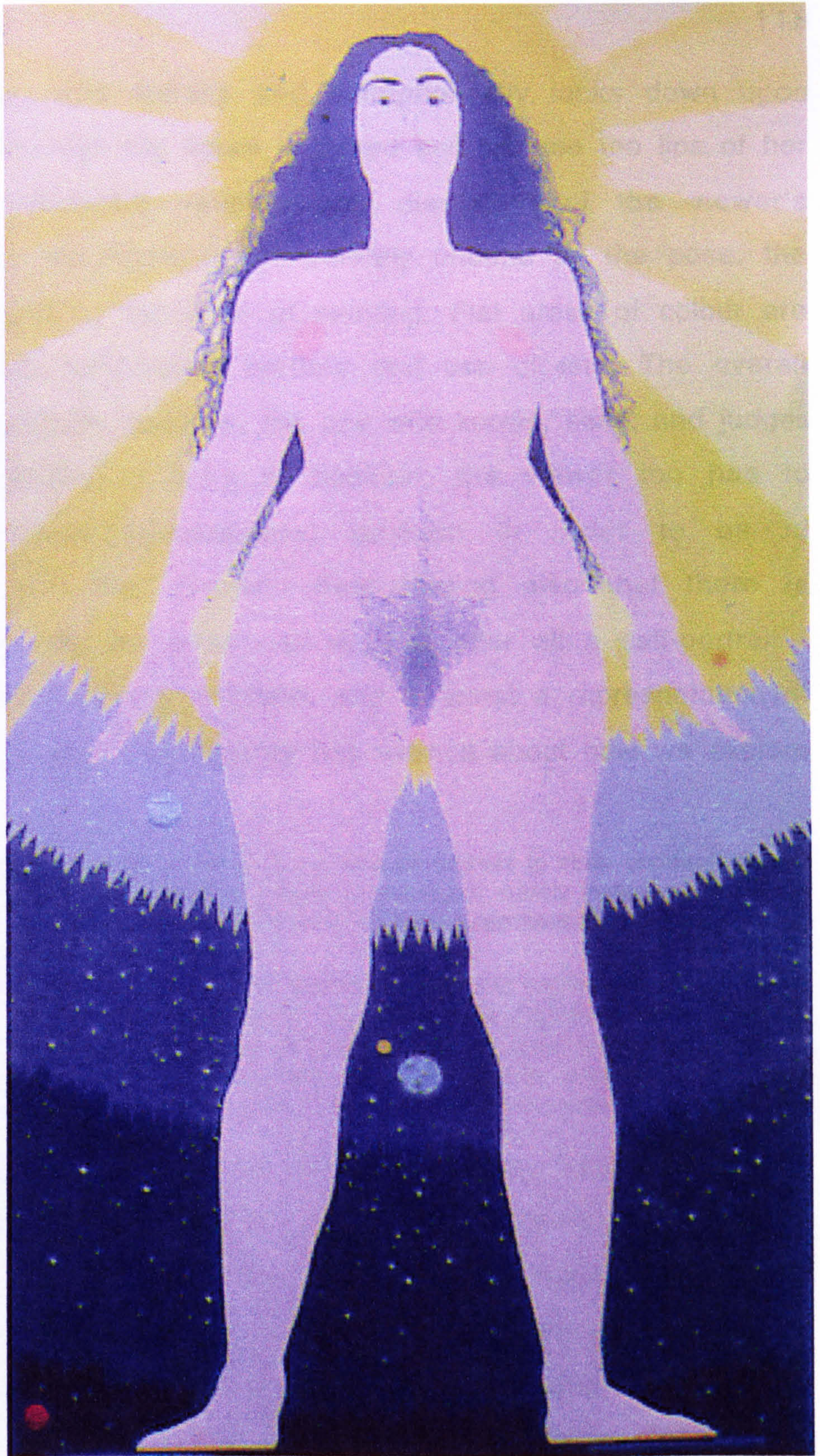
We can see in a brief examination of a couple of artworks how some artists, in attempting a feminist development of goddess imagery, have assumed that there is a "simple manageable way to leap to the outside of phallogocentrism", and how others have attempted "to demarcate the possible 'outside' of this imaginary and to [...] situate [themselves] with respect to it as a woman".

A work such as Cynthia Mailman's *Self Portrait as God* (1977) (plate 4) falls into the former category. A painting 9' high, the centrally placed figure is well over life size. Painted in a symmetrical standing pose and using a perspective that increases illusionistically the height of the figure, the effect is of an all-

---

91 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, pp. 162-163/*Ce sexe*, p. 157.





Cynthia Mailman  
*Self-Portrait as God*  
1977. Acrylic on canvas, 108" x 60"  
Collection of the artist

Photograph from *The Power of Feminist Art*, ed. by Norma Broude and Mary Garrard  
(New York: Abrams, 1994)



powerful being who literally and metaphorically looks down upon the viewer. Although the figure is naked and we see the lips of her vulva, any potentially revolutionary disruption of the viewer's relationship to the figure is immediately undone by the pose, the perspective, and by the style of painting. Flat areas of colour are articulated with hard-edged borders and use of line. The overall effect is of a phallic goddess, the one who knows, sees, and judges all, who maintains a fixity of position; the viewer too has to maintain a fixed (subordinate) position in order to be in relationship with her. (I can't help feeling also that there is displayed here by the artist - in what is after all a self-portrait - at best an over-weening ambition, and at worst a representation of sublime arrogance.) Luce Irigaray has warned about how we explore goddesses:

I am far from suggesting that [...] we have to regress to siren goddesses, who fight against men gods. Rather I think we must not merely instigate a return to the *cosmic*, but also ask ourselves why we have been held back from becoming *divine women*. [...]

But all this must be done in the context of entering further into womanhood, not moving backwards. If we resist hierarchies (the man/woman hierarchy, or state/woman, of a certain form of God/woman, or machine/woman), only to fall back into *the power* {*le pouvoir*} of nature/woman, animal/woman, even matriarchs/ women, women/women, we have not made much progress.<sup>92</sup>

Cynthia Mailman in this painting has fallen back into these retrogressive power structures. There is no space for mediation between the subjects, women and her/their divine; there is no inter-subjectivity, no reassertion of female genealogies. We have here an equivalent to a Christian representation of an Old Testament God, or a Zeus, in a woman's body; a maintenance mimesis of phallogocentric structures of representation and

---

92 Luce Irigaray, 'Divine Women', p. 60/'Femmes divines', pp. 72-73. Irigaray is meticulous in her usage of the two words for power: *le pouvoir* and *la puissance*. Here, the masculine *le pouvoir* re-enforces the patriarchal nature of power structures that must not be thoughtlessly re-instated.

patriarchal structures of religion.

Yolanda López's *Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe* (1978) (plate 5) forms an interesting contrast as it has some strong similarities with Mailman's painting: both are two-dimensional works, both self portraits, and in both the figure is centrally placed, frontally posed, and against a background which represents infinite space. The López however is an oil pastel drawing and just 24" high; the outlines are necessarily a little fuzzy because of the pastel; and the figure carries a cloak-like cloth which billows around her, giving a sense of dynamic interrelation with space. Importantly, the figure is seen straight on (rather than illusionistically towering over the viewer), and active: she runs out of, or through, or is creating as she runs, the energy field which encircles her. Her eyes are partially closed by her very human grin, so the viewer is not fixed by her gaze into a spatially or emotionally static relationship with her.

The Virgin of Guadalupe is seen as a national symbol by Mexicans, and as a symbol of cultural identity by Chicanas like Yolanda López. In herself - the Virgin Mary as a Mexican - she begins to undo some of the Euro-centrism of Catholic symbolism; but she is still very much an interceder, and is maintained in a particular position in the Catholic patriarchy-hierarchy of imagery. She is:

... the mark of a people's favour with God and thus boosts their confidence in the Church. At the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, all the strands of Catholic devotion since the departure of the Reformed Churches are gathered together in their most characteristic form [....]. Her shrine is the best loved of Catholic Mexico. She was declared patroness of the country in 1754 by Pope Benedict XIV, and of the Americas in 1910. She is dark-complexioned like an Indian [....]. During the Mexican revolution, the Royalists fought under the standard of *La Virgen de los Remedios*, the ancient palladium of Cortes' conquering army, which he had brought with him from Alcantara. The independents marched





representations of women-goddesses thus:

For us women, meaning remains  
perceptible form. It also develops like

Yolanda M. Lopez  
*Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe*  
1978. Oil pastel on paper, 30" x 24"  
Collection of the artist

Photograph from *Sexual Politics*, ed. by Amelia Jones (Los Angeles: UCLA, 1996)

93. Maria Winkler, *None of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Pan Books, 1973), pp. 262-303.

94. Yolanda Lopez, quoted by Shirin Galman, 'Contemporary Chicana Artists', in *Women of Color: An Anthology*, ed. by Aileen Raven, Cassandra Langer, and Joanne Meyer (New York: Pantheon, 1991), pp. 187-205 (p. 199).



under the banner of Our Lady of Guadalupe.<sup>93</sup>

By representing herself as Guadalupe, Yolanda López asserts a Chicana cultural identity; by representing Guadalupe as a physically and spatially dynamic contemporary woman, López discards the role of interceder; by showing her holding a snake, López refers back and across cultures to pre-Columbian religion and to the Cretan snake goddess; by then placing this image as the centre of a triptych which also images her mother and grandmother, López asserts a genealogy which modulates across time and space, both within each image and across them, wresting the imagery away from the Catholic church in an exploration of the matrilinear and the divine. She has written about this:

I looked at Guadalupe as an artist, as an investigator of the power of images. I was interested in her visual message as a role model. Essentially she is beautiful, serene, passive. She has no emotional life or texture of her own. She exists within the realm of magical mythology sanctified as a formal entity by religious tradition. [...] Because I feel living, breathing women also deserve the respect and love lavished on Guadalupe, I have chosen to transform the image. Taking symbols of her power and virtue, I have transferred them to women I know. My hope in creating these alternative role models is to work with the viewer in a reconsideration of how we as Chicanas portray ourselves. It is questioning the idealized stereotype we as women are assumed to attempt to emulate.<sup>94</sup>

Before leaving this consideration of Luce Irigaray's disruption of phallogocentric visual representation I would like to attend to her comments on the abstract and the figurative. Luce Irigaray precedes the comments quoted earlier concerning the representations of women-goddesses thus:

For us women, meaning remains concrete, close, related to what is natural, to perceptible forms. It also develops like our bodies, those of our children, of

---

93 Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Pan Books, 1985), pp. 302-303.

94 Yolanda López, quoted by Shifra Goldman, 'Contemporary Chicana Artists', in *Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology*, ed. by Arlene Raven, Cassandra Langer, and Joanna Frueh (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), pp. 187-205 (p. 199).



our sexual partners, of those that belong to the living world. At that time in History - conventionally termed Prehistory - when women participated in civil and religious life, written signs were still partially figurative, non-abstract, arbitrary, fiduciary.<sup>95</sup>

As we have seen in the section on mimesis, 'pre-history' is an era Luce Irigaray identifies as pre-alphabetical writing as well as pre-phallogentric. Here she makes a link between writing, gender, and figuration/abstraction, before discussing the differences in representations of divine women. In an interview about her practice of writing she suggests that our present alphabetical writing is not part of a syntax in the Symbolic which is appropriate for women:

One means of communicating thought, in the late twentieth century, is by alphabetical writing. Thus, I use it to communicate even if I think this method is limiting to what I have to say, especially as a woman.  
[...] Indeed, alphabetical writing is linked historically to the civil and religious codification of patriarchal powers.<sup>96</sup>

The limits of alphabetical writing are a result of its abstractness; "writing has difficulty translating colors, sounds, bodily identity, the chromo-soma.... All the civilizations that give priority to nonfigurative writing, arbitrary forms, and formal codes, move away from color and from tonality as qualities of flesh, gender, genealogy. They express these as numbers. Mastery and the abstraction of the living being?"<sup>97</sup> The stress of our culture upon an abstract system for a primary method of communication impacts upon the Symbolic at all levels - and indeed is implicated in Philosophy itself, the discourse of discourses:

The birth of Western philosophy is accompanied by the constitution of a logos, a language obeying rules such as those of self-identity, of non-contradiction, etc., which distinguish it from a simple empirical language. These logical rules have been defined in order to ensnare the totality of the real in the nets of

---

95 Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous*, p. 110/*Je, tu, nous*, p. 125.

96 Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous*, pp. 51, 53/*Je, tu, nous*, pp. 59, 61.

97 Luce Irigaray, 'Flesh Colors', p. 160/'Les couleurs de la chair', pp. 174-175.



language, and thus to remove it from sensible experience, from the ever infinite contiguity of daily life.

Philosophy thus represents an artificially constructed language in comparison to what is called natural language. But the latter is itself already constructed and there is an interaction between philosophical discourse and everyday discourse.<sup>98</sup>

For Luce Irigaray, the abstract is a human product which is completely arbitrary in its relation to the human body. This is expounded upon in most detail in 'Flesh Colors'<sup>99</sup> which starts with an examination of the psychoanalytic scenario, where sound (the spoken word) is prioritised over light. The gestures and colours within that scenario are spoken of when the spoken word fails - for example, the gestures of the hysteric are only commented upon because of her muteness. Because sound moves more slowly than light, "psychoanalytic practice becomes an exercise in patience"<sup>100</sup>, a soporific experience, where the subject risks sinking into a colourless demented language of arbitrary forms. Lying down increases this risk, as the subject no longer needs a sense of balance, encouraging an artificial, arbitrary - abstract - reality. This model is one that echoes across all of Luce Irigaray's work on writing, on the abstract and the arbitrary, and which informs her thinking about the cultural, social, political, and religious roles accorded the body.

Frequently in our culture the abstract is referred to as objectivity, but this is a delusion, as Luce Irigaray has outlined in another essay:

---

98 Luce Irigaray, 'Thinking Life as Relation: An Interview with Luce Irigaray', Interview by Stephen Pluhacek and Heidi Bostic, *Man and World*, 29 (1996), 343-360 (p. 349).

99 Luce Irigaray, 'Flesh Colors', pp. 153-165/'Les couleurs de la chair', pp. 167-179.

100 Luce Irigaray, 'Flesh Colors', p. 153/'Les couleurs de la chair', p. 167.



This abstractness and the loss of that concrete, sensual immediacy that was always Hegel's point of departure block the passage from subjective into objective, from objective into subjective. Hegel sought to keep faith with nature but to do this one must pass through that question of sex and the spirit. The increase in so-called objective cultural effects produced by an inadequate dialectic of subjective and objective risks burying us under its spiritless shell, overwhelming us with its pestilential waste products.<sup>101</sup>

Alphabetical writing is fundamentally implicated in this; as we have seen, Luce Irigaray affirms that it developed as cultures shifted from women-goddesses to mother-of-sons-goddesses; from goddesses to gods; from oral histories to written histories; from living with nature to hierarchical domination of nature; and as financial systems were developed. Underlying this is a phallogentric structure which sees woman not as different but as other of the same. This is itself a form of abstraction:

Cultures have forced us to repress the female genealogies. This means that we have entered into a kind of historical mania made up of:

- forms that are balanced in an artificial game of contradictions (the two poles are contained within sameness).<sup>102</sup>

And as a result our culture is constructed from "resemblances, abstracted from the body instead of expressive of it, that form a system of mimicries that allow me to say that I am like the other sex without in fact there being any correspondence with the same living forms, the same relations to sounds, to colors".<sup>103</sup> These "resemblances, abstracted from the body instead of expressive of it" can, I think, begin to account for the shift Luce Irigaray notes from the representation of women-goddesses to mother-of-sons-goddesses:

During the period when there were female goddesses, the woman's sexual organs always appear in the representation of the bodies of women,

101 Luce Irigaray, 'The Universal as Mediation', in *Sexes and Genealogies*, pp. 125-149 (p. 142)/'L'universel comme médiation', in *Sexes et Parentés*, pp. 139-164 (p. 156).

102 Luce Irigaray, 'Flesh Colors', p. 160/'Les couleurs de la chair', pp. 174-175.

103 Luce Irigaray, 'Flesh Colors', p. 160/'Les couleurs de la chair', pp. 174-175.



particularly goddesses, and not merely in the form of the triangle indicating the womb, but also in the form of the labia, an inscription which will later be erased. The cult of goddesses who are exclusively mothers, and mothers of sons, is a late episode in the history of women. In the symbolism of social exchanges, it is accompanied by the representation of the woman's sexual organs as the figure of the triangle representing the womb and standing as a symbol of the maternal function.<sup>104</sup>

The triangle alone represented women reduced to mothers; the representation, 'woman', without her ontology recognised, without her relation to origin represented. The triangle plus the labia represents the woman-goddess, and the possibility of mediation for the subjects, women. Neither of these representations could be confused with Realism, and it becomes clear that Luce Irigaray, in decrying abstract representation, is not implying that we return to forms of Western Realism in art. That which is expressive of the body, after all, has to be a form of mediation, not a form of illusion. Considered this way, the rigid structures of two-dimensional, illusionistic Realism could be considered as "resemblances, abstracted from the body instead of expressive of it".<sup>105</sup> (This discussion will be of importance for later chapters.) Now, mindful of Luce Irigaray's analysis of the phallogocentric structures which inform "our current world - grey, abstract and destitute",<sup>106</sup> we can turn our attention to possible ways of working towards a Symbolic syntax in the visual appropriate for women.

---

104 Luce Irigaray, 'Questions to Emmanuel Levinas', in *The Irigaray Reader*, pp. 178-189 (p. 178).

105 It also accounts for patriarchy's (and patriarchal capitalism's) ability to exchange women through the structure of the representation, 'woman' - which is, after all, an abstraction: "Woman's price is not determined by the 'properties' of her body - although her body constitutes the *material* support of that price. But when women are exchanged, woman's body must be treated as an *abstraction*. The exchange operation cannot take place in terms of some intrinsic, immanent value of the commodity. It can only come about when two objects - two women - are in a relation of equality with a third term that is neither the one nor the other." Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 175/*Ce sexe*, p. 171.

106 Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous*, p. 111/*Je, tu, nous*, p. 126.

## Chapter 4

### **The visual and the visible 2: creating structures in a Symbolic syntax appropriate to women.**

#### Mirror, speculum, burning glass

Luce Irigaray uses the analogy of a mirror in various forms - particularly flat, concave, and convex - to expose the structures of phallogocentrism and its determining of the structures of phallogocentrism. She does this in order to undo those structures while asserting a potential ecstatic relationship with light in the realm of the spiritual for women; a prerequisite on the horizon of possibilities to enable the becoming of the subjects, women. Light, of course, is a prerequisite of the visual; and Luce Irigaray draws several distinctions between patriarchal understandings of light, dark, shadow, and so forth (particularly within philosophy) and anti-patriarchal ways of looking at these phenomenon. Ultimately these lead towards an undoing of the phallogocentric gaze of the 'subject' at the 'object' as the determinant of inter-relationship, and suggest instead intersubjective relationships where listening is as important as looking, but, crucially, both have qualities of attentiveness.

As discussed in the previous chapter, within Western culture 'woman' functions as 'other of the same' for man; and thus, bereft of her subjecthood, she can only do so as a representation. Man



being confirmed in his 'sameness' by her 'otherness', the representation, 'woman' (which he has constructed) functions for his subjectivity as a mirror. As Luce Irigaray says, "Of course, a mirror is needed. But this can be 'interiorized', *put inside*. Representation can dispense with and supplant the role played in the real life of the senses by the mirror".<sup>1</sup> With reference to *Parler n'est jamais neutre*,<sup>2</sup> Tina Chanter outlines Luce Irigaray's understanding of the image-like, representational, qualities of reflections through her (Luce Irigaray's) comparison of the reflection with the written letter - a comparison that does indeed rest at the heart of phallogocentrism. Both the reflection of the 'subject' in the mirror, and the written letter, constitute the 'subject' as distinct, but both necessitate a surface support. Both are isolated (abstract?) from the gestures preceding and following, and thus fixed, "providing an image of unity where in fact there is none. [...] Creating a fiction of absolute presence and uniformity, the mirror image imposes a coherence that is nonetheless conditioned by 'fragmentation' and 'dispersal'".<sup>3</sup> The paradox of the reflection in the mirror is that it indeed is not the *reproduction* of 'the same', but it is a *representation* which fixes the 'other of the same' as the device through which 'the same' knows itself:

And even if, conceptually, my right hand and my left hand, or my hand and its image in the mirror, are rigorously the same, or the same thing, this would not be true for the intuitive character of space in which *the paradox of symmetry* was taken into account. Thus already a mirror turns out to support the apprehension of objects. [...] Does the subject derive his power from the appropriation of this non-place of the mirror?<sup>4</sup>

---

1 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum Of The Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 95/*Speculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1974), p. 116. Hereafter cited as *Speculum/Speculum*.

2 Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais neutre* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985).

3 Tina Chanter, *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray's Rewriting of the Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 250.

4 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 205/*Speculum*, p. 256.

The construction of the representation, 'woman', as not-man, as other, is (as we have seen) always already (m)other for man. Here is the paradox of the mirror's symmetry: that the representation, 'woman', is not the same as him, but, as his place of origin, has to be defined by him in terms of 'her' relation to his sameness - the-same-but-other, other-of-the-same, the-same-back-to-front, inverted: *mirror-image, rather than the same; mirror-image, rather than different*. If she were to be recognised as different (as the subject, woman), then the structures of his 'subjectivity' would be in crisis. At present, however, as we have seen, this functioning of the representation, 'woman', when produced as the expected role, is fatal for the subjects, women:

Now, if this ego is to be valuable, some 'mirror' is needed to reassure it and re-insure it of its value. Woman will be the foundation for this specular duplication, giving man back 'his' image and repeating it as the 'same'. If an other image, an other mirror were to intervene, this inevitably would entail the risk of mortal crisis. Woman will therefore be this sameness - or at least its mirror image - and, in her role of mother, she will facilitate the repetition of the same, in contempt for her difference. Her own sexual difference. Moreover, through her 'penis envy', she will supply anything that might be lacking in this specula(riza)tion. Calling back, now and forever, that *remainder* that melts into the depths of the mirror, that sexual energy necessary to carry out the work. The work of death.<sup>5</sup>

The structures of castration incorporated here are echoed by Sarah Miller's evoking of "the horror of nothing to see" in her account of Luce Irigaray's argument: "[woman's] absence of being functions like a mirror, casting man's reflection back on himself. His recognition of himself and his identity depend on the empty depths of the looking glass. Phallogentrism is constructed on this 'homosexual' [sic - i.e. "hom(m)osexual"] glance - the woman's place is to have no place, but to be a reflecting surface that

---

5 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 54/*Speculum*, p. 63.



permits man's speculation".<sup>6</sup>

These structures of castration theory are impossible to disentangle from any aspect of the construction of the representation, 'woman' which makes her "only the path, the method, the theory, the *mirror*"<sup>7</sup> for the 'subject'; but this investment of the one in the other is in turn utterly dependent upon phallogocentric ways of seeing, in particular the overvaluing of aspects of sight while ignoring sight's interaction with other senses - significantly, touch. The representation, 'woman', functions within phallogocentrism as a *flat* mirror, "a faithful, polished mirror, empty of altering reflections",<sup>8</sup> two dimensional, lacking any form of its own: "the flat mirror reflects the greater part of women's sexual organs only as a hole",<sup>9</sup> confirming the male subject in his singular position, disallowing any play of couples, whether woman/man or mother/daughter,<sup>10</sup> and instead allowing only the play of the paradox of symmetry. Woman as a desiring subject would expose the flat mirror as a fiction:

As for the priority of symmetry, it co-relates with that of the *flat mirror* - which may be used for the self-reflection of the masculine subject in language, for its constitution as subject of discourse. Now woman, starting with this flat mirror alone, can only come into being as the inverted other of the masculine subject (his *alter ego*), or as the place of emergence and veiling of the cause of his (phallic) desire, or again as lack, since her sex for the most part - and only the historically valorised part - is not subject to specularization. Thus in the advent of a 'feminine' desire, this flat mirror cannot be privileged and symmetry cannot function as it does in the logic and discourse of a masculine

---

6 Sarah Miller, 'Bringing up Demons', *Diacritics*, 18.1 (1988), 2-17 (p. 7).

7 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 239/*Speculum*, p. 297.

8 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 136/*Speculum*, p. 168.

9 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, fn. 92, p. 89/*Speculum*, fn. 122, p. 109.

10 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 77/*Speculum*, p. 92.

subject.<sup>11</sup>

This idealised reflecting of the male subject back to himself is understood as a closed circuit by the phallogentric gaze. But then, as we have seen, the phallogentric gaze, phallogentric in its auto eroticism, occupies the site of sight, ignoring other senses. It sees that woman is the other of its same; it sees she has nothing to see; it sees only the symmetrical paradox. It does not see that the/his representation, 'woman' (like the letter, the logos, which will be developed as a result of this 'seeing') is a phenomenon dependent upon the structures of the/his flat mirror. It does not see that the mirror does not reflect itself, that the mirror has its own form, that the mirror does not reflect its silvery backing. This silvery backing is, if you like, the 'reserve' of the mirror: a part of the mirror reserved from the phallogentric gaze. As with the hysteric, and as with the implementation of productive mimesis, so too in the structure of the flat mirror which bears the phallogentric gaze upon the/his reflection-image of the representation, 'woman', there is a reserve which can be deployed strategically in order to disconcert the economy of representation, disrupt the unity of the male subject: "This silvering at the back of the mirror might, at least, retain *the being* {l'être} - which we have been perhaps and which perhaps we will be again - though our mirage has failed at present or has been covered over by alien speculations".<sup>12</sup> While phallogentric man does not see this reserve, he structures the 'absence of its presence' and its effects in order

---

11 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 129/*Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1977), p. 127. Hereafter cited as *This Sex/Ce sexe*.

12 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 197/*Speculum*, p. 245.



to sustain his subjectivity. His refusal to see it risks his structure:

Where will the other {*ou [...] va-t-elle*} spring up again? Where will the risk be situated which sublates the subject's passion for remaining ever and again the same, for affirming himself ever and again the same. In the *duplicity* of his speculation? A more or less conscious duplicity? Since he is only partially and marginally where he reflects/is reflected? [...] The Other, lapsed within, disquieting in its shadow and its rage, sustaining the organization of a universe eternally identical to the self. The backside of (self) representation, of the visual plane where he gazes upon himself?<sup>13</sup>

The chapter of *Speculum* from which this comes, 'Any Theory of the "Subject" Has Always Been Appropriated by the "Masculine"', contains an extended passage where Luce Irigaray expands her analysis of the mirror. She suggests that we need to break through the two dimensionality of the flat mirror, in order to find the more appropriate mirror and achieve recognition of the silvery backing. In other words, the task is to disrupt the phallogocentric gaze, the dominance of its syntax in the Symbolic, and its creation, the representation, 'woman', in order to develop recognition of the subjects, women, and an appropriate syntax in the Symbolic, and also, importantly, to recognize the necessary discursivity that (inter)subjectivity and such a syntax entail.<sup>14</sup>

Having evoked the two-dimensionality of the flat mirror and the visual structure of the phallogocentric gaze through referring to "a given *plan/e*: a projection from a single source",<sup>15</sup> Luce Irigaray once again argues for an engaged, rather than a separatist, strategic response:

This disconcerting of language, though anarchic in its deeds of title,

---

<sup>13</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 135/*Speculum*, pp. 167-168.

<sup>14</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, pp. 132-135/*Ce sexe*, pp. 130-133.

<sup>15</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 142/*Speculum*, p. 177.

nonetheless demands patient exactitude. The symptoms, for their part are implacably precise. And if it is indeed a question of breaking (with) a certain mode of specula(riza)tion, this does not imply renouncing all mirrors or refraining from analysis of the hold this *plan/e* {*plan*} of representation maintains, rendering female desire aphasic and more generally atonic in all but its phallic disguises, masquerades, and demands. For to dodge this time of interpretation is to risk its freezing over, losing hold, cutting back. All over again.<sup>16</sup>

To throw out the mirror and its play of couples - its discursivity - would leave women's desire still not understood and without understanding; without its accents, its pitches, its timbre, which means that such a strategy would leave the representation, 'woman', intact within the phallogentric gaze.

Luce Irigaray continues this passage by shifting her terminology subtly to expose the implications of "breaking (with) a certain mode of specula(riza)tion". She presents a vision of what might be found upon disrupting the two dimensional surface of the mirror - "this *plan/e* of representation" - and with it, the representation, 'woman'. Breaking (with) a two dimensional *plan/e* of representation necessitates a breaking *through*; which brings us into contact with the brilliance of the reserve of the mirror as the result of a movement that evokes concavity:

But perhaps through this specular surface which sustains discourse {*le discours*} is found not the void of nothingness but the dazzle of multifaceted speleology. A scintillating and incandescent concavity, of language also, that threatens to set fire to fetish-objects and eyes plugged with gold {*les yeux aurifiés*}. The recasting of their truth value is already at hand. We need only press on a little further into the depths, into that so-called dark cave which serves as hidden foundation to their speculations. For there where we expect to find the opaque and silent matrix of a logos immutable in the certainty of its own light, fires and mirrors are beginning to radiate, sapping the evidence of reason at its base! Not so much by anything stored in the cave - which would still be a claim based on the notion of the closed volume - but again and yet



again by their indefinitely re-kindled hearths.<sup>17</sup>

The concavity - the space through and behind the flat mirror's surface - scintillates and burns infinitely. This is not the dark continent, the dark cave, the yawning gap, or the vagina dentata. Each of these terms - and others related - are products of phallogentric fear of multiplicity and difference; phallogentric in nature, they are immutable notions stored in the fixity - "the closed volume" - that is created by phallogentric man as the fearsome flip-side to the/his beautiful object of contemplation.

This makes inevitable the rhetoric of Luce Irigaray's following questions:

But which 'subject' up till now has investigated the fact that a *concave mirror* concentrates the light {*la lumière*} and, specifically, that this is not wholly irrelevant to woman's sexuality {*le sexe de la femme*}? Any more than is a man's sexuality {*le sexe de l'homme*} to the convex mirror? Which 'subject' has taken an interest in the anamorphoses produced by the conjunction of such curvatures? What impossible reflected images, maddening reflections, parodic transformations took place at each of their articulations?<sup>18</sup>

As the title of this section of *Speculum* suggests ('Any Theory of the "Subject" Has Always Been Appropriated by the "Masculine"'/ 'Toute théorie du "sujet" aura toujours été appropriée au "masculin"'), Luce Irigaray places the term 'subject' in quotation marks when she is referring to the supposed universal subject which is, however, always already masculine - i.e., when she refers to that subjecthood granted men within a phallogentric economy. One must assume that Luce Irigaray is aware of such paintings as Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533) (plate 6) with its

---

17 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, pp. 143-144/*Speculum*, pp. 178-179. Translation modified: *les yeux aurifés* was translated as *gilded eyes*, but in fact refers to gold tooth fillings. I take this not to be a reference to decorated surface (she is talking about eyes, not the mirror's surface), but another confirmation of Luce Irigaray's analysis that the amalgam of the exchange value of women in patriarchy and capitalism is essentially rotten.

18 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 144/*Speculum*, p. 179.





Hans Holbein the Younger  
*Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve (The Ambassadors)*  
1533. National Gallery, London

This provides the 15<sup>th</sup> examine two more recent artworks. The

12. "Lacan's 'The Burning Glass'": Jacques Lacan, *The Act: The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real*, trans. by Alan Sheridan, intro. by David Macey (London: Routledge, 1973), pp. 85-89. I would like to thank Jacques Lacan for sharing his thoughts with me. During the course of this passage Lacan writes: "It is a fact that the ear is the organ of the state of repose and of the state of activity. It is the organ of the state of repose and of the state of activity." Jacques Lacan, *ibid.* (pp. 87-89).

13. "The Burning Glass": Jacques Lacan, *The Act: The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real*, trans. by Alan Sheridan, intro. by David Macey (London: Routledge, 1973), pp. 85-89. I would like to thank Jacques Lacan for sharing his thoughts with me. During the course of this passage Lacan writes: "It is a fact that the ear is the organ of the state of repose and of the state of activity. It is the organ of the state of repose and of the state of activity." Jacques Lacan, *ibid.* (pp. 87-89).



anamorphic skull in the foreground.<sup>19</sup> Other anamorphic paintings rely upon a cylindrical mirror to provide, in the reflection, the 'correct' reading of the image (plate 7). It could be argued, of course, that both of these forms of anamorphic image - reliant upon a fixed viewing position, and in the second instance, upon the phallogocentric convex mirror - rather than "reveal[ing] the limitations of a worldly existence"<sup>20</sup> instead re-assert the primacy of single-point perspective (the visual structure of phallogocentric representation par excellence) as the only means by which confusion can be righted. Thus again the 'subject' is affirmed in his subjecthood and its worldly and transcendental structures. The above passage continues:

And here again, here too, one will rightly suspect any perspective, however surreptitious, that centers the subject, any autonomous circuit of subjectivity, and systematicity hooked back onto itself, any closure that claims for whatever reason to be metaphysical - or familial, social, economic even -, to have rightfully taken over, fixed, and framed that concave mirror's incandescent hearth. If this mirror - which, however, makes a *hole* {*trou*} - sets itself up pompously as an authority in order to give shape to the imaginary orb of a 'subject', it thereby defends itself phobically in/by this inner 'center' from the fires of the desire of/for woman. Inhabiting a securing morphology, making of its very structure some comfortable sepulcher from whence it may, possibly, by some hypothetical survival, be able to look out. (Re)g(u)arding itself by all sorts of windows-on-wheels, optical apparatuses, glasses, and mirrors, from/in this burning glass, which enflames all that falls into its cup.<sup>21</sup>

This prompts me to examine two more recent artworks. The

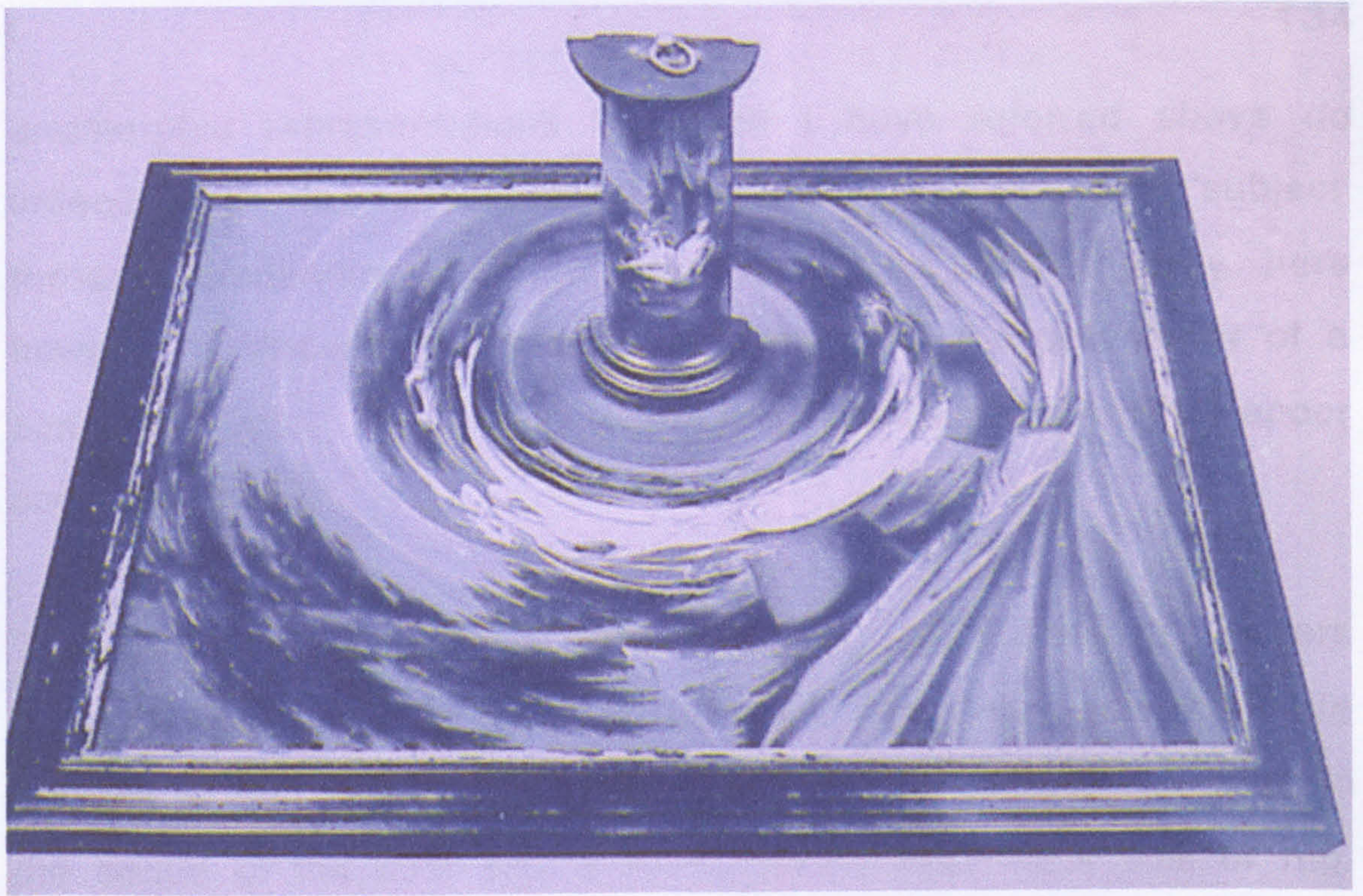
---

19 Certainly, one might assume that she was aware of Lacan's reference to this painting during a discussion of anamorphosis in the publication of his 1964 seminar. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, trans. by Alan Sheridan, intro. by David Macey (London: Penguin, 1994. First French publication, 1973), pp. 85-89. I would like to thank Griselda Pollock for directing me to this. During the course of this passage Lacan wonders "How is it that nobody has ever thought of connecting this with ... the effect of an erection? Imagine a tattoo traced on the sexual organ *ad hoc* in the state of repose and assuming its, if I may say so, developed form in another state". Jacques Lacan, *ibid.* (pp. 87-88).

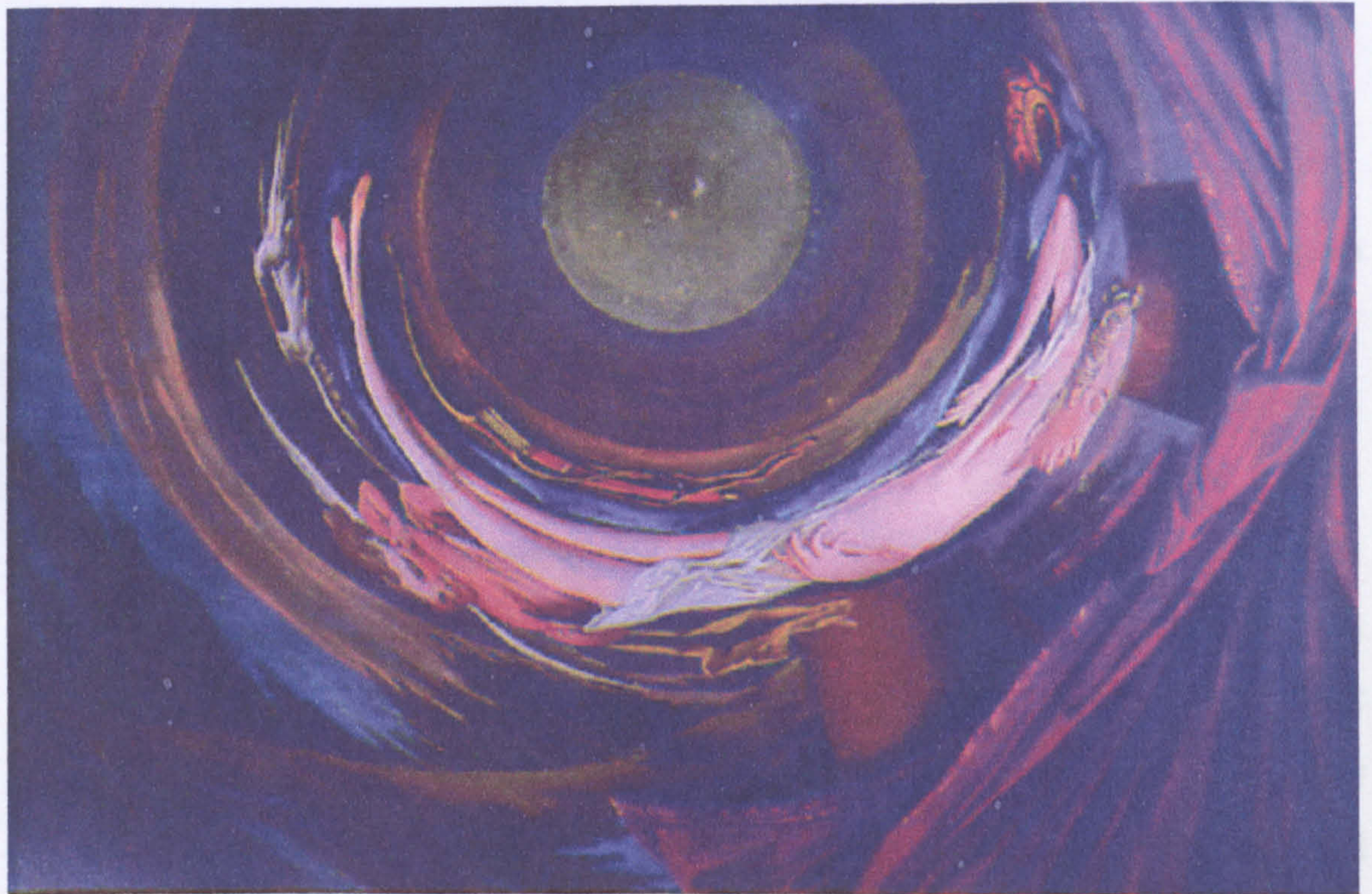
20 Philippa Berry, 'The Burning Glass', in *Engaging With Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. by Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 229-246 (f.n. 32, p. 245).

21 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 144/*Speculum*, p. 179-180.





Having seen Kettle's work, we were struck by the way he had accustomed



by a small piece

Henry Kettle  
*Sleeping Venus Uncovered by Amor*, c. 1770  
Cylinder anamorphosis, oil on panel, 14.5" x 19"  
Collection Schuyt, Amsterdam

Photographs from Fred Leeman, *Hidden Images* (New York: Abrams, 1976)

that it out of which it intersected

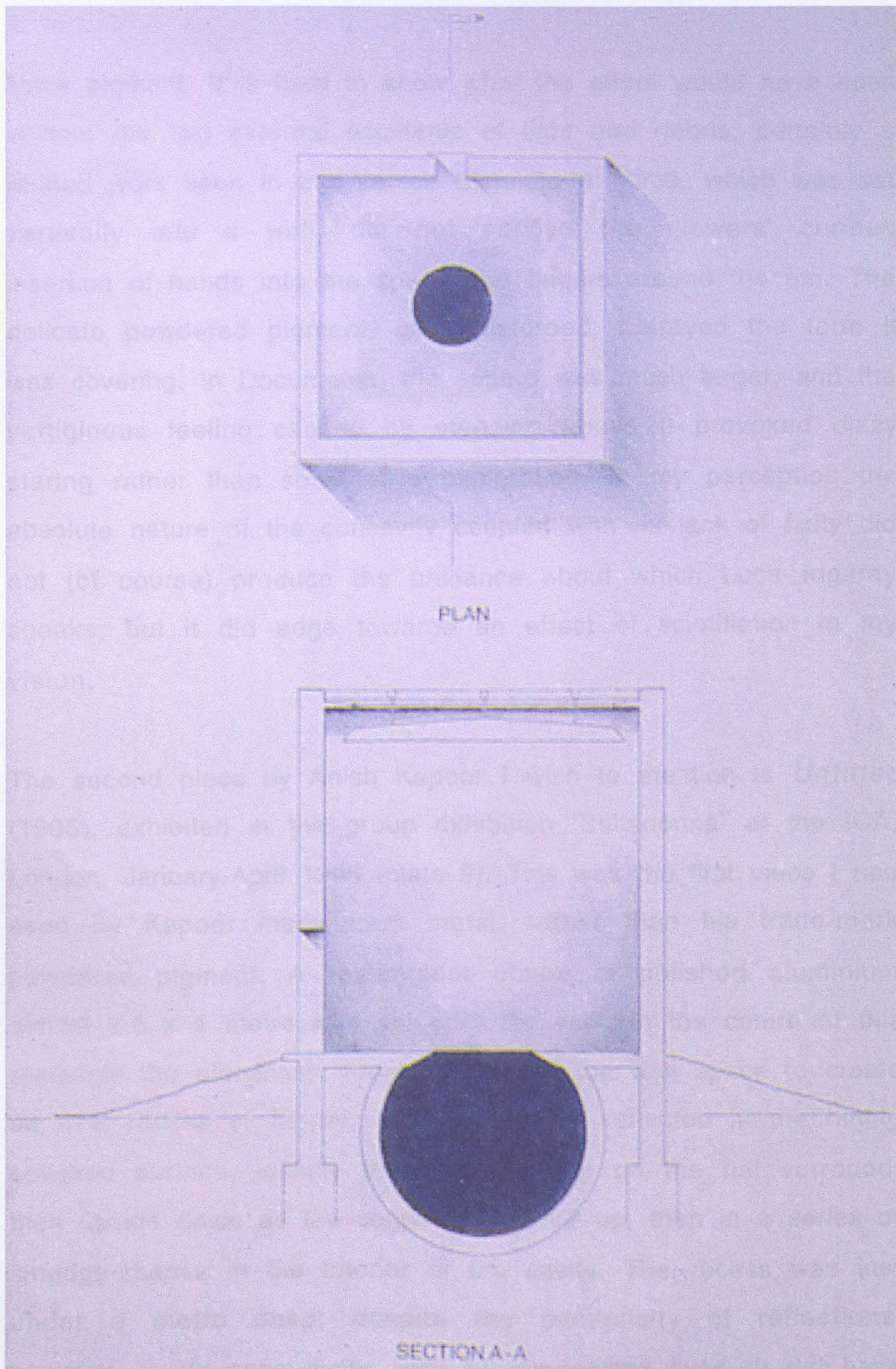
with the floor. The floor of the square was then covered



anamorphic representations to which I have referred above do indeed claim to be metaphysical while re-centring the 'subject' through demanding a fixed viewing point. Luce Irigaray here however is discussing the fixity enforced upon the potentiality of a concave mirror, and in this respect two works by Anish Kapoor come into mind.

The first was exhibited in Documenta in 1992 (plate 8) Viewers were allowed into a room in carefully regulated numbers. We entered to find a windowless cubic space with diffused top light. In the centre of the floor was a round, dense matt black disk or rug. Having seen Kapoor's work on earlier occasions I was accustomed to his use of powdered pigments in saturated colours in his sculpture. This achieved such an absolute density of colour that the effect was sometimes paradoxically two-fold: to enhance the viewer's perception of form, solidity, and surface, while also disconcerting the viewer's perception of space. This is what I assumed was happening here, through the placing of black pigment on the floor; and (taking my cue from the two other viewers in the room) walked warily around it, gazing into the seemingly infinite depths of its surface. It was a good while before I realised with a jolt that I was not walking around pigment on the floor, but in fact was walking around a not insubstantial hole. I'm not sure now what it was that caused the jolt of perception, a trick of the light maybe, or an imperfection in the pigment caused by a small piece of debris having fallen in; once the perceptual shift had happened I noticed both, and I could no longer revert to seeing the blackness as a floor-level disk. Kapoor had created a sphere-shaped hollow under floor level, with a narrow slice of it cut off where it intersected with the floor. The walls of the sphere were then covered with the





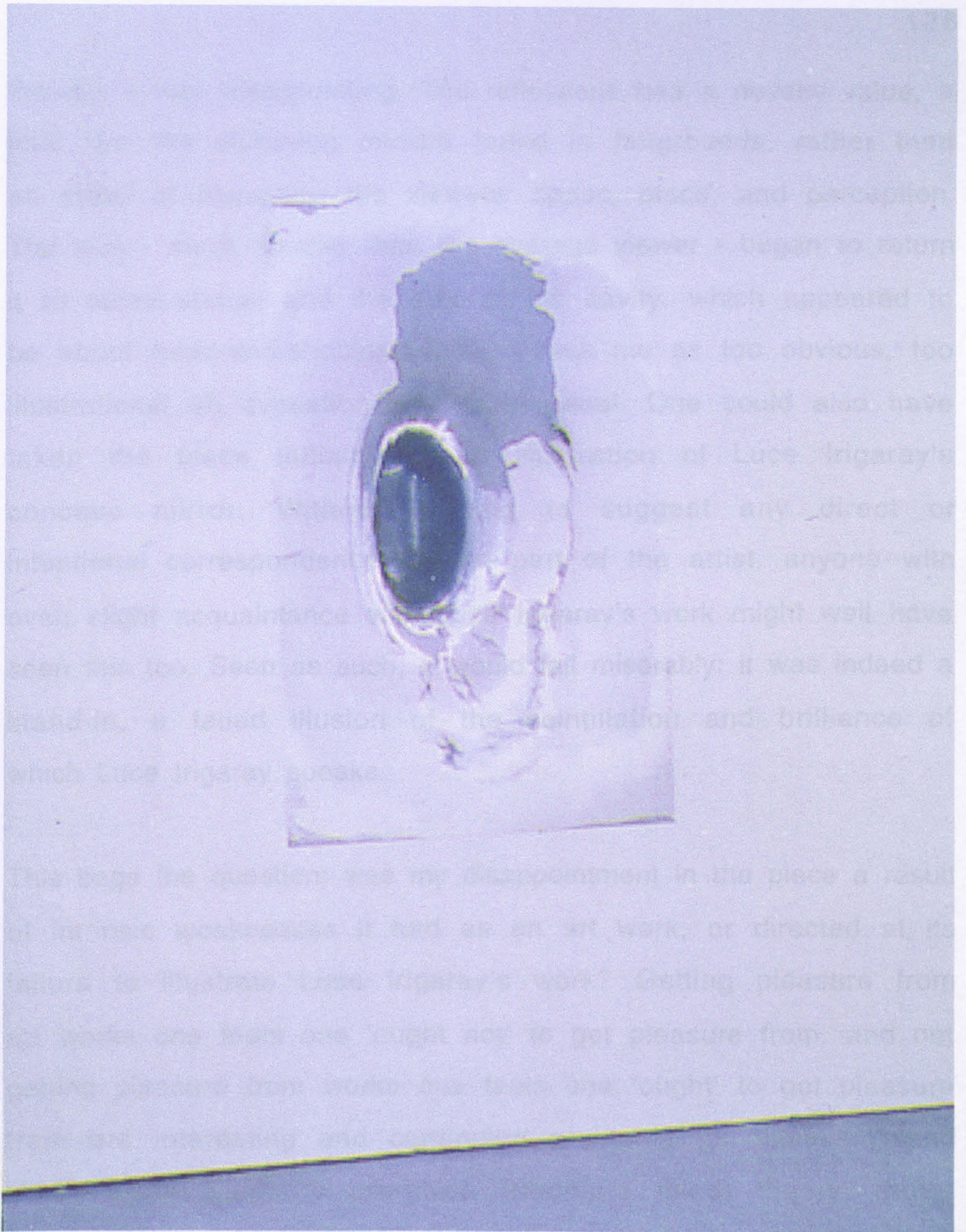
an immediate impression of being dark, massive, & Anish Kapoor  
1990. *Drawings for a descent into Limbo* ▶  
n.d. Photograph from *DocumentalX* vol. 2, ed. by Roland Nachtigaller and Nicola von  
Velsen (Stuttgart: Edition Cantz, 1992)



black pigment. It is hard to know what the effect would have been without the two external accidents of light and debris; certainly a related work seen in the Venice Biennale of 1990, which was set vertically into a wall, did not survive the viewers' curious insertion of hands into the space and fingers around the rim. The delicate powdered pigment, once disturbed, betrayed the form it was covering. In Documenta, the sphere was much larger, and the vertiginous feeling caused by standing above it provoked dizzy staring rather than speculative exploration. In my perception the absolute nature of the concavity coupled with its lack of fixity did not (of course) produce the brilliance about which Luce Irigaray speaks, but it did edge towards an effect of scintillation in my vision.

The second piece by Anish Kapoor I wish to mention is *Untitled* (1995), exhibited in the group exhibition 'Belladonna' at the ICA, London, January-April 1996 (plate 9). This was the first piece I had seen by Kapoor made from metal, rather than his trade-mark powdered pigment. A rectangular shape of polished aluminium almost 1.5 x 1 metre was set onto the wall. In the centre of this rectangle the aluminium veered back into the wall space to create an oval recess or tunnel. The viewer was reflected in the highly polished surface, initially the right way up on the flat surround, then upside down as the concavity opened up, then in a series of smudge-shapes in the interior of the cavity. The recess was just under a metre deep; despite the multiplicity of reflections, however, it did seem finite, with its dimensions fixed. It did have an immediate impression of being transgressive in a fashionable, 1990s, post-modern-chic manner: the piece had immediate sexual connotations in its shape, form, and penetrative aspect. Ultimately





Anish Kapoor  
*Untitled*  
1995. c. 48" high. Aluminium  
Courtesy ICA, London



though, it was disappointing. The reflections had a novelty value, a little like the distorting mirrors found in fairgrounds, rather than an effect of disrupting the viewers' space, place, and perception. The size - much smaller than the average viewer - began to return it to object-status; and the size of the cavity, which appeared to be about head-and-shoulders size, struck me as too obvious, too illustrational an evocation of a birth canal. One could also have taken the piece initially as an illustration of Luce Irigaray's concave mirror. Without wishing to suggest any direct or intentional correspondence on the part of the artist, anyone with even slight acquaintance with Luce Irigaray's work might well have seen this too. Seen as such, it would fail miserably: it was indeed a stand-in, a failed illusion of the scintillation and brilliance of which Luce Irigaray speaks.

This begs the question: was my disappointment in the piece a result of intrinsic weaknesses it had as an art work, or directed at its failure to illustrate Luce Irigaray's work? Getting pleasure from art works one feels one 'ought not' to get pleasure from, and not getting pleasure from works one feels one 'ought' to get pleasure from are interesting and continuing problems for feminism; and works which illustrate pre-given (therefore fixed) theory, rather than being productive of their own theory (and which are, therefore, discursive), inevitably have structural problems concerning how they create meaning. While a discussion of the relationship between politics and aesthetics is implicit throughout this thesis, suffice it to say here that with the second piece, the two disappointments were entwined: I could not see the work without immediately thinking of Luce Irigaray; and the first piece was clearly stronger, but did not provoke thoughts of Luce



Irigaray's work in me until I made a comparison between it and the second piece. It was, however more *productive* of Luce Irigaray's analysis for me, in the way in which it made me think about space, place and perception, vision and sensation, in my processing of my experience of the work. The paradox was that the possibility of such a scintillation as evoked by Luce Irigaray was hinted at far more persuasively by the black spherical hole, with its production of vertigo and its disruption of the relation between its space, the viewer, and the viewer's perception, than by the rather tacky aluminium false-mirror, which was productive only of the frisson of novelty and a speculative gaze. Discussion with other people who had seen this second piece centred on the question of whether we had reached inside to ascertain for ourselves what its limits were. It encouraged the phallogocentric gaze, tickling it rather than disrupting it.

Luce Irigaray is well aware of the associations of the convex mirror with gynaecological instruments and the knife-edge along which she travels: the attempt to develop an analogy in a syntax appropriate for women, while still speaking in a Symbolic which needs to undo its own phallogocentricity, with the risk of collapsing back into phallogocentric structures:

But, may come the objection, - defending again the objective and the object - the speculum is not necessarily a mirror. It may, quite simply, be an instrument to *dilate* {*écarter*} the lips, the orifices, the walls {*parois*}, so that the eye can penetrate the *interior*. So that the eye can enter, to see, notably with speculative intent.<sup>22</sup>

The group of words around 'speculum', including speculation, speculate and specularization, are played with from the title of *Speculum* onwards, with their intellectual, financial and visual

---

22 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 144/*Speculum*, p. 180.



meanings being alluded to at different moments. Luce Irigaray has said on at least two occasions that she was unhappy with the translation of the title *Speculum, de l'autre femme* as *Speculum of the Other Woman*.<sup>23</sup> The (non)placing of punctuation encouraged the understanding for an English-language readership that Luce Irigaray was suggesting both a straightforward mirror - in which, in a phallogocentric structure, the subject sees the other of his same - and also the gynaecological instrument, the speculum, which Luce Irigaray was then assumed to use as an analogy to speculate upon her 'other woman' - whomsoever, and in whatsoever relationship, she might have been. In both of these dissenting passages Luce Irigaray states that upon reflection the translation *Speculum: On the Other: Woman* would have indicated more strongly a further meaning:

In the title of *Speculum*, as throughout the whole book, I played on words, on meanings, to enable a different truth {*une autre vérité*} to appear. Thus, *speculum* denotes a gynecological instrument, though at an earlier period in our culture this term was used to denote the most faithful {*la plus fidèle*} expression of reality possible. *Speculum mundi*, for example, was not an uncommon title and was what I had in mind.<sup>24</sup>

She expands upon this elsewhere:

It's not simply a question of a mirror in which one sees oneself, but of the way in which it's possible to give an account of the world within a discourse: a mirror of the world. How I'm going to try to give an account of the world in my discourse. It's in this sense above all that I also played with the mirror, but not simply, because the mirror in a simple sense, in which I see myself, has served for the most part to constitute a masculine subject.<sup>25</sup>

So the speculum is not simply an instrument of the phallogoculo-

23 Luce Irigaray, *I Love To You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History*, trans. by Alison Martin (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 59-61/*J'aime à toi: esquisse d'une félicité dans l'histoire* (Paris: Grasset), pp. 101-104. Hereafter cited as *I Love To You/J'aime à toi*. "Je - Luce Irigaray": A Meeting with Luce Irigaray', interview by Elizabeth Hirsh and Gary A. Olson, trans. by Elizabeth Hirsh and Gaëtan Brulotte, in *Women Writing Culture*, ed. by Gary A. Olson and Elizabeth Hirsh (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 141-166 (pp. 147-148).

24 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, pp. 59-60/*J'aime à toi*, pp. 101-102.

25 Luce Irigaray, 'Je - Luce Irigaray', pp. 147.



centric hysteroscopy discussed in the last chapter. Luce Irigaray is using the analogy of the speculum not as maintenance mimesis (which Anish Kapoor falls back into, for instance) but as productive mimesis. This much should be evident from the overall text: the reflecting back of the patriarchal and phallogocentric philosophies of Plato and Freud upon themselves; the central section of the book named 'Speculum' pushing to either side the sections on Freud and on Plato; the three central chapters of that central section named 'Une mère de glace' ('The ice-glass-mirror mother'), '...And if, Taking the Eye of a Man Recently Dead,...', and 'La mystérique' ('the woman hysteric-mystic-mystery'), and so forth. Her speculum is not looking for an absolute or universal truth, but, as quoted above, for "a different truth [...] the most faithful expression of reality". The word "faithful", occurring here in *I Love to You*, is used through that book in close relation with the subject's recognition of the limits of his or her subjecthood in a relation of intersubjectivity. Its use in relation to the speculum denotes the nature of the subjecthood and its truth, its reality: a subjecthood which recognises the subjectivity of others, and, therefore, recognises also that it has limits and that others cannot be reduced to its objects - or to itself.

Once again, however, the subtlety of Luce Irigaray's moves within language can be blunted with the inevitable problems of translation. For example, Philippa Berry has pointed out<sup>26</sup> that, in the phrase quoted above, "it may, quite simply, be an instrument to *dilate* the lips", the choice of "dilate" for the original "écarte" cannot carry the full implication of the French, which my

---

26 Philippa Berry, 'The Burning Glass', p. 236.



dictionary tells me includes such meanings as 'to part', but also 'to brush aside', 'to remove', 'to distract', 'to stray' and 'to diverge from'.<sup>27</sup> This indicates a potential reserve in the structure of the speculum, and possibilities for a productive mimesis of it. Philippa Berry suggests one apposite example of this:

In her separation of the other woman, not from the mother but rather from the restricted place of the mother allocated to woman in patriarchy, one of Irigaray's key moves in *Speculum* is to turn the mirror that is "mother-matter" *in upon itself*, in an act of self-examination [...]. Irigaray's emphasis [is] upon a feminist *écart* or in-turning into a mysterious opening - an opening she implies to be the forgotten ground of philosophical speculation...<sup>28</sup>

The use of productive mimesis of the speculum shatters the ice-glass-mirror that is the two dimensional representation, 'woman', exposing the device that it is and recognising the brilliance that is that mirror's backing, unseen and unknown in phallogocentric structures.

The structure of the eye itself - or rather, the phallogocentric understanding of the eye and its vision - is also available for question here. I have already noted Luce Irigaray's summary of this as "a given *plan/e*: a projection from a single source".<sup>29</sup> This evokes the image of a slide projector, with the flat surface of the screen carrying the illusionary projected image, also a flat representation. I understand this as being suggestive of a closed circuit: that the masculine subject sees only what he wants to see in order to maintain his subjecthood. Thus the representation, 'woman' is an illusion on the flat surface of the mirror - a flat surface which is necessary in order to reflect back to him without distortion the image he wishes to see: the other of his same. One of

---

27 s.v. *écarter*, *The Oxford Hachette French Dictionary* (1994).

28 Philippa Berry, 'The Burning Glass', p. 236.

29 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 142/*Speculum*, p. 177.



the central chapters in *Speculum*, ‘...And if, Taking the Eye of a Man Recently Dead,...’, explores the relation between Descartes’ ocular experiments (the title comes from the Fifth Discourse of his treatise on refraction and telescopes) and his assertion of subjecthood; another chapter, ‘Kore: Young Virgin, Pupil of the Eye’, also attends to Enlightenment thought, in particular “reason - which will also be called natural light”<sup>30</sup> and the structures that support this analogy. The title also draws our attention to the meanings of the name given to Kore, the daughter of Demeter. Her story is not discussed here, but it is elsewhere, where it is offered by Luce Irigaray as the telling through myth of the potentially fatal results of the disruption to the mother/daughter relationship caused by the exchange (and theft/rape) of women between men.<sup>31</sup>

But here, in the centre of *Speculum*, the patriarchal exploration and philosophy of the structure, role and definition of the *kore* is described:

The Words of the Father depend for their effect upon a measured and harmonious reflection of each part within the whole, untroubled by searchlights by night or eclipses by day. This rigorous distribution of each speck of brightness, of which only the *information* is retained, is set up by relays of mirrors - as well as filters, lenses, paraphragms, camerae obscurae {*de chambres noires*}, projection and reproduction screens - which divide up “Being” {*l’ “être”*} as a whole into fragments suitable to each “being” {*“étant”*}: [...] [including the] mirror of the eye in which the *central point of vision* - the *kore* - is the most purely reflecting.<sup>32</sup>

But of course the *kore* - the pupil of the eye - is not a flat

30 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 148/*Speculum*, p. 184.

31 For example, in ‘Luce Irigaray: Paris, Summer 1980’, interview by Elaine Hoffman Baruch and Lucienne Serrano, in *Women Analyze Women in France, England and the United States*, ed. by Elaine Hoffman Baruch and Lucienne Serrano (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988), pp. 147-164 (p. 157), and *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 111-115/*Amante marine de Friedrich Nietzsche* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980), pp. 119-123.

32 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, pp. 148-149/*Speculum*, p. 185. Original emphases restored.



reflecting/projecting surface; it is the darkness marking the entrance from the external convexity to the internal concavity of the eye, a 'hole', a 'nothing to see'; a place where sight is underwritten by touch; a physically structural relationship between concavity and convexity, mediated through proximity and touch; the space and place through which the vision of the 'subject' really is turned upside down. Luce Irigaray says that "touch is a more subjective, intersubjective sense [than sight]; it is somewhere between active and passive; it escapes the possessive, mechanical and warlike economy, except where it is reduced to assault and battery or to a part of the body".<sup>33</sup> Is this, a site of the interaction of sight and touch, and a site of patriarchal denial of touch, the causal site of the 'blind spot'? If so, why? The concave mirror, given the slightest entrance of light, will generate a scintillating brilliance so intense that it will burn anything within and anything which looks within. The gaze is more than dazzled; it is blinded; it will look, but see nothing. "Then the gaze, aghast at such bareness, will have concluded that at any rate all brilliance was its own preserve, that it could continue to speculate without competition".<sup>34</sup> So, says Luce Irigaray, while its ability to create 'confusion' is noted, "the concave mirror's potential for setting things afire is not mentioned".<sup>35</sup> In this way, "Nature, *physis*, is apprehended by (her) mirage, not by her dazzling radiance. Men freeze nature to understand her, they do not set her aflame. {*Elle se*

---

33 Luce Irigaray, *Thinking the Difference: For a Peaceful Revolution*, trans. by Karin Montin (London: Athlone Press, 1994), p. 21/*Le temps de la différence: pour une révolution pacifique* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche/Librairie Générale Française, 1989), p. 38. Hereafter cited as *Thinking the Difference/Le temps de la différence*.

34 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 146/*Speculum*, p. 182.

35 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 149/*Speculum*, p. 186.



*comprend en la/se glaçant non en l'/s'embrasant}*".<sup>36</sup>

In Western patriarchy, the place from which women have been allowed to speak and act publicly is the site of *la mystérique* - the hysteric-mystic-mystery which is the name Luce Irigaray gives to:

... mystic language or discourse. [...] This is the place where consciousness is no longer master, where, to its extreme confusion, it sinks into a 'dark night' that is also fire and flames. This is the place where 'she' - and in some cases he, if he follows 'her' lead - speaks about the dazzling glare which comes from the source of light that has been logically repressed [...]. Also about a 'burning glass' {*miroir ardent*}.<sup>37</sup>

What patriarchy understands in its representational economy is the ice-glass-mirror - *la glace* - when what could be understood is the brilliance of the soul-mirror - *la psyche*. It is this (sense of) vision which is at the centre of *Speculum*: the attempt, with words which evoke passion, to find ways of recognising the female, woman's, soul; the same attempt that is central to the enunciative position of *la mystérique*:

And my eyes have proved sharp enough to look upon that glory without blinking. They would have been seared had they not been that simple eye of the 'soul' that sets fire to what it admires out of its hollow socket. A burning glass {*miroir ardent*} is the soul who in her cave (re)joins with the source of light to set everything ablaze {*embraser*} that approached her hearth. Leaving only ashes there, only a hole: fathomless in her incendiary blaze.<sup>38</sup>

We could pause here to remember the painting by Berthe Morisot called *La Psyché* (1876) (plate 10), which images a young woman standing before a tall swing-mirror of the type called in France *une psyché*. It is ambiguous whether the title refers explicitly to the mirror, or more elliptically evokes through the figure of the young woman, Psyché, who, in Greek myth, was a mortal woman who

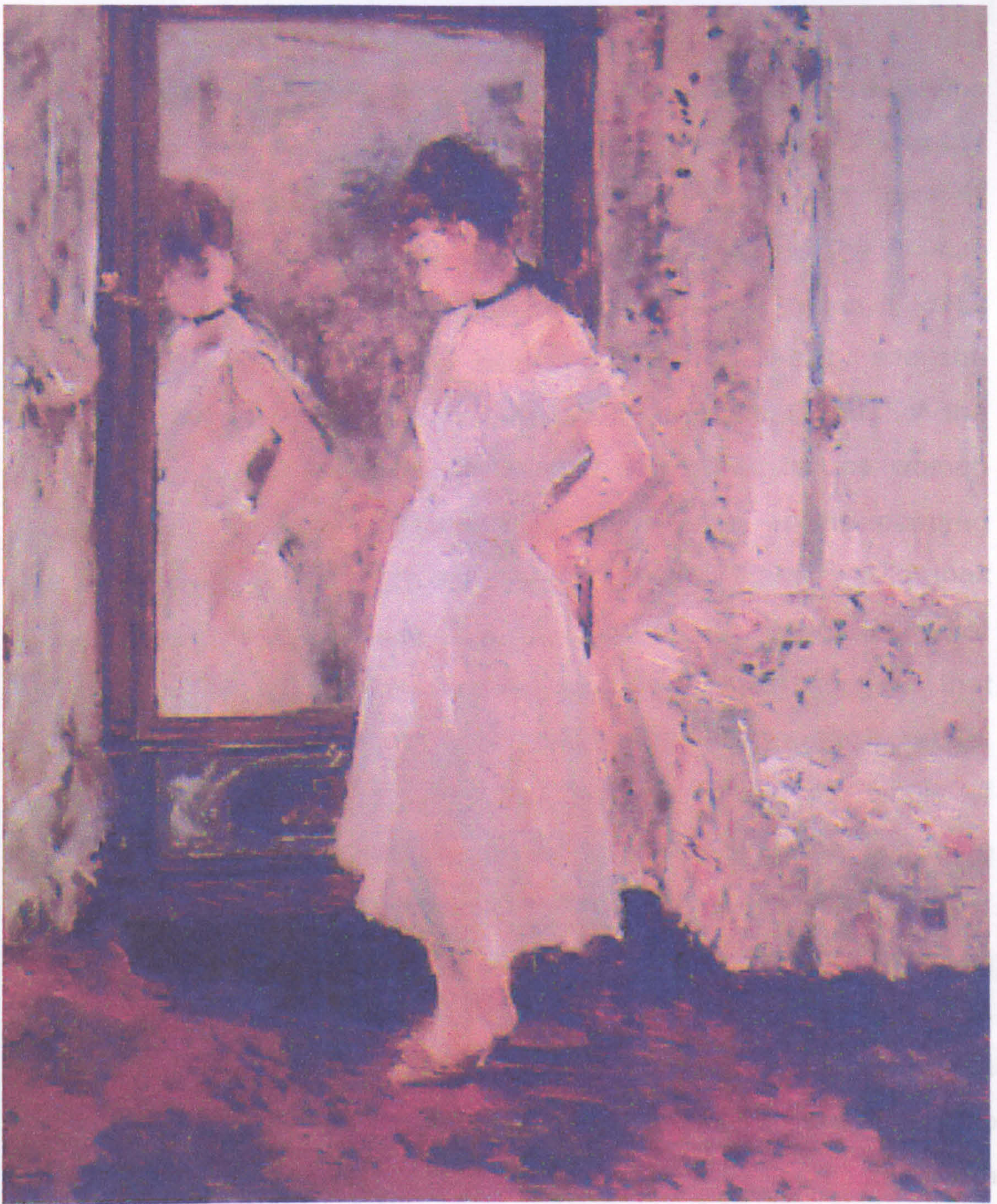
---

36 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 150/*Speculum*, p. 186.

37 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 191/*Speculum*, p. 238.

38 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 197/*Speculum*, p. 246.





Berthe Morisot  
*Psyche*  
1876. Oil on canvas, 25.5" x 21.25"  
Thyssen Bornemisza Collection, Lugano  
Photograph from Kathleen Adler and Tamar Garb, *Berthe Morisot* (Oxford: Phaidon  
Press, 1987)



gazed upon the god Eros. Anne Higonnet quotes Carla Gottlieb, who says "Living in a world of positivist values, the nineteenth-century artist does not play with the double meaning of the term".<sup>39</sup> However, Higonnet also reads the painting as showing the woman "gathering a loose chemise around her waist", when to me it looks like a more fitted garment with gathering and front lacing, and she states that "the mirror image is directed to us", when parts of the reflection are not visible to us, and would only be so for the women in the pose. She also projects onto the women in the painting particular speculations: "she considers how her figure would look if she were formally dressed [...] absorbed by the mirror image of alterations intended for the public eye".<sup>40</sup> I would suggest that there is more ambiguity in the painting than Higonnet credits, particularly in that we are aware that we do not see the whole of the image that the woman in the pose sees. Not only do we see more of her, but we see her more clearly than we see her mirror image: its clarity is hers alone. Certainly, there is a tension between interior and exterior - the painting of the chemise in the mirror is highly generalised, and could just pass as an image of the dress Morisot painted in *At the Ball* a year earlier. But there is also tension between the exteriorising of the image and the interiorising of thought suggested by the word 'reflection'. To project a content for the woman's thoughts is to limit the possibilities which Morisot herself may have been contemplating, as well as the nuances we can read into the representation of a

---

39 Carla Gottlieb, quoted by Anne Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot's Images of Women* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), fn. 4 p. 279.

40 Anne Higonnet, *ibid.*, p. 167.



woman and her reflection today.<sup>41</sup> The ambiguities can add to, rather than detract from, the present significance of *La Psyché*, and not *La glace*, as a title. It can lead us to a consideration of Luce Irigaray's analysis of women's contemplations of their reflections in (front of) the mirror.

### Reflection, self-image, beauty

In 'Divine women', Luce Irigaray quotes Ludwig Feuerbach as saying "God is the mirror of man", adding:

Woman has no mirror wherewith to become woman. Having a God and becoming one's gender go hand in hand. God is the other that we need absolutely. In order to become, we need some shadowy perception of achievement {*besoin du pressentiment d'un accomplissement pour devenir*}; not a fixed objective, not a One postulated to be immutable but rather a cohesion and a horizon that assures us the passage between past and future, the bridge of a present *that remembers*, that is not sheer oblivion and loss, not a crumbling away of existence, a failure simply, to take note.<sup>42</sup>

Feuerbach's comment adds to the complexity of the structure which

---

41 See Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 81, for a discussion of *La Psyché* as an example of Morisot's "concern with female subjectivity especially at critical turning-points of the feminine" and with "spaces of femininity".

42 Luce Irigaray, 'Divine Women', in *Sexes and Genealogies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 55-72 (p. 67)/'Femmes divines', in *Sexes et Parentes* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987), pp. 67-85 (p. 79). I would like to note that there is an echo here of Lacan's 'mirror phase' and critiques of it; an echo which will recur through this section. To engage with this fully would, again, be necessarily technical, lengthy, and tangential to my aim, which is not to chart the differences between Luce Irigaray and Jacques Lacan; such a project would be of more interest in a psychoanalytic-historical context, but is not really of interest here. So I would like to leave Lacan's work in the status of being symptomatic of the phallogocentric structures that Luce Irigaray is trying to undo, rather than present it as over-determinedly causal of her work. This is also in acknowledgement her own stated aims: "I did not want [...], as some have thought or written, to enact the parricide of one of my supposed masters. Not at all. I wanted to begin to define what a woman is, thus myself as a woman - and not only a woman but as freely belonging to the female gender or generic - by carrying out a partial process of limitation or negation relative to my natural immediacy, and relative to the representation I had been given of what I was as a woman, that is, the other of/for man, the other of male culture." *I Love To You*, pp. 63-64/*J'aime à toi*, pp. 108-109.



rests upon a fundamentally simple premise: phallogocentric structures build man's subjectivity upon his 'seeing' everything around him as other of his same. Most importantly for this discussion, it means that he has constructed the representation, 'woman', and projected it upon women. But it also means that, certainly in patriarchal, Western, Judeo- or Helleno-Christian cultures, man can create God in his own image. This other, 'idealised', other of his same (as distinct from the 'deformed' other of his same, the representation, 'woman') then functions as the horizon of his possibilities, that necessity for a 'becoming' into subjectivity. As I noted at the start of this chapter, for patriarchal man, the other of his same functions for his subjectivity as a mirror, and Luce Irigaray has indicated that "Representation can dispense with and supplant the role played in the real life of the senses by the mirror".<sup>43</sup> But if women do not have an horizon of possibilities, an enunciative divine/position from the burning mirror, then one of the things that is needed is a movement the other way:

The impotence, the formlessness, the deformity associated with women, the way they are equated with something other than the human and split between the human and the inhuman (half-woman, half-animal), their duty to be adorned, masked, and made up, etc., rather than being allowed *their own* physical, bodily beauty, their own skin, their own form(s), all this is symptomatic of the fact that women lack a female god who can open up the perspective in which their flesh can be transfigured.<sup>44</sup>

As well as a move towards recognising the potential for a representation that is an horizon of possibilities, we need also to move from this to its necessary corollary: a representation that is "in the real life of the senses" that allows for such an horizon; a self-image in a real-life mirror and elsewhere. There are clear

---

43 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 95/*Speculum*, p. 116.

44 Luce Irigaray, 'Divine Women', p. 64/'Femmes divines', p. 76.



implications here for art practices (representational practices) by women; not only how women image themselves, but how they image each other, how they image womanliness and femininity: becoming a woman. I think that what Luce Irigaray does in following this argument through is, without being proscriptive about the nature of practice, to offer indicative analyses of the structures by and through which women represent themselves in the broadest sense (initially to themselves, but not exclusively).

In 'Divine Women' Luce Irigaray performs such a move (from an horizon of possibilities in the divine to one in the spirit *through* the body) in her account of women's relation to their own self image in the mirror, and to their beauty: "Women have rarely used their beauty as a weapon for *themselves*, even more rarely as a *spiritual* weapon. The body's splendour has rarely been used as a lever to advance self-love, self-fulfilment".<sup>45</sup> Without being able to see their self-image (to represent it to themselves) as beautiful, there is no potential for women to recognize/develop a representation which is an horizon of possibilities appropriate for them; such an horizon would necessarily include a possibility of beauty for women, a female soul, and a female divine. Following this point, over the subsequent couple of pages, Luce Irigaray works through the problems of self-image for women in a patriarchy, and the credible potential self representation (I distinguish here between women's relation with self-image, by which I mean in particular the visual image in the mirror, and self-representation in the broad sense indicated above, and including how women represent that self-image to themselves: how they see

---

45 Luce Irigaray, 'Divine Women', p. 64/'Femmes divines', p. 76.



the image, allow for and develop its potential as an horizon). I shall follow these arguments through, taking Luce Irigaray's discussion in five sections.

1.

Maternal beauty has been glorified in our religious and social traditions, but womanly beauty for centuries has been seen merely as a trap for the other {*que séduction pour fair tomber l'autre chez la femme amante*}. The transfiguration of a female body by beauty, the active share that the woman can have in that transfiguration, are today often misunderstood. Perhaps they have been forgotten. Beauty is not presented or represented as the spiritual predicate of the flesh. Yet, it is not impossible to imagine that a body can be, can above all become, intelligent or stupid, that our relation to corporal love can be actively aesthetic or passively abject {*soumis*}, reduced: for example, to a pseudoanimality (animals themselves are beautiful in their sexual displays; bestial is an animal quality negatively attributed to man), or to motherhood, with its associations to bodily deformity and the link often made between it and chastity.<sup>46</sup>

Beauty in women, as it is understood in Western patriarchal culture, is found in the two extremes of the representation, 'woman': the/his mother and the/his mistress, the virgin and the whore, the beautiful object of contemplation and the woman subjected to hysteroscopy. This has been well charted, not least through feminist research and works such as Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martines' *Not in God's Image*. They have collected such passages from the early teachings of the Church as this from Tertullian: "And so a veil must be drawn over a beauty so dangerous as to have brought scandal into heaven itself, so that before God, in whose eyes it is guilty of the angel's fall, it may blush in the presence of the remaining angels and give up the licence to show itself and hide even from the eyes of men".<sup>47</sup> Mary was the model of

---

46 Luce Irigaray, 'Divine Women', pp. 64-65/'Femmes divines', pp. 76-77.

47 Tertullian, *De Virginibus Velandis*, quoted by Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martines, *Not in God's Image: Women in History* (London: Virago, 1979), p. 144.



beauty for women, but as mother and virgin, not as woman. Mothers were encouraged to emulate her as much as was possible. Marina Warner includes in her eloquent charting of the mythic figurations of Mary the following modern prayer for girls: "Most blessed Virgin Mary ... your life of faith and love and perfect unity with Christ was planned by God to show us clearly what our lives should be ... you are the outstanding model of motherhood and virginity";<sup>48</sup> while Olwen Hufton has collected a C17th French prayer recommended by the church for women in labour which begins: "Oh Mother of the holiest one of holies who approached nearest to his divine perfection and so became mother to such a son".<sup>49</sup> But to place women as mothers by creating an ideal who is figured as a mother rather than as a woman is to reduce women; and to structure an ideal of motherhood which has bodily failure built in to it (she conceived without sex, and did not die but was taken body and soul into heaven) is to reduce still further any possible sense of becoming women. As it is, and with this impossible ideal, Luce Irigaray reminds us, the motherly body is often considered deformed (and thus shameful in its relation to the ideal?<sup>50</sup>) and has to remain chaste (the closest approximation to the patriarchal

---

48 From *Marian Devotions for Today. Based on the Second Vatican Council*, ed. by Fr. Dermot Hurley (Dublin, 1971), quoted by Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Pan Books, 1985), p. 68.

49 From *Dévotions particulières pour les femmes enceintes* (1665), quoted by Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe. Volume 1: 1500-1800* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), p. 183.

50 Again, as laid down by the early Church. For example, Fortunatus (530-609), Bishop of Poitiers on pregnant women: "When the belly swells from its wound and sensual dropsy grows, the woman's exhausted health hangs by a hair. The raised skin is so distent and misshapen that even though the mother may be happy with her burden, she becomes ashamed .... How describe the tears shed at the moment when the muscles relax to release the prisoner and procure relief for the viscera? A way is forced violently through the passage and a being, perhaps lifeless, brought to life. The mother painfully turns her dull glance towards him. What does she see? An infant stretched motionless ... so that she no longer deserves to be called either mother or virgin." *Opera Poetica*, quoted by Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martines, *Not in God's Image*, p. 151.



definition of Mary's virginity?).

The language that Luce Irigaray uses in her discussion of female beauty and women's self-images in the mirror intertwines terminology of corporeality with that of Christianity, particularly Catholicism. While exposing the maintenance mimesis expected of women in Western patriarchy, she performs an act of productive mimesis upon this terminology in order to work towards a sense of spirituality or the divine for women, which issues from a sense of female beauty. A sense of womanly corporeal beauty is part of this, and thus so too is a woman's comprehension of beauty in her self-image. In this introductory passage, Luce Irigaray talks of "the transfiguration of the female body by beauty" and the possibility that beauty can be "the spiritual predicate of the flesh". We already consider other emotional and intellectual aspects of the body; why, then, is it impossible to think of the spirituality of the female body?

2.

Female beauty {*la beauté féminine*} is always considered as *finery* {*parure*} ultimately designed to attract the other into the self. It is almost never perceived as a manifestation of, an appearance of, a phenomenon expressive of {*qui dit*} interiority - whether of love, of thought, of flesh. We look at ourselves in the mirror to *please someone*, rarely to interrogate the state of our body or our spirit, rarely for ourselves and in search of {*en vue de*} our own becoming.<sup>51</sup>

Feminine beauty is *une parure* - that most feminine of finery, a word used in France in relation to (for example) the frivolity of food trimmings, bridal wear, and the innate floweriness of spring. Innate, frivolous, up for consumption, and feminine, it is both a trap - indicative of intentionality and concealment - and surface,

---

51 Luce Irigaray, 'Divine Women', p. 64/'Femmes divines', p. 77. Translation modified.



not speaking of the profundity and interiority of body and spirit. We are back in the realm of the two dimensionality of the phallogocentric representation, 'woman': surface, with an illusion of depth. The relationship that women as the representation, 'woman', have with the mirror at present is one of maintenance mimesis of the representation, 'woman': to please, to reproduce the allure that the other has in the eyes of the same. We cannot become subjects in this representational economy; we cannot become women. When we look at images of ourselves, in the mirror and elsewhere, we *look at ourselves as* the representation, 'woman'. We *represent ourselves to ourselves as* the representation, 'woman'.

### 3.

The mirror almost always serves to reduce us to a pure exteriority - of a very particular kind. It functions *{il intervient}* as a possible way to constitute screens between the other and myself. In a way quite different from mucuses or skin, living, porous, fluid differentiations and the possibility of communion, the mirror is a weapon of frozen *{glacée}* - and polemical - distancing. I risk only my double to love. I do not abandon or give myself as body, flesh, as immediate - and geological, genealogical - affects. The mirror signifies the constitution of a fabricated (female) other *{d'un(e) autre fabriqué(e)}* that I shall put forward as an instrument *{enjeu}* of seduction in my place. I seek to be seductive and to be content with images of which I remain the artisan, the artist.<sup>52</sup>

In the dominant ways of seeing in Western culture the flat mirror, as we have seen, structures representational and interpretive possibilities. As guarantor of the 'subject', it is also guarantor of the other of his same. A screen for projecting onto, it maintains this 'otherness', it maintains a distance without a possibility of mediation and disallows the play of couples. Thus the representation, 'woman' is fixed, frozen: the mirror is *la glace* -

---

52 Luce Irigaray, 'Divine Women', p. 65/'Femmes divines', p. 77. Translation modified.



the ice-glass-mirror - not *la psyché*, the soul-mirror, or the *miroir ardent*. A woman, always already elsewhere than the representation, 'woman' - her double - can never enter fully that play of the couple, can never, as the representation, 'woman', fully risk love. How can she when her subjectivity is elsewhere? The representation, 'woman', created by patriarchal man, is re-created in a process of maintenance mimesis by women. This is her stake in the patriarchal game of representation: to create the seductive *parure*. As with the hysteric and her mimesis (as we saw earlier), this is her art. How can there be room here for her to make anything else as art? This does not mean that she will not make 'art': but that the 'art' she makes will embody aspects of the representation, 'woman', and not her subjecthood, her subjectivity.

## 4.

I have yet to unveil, unmask {*démasquée*}, or veil myself *for me* - to veil myself for self-contemplation, for example, to retouch myself with my gaze so as to limit my exposure to the other, but also to again be in touch with {*retoucher*} my own gestures and garments, thus to re-nest (into) my vision and contemplation of myself. Which is not a kind of cold narcissism, but rather a way that I can supply extra help and assistance, as an adult, to the different houses, the different bodies that have borne me, enveloped me, rocked me, embraced me, wrapped themselves around me... The mirror, and indeed the gaze, are frequently used as non-tactile weapons or tools, which break off the fluidity of touch, including that of the gaze.<sup>53</sup>

If *la parure* is a covering of finery and trimmings for the representation, 'woman', then the subjects, women, must have garments which are different and with a different relationship to the gaze. In 'The poverty of psychoanalysis' Luce Irigaray describes the function of the dance of the veil: "In many traditions [it] is the sexual and religious rite *par excellence*, a dance with a mystery and a cosmic reality that is at once prior to and beyond any

---

53 Luce Irigaray, 'Divine Women', p. 65/'Femmes divines', pp. 77-78. Translation modified.



already-constituted subjectivity. The scene is played out by the goddess-mother {*la déesse-mère*} or the woman-lover {*amante*}, the gods and the universe. It does not cover nothingness; it attempts to pass through illusion towards the act/gesture of creating or begetting the world".<sup>54</sup> This leads me to understand the use of the word 'veil' in the above passage as indicating in two ontological directions: not merely a choice of being clothed or not. "I have yet to unveil, unmask" I see as an acknowledgement of having yet to remove the covering that is *la parure*, the representation, 'woman', the masquerade required within patriarchy: to remove the surface plan/e or screen of the mirror. With "I have yet to [...] veil myself *for me*" a difference in the veil is indicated: note that she says "veil" and not "re-veil" after the unveiling. I understand this as referring to clothing oneself with the vestments that are the Symbolic syntax of one's subjectivity, and thus to have a screen/veil of mediation, whether of the subject with herself or of intersubjectivity. This is a veil that allows the self-contemplation of the subjects, women; and it also sets limits on that subjectivity and choice about marking those limits. It is a veil which allows touch to return to the gaze, rather than one which retains the gaze as abstract specularization. This is not the frozen auto-erotics projected onto the representation, 'woman', by an economy of the same, but a subjectivity to which amorousness, touch, vision and history have been returned, and in which they are returned to each other.

## 5.

---

54 Luce Irigaray, 'The Poverty of Psychoanalysis', trans. by David Macey, in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 79-104 (p. 87)/'Misère de la psychanalyse', in *Parler n'est jamais neutre* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985), pp. 253-279 (p. 261). Translation modified.



Though necessary at times for separating, the mirror - and the gaze when it acts as a mirror - ought to remain a means and not an end to which I yield. The mirror should assist, not undermine my incarnation. Generally it reflects back *{renvoie}* nothing but superficial, flat images. There are other means that generate volume better than specular reflection *{le reflet spéculaire}*. To work at beauty is at least as much a matter of working at gestures as the relationship to space and to others as it is a matter of cross-examining, usually with anxiety, your mirror. The mirror freezes our becoming breath, our becoming space. Our becoming bird, perhaps? Though it may at times help us to emerge, to move out of the water, the mirror paralyzes our energies *{élans}*, our movements, our wings. What protects me from the other and allows me to move toward him or her is more often the plotting out of a space of air *{l'aménagement d'un territoire d'air}* rather than the interposition of mirrors and ice-glasses *{glaces}* whose cutting edge always threatens to turn against me. After the totally enveloping *waters* of our prenatal time, we have to construct for ourselves, bit by bit, an envelope of *air* for our time on earth - air in which we can breathe and sing freely, in which we can spread our appearances and movements. Once we were fishes. We are destined to become birds. This will not happen without opening and mobility in the air.<sup>55</sup>

Luce Irigaray is not discarding mirrors. A sense of immediacy is intensely problematic for women, who have not had an appropriate Symbolic syntax through which to mediate themselves and their subjectivity. Then, a sense of separation is necessary, and mirrors can assist. But assist they must, not hinder: at present, they do not assist women's becoming and their subjectivity. As we have seen, in phallogocentric structures, they fix women as the representation, 'woman', freeze them into an anxious, speculative relationship with their own self-imagery. Luce Irigaray suggests that beauty is to be found in our gestural relationships with space, with other subjects. Space - air - is necessary for breath, life and movement. Beauty will be found in our becoming the subjects, women, for which air and space is necessary. It does not reside in the anxious relationship of the representation, 'women', with her image as the representation, 'woman', in the mirror; caught in a closed circuit, a maintenance mimesis of the phallogocentric gaze.

---

55 Luce Irigaray, 'Divine Women', pp. 65-66/'Femmes divines', pp. 78. Translation modified.



### Looking, listening, attentiveness

Women cannot represent themselves to themselves as subjects (let alone represent themselves to other subjects as subjects) while they are stuck in a representational economy of same and other, in which they are doomed to be forever other of the same. Women's relation to their self-image and to images of women, womanliness, and femininity is one that Rosalind Coward has identified as one not of narcissism, but of "narcissistic damage".<sup>56</sup> But women can scarcely become subjects without representational economies which recognize their subjectivity, and which are, therefore, economies of intersubjectivity. What is crucial to ensure the functioning of a Symbolic syntax appropriate to women is to build ways of attending to that syntax. It is not enough to develop a syntax in the Symbolic, then to assume that the methods of understanding it are unproblematic. If women collectively and painstakingly are developing visual languages which are appropriate, then we must not omit to attend to *how* we understand them. We must not continue developing such a syntax and our understandings of it (how we represent it to ourselves) without attending to the *methods by which* we come to those understandings. How do we look, listen, read? In this context, how do we (women) experience artworks (by women)? And how is that experience then mediated, to ourselves and to other subjects? What is an intersubjective relationship between the artist and the woman who looks at her work? How can it be developed?

---

56 Rosalind Coward, *Female Desire: Women's Sexuality Today* (London: Paladin, 1984), p. 80.



In *I Love to You* Luce Irigaray poses the initial questions:

Yet isn't it time for us to become communicating subjects? Have we not exhausted our other possibilities, indeed our other desires? Isn't it time for us to become capable not only of speech {*paroles*} but also of speaking to *one another*? Which is not the same thing at all.<sup>57</sup>

This speech is not necessarily the Symbolic towards which she aims elsewhere, accommodating the syntax appropriate for women.

Indeed, she points out just before this that:

Teleology, for man [...] is not conversing {*dialoguer*} with the other but rather suspending the interaction of the relation with the other in order to accomplish the self's own intention [...]. The whole of Western philosophy is the mastery of the *direction* of will and thought by the subject, historically man. Nothing is changed by the fact that nowadays women have access to this.<sup>58</sup>

If the subject and relations between subjects are not reconstituted, then things could get worse for women. Establishing "a new economy of existence or being which is neither that of mastery nor that of slavery but rather of exchange with no preconstituted object - vital exchange, cultural exchange, of words {*paroles*}, gestures, etc."<sup>59</sup> is the point of discussion here; indeed, one implication of *I Love to You*, when considered against the background of the earlier work, would be that a Symbolic syntax appropriate for women would be impossible without this shift to a "new economy" of exchange; another implication is that this change would inevitably begin to undo the languages of patriarchy, clearing the space for a syntax appropriate for women. The two must go hand in hand if women are to do something more than perform a maintenance mimesis upon patriarchy.

---

57 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, p. 45/*J'aime à toi*, p. 81.

58 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, p. 45/*J'aime à toi*, pp. 79-80.

59 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, p. 45/*J'aime à toi*, p. 80.



In a very pragmatic way, Luce Irigaray indicates two structures of discourse which are already in use. These, she suggests, are models of, on the one hand, the form of discourse to be disrupted, and on the other, the form of discourse to be developed:

... there is a difference in subjective economy between the hierarchical transmission of an already established discourse {*un langage*} and language {*une langue*}, order and law, and the exchange of meaning between us here and now. The first model of transmission or instruction is more parental, more genealogical, more hierarchical; the second more horizontal and intersubjective. The first model risks enslavement to the past, the second opens up a present in order to construct a future.<sup>60</sup>

These two models both help shape and are shaped by different structures of, and assumptions about, subjectivity, as can be deduced from their differing methods of giving and receiving: "The first model operates by way of transmitted dependency, the second by way of reciprocal listening {*une écoute réciproque*}".<sup>61</sup> Thus is brought in a concern of Luce Irigaray's which has increased since the late 1980s: that of working towards an anti-patriarchal culture (I mean by 'culture' the tenor of social, political, and artistic interaction between subjects). This is a necessary development from her analysis of the non-subjecthood of women under patriarchy and her work towards possible subjectivity, Symbolic syntax, and horizons for women. Women cannot become subjects in broader cultural and social structures which alienate them. As she puts it later in the book, discussing the use of the masculine as the normative subject in language:

The *he/they* {*il(s)*} becomes a pseudo-transcendence to which she is oriented, losing her subjectivity on the way, and thus the possibility of real communication.

Communication, exchange between people, intersubjectivity - the privileged loci of the least alienated female identity - are thus held back from appropriation by the female gender and from reciprocity between the sexes.

---

60 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, pp. 45-46/*J'aime à toi*, p. 81.

61 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, p. 46/*J'aime à toi*, p. 81.



With no return to the self, woman/women cannot truly engage in dialogue.<sup>62</sup>

Luce Irigaray proposes a developed practice of *listening* as key to anti-patriarchal culture:

Listening that does not exclude respect, especially for the other's experience, for the unique contribution *he* or *she* makes to culture beyond the transfer of information. The first model is not, strictly speaking, a model of communication. It is, at best, an information model, constituting knowledge as an aggregate of information and as the power {*le pouvoir*} it is likely to confer within institutions, in the opinion of colleagues or followers. The second model offers itself as an opening to a field of communication, as a world of the creation and exchange of thought and culture in which no man or woman can become master or slave for fear of destroying the given objective.<sup>63</sup>

This second model harkens back to comments that Luce Irigaray makes about the structures of listening in the psychoanalytic scenario, both in *This Sex* and in essays such as 'The Limits of the Transference'.<sup>64</sup> For example, the analyst may:

... on the traditional model of the theoretical, privilege a certain 'visible' element, which goes hand in hand with truth and proper meaning ... My ear may then be what discriminates, and identifies, and classifies, and interprets this 'visible' element; it may be at the service of perception from a distance, and privilege what is 'well formed'.<sup>65</sup>

The phallogocentric model of the relation between the analyst and the analysand retains power with the analyst, to whom belongs the gaze with its speculative, teleological structure and its need to discriminate form. Any practice of listening follows upon this structure and its configuring of the logos: distant, defining, controlling, turning what is said into information. But there is an alternative, where listening:

... may let itself be *touched differently*. [...] And this would mean that what is

---

62 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, p. 98/*J'aime à toi*, p. 153.

63 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, p. 46/*J'aime à toi*, p. 81-82.

64 Luce Irigaray, 'The Limits of the Transference', trans. by David Macey, in *The Irigaray Reader*, pp. 105-117/'La limit du transfert', in *Parler n'est jamais neutre*, pp. 293-305.

65 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 147/*Ce sexe*, p. 144.



to be heard and accomplished is rather a different mode of the 'syntactic', in language and in the body. Let me add that as soon as your listening ceases to privilege meaning, the well formed, the visible, then the analyst's body, your own - in this connection we could take another look at what is called 'benevolent neutrality' ... - is no longer protected by that sort of screen or referent. And so it comes into play 'differently' in transference. [...] We would thus escape from a dominant scopic economy, we would be to a greater extent in an economy of *flow*.<sup>66</sup>

Here we have a description of a practice of 'listening' which is (like that of sight) underwritten by touch; which is not predetermined by a certain economy of the logos which in turn rests upon a teleological scopic economy. It is a practice which works against the teleology of the classical analytic scenario, where the analyst works at "narrating', dissecting, interpreting the transference of the (male or female) analysand alone", but one that recognises "*both* transferences. Here is one of the things at stake in analytic power. Analysts do indeed have transferences".<sup>67</sup>

So overall in this advanced practice of listening we have a structure that recognises the subjectivity of the person who is speaking (does not reduce him or her to an object), and where the person listening does not deploy a "benevolent neutrality" but which instead recognises their listening, even their objectivity, as a subjective and bodily practice. It is a practice of engagement, not one of distance; a practice of communication between two subjects in which both are active participants; an active practice of intersubjectivity. It is a practice also which does not isolate the senses from each other, and which in its shape as a practice, can be found in the intersubjective engagement of other senses. Indeed, Luce Irigaray finds one of the most exemplary instances of this

---

66 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, pp. 147-148/*Ce sexe*, p. 144.

67 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 148/*Ce sexe*, pp. 144-145. Translation modified.



practice in the realm of sight and the gaze, as will be discussed below. I would like to call it a practice of attentiveness, as I think this suggests a combination of activity, non-imposition, and being-a-subject. I will follow through some of Luce Irigaray's discussions of this practice and this quality as I think it can advance possibilities for engaging with artworks. As I do so I also want to shift the terminology for the woman who experiences or encounters the artwork away from 'the viewer' with its naming of sight as the only sense which is involved, and also away from 'the female gaze', which, for all its theorizing, still appears to imply a simple inversion of the theory from which it developed, of the phallogentric male gaze. The word 'audience' has overtones of sociological surveys and of the theatrical, but does have the benefit of retaining a trace of Luce Irigaray's interest in the practice of listening. There is no phrase or word to encapsulate 'the subject, woman, who is in an intersubjective relationship with another subject, woman, mediated by the artworks of the second subject' (!) so as a compromise I will use the attentive woman or the attentive audience, on the understanding that attentiveness involves more than one sense, and presupposes a move towards intersubjectivity.

Essential to a practice of intersubjectivity is a recognition of the limits of the subject. If the other subject cannot be reduced to an object and so cannot be reduced to being the other of the same, then the subject has to recognize his or her limits. For Luce Irigaray, recognition of gender identity and gender difference is key for the subject's recognition that he or she is not everything:

In this way, to recognize an identity in oneself is itself to overcome instinctual and egological immediacy by recognizing the negative in the self. "I am sexed"



implies, "I am not everything". Identifying with my gender amounts to entering the world of mediation provided I recognize the existence of the other gender. There will thus no longer be the simple identity of my will with itself since respecting my nature as generic identity constrains the immediacy of my will. But this constraint does not emanate from an abstract or impersonal law. It is established on the basis of the objectivity of who I actually am. Before being limited by others, I am limited by myself owing to the objectivity of my sexed body and to the particularity that ensues from my inscription in a genealogy. In this sense, there is no immediate subjectivity. This is an incorrect concept, notion or expression.<sup>68</sup>

This is a subtle structure of accounting for a relation to mediation. If the subject recognizes an identity, then the will is constrained: the will has to recognize that the subject is not everything, that there are other identities. The sexed body, productive of particular structures of subjectivity, is also productive of the limits of that subjectivity - the negative of subjectivity being the recognition of other subjectivities. With the recognition of those limits comes the necessity for mediation. The subject, in a situation of intersubjectivity, cannot rest in a state of immediacy to itself or to other subjects. As Luce Irigaray says elsewhere, "Each subject is indexed to a gender and addresses another subject which is equally so: I<sub>she</sub> address you<sub>he</sub>, for example. This calls for the

---

68 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, pp. 51-52/*J'aime à toi*, pp. 91-92. She does state explicitly her privileging of gender difference over other differences - for example "But I think that it's because I'm able to situate *there* [ie: between woman and man] the difference and the negative which I will never surmount [...] that I'm able to respect the differences everywhere: differences between the other races, differences between the generations, and so on. Because I've placed a limit on my horizon, on my power." 'Je - Luce Irigaray', p. 161. This is, of course, a highly contentious position. One of the most considered and interesting critiques of it is Henry Louis Gates, 'Significant Others', *Contemporary Literature*, 29.4 (1988), 606-623. Gates criticises Irigaray's lack of concern for daily struggle (based on a reading of *Speculum* and *This Sex*) and opens up consideration of white men's specularization of black men, and gay male specularization. He concludes by preferring to Luce Irigaray some lines from Audre Lorde: "It is a waste of time hating a mirror/or its reflection/instead of stopping the hand/that makes glass with distortions". This is ironic: I think Luce Irigaray would agree with Audre Lorde about this, and indeed also with Gates when he says: "We must also interrogate [white, patriarchal representation]'s material conditions of emergence - and thus take a very practical interest in patriarchy as an everyday practice with specific conditions of reproduction" (pp. 622-623). Luce Irigaray has insisted from early on that "in order for a woman to reach the place where she takes pleasure as a woman, a long detour by way of the analysis of the various systems of oppression brought to bear upon her is assuredly necessary". Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 31/*Ce sexe*, p. 30.



construction of new types of mediation allowing an inter-communication between the genders which is not reducible to need, not to instinct, nor to natural fecundity, etc.”.<sup>69</sup>

As might be imagined, achieving this is far from being the same process for each gender, not least because men and women have a different relation to the Symbolic in our present culture. Thus what is necessary is not only a sense of identity and its limits, but a more active sense of identity: what Luce Irigaray calls a *relational identity*, a subjective identity which recognizes that each gender has its own particular problems to overcome to achieve intersubjectivity and thus attentiveness, both with other subjects of its own gender and of the other gender: “Such a relation [of attentiveness] can only come about if man renounces the domination of nature and of the economy of subjectivity, and if woman has the ability to govern her nature so that she becomes subjectivity”.<sup>70</sup> Men must realize that their subjectivity has limits; while women must realize their subjective identity (their identity as subjects) and, therefore, their need for subjective mediation:

Men and women must modify their relational identity. Certainly, women ‘spontaneously’ privilege the relation between subjects and men the relation to objects. The feminine subject constructs itself through a relation to the other, the masculine subject through the manufacture of objects and worlds starting from which it is possible for him to exchange with the other. Let us say the woman must learn to put some objectivity susceptible to being shared between *I* and *you*: this relation must not remain, for her, at the level of need and of subjective immediacy, otherwise the *you* risks disappearing as *you*. The man, on the other hand, needs to rediscover the other as subject beyond his universe of objects. What the one and the other lack in order to realize their relation is a dialectic between subjectivity and objectivity, at the same time

---

69 Luce Irigaray, ‘Thinking Life as Relation: An Interview with Luce Irigaray’, interview by Stephen Pluhacek and Heidi Bostic, *Man and World*, 29 (1996), 343-360 (p. 355).

70 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, p. 46/*J’aime à toi*, p. 82.



proper to each and common.<sup>71</sup>

In this passage, Luce Irigaray returns us to the highly pragmatic nature of this relationship: indeed (to treat it pragmatically), it could serve as an analysis of the crisis of representation in the art world. Historically, women artists have had to make work which can be seen to be a maintenance mimesis of the patriarchal languages of men; while at the same time that work has been written about *as if it were* a symptom of their *immediacy as women* (a phenomenon well charted within feminist art history). More recently, the apparent break down of the visual languages of art has served only to present the father-son power struggles of the maintenance mimeses in a slightly altered guise. The space that seems to have opened up for developing subjectivities is still, for men, about the production of the object (often as spectacle) and not about developing an awareness of the other subject and the possibilities of intersubjectivity. The market keeps excelling itself, not only (and most clearly) with palpable objects (paintings, sculptures etc) but with the selling of objects of little or no monetary value (Richard Long's stone circles, David Mach's sculptures made from wire coat hangers, matches, etc) and the marketing of body art (from Pietro Manzoni's canning of his breath and shit to photographic documentation of performance work being promoted to the level of artwork itself - and always on the behalf of the performer being photographed, not the photographer). Aspects of conceptual work could be considered as avoiding this; but some which clearly rely upon a degree of intersubjectivity, such as Sol LeWitt's wall drawings and Lawrence Weiner's

---

71 Luce Irigaray, 'Thinking Life as Relation', p. 355.



descriptive statements, nonetheless compromise this by only being available *as objects* on the market. They can only be accessed once they have negotiated the market (been sold) and have been reproduced by the owner. All of these correspond to Luce Irigaray's identification of men's patterns of 'communication': "For men's teleology implies rather an abandonment of immediate communication - of intersubjectivity and dialogue - in order to set off in quest of an *oeuvre* (in which they usually alienate themselves) and, among other things, a spiritual journey compelled by a transcendence appropriate to their ego".<sup>72</sup>

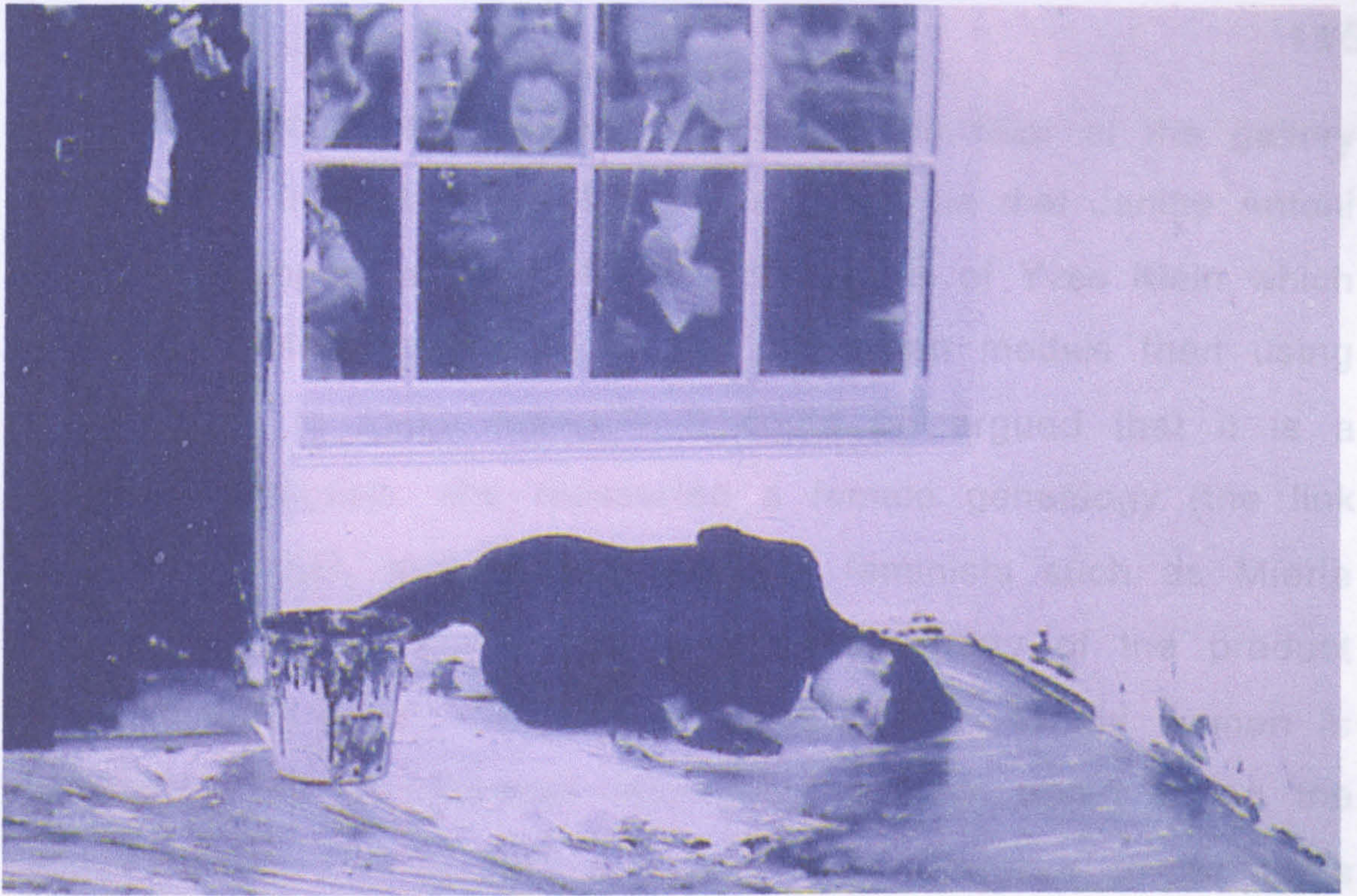
For women, the situation is slightly different. Of course, some are still permitted a place through their maintenance mimesis of patriarchal languages; and in some cases their work is still written about as a symptom of their immediacy. For others, particularly those who acknowledge their gender, the expression of a subjectivity through an appropriate Symbolic syntax has become an issue - even if it is one they appear at once to close. Tracy Emin, for example, with her to-camera monologue on video about an abortion, and her creation of confessional rooms, furniture, quilts, and so forth, de-politicises - or even undoes the politics of - feminist work of the 1970s through copying the surface style of that work while ignoring its collectivity, its political intent, and its responsibility towards its audience.

Other cases appear more ambiguous. Janine Antoni's performance *Loving Care* (1993) (plate 11) is one such. Having dipped her long hair in Loving Care hair dye - rumoured to be the brand used by her

---

72 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, p. 100/*J'aime à toi*, p. 157.





Janine Antoni  
*Loving Care*

Performance at the Anthony D'Offay Gallery, London, 1993

Photograph from *Janine Antoni: Slip of the Tongue* (Glasgow & Dublin: CCA & IMMA, 1995)



mother - Antoni then proceeded to 'mop' the floor of the gallery with it. One understanding of this work could be that Janine Antoni was performing a mimesis of the 1950s works of Yves Klein which involved painting the naked bodies of women models then using their bodies to make marks.<sup>73</sup> It could be argued that it is a productive mimesis: she reasserted a female genealogy (the link with her mother, and earlier works by feminists such as Mierle Laderman Ukeles) while bring to mind the irony of the product name, 'Loving Care' - it is, after all, a product to aid women in performing the masquerade, femininity, and not about loving the subject, woman. It is also a highly ironic reference to 'women's work' (the 'loving care' of usually unseen tasks of cleaning) and to Jackson Pollock's action painting. But another understanding can be gleaned from the photographic documentation. Here are images of a woman turning herself into an object - or maybe abjecting herself - before the speculative gaze of the viewers. If this is what happened (I was not present at the performance) then either way - object or abject - she denies any possibility of articulating her subjectivity and of an attentive, intersubjective, presence from (and relationship with) the audience.

There is a problem in achieving an intersubjectivity between women to which Luce Irigaray returns on a number of occasions. Between a woman and a man there is the irreducible difference of gender:

... between a man and a woman there's a negative, a type of irreducibility that doesn't exist between a woman and a woman. Let's say between a man and a woman the negativity {*la négativité*} is, dare I say it, of an ontological, irreducible type. But between a woman and another woman it's of a much more

---

73 Dan Cameron makes the link between this piece and the Yves Klein works in *Janine Antoni: Slip of the Tongue*, ed. by Nicola White and Brenda McParland (Glasgow and Dublin: CCA and IMMA, 1995), p. 45.



empirical type and, furthermore, can only be understood and can only live in the ontological difference between man and woman. It's complicated.<sup>74</sup>

Luce Irigaray holds that gender difference and gendered subjectivity works across other forms of difference. The subject's recognition of difference and of the other subject is rooted in the experience of sexual difference and its irreducibility. For a subject, woman, to recognize the difference that is another subject, woman, she has first to be a woman - to have her subjecthood - and secondly to have a relational identity - to have an awareness of her limits, and that the other subject is irreducible to herself. The subject, woman, is still more likely to reduce the other subject, woman, to herself, than she is to reduce the other subject, man. This is more to do with identity than with identification; by which I mean that it is a matter of ontology, of the relation to origin and the subsequent relationship with the mother:

The possible discovery of their identity [...] poses a major problem of subjective relationships. Woman has a direct intersubjective relationship with her mother. Hers is more an *inter-subject* economy than an economy of subject-object relations; it is thus a very social and cultural economy that has doubtless led to interpretation in which women are seen as the guardians of love. This subjective economy between mother and daughter can be partially translated into action {*en gestes*} [...]. But that is not enough. Woman must be able to express herself in words, images and symbols in this intersubjective relationship with her mother, then with other women, if she is to enter into a non-destructive relationship with men. This very special economy of woman's identity must be permitted, known and defined. It is essential to a real culture. It means supporting, not destroying, the mother-daughter relationship.<sup>75</sup>

It is not so much that what is needed here (between mothers and daughters, and then between women) is a re-assertion of limits; what is necessary is an insertion - a bringing into play - of objects. To become the subjects, women, cries out for mediation

---

74 Luce Irigaray, 'Je - Luce Irigaray', p. 160.

75 Luce Irigaray, *Thinking the Difference*, pp. 19-20/*Le temps de la différence*, p. 37.



between women. Luce Irigaray suggests this when discussing the interaction of the woman analyst and the women analysand:

When it is a matter of *analysis of women, between women*, this path has to be invented, created. [...] Our grammar remains foreign to this becoming of feminine jouissance, which loses its self-affection and the possibility of speaking its name therein.

Unable to create their own words, women remain and move in an immediacy without any transitional, transactional object. They take-give without mediation, commune without knowing it with and in a flesh they do not recognize: maternal flesh not reducible to a reproductive body, more or less shapeless amorous matter to which there could be no debt, no possible return.<sup>76</sup>

So there is a fundamental need for women to create objects in an appropriate syntax; objects that function transactionally between them in order to achieve a form of intersubjective mediation. Indeed, in her list of highly pragmatic recommendations to aid the creation of space between mothers and daughters, Luce Irigaray suggests "Between mother and daughter, interpose small handmade objects to make up for losses of spatial identity, for intrusions into personal space".<sup>77</sup> Evidently not tokens to assuage guilt after traumatic rows, these objects are the development of a Symbolic - and symbolised - syntax in the mother-daughter relationship; one that will create the third space of mediation, and avoid women collapsing back into immediacy.

To extrapolate from this, therefore, the art object *between* women can then be understood as a means of attending to an intersubjective relation *if* we recognize it as a gift of a means of mediation between subjects, rather than as a stand-in for the objectness of the other, as phallogentric man does with his

---

76 Luce Irigaray, 'The Limits of the Transference', p. 105/'La limit du transfert', p. 293.

77 Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, trans. by Alison Martin (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 49/*Je, tu, nous: pour une culture de la différence* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), pp. 55-56. Hereafter cited as *Je, Tu, Nous/Je, tu, nous*.



production of objects. There is a risk however:

How can women - especially amongst themselves - refrain from taking from this gift the means to palliate their dereliction through a more or less immediate and paradoxical mimetic identification? This operation turns the donor inside out before there is any gift-object and closes the path of the taker; a gesture which involves a sort of capitalization of the mucous membrane, an exteriorization of what is most inner.<sup>78</sup>

A woman may make an object - an artwork - as a means of mediation and offer it in all good faith as a space through which mediation can occur. But this does not guarantee that the woman to whom it is offered will be a subject able to accept and produce intersubjective relationships between women, or able to be attentive. This risks a hurt to the subjectivity of the woman who gives the space/object. In part, this risk may be ameliorated by the nature of the enunciation, the presenting of what we can call the gift-space/object. We can look here at the offer of love. Luce Irigaray explains her use of the phrase 'I love to you':

*I love to you* thus means: I do not take you for a direct object, nor for an indirect object by revolving around you. It is, rather, around myself that I have to revolve in order to maintain the *to you* thanks to the return to me. Not with my prey - you become mine - but with the intention of respecting my nature, my history, my intentionality, while also respecting yours. Hence, I do not return to me by way of: I wonder if I am loved. That would result from an introverted intentionality, going toward the other so as to return ruminating, sadly and endlessly, over solipsistic questions in a sort of cultural cannibalism.<sup>79</sup>

Luce Irigaray is here suggesting an approach to an intersubjective mediation through the phrase 'I love to you'. If we take this as a model for extended forms of intersubjective communication, then it suggests practices of enunciation - of creating intersubjective objects - that neither reduce the other subject to an object, nor uses them to reflect back one's subjectivity. If I then further

---

78 Luce Irigaray, 'The Limits of the Transference', p. 110/ 'La limit du transfert', p. 298.

79 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, p. 110/*J'aime à toi*, pp. 172-173.



extrapolate from this to the making of art, it suggests a practice which is respectful of the subjectivity of the artist (i.e. which is not a maintenance mimesis but instead aids the woman artist in becoming the subject, woman) and which is offered as a mediation between attentive subjects, not a spectacle whereby to win approval. 'Attentiveness' here is thus actively two-way, not only about the audience, woman. For the artist, it is not only about the private, studio practice of making her work, but also about the broader aspects of enunciation through the making of art: the practices of the market, exhibiting, documentation, criticism, teaching or lecturing, and so forth. This suggests that women artists continue to get more attentive to these practices as practices (that they get more 'difficult'?) and make the shift from treating their artworks as objects of distance (as galleries tend to), instead treating them as objects of mediation, or, rather, objects through which mediation can happen. It means taking further responsibility for the work, whatever its material nature: in particular, painstaking exactitude over the installation of work, but also, for example, in the heart of the gallery system, insisting upon a veto - and making positive suggestions about - other aspects of the gallery's activity.<sup>80</sup>

Luce Irigaray discusses the reciprocal activity of listening in one chapter of *I Love to You*.<sup>81</sup> She outlines it as a highly exacting

---

80 Without wishing to point the finger at individuals, personal experience of working as a critic and art administrator suggests that the epithet 'difficult' is more readily applied by curators to artists who are women than to artists who are men; indeed, the man who is exacting about the context his work in which his is presented may be described as 'committed' or 'professional'. I would read this as symptomatic of two things: firstly, the problematic of phallogocentric representation of 'woman', and secondly, the strategies some women already employ to disrupt or open up the structures of various gallery situations.

81 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, pp. 115-119/*J'aime à toi*, pp. 179-185.



practice of concentration, attentiveness, and silence: an emptying of the ego in order to offer the other subject “the possibility of existing, of expressing your intention, your intentionality, without your calling out for it and even without asking, without overcoming, without annulling, without killing”.<sup>82</sup> The situation she is assuming here is one of discussion between two subjects: “one *with* the other in the serenity and the occasion of *being with*, respecting difference”.<sup>83</sup> Is it then possible to move the model of practice she offers here and apply it to an attentive audience of an artwork? Is it possible to apply practices from face-to-face communication, with the mediation of the spoken word and of bodily gesture, to the situation of encountering the mediating object of the artwork? I think so, precisely because it is a *set of practices* that are given - emotional, intellectual, spiritual practices carried out in and through the body. The risk here would be that the artist would still be treating her work as a object of distance, rather than an object through which mediation will take place; in which case the gift of attentiveness from an audience, if it is acknowledged by the artist, will be either ignored, or (mis)taken as a response to the question “am I loved?”. Luce Irigaray does not mention this risk and its effects on the attentive subject. But what is offered by this attentive audience is not the gift-space/object mentioned above: instead, her practice of attentiveness is part and parcel of being-a-subject. Part of becoming the subject, woman, is an acknowledgment that the other subject is not reducible to the self, and that an active practice of intersubjectivity is necessary. Thus the gift of attentiveness,

---

82 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, p. 118/*J'aime à toi*, p. 184.

83 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, p. 118/*J'aime à toi*, p. 184.



insofar as it is a gift, is a gift of flow from *one* subject to *both* subjects, as the following passages indicate:

Thus, *I am listening to you* is not to expect or hear some information from you, nor is it the pure expression of sentiment (a rather naive aim of psychoanalysis sometimes). *I am listening to you* is to listen to your words as something unique, irreducible, especially to my own, as something new, as yet unknown. It is to understand and hear them as the manifestation of an intention, of human and spiritual development. [...]

I am listening to you, as to another who transcends me, requires a transition to a new dimension. I am listening to you: I perceive what you are saying, I am attentive to it, I am attempting to understand and hear your intention. Which does not mean: I comprehend you, I know you, so I do not need to listen to you and I can even plan a future for you. [...]

I am listening to you not on the basis of what I know, I feel, I already am, nor in terms of what the world and language already are, thus in a formalistic manner, so to speak. I am listening to you rather as the revelation of a truth that has yet to manifest itself - yours and that of the world revealed through and by you. I give you a silence in which your future - and perhaps my own, but *with* you and not *as* you and *without* you - may emerge and lay its foundation. [...]

This silence is the condition for a possible respect for myself and for the other within our respective limits.<sup>84</sup>

These are practices that can be adopted by attentive audiences (even by attentive critics?). Luce Irigaray describes this silence as “a space-time”<sup>85</sup> made possible by recognising the irreducibility of the other subject. Maybe then our encounters with the gift-space/object, the artwork of the other subject, are wholly appropriately regarded as chances for intersubjectivity, times to avoid “subjective affect [...]. Sentiment [which] will bind one to the other, often in one direction and not reciprocally”.<sup>86</sup>

In an earlier evocation of this attentiveness, Luce Irigaray frames the discussion in terms of art and aesthetics as social practice:

For a dialectic of the couple to occur, we need an art of perception that cannot be reduced either to a pure innerness or a pure outerness but passes ceaselessly from one to the other. This art requires that concrete perception

84 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, pp. 116-117/*J'aime à toi*, pp. 180-182.

85 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, p. 117/*J'aime à toi*, p. 182.

86 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, pp. 116-117/*J'aime à toi*, pp. 179-180.



be detailed and attentive, a perception that as autoaffection is individual, is copulative as the privileged space of hetero-affection, and finally is collective. [...] A contemplation of nature in itself, of the self {*de soi*} and of the other.<sup>87</sup>

She suggests that such an art can be found in some cultures of the East, particularly India. This passage alerts the reader to the aesthetic and visual possibilities of mediation, though she is adamant that “there is a danger that ethics should become a part of {*soit laissée à*} aesthetics and seen as secondary to the life of the people, pleasant but not essential to spiritual development”.<sup>88</sup> Does this mean that Luce Irigaray considers aesthetics beneath ethics? I think it is an analysis of the present relation between the two in our culture. In *I Love to You* she indicates that in some other cultures an ethical dialectic of the (sexual) couple is expressed aesthetically:

In cultures where sexual attraction is cultivated, certain gestures express the desire for coming together, for union.

A greeting is made by the whole body.

A request for carnal union may be expressed by the hands.

Hands are placed in different positions depending on the degree of union desired.

These modalities of speech and gesture can be brought into relation with:

forms

colors

sounds

fragrances

breath

appropriate to man and to woman and to each of their *chakras*.

Love, even carnal love, is therefore cultivated and made divine. The act of love becomes the transubstantiation of the self and his or her lover into a spiritual body. It is a feast, celebration, and a renaissance, not a decline, a fall to be redeemed by procreation. Love is redemption of the flesh through the transfiguration of desire *for* the other (as an object?) into desire *with* the other.<sup>89</sup>

---

87 Luce Irigaray, 'The Universal as Mediation', in *Sexes and Genealogies*, pp.125-149 (p. 144)/'L'universel comme médiation', in *Sexes et Parentés*, pp. 139-164 (p. 159). Translation modified.

88 Luce Irigaray, 'The Universal as Mediation', p. 145/ 'L'universel comme médiation', p. 159.

89 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, p. 139/*J'aime à toi*, pp. 218-219.



What is significant here is that the ethical relation of the couple has an aesthetic mediation; it is mediated *through* the aesthetic relation and perceptible through different senses. This is also stressed elsewhere: “Looking again at {*rouvrant les yeux sur*} the woman he has loved, the lover may contemplate the work of fecundation. And, if the abandon of the beloved woman - and of the female lover - means a childlike trust, and animal exuberance, it illuminates the aesthetics and ethics of the amorous gesture, for those who take the time to reopen their eyes”.<sup>90</sup> It is not a question of establishing an ethical relation, and adding the aesthetics, nor of seeing an aesthetic representation distanced in time and space from the ethical relation. It may be a question of reconsidering the Western term - and processes of - ‘aesthetics’. Certainly, it assumes that at its most developed and intimate level, intersubjectivity is a practice both of ethics and aesthetics: of beauty. This is emphasised in the discussion of certain Eastern cultures:

What is remarkable in these traditions is the fact that thought is ready to listen to nature, to the sensible. The famous example of this is Buddha contemplating a flower. For him, this gesture probably represents the perfect act, since it respects nature while becoming spiritual. The overcoming of matter by spirit or the privileging of the speculative over the sensible is, therefore, no more. Buddha becomes spirit while remaining sensible, awakened flesh. Surely this is a fine {*une belle*} lesson in love?<sup>91</sup>

Here we have again the evocation of listening in relation to a visual contemplation, and a working of spirit and flesh together: a “lesson in love” for both men and women.

Luce Irigaray’s references to yogic practices and to Buddha can be

---

90 Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London: Athlone Press, 1993), p. 190/*Éthique de la Différence Sexuelle*, (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1984), p. 177. Translation modified. Hereafter cited as *Ethics/Éthique*.

91 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, pp. 139-140/*J'aime à toi*, p. 219.



challenging to a Eurocentric audience, both to our sense of positioning in relation to cultural difference, and to a wariness of a New Age supermarket-trolley approach to spirituality. However, such references have been for a number of years, and are increasingly, a significant element within the overall parameters of her work.<sup>92</sup> Gayatri Spivak has noted how “French theorists such as Derrida, Lyotard, Deuluze and the like, have at one time or another been interested in reaching out to all that is not the West, because they have, in one way or another, questioned the millennially cherished excellences of Western metaphysics”, prefacing this with the warning that “in order to learn enough about Third World women and to develop a different readership, the immense heterogeneity of the field must be appreciated, and the First World feminist must learn to stop feeling privileged as a *women*”.<sup>93</sup> Questioned about these comments three years after writing them, Gayatri Spivak strengthens her critique. The problem of the interest this strand of Western philosophy has in the non-Western lies in the shape of what she calls it’s “turn”, analyzed as “a desire marking the place of the management of a crisis”. The reversal of the binary opposition, “the so-called non-West’s turn toward the West” she names a “command” which works to deconstruct the Western intellectual desire. In so doing, and “making out a life [...] as [an] intellectual” she then also needs to see how far she herself is “caught within the European desire to turn towards the East”. As a result, her work of the moment was

---

92 An early reference to an interest in yoga is noted by the interviewers in ‘Luce Irigaray: Paris, Summer 1980’, p. 150; more recently, she has devoted a book to the uses of yogic practices of breath in establishing ethical relationships. *Tra oriente e occidente: dalla singolarità alla comunità* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 1997). As yet this is untranslated into French or English.

93 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘French Feminism in an International Frame’ (1981), in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 134-153 (p. 136).



“to show how in fact the limits of the theories of interpretation that I am working with are revealed through the encounter of what can be defined as ‘non-Western material’”.<sup>94</sup> This analysis outlines what is a continuing complexity of inter-relationship between Western and non-Western intellectuals and thinking, where an asymmetrical relation is still caught in an imbalance of power. Luce Irigaray’s project is also (though differently) one of working at “the limits of the theories of interpretation”. I find it interesting that her references to Buddha and contemplative practices occur mainly in a text which is neither aimed at a readership which is academic or with a specialist theoretical interest, nor is it polemic. This removes the references from a mimesis of a Western discipline and from a potential interpretation of advocacy. While I do not wish to remove Luce Irigaray from the problematic structure of intellectual desire mapped by Gayatri Spivak, it is important to note that her references are highly particular and focused. So too is their context - discussions of practices of intersubjectivity and attentiveness. This places her turn to the non-Western at one remove from the desire which reduces a heterogeneity of peoples to an assumed unified class. Consequentially, it is important to understand the particularity of the practices to which she refers, and how they contribute to her discussions of practices of subjectivity within Western psychoanalytic and civic structures.

While in the West individuals may be able to disentangle (even if in a generalised fashion) different strands globally within

---

94 Gayatri Spivak, ‘Criticism, Feminism, and the Institution’, interview by Elizabeth Grosz, in *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. by Sarah Harasym (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 1-16 (p. 8).



Christianity and their cultural and social impact - the Jesuits from the Mormons, the Baptists from the Anglicans, Italian Catholicism from Irish, and both from Liberation Theology - few would be able to disentangle the similar differences which occur globally within Buddhism. It is important to recognize that Luce Irigaray is discussing practices, and not ritual, religion, or cultures. She has recently stated this explicitly:

In any case, western culture has not taught me the way of that with which I've begun to experiment, of necessity, in a solitary manner. I have had to turn towards the East, the Far East, as have some of the most recent philosophers of the West, in order to find there guides and methodological rudiments. I think I've done it differently from the masters of the West. I have no pretence towards encompassing the knowledge of the eastern masters in my thought, nor of simply passing from their words to mine. Such manners of transmission seem to be to be perishable. I have followed the teaching of masters for whom a daily practice - in fact, of yoga - represents the way to be born or reborn, and to discover some of the words and deeds that carry another signification, another light, another rationality.<sup>95</sup>

The yogic and meditative practices to which Luce Irigaray refers can be found in the differing cultures of India, Japan, Tibet, Korea, China, Burma, and many other countries, and their relation to the daily ways of life and religions of these places is complex. This is not least because these practices can be removed from formal religious structures, and instead actively return the responsibility for morality and ethics to the individual practitioner. For example, although it is often classed by the West as a religion, Buddhism is a philosophy; most manifestations of it do not centre upon a belief system, god, or gods. Within Zen (one strand within Buddhism) one might learn that yogic and meditative practices can aid focus upon the moment, even if the chosen activity for that moment might be seen as, say, inherently criminal. One would also learn that those

---

95 Luce Irigaray, *Tra oriente e occidente*, pp. 10-11. Capitalising as in the original. I would like to thank Nancy Proctor for translating the introduction of this book for me. Irigaray's concept of being 'born' will be discussed in Chapter 7.



around the practitioner may well not notice when she or he is using Zen practices in order to focus upon the activity of a particular moment. Because of this return to the subject's activity, away from the metastructures within a particular culture, Zen has long been recognised as a philosophy of practice which has trans-cultural possibilities.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, the key Zen philosophers ('masters', or teachers) through the centuries have come from diverse cultures. Further, forms such as Rinzai Zen (a Japanese form) are taught in an overt and flexible philosophical manner, by the setting of unique problems (*koans*) appropriate to the life, work, culture, and experience of the individual.

I am focussing on Zen here as it is the philosophy of meditation and attentiveness which probably has the most extensive literature. Clearly not a belief structure (not a religion), it offers practices of analysis through which, over time, the individual can come to terms with his or her interaction with others.<sup>97</sup> Within the literature of Zen is discussion of the moment of Buddha's gaze at the flower, to which Luce Irigaray refers as a model for intersubjectivity. The *Mumonkan*, one of the classic Zen texts by the C13th Mumon, is a collection of 48 problems. One recounts the Case (or anecdote) of Buddha and the flower, with Mumon's commentary upon it. The Case is this:

Once when the World-Honoured One, in ancient times, was upon Mount Grdhrakuta, he held up a flower before the congregation of monks. At this time

---

96 There are also echoes here of some of the criticisms of psychoanalysis - its concentration upon the individual, its a-historicity, its lack of attention to issues such as class. But the differing cultural flexibilities of Zen and psychoanalysis (I am far from suggesting that they are interchangeable) are ensured by attention to/of the particularity of individual, which in turn ensures that such issues are within their parameters as is appropriate.

97 In this, the relation of Zen to some aspects of 'New Age' culture is similar to that of the practice of psychoanalysis to other aspects of 'New Age' culture - unrecognizable.



all were silent, but the Venerable Kasyapa only smiled. The World-Honoured One said, "I have the Eye of the True Law, The Secret Essence of Nirvana, the Formless form, the Mysterious Law-Gate. Without relying upon words and letters, beyond all teaching as special transmission, I pass this all on to Mahakasyapa".<sup>98</sup>

R. H. Blyth, in his extended commentary upon the original text and his translation, gives us some insights which can aid our understanding of Luce Irigaray's interest in this moment of the Sakyamuni Buddha. The title Buddha itself "comes from buddh, to be completely aware, and was translated into Chinese by [the symbol meaning] to perceive, be awake, and [the symbol meaning] gnosis. The original meaning of [the symbol meaning Buddha] is to flourish. It was used for its sound".<sup>99</sup> So here we have the person who 'performed' this action referred to initially as completely aware, and as mystic knowledge in perception (gnosticism itself was of the C2nd AD). In an attractive move, it is the *sound* of the symbol meaning 'to flourish' that determines his later visual/written representation. R. H. Blyth says "for Zen the important thing is not the life and death of Sakyamuni, nor his teachings, but his enlightenment. Not his words but his silence, not his acts but his un-acts are what we would grasp".<sup>100</sup>

---

98 *Zen and Zen Classics*, ed. and trans. by R. H. Blyth, 5 vols (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1960-1966), IV: *Mumonkan* (1966), p. 76. R. H. Blyth comments closely on the difficulty of translation. I would like to draw out here just one phrase, which he translated as "The Eye of the True Law", which, left without further comment could imply the worst excesses of phallogocentrism. He comments on the four Chinese symbols in the original: "[the first symbol] means absolute, beyond true and false and all other antitheses. [The second symbol] means things, the Buddhist Law. Here it means perhaps all existence. [The third symbol] means clear apprehension without any added intellectual deformation or emotional discoloration. [The fourth symbol] means that all is included, nothing omitted or wasted". R H Blyth, *Mumonkan*, p. 75. This gives a far more sympathetic reading in the context of this thesis. While this is a standard English-language translation, it carries heavily the inflection of its time and its translator (Blyth was born 1898). More recently, Thomas Cleary has translated the phrase as "treasury of the eye of truth". Keizan, *Transmission of Light: Zen in the Art of Enlightenment*, trans. by Thomas Cleary (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), p. 6.

99 R H Blyth in *Mumonkan*, p. 74.

100 R H Blyth, *ibid.*, p. 75.



This practice of enlightened silence begins to resonate through a re-reading of Luce Irigaray's understanding of listening or attentiveness. The moment of the gift of space-time within a relation of intersubjectivity can be found in Zen teaching: "There is a common assumption that this moment is not perfect, and because of this worldly assumption, we blind ourselves from seeing our partners as they really are, as Bodhisattvas. When we begin to see people as the Bodhisattvas that they really are, we are seeing reality".<sup>101</sup> 'Bodhisattva' is a term describing people engaged with a process towards enlightenment or self-realization. This could be read sympathetically through Luce Irigaray's concept of 'becoming subjects', with its integral figuration of an horizon of possibilities. Without wishing to overstate any similarities, the term could also resonate with the name and process of the analysand. So too the practice of 'enlightened silence' in relation to the other subject echoes Luce Irigaray's comments on the transference and counter-transference:

The analyst must constantly keep present the dimension of his or her transference; the other to whom he or she listens must remain close and distant within a reversible and open transferential relationship, that links all possible positions in space and time. [...] The analyst perceives him/herself as what he or she is, has been, is becoming, so as to hear the other without confusion. This listening marks the limits of his or her possibilities; it acts as an horizon between him or her and the analysand; the horizon of life and death, a matrix-envelope to be constantly reconstituted in its most nourishing and protective dimension, the opening remaining for becoming and reception by/of the other.<sup>102</sup>

R. H. Blyth says of the moment between Buddha and Kasyapa "We might call this a love scene";<sup>103</sup> it could also be read as a moment

---

101 Joshu Sasaki Roshi, 'True Religion', *Metamorphosis*, Winter 1977 (unpaginated).

102 Luce Irigaray, 'The Limits of the Transference', p. 115/'La limite du transfert', p. 304. Translation modified.

103 R H Blyth in *Mumonkan*, pp. 76-77.



of mediation of “a reversible and open transference relationship”. Buddha’s state of enlightenment was his ‘gift’ to Kasyapa: “It would be a great mistake to think that Kasyapa smiled as a sign that he understood something or other. His ‘breaking his face’ was the opening of the flower”.<sup>104</sup> The flower and Buddha’s gesture are not reduced to being Kasyapa’s objects, his ‘others’, just as the flower is not reduced by the Buddha. This is what is mediated - the moment of intersubjectivity, of enlightenment, *not* a truth *about* the flower: “what Zen wishes us to avoid [is] the dividing of the flower and its meaning [...] When ‘the bright consummate flower’ is really seen, the flower sees itself. The self flowers”.<sup>105</sup>

It becomes difficult to differentiate between the dissolving of the ego in the practices indicated in such texts, and the dissolving of the ego indicated in Luce Irigaray’s texts on intersubjectivity. Although their impulses differ radically, some of their practices and effects resonate clearly; indeed, Luce Irigaray has made this resonance implicit at particular moments. Ten years before explicitly indicating Buddha’s contemplation of the flower, she wrote a meditation upon the extreme difficulty of not reducing the other subject to an object, in which the subject-not-to-be-so-reduced was written as a flower: “Do you want the flower to open only once? The unveiling of the opening would then belong to you. The beauty or truth of the opening would be your discovery. Proposed and exposed in one definitive blossoming. The nightly closing of the flower, its folding back into itself would not take place. [...] Fixed display, rapt - an immortal show. Unattainable,

---

104 R H Blyth, *ibid.*, p. 80.

105 R H Blyth, *ibid.*, p. 80.



thus transported outside itself".<sup>106</sup> This would sit comfortably with some Buddhist teachings. For example, Joshu Sasaki Roshi has written: "We all have a personal consciousness which looks at things as objects. [...] When that personal consciousness becomes free of the need to look at the pine tree as object, then your personal nature becomes perfect. Now you are looking at bird as object, but you don't need to. Bird is [one with] you".<sup>107</sup> To refigure this in Luce Irigaray's terminology: the other subject retains its subjecthood as you recognize its irreducibility to yourself and its irreducibility to being your other; as I quoted her earlier, "one *with* the other in the serenity and the occasion of *being with*, respecting difference".<sup>108</sup>

Luce Irigaray's most far-reaching passage on Buddha concerns the realm of the visual. She refers to his 'gaze' at the flower:

By training the senses in concentration we can integrate multiplicity and remedy the fragmentation associated with singularity and the distraction of desiring all that is perceived, encountered, or produced. There is no question, then, of renouncing the sensible, of sacrificing it to the universal, but rather it is cultivated to the point where it becomes spiritual energy. And so the Buddha's gazing at the flower is not an inattentive or predatory gaze, nor the decline of the speculative into flesh. It is both material and spiritual contemplation, furnishing thought with an already sublimated energy.

This contemplation is also a training in finding pleasure while respecting what does not belong to me. Indeed, Buddha contemplates the flower without picking it. He gazes at what is other to him without uprooting it. Moreover, what he is gazing at is not just anything - it is a flower, which perhaps offers us the best object for meditation upon the appropriateness of form to matter.

Buddha's gazing at the flower might provide us with a model. So might the flower. Between us, we can train ourselves to be both contemplative regard and the beauty appropriate to our matter, the spiritual and carnal

---

106 Luce Irigaray, *Elemental Passions*, pp. 31-32/*Passions élémentaires*, p. 38. The meditation upon this problem forms the whole of section 6 of the book (pp. 31-36/pp. 37-44).

107 Joshu Sasaki Roshi, *Buddha is the Center of Gravity*, trans. by Fusako Akino (San Cristobal, 1974), p. 88. Indeed, Luce Irigaray's flower is one which has wings. *Elemental Passions*, pp. 34-35/*Passions élémentaires*, pp. 41-42.

108 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, p. 118/*J'aime à toi*, p. 184.



fulfilment of the forms of our body.<sup>109</sup>

Here, in this non-patriarchal gaze, we find one of Luce Irigaray's most developed accounts of becoming a subject and intersubjective communication. The nature of the *particular body* is respected (not sacrificed to a spurious 'universal') while at the same time fragmentation is remedied. Flesh and spirit are one in the subject; the subject becomes in its recognition of the other subject. Communally, in intersubjectivity, in love to each other, we achieve our beauty:

Thus, neither the one nor the other will take the initiative of plucking {*cueiller*} the bloom in order to contemplate it. Both contemplate {*recueillis*} and bloom. Opening and closing themselves in order to keep giving each other that which they could never have brought to life.<sup>110</sup>

Having explored the structures supporting a syntax appropriate to women, and confirmed the role of artworks in mediation, I will now move on to case studies of the inter-relation of further aspects of Luce Irigaray's thinking with particular art practices and works. Firstly, I will explore the concept of morphology and its discernment in particular media; then psychoanalytic understandings of gesture and the gestures of the artist; and finally, discuss the need to reassert female genealogies and how this is being negotiated in a particular cultural context.

---

109 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, p. 25/*J'aime à toi*, pp. 48-49.

110 Luce Irigaray, *Ethics*, p. 194/*Éthique*, p. 180.



## Part 2



## Chapter 5

### Morphology, materiality, signification.

#### Morphology

In her important introductory text on French feminism and cultural theory, Toril Moi provided an influential gloss on Luce Irigaray's use of the term 'morphology'. Moi writes: "Irigaray's theory of 'woman' takes as its starting point a basic assumption of analogy between woman's psychology and her 'morphology' (Gr. *morphé*, 'form'), which she rather obscurely takes to be different from her anatomy."<sup>1</sup> This summary set a tone of subtle misunderstanding for subsequent discussion of Luce Irigaray's use of the term, extended by Margaret Whitford's suggestion that Irigaray is "making a connection between the morphology of the body and the morphology of different kinds of thought processes".<sup>2</sup> As Moi's comment contains, however, three errors or possible misreadings of Luce Irigaray's work, it does not provide a support for advanced engagement with this concept. Instead it has supported further misreadings, leading to simplistic dismissals of Luce Irigaray as an essentialist. In this chapter I want to retrieve the term 'morphology' as Luce Irigaray uses it from a reduction to anatomy and essentialism. I want, moreover, to examine the possibility of the concept for reading certain material practices in art, not in order to position such practices as illustrations of an Irigarayan morphology, but to allow for the play of a *morpho-logic* as prior to,

---

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

2 Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 58.



while also allowing for, the production of what Luce Irigaray terms a syntax in the Symbolic.

My first criticism of Toril Moi is that Luce Irigaray has not produced what Moi calls "a theory of 'woman'". To suggest that women cannot be theorised as they have not yet attained their subjectivity is a theoretical position; but it is not - cannot be - a *theory of the subjects, women*. What Irigaray has done is to analyze the *phallogentric theory* of woman propounded by Western patriarchal culture. She also suggests strategies which women have used to resist this and which could be used by them in working towards becoming the subjects, women. My second criticism of Moi is that although the term 'morphology' is indeed from the Greek *morphé*, meaning 'form', and is used in the field of biology, it does not automatically imply an anatomical reading. In biology it does not refer to deterministic analysis of forms in themselves, but to a method of discerning patterns of *relationships between* forms (as is known to plants-women and plants-men, and thus explaining why flowers as superficially dissimilar as buttercups and delphiniums are in the same family: they share a morphology). 'Morphology' is also used as a term within linguistics (the subject in which Luce Irigaray presented her first Doctorate<sup>3</sup>), where it names a method of studying the component parts of words and of language. So while there is a biological implication in the use of the term 'morphology', to reduce it, as Moi does, to the anatomical is to restrict its possibilities. Furthermore, when Luce Irigaray uses the term we are always also in the realm of linguistic structures.

---

3 Luce Irigaray, *Le langage des éléments* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1973).



Despite Toril Moi's argument, therefore, Luce Irigaray does not structure a relationship of "analogy" between woman's psychology and her anatomy (which is what I take Toril Moi to be meaning in *her* use of the term morphology). Rather, I think that she uses the term precisely to evoke and describe a distinct relationship not covered by the term 'analogy'. 'Morphology' names the site of a discursive and dynamic relationship between a subject's empirical living in the body and in the Symbolic; a relationship which does not go in one direction, but where the way the subject *understands* the body is significant in determining an appropriate syntax in the Symbolic; and where in turn the subject understands - or reads - the body through the Symbolic syntax. The subject then 'sees' anatomy according to the signifiers of that syntax. The 'objectivity' granted this understanding is thus determined in a dynamic relationship with the subject's language inflected subjectivity.

This last point, of course, can be applied to both men and women. As Jane Gallop points out:

When she speaks of 'the sex which is one', she is not speaking of male genital anatomy but rather of an already phallic conception of male genitals, that actually has only a selective relation to male anatomy. Irigaray, for example, nowhere mentions the testicles. Male genital anatomy does not determine phallic logic, but rather phallic logic determines a certain unitary perception of male genitalia.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, an initial, resistant reaction to reading Luce Irigaray's enunciation of the multiplicity of women's sexual pleasure and sexual organs<sup>5</sup> can be to reflect that men's sexual pleasure and sexual organs are also multiple: not only the testicles, but the

---

4 Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 94.

5 For example, Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 28/ *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1977), p. 28. Hereafter cited as *This Sex/Ce sexe*.



scrotum, the glans, the foreskin (if not removed) - to say nothing of the touching of the foreskin and the glans, the flow of blood and the stretching of skin, the passage from detumescence to tumescence and back....

But this is surely Luce Irigaray's point, that erecting the phallus as a unitary determinant then produces "the penis [as] being the only sexual organ {*comme seul sexe*} of recognized value" and women's sex organs as "never amount[ing] to anything but a clitoris-sex that is not comparable to the noble phallic organ, or a hole-envelope that serves to sheathe and massage the penis in intercourse".<sup>6</sup> Men's sex organs are seen as singular through phallogentrism - 'the penis'; and women's are seen only as an other which reflects this unit - the nothing-to-see, determined in a negative relationship to the one. As Elizabeth Grosz points out, "bodies are not conceived by Irigaray as biologically or anatomically given, inert, brute objects fixed by nature once and for all. She sees them as the bearers of meanings and social values, the products of social inscriptions, always inherently social. [...] Her emphasis on morphology in place of anatomy indicates that she has stepped from the register of nature into that of social signification".<sup>7</sup> This social, discursive, understanding of the term 'morphology' supports Maggie Berg's removal of a determinant, indexical link from the relationship:

It is important, however, to distinguish an indexical relation of language to the body, which Irigaray does not claim, from a morphological one. An indexical sign, as Silverman explains, is understood to be existentially connected to its referent, whereas a morphological or iconic sign merely draws attention to formal resemblances. If Irigaray criticizes the phallogentrism of discourse, she does not make any claims about which comes first, the penis or the phallus; in fact, she suggests that the focus on the penis in the construction of

---

6 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 23/*Ce sexe*, p. 23.

7 Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1989), p. 112.



male sexuality is a consequence of values inscribed in discourse.<sup>8</sup>

A different morpho-logic might represent both sexes differently, and Luce Irigaray made it quite clear early on that this is not a matter simply of anatomy: "I think we must go back to the question not of the anatomy but of the morphology of female sex";<sup>9</sup> a point she later reiterated:

Going back to historically dated anatomico-physiological arguments is obviously out of the question, but we do have to question the empire of a *morpho-logic*, the imposition of formations which correspond to the requirements or desires of one sex as the norms of discourse and, in more general terms, of language {*langue*}.

[...] Trying to find or find anew a possible imaginary for women through the movement that brings the lips into contact [...] does not imply a regressive retreat to the anatomical or to a concept of 'nature', nor is it a call to go back to genital norms - women have two lips several times over! It is more a question of breaking out of the autological and tautological circle of systems of representation and their discourse so as to allow women to speak their sex.<sup>10</sup>

A morpho-logic - logic which ensues from morphology - is imposing its formations of language. It is significant that Luce Irigaray stresses here a morpho-logic, signalling both that only one morpho-logic is in play at present, and that it is a logic of a morphology of singularity, sameness. Questioning this morphology does not mean retreating to anatomy, but breaking the tautology where only men's sex is spoken - a repetitive, mirroring, maintenance mimesis.

### A red herring: 'essentialism'

---

8 Maggie Berg, 'Luce Irigaray's "Contradictions": Poststructuralism and Feminism', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 17.1 (1991), 50-70 (p. 54).

9 Luce Irigaray, 'Women's Exile: Interview with Luce Irigaray', interview by Dianna Adlam and Couze Venn, trans. by Couze Venn, *Ideology and Consciousness*, 1 (1977), 62-76 (p. 64).

10 Luce Irigaray, 'The Poverty of Psychoanalysis', *Reader*, pp. 96-97/*Parler n'est jamais neutre*, pp. 271-272. Translation modified.



If we understand the term 'morphology' as Luce Irigaray uses it as the site of a social and discursive relationship between body and language, then this should begin to disentangle what Naomi Schor has described as "the red flag (when it is not a red herring) of essentialism".<sup>11</sup> In referring back to the passage I quoted from Toril Moi at the start of this chapter, Elizabeth Grosz suggests that to call Luce Irigaray an essentialist is only possible if there is a misunderstanding of the term morphology:

Moi articulates probably the most common objection to Irigaray's work. *If morphology is reduced to biology, the charge of essentialism seems well justified. If men's biologically given bodies are isomorphic with the structure of dominant discourses, this becomes simply a 'fact of nature' that must be accepted, not a political move that can be countered. The reduction of morphology to biology occurs only on the crudest of misreadings and a wilful ignorance on the part of the critics.*<sup>12</sup>

Elizabeth Grosz is right to refute the collapse of morphology into anatomy; she also evidently wishes to distance both Luce Irigaray and her own position as far as possible from any charge of essentialism. More recently, Tina Chanter has accounted for the charges of essentialism against Luce Irigaray by charting the history of the debate about essentialism (primarily in the USA) while also "exonerating" her from that charge.<sup>13</sup> But I wonder if the discussion of essentialism is not now both a little more complex than this, and a little less fraught? Even while Grosz and Chanter were doing their work, certain writers re-invested in or re-explored theories of essentialism: most prominently for feminist theory, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Diana Fuss. I shall briefly fish for the red herring.

---

11 Naomi Schor, 'This Essentialism which is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray', in *The Essential Difference*, ed. by Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 40-62 (p. 53).

12 Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, p. 113.

13 Tina Chanter, *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray's Rewriting of the Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 21-46.



Diana Fuss indicates that the important question for critics “is not ‘is this text essentialist (and therefore “bad”)?’ but rather ‘if this text is essentialist, *what motivates its deployment?*’ How does the sign ‘essence’ circulate in various contemporary critical debates? Where, how, and why is it invoked? What are its political and textual effects?”.<sup>14</sup> She argues that the risk of essentialism is not necessarily one that has to be avoided at all costs. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak suggests that the volubility of the anti-essentialist argument is a symptom of displacement: “The critique of essentialism should not be seen as being critical in the colloquial, Anglo-American sense of being adversely inclined, but as a critique in the very strong European philosophical sense, that is to say, as an acknowledgement of its usefulness”.<sup>15</sup> Spivak is not much interested in producing a theory of essentialism, but rather seeks to acknowledge and use what she calls a “strategic essentialism”. The emphasis here is on producing strategies rather than on anxiety about whether or not a particular strategy is essentialist:

I think the way in which the awareness of strategy works here is through a persistent critique. The critical moment does not come only at a certain stage when one sees one’s effort, in terms of an essence that has been used for political mobilization, succeeding. [...] It seems to me that the awareness of strategy - the strategic use of an essence as a mobilizing slogan or masterword like *woman* or *worker* or the name of any nation that you would like - it seems to me that this critique has to be persistent all along the way, even when it seems that to remind oneself of it is counterproductive. Unfortunately, that crisis must be with us, otherwise that strategy freezes into something like what you call an essentialist position.

[...] A strategy suits a situation; a strategy is not a theory.<sup>16</sup>

---

14 Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*, (London: Routledge, 1990), p. xi.

15 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘In a Word. Interview’, interviewed by Ellen Rooney, in Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed, pp. 151-185 (p. 157).

16 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *ibid.*, pp. 153-154.



In some respects, this "persistent critique" is what we can see happening in Luce Irigaray's work. When she uses the term 'woman' to refer to what I have read as 'the representation, woman' then she is being essentialist in the bluntest sense, in that she is using the term in a practice of mimesis to expose its construction as an essentializing category within patriarchy. She mimeticizes essentialism. On the other hand, when she uses the term 'woman' to refer to what has not yet become - the subjects, women - she is naming strategically a space of potentiality rather than a pre-existing ontological category.

Diana Fuss suggests that to an extent such an act of naming can be an essentializing move. To announce oneself as anti-essentialist names a place for essentialism; and the most ardent anti-essentialist, in breaking supposed universals down into categories, can be by default in that hazy space between identity and essence as a result of the act of naming:

The constructionist impulse to specify, rather than definitively counteracting essentialism, often simply redeploys it through the very strategy of historicization, rerouting and dispersing it through a number of micropolitical units or sub-categorical classifications, each presupposing its own unique interior composition or metaphysical core.<sup>17</sup>

This however appears to be that moment Gayatri Spivak identifies when the critique is no longer persistent, and the strategy freezes.<sup>18</sup> In Luce Irigaray's writings what we see in the potentiality of the subjects, women, is rather what Gayatri Spivak describes as "vigilance, what I call building for difference, rather than keeping ourselves clean by being whatever it is to be an anti-

---

17 Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking*, p. 20.

18 See Hilary Robinson, 'Reframing Women', *Circa Art Magazine*, 72 (Summer 1995), 18-23, for a discussion of how supposedly 'essentialist' imagery has been used in feminist art practice, with some examples freezing into an essentialist position (in Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*, for example), and others used as a strategic critique (works by Adrian Piper and Zoe Leonard).



essentialist”.<sup>19</sup>

In many respects the debate about whether Luce Irigaray is or is not an essentialist is precisely Naomi Schor's red herring, a distraction from the work that her work is actually doing. Gayatri Spivak notes, “I like reading Irigaray, but I read her within the tradition of the French, foregrounding rhetoric. I see many of my students, who accuse her of being essentialist as she's talking about women, not reading *in that way*. [...] Why do we become essentialist readers when we read Irigaray?”.<sup>20</sup> I'm not sure that I read Luce Irigaray in a French rhetorical tradition; but I hope one point that emerges from this present study is the absolute necessity of attending closely to her deployment of words and terminology. ‘Morphology’ is crucial in this respect. If we recognize it as naming a place between body and language, and recognize that it is not anatomy, then we also have to acknowledge that careless, non-strategic (a-political) reading reduces it to anatomical determinism. This does not mean we should avoid the risk Luce Irigaray asks us to take, nor castigate her for taking that risk. For this reason I have declined to define (anti)essentialism, preferring to throw the red herring back into the water, and instead to discuss Luce Irigaray's use of morphology.

### Difference/différance

In an article published in 1986, Margaret Whitford placed the

---

19 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘In a Word’, pp. 155.

20 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *ibid.*, p. 172.



empirical (“biological and social”) in a relation of difference with the textual - “the ‘female’, ‘feminine’ or ‘other’, where ‘female’ stands metaphorically for the genuinely other in a relation of difference”.<sup>21</sup> Leaving aside ‘the genuinely other’ as suggesting an authenticity which does not figure in Luce Irigaray’s writing, there is another problem with this distinction. Maggie Berg’s refusal of such a distinction is interesting:

Far from being a trap, however, some sort of identification between ‘woman’ as a discursive construct and woman as a ‘biological and social’ entity is absolutely necessary and is central to Irigaray’s work. Had Whitford recognized that masculine and feminine are in a relation of ‘*différance*’ rather than ‘difference’ in Irigaray’s work, she would not, I maintain, also have made the misleading split between empirical and textual women.

In a footnote Berg adds:

‘*Différance*’ combines ‘to differ’ and ‘to defer’, in order to remind us that difference is not a consequence of identity but, rather, makes identity possible.<sup>22</sup>

‘*Différance*’ is a concept developed by Jacques Derrida. He defines the term as:

the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the *spacing* by means of which elements are related to each other. This spacing is the simultaneously active and passive [...] production of the intervals without which the ‘full’ terms would not signify, would not function.<sup>23</sup>

This spacing is both active and passive as it is the combination and confusion of differing and deferring. It is in this play that identity becomes possible, rather than identity leading to a recognition of difference. ‘*Différance*’ is

a structure and a movement no longer conceivable on the basis of the opposition presence/absence [...] Differences are the effects of transformations, and from this vantage the theme of *différance* is incompatible with the static, synchronic, taxonomic, ahistoric motifs in the concept of

21 Margaret Whitford, ‘Luce Irigaray and the Female Imaginary: Speaking as a Woman’, *Radical Philosophy*, 43 (Summer 1986), 3-8 (p. 7).

22 Maggie Berg, ‘Luce Irigaray’s “Contradictions”’, p. 55.

23 Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 27.



*structure*. But it goes without saying that this motif is not the only one that defines structure, and that the production of differences, *différance*, is not astructural".<sup>24</sup>

An opposition of presence/absence (i.e. difference, or a master-discourse) would be a product of fixed structure, while the play of *différance* produces transformation and structure together. *Différance* is not produced by something beyond itself; it is necessary before any distinctions in seemingly circular relationships (for example, speech-language-speech) can be made.<sup>25</sup>

We can see here how an understanding of *différance* can support Luce Irigaray's notion of non-oppositionally gendered identity - intersubjectivity, the play of couples, sexuate subjectivity. We can also see how morphology, in the site where it is, a spacing between body and signification, can be an instance of *différance* at work (play) - both as a producer of gendered subjectivity, and indeed (in that very space between body and language, between empiricism and text, coming before any distinction between the two), productive of structure and transformation in that relationship. This is not disproved by the earlier discussion of man's morphologic as singular; a phallogentric morphology will produce structures of sameness while remaining within what is (as I indicated) only a morpho-logic. Luce Irigaray writes:

Thus, for women, the issue is to learn to discover and inhabit a different kind of magnetism and the morphology of a sexualized body [...]. Whether as prime matter or as creation's reject, woman has yet to find her forms, yet to spread roots and bloom. She has yet to be born to her own growth, her own subjectivity. The female has yet to develop its own *morphology*. Forced into the maternal role, reduced to being a womb or a seductive mask {*parure*}, the female has served only as the means of conception, growth, birth, and rebirth

---

24 Jacques Derrida, *ibid.*, p. 27-28.

25 Jacques Derrida, *ibid.*, p. 28.



of forms for the other.<sup>26</sup>

In a phallogentric morpho-logic, defined as other of the same, women have been denied the play of *différance* that will give them access to becoming sexuate subjects; denied the play of *différance* which will be productive of an appropriate Symbolic syntax; denied this, because the *différance* made possible by women's morphology can not be recognised by a phallic economy.

Through bringing women's morphology into play, phallic morpho-logic will have to shift:

What this implies is that the female body is not to remain the object of men's discourse or their various arts but that it become what is at stake {devienne enjeu} in a female subjectivity experiencing and identifying itself. Such research attempts to suggest to women a morpho-logic that is appropriate to their bodies. It's aimed at the male subject, too, inviting him to redefine himself as a body with a view to exchanges between sexed subjects.<sup>27</sup>

Women's bodies will no longer be available as objects for men; no longer will women be other of men's Same. Once their subjectivity in/as *différance* with/from men's subjectivity is recognised, so too the necessity of inter-subject relationships will be recognised. This will be aided by the deployment of a morpho-logic appropriate to women: the morphology in play between women's bodies and their syntax in the Symbolic, productive of that appropriate syntax and of appropriate symbolic (cultural) representations of women's bodies.

---

26 Luce Irigaray, 'The Three Genders', in *Sexes and Genealogies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 167-181 (p. 180)/'Les trois genres', in *Sexes et Parentes* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987), pp. 181-196 (p. 194).

27 Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, trans. by Alison Martin (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 59/*Je, tu, nous: pour une culture de la différence* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), p. 68. Translation modified. Hereafter cited as *Je, Tu, Nous/Je, tu, nous*.



## The morpho-logic of the lips and of the mucous

The terms that Luce Irigaray uses most often in order to mediate the play of women's morphology are those of 'the lips' and, increasingly through the writings of the 1980s, 'mucus'. 'The lips' as a term is inclusive of ambiguity, particularly in the French, where *lèvres* refers both to the lips of the mouth and to what speakers of English are more likely to call the labia of the vulva.<sup>28</sup> Women's morphology produces a site for itself in this term: *not* the lips of the mouth, *not* the lips of the genitals, but at the same time *both* the lips of the mouth *and* the lips of the genitals: 'the lips', as a term, is the site of a play between them. The lips are at least two in at least two ways: both in the play between the (not)mouth and (not)vulva, and also in the internal morpho-logic of such (non)references:

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. (The idea of 'one lip' seems absurd!) This image defies binary categories and forms of classification, being undecidable inside and outside, one and two, genital and oral.<sup>29</sup>

This morphological always-plural (i.e., which is not a one + one + one + .... ) is a point of distinction from phallomorphism, which counts in ones:

We are luminous. Neither one nor two. I've never known how to count. Up to you. In their calculations we make two. Really, two? Doesn't that make you laugh? An odd sort of two. And yet not one. Especially not one. Let's leave one to them: their oneness, with its prerogatives, its domination, its solipsism: like the sun's. And the strange way they divide up their couples, with the other as the image of the one. Only an image.<sup>30</sup>

---

28 Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body*, p. 98.

29 Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, pp. 115-116.

30 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 207/*Ce sexe*, pp. 206-207.



It is noticeable that Luce Irigaray does not produce a name for this morpho-logic of women. There is an unhappily conflicting use of the word 'displace' in Elizabeth Grosz's and Maggie Berg's accounts of this. Berg says that "Irigaray eschews dogmatic statement, or 'univocity', because she does not wish to displace Lacan's phallus with the lips, which would be a phallogocentric strategy",<sup>31</sup> while Grosz suggests that "her purpose is to displace male models, rather than to accurately reflect [sic] what female sexuality *really* is. In other words, her writing always refers to other texts or discourses, not to a non-discursive or 'real' corporeality, experience or pleasure. It [...] may produce a female body whose sexuality is lived in other, different terms than the limiting possibilities available to women in patriarchy".<sup>32</sup> But given the contexts, I think we can understand Berg's "displace" in the sense of 'replace', and Grosz's "displace" in the sense of 'disrupt' or 'dissolve', and in doing so recognize that Luce Irigaray is working with this morpho-logic in her writing. The lips' lack of one-ness means that they do not have a graspable, unitary form; to give this morphology a name would be to revert to phallogocentric practice, to place it in patriarchal limits.

This lack of form is referred to frequently by Luce Irigaray. In an often quoted passage, as part of her accounting for phallogocentric vision and phallogocentric Symbolic syntax being unable to see woman's sexuality, she describes the female genitals as lacking a form of their own:

This organ which has nothing to show for itself also lacks a form of its own. And if woman takes pleasure {*jouit*} precisely from this incompleteness of

---

31 Maggie Berg, 'Luce Irigaray's "Contradictions"', p. 68.

32 Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, p. 117.



form which allows her organ to touch itself over and over again, indefinitely, by itself, that pleasure {*jouissance*} is denied by a civilization that privileges phallogormorphism. The value granted to the only definable form excludes the one that is in play in female autoeroticism. The *one* of form, of the individual, of the (male) sexual organ, of the proper name, of the proper meaning ... supplants, while separating and dividing, that contact of *at least two* (lips) which keeps woman in touch with herself, but without any possibility of distinguishing what is touching from what is touched.<sup>33</sup>

This passage shows a constant slipping between the lips of the bodily vulva and the (not)vulva of women's morpho-logic - in fact, this gives us an understanding (reading) of the vulva *through the means* of such a morpho-logic. The words "*jouissance*", "phallogormorphism", "definable", "meaning", and "at least two", remove it from the realm of the simply anatomical (while also providing plenty of confusion for those who understand 'morphology' as a synonym for anatomy). The non-form qualities of the genitals is in play with the non-form qualities of women's morpho-logic:

In the 'at least two' lips, the process of becoming form - and circle - is not only never complete or completable; it takes place (no ek-sistance) thanks to this non-completion: the lips, the outlines of the body reflect one another, and from this movement is born, self-perpetuates, self-develops, a formation of desire, an imaginary of the sexuate body which never detaches itself as form(s) from the matter which generates it. Form and matter - and even the distinction between the terms is foiled - beget one another endlessly, and no form can be extrapolated from the body-support that gives birth to it.<sup>34</sup>

So women's morpho-logic, in play between women's body and language, in a play of *différance*, is the place of the birth of the imaginary: *women's morpho-logic, which has its own material practices, is the necessary precursor to the distinction of a Symbolic syntax appropriate to women* (this point is crucial). And without this syntax, as we have seen, women remain in a state of immediacy, without access to their subjectivity, since

---

33 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 26/*Ce sexe*, p. 26.

34 Luce Irigaray, 'The Poverty of Psychoanalysis', pp. 97-98/*Parler n'est jamais neutre*, p. 273. Translation modified.



subjectivity is entwined with signification. Luce Irigaray expresses this threading very clearly in 'When our lips speak together', in language which is not a 'poetics of the body', not '*écriture féminine*', but an attempt to write of and through the morpho-logic of women: the *parler-femme*, the witnessing woman:

If we don't invent a language, if we don't find our body's language, it will have too few gestures to accompany our story. We shall tire of the same ones, and leave our desires in latency, unrealized. Sleep again, unsatisfied. And fall back upon the words of men - who for their part, have 'known' for a long time. But *not our body*. Seduced, attracted, fascinated, ecstatic with our becoming, we shall remain paralyzed. Deprived of *our movements*. Rigid, whereas we are made for endless change. Without jumps or falls necessary. And - without repetition.

Keep on going, without getting out of breath. Your body is not the same today as yesterday. Your body remembers. There's no need for *you* to remember. To guard, to count, to capitalize yesterday in your head. Your memory? Your body speaks yesterday in what it wants today. If you think: yesterday I was, tomorrow I shall be, you are thinking: I have died a little. Be what you are becoming, without clinging to what you might have been, what you might yet be. Without ever being fixed. Let's leave decisiveness to the undecided. We have no need of the definitive. Our body, here and now, gives us an altogether different certainty.<sup>35</sup>

The "we", "you", and "I" through this essay should not be reduced to anatomy in either the generalised sense (reduction to the genitals and the mouth); but neither should they be anthropomorphized (reduced to a quasi-narrative between two women). Instead, they can be seen as the play of the *différance* of a woman's morpho-logic: (not)lips, (not)vulva, form and matter endlessly begetting each other. This writing of and through the morpho-logic of women is the necessary precursor to such later works as *Elemental Passions* - "fragments from a woman's voyage as she goes in search of her identity in love"<sup>36</sup> - which attempt to write (of) intersubjectivity through an appropriate syntax.

---

35 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 214/*Ce sexe*, p. 213. Translation modified.

36 Luce Irigaray, *Elemental Passions*, trans. by Joanne Collie and Judith Still (London: Athlone Press, 1992), p. 4 (from the Foreword not published in the French edition).



And the only way in which such a contemplation can come about - the only way to mediate what would otherwise be an immediate, distanceless proximity, the morpho-logic of two lips touching - is through the morpho-logic of mucus:<sup>37</sup>

Your skin and mine, yes. But mine goes on touching itself indefinitely, from the inside. Secreting a flow which brings the sides together. From which side does that liquid come? One or the other? Both? So which is one and which is other in that production? Neither? Yet it exists. Where does it come from? From both. It flows between. Not held or held back by a source. The source already rises from the two caressing.<sup>38</sup>

The possibility of realizing an intersubjectivity through the mucous is suggested here in *Elemental Passions* through an attempt to symbolize in writing. Luce Irigaray discusses the facets of the morphology of mucus and mucous membranes most fully in 'The Limits of the Transference' and in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*.<sup>39</sup>

A distanceless proximity can be dangerous for both sides:

In the absence of the woman-mother's identity, the speech {*parole*} of the 'daughters' is spoken as a mimetic gesture or flows into the mysterious desire of/for that Other woman. Verbal exchange therefore becomes impossible or useless. Everything takes place before speech intervenes.

Mimetic appropriation by women is still the most terrible thing of all because it is practised without any feminine ideality or model. The absence of an ideal maternal and female figure {*figure idéale*} for women results in the fact that mime between women becomes the flaying of one woman by the other, the reduction of the skin and of the most mucous {*muqueux*} to forms {*figures*} into which they flow in order to exist, often quite unconsciously. They take the appearance of the other before there is any image, and may leave her their own, which they no longer want, for lack of a self-

---

37 Once again there are some difficulties in translation, with confusion between the noun [mucus/*mucus* or *mucosités*] and the adjective [mucous/*muqueux* or *muqueuse*], and the mucous membranes [(*membrane*) *muqueuse*]. I shall supply the original in each instance.

38 Luce Irigaray, *Elemental Passions*, p. 15/*Passions élémentaires* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1982), p. 18. Hereafter cited as *Elemental Passions/Passions élémentaires*.

39 In the later, and in other texts such as 'Questions to Emmanuel Levinas', she engages with the work of philosophers such as Levinas and Merleau-Ponty insofar as their work touches upon the borderlines of the subject and the ethics and possibilities of inter-subject relations. (She also engages in an implicit way with other European philosophers such as Sartre and Baumann. I would like to thank Griselda Pollock for indicating this to me.) My aim here, however, is not to chart the history, impulse, or course of her engagement with these other philosophers - there are others, such as Tina Chanter in *Ethics of Eros*, who are more qualified to do so - but rather to sift through Luce Irigaray's writings on the mucous in order to understand their possible implications for the practices and criticism of art.



representation to venerate, contemplate, admire or even adore.<sup>40</sup>

In “this distanceless proximity between women [...], distanceless because no symbolic process allows us to account for it”,<sup>41</sup> occurs a form of maintenance mimesis - but a maintenance of an identity which has no subjectivity, no ideal, no Symbolic syntax of its own. Instead, that mimesis strips away the possibilities of mediation and a syntax through maintaining a disregard of women’s morphology. There is, I think, a deliberate ambiguity in Luce Irigaray’s use of the word ‘*figure*’ here: an ideal female model for women would require some form of configuration within a Symbolic syntax appropriate to women; the manner of gestural mimesis which is described here is the result of a proximity so unmediated that it does not recognize that the other is not that female ideal model and that it has no mediation, and instead displaces the site of the ideal through a mimesis of the representation, ‘woman’. In doing so the woman displaces the morphology of the mucous (flays it back, even) with a reduction to a form - a reassertion of phallomorphologic, “a gesture which involves a sort of capitalization of the mucous membrane, an exteriorization of what is most inner”.<sup>42</sup> The possibility of (and possibilities ensuing from) a woman’s morpho-logic are eclipsed by the fatal misrecognition of the phallomorphic form that is the representation, ‘woman’.

---

40 Luce Irigaray, ‘The Limits of the Transference’, trans. by David Macey, in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 105-117 (pp. 110-111)/‘La limit du transfert’, in *Parler n’est jamais neutre* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985), pp. 293-304 (p. 299). Translation modified. Hereafter cited as ‘The Limits of the Transference’/‘La limit du transfert’.

41 Luce Irigaray, ‘The Limits of the Transference’, pp. 107/‘La limit du transfert’, pp. 295-296.

42 Luce Irigaray, ‘The Limits of the Transference’, p. 110/‘La limit du transfert’, p. 298.



To recognize the morphology of the mucus and realize its morphologic is thus a priority. Once again, Luce Irigaray promotes an understanding of bodily mucus which can be read into the morphological:

The mucous {*le muqueux*}, in fact, is experienced from within. In the pre-natal and loving night known by both sexes. But it is far more important in setting up the intimacy of bodily perception and its threshold for women. Does the mucous perhaps take the place of the soul for women? But of a soul that is never spoken?<sup>43</sup>

This idea that the mucous might take the place of the soul is potentially seductive, but there is a further complexity here. Indicating that the mucous itself has no permanence while being the "tissue" allowing the development of duration, Luce Irigaray wonders if the mucous is "the condition of possibility for the extension of time?". If it is understood today as being this, she answers herself, this is:

... only insofar as it is made available to and for a masculine subject that erects itself out of the mucous {*le muqueux*}. And which believes it is based on substances, on something solid. All of which requires the mucous {*le muqueux*} to blur in its potency and its act (in its potentially autonomous *hypokeimenon*?<sup>44</sup>) and to serve merely as a means for the elaboration of the substantial, the essential.<sup>45</sup>

So reading the mucous as taking the place of the soul which is not yet spoken for women, and as extension of time, could be compromised by phallogocentric man's very different reading of it as *his* entry to the extension of time. To phallogocentric, the mucous is matter in which man makes his entry to, literally, duration (from '*dur*', meaning 'hard'): "a masculine subject that erects itself out of the mucous".

---

43 Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London: Athlone Press, 1993), p. 109/*Éthique de la différence sexuelle*, (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1984), p. 107. Hereafter cited as *Ethics/Éthique*.

44 Gr: that which underlies being; prime matter; the basis.

45 Luce Irigaray, *Ethics*, pp. 109-110/*Éthique*, p. 107.



But just because phallogomorphic 'gets off' on women's mucus it does not mean that the mucous is forever 'lost' to women. Indeed, we have seen that the realization of the morpho-logic of the mucous is crucial for woman-woman relationships; it is also crucial for woman-man relationships and for a woman's relationship with herself - her self-mediation through an appropriate symbolization:

- However, it is possible that the mucous {*le muqueux*} corresponds to something that needs to be thought through today. For different reasons and imperatives:
- any thinking about the female has to think (through) the mucous {*doit penser le muqueux*}.
  - No thinking about sexual difference that would not be traditionally hierarchical is possible without thinking (of) the mucous {*sans pensée du muqueux*}.
  - In its extension, in its property of expansion, does the mucous {*le muqueux*} not correspond to what Heidegger designates as the crucial issue our generation has to think through?<sup>46</sup>

This last point refers us back to the opening paragraph of *An Ethics*: "sexual difference is one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue, of our age. According to Heidegger, each age has one issue to think through, and one only. Sexual difference is probably the issue in our time which could be our 'salvation' if we thought it through".<sup>47</sup> The morphology of the mucous is that which mediates a woman to herself, and also mediates her, in her difference and specificity, to her lover. It is the mark of her sex, and it is the mark of mediation. The lips are, morphologically, a threshold; ajar, but touching;<sup>48</sup> not closed; not skin (surface closure), not flayed (internal made external), not a unitary form of flesh (non-mediating); but rather, mucous: the site of mediation.

---

46 Luce Irigaray, *Ethics*, p. 110/*Éthique*, p. 107. Translation modified.

47 Luce Irigaray, *Ethics*, p. 5/*Éthique*, p. 13.

48 '*l'entreouverture*' (for example, *Parler n'est jamais neutre*, p. 300; *Éthique de la différence sexuelle*, p. 108) can read as 'the inter-enter-opening'. It is usually translated (rather unsatisfactorily) as "open".



Margaret Whitford has speculated that “it will be of great interest to see what emerges from women’s interpretive imaginations when the mucous starts to receive the same kind of attention as the two lips. It is not clear yet, for example, whether the mucous will be able to bear the weight of symbolic meaning that Irigaray attaches to it”.<sup>49</sup> Through this article, Margaret Whitford refers to the mucous as bodily, suggesting that what is needed is “to symbolize the mucous”.<sup>50</sup> I think that this is a slippage between the adjective and the noun, producing an over-literal reading of Luce Irigaray’s use of the adjective “the mucous” {*le muqueux*}. Instead of symbolising mucus (the noun) as such, we need to recognize in it the play of ‘*différance*’, and its morphological patterns, and develop from that site morphologies of mediation and, contiguously, of another syntax in the Symbolic. As Luce Irigaray says, “of course no woman has the morphology of another”.<sup>51</sup> To “symbolize the mucous” (being reductive in turn, this could collapse into inventing symbols of it) would be to take from it with a gesture which (as mentioned earlier) “turns the donor inside out before there is any gift-object and closes the path of the taker; a gesture which involves {*geste où se joue*} a sort of capitalization of the mucous membrane {*du muqueux*}, an exteriorization of what is most inner”,<sup>52</sup> and in so doing, revert to a phallomorphologic. However, recognizing its morphology involves relinquishing such control: “these mucous membranes {*ces tissus muqueux*} evade my

---

49 Margaret Whitford, ‘Irigaray’s Body Symbolic’, *Hypatia*, 6.3 (1991), 97-110 (p. 107).

50 Margaret Whitford, *ibid.*, p. 106.

51 Luce Irigaray, ‘The Limits of the Transference’, p. 112/‘La limit du transfert’, p. 300.

52 Luce Irigaray, ‘The Limits of the Transference’, p. 110/‘La limit du transfert’, p. 298.



mastery".<sup>53</sup>

What I discern and am trying to present here in my reading of the morphology of the mucous is a morphology which allows for both the relinquishing of control and the presence of the subject demanded by the intersubjectivity and attentiveness discussed in the last chapter. Recalling the flowering of the subject that was the Buddha's gaze upon the flower (one of many references to flowers which should not, I think, be misread as a patriarchal representation of femininity), Luce Irigaray evokes the potential of the mucous: "The flesh of the rose petal - sensation of the mucous {*du muqueux*} regenerated. Somewhere between blood, sap, and the not yet of efflorescence. Joyous mourning for the winter past. New baptism of springtime. Return to the possible of intimacy, its fecundity, and fecundation".<sup>54</sup> And this "return to the possible of intimacy" can be found in the way the mucous marks the limits of the subject as it performs a mediation between subjects.

Articulating the limits between women is problematic: "the very openness {*l'entreouverture*} of their bodies, of their flesh, of their genitals {*sexe*} makes the question of boundaries difficult".<sup>55</sup> What is necessary, then, is a site of a 'third term' - a site that is neither subject (and which will thus prevent each woman reducing the other to herself), but which is not abstract: what Luce Irigaray describes as a "sensible-transcendental - a female transcendental against which each women can measure herself rather than progressing only by taking the place of the mother, the other

---

53 Luce Irigaray, *Ethics*, p. 170/*Éthique*, p. 159.

54 Luce Irigaray, *Ethics*, p. 200/*Éthique*, p. 185.

55 Luce Irigaray, 'The Limits of the Transference', p. 112/'La limit du transfert', p. 300.



woman or the man".<sup>56</sup> Throughout the discussion of how this may be achieved in the psychoanalytic transference between a woman analyst and a woman analysand, Luce Irigaray uses the morphologic of the mucous to provide an understanding of the processes:

Within the transference, a certain limit, a certain threshold is never crossed and always transgressed - the porosity of the mucous membranes {*des muqueues*}. [...] The mucous {*le muqueux*} never retouches itself carnally in the transference.<sup>57</sup>

With this morpho-logic in play, it is inevitable that "already-constructed theoretical language does not speak the mucous {*ne dit pas le muqueux*}".<sup>58</sup> Once again, it is the lack of an appropriate syntax in the Symbolic which can prove fatal for the two women attempting to achieve subjecthood and intersubjectivity through the psychoanalytic transference. As indicated above, Irigaray had previously outlined how "mime between women" without "an ideal maternal and female figure [...] becomes the flaying of one woman by the other, the reduction of the skin and of the most mucous to forms into which they flow in order to exist".<sup>59</sup> In the analytic scenario, with its already constructed theoretical language, the mucous:

... remains a remainder, producing delirium, dereliction, wounds, sometimes exhaustion, mucous {*muqueux*} deployed in the journey that is an analysis, and which risks death if it is not resituated in its place. In that case, all thought becomes skin stripped from the other.<sup>60</sup>

In order to allay this possibility, the two subjects have to produce a (non)object - the third term - between them:

---

56 Luce Irigaray, 'The Limits of the Transference', p. 112/'La limit du transfert', p. 300.

57 Luce Irigaray, 'The Limits of the Transference', p. 113/'La limit du transfert', p. 302.

58 Luce Irigaray, 'The Limits of the Transference', p. 113/'La limit du transfert', p. 302.

59 Luce Irigaray, 'The Limits of the Transference', p. 110-111/'La limit du transfert', p. 299.

60 Luce Irigaray, 'The Limits of the Transference', p. 113/'La limit du transfert', p. 302.



How are they constantly to make greatest and smallest meet? And above all, move from one qualitative to another? A difficult energetistic question, especially when there is no object, no comparison between the two poles. They must become creations. Art *objects*? In that way two subjects can advene one to the other, and an alliance between the two becomes possible.

This is not so much a problem of mastery as the question of a creation allowing participation in the *jouissance* of the object or its cocreation: a useful work because it marks, without destruction, the limits of energy, of the flesh and of the body, of desire and its possibilities. The creation or elaboration of the *object* becomes an architectonic of the body, of a life and a death that does not kill the other.

This creation might be the only thing that could allow the resolution of the transference.<sup>61</sup>

Without the morpho-logic of the mucous in play in the analytical process, this resolution would be impossible. The object would otherwise remain the over-valued object of phallogentrism identified in the last chapter; possibly, if the fatal mimesis by one woman of the other has taken place, a symbolizing of the mucus in a phallogentric syntax. The 'object' that is created, however, is something more like a fluidity of creation itself: the work of creating a subject is a co-creation in the analysis. This must start not from the premise that one woman is the subject and the other is her object (nor that the other is the object of the analysis); but that both are potentially subjects in a relationship of intersubjectivity:

The third term in the transference becomes the limits not only of the skin but also of the mucous {*du muqueux*}, not only the walls, but also the experience of the most extraordinary intimacy: a communication or communion which respects the life of the other whilst still tasting the strangeness of his/her desire. Impossible to exhaust? The outer limits of interpretation, beyond which the risk of aggression {*risque polémique*} is at its most implacable.

And where one also discovers the perception of the possibility or necessity of calm. An interval between the two, a release from quantitative estimates, to allow the opening on to an encounter of a different, peaceful quality. A ground other than, the same as, that of the highest intensity? Access to this is essential if there is to be an other.<sup>62</sup>

---

61 Luce Irigaray, 'The Limits of the Transference', pp. 112-113/'La limit du transfert', p. 301.

62 Luce Irigaray, 'The Limits of the Transference', pp. 114-115/'La limit du transfert', p. 303. Translation modified.



In this way the transference takes place not as a pouring of one subject into the other, with the resultant annihilation of both, but as a relation of intersubjectivity: two subjects, women, retaining their boundaries,<sup>63</sup> relating through the play of the morpho-logic of the mucous. The morphology of the mucous - its (non)form, its other-translucency, its resistance to being mastered by either subject, its specificity to each woman, and its mediation of the woman to herself - provides a pattern for the morphology of the mediation between the women. The 'object' to be created is this work:

... it is only in an act that the mucous {*le muqueux*} perceives and loves itself without thesis, without position outside itself. The potency {*la puissance*} achieves 'its' act which is never set in a finished piece of work. But which is always half open {*entrouvert(e)*}. Never amounts simply to {*irréductible à*} consumption. To producing some child".<sup>64</sup>

Once the patterns of the morpho-logic of the mucous are recognized, they can be worked for elsewhere. I should like now to take this understanding of Luce Irigaray's writing of the mucous as being an exploration and use of the morpho-logic of the mucous, and look for its patterns in practices of art-making: how it might be discerned in the use of certain media. Further, I will explore how, as a result, those media may function as material through which mediation between subjects may take place.

### The morphology of the mucous: a possibility in the materiality of art practices?

---

63 Luce Irigaray, 'The Limits of the Transference', p. 115/'La limit du transfert', p. 303.

64 Luce Irigaray, *Ethics*, p. 111/*Éthique*, p. 108.



Architects are needed. Architects of beauty who fashion jouissance - a very subtle material. Letting it be and building with it, while respecting the approach (*l'abord*), the threshold, the intensity. Urging it to unfold without a show of force. Only an accompaniment? It only unfolds itself from being unfolded. It is in touch with itself from being touched while touching itself. [...]

Is the memory of touching always disguised by senses that forget where they come from? Creating distance through a mastery that constitutes the object as a monument built in place of the subject's disappearance.<sup>65</sup>

Various commentators have attempted to describe Luce Irigaray's use of the morphology of lips and the mucous within extant grammatical formations. Most of them fall short of the way in which she herself uses such a morpho-logic - as we have seen, "already-constructed theoretical language does not speak the mucous"<sup>66</sup> - and thus also fall short of being ways in which we might think anew about practices of making art, and the languages we use through which we can develop an appropriate Symbolic syntax. For example, Margaret Whitford points out that "readers do not hesitate to use the term 'metaphor' when they discuss Irigaray's work; some, but not all, realize that there is a problem here".<sup>67</sup> Whitford herself has fallen foul of these problems when, as we have seen, she suggests that what is needed is "to symbolize the mucous".<sup>68</sup> The problem here is in the use of the word "symbolize": Margaret Whitford appears to slide from using the term 'symbolic' in its psychoanalytic meaning ('the Symbolic'), to using it as one might refer to symbols within symbolism. Thus she is able to refer to Luce Irigaray's "images of the body" such as the two lips and the mucous, and say "that what Irigaray has succeeded in doing [...] is to provide *images of women's bodies* which have

---

65 Luce Irigaray, *Ethics*, pp. 214-215/*Éthique*, p. 197.

66 Luce Irigaray, 'The Limits of the Transference', p. 113/'La limit du transfert', p. 302.

67 Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray*, p. 71.

68 Margaret Whitford, 'Irigaray's Body Symbolic', p. 106.



become material for symbolic exchange between women, and which therefore have already in a limited domain and to a limited extent exceeded the parameters of patriarchal representations of women.”<sup>69</sup> To me, this is a rather literary way of reading Luce Irigaray’s writing, and one which comes perilously close to encouraging a reading which falls back into the capitalizing (to follow Luce Irigaray’s usage of the term<sup>70</sup>) of the verbal or visual metaphor. It also undermines her discussion of ‘the lips’ and the mucous as an example of metonymy, rather than metaphor.<sup>71</sup> There is no doubt that this problem of Margaret Whitford’s and of others could be seen as the crux of an interesting problem with Luce Irigaray’s writing itself: how, at present, can we work simultaneously with and against the structures and tropes of the Symbolic currently provided by our culture? How does one produce the element of mediation - the third term, the gift-space/object, the appropriate syntax in the Symbolic - and its representations, without capitalising? How do we self-represent without reproducing (to ourselves or to others) the representation, ‘woman’?

Diana Fuss also distinguishes between metonymy and metaphor in Luce Irigaray, suggesting that “the ‘two lips’ operate as a metaphor

---

69 Margaret Whitford, *ibid.*, p. 98.

70 Luce Irigaray, ‘Limits of the Transference’, p. 110/‘La limit du transfert’, p. 298.

71 Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray*, pp. 177-185. Jane Gallop has a similar problem: “Vulvomorphologic, by newly metaphorizing the body, sets it free, if only momentarily. For as soon as the metaphor becomes a proper noun, we no longer have creation, we have paternity” (*Thinking Through the Body*, p. 96) - seeming not to realize the trap of producing the (highly reductive) term ‘vulvomorphologic’ as a noun after a rather elegant disquisition on the problem. Maggie Berg notes this. However, after quoting Luce Irigaray on the need to ascertain whether “the motifs of ‘self-touching’ [...] might not imply a mode of exchange irreducible to any centering, any centrism” (*This Sex*, p. 79/*Ce sexe*, p. 76) and saying “she does not wish to displace Lacan’s phallus with the lips, which would be a phallogocentric strategy” (‘Luce Irigaray’s Contradictions’ p. 68), Berg supplies her own term of “lipeccentrism” (p. 69). This runs the danger of being defined by its otherness to the (phallic) centre. Their relation would require further teasing out before it could be used productively.



for metonymy".<sup>72</sup> This seems to me to be closer in *structure* to an understanding of what Luce Irigaray's writing is doing - what work her work is doing - but still with the risk of retaining phallogocentric understandings and functions of the terms 'metaphor' and 'metonymy'. Metaphor has also been hugely dominant in the way we talk about art and art-making, even of radical practices. Mary Kelly, for example, has also explored the roles of metaphor and metonymy in making work:

As I've emphasised before, when I speak about it, my way of working is a visualisation and a theorization simultaneously. [...] I work out the problems, or engage in the debates that I'm interested in partly as a visual means, and this is not very easy to describe. I'm sorry I have to resort to some kind of essentialism here, but how do you describe a feeling for certain materials, how do you make that translation? It's interesting to see how much the whole idea of metaphor is central to what causes visual pleasure. [...] If you're involved in a construction of meaning that's tying together with form and content; then, it's primarily the ideas that you're working with that are prompting you to take on the problems of different media. [...]

Another feeling that's very common is that you're never satisfied. That places you within the axis of metonymy of desire, which is also very productive to examine in terms of who you really are desiring to speak to in the work.<sup>73</sup>

This is where I think we need to return to an understanding of the functioning of morphology, and of the morpho-logic of 'the lips' and of the mucous: to attempt to locate a morphology which can account for "a visualisation and a theorization simultaneously [...] a construction of meaning that's tying together with form and content" (a mediation through materials - an enunciation which is legible and productive of discourse - in an appropriate Symbolic syntax). What we can see Luce Irigaray doing - practising - in her '*parler femme*' is not so much in a reductive sense 'speaking as a

---

72 Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking*, p. 66.

73 Mary Kelly in 'Mary Kelly and Griselda Pollock in Conversation', in *Critical Feminism: Argument in the Disciplines*, ed. by Kate Campbell (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992), pp. 182-216 (pp. 193, 197).



woman'<sup>74</sup> but rather speaking *in* the morpho-logic of 'the lips' and the mucous. Thus, the task for us reading her work is not to distinguish between metaphor and metonymy, but to realize the play of *différance* between the language which is spoken and that which is said within that language (they may well be contiguous) and its morphology. This would then allow us to approach, develop, and be attentive to the motifs within that speech without capitalizing them *as a result of our use of ('speaking' and 'reading') the language*, without returning them to metaphor or phallogomorphic object. Luce Irigaray hints at this early in her work, commenting upon motifs such as 'self-touching' within the work:

But of course if these were only 'motifs' without any work on and/or with language, the discursive economy could remain intact. How, then, are we to try to redefine this language work that would leave space for the feminine? Let us say that every dichotomizing - and at the same time redoubling - break, including the one between enunciation and utterance, has to be disrupted. Nothing is ever to be posited that is not also reversed and caught up again in the *supplementarity of this reversal*. To put it another way: there would no longer be either a right side or a wrong side of discourse, or even of texts, but each passing from one to the other would make audible and comprehensible *{pour faire 'entendre'}* even what resists the recto-verso structure that shores up common sense. If this is to be practiced for every meaning posited - for every word, utterance, sentence, but also of course for every phoneme, every letter - we need to proceed in such a way that linear reading is no longer possible: that is, the retroactive impact of the end of every word, utterance, or sentence upon its beginning must be taken into consideration in order to undo the power of its teleological effect, including its deferred action. That would hold good also for the opposition between structures of horizontality and verticality that are at work in language.<sup>75</sup>

The play of the morpho-logic (including its play through the media of the artwork) precede the distinction of the Symbolic syntax appropriate to women: the motifs and representations occurring

---

74 When asked in an interview if "writing as a woman" *{écrire en tant que femme}* was "valid" *{valable}* Luce Irigaray responded to that particular question as if it were a tautology: "I am a woman. I write with who I am. Why wouldn't that be valid, unless out of contempt for the value of women or from a denial of a culture in which the sexual is a significant subjective and objective dimension." *Je, Tu, Nous*, pp. 52-53/*Je, tu, nous*, p. 61. Later in the interview Irigaray queries the translation (from English to French) of the questions being put to her. In *This Sex*, "*parler-femme*" is translated as "speaking (as) woman". *This Sex*, p. 135.

75 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, pp. 79-80/*Ce sexe*, pp. 76-77.



within it - that which we wish to say in it - cannot be anticipated in advance; nor can the degree of contiguity between the two. Continuous vigilance regarding the play of the morpho-logic in the structure of the Symbolic is required: in a constant multiple movement we have to work with and through the language (material and representations) to hand, back to its informative morpho-logic, and return again to language. (This reminds me again of Buddhism: in Zen translations of the *I Ching* the 18th hexagram is named 'work with what has been spoiled'.) It indicates, moreover, the partial nature of this present text: it is a practice of writing, not a practice of making art. As such, it should not presume to tell artists what to do, but rather should be at that moment of re-engaging with the morphological structures informing artworks and the practices of making them and reading them.

What is at stake here is the morpho-logic informing both our making of artworks, and how we represent the representational practices of art to ourselves. Lynda Nead has noted how, within writing on art:

... the artistic subjectivity that is registered by the brushwork and surface is sexualized. Art criticism writes sex into descriptions of paint, surface and forms. The category of art does not permit a sexuality that is an obvious and provocative element, but a certain kind of phallogentric textuality can be articulated in the discussion of a painting's handling and style. The sexual, then, is distanced from the subject represented on the canvas and is reinscribed through the metaphorical language of connoisseurship.<sup>76</sup>

In recognizing the morpho-logic of the mucous and the lips, the whole approach of thinking through metaphor would need to be undone; the recognition and privileging of metaphoric elements before other elements would be opened for question. As with Luce Irigaray's work on vision, this does not mean that metaphor would

---

76 Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 58.



be expunged: rather, that its role in producing phallogentric representations be recognised, and the prior workings of a phallomorphologic be disrupted by its need to recognize a morphology of the mucous. This returns us to the materiality of art making, and to the problem of approaching a medium and working with it as that element of mediation - the third term, the gift-space/object of co-creation - in which enunciation in the appropriate syntax in the Symbolic is possible. Thus, 'representational practices' in artworks are in an interdependent and discursive relationship with the practices and processes engaged with by the artist in her use of media. The medium, therefore, must be recognized by the artist and the attentive audience as an element in a discourse productive of representations which remain without capitalising - if you like, one set of signifiers among others in artworks as non-capitalized objects.

The medium recognized historically as the one privileged among art practices is paint. Griselda Pollock argues, moreover, that: "Since the late eighteenth century, and certainly since the beginning of this, the term ['painting'] has referred to the hegemonic cultural form which is constituted by the combination of a subject (the artist), an activity (the practice in the studio) and a web of symbolic meaning woven through that figure in that space by means of the economic investment in the commodity it produced".<sup>77</sup> In analyzing the critical structures of modernism which capitalize the medium, Paint, and the practice, Painting, as product of the Artist, Griselda Pollock writes of the signification of paint and the

---

77 Griselda Pollock, 'Painting, Feminism, History', in *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, ed. by Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 138-176 (p. 159).



act of painting within Greenbergian modernism:

The purity of the visual signifier, seemingly emptied of all reference to a social or natural world, is still loaded with significance through its function as affirmation of its artistic subject. Abstract Expressionism is a celebration of the 'expressivity' of a self which is not to be constrained by expressing anything in particular except the engagement of the artistic self with the processes and procedures of painting. Thus 'painting' is privileged in modernist discourse as the most ambitious and significant art form because of its combination of gesture and trace, which secure by metonymy the presence of the artist. These inscribe a subjectivity whose value is, by visual inference and cultural naming, masculinity.<sup>78</sup>

As Griselda Pollock's essay indicates, the moment of modernism and its structuring of 'the Artist' has been massively disrupted by post-modernist and feminist critiques and practice. She names artists such as Barbara Kruger, Lubaina Himid, Martha Rosler, Jo Spence and Mona Hatoum whose "strategic practices [ensure that] their work is a site for a sustained analysis of the meanings of sexual difference authored by culture, across which 'cultural body' they inscribe feminist readings"<sup>79</sup> - practices which include disrupting the privilege accorded paint.

It is interesting to note, however, that when it comes to painting, some feminist critiques have simply enacted a reversal upon the Greenbergian emptying of all meaning other than "the engagement of the artistic self with the processes and procedures of painting", and have instead emptied paintings by women of all meaning other than that discerned in their images. One example of this occurs in Peggy Phelan's *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, where a discussion of paintings by Mira Schor omits any engagement with the materiality of the work (other than to give their dimensions, configuration when hung, and the fact that some utilize rice paper)

---

78 Griselda Pollock, *ibid.*, p. 142.

79 Griselda Pollock, *ibid.*, p. 154.



in favour of a discussion of the overt representations of the imagery.<sup>80</sup> This is surprising, given both the subtitle of the book, and other discussions within it - for example, of representations in films by Yvonne Rainer as products of material and image in a dynamic relation. If Painting (as capitalized act) is left undisrupted by feminist theorizing in the culture, then not only will feminists who are painting remain marginal and their strategies reduced to ones of choice of medium, but also, crucially, any feminist interventions into the practices of painting will remain broadly illegible, even to other feminists. In some respects - both because of its historical signification, and because of some of its material potentialities - the practice of painting could prove a major testing ground for the possibilities of non-phallogomorphic developments of an appropriate Symbolic syntax. It should be clear that I am not arguing for a return to formalism; as Griselda Pollock has stated: "Any return to formalism after these [feminist and socialist] critical developments in theorisation and historical analysis of modernism and its legacies will be to refetishise the form which has been shown itself to be an ideological representation of a far more complex process of change in the politics of representation".<sup>81</sup> It would be easy to capitalize mucus by capitalizing paint, understand 'Paint' as a metaphor for mucus. Instead, I want to try to arrive at an understanding of painting as one site of mediation within the morpho-logic of the mucous. First, I would like to indicate one example of how the work of one woman has been brought into a state of semi-legibility, but no further, by the terminology of present feminist criticism.

---

80 Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 51-60.

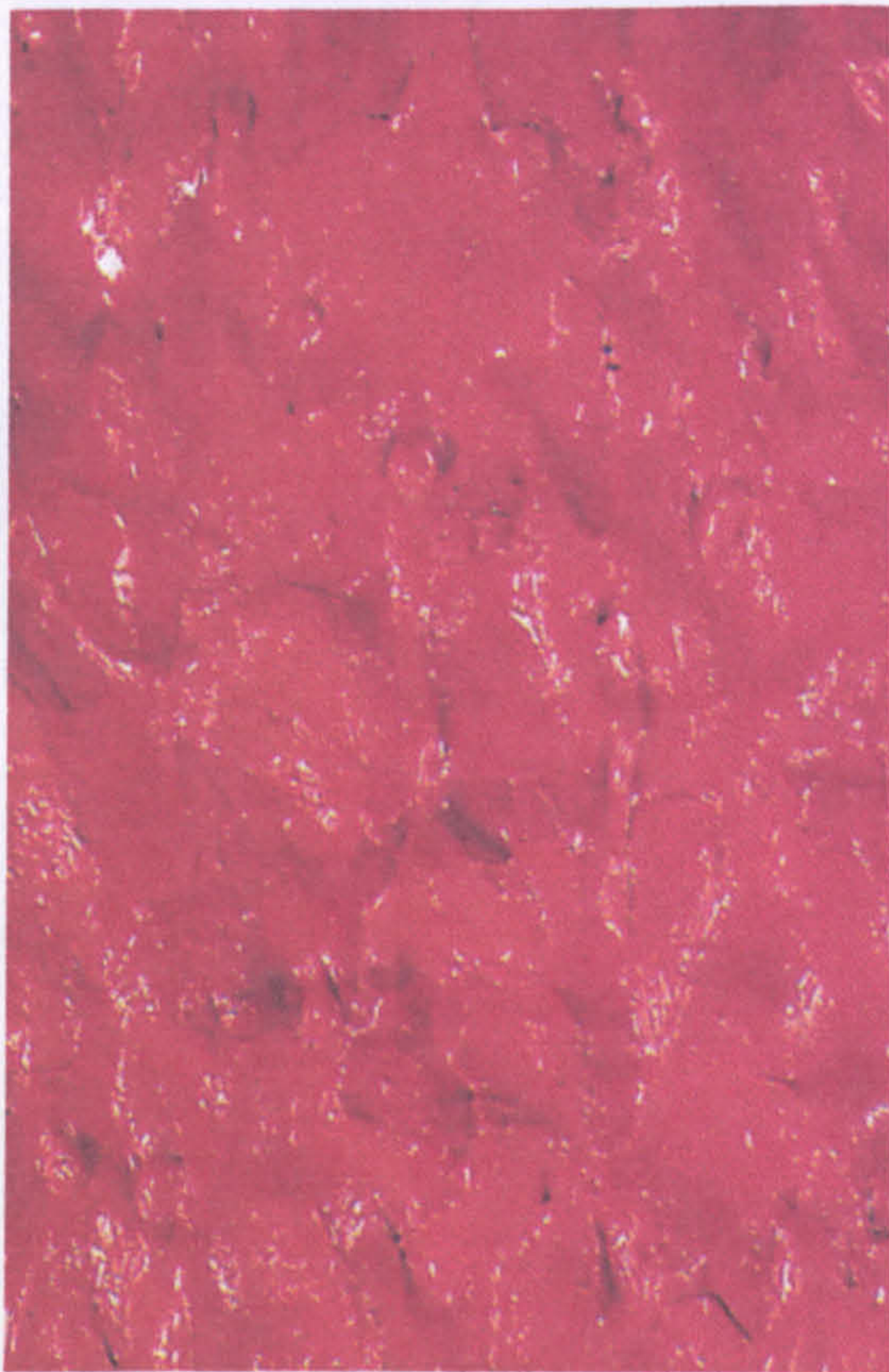
81 Griselda Pollock, 'Pollock on Greenberg', *Art Monthly*, 178 (1994), 14-18 (p.18).



Laura Godfrey-Isaacs first came to prominence in 1990 when she received a Momart Fellowship at the Tate Gallery, Liverpool. At that time, and until 1992, she was working with oil paint, but subsequently she has worked with a variety of media including resin, plasticine, and expanded polyurethane. The properties of oil paint were pushed to the limit in her paintings, which ranged from one foot to over ten foot wide. Usually single colour - for example the *Red Series* (1991-1992) (plate 12) - the technical interest was in working with the contrasting liquidity and solidity of the paint, its qualities when skinning and drying, and when mixed with different oils and varnishes. This was extended in the series of small *Padded Paintings* (1993-1994) to the extent that the paintings would be built up with scrapings of dried paint and varnishes, layer upon layer, until they were inches thick. The related *Alien Blobs* (1994) were moved off canvas, and worked with resin, until the largest was 25"x15"x10". In the *Monstrous* series (1995), Laura Godfrey-Isaacs started making free-standing sculptural pieces, using similar techniques of pouring and layering, but on a large scale with polyurethane. The malleability of plasticine, clay and dough has been explored in series of small clay and dough sculptures (1995), and in the wall pieces called *Plasticine Paintings* (1995).

Whatever the media, critics have located the signifiers of Laura Godfrey-Isaacs' work somewhere between its imagery and its material, and its significations in the realm of the body, its wet interior and its skin. They have been read as exploring qualities of their media in order to express interest in and metaphors for viscera and bodily fluids. Simon Watney writes: "Laura Godfrey-Isaacs is well known for the emphasis in her work on the liquidity





Laura Godfrey-Isaacs  
details from *Lumpish*, *Exposure*, and *Sensation*  
All 1991. Oil on canvas  
Courtesy of the artist



of paint, its viscous, tick-tacky, messy gooey qualities. [...] Obligated to think of the painted surface through metaphors of skin and flesh, Godfrey-Isaacs' work takes us to the other side of skin, to the clinically exposed insides of the organism - gleaming, wet, animal, and to most of us largely unrecognisable and incomprehensible".<sup>82</sup> Much referred to, but little theorized, Laura Godfrey-Isaacs' work has been written about predominantly in two styles, even in gallery-generated texts intended to support and elucidate: either in a mock-transgressive voice, reminiscent of the advertising of cream-cakes to women ("naughty but nice"), or assuming that their engagement with feminist theory is transparent. Simon Watney falls into the former category, as does Rose Jennings.<sup>83</sup> Leah Karibian, in a conversation with the artist about the *Padded Paintings*, assumes the latter position, and tries to retrieve the works for formalist analysis:

You seem to have taken a step out of the critical fold in which your practice was previously protected, or let's say supported. You've stepped away from certain well-established feminist narratives on the body into areas where those arguments are less applicable. In particular, I'm thinking about the way your new work openly flirts with the language of modernist formalism [...] The thrill for me is seeing a feminist artist play around with formal concerns - to enjoy them. It's been such a male preserve in the past, and a language that feminist practitioners have denied themselves - almost on moral grounds. Audiences have had to go without. But now you're in there, having a great time, altering formalism through informed practice.<sup>84</sup>

This is worrying for three reasons; firstly, that a one-time editor of *Women Artists Magazine* should say that the function of feminist criticism is to "protect" or "support", and then be content to allow that statement to be published unedited; secondly, for its partial

---

82 Simon Watney, *Laura Godfrey-Isaacs: Monstrous* (London and Exeter: The Gallery and John Jones and Spacex Gallery, 1995), unpaginated.

83 Simon Watney, *ibid.* Rose Jennings, *Laura Godfrey-Isaacs: Slime* (London: Sue Williams Gallery, 1993).

84 Leah Karibian, in *Laura Godfrey-Isaacs: The Alien and the Domestic* (Winchester: Winchester Gallery at Winchester School of Art, 1994), unpaginated.



reading of “feminist practice”; but thirdly, most pertinently here, because of the opening it provides for a return to formalism. Godfrey-Isaacs responds to Karibian: “I definitely stepped out of that practice which directly references the gendered body, and the culturally defined body”. This opens a space for discussion of ‘indirect’ references of such a body; but the opening is immediately closed by another participant in the discussion who, prompted by Karibian’s comments, validates the work by comparing it with ‘masters’ of Abstract Expressionism: “it’s a Frank Auerbach or a Karel Appel painted with mashed up Baked Beans [...] I had this rather charming image of Auerbach larding on the beans in heroic fashion but which in fact was an image of a child playing with its food”.<sup>85</sup> The dangers of positioning the work in such a discourse become clear: no matter how wittily it is phrased, we are left with a reading of the works of the woman artist (Laura Godfrey-Isaacs) as, “in fact”, infantile, unintentional, simulations of work by the grand male figures of Abstract Expressionism.

From the outset, Rosemary Betterton’s *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body* directs the reader to consider Laura Godfrey-Isaacs’ work as key.<sup>86</sup> A detail of the painting *Pink Skin* (1992) wraps around the whole cover of the paperback, bleeding off the edges. Rosemary Betterton dedicates one passage of the book to the paintings of the early 1990s, and another to the resin and polyurethane works of the exhibitions *The Alien and the Domestic* (1993) and *Monstrous* (1994). While these passages do go some way towards providing a theoretical discourse for the works, they are

---

85 Laura Godfrey-Isaacs and Stephen Johnston, in *Laura Godfrey-Isaacs: The Alien and the Domestic*.

86 Rosemary Betterton: *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body* (London: Routledge, 1996).



caught by attempting to fit the them into a pre-existing theoretical structure which is not, ultimately, appropriate, but tangential to other structures suggested by the works. Having referred to the *Alien Blobs* series as “such fetish objects” as those found in a “bulim[ic] [...] fetish structure”,<sup>87</sup> Betterton then gives the *Padded Paintings* a related context: “If the problem for daughters in separating from their mothers is represented in terms of a process of disavowal (I am not like her, but all the same), then this work functions in a similar way as a fetish which both alludes to and denies that loss”.<sup>88</sup> This takes us some way; but the problem is indicated in that “if” and “then”. *If*, on the other hand, the problem for daughters in separating from their mothers is *not* seen as caught in a phallogocentric bind, requiring disavowal in a phallogomorphic syntax *but instead* seen through a morphologic of the mucous, *then* these works can be read as attempts at mediation in an appropriate syntax. Form and matter can be read as begetting each other in a play of *différance* productive of syntax, rather than form being read through a phallogomorphic syntax as metaphor or fetish. The project they speak of is then read not as one of providing a fetish to stand in for the relationship with the mother, but of providing the gift-space/object which ensures its continuation through constructing the means of its mediation. The works can then be read also as more productive of the “intimate distance” of Betterton’s title. It is perhaps indicative of the complexity of the problems facing critics and theorists that when Rosemary Betterton touches upon the paintings such as *Pink Skin* she does so in the context of opposing “painting ‘femininity’” to “painting women”. She describes them as “explor[ing] the

---

87 Rosemary Betterton, *ibid.*, pp. 151-2.

88 Rosemary Betterton, *ibid.*, p. 153.



metaphorical and literal equivalencies between the feminine body and the surface and textures of oil paint".<sup>89</sup> When critiques (like those of all the writers cited on Godfrey-Isaacs' work) are built upon structures of metaphoric narrative between media and signification, then they will not survive the artist's radical shift of media. Laura Godfrey-Isaacs' most recent work is made from knitting. Much of the material used in them - knitted sheets, squares, and pillows - was made collaboratively by the artist, her mother, and other earlier generations of women in her family, during her pregnancy and the early life of her first child.<sup>90</sup> No longer possible to read as narratives of sexual metaphor, they would add to my argument to read her work as the site of a mediation of, rather than a fetish for, a relationship.

As indicated above, Griselda Pollock has laid out the problematic of the intersection of modernist painting and feminist practice, preparing the ground for further analysis. Two recent articles by other women have begun to address the materiality of paint (and in one work discussed, plaster) in a manner that works at undoing phallogomorphic understandings of paint and of writing about paintings. Instead, they suggest new possibilities for women engaging with the practice of painting, either as subjects who paint or as subjects attending to paintings. Joan Key's 'Unfold: imprecations of obscenity in the fold'<sup>91</sup> attends to an experience the writer had of seeing Rachel Whiteread's *Untitled (Airbed)*

---

89 Rosemary Betterton, *ibid.*, p. 96. She also describes them as "parodying [...] femininity [and] close to a strategy at work in Irigaray's writing, that is the idea of mimicry or mimesis". As the implication here is of a maintenance mimesis with no possibility of a productive mimesis, this would again indicate a possible approach, only to leave it closed.

90 Conversation with Laura Godfrey-Isaacs in her London studio, summer 1997.

91 Joan Key, 'Unfold: Imprecations of Obscenity in the Fold', in *Other Than Identity: The Subject, Politics, and Art*, ed. by Juliet Steyn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 185-197.



(1992) and Bridget Riley's *Arrest II* (1965) exhibited together, the only two artworks in a gallery space. Alison Rowley's 'On viewing three paintings by Jenny Saville: rethinking a feminist practice of painting'<sup>92</sup> also takes as its starting point (as the title suggests) a gallery experience. I was struck by the way in which both these articles (each written by a painter) attended to the experience of being in the same space as the art works and to the presence, substance, and make-up of the works they were discussing. Both writers attend to the particular medium of paint or plaster as if they were sites through which Irigarayan mediation is occurring (although neither writer theorises the media in this way); both attend through sight - seeing the works - "which is after all, the only place where a painting can be experienced by the viewer";<sup>93</sup> but both are acutely aware of the significance of touch in producing what they see: "a highly tactile sensation, not only the desire to press, but a response to that pressure, to be pressed back: a sensation that hints of desire and relation in excess of the contemplative utility of art".<sup>94</sup>

Rachel Whiteread's *Untitled (Airbed)* (plate 13) is a plaster-cast of the space above an inflated airbed. Bridget Riley's *Arrest II* (plate 14) is an acrylic on canvas painting of black, grey and white wavy lines. Joan Key tells us that the curator had no reasons for exhibiting the two works together other than superficial resemblance; he considers them to be utterly different historically, intentionally, and conceptually. She says that "this

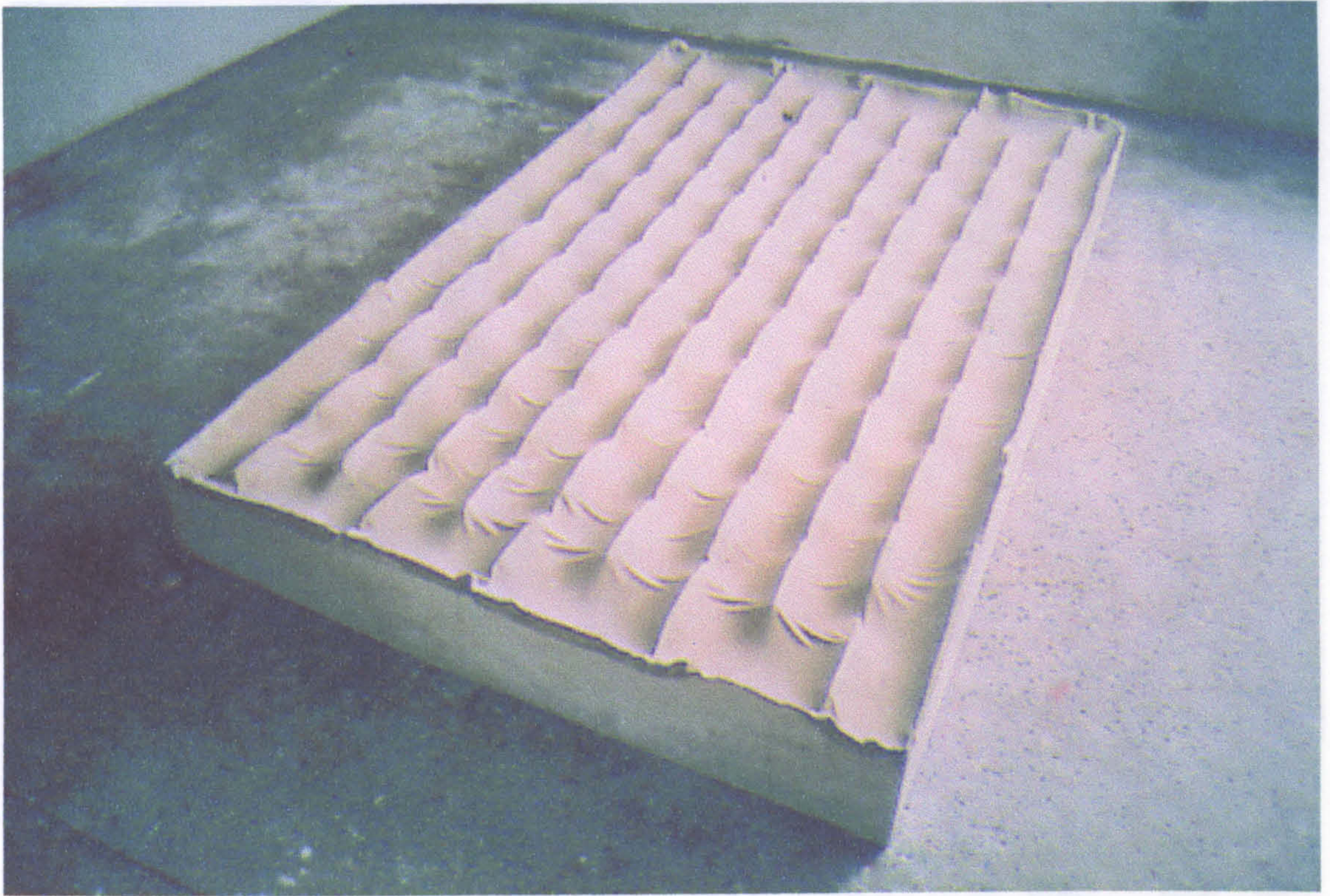
---

92 Alison Rowley, 'On Viewing Three Paintings by Jenny Saville: Rethinking a Feminist Practice of Painting', in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, ed. by Griselda Pollock (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 88-109.

93 Alison Rowley, *ibid.*, p. 97.

94 Joan Key, 'Unfold', p. 194.

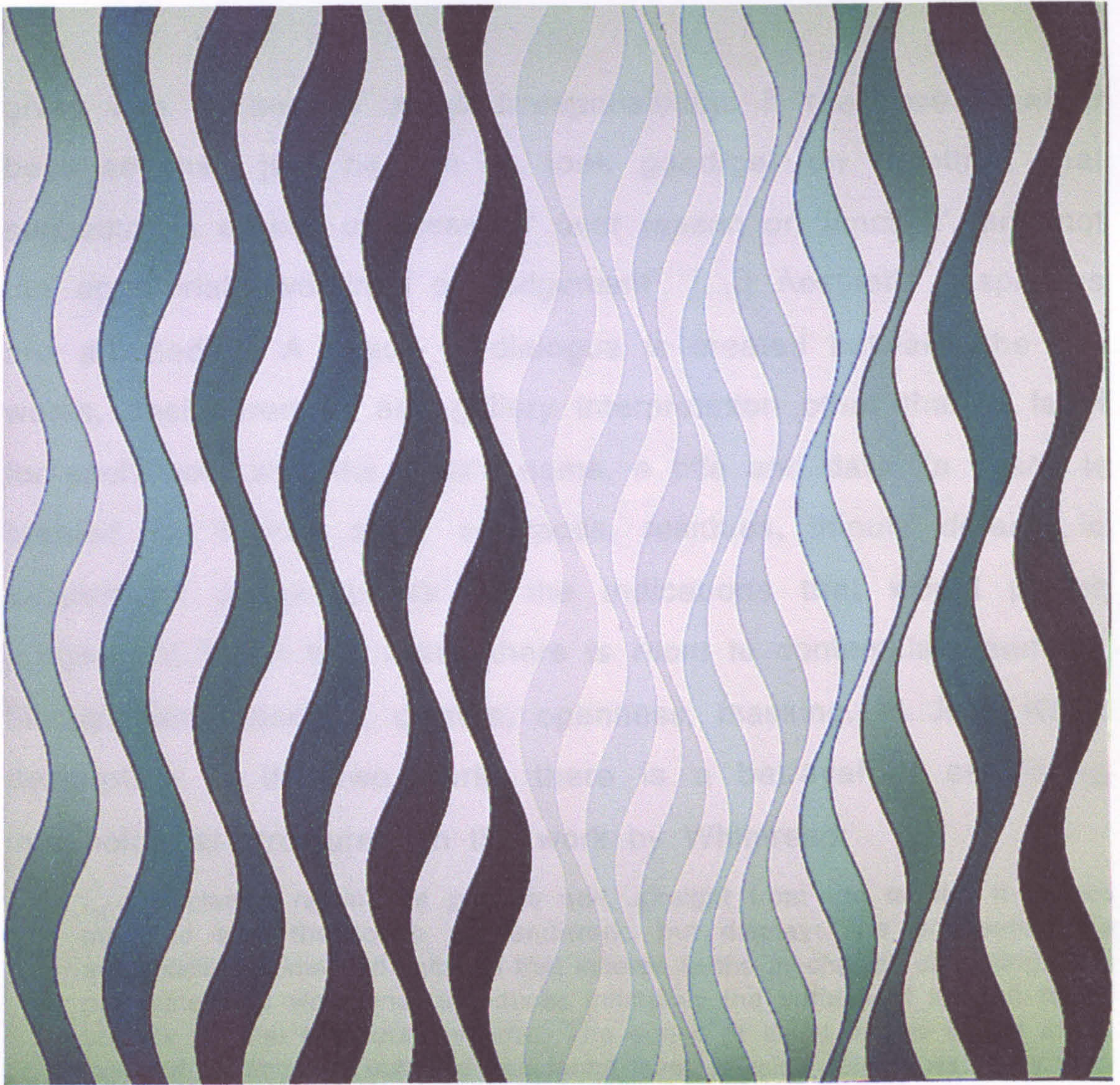




Rachel Whiteread  
*Untitled (Airbed)*  
1992. Plaster and polystyrene, 22 x 120 x 194 cm  
Courtesy Anthony D'Offay Gallery, London

Bridget Riley  
*Arrest II*  
1965. Acrylic on paper, 75.75" x 75"  
Courtesy Anthony D'Offay Gallery, London





refer to the lost container/matrix that leaves the positive form of the bed in negative and mentions an underside/undesired that had been uppermost as the plaster coagulated, but now forms the base, the hidden sign of the nature of the casting process.<sup>87</sup>

Bridget Riley  
*Arrest II*

1965. Acrylic on linen, 76.75" x 75"  
 Courtesy Karsten Schubert Gallery, London

This work does not claim authenticity by indexing the artist through her gestural trace. Rather, any claim to authenticity rests in its indexing of the technical process of its making. In particular, the once-liquid state of its material (plaster), and the flexible, nature of its matrix (the air-bed).

Brigit Riley's painting is in contrast to this:

Riley's paint is flat; its original fluidity may be residually referenced in the

86 Joan Key, *ibid.*, p. 187.

88 Joan Key, *ibid.*, p. 196.

87 Joan Key, *ibid.*, p. 188.



gives rise to unease about irresponsibility: if they are together because they just happen to look good/get on together, that suggests an excess of 'pleasure' over reason or 'function', and not the appropriate workings of 'judgement'. [...] Aesthetic suspicions are aroused".<sup>95</sup> A space of dialogue is created between the two works, uncluttered by any gallery interpretation other than a label for each work with the artist's name, a title and date: "a space is created for intense study of traces, residues, minute details, in suspension of awareness of the indications that would permit judgement."<sup>96</sup> In this space there is room to contemplate surface, fluidity, skin, absence, closure, openness, masking. In Joan Key's description of the two works there is a betrayal of conflicting morphological structures. In the work by Whiteread:

... the plaster retains its pristine self, straight from the mould. It is not modified with the touch of handiwork, but displays the unquestionable authenticity of time and imitation that inheres to the mechanics of casting. This permeates the work and reproduces intimately the surface of inflated fabric and its internal structural dynamic. The sense of liquid origins in the slight signs of pouring and bubbling transforms these physical references. They also refer to the lost container/matrix that leaves the positive form of the bed in negative and mentions an underside/undesired that had been uppermost as the plaster coagulated, but now forms the base, the hidden sign of the fragmented nature of the casting process.<sup>97</sup>

This work does not claim authenticity by indexing the artist through her gestural trace. Rather, any claim to authenticity rests in its indexing of the technical process of its making. In particular, the once-liquid state of its material (plaster), and the flexible, nature of its matrix (the air-bed).

Brigit Riley's painting is in contrast to this:

Riley's paint is flat: it's original fluidity may be residually referenced in the

---

95 Joan Key, *ibid.*, p. 197.

96 Joan Key, *ibid.*, p. 196.

97 Joan Key, *ibid.*, p. 186.



flowing pattern of the drawing, but now it lies in a fine layer across the picture in an even continuous film, its own texture subordinated to a plastic ideal of perfectly smooth consistency. Phenomenal painterly content is totally rationalized into a predetermined scheme: the flawless surface seems to have arrived through automatic procedures. Paint is literally a skin, divided by sharply delineated streams of black/grey/white. The closure of their edges is absolute: not a layering but a suffocating continuity in the surface. The perfection of the skin reveals and reproduces the hidden structure of the underlying support, a surprising reference to cloth, evenly woven, stretched but elastic, subject to pressure: an estimated depth of movement paralleled in the imaginary depth of the undulation of the painted pattern. The image, in the design of a wave pattern, suggests continuity, duration and distance. However, Riley's pattern is cut at a random edge, and brought up close by its unvarying ratio. Like the patterning of textile or wallpaper, it implies the function of a cover or a blanket/obliteration.<sup>98</sup>

Knowledge of the original fluidity of its materials (paint; canvas) is suppressed. Any trace of the gesture of the artist's hand is removed to provide a perfect closure: the smooth, flat skin of the paint surface. The canvas is stretched taught; its trace in the finished painting seems incidental to the artist's intention, but proves crucial. Rather than index its fluidity of material or of process, the work instead has fluidity simulated within it, in the image it carries.

Alongside the differences between the works are another set of qualities which, if not exactly 'similarities', do, nonetheless, resonate between the two works. Both employ what was originally a fluid medium which has, in particular ways, coagulated to form a pristine surface. Both artists employ techniques which suppress any signatures in mark-making, but both use techniques which make the works instantly recognisable as being by that particular artist. Both works contain imagery of waves - the painting in the pattern painted, the sculpture in the undulations of the bed. "Both works suggest themselves as whole, while, unsettlingly, they turn out to



be fragments; both have an area of unseen content that us powerfully present yet invisible".<sup>99</sup>

The morphology informing each begins to differentiate them, and to form their differing significance in the Symbolic. The painting has a surface which is closed, suffocating, described in a manner which suggests that it was produced with a maintenance mimesis of a phallomorphologic. The sculpture is more ambiguous, asserting its presence through processes of reversals - the bed and its absence; authentic presence with no visible trace of the artist; apparent solidity displaying originating fluidity, and so forth. More ambiguous still is the 'reserve' of each work, that which is always already there during any configuration of the works as being informed by a phallomorphologic: the potential presence of a morpho-logic of the mucous. In both works this can be found in cloth and the artist's touching of cloth through the once-fluid medium of paint or plaster. Joan Key does not use this terminology at all, but her description of the works allows for such a reading:

Both the Whiteread and the Riley share a reference to the potentially mobile surface of cloth. In both the sculpture and the painting this reference seem to have the status of an incidental detail, but it imposes on their form with unexpected force, since in both, the image of the cloth is embedded in another surface (plaster or paint) to the point where it nearly disappears.<sup>100</sup>

This "incidental detail", if one cares to look for it, can be perceived as a determining detail for the attentive audience of the two works. Even though the flow of plaster and paint is stilled (closed), the memory of it is carried in the material of the plaster as (to use terminology from an earlier chapter) an hysterical reserve, and in the material of the differently tinted paint as

---

99 Joan Key, *ibid.*, p. 187.

100 Joan Key, *ibid.*, p. 191.



masquerade, *parure*:

The residual image of the cloth resonates with the patterning of waves, informing and intensifying the sensation of surface movement. However, the fluidity of plaster and paint make their own reference to waves, which inflect the movement of the cloth with a different mathematical ratio. The surfaces ripple, part of the illusion of the painting and the structure of the sculpture; but these reticulations are immediately contradicted in the stretching of the canvas and in the reversal of the casting. The potential fold in the surface is immediately flattened, its recess revealed, and yet the hidden aspect of the fold remains permanently present as an imagined possibility.<sup>101</sup>

There is another element in this: the encountering of the two works by an attentive audience. The way Joan Key has written her essay is through a series of folds; episodic, it does not demand a linear reading, and indeed (with the exception of the initial paragraph) encourages both circular and non-linear reading, each episode touching upon others. While not formless, it does not have an academic form. What is of particular interest in this context is what Joan Key discerns not only within each work, but in the third term they create between them, the work they do together, traces of which they each, in their particular ways, bring individually to the encounter:

This is a continuous folding and unfolding that is out of the spectator's control: a simultaneous display of two positions, so that there is a perpetual relay between two opposed visual messages. This process puts the content of the fold on display, returning its hidden nature to a surface which cannot settle into place and immediately hides it again. This refusal to keep still leaves the spectator with literally 'nothing to hold on to', deflecting the spectator's gaze through the permanent defeat of closure to a surface that seems always on the verge of opening up, an unconscious movement of logarithms and numbers, not to be controlled by conscious design.<sup>102</sup>

In this we can discern a non-phallogomorphic logic at play between the materiality of the artworks and their imagery - and between the artworks and Joan Key. Nowhere does she capitalize the fold: though she does tell an amusing anecdote (courtesy of Joan Copjec)

---

101 Joan Key, *ibid.*, pp. 191-192.

102 Joan Key, *ibid.*, p. 192.



which suggests how a phallomorphic might do so. The tale of psychiatrist, Gaetan de Clérambault, could be interpreted as on the one hand an instance of hysterectomy, and on the other, a castrating refusal to see. Gaetan de Clérambault ran, at the *École des Beaux Arts*, a course on drapery and folds which was peremptorily closed down by the authorities: “the recoil they felt it necessary to make, in order to disassociate themselves from that very concern with FOLDing, demonstrated the degree of their embarrassment. It was important to mark not just disapproval, but the stronger emotion of disgust, a visceral revulsion”.<sup>103</sup> It is in Joan Key’s discernment of the never-completed, never-completable folding and unfolding of cloth in the reserve of the two works and in the work they make together that the phallic “scandal” of their interaction can be found: a morpho-logic of ‘the lips’ and of the mucous.

Alison Rowley’s essay allows us to concentrate more closely upon the manner in which the handling of the material substance of paint and the configuration of imagery in paint touch upon each other. Her shifting of terminology from “formal” qualities to “technical” procedures<sup>104</sup> would seem initially to hold the two apart; but in fact the term ‘formal’ insists that issues arising from the relationship between the image on the canvas and anything which lies beyond the canvas be discarded in favour of abstract discussions of, for example, ‘composition’. Distinguishing technical procedures from configuration of imagery (and by extension, matters of representation) allows us to attend anew to their touching upon each other.

---

103 Joan Key, *ibid.*, p. 192-193.

104 Alison Rowley, ‘On Viewing Three Paintings by Jenny Saville’, p. 92.

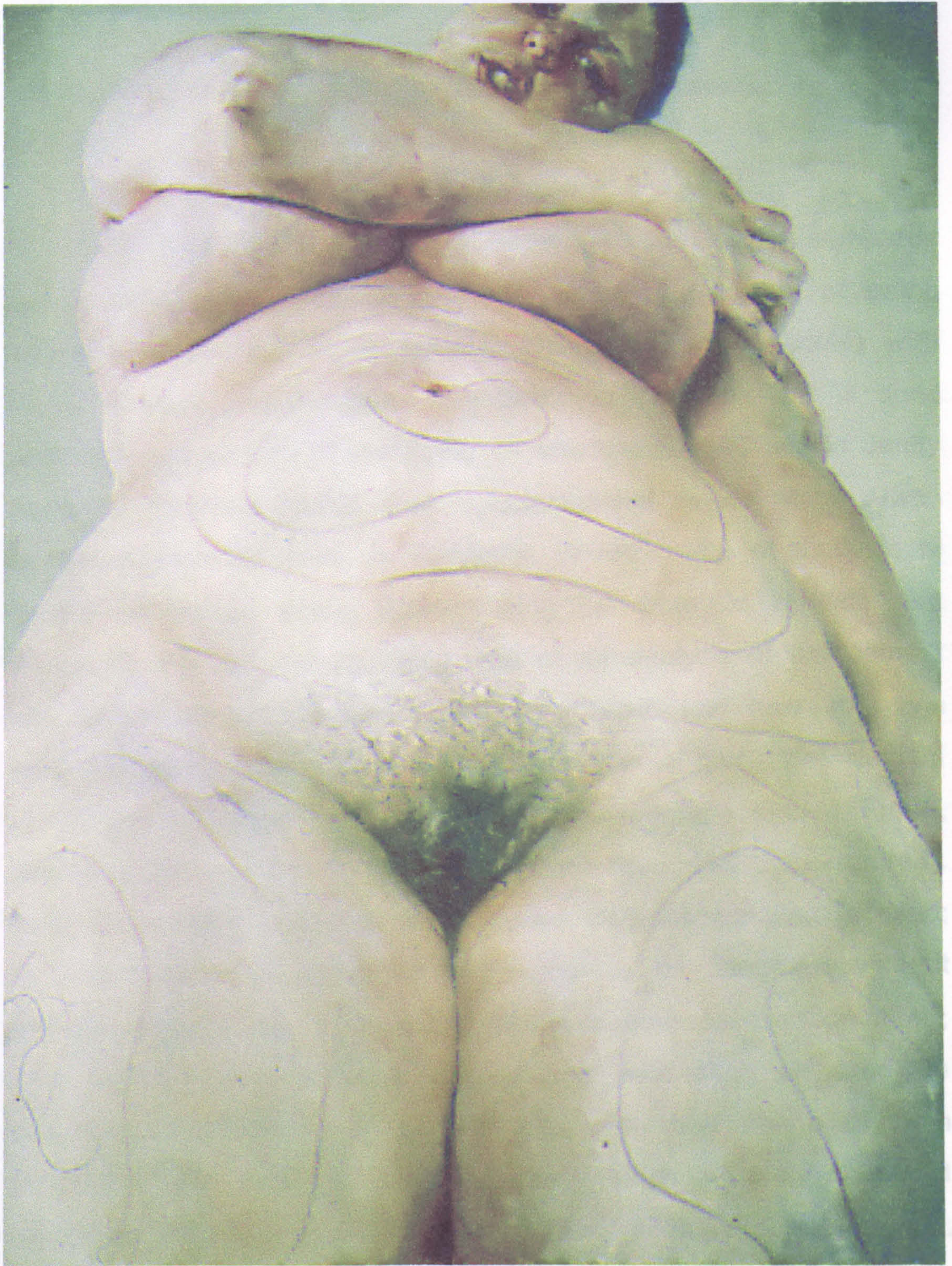


As with Joan Key's essay, Alison Rowley's contains a memorable passage of writing which is more than descriptive of the artwork under discussion - Jenny Saville's *Plan* (plate 15). Because it is not only pertinent to the discussion of the morphology of the relationship between the audience and the artwork, but also suggestive of how this morpho-logic may be signified through the writings of the art critic or theorist, I will quote the paragraph in full:

At my height of 5'7" if I stand at painting distance from the canvas (by the size of the marks this is closer than arm's length as these are manipulations of the brush by fingers and wrist, not swings from the shoulder), I have in my focused vision a group of oblongish marks of flesh tones modulated to simulate the play of light over a smooth but slightly uneven surface. Into this surface break some small brownish black curved marks of raised paint which I can imagine as have been made by gently laying a fine, long-haired brush loaded with colour onto the surface of the canvas and quickly lifting it off again. The memory from my own experience of manipulating paint, of the controlled combination of amount of paint, weight of hand, movement of fingers needed to execute marks like these is very pleasurable. At this distance from the canvas I'm lost in the memory of the tactile pleasures of paint application. And literally lost in the space of the canvas with nothing to locate myself, I cannot see any whole shapes or the edges of the canvas. How does this area of painted marks relate to those on the rest of the canvas, and to construct what? To find out, I have to pull a good way back from touching distance before I have the whole canvas within my field of vision and can see that what the marks make is where the pubic hair peters out into the smooth skin of the stomach. But at this distance my memories are of another order, in another register: they are memories of other images of women without clothes, from other paintings and photographs with which I begin to compare *Plan*. By moving back to hold the whole canvas within my view so that I can see how the marks coalesce into the bounded shape I look for as standing for the human figure in the conventions of western painting, I have to forfeit the tactile pleasure of an imaginary application of marks to the surface of *Plan*, the memory of my own body in contact with a canvas. But I can move in and back again at will.<sup>105</sup>

Sight, informed by knowledge and bodily memory of touch making what is seen; movement between proximity and distance; identification with the woman painter; identification of a body sexed female in representation; these are experienced as moments of pleasure. I detect a hint of a more ambivalent consideration of





Jenny Saville  
*Plan*

1993. Oil on canvas, 274.5 cm x 213.5 cm  
Courtesy the Saatchi Gallery, London



the representation in relation with other representations in the memory.

In a long and complexly layered essay, Alison Rowley compares Jenny Saville's technical choices (in particular, handling of paint, viscosity of paint, size of canvas, and figure-ground scale) with those of Helen Frankenthaler and Dorothea Tanning. This is done against a background of identifying an unacknowledged use in Jenny Saville's *Branded* (1993) of a representational device which Alison Rowley recognises from Jo Spence's *Exiled* (n.d.); of analysis of Saville as middle class, differentiating her from Jo Spence and Alison Rowley as working class; and of an analysis of the context into which Jenny Saville's work was placed, and how she was represented by newspaper critics at the time of her 1994 Saatchi Collection exhibition (in a nutshell: compared with Lucien Freud, with any feminist intent at best acknowledged and then ignored). Kaja Silverman's theory of the negative Oedipus complex is used: "in this formulation we might find our place as daughters without the destruction, the replacement of the mother as the condition"; and Saville's work praised for "intuiting" just such an area "in paintings like *Plan* and *Interfacing*, with their space of both eroticism (her need to paint areas of flesh in close-up) and identification (her retention of the recognizable female body)". However, Saville is deemed to do this in "close alignment in technical terms with all that is associated with the devaluation of the feminine".<sup>106</sup> Colour and (interestingly, in relation to Joan Key's article) "sensitivity to the quality of canvas as material ground"<sup>107</sup> are noted as spatial devices in Frankenthaler's work, and as being

---

106 Alison Rowley, *ibid.*, p. 99.

107 Alison Rowley, *ibid.*, p. 102.



under-utilized in Saville's. Alison Rowley quotes Hubert Damisch on the image in a painting being characterized "by a surplus of *substance*, from which would come its weight, its charge, its title of painting, and which would produce, under that title, an effect of pleasure specific to it".<sup>108</sup> This leads to an identification of a problem with Saville's work: her "reliance on paint to simulate flesh produces, like all simulations, a sure, disappointing and wearying foregrounding of its falling short of that which it attempts to simulate. This is surplus paint, and highly unpleasurable".<sup>109</sup>

In Alison Rowley's essay Lucien Freud's work is evoked as highly problematic, but not given the close reading afforded Saville, Frankenthaler, Tanning or Spence. While this could be greeted with relief, its absence means that certain possibilities in Jenny Saville's painting could be missed. I am trying to create from memory an imagined space for an encounter between works by the two. What I find is a number of instructive differences between the two, both at the level of technical procedures and of configuration of imagery. Few of Freud's paintings are as large as many of Jenny Saville's; the figures imaged in them are not only thus relatively smaller, but also the relation of the scale of the figures to the size of the canvas is usually more conventional: they 'fit' into the picture. In terms of figure-ground relation, they are more bounded. Their object-like status is increased by the view-points most often used by Freud, higher than the seated or lying person, and at a distance from a standing person. In Jenny Saville's work we frequently are given a view point of the figures whereby we are

---

108 Hubert Damisch, quoted by Alison Rowley, *ibid.*, p. 103.

109 Alison Rowley, *ibid.*, p. 106.



looking up at them, and from a position of closeness. Thus we are invited into an intimate relation with their flesh, both by the scale of the figures (and the potential 'loss' of the boundaries that Alison Rowley suggests) and by the way the scale of the figures butts up against the size of the canvas: they fill and exceed the field of vision in the painting, thus provoking memory of a necessary closeness in order to make sense of the image. Even when we are at a distance from the canvas, beyond touching distance, the memory is of being within touching distance: a memory indicated by Luce Irigaray as crucial to intersubjectivity:

The memory of touching? The most insistent and the most difficult to enter into memory. The one that entails returning to dues whose beginning and end cannot be recovered.

Memory of the flesh, where that which has not yet been written is inscribed, laid down? That which has no discourse to wrap itself in? That which has not yet been born into language? That which has a place, has taken place, but has not language. The felt, which expresses itself for the first time. Declares itself to the other in silence.

One must remember this and hope that the other remembers.<sup>110</sup>

It would be hard to reproduce in front of a Lucien Freud painting the 'loss' of mastery of the figure that Alison Rowley described when close to the Jenny Saville painting, or the "memory of flesh [...] not yet [...] born into language" evoked by Luce Irigaray. Freud's paint work (particularly in his painting of skin) may look creamy from any distance, but it is also usually shiny, with a hard, repulsing surface, giving us phallic closure and rigidity in the shiny paint surface. In his painting of limbs and bodies, large brush strokes (though usually small on the face) while 'moulded' in effect, often appear to work against the architecture of skin, muscle and bone. It is an activity which displays a fear or hatred of, or revulsion from, flesh, and which certainly resists



intersubjectivity or any mediation of the other's subjectivity. In that close-up activity of painting, I extrapolate Lucien Freud interrogating his models visually, delineating the object on canvas - the over-production of the object at the expense of subjectivity identified in the last chapter. As Luce Irigaray asks, "is the memory of touching always disguised by senses that forget where they come from? Creating distance through a mastery that constitutes the object as a monument built in place of the subject's disappearance".<sup>111</sup>

Jenny Saville's paint work, memorably described by Alison Rowley in the passage quoted above, differs. Her paint has a matt, but not 'dry', surface; her brush is not large, nor are her brush strokes; and in relation to the scale of the figures imaged, both brush and strokes could be considered very small. When close up to the canvas, she is not delineating the object; its borders are not in her visual control. She is, through a series of touches, building the image. From Alison Rowley's account, we can imagine the patience with which she does this, "urging it to unfold without a show of force".<sup>112</sup> There is also, as Rowley indicates, an identification between Jenny Saville and the body she is painting, whether as self portrait or not: the image of the woman she paints can thus never fully be her object.

While I agree that simulation of flesh is problematic and can easily fall back into a maintenance mimesis, I think something else is happening here, something akin to love, which is important not to miss. Alison Rowley quotes Jenny Saville as saying "I'm not

---

111 Luce Irigaray, *Ethics*, pp. 214-215/*Éthique*, p. 197.

112 Luce Irigaray, *Ethics*, pp. 214-215/*Éthique*, p. 197.



painting disgusting, big women. I'm painting women who've *been made to think* they're big and disgusting, who imagine their thighs go on forever.... I haven't had liposuction myself but I did fall for that body wrap thing where they promise four inches off or your money back" (my italics) and wonders "Does Saville, then, worry about her own size?".<sup>113</sup> But Saville's comment was in the past tense, not the present: I read her act in painting as she does as a gesture of attending to the interrelation of subjectivity and body, and of restoring touch to sight, through the mediation of paint. Rather than being "surplus paint, and highly unpleasurable" or using paint as a "modelling material" in simulating flesh (more likely to be found in a Freud painting), Jenny Saville is restoring beauty to that *which has been regarded as* surplus substance<sup>114</sup> by returning through the imaging of that body and that subjectivity; making a gift-space/object necessary for intersubjectivity and for mediation between women. Once again, there is a non-phallic morpho-logic at play between the technical applying of the paint and the deferral between the surplus substance of the paint and the surplus substance of the image, which pivots upon the qualities that Jenny Saville has required of the paint and the countless touchings.

What these two articles achieve is to alert us not only to practices of using the materiality of fluid media as artists, but also practices of attending to the implications of this materiality as an audience. Luce Irigaray wrote in an early work "now if we examine the properties of fluids, we note that this 'real' may well include,

---

113 Alison Rowley, 'On Viewing Three Paintings by Jenny Saville', p. 95.

114 "For the anorectic, there is always excess matter deposited over the surface, the form of the body. The goal is to get rid of that surplus and to reveal the essential, core self - to get back to the original boundaries". Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude*, pp. 10-11.



and in large measure, a *physical reality* that continues to resist adequate symbolization and/or that signifies the powerlessness of logic to incorporate in its writing all the characteristic features of nature".<sup>115</sup> As we have seen, this has developed into the suggestion that we need to think through the mucous - not only to 'think it through' as a political and theoretical necessity, but also to 'think through it' as a means of achieving an appropriate syntax in the Symbolic and the possibility of mediation in intersubjective relationships. Joan Key and Alison Rowley evoke what we could refer to as the hysterical reserve of the Rachel Whiteread sculpture, the *parure* of the Bridget Riley painting, and the touching-upon within Jenny Saville's painting. Further, we can read the two writers as alerting us to a particular morpho-logic at play and beginning to be productive of its Symbolic syntax. It is a morpho-logic which is discernable in the *différance* between the technologies selected and the imagery produced; in the traces (implicated in this *différance*) of the material fluidity of cloth and of the plaster and paint; and in the gaps between the three art works and the two essays. It is discernable also through attempting to develop a practice of thinking through it: attending to the possibility of mediation through the morphology of the mucous and 'the lips'.



## Chapter 6

### Retraversing 'gesture'.

Louise Bourgeois's series of installational sculptures of the late 1980s and the 1990s - the *Cells* - provide an opportunity to rethink the concept of 'gesture' as it is used with reference to modern and contemporary art. In this chapter, I will propose that it is possible to read Louise Bourgeois's *Cells* and Luce Irigaray's discussion of gesture (particularly as found in her paper 'Gesture in Psychoanalysis'<sup>1</sup>) in a dynamic relationship with each other; and that doing so produces not only an enriched understanding of each, but also new possibilities for reading gesture embodied in the artwork. Gesture can be used as a way of thinking about the relation between the psychic subject, the sexed subject, and a practice. This enables, moreover, a critique of some current trends in writing on Louise Bourgeois which have produced reductive, psychobiographical readings which displace the work with an 'authenticating narrative' of the artist and her life-story.

#### Louise Bourgeois: *Cells*

For the 45th Venice Biennale (1993) the USA selected the French-born artist Louise Bourgeois as their representative. An exhibition was mounted in the US pavilion consisting of 13 sculptures, dating

---

1 Luce Irigaray, 'Gesture in Psychoanalysis' in *Sexes and Genealogies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 89-104/'Le geste en psychanalyse', in *Sexes et Parentes* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987), pp. 103-118. Hereafter cited as 'Gesture'/'Le geste'



from 1984-1993. Four of these were large works each given the title *Cell*, with further individual titling supplied in brackets: *Cell (Eyes and Mirrors)* (1989-1993); *Cell (Choisy)* (1990-1993); *Cell (Glass Spheres and Hands)* (1990-1993) (plate 16); and *Cell (Arch of Hysteria)* (1992-1993). The catalogue for an expanded version of the exhibition held at the Brooklyn Museum in 1994 also included *Cell II* (1991); *Cell III* (1991) (plate 17); *Cell IV* (1991) (plate 18); *Cell (You Better Grow Up)* (1993) (plate 19); *Cell (Three White Marble Spheres)* (1993) (plate 20). Also documented in the Brooklyn catalogue are *Cell I* (1991); *Cell V* (1991); and the related *Precious Liquids* (1992). Anything between 3'8" and 14' wide and between 7' and 12' high, the sheer bulk and number of these works, produced when the artist was in her late 70s and early 80s, speak of the importance to her of this development in her work.

The *Cells* are best described as creations of interior spaces. They are bounded by 'walls', made from old warehouse window frames, with some of the glass still in place, from steel grilles, from sheet metal, old doors, wooden planking. In the 'walls' are door- or window-type entrances through which the audience can sometimes walk, or sometimes only look. Contained within the walls, various elements, found or made by the artist, are placed in juxtaposition. The objects inside vary widely: old furniture, mirrors, and objects seemingly scavenged from waste sites - an industrial saw, bottles, a desk-guillotine. There are glass spheres and phials, and marble sculptures with a mix of rough-hewn stone and highly polished, smooth, exact finish. The details fascinate, yet none seems superfluous. The spaces pull the gaze into and around them; the 'walls' both cage and house their contents.





Louise Bourgeois  
*Cell (Glass Spheres and Hands)*  
1990-1993. Mixed media, 86" x 86" x 83"  
Collection of the Artist, courtesy Robert Miller Gallery  
Photograph from *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory*, ed. by Joanna Ekman (New  
York: Abrams, 1994)





Louise Bourgeois  
*Cell III*

1991. Mixed media, 111" x 130.5" x 165"  
Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation, Toronto

Photograph from *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory*, ed. by Joanna Ekman (New York: Abrams, 1994)

Photograph from *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory*, ed. by Joanna Ekman (New York: Abrams, 1994)





Louise Bourgeois

Louise Bourgeois  
*Cell IV*

1991. Mixed media, 82" x 84" x 84"

Collection of Ginny Williams, Denver

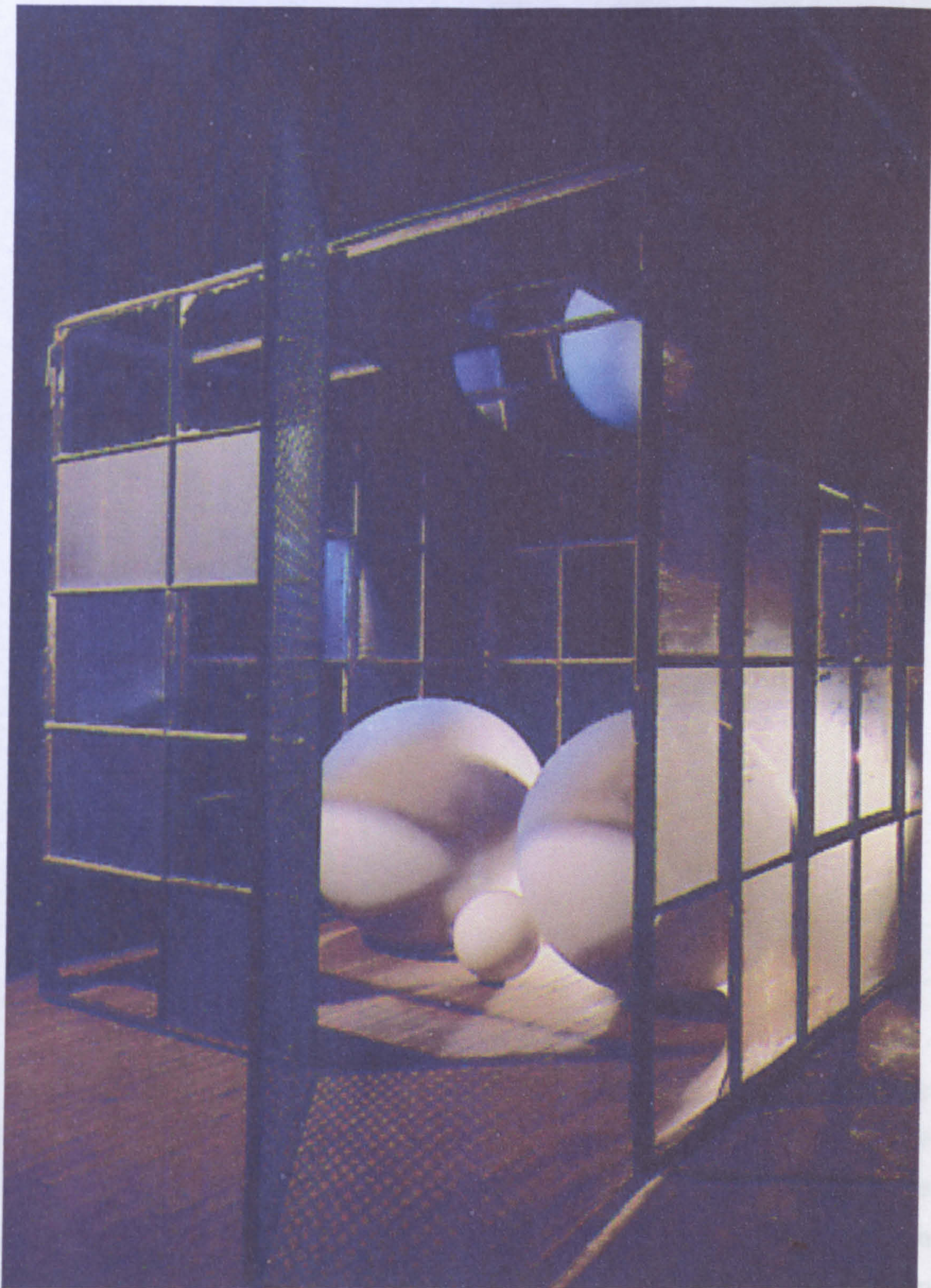
Photograph from *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory*, ed. by Joanna Ekman (New York: Abrams, 1994)





Louise Bourgeois  
*Cell (You Better Grow Up)*  
1993. Mixed media, 83" x 82" x 83.5"  
Collection of the artist; courtesy Robert Miller Gallery  
Photograph from *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory*, ed. by Joanna Ekman (New  
York: Abrams, 1994)





Louise Bourgeois  
*Cell (Three White Marble Spheres)*  
1993. Mixed media, 84" x 84" x 84"  
Collection of the artist; courtesy Robert Miller Gallery

Photograph from *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory*, ed. by Joanna Ekman (New York: Abrams, 1994)



Richard Serra is quoted in the Brooklyn catalogue: "the meaning [of the works] evades me: discursive analysis, conceptual terms fail. All tracking leads to dead ends. Imposition of formal logic and conjectures of academic language do not resolve the content".<sup>2</sup> The *Cells* do not fit into any categories of art, even the broadest: they resist terms of figuration or abstraction, modernism or post-modernism. When encountering them in the cool rooms of the US pavilion in Venice, out of the mid-summer heat, my desire was not to "resolve the content", to fix, to know, and thus control through completion, but to spend time with, to dialogue, to question and be questioned by, to negotiate, to return. But I was wanting the language with which to do this. It required some learning.

### Present critical analysis of Louise Bourgeois's work

It is difficult to find a framework vivid enough to incorporate Louise Bourgeois's sculpture. Attempts to bring a coolly evolutionary or art-historical order to her work, or to see it in the context of one art group or another, have proved more or less irrelevant. [...] Rarely has an abstract art been so directly and honestly informed by its maker's psyche.<sup>3</sup>

So wrote Lucy Lippard in 1975. Over twenty years later the same is still the case. The growing number of articles and essays written about Louise Bourgeois during the last ten years confirm this continuing search for frameworks within which her work can be discussed, tested, and come to terms with. Feminist art criticism has, however, during this time equipped us with the tools to re-

---

<sup>2</sup> Richard Serra, in *Louise Bourgeois: Locus of Memory, Works 1982-1993*, ed. by Joanna Ekman (New York: Abrams, 1994), p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> Lucy Lippard, 'Louise Bourgeois From the Inside Out', *Artforum*, 13.7 (March 1975), 26-33 (p. 27).



evaluate Louis Bourgeois's position in a gendered historical and cultural context. As she matured as an artist she was a wife and mother in the New York of the 1940s and 1950s. Her exclusion from formal art historical narratives of that period can now be understood in the context of the positioning accorded actual women and the concept of femininity within modernism in general, and Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism in particular. The more recent use of psychoanalytical theory has produced particular readings of her work, and feminist use of psychoanalytic models has given us the tools to analyze the constructions of 'femininity', 'madness' and 'genius', and to re-assess the work of women artists like Bourgeois without inappropriately valorising a concept of 'madness'.

These feminist, art historical, and psychoanalytic readings of Louise Bourgeois's works have been both notably diverse and partial. While the commentators have not had violent arguments with each other, their lack of unity is striking. Thus one writer will account for Bourgeois's work within expressionism; another will call it formalist. One writer will focus on its materials; another find the artist's life story at the centre of their analysis. One will describe it as symptomatic of a dysfunctional family background; another, as symptomatic of Bourgeois's involvement with Surrealism.<sup>4</sup> And so on and so forth. The one thing that the writers do all seem to agree upon is that the work is somehow

---

4 See, for example, respectively: William Rubin, 'Some Reflections Prompted by the Recent Work of Louise Bourgeois', *Art International* (April 1969), 17-20; Carter Ratcliff, 'Louise Bourgeois', *Art International*, 22.7 (November 1978), 26-27; Alain Kirilli, 'The Passion for Sculpture: Conversation with Louise Bourgeois', *Arts Magazine*, 63 (March 1989), pp. 69-75; Deborah Wye, 'Louise Bourgeois: One and Others', in *Louise Bourgeois*, ed. by Deborah Wye (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982), pp. 13-33; Donald Kuspit, 'Louise Bourgeois: Where Angels Fear to Tread', *ArtForum* (March 1987), 115-120; Harald Szeemann, 'The Fount of Youth: Gobel la Bourgeoisiel', *Parkett*, 27 (1991), pp. 74-76.



something to do with the body and with sex - though whether it is descriptive, symbolic, metaphorical, representational or evocative in its relation to the body is not something about which there seems to be any consensus. Similar ambivalence emerges about the work's sexual content - extending to lack of clarity about whether this content is produced in the work's relationship to the body of the artist, to the bodies of the critics, or to a construct of gender. The cumulative effect of reading the extant literature on Bourgeois is that in the discussions of her work, the terms 'body' and 'sex' are not problematized, as if in and of themselves these words can be universally understood and experienced, and provide a definitive bench-mark.

Since the early 1980s, criticism has constructed, theorized, and made famous a 'Louise Bourgeois' who makes work stemming from her feelings about her father. Robert Storr has written, describing conversations he had with Bourgeois:

It was while preparing a slide show autobiography for her 1982 MoMA exhibition [...] that she first told in full the story of her father and the mistress, which has since become myth of origin for much of her work. Enlightening in many respects, in others this story has restricted the interpretation of what she has done to narrowly personal or archetypically Freudian sources.<sup>5</sup>

In our eagerness to hear another version of the Freudian 'family romance'<sup>6</sup> - in this case, a charming, philandering, autocratic and

5 Robert Storr, 'The Discreet Charm of Louise Bourgeois', *Tate, The Art Magazine*, 6 (Summer 1995), 24-31 (p. 29).

6 This term is used by Freud to describe the child's interpretation and justificatory stories of his or her parent's behaviour, often including the 'relegation' of a biological parent into a hated step-parent. It is worth noting that Freud comments "But here the influence of sex is already in evidence, for a boy is far more inclined to feel hostile impulses towards his father than towards his mother and has a far more intense desire to get free from *him* than from *her*. In this respect the imagination of girls is apt to show itself much weaker". Freud then discusses "the child...he", and structures appropriate to boys. 'Family Romances', *The Penguin Freud Library VII: On Sexuality*, trans. by James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 221-225 (p.222).



ultimately intolerable father, whose mistress is not only the daughter's nanny and governess, but is also moved by the father for a number of years into the marital home - it becomes easy to focus on the daughter-to-father emotion; the anger, the desolation of the daughter, the young Louise Bourgeois. It becomes manifest in the work. Indeed, at times, it is explicitly of great importance. Bourgeois herself helps us focus on this through her own words, providing a moving, at times devastating account of her autobiography - "My father betrayed me by not being what he was supposed to be... It is just a matter of rules of the game, and in a family the rules of the game are such that a minimum of conformity is expected".<sup>7</sup> "My father provoked in me a continual loss of self-esteem".<sup>8</sup> She has also stated that when her mother died, her father ridiculed her grief.<sup>9</sup>

But this dysfunctional father/daughter relationship has functioned as a 'suitable' subject for critical voyeurism. Among the commentators on Louise Bourgeois, Julie Nicoletta has written:

The story of this affair [...] has taken on the aura of myth. No one interested in Bourgeois's work has looked beyond this Freudian idea of a traumatized childhood to see what other factors may have inspired Bourgeois.<sup>10</sup>

In her discussion of Bourgeois's 'Femmes-Maisons' series Nicoletta opts to follow a Lacanian model - which may or may not be a way out of this particular family romance. In the literature on Louise

---

7 Louise Bourgeois, quoted by Christiane Meyer-Thoss, *Louise Bourgeois: Konstruktionen für den Freien Fall/Designing for Free Fall* (Zurich: Amman, 1992), p. 182.

8 Louise Bourgeois, quoted by Christiane Meyer-Thoss, *ibid.*, p. 187.

9 Deborah Wye, 'The Drama of the Self: Louise Bourgeois as Printmaker', in *The Prints of Louise Bourgeois*, ed. by Deborah Wye and Carol Smith (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1994), pp. 10-32 (p. 180).

10 Julie Nicoletta, 'Louise Bourgeois's Femmes-Maisons: Confronting Lacan', *Women's Art Journal* (Fall/Winter, 1992-3), 21-26 (p. 21).



Bourgeois it is the lack of discussion of her relationship with her mother that becomes apparent. For instance, Mira Schor has written:

[Bourgeois's] insistence on the source of her work residing in psychological wounds inflicted on her by her father contravenes any formal theories of art and yet embodies the Oedipal crisis that psycholinguistic theory interprets as the entrance of human beings into the Symbolic Order of the Father. Bourgeois obsessively returns the critical audience of her work to its motivating source - the murderous rage of a betrayed daughter. Her admission to the symbolic order has been warped by her father's open affair with her governess.<sup>11</sup>

She then continues the paragraph by suggesting that "[Bourgeois's] link back to the Imaginary (completeness of relation to the Mother) is damaged by her mother's presumed complicity" - but she does not follow this thread further. Donald Kuspit, however, does develop an argument about the importance of Bourgeois's mother:

Bourgeois' entanglement with her mother, not her father, is becoming clear as the inner content of her work. She has filled the void of mother/artist in spirit as well as substance, an Oedipus replacing the mother instead of the father, a sphinx whose secret is that a story about a relationship to a father is really a story about a relationship to a mother.<sup>12</sup>

This is the conclusion, rather than the starting point, of his article, and is a theme which has not been taken up by anyone else. Maybe a girl's relation with her mother is seen as having less potential for scandal and tragedy, less glamour, and less scope for critical voyeurism; or maybe it is a relationship which remains largely unvalued because, as Luce Irigaray argues, it is unseen in women's gestures: "But, since [women's] gestures are is often paralyzed, or part of the masquerade, in effect, they are often difficult to 'read'. Except for what resists or subsists 'beyond'. In

---

11 Mira Schor, 'From Liberation to Lack', *Heresies*, 6.4 (1989), 15-21 (p. 20).

12 Donald Kuspit, 'Louise Bourgeois: Where Angels Fear to Tread', *Artforum* (March 1987), 115-121 (p. 121).



suffering, but also in women's laughter."<sup>13</sup>

Louise Bourgeois herself, however, gives us plenty of prompting to take her relationship with her mother seriously. To give just three examples:

These titles are informative. 'Blind Vigils' is like 'Blind leading the Blind'. Blindness came from the blush I experienced at the side of the people around me, everybody. As I say, my father was promiscuous. I had to be blind to the mistress who lived with us. I had to be blind to the pain of my mother.<sup>14</sup>

When I was afraid of my mother dying, a challenge I could not meet, the warding off of her death, not to let her disappear, I made a vow. I swore to myself, if my mother survived that morning I would give up sex.<sup>15</sup>

The material was there taking all that room and bothering me, bothering me by its aggressive presence. And somehow the idea of the mother came to me, This is the way my mother impressed me, as very powerful, very silent, very judging, and controlling the whole studio. And naturally this piece became my mother. At that point, I had my subject. I was going to express what I felt toward her... First I cut off her head, and I slit her throat ... And after weeks and weeks of work, I thought, if this is the way I saw my mother, then she did not like me. How could she possibly like me if I treat her that way? At that point something turned around. I could not stand the idea that she wouldn't like me. I couldn't live if I thought that she didn't like me. The fact that I had pushed her around, cut off her head, had nothing to do with it. What you do to a person has nothing to do with what you expect the person to feel toward you... Now at the end I became very, very depressed, terribly terribly depressed.<sup>16</sup>

I find it interesting that Bourgeois's comments have surfaced in recent years, and I would like to link them to a strand in her work which, although it can be traced back, has also emerged in a particularly notable manner over the past decade in the *Cell* works and other related pieces. In these we can find Bourgeois's

---

13 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 134/*Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1977), p. 132. Hereafter cited as *This Sex/Ce sexe*.

14 Alain Kirili, 'The Passion for Sculpture: A Conversation with Louise Bourgeois', *Arts Magazine* (March 1989), 69-75 (p. 71).

15 Louise Bourgeois, quoted by Christiane Meyer-Thoss, *Designing for Free Fall*, p. 187.

16 Mignon Nixon, 'Bad Enough Mother', *October*, 71 (Winter 1995), 71-92 (p. 87). In this essay Nixon offers a Kleinian reading of certain works by Bourgeois and other artists.



embodiment, through particular manipulation of space through materials, of an earlier interest (manifested in a more straightforwardly representational manner) in the spiral and circling movement. We also find a blurring of subject/object relations: the *Cells* are not easily containable 'art objects' as such, and neither are the 'objects' comprising them clear in their object status to either the attentive audience or to Louise Bourgeois herself. However, in order to make any tracing between Bourgeois's work and her comments on her mother, it is necessary to problematize the 'Freudian family romance' provided in the present critical analysis. Constructing this 'romance' through the father-daughter relationship alone is clearly insufficient for the structure of the Bourgeois household from little Louise's viewpoint. It is arguable whether the Oedipal son/mother relation can simply be reversed to 'fit' a daughter/father relation; and it is apparent that the relationship of little Louise with the displaced Mme. Bourgeois is crucial. Freud himself wrote of the reaction of a little boy, Ernst, to the trauma of missing his mother;<sup>17</sup> a story problematized by Luce Irigaray in 'Gesture in Psychoanalysis'.

### Reading gestural process: between psychoanalysis and artworks.

In 'Gesture in Psychoanalysis' Luce Irigaray explores two sites of gesture from her experience of the psychoanalytic scenario: the gestures which are particular to that scenario, and gestures which

---

17 Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *The Penguin Freud Library XI: On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), pp. 269-338.



originate beyond it, but which she has uncovered within it. She begins her paper with a long discussion of the gender-specific experiences and significations of the classic analytic scenario as read through gesture. This is a scenario where gesture is ostensibly repressed and neutered in favour of speech: “The patient is held still so that his or her speech can be reconstituted in another way. I mean this in the broadest sense, to include gestures. Obviously this not a question of teaching the subject a new code, doctrine, etc., but of helping him or her to structure a new house of language”.<sup>18</sup> Luce Irigaray exposes the gestures involved in arranging the scene that are as dramatic as any. The patient lies down. The analyst sits behind, out of sight. In the scene as it was developed by Freud, these gestures are decidedly not neutral in their implications - the laying down of a person, usually a woman, in the presence of a man who assumes a position sitting where he will be unseen by her. This has the effect of both disrupting social etiquette, and betraying a socially gendered norm of power and voyeurism by confirming phallogocentric patterns: he will be able to see that she does not have it. Luce Irigaray wonders if this is generally considered to be neutral or neuter in part because the analysand is reduced to “childedness {*l'enfantine*}” - ‘child’ being neuter in Freud’s language, German:

This seems to me to be a very weak argument! It is also tragic, in the sense in which Hegel talks about the tragic in the constitution of the ethical order, tragic in the sense of the great tragedies that mark the beginning of our sociocultural order. Even the child or already the child is considered to be neuter or neutered before he or she begins to speak! What a loss of freedom in the imaginary, the symbolic, the gestural!<sup>19</sup>

---

18 Luce Irigaray, ‘Gesture’, p. 93/‘Le geste’, p. 107. Translation modified.

19 Luce Irigaray, ‘Gesture’, p. 94/‘Le geste’, p. 108. Translation modified.



Luce Irigaray's subsequent discussion of gestures from beyond the analytic scenario (but discussed within it) is then reflected back upon this initial discussion to re-enforce, from other viewpoints, her original contention that the analytic scenario is a gendered experience readable through body language. In *This Sex* Luce Irigaray had already stated in relation to a "feminine syntax {*une syntaxe du féminin*}" that "I think the place where it or she could best be deciphered is in the gestural code {*gestualité*} of women's bodies".<sup>20</sup> Much of Irigaray's argument in 'Gesture in Psychoanalysis' derives from her exploration and understanding of the girl/mother relation, of the specificity of the girl's relation to the absence of her mother, and in particular from her insight into the ways in which the little girl comes to terms with her traumatic experiencing of her mother's absence. Most pertinently, Luce Irigaray indicates how this is mediated through the syntax of the girl's gestural codes. I wish to argue that the gestural practices Irigaray has located in this process of the little girl may also be discovered resonating within a strand of Louise Bourgeois's practice, cumulating in the *Cell* series and related works - thus opening a space of suggestive inter-readings.

In her questioning of the neutral status of "the child", Luce Irigaray refers to Freud's observations of the gestural play of his grandson, Ernst. Freud interpreted Ernst's play with a cotton reel and string, says Irigaray, as "an action designed to master"<sup>21</sup> the absence of his (Ernst's) mother. He did this by repeatedly throwing the reel away, then retrieving it with the string, accompanying this

---

20 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 134/*Ce sexe*, p. 132.

21 Luce Irigaray, 'Gesture', p. 96/'Le geste', p. 110.



with noises interpreted as 'fort' and 'da' - 'away' and 'here'. Luce Irigaray stresses that Ernst is a boy, and nowhere does Freud question the gender specificity of the event, nor does he suggest that a girl might act in the same way.<sup>22</sup> The responses of girls to the absence of their mothers, therefore, merit some separate attention.

Luce Irigaray states that the child in the story must have been a boy:

My hypothesis is that it couldn't have been a girl. Why? A girl does not make the same gestures when her mother goes away. She does not play with a string {*un fil*} and a reel symbolizing her mother, because her mother is of the same sex as she is and cannot have the object status of a reel. The mother is of the same subjective identity as she is.<sup>23</sup>

Here, the deliberate play on the word "*fil*", the plural of which ("*files*") also means "son", reminds the reader to consider again the 'double syntax' of the Symbolic and the morpho-logic informing both the gestures of little Ernst and Freud's reading of them. The little girl doesn't have to create her mother as 'other of her same' and as her object in order to understand her relationship to origin or to attain her subjectivity. She will not have to accommodate difference as well as loss. Luce Irigaray indicates three significant reactions from a little girl:

1) When she misses her mother, she throws herself down on the ground in distress, she is lost, she loses the power and the will to live, she neither speaks nor eats, totally anorexic.<sup>24</sup>

---

22 "He was a boy. It is important to be faithful to the text. Not every substitution is possible, especially when sexual difference is involved. In Freud's text, then, the child is a boy. And Freud never wrote that it might have been a girl". 'Gesture', p. 97/'Le geste', p. 111. Irigaray also discusses the story of little Ernst in an earlier lecture reprinted in the same volume of essays: 'Belief Itself', in *Sexes and Genealogies*, pp. 23-53/'La croyance même', in *Sexes et parentés*, pp. 35-65.

23 Luce Irigaray, 'Gesture', p. 97/'Le geste', pp. 111-112. Translation modified.

24 Luce Irigaray, 'Gesture', p. 97/'Le geste', pp. 112.



As the little girl and her mother are “of the same subjective identity”, when they are parted, the little girl has lost a transcendental model for that subjectivity, unlike the little boy, who has to come to a realization of himself (or achieve a sense of his subjectivity in separation) as differing from that of his mother. Thus the little boy may try to ‘master’ his mother’s absence by symbolising her as an object. The little girl, however, - who has no reason to think of her mother in terms of subjective difference,<sup>25</sup> and who has therefore lost part of ‘her’ subjectivity - is bereaved. She begins to show symptoms of hysteria. Elsewhere, Luce Irigaray has made this link between the hysteric and her loss of her mother:

Even in her paralysis, the hysteric exhibits a potential for gestures and desires.... A movement of revolt and refusal, a desire for/of the living mother who would be more than a reproductive body in the pay of the polis, a living, loving, woman. It is because they [those in progressive circles] want neither to see nor hear that movement that they so despise the hysteric.<sup>26</sup>

This moment of desire for her mother is an aspect of the hysteric’s reserve, “a revolutionary potential in hysteria”.

A second reaction of a girl missing her mother could be that

2) She plays with a doll, lavishing maternal affection on a quasi subject, which allows her to organize a kind of symbolic space; playing with dolls is not simply a game girls are forced to play, it also signifies a difference in subjective status in the separation from the mother. For them, the mother is a subject that cannot easily be reduced to an object, and a doll is not an object in the way that a reel, a toy car, a gun, etc., are objects and tools used for symbolization.<sup>27</sup>

This suggestively aids our understanding of the ways some women approach the making of their art works. The possibilities lie in reading the girl’s organization of “a kind of symbolic space”, the

25 I would like to thank Griselda Pollock for this insight.

26 Luce Irigaray, ‘Women-Mothers, the Silent Substratum of the Social Order’, trans. by David Macey, in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 47-48.

27 Luce Irigaray, ‘Gesture’, p. 97/‘Le geste’, p. 112. Translation modified.



“subjective status” of the relationship which leads to play, and the fact that the thing played with “is not an object” in the way that the boy’s toys are. The doll is not in an ‘either/or’ relation to objecthood, and cannot be a non-object or even a (non)object, so we can instead use the terminology of the last chapter, and refer to it as a non-capitalized object for the little girl who is playing with it. This also echoes the earlier discussion (in ‘The Visual: 2’) of the need for women to develop the gift-space/object as a means of mediating their subjectivity to themselves and to others. In this image of the little girl and her doll, Luce Irigaray is offering an approach where process can be stressed without process in and of itself being the meaning; where the importance of the art object as *object* is fundamentally compromised; and with it the notion of mastery, in favour of an understanding of the art work as an non-capitalized space/object of mediation for the subject.<sup>28</sup> It is an insight Luce Irigaray gained from psychoanalyzing women, concerning a practice which is pivotal in the engendering of an ‘appropriate’ femininity in girls (Luce Irigaray acknowledges the social coercion of play: “not simply a game girls are forced to play”), but which also reflects and makes manifest the girl’s psychic accommodation of the absence of her mother through gestural codes in body and imaginative space. As the little girl plays with the doll, she gains comfort; through repetition, the play gains signification, producing signifiers of the little girl’s subjective identity and the means of possible mediation.

Thus through the structure in Luce Irigaray’s argument we can

---

28 It is noticeable that the concept of the fetishizing of the art object and the construction of ‘mastery’ and ‘genius’, both mainstays of masculinist mainstream art discourses, have repeatedly come under fire from various feminist analyses. See for example the cumulative work of writers such as Lucy Lippard and Griselda Pollock.



propose for the subjects, women, a potential relation to the art works they make that is both gendered and yet variable among women. It is a relation which could be manifested materially in particular practices. The practices of play (their processes and effects) are embedded in and understandable through social practices. Thus the embodiment of such practices of play in art practices may well be discernible, but it is by no means inevitable. This is a reading which might, therefore, be appropriate for practices of some women which sit uneasily in current discourses of the art object, yet it is a reading which also resists any simplistic collapse back into an essentialist discourse. It is an insight, moreover, through which we can begin to account for the desire of many women artists to work with representations of the female body or 'bodiliness', if you like; an understanding which would refute charges of narcissism, and instead attend to the gift-space/object, a non-capitalized symbolization which is of the same subjective identity as the artist.<sup>29</sup>

Luce Irigaray proposes that a third way in which girls cope with the absence of the mother is through dance, and in particular a whirling or spinning dance:

3) She dances and thus makes for herself a vital subjective space open to the cosmic maternal world, to the gods, to the present other. This dance is also a way to create for herself a territory of her own in relation to the mother.<sup>30</sup>

Luce Irigaray here provides the resource for suggestive readings of gesture from which to read Louise Bourgeois's bodily practice in creating the space of the *Cell* works. Gesture can be read as

---

29 Artists as diverse as Louise Bourgeois, Leonora Carrington, Geneviève Cadieux, Helen Chadwick, Mona Hatoum, Laura Godfrey Isaacs, Jana Sterbak could be discussed in this context.

30 Luce Irigaray, 'Gesture', p. 98/'Le geste', p. 112. Translation modified.



encoded movement in space. Not only do the gestures of Louise Bourgeois thus mark out her imaginative space through her working practices and processes, but also those gestures are evoked in the deployment of materials - the gift-space/object's mediation of the subject. The assertion of "a vital subjective space" - creativity in the face of loss and pain - is something that the African-American sculptor Martin Puryear has recognised in Louise Bourgeois's approach: "Ultimately she's a survivor. Her work is a tool of survival, a means of putting the pain out and dealing with it. Louise Bourgeois is a person who talks about pain, but her stance is not at all the stance of a victim".<sup>31</sup> Richard Serra emphasises the element of mediation in the gestures: "The source of pain, the core of the anxiety remains indecipherable, and yet these sculptures trigger in me the memory of personal experiences I'd rather forget. Her subjectivity forces me to deal with my own".<sup>32</sup> These comments amplify one made by Louise Bourgeois about a figure in one of the *Cells*: "It's a circle going round and round. Pain can begin at any point and turn in either direction. Each *Cell* deals with fear. Fear is pain. Often it is not perceived as pain, because it is always disguising itself. [...] She creates her own world and is very happy".<sup>33</sup>

Luce Irigaray concentrates on the gestures of the little girl's dance:

Among women, the relationship to sameness and to the mother is not mastered by the *fort-da*. The mother always remains too familiar and too close. In a way, the daughter has her mother under her skin, secreted in the dampness of the mucous membranes {*des muqueuses*}, in the most intimate of intimacies, in

---

31 Martin Puryear, 'Louise Bourgeois', *Sculpture* (September-October 1994), p. 35.

32 Richard Serra, in *Louise Bourgeois: Locus of Memory*, p. 80.

33 Louise Bourgeois, quoted by Christian Leigh, 'The Earrings of Madame B.', in *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory*, pp. 51-69 (p. 61).



the mystery of her relationship to gestation, to birth, and to her sexual identity. Furthermore, the basic sexual movement of the female is linked more to gyration than to the gestures of throwing and pulling back of little Ernst. The girl then tries to reproduce around and within her an energetic circular movement that protects her from dereliction, immediate breaking into, depression, loss of self. Spinning round is also, but in my opinion secondarily, a way of attracting {*séduire*}. The girl describes a circle while calling and refusing access to her territory. She plays with this gestural territory and its limit. There is no object here, in the strict meaning of the word, no other that has had to be introjected or incorporated. On the contrary, girls and women often set up a defensive territory that can then become creative, especially in analysis.<sup>34</sup>

Here, Luce Irigaray opens an analytic site through which we can account for some performative aspects of women's art practices - actual making and doing, gestures in the studio, the physical negotiation of the work by artist and viewer alike.

It is important at this point not to collapse the term 'performative' back solely into the category of 'performance art' as it might be commonly understood in a visual art context, though it is of course useful in analyzing such practices. An understanding of a woman performance artist "calling and refusing access to her territory", a territory she has described with her body, could well begin to account for the resistant position many women performers feel themselves to be in with regard to the male gaze.<sup>35</sup> However, it is more productive to remember that the performativity of the gesture of the little girl, as Luce Irigaray describes it, has a function: the production of subjectivity in the face of the

---

34 Luce Irigaray, 'Gesture', p. 98/'Le geste', p. 112. Translation modified.

35 For example, Carolee Schneemann wrote very early on in the 'second wave' of the women's movement that in the absence of further discourse she had been labelled as "an image, but not an Image-Maker, creating my own self-image", and that "the life of the body is more *variously* expressive than a sex-negative society can admit. I didn't stand naked in front of 300 people because I wanted to be fucked, but because my sex and work were harmoniously experienced I could have the audacity, or courage, to show the body as a source of varying emotive Power". Carolee Schneemann, *Cézanne, She Was a Great Painter* (1968), quoted in Lucy Lippard, 'The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth: European and American Women's Body Art', *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art* (New York: The New Press, 1990), pp. 99-113 (p. 103).



traumatic absence of her mother - who is of the same subjective identity. The gestural process of the spinning dance is a struggle for a life, one of signification. The subjectivity of the little girl is developed through her performativity, including that of bodily gestures which can develop signification in the Symbolic. Feminist cultural theory has concentrated much energy upon analyzing how both the body and image of woman is structured as object of the (male) gaze;<sup>36</sup> and feminist art practice across different media<sup>37</sup> has often incorporated an exposure of, or resistance to, a voyeuristic and phallogentric gaze at the image of a woman, and attempted to construct non-phallogentric ways of looking at women. In "calling and refusing access to her territory", the stress is on the creation and assertion of the territory: her subjectivity as signified in an appropriate Symbolic syntax that involves the spatialisation of female subjectivity and its desire for and distance from the mother. The work of Jo Spence is just one example: not only is such resistance and reconstruction visible in her photographic work, but she has also charted her struggle towards it in her writings.<sup>38</sup>

---

36 This can be found in strands of feminism as diverse as, on the one hand, the anti-pornography movement, in its activist form and in texts like Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (London: The Women's Press, 1981); and on the other hand, psychoanalytic film theory, particularly the line of enquiry engendered by the highly influential paper by Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16.3 (1975), 6-18.

37 The performing of gesture in making art works, and the trace or embodiment of gestural performance in art works, is not restricted to particular media.

38 Jo Spence has written about combatting dominant structures of the gaze in relation to her performative process of making work, and the gaze of the audience upon the image of a woman. For example "The female gaze was always foregrounded in work with Rosy [Martin, co-worker in phototherapy sessions] [...]. Once I had worked through some of my material with Rosy on adolescence, specifically using NLP techniques of 'part work' and 'reframing' and felt the safety of her acceptance in a non-critical way of what I presented to camera, it became easy to move backwards into reinhabiting scenarios of my so-called oral, anal and genital and 'mirror' phases for the camera. This is something which I would find unthinkable with a male photographer/therapist". Jo Spence, 'The Politics of Transformation', in *Cultural Sniping: The Art of Transgression* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 147-155 (pp. 154



We can find this performativity in Louise Bourgeois's practice too, both in the *Cells*, and in her dealings with possible audiences. In a television programme made largely in her studio about her and her work, Louise Bourgeois, not only aware of the camera and the interviewer, but behaving in particular ways because of them, frequently disrupts any easy access they may presume they have to her.<sup>39</sup> She circles around the studio; at one point she stops speaking and holds up a mirror to the interviewer; at another, also not speaking, she holds up a large sign between herself and the camera which reads "NO TRESPASSING"; she throws things on the floor between herself and the camera; she uses a noisy bandsaw and for several uncomfortable seconds ignores the requests of the interviewer that it be turned off so he can continue questioning her. One reading of the film is that she has been patronised as an eccentric 'little old lady' who borders on hysteria (true to stereotypical representations of women, these images of her are supplied by a male interviewer and production team, and she is contextualized by male 'experts' in emotional, ahistorical terms). Another reading is provoked by the discovery in the last third of the film that the contract read out by Louise Bourgeois at the start, confirming that final approval of any representations of her or her work will rest with her, was in fact not accepted by the film-makers. Surrounded by male authority figures, with no apparent 'mother' figures (whether 'good' or 'bad'), Louise

---

155). "Much of the previous work has been described as in 'bad taste, 'unsuitable for galleries', 'revolting', 'ugly', 'narcissistic', and 'obsessive': pejorative and dismissive words, presumable spoken because of the thwarted expectations of the viewer/critic who might prefer to continue to consume the female body, or to dwell only in fantasies of idealization of self and others, rather than be encouraged to ask critical questions." Jo Spence, 'The Daughter's Gaze: Blaming, Shaming, Renaming and Letting Go', *Cultural Sniping*, pp. 196-201 (p. 198).

39 'Louise Bourgeois', *Arena* (BBC2), 6 August 1994.



Bourgeois is refused the means of controlling the images and words which will represent her subjectivity to the TV audience. In her gestural performance we can recall Luce Irigaray's account of the little girl who is "calling and refusing access to her territory". It is a phrase which is echoed by Christian Leigh, who says of the *Cells*: "the magic of the work resides in its ability to keep us out while drawing us in".<sup>40</sup>

The way we understand the word 'gesture' is also crucial. Luce Irigaray associates it with the idea of being in some way performed (whether that performance is the reason for the gesture's being, or whether the performance of the gesture is considered pragmatic, or a means to an end). This is a specific usage through which we can assess the gestures of women artists in their studios, certain gestural structures they build into their work, their approach to the spaces in which their work is made public, and the manner in which it is made public. In short, it suggests a space for analysis of *what, where, and how* the performative gestures of women artists *are* in their practices. As I resisted above a reductive reading of 'the performative' as performance art, so too 'gestural' should be read as literally 'of the gesture' in the manner in which Luce Irigaray charts the gestures of lying or sitting in the analytic scenario, and *not* reduced to its usage in art criticism in relation to, for instance, Abstract Expressionism. This particular distinction is crucial, given the naming and over-determination of a particular form of gesture within the area of visual art discourse, and how it is redolent of

---

40 Christian Leigh, 'The Earrings of Madame B.', p. 61.



patriarchy, modernism, and genius.<sup>41</sup>

Griselda Pollock has analyzed Abstract Expressionism as:

... a form of painting that specifically staged a kind of primal gesturing, an intentionally informal relation between the body of the painter and the things with which the painter works to create a trace of being in that body by its movements in space - both literal and mapped on canvas. If, at a certain level, abstract painting took to its logical conclusion, as Greenberg argued, the fundamentals of the activity - paint, a surface, and, add from Rosenberg, an active, but also acting painter - we have the gesture as the articulating sign of that process we call subjectivity.<sup>42</sup>

This identifies the role of gesture granted by Abstract Expressionism. However, it is the morphological structure through which these moments in the process relate to each other which differentiates their manifestation in Abstract Expressionism and their potentialities if understood through Luce Irigaray's work.

Griselda Pollock again:

Abstract Expressionism [...] reduced reference to a world, however stylized or oblique, and substituted these vivid, metonymic traces of the 'body of the painter' epitomized by 'the gesture'. [Jackson] Pollock's practice was critically valorized in different ways, all of which celebrate, however subtextually, a colonizing masculine mastery. [...] Abstract Expressionism is a celebration of the 'expressivity' of a self which is not to be constrained by expressing anything in particular except the engagement of the artistic self with the processes and procedures of painting. Thus 'painting' is privileged in modernist discourse as *the* most ambitious and significant art form because of its combination of gesture and trace, which secure by metonymy the presence of the artist. These inscribe a subjectivity whose value is, by visual inference and cultural naming, masculinity.<sup>43</sup>

Here Griselda Pollock exposes the phallic morphologic at work within the critical discourses of Abstract Expressionism. A clear

41 See Mary Kelly, 'Reviewing Modernist Criticism', *Screen*, 22.3 (1981), 41-62, for a discussion of the economic investment in reading the gestural trace as authenticating signature indicating both the presence and the commodification of the artist-subject. I would like to thank Griselda Pollock for reminding me of this.

42 Griselda Pollock, 'Killing Men and Dying Women', in Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 221-294 (p. 256).

43 Griselda Pollock, 'Painting, Feminism, History', in *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, ed. by Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), pp. 138-176 (p. 142).



hierarchy of practices is set up by these discourses. A concept of 'painting' is the most privileged by them, and is constructed as a metonymic trace of the artist, who is then valorised for his mastery of the medium. Thus, readings are produced wherein the medium does nothing but get mastered. This mastery by a (male) subject is all it mediates, and indeed is read as the artist's 'I am'. The gestural traces in the medium are capitalized by these discourses; the finished paintings are capitalized; the artist is capitalized for (as Luce Irigaray might put it) "creating distance through a mastery that constitutes the object as a monument built in place of the subject's disappearance."<sup>44</sup> Luce Irigaray describes a different process of entering language for girls:

Girls do not enter language in the same ways as boys. [...] They enter language by producing a space, a path, a river, a dance and rhythm, a song.... Girls describe a space around themselves rather than displacing a substitute object from one place to another or into various places.<sup>45</sup>

Any approach to painting as mediation in a process of intersubjectivity - a co-creation of a signification through gestural practices between a subject artist and a subject attentive audience - would not be recognised by the phallic morphologic which informs the critical structures of Abstract Expressionism.<sup>46</sup>

If the loss of the mother leads girls to a distinct relation with the thing that signifies the mother in her absence, covering or displacing the fear of her loss; if it leads them to particular

44 Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London: Athlone Press, 1993), pp. 214-215/*Éthique de la Différence Sexuelle*, (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1984), p. 197.

45 Luce Irigaray, 'Gesture', p. 99/'Le geste', p. 113.

46 As we have seen in an earlier chapter in a comparison between intersubjectivity and a phallomorphologic, "to work at beauty is at least as much a matter of working at gestures as they relate to space and to other people as it is a matter of gazing, usually in anxiety, at one's mirror". Luce Irigaray, 'Divine Women', in *Sexes and Genealogies*, pp. 55-72 (p. 65)/'Femmes divines', in *Sexes et parentés*, pp. 67-85 (p. 78).



delineation and definition of space - space which is both a defensive space which speaks of the experience of loss, and a display at the same time; and if this is articulated through gestures which are gendered, sexualized even, an enunciation which invests in process rather than object through which to construct its syntax - then I think we have a set of concepts which can facilitate a developing analysis of aspects of Louise Bourgeois's practice. We have to return to Bourgeois's relation to her mother.

### Louise Bourgeois's gestures in the *Cells*.

Coming to terms with the trauma of her mother's loss is part of the structure of separation for the little girl. In 'Gesture in Psychoanalysis', Irigaray is not referring to particularly notable or extreme case studies; rather she is attending to the a structure of inevitable separation. Louise Bourgeois would have experienced such loss. But for the little Louise the trauma of losing her mother would have been drawn out: Madame Bourgeois was displaced from her position as mother within the family as a result of her husband's introduction of his mistress into the house. She no longer had a structural position in her family which was clear and comprehensible to little Louise. There was also no longer clarity in the structural 'mother'/daughter relationship, as the mistress was also tutor to the girl, *in loco parentis* in more ways than one. Madame Bourgeois was still physically present; but her position as *mother* was displaced; the nature of her presence spoke of her loss of position of 'mother'. It is this removal, this loss, that caused such pain, anger and anxiety in her daughter. The anger is expressed



towards her father for doing what he did; and towards her mother for not being all she should have been. It is notable that in this story the father's position as patriarch of the family remains intact: in this respect he was still structurally what he should have been, although personally flawed and unethical in his relationships with these three women.

Louise Bourgeois has frequently referred to her life history as the cause of her impulse to work. For example, Deborah Wye quotes her as saying of some earlier works that they "had nothing to do with sculpture, they meant physical presences. That was an attempt at not only re-creating the past, but controlling it".<sup>47</sup> Drawing upon the insights offered by Luce Irigaray, I would like to argue that the past decade, during which Louise Bourgeois has been articulating in interviews the intensities and complexities of her feelings towards her mother, has also been the period in which she has articulated this relationship through her work. If we identify a correspondent morpho-logic informing the gestural practices of the little girl traumatised by the loss of her mother, and the gestural practices embodied in Louise Bourgeois's *Cells*, then we can open a space of mediation between the two which can suggestively enrich our readings of both.

Luce Irigaray indicated that the girl missing her mother will (amongst other things) organize a symbolic space around herself. She produces a territory through gestures of spinning, sexuate, gender specific circular movement. This performs three main functions for the girl: it protects her from abandonment,

---

47 Deborah Wye, 'Louise Bourgeois: One and Others' in *Louise Bourgeois*, ed. by Deborah Wye (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1982), pp. 13-34 (p. 19).



depression, attack, loss of self; it attracts; it refuses access. It is also a process in which there is no clear object - no capitalized object - produced by the subject. The little girl also plays with objects which are of the same subjective identity as herself, and which therefore remain uncapitalized in the signifying syntax constructed through that play. These are precisely the processes I think Louise Bourgeois has performed in making the *Cell* pieces. Referred to by critics as "installations",<sup>48</sup> these are, however, unusual for installation work as they delineate a self-determined, architectural, material description of the artist's own psychic space, rather than the artist making manifest their psychic (or intellectual or what ever) space within the architectural terms provided in a pre-existing space. The mapping and embodying of space performed by Louise Bourgeois is thus autonomous to a degree not usually found in installation artworks, which tend to be architecturally reactive. The role of the work in protecting the artist from her childhood abandonment and loss of self is apparent from her own statements. Little in the work is reducible to object-status; things in the works are never treated in a manner where they can be identified as symbolic objects, but retain an ambivalent status. Thus, for instance, marble 'sculptures' such as that of the hands on the table in *Cell (Glass Spheres and Hands)* (plate 16) and that of the ear in *Cell III* (plate 17), referring in both their material and its working to a well-established tradition of object-making, are placed in space or juxtaposed with other materials or things (respectively in these instances, old chairs and stools, and old taps and a table guillotine) in a manner clearly compromising that tradition. Likewise, 'found objects' in the works

---

48 For example, Stuart Morgan, 'Louise Bourgeois', in *Rites of Passage* (London: Tate Gallery, 1996), pp. 54-57 (p. 56).



are not placed to emphasize their surreal nature or their usage as universal symbols, nor to encourage a reading of them as fetish objects; rather they are used as visual material through which an idiosyncratic narrative is being articulated; non-capitalized objects, with which we have to work to create meaning. As Terrie Sultan has written, “one of the defining characteristics of Bourgeois’s work [is] the great care the artist takes to ensure that as viewers we are left to make our own attachments to her forms”.<sup>49</sup> We have to read the spaces between, as with the picture-puzzles mentioned above in Chapter 3 : “pictographs in which the hunter and hunted, and their dramatic relationships, are to be discovered *between* the branches, *made out* from *between* the trees. From the spaces between the figures, or stand-in figures. Spaces that organize the scene, blanks that sub-tend the scene’s structuration and that will yet not be read as such. Or not read at all? Not seen at all? Never in truth represented or representable, though this is not to say that they have no effect upon the present scenography”.<sup>50</sup> Viewers are attracted in to the *Cells*, but at the same time kept at bay through Louise Bourgeois’s delineation of this, her signifying space. She does this sometimes literally, by making us peer in, while refusing us clear physical or visual access; sometimes she does this through her imagery and the “spaces that organize the scene”, with what can be for the viewer a baffling lack of didacticism for such precisely selected or made things and such rigorously articulated space.

---

49 Terrie Sultan, ‘Redefining the terms of engagement’, in *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory*, pp. 28-50 (p. 38).

50 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum Of The Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 137-138/*Speculum de l’autre femme* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1974), p. 171.



But this struggle with legibility is the moment at which an engagement with a gestural syntax as articulated through a morphologic appropriate to women can begin to provide us with a site of difference through which to read the work and construct critical discourses around it. The significance of the dimensions of the *Cells* provide one instance for this discourse of difference. There is here an engagement with what Luce Irigaray calls “gestural territory and its limits”, and a spatial relationship to the human body. Their generic title, *Cells*, recalls on the one hand cells both of incarceration and of contemplation, with their connotations of spatial relation to body size; and on the other hand, evocations of body cells, and implications of literal incorporation of experience. Louise Bourgeois has said “since the fears of the past were connected with the functions of the body, they reappear through the body”.<sup>51</sup> She does indeed produce in these works “a space, a path, a river, a dance and rhythm, a song”. One can almost imagine her performing the dance that Luce Irigaray has identified, circling or spinning around, arms outstretched, to find the dimensions that are appropriate for each piece - dimensions which will thus vary from piece to piece. The gestural territory will exceed the immediate dimensions of the static body.<sup>52</sup> The artist-subject reaches, turns, steps and twists to establish the appropriate space/object relation, delimitation and articulation through a material signifying practice. As established above, Louise Bourgeois marks out her imaginative space through her working practices and processes, as well as those gestures being

---

51 Louise Bourgeois, quoted by Christiane Meyer-Thoss, *Designing for Free Fall*, p. 195.

52 One of my own remembered pleasures of girlish spinning games (twisting, spinning, cartwheeling, swinging, etc.) is that of provoking the heady moment when the more decorous limits of the static body and the formally-sanctioned gesture (such as the single cartwheel) were exceeded, and the limits of subjective control tested.



evoked in the deployment of materials: hence the articulation of space with signifying 'objects'. The *Cells* (their limits, materials, spaces, and 'objects') can thus be read as a gift-space/object mediation by the subject of a process of *différence* between the little girl and the mature woman.

Louise Bourgeois has made many comments about the signification in her work of spiralling, in a manner which resonates with Luce Irigaray's notion of spinning - for instance:

There are a lot of spirals... but they are not automatic. The spiral is a vacuum... It represents something... the void, the anxiety void, the void of anxiety.<sup>53</sup>

and:

The spiral is an attempt at controlling the chaos. It has two directions. Where do you place yourself, at the periphery or at the vortex? Beginning at the outside is the fear of losing control; the winding in is a tightening, a retreating, a compacting to the point of disappearance. Beginning at the center is affirmation, the move outward is a representation of giving, and giving up control; of trust, positive energy, of life itself.<sup>54</sup>

and:

The spiral is the beginning of movement in space. As opposed to the rigidity of the monolith, the subject is exploring space.<sup>55</sup>

The spiral and the spinning figure can be found as a theme in many works earlier than the *Cells*. There it is in sculptures such as the *Spiral Women* of the late 1940s and early 1950s (plate 21); *Life Flower I* (1960); *Spiral/Summer* (1960); and *Spiral Woman* (1984) (plate 22). This last has a slate disc of some three foot wide placed on the floor; hanging above it, at about head height, suspended on a wire and able to turn, is a small bronze of a female

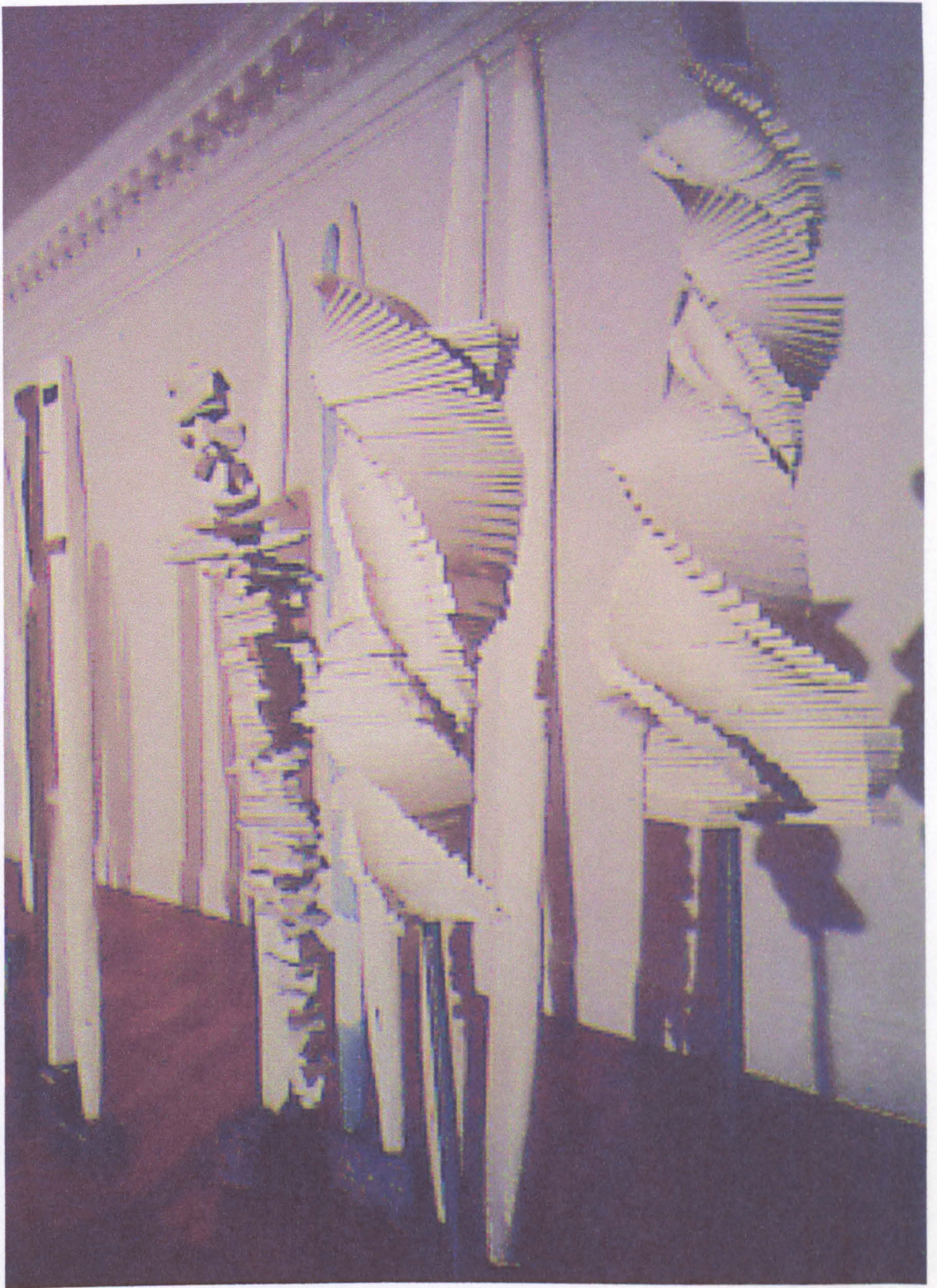
---

53 Louise Bourgeois, quoted by Christiane Meyer-Thoss, *ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

54 Louise Bourgeois, quoted by Christiane Meyer-Thoss, *ibid.*, p. 179.

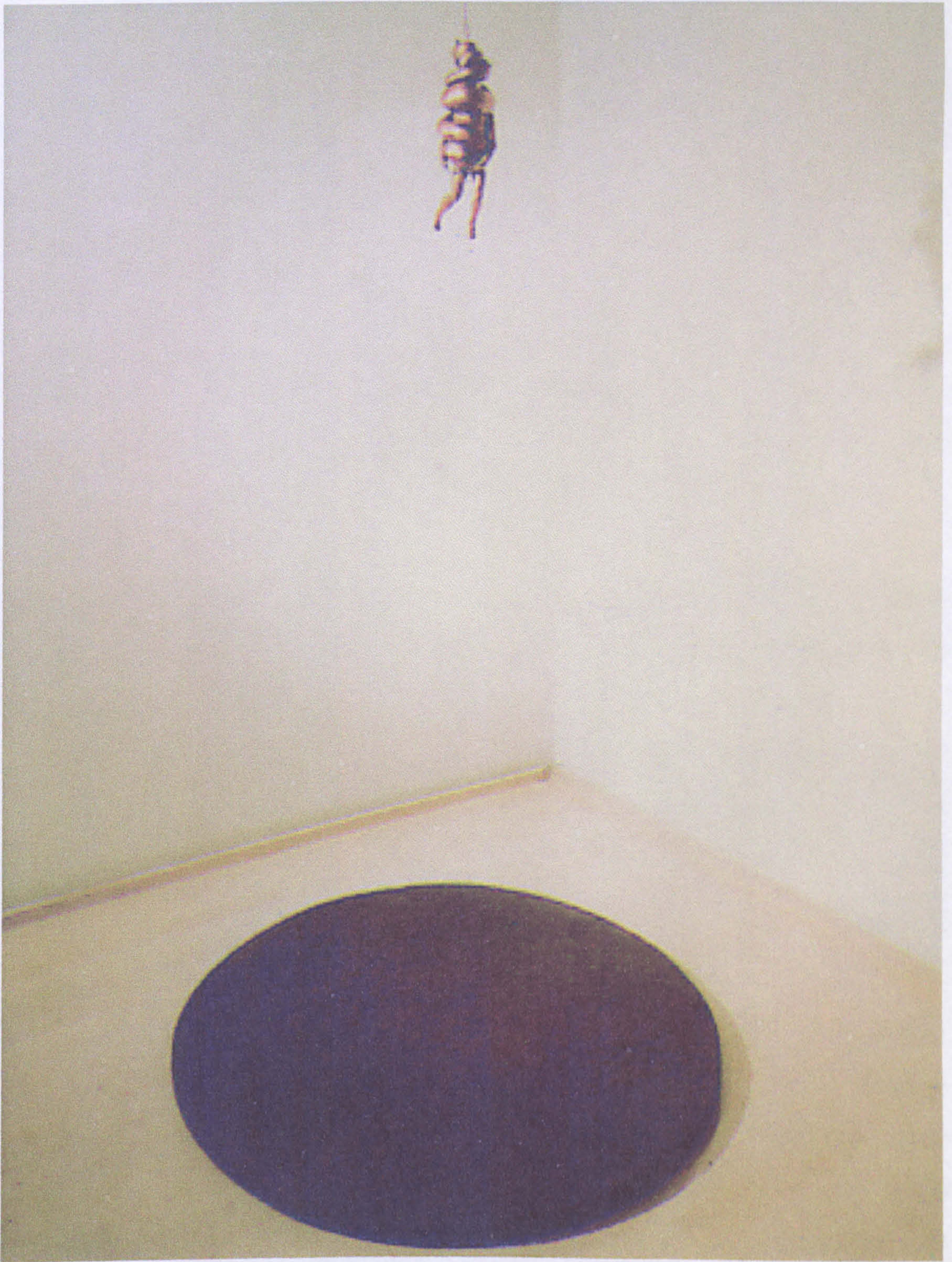
55 Louise Bourgeois, quoted by Alain Kirili, 'The Passion for Sculpture', p. 74.





1604. Bronze and steel. Bronze 11.5" x 3.5" x 4.5" Louise Bourgeois  
*Figures*  
c. 1947-1955. Painted wood, each c. 66" high  
Private collection, New York  
Photograph from Deborah Wye, *Louise Bourgeois* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982)





Louise Bourgeois  
*Spiral Woman*  
1984. Bronze and slate. Bronze 11.5" x 3.5" x 4.5"; Slate 1" x 34.75"  
Collection of Elaine Dannheisser, New York  
Photograph from *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory*, ed. by Joanna Ekman (New  
York: Abrams, 1994)



figure. Her torso and head are surrounded by a thick coil of bronze; her limbs are positioned as if she were twirling round. In the terms of this discussion this appears to be a transitional work, somewhere between on the one hand the earlier projection *onto* materials of what it is to spin and spiral, as in the earlier, more literal, *Spiral Women*; and on the other hand, in the subsequent *Cell* works, a creation of a symbolic space *through the gestural manipulation of materials*, producing a site of mediation for that spinning, its causes and indeed its comforts and pleasures.

Robert Storr has looked back to what he calls “the whirling dervish figure” in plate 4 of Bourgeois’s print sequence *He Disappeared into Complete Silence* (1947):

When she [Bourgeois] comes round it is never to close the circle but to re-inscribe its course with a new emphasis, widening or narrowing its scope as she proceeds [...] The animating force of her formal language and a self portrait, that figure is the direct spatial expression of an insatiable need. She is the spiral-woman, seeking but never finding the absolute core of her being, always advancing even when she seems to be retracing her steps, always restless because she has not reached her outer limits. Nothing in the psychic or aesthetic economy of Bourgeois’s obsessions has altered these terms.<sup>56</sup>

But Storr, for all his acute perception in his essay, also forgoes any account of Louise Bourgeois’s relation to her mother, despite mentioning both her father and his mistress. In this he also demonstrates the effect of this lack, by suggesting that the artist is “seeking but never finding the absolute core of her being”. In missing the mother, and the little girl’s loss the mother, the void is, rather, in the centre of *his* discussion of Bourgeois: a void that represents in a phallogocentric structure “the horror of nothing to see”.<sup>57</sup> His discourse around Bourgeois is struggling with the limits

---

56 Robert Storr, ‘The Discreet Charm of Louise Bourgeois’, p. 31.

57 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 26/*Ce sexe*, p. 25.



of phallogomorphic logic and its syntax, and therefore his comments are unable to make that imaginative leap into reading, across difference, the syntax appropriate to women as it is embodied in this particular site of enunciation. What is missed, then, is that the mother of the woman is central to her morphologic and her self-representation:

Woman always speaks *with* the mother, man speaks in her absence. This *with her* obviously takes different shapes and it must seek to place speech *between*, not to remain in an indissociable fusion, with the women woven together. This *with* has to try to become a *with self*. Mother and daughter turn around each other, they go up and down while encircling themselves but they also delineate the two entities that they are: in the lips, the hands, the eyes.

The girl-subject does not exert mastery, except perhaps in her silence, her becoming, her overflowing. The girl-subject does not have objects as the boy does. It splits into two in a different way and the object or the goal is to reunite the two by a gesture, to touch both perhaps so the birth is repeated, so that no unconsidered regression occurs, so that the self is kept whole or, sometime, upright. Women do not try to master the other but to give birth to themselves.<sup>58</sup>

Mediation between mother and daughter, two subjects of the same subjective identity, and mediation of the woman to her self, will spring from the same morphologic, and are necessary to produce intersubjectivity and avoid the reduction of the one into the other. If we accept the importance of the morphology of the mother/daughter relationship, and the birth of the subjects, women, through an appropriate syntax, we can assess in Louise Bourgeois's *Cells* a signification which otherwise remains unacknowledged. In so doing, we also test the structures of gesture proposed by Luce Irigaray. Each woman's work augments the legibility of the other's.

---

58 Luce Irigaray, 'Gesture', p. 99/'Le geste', pp. 113-114.



## Chapter 7

# Becoming women: woman to woman genealogies.<sup>1</sup>

At present, argues Luce Irigaray, “we are still not *born women*.”<sup>2</sup> We have not attained our full subjectivity, or found our syntax in the Symbolic; we struggle to achieve the creation of objects of mediation between ourselves. We have not become women because we have no horizon corresponding to our morphology, nor do we have our genealogies. Women's genealogies (which I understand as the culture in an appropriate syntax passed from woman to woman through the generations) have been utterly disrupted by patriarchal social, sexual, legal, cultural, and religious structures; we have no sense of our potential for divinity according to our morphologies, no appropriate transcendental, no universal which allows us an horizon towards which we can move. We see that this structure grants our mothers no respect, and without an horizon of possibilities leading us to do otherwise, we reproduce those structures. Mother to daughter, in a state of immediacy, we are not in position to become the subjects, women.

In this chapter I will follow through Luce Irigaray's analysis of the structures necessary to allow us to become women and to re-assert woman-to-woman genealogies. This includes the need for an

---

1 I would like to thank Professor Robert Welch, Director, and Dr. Anne McCartney, of The Centre for Irish Literature and Bibliography, University of Ulster, for reading sections of this chapter.

2 Luce Irigaray, 'Divine Women', in *Sexes and Genealogies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 55-72 (p. 66)/'Femmes divines', *Sexes et Parentes* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987), pp. 67-85 (p. 78).



appropriate horizon of possibilities in the ideal realm of the spiritual: a divine, a transcendent and a universal sufficient to allow those born female to become women. I will do this through discussing women's genealogies in relation to a particular cultural, historical and political site. An initial discussion of representations of women in Irish myth and religion will outline how iconic representations of women in Ireland produce the function of the representation, 'woman', as being a cypher of nation, while reducing actual women, politically and empirically, to mothers. I will then identify a 'reserve' in Hiberno-English - the English language as spoken in Ireland - which, I argue, allows politicized women artists to retrace one site of their exploitation in order to assert and mediate women's genealogies.

### The representation 'woman' in Irish visual culture.

It is often said that there are two traditions, or two cultures in Ireland. There are not. There are scores of traditions, maybe hundreds, all making up a diverse and rich culture. All equally valid. All part of making up what we are. Urban and rural. Small town and hill village. Fishing port and island. Inner city and farming community. Gaeltacht and Gallteacht. Labourer and artisan. Visual, literary and oral. Feminist. Song and dance. Orange and green. Hurling and rugby. Football and handball. Pagan and Christian. Protestant and Catholic. North and south. East and west. The midlands. These traditions and all that they represent do not conflict. They are part of the diversity of Irishness.<sup>3</sup>

When I first read this statement of Gerry Adams' I was immediately reminded of a passage by T. J. Clark used by Griselda Pollock as the epigraph to her 1983 article, 'Women, art and ideology': "It ought to be clear by now that I'm not interested in the

---

<sup>3</sup> Gerry Adams, "S é an rud é, cultar, ná an méid a dhéanann sé (Culture is what Culture Does)", in *Distant Relations/Cercanías Distantes/Clann I gCéin: Chicano, Irish, Mexican Art and Critical Writing*, ed. by Trisha Ziff (Santa Monica: Smart Art Press, 1995), pp. 228-233 (p. 228). 'Gaeltacht': an Irish-speaking area; 'Gallteacht': an English-speaking area.



social history of art as part of a cheerful diversification of the subject, taking its place alongside other varieties - formalist, 'modernist', sub-Freudian, filmic, feminist, 'radical', all of them hot-foot in pursuit of the new. For diversification, read disintegration".<sup>4</sup> In her article, Pollock exposes Clark's attempt to depoliticise feminism by reducing it to one of a number of "mere novelties, reflecting fashions in relevant but distinct disciplines".<sup>5</sup> To do this, Pollock demonstrates how, far from being content with an "unthreatening and additive feminism" which liberal art history can allow "a marginal place at its conferences and in the pages of its journals", instead "a central task for feminist art historians is [...] to critique art history itself, not just as a way of writing about the art of the past, but as an institutionalised ideological practice".<sup>6</sup>

Gerry Adams also reduces 'feminism' to an emblem of diversity. Tellingly, by standing the term alone among other terms which he pairs in differing degrees of antagonism, he also constructs 'feminism' as uniquely removed from any sense of discourse, context, difference or engagement. While he rightly indicates later that the term "two traditions" is "incorrectly and often deliberately misused to describe what are in fact two different and conflicting political allegiances"<sup>7</sup> - the 'traditions' of Protestantism and Catholicism used as euphemisms for unionism and nationalism - his construct of 'feminism' is left as one of his

---

4 TJ Clark, 'On the Condition of Artistic Creation', *The Times Literary Supplement*, May 24, 1974, 562. Quoted in Griselda Pollock, 'Women, Art and Ideology: Questions for Feminist Art Historians' (1983), in *Visibly Female: Feminism and Art Today*, ed. by Hilary Robinson (London: Camden Press, 1987), pp. 203-221 (p. 203).

5 Griselda Pollock, *ibid.*, p. 204.

6 Griselda Pollock, *ibid.*, p. 207.

7 Gerry Adams, "S é an rud é, cultar, ná an méid a dhéanann sé", p. 229.



number of traditions co-existing in happy diversity: they “and all that they represent do not conflict”. Many feminists in Ireland would disagree, and have a construct of ‘feminism’ which, as a political practice, is able to engage fundamentally and sometimes conflictingly with the structures of each of the traditions listed by Adams, and many others not listed by him. If I may paraphrase Griselda Pollock, a central task for feminists in Ireland (including artists and art historians) is to critique the concept ‘Irish woman’, not just as a way of writing about the lives of actual women, but as an institutionalised ideological practice of representation in and of the culture. Irish culture has a complex history of relating representations of women to those of nationality and nation, and the Republic was founded with a Constitution which has conservative notions of womanhood written into it. Since the early 1980s, however, the number of Irish women emerging as powerful artists has been exceptional. Before attending to work by some of these artists, I would like to explore the debates about the intertwining of nation and the representation, ‘woman’ in Ireland.

Many contemporary writers on Irish culture indicate the entwining of representations of identity and the Irish nation, and both of these with ‘woman’. Gerardine Meaney writes that:

in Ireland, sexual identity and national identity are mutually dependent. The images of suffering Mother Ireland and the self-sacrificing Irish mother are difficult to separate. Both serve to obliterate the reality of women’s lives. Both seek to perpetuate an image of Woman far from the experience, expectations and ideals of contemporary women.<sup>8</sup>

The iconic and multi-faceted figure of Mother Ireland, and the social ideal of the self-sacrificing mother both set reductive

---

<sup>8</sup> Gerardine Meaney, ‘Sex and Nation: Women in Irish Culture and Politics’, in *Irish Women’s Studies Reader*, ed. by Ailbhe Smyth (Dublin: Attic Press, 1993), pp. 230-244 (p. 230).



limits on any horizon of possibilities for each other and for actual women. The effects of this for women's access to the Symbolic and to language has been much discussed by women poets in particular. The poet Eavan Boland, commenting on C19th poetry in Ireland, writes:

Within a poetry inflected by its national tradition, women had often been double-exposed, like a flawed photograph, over the image and identity of the nation. The nationalization of the feminine, the feminization of the national, had become a powerful and customary inscription on the poetry of that very nineteenth-century Ireland.<sup>9</sup>

Mythical figures such as Cathleen Ní Houlihan, Mother Ireland, and the Sean Bhean Bhocht (the vulnerable virgin, the protecting mother - who in fact encompasses all the others - and, literally, the Poor Old Woman) were all used as representational tropes of Ireland, both land and nation, in Irish art and writing.<sup>10</sup> These were still very much live images in the 1970s when Northern Irish poet Seamus Heaney was able to describe the conflict there as "between the cults and devotees of a god and a goddess": the goddess, Mother Ireland in her various guises, ranged against "a new male cult whose founding fathers were Cromwell, William of Orange and Edward Carson"<sup>11</sup> - or another version of the mythical, a-historical female against the 'rational', historical male, and an extreme proof of Marina Warner's analysis of public representations of women being usually mythic or allegorical, while those of men are of

---

9 Eavan Boland, *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time* (New York: Norton, 1995), p. 196.

10 There is not the space here to explore the multiple configurations of 'Mother Ireland' and her sisters. The most substantial source on the subject is Belinda Loftus, *Mirrors: William III and Mother Ireland* (Dundrum: Picture Press, 1990). See also a review of the book which adds further complexities, Joan Fowler, 'King Billy and Mother Ireland in Mirrors', *The Oxford Art Journal*, 14.2 (1991), 104-107. A discussion of the perpetuation of the triple configuration into contemporary literature can be found in Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, "Thinking of Her ... as ... Ireland": Yeats, Pearse and Heaney', *Textual Practice*, 4.1 (1990), 1-21.

11 Seamus Heaney, quoted by Edna Longley, *From Cathleen to Anorexia: The Breakdown of Irelands* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1990), p. 18.



historical figures.<sup>12</sup> Heaney's poems of the period often extend the metaphor of Mother Ireland into one of the land of Ireland as woman - either mother, beloved, or rape victim. In his acclaimed volume *North*,<sup>13</sup> published after a particularly vicious three year period in Northern Ireland, we find, for example, in 'Kinship' a bog is an "Insatiable bride" and "Our mother ground / is sour with the blood / of her faithful, / they lie gargling / in her sacred heart". 'Ocean's love' opens: "Speaking broad Devonshire, / Raleigh has backed the maid to a tree / As Ireland is backed to England / And drives inland / Till all her strands are breathless".

The painter Rita Duffy, a Catholic woman from Northern Ireland, disrupts the binary oppositions of male/female, Catholic/Protestant, and British/Irish as they are found in the poem 'Act of Union'. Through this work Seamus Heaney plays on the sexual-political pun of the title, and speaks as the various male occupiers of the land. The second stanza reads:

And I am still imperially  
 Male, leaving you with the pain,  
 The rending process in the colony,  
 The battering ram, the boom burst from within.  
 The act sprouted an obstinate fifth column  
 Whose stance is growing unilateral.  
 His heart beneath your heart is a wardrum  
 Mustering force. His parasitical  
 And ignorant little fists already  
 Beat at your borders and I know they're cocked  
 At me across the water. No treaty  
 I foresee will salve completely your tracked  
 And stretchmarked body, the big pain  
 that leaves you raw, like opened ground, again.

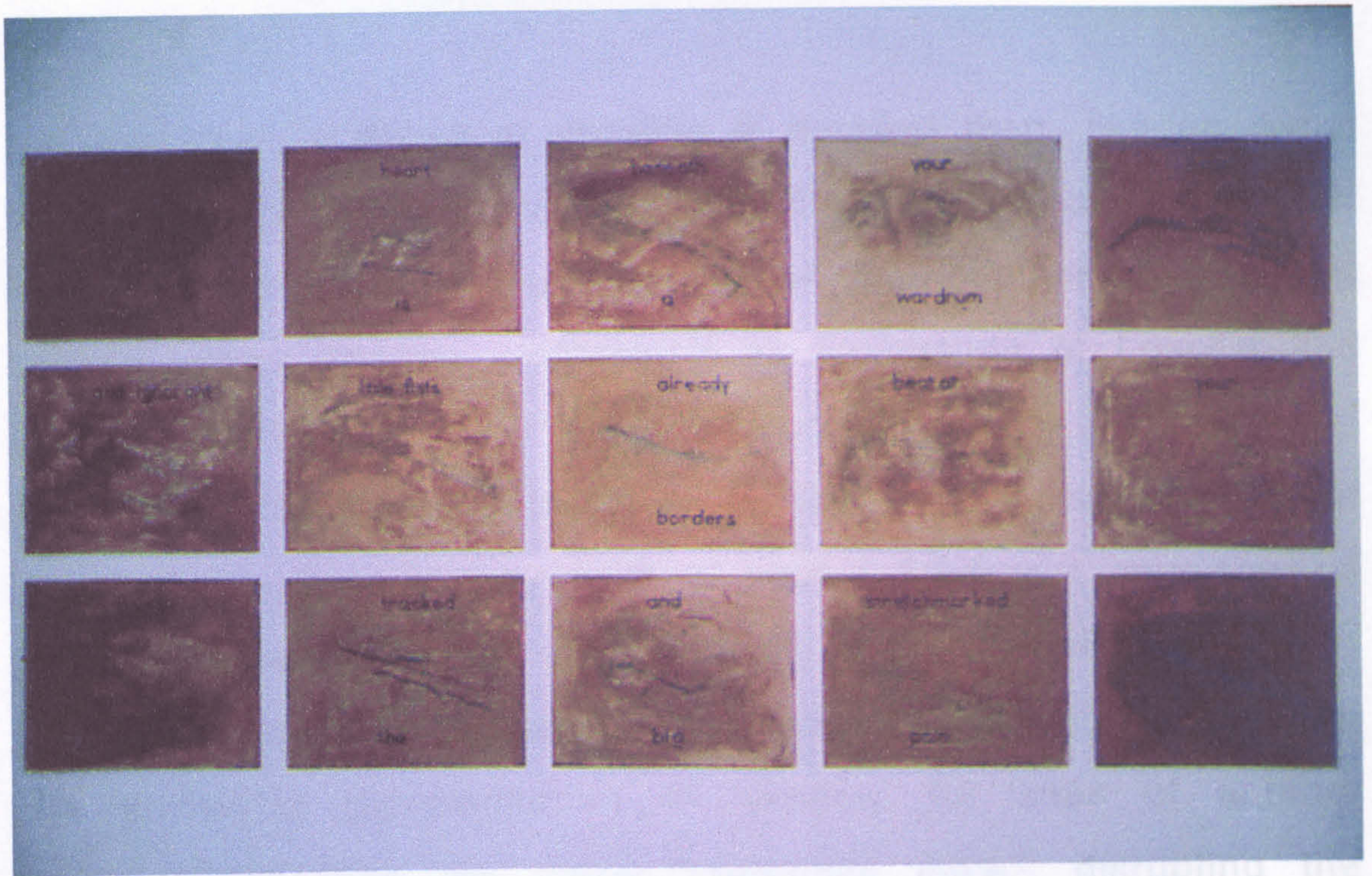
Rita Duffy's painting *Territory* (1996) (plate 23) consists of 15 panels, each 24"x30". On each one paint is layered and sanded. Upon

---

12 Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), particularly pp. 18-37.

13 Seamus Heaney, *North* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975).





Rita Duffy  
*Territory*  
 1996. Pigment and graphite on gesso boards, 15 panels each 24" x 30"  
 Courtesy the artist



the top layer is drawn in graphite a detailed map, like an aerial photograph, of the 15 so-called 'peacelines' in Belfast - walls built to keep separate particular areas of Catholic and Protestant working class housing, understood as flashpoints of Loyalist and Republican violence. Over these images Rita Duffy has stencilled the words "his heart beneath your heart / is a wardrum / and ignorant little fists already beat at your / borders / your tracked and stretchmarked body / the big pain". In this mimetic process (in Irigarayan terms) she retraverses a site of exploitation, looking at this particular representation of 'woman' for sites of another syntax. Eschewing the voice "imperially male", disrupting the sonnet rhythm and rhyme, and dissecting the poem, Rita Duffy mimeticizes the words so their signification shifts to become more evocative of a woman's experience of pregnancy. Shorn of the explicit links between land and female body, rape and colonisation, and the now too-easy opposition between occupier and occupied, the words are left in an indirect, tense relation with the images. Neither is sufficient as metaphor for the other. Although the border of the woman's body will be crossed by the birthing baby, it is not clear in the drawings to whom the borders, fragmented inside the broader territory of Belfast, belong. Spaces of identity in the triangle British/Protestant/Catholic are disrupted, and with them any possibility of identification - Army/Loyalist/Republican or English/ Ulster-Scots/Irish in one realm, and female/Irish/land or male/ British/rapist in the other.

Referring to Mother Ireland, Richard Kearney asks if the development of "such idealized *imagos* of womanhood might be related to the social stereotypes of the Irish woman as pure virgin



or son-obsessed mother?"<sup>14</sup> and relates it to Ireland's history. The early Irish church, in which women played an important role, shifted

to a more puritanical religion which idealized women as other-worldly creatures of sublime innocence. And it is perhaps no accident that this shift coincided in some measure with the colonization of Ireland. Since the women of colonized Ireland had become, in James Connolly's words, the "slaves of slaves", they were, in a socio-political sense at least, the perfect candidates for compensatory elevation in the order of mystique. The cult of virginity undoubtedly corroborated this process of sublimation. Woman became as sexually intangible as the ideal of national sovereignty became politically intangible.<sup>15</sup>

Mary Condren charts the shift from matrilineal to patrilineal religious structures in Ireland.<sup>16</sup> The shift from the 'Age of Brigit' ('She who created without spouse') to the 'Age of Mary' ('the Virgin who created without sin'<sup>17</sup>) through the C12th and C13th marked a shift in the delineation of femininity. Brigit was at various times a triple goddess, a virgin mother, or a lawmaker, who had been assimilated into Christianity as a virgin saint.<sup>18</sup> In Ireland, baptisms were performed with milk, following Brigit's own baptism in milk and nourishment with the milk of a sacred cow. This was prohibited in the C12th;<sup>19</sup> along with clerical marriage. An increasingly large number of churches or monasteries were

14 Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 118. This echoes Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill in an article which does for American configurations of Irish women's genealogies what Christine Delphy has done for American configurations of 'French feminism': "The more the Virgin is revered as a spotless and shining example, the more ordinary human women are made to feel guilty for not being simultaneously virginal and motherly (forget the biological impossibility), masochistic and above all producers of suicidal sons. (Well, He was, wasn't He?). 'What Foremothers?', *Poetry Ireland Review*, 36 (1993), 18-31 (pp. 30-31). This evokes a configuration of 'woman' within Irish Republicanism: "Women are venerated only to be marginalized as producers of sons for slaughter, ungrudgingly offering men to death for the cause". Elizabeth Butler Carlingford, "Thinking of Her...as...Ireland': Yeats, Pearse and Heaney", *Textual Practice*, 4.1 (1990), 1-21 (p. 16).

15 Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland*, pp. 118-119.

16 Mary Condren, *The Serpent and the Goddess: Women, Religion and Power in Celtic Ireland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1989).

17 Epithets quoted by Mary Condren, *ibid.*, p. 160.

18 Mary Condren, *ibid.*, p. 55.

19 Mary Condren, *ibid.*, p. 177.



dedicated to The Virgin Mary through the C12th, although none had been so dedicated in Ireland before 1100.<sup>20</sup> In the following centuries, the discourse of the Church concerning women, and in particular the nature of women's bodies, shifted: "in the public and symbolic realm, under the mantle of Mary, women would be placed on a pedestal and idealized. But in the private realm (where it counted), women would remain under the shadow of Eve, symbols of evil and gateways to destruction".<sup>21</sup> The cult of Mary was promoted specifically among women, "but with men firmly in control of the image making or dogmatic world, the image to which women would relate was essentially a male construct. [...]. Mary's image emphasized the radical disjuncture between the sacred and the sexual, [...] essentially compensatory, *atoning* for the loss of social status on the part of women. Mary's image was reactionary in that, denied the possibility of effective action, she could only *react*".<sup>22</sup> Such constructs in the Catholic religion in Ireland were not only re-enforced by the increasingly patriarchal structures of the Catholic reformation, but by colonization: in Irish culture "the links with the Roman Catholic church provided the only symbolic force the Irish had against the might of the British Empire. [...] Irish Catholicism became the vehicle of Irish nationalism, a position that it retains in Irish minds even today".<sup>23</sup>

The cultural and political re-alignments experienced in a post-colonial situation produce shifts in gender roles which have been analyzed. Gerardine Meaney has drawn upon the work of Indian

---

20 Mary Condren, *ibid.*, pp. 160-161.

21 Mary Condren, *ibid.*, p. 143.

22 Mary Condren, *ibid.*, p. 171.

23 Mary Condren, *ibid.*, p. 184.



political philosopher Ashis Nandy, who explores a pattern of gender roles in colonised and post-colonial cultures. Meaney writes that:

A history of colonisation is a history of feminisation. [...] Nandy points out that the subject people, in rebelling and claiming independence and sovereignty, aspire to a traditionally masculine role of power. The result is that colonised peoples, often long after colonisation itself has ended, tend to observe or impose strictly differentiated gender roles in order to assert the masculinity and right to power of the (male) subjects. [...] It is not difficult to trace this process at work in the sexual conservatism and political stagnation of post-independence Ireland. Anxiety about one's fitness for a (masculine) role of authority, deriving from a history of defeat or helplessness, is assuaged by the assumption of sexual dominance.<sup>24</sup>

This "sexual conservatism" in the present Republic of Ireland is written into the founding Constitution of the State.<sup>25</sup> The Constitution states amongst other things that "in particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman [*sic*] gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home". Molly Mullin adds that "the language of the Constitution illustrates, once again, the importance of struggles over definition. Not only does the Constitution assume the right to define 'Family', but it also assumes that 'woman' can be used interchangeably with 'mother', and that both are automatically associated with domesticity".<sup>26</sup> Molly Mullin also highlights a reduction of women to mothers in the everyday culture of the Republic, "where the press consistently follows the mention

---

24 Gerardine Meaney, 'Sex and nation', p. 233.

25 The control over women's sexuality in the Republic has been absolute: not only have divorce and abortion been illegal, but they are also anti-Constitutional. This is why there have had to be referenda about changing such laws: the Dáil (parliament) cannot alter the Constitution without a referendum. The constitutional stance on divorce was altered by a referendum in 1996, but by a majority of under 1%.

26 Molly Mullin, 'Representations of History, Irish Feminism, and the Politics of Difference', *Feminist Studies*, 17.1 (1991), 29-50 (p. 42).



of a woman's name with 'mother of x number of children'.<sup>27</sup> It is this reduction of women to mothers which accounts for the surface paradox of Lia Mills's identification of "the dominant iconography and rhetoric of the Republic, whose symbolism idealises women while its policies, on the whole, ignore us":<sup>28</sup> the Constitution idealises a representation, 'woman' (particularly in its construction of her relation to motherhood) while ignoring the autonomy and subjectivity of actual women.<sup>29</sup>

This analysis of the superimposition of the feminine on Irish national imagery outlined above<sup>30</sup> has been problematized by Edna Longley, a critic based in Belfast. Longley argues that such analyses depend upon a view of Irish identity which is at one and the same time partial and totalising.<sup>31</sup> From the time of partition in 1921, and emphasised first by the establishing of the Republic and then by the conflict in the North, Irish Nationalism and Republicanism has differed on either side of the border in its

27 Molly Mullin, *ibid.*, p. 37.

28 Lia Mills, "I won't go Back to It": Irish Women Poets and the Iconic Feminine', *Feminist Review*, 50 (1995), 69-88 (p. 69).

29 Indicating the large numbers of Irish women who had travelled - and still do travel - to England for safe abortions, Gerardine Meaney reflects upon the effect of the Republic's reduction of women to mothers for the 1992 referendum on abortion (the Eighth Amendment): "The extent to which women only exist as a function of their maternity in the dominant ideology of Southern Ireland became apparent during the referendum [...]. The only real effect of the Eighth Amendment has been to compromise any general or 'human' constitutional rights which might give precedent to the woman's rights as an individual over function as a mother." She suggests that the presence of women in the so-called 'pro-life' movement is complex in Ireland: "Such women seek to perpetuate the idealised virgin/mother figure of woman so that they can *be* that figure. Such identification offers women one of the few roles of power available to them in patriarchy." Gerardine Meaney, 'Sex and Nation', pp. 230, 231.

30 - which is remarkably consistent across recent cultural analyses - Luke Gibbons perhaps being the dissident. He suggests cultures feminized by colonialism create what he calls "an alternative 'feminized' public space (imagined as the nation) against the official patriarchal order of the state" - i.e. the allegorical female form - which in fact works to "turn the colonial stereotype against itself". Ultimately, his argument is unconvincing. While he does admit that such allegorical female figures may "in some sense mask patriarchal power on the part of the colonial administration", he offers no analysis of their cause or effect in the colonised or post-colonial culture and on the women or men living within it. Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), p. 131.

31 Edna Longley, *From Cathleen to Anorexia*.



political strategies and imagery. Furthermore, within the North itself the representations of identity, religion, mythology, and femininity differ across the Catholic/Protestant divide. Edna Longley also questions the ethics of the re-investment in the mythic female imagery of Ireland by contemporary Northern Nationalism (such images appear frequently in the political murals in Nationalist areas) (plate 24):

To characterize Irish Nationalism (only constructed in the nineteenth century) as archetypally female both gives it mythic pedigree and exonerates it from aggressive and oppressive intent. Its patriarchal elements also disappear. [...]

While Virgin-Ireland gets raped and pitied, Mother Ireland translates pity into a call to arms and vengeance. She resembles the white-feather-bestowing 'Little Mother' in First-World-War recruiting. [...] Is there not collusion between all feminine-Nationalist images, between Queen Maeve and Mother Ireland, between the feminine-pathetic and the feminine-heroic?<sup>32</sup>

There is a suggestion here that the imagery of such figures in the North could simply reproduce patriarchal political structures - in the manner of some of the goddess images discussed in an earlier chapter - unless they are very carefully rethought. The paradox is that it should be easier for Catholic women south of the border to interrogate the relationships between identity, imagery, and the production and signification of such imagery - as it has proved, for example, with interrogations of the Catholic Church: women in the Republic can criticize the Church and still be secure in their Irish identity, whereas in the North such questioning might make vulnerable a woman's perceived identity and political allegiances, opening them to question in her community.

Visual artists who are women from either side of the border have not re-invested in these images as much as have writers, or the painters of political murals. Artists in the Republic in particular





Republican murals showing historical male figures (those killed by the English after the Easter Uprising, and a hunger striker) and mythical female figures representing aspects of Ireland  
 n.d. Short Strand (top) and the Ardoyne (bottom), Belfast  
 Photograph 1996 by the author



have shown more interest in the sheela-na-gig figures - Romanesque carvings of female figures exposing their genitals (plate 25). These would appear to have more potential, as they are at present 'empty' images: it is not known who made them, what they represent conceptually or spiritually, what the name originally meant, nor how they functioned or were used.<sup>33</sup> There is not even (and this seems extraordinary given Ireland's wealth of written and oral story telling) any oral tradition about them which can supply clues. Unlike the Mother Ireland figures, they have no perceptible patriarchal overlay. They are not sexual fantasy figures. They are not mother figures or nurturers: their breasts are either not depicted or only in a sketchy fashion. Despite this, some have mis-read them as "primitive fertility symbols"<sup>34</sup> or even more wildly as "the mother-goddess [...] of fertility in Celtic mythology",<sup>35</sup> once again reducing a female image to an image of mothering. They are also open to re-representation through maintenance mimesis of timeless and a-historic symbols of mythic womanliness.<sup>36</sup> However, in their installation *Sounding the Depths* at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in 1992 the artists Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh produced a reconfiguration or echo of

---

33 Eamonn P. Kelly, *Sheela-na-Gigs: Origins and Functions* (Dublin: Country House in association with The National Museum of Ireland, 1996).

34 Un-named Dublin woman quoted by Molly Mullin, 'Representations of History', p. 31.

35 Wanda Balzano, 'Irishness - Feminist and Post-Colonial', in *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, ed. by Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 92-97 (p. 95). This is just one of a number of errors in a very poorly written essay. For an interesting examination of a contemporary re-presentation of the sheela-na-gig image and the meanings that accrued from it, see Molly Mullin; and for my analysis of the problematic curation of a recent exhibition of sheela-na-gig carvings, see Hilary Robinson, 'Within the Pale in *from: Beyond the Pale: The Curation of 'Femininity' in an Exhibition Season at the Irish Museum of Modern Art*', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 6.3 (1997), 255-267.

36 See, for example, the work by Carmel Benson which was (unfortunately) selected to illustrate Lia Mills, "'I won't go Back to It": Irish Women Poets and the Iconic Feminine'. Mills mentions briefly a treatment of the sheela-na-gig in a volume of poems produced by a collective of women poets as "going beyond the merely national to something older, deeper, more primitive" (p. 76). This is clearly a problematic project in the context of discussing the critique offered by poets such as Eavan Boland, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and Mary Dorcey, and I read Mill's brevity as an example of an academic feminist's lack of appetite for lengthy, negative criticism of a strand of non-academic, separatist feminism.





*Sheela-na-gig* (Co. Cavan)  
nd. Stone

National Museum of Ireland, Dublin. Photograph courtesy Irish Museum of Modern Art,  
Dublin



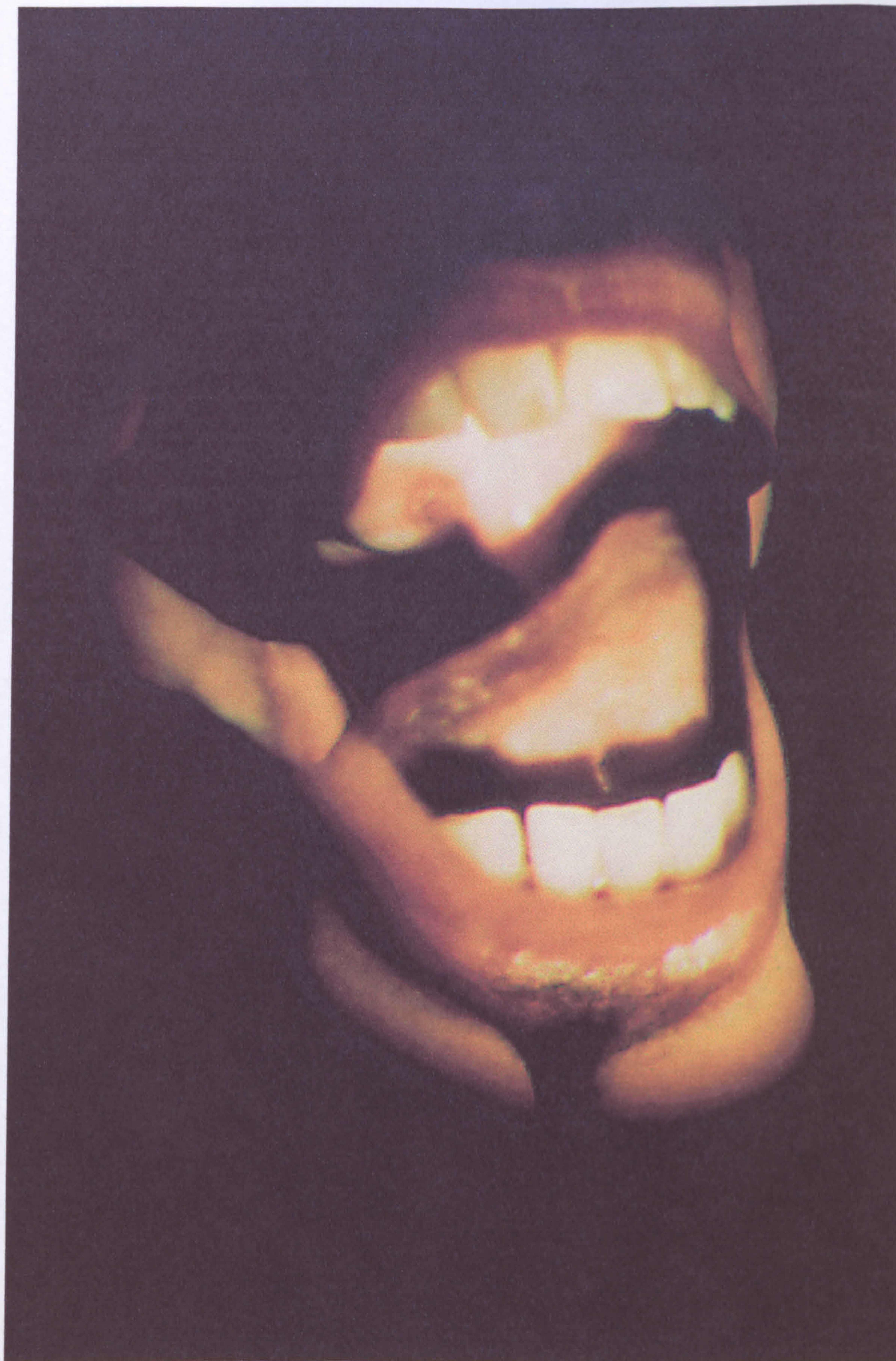
the sheela-na-gig which has a more productive signification (plate 26). The main section of the installation was a darkened room with black walls. Focused spot-lighting illuminated a series of large photographs. The images had been made by projecting onto each of the artists' naked bodies slides of mouths, then photographing the result. Thus the images were of the bodies of mature women which were inscribed with and incorporated a means of enunciation. Some women to whom I spoke on the night of the private view found it challenging, or even frightening, to be in a situation which, they felt, expected them to identify with images representing the possibility of inhabiting a body deeply sexed and the site of enunciation. The work represents a vision where a syntax and morphology issuing from the body is possible. It also represents the memory of the sheela-na-gigs as a dynamic, developing, and culturally appropriate indicator of a transcendent female genealogy. The artists have therefore produced a site where cultural memory, female genealogy, and the horizons of latent possibility cohere through a process which recalls Griselda Pollock's term "inscriptions in the feminine":

I use it to avoid all the fallacies of expressionism and intentionalism associated with notions of self-conscious authorship. [...] According to one major twentieth century theory, psychoanalysis, we are not fully known or even knowable to ourselves. Split between conscious and unconscious levels, structured by histories and the desire they foster that culture and language repress, what we make, paint, write or film is only partially framed by our own purposes and known tactics. 'Inscriptions' brings us closer to a kind of analytical reading of symptoms - pressures and signs from the other scene, the other registers of meaning, the scripts of desire.<sup>37</sup>

---

37 Griselda Pollock, 'Preface', *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. xii-xx (p. xvi).





Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh  
*Sounding the Depths* (detail)  
1992. Cibachrome, video and sound installation  
Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin. Photograph courtesy of the artists



Rethinking the divine, the transcendental, and the universal.

Achieving an appropriate subjectivity for women, rather than the sensibility assigned us by the patriarchy, is a point of political struggle:

I am a sexed ontological or ontic being { *un être ou un étant*}, hence assigned to a gender, to a generic identity, one which I am not necessarily in/through my sensible immediacy. And so to be born a girl in a male-dominated culture is not necessarily to be born with a sensibility appropriate to my gender. No doubt female physiology is present but not identity, which remains to be constructed. Of course, there is no question of its being constructed in repudiation of one's physiology. It is a matter of demanding a culture, of wanting and elaborating a spirituality, a subjectivity and an alterity appropriate to this gender: the female. It's not as Simone de Beauvoir said: one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman (through culture), but rather: I am born a woman, but I must still become this woman that I am by nature.<sup>38</sup>

Being born physically female does not determine sensibility: girls are assigned an identity through the culture, one deemed appropriate because of their "physiology". It is precisely because identity is produced through a play of *différance* within cultural assignments to "physiology" that it can be shifted. This is true of both men and women; and it spreads the realm of the political, and of political responsibility, into the site of consciousness. Attending to the socio-political has to be informed by attention to the subjective-political:

The task of making the transition from the singular to the universal thus remains for each person in his or her own unique singularity [...]. Each woman will, therefore, be for herself woman in the process of becoming [...]. In other words, being born a woman requires a culture particular to this sex and this gender, which it is important for the woman to realize without renouncing her natural identity. She should not comply with a model of identity imposed upon her by anyone, neither her parents, her lover, her children, the State, religion or culture in general. That does not mean she can lapse into capriciousness, dispersion, the multiplicity of her desires, or a loss of identity. She should,

---

38 Luce Irigaray, *I Love To You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History*, trans. by Alison Martin (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 107/*J'aime à toi: esquisse d'une félicité dans l'histoire* (Paris: Grasset), p. 168.



quite the contrary, gather herself within herself in order to accomplish her gender's perfection for herself, for the man she loves, for her children, but equally for civil society, for the world of culture, for a definition of the universal corresponding to reality.<sup>39</sup>

Here, Luce Irigaray is arguing for an ethical relation between each woman's attention to her conscious being (her self-knowledge) and her attentive intersubjective relations, including the most broadly social. There does appear to be a potential confusion between Luce Irigaray's use of the terms "identity" and "subjectivity" in these sections of *I Love to You*. I do not consider her understanding of 'subjectivity' to have shifted here, but 'identity' should be differentiated from it: I read it as referring to those traits within a subject which would mark him or her as behaving in a manner appropriately (for example) 'manly' or 'womanly' for a culture; traits of which the subject is or can become conscious and upon which he or she can 'work': "gather herself within herself in order to accomplish her gender's perfection for herself". Luce Irigaray's argument for a radical practice of psychoanalysis would form one strategy of doing this work. But only if political work is undertaken on identity appropriate to gender can individuals achieve their subjectivity, and so allow the other gender to begin to recognize the limits of their own gender and subjectivity.

Thus, self-consciousness has its role in developing subjectivity:

It would be a matter of setting into motion a passive and retroactive intentionality: to become aware of being a woman or a man, and wanting to become one. It is by recognizing this that I am able to bring my intentions in line with my reality. Thus there is no longer any simple projection or natural immediacy; rather my intentions are regulated by who I am. Intention is subsequently located in a context devoid of necessary phantasies and without an imposed origin. It is moved or determined by a project but does not have to be phantasmatic, imaginary or invented. My project is regulated on the basis



of my natural identity. The intention is to assure its cultivation so that I may become who I am. Equally, it is to spiritualize my nature in order to create with the other.<sup>40</sup>

The “natural identity” here is an identity appropriate to one’s gender, and echoes the passage quoted above: “I am born a woman, but I must still become this woman that I am by nature”.<sup>41</sup> The terminology is problematic because it is another example of Luce Irigaray re-entering a “site of exploitation” in order to wrest it away from a phallogocentric syntax. “Natural identity” is not one suited to bolstering the identity of another gender according to its partial and exclusive configuration of the world, nor is it an essential identity, as we might most commonly and colloquially use the term ‘nature’ in our culture. Rather, it is the site of potentiality appropriate to each gender, and, therefore, a site of resistance to current configurations of gender - which are in themselves a disruption to possible appropriate realisations of the gendered self. Luce Irigaray defines her use of the term “passive” in this context as a matter “not of pure receptivity but of a movement of growth that never ultimately estranges itself from corporeal existence in a natural milieu”; something which is more a matter of fidelity to self than submission to the other.<sup>42</sup> Fidelity to one’s gendered identity will produce a gendered spirituality - a gendered transcendental - and thus provide a site for ethical intersubjective relations. This is what is “natural”, Luce Irigaray argues. In order to achieve this ‘natural’ it is thus necessary to establish positive discursive relationships through woman-to-woman genealogies - particularly the mother-daughter relation -

---

40 Luce Irigaray, *I Love To You*, p. 39/*J'aime à toi*, pp. 71-72.

41 Luce Irigaray, *I Love To You*, p. 107/*J'aime à toi*, p. 168.

42 Luce Irigaray, *I Love To You*, p. 38/*J'aime à toi*, p. 71.



and a female divine: "However, insofar as a respect for the identity and dignity of women is concerned, two bridges must be established or re-established. One is the bridge consisting of the mother-daughter relation; the other is that of feminine identity. It is impossible to ask a woman to be holy, absolved of blame, as long as she is unable to recognize the potential holiness of her own mother".<sup>43</sup>

Following the earlier discussion, we can understand these relationships as only practicable when they are faithful to women's morphologic. It has been long recognised by feminism that even at the most publicly social level (for example, in most Western cultures, in the passing down of family names) mother-daughter relations have been utterly disrupted by patriarchy; but the potentially positive impact of configurations of the divine upon this has not always been appreciated. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has indicated this in a way which has particular interest for the discussion of cultural representations in Ireland:

Given the connection between secularism and imperialism, there is almost no way of getting to alternative general voices except through religion. And if one does not look at religion as mechanisms of producing the ethical subject, one gets various kinds of 'fundamentalism'. Workers in cultural politics and its connections to a new ethical philosophy have to be interested in religion in the production of ethical subjects. There is much room for feminist work here because western feminists have not so far been aware of religion as a cultural instrument rather than a mark of cultural difference.<sup>44</sup>

While many women have rejected dominant religions because of their patriarchal structures and their misogyny, feminist spiritual or theological movements have often been regarded as a bit of an

---

43 Luce Irigaray, 'Equal to Whom?', in *The Essential Difference*, ed. by Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 63-81 (p. 77).

44 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The Politics of Translation', in *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, ed. by Michèle Barratt and Anne Phillips (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp.177-200 (p. 192).



embarrassment, or the potential for a dynamic importance of spirituality for women has been ignored, simply not discussed. As we have seen in an earlier chapter, some feminist configurations of a goddess can re-assert phallogomorphic logic; and it is clear that this is counterproductive in the development of subjectivity by women. Patriarchal notions of the divine (Luce Irigaray is talking mainly about the dominant Western religion, Christianity, though the argument could be extended into some other religions) are far from appropriate for women:

Man has sought out a unique *male* God. He has created God out of his gender... He scarcely sets limits within Him and between Him: he is father, son, spirit. Man has not allowed himself to be defined by another gender: the female. His unique God corresponds to the human race {*genre humain*}, which we know is not neuter or neutral {*neutre*} from the point of view of the difference of the sexes.<sup>45</sup>

It is the morphologic of men-amongst-themselves, of the Same, which has left female sexuality without its spirituality, “without representation in terms of the divine”<sup>46</sup> because this masculine morphologic “denies transcendence in the feminine. Everything that is of the feminine gender is thus less valued in this logic because it lacks any possible dimension of transcendence. [...] It is this that makes a spiritual relationship between the sexes an impossibility”.<sup>47</sup> Without this sense of the divine and of transcendence, women can only repeat the representations of themselves constructed by a phallo-morphologic.<sup>48</sup> As elsewhere in Luce Irigaray’s thinking, a notion of surface equality is spurious: “A theology of women’s liberation establishes as its priority not

---

45 Luce Irigaray, ‘Divine Women’, pp. 61-62/‘Femmes divines’, p. 74. Translation modified.

46 Luce Irigaray, ‘Questions to Emmanuel Levinas’, in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 178-189 (p. 178).

47 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, p. 67/*J’aime à toi*, p. 115.

48 Luce Irigaray, ‘Divine Women’, pp. 62 and 64/‘Femmes divines’, pp. 74 and 76.



equal access to the priesthood, but rather an equal share in the divine. This means that what I see as a manifestation of sexual liberation is God made a couple: man and woman and not simply God made man".<sup>49</sup>

For a believer, the notion that God is purely a product of man's morphologic could be problematic: God would then be seen to be "the space of an empty sign",<sup>50</sup> a mere mirror-construct made by man, and therefore all belief would have to be suspended. Another problem could be that this God could be understood as something approaching flesh made God, rather than (in part) God made flesh - which would be an heretical interpretation. We have already seen that Luce Irigaray warns us against regressing to a deification of "siren goddesses" and hierarchies which repeat old patterns and structures.<sup>51</sup> In this understanding of God as "God made a couple: man and woman and not simply God made man" resides an answer. God has been represented by man in his (man's) own image, according to the same morphologic that has produced the representation 'woman'. But if God is understood as couple and neither as The One, nor as the 'bisexual', two-in-one God of equal-rights feminism which reasserts, at the end of the day, a singular, phallogomorphic God (so, to put it another way, if God is understood as He-She or She-He, rather than He or She or S/He), then believers might be able to find a structure flexible enough to allow for different morphologies as are appropriate for them as gendered subjects; a structure 'god' which pre-exists man and woman and

---

49 Luce Irigaray, 'Equal to Whom?', p. 74.

50 Serene Jones, 'Divining Women: Irigaray and Feminist Theologies', *Yale French Studies*, 87 (1995), 42-67 (p. 65).

51 Luce Irigaray, 'Divine Women', p. 60/'Femmes divines', pp. 72-73.



their syntaxes of representation.

If a woman is to become woman (to achieve her subjectivity) and thus be born into a knowledge of her limits and of intersubjective relationships, she must have a sense of a transcendent which can be recognised through the structures of her morphology. Intersubjective relationships depend upon the irreducibility of the other subject:

you are irreducible to me, just as I am to you. We may not be substituted for one another. You are transcendent to me, inaccessible in a way [...]. Between us there is always transcendence, not as an abstraction or a construct, a fabrication of the same grounding its origin or measuring its development, but as the resistance of a concrete and ideational reality: I will never be you, either in body or in thought.<sup>52</sup>

This transcendental is experienced in difference between one subject and another, not only in difference between the genders: "Two qualitative differences need to be discovered, to be related - one which takes place in sexual difference, and one that can be lived in sympathy between women. [...] Each sex should be considered in relation to its corresponding ideal, its transcendental".<sup>53</sup> This is what Luce Irigaray terms a "sensible transcendental",<sup>54</sup> that is, a transcendental which (as it is informed by appropriate morphologies) resolves any patriarchal split between the material body and the spiritually ideal. The ideal for each sex, in the sensible transcendental, corresponds to its morphologic and thus relates in part to the material body; and the morphologic of the material body can be recognised in the ideal to

52 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, pp. 103-104/*J'aime à toi*, pp. 161-162.

53 Luce Irigaray, 'The Limits of the Transference', trans. by David Macey, in *The Irigaray Reader*, pp. 105-117 (p. 106)/'La limit du transfert', in *Parler n'est jamais neutre* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985), pp. 293-304 (p. 294).

54 Luce Irigaray, 'The Limits of the Transference', p. 112/'La limit du transfert', p. 300, and elsewhere.



which that subject can aspire:

Transcendence is thus no longer ecstasy, leaving the self behind toward an inaccessible total-other, beyond sensibility, beyond the earth. It is respect for the other whom I will never be, who is transcendent to me and to whom I am transcendent. Neither simple nature nor common spirit beyond nature, this transcendence exists in the difference of body and culture that continues to nourish our energy, its movement, its generation and its creation. Our energy is thence no longer channelled, sublimated, or paralyzed in a movement towards a beyond *I-me*, or *you*, or *we*. It is the movement and transformation that limits the empire of my ego, of the power of *you*, or of the community and its already established values. It remains in me, enstasy rather than ecstasy, but ready to meet with the other, particularly through language, without sacrificing sensibility.<sup>55</sup>

If Luce Irigaray's configuration of the transcendental insists upon the material real for each gender - a transcendent which is at one with the morphologic of the subject - then the same initial analysis informs her configuration of the universal. She critiques the movements which demand equality (rather than her politics of respect for difference) as resulting from the same morphologic as do our present structures of the universal - equality meaning sameness and thus ultimately (particularly in the case of gender) death: "the demand for equality for all, between all men and all women, is indeed faithful to our secular metaphysical ideal, an ideal aimed at universality, totality, the absolute, and essence by reducing distinctions and dissimilarities".<sup>56</sup> Phallomorphologic, in producing a concept of equality as singularity, totalising universality, and sameness, has produced something which (to pick up an earlier point) goes against nature. Neither nature nor its content are universal - not even its basic elements, such as air: "air itself varies in terms of density, heat, etc., and is not, therefore, universal matter as such even though without it there

---

55 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, pp. 104-105/*J'aime à toi*, pp. 163-164.

56 Luce Irigaray, *I Love To You*, p. 99/*J'aime à toi*, p. 155.



can be no universal".<sup>57</sup> Sexual difference is the constant reminder of the impossibility of a singular universal:

The natural is at least two: male and female. All the speculation about overcoming the natural in the universal forgets that nature is not one. In order to go beyond - assuming this is necessary - we should make reality the point of departure: it is *two* (a *two* containing in turn secondary differences: smaller/larger, younger/older, for instance). The universal has been thought as *one*, thought on the basis of *one*. But this *one* does not exist.<sup>58</sup>

Some notion of non-singularity, limit and irreducibility therefore exists throughout the living world, to the extent that sexual difference itself is the only globally appropriate *content* for the concept of the universal:

Without doubt, the most appropriate content for the universal is sexual difference. Indeed, this content is both real and universal. Sexual difference is an immediate natural given and it is a real and irreducible component of the universal.<sup>59</sup>

Other differences for the subject, including racial difference, will be recognised and confronted after sexual difference. Mostly, the little girl or little boy will produce their gendered identity through a recognition of sexual difference before they produce a racial identity through recognition of racial difference.<sup>60</sup>

In this way we can see that the universal is paradoxically not one but, as is the divine, at least two; and that it is related to a redefined 'natural' which, as indicated above, is the potential for an order respecting difference:

The fact remains that we are men and women. And that this constitutes a living

57 Luce Irigaray, *I Love To You*, p. 37/*J'aime à toi*, pp. 68-69.

58 Luce Irigaray, *I Love To You*, p. 35/*J'aime à toi*, p. 65.

59 Luce Irigaray, *I Love To You*, p. 47/*J'aime à toi*, p. 84.

60 Luce Irigaray's comments on race could prove contentious. As is frequent in her work, this analysis results from consideration of a 'usual' experience, and would certainly hold true for infants born into mixed-sex families (or similar social structures) as a member of the dominant race in a predominantly mono-racial society, no matter what that race is. It may also hold true for infants born into mixed sex families in minority racial communities. However, other situations (such as being born into a single-sex family in a racially diverse community for example) could well produce different chronologies.



universal. It is a universal related to our real person, to his or her needs, abilities and desires. The particularity of this universal is that it is divided into two. Thus, respecting the difference between woman and man is itself culture. It goes beyond natural immediacy. If man and woman respect each other as those two halves of the universe that they represent, then by recognizing the other they overcome their immediate instincts and drives.<sup>61</sup>

Through this natural universal of sexual difference a sexuate culture can be developed; and across its nature of difference irreducible to one we have to establish ethical mediation. Mediation, therefore, can be seen as a secondary characteristic of the universal: "language is the *tool* of the universal. Yet it is not the universal. Anything associated with nature is immediately universal; that which passes through articulation is only mediately universal".<sup>62</sup> Mediation, as we have already seen, is sexuate.

What this means for the individual sexuate person, man or woman, is that there is a morphological relationship between their particularity and the universal - a second seemingly paradoxical element of this understanding of universality:

With generic identity, there is no longer an opposition between particular and universal in the sense that the universal is already within me and does not have to be constructed outside of me. Of course, I am still subject to a historical particularity. But no longer is there any contradiction between the singularity of that history and a {un} neuter(?) universal produced by a {unə} culture, a {un} spirit. That tension is resolved within the horizon of belonging to a universal as generic identity. I no longer have any reason to estrange myself from myself so as to meet up with the absolute in a for-itself existing outside of me. Rather, I have to fulfil myself as what and who I am: a woman. This woman I am has to realize the female as universal in the self and for the self as far as she is able during the period of History in which she finds herself and given the familial, cultural, or political contingencies she has to overcome.<sup>63</sup>

Particularity, the universal, mediation, the divine, the natural, and

---

61 Luce Irigaray, *I Love To You*, pp. 50-51/*J'aime à toi*, p. 84.

62 Luce Irigaray, 'The Female Gender', in *Sexes and Genealogies*, pp.105-123 (pp. 111-112)/'Le genre féminin', in *Sexes et parentés*, pp. 119-138 (p. 127).

63 Luce Irigaray, *I Love To You*, pp. 144-145/*J'aime à toi*, pp. 225-226.



the transcendental, once they are (re)thought through a sexuate morphology, can be understood as being in harmony with and for our gender, and as elements through which we can achieve our gendered subjectivity. They would no longer be, as they are in our present configuration of them, riven with splits and exclusions. What we would see now in a patriarchal culture as paradoxes could be understood as coherent in a different morpho-logic.

### Mother-daughter genealogies.

Patriarchy has disrupted mother-daughter relationships through an act of matricide. As patriarchy reduces women to their relationship to motherhood (reducing them to mothers, or as sub-categories, potential mothers or non-mothers), the mother-woman is erased in favour of the mother-reproducer (of the male):

our culture is built on a matricide: the matricide of the mother/lover - not of the woman as reproducer but of the woman as a lover, as a creator who has a specific desire and who fights for her desire. One sees this matricide at the beginning of our culture; our culture has been founded on it. When the fathers took power, they had already annihilated the mother. This can be seen in mythology, in Greek tragedy.<sup>64</sup>

If women are reduced to mothers from their status as women in order to 'fit' the identity the patriarchal culture provides for them, then this has a devastating effect upon mother to daughter genealogies. We have seen above how, if a daughter cannot imagine her mother partaking of the divine, then she will have no divine of her own. There will be no horizon for her on which is situated an ideal feminine. But as well as this, in the site of a particular

---

64 Luce Irigaray, 'Luce Irigaray: Paris, Summer 1980', interview by Elaine Hoffman Barauch and Lucienne Serrano, in *Women Analyze Women in France, England and the United States*, ed. by Elaine Hoffman Barauch and Lucienne Serrano (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988), pp. 147-164 (p. 156).



relationship between a mother and a daughter, "given the exploitation that she submits to on the part of her father/husband, given her exclusion from social and creative activity, [a mother] reproduces the oppression to which she is subject".<sup>65</sup> Luce Irigaray has confirmed this through analysis of mother-daughter conversations:

Unfortunately, the mother does not show [...] intersubjective respect for her daughter. [...] The elder [woman] seems to repeat to the younger what has been forced upon her as a woman. A dominant male culture has intervened between mother and daughter and broken off a loving and symbolic exchange. The position of the man relative to the object has separated the two women subjects. The message between them has become the imperative of an action to be accomplished and not a question that allows the other to speak.<sup>66</sup>

The antidote to this, the strategic response for disrupting the disruption of this relationship, is twofold. Initially the strategy would be of attending to the subjectivity of the mother: "If the mother is the alienator, it is because she has no identity as a woman. [...] The mother has to find her identity as a woman and from that point, she would be able to give an identity to her daughter".<sup>67</sup> Finding her identity as a woman would involve a further strategic move: the development of an appropriate Symbolic syntax, and with it, the establishment of objects of mediation and intersubjectivity: "If one were to succeed in creating again a good relationship between mother and daughter, women would no longer subordinate themselves. There would be a feminine identity and women would not submit themselves to what is called the exchange of women among men".<sup>68</sup> A key element of the patriarchy would be

---

65 Luce Irigaray, 'Luce Irigaray: Paris, Summer 1980', p. 156.

66 Luce Irigaray, *I Love To You*, pp. 130-131/*J'aime à toi*, pp. 203-204. Translation modified.

67 Luce Irigaray, 'Luce Irigaray: Paris, Summer 1980', p. 157.

68 Luce Irigaray, 'Luce Irigaray: Paris, Summer 1980', pp. 157-158.



effectively unpicked, not through head-on collision, but through establishing respectful and amorous relationships between women: a potentially revolutionary move:

In a sense we need to say goodbye to maternal omnipotence (the last refuge) and establish a woman-to-woman relationship of reciprocity with our mothers, in which they might possibly also feel themselves to be our daughters. In a word, liberate ourselves along with our mothers. That is an indispensable precondition for our emancipation from the authority of fathers. In our societies, the mother/daughter, daughter/mother relationship constitutes a highly explosive nucleus. Thinking it, and changing it, is equivalent to shaking the foundations of the patriarchal order.<sup>69</sup>

Daughters need to identify with their mothers as women in an intersubjective relationship as a result of recognising their same subjective identity. Only then is it possible to establish objects of communication between the two which perform the presently tricky task of not reducing either subject to object-status in the eyes of the other.<sup>70</sup> Again, there is a potentially revolutionary effect here, this time in language, which would impact upon both genders: "But if mothers could be women, there would be a whole mode of a relationship of desiring speech between daughter and mother, son and mother, and it would, I think completely rework the language {*langue*} that is now spoken".<sup>71</sup> An indication of how this might develop can be gleaned from attending to the present words of little girls in conversation with their mothers, as uncovered in Luce Irigaray's work on language:

And so, in the words, whether real or imaginary, that the little girl addresses to her mother, there are always two persons speaking to one another and they are represented as doing something together. Rarely is there an object circulating between them, except an object of communication.<sup>72</sup>

---

69 Luce Irigaray, 'Women-Mothers, the Silent Substratum of the Social Order', trans. by David Macey, in *The Irigaray Reader* (pp. 47-52), p. 50.

70 Luce Irigaray, *Thinking the Difference: For a Peaceful Revolution*, trans. by Karin Montin (London: Athlone Press, 1994), pp. 18-20/*Le temps de la différence: pour une révolution pacifique* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche/Librairie Générale Française, 1989), pp. 36-38.

71 Luce Irigaray, 'Women-Mothers', p. 52.

72 Luce Irigaray, *I Love To You*, p. 130/*J'aime à toi*, p. 203.



The daughter's words to the mother may represent the most highly evolved and most ethical models of language, in the sense that they respect the intersubjective relationship between the two women, express reality, make correct use of linguistic codes and are qualitatively rich.<sup>73</sup>

At this point it might be instructive to reflect once more upon Luce Irigaray's suggestions (which could be read as being peremptory or propagandist<sup>74</sup>) about displaying images of mother-daughter couples. These are found in three passages, two in *Thinking the Difference* and the other in *Je, Tu, Nous*; books which have a more polemic tone than much of her other work. The first two concern the public environment:

To anyone who cares about social justice today, I suggest putting up posters in all public places with beautiful pictures {*belles images*} representing {*figurant*} the mother-daughter couple - the couple that bears witness of a very particular relationship to nature and culture. Such representations are missing from all civil and religious sites. This is a cultural injustice that is easy to remedy. There will be no wars, no dead, no wounded. This can be done before any reform of language, which will be a much longer process. This cultural restitution will begin to redress women's individual and collective loss of identity. It will cure them of some ills, including distress, but also rivalry, and destructive aggressiveness. It will help them move from the private sphere to the public, from their family to the society in which they live.

[....]

Putting up images - photographs, paintings, sculptures, etc., not advertisements - of mother-daughter couples in all public places today would show respect for the social order. The social order is not made up of mothers and *sons*, as patriarchal culture represents it.<sup>75</sup>

The image of the mother-daughter couple is represented here as a matter of social justice, of redressing and re-addressing a social order, and with recollection of the relation to nature outlined above. Irigaray's suggestion of placing such images in public is

---

73 Luce Irigaray, *Thinking the Difference*, p. 111/*Le temps de la différence*, p. 122.

74 Christine Battersby, 'Just Jamming: Irigaray, Painting and Psychoanalysis', in *New Feminist Art Criticism: Critical Strategies*, ed. by Katy Deepwell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 128-137 (p. 131).

75 Luce Irigaray, *Thinking the Difference*, pp. 9-10, 12/*Le temps de la différence*, pp. 27-28, 30. Translation modified.



verging on the propagandist, but for the fact that her aim is not so much didactic as healing. Images can be extraordinarily effective: advertising campaigns, for example, can change people's habits of eating or dressing in a relatively short time; while changes to linguistic habits can take not only years but decades to achieve. The problem is that the visual, as well as verbal, signifiers need careful attention - something of which Luce Irigaray seems not fully aware.<sup>76</sup>

Similar problems occur in the second passage, published a year later. This attends more to the family and domestic space, rather than the public space:

In all homes and all public places, attractive {*belles*} images (not involving advertising) of the mother-daughter couple should be displayed. It's very damaging for girls always to be faced with representations of mother-son, especially in the religious dimension. I'd suggest to all Christian women, for example, that they place an image depicting Mary and her mother Anne in the communal rooms of their homes, in their daughter's rooms, and in their own rooms. There are sculptures and easily reproducible paintings of them available. I'd also advise them to display photographs of themselves with their daughter(s), or maybe with their mother. They could also have photographs of the triangle: mother, father, daughter. The point of these representations is to give girls a valid representation of their genealogy, an essential condition for the constitution of their identity.<sup>77</sup>

This also presents problems of an apparent disregard for the morphologic which may be at play in the visual language of an image. The other major problem here is a surprising lack of interrogation of Christianity. However, if we read this in the light of its presentation in her most polemical book as one of a number of "practical suggestions for the development of mother-daughter

---

76 We have seen earlier, in the discussion of 'goddess' representations, that images which share a number of compositional and representational characteristics and a pro-woman aim, can nonetheless be productive of very different meanings and even fluently reproduce phallic languages of representation.

77 Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, trans. by Alison Martin (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 47-48/ *Je, tu, nous: pour une culture de la différence* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), pp. 53-54. Translation modified. Hereafter cited as *Je, Tu, Nous/Je, tu, nous*.



relationships"<sup>78</sup> (it is one of six) and understand it as a short-term strategy which is amplified by other strategic actions, then it can make more sense.

It can also make more sense when considered in relation to an earlier passage in the same book, describing an encounter Luce Irigaray had with one work of art:

In May 1984, after a conference at the Venice-Mestre Women's Center entitled *Divine Women*, I went to visit the island of Torcello. In the museum there is a statue of a woman in the position of Mary, Jesus's mother, sitting presenting the child who sits on her knee, facing those who look at them. I was admiring this beautiful wooden sculpture when I noticed that this Jesus was a girl! That had an effect on me, which was perceptual, mentally significant, and of jubilation. I felt freed from the tensions of that cultural truth-imperative which is also practiced in art: a virgin-mother woman and her son depicted as the models of redemption we should believe in. Standing before this statue representing Mary and her mother, Anne, I felt returned calmly and joyously into my body, my affections, and my woman's history. I was facing an aesthetic and ethical figure that I need to be able to live without contempt for my incarnation, for that of my mother and other women.<sup>79</sup>

This was certainly a profound experience. The sculpture itself (which was still there in the tiny museum on Torcello in the summer of 1997, when I saw it) is indeed beautiful (plate 27). About 4' high, wall-mounted, it dates from the C15th and is now a little battered. If one did not look closely it would be easy to assume it was of Mary and Jesus. There is a light and open quality given to the features of both woman and girl, and despite the relatively formal composition, an affectionate gesture passes from mother to daughter. With similar faces and postures, the daughter encompassed but not swamped by her mother's body, they look out on the world together with pleasure. Luce Irigaray does not analyze these elements, but had the sculpture been comprised of elements which jarred with a positive reading of the mother-daughter

---

78 Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous*, p. 47/*Je, tu, nous*, p. 53.

79 Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous*, p. 25/*Je, tu, nous*, pp. 25-26. Translation modified.





*Santa Maria e Santa'Anna*  
C15th. Oil on wood, c. 48" high.  
Museo dell'Estuario, Torcello, Venice



relationship, then the experience of seeing it must have been different. As it is, it is significant that Luce Irigaray is able to contemplate the sculpture in its own terms as a representation of a divine mother-daughter couple, and not through any re-mediation through the patriarchal structures of the Church. This image, while produced from a Christian story, has nonetheless provided for an experience of the transcendental and the divine - provided an horizon of possibilities - which can aid a woman in fulfilling her subjectivity.

### “The mother”/“my mother” in Hiberno-English: a cultural reserve?

I would now like to discuss one specific aspect of the linguistic and conceptual context within which women in Ireland are working. The Irish use of English (or ‘Hiberno-English’) provides for a clear space of reserve from the patriarchal representation of woman in its interchangeable use of the nominative rather than the personal possessive when referring to a particular mother. This would be recognised throughout the island, but is more prevalent geographically in the South (possibly accompanying the difference between northern and north-eastern accents and the southern and western accents). For instance, when a little girl got lost in a large shop, I heard the question asked “where is the mother?” rather than “where is her mother?”. Likewise, talking about a woman going to a celebration, a comment was “she took the mother with



her", rather than "she took her mother".<sup>80</sup> This usage of the nominative mother - "the mother" - is positive, precise and particular as it can be interchangeably used instead of the personal possessive - "my mother", "his or her mother". Thus are drawn together three separate concepts: a transcendent concept of a mother; the person of an individual woman; and the role which that woman has in a particular relationship. This is a use of the English language which allows for a shift in understanding of the concept 'mother', and which can reinforce women's genealogies by providing an horizon. It also leads to a necessary revaluing of what might constitute essentialist representations in that context, as it is a site for rethinking "the mother" where the universal can constantly be drawn across to the particular or personal, and vice versa, and where a female transcendent in harmony with the real can be experienced. This is the "generic identity" described by Luce Irigaray, in which

there is no longer an opposition between particular and universal in the sense that the universal is already within me and does not have to be constructed outside of me. Of course, I am still subject to a historical particularity. But no longer is there any contradiction between the singularity of that history and a neuter(?) universal produced by a culture, a spirit. That tension is resolved within the horizon of belonging to a universal as generic identity.<sup>81</sup>

For Irish women artists searching for appropriate visual syntax, this is a reserve in the spoken language which allows for morphological shifts and changes to be made towards establishing intersubjective relations between the mother-daughter couple; a

---

80 The closest that English usage of the English language gets to this is in the use of "the wife" (as in "don't tell the wife" or "the wife's on the phone for you"); but this is specific to male usage, and indicates in varying degrees disparagement, fear, or loathing. "The wife" becomes a figure against whom men are pitted, and she is invoked in the search for male bonding. There may be similar constructions to the Irish in local dialects in Britain, but in distinction from this, the Irish is notable for its cross-class, cross-region, and non-dialect-specific occurrence.

81 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*, p. 144/*J'aime à toi*, p. 225.



reserve of the representation, 'woman', in its particularity in Irish culture. It is a reserve where language can be retraversed as a result of politicization, rather than left as a site for hysterical mimetism; a space where a woman can "ceaselessly measure herself against her beginning and her sexuate determination, beget anew the maternal within her, give birth within herself to mother and daughter in a never-completed progression".<sup>82</sup> Moreover, it is a reserve in the particular representational system for development of an imagery of the universal as mediation between women. This is an unusual space (as Luce Irigaray points out, in general "our discourse is incapable of rethinking a universal as mediation and not as truth resulting from arbitrary forms"<sup>83</sup>), not only where the English language is spoken, but within other European languages also. The concept does not occur in the Irish language (Irish gaelic), and native speakers and translators of Irish to whom I have spoken are unable to account for the shift.<sup>84</sup> It is only possible to speculate here on the relation between the suppression of Irish, the suppression of Irish culture, the development of representational tropes such as 'Mother Ireland', and this structure in Hiberno-English. Certainly the women's movement in Ireland has an ability to cross class and party political differences in a manner which is a revelation to British feminists

Approaches to figuration and representation of women's bodies have developed among Irish women artists in a manner which is quite distinct from that seen in Britain, Europe or the USA. One

---

82 Luce Irigaray, 'Limits of the Transference', p. 109/'La limit du transfert', p. 297.

83 Luce Irigaray, 'The Universal as Mediation', in *Sexes and Genealogies*, pp. 125-149 (p. 128)/'L'universel comme médiation', in *Sexes et Parentés*, pp. 139-164 (pp. 142-143).

84 I would like to thank in particular Fiach Mac Conghail, Director, Project Arts Centre, Dublin, and Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith, University College, Dublin, for advice on this matter.



factor in this is the position of modernism, which, with its discourse of the universal as ultimate singular truth, is the culture of the colonisers, not of the colonised or the post-colonial. Ireland is a post-colonial state, and as such has a tangential relationship to modernist culture.<sup>85</sup> This, I would like to suggest, has further allowed for the development of a feminism and a related women's culture of representation and difference distinct from those developed in England and the USA. But further, the Hiberno-English construction of "the mother" gives space for criticism, development, change. This is the conceptual and representational space where many Irish women choose to work. It is against this background, I would argue, that the successes and failures of many Irish women artists should be measured. Anglophone feminist art criticism has found the work made in this space hard to acknowledge:<sup>86</sup> I have heard non-Irish feminists dismiss Irish women's work as "essentialist". This is in itself an essentializing and racist judgement, as it ignores the specificities of Irish cultural history. In using the term 'essentialist' as if essentialism were universal not only in its structures but also in its effects and symptoms, such a judgement is often spoken from within a construction of 'Irishness' (sometimes couched in 'positive',

---

85 This has produced some interesting anomalies: two of literature's key modernists, Samuel Beckett and James Joyce, lived in self-imposed exile from their Irish home; and in Irish visual art the absence of the modernist, masculinist avant garde left space for a woman painter raised in the Unionist Anglo-Irish ascendancy, Mainie Jellett, to become the major proponent of modernist painting in Ireland. For a response to a contesting of Ireland's post-colonial identity, see Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* pp. 174-176.

86 In all the books on my shelves charting a broad range of feminist art practices there are just three books with any mention of work by Irish women: Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscurity and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992) discusses work by Mary Duffy, pp. 77-78; Jo Anna Isaak, *Feminism and Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter* (London: Routledge, 1996), discusses work by Kathy Prendergast (pp. 165-171) and mentions Dorothy Cross (p. 165); and my own 'Border Crossings: Womanliness, Body, Representation', in *New Feminist Art Criticism: Critical Strategies*, ed. by Katy Deepwell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 138-146, mentions briefly Mary Duffy (p. 114), Anne Tallentire (p. 115-6) and a Pauline Cummins/Louise Walsh collaboration (pp. 142-3).



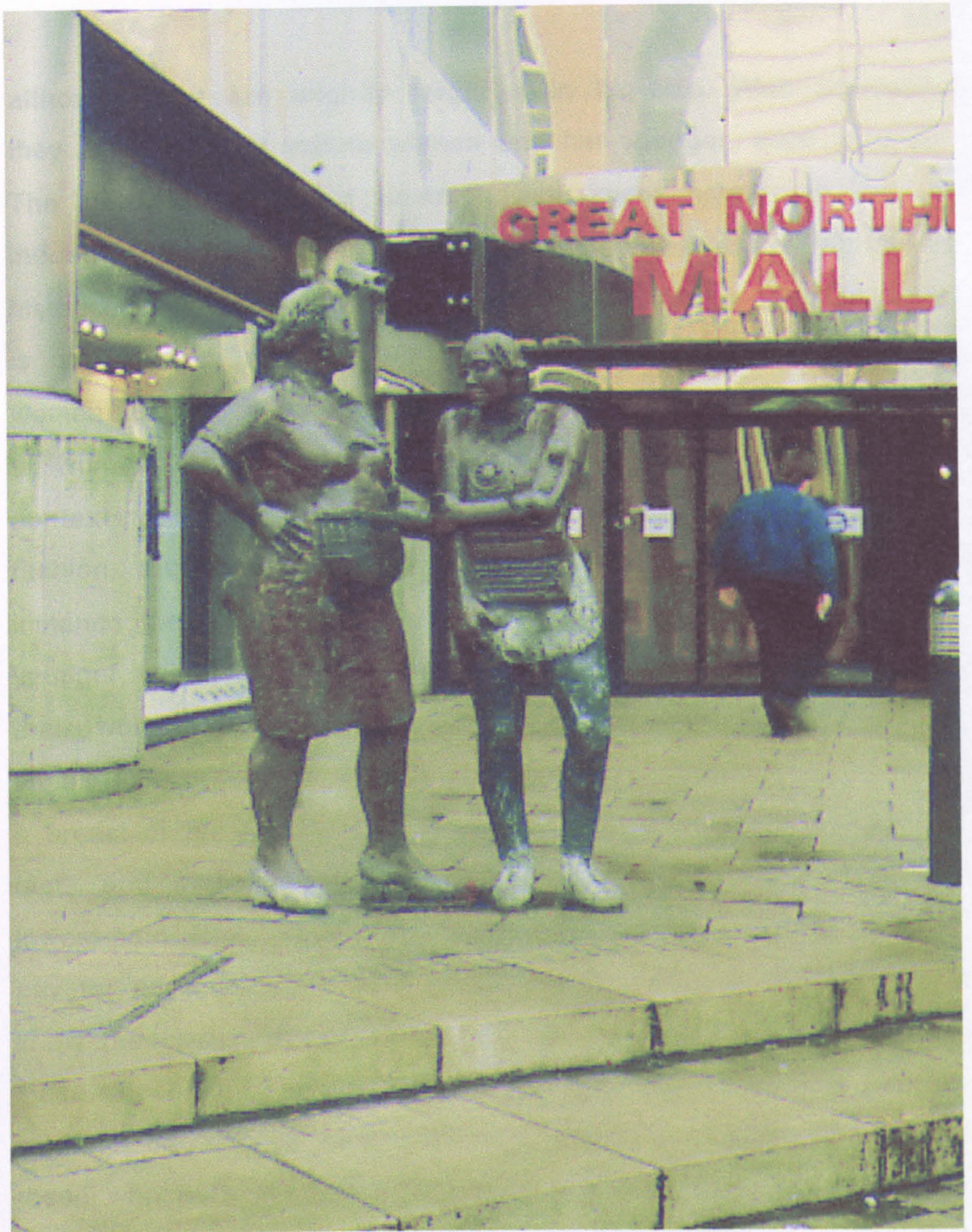
romantic terms) as already primitive, wild, spiritual and close to nature. Add retrograde notions of 'femininity' to this, and the colonialist trap for Irish women would be complete. But if Irish women are starting from a place of difference (differences of history, of culture, of politics, even - as I have demonstrated - subtle and crucial differences of language and concepts of womanliness), and if they are prompted by the women's movement to enter the reserve of representation that can be found in this usage of the term 'the mother', then Irish women artists may begin to produce representations of women's genealogies and objects of inter-subject mediation as a result of their exploration of appropriate strategies to deal with that position of difference. This will have little to do with embracing or maintaining a fundamentally essentialist position according to English or USA criteria.<sup>87</sup> I would like to discuss two very different artworks in light of this. My aim here is not to claim that these works embody aspects of Luce Irigaray's thinking, but rather to indicate the ways in which they can be read as disrupting the present discourses structuring the representation, 'woman', in Ireland

Louise Walsh's *Monument to the low paid women workers* (1993) (plate 28) mimeticizes monumental or commemorative public sculpture. In the tradition of western civic sculpture, the piece is made of cast bronze and stands in a busy city street. Unusually, the two sculpted figures do not stand on a plinth but on the ground,

---

87 It is interesting that the attacks on Luce Irigaray's 'essentialism' have come primarily from critics in the USA, where a need to counter reductive or racist identity politics may mean that some forms of difference - including European differences - are not recognised. See for example Christine Dolphy, 'The Invention of French Feminism: an Essential Move', *Yale French Studies*, 87 (1995), pp. 190-221, for an analysis of 'New French Feminism' as a designation which has meaning only in Anglo-American academia, and none in France. Toril Moi, 'Feminism, Postmodernism, and Style: Recent Feminist Criticism in the United States', *Cultural Critique*, 1 (1988), 3-22, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'French Feminism in an International Frame', in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 134-153 both map out differences between developments in feminist theory in different geographical locations.





Louise Walsh  
*Monument to the Low-Paid Women Workers*  
1993. Bronze, 84" high  
Photograph by the author



although they are slightly larger than life-size. Also unusually, they are female: a mature woman and her younger, adult daughter. The city is Belfast: in common with most nineteenth century industrial western cities its public sculptures show figures of historical men and allegorical women. In one respect this sculpture is not unusual, as its figures are not representative of individual women. Instead it seeks to make visible a class or categorisation of women - the low-paid women workers of the title - and the contexts of their lives. Each figure is sculpted in a realistic fashion, augmented by objects which make up their lives - for instance the older woman has a shopping basket for a belly; the younger has a typewriter. Their bodies literally carry the traces of their working lives: the accoutrements of low paid and unpaid female labour such as scrubbing brushes help form a shoulder here, a breast or an arm there. Additionally, inscribed upon them are the facts and statistics of work for these women - listings of the lowest-paid jobs, traditionally women's occupations; the rates of pay for particular jobs; and so on. But in order to read these, to know the circumstances of life for these women, you have to get close, become intimately acquainted with them, as the type is small. It becomes a wider political analysis in a public place: only those who care enough to get close will ever know. Although the work represents the two women situated within a patriarchal economic structure, it does not show them as victims. The older woman is standing tall, physically solid, head held upright and a look of confidence - some might see it as challenge - on her handsome face. The daughter is slighter; her head and body turn a little towards her mother, as if seeking reassurance in her strength. The sculpture is not expressionistic in any way; the figures have not been given theatrical emotive gestures. Instead,



the gestures are everyday ones, eloquent of a quiet dignity and a clear affectionate bond between the two women.

Among men in the Belfast art world, feelings about the work appear ambivalent: it cannot be easily assimilated into the usual terms of the modernist/post-modernist debate. It does not aspire conceptually or formally to 'the universal' as it is understood within that debate, but primarily functions as a mediation of female experience and the politics of gender, rather than the preferred political content for work in Belfast, the so-called 'troubles'. However, it is also clear from anecdotal and verbal evidence that the sculpture is held in high esteem by women in Belfast across class and political or sectarian categories: "my mother always touches them as she goes for the bus", one woman said to me, "and she's always so 'proper' in public!". In women's positive responses we can begin to see an empathy with Luce Irigaray's own anecdotal telling (as mentioned earlier) of her reaction to seeing a sculpture of Anne and Mary: "I felt returned calmly and joyously into my body, my emotions, and my history as a woman".<sup>88</sup>

It was this experience that confirmed for Luce Irigaray the importance of positive representations of mother and daughter couples and led her to urge for the placing of such works in public and domestic settings. Part of this is the adaption of extant traditions of representation; for her, living in a Catholic country, this includes images of Mary and Anne. In the Republic of Ireland (some 95% Catholic) representations of Mary are embedded in the

---

88 Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous*, p. 25/*Je, tu, nous*, p. 26. Translation modified.



broader culture to an extent that they are not in Northern Ireland, which is 38% Catholic, and has its Protestant churches dominated by an iconoclastic Presbyterianism. In Belfast, a city utterly divided in its housing, schooling, employment and national allegiances, and riven by decades of what can be best described as low-grade civil war, where the only thing the two sides seem to agree on is their need to control women's bodies and their anti-abortion stance,<sup>89</sup> the public political message to women has often appeared to be that sexual politics are a containable side issue, and political organization between women has been restricted to non-aligned women or to the Peace Movement.<sup>90</sup> In such a context, Walsh's sculpture has enormous potential as a channel of mediation for Belfast women.

In the spring of 1996 the Irish Museum of Modern Art hosted the touring exhibition *Distant Relations: A Dialogue Among Chicano, Irish and Mexican Artists*. Curated by the American Tricia Ziff, and predicated upon a supposed rapport between Ireland and Mexico as Catholic countries dominated by Protestant neighbours, the exhibition was generally criticized in Ireland for its reductive notions of Irishness and Irish national identity. However, some individual works were eloquent of a more interesting complexity,

---

89 This was expressed by a speaker from the floor at one of a number of public meetings and lectures in Belfast given by African-American activist Angela Davies in 1996. The rest of the audience clearly signalled agreement.

90 One prominent Republican woman told me that since the 1970s women could not be accepted within the organised women's movement in the North as feminists unless they supported the Peace Movement thus relinquishing struggle for national or cultural identity. This contrasts strongly with at least one strand of the British women's movement. The special 'Irish issue' of *Spare Rib* (August 1989) eulogised women in the Northern Republican movement such as those in Sinn Féin, while ignoring the peace movement, Northern protestant women, and Southern feminists. In the mid-1990s the situation in the North has changed slightly, with the founding in 1996 of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition. This is a political party which is inclusive of women from both Republican and Loyalist backgrounds, as well as Unionist, Nationalist and non-aligned backgrounds. It is also cross-class. In May 1996 representatives were elected to the Northern Ireland Forum and the Peace Talks. It develops consensus positions on all aspects of policy, including 'the constitutional question'.



and as each artist's work was curated in separate rooms it was possible to give each one particular attention. Fran Hegarty exhibited the final version of a video installation which had previously been exhibited in differing forms: *Turas* (Journey) (1991-1995) (plate 29). In a room to itself, *Turas* had two main elements. Down the middle of the floor were a series of light boxes with images of the surface of a river. This led to the far wall, on which was projected a video. A sequence of seven scenes were shown on a loop. On the left of the image sits an older woman, facing the camera; on the right, in profile, a woman approaching middle age. Each scene starts with a close up of the hands of the younger woman touching the elder in a gesture which speak of the possibility of communication from elder to younger: fingers touching the place of the elder woman's voice box; fingers touching a book in her hands; and so on. The camera pulls back to hold both women in frame; then finally the younger woman stands and leaves. We hear a voice speaking haltingly in Irish: "An dtig leat cuidiú liom Gaeilge a labhairt arís?". The voice changes to that of an older woman saying "Thiocfaidh liom cuidiú leat Gaeilge a labhairt, cinnte". In the final sequence she collects the book from the elder woman's hands and leaves with it. Then the whole set of scenes repeat. The Irish cannot be exactly translated into English, but would be understood as "Do you [think / believe / feel] you could [give / teach] me Irish again?" and "I do [think / believe / feel] that I could [give / teach] you Irish, surely".

It is possible to read a morphological relationship between the representations in this work and the Hiberno-English structuring of 'the mother'. I recognize the younger woman as the artist, and know the elder to be her mother; it is their voices on the tape. This is





Frances Hegarty  
*Turas (Journey)*  
1990-1995. Video still  
Courtesy of the Artist



privileged information, not available to the majority who see the work; I mention it not to add 'authenticity' to any narrative reading into the work, but rather to demonstrate the morphological structures at different levels of it. In a letter the artist told me "you wouldn't believe the consternation it all caused back in Teelin when I phoned some friends for the correct spelling. I was passed from house to house all week with no one agreeing on any word [...]. The meaning of the words in brackets is more in the emphasis of the spoken maternal voice than its written form".<sup>91</sup> Governmental rationalizing of spelling (replacing certain letter combinations with accents) and centralizing of Irish language teaching, combined with highly localized accents, word and sentence structure, ensure a tension between the mother's speech and its abstraction into writing. Her certainty that her speech can be transmitted is not shared by the daughter, and died with her.<sup>92</sup> The answer for the daughter is in the gift-object of the old book from which the mother read, and which remains a mediation of the mothertongue: a chance for its legibility, rather than unmediated authenticity. Maintenance mimesis is not possible; but what is at stake is the possible trauma of total loss of mothertongue. The video sequences do have inscribed in them traces of histories particular to the artist and her family, but which are also common on the Irish west coast: traces of emigration, dispersal of culture and of language, shifting of culture through the diaspora, and the impossibility of return to any 'authenticity'; all granted extra poignancy through the death of an individual, and with her the death of particular usage of

---

91 Fran Hegarty, letter to the author, 4 February 1998.

92 On a personal note, the last time I met my mother-in-law before she died she offered to teach me her mothertongue - she was a Scots-Gaelic speaker from Skye - although her son had been brought up to speak only English so he could 'better himself'. The certainty that it can be transmitted unchanged is almost unbearably poignant.



Irish, and the end of possible mediation in a particular syntax between mother and daughter. The mother and daughter speak not just of their relationship, nor just of Fran Hegarty's trauma at the loss of her language, and their different historical processes, but of that possibility of mediation between them. Through repeated gestures of touching-upon and leaving, touching-upon and leaving, the daughter is struggling to realize the transcendent genealogy as mediated through her mothertongue, and thus the possibility of her own becoming. Fran Hegarty has written of *Turas*:

This [...] is where the Mothervoice offers itself as an alternative, a repository of knowledge and a fund of cultural energy with which to resist the effects of displacement. In *Turas*, the daughter's relationship the Mothertongue is not only gendered but predicated on a genealogical link with the maternal body. There is also an analogy between the separation from the mother and the emigrant's trauma of lost access to both language and the physical landscape.<sup>93</sup>

Through retraversing the Hiberno-English site of 'the mother' Fran Hegarty has produced a morphologically coherent space in which to speak of her mother, of her own history of being mothered, and finally of the loss and possibility of a transcendent genealogy. *Turas* speaks of the struggle to retrieve this loss through productive mimesis, and thus to become a woman.



## Conclusion.

But one apparently negative predicate still remains to [God]: that of invisibility. We keep invisible too, to a large extent, our sexual relation, our carnal act, especially through the mediation of woman. What birth takes place, is yet to come, between these two poles of invisibility? How can we discover and interpret its traces in discourse? How can we remodel existing languages {*langages*} so as to give place to a sexuate culture? That is what is at stake in my researches.<sup>1</sup>

The “becoming” in the title of this thesis can now be read in three ways: the ‘becoming’ qualities of the patriarchal masquerade, femininity; the aim of becoming subjects, women, shedding our being the representation, ‘woman’; and the ongoing unfolding of being in a state of becoming as those subjects - becoming (as) beauty.

There are a number of things that Luce Irigaray does not offer to women involved with art practice. She writes very little about visual art, and even less does she write about what art made by women might look like - either in its overall aesthetic, or its materiality, or its overt imagery. To do so would be to offer a form of security, but a false security: it would be to set a fixity to that which has not yet developed its porousness, nor recognised the sites of its limits. The *parler-femme* and the witnessing-woman, enunciations in a syntax appropriate to women and through a morphologic which respects women’s “natural” and spiritual ontology, are as yet hardly realized. Luce Irigaray’s work is of

---

<sup>1</sup> Luce Irigaray, ‘The Three Genres’, trans. by David Macey, in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwells, 1991), pp. 140-153 (p. 152)/‘Les trois genres’, in *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987), pp. 181-196 (pp. 195-196). Translation modified.



strategic use for creative practices in the analysis of how we might move from where we are now in the spheres of the political, the philosophical, and the performative, towards bringing this morphologic and its syntax in the Symbolic into being.

These strategic possibilities emerge primarily because of Luce Irigaray's active practice of productive mimesis - as an anti-patriarchal position, rather than a binary oppositional, separatist, or equal rights form of feminism. Her practice of mimesis (drawing together textual practices, civil rights, and the empirical woman) in tandem with her practice within an appropriate morphologic (a structural relationship between the enunciation and the sexuate subject) provide patterns for art practices as a set of discourses (including its interrelation with criticism), rather than producing models for such practices. In particular, the attempt to engage with a productive mimesis and to develop an appropriate morphologic can make us aware of places of resistance - reserves - in extant syntaxes. In doing so, we can recognize that we, as the subjects, women, are always elsewhere from the patriarchal site of the representation, 'woman', and we can identify the sites we have to re-traverse in order to expose their blind spots and in order to signify women in the Symbolic.

What Luce Irigaray provides us with, then, is a number of strategies, both pragmatic and philosophical, through which we can work as theoreticians and practitioners. These start from a recognition of the limits of the present Symbolic structures, in order to begin the development of appropriate syntaxes. This will inevitably involve a repossessing of images and a refiguration of our sexuate subjectivity, rather than a trust in the abstract: 'The



fact that this sort of language barely exists greatly restricts women's space for subjective freedom. It's possible to start to create it with everyday language'.<sup>2</sup> Crucially, it will develop discourses of representational economies which recognize sexuate subjectivity - economies which are, therefore, intersubjective, aware of the subject's limits and of *différance* rather than difference between the Same and its other.

This requires attention to be paid to the manner of mediation - its function in terms of subject-subject relations: in short, how artworks mediate between artist and audience. If women have existed in a state of immediacy with other subjects (if they have had no appropriate Symbolic for mediation) then one task - and this is a particular problem for artists - is to produce objects of mediation: gift space/objects, the third term, which allow for mediated, intersubjective relation. These are not the capitalized objects of phallogocentric discourse (familiar in the present mainstream art world), a discourse which closes down intersubjectivity by reducing the other subject to object status, to mirror status, to being nothing but the other of the same. Present phallogocentric discourse, in capitalizing art objects, does not require of them any more than the one-way mediation of the self of the artist. Mediation in intersubjectivity requests a two-way responsibility: it requires attentiveness from the subject audience. This suggests that there may be anti-patriarchal structures of looking at art, including gallery practices and the pre-writing aspects of criticism.

---

<sup>2</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 49/*Je, tu, nous: pour une culture de la difference* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), p.56.



Finally, while Luce Irigaray's writing does not tell artists what to say through their practice, it is clear that none of the above will be able to be worked upon without some concomitant - morphologically appropriate - sense of the transcendent and thus of the spiritual or divine and of women's genealogies. Here, Luce Irigaray offers particular suggestions of representational practices: but they are pragmatically strategic, rooted in the knowledge of what is possible while working through the Symbolic presently available to us. They are concerned with creating gift space/objects which mediate between women (including in domestic spaces and between mothers and daughters), which do not perform a maintenance mimesis of patriarchal languages, and particularly not of the representation, 'women' within those languages; which respect women as subjects, not reducing them to objects or to mothers; which recognize the subject's limits and her transcendental.

The question to be asked at this point is: What is to be done now? Given the above findings, what are the tasks for feminists concerned with progressing the theories of art, whether as artists or as writers? Most pressing, I would say, is the need to identify where Luce Irigaray's analysis can be most productively juxtaposed with current feminist theories of art so they can, in Gayatri Spivak's dynamic term, "critically 'interrupt' each other, bring each other to crisis, in order to serve their constituencies",<sup>3</sup> in order not only to make legible artworks of the past, but also in order to provide spaces of discourse capable of providing a

---

3 Gayatri Spivak, 'A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: A Woman's Text from the Third World', in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 241-268 (p. 241). She was specifically referring to the historian and the teacher of literature, but this is a useful model for productive interdisciplinary engagement.



background against which artists can work in the future. I would like to conclude by outlining briefly how this might happen.

In two important recent essays, Griselda Pollock outlines the histories of feminist theories of and in Art History, and identifies areas of possible development and tasks for feminist critical practices.<sup>4</sup> These practices are ones which work antagonistically towards the present curatorial impulse of Art History, with its categorization according to dates and styles, and instead looks for differently structured “spaces of femininity”:

Yet the meanings of works produced by women will only become vivid to us when we can articulate what is particular to them, what makes them different from the existing norms, and when we define signifying temporalities quite other than those of styles, movements, avant-garde innovations and so forth. We are searching for ways to acknowledge the ‘spaces of femininity’ and its subjective temporalities in the rhythms of women’s lived experience within and against the hierarchies of sexual difference as that is configured in complex social formations of class, race and sexuality.<sup>5</sup>

These “spaces of femininity” are far from being the masquerading ‘femininity’ of Freudian terminology. Griselda Pollock identifies ‘the feminine’ as being a radical rupture of patriarchy, and denies the binary oppositional position of being the other of phallogocentric man’s same: “feminism has needed to develop forms of analysis that can confront the difference of women as *other* than what is *other* to this masculine order while exposing the sexual politics of dominant discourses and institutions”.<sup>6</sup> In order for the spaces of femininity to be legible as sites of mediation, we need to search

---

4 Griselda Pollock, ‘The Politics of Theory: Generations and Geographies in Feminist Theory and the Histories of Art Histories’, in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, ed. by Griselda Pollock (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 3-21; ‘Inscriptions in the Feminine’, in *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art, In, Of, and From the Feminine*, ed. by M. Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 67-87.

5 Griselda Pollock, ‘The Politics of Theory’, p. 8.

6 Griselda Pollock, ‘Inscriptions in the Feminine’, p. 71.



for, and develop, what Griselda Pollock calls (drawing upon Mary Kelly's writing of the 1970s) "inscriptions in the feminine":

The phrase, "inscriptions in the feminine," has an archaeological ring to it. As if deciphering an ancient culture whose language is lost while its strange monuments remain to puzzle and provoke our curiosity, we must assume that we do not yet know what is being traced upon the surface of culture by artists speaking in, from, or of the feminine. A feminist reading for the inscriptions of the feminine means listening for the traces of a subjectivity formed in the feminine within and in conflict with a phallogentric system. Beyond that, it implies figuring out what working from that place, however unconsciously, might be *producing*, as yet unarticulated, unrepresented, unsignified, unrecognized.<sup>7</sup>

Already we can begin to find a structural (if not terminological) rapport between Griselda Pollock's analysis of the present moment, and that of Luce Irigaray. In the notion of "the spaces of femininity" and "artists speaking in, from, or of the feminine" there are echoes of the morphology appropriate to women as a site of mediation and productive of an appropriate syntax. There are echoes too of sites of Irigarayan 'reserve' as sites for re-entering as strategies of resistance and rupture.

This indicates one of the present points of tension: terminology. As of yet, although there may be areas of rapport between Luce Irigaray's work and Griselda Pollock's theorizing of the discourses of art, the use of terminology is far from agreed. In the short term this might be a problem, as differences of terminology (particularly across cultures and languages) can mean even further lack of legibility. In the longer term, however, this might prove more healthy: painstaking negotiation over terminology avoids the capitalization of phrases, their reduction into mere translation (or maintenance mimesis) of extant terminology, their collapse into containable quasi-objects rather than dynamic processes aiding

---

7 Griselda Pollock, *ibid.*, p. 74.



women becoming subjects. I am thinking here of terms such as 'difference' being mis-understood as 'other', and thus maintaining a phallic norm; or a 'feminine space' collapsing into celebration of the masquerade of femininity in Freudian terms; or the way in which 'écriture féminine' was dismissable as somehow both essentialist and something to do with surface style.<sup>8</sup> For theoreticians to keep the spaces of terminology open through continual processes of resistance and open discourse can only rebuff assumptions and misreadings, and eventually do what is most difficult: help shift embedded ways of thinking. Such terms (including, of course, the ones I have identified in this thesis) may stretch structures of thinking and mark sites of intervention, but for them to become art-critical shorthand for style would be to miss the point. Neither the discussion of Griselda Pollock, nor the implications of that of Luce Irigaray, indicate a prescription of style or of media. However, as we have seen, for an artist unthinkingly to mimic technical means (including style of use of media, composition, imagery, gesture, etc.) can undermine absolutely any assumed feminist voice in the artwork. As Toril Moi says in criticizing Jane Gallop on styles of writing:

Jane Gallop is right to claim that to take up a style is to take up a position, but she is wrong to recommend a single stylistic move as uniquely feminist, just as she is wrong to assume that style can be analyzed without regard to contents and the specific historical space where it makes its intervention.<sup>9</sup>

Griselda Pollock outlines the theoretical work of artist and

---

8 These seem crude examples; but the crudities of studio Fine Art courses (a site to which I am committed) is often a bottom line for the (mis)interpretation of theoretical work. I am thinking for example of students such as the one who, after reading critiques of Derrida for his final year essay, announced to a colleague that he wished to write his essay "in a stream of consciousness style".

9 Toril Moi, 'Feminism, Postmodernism, and Style: Recent Feminist Criticism in the United States', *Cultural Critique*, 1 (1988), 3-22 (p. 22).



psychoanalyst Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger and describes how it offers a potential articulation of the 'feminine':

Lichtenberg Ettinger theorizes a way to imagine the Symbolic expanded to contain more than one symbol - more than one "signifier of signifiers" for subjectivity. Neither replacing nor merely supplementing the phallus, itself *the* signifier for subjectivity based on the opposition of on/off, absence/presence, and all related binaries of assimilation versus rejection, she proposes the matrix, a symbol of coexisting and coemerging part-subjectivities that holds special promise for women, for whom this aspect has particular and profound resonance in allowing elements of their feminine but invisible bodily specificity and the fantasies to which it gives rise to filter into signification.<sup>10</sup>

Once again, there are structural resonances between aspects of this and aspects of Luce Irigaray's thought. Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger goes further than Luce Irigaray in proposing "more than one symbol". Irigaray proposes the "double syntax" and syntactical signification, produced through an appropriate morphology, while Lichtenberg Ettinger proposes the 'matrix' as a neutral term (alongside reasserting the phallus as a neutral term) productive of a space which relates to Irigaray's 'morphologic' in allowing mediation or a 'filtering' of subjectivity into signification.

The significance of an artist producing this work is of course profound, not least because of the very real knowledge she would have of the struggle to produce significations in the realm of the visual as well as through verbal language.<sup>11</sup> Griselda Pollock indicates the questions for art theory (including that produced by artists through their work) provoked by Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger's writing:

Lichtenberg Ettinger's suggestion that there may be more than one symbol (the one being the phallus that forces us to think of sex as the One and its Other, and thus in fact always and only as the One) opens up art criticism to ask: What is involved in a nonphallic, matrixial reading of an artistic text? What

---

10 Griselda Pollock, 'Inscriptions in the Feminine', p. 79.

11 This is not to deny the obvious: that we all work with visual significations of gesture, clothing, etc., but rather to stress the particularities of producing artworks as signifiers.



would be a matrixial exhibition? The matrix reveals the sexual difference at work in our forms of knowledge, interpretation, and curatorship and once acknowledged will change the politics of selection, viewing, and response.<sup>12</sup>

These questions can find a correlation in some that I have been attempting to ask in this thesis: What is a morphologically appropriate, nonphallic, reading of an artwork? If there is more than one syntax in the Symbolic, how does that syntax become legible? What are the processes of reading nonphallically, intersubjectively? How, ultimately, can we shift the deeply phallogentric present discourses of the artworld? While Luce Irigaray's 'morphologic' and 'double syntax', Griselda Pollock's 'spaces of femininity', and Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger's 'matrix' do not map exactly upon one another, it is in what I detect to be a fruitful tension between these terms that I feel the grounds for most optimism. It is here that I think we have the most likely space for the realization, in the possibilities of their art, the becoming beauty of the subjects, women.

---

12 Griselda Pollock, 'Inscriptions in the Feminine', p. 81.



## Bibliography

- Adams, Gerry, "S é an rud é, cultar, ná an méid a dhéanann sé (Culture is What Culture Does)", in *Distant Relations/Cercanias Distantes/Clann I gCéin: Chicano, Irish, Mexican Art and Critical Writing*, ed. by Trisha Ziff (Santa Monica: Smart Art Press, 1995), pp. 228-233
- Allen, Jeffner and Iris Marion Young, eds., *The Thinking Muse: Feminism and Modern French Philosophy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989)
- Antoni, Janine, *Slip of the Tongue* (Glasgow and Dublin: CCA and IMMA, 1995)
- Balzano, Wanda, 'Irishness - Feminist and Post-Colonial', in *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, ed. by Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 92-98
- Barrett, Michèle and Anne Phillips, *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992)
- Baruch, Elaine Hoffman and Lucienne Serrano, *Women Analyze Women in France, England and The United States* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988)
- Battersby, Christine, *Gender and Genius* (London: The Women's Press, 1989)
- Battersby, Christine, 'Just Jamming: Irigaray, Painting and Psychoanalysis', in *New Feminist Art Criticism: Critical Strategies*, ed. by Katy Deepwell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 128-137
- Battersby, Christine, 'Situating the Aesthetic: A Feminist Defence', in *Thinking Art: Beyond Traditional Aesthetics*, ed. by Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1991), pp 31-43
- Bauer, Dale M. and Susan Jaret McKinstry, eds., *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991)
- Benjamin, Andrew, and Peter Osborne, eds., *Thinking Art: Beyond Traditional Aesthetics* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1991)
- Berg, Maggie, 'Luce Irigaray's "Contradictions": Poststructuralism and Feminism', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 17.1 (1991), 50-70
- Berry, Philippa, 'The Burning Glass', in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. by Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 229-246
- Berry, Philippa, 'Woman and Space According to Kristeva and Irigaray', in Philippa Berry and Andrew Wernick, eds., *Shadow of Spirit: Postmodernism and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 250-264
- Berry, Philippa and Andrew Wernick, eds., *Shadow of Spirit: Postmodernism and*



*Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992)

Betterton, Rosemary, *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body* (London: Routledge, 1996)

Blyth, R. H., *Zen and Zen Classics: IV: Mumonkan* (Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1966)

Bock, Gisela, and Susan James, eds., *Beyond Equality and Difference: Citizenship, Feminist Politics and Female Subjectivity* (London: Routledge, 1992)

Boland, Eavan, *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996)

Braidotti, Rosi, 'Body-Images and the Pornography of Representation', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 1.2 (November 1991), 137-151

Braidotti, Rosi, 'Feminism and Modernity', *Free Inquiry*, 15.2 (Spring 1995), 23-29

Braidotti, Rosi, 'Of Bugs and Women: Irigaray and Deleuze on the Becoming-Woman', in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. by Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 111-137

Braidotti, Rosi, 'On the Female Feminist Subject, Or: From "She-Self" to "She-Other"', in *Beyond Equality and Difference: Citizenship, Feminist Politics and Female Subjectivity*, ed. by Gisela Bock and Susan James, (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 177-192

Braidotti, Rosi, 'The Politics of Ontological Difference' in *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Theresa Brennan (London: Routledge, 1989)

Brennan, Theresa, ed., *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1989)

Brennan, Teresa and Martin Jay, eds., *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight* (London: Routledge, 1996)

Broude, Norma and Mary Garrard, eds., *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact* (New York: Harry H. Abrams, 1994)

Brown, Derek and others, eds., *MHRA Style Book: Notes for Authors, Editors, and Writers of Theses*, 5th edn. (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1996)

Burgin, Victor, James Donald and Cora Kaplan, eds. *Formations of Fantasy* (London: Methuen, 1986)

Burke, Carolyn, 'Introduction to Luce Irigaray's "When our Two Lips Speak Together"', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* (1980) 6.1 (66-68)

Burke, Carolyn, 'Translation Modified: Irigaray in English', in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. by Carolyn Burke,



- Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 249 - 261
- Burke, Carolyn, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford, eds, *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994)
- Butler, Judith, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993)
- Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990)
- Callois, Roger, 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia', trans. by John Shepley, *October*, 31 (1984), 17-32
- Campbell, Kate, ed., *Critical Feminism: Argument in the Disciplines* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992)
- Central London Women Against Violence Against Women, 'What is Pornography?', *Spare Rib*, 118 (1982), 52-55
- Chambers, Iain, and Lidia Curti, eds., *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (London: Routledge, 1996)
- Chanter, Tina, *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray's Rewriting of the Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 1995)
- Chisholm, Dianne, 'Irigaray's Hysteria', in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. by Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 263-283
- Cicioni, Mirna, "'Love and Respect, Together": The Theory and Practice of Affidamento in Italian Feminism', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 10 (1989), 71-83
- Clark, Kenneth, *The Nude: a Study of Ideal Art* (London: John Murray, 1956)
- Condren, Mary, *The Serpent and the Goddess: Women, Religion and Power in Celtic Ireland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1989)
- Coward, Rosalind, *Female Desire: Women's Sexuality Today* (London: Paladin, 1984)
- Cullingford, Elizabeth Butler, "'Thinking of Her ... as ... Ireland": Yeats, Pearse and Heaney', *Textual Practice*, 4.1 (1990), 1-21
- Curthoys, Jean, *Feminist Amnesia: The Wake of Women's Liberation* (London: Routledge, 1997)
- Deepwell, Katy, ed., *New Feminist Art Criticism: Critical Strategies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995)
- Delphy, Christine, 'The invention of French Feminism: An Essential Move', *Yale French Studies*, 87 (1995), 190-221



- Derrida, Jacques, *Positions*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981)
- Desmond, Jane C., ed., *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997)
- Deutscher, Penelope, 'Irigaray Anxiety: Luce Irigaray and her Ethics for Improper Selves', *Radical Philosophy*, 80 (1996), 6-16
- Deutscher, Penelope, "'The Only Diabolical Thing about Women...': Luce Irigaray on Divinity", *Hypatia* (fall 1994), 9.4 (88-111)
- Donovan, Josephine, 'Everyday Use and Moments of Being', in *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective*, ed. by Hilda Hein and Caroline Korsmeyer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 53-67
- Duchen, Claire, *Feminism in France from May '68 to Mitterand* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986)
- Duchen, Claire, *French Connections: Voices from the Women's Movement in France* (London: Hutchinson, 1987)
- Dworkin, Andrea, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (London: The Women's Press, 1981)
- Ekman, Joanna, ed., *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory, Works 1982-1993* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1994)
- Elliot, Patricia, *From Mastery to Analysis: Theories of Gender in Psychoanalytic Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991)
- Ellis, John, 'Photography/Pornography/Art/Pornography', *Screen*, 21.1 (Spring 1980), 81-108
- Ettinger, Bracha Lichtenberg, 'Matrix and Metramorphosis', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 4.3 (1992), 176-208
- Ettinger, Bracha Lichtenberg, *The Matrixial Gaze* (Leeds: Feminist Arts and Histories Network, 1995)
- Fletcher, John, 'Versions of Masquerade', *Screen*, 29.3 (1988), 43-70
- Foster, Hal, ed., *Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1985)
- Fowler, Joan, 'King Billy and Mother Ireland in Mirrors', *The Oxford Art Journal*, 14.2 (1991), 104-107
- Freud, Sigmund, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *The Penguin Freud Library XI: On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991) pp. 269-338
- Freud, Sigmund, 'Family Romances', in *The Penguin Freud Library VII: On Sexuality*,



- trans. by James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 221-225
- Freud, Sigmund, *The Penguin Freud Library VII: On Sexuality*, trans. by James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991)
- Freud, Sigmund, *The Penguin Freud Library XI: On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991)
- Fuss, Diana J, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1990)
- Gallop, Jane, *Thinking Through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988)
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., 'Significant Others', *Contemporary Literature*, 29.4 (1988), 606-623
- Gebauer, Gunter and Christoph Wulf, *Mimesis: Culture, Art, Society*, trans. by Don Reneau (London: University of California Press, 1995)
- Gibbons, Luke, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996)
- Goldman, Shifra, "Portraying Ourselves": Contemporary Chicana Artists', in *Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology*, ed. by Arlene Raven, Cassandra Langer, and Joanna Frueh (New York: IconEditions, 1991) pp. 187-205
- Grosz, Elizabeth, 'Conclusion: A Note on Essentialism and Difference', in Sneja Gunew, ed., *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct* (London: Routledge, 1990) pp 332 - 344
- Grosz, Elizabeth, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1989)
- Grosz, Elizabeth, *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (London: Routledge, 1995)
- Grosz, Elizabeth, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994)
- Gunew, Sneja, ed., *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct* (London: Routledge, 1990)
- Heaney, Seamus, *North* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973)
- Heath, Stephen, 'Difference', *Screen*, 19.3 (Autumn 1978), 51-112
- Heath, Stephen, 'Joan Riviere and the Masquerade', in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. by Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 45-61
- Hein, Hilda, and Carolyn Korsmeyer, eds., *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993)



- Higonnet, Anne, *Berthe Morisot's Images of Women* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992)
- Holmlund, Christine, 'I Love Luce: The Lesbian, Mimesis and Masquerade in Irigaray, Freud and Mainstream Film', *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics*, 9 (Winter 1989), 105 - 123
- Holmlund, Christine, 'The Lesbian, the Mother, the Heterosexual Lover: Irigaray's Recodings of Difference', *Feminist Studies*, 17.2 (Summer 1991), 283-308
- Hufton, Olwen, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe. Volume One 1500-1800* (London: HarperCollins, 1995)
- Irigaray, Luce, 'A Natal Lacuna', *Women's Art Magazine* (1994) 58 (11-13)
- Irigaray, Luce, *Amante marine de Friedrich Nietzsche* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980)
- Irigaray, Luce, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London: The Athlone Press, 1993)
- Luce Irigaray, 'An Interview with Luce Irigaray', interview by Kiki Amsberg and Aafke Steenhuis, *Hecate*, 1.1/2 (1983), 192-202
- Irigaray, Luce, 'And the one doesn't stir without the other', trans. by Hélène Vivienne Wenzel, *Signs*, 7.1 (1981), 60-67
- Irigaray, Luce, 'Body against Body: In Relation to the Mother', in *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. by Gillian C Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 7-21
- Irigaray, Luce, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1977)
- Irigaray, Luce, 'Comment créer notre beauté?', in *Je, tu, nous: pour un culture de la différence* (Paris: Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle, 1990)
- Irigaray, Luce, 'Divine Women', in *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. by Gillian C Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 55-72
- Irigaray, Luce, 'Each Sex Must Have its Own Rights', in *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. by Gillian C Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 1-5
- Irigaray, Luce, *Elemental Passions* (London: The Athlone Press, 1992)
- Irigaray, Luce, 'Equal to Whom?', trans. by Robert L Mazzola, in *The Essential Difference*, ed. by Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 63-81
- Irigaray, Luce, *Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1979)
- Irigaray, Luce, *Éthique de la différence sexuelle* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1984)



- Irigaray, Luce, 'Femmes divines', in *Sexes et parentés* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987), pp. 67-85
- Irigaray, Luce, 'Flesh Colours', in *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. by Gillian C Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 151-165
- Irigaray, Luce, 'How Can We Create Our Beauty', in *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, trans. by Alison Martin (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 107-111
- Irigaray, Luce, *I Love To You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History*, trans. by Alison Martin (London: Routledge, 1996)
- Irigaray, Luce, *J'aime à toi: esquisse d'une félicité dans l'histoire* (Paris: Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle, 1992)
- Irigaray, Luce, "Je - Luce Irigaray": A Meeting with Luce Irigaray', interview by Elizabeth Hirsh and Gary A. Olson, trans. by Elizabeth Hirsh and Gaëtan Brulotte, in *Women Writing Culture*, ed. by Gary A. Olson and Elizabeth Hirsh (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 141-166
- Irigaray, Luce, *Je, tu, nous: pour un culture de la différence* (Paris: Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle, 1990)
- Irigaray, Luce, *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, trans. by Alison Martin (London: Routledge, 1993)
- Irigaray, Luce, 'L'universel comme médiation', in *Sexes et parentés*, (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987), pp. 139-164
- Irigaray, Luce, 'La limit du transfert', in *Parler n'est jamais neutre* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985), pp. 293-304
- Irigaray, Luce, 'La nécessité de droits sexués', in *Sexes et parentés*, (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987), pp. 13-18
- Irigaray, Luce, 'Le corps-à-corps avec la mère', in *Sexes et parentés*, (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987), pp. 19-33
- Irigaray, Luce, 'Le genre féminin', in *Sexes et parentés* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987), pp. 199-138
- Irigaray, Luce, *Le langage des déments* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1973)
- Irigaray, Luce, *Le temps de la différence: pour une révolution pacifique* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1989)
- Irigaray, Luce, 'Les couleurs de la chair', in *Sexes et parentés* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987), pp. 165-179
- Irigaray, Luce, 'Les trois genres', in *Sexes et parentés* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987), pp. 181-196



Irigaray, Luce, 'Luce Irigaray', interview by Alice A. Jardine and Anne M. Menke, tr. Margaret Whitford, in *Shifting Scenes: Interviews on Women, Writing, and Politics in Post-68 France*, ed. by Alice A. Jardine and Anne M. Menke (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 97-103

Irigaray, Luce, 'Luce Irigaray: Paris, Summer 1980', interview by Elaine Hoffman Baruch and Lucienne Serrano, in *Women Analyze Women in France, England and the United States*, ed. by Elaine Hoffman Baruch and Lucienne Serrano (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988), pp. 147-164

Irigaray, Luce, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991)

Irigaray, Luce, 'Misère de la psychanalyse', in *Parler n'est jamais neutre* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985), pp. 253-279

Irigaray, Luce, *Parler n'est jamais neutre* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985)

Irigaray, Luce, *Passions élémentaires* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1982)

Irigaray, Luce, 'Questions to Emmanuel Levinas', trans. by Margaret Whitford, in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 179-189

Irigaray, Luce, *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. by Gillian C Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993)

Irigaray, Luce, *Sexes et parentés* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987)

Irigaray, Luce, *Speculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1974)

Irigaray, Luce, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C Gill (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985)

Irigaray, Luce, 'The Female Gender', trans. by Gillian C Gill, in *Sexes and Genealogies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 105-123

Irigaray, Luce, *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991)

Irigaray, Luce, 'The Limits of the Transference', trans. by David Macey, in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 105-117

Irigaray, Luce, 'The Poverty of Psychoanalysis', trans. by David Macey, in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 79-104

Irigaray, Luce, 'The Three Genders', in *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. by Gillian C Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 167-181

Irigaray, Luce, 'The Three Genres', trans. by David Macey, in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 140-153

Irigaray, Luce, 'The Universal as Mediation', in *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. by



Gillian C Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 125-149

Irigaray, Luce, 'Thinking Life as Relation: An Interview with Luce Irigaray', interview by Stephen Pluhacek and Heidi Bostic, trans. by Stephen Pluhacek, Heidi Bostic, and Luce Irigaray, *Man and World*, 29.4 (1996), 343-360

Irigaray, Luce, *Thinking the Difference: For a Peaceful Revolution*, trans. by Karin Montin (London: Athlone Press, 1994)

Irigaray, Luce, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985)

Irigaray, Luce, *Tra oriente e occidente: dalla singolarità alla comunità* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 1997)

Irigaray, Luce, 'Women-Mothers, the Silent Substratum of the Social Order', trans. by David Macey, in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 47-52

Irigaray, Luce, 'Women's Exile: Interview with Luce Irigaray', interview by Dianna Adlam & Couze Venn, trans. by Couze Venn, *Ideology and Consciousness*, 1 (1977), 62-76

Isaak, Jo Anna, *Feminism and Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter* (London: Routledge, 1996)

Jardine, Alice A., and Anne M. Menke, eds., *Shifting Scenes: Interviews on Women, Writing, and Politics in Post-68 France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991)

Jay, Martin, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993)

Jennings, Rose, *Laura Godfrey-Isaacs: Slime* (London: Sue Williams Gallery, 1993)

Jones, Amelia, ed., *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* (Los Angeles: UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art, 1996)

Jones, Ann Rosalind, 'Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of *l'écriture féminine*', *Feminist Studies*, 7.2 (Summer 1981), 247-263

Jones, Serene, 'Divining Women: Irigaray and Feminist Theologies', *Yale French Studies*, 87 (1995), 42-67

Joy, Morny, 'Equality or Divinity: A False Dichotomy?', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 6 (Spring 1990), 9-24

Karibian, Leah, and others, *Laura Godfrey-Isaacs: The Alien and the Domestic* (Winchester: Winchester Gallery at Winchester School of Art, 1994)

Kearney, Richard, *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997)



- Keizan, *Transmission of Light: Zen in the Art of Enlightenment*, trans. and intro. by Thomas Cleary (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990)
- Kelly, Eamon, *Sheela-na-Gigs: Origins and Functions* (Dublin: Country House in association with The National Museum of Ireland, 1996)
- Kelly, Mary, 'Reviewing Modernist Criticism', *Screen*, 22.3 (1981), 41-62
- Kelly, Mary and Griselda Pollock, 'Mary Kelly and Griselda Pollock in Conversation', in *Critical Feminism: Argument in the Disciplines*, ed. by Kate Campbell (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992), pp. 182-216
- Key, Joan, 'Models of Painting Practice: Too much Body?' in *New Feminist Art Criticism*, ed. by Katy Deepwell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 153-161
- Key, Joan, 'Unfold: Imprecations of Obscenity in the Fold', in *Other Than Identity: The Subject, Politics, and Art*, ed. by Juliet Steyn, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 185-197
- Kirili, Alan, 'The Passion for Sculpture: A Conversation with Louise Bourgeois', *Arts Magazine* (March 1989), 69-75
- Kotil, Charlotta, 'The Locus of Memory: An Introduction to the Work of Louise Bourgeois', in *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory, Works 1982-1993*, ed. by Joanna Ekman (New York: Harry Abrams, 1994), pp. 13-27
- Kozel, Susan, "'The Story is Told as a History of the Body": Strategies of Mimesis in the Work of Irigaray and Bausch', in *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance* ed. by Jane C. Desmond (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 101-109
- Kristeva, Julia, 'Revolution in Poetic Language', trans. by Margaret Waller, in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 88-136
- Kristeva, Julia, 'Stabat Mater', trans. by Léon S Roudiez, in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 160-186
- Kristeva, Julia, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986)
- Kuspit, Donald, 'Louise Bourgeois: Where Angels Fear to Tread', *Artforum* (March 1987), 115-121
- Kuykendall, Eleanor H, 'Subverting Essentialisms', *Hypatia*, 6.3 (Fall 1991), 208-217
- Lacan, Jacques, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, trans. by Alan Sheridan, intro. by David Macey (London: Penguin, 1994)
- Leigh, Christian, 'The Earrings of Madame B... : Louise Bourgeois and the Reciprocal Terrain of the Uncanny' in *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory, Works 1982-1993*, ed. by Joanna Ekman (New York: Harry Abrams, 1994), pp. 51-67



Lippard, Lucy, 'Louise Bourgeois from the Inside Out', *Artforum*, 13.7 (March 1975), 26-33

Lippard, Lucy, 'The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth: European and American Women's Body Art' (1976), in *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art*, (New York: The New Press, 1995), pp. 99-113

Lippard, Lucy, *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art*, (New York: The New Press, 1995)

Lippard, Lucy, 'The Women Artists' Movement: What Next?' (1975), in *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art* (New York: The New Press, 1995), pp. 80-83

Loftus, Belinda, *Mirrors: William III and Mother Ireland* (Dundrum: Picture Press, 1990)

Longley, Edna, *From Cathleen to Anorexia: The Breakdown of Irelands* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1990)

Lourde, Audre, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984)

Meaney, Gerardine, 'Sex and Nation: Women in Irish Culture and Politics', in *Irish Women's Studies Reader*, ed. by Ailbhe Smyth (Dublin: Attic Press, 1993), pp. 230-244

Meyer-Thoss, Christiane, *Louise Bourgeois: Konstruktionen für den Freien Fall/Designing for Free Fall* (Zurich: Amman, 1992)

Miller, Sarah E, 'Bringing up Demons', *Diacritics*, 18.1 (1988), 2-17

Mills, Lia, "'I Won't go Back to It": Irish Women Poets and the Iconic Feminine', *Feminist Review*, 50 (1995), 69-88

Minsky, Rosalind, *Psychoanalysis and Gender: An Introductory Reader* (London: Routledge, 1996)

Mitchell, Juliet and Rose, Jacqueline (ed), *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1982)

Moi, Toril, 'Feminism, Postmodernism, and Style: Recent Feminist Criticism in the United States', *Cultural Critique*, 1 (1988), 3-22

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

Morgan, Stuart, 'Louise Bourgeois', in *Rites of Passage* (London: Tate Gallery, 1996), pp. 54-57

Mortensen, Ellen, 'Woman's Untruth and *le féminin*: Reading Irigaray with Nietzsche and Heidegger', in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. by Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford (New York:



- Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 211-228
- Mullin, Molly, 'Representations of History, Irish Feminism and the Politics of Difference', *Feminist Studies*, 17.1 (1991), 29-50
- Mulvey, Laura, 'Changes: Thoughts on Myth, Narrative and Historical Experience', in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 159-176
- Mulvey, Laura, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1989)
- Mulvey, Laura, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16.3 (Autumn 1975), 6-18
- Mulvey, Laura, 'You Don't Know What is Happening, Do You, Mr Jones?', *Spare Rib*, 8 (1973), 13-16, 30
- Nead, Lynda, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992)
- Ní Dhomhnaill, Nuala, 'What Foremothers?', *Poetry Ireland Review*, 36 (1993), 18-31
- Nickson, Elizabeth, 'Learning Curves', *The Guardian*, 8 April 1996, section 2, p. 7
- Nicoletta, Julie, 'Louise Bourgeois's *Femmes-Maisons*: Confronting Lacan', *Women's Art Journal* (Fall/Winter, 1992-3), 21-26
- Nixon, Mignon, 'Bad Enough Mother', *October*, 71 (1995), 71-92
- O'Faolain, Julia and Lauro Martines, *Not in God's Image: Women in History* (London: Virago, 1979)
- Olson, Gary A and Elizabeth Hirsh, eds., *Women Writing Culture* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995)
- Orton, Fred, and Pollock, Griselda, *Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996)
- Owens, Craig, 'The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism', in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Hal Foster (London: Pluto Press, 1985), pp. 57-82
- Parker, Rozsika, 'Censored', *Spare Rib*, 54 (1977), 43-45
- Phelan, Peggy, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993)
- Pollock, Griselda, ed., *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (London: Routledge, 1996)
- Pollock, Griselda, 'Inscriptions in the Feminine', in *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art, In, Of, and From the Feminine*, ed. by M. Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 67-87
- Pollock, Griselda, 'Killing Men and Dying Women', in Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock,



- Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 221-294
- Pollock, Griselda, 'Missing Women: Rethinking Early Thoughts on Images of Women', in *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, ed. by Carol Squiers (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991), pp. 202-219
- Pollock, Griselda, 'Painting, Feminism, History', in *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, ed. by Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 138-176
- Pollock, Griselda, 'Pollock on Greenberg', *Art Monthly*, 178 (Jul/Aug 1994), 14-18
- Pollock, Griselda, 'The Politics of Theory: Generations and Geographies in Feminist Theory and the Histories of Art Histories', in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, ed. by Griselda Pollock (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 3-21
- Pollock, Griselda, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988)
- Pollock, Griselda, 'Women, Art and Ideology: Questions for Feminist Art Historians', in *Visibly Female: Women and Art Today*, ed. by Hilary Robinson (London: Camden Press, 1987), pp. 203-221
- Puryear, Martin, 'Louise Bourgeois: A living legacy', *Sculpture*, 13 (1994), 35
- Ragland-Sullivan, Ellie, 'The Symbolic', in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: a Critical Dictionary*, ed. by Elizabeth Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 420-423
- Ratcliff, Carter, 'Louise Bourgeois', *Art International*, 22.7 (November 1978), 26-27
- Raven, Arlene, Cassandra Langer, and Joanna Frueh, eds., *Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology* (New York: IconEditions, 1991)
- Ricoeur, Paul, 'Mimesis and Representation', *Annals of Scholarship*, 2 (1981), 15-32
- Riviere, Joan, 'Womanliness as a Masquerade', in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. by Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 35-44
- Robinson, Hilary, 'Border Crossings: Womanliness, Body, Representation', in *New Feminist Art Criticism: Critical Strategies*, ed. by Katy Deepwell (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 138-146
- Robinson, Hilary, 'Irigaray's Imaginings', *Women's Art Magazine*, 61 (1994), 20
- Robinson, Hilary, 'Reframing Women', *Circa*, 72 (Summer 1995), 18-23
- Robinson, Hilary, *Visibly Female: Women and Art Today* (London: Camden Press, 1987)



- Robinson, Hilary, 'Within the Pale in *from: Beyond the Pale: The Curation of 'Femininity' in an Exhibition Season at the Irish Museum of Modern Art*', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 6.3 (1997), 255-267
- Rose, Jacqueline, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986)
- Rowley, Alison, 'On Viewing Three Paintings by Jenny Saville: Rethinking a Feminist Practice of Painting', in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, ed. by Griselda Pollock (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 88-109
- Rubin, William, 'Some Reflections Prompted by the Recent Work of Louise Bourgeois', *Art International* (April 1969), 17-20
- Santoro, Suzanne, *Per Una Espressione Nuova/Towards New Expression* (Rome: Rivolta Femminile, 1974)
- Sartori, Eva Martin and Dorothy Wynne Zimmerman, eds., *French Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Source Book* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1993)
- Sasaki Roshi, Joshu, *Buddha is the Center of Gravity* (San Cristobal: Lama Foundation, 1974)
- Sasaki Roshi, Joshu, 'True Religion', *Metamorphosis* (Winter 1977), unpaginated
- Schjeldahl, Peter, 'The Documenta of the Dog', *Art in America*, 80.9 (1992), 88-97, 77
- Schor, Mira, 'From Liberation to Lack', *Heresies*, 6.4 (1989), 15-21
- Schor, Naomi, 'This Essentialism Which is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray', in *The Essential Difference*, ed. by Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 40-62
- Schor, Naomi and Elizabeth Weed, eds., *The Essential Difference* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994)
- Schwab, Gail M, 'Irigarayan Dialogism: Play and Powerplay', in Dale M. Bauer and Susan Jaret McKinstry, eds., *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 57-72
- Simon, Sherry, *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission* (London: Routledge, 1996)
- Smyth, Ailbhe, ed., *Irish Women's Studies Reader* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1993)
- Spare Rib*, special issue: Ireland (August 1989)
- Spence, Jo, *Cultural Sniping: The Art of Transgression* (London: Routledge, 1995)
- Spence, Jo, 'The Daughter's Gaze: Blaming, Shaming, Renaming and Letting Go' (1990), in *Cultural Sniping: The Art of Transgression* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 196-201



- Spence, Jo, 'The Politics of Transformation' (1986), in *Cultural Sniping: The Art of Transgression* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 147-155
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, 'A literary representation of the subaltern: a woman's text from the third world', in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 241-268
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, 'Criticism, feminism, and the institution', interview by Elizabeth Grosz, in *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. by Sarah Harasym (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 1-16
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, 'French Feminism in an international frame', in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 134-153
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, 'In a word: interview', interview by Ellen Rooney, in *The Essential Difference*, ed. by Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) pp. 151-185
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 1988)
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, 'The politics of Translation', in *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, ed. by Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 177-200
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. by Sarah Harasym (London: Routledge, 1990)
- Squiers, Carol, ed., *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991)
- Stephenson, Katherine, 'Luce Irigaray' in *French Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Source Book*, ed. by Eva Martin Sartori and Dorothy Wynne Zimmerman (New York: Greenwood Press, 1993), pp 229 - 243
- Steyn, Juliet, ed., *Other Than Identity: The Subject, Politics, and Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997)
- Still, Judith, 'Feminine Economy', in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: a Critical Dictionary*, ed. by Elizabeth Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 90-92
- Storr, Robert, 'The Discreet Charm of Louise Bourgeois', *Tate, The Art Magazine*, 6 (Summer 1995), 24-31
- Sultan, Terrie, 'Redefining the Terms of Engagement: The Art of Louise Bourgeois', in *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory, Works 1982-1993*, ed. by Joanna Ekman (New York: Harry Abrams, 1994), pp. 28-49
- Szeemann, Harald, 'The Fount of Youth: Gobeil la Bourgeoisiel', *Parkett*, 27 (1991), pp. 74-76
- Tickner, Lisa, 'The Body Politic: Female Sexuality and Women Artists Since 1970', *Art History*, 1.2 (June 1978), 236-251



- Vasseleu, Cathryn, 'Illuminating Passion: Irigaray's Transfiguration of Night', in *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight*, ed. by Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 129-137
- Warner, Marina, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Pan Books, 1985)
- Warner, Marina, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985)
- Watney, Simon, *Laura Godfrey-Isaacs: Monstrous* (London and Exeter: The Gallery and John Jones and Spacex Gallery, 1995)
- Weed, Elizabeth, 'The question of Style', in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. by Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 79-109
- Weinbaum, Alys Eve, 'Marx, Irigaray and the Politics of Reproduction', *Differences*, 6.1 (1994), 98-128
- Wenzel, Hélène Vivienne, 'Introduction to Luce Irigaray's "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other"', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 7.1 (Autumn 1981), 56-59
- Whitford, Margaret, 'Irigaray's Body Symbolic', *Hypatia*, 6.3 (1991), 97-110
- Whitford, Margaret, 'Luce Irigaray and the Female Imaginary: Speaking as a Woman', *Radical Philosophy*, 43 (Summer 1986), 3-8
- Whitford, Margaret, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991)
- Whitford, Margaret, 'Reading Irigaray in the Nineties', in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. by Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 15-33
- Whitford, Margaret, 'Woman with Attitude', *Women's Art Magazine*, 60 (September/October 1994), 15-17
- Woolf, Virginia, *A Room of One's Own* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1949)
- Wright, Elizabeth, ed., *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: a Critical Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992)
- Wye, Deborah, ed., *Louise Bourgeois* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1982)
- Wye, Deborah, 'Louise Bourgeois: One and Others' in *Louise Bourgeois*, ed. by Deborah Wye (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1982), pp. 13-34
- Wye, Deborah, 'The Drama of the Self: Louise Bourgeois as Printmaker', in *The Prints of Louise Bourgeois*, ed. by Deborah Wye and Carol Smith (New York: The



Museum of Modern Art, 1994), pp. 10-32

Wye, Deborah, and Smith, Carol, eds., *The Prints of Louise Bourgeois*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1994)

Xu, Ping, 'Irigaray's Mimicry and the Problem of Essentialism', *Hypatia*, 10.4 (fall 1995), 76-89

Young, Iris Marion, 'Throwing like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality', in Jeffner Allen and Iris Marion Young, eds., *The Thinking Muse: Feminism and Modern French Philosophy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 50-70

Zegher, M. Catherine de, ed., *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art, In, Of, and From the Feminine* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996)

Ziff, Patricia, ed., *Distant Relations/Cercanias Distantes/Clann I gCéin: Chicano, Irish, Mexican Art and Critical Writing* (Santa Monica: Smart Art Press, 1995)