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Luce Irigaray and Premodern Culture

Thresholds of history

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and Elizabeth D. Harvey**

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11 Afterword

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For Irigaray, feminism is the process of bringing into representation the female feminine subject, that is to say that which is coded as unrepresentable within the dominant discourse of subjectivity. Bringing the unrepresentable into representation in a non-dialectical manner which would not result merely in a reversal of the poles of the gendered opposition Masculine/Feminine, is a work of the imagination. It requires both conceptual and affective creativity. Irigaray translates this problem into the issue of "women's language," i.e. of how to find adequate expression for the margin of difference that female feminist subjects can draw from revisiting the site of the feminine. As the contributors to this volume show in different ways, this process of speaking the silence of women within the language which is one and the same for everyone implies both retrieval (memory) and creation (imagination). The difficulty consists in thinking through and expressing the in-between spaces, the transit-areas, the transitions and the shifts which make up the nomadic itinerary. It's these moments of nomadic transit that are both crucial to the process of theoretical creation and also quite resistant to representation: how does one configure that which goes in-between A and B and does not coincide with either? What counts in the project of sexual difference is the in-between spaces, the itinerary, rather than the final destination. The 'feminine' in question is the trace of this journey, not its arrival-point.

SEXUALITY IN FEMINIST DISCOURSE: TRANS-ATLANTIC DIS-CONNECTIONS

The embodied structure of the subject is a key-term in feminist struggle, and it is not accidental that many of these essays consider embodiment. It is to be understood as neither a biologically nor sociologically fixed category, but rather as a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic and the material social conditions. The body is an inter-face, a threshold (an idea that animates Jane Bellamy's essay), a field of intersecting material and symbolic forces, it is a surface where multiple codes (race, sex, class, age, etc.) are inscribed; it is a cultural construction that capitalizes on energies of a heterogeneous, discontinuous, and

affective or unconscious nature. This vision of the body contains sexuality as a process and as a constitutive element.

Being embodied means being in and of sexualized matter. This sexual fibre is intrinsically and multiply connected to social and political relations; thus, it is anything but an individualistic entity. Sexuality is simultaneously the most intimate and the most external, socially-driven, power-drenched practice of the self. Sexuality as a social and symbolic, material and semiotic institution is singled out as the primary location of power, in a complex manner which encompasses both macro- and micro-relations. Sex/gender is the social and morphological mode of dualistic assignation of identity and suitable form of erotic agency to subjects that are socialized/sexualized in the polarized dualistic model of Masculine/Feminine implemented in our culture. Sexual difference, the sexualized bi-polarity, is another word for power in both the negative or repressive (*potestas*) and the positive or empowering (*potentia*) meaning of the term. Accordingly, for Irigaray (1985a) the body, and especially sexuality, is perceived as the site of power struggles and contradictions and, consequently, it is viewed critically. But it is also re-visited creatively as a site of re-constitution of the subject.

The feminist theory of sexual difference gives sexuality a central place as the matrix for power-relations in the broad but also most intimate sense of the term. This is a major point of divergence with American feminism. In the USA through the 1990s, the sex/gender dichotomy swung towards the pole of gender with a vengeance, embracing it either as the preface to liberal individual "rights" or in terms of social constructivist "change." In both cases gender occupies the center of the political spectrum to the detriment of issues of sexuality and of sexual difference. It was left to the gay and lesbian and queer campaigners to try and re-write sexuality into the feminist agenda. In this framework, homosexuality is almost always synonymous with transgression or subversion. The tendency is also to critique heterosexuality as the dominant matrix of power and to target specifically the maternal roots of female sexuality for critique. Judith Butler (1990, 1993), following on from the work of Gayle Rubin (1975) and Monique Wittig (1992), makes an important intervention, pointing out that the distinction sex/gender is not only untenable, but also complicitous with structural patterns of exclusion. If anything, argues Butler, it is the always-already sexualized matter that constructs the possibility of this dichotomy in the first place. Butler then proceeds to propose her own theory of performativity as a form of affirmative deconstruction of all identities, even those they taught us to despise.

The 1990s in European feminism, by contrast, are marked by a number of very explicit and politically motivated experimentations around the theme of alternative forms of sexuality, including heterosexuality. Under the impact of psychoanalysis, post-structuralism and other radical critical theories many European feminist movements make sexuality into a public issue, both in terms of political debates concerning regulations of new family forms, gay and lesbian marriages, and in terms of reproductive rights (Griffin and Braidotti 2002). Whereas, as a sequel to the "sex wars," in American public discourse heterosexuality is either silenced or made into the site of litigious court cases focused on

male abuse and violence. In Irigaray's work but also in European feminism as a whole this issue is not abandoned to its own static fate, but is rather challenged from a variety of critical corners. One of these is Irigaray's radical feminist call for a different heterosexuality. Because of her psychoanalytic frame of reference, Irigaray states that women's self-love, or primary narcissism, has to be reconstructed as the necessary premise to a redefinition of the terms of heterosexual encounter in our society. The project of regrounding female sexuality in an empowered sense of self-esteem requires love for and recognition by another woman. This homosexual moment is constitutive of a woman's sense of empowerment in so far as it enables the exploration and the redefinition of sexuality in its wide range of choices and applications (Grosz 1994).

Irigaray is a thinker who places full emphasis on radical heterosexuality and the need to reconstruct a heterosexual social-symbolic contract that does not rest on femino-phobia and hence not on a patriarchal social unconscious, an idea that Harry Berger's contribution considers in detail. Irigaray denounces the delusional nature of identities postulated on the phallogocentric signifier and digs deeper than the sociological expressions of everyday sexism and culturally-enforced misogyny. Her critique touches upon the in-depth roots of a subject whose foundations rest on the rejection of the feminine as the site of an irreparable loss and an unrepresentable grief. This is a structure of "unrepresentability" – which expresses the patriarchal unconscious' unease with all the attributes, qualities, and entitlements which are cast/projected on the feminine: embodiment, natality and hence mortality (this complex connection between mortality and natality is the subject of Theresa Krier's essay), generative powers, and sexual vitality. How to recast these elements in a new socio-symbolic contract is the question which lies at the core of Irigaray's feminist politics by calling for a radically new form of sexuality. In other words, for Irigaray, both heterosexual and homosexual identities are equally problematic in a phallogocentric system which reduces everything to the criteria of evaluation and selection of sexual Sameness, or the power of One. Irigaray's emphasis on heterosexuality stresses the radical difference and the role it plays in the constitution of sexuality: we need an "other" sexuality which breaks from the male homosocial bonding induced by the reduction of all human sexualities to a phallic model. The dissymmetry between heterosexuality and homosexuality is made more complex by Irigaray, who introduces instead the notion of differentiation within different forms of homosexuality – first and foremost the difference between homosexuality in women and homosexuality in men.

This radical position also grants a significant role to men in reconstructing their own attachment to phallic parameters of sexual identity. Far as this may sound from the claims of deconstruction and sexual in-between-ness which are advanced by queer theorists, Irigaray's political project is however neither incompatible with nor opposed to homosexual, gay, and lesbian discourses (Braidotti 2002). Her position refuses to place all the burden of the transformation onto gay and queer people and calls into question instead the great majority of self-perpetuating sexually "normal" individuals. Irigaray shows both the

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intrinsic dysfunctionality and the enduring violence of heterosexual love under the power of the phallic signifier and calls for a drastic realignment of all parties concerned. In so doing she emphasizes the extent to which "feminophobia" still functions in our world and of how some feminist theories are complicitous with it.

In Irigaray's scheme of things, the other-woman (including the mother-daughter dyad) is like a data-bank of missing information which the feminist subject can draw from. Indeed, Ann Rosalind Jones makes this crucial mother-daughter relationship central to her analysis of an early modern dialogue. This exchange repairs ontological losses and accelerates the state of change, transforming the collective space between politicized women into a laboratory of becoming. This is not to say that this subject draws only from other women; on the contrary, Irigaray's heterosexual scheme gives a very ample margin and a high priority to the wealth of exchanges that are possible between the sexes. The ethics of sexual difference has to do with more than differences within each woman and among women: it is marked by sets of irreducible differences which construct the singularity of the subject. In other words: identification with the Feminine and the Masculine is necessary for the constitution of female and male subjects respectively, but it is not sufficient. More is needed – such as concrete and imaginary relations to ethnicity, religion, and other variables – the "other" remains for Irigaray a moving, ungraspable horizon. The yearning for the other – or desire – is also described by Irigaray as the passion of wonder.

The theoretical core of the feminism of sexual difference is the assertion of not-One-ness at the origin of the subject, and hence also within each subject (Braidotti 2002). This non-unitary or complex vision of subjectivity also affects the diversity or multiple differences among women. Both on political and on logical grounds (Frye 1996) the assumption that emphasizing sexual difference is a totalizing move that denies all other differences among women is mistaken. Sexual difference is a marker of multiple differences, first and foremost within each one (radical anti-essentialism) and then also among different "others" (radical politics of difference). I concur with both Whitford (2003) and Deutscher (2003) that Irigaray's conceptual schemes offer important points of cross-reference and applicability to the analysis of other differences, notably ethnic and religious ones.

What is at stake in this feminist project is the redefinition of the entire framework of the subject, not only of its gendered or sexed identity. It is a symbolic transformation of far broader appeal. From self-love to and through the recognition of an-other who is like me, to the engagement in a political project of social and ethical transformation all the way to a new universal that will no longer be colonized by the Same. A vital bond of recognition of woman by woman is the crucial starting point for this process. It is an elemental, basic process of becoming. It's a way of re-processing what Deleuze and Guattari (1980) call the "stolen body" of the little girl under patriarchy. Primary narcissism repairs this ontological theft, in such a way as to re-assert the asymmetry between the sexes.

BODILY MATERIALISM(S)

As the essays in this collection richly demonstrate, this body is a multi-layered text where different meanings and attributes related to the "feminine" have historically sedimented. Psychoanalysis shows that the female body is the screen where male fantasies and castration fears have been projected and performed. As such, it has been metonymically displaced and replaced over and over again. The radical edge of Lacanian politics consists in exploring this reduction of the feminine (imaginary) to women (empirical) and the masculine to men, stressing instead the instability of any subject and the impossibility of being anchored to the imaginary and binary institutions of masculinity and femininity. Exposing this imposture is Lacan's political gesture. What to do about changing any of it, however, is an off-limits question for psychoanalysis. Not so for feminism, of course (Irigaray 1974, 1977a, 1984), where the female body becomes the site for feminist reinscriptions and symbolic reappropriations of woman's subjectivity.

At the core of the debate over sexual difference lies the notion of embodied matter (a question that Jonathan Crewe's essay engages), or bodily materialism in our age, which could be described as one of advanced post-humanism. Even the most convinced social constructivists today argue that the performances of bodies cannot be ascribed exclusively to the social codes or to symbolic and imaginary orders – nor can they be read back into the Holy Scriptures of the DNA Scrolls. Both "nature" and "the body" are slippery categories – that tend to slide towards essentialism; get caught into positivist reductions – or in their opposite: new-age naïve celebrations. In the age of the politics of bio-diversity, the inter-dependence of the natural and the social needs to be explored outside classical, dualistic habits of thought. I prefer a deeply embedded vision of the embodied subject. In the light of contemporary genetics and molecular biology, it is more than feasible to speak of the body as a complex system of self-sustaining forces. The DNA and the cells communicate effectively with each other, transferring vital information. In terms of bio-diversity, we humans are actively and destructively involved in manipulating our environment. Neuro-sciences have increased our understanding of memory and the extent to which the storage and retrieval of information is essential to the progress of the self. This is evidence which can no longer be ignored by critical, Left-leaning intellectuals. Nor need it be left to the delusions of grandeur of professional scientists and their industrial, financial backers. Irigaray's approach to bodily materiality can be of inspiration to develop new levels and forms of understanding about being embodied humans in the age of intelligent machines.

The effect of the contemporary technological revolution – which is marked by the convergence of bio-technologies and information technologies is such, in fact, as to institutionalize the decline of dualistic oppositions between bodily matter and materialized intelligence – mind/body; brain/muscle – which our culture has adopted since the eighteenth century as the dominant model of representation. Contemporary science and technology in fact have reached right into the most intimate layers of the living organism and the structures of the self, dissolving

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boundaries that had been established by centuries of humanistic thinking. This means that we can now think of the body as an entity that inhabits different material spheres and time-zones simultaneously, and is animated by different speeds and a variety of internal and external clocks which do not necessarily coincide.

As the site of our conscious self-representation and the motor of unconscious self-styling, the "body" remains a central factor for both processes of identification and forms of libidinal and social investment. The body is intelligent matter endowed with the capacity to be affected and to affect and thus to inter-relate. Temporally speaking, on the other hand, a body is an enfolded memory, that is an organism that endures, lasts – albeit temporarily – by undergoing constant internal modifications following the encounter with other bodies and forces. The key terms are affectivity and inter-relation. A body is an entity which yearns for, and thus actively desires, encounters and inter-relations with others. Irigaray, not unlike Deleuze on this score, supports the vision of desire as the positive longing for inter-connections. In so doing, she goes beyond the psychoanalytic idea of desire as lack structured within a phallogocentric economy of self-representation. Affectivity is the heart of the subject, an idea whose early modern roots Harvey elaborates, and this desire to be moved by others is motivated by wonder – the passion of admiration – and by the love of "others": it is therefore hetero-directed, though not normatively hetero-sexual. Love, or positive affectivity, happens in encounters with different bodies and forces which propel the subject forward towards a dynamic horizon of shifting and multiple encounters.

The feminist subject of knowledge is an intensive, multiple subject, functioning in a net of inter-connections. It is non-unitary, non-linear, web-like, embodied and therefore perfectly artificial. As an artifact it is machinic, complex, endowed with multiple capacities for inter-connectedness in the impersonal mode. It is sexed, but it's all over the place. It is abstract and perfectly, operationally real, and one of the main fields of operation is sexual difference. The "feminine" at stake in sexual difference is neither one essentialized entity, nor an immediately accessible one: it is rather a virtual reality, in the sense that it is the effect of a project, a political and conceptual project of transcending the traditional subject position of Woman as the Other of the Same, so as to express her as the multiple other of the Other. This transcendence, however, occurs through the flesh, into embodied locations and not in a flight away from them.

Feminist theory is about multiple and potentially contradictory locations and differences, among women but also within each woman. To account for them, locations are approached as geo-political, but also as time-zones, related to personal, historical, and cultural memory. Feminism is not about restoring another dominant memory, but rather about installing a counter-memory, or an embedded and embodied genealogy. Feminist thinking takes place between the no longer and the not yet, in the in-between zone between wilful, conscious political practice and the not-necessarily conscious yearning for transformation and change. I see feminist theory as the activity aimed at articulating the questions of individual gendered identity with issues related to political subjectivity, the production of knowledge, diversity, and epistemological legitimation.

FEMINIST ETHICS

Irigaray has argued passionately for an ethics of empirically based sexualized subjects involved in processes of transformation. As Alison Martin (2003) points out, the political culture of sexual difference is not only leftist and radical in that it aims at social justice, civil rights, the empowerment of women in public life, but also ethical – in that it wants to keep in mind the larger picture. Thus issues of sustainable development, adequate technologies and respect for nature enter the agenda, but so also does the need to have an ethical system of indexation for the changes and transformations which are induced by the shifting relations within a new socio-symbolic contract – aka “radical heterosexuality.” A philosopher of change first and foremost, Irigaray stresses the importance of marking the limits of changes, which are often linked to how much the embodied subject can sustain, process and be empowered and not wounded by. The idea of transcendence through the flesh or the sensible empirical is crucial to the project of transformation which finds both its site and its limit in the body itself.

Of special concern to me and the writers of these essays is the affirmative dimension of this ethical project, namely how to move beyond the aporia of deconstruction, or a post-Lacanian hystriotic exacerbation of the guilt and aggression that fuel the phallic symbolic (Žižek 1992). How can we grab the historic chance to create the new and thus avoid repetitions of the Same? Affirming sexual difference is a positive passion that implies loyalty, not so much to what one is, or could be, as to what one will have been. This is a new form of activism, which takes seriously the active force of affects understood as affirmative ethical inputs. I call them positive processes of becoming which are neither abstract nor disengaged from concrete material and historical situations. They are processes of actualization or materialization of qualitative shifts that occur across a number of interrelations, or in-between spaces: between different species: human/non-human actors; different categories; masculine/feminine, or European/native; and between different forces: negative/positive or reactive/active. This transformative project is utopian only in the sense that it traces a path of becoming or transformation. It implies the transcendence of the present, not in a flight away from the body but rather as a radical exploration of the immanence of the flesh. Indeed, Irigaray's interest in the vitalism and materialism of early periods contributes possibilities to this hope for the future. This utopian impulse in turn implies a different approach to the spatio-temporal co-ordinates that we have learnt to recognize as “the body,” and of its immense vitality – which redefines the boundaries between life, death and the many degrees of in-between.

This is where the question of time becomes crucial, as Barbara Estrin's essay, for example, implies. One of the many positive sides of feminist ethics is that one gets used to time loops, or a permanent state of jetlag. A feminist critical position assumes the dislocation of the linearity of time and hence the necessity to inhabit different and even potentially contradictory time zones at the same time: a sort of trip through chrono-topia. On the theoretical level, feminists have developed crucial critiques of ideologies, revisions of the symbolic and a vast array of

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counter-models and paradigms to configure the shifts of subjectivity actually in progress in our globalized world. Those who were still hoping to use such immense creativity to correct the mistakes of the patriarchal order soon realized they would run out of time before they could reach their aim. One of the possible figurations of oppression is being systematically behind: living in one time zone behind the times – like reading yesterday's paper. It is not so much being second-best as being minus-one.

Irigaray's feminism affirms political and ethical passions. It designs tools and road maps by which to establish values, not in the normative mode, but in the sense of evaluation of the interaction with a large variety of others, including external objects and projects. This 'intensive' reading of feminist theory expresses a non-unitary – in my terms 'nomadic' subject – that is opposed to classical humanism, or liberal notions of the individual, but also to facile postmodern celebrations of fragmentation for its own sake. In opposition to the urge to complete the loss of specification or marking of the subject, this position expresses also my desire to defend the relevance of that historically obsolete institution known as the "feminine." As I suggested earlier, it is neither as an essentialized entity, nor as an immediately accessible one, femininity is rather a virtual reality, in the sense that it is the effect of a political and conceptual project aimed at transcending the traditional subject position of Woman as other. This transcendence, however, occurs through the flesh, into en fleshed locations and not in a flight away from the body, in an embodied and embedded manner.

Feminism, like all critical theories, can express affirmative forces and thus liberate in those who partake of it a yearning for freedom, dignity, justice, lightness, and joyfulness. These values can also be translated both into dogmatic gloom and into more constructive rational beliefs and policies. They form in any case a substratum of affect that activates the movement in the first place. In feminism, as elsewhere in critical theory and practice, the wager is to move beyond the negative stasis and the slave morality of an oppositional culture. One must avoid the deadly serious priestly revolutionary zeal of *dogma* and *doxa* joining forces within the gravitational pull of a new normative order. If politics begins with our passions, then what I yearn for is the gay knowledge of an affirmative critical spirit.

SEXUAL DIFFERENCE AS THE PRINCIPLE OF NOT-ONE

Sexual difference, understood as the principle of not-one, in Lévi-Strauss's sense of "zero institution," fulfills the essential function of making a fundamental break at and as the site of origin of the subject. What needs to be broken is the fantasy of unity, totality, and one-ness. This is what the psychoanalytic idea of the original loss stands for: it is the pound of flesh one needs to hand over in order to enter the socio-symbolic contract. What is knocked out from the subject's psychic landscape is the delusion of One-ness, the phantasy of omnipotence, which leans upon the empirical referent that is the closest for the newly-born, namely the mother. This "leaning-upon," however, and the symbolic marking it operates, must not be

confused with the symbolic function it enacts. The difference between poststructuralist, Lacanian psychoanalysis and other psychoanalytic schools, as for instance object-relation theory, rests precisely on this point: in Lacanian terms, the empirical does not equate or comprehensively include the symbolic, but it merely props it up. The mother is the logical operator of a number of symbolic functions which are structural. A mere focus on this empirical level, therefore, is likely to miss the point altogether and thus leave the symbolic system untouched. To recognize this basic, ego-deflating principle is a gesture that marks a syntactical necessity, a zero-level out of which an interactive vision of the subject can begin to emerge. That recognition of alterity in the sense of incommensurable loss and an unpayable outstanding debt to others entails the awareness that one is the effect of irrepressible flows of encounters, interactions, affectivity, and desire, which one is not in charge of.

This humbling experience of not-Oneness, far from opening the doors to relativism, anchors the subject in an ethical bond to alterity, to the multiple and external others that are constitutive of that entity which, out of laziness and habit, we call the "self." The split, or not-one nature of the subject, entails the recognition of a pre-discursive structure of the "self," of a necessary loss of that which is always already there – an affective, interactive entity endowed with intelligent flesh and an embodied mind. The totality and the always-already-thereness of the corporeal self is that which must become foreclosed, and thus remain inaccessible to the reduced, but more functional unit that will become the socialized subject. As such, the totality and priority of the enfleshed corporeal subject – rooted in desire – is that which remains un-thought at the heart of the thinking subject, because it is what drives him/her in the first place.

As I argued previously (Braidotti 2002) the pathetic-despotic face of femininity in the historical era of advanced technologies bears a privileged link to whiteness as a term that signifies Sameness and thus indexes access to power and to the structural advantages that being white entails. This mutation takes place in the spectral economy of globalization, propelled by the convergence between the new media and information technologies and bio-technologies. In such a context, I want to plead most definitely for a new brand of vitalistic materialism that would address these contradictions and instaurate a materialist culture of affirmation, not of euphoria. I see radical immanence and sustainable ethics as a strategy to dis-intoxicate ourselves from the fumes of prosthetic promises of perfectibility and face instead the specific complexities of our embodied subjectivity in the age of *zoe-power*.

In this framework, I want to defend sexual difference as a political project for the following reasons. First, as a cartography of contemporary geo-political relations, which see the return of essentialized forms of sexual dichotomy and hence a resurgence of discrimination against women on a global scale. Second, as a political platform to articulate and empower the female feminist subjects towards alternative social and symbolic spaces. I see sexual difference as a political project and hence as a site of transformation of the subject. I call this the project of the "virtual feminine" and of "virtual/masculinities." This alternative subject

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position is multi-layered and implicated with complex sites of articulation of its complexities. It is inter-relational and intersectional, but also split within itself, in a myriad of internal self-differentiations and discrepancies. It is a resolutely non-unitary subject.

This enchanted, anti-essentialist, high-tech vitalism echoes the ideas of Irigaray about the subject as a bodily human entity, sensitive flesh framed by the skin (a notion that has affinities with Hollywood's discussion of the erotics of surface). I find it significant that Irigaray turns to non-Christian religions, notably Judaism in the philosophy of Levinas and Buddhist practices like yoga in her more recent work. In the reading of Levinas, which Grant Williams uses in his examination of the blazon, Luce Irigaray writes an apology of the caress as a mode of approaching the other – the erotic, respectful touching of the other's skin is distinctly posed as the basis for an ethics of sexual difference. This respectful contemplation of the contained boundaries of an other's life – his skin-cloud, enfleshed existence – is also a response to the philosophy of excess in Bataille. This cruel and violent attempt to break beyond the enclosed space of the embodied self leads him to theorize both the inevitability of violence, and also the desirability of a transcendence which requires – ontologically – the consumption of an other's body. As in Bataille's un-reconstructed phallogocentrism, an other's body is preferentially the body of the other, of woman as "other-of-the-same" – the specular, necessary and necessarily devalorized other – Bataille's theory of transcendence is also an apology of female sacrifice.

Irigaray's emphasis on the "enchanted materialism" of feminine morphology constitutes a parallel but dissonant project in relation to the nomadic anti-foundationalism of Deleuze. The ethics of sexual difference and the ethics of sustainable nomadic subjectivity are two faces of the same coin: that of an enfleshed, immanent subject-in-becoming, for whom life is embodied, embedded, and eroticized. To present them as mutually incompatible is not doing justice to either. I think instead that a parallel reading of Irigaray's ethics of sexual difference (and the notion of the sensible transcendental) and Deleuze's sustainable nomadic ethics (transcendental empiricism) can be mutually illuminating. Both predicate the reversal of the tide of dialectical negativity and support an ethics of affirmation and positive desire. Deleuze's empirical transcendental and Irigaray's sensible transcendental are bodily locations for the elaboration of embodied, situated ethics of sustainability. The model of alternative ethics proposed by radically immanent philosophies of difference such as Irigaray's, Deleuze's, or my own feminist brand of philosophical nomadism implies a non-hierarchical idea of transcendence and a non-binary model of inter-relation or inter-subjectivity. That Irigaray chooses to focus her priority on the reconstruction of the female imaginary in order to work towards the empowerment of women, whereas Deleuze postulates the feminine as the threshold to a more generalized becoming-minoritarian, does not alter the commonalities between their two projects.

Therefore, what is at stake in sustainable ethics is not the feminine as codified in the phallogocentric code of the patriarchal imaginary, but rather the feminine as project, as movement of destabilization of identity and hence of becoming. I

call this the "virtual feminine," and I connect it to the social and symbolic project of redefinition of female subjectivity which is undertaken by feminism. Irigaray's discussion of a virtual feminine "symbolic" expresses both theoretically and ethically the desire to find a transmissible form for this feminine voice. Crucial to this project is the empowerment of the embodied female subject, in flesh as well as in word. While holding on to the empirical foundations of a feminist subject that is in a process of becoming other – than the eternal feminine of Man – the feminist practice of sexual difference nomadizes the subject. The feminine gets redefined as a moving horizon, a fluctuating path, a recipe for transformation, motion, becoming. This non-teleological understanding of the feminist process of redefining the feminine is combined in Irigaray's work with close attention to the body and to bodily morphology, to the flesh and blood of female embodiment and the specific sensorial experiences related to it, including the importance of touch and feeling over seeing and the scopic. This passionate, intelligent, and memory-driven flesh is at the heart of Irigaray's carnal materialism. Moreover, the "virtual feminine" project opens up to issues of universality and transcendence. Irigaray locates this corporeal universal in the specifically situated efforts by female feminist subjects to re-conceptualize the spatio-temporal territory of the feminine as a transit-zone between themselves.

The reference to the "universal" is a qualitative leap from individual experience to collective practice that aims to generate representations of general relevance. In other words, the universal is located in the specific singularity of an immanent subject. More importantly, the political project of feminism consists in framing the space between different women, conscious of their differences, who both recognize each other's efforts and empower one another to go further. In other words, for Irigaray, "virtual feminine" is a collective project that rests upon the presence of at least another subject, first of all another woman as the threshold through which to activate paths of becoming-subject in alternative ways. As both an ethical and political quest, it is a project fit for the third millennium.

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