Chapter One: The Invisible Made Visible

1. Introduction: Sexuate Difference

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

5 See Irigaray, WD, 123.
malformed man, a man without a phallus (castrated), and therefore a negative of the positive man. Irigaray dubs such ideology as sexual indifference and a model of this indifference may appear something like the following:

**Figure 1. Sexual Indifference**

*Light, Civil, Law, Language, Subject: Male: a*

---

*(sea/mother/mirror/ice/nature/matter)*

*Darkness, Nature, Earth, Hysteric, Object: Female: -a*

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

---

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

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

8 She expands this idea in *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*. 
whose sexual identity in relationship to the male defines her.\(^9\) Woman, and her domain, is the substratum\(^10\) through which the male acts upon the world. As an object, her embodied objectivity corresponds to the earth, matter (\textit{hyle}), or the uncultivated soil, which must be tilled and impregnated with his seed,\(^11\) and she conceives his children, upholds his domestic life, thus, freeing him to dominate private and public spheres. In a post-Marxist sense, she is like a bank, a passive repository that holds his valuable product and will eventually yield a fruitful interest on his investment.\(^12\) With Freud as a modern exemplar of the male subject she writes, “But as a result of using psychoanalysis (his psychoanalysis) only to scrutinize the history of his subject and his subjects, without interpreting the historical determinants of the constitution of the “subject” as same, he is restoring, yet again, that newly pressed down/repressed earth, upon which he stand erect, which for him following tradition through in more explicit fashions, will be the body/sex of the

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

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

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

\(^12\) Again she writes how the systems of reproduction and production, or biology and economics, are combined to favor a male homo-economy. She explains, “Matrix—womb, earth, factory, bank—to which the seed capital is entrusted so that it may germinate, produce, grow fruitful, without woman being able to lay claim to either capital or interest since she has only submitted “passively” to reproduction. Herself held in receivership as a certified mean of (re)production.” Ibid., 18.
mother/nature.”\textsuperscript{13} Woman is the object in the mirror, and she is also the mirror through which he sees himself.\textsuperscript{14} Woman is the sea who is the mirror and holds the mirror refracting his subjectivity. It is worth quoting her at length:

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

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

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 139-140.
\textsuperscript{14} See note 5.
\textsuperscript{15} Irigaray, S, 185-6.
check its excessive power. As man dominates woman, he also dominates nature (Greek, *physis*), keeping the chaos and formlessness of nature at bay as he overcomes in order to yield the light of civilization, culture, language, and the machination of society. The negatives of this positive male-centered world, such as irrationality, non-cultivation, or lack of progress and technology, have been attributed to woman’s sphere, which must be kept silent and docile in order to maintain the natural and historical order of male subjectivity. Irigaray dubs what Freud diagnosed as women's hysterics as “the necessary remainder.” She explains, “She borrows signifiers but cannot make her mark, or re-mark upon them. Which all surely keeps her deficient, empty, lacking in a way that could be labeled “psychotic,” a *latent* but not actual psychosis, for want of a practical signifying system.”

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

---

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

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

18 Irigaray, S, 71.

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

**Figure 2. Sexual Difference**

\[
\text{Man: } m \quad \text{Other men: } m^1 + m^2 + m^3 \quad \text{Woman: } w \quad \text{Other women } wc + wx + wr
\]

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

### 2.2. Sacred Sexual Difference

Irigaray’s prevailing thesis is that sexual difference runs through every institution and sphere of life, including the religious or spiritual as well as the political. She notes that the efficacy of religion, when linked with affect, can in some obscure way hold together the

---

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

**Figure 3. Religious Sexual Indifference**

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

In this model, the male monotheistic God condemns difference as idolatry, and serves to unify the male with an infinite ideal of Sameness. Woman, who falls under the

---

21 Irigaray, KW, 171.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., 172.
25 Irigaray, TSN, 17.
headship of the male, will “complementarily” work toward the same end. To be clear
Irigaray, with many feminist theologians, rejects any form of complementary religious
ideology that regards a woman’s essence as equal to a man’s, yet remains ensconced in
sexual constructions that are socially determined and naturally defended. Such a position,
while seemingly benign, has had a potent ability to exclude women and others from sharing
the world in meaningful ways, especially in religious or spiritual discourses. Indeed,
Christian theology has historically wrestled with supposed Aristotelian claims such as, do
women have souls, are they defective males, and is their principle function childbearing? Whether such reasoning is historically warranted or theologically correct is beyond this
thesis; Irigaray realizes, right or wrong, such a sacred imaginary of women and their bodies
has become imbued with meaning in theological discourses that wish to keep power and
authority with the male sex. Rather than tackling church theology through discursive
claims of seemingly authoritarian texts, Irigaray suggests how sexual difference could
interrupt the present sexually indifferent dispersal of identity and subjectivity that informs
western religion, and, instead, imagines a spiritual awakening from within. By
appropriating the remainder or the negative of religion, that which religion naturally
rejects in favor of its supposed opposite, she posits an affirmation of spiritual life that is in
accord with her dimorphic structure of human subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Like her
model of sexual difference, she isn’t attempting to start a new cult or an alternative goddess

26 Complementarity of sexual difference is a typically Christian theological positions (although there are
Islamic and Judaic variants) that identifies men and women have different but equal essences, and a ‘natural’
sexual division creates gendered roles that are viewed as normative and ordered within the great chain of
being. Male headship thus serves as a means to ensure male public service in institutional affairs such as
church and state, while women serve in private spheres of family life, nurture, and education. For an
elaborated Christian position see John Piper and Wayne Grudham, eds. Recovering Biblical Manhood and
Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006).
27 See note 4.
religion. Instead, she, like many faithful before her, offers a unique reformational perspective that seeks to discover and reclaim what is within the tradition and its sacred texts. Her claims contest a hermeneutic formation that is in accord with sexually indifferent ways of knowing and being and how these philosophies shape our theologies. A sexually differentiated model of religion may appear something like the following:

**Figure 4. Sexually Differentiated Model of Religion**

Male:  a  Ideal Male Divine Possibility:  A  
Female:  b  Ideal Female Divine Possibility:  B

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

### 2.3. Asymmetrical Contraries of Sexual Difference

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

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

The first three posit relative oppositions. The first opposition is that between mutually conditioned phenomena. Aristotle’s example is the opposition between the concepts of double and half. You cannot think half without presupposing the concept of double and vice versa. They go together, inexorably. Contrariety is the opposition at play in any continuum. Opposite poles we might say on the continuum between white and black (the colour spectrum is Aristotle’s example of a mediated continuum where white and black stand at the poles of the colour continuum and the other colours exist at various mediating positions between white and black. There are also in his

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Categories}, 11b.-10.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
view unmediated continua and his example is the continuum of odd and even numbers. The continuum only knows the two poles; there are no media to be found between the two contrary poles, only the poles themselves for in his view numbers only come in two types: odd numbers and even. What makes contrariety a relative opposition within the framework of a continuum is that the phenomena that constitute the poles of the continuum, while as different as possible within the continuum are yet members of the continuum. In other words they are maximally different within a deeper unity. In Aristotle’s language one is speaking of species within a genus, or individuals within a species. It is contrariety that Hegel is so sensitive to, not the static contrariety of Aristotle’s ontological tree of ascending species and genera with being as the culminating unity, but rather the dynamic contrariety of things-in-time. So the synthesis which takes up the thesis and antithesis into a deeper unity is futural with respect to the thesis and antithesis it sublates, etc.30

I understand Irigaray to say that men and women have been located wrongly as two ends of the same relative continuum of opposites, and whether mediated or unmediated, the continuum presupposes that they belong to the same deeper unity, namely, male centered humanity. In Aristotelian terms, Irigaray’s critique is that this continuum of contraries has been fused with the opposition of positive and privation, man being the positive and woman its privation (absence of male sex). Aristotle states unequivocally that in the opposition of positive and privation, “It is a universal rule that each of a pair of

30 Robert Sweetman, email message to author, May 18, 2011.
opposites of this type has reference to that which the particular ‘positive’ is natural.”31 In his example blindness is a privative of the positive sight and we limit the attribution privation to that which is capable of some particular faculty or possession when, at the time, it should naturally be present. The two opposites are not relative to each other since they cannot reciprocate: “Sight is not called the sight of blindness.”32 While these terms don’t have reciprocity they are rooted in a universal reference to the positive. The positive becomes the standard by which the absence, or privation is determined. Irigaray translates this mode of opposition into thinking about equal rights between men and women. She suggests that to have rights like a man, to be treated like a man, reduces woman to a privation or a reference to a false positive: male subjectivity.

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

In her critique woman is wrongly placed in opposition to man: as a contrary to man, as a privation of man, and as the negation to his affirmation. The impact of this logic funnels into Christian theologies like complementarianism, where women function as man’s opposite, or the privation of male subjectivity. In the softest sense, this means helping man

---

31 Categories, 12a-25iii.
32 Ibid., 12b-24.
33 Ibid.
in the areas he is weakest; in the hardest sense it is to be the rejected male constitution. This scheme permits man to remain the preferential pole, and the preference has natural and moral implications. Indeed, to abandon the pole of opposition as man’s opposite, whether contrary or privative, has labeled women bereft of reason and moral sense. Adding the religious power of authority and divine obedience, for a woman to abandon one’s pole seems improbable, immoral, and ungodly. Irigaray argues vehemently that woman has her own rhythm and right, and she must elaborate her own self, relational context, spiritual meaning, political agency, and inherent contradictions without remaining the supporting pole to any continuum that subtly or overtly forces her reference to be male sexuality and subjectivity (two terms which become synonymous in the Post-Freudian era). Therefore, rather than one continuum with two poles (male and female), one might suggest that in an Irigarayian reading, there are two continua, male and female, and these continua are asymmetrical to one another, that is that they are not relative nor predicated upon one another. Each sexuate identity has its own poles, and only the participants within that continuum can determine and moralize the poles, a project, she urges, that women must actively and consciously own.\textsuperscript{34}

By conflating these oppositions with a sexual determination that serves a single sex, we also conclude that given these oppositions only one truth claim is possible. She explains, \textit{Nature has a sex}... All traditions that remain faithful to the cosmic have a sex and take account of natural powers (\textit{puissances}) in sexual terms. They are also regulated by alternation that do not truly contradict each other. Spring is not autumn nor summer winter, night is not day. This is not the opposition

\textsuperscript{34} See Irigaray, S. 91-93, 103, 124.
that we know from logic in which the one is opposed to or contradicts the other, where the one is superior to the other and must put the inferior down.

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

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

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

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

35 Irigaray, SG, 108.
passive, inferior, privative male, such as masochistic behavior, keeps the sexes within a philosophy of the same, what she understands to be the root of oppression and patriarchy. Yet, the pervasiveness of binary oppositional rationality of the sexes also implies that it is impossible to step out of this suspicion of a deeper unity that always serves male sexual interests.

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

Rather than wait to cross over to Jordan, or wait for the Messiah to come, she says we can elaborate the conditions of possibility for such a miracle now, and with hope of

\textsuperscript{36} Irigaray, T, 228.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 229.
greater justice yet to come. She advocates not a utopia, but the hard work of internal and external ethics. But without a culture of two, the only position of enunciation within which Irigaray can question these sexually determined logical oppositions is within the pole of the negative or privative, a dangerous task she strategically owns in order to not only react to the male pole as his natural, negative, opposite, but to elaborate a possible discourse outside of its relative reach. Rather than minimizing the force of phallogocentrism, she consciously and actively reappropriates the pole in order to jam the meaning of such a continuum, while elaborating or pointing to another series of continua that women must theorize and categorize, ideally with the blessing and communion of men. She cannot escape the logic of sexually infused opposition, but she can mimetically point toward its oppression, exclusive claims, and the possibility for expanded means to articulate difference. While woman has been forced to specularize man and be his privation, Irigaray has insisted she is elsewhere, in exile, as appearance or simulacrum, but that she still “subsists.”38 This doubled location of negation and existence elsewhere yields what some have observed as a “doubled discourse . . . an oscillation that never rests in affirmation or reaction.”39 Her doubled location is more than a simple reversal of phallogocentrism, but a conscious displacement, typified in grammatical endings in which she ends a declaration with an interpolation, marking a question, turning an utterance back on itself.

Irigaray isn’t making a simple isomorphic comparison between body and language, or nature and gender; rather, she insists that we confess how these poles have been

38 Irigaray, ML, 88, 91, 92, 118.
rendered in service of a masculine unity.\textsuperscript{40} To strategically conflate the pole of female sexuality is to displace her and expose the brutalizing way the dialectic has been used to sublimate, sublate, and control difference. Irigaray posits that the multiplicity of a woman’s erogenous zones contests against a singular subjectivity that corresponds with male heterosexuality,\textsuperscript{41} and reveals a plurality to a woman’s sex. Contesting the two dimensions of a singular continuum of human subjectivity she argues there are at least four dimensions: “from left to right, from right to left, from before after, from after before, the threshold of inside to outside of the body.”\textsuperscript{42} If within a woman’s body there is a heteroplurality, both active and passive in her own sexual organs, then the hope of a true heterosexuality (versus heterosexualism\textsuperscript{43}) rests upon the cultivation of this/these difference(s).\textsuperscript{44} The cultivation of difference becomes a central thesis for spiritual life to flourish for men and women.

2.4. Kore and the Allegory of the Cave

Irigaray achieves the displacement of woman from the pole of opposition to men by pointing toward its most overt positives, thus questioning its supposed privations. While

\textsuperscript{40} She questions Freud’s conclusions, “Of what social customs must we beware of understanding the influence? What influence is capable of forcing women to remain in ‘passive situations’...But might one not envisage the possibility that one might prescribe ‘the other,’ that is to say by legitimating, even by producing the discourse, the ideology, which determine it as a factor? The question would doubtless be unavoidable were it not that these ‘social customs’ are left in an evocative imprecision so general, so devoid of commitment, as to lose all impact.” Irigaray, S, 19.

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

\textsuperscript{42} Irigaray, ML, 115.

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

\textsuperscript{44} She writes, “The multiplicity of woman’s erogenous zones, the plural nature of her sex, as a differentiating factor that is too rarely considered in the male/female polarity, especially as far as its implication for ‘signifying’ practices are concerned.” Irigaray, S, 103, n. 106.
Speculum exposed the fetish for the visible, it also notes the movement of the male gaze with the preference for high places versus low lands, for Dionysian ecstasy versus Persephone’s abyss, or Apollo’s sun versus Artemis’s wooded shade. This vertical preference moves upward toward light, or away from the dark origins, creating a vertical hierarchy that has one-way movement toward higher ground. In an organic example, the visible foliage is considered the sum of the plant, despite its invisible roots. She suggests that present cultural movements of up and down merely constitute a negation of negation that dissociates men from the immediacy of the senses of heritage. What is left in the dark low lands becomes the story of origin, or the womb of the mother.

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

45 She writes, “Man seems to go to the top and stay there and leave the others, women for example, to occupy the low ground, while the path between heaven and earth is lost. In case they forget that they are obliged to go back down to their roots if they are to grow.” Irigaray, SG, 108.
46 Irigaray, ML, 114-115; 145.
47 Ibid., 149, 152.
48 She says that the fulfilled spirit appears as a negation of negation. Irigaray, SG, 109.
49 Ibid.
that the reality men are unable to know is the reality of human origin in female bodies.”

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

51 Ibid.
52 Irigaray, S, 253-256.
53 Irigaray, ML, 115.
Despite the breadth of her corpus that now exists, *Speculum* remains one of Irigaray’s most respected pieces of academic work. I believe *Speculum* is still so highly regarded because of the rigor, systematic care, and nuanced work within a clear, academically notated work that she produced. Use of citation, I suggest, permits the sharing of knowledge that Irigaray posits as a condition of possibility for human flourishing, but which she presently tends to omit as a way to challenge the rigidity of academic discourse. Using the specular as a *leitmotif*, she deconstructs its power and resituates the force of the gaze. Woman, an outlier of the symbolic order, has been rendered invisible, but Irigaray exposes the system that renders her thus. By mimicking or conflating the mirror, she turns the male gaze on itself, revealing its dependency upon this ocular posture, and thus, revealing what the visible refuses to see: the female subject. She also turns the mirror on herself, or the woman, revealing the need to elaborate a subjectivity and faithfulness to female specificity that is not a prop to the definition of Woman within patriarchy. In a reversal of history, she examines the corpus of Western philosophy from Freud to Plato, providing a bevy of citations that allow the reader to journey with her research and examine the primary texts and join in her analysis and conversation of how Freud’s sexual conclusions were complicit with Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus’s compositions of the cosmos, nature, its mechanics, and way to access these notions was theorized.

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

3. Phase Two: Elaborating Sexual Difference

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

3.1. Irigarayan Contribution to Sexual Difference

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

Irigaray, in an interview, claims that Speculum explicitly drew attention to the cultural and symbolic tyranny of ‘phallogocentrism’ or, ‘auto-mono-centrism,’ a critique

---

54 Phallogocentrism involves the combination of several male dominated morphological ideals. The term encompasses the notion of the male phallus as the centering or master signifier of reality, together with the Enlightenment notion of logos or reason. Promoters of patriarchy have embraced phallogocentrism, argues Irigaray, as a means to exclude a female morphology from having access to reason since she has no access to
which marks her first period of work. The unified male self, symbolized by the male phallus, must defensively repress the mother, and subsequently all others. Irigaray links the preservation of a unified self with the dread and repression of mother, negativity, difference, and nonidentity. Irigaray’s project turns these “abjected” positions and constructs a symbolic and cultural imaginary built around female morphology, revealing the false dichotomy of the binary and a new economy that renders these terms no longer abject, but rather, positive affirmations of another sexual identity. Irigaray’s work is a critical departure in its emphasis of permitting woman to define their own subjectivity, rather than having it defined relative to another sexuate economy. Most importantly, she removes woman’s status as Other of the male subject, an absolute affirmation she calls suspect given its incessant repetition and unthought treatment. First challenging the status of woman as an accessory to male subjectivity, and then permitting women to determine her own subjectivity, mark a critical contribution of her philosophy. Irigaray chooses to permit the sexes to elaborate their own subjectivity and confirm identity through the surprising maneuver of self-limitation. She adheres identity with its very shifting or fluid movement in nature and culture, and she reappropriates the passive with a decisive and strategic activity of belonging to a gender. I explain these paradoxes in the next section.

3.2. Sex, Gender, and Sexuate Identity

the phallus, a psychical and biological lack that results in ‘penis envy.’ Since logos is combined with the phallus, male morphology thus privileges reason as being intrinsically linked to a masculine culture with its access to phallic signification. See Irigaray, S, 28; TS, 162-3, 55 Irigaray states that in her first phase, of which Speculum, This Sex, and to a certain extent, An Ethics of Sexual Difference are a part of her attempt to show how a single subject (traditionally masculine) has “...constructed the world and interpreted the world according to a single perspective.” Irigaray, JLI, 97. Her three stages consist of “...first a critique...of the auto-mono-centrism of the western subject; [second] how to define a second subject; [third] how to define a relationship, a philosophy, an ethic, a relationship between two different subjects.” Irigaray, WWC, 145.
For Irigaray, I suggest, the terms *sexe*, *genre*, and more recently, *sexuate*, are critically redeployed to confound traditional meanings and, instead, protest their use in service of patriarchy while positively imaging a way to speak of alterity or difference in sex, gender, and sexuality. I suggest that Irigaray’s use of these terms has been to recover the negative, or non-affirmative position of male subjectivity, and to mobilize this negativity to assert an affirmation of female becoming, rather than its typical use as an extension of male subjectivity and agency. In the Aristotelian sense, she confounds the original use of privative pole and opens a meaning beyond its intention. Like Morny Joy, I argue that Irigaray’s recovery of the negative is a deliberate and conscious choice, aware of the historical oppression and confinement of these poles. With this full disclosure she actively and deliberately contests the sexual determination of the symbolic and philosophic system, while positing a female subjectivity and specificity that exceeds current constitutions.

But Irigaray’s redeployment of these terms has received a varying reception. Most feminists are wary of identifying or stating a sexual difference between men and women, or naming sexual markers that differentiate men from women because they realize how powerfully these differences have been used to relegate women from the ability to reason, earn fair wages, and participate fully in culture and society. By holding apart the poles of sex and gender, the concept of gender has been released from a biological destiny, which may be articulated as one’s sex. Gender, as its own concept, can now account for the “traditional” differences, which were assumed as biologically or sexually determined. These

---

56 See section *Sexuate Identity*.
“differences” are actually mere social constructions that were employed to cause women to be materially as well as culturally oppressed within a patriarchal culture that favors the male sex and the male culture over and against the female sex and all that has been culturally categorized as part of female culture. By loosening the connection between one’s gender and sex, one may reasonably conclude that a certain ‘sex’ does not necessitate a certain ‘gender,’ although obvious and prominent cultural constraints still exist. Gender is a cultural representation that the sexed body assumes. What truly occurs, argue writers like Judith Butler, is that we ‘perform’ our gender, and this performance determines our ‘sex.’ Butler questions the concept of sex altogether, querying if the threshold of determining one’s sex is natural, anatomical, chromosomal, or hormonal? At the same time, Butler assesses the scientific discourse that purports to establish such notions as pure ‘fact.’ Indeed, Butler argues that sex must be collapsed within the same critique of gender in the following:

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

Butler argues that that these two poles actually allow us to critically regard sex again, and discover that sex is as culturally saturated as gender. Sex is not a pre-discursive notion that is prior to culture, but operates within the same discursive regimes of power within which one’s gender exists, and the very notion of a pre-discursive natural sex, is a culturally imbued reasoning.\textsuperscript{60}

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

Irigaray’s translation of the French word, ‘sexuelle’ has typically been translated as ‘sexual’, a common and understandable translation. Recently, Irigaray has distinguished that her deployment of ‘sexuelle’ should be more accurately translated as ‘sexuate’, an

\textsuperscript{60} For a more comprehensive and careful discussion of the sex and gender distinction between Butler and Irigaray see Alison Stone, \textit{Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference}, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 87-126.
identity with specific rights and responsibilities that corresponds to one’s gender.\(^62\)

Therefore, she is postulating a theory of ‘sexuate’ identity instead of ‘sexual’ identity.\(^63\) A ‘sexuate’ identity differs from a ‘sexual’ identity in that a sexuate identity is, according to Irigaray, a global identity informed by the morphology of the body, and within a relational context, depicts how the body comes into the world.\(^64\) She uses the French term ‘genre’ to depict the belonging of men and women to a universal that accords with their differing body morphology and relational context, and as Penelope Deutscher astutely observes, loses its sense when translated into the English “gender.”\(^65\)

3.2.1. Gender As Self-Limitation

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

---

\(^62\) Irigaray, ILTY, 4.
\(^63\) Luce Irigaray, “Listening, Thinking, Teaching” (teleconference address, Stony Brook University, New York, NY, September 23, 2006).
\(^64\) Ibid.
\(^66\) Irigaray, KW, 10.
seeking the bodily and cultural belonging proper to each gender, but this sexuate identity is an identity that simultaneously reaches out to the entire world. Irigaray begins to form the sexuate identity and responsibilities and rights of each sex by a unique self-limitation, rather than socially or culturally imposed limitations of gender.

To be specific, gender has typically referenced only the cultural conscription for a sexuate or sexual identity. Male and female genders have been understood as halves of the human whole and I have already elaborated extensively on the pole or half allotted to women. Sexual identity has been reduced historically to a biological aspect or ‘natural immediacy’ of the self or sexual desire and attraction linked to reproduction and reproductive capacities. Butler has argued that one’s gender and the categorization of one’s sex are both social constructions, premised upon lived bodies, and individuals ‘perform’ the gender and sex that they are assigned. But Irigaray’s sexuate identity does not ignore or depend solely on a purely sexual identity (an idea of desire or sexual attraction) or a cultural inscription of gender. Her sexuate identity and notion of gender are concepts connected with the body (natural, sensible, carnal) and also the cultural and relational context in which bodies are shaped or oriented in the world. Gender orients a self-limitation that paradoxically opens the subject to one’s self and the world.

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

She states that one’s gender isn’t a half of humankind; rather than prescribed percentages or portions, she argues that only those within the gender can ascribe the limits of that gender. Those who ascribe to the gender male or female may determine the limits.

As stated previously, she implies that one’s gender becomes one’s genus, or the relational context that allows for the appearance or growth (generation) for self and the human species. While the battle between the sexes has endemically assumed the language of violence or limit, Irigaray’s formulation for gender or sexuate identity erupts in growth, generation, regeneration, or flourishing for the human species. The sexes aren’t in a battle, they are in love and love fecundates life itself. Reproduction is not a by-product of love, but love itself is a nourishing regenerative for the couple. A child is not needed to verify love; the couple can generate their own energy of love, or a culture of love that is in touch with nature. As she states, “Such a cultivation of relationship between the genders can be transposed into community relations. Instead of seducing (one another) to expend (one another’s) energy, man and woman, woman and man contribute, one another alike, one to the other, what it takes to cultivate their desire for one another.”

Limitations are no

---

67 Irigaray, WD, 95.
68 Ibid.
69 Irigaray, KW, 220.
70 Irigaray, ILTY, 138.
longer socially inscribed stereotypes of gender in service to male sexual desire, but they are free and intentional limits in order to contribute and cultivate the growth or generation of civil society.

3.2.2. Gender As Passive Belonging

To become one’s gender is to find the sexuate identity that is ‘proper’ to each body. Gender is no longer a cultural inscription of a role based loosely upon one’s sexual identity; gender is, according to Irigaray, something I belong to: “I belong to a gender. I am objectively limited by this belonging. . . . It is necessary and sufficient for me to respect the gender I am.” She continues, “… becoming one’s gender also constitutes the means for returning to the self. The gender cannot enter into the realm of pure knowledge, pure understanding. Belonging to a gender cannot be known or assumed as the truth, the truths of classical philosophy were.” The truth of gender is both a receiving, a ‘passivity,’ and an owning, a ‘fidelity to the being I am.’ Instead of aligning to certain cultural facts, or biotic impulses, she casts belonging to a gender as a posture that fosters respect and cultivates a contribution to the genus of human identity. According to Irigaray, we can constitute human identity through an axis of vertical relations (genealogical: those that differ vertically in relationship to self, but belong to the same gender, such as grandmother, mother, daughter), and horizontal relations (alterity: a wholly other sexuate economy and identity with a differing relationship to time and space). Gender is a place of belonging or faithfulness more than a correspondence between body and role. Gender becomes an

71 Irigaray, KW, 10.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid., 10-11.
74 Ibid., 11.
intentional self-limitation and the ability to receive the “being that I am.” The question of being and who the self is become a critical juncture for this belonging.

3.2.3. Gender as Sensible Immediacy

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

75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
Instead she is attempting to postulate an *ontology* of sexuate identity that must be able to carry the weight of the universal claims she insists sexual difference can bear; *viz*, a concept that can engage the global nature of bodies, subjects, differences, and culture. As Irigaray elaborates, sexuate identity distinguishes between the subject of *énonciation* and the subject of *énoncé*. To put it in a more Heideggerian framework, a sexuate identity is concerned about ontology and not just the ontological, but it is an ontological sexuate identity of ontic beings that must be in touch with the notion of ontology. The question of being involves the sexuate identity of beings, but sexuate identity is not reducible to ‘natural immediacy,’ it is a ‘sensible immediacy’ that allows sexuate beings to be more than the sum of their physiology. To overly simplify, her question of sexuate identity as the basis for sexual difference brings *Dasein* back into the fore as the question of our age, but *Dasein* is no longer a neuter question of being. It asks the question of being with regard to the sexuate identity and gender of beings, but is more than Freudian sexual libidinal coding. In conclusion, Irigaray’s sexual difference is shaped through the critical paradox of self-limitation, a receptive belonging that keeps cultivation of a civil society at its fore, rather than biotic attributes of Freudian-libidinal markers, and a sensible immediacy of shifting and sensuous notions of nature and culture.

4. **Phase Three: A Way of Love**

Irigaray’s third phase focuses on intersubjectivity between these two asymmetrical, dimorphic, universal genders, cultivating sexuate identities that permit love to each other to be the new avenue or road to redemption. Again, we will note the curbing of a desire to

---

77 Luce Irigaray, “Listening, Thinking, Teaching” (teleconference address, Stony Brook University, New York, NY, September 23, 2006).
dominate, a self-imposed or self-informed limit, and a flourishing that resists any enlargement of one subjectivity to the demise of another.

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

According to Irigaray, one cannot locate female sexuate identity by reversing the sex of the subjects within the dialectic. Instead of reversing, Irigaray inverts the dialectic; this strategy of inversion is one she observes Marx performing upon Hegel, Nietzsche performing upon Platonism, even describes the problems of the return, which Heidegger develops, as a problematic of inversion. In her case she says, “. . . it was more a question of inverting myself.” She explains, “I was the other of/for man, I attempted to define the objective alterity of myself for myself as belonging to the female gender. I carried out an inversion of the femininity imposed upon me in order to try to define the female corresponding to my gender: the in-and-for-itself of my female nature.” She states that she carried out a partial process of limitation or negation relative to her natural immediacy, and relative to the representation she had been given of what she was as a woman, the other of for man, the other of male culture. She concludes, “Hence I attempted to sketch out

---

78 Irigaray, ILTY, 63.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
a spirituality in the feminine and in doing so, of course, I curbed my own needs and desires, my natural immediacy, especially by thinking myself as half and only half the world, but also by calling into question the spirituality imposed on me in the culture appropriate to the male or to patriarchy, a culture in which I was the other of the Same.”

Irigaray's critique of male sexuate identity isn’t its existence, but its overreach, its distortion of the female gender as derivative of itself, and its spiritual alignment with the transcendent claims of God as its natural and spiritual will to power. By inverting the representation given her, Irigaray self-represents herself for herself, as she reaches out for a relationship of mutuality in which both her needs and desires are met, as well as the others, in order to consciously develop a relationship of intersubjectivity with another gender, a maneuver she identifies as the negative of the dialectic.

4.1. Irigaray’s Strategy: The Negative

I suggest that in order to understand how Irigaray deconstructs and dismantles logocentrism from within, while positing a positive location for female subjectivity and desire, it is critical to understand her deployment of the term “the negative.”

I sketch Irigaray’s use of the term “the negative,” as implying multiple senses: first, an affirmation of certain activities, rather than idealized qualities, that give expression to women’s desire and subjectivity; second, a deliberate and strategic self-limitation of a sexed individual in

---

81 Ibid., 64. Italics mine.
82 The negative is a strategic affirmation of what the female signifies in the psychosexual history of philosophy and often signals a kind of limit to any one subjectivity. Namely, if the penis is the positive point of signification and reference for meaning, then the vagina is the “negative” or “lack.” Annemie Halsema has also written on the Irigaray’s use of the negative connecting her usage with Hegel’s dialectic, explaining, “It is an affirmative limit which is necessary for the growth of gendered identity—namely through acceptance of the boundary formed by one’s gender—and that is also necessary for recognition of the irreducibility of the other, in other words for considering the other as other... in more general terms finiteness... the task for human beings is to cultivate their finiteness.” Annemie Halsema, Luce Irigaray and Horizontal Transcendence (Amsterdam, NE: Humanistics University Press, 2010) 21.
order to develop an intersubjective and interpersonal encounter between two universal
genders; and third, attentive development of a divine ideal for one’s self, gender, and the
everyday wholly other whose alterity and gender supports one’s own spiritual becoming.
Rather than a focus on divine ecstasy located in the beyond, the divine is located in the
interpersonal relationship of difference between men and women.

4.2. Rewriting the Negative

In the traditional interpretation of Hegel and the Lacanian heritage, desire and the
negative connote a sense of paucity. A woman’s desire within logocentrism is desire or
negativity for what she lacks: unity of being, rational consciousness, phallic power, and a
will to power. As Morny Joy explains, “In contrast to Hegel, where negativity (as a
necessary movement of the dialectics) will be integrated in the interests of a final mode of
self-consciousness or universality, Irigaray seeks to transform radically this triumphalistic
procedure.” She will rescue negativity from its employment as a device that “... artificially introduces alienation in the service of a higher (yet equally suspicious unity).”

Irigaray describes Hegel’s negative as one that annihilates, “the mastery of consciousness
(historically male) over nature and human kind.” Irigaray principally rejects the claim
that women can only be located within the scheme of binary oppositions constitutive of
male subjectivity and desire. Within this scheme, a woman can only remove herself from
the location of passive object by pursuing the same location as the philosophical subject
man. Therefore, a woman, pursuing desire and agency to exercise her self-consciousness,

84 Ibid.
85 Irigaray, ILTY, 13.
simply reverses the role of object for subject and the result is a sameness in identity and consciousness: instead of men, now women war for the same will to power as patriarchy and the movement toward a higher or transcendent unity is affirmed. Rather than being the pawns, they become the agents seeking unity and aspiring toward the same identity as the male subject.

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

\textsuperscript{86} Irigaray, TS, 107.
\textsuperscript{87} Rosi Braidotti, “Sexual Difference Theory,” 305.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 304.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid. 306.
For in one sense she wants to keep in play the deconstructive dismantling of any abstract binaries, especially that of nature/culture. At the same time, she poses a nonessentialistic alternative with a definite strategy for its attainment. Negativity will remain, but rather than being a confrontational element, it will now imply a stage of self-analysis and critical appropriation that has distinctive implications for both women and men.90

Woman's desire and the negative is no longer a notion signposting to what she lacks, it is a positive notion of fulfillment, plenitude, and flourishing for female sexuate identity. But ironically, fulfillment comes from limit, plenitude from recognition of an irreducible other, and flourishing from the flourishing of two genders that are responsible for their own becoming and constitute the whole of humanity.

Joy nuances that the acknowledgement of sexual difference involves, but does not imply, a simple acceptance of the irreducibility of the other and its resistance to preordained categories. She writes that there must be “. . . an acknowledgment that women will no longer conform to definitions of femininity that do not respect a women's integrity and her responsibility for her own becoming.”91 The becoming is not an innate identity but “that form of universality, which within the Hegelian dispensation, acknowledges that the final stage of individuality can be expressed as a reaffirmation of the primary abstract formula at a personalized level.”92 Irigaray explains, “Each woman will, therefore, be for herself woman in the process of becoming, the model for herself as a woman for the man whom she needs, just as he needs her to ensure the transition from nature to culture. In

---

91 Ibid., 114.
92 Ibid.
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.”

Lest one think this means subjective relativism, romantic naturalism or biologism, or an arbitrary self-determination, Irigaray carefully adds, “That does not mean she can lapse into capriciousness, dispersion, the multiplicity of her desires, or a loss of identity. She should, quite the contrary, gather herself within herself in order to accomplish her gender’s perfection for herself, for the man she loves, for her children, but equally for civil society, for the world of culture, for a definition of the universal corresponding to reality.”

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

In I Love to You, Irigaray explains the negative, not as a set of idealized qualities, but as an active participation in the labor of love, where each sex upholds its limit and refuses an egological position that insists one sex is the whole of the human genus. She explains the negative as, “the limit of one gender in relation to the other.” She says the negative in sexual difference means, “…an acceptance of the limit of my gender and recognition of the irreducibility of the other. It cannot be overcome, but it gives a positive access—neither instinctual nor drive-related—to the other.” She is careful to articulate this self-limit not as a sacrifice or an ascetic posture. In another passage she candidly states one can recognize the negative in the self: “‘I am sexed’ implies, ‘I am not everything.’”

While limits have been formed, such as the Oedipal theory of sexual drives, Irigaray notes, they

---

93 Irigaray, ILTY, 27.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid., 11.
96 Ibid., 13.
97 Ibid., 51.
have been formed wrongly in opposition to the other gender, and such thinking remains locked in a dialectic of master and slave, where one can only win at the other’s expense. Irigaray laments the history of sexes, which has been a division of labor based upon sex, and thus, a battle of the sexes, and a warring of absolute spirit whose master and horizon is death. She explains the labor of the negative on man’s terms: “death as the rallying place of sensible desire, the real or symbolic dissolution of the citizen in the community and enslavement to property and capital.” Irigaray’s use of the negative offers a new horizon, the cultivation of life. Rather than a division of a rivalry between the sexes, she offers a way to create an alliance, or a way of happiness or felicity for all men and women, which does not annihilate the self. The negative begins within the interiority of the self, returning the self back to the self, placing the responsibility of becoming on the person. As she writes, “… this negative created a space for potential meeting or listening within me.” The return to self is meant to permit a woman to develop a sense of identity and an ideal faithful to herself, and then to women as a collective. By appropriating the negative, she permits the negative of limit, finitude, and renunciation to form a critical symbolic discourse that can cultivate a personal sensibility that is appropriate to a sexed man or woman, while at the same time, faithful to a universal gender. Faithfulness to one’s gender means incarnating our happiness as living women and men and she adds, “Equality  

———  
98 Ibid., 3.  
99 Ibid., 23.  
100 She writes, “It may be possible for a harmony and growth respectful of life to exist through a constant balancing between attraction and retention. And this would maintain and retain an energy of return for each man and woman, an energy that serves life and culture, prevents ill-considered and short-lived forms of growth, and protects and retain what has been gained, particularly with respect to life and civilization.” Irigaray, ILTY, 55.  
101 Ibid., 13.  
102 Ibid.  
103 Ibid., 64.
neutralizes that dimension of the negative which opens up an access to the alliance between the genders."\textsuperscript{104} But the formulation of a female generic, or gender, must be developed before a possible felicity or alliance between the genders can emerge in history.

4.3. \textit{Nature and Culture: The Double Dialectic}

Irigaray believes Hegel considered his own time and system as capable of realizing the end of History and dubs his theory as the most powerful of Western philosophies.\textsuperscript{105} Unquestionably the power of his theory still influences our present notions of marriage, family, and civil society. Feminists have noted the dire effects women experience when traditionally they are assigned to the private sphere and men to the public. Irigaray adds how men also suffer from this erroneous division between public and private, nature and culture. She writes,

\begin{quote}
This division of tasks between home and the public realm could not be sustained without depriving woman of a relationship to the singular in love and of the singularity necessary for her relationship to the universal. The home—the couple or family—should be a locus for the singular and universal for both sexes, as should the life of a citizen as well. This means that the order of cultural identity, not only natural identity, must exist within the couple, the family, and the state. Without a cultural identity suited to the natural identity of each sex, nature and the universal are parted, like heaven and earth; with an infinite distance between them, they marry no more. The division of tasks between heaven and earth, suffering and labor here below,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 55.
recompense and felicity in the beyond, begins as a period in our culture that is described in mythology and inscribed into philosophy and theology.\textsuperscript{106}

What each sex needs, rather than the diminution of one sex for the other, or their fractured participation in differing spheres, is the universality\textsuperscript{107} of each sex to emerge corresponding to their natural immediacy, or an idealized version of each gender that is in touch with nature. The natural and the sensible do not determine culture, nor does culture determine the natural. The two, nature and culture, mobilize in a non-oppositional dialectic for each sex, which forms a double dialectic, “a dialectic of the relation of woman to herself and of man to himself, a double dialectic therefore, enabling a real, cultured and ethical relation between them.”\textsuperscript{108} By contemplating and respecting the differences of the natural body, men and women can move beyond instinct or drive to consciousness of the body of each sex. While the Hegelian paradigm depicts consciousness and freedom as separate and divided from nature, Irigaray understands their alliance, but not their fusion, as the critical passageway for each sex to bring together natural immediacy appropriate for each sex with its universality or ideal.

4.4. \textit{The Spiritual Labor of Love}

This sensible attraction or carnal love, which cannot be reduced to biological consummation or reproduction, yields a physical and spiritual labor of love. Obviously this

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{107} Morny Joy notes that the final stage of Hegel’s dialectic is variously described in his works, but the individuality of self-consciousness ultimately attained (as Geist/spirit) is also understood as an enrichment or precision at a more refined level of the initially posited general universal. In this essay, I with Joy, refer to this stage by the word “universality” to distinguish it from universal statements and universalism, which, Joy notes, is a crucial and controversial aspect of Irigaray’s work, when she states that women should attain the perfection of their gender or the universal. I agree with Joy that when Irigaray refers to women attaining the universal, what she has in mind is actually a mode of universality as described above. See Joy, \textit{Resistance, Flight, Creation}, 241, n. 3.
\textsuperscript{108} Irigaray, ILTY., 62.
love is not a “facile fusion of romantic sensibility” since “… such hackneyed conventions simply feed into an absorption that obliterates necessary distinction.” The love Irigaray invokes is firmly grounded in the reality of actual men and women and their natural necessities to breathe, feed, clothe and house themselves. True Geist or spirit ought to incarnate a love between actual men and women that addresses and redresses these necessities. We do not sit and wait for a deus ex machina, but incarnate such a divine ideal between and among actual men and women. She understands spirit to be the means for matter to emerge and endure in its proper form or forms, and the celestial being the manifestation of our degree of spirituality in the “here and now.”

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

110 Irigaray, ILTY, 50.
111 Ibid., 15.
112 Ibid., 14.
113 Halsema, Luce Irigaray and Horizontal Transcendence, 57.
114 Ibid.
Irigaray has taken what phallogocentrism covered over, repressed, dismissed, or abhorred, and has recovered, reappraised, and repossessed the negative, or the limit of one's self constitution that recognizes another gender, as a positive feminist strategy that permits an affirmative reconstruction of political will and female subjectivity and agency from a position of alienation and exile. While Derrida also noted this position of marginal power and phallocratic excess, in *Spurs* he was content to leave women there. Irigaray recovers the negative and forms a rallying point for political agency and positive constructive or strategic ontology of female subjectivity.

In chapter two I suggest that the dialectic of the negative is central to a critical theory of two universals. I connect the negative to Irigaray’s account of how two genders recognize self-limitation and self-representation in their interaction. In *Speculum*, Irigaray traced the “blind spots” in order to reveal how the female body was not only used as a passive object, but also, to contest this position. The negative, I suggest, functions as a pole that constitutes a vital part of the cosmic world, a way for each gender to generate positively a natural-cultural-social identity individually and collectively. In chapter three I develop how the dialectics of the negative can also interlock with the question of proximity, or why ethics is continually a relationship with or near others who are different and how

---

115 In *Spurs* Derrida suggests that the location of woman as truth and untruth, offers a particularly potent site from which to deconstruct the specular economy, a site that within his scheme prefigures the economy of gift rather than propriation. He leaves women in a state of undecidability, which can be potent, but risks losing sexual specificity. For example he writes, “Although there is not truth in itself of the sexual difference in itself, of either man or woman in itself, all of ontology nevertheless, with its inspection, appropriation, identification and verification of identity, has resulted in concealing, even as it presupposes it, this undecidability.” Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 103-4. For critical appraisal of his position see Peggy Kamuf, “Deconstruction and Feminism: A Repetition,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Jacques Derrida*, ed. Nancy Holland (University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997) 103-26; Ellen T. Armour, “Deconstruction’s Alliance with Feminism: Possibilities and Limits,” *Deconstruction, Feminist Theology, and the Problem of Difference: Subverting the Race/Gender Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) 79-102. For Irigaray’s concern for sexual specificity in the deconstruction of text, see Irigaray, TSN, 121-136.
these differences can be respected. In chapter four, I will retrace the primary mythologies of the Christian tradition of sexual difference and deploy the negative to mobilize an excess within these primal accounts that can positively account for female subjectivity, while resisting the absolutizing stance of phallogocentrism. While *Speculum* offers a critical unpacking of Greek *genesis* or origins, and uncovers the forgotten mother/daughter dyad, I will also offer a critical and, hopefully, co-redemptive understanding of the Hebrew Genesis account, the formative mythology of the Judaic, Abrahamic, Christian, and various ‘other’ traditions.

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