

## Chapter 1

# Thinking Difference as Different Thinking in Luce Irigaray's Deconstructive Genealogies

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The new is not found in what is said, but in the event of its return.

—Michel Foucault, “The Order of Discourse”

Ancient Greek *logos*, *mythos*, and tragedy have played a mobilizing role in Luce Irigaray's philosophical critique of Western metaphysics. Her persistent return and affective bond to Ancient Greek thought redraws the contours of the very field of intellectual kinship, a kinship whose multitude of forces remains in language and whose rearticulations are not fully to be anticipated or controlled. This volume is a reflection on how Luce Irigaray *reads* the classic discourse of metaphysics and how Luce Irigaray *is read* within and against this discourse. Such readings do not merely bear upon textual questions, but revisit some of the most complex and pressing epistemological aporias of the current historical moment, such as the workings of criticism, the question of ideology, the language of politics and the politics of language, the possibility of social and symbolic transformation, the multiple mediations between metropolitan and postcolonial contexts of theory and practice, the question of the other, and the function of the feminine—the feminine other—in Western metaphysics. Irigaray's ethics of the feminine other not only signals new ways to rethink self, relatedness, experience, subjectivity, and the body, but also creates a space for a fresh discussion of the politics of identity and the politics of difference. The essays in this collection attempt to employ Irigaray's strategies of rewriting the Ancient Greek intellectual traditions in ways fruitful and creative for a critical theory of the political, one that engages primarily with the question of the other.

In the context of Luce Irigaray's innovative rereadings of the Greek classical texts, transformative readings that are marked by her psychoanalytic feminism, the appellation "the Greeks"—stereotypically invoked to denote "Ancient Greek civilization"—is used critically. What are the theoretical, cultural, and political implications of the monologic emphasis on the Greek classical past? How can we trace its routes of rewriting and translatability into various contemporary identities? How does a de-authorization of the priority of "the classical" motivate new critical treatments of the canon of the "West"? Irigaray's rereadings of the "origins" of Western representation offer a critical frame in which to expose the founding violence involved in the production of the "origins" of "Western" intelligibility. "Origins" and the "West" must remain in quotation marks here, as Irigaray's textual practice of "romancing" the Greeks could be seen as being precisely about the very problem of quotation marks. As it designates the limits of referentiality and implies the catachresis of the proper name, the problem of quotation marks ultimately involves the question of what and who is rendered unintelligible in this male economy and imaginary of origination, what configurations of the feminine, racialized Others, and other unspeakable modes of humanness are produced as sites of constitutive impropriety and exclusion.

The book traces Luce Irigaray's rereading of "the Greeks" as history of metaphysics and as history of paternal nomination. In Irigaray's mode of deconstructive genealogy, going back to the Greeks is figured neither as an attempt to retrieve an originary question nor even as a restorative return to the question of origin. Irigaray's rereading does not seek to bring the disclosed aspects—the occlusions, the foreclosures, and the erasures—of the Greek text to the propriety of full presence and the mastery of interpretation. It is not a cognitive commentary but rather a performative engagement; one that, in bringing forth the internal production of difference and improper usage, works as an affirmation and reinvention of the dispersal.

Irigaray renders the archive of Western metaphysics available for a rereading. She reads ancient Greek grammatology to excavate, along its fissures, interstices, caesuras, lapses, resonances, and fault lines, what has remained repressed within its discourse of truth and identity, within the unifying force and violence of the logos, but also within its internal dynamics. Her reading and rewriting of Western histories of reading and writing engage with what Jacques Derrida invokes, in "The Double Session," as the undecidable duplicity of every text. Every text is inescapably double: while the one is open to the hermeneutics of reading and its technologies of transparent presence, truth, representation, and meaning, the second can be partly encountered through the tracing of fissures in the first. It is that second dimension—the always deferred quality of the

text—that Irigaray seeks to capture. In theorizing how mimicry does not mechanically reproduce a prior referent, but rather exposes and constitutes the original as phantasmatic, Derrida significantly conveys the function of mimicry-imitating-nothing through the figure of a speculum reflecting no reality: “[I]n this speculum with no reality, in this mirror of a mirror, a difference or dyad does exist, since there are mimes and phantoms. But it is a difference without reference, or rather reference without a referent, without any first or last unit, a ghost that is the phantom of no flesh.”<sup>1</sup> In Irigaray’s reading and writing, the order of logos fails to achieve the phantasmatic ideal of authorial and authoritative unification. Spectralized/spectralizing and specularized/specularizing difference keeps the unifying drive of the logos from normative closure, completion, and commensuration; discourse never turns into a figure of plenitude and totality.

This is a philosophy that performatively resonates with the abject and fugitive other in Western discourse; a philosophy that affectively opens the possibility for the discourse of the displaced other at the limits of intelligibility. Irigaray’s philosophy enacts the passage beyond phallic mimicry of the monologic propriety of logos to the possibility of an affective language in and through which to think difference without reducing it to the normative fantasy of oneness. The word *heteros* is inhabited by the Indoeuropean suffix *-tero(s)*, echoing the monstrous liminality and indeterminate strangeness of *teras* (*teras*: both horrible and wonderful) that calls into question the closure of intelligibility. And it is the unintelligible other as female that may be grammatologically traced in the term *ys-teros*.<sup>2</sup>

Irigaray’s writing performs the difference it puts in language. It performs the impossibility of such articulation of difference within the discursive system that has produced it as abject. The question of articulating difference in language is posed as a question of the very possibilities and impossibilities of intelligibility itself. Thus, this thinking of difference is committed, and gives rise, to a different thinking. Irigaray’s challenge to the phallogocentric economy and its constitutive suppression of the feminine is particularly suggestive in that respect. Irigaray’s non-phallic metaphor of the lips—neither singular nor plural—gestures toward what Tina Chanter calls an “ethics of eros,” an ethical space where sexual difference is reclaimed and refigured beyond the Platonic economy of the same.<sup>3</sup>

Judith Butler is absolutely right to point out that, in deconstructing the form/matter distinction in Plato, Luce Irigaray’s task is “to show that those binary oppositions are formulated through the exclusion of a field of disruptive possibilities.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, in what Butler provocatively calls “rude and provocative reading,”<sup>5</sup> Irigaray’s tactically mimetic intervention exposes phallogocentrism as a proprietary economy of representation that produces the “feminine” as its improper, specular and spectral, constitutive outside: the necessary, albeit unspeakable and illegible, exclusion that

enables this economy to proceed and operate in a legible fashion. The feminine is excluded and, at the same time, phantasmatically associated with materiality and corporeality, Irigaray argues. The feminine is erased and excluded as incoherent, excessive, and uncontainable “matter,” a matter figured as receptivity. Reading the figurations, or dis-figurations, of the disavowed feminine through the *chora* (the receptacle, *hypodochē*) in Plato’s *Timaeus*, in her well-known essay “Plato’s Hystera,” Irigaray resists the conflation of the *chora* and the maternal; she is, rather, interested in how the discursive articulation of this reduction performs a certain figuration of the feminine as perennial outside. The question whether and to what extent the sign of the feminine monopolizes the domain of exclusion in Irigaray’s own discourse rightly attracts much of the authors’ critical attention in this volume.<sup>6</sup>

As manifested in her textual strategy of mimesis, Irigaray is interested in the *chora* as a dimension of reading and writing. Reading the Greeks is not merely epiphenomenal but rather emblematically constitutive to Irigaray’s overall project. In the scope of Irigaray’s work, the encounter with “the Greeks” encompasses mimetic deconstructive readings of canonical texts but also appropriating Greek mythology especially in its aspect of female genealogies. The Greeks conventionally represent the idealized origin, the *arche* (in its dual sense, as both beginning and authority) of Western metaphysics. In her earlier writings, Irigaray inhabits this *arche* in order to deconstruct the *logos*—as both reason and discourse—of sexual in-difference, while in her later phase of her writing she uses the alternative beginnings figured by mythical female genealogies in order to articulate a re-figured sexual difference yet-to-come.

Irigaray’s retrospective encounter with the Greeks stages a passage from *logos* to myth; it stages the interstice between them. *Logos* as reason and discourse which denotes authoritative beginning is displaced by mythology as *logos* of/for myth. The very idea of myth, as it signals the impulse of the West to retrieve and reclaim its own origin, is interrupted; mythology is appropriated as an inevitable, incessant, and indissociable recitation and invention, a mimetic *poesis* that brings forth a new articulation of myth, a new *mything*.<sup>7</sup> Irigaray recounts this interruption, or, to phrase it more accurately, she lets the myth recount its own interruptions and thus entail its own events. Here is how Jean-Luc Nancy puts it: “Thus, once myth is interrupted, writing recounts our history to us again. But it is no longer a narrative—neither grand nor small—but rather an offering: a history is offered to us. Which is to say that an event—and an advent—is proposed to us, without its unfolding being imposed upon us.”<sup>8</sup>

In Irigaray’s hands, myth is motivated, and proposed to us, as a route for refiguring sexual difference. In her later work, a more constructive and positive use of myths emerges in the context of her affirmative, re-creative

articulation of female genealogies deriving from a pre-Hellenic matrix. From the authorial and authoritative logos of male philosophers Plato and Aristotle, Irigaray shifts to female figures emerging from the more polylogic horizon of mythology: Demeter and Persephone, Eurydice.

Luce Irigaray returns persistently to the founding discourses of Ancient Greek thought whose genealogical transmission through the ages has been too singularly generated through phallogocentric lines. She does so by deploying strategies of free-indirect citing, miming, specularizing, and displacing monologic classical Greek metaphysics with polylogic, pre-Hellenic genealogies. What is at stake in this movement of hers is not a nostalgic Odyssean return (although we know that even that homecoming was not entirely tranquil), but rather the infinite constitution of the unforeseeable, which rises upon an altering and disquieting interruption.

Irigaray's sustained commitment to strategies of deconstructing, demythifying, reconstructing, and remythifying seems to resonate with Nietzsche's perception of historicity, in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, as a sign-chain of ever new, random, contingent takeovers, adaptations, reinterpretations, and redirections to new ends. It also resonates with the way in which Nietzsche's eternal recurrence repeats perpetually the becoming of the arbitrary event. Ambivalently deriving from the Pythagoreans and the Stoics' cosmologies, the Nietzschean concept of perpetual recurrence refers to a circular repetition of time, one that is intimately related to self-overcoming and the overcoming of the will to truth. As in Nietzsche the self is an aggregate of actions and events, and there is no doer behind the deed, eternal return is a way to be actively open to the future through redeeming the past in the present. It is a way to affirm becoming. "There will be nothing new in it," Nietzsche writes, "and everything...in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence."<sup>9</sup> As he expounds in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "The will cannot will backwards; and that he cannot break time and time's covetousness, that is the will's loneliest melancholy."<sup>10</sup>

As Heidegger significantly considered, however, the notion of eternal return is by no means incompatible with the will to power. The question is: How to turn every "and thus it was" into "and thus I willed it," as the demon asks of Zarathustra? How to will the perpetual recurrence if human subjects are not afforded a full perception and control of temporal structures and occurrences? A theory of human time and subjectivity rather than a cosmology, then, eternal return can be understood as an iterative drive, wherein the momentariness of the moment is not negated—as in the Western metaphysics of eternity—but perpetually fulfilled. As Elizabeth Grosz has put it: "What eternal recurrence repeats is the random event that lives only by being willed again, by being actively chosen while passively bestowed."<sup>11</sup>

Irigaray's tarrying with the return as not simply a return to the "same" might prompt us to consider the act of returning as a performative one which wrestles with the limits and foreclosures of resignification. The movement of returning as open-ended responding, refiguring, and reauthoring is not an ascent into a plenitude of unencumbered and assertive difference. Rather, it is circumscribed and conditioned in part by what cannot be taken over and what cannot be refigured. We return, and we are returned, to the historicity of power relations no more than power arrangements return to us, containing the eruption of newness but also providing the devices of re-authorship and forming the condition of its possibility. It is this active recognition of what inevitably delimits all discursive practices and events that ultimately invigorates the eventness of our critical returning to the matrices of intelligibility. Such modality of return, both constrained and indeterminately contingent, would be more than an event in that it would eternally and inventively produce the question of the event: not an impetus to the future without a history of the present.

As a counterpoint to the joyous utopics of radical resignification within the discourse of power, Butler rethinks this Nietzschean notion of sign-chain of ever new possibilities of resignification (as well as its echoes in Foucault's commitment to genealogy) through the question of the power constraints on and in processes of resignification. We maintain that such rethinking is crucial in any attempt to capture the complex strategies of genealogy in which injurious discourses not merely mark but become the painful and enabling resources of every innovative, resignifying practice.<sup>12</sup>

Irigaray's return to "the Greeks," is not a nostalgic return to the ideality of the universal origin or to the original promised land of Hellenocentric antiquity, but an affirmatively critical (albeit not reduced to the normative positive/negative split) revisiting of this ideality; a revisiting not through an appropriative mastery, but rather through the means of a disruptive passage—proximity and distance, repetition and displacement—which conveys a certain affect of reciprocity. This return bears also connotations of the return of the gift and the return of the debt; furthermore, it might denote the specter of an unanticipated, terrifying reemergence. It is this multilayered return—repetition, recurrence, repayment, and rediscovery at once—in all its crucial performative exigencies of temporality and temporal/temporary productivity, that brings to the fore a certain unprogrammatic, noncategorical production of dissonance. This bringing forth evokes Michel Foucault's words, in "The Order of Discourse": "The new is not found in what is said, but in the event of its return."<sup>13</sup> This return is not a mere addition to a universal matrix, it is not a topographical movement to an inscriptional, enclosed space of discursive order; rather, it is an opening onto the boundless transformative possibilities erupting within the thought of the event. Let us recall Foucault again: "[T]he return

to a text is not a historical supplement that would come to fix itself upon the primary discursivity and redouble it in the form of an ornament which, after all, is not essential. Rather, it is an effective and necessary means of transforming discursive practice.”<sup>14</sup>

The essays collected here highlight the ways in which Irigarayan writing inhabits and challenges the fixed borders between such Platonic and Aristotelian distinctions as origin and copy, actuality and potentiality, sensible and intelligible. In this collection, Irigaray’s engagement with the potential of forms and traces of iterability within the history of reading and writing is addressed as part of a deconstructive genealogy that runs from Homer, Sophocles, Plato and Aristotle to Hegel, Marx, Heidegger, Lacan, Foucault, Loraux, Derrida, Butler, Spillers, and Agamben. The book addresses these multilayered genealogies from a multitude of perspectives and disciplines. In their reading of Irigaray’s engagements with “the Greeks,” authors mobilize and engage the work of a diverse array of theories such as: contemporary feminisms, critical theory, comparative literature, postcolonial theory, psychoanalysis. Taken together, the essays follow the traces of Irigaray’s own mode of reading: occasionally critical of Irigaray, but also, at the same time, critically responsive to the criticisms that have been leveled against her work. The guiding question that interlaces this volume is what kinds of refigurations of the theoretical and the political emerge from a gesture of reading Irigaray in an Irigarayan way, that is, in a way that “involves a far more controversial and riskier operation, a transvaluation rather than a repudiation” of the *master* discourse, as it was put by Naomi Schor, one of Irigaray’s most adept readers?<sup>15</sup> Such reading, we believe, a reading that resists being reduced to idealization or dismissal, would necessarily entail politically and theoretically innovative ways to engage with both Irigaray and “the Greeks.”

Discussing a certain illegibility that marks Irigaray’s writing, Elizabeth Weed reads Irigaray’s genre as a psychoanalytic-deconstructive critique that exposes the conditions of possibility of discourse and legibility; she does so by opening up the question of the relation between social and the psychic. Both in Irigaray’s earlier phase marked by deconstructive readings of canonical texts of the Western tradition and in her second phase in which a different sexual difference is creatively articulated, the reader is called on to an *askesis* of deconstructive reading of Irigaray’s critique. This encounter at the limits of intelligibility resonates with Irigaray’s appropriation of the female genealogies occurring in Greek mythology, whereby myth performatively leads to theory through staging the psychic. The separation of Persephone and Demeter figures the darkness of monosexual culture whereas their reunion promises the possibility of an unthought mode of sexualization. It is this route from myth to theory that allows for the unprogrammable to occur both in Irigaray’s critique and in the reading that it calls on.

Inspired by Irigaray's "Kore: Young Virgin, Pupil of the Eye," Dorothea Olkowski confronts the complexity of the myth of Kore, a myth that implies the challenges of in/visibility and figures the position that understanding through seeing occupies in the metaphysics of presence. *Kore* is Demeter's daughter, the young girl who must be blinded and abducted by Hades so as to turn into the receptacle of his self-vision, so as to open onto en-visioning and understanding of an Other self; *kore* denotes also the "pupil," that part of the eye that gives vision and in which one must look in order to see oneself. The philosophical axiom that self-knowledge requires gazing into the kore of the eye, capturing the young girl, obscures the capacity of light to diffract. On the contrary, imagining Demeter-Kore as the creative story of diffracted light transmitting sensibly its energy to the world proposes a new image of philosophy.

Dianne Chisholm engages Kathy Acker and Luce Irigaray's leap beyond phallic mimicry of logos to the possibility of a primal, corporeal language of self-affection. Acker enacts Irigaray's call for a genealogy deriving from a pre-Hellenic matrix, an arche preceding the origins inaugurated by the Greeks. Her restaging of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, but also her restaging of Irigaray's deconstruction of Plato's cave allegory, find the "elsewhere" of sexual difference in the underworld that lies repressed beneath the Oedipal patriarchal civilization denoted by "Greece"; Eurydice's mythic descent in patriarchal reality's deathhouse tells the story of Acker's living and dying with breast cancer and her passage through the operations of obstetrical enlightenment.

Irigaray's ambivalent emphasis on the veil, and the veil as "Greek," is the focus of Anne-Emmanuelle Berger's contribution. In Irigaray's work, the analysis of veiling as a strategy of women's wrapping in the market of sexual exchange shifts gradually to an argument about a protective, maternal veil that would shield women against the expropriating gaze. Such shift implies Irigaray's complicated relation to deconstruction, as she progressively abandons the deconstructive approach adopted in her early work of critical mimicry, and comes to value the propriety of linguistic referentiality. In the context of Irigaray's recourse to Greek mythology and critical engagement with the conceptual borders of philosophical discourse, the distinction between the veil as material and the veil as metaphor proves untenable; a separation of (textile) matter from signification is impossible, as the concrete gesture of wrapping the body cannot be dissociated from abstracting the body. Thus, the veil as matter and trope becomes a point of entry into Irigaray's peculiar materialism, a materialism that is inscribed in her stance on sexual difference as well as her critique of Greek idealism as a process of dematerialization. Indeed, the veil-as-metaphor and the metaphor-as-veil allegorize Irigaray's ambivalent position vis-à-vis the metaphysical tradition (of veil weaving) she purports to critically mime.



Through an Irigarayan reading of relations among women under patriarchy, Gail Schwab traces the erasure of sexual difference in Aeschylus's *Oresteia* and Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Electra*. The severing of the intergenerational link between women is emblemized by the emphasis on the death of the father and the silencing of the originary matricide, which functions as the founding act for the establishment of the social order. As an antidote to the rupture of female genealogies, the mythological narrative of Demeter and Persephone points to a potential reclaiming of the lost utopia of creative relationships among and between women.

Mary Beth Mader sheds light on Irigaray's readings of Sophocles' *Antigone*, focusing on Antigone's reasoning for burying her brother against Creon's command and her enigmatic claim that she would not have broken the king's edict for a husband or child of hers. In an early account, Irigaray understands Antigone's violation as an allegiance to her maternal line, whereas in a later discussion Antigone figures the subsumption of female *genre* into male power and kinship order. Mader suggests that Antigone's favoring of Polynices is not a universalizable defense of a brother's irreplaceability or maternal filiation in general, but rather a struggle to restore her family's precariousness by releasing sexual difference from its genealogical bounds.

In our text, the figure of Antigone becomes the performative occasion for exploring the aporias of mourning. How does mourning turn from a proper language-in-the-feminine into a threatening performative catachresis expelled by and actively opposed to the very intelligibility of the political? Could Antigone represent the poetic horizon in which Luce Irigaray's *parler-femme* can be read in conjunction with catachresis of mourning-as-language-in-the-feminine? These questions resound in the questions that Irigaray herself poses with respect to Antigone's pathos: "Is mourning itself her *jouissance*?...Does she anticipate the decree of death formulated by those in power? Does she duplicate it? Has she given in? Or is she still in revolt?" (*Speculum*, 219). Drawing on Nicole Loraux's theorization of tragic mourning as central to the ways in which the polis imaginatively invents itself, we consider the ways in which the antipolitical inherent in laying claim to mourning rites for the other has the potential to hold intelligibility open to political rearticulation, and thus mobilize the affective force of the disruptive performative.

In Lynne Huffer's contribution, intertextual reading of Michel Foucault and Luce Irigaray—in their shared engagement with the Greeks—establishes the ground for reflecting on the moral implications of the queer-feminist dissonance, and for figuring the possibility of a queer feminism. The two philosophers' corresponding and contrasting readings of the Greeks—namely, Foucault's interest in politics of homosocial friendship and an economy of pleasures, and Irigaray's female genealogies

and rewriting of the female body's morphology—articulate an ethics as a collective practice of freedom that retains the spirit of the Greek concept of *poiesis*.

Irigaray's notion of the impossible as the only possibility of a future becomes the focal site of reflection in Stathis Gourgouris's text. The possibility of "what does not yet exist" is read in conjunction with Aristotle's impossible requirement that rule can only be enacted from within the experience of being ruled. Irigaray offers the means with which to encounter the question of alterity without allowing heterology to disintegrate into heteronomy, without allowing the politics of the other to lapse into mere identity politics. Her epistemology of sexual difference enables a self-interrogation of alterity as a monistic, absolute One; by emphasizing that each other's alterity does not amount to mere opposition or arithmetic equation, Irigaray produces a mode of raising the question of autonomy as a continuously altering and altered question of the *praxis/poiesis* of self-alteration.

In her account of hospitality and sexual difference, Judith Still focuses on a close analysis of Homer's *Odyssey*. In this classical text, hospitality is performed as a male homosocial relation within which virtuous manhood is assessed. Women, however, are relegated to maidens to the master of the house, while female hosts—those who have a place of their own, such as nymphs and sirens—entrap their male guests. In her critique of the patriarchal mythology, Irigaray proposes another ethics of hospitality, where sexuate subjects are hosts in their own places, while, at the same time, forming a third place, in which the other is received by the self in all her/his strangeness.

Laine Harrington reads Irigaray's account of the Word, in which the Christian reiteration of the ancient Greek *logos* has formulated a religion where Man becomes God as Word. Criticizing the Platonic notion of dialectic upon which ancient Greek philosophy is founded, Irigaray shifts toward a rewriting of the dialectic of gender; evoking the return of the divine as love, this Irigarayan "other word" signals the crucial role that writing plays in articulating feminine subjectivity but also in opening up a space for two subjectivities.

In Claire Colebrook's text, Plato's allegory of the cave becomes the point of entry into the question of looking back at the ethic of life that permeates the history of metaphysics, and, more specifically, Aristotle's concept of *proper potentiality*. Whereas both Heidegger and Agamben seek to retrieve the concept of *aletheia* from the Greek text, Irigaray, by raising the question of sexual difference, reads the Greeks in order to challenge the normative image of life that governs Plato's allegory, in its dividing the sensible from the intelligible, and in its subjecting all difference to the rule of revelation. By criticizing the figuring of potentiality as that

passive, feminized matter awaiting the proper form of masculine actuality, and by insisting on the positivity of what remains undisclosed, Irigaray opens the possibility of a life—and a reading—with no proper potential and no preceding origin. She therefore displaces the propriety of bringing all potential to full presence with the production of dissonance and the thought of the nonrelational.

Gayle Salamon reads Irigaray's reading of Aristotle, by focusing on the place of sexual difference. She asks whether Irigaray's notions of bodies, boundaries, and sexual difference might be deployed in nonheteronormative ways, in ways that do not necessitate the displacement of the sexually different or the differently sexed. If the Aristotelian model emphasizes the substitutability of one body for another, Irigaray suggests a bodily singularity that enables proximity: due to this unsubstitutability, two bodies might inhabit the same place without annihilating each other. The question that emerges from a critical reading of both Aristotle and Irigaray, however, is whether sexual difference is thinkable in other than dimorphic and *hylomorphic* terms, beyond the terms of a division fixed in place as a marked boundary between "male" and "female."

In order to address the crucial relevance of value theories to feminist theories of race and gender, Ewa Plonowska Ziarek intertwines Irigaray's engagement with Aristotle's notion of needs/desires (*chreia*) and Marx's notion of abstract labor with Hortense Spillers's reading of American "grammar" of slavery. The commodification of the black captive body as the bearer of "despiritualization" and non-value, which remains in the penumbra of Irigaray's rereading of the commodity form in the context of female embodiment, calls for a reinterpretation of the ways in which the essentialism/social construction binary occludes the traumas that commodification inflicts on racialized, sexed bodies. Read together, Irigaray's "sensible transcendental" and Spillers's spiritual monstrosity might imply an alternative model of social mediation beyond the opposition between the abstract and the sensible.

Tina Chanter unravels Irigaray's challenge to the phallogocentric discourse as an exploration of the possibility for a new symbolic that does not submit to Platonic monologism and its constitutive suppression of the feminine. The trope of fetishism, in particular the way in which Irigaray reads Marx who reads Aristotle in this context, provides a way of raising the question concerning the priority of sexual difference over racial classifications. The privilege Irigaray accords to sexual difference over other social differences dramatizes the formal problem of the Western thought—the ineluctable difficulty of thinking difference without reducing it to the fetishistic fantasy of the one.

Being concerned with the political and interpretative strategies through which "Ancient Greece" is conventionally evoked as the universal

matrix of the modern imaginary, Eleni Varikas raises some questions regarding Irigaray's appropriation of Greek "tragedies and mythologies." She delineates the role that "tradition" plays in the philosopher's work: from a radical de-authorization promised by her earlier writings, to a re-authorization enacted in her later work, where tradition is summoned to articulate a universal and positive configuration of sexual difference. Drawing on Nicole Loraux's work as an antidote to German historicist classical studies, Varikas seeks treatments of tradition that unsettle the sexual two-ness of the body politic as well as its heteronormative and colonialist implications.

Does Irigaray's emphasis on sexual difference occlude other forms of alterity? Penelope Deutscher poses this question, while at the same time engaging with the conditionality of this very question. In revisiting the mode of critique that addresses the occlusions in Irigaray's work, she shifts to the more appropriate question whether Irigaray allows us to read her project from the perspective of its own conditionality. Turning to the conditionality of Irigaray's considerations of a corporeal hospitality between women and progeny, Deutscher claims that Iocasta, a figure occluded in Irigaray's engagement with Greek tragedy, has the potential to displace the figuring of the maternal in Irigaray's work as originally nonappropriative, and to incarnate the unpredictability that is integral to the maternal relationship.

Why does Western culture have to always *return* to the Greeks? Does this return imply an exile from the singularity and the reciprocity of the affective? In her own essay, Luce Irigaray takes on and re-signifies the theme of return, a theme that draws on the epic of Ulysses, in order to articulate a return to the interiority of the self through self-affection and reciprocity, beyond the metaphysics of appropriative mastery of the outside. This revisiting of the economy of home, belonging, and familiarity through affect resonates with a culture of being in relation with the other—the foreignness of the other as *heteros*.

Reaching one's own autonomous self-affection, however, requires the differentiation from the maternal. In Western culture, where the relation with the mother is both eclipsed and overemphasized, the repressed maternal element returns as an emphasis on genealogy at the expense of gender. So the Greek word *genos* has increasingly come to denote the vertical, hierarchical dimension of genealogy as biological reproduction, and less the horizontal dimension of gender and the relational affect of desire and love. Nevertheless, Irigaray warns against any resorting to feminization of genealogy as panacea: although the reassertion of the value of female genealogies can be usefully deployed as a tactical device challenging the idealized hegemony of masculine lineages, she argues, such gesture of reclaiming—especially in its biologized and naturalized configurations—is

typically renormalized as a perilous adhesion that forecloses one's own subjective and autonomous becoming.

Thus, the cultivation of self-affection emerges in Irigaray's thought as a necessary condition for reaching a reciprocal relation with the other, a relation that does not reiterate the link with the mother and is not reduced to a dyadic pair of opposites. It is precisely this going beyond the pair of opposites active-passive that is portrayed in the Greek grammatical verbal form of the middle-passive or middle voice, which conveys a certain affect of reciprocity—to affect/to be affected—irreducible to the normative oppositional or hierarchical split of subjectivity between activity and passivity.

Indeed, Irigaray's mode of critique lies emphatically beyond the conventional binary pair exculpation versus repudiation, or endorsement versus dismissal, posited by the metaphysics of original authorship and reading. Perhaps, one could say, her critique is articulated in the middle voice: neither active nor passive, neither the one of subject nor that of object. We know, of course, from Derrida that the grammatical mode of the middle voice is associated with *différance*—differentiation/divisibility and deferral.<sup>16</sup> Irigaray's critique does not return the violence of discursive closure. It does not direct itself to the reflexes of denouncement and annulment. Hers is a critique that produces events, or, rather, the undecidable and indeterminate possibility of the event, in all its contingency and openness. It is ultimately a critical reading of past philosophies that lets the critical possibility of the present—or, critique as possibility of the present—take place.

## Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, "The Double Session," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 206.

2. In her own reading of "becoming-woman" in terms of Irigaray's "sensible transcendental," Rosi Braidotti enlists the monstrous feminine in mapping out a figuration of multiple becomings. In tracing the ways in which the feminine is posited as the Other in the techno-teratological social imaginary of the late postindustrial Western postmodernity, she unravels how the multiple patterns of feminized monstrous becoming overthrow humanistic axioms of representation. Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialistic Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002).

3. Tina Chanter, *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray's Re-writing of the Philosophers* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

4. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 35.

5. *Ibid.*, 36.

6. Inspired by Luce Irigaray's work, Adriana Cavarero has deployed a mimetic strategy of repossession in her own neo-materialist deconstructive reading

of Ancient Greek—mainly Plato, but also Homer and Parmenides—philosophical texts. Cavarero evokes and reappropriates central female figures in the phallogocentric imaginary, stealing them from their literary context and relocating them within the conceptual canvas of a feminine symbolic order. Adriana Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato: A Feminist Rewriting of Ancient Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

7. Jean-Luc Nancy, “Myth Interrupted,” in *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

8. *Ibid.*, 69.

9. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), Aphorism 341.

10. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 251.

11. Elizabeth Grosz, “Becoming...An Introduction,” in *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory, and Futures*, ed. Elizabeth Grosz (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 5.

12. Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 224.

13. Michel Foucault, *L'Ordre du discours* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1971), 28.

14. Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?” in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 135.

15. Naomi Schor, “This Essentialism Which Is not One,” in *Engaging with Irigaray*, ed. Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 67.

16. Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 9.