

Rendering Visible: Painting and sexuate subjectivity

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, I examine Luce Irigaray's aesthetic of sexual difference, which she develops by extrapolating from Paul Klee's idea that the role of painting is to render the non-visible rather than represent the visible. This idea is the premise of her analyses of phenomenology and psychoanalysis and their respective contributions to understanding art and sexual identity. I claim that Irigaray assembles an aesthetic of sexual difference that exceeds these familiar intellectual traditions, one that articulates the encounter of non-visible, material (human and non-human) forces that engender modes of sexuate being and becoming. I further claim that this encounter is the very matter of artistry and art-making.

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Irigaray, sexual difference, colour, ontology, art

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Is not art a means of creating reality and not only of reproducing it?

Art is a daily task for each one of us, and sexuate belonging is the most crucial dimension that art has to work out. (Irigaray, 2004c, p. 97)

Section 1

In a piece of art criticism rarely found in her body of work, feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray makes a negative judgement on the German surrealist writer and visual artist, Unica Zürn (1916–1970), claiming that she 'fail[s] to be born' as both a woman and an artist (1994, p. 13). According to the philosopher, Zürn's paintings and drawings depict a negative relation to herself and the world: as a formless 'other' to man. Zürn's art, including autobiographical accounts of her relation with artist partner Hans Bellmer, reveals the psychic pain that in moments of reprieve provided material for her art, but also led to her suicide. For Irigaray, Zürn's art encapsulates her theories of woman's deadly relation to patriarchy. Although Irigaray defends her statements by claiming they are not directed at the artist, but rather raise questions about art, the disclaimer did not convince her English translator, Margaret Whitford (1994, p. 12). The feminist scholar and translator made a reply to the piece in a subsequent issue of the art journal, noting Irigaray's value to practising artists as a philosophy, but as a critic, having little to offer. Art critic, Hilary Robinson added to the exchange by reaffirming Irigaray's value to practising artists and by taking both the philosopher and Whitford to task for privileging a literary model in assessing the artist's work that failed to consider the materials and techniques with which the visual artist worked (1995, p. 20). To my knowledge, Irigaray has not ventured into art criticism since the Zürn piece. However, she has continued to write on art practices, and on the relation of colour to painting in ways that are rich and productive for thinking difference for artists and non-artists alike. I draw attention to this curious moment in Irigaray studies because

it captures a problem with one philosopher that reflects a problem for feminist aesthetics more broadly.

Feminist aesthetics is a fraught area of inquiry. For much of the past several decades, it has succumbed to at least two familiar divisions: between art and politics on the one hand, and for longer than several decades, between art and philosophy on the other (Grosz, 2008; Ziarek, 2012). With the first of these divisions, feminist aesthetics had arrived at a position of either subordinating the work's specificity to its political value, or overly focusing on the formal qualities of the work to ignore the forms and conditions of power that inflect the production and reception of the work. With the division between art and philosophy, the art work's expressive and affective power has often been silenced by the explanatory and evaluative power of philosophy by way of the traditional aesthetic categories of style, taste, autonomy and genius, among others. Whether by assuming these terms are gender neutral or able to be corrected by feminist perspectives, philosophy has traditionally positioned itself as the voice of the work speaking for its assumed mute and passive existence. Effectively, this is the position Irigaray occupied with Unica Zürn's work, and which Whitford—and possibly Irigaray upon reflection—reject. The consequence of these divisions has led to a situation of retreat by feminist theorists. Rita Felski, for example, claims that the project of feminist aesthetics is doomed because irrespective of the artistic medium, it presumes a normative aesthetic (1995, p. 431). Felski calls for feminist theorising to 'go beyond feminist aesthetics, but not by ignoring the realm of the aesthetic' (1995, p. 431).

How might philosophy and art make a mutual encounter in ways that do not succumb to the impasses of the past? Should feminism rely less on aesthetics—as the branch of philosophy that traditionally participates in the domain of art—to instead consider non-aesthetic concepts and philosophical approaches to art to activate the 'realm of the aesthetic?' And would that be an aesthetic still? I approach these questions by returning to other of Irigaray's writings on art and sexual difference to consider how non-aesthetic concepts and contexts can contribute to a philosophy of art compatible with feminist aims; one that offers generative potential for professional artists as well as the everyday artistry of being-in-the-world.

In the several, and sometimes cryptic, remarks Irigaray makes about colour and its necessary (although by no means exclusive) relation to painting, I locate Irigaray's aesthetic of sexual difference. I argue that Irigaray's references to painting have nothing to do with critiques of representations of women *in* art as rather her turning towards the painter's task to think through the materiality of their medium, one that is analogous to philosophy's problem in thinking sexual difference. Before I address the status of art and painting in her writing, I turn to her concept of sexual difference.

Section 2

Irigaray explicitly rejects the label 'feminist' to describe her theoretical aims, preferring women's, and more so, humanity's liberation (See Irigaray, 2002a, p. 67). Central to her idea of liberation is the concept of sexual difference, an ontological category constitutively philosophical, political and ethical (Grosz, 2012, p. 70). Sexual difference is not only the organising concept in her philosophy; it is also the philosophical problem of our era par excellence (1993b, p. 5). Conventional accounts explaining the differences between the sexes do so according to one of three typical models: where women and the feminine are either opposite, complementary or equal to men and the masculine. By contrast, sexual difference as Irigaray accounts for, is premised on a notion of difference where the terms woman/man; women/men; feminine/masculine do not pre-exist their difference and do not invoke a hierarchy between the terms. Irigaray says 'who or what the other is, I never know. But the other who is forever unknowable is the one who differs from me sexually' (1993b, p. 13). 'She' is different from 'he' in a mode that is of another order to the difference 'he' is from 'she': the difference

is non-reciprocal as well as non-hierarchical. It is a model of difference based on two sexes that are irreducible to each other.

Irigaray's term 'sexuate' describes a positively defined feminine identity that does not currently exist within patriarchy and phallogentrism. It refers to the bodily, psychical and cultural dimensions of feminine (and implicitly masculine) being that for woman is reconceived from her negative and sexually neutral status within phallogentrism to a positive, sexually different status. 'Sexuate' refers not simply to anatomical or genital differences between men and women (although it does include these and what they enable) as if this difference were some kind of essence to sexual identity or a grounding principle of sexual being. It incorporates a transfigured conception of a being's identity that comprises dimensions that are *morphological* (bodily in the widest sense of a living form), *perceptual* (in terms of the sensate perspective a sexed being has of self, others and the world) and *associative* qualities (the kinds of relations that are possible for sexually different beings) (Grosz, 2012, p. 70). These dimensions of being relational, bodily and perspectival override the possibility of reducing Irigaray's account of sexual difference as biologically essentialist or heterosexist. In Irigaray's more recent writings, she speaks of the productive encounter between sexuate beings involving the creation of a third being, which cannot be reduced to the production of a child, nor a privileging of the heterosexual couple: 'the real exists as at least three: a real corresponding to the masculine subject, a real corresponding to the feminine subject, and a real corresponding to their relation. These three reals thus each correspond to a world, but these three worlds are in interaction' (2002b, p. 111). Some feminists of difference have read Irigaray's work subsequent to her early and predominantly critical philosophical interventions as regressively heterosexist (Butler, Cornell, Cheah, & Grosz, 1998). However, Irigaray is explicit in not reducing the couple to a familial unit of reproduction: 'Maternity—giving birth to a child—should remain an extra ... surplus to any morphology' (1994, p. 13).

Sexual difference is real, but it is not reality. It is a difference that does not accord with any existent identity or term. The ontological dynamic of a being's identity, as a mode of becoming that Irigaray's concept necessitates, is not permissible under the Aristotelian logic of ontology that needs being to be either A or not-A. Within this logic, a being is defined according to a grouping of dominant characteristics comprising its identity/term as a universal category (A), or according to the absence of those (other being's) characteristics in order for this being to belong to a universal identity foreign to its singularity (not-A). For Irigaray, sexuate being is a mode of becoming other than how feminine identity is defined according to this dominant logic, by becoming in different moments of encounter with self and other through the various dimensions of woman's (and implicitly man's) singularly sexuate being.

Irigarayan sexuate difference, then, and the culture of worlds that it would make possible, is a radically transformed understanding of conventional ways of thinking who and what we are as beings, and the nature of our relations to each other and the world. She seeks methods, techniques and practices, along with concepts, with which to think that expression. In addition to the philosophical tradition (among other traditions), Irigaray turns to painters and to painting to begin the transformations required to be thought and practised by sexuate difference. How, for example, does the visual medium of painting afford techniques, methods and approaches that give expression to what not only does not exist in reality, but must also of necessity remain 'forever unknowable?' What do modernist painters' preoccupation with vision and perception offer to Irigaray's philosophy? How does the material of colour, its handling and applications—unique to each painter—participate in making visible the *invisible* sensations in the encounter between sexuate subjects that is yet to happen, and of which Irigaray describes as a 'field of forces' the two sexes generate (2002b, p. 108).

Before turning to these questions, we need to consider the necessity of transforming the relations of form to matter and of space to time to see the relevancy to the task of painting sexuate difference. First, is the reconfiguration of the logic of form and matter. Irigaray has analysed the

traditional relation in Western thought of matter to form and its sexual *indifference* to woman through her critique of the place of fluids within theories of solids. Phallogentrism requires that what is counted as real has to conform to a logic which reflects the morphological qualities of the masculine sex ('production, property, order, form, unity, visibility, erection') (1985b, p. 77). Fluids are analogous to woman's subjectivity within this patriarchal logic: woman, like fluids, cannot be counted as real or having a reality of her own that can be formalised on her own terms because the real of her being, like that of fluids, is of another order of logic to that of phallogentrism and its discourses of symbolisation. Irigaray reminds us that ontology presumes (a) form that gives a shape, dimension(s) and substance to matter, and therefore presumes a logic of relation between the matter/material of what is (contained) within its form. The analogy between the resistance to formalisation of fluidity with woman's being is that the universal, abstracted logic unifying reality which underpins phallogentrism refuses the 'indefinite and the in-finite *form* [that] is never complete' in her being (1985a, p. 229). Fluidity, like solids, names physical reality and includes internal frictions, pressures and movements 'continuous, compressible, dilatible, viscous, conductible, diffusible ... unending, potent and impotent owing to its resistance to the countable' (1985c, p. 111). Fluids participate within, across and through the walls of solids; they are not contained by the logic that erects the 'solid/fluid' hierarchical pairing, and undermine that opposition in fluids' refusal to be in one *or* other place, conforming to one *or* other form. As fluids are to theories of mechanics, so too is woman's being to symbolisation within the phallogentric morphologic: woman's form is not one. Woman does not belong to *a* form that would be geometrically placed in space and mathematically countable like the solid object in space.

Irigaray links her critique of the dominant logic of forms to colour. In ways that are analogous to fluids and fluidity, colour participates in Irigaray's philosophy because, as Ludwig Wittgenstein reminds us, conceptually, colour is in excess of any attempt to order its physical reality to a system or schema (n.d., p. 16e). The patriarchal forms in which women have always existed are inappropriate to feminine identity, and, says Irigaray, we must break out of them through 'acts of liberation' which may enable us to discover colour ... what's left of life beyond forms ... When all meaning is taken away from us, there remains color, colors, in particular, those corresponding to our sex ... (1993c, p. 109). Ontologically, colour has multiple forms of affectivity both natural and cultural that are transformative: for example, in animal and plant life, forms that enable attractions and repulsions within and across species; in the spiritual domain of some cultures showing relations between inside and outside (Irigaray's example refers to the role of chakras in the practice of yoga), and it has forms in painting that are transformations of relations between perceptual and pictorial space, and in rendering visible and non-visible forces. Colour does not conform to quantity and abstraction, the mathematisation of Aristotelian logic. Rather, it is pure quality. Irigaray, therefore, looks to art, artists and art practices to find forms and transformations with colour, and the thinking that painters have brought to their material.

Second, Irigaray seeks the reconfiguration of space to time. A sexuate culture requires a change in our understanding of perception and of the inhabiting of place so that femininity is not figured as space, and masculinity is figured as time as they are under patriarchy and phallogentrism (1993b, p. 7; see also Olkowski, 2000). Woman must not be figured as space for man to achieve his accession to subjectivity and thus to history, and woman must not be outside her internal and external relations to time and thus figured as what history cannot admit *as woman* (Irigaray, 2002b, pp. 121–122). Woman needs a place proper to herself by having a limit or point of return within herself, and in not being the place of limit for man as she is within patriarchy. To achieve this rethinking of the 'whole economy of space-time', and the relation of matter to form, Irigaray must look to the resources both within and outside philosophy for the reconfiguration of sexed being to take place (1993b, p. 11).

Section 3

One of Irigaray's most important influences for thinking sexual difference beyond dualist structures by way of embodied existence is Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who is unique among the early phenomenologists in aiming to get 'to the things themselves' in a pre-reflective manner via the perceiving body. His philosophy relies heavily on painters to advance and illustrate such that Irigaray says it 'almost mistakes itself for a phenomenology of painting or of the art of painting' (1993b, p. 175). Given that woman has traditionally been on the subordinate side of dualist thinking—mind/body; spirit/flesh; subject/object—the phenomenologist's philosophy contributes much in the development of her own.

Merleau-Ponty pays close attention to René Descartes's views on painting and its relation to colour in inaugurating his philosophy away from Cartesian 'operationalism' claiming it assumes pre-reflective contact with a 'tacit cogito' which his phenomenology targets (1962, p. 402). For Descartes, colour had been understood as a secondary quality to the quantity of *res extensa*, and contributes to the simulacra detrimental and redundant to representation. Like other inessential sensory qualities, colour has laws that are inaccessible to vision, and vision for Descartes is dominant among the senses. Although vision depends on colour to make the discriminations worthy of its place in the sensorium, for the early modern metaphysician, colour judgements will lead to error. The percipient views colour as inhering in the property of the thing rather than in a relation between the percipient and the perceived. Descartes's optics also views vision as passive and cannot account for the optical laws of colour perception: light and colour are signs instituted by nature to which humans do not have the code to read its laws. Descartes's expressed preference for the (non-coloured) graphic arts to that of painting, encapsulates for the phenomenologist the monochrome and machine-like model of techno-rationalist thinking that dominates all dimensions of his metaphysics in its grasping, mastering and objectifying operations of rationalist thought. As colour is ontologically essential for painting, for Merleau-Ponty it cannot be treated as a mere secondary quality, and has instead the capacity of 'leading us somewhat closer to "the heart of things"'; that is, to that pre-reflective contact with being (1993b, p. 141).

Merleau-Ponty focuses on how post-impressionist Paul Cézanne, (in his writings as well as his paintings), is able to create a modulation of relations between things on the canvas, not by giving priority to line that would contain the thing within a determined form. Rather, the artist creates a form that is achieved through giving representation on the canvas to a mode of pre-reflective or 'lived' perceptions that are prior to the perception that consciousness organises into a perceptual unity of objects in a spatial field (1993a, p. 64). Cézanne's thought and practice is applauded by Merleau-Ponty on two counts. First, in representing on the canvas a way of seeing the world so that the contour or form of the thing is rendered as it emerges to our vision. As Merleau-Ponty says: 'Cézanne follows the swelling of the object ... one's glance captures a shape that emerges from among them all, just as it does in perception' (1993a, p. 65). Cézanne's canvas depicts the practically imperceptible movement of the various phenomenological dimensions of lived perception. It is the perceptual experience as 'lived' in its immediacy with and immersion in the world that intertwines seer with seen. Of his art, Merleau-Ponty says: 'in reality we see a form which oscillates around the ellipse without being an ellipse' (1993a, p. 64). The pictorial effect is not a thing presented as a single outline sacrificing the thing's depth, but rather a thing that is presented as 'an inexhaustible reality full of reserves' (1993a, p. 65) Second, Merleau-Ponty admires Cézanne for perfecting a method for achieving that movement of pre-reflective perceptual vision through the modulation of colours and their relations on the canvas. The priority Cézanne gives to colour (over line) results in colour blurring with line making the two painterly resources dissolve in order to achieve a spatial structure that 'vibrates' in the thing's representation on the canvas. In that 'vibration', says Merleau-Ponty, 'we see the depth, the smoothness, the softness, the hardness of objects ... the presence ... which for us is the definition of the real' (1993a, p. 65). The painter's thought and practice achieves a method for pictorial space that has its parallel in what Merleau-Ponty is seeking

phenomenologically: a tactile sense of vision; a mode of vision that is chiasmically rather than dualistically understood as the embodied relation of a self to the world.

In Merleau-Ponty's idea of 'the flesh', he conceives a more primordial formulation of embodied perception understood as the condition of both seeing and being seen, and of touching and being touched (1968, p. 147). Sight and touch have a fundamental and necessary interaction for perception, and they are common to, and the condition of, both the subject and the object in being a single 'thing' folded back on itself (1968, p. 147). Again, the ontology of colour is crucial to the phenomenologist's project to undermine dualist structures of thought. To use Merleau-Ponty's example: the Red is seen and felt as a 'certain differentiation, an ephemeral modulation of this world—less a colour or a thing, therefore, than the difference between things and colours, a momentary crystallisation of coloured being or visibility' (1968, p. 132). The red separates from, to continue his example, the dress, to connect with other reds that neighbour it, and form a constellation or field of reds that gives, in another moment of sensation, the dress in its form as thing-like and ultimately as object. His concept of the flesh is an element of being with the capacity to fold in on itself, to face inward towards the self, as well as outward towards other things and beings, and to express the sensation of being as it is lived. His example of the double sensation of one hand touching and being touched by the other in a single fold of two hands illustrates this inward and outward interfaces of the modulations connecting and reversing subject and object, whereby a body can be both and at once subject and object within the same field of visibility (1968, p. 134). The flesh expresses the shimmering or quivering of the visual sense felt on the eye as the difference that connects and disconnects colour to and from the thing. More so than any other element in his account of the flesh, colour has an ontological status for Merleau-Ponty of being the 'exemplar sensible' in that it both gives itself as a being, and is the condition of Being (1968, p. 135).

In spite of his philosophy's advance beyond dualist, mechanistic subjectivity, Irigaray's several engagements with his philosophy demonstrate how his phenomenology still retains the domination of vision within the sensorium through a reliance on maternal and feminine metaphors of experience, but does so while ignoring the real of women's bodies. Woman's maternal and feminine elements of her being, complicate his phenomenology of the flesh, which ultimately maintains a monosexual conception of embodiment and of the flesh's relation to the world (1993b, p. 177). Irigaray begins her critique of the phenomenologist's monosexual philosophy in her chapter, 'The Invisible of the Flesh: A Reading of Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible*, "The Intertwining—The Chiasm"' in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993b), develops it further in 'Flesh Colors' in *Sexes and Genealogies* (1993a) and again in 'To Paint the Invisible' (2004b). Irigaray is critical of Merleau-Ponty's references to feminine attributes such as fluidity (through metaphors such as 'between the sea and the strand'); references to female desire (with the comment: 'the telepathy of the visible when a woman knows her body to be desirable without even seeing those who look at her'); and to woman's body ('Pregnancy, *Gestalt*, phenomenon—represent a getting into contact with being as pure *there is*' (1968, p. 245; 206). While pregnancy is the word for Merleau-Ponty that 'gives' the pure givenness of the *there is*, he overlooks the particular entwinement of the flesh of the maternal body and its complication to his theory of visibility and invisibility in the relation between mother and fetus. His references to the red of the woman's dress ignores the more primordial red of her blood, let alone the white of her milk, or the colour of the fetus's eyes that have a different relation again to the light and to the inside and outside of a field of sensation (Irigaray, 1993b, p. 156).

Merleau-Ponty's claim of reversibility of sight and touch may work for man but, says Irigaray, not so readily for woman. The experience of tactility for and between the fetus and the mother is not a relation of reversibility that he proposes, and in terms of the senses' reversibility, it is likewise not of the order of symmetry in that mother and fetus have a relation to their lived experience of spatiality *vis a vis* each other that is not reducible to sight (Irigaray, 1993b, p. 160). In the maternal relation, tactility has more of a relation to the sense of hearing than to vision (Irigaray, 1993b, p. 160). To Merleau-Ponty's hand-touching-hand allegory of the reversible positioning of active and passive

sensation, Irigaray proposes the two lips where one is not dominant and grasping by one of the other, but remains in constant intimacy and is in woman's body, already doubled sensation (1993b, p. 167).

The world that Merleau-Ponty describes as symbiotic with a sensible self, Irigaray describes as 'solitary and solipsistic:' an inward and outward movement of a masculine subject that forgets the prior movement of symbiosis of fetus and placenta (2004b, p. 394). From Irigaray's perspective, Merleau-Ponty's conception of world is a substitute for the even more primordial realm of the placenta, the sensible realm to which all human beings have a relation as the first 'lived experience' of co-belonging and co-existing. The placenta is an organ that undertakes an intermediating role between mother and fetus by performing functions that benefit both beings while also being relatively autonomous of each: supplying blood and nutrients to the fetus and secreting hormones to the mother ceased by the ovaries during gestation (1993c, p. 39). Unlike the current cultural imaginary of the fetus as *either* fused with the mother *or* as a foreign body cannibalising its host, the biological reality of the placenta is a prized sensible-transcendental term (invisible/visible in Merleau-Ponty's) for rethinking the intermediation of the third being of sexuate identities.

Irigaray's relation to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is highly equivocal yet she does not repudiate phenomenology even when questioned about its value to her work (Irigaray, 2008, pp. 129–132). Rather, she adapts the concept of 'the flesh' to other contexts such as the clinical practice of psychoanalysis and destabilises both practice and theory and the relation between the two. Irigaray's relation to psychoanalysis is similarly highly equivocal, however, she has been a practicing psychoanalyst herself and views psychoanalysis as having the potential for transformation because it is the 'scene that calls the very condition of representation into question' (2002c, p. 193). Irigaray considers the 'drama of analysis' as theatrical in its incorporation of the physical props, gestures or the bodily posture(s) of its actors, and the verbal and non-verbal exchanges of speaker/listener: a setting that 'corresponds to an optical illusion' (2002c, p. 199, 201). She argues the classical setting of the encounter creates an artificial reality that places the analysand in a 'blind' and 'supine' orientation towards the analyst and therefore disoriented from her immediate, and particularly, visual perceptions. The sensory deprivation of both actors is further described in terms of the disequilibrium of sound and light waves affecting the analysand's perceptual capacities.

In 'Flesh Colors', Irigaray prescribes to her colleagues (the essay was originally delivered as a lecture to a professional conference) that the solution to this disequilibrium between the non-human speeds of light and sound forces and the disorientation between human actors is 'to paint'. Her point is not only to reorientate the position of the actors (side-by-side and vertical rather than back-to-front and vertical/horizontal) in the encounter. Her aim is also to provide another form to the expression of those perceptual affects through a non-linguistic medium. Irigaray claims that the different speeds of light and sound (waves) are the conditions of vision and hearing (that is, conditions of the perceptual field) between subjects, but the different speeds of this 'physical matter' of real, invisible and non-human forces puts speech/listening out of balance, and leads to the analysand's inability to integrate the present in the past, and the past into the present and the future. Irigaray says: 'we need to give back to each sense the objective and subjective speeds of its current perceptions and facilitate harmony between these, and the past, present, and future history of the subject' (1993a, p. 156).

Citing Paul Klee, she says that painting in the therapeutic encounter would 'spatialize perception and make time simultaneous' (1993a, 155). Against Freud's (untheorised) *practice* of the 'talking cure' and his *theory* of the death drive (that women fail to sublimate) as the necessary prerequisite for a transition to culture, Irigaray overlays these Freudian insights with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to radically surpass both knowledge domains. And painting is the key to her strategy.

Freud examines sublimation of the death drives in a number of places in his writings, but it is his connection of the subject's psychical processes to the founding of social organization that has

relevance to Irigaray's imperative that women must learn 'the art of genital sublimation' (1993a, p. 165). Sublimation is a psychological process consisting of the abandonment of an erotic aim and taking on another that is social. Freud argues that ability to sublimate bodily drives and their manifestation in affects, representations and artistic practices is the source of human civilization and creativity (1961, p. 82). Without this ability, he says, we lose the basis for creating meaning for our own lives, and we remain unhappy or outside culture. Freud offers some suggestions for overcoming the arbitrariness of the opportunity to sublimate, such as devoting one's life to artistic production. Freud claims that for human civilisation to appear, mankind's sexual desire must be redirected from two natural aims: the body of the mother and the bodies of men. When the desire engendered among men, by urinating on the threatening flames of fire, was redirected to another aim, culture came into being. The continued sublimation of both incestuous and homosexual desire would ensure culture's progression. Freud claims that due to women's anatomical deficiency for dousing the flames, her role was to be the guardian of the fire. In Freudian theory, then, woman's genitals represent a double handicap in being neither beautiful nor culturally productive, merely *re-productive*. To which Irigaray replies:

This imperative of genital sublimation [something that we women have either forgotten or never learned the art of] solves the dilemma of art for art's sake. If art is a necessary condition for the establishment of a culture of affective relationships, and especially sexual relationships, then art is useful as a place where individual, bodily matter can be transmuted and sublimated. Art is not just an aid to a social body that has already been abstracted from the sexual dimension ... Without art, sexuality falls into a natural immediacy that is bound up with reproduction and into infinite particles. (1993a, p. 165)

We know from Merleau-Ponty that colour can be a mode of access to 'pre-discursive experience' and that for him painting unlike drawing is a mode of expression more appropriate to making intelligible that sensible experience than is the mode of spoken language (Irigaray, 1993b, p. 151). It is also an expression which produces in the psychoanalytic clinical encounter an artefact shared with another that may be ephemeral or enduring, but one that would contribute to thinking a *sexuate* culture in the way in which Freud speaks of artistic activity as a necessity of culture's founding and perpetuation. Given that woman's role in monosexual economies of culture have been caught between her value as a use and as an exchange—as a value of utility even when she is a sign of value—the production of a woman-defined culture through the creation of non-utilitarian production of art would seem to be a necessary precondition of Irigaray's *sexuate* culture (see Daley, 2012).

Irigaray directs her complex reading of intersubjectivity and sexual identity in 'Flesh Colors' through painting in the clinical context. She is also making a larger claim for women's creativity to the construction or production of a culture appropriate to her sex: 'This is the indispensable road to take not only for psychoanalysis but, more generally, in every relationship, if we are to realize an art of the sexual that respects the colors, the sounds, and the forms proper to each sex' (1993a, p. 165).

In 'To Paint the Invisible', Irigaray spells out the role of painting and the painter that she had begun in her earlier essays as more explicitly a relation to invisibility. Drawing out the understanding of the monosexual invisibility in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, Irigaray refines her understanding of its role for her own enterprise. Alphonso Lingis, translator of *The Visible and the Invisible*, explains the invisible as the 'wild *Logos*' that does not constitute a set of principles or laws, but rather a system of levels posited in the sensible field by our body (1968, p. li). The invisible offers a cognitive unity or the intelligibility by means of which sensible things are distributed in a field according to proximity or distance, and differentiated according to qualities or intensities. He adds: 'like the light, these levels and dimensions [of the sensible], this system of lines of force, are not *what* we see; they are that *with which, according to which, we see*' (Lingis, 1968, p. li). The invisible is the field that unfolds the visible of sensible being.

Again in reference to Paul Klee, whose well-known formula: *the painter's task is not to render the visible as rather render visible*, Irigaray refines her account of what constitutes the invisibility of the

flesh for sexual difference, and implicates the role of painting in its actualisation. Whereas, in her chapter in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray names the invisible as the maternal-feminine, elsewhere she refers to the invisible as 'relations between us and the world, us and the other(s)' (1993b, p. 173, 2004a, p. 395). Irigaray progressively refines her understanding of the invisible of sexual difference from terms that do not exist in the imaginary and symbolic orders to terms for expressing the ontological real of woman and of her series of relations that are constitutive of her being and for which she seeks forms that do not yet exist. The current phase of Irigaray's writings comes to increasingly focus on real forces that are non-human and inorganic in comprising the contours of these relations to the world(s) in which we co-belong. These worlds are of another order of relation to the single world Merleau-Ponty's flesh outlines (see Irigaray, 2013, 2002b, 2004b). The ethical dimension of her ontology of sexual difference therefore expands the ontology of her ethics beyond any bodily limit of 'lived experience' [*Erlebnis*] of phenomenological inquiry. Irigaray says: 'the ability to be at the same time seeing and seen, touching and touched, does not seem to be specifically human' (2004b, p. 397). The 'specifically human' is insufficient for defining relations with the world and others, or sufficient in characterising 'becoming human' (Irigaray, 2002b, pp. 117–133). In 'Flesh Colors,' Irigaray describes these non-human forces of the real on sexed beings in reference to the invisible forces of light waves and sound waves in producing the perceptual field prior to the language in which perceptions would be interpreted. Furthermore, these forces have different affective modalities on the perceptual capacities of the subjects according to their sex (2004b, p. 397). Irigaray folds back Merleau-Ponty's thought onto itself seeking not so much to preserve his conception of a flesh that materially provides the support for both vision and thought, but of opening 'another relation between flesh, vision and thought' (2004b, p. 390).

Irigaray is critical of Freud for his theory of sublimation, in refusing women the access to the creation of culture, she is also critical of Freudian theory that forgot its early practice as 'talking cure' when the analyst listened closely to what women were saying and how they were saying it (2002a, p. 208). At a certain historical point in its development as a science, psychoanalysis forgot to listen to women's voices (2002a, p. 203). Significantly, Irigaray is not urging a return to that early kind of listening, as rather a different mode of encounter between analyst and analysand: a sexually different relation to the perceptual field; a sexually different orientation of bodies in the analytical field; and a non-linguistic mode of expression that has an essential relation to colour.

Section 4

We might ask of Irigaray's aesthetic, Why painting? Why is her reconfigured aesthetic focused on the resources of an art form that among all the arts, is possibly the most inherently misogynist in its traditional figuring of woman as muse to the genius (male) artist or as the model of beauty to be represented; where the studio is a physical externalisation of the appropriation of place that Irigaray's analyses repeatedly examine and repudiate (see Pollock, 1992; Schor, 1997)? Why painting rather than, say, writing, sculpture or music? First, painting has an ontological link with colour in a way that, as we have seen via Merleau-Ponty and Descartes, other forms of rendering do not. Second, as Irigaray reminds us, colour belongs to nature as well as to culture, and her philosophy seeks methods and techniques for thinking the contexts of their reconnection. Third, since the crisis in representation that photography's arrival created more than one and a half centuries ago, it is painting's task to render visible what is otherwise imperceptible or invisible. Rendering the invisible of sexual subjectivity and culture is Irigaray's aim. It also marks the tension that her philosophy delineates: how to render the invisibility of the encounter of the two sexes without risking its representation, and thus the critique of its representation.

Irigaray comes very close to Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of art in claiming that it is not art's task to give an opinion or make a judgement on the world. Instead, it is to render the aggregations of sensations that our being-in-the-world effects (Deleuze, 2002, p. 31). All art, not only visual art, has this task: to give expression to sensations that are ordinarily inhibited from our modalities of

perception. In the non-painterly context of psychotherapy theory and practice, Irigaray liberates painting from the strictures of the aesthetic tradition and links its material resources to the articulation of sexuate subjectivity and culture. In the case of visual perception, Cézanne understood well that his job was to paint the sensation because 'sensation is the master of deformations', and when painting links itself to sensation, it 'ceases to be representative and becomes real' (Deleuze, 2002, p. 32, 40). When art forms give expression to sensation, we know that it is neither of the subject nor of the object, but rather *between* subject and object even when the object is an apple. In Irigaray's theorising of painting, we can also hear Deleuze's understandings of the relations of painters to expressions of the invisible and imperceptible forces outside the human being that act on bodies. His account of art as the power of forces affecting living bodies' nervous systems are close to her call to render the sensations of relations between self and other(s) and self and world(s); rendering the sexuate nature of the real that constitutes those relations.

From Irigaray, we know that women need to create the artefacts that would be the symbolic resources to which we can look and with which we can form a feminine imaginary, the lack of which from patriarchy's perspective, has been cited as preventing her accession to culture, and which are necessary for a sexuate culture to be figured. Perhaps more so, women need to heed professional artists' view of art as a form of making that can be extended to wider contexts and applications. In viewing art as a form of *making* where an enduring artefact may (or may not) emerge, but more importantly one where *making* would include making relationships between sexuate subjects that are currently experienced as either formless or contained by forms that are inappropriate to sexuate beings. Irigaray says 'making has seldom been considered as a work carried out *inside* subjectivity' (emphasis added, 2002b, p. 115). By 'inside' here, Irigaray is talking of women's need to turn inward towards herself, to form a relation of spacing within herself from which she can create forms for herself through her relation(s) with other women and men. The internal movement of self-affection is an artistic formation that Irigaray determined Unica Zürn did not achieve, and is a necessary condition for a sexuate culture to come.

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