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*Luce Irigaray and the
Question of the Divine*

ALISON MARTIN

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*

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INTRODUCTION

What yesterday was still religion is no longer such to-day;
and what to-day is atheism, tomorrow will be religion.
Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*

The significance of the question of the divine for Luce Irigaray has been evident since the publication of her essay, 'Divine Women' in 1987. In what was originally a lecture, Irigaray expressed in the most forthright and lucid terms her view that a female divine is necessary for women if they are to become subjects. Expressed in this manner such a contention can appear relatively straightforward. In its simplicity it even invites immediate acceptance or rejection on the basis of established and perhaps entrenched positions regarding religion. Yet the meaning of Irigaray's proposal can only be assessed in the context of her philosophy as a philosophy of sexual difference. It cannot be judged in advance of an understanding of that philosophy or indeed apart from it. Therefore, although the question of the divine forms the central focus of this study, it is but an opening to many other questions. I believe that it should not be considered as one aspect of Irigaray's thought. Indeed, it is possible to read her entire *œuvre* as an analysis of the absence of a female divine in patriarchal culture and the need for such a divine in order to go beyond that culture.

It is curious that, barring some notable exceptions, the general reception of Irigaray's thought in the anglophone world has largely ignored the question of the divine or given insufficient attention to it. Where it is discussed, it does indeed tend to be considered as one aspect of her work or as one element in her proposals for a women's politics, and there is little emphasis upon its structural significance to her thought in all its stages. This study attempts to read her thought at each stage through the issue of the divine.

Nevertheless, the principal impetus to examine Irigaray's notion of the divine derives from the veracity that may be attached to Feuerbach's assertion above: although religion may appear to have been overcome, the current form of religion is merely waiting to be revealed as such. I believe this is a fundamental point in Irigaray's discussion of the divine, and it is one which I accept and share from the outset, without necessarily agreeing with her specific assertions regarding the divine. In this instance, religion is to be understood in the broadest possible sense as a bond or link between beings. That was Feuerbach's understanding of it and is also the one Irigaray assumes in her notion of the divine.

As a philosopher, Irigaray does not subscribe to the view that the historical process of rationalization in Western societies and their increasingly individuated secularity are indications that these societies have gone beyond or marginalized religion. Rather, she views religion as a cultural phenomenon which arises as a necessity of being; it is a manifestation of a condition of being that will emerge in some form whatever the apparent socio-historical state of belief. Therefore, she has argued that:

Exclure ou supprimer le phénomène religieux apparaît impossible. Il resurgit sous diverses formes souvent dégradées: le sectarisme, les dogmatismes théoriques et politiques, la religiosité... Il importe donc de le repenser, notamment dans ses structures, ses catégories, ses initiations, ses règles et utopies, masculines depuis des siècles. Sans oublier que celles-ci s'appellent souvent aujourd'hui sciences et techniques. (1987b: 89)¹

Clearly, then, religion is not merely to be understood as whatever declares itself by that name at a given historical moment. It is, in its broadest sense, that which subtends the organization of a society; it is its links or bonds. By this definition, secular, atheistic and even nihilistic discourses may be considered religious to the extent that they constitute a form of communication and therefore a link between beings.

Such a definition of religion is, of course, extremely vague. Irigaray both assumes this definition and qualifies it by generally using the word 'divine' rather than 'religion'. For her, the 'divine' raises the vital question of the continuity between nature and culture, the body and spirit, whereas 'religion' raises the question of a link without necessarily challenging their dichotomous status (1996: 223).

To pose the question of the divine in Irigaray's work therefore is to investigate notions of religion, but also notions of God, the ideal, transcendence, perfection, nature, culture, as well as intersubjectivity. In that way, the scope of her notion of the divine cannot be restricted to religious or even theological questions in the narrow sense, because she engages in a philosophical critique of religion and theological conception which turns back on itself as a critique of the objectifying metaphysics of philosophy. Hence, she describes the question of the relationship to God as 'absolument cruciale' and argues that any philosophical analysis which fails to take it into account risks distancing women even further from their history as women (1996: 212). She insists that this has been her understanding from her early work: 'Cela, je l'ai toujours compris. Depuis *Speculum*, je me suis toujours mesurée avec cette question' (1996: 212).

That this apparently decisive question in Irigaray's thought has received relatively scant attention is in part symptomatic of the concerns of some of her

audiences. Northern Europeans, as well as North Americans, are generally immersed in cultures which have rationalized religion and largely secularized ontological questions. Many feminist traditions in those countries have been facilitated by Enlightenment discourses of freedom and equality, and the discourse of religion is not one in which they wish to dwell and stake their claims for in many respects their premise resides in an opposition to the traditional dogmas of religion and its myth. The issue of divinity is either treated indifferently or it is analysed as a factor contributing to women's historical oppression. Very few feminist thinkers consider the divine to be relevant to questions of language, representation, and truth, nor would they consider it a particularly relevant factor for the emancipation of women, much less a necessity. Irigaray's stance in this respect, although not unique, is distinctive.

In this study, my aim is to illustrate the distinctiveness of Irigaray's position by showing that for her, the question of the divine pertains directly to the constitution of subjectivity. She does not restrict the divine to the strictly theological, but neither does she envisage it as matter for somewhat marginal cults. I argue that she presents the question of the divine as a question of how and for whom subjectivity is constituted in Western culture. It has long been established that subjectivity is a prevailing concern of Irigaray's thought in all its stages, and my argument is that this must be considered in relation to the issue of the divine because for Irigaray subjectivity is necessarily divine.

I do not discuss all aspects of Irigaray's work in terms of the divine, nor indeed do I claim to discuss all possible aspects of the divine. I believe that would be beyond the scope of a single study, especially if her writing is to be considered within the philosophical context in which she is operating, as is my aim here. Nevertheless, I believe that the question of the divine provides a way of approaching Irigaray's work as philosophical, feminist *and* historico-political, because it relates to the philosophical problem of subjectivity while suggesting a women's politics and the possibility of ideals to bring about that politics in history.

A further fundamental factor in Irigaray's thought is that she treats gender and sex as questions of philosophy and considers philosophy itself in terms of these. I accept this argument and it forms a premise of my study although I do not *necessarily* accept the philosophical arguments of Irigaray herself regarding gender. Irigaray does not argue as a theologian but as a philosopher, though one prepared to advance her own emotional investment in the divine rather than merely subject it to the objectivist critiques of philosophy. I have considered her work in terms of philosophy, and her claim for a female divine is therefore considered in the first instance as a philosophical claim. However, that claim is *situated* within a conception of philosophy as a historical and socio-cultural concern, and her contention that women need a female divine is

very much a political and historical one. I argue that it follows a critique of patriarchy as a system which is supported by an exclusively masculine divine, and it amounts to a *response* to that historical and theoretical analysis. Consequently, the validity of Irigaray's contention is considered through close attention to her own analysis of the status of woman within patriarchy as well to as the status of her claims in the context of specific philosophical discourses.

With regard to the question of Irigaray's philosophical tap-root, I maintain that her thought depends upon a number of philosophical traditions but that she cannot be reduced to any of them. I put forward the argument that her claims must be understood structurally and historically, and that her analyses are not simply to do with the structures of language and culture but relate to the evolution of a history whose historical forms are contained within those structures. I read her as a dialectical thinker, a phenomenological thinker and a psychoanalyst. However, I have given less attention to her relationship with psychoanalysis because it has been the subject of much previous discussion, and although it remains a decisive factor in her thought, it does not provide the principal context of engagement for Irigaray as her work progresses. For this reason, I focus on her thought as dialectical and phenomenological, stressing its cultural *and* social implications.

In approaching Irigaray's work I have chosen to highlight a small number of her texts which are particularly relevant to my main arguments. I have subjected these texts to close scrutiny, incorporating other texts which are relevant to the argument where appropriate and necessary. This is to provide the textual focus Irigaray's extensive body of work demands, while not restricting the implications of her argument, or indeed my own, to the specific focus of the particular texts in question.

My critique is broadly an immanent one, in the sense that much of it is internal to Irigaray's own analysis and I assess the feasibility of her claims in terms of the 'grounds' or assumptions of Irigaray's own philosophy. Her philosophy of sexual difference is a radical philosophy which desires to refound the core assumptions of philosophy and, along with that, to refound the horizon of Western culture. It is a speculative philosophy, full of the rigours of a creative intellect; it is complex and rarely self-explanatory. Given its radicalness and its complexity, I would argue that for the purposes of comprehension it is necessary in the first instance to suspend disbelief and to allow her thoughts to be pursued to their end in the very tradition of philosophy. The temptation with radical thinkers is to assess them in terms of the thought they are criticizing rather than to allow their critiques to come to the fore and be comprehended on other terms. In recognition of this temptation, I have attempted to give full rein to Irigaray's thought and to its

assumptions *before* reining it in to my own criticisms. I have therefore addressed the difficulty and complexity of her thought through close analysis with the aim of producing a more subtle reading than would be achieved by reading her in terms of prior philosophical and political commitments. Doubtless what I can recognize of these in my own procedure will be matched by unrecognized assumptions. This is unavoidable and not entirely undesirable, because Irigaray's thought is not intended as an abstract epistemological tract but as a communication *with* others in their particularity.

In addition to my own criticisms of her thought, I make use of other philosophers' arguments in order to comprehend and criticize her. Irigaray is engaging with the history of Western philosophy and the debates of contemporary French philosophy. She can be judged in relation to these because she is dependent upon them for all her radicalness. I also refer to and use the body of Irigaray criticism now available, most notably Whitford (1991a), Grosz (1989), Chanter (1995), Mortensen (1993), and the collection of essays in *Engaging with Irigaray* (Burke et al 1994). I signal my agreements and disagreements with these throughout the study, while attempting to articulate my own distinctive reading through the question of the divine. My debt to other engagements with Irigaray, even those I criticize, is also significant and I acknowledge that debt here.

As a *philosophy* of sexual difference, Irigaray's thought cannot be entirely reduced to the exigencies of a political strategy within the ideals and objectives of the existing order. However, neither can it be abstracted from the determinations and limitations that order imposes. Her argument for a female divine represents a claim for what is currently a potential in order to create and open out a possible future which cannot be programmed in advance. It therefore has to be assessed in terms of its credibility now but with a view to its realization, and the nature of such a potential realization is impossible to decide in advance of historical event. That Irigaray's thought is in many respects a proposition for what *may* be has been a prime consideration throughout this study. Her writing glides across the division between what *is* and what *may* be (not *ought* to be), so that the nature of her claims are open to evolution in accordance with the ineluctable *becoming* they proclaim. Furthermore, Irigaray continues to write, and this is a factor relevant to any assessment of her work. It is an *œuvre* in progress, and future publications may well affect current critiques of her thought in ways which are impossible to foresee.

I begin by introducing Irigaray's thought and some of the key issues that have arisen in its reception. Against readings of her as a 'French feminist' and as an essentialist thinker, I propose that she be understood as a French thinker who supports a form of universalism — divine universalism. Having set the

scene for my reading of Irigaray, through her engagement with Marx I go on to examine her critique of patriarchy which was the principal object of the first stage of her work. I read it as a critique of the form of the divine prevalent within patriarchy — a divine which, she argues, denies the continuity between nature and culture and supports a masculine subject at the expense of a potential feminine subject. I then consider Irigaray's response to her analysis of patriarchy as a system that deprives the feminine of value by examining her contention that women need a female divine. After setting out her Hegelian model of two universal and sexed divines, I discuss how she begins to articulate a notion of the feminine that might be appropriate to women in relation to feminine modalities or a female imaginary, although I argue that it is the female divine which provides the mainstay of the feminine subject. This is followed by an assessment of Irigaray's further articulation of the notion of the sexed divine via her interpretation of Christianity which I juxtapose with Nietzsche's critique of that religion. I discuss her interpretations of Christ as a figure of the divine in the feminine and her proposal that Mary be considered the symbol of the female divine for women — a proposal which I believe illustrates the cultural particularity of any divine ideal. Such particularities cast doubt, not so much on the primacy of sexual difference, but on the possibility of that difference being realized as two universal sexed divines.

NOTES

1. Throughout this study, all ellipses and emphases in quotations are those of the author(s) in question, unless indicated otherwise.

CHAPTER ONE

IRIGARAY AND CONTEXT

Irigaray's thought has stimulated much debate, some of it heated by the place and moment of its reception. In this chapter I discuss a number of significant issues that have arisen in response to her work by outlining in general terms the manner in which it has been received. From this review it emerges that if Irigaray is to be given a fair hearing then her arguments must be read in the context of the philosophical discourse with which she is specifically engaging, although the temptation to reduce her thought to any particular discourse must be resisted. Furthermore, the allegations of essentialism levelled at Irigaray appear misplaced if she is read as a universalist thinker; her universalism becomes apparent in the process of examining the question of the divine throughout the different stages of her *œuvre*.

Early Reception

Problems in attempting to understand and assess Irigaray's thought were particularly apparent in the early stages of its production. Barriers to comprehension included the lack of available translations for anglophone readers and the question of different intellectual traditions, as well as the problem of categorizing the status of her thought. The definition of Irigaray as a 'French feminist' unhelpfully assimilated her to the prevailing reading of that group as celebrators of femininity while prominent readings of her as a deconstructionist tended to reduce her thought to that of Derrida. Each of these factors has had the potential to impede or distort comprehension of Irigaray, especially as she is a difficult thinker still in the process of articulating and developing her work.

Irigaray may be considered a difficult thinker for a number of reasons. Not least is the question of her writing style which, particularly in her earlier texts, defies the stylistic conventions of intellectual discourse. It is a style which self-consciously plays with language, syntax and grammar in order to enact the meaning of its content, attempting to both expose and subvert the commitments of conventional philosophical logic and its style. The question of Irigaray's style is thus of central importance to much of her work. However, at the time of the production of her first major philosophical publications, the early 1970s, the notion and practice of transgressing conventional meaning through stylistic innovation was not unfamiliar given the history of literary

modernism. What perhaps made her texts more difficult to assimilate was the question of their status. Engaging with questions within the realm of philosophy, and yet animated by a human interest that appeared to be feminist, Irigaray's writing did not appear to fit either tradition. Philosophy had always viewed the question of gender and the condition of women as at best a social question, one irrelevant to philosophy's concerns of reason and universality (Lloyd 1984). Feminism in the Anglo-American world was primarily a social movement wary of abstruse intellectual reasoning, believing that it denied the particularity of women's experiences. This lack of fit was compounded by the incorporation of psychoanalysis into Irigaray's thought. Although psychoanalysis had received a relatively favourable philosophical treatment from some schools of critical thought, particularly the Frankfurt School, it was then and remains now a relatively marginal discourse within philosophy as such. Furthermore, while feminists such as Juliet Mitchell (1974) were beginning to advocate the usefulness of Lacanian psychoanalysis to feminist analyses, more typical at that time was the view expounded by Kate Millett (1969), which was that Freud was a patriarchal misogynist whose thought was positively damaging for women.

In terms of philosophy and feminism, then, Irigaray's thought had no given intellectual audience in the anglophone world. This largely remains the case, although the development of critical theory as predominantly cultural theory in the last two decades has provided a body of thought to which her contribution can be assimilated. Furthermore, in certain contexts she has been established as a feminist theorist worthy of academic recognition and is therefore studied at university level on courses principally concerned with feminism, as well as in philosophy departments with a strong interest in French and German thought. These are often institutional contexts or intellectual spaces created in order to facilitate thought such as Irigaray's, rather than established domains which have simply added her to an existing list of worthy intellectuals. Nevertheless, it is a sign of the success of the kind of style and argument put forward by Irigaray (among others) that 'feminist philosophy' is no longer an oxymoron.

That Irigaray is a feminist philosopher to whom both terms apply with equal weight was established by Margaret Whitford in her *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (1991a). Whitford's work on Irigaray has been of central importance to her reception in the anglophone world. Since that publication Whitford's call for a serious *engagement* with this difficult philosopher has been met by a number of important studies and a proliferation of papers that approach Irigaray's work with the caution and consideration it deserves. Disagreement and doubt remain, along with excessive reverence and awe, yet

easy dismissal is no longer credible after Whitford's positioning of Irigaray as a feminist philosopher.

Whitford emphasized that Irigaray's thought is embedded within the history of philosophy and that the claims she makes must be understood in relation to that history (1991a: 10). It is now generally accepted that it is necessary to position Irigaray's work and by some method to place it in context if her claims and arguments are to be fully appreciated and evaluated. This was the method deployed by Tina Chanter in her subsequent exploration of Irigaray's relation to various phenomenological thinkers in *ethics of eros: Irigaray's rewriting of the philosophers* (1995). Part of the necessity of this process derives from Irigaray's work which, because of its allusive style, has always been particularly susceptible to being misunderstood. The notion that a writer or thinker is liable to be misunderstood has often been taken as a point in their favour in recent years, entailing a cultic reverence for their work on the part of initiates who claim true comprehension, a trend probably ensuing from Nietzsche's sense of his own untimeliness and his desire to write for the future. It would be inappropriate to ascribe such a seemingly prophetic role to Irigaray in attempting to account for the problems that have arisen in dealing with her thought, nor would it be appropriate to imagine a particular audience uniquely endowed with the qualities necessary to understand her. While her writing is difficult, even esoteric at times, the sentiment is much more democratic than that.

It remains the case, however, that a good deal of the earlier reception of Irigaray in the anglophone context made claims that would now be difficult to substantiate.¹ The reason for this is in part a pragmatic one concerning the availability of her work. When Whitford published her book, very few of Irigaray's works had been translated into English, and this of necessity obliged a limited reading of her work for some. The two significant texts of Irigaray's early work were translated and published in 1985, these being *Speculum of the Other Woman*, (*Speculum. De l'autre femme* 1974) and *This Sex Which is Not One*, (*Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* 1977). Prior to that, translations mostly consisted of sections or essays extracted from these texts, along with some interviews, which were published separately in journals or collections. A similar position pertained after 1985 until the publication in 1991 of *Marine Lover. Of Friedrich Nietzsche* (*Amante Marine. De Friedrich Nietzsche* 1980) and *The Irigaray Reader* (Whitford 1991c). Particular essays were selected from her texts for publication in isolation from the other essays in the complete French texts. Hence, while the significant early texts were available in English, in this initial period it would have been difficult to assess them in the light of the development of Irigaray's thought since for a time, at least, translations were emerging in a fragmentary manner.

Translation issues were not the sole problem, however. The fact that Irigaray's style places her beyond the province of the realms she ostensibly inhabits, feminism and philosophy, merely compounded the problem of the specificity of intellectual context, particularly for the Anglo-American reader. Irigaray's thought is steeped in what is sometimes referred to as the 'Continental' tradition, and specifically contemporary French philosophy that takes its cue from German thinkers, particularly Hegel, Heidegger and Nietzsche, along with Freud as an explicit or implicit counterpart. This contrasts with the traditions of thought most familiar to many Anglo-American feminists in particular who have generally worked in an intellectual climate dominated by empiricism, pragmatism, 'ordinary language' philosophy, or a Marxism dominated by praxis or empiricism. Much has been made of this division, which is probably less a dichotomy than a manifestation of intellectual tendencies, and it is certainly a contrast which has become stale, both through the natural ageing of an academic issue and through the limitations it poses upon furthering intellectual development. What is more, the influence of one upon the other (particularly westwards across the Atlantic) has produced a degree of cross-fertilization such that the different methods of thought are now less discernible along linguistic-nationalistic lines. Nevertheless, the difference in intellectual context was undoubtedly important regarding the early reception of Irigaray, and goes some way to explain the difficulty that has existed in simply inserting her work into the patchwork of feminist thought or into a given intellectual tradition.

Part of the reaction to this difficulty of 'coming to grips' with Irigaray, to borrow Naomi Schor's expression,² was to place her in context and categorize her in a particular way which, although facilitating further understanding through emphasizing her Frenchness, itself imposed limitations upon the process of understanding her. For Irigaray was described as one of a group of 'French feminists'. This phenomenon is pointedly discussed by Diana Leonard and Lisa Adkins (1996), whose concern with what they designate materialist French feminism in fact leads them to a position of non-engagement with Irigaray. However, their construal of the scenario highlights some pertinent issues even if, by not engaging with Irigaray, they are in certain respects guilty of perpetuating the phenomenon of categorization they criticize.

Leonard and Adkins argue that Irigaray was 'marketed' in the late eighties along with Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous as *the* 'French feminists', forming a holy trinity that has successfully entered into so-called 'Anglo-American' feminism and indeed transformed that feminism. They emphasize the successful influence of the French thinkers and thus they quite justifiably point to the paradox that much Anglo-American feminism influenced by this presentation of these thinkers' work is now more 'French' than French femi-

nism. For French feminism, as a movement and a discourse, is predictably much broader than the work of these three intellectuals, powerful though their work may be. The principal concern of Leonard and Adkins is to highlight the existence of other feminist tendencies in France, particularly those feminists working in connection with the journal *Questions féministes* (and the later, *Nouvelles questions féministes*). These feminists have worked with and claim allegiance to Simone de Beauvoir, whom they classify as materialist, and have more affinities with, for example, English socialist feminism than with the 'holy' three. So while Leonard and Adkins correctly point out that these materialist feminists have always been critical of Irigaray and Cixous, not least for their *écriture*, what is important here is their account of how Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous were gathered together and appropriated as the cultural capital known as 'French feminism'.

One factor Leonard and Adkins highlight to explain the purchase that Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous have had in Anglo-American academia is the very difficulty of these writers, their 'exoticism' and otherness. Quoting Christine Delphy, they argue that Anglo-American feminists themselves created 'French feminism' as a phenomenon and used its otherness to facilitate the dissemination of seductive ideas that could otherwise only be approached with trepidation (1996: 8). This was particularly true for North America, where Delphy objects to the emphasis placed upon gender difference and its possible valorization by 'French feminism', arguing that it was a way to rehabilitate essentialism. While it is possible to concur with her view that 'French feminism' was an external construction, it is highly improbable that this appropriation provided a backdoor for essentialism since the question of essentialism was frequently raised at Irigaray's expense, as discussed below. What is more credible as an explanation are the factors pointed to by Leonard and Adkins: the weakness of Marxism and the apparent predilection for psychoanalysis and social psychology in North American institutions (1996: 8). It is probable that these institutional and contextual factors did facilitate the embrace of the work of Irigaray, Cixous and Kristeva rather than of other French writers, albeit at the expense of considering these named thinkers' relation to historical materialism. For what is now apparent, both from the critical thought given to the work of each of the three and from the directions their subsequent work has taken, is that speaking of 'French feminism' was in many respects an assimilatory gesture which thereby inevitably entailed some reductionism and omissions for those excluded *and* those included. In the British context, for example, to be a theorist seemingly outside the orbit of materialist thought, and therefore not to have a theory of the 'social', gave cause for rejection as well as acceptance (Segal 1987).

Leonard and Adkins go on to outline a further significant factor in the marketing of 'French feminism'. They recall the distribution of a series of texts giving prominence to these three thinkers, not least Marks and de Courtivron's *New French Feminisms* (1981) and Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985).³ These texts were simultaneously influential for the reception of Irigaray and symptomatic of that reception in the way they arose from but also shaped a certain intellectual climate. The collection *New French Feminisms* does include a broad selection of essays, but the title in itself promises something very specific to the French scene, emphasizing its difference compared with other feminisms presumably also defined along national-linguistic lines. Given this anticipated difference, Leonard and Adkins argue that it is the psychoanalytical tendency which is privileged in the introduction by the editors, Marks and de Courtivron — a tendency identified with the group, *Psychanalyse et politique*. This group was always notorious for its rejection of the word 'feminism', and for its successful legal action to claim for its own publishing house the title, *MLF (Mouvement de la libération des femmes)*.⁴ Nevertheless, they are described as the most influential, radical and innovative group by Marks and de Courtivron, and the writings of Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous tend to be elided with this group. While only Cixous in fact seems to have had any lasting connection with the group, and it is doubtful whether Irigaray had any connection whatsoever, the elision successfully conveyed the sense of a tendency with shared aims: a somewhat utopian celebration of femininity and a concern to 'write the body'. The shared interest in psychoanalysis as a serious tool for analysing the notion of femininity was reduced to the apparently shared objective of affirming a given femininity.

This elision did not only prevail outside France. In an article critical of 'French feminism' and the specific role of *New French Feminisms* in constructing this concept, Simone de Beauvoir herself places Irigaray in a 'neo-femininity' camp:

The French women's movement... is in constant danger, because of the existence of such groups as *Psych et Po* which pass themselves off as *the* women's movement and exert considerable influence, thanks to the unfortunately all-too-warm reception the general public has given their ideology — a convenient neo-femininity developed by such women writers as Hélène Cixous, Annie Leclerc and Luce Irigaray... Unfortunately, this is also the aspect of the women's movement best known in the United States. Such books as *New French Feminisms* give a totally distorted image of French feminism by presenting it, on the one hand, as if it existed in theory and not in action and, on the other, as if the sum of that theory emanated from the school of neo-femininity — which celebrates women's cycles, rhythms, and bodily fluids, along with *écriture du corps* and women's 'circular thinking'. (1984, quoted in Leonard and Adkins 1996: 7)

That de Beauvoir snubbed Irigaray in the early stages of her work is attested to by Irigaray in later writing,⁵ and certainly many of the distinctive preoccupations arising in Irigaray's earlier work support the view that she was celebrating a neo-femininity. Speculative notions developed by Irigaray in *Ce sexe*, such as an economy of fluids, a feminine syntax, a *parler-femme* and the infamous 'two lips' image from the essay in that volume, 'Quand nos lèvres se parlent', taken together with the poetic and allusive writing style, all lend themselves to such an interpretation. However, to assimilate the thought of Irigaray and Cixous is to misunderstand the endeavours of both, as the question of *écriture féminine* makes apparent.

Merged with the *Psych et po* tendency, Irigaray was readily seen as celebrating an exclusionary and utopian notion of the feminine through an *écriture féminine*. This was generally perceived as a kind of 'writing the body', writing which ostensibly emanates from the materiality of the feminine body, its libido, *jouissance* and rhythm. It was understood as a practice of writing that is *written* in defiance of the patriarchal *logos* which is assumed both to harness and suppress these material energies for its own conceptual and theoretical purposes. Ann Rosalind Jones, in a paper published in 1981 aiming to explicate *écriture féminine*, again grouped Irigaray alongside Kristeva, Cixous and this time Monique Wittig, too, as the major exponents of the practice. She wrote in this context:

French feminists in general believe that Western thought has been based upon a systematic repression of women's experience. Thus, their assertion of a bedrock female nature makes sense as a point from which to deconstruct language, philosophy, psychoanalysis, the social practices and the direction of patriarchal culture as we live in and resist it. (1981: 247)

Thus, the somewhat vague and general notion of *écriture féminine* added fuel to the view that Irigaray's notion of the feminine necessarily referred to some unmediated outpouring deriving from the biological female body. However, while *écriture féminine* is a term developed by Cixous, it is not strictly applicable to Irigaray who, as Whitford observes, never uses the term (1991a: 38).

Cixous's own use of the term has been to suggest a practice rather than a definition. *Écriture féminine* evokes a writing which plays on difference and polysemy rather than unity and intentional meaning, which is in excess of logic and exudes pleasure in open-ended textuality. For Cixous, it has in fact no simple relation to the female body in the sense that it emanates from a libido said to be feminine but which is better described as bisexual. In her account this bisexuality entails not the binary poles of masculinity or femininity but a multiple sexuality akin to a pre-Oedipal polymorphousness. The production of feminine writing as the inscription of this multiplicity is thus poten-

tially open to both men and women, for it depends upon their creative response to psycho-sexual identification rather than their sex. Its radicalness derives from a refusal to conform to such binary oppositions as male and female and it is explicitly situated as a practice that defies the identifying structures of theory (Cixous 1975).

A fundamental point of distinction here is that, like many philosophers following in the wake of Heidegger, Irigaray is committed to the history and practice of philosophy in spite of a desire to see its end as a metaphysical idealism. Furthermore, she does not concur with Cixous's notion of multiplicity, as discussed below, because she accepts neither the notion of a fundamental bisexuality nor the Freudian topography for psycho-sexual development. Nevertheless, while she does not use the term *écriture féminine*, she does in her earlier work develop the notion of *parler-femme* ('speaking (as) woman') which could be interpreted as a term corresponding to a feminine writing.⁶ Irigaray notoriously emphasized in *Ce sexe* the non-identical meaning of female language, its incoherence for a male interlocutor, its multiple effect and its contiguity which is akin to the constant 'touching' of women's 'two lips' and their 'body-sex' (1977a: 28). Thus, her notion evokes a female speaking subject who speaks in a manner which, similarly to 'feminine writing', ostensibly confounds the supposedly appropriating metalinguistic logic of a patriarchal language.⁷ However, her description of this female speaking subject arises in a section that opens with the statement that: 'La sexualité féminine a toujours été pensée à partir de paramètres masculins' (1977a: 23). Thus, it is important to recognize that it is only within those parameters and in accordance with a patriarchal logic that 'speaking (as) woman' necessarily appears as a kind of inchoate, unmediated outpouring from the female body. *Parler-femme* needs, therefore, to be placed here in the context of her analysis of the feminine's structural relation to the masculine subject and her position as the 'body' in his dialectic between his self and other. Which is not to say that there is no sense of another *parler-femme* immanent within her critique of its patriarchal manifestation, one that might go beyond patriarchal determinants. However, for Irigaray that is something to be developed as much as revealed. Even in her earliest texts, then, the notion of the feminine is analysed as a structurally relative and dialectically mediated term by Irigaray. At no point is it simply written.

A further significant factor which distinguishes Irigaray from a 'feminine writing' is her general scepticism regarding the radical potential claimed in different ways by both Kristeva and Cixous, among others, for avant-garde or experimental writing. As a linguist and, in many respects, a creative writer, Irigaray supports the proposition that meaning is inextricably bound to the very structure of a language. Indeed, the structuring order of language as the

medium which 'houses Being', in Heidegger's renowned formulation, is a principal object of her critique. However, the primary focus for her project has never been the notion of writing as such. The question of language arises for Irigaray because of the central significance she attributes to language as a cultural medium for the constitution of the subject and of identity. Hence, Whitford argues that the notion of *parler-femme* pertains to the question of the *subject* of enunciation, the position of a speaker in a discourse or statement relative to his or her interlocutor (1991a: 41). This is ultimately as much a matter of social positioning as it is a psycho-sexual one, and therefore implies something other than intertextual play. Irigaray's model is one of dialogue *between* speaking subjects. In an interview published in 1990 Irigaray is critical of the apparent trend towards interdisciplinary thought and its assumed correlate: a fusion of writing genres which is assumed to initiate change.

Écrire différemment n'a jusqu'à présent pas beaucoup modifié le sexe des dirigeants politiques ni leurs discours civils ou religieux... La littérature, c'est bien. Mais comment amener le monde des hommes à diriger poétiquement les peuples alors qu'ils s'intéressent avant tout à l'argent, à la concurrence pour le pouvoir, etc.? Et comment gérer le monde en tant que femmes si nous n'avons pas défini notre identité concernant nos rapports généalogiques, notre ordre social, linguistique, culturel? (1990a: 69–70)

For Irigaray, writing differently was thus never a lyrical retreat into aestheticism, as Fauré alleged (1981: 81).⁸ Her use of different styles is necessitated by the process and object of her critique at each of the different phases of her work. If *Speculum* and *Ce sexe* do manifest a stylistic affinity with Cixous's *La Jeune Née* (1975), for example, then it does not ensue that their theoretical positions are the same. That is to reduce content to style, and to facilitate an easy dismissal of both. The practice of describing Irigaray's work as a form of *écriture féminine* was thus symptomatic of the process of assimilation which categorized Irigaray as a French feminist along with Kristeva and Cixous and tended to conflate their very different intellectual projects and positions at the cost of understanding them.

Moi's book, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985), does not simply conflate the work of Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous and she engages in a critical discussion of their thought which illustrates their differences; Moi's critical evaluation here comes down broadly in favour of Kristeva. Nevertheless, this book is symptomatic of other factors relevant to the earlier reception of Irigaray. Again, she is positioned alongside Kristeva and Cixous as one of the major exponents of French feminism (following a discussion of de Beauvoir as the mother of the movement). Yet all three are positioned in the context of French deconstruction and discussed in relation to the work of its principal exponent,

Jacques Derrida, in a manner that tends to reduce their work to his. Their work is presented as derivative and they themselves as if they were 'les filles de Derrida'. Despite the sophisticated critique of authorial authority advanced by deconstruction itself, the manner in which the work of Derrida is foregrounded sets up a hierarchical intellectual lineage that can only produce a reductive reading of Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous. His strictures become the arbiters of their 'truths'. Moi writes:

Though Irigaray never acknowledges the fact, her analysis of male specular logic is deeply indebted to Derrida's critique of Western philosophical tradition. If the textual analyses of *Speculum* are inspiring examples of anti-patriarchal criticism, it is because Irigaray knows how to expose the flaws and inconsistencies of phallogentric discourse. (1985: 138)

For Moi, Irigaray *knows* because she has learnt from Derrida, although Irigaray does not admit this because she apparently succumbs to the 'temptation to produce her own positive theory of femininity' (1985: 139). However, Moi has already declared this inadmissible because Derrida has argued that 'it is impossible to produce new *concepts* untainted by the metaphysics of presence' (1985: 139). Exactly how this objection relates to Irigaray's notion of the feminine is not analysed by Moi.

Moi's staging of this intellectual scene is akin to the literary phenomenon described by Freud in 'The Theme of the Three Caskets' whereby women are often presented in a group of three, women who are fundamentally the same but have discernibly different characteristics (Freud XII: 289–301). Inevitably, a man chooses between them, and here it is Derrida who is the man since he is established as judge and jury of their wares.⁹ It is quite feasible to read Irigaray's exploration and apparent 'affirmation' of a certain 'femininity' in *Speculum* and *Ce sexe* as a deconstructive strategy of affirming the second term of a hierarchical duality for the purpose of deconstructing that duality, thereby reversing and displacing it. Burke (1981) deploys this strategy, but inevitably Irigaray is found wanting in the terms of such a strategy because of the sense of the immanence of a different feminine in her writing compared with deconstruction's valorization of the undecidable feminine.¹⁰ In such deconstructive readings, Irigaray is thus deemed to be both performing deconstruction and manifesting the tendency to assume the actual or potential existence of fully self-identical beings in bipolar terms (masculine and feminine) which is the object of deconstructive critiques or practices. Reading Irigaray as a deconstructionist in this way thus reveals both the utility and the truth of deconstruction: it is useful because it enables Irigaray to reveal the investments of a patriarchal system but its truth is the ineluctability of the alluring trap of metaphysical polarities into which Irigaray regrettably falls.

No doubt the relationship between Irigaray and deconstruction can be a fruitful one.¹¹ Irigaray herself clearly has a high intellectual regard for Derrida and she does in fact explicitly engage with his writing at several moments in her work.¹² However, Irigaray's influences and dependencies are broad and diffuse and depend significantly upon the shared philosophical language of contemporary French thinkers. In order to understand Derrida's objections to the metaphysics of presence, it is probably a requirement to have at least some familiarity with Heidegger's later work and his conception of *alētheia* as the unconcealment of Being. If the question of intellectual debt and rigour is uppermost, evoking Derrida against Irigaray could only be undertaken with any justice to the latter by engaging with her own interpretation of Heidegger's ontological difference and specifically her abstruse poetic text, *L'oubli de l'air. Chez Martin Heidegger* (1983).¹³ This reading is not undertaken here; the point is raised merely to register an objection to the tendency that will readily *reduce* a woman's thought to another's (especially a man's) when an association is clearly discernible rather than explore that association for what its interface might reveal. The question of intellectual debt and genesis is a complex one that, particularly in this case, is likely to be highly ambiguous. Whitford points out that Irigaray's method implies a certain parasitism: 'it is quite clear, for example, that a large number of Irigaray's central terms derive from either Lacan or Derrida — often she is explicitly reworking or redefining them' (1991a: 3). This is undoubtedly true, but it is equally the case that Derrida's method is deliberately parasitical and Lacan is explicitly reworking Freud in an avowed attempt to return to Freud. Since Irigaray also engages with Freud and many of the philosophers dear to Derrida (such as Heidegger) 'on her own terms', it is important (as Whitford suggests) to chart the stakes of any discovered debt rather than simply assert it.¹⁴

If the manner of Irigaray's appropriation as a 'French feminist' proved in some respects problematic, it is acknowledged that to stress her status as a 'French thinker' could be equally problematic. Nevertheless, the philosophical language of the contemporary French thought in which she is immersed is sufficiently significant to merit emphasis provided assimilatory tendencies are kept at bay. It is a philosophical language that appears to be absorbed in the manner of a mother tongue; a new generation absorbs it and it certainly becomes a requirement for any philosophical intervention but the preoccupation is less with acknowledging ownership and charting its origin than with furthering its potential by exploiting its uses. This is very much the case for Irigaray, whose allusive rather than referential style incorporates terms and texts as much for the sake of subjecting them to a critique or developing them as for the sake of 'using' them as a methodology of reading. Joanna Hodge aligns Irigaray's style with that of Nietzsche and Heidegger and argues that: 'Their

texts function as palimpsests, obscuring but preserving the traces of the thinkers with whom they have engaged on the way to developing their own thought' (1994: 199).¹⁵ This practice probably facilitates a certain reductionism in the way that it is possible to hear the voice of another thinker in Irigaray's texts but frequently no attempt is made to clearly distinguish her voice from the other's. By not always 'mentioning' her sources, Irigaray can be suspected of having something to hide and may be reduced to those sources.

While it is necessary to place Irigaray's thought in context, the assumption here is that her thought cannot be *reduced* to the determinants laid down by any other thinker within the philosophies she deploys.¹⁶ Irigaray is working within the traditions of thought emanating from Hegel and Heidegger, she is within the phenomenological and psychoanalytical traditions and she is influenced by Nietzsche (as well as by de Beauvoir, whether directly or indirectly). Inevitably, then, the Irigaray-deconstruction connection is valid. However, this cannot be an exclusive connection nor even a decisive one. Any form of intellectual connection of this kind is as much a reflection of the reader's interests (which are, of course, wholly valid) as it is a necessary requirement for understanding a thinker. That Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics* was aimed at furthering theory in the academic field of literary criticism is, in fact, significant given that during the 1980s deconstruction had already gained some prominence in literary criticism for those interested in theory and therefore it provided the ruling perspective through which to read theory.¹⁷

The early reception of Irigaray, particularly in the Anglo-American context, thus tended to emphasize her status as a deconstructive thinker and to position her as a figure for literary studies. The very construction of 'French feminism' compounded that tendency, given that this notion highlighted questions of writing, textuality and indeterminacy, classically considered more 'literary' concerns than 'social' or 'philosophical' ones. On the whole, Irigaray's concern with questions pertaining to the cultural order in the broadest sense received less emphasis. Therefore, early reception of Irigaray tended to type-cast her as a literary figure, broadly conceived, for want of an audience able and willing to read her outside of literary studies. Where she was read, she was categorized as a difficult 'French feminist' concerned with writing the body or articulating some fluid feminine essence, more or less subscribing to or failing to follow the technique of deconstruction.

From Essentialist to Universalist

One of the central and pressing debates in the reception of Irigaray's work has been the question of her essentialism, an essentialism rendering her position

objectionable. Margaret Whitford (1991a) argued persuasively that this is an inappropriate way of classifying Irigaray's position. However, the debate itself is important (if rather tired) and I would argue that it does give rise to the question of Irigaray's universalism.

Whitford's *Luce Irigaray* established Irigaray as a figure in philosophy for feminist theory. Reading Irigaray as a utopian feminist who is 'psychoanalysing the philosophers', Whitford was less concerned with Irigaray's status as a French feminist and more concerned to emphasize her insertion within the philosophical tradition of the West. Moreover, in continuously reiterating Irigaray's stance as a philosopher of change, Whitford both highlighted and confirmed Irigaray's commitment to women's politics.¹⁸ Against the temptation to dismiss Irigaray for lack of seriousness in the light of the mocking tone, the mimicry and the ostensible lack of textual rigour found in some of her earlier work, Whitford's arguments leave one in no doubt as to the seriousness of Irigaray's endeavour. While this may have led her to a somewhat analytical reading of Irigaray that, as she acknowledges, ignores her poetry, the style of Whitford's book was a requirement at the moment of its writing in order to clear the ground for anglophone readers so that they might better appreciate Irigaray's thought and go on to engage with her.

In clearing the ground, it would seem that Whitford had two principal positions against which to defend or explain Irigaray. The first was British socialist feminism, probably the most dominant and certainly one of the most politically active feminisms of the 1970s and early 1980s in Britain. The second was the Lacanian school of psychoanalysis and feminist thought. The predominant issue was the question of Irigaray's essentialism, which partly derived from the nature of Irigaray's thought itself and partly from the fact that essentialism constituted a foremost issue for Anglo-American feminists at the time.

Labelling a thinker as essentialist was tantamount to authorizing a dismissal of their work, or freeing oneself from the obligations of a close reading, since the label supposedly spoke for itself. Whitford had the task of saving Irigaray's thought from the charge of essentialism and hence from outright dismissal by locating her as a post-Lacanian. This entailed outlining Irigaray's relation to Lacanian thought and her use of Lacan's theories for the socialist feminists (and indeed for a broader audience not versed in psychoanalysis) as well as offering a nuanced explanation of Irigaray's relation to Lacan for her Lacanian critics. Thus, Whitford's reading does tend to focus upon psychoanalysis as the route into Irigaray's work, as Tina Chanter later observed (1994: 9). This might appear paradoxical given Whitford's aim to establish Irigaray as a philosopher, but it is not paradoxical if we accept Irigaray's inclusion of psychoanalysis in the discourse of philosophy. Such an inclusion

does not lead Irigaray to privilege psychoanalysis over philosophy in her *œuvre*, and if Whitford takes it to be a privileged route into an interpretation of Irigaray it is because it proves a convincing means of reconfiguring her thought beyond the essentialism/anti-essentialism debate.

The dichotomy of 'essentialism' and 'non-essentialism' has now waned as an organizing principle for feminist debate, yet it has left an indelible mark on the reception of Irigaray's work. Although it did in many respects reduce Irigaray's thought to an either/or decision — is she or is she not an essentialist? — it is a significant debate which can be neither dismissed nor considered resolved. Many of the issues raised in the debate are liable to re-emerge in any reading of Irigaray because of her assertions regarding 'nature' and because of the complexity of her thought when situated in relation to such a debate. For these reasons alone it merits consideration.

To ask, 'What is essentialism?' is to frame a question metaphysically, to seek an essence, thereby performing the answer to one's own question. This is broadly the argument made by Naomi Schor in her article, 'This Essentialism Which Is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray' (1994). In a critique of the essentializing potential of anti-essentialism, Schor offers the following provisional definition of that to which the term essentialism generally refers:

Essentialism in the specific context of feminism consists in the belief that woman has an essence, that woman can be specified by one or a number of inborn attributes that define across cultures and throughout history her unchanging being and in the absence of which she ceases to be categorized as a woman. In less abstract, more practical terms an essentialist, in the context of feminism, is one who instead of carefully holding apart the poles of sex and gender, maps the feminine onto femaleness, one for whom the body, the female body, that is, remains, in however complex and problematic a way, the rock of feminism. (1994: 59)

Schor's concern is to tease out the different meanings of essentialism according to how the critiques of essentialism stage their object. Nevertheless, her provisional description of essentialism here does usefully serve to illustrate some enduring and pervasive features of this concept.

In the first instance, Schor raises the issue of essentialism in its philosophical sense as a question of metaphysics. Metaphysics can no more readily be essentialized than any other concept, in the sense that to define metaphysics is to attempt to abstract its meaning and its use from the specific and complex context from which this term is being used and to attempt to reduce its meaning to a unitary one. However, for the purpose here of staging the parameters of a long-standing debate a general outline is appropriate. In the philosophical climate within which Irigaray is working, which is post-Heideggerian and post-Nietzschean, metaphysics can be assumed to refer to the assertion of a

definition of essence through the copula 'is'. The predicated definition is assumed to correspond to the truth of a Being in its eternal (and possibly immutable) reality; it is a definition which names the essence that constitutes the ground or foundation of a being whose form necessarily ensues from that ground.

In the second instance, the question of essentialism for feminism entails the sex/gender distinction which has provided the bedrock of feminist thought since de Beauvoir. Generally speaking, this distinction holds that sex is a description of a biological given which is the sexed body and is assumed to be either male or female. Sex is thus a natural state which is consequently unchangeable.¹⁹ Non-essentialists who subscribe to the sex/gender distinction either attribute no significance whatsoever to the sexed body, or they treat it functionally, as a material entity which houses a subject whose plumbing may differ according to the male and female version but for whom this is of no necessary consequence. Gender, on the other hand, is assumed to be significant and historical. Femininity and masculinity are held to be cultural variables with no necessary relationship to the forms and functions of the sexed body, which form a spectrum across which both males and females are inserted. Essentialists are classified as those who assume that the biological given of sex holds or somehow determines the essence of gender in a causal fashion, thereby reducing culture to a nature which should have no significance except for its functionality.²⁰

For non-essentialists, then, essentialists are deemed to be endorsing culturally defined notions of femininity and masculinity which have coagulated as unified entities and have been ascribed to the apparently corresponding female and male forms. Tying gender down in this way is objectionable to non-essentialists principally because it ostensibly blocks the pathway to change.²¹ In an enlightened culture, to reduce the essence of one's being to a natural given (the body), is to deny one's freedom and capacity for change. Hence, de Beauvoir's most famous anti-essentialist statement in *Le deuxième sexe*: 'On ne naît pas femme, on le devient'. Not born a woman does not mean for de Beauvoir that there are no anatomical or indeed biological differences between the sexes: it does mean that the essence of a woman is defined through her existence. Cultural existence defines femininity (and masculinity) in a fashion that simply makes of the natural body a kind of facticity which is only given to human consciousness through interpretation. She states: 'Ce n'est pas la nature qui définit la femme: c'est celle-ci qui se définit en reprenant la nature à son compte dans son affectivité' (1949, Vol. 1: 78). While the body is one necessary factor in existence, then, such a distinction enables it to be situated in a context of interpretation rather than making it the foundation for determination (1949, Vol. 1: 48).²²

The sex/gender distinction, understood as the feminist variant which could be mapped onto other dichotomies deemed central to theorizing the possibility of change and enlightenment (such as nature/culture, biology/society, consciousness/self-consciousness) was thus established as a sacred tenet of feminism. As Chanter argues, this distinction has had a good deal of social and political efficacy in that emphasizing the construction of gender enabled feminists to challenge patriarchal ideals of femininity and the social roles these ideals determined for women. However, this was exacted at the cost of sexual difference:

Underplaying sexual difference, in this feminist scenario, is the corollary of emphasizing gender construction, which appeals not to sexual difference but to the commonalities between the sexes. To emphasize gender rather than sex has been an important motif in the struggle to achieve equality of opportunity and rights between men and women. The strategy of stipulating social roles as the most decisive influence on women's lives has served as an effective way of acknowledging and facilitating the possibility of changing the most restrictive aspects of these roles. It is hard to over-estimate the importance of this strategy in securing equality for women to date, but the success of playing off gender against sex should not obscure the need for feminism to move with the times [...] A crucial part of this re-evaluation of feminist goals should be to reassess how useful it is to emphasize gender to the extent of obliterating the significance of sexual difference. (1994: 5)

Since sexual difference had been used against women, particularly the sexual difference of the 'biological' sexed body, the fact of denying its significance facilitated direct access to the arguments and structures oppressing women and a direct refutational strike against them. Irigaray's thought emerges from this sense of the neglect of sexual difference and the tendency to outright denial with respect to whatever had been put forward to explain women's secondary status. She writes:

Les difficultés des femmes à faire reconnaître leurs droits sociaux et politiques sont fondées sur cette relation insuffisamment pensée entre biologie et culture. Refuser aujourd'hui toute explication de type biologique — parce que la biologie a paradoxalement servi à l'exploitation des femmes —, c'est se refuser la clé de l'interprétation de cette exploitation. (1990: 56)

Irigaray's return to the question of the sexed body as the key to the interpretation of women's exploitation thus necessitated a language that had already been ruled out of court for many feminists, hence the accusations of essentialism.

Irigaray's detractors have attributed various kinds of essentialism to her which, although related to one another, may broadly be defined as biological,

psychic and materialist. The attribution of biological essentialism principally relates to what Schor calls the liberationist critique of essentialism: Irigaray is deemed to be *endorsing* the patriarchal construction of gender through her focus upon the female body and the maternal. It is argued that Irigaray thus reduces femininity to the female body and to motherhood in the same way that patriarchy reduces women to these. Rather than re-emphasizing their significance for women's lives and their identity, women need emancipation from them. This is the objection typical of socialist feminists, such as Segal in Britain who argued that: 'The writings of Irigaray are most readily interpreted as strengthening and celebrating traditional gender ideologies of fundamental biological difference between women and men' (1987: 133). It also relates to the criticisms raised by Monique Plaza (1978) in her article originally published in *Questions féministes*, which I go on to discuss below.

The attribution of a form of 'psychic' essentialism relates to what Schor terms the linguistic critique of essentialism: the Lacanian post-structuralist rejection of linguistic empiricism which argues that language is constitutive rather than referential with regard to what is designated as reality. It is held that only within language are psycho-sexual categories such as feminine and masculine determined. Since the loss of any referent is the condition of entry into language, it is argued that 'the body', its libido and its psychic correlates, are inaccessible as such except for their already encultured inscription in language. To attempt to return, as it were, the feminine to a psychic space outside the structures of language and its law is to assume a point of origin for psycho-sexual identity in the maternal body and feminine drives, thereby suggesting a model of psycho-sexual development that denies both Freud's bisexuality and the unconscious and returns identity to the destiny of anatomy. This argument is typical of Lacanians, who maintain that Irigaray has simply misunderstood the necessity of Lacan's position. Jacqueline Rose explains:

For Lacan, as we have seen, there is no pre-discursive reality [...], no place prior to the law which is available and can be retrieved. And there is no feminine outside language. First, because the unconscious severs the subject from any unmediated relation to the body as such [...], and secondly because the 'feminine' is constituted as a division in language, a division which produces the feminine as its negative term. If woman is defined as other it is because the definition produces her as other, and not because she has another essence. (1992: 55–56)

The attribution of a form of materialist essentialism to Irigaray's position relates to deconstruction once again, and to its critique of the hierarchical binary oppositions of metaphysics in what Schor terms the philosophical critique of essentialism. As we have seen, Western thought is deemed to designate essence in accordance with a dualistic schema which ties one definition into a

necessary and hierarchical relation with another. Woman has always been positioned as the secondary and inferior term, as in the Aristotelian designation of woman as matter relative to the form that man represents. The very process of affirming such essences reveals their interdependent yet contradictory status and displaces them. Essence is not so much denied as questioned. This argument is typical of deconstructionists who position Irigaray as a strategic essentialist. Diana Fuss thus argues that Irigaray opens up the question of essence by exploring the Aristotelian designation of woman as matter who cannot accede to form in a strategic manner, thereby exposing the contradictions of Aristotle's essence. She argues that for Irigaray, 'essentialism represents not a trap she falls into but rather a key strategy she puts into play, not a dangerous oversight but a lever of displacement' (1989: 72).

Whitford's arguments against an essentialist reading of Irigaray in *Luce Irigaray* remain pertinent and have arguably been strengthened by remarks in Irigaray's work published subsequently. Whitford points out that given that Irigaray is a philosopher of change, those who attribute a deterministic biological essentialism to her are assuming a notion of stasis in her thought that simply cannot be supported. The causal relation they perceive between biological sex and sexual identity operates upon a largely empiricist notion of the body which does not allow for a phenomenology of the body or an imaginary body whereby both the constitution of body and identity are symbolically and linguistically mediated (1991a:14). It is therefore important to emphasize the complexity of Irigaray's position here. At no point can 'the body' be accessed in a raw state, for while it both reveals and is subject to a fundamental sexual difference, these different bodies are themselves historical and imaginary natures. Thus, although the body is given for Irigaray, its interpretation depends upon the conditions of a certain historical understanding and its ontological structures, conditions which in the course of history have material effects on the evolution of the 'given' body. This is captured in Irigaray's restatement of de Beauvoir's most famous statement, 'je suis née femme, mais je dois encore devenir cette femme que je suis par nature' (1992: 168). The emphasis upon becoming a woman is retained but the significance of being born one is not undermined since the body is never a neutral structure awaiting cultural inscription but rather makes of cultural inscription a process that is always already sexed.

With regard to the Lacanians who argue that Irigaray is essentializing the feminine and the masculine, reducing them to some pre-Oedipal and hence extra-linguistic libido, Whitford argues that they are guilty of confusing description with prescription. What they claim Irigaray is advocating is merely her description of the feminine within the structures of a patriarchal order and, indeed, all that is permitted them as women by discourses such as the one elabo-

rated by Lacan. As a philosopher of change, Whitford suggests, this articulation is merely a stage in the process of changing what Lacan defines as the symbolic order so as to permit a different mediation of nature and the body (1991a: 14). It is understandable that confusion might arise with respect to how to interpret the status of Irigaray's early exploration of the feminine since it is suffused with subtle and conditional arguments that tend to leave open and ambiguous not only the questions they raise but also the status of the claims made. However, it has become evident in Irigaray's subsequent work that she explores the feminine with the aim of imagining a different model of psychic development. This would entail radically rethinking the very terms of the Oedipal structure in such a way that it may become unrecognizable as such. It is now clear that the implications of Irigaray's critique of the Oedipal model as one which is subsumed within a patriarchal logic mean that she cannot simply be aligned with some generalized position regarding the radical potential of the 'pre-Oedipal', since for her that would be to remain within Freud's normative topography. Hence, the following remarks:

L'apologie du préœdipien comme libération de la norme sexuelle génitale entraîne beaucoup de caprices ou immaturités du désir s'exerçant au détriment du devenir humain en tant que genre, en tant que deux genres. Et à ceux ou celles qui revendiquent le préœdipien contre Freud, il est facile de répondre que la sublimation du prégénital est présente dans l'œuvre de Freud mais non celle de la génitalité, réduite à la reproduction. (1992: 54)

Irigaray's aim is neither simply to return to the 'body' nor to the 'pre-Oedipal' for these are problematized in her thought. Nor is it strictly appropriate to label her a strategic essentialist as does Fuss (1989: 56). Strategic thinking of this nature entails provisional and situational identification with universal and metaphysical terms for the purposes of political expediency, with the proviso that these terms will finally be deconstructed and dissolved. Any strategic identification with the essentialisms of patriarchal thought on Irigaray's part is always problematic and not simply strategic in the deconstructive sense because of the other feminine which hovers in her writing. This other femininity is to be affirmed in a process of self-development for women as if it may be realized and in the expectation of this realization. It is not reluctantly enacted as if all forms of identity are necessarily delusions and nor does it, on its own terms, represent a figure of equivocation or ambivalence.

The readings of Irigaray as an essentialist do nevertheless touch upon a fundamental aim of Irigaray's thought, which is the development of a female identity. In her comments in *Ce sexe* Irigaray states unequivocally that she is not attempting to define woman in her essence for when asked 'Qu'est-ce qu'une femme?' she refuses the question on the grounds that it is metaphysi-

cal. When pressed to discuss the elaboration of another femininity to counter the Freudian description, Irigaray rejects this if it entails the elaboration of a *concept* and a *theory* which are, she argues, inherently masculine. It is notable that she does not reject here all possibility of elaborating the feminine as such:

Est-ce qu'on peut, est-ce que je peux élaborer un autre concept de la féminité? Il n'est pas question d'un autre *concept* de la féminité. Prétendre que le féminin puisse se dire sous la forme d'un concept, c'est se laisser reprendre dans un système de représentations 'masculin', où les femmes se piègent dans une économie du sens, qui sert à l'auto-affection du sujet (masculin). S'il s'agit bien de mettre en cause la 'féminité', il ne s'agit pas pour autant d'élaborer un autre 'concept' — à moins pour une femme de renoncer à son sexe et de vouloir parler comme les hommes. Pour élaborer une théorie de la femme, les hommes, je crois, suffisent. Dans un langage de femme(s), le concept comme tel n'aurait pas lieu. (1977a: 122)

Thus, the form and process of elaboration are the object of Irigaray's concern, and most particularly the notion of a *concept* as a categorizing and immobilizing idea abstracted from the subject and its object.²³ Moi argued that Irigaray falls into an essentializing position in being tempted to define woman (1985: 139). However, it is evident from the above that in Irigaray's view the process of definition may take different forms which cannot be conceptualized in the sense attributed to this term by rationalist philosophy. These different processes of definition are developed in Irigaray's later explorations of modalities in the feminine and female symbols that might bring into operation and support a female subjectivity. Therefore, as Fuss argues, attempting to define woman does not necessarily essentialize her (1989: 56), but nor does it necessarily simply displace her. In Irigaray's work it is more a question, I would argue, of attempting to *cultivate* her.

This question of how the feminine is or might be articulated and elaborated raises a further significant issue. One of the problems in situating these debates is that the language of essentialism as such does not belong to the intellectual discourses Irigaray inhabits. Issues framed in the manner of 'essentialism or anti-essentialism' do not provide a language with which she is immediately familiar.²⁴ While this in itself does not invalidate these questions (for there is no requirement to approach the object of criticism on its own terms) it does render problematic the interpretation of texts which to a large extent assume certain given linguistic denotations and connotations and, moreover, play with these meanings. In an interview, Whitford explains this difficulty and clearly expounds an 'anti-biological' interpretation of Irigaray, arguing that she is operating within the bounds of the symbolic order and attempting a symbolic redefinition of biology and woman:

I have always been puzzled by the essentialist critique, and wonder if it has something to do with differences of philosophical vocabulary in Great Britain and Europe. In France, the question of essence is the question of the proper (*le propre*), and Irigaray has always insisted that the proper is phallogentric, that woman can only be defined, essentialized, from the point of view of man. The problem is that nature has been 'appropriated' by the patriarchal economy [...] Her insistence on nature (biology) is intended to expose the role of culture/philosophy in maintaining a completely traditional symbolic division between the sexes. Her argument in 'Plato's *Hystera*' in *Speculum* is that a process of 'naturalisation' takes place, i.e., a process of appropriation by the 'proper' or paternal genealogy. What is appropriated is then symbolised as nature (as opposed to culture or symbolic); the result of the process is presented as if it were natural and inevitable, rather than the effect of symbolisation. The point is that biology — or nature — must receive a symbolic mediation which is more adequate for women. (1990: 54)

Speaking in terms of 'the proper' rather than 'essence' thus makes Irigaray's language confusing in relation to the terms of some feminist theory.²⁵ Yet in other respects, too, Irigaray's thought has been out of step with much debate regarding essentialism. For subscribing to the sex/gender distinction in a strong sense, as a division between nature and culture, perpetuates the dichotomies and essentialist distinctions critiqued by the anti-metaphysical thought in which Irigaray's work is immersed and against which she would wish to elaborate her notion of the feminine. Hence, as Whitford explains above, Irigaray's use of the language of the body and nature can only be deemed to be essentializing as such when taken out of the context of its host philosophical vocabulary, which is post-structuralist and phenomenological, and inserted into an empiricist and materialist-empiricist vocabulary. As Chanter aptly remarks, the debates regarding sex and gender and essentialism and anti-essentialism have themselves made metaphysical assumptions regarding the notion of essence which need to be rethought (1995: 44).

Rethinking the sex/gender distinction in the most general terms can mean either examining the relationship between nature and culture as interdependent terms or, and by extension, denying nature as the given because of its necessarily cultural definition. An influential rethinking of the distinction was Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990). In an analysis suffused with French post-structuralist thought Butler argued that sex itself is a gendered category made material by the heterosexist social order. To the extent that gender is a mark denoting what is cultured she reduces sex to gender by denying the binary opposition that could make of sex some pre-linguistic category beyond the bounds of cultural definition: biology itself is a product of culture. Hence she argued that 'perhaps it [sex] was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all' (1990: 7).²⁶ Such a critique of the sex/gender distinction has become a

more recent imperative of feminism and gender critique in a desire to explore the multiplicities of gender beyond the male/female, masculine/feminine binary poles. However, as Leonard and Adkins argue, critique of this distinction has been a long-standing feature of French feminism (1996: 16). It is arguably incipient in de Beauvoir. Her successors, such as Monique Wittig, have taken her statement regarding the cultural construction of woman to its logical extreme: not born a woman, there is no given sex (Wittig 1981). This may explain why the critiques of Irigaray put forward by those associated with *Questions féministes* remain some of the most trenchant. Since these feminists argue that it is patriarchy which constructs sex and sexualizes all social relations in the name of heterosexuality, from the time of Irigaray's earliest publications they have adamantly rejected her thought with its insistence upon the need to develop rather than demolish sexual difference.

Monique Plaza (1978) denounces Irigaray's apparent confusion between the place of woman in Western discourses (in which they are not and cannot be represented, according to Irigaray) and the place of women who actually exist in Western societies. She claims that in not making this distinction Irigaray has to contend that woman is what the discourses make of her — nothing — and then project an imaginary feminine for woman's becoming. Since this imaginary feminine is not grounded in any socio-historical context, Irigaray cannot help but return to the naturalisms of the patriarchal female body in order to constitute it. Plaza reaffirms de Beauvoir's position in *Le deuxième sexe* by insisting upon the validity of the question 'Qu'est-ce qu'une femme?' (de Beauvoir 1949, Vol. 1: 13). Asking such a question is not to be repudiated as metaphysical but needs to be accounted for in a theory of oppression. Irigaray, Plaza argues, produces an oppressive theory for want of an acknowledgement of the existence of women, and therefore risks doubling rather than relieving their oppression:

Luce Irigaray provides not so much a theory of oppression as a reconstitution of the ideological place of 'woman' that patriarchy offers women. She does not describe for us what women are, *because women are not the object, 'woman' of masculine discourse*: one cannot confuse the 'woman' that ideology describes and women in their social existence. (1978: 25)

For Plaza, Irigaray does not subvert but merely compounds patriarchal logic — a logic that does not deny sexual difference as Irigaray maintains but actually creates, integrates and naturalizes difference in its construction of a social order.

In many respects, Plaza's reading of Irigaray succumbs to the same tendency as Lacanian readings: she confuses Irigaray's descriptions with prescription. Irigaray is equally critical of the way a particular form of sexual difference is

mythologized as natural in patriarchal systems, even if she argues that it is a difference which thinly veils a pernicious indifference to sexual difference. Thus, to repeat, the view that Irigaray's thought naturalizes or essentializes sexual difference in a *patriarchal* manner is difficult to sustain. However, by highlighting the centrality of the category of sex and of sexual difference for Irigaray and by problematizing Irigaray's chosen historical location for the commencement of her analysis (the non-representation of women in patriarchal discourses, their nothingness), Plaza's critique does expose the enduring stakes of Irigaray's thought. For whereas Plaza rejects the notions of masculine and feminine as simply the constructs of patriarchy, Irigaray assumes that these constructions bespeak a more primordial relation that has been forgotten and is continuously forgotten in patriarchy. The prevalence of sex and gender in patriarchy, coupled with its disavowal on the part of the masculine subject, is for Irigaray symptomatic of a denial as well as a construction, a denial of something given as gender. Otherwise, from where do the categories of masculine and feminine emerge? In Irigaray's thought, the assumption that sex and gender are false constructs of the human community to be simply denied or transformed at will readily feeds the decisionism and control of a humanism which assumes an imperialistic responsibility for the world.

While Irigaray therefore makes of sex a construction constantly in the process of becoming, ruling out any question of a determinative eternal essence, the primacy of sexual difference in her thought makes the category of sex something given and universal. This enables her provisionally to accept the collective categorization of woman as nothing without being distracted from her critique by evidence of socio-historical variation, for it is a collective elaboration of woman's unity which will ultimately emerge as a necessity in Irigaray's thought. Feminists such as Plaza will take such socio-historical variation as their benchmark in analysis since it reveals the existence of women which is not nothing even though this existence can never be the manifestation of a feminine ontological Being. Such a Being they hold up as an illusion, given that any being is constituted by the manifestation of its existences. These existences are formed within the limits and determinants of their concrete situation, determinants which are not all related to the question of sexual identity. Irigaray, on the other hand, having found no place for woman's identity and subjectivity in the patriarchal order of discourse, language and truth, holds that all that is left to women are 'shards': the functional roles which make up their experience and their existences. In her view, the apparent diversity of this social experience thus remains within the confines of patriarchal determinants. In order to go beyond those, it is first necessary to explore them from the inside, as it were, and from there elaborate another femininity and a different kind of subjectivity. It is possible to think of this

elaboration not so much as a response to the question 'What is a woman?', but rather as a response to the question 'Who and how is a woman?' Only once this critique and elaboration of the feminine have been addressed can different existences in the feminine be said to occur, that is to say, differences that are not ultimately determined by the masculinity of the patriarchal order. Irigaray cannot be said to deny or ignore other differences. However, the problem remains for her that without a rethinking of sexual difference, representations and mediations of women's existences will continue to be subject to a patriarchal order which cannot represent them *as women*. Since Irigaray theorizes difference according to the parameters of sexual difference, questions of difference are therefore never denied by her but always returned to these parameters. For example, there is no doubt that Irigaray is sensitive to the specific problems and differences of individual women's lives. Those sympathetic to her work are often at pains to emphasize this given the force of a critique like Plaza's. Chanter, for example, argues that: 'In fact, Irigaray's questioning of sexual difference, rather than precluding serious consideration of other differences, requires that they be taken into account' (1995: 8). The following statement from *Ce sexe* is often quoted in support of the view that Irigaray recognizes differences:

Je pense que le plus important est de faire apparaître l'exploitation commune à toutes les femmes et de trouver les luttes qui conviennent à chaque femme, là où elle est: suivant son pays, son métier, sa classe sociale, son vécu sexuel, c'est-à-dire la forme d'oppression qui lui est le plus immédiatement insupportable. (1977a: 161)

This is undoubtedly a statement stressing the significance of different forms of oppression for different women, but it is also a statement which expresses the need to reveal the *common* exploitation of women in the first instance and a further endorsement of the primary significance she attributes to sexual difference.

Irigaray's concern with the elaboration of a female identity and subjectivity derives from her position as a universalist thinker.²⁷ The need to elaborate the 'feminine' in her work may be expressed in relation to ontology, the notion of an absolute or a unity, or indeed the divine, depending upon the philosophical context in question. There is a universality to these elaborations which has become more explicit in her later work but is immanent in the earlier work. This has probably contributed to the essentialist reading of Irigaray which has apparently found its source in her own writings — probably in her claim that there is something specific to the feminine which is distinctive from, and radically other to, the masculine (and vice versa). Irigaray's thought assumes a prior and potential *commonality* among women, and conversely among men,

and attributes to sexual difference a primacy and an ineluctable quality that makes it universal.

This universalism cannot be reduced to or equated with an essentialism. As Schor argues in her reading of Irigaray as a universalist thinker, universalism is often rejected for the same reasons as essentialism because it is also held to deny historical and cultural differences (1995: 24–25). It suggests a common identity among women that implies a certain grounding in the humanist subject as a unity standing over and above the world. Indeed, Grosz argues that universalism, with its emphasis upon the commonalities between women, is less favourable with regard to the differences between women than is essentialism. This is because, by definition, universalism only asserts similarities and that which homogenizes women as a category across time and space (1994: 89–90). However, this notion of the universal as eternal and immutable bears no relation to the universalism of Irigaray's thought. Her universalism can be interpreted in relation to the thought of Heidegger and Hegel. Hence the universal is given as Being and forms a horizon in the phenomenological sense. The universal cannot be reduced to the conceptual identity of what a present being *is*, because Being always withdraws as it unconceals itself and remains prior to and beyond representation. Yet Irigaray's universal also *evolves* in a Hegelian manner, and is therefore always formed through mediation in its particular historical instantiations. Irigaray's universal cannot be essentialist because it entails no grounding metaphysical determinations, no eternal *essence* in that sense which can be conceptualized as such and declared as the representation of an eternal truth. Simply because 'universality' has been equated with the transcendent, the absolute, the determinative and the same does not deter Irigaray from reclaiming that universality in the name of a reworked notion of the transcendent and the absolute. Universality is thus *interpreted* and *made* in her thought, and it is reasserted in the name of individual and social development.²⁸

Given the primacy of sexual difference in Irigaray's thought, her universalism is thought in accordance with the parameters of sexual difference and she attempts to go beyond the universalism characteristic of patriarchy. Therefore, Irigaray's universalism is not singular, but is premised upon the existence of two sexes. This leads her to the seeming paradox of 'two' universals in the form of the masculine and the feminine as mediated terms.²⁹ In her attempts to imagine an era of sexual difference, she argues that each sex would constitute the content of universals that are always mediated by the relationship with the other sex; thus the universal is a form of mediation that is exemplified in the love between the sexes. These 'contents' are not the products of a purely natural sexual difference. Rather, the two universals of gender are put forward as the ultimate counter to the claims of an unmediated biological de-

terminism: 'L'appartenance à un genre représente, pour une personne humaine, une destination à l'autre plus qu'un destin biologique' (1997: 63). Consequently, Irigaray's universalism is one that ostensibly confounds the very meaning of the universal. Universality is two and more enabling than determinant, located in movement rather than stasis.

It is the significance of Irigaray's stance as a universalist thinker and the implications of her elaboration of universality which form the bench marks for the reading of her work in this study. The question of the universalist status of Irigaray's thought is important because it directly relates to an understanding of her notion of the divine. Irigaray's divine is in effect constituted of two universals. It is in this regard that I raise the question of her position as a universalist thinker. Hence, this question is not developed with the intention of furthering an engagement with the debate regarding Irigaray's essentialism, for that debate is in many respects simply out of step with her thought. It is not possible to engage with and understand Irigaray's thought while attempting to align it with a position that can hold apart sex and gender and assume a one-way determinative causal relation between them. Nor is it feasible to evaluate her elaborations of the feminine on the basis of the judgement that she is defining what a woman *is* in a manner that takes the copula to designate an eternal correspondence between a subject and its predicates.

Nevertheless, the question of Irigaray's universalism may respond to the essentialism debate in an indirect fashion. In the first instance, it can give full recognition to some of the sources in Irigaray's own writings which have given rise to the charges of essentialism. Time and again Irigaray declares the necessity and primacy of sexual difference understood as the double-poled difference between women and men. The potential of sexed identity is both necessary and desirable for Irigaray, and there seems little doubt that, for her, identity should in the first instance be defined as either masculine or feminine. A reading of Irigaray as a universalist can acknowledge that she explicitly asserts the necessity of the difference between women and men without needing to avoid the essentialist charge by focusing upon the ambiguities in her writing or by avoiding the force of her main thesis. It can thus credit the anxiety over essentialism that arises from certain readings of Irigaray with some validity. Furthermore, it may provide a way beyond that anxiety by denying her essentialism, while at the same time emphasizing the strength of her thesis regarding sexual difference. In a sense, reading Irigaray as a universalist in the aftermath of the essentialism debate is to read her not guilty *as charged*. Problems nevertheless arise as a consequence of her universalism, especially in the process of attempting to represent universals without essentializing them in their particularity; this will be discussed further below. Returning to the main theme of this chapter, I now discuss the significance of contextual-

izing Irigaray's thought by situating her claims in relation to their place in her *œuvre*.

The Evolution of Irigaray's Thought

The question of the evolution of Irigaray's thought has arisen most notably in relation to the proposition that a break occurred in her thought around the early 1980s. This proposition raises political stakes, especially for some Italian feminists. However, I believe that Irigaray's own description of her work as an evolving *œuvre* involving three phases is a more useful and convincing way of understanding her thought, although I acknowledge that this does give rise to significant shifts of emphasis in her work.

The fact that a question has arisen regarding Irigaray's earlier and later work could be taken as a sign that she is on the way to receiving canonical status. For the question of the earlier and later work has arisen in relation to many of the principal philosophers of recent times: not least Wittgenstein, Marx, and Heidegger. Debates revolve around the philosophical implications of the break, the epistemological status of the break, the thinker's perception or indeed denial of the break, the validity of the thinker's views with regard to their own work, judgements upon the status of the earlier or later work... As far as Irigaray is concerned, her continuing publications render any assessment provisional. However, in *J'aime à toi* she herself explicitly denies that there has been a shift in her theoretical and political orientation, preferring to describe her work as an *œuvre* involving three separate but related phases (1992: 106). This provides a useful way of situating the claims she makes and of distinguishing critical from speculative moments in her thought. Nevertheless, the claim that Irigaray has 'changed' raises some important issues in her work.

The debate is not simply an academic issue concerning scholarly rigour and consistency on the part of Irigaray; neither can it simply be resolved in a scholarly manner since the stakes go beyond intellectual exigencies *per se*. As suggested above, this is particularly true for a certain Italian feminism since it is in this context that her thought has probably had its greatest impact, particularly in terms of cultural and political practice. Irigaray is better known in Italy than in France and more widely accepted there. She has been influential for the Italian feminism of difference that has attempted to develop a female social-symbolic practice. Thus, she has had connections with the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective and feminist philosophers at the University of Verona, especially Luisa Muraro and Adriana Cavarero. This influence has not been one-way, however, and Paolo Bono and Sandra Kemp argue that the work of the latter group, 'has helped establish Irigaray as one of the main

points of reference for feminist thought in Italy, but it has also been a focus of interest for Irigaray herself' (1991: 12). Thus, Irigaray has engaged extensively in the Italian context. In particular, she has worked with feminists connected to the ex-Communist Party of Italy, the Democratic Left, writing in their newspaper, *L'Unità* and speaking at their festivals. In response to such involvement, she has developed her knowledge of Italian to a level such that she can now write in that language. She edited a special issue of the Italian journal *Inchiesta* on the divine, *Il divino concepito da noi* and three of her most recent publications have been in Italian: *Essere due* (1994), *La democrazia comincia a due* (1994) and *Tra oriente e occidente* (1997).³⁰ Furthermore, she has worked with an Italian MEP, Renzo Imbeni, with whom she put forward a proposal to the European Parliament in 1994 for the European Union to be founded upon a definition of its citizens as sexed.

It is therefore possible to view the significant contexts for Irigaray's interventions as being both contemporary French philosophy and Italian feminism and leftist politics. Much of her work, especially after *Speculum* and *Ce sexe*, is implicitly engaging with that Italian context, which becomes explicit in more recent texts such as *J'aime à toi* (1992). The text itself is dedicated to Renzo Imbeni, while the 'Prologue' is a critical response to certain unnamed Italian feminists and their objections to her working politically with both men and women.³¹ She recounts that: 'Cette démarche a suscité une telle agitation que j'ai cru les remous insurmontables' (1992: 12). Such a strong reaction to Irigaray's position is indicative of the apparent status of her work in Italy. For while many anglophone and even French feminists consider her work obscure and esoteric, for Italian feminists of difference she is not regarded as an abstract theorist as such but is received as a political thinker whose work relates to the concrete contexts of women's lives (Bono and Kemp 1991: 13). That Irigaray was willing to participate in a political scenario managed by and engaging with men was thus a problem for those who had read her earlier work as supporting and advocating a form of separatism over and above mixed-sex political strategies.

There is no doubt that in many respects this is a valid interpretation. The thought of *Speculum* and *Ce sexe* is a critique of patriarchy as a phallogentric system in which, significantly, the feminine other as described by de Beauvoir is found wanting by Irigaray as the other of the masculine. Therefore, feminine otherness is but a masculine otherness, the other of what Irigaray terms the patriarchal *même* or same. Woman as woman does not exist for such a system; hence Irigaray's now famous assertion that all theories of the subject have been appropriated by the masculine (1974: 165) and her contention that woman is the material substrate of that subjectivity. In the anglophone context, this staging of patriarchy as a masculine system of dominance in which

social, cultural and linguistic orders are found to be isomorphic to the masculine sex in and through its imaginary constitution automatically suggested thematic affinities with radical and certain lesbian feminisms. Her emphasis upon the radical alterity of the feminine, along with the significance she attributes to relations among women, suggested the need for a separatism. These affinities were compounded by Irigaray's insistence upon the need to develop exchange between women through the creation of a sociality between-women, and by her call for the recognition and creation of female genealogies, particularly through the mother-daughter relationship. Moreover, Irigaray explicitly rejected Freud's account of lesbianism in that it is constructed upon a masculine model as the unique norm. Add to this her focus upon the autoeroticism of the 'two lips' model, as well as her notion of desire as resistant to hierarchy and division, and her position as a radical feminist is complete. Irigaray was read as a separatist feminist who emphasizes the need for a women's culture distinct from liberal juridical political processes in order to embrace the connectedness of women and their plurality.³²

It would seem that the Italian feminist politics influenced by Irigaray embraced her project for the radicalness of its attempt to create a female symbolic community in which women might take up subject positions as women. However, this separatist position is a distinctive one compared with Anglo-American culture since in Italy the issue of separatism seems to be less connected with the issue of sexual practice or choice. In her introduction to the English translation of the manifesto of the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*, Teresa de Lauretis explains that Italian feminist politics is 'separatist'. However, rather than designate a negatively-perceived tendency as it tends to in Anglo-American culture,³³ in Italy this word has positive connotations and is almost synonymous with feminism (1990: 7). Separatism connotes intellectual and political strength for feminism, regardless of differences of sexual orientation or class position. Bono and Kemp deploy the term 'political homosexuality' to explain this separatism, and argue that this idea 'is shared by most Italian feminists, so that separatism does not imply a withdrawal from and a refusal of relationships with men, including sexual relationships, but rather the existence of separate spaces of theoretical production and political action; separatism is *inside* a woman, besides taking form concretely in women-only groups' (1991: 14). While differences have emerged with respect to the question of sexual practices,³⁴ here it is important to stress that Italian feminists' engagement with Irigaray has produced a politics of radical separatism premised on the primacy of sexual difference as the difference between men and women, with *difference* as its political strategy. It has largely jettisoned equality politics and the liberal concept of rights for its indifference to sexual difference, and has

focused upon enhancing sexual difference by creating inclusive female social-symbolic practices specific to women. Irigaray's writings were assumed to support this female symbolic community, its specific practices and its ethics.

Irigaray is believed to have changed political and theoretical direction from the publication of *Éthique de la différence sexuelle* (1984) onwards. In turning her attention towards the question of how to develop an ethics of sexual difference, she pitched her question in relation to the phenomenological idea of a horizon. This was then developed by drawing upon Hegel's concept of *Sittlichkeit* as a notion to be distinguished from morality on the grounds that it includes rights, customs, law and religion. Already, then, for deconstructionist and Lacanian readings of Irigaray, this was to mark a shift of emphasis away from strategies of destabilizing identity and desire towards a concern for an ethical evolution of culture and identity. However, around this time she is also interpreted as having abandoned her earlier commitment to a women's politics with her emerging emphasis on the politics of the relation between woman and man. This was particularly a concern for her Italian feminist audience.

Irigaray's apparent change in direction is charted in a relatively sympathetic manner by her Italian translator, Luisa Muraro, in her article 'Female Genealogies' (Burke et al 1994). Although Irigaray does discuss the question of ethics in relation to the need to establish female genealogies in *Éthique*, Muraro notes that there is a growing shift of emphasis that becomes decisive in Irigaray's 1986 lecture, 'L'Universel comme médiation' (published in *Sexes et parentés* 1987b). She writes: 'We are warned that the theme of female genealogies will henceforth be considered in relation to the setting up of an ethical world of men and women together, whereas before it concerned the world of women-among-themselves' (1994: 326). The universal is now a *mediating* term, and mediation is not only a necessity emerging from the connectedness among women, but also pertains to the necessary universality of woman-man relations. In spite of her appreciation of Irigaray's thought, the sense of betrayal is manifest in Muraro's article. Moreover, it is the nature of Irigaray's relation to women's politics, and the fact that she has apparently not experienced the power of a separatist female symbolic community, which is put forward as an explanation for this break with her earlier position by Muraro (1994: 330). Although, as she acknowledges, Irigaray continued to stress the importance of creating and sustaining a sociality between-women, this lecture nevertheless signalled the development of what was to become a growing emphasis on relations between men and women and on the politics of the heterosexual couple, understood in 'political' rather than 'sexual' terms. For her Italian audience, then, Irigaray broke with the 'separatist' concerns of the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective. As de Lauretis observes, her insistence upon the 'final, and optimal, union of woman and man [...] is in striking con-

trast with the political positions publicly reiterated by the authors of *Sexual Difference* and explicitly articulated in the book' (1989: 17).

Irigaray has attempted to impose her authority upon interpretations of her work, probably in response to these debates. This is most evident in the chapter, 'L'Autre: femme' in *J'aime à toi* and in an interview with Hirsch and Olsen (1995). Here she insists that there has been no break in her work and attributes some of the apparent misunderstanding of her earlier work to the way her somewhat ambiguous title, *Speculum. De l'autre femme*, was translated. These translations tended to make *l'autre* an adjective as in its familiar usage, rather than a noun as in its philosophical one. Hence, the suggestion of a relationship between two women was promoted whereas Irigaray explains that her objective was rather 'mettre en question cette altérité du féminin définie du point de vue d'un sujet masculin' (1992: 107). There can be no question of 'the other woman' since 'le générique féminine n'existe pas encore comme représentation ou contenu d'idéalité pour la femme' (1992: 103). Irigaray is thus attempting to shift the focus of interpretation away from any immediate question of relations between women and towards her philosophical investigation of the impossibility of these relations in patriarchy. Hence, she stresses that whereas '*speculum*' was also intended to designate the idea of the expression of reality in and through discourse, its has generally been interpreted as referring only to the gynaecological instrument (1992: 102). Her investigation of the philosophical problems of representation, and their relation to women's bodies, was thus somewhat sidelined in the emphasis given to the affirmation of the representations of women's bodies she evoked in the course of that investigation. Furthermore, Irigaray claims that none of her investigations of philosophical representation and the other woman concern questions of sexuality in the narrow sense:

So, I was a homophile and I've become a homophobe. [Laughs]. It has nothing to do with all that. Personally, I haven't changed positions. (1995: 105)

Thus, Irigaray emphasizes that as far as she is concerned the issues of creating a female social-symbolic community and of developing relations between men and women do not pertain to issues of sexual choice, which she believes are secondary. In her writing, the issues are raised as philosophical and political concerns in relation to the constitution of subjectivity and culture.

It is probably this distinction between an identity which is sexed and sexual choice in sexual practices which is a major cause of the tension in the reception of Irigaray's *œuvre*. For while Muraro is also keen to sustain the Italian women's movement as separatist in a fashion that does not refer to sexual choice,³⁵ this seems a difficult distinction to sustain in an absolute sense, even

if one accepts the theoretical necessity of this position. Irigaray's own thought emphasizes the passional basis of subject-subject relations, both within the mediations necessary to develop a social-symbolic community between women and for relations between women and men. In *Éthique*, she speaks of the need for a love of the self, love of one's gender and love of the other, and while this cannot be reduced to some narrowly-conceived romantic notion it is nevertheless a passional relation evoked as an integral and necessary element to the development of an identity, even in its civil form. Given this avowed necessity, it is almost inevitable that in practice the distinction between a symbolic sexed identity and forms of sexual behaviour are likely to merge and become confused.

Yet the difficulties of sustaining such a distinction do not support the view that Irigaray has broken with her earlier position with respect to the questions of the need for a female subjectivity and of how it may be constituted. Irigaray has indeed always insisted upon the risks of female communities attempting to take up the dominant and domineering position of the masculine and has always signalled the ultimate significance of relations between women and men in her thought. Clearly, this significance has become more evident in her later work, but it was present as an incipient element in her earlier work. In *Ce sexe* she argues against simply reversing the power relations between women and men, not least because of the complexity and delicacy of the position of a master who, even if he will not recognize it, depends upon the power of slaves:

Pouvoirs d'esclaves? Qui ne sont d'ailleurs pas nuls. Car, pour ce qui concerne le plaisir, le maître n'est pas forcément bien servi. Donc inverser le rapport, surtout dans l'économie sexuelle, ne semble pas un objectif enviable. (1977a: 31)

While Irigaray supports the need for a female symbolic community, she also argues that without the restructuring of male and female subjectivities as dialectically-related, women will not come to be as women. Instead, they risk merely repeating the patriarchal model of power and dominance:

Mais, si leur projet visait simplement à inverser l'ordre des choses — admettons même que cela soit possible... — l'histoire reviendrait finalement encore au même. Au phallocratisme. Ni leur sexe, ni leur imaginaire, ni leur langage n'y (re)trouveraient leur avoir lieu. (1977a: 32)

Against the reading of her work as divided and divisive, Irigaray has put forward an alternative reading of it as divisible into three stages. The first stage is a critique of patriarchy as a system that defines the feminine as other on its own terms. The second is an exploration of the feminine, an attempt to define

mediations that might enable the existence of a feminine subjectivity. The third is an examination of how to create a truly heterosexual order, respecting sexual difference and the existence of two different subjects (1995: 97). Thus, she clearly sees her work as an *œuvre*, as a cohesive whole that nevertheless changes with one stage emerging from and leading onto another. I believe this is a useful description of her work. It is doubtful whether all of the claims made in her more recent work *necessarily* ensue from her earlier writing, doubtful that all of her thought could have been programmed in advance to unfold according to some teleological schema. Her thought has certainly evolved and changed over the course of her writings. Nevertheless, there is a cohesiveness to it and by situating her claims in relation to the three stages she outlines it is possible to evaluate them more clearly. Hence, if her evocations of the feminine in her early writing often appear to compound the patriarchal determination of the feminine it is because at that stage she is in part engaged in ascertaining and describing the nature of that determination. If she appears to be upholding a utopian feminine and developing an increasingly esoteric style in her 'middle' stage it is because she is attempting to imagine female mediations which are radically other to prevailing discourses. If, in the third stage, she appears to be abandoning her earlier commitments it is probably because, as far as she is concerned, she has completed the theoretical work of the former stages and is developing her thought beyond them, even if the point at which her speculations could be realized has not been reached.

Irigaray's three stages do not justify her positions or absolve the nature of her claims from criticism, but they do help to make sense of her work and to refute the claim of any significant breaks in her thought. That is not to say that there have been no significant shifts in tone and style as well as emphasis, but these do not constitute a break that in some way refutes or denies her earlier work. These shifts of tone and emphasis have nevertheless themselves given rise to consternation. Penelope Deutscher has commented upon 'Irigaray anxiety' in her article entitled thus (1996). Deutscher argues that in some of her later work Irigaray is moving towards a constructive, more programmatic philosophy in which her style has become less allusive and more direct. She also claims that this has been accompanied by an increasingly grandiose tone which has given rise to anxiety regarding Irigaray's work and its uncomfortable affinities with the hegemonic tendencies of the philosophies she has always criticized. Deutscher points to the relative simplicity of some of Irigaray's later work, particularly, *Le temps de la différence* (1989), *Je, tu, nous* (1990), and *J'aime à toi* (1992) as a potential problem in that they risk being misunderstood by those who have not read the earlier work, and who do not interpret the clarified statements of the later work in the light of the complexity of the former (1996: 7).

Given the range and scope of Irigaray's writings, it is inevitable that for some their difficulty will be a problem whereas for others the clarity of some of her writing risks its misinterpretation. It is indeed important to read Irigaray's later work in conjunction with the earlier work as her own description of it as an evolving *œuvre* suggests. In this case, references in the later work to the need for a subjectivity, an identity and indeed a universal for women are conditioned and contextualized in terms of a prior critique of their patriarchal constructions. Since Irigaray is engaging with different but related concerns at different moments in her work, to some degree the style of her intervention is determined by the object of her critique.³⁶ There is a general shift in style and tone, from a critical and ironic, if not mocking, tone in the earlier work to the earnest and somewhat grandiose speculations of some of the later work. However, it is not possible to argue that she has an entirely consistent and persistent style for any specific phase, since her publications in all the various stages entail writing and lectures, critique and speculation, poetry and analysis, anecdote and ontological questioning. The level of 'difficulty' is often determined principally by her initial or immediate audience and not by its eventual publication for a wider audience.³⁷ Furthermore, Irigaray's work as a linguist is often ignored or discussed only parenthetically in these considerations — work which is technically detailed, full of analytical rigour and highly respected.³⁸ This work straddles her career, with Irigaray participating in and coordinating two major publications towards the 'later' phase of her work, *Le sexe linguistique* (1987) and *Sexes et genres à travers les langues* (1990). Therefore, any claim regarding Irigaray's style at any stage must be qualified rather than over-generalized.

That Irigaray has gone on to develop her 'styles' and her thought and to reflect upon that development can be viewed positively as a way to better appreciate the complexities of her thought. Thus, it may be equally beneficial to read her earlier work in the light of the later work. As we have seen, in several places in her later work she attempts to clarify and explain her earlier work in relatively lucid terms.³⁹ Part of the justification for claiming a break in Irigaray's work must derive from a refusal to reverse a chronological order of reading and to view the earlier work in the light of the later. This refusal tends to project onto some of the ambiguities of the earlier work a kind of essentialist reading of Irigaray by reducing her entire *œuvre* to the predominant features of her thought at that time. Since her moment of critique of patriarchy did potentially leave open several avenues to exit from it, to claim that the path Irigaray chose is a denial of this work is to impose a more certain interpretation upon the earlier work than it can support. One might disagree with her later direction, but it does not necessarily imply an internal inconsistency in her *œuvre*. Indeed, its continuities can be highlighted by examining the

question of the divine as a guiding structural notion throughout her *œuvre*, albeit one which receives a different treatment and different emphases at each successive stage.

Examining Irigaray's Divine

The notion of the divine has not been a prevalent or central concern of most interpretations of Irigaray's thought. Furthermore, if the question of the divine is raised it tends to be approached thematically as one aspect of her *œuvre*, whereas I believe that, if taken in its broadest sense, the issue of the divine is a pivotal notion of her thought as a whole and at each of its stages.

As we have seen, dominant preoccupations in the reception of Irigaray's work have been centred upon her textual practices, her essentialism, her relationship to deconstruction and psychoanalysis and her relationship to a women's politics. More recent interpretations have been focused upon sophisticated analyses of her relationship with phenomenology (Mortensen 1993; Chanter 1995). These debates have raised important issues for philosophy, feminism and for the better appreciation of Irigaray's thought. The issue of the divine has formed a central focus in very few of these debates, although there are some notable exceptions in work by Elizabeth Grosz (1989), Margaret Whitford (1991a), Penelope Deutscher (1994) and Katherine Bond Stockton (1994).⁴⁰ However, generally speaking the divine does not appear to be perceived as a major factor in the assessment of Irigaray's thought. This is symptomatic of the breadth and depth of her thought, in that it raises major and complex philosophical and political problems that are probably beyond the scope of any single study.

Yet it is also symptomatic of a certain expectation that the question of the divine should be a matter for religion alone and of the assumption that religion is one aspect of life which can be adopted or rejected at will. Such an expectation assumes a post-Enlightenment conception of religion as a system of myth that is susceptible to rational analysis and to the informed choices of thinking subjects. This limited understanding of the divine, as something to which individuals adhere or not, is not Irigaray's understanding of it. For her, the divine is not simply a question of belief that can simply be avoided. Penelope Deutscher, in her excellent and succinct article, "The Only Diabolical Thing About Women...": Luce Irigaray on Divinity', explains the implications of Irigaray's position for feminist thought:

In the case of Irigaray, we go beyond arguments that philosophy of religion should be reshaped by feminist reflection. Rather, we consider the more curious case of a theo-

rist whose argument is that a substantial reshaping of feminist reflection and practice is not possible without the reshaping of philosophical conceptions of divinity. (1994: 89)

For Irigaray, the divine is always a matter for philosophy which operates within a social order and subtends the subject of that order. In her thought the divine is, therefore, a complex notion, one which cannot again be reduced to a single definition as such, for what it *is* depends upon the philosophical and social order in question. However, it would seem that within the parameters of Irigaray's philosophy her question is to examine the way the divine operates in the constitution of the subject. The divine functions to subtend the subject and to thus structure subject-object and subject-subject relations in whatever particular forms these may take. It is, conversely, defined by these relations. As a religious process it is not at all functionalist or utilitarian; it is a process of linking or bonding. Yet the notion of the divine advocated by Irigaray for the era of sexual difference she envisages has to be distinguished from patriarchal notions of religion. The latter, she argues, are founded by a sacrifice, one which through actual or symbolic violence *returns* the human to his divinity as that from which he has necessarily been separated. In contrast, Irigaray prefers notions of the divine which presuppose continuity rather than splits or separation. She explains:

Pour moi, 'divin' désigne un processus qui permet de passer dès l'ici-maintenant à la perfection, de spiritualiser son corps et la nature (inséparables dans leur relation), les autres humains (chacun(e) selon son être et sa liberté), d'établir une continuité entre nature humaine et nature divine. (1996: 223)

Given that the main thrust of Irigaray's thought is what she describes as the appropriation of the subject by patriarchal masculinity and the need to develop a female subject, it follows that many of the figures and notions she raises throughout her work will appear to pertain to the divine, or to have an associative relation to the notion of the divine. Whitford raises the issue of Irigaray's divine at several points in *Luce Irigaray*: initially in the context of a discussion of Irigaray's idea of a 'sensible transcendental', where she suggests that the latter is the divine (1991a: 47), followed by a more detailed discussion, where she argues that 'God' is a symbolic category for Irigaray, a discursive representation of the monosexual economy (1991a: 142). Deutscher similarly points out the broad range of Irigaray's deployment of the term 'divinity' and the notion of 'God':

Sometimes, 'divinity' simply means 'transcendence.' In a culture of sexual difference, Irigaray says, there would be 'transcendence' (limit, radical difference, the 'beyond') between men and women. Love would be 'divine,' if it were love of the other-

as-difference, and not of the other as a variation of, or reflection of, the self. Some comments leave the impression that the concept of women 'lacking their own divinity' simply amounts to the familiar claim that women 'lack identity' in the sense that they serve as 'negative mirror' to masculinity. The ideal of woman's 'identity' is now transformed by Irigaray into a new definition of 'divinity.' Such an interpretation certainly applies to Irigaray's descriptions of women's 'fulfilment' as 'divine,' for example. (1994: 98)

In the light of this apparent interchangeability of many of Irigaray's terms, Deutscher raises the understandable question as to why Irigaray uses the term 'divinity' at all. Irigaray's articulation of the notion of sexual difference seems to correspond to the redefined notion of divinity she advocates for a future of sexual difference; the question is whether it needs to be understood as divine (1994: 99). As Whitford remarks, the use of 'God' as a symbolic category is not a category like any other in Irigaray's thought, such as her notion of *sang blanc*, because of the meaning it already has (1991a: 140). Yet for Irigaray it is the very weight and tradition of the notion of divinity and the word 'God' which indicate the significance and direction of her argument. She explains that it is important to reclaim these words:

J'emploie le mot 'Dieu' parce qu'il est celui qui peut le mieux donner l'intuition, ou mettre en chemin, concernant ce qui est nécessaire. Les mots déjà utilisés par nous ont un contenu que nous devons nous réapproprier: d'où l'usage du mot 'Dieu'. J'ai essayé de faire entendre ou sentir que, pour devenir son genre, pour constituer une communauté de son genre [...] il faut un absolu vers lequel tendre. Les femmes n'iront pas vers l'absolu de la même façon que les hommes, mais il leur faut un équivalent, sinon constituer un devenir féminin ou une communauté féminine est impossible. (1996: 237)

Thus, while the divine is in many respects a cluster term for Irigaray that may be interchangeable with other terms such as sexual difference and universal, she deploys the notion of the divine and of the word 'God' to indicate the *necessity* of this construction to the development of the feminine as a female subject and community. Irigaray does not remain content with articulating her notion of sexual difference in terms of the language of sex and gender alone. This is because there is a necessity to the masculine and feminine which she wishes to stress — a necessity which is traditionally delivered in the veil of the ostensibly neuter universality of the masculine God of monotheism. What is more, although she does redefine the language of the divine, she also retains much of its content in her reclaimed notions. Hence, in using the word 'God' she is making use of its associations with the universal and the absolute to signal the status she attributes to sexual difference, even if sexual difference is then returned to the concept of universality in order to transform it. That the

divine remains a universal notion in Irigaray's thought is evidenced in her reasoning for not using the word 'Goddess' in relation to the creation of a female divine. She explains: 'J'emploie stratégiquement le mot 'dieu' parce qu'il désigne le plus absolu dans notre tradition et que le mot 'déesse' s'emploie généralement au pluriel' (1996: 237). With the very universality of the divine, there is a form of continuity between Irigaray's reformulation of the notion and traditional conceptions of it, although the development of the one from out of the other is indeed a radical development and transformation.

This study approaches the question of the divine in Irigaray's thought by stressing its significance at each of the three stages of her work and thereby the continuity between them. In this respect, it aims to differ from and develop previous discussions by examining fully the implications of her critique of patriarchy as a system supported by a particular conception of divinity determined by masculine religion, before going on to examine the symbolic ideals she has proposed in her most recent work for the creation of a female divine.⁴¹ Having set the scene for my interpretation of Irigaray's notion of the divine, I thus begin my evaluation by examining her critique of patriarchy.

NOTES

1. Notable exceptions to this include articles by Carolyn Burke (1987), Jane Gallop (1983), Elizabeth Gross (1986), Elizabeth Grosz (1988) and Rosi Braidotti (1986). While not uncritical, these articles generally attempt to discuss Irigaray's thought without an exclusive focus upon the question of essentialism, a question which has dogged Irigaray's work as I go on to discuss.
2. Schor, 'This Essentialism Which is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray,' (1994).
3. Mary Poovey also cites both of these texts as significant for the creation of and dissemination of 'French feminism' in the United States (1988: 54).
4. For an account of the actions of *Psych et po*, see Duchén (1986), and Annie Tristan and Annie de Pisan's description from inside the French (Parisian) women's movement, translated as, 'Tales from the Women's Movement' in Moi (1987).
5. This is evident in, 'Petite annonce: Égales ou différentes?', the introduction to *Je, tu, nous* (1990a). Irigaray sent a signed copy of *Speculum* to de Beauvoir in the belief that they should work together as women. The latter's lack of response clearly disappointed Irigaray, who suggests that this may have been due to de Beauvoir's wariness of psychoanalysis, and concomitantly of Irigaray's commitment to identity as sexed and to sexual difference. In spite of this, Irigaray here pays a very personal tribute to de Beauvoir as the mother of the French feminist movement as well as keenly emphasizing her own political *action* as a woman in support of women's rights.
6. Burke in a relatively early paper on Irigaray somewhat surprisingly translates *parler-femme* as 'feminine writing' (1981: 290). This is not completely unreasonable given that Irigaray's evocation of the notion of 'speaking (as) woman' does appear to correspond to her style of writing in her earlier work, which is fluid and sinuous in defiance of the style of academic philosophy. It is with these earlier texts that Burke is engaging. Nevertheless, such a manoeuvre readily assimilates Irigaray to the 'feminine

writing' movement by ignoring the significance of a difference in terminology, which is always important in philosophy whatever the 'style'.

7. In a discussion of Irigaray's use of 'the imaginary', Whitford argues that Irigaray does in fact come close to the proponents of *écriture féminine* because of their similar use of the notion of the imaginary (1991a: 54–55). This is true, but it is important to stress that given that Irigaray's focus is upon writing as a means of communication between subjects, her cultural emphasis is much more apparently socio-political than that of Cixous, who is more directly concerned with the radical potential of the aesthetic as such. In her interview with Alice Jardine and Anne Menke in *Je, tu, nous* Irigaray is asked what writing means to her, and the reasons she gives for writing are largely pragmatic. In many ways she regards writing as a substitute for oral communication, enabling her to communicate with others in a different time and space or when she has been prevented from expressing herself orally. The purpose of this communication is to engender an era of sexual difference: 'Du point de vue contenu(s) et forme(s) de mon discours, le recours à l'écriture, en cette fin de XX^e siècle, signifie essayer de mettre en place une nouvelle époque de la-culture: celle de la différence sexuelle' (1990a: 64). This desire to communicate on the part of Irigaray does not always mean that her writings are particularly accessible, however! For further discussion of Irigaray and the imaginary, see Chapter Three.
8. Curiously, even in 1991 Christine Holmlund could write that Irigaray 'holds up male avant-garde literature and poetry, not writing by women, as the prime loci of subversion' (1991: 283).
9. Freud's essay discusses a number of myths and their dramatizations (including *King Lear* and *The Merchant of Venice*) to suggest that relations within them represent the phantasmized relations of a man with a woman. The three women are the same but represent the three different kinds of relations a man has with a woman: his mother, his wife and his destroyer. Each are obliged to lay claim to the man's affections through some means or other. Yet Freud suggests that all three may ultimately represent the mother. The man's attempt to exercise choice over them is an attempt to overcome death as a fate, and death is always represented by the third woman, even if this third is sometimes transformed into the figure of love as a further symptom of the denial of death's ineluctability. It is the association between the man and three women which is most relevant to my point; it could represent an archetypal structure of man–woman relations taken from the man's point of view. Even Grosz, in her interesting and useful book, discusses the work of *three* French feminists together (Kristeva, Irigaray and Le Doeuff), following a section on twentieth century French thought by men (1989). Irigaray analyses the roles of women within patriarchy as reducible to three, as I discuss in Chapter Two.
10. Burke (1981) makes a quite astonishing claim in an attempt to *tie down* Irigaray's debt to Derrida in her reading of Irigaray as a deconstructionist. She refers to Derrida's essay, 'La question du style', in which Derrida takes up Nietzsche's assertion as to the incompatibility of woman and truth and pursues it to explore the figure of woman as that which is radically other to the metaphysical concept of truth. Derrida ruminates on the status of woman who cannot be grounded and who is in excess of the logic of 'phallogocentricity'; she is non-identity. My objection is not specifically Burke's use of deconstruction to read Irigaray but rather the fact that Irigaray's 'methodology' in *Speculum* is attributed to the content of this *one* essay by Derrida; Burke reads the essay as an attack by Derrida upon Lacan (1981: 292). What is astonishing is that Burke gives a reference for this essay in the main body of her paper, citing its '*first appearance*' in the collection, *Nietzsche au 'jour d'hui' I: Intensités*, Paris: Collection 10/18, 1973. This paper was published in 1973, merely *one year* prior to the publica-

tion of Irigaray's *Speculum* which she had submitted for the prestigious award of *doctorat d'état*. Burke maintains that 'this text hovers, unmentioned, in the background of *Speculum* and *Ce Sexe*' (1981: 292), and that Irigaray, 'operates through the detour of deconstructive philosophy, which provides her with the methods to elaborate upon Derrida's charge against Lacan' (1981: 293). Are we to presume that Irigaray read this text and then proceeded to write the whole of *Speculum* (463 pages, which set out detailed textual explorations of Freud and Plato, revealing an interpretation of the entirety of their respective works, and contain a further section dealing with major figures in the history of philosophy), before submitting it for examination and achieving its publication in the space of *one year*? On this account, one can only assume that Irigaray had already done the reading and was searching for a textual methodology which she found in Derrida's paper. It is possible that Irigaray was familiar with the paper from the Nietzsche conference held at Cerisy-la-Salle in July 1972, where Derrida first gave the paper, but as far as I know, she is nowhere listed as one of the participants. In this case, she would have had two years to produce *Speculum*. These are admittedly pedantic considerations, but the point I wish to make is that Burke's attempt to make concrete the Irigaray–Derrida connection is symptomatic of a tendency to reduce Irigaray's thought to his in a rather unconvincing fashion. In this case, it would seem that the principal justification for aligning Irigaray's thesis with Derrida's paper is a thematic one, which is, broadly, that they both address the question of the problematic status of woman and truth. If Irigaray were deploying deconstruction in her texts, it is more likely that her understanding of it came from a reading Derrida's earlier publications, such as *De la grammatologie*, 1967, Paris: Minuit, and her reading would engage with the structural contours of Derrida's philosophy, his 'logic', as much as with any theme.

11. Luisa Muraro, Irigaray's Italian translator and a philosopher, is nevertheless unequivocal in her refutation of the classification of Irigaray as a deconstructionist or 'post-structuralist'. She writes in her essay, 'Female Genealogies' (1994): 'Such an approach is fashionable, perhaps, but misleading. The deconstruction of received cultural forms is never one of Irigaray's aims' (1994: 323).
12. Notably in the section, 'Lèvres voilées' in *Amante marine* (1980a), 'Le v(i)ol de la lettre' in *Parler n'est jamais neutre* (1985), and in 'La croyance même' in *Sexes et parentés* (1987b).
13. Heidegger's discussion of *alētheia* is elaborated in 'The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking' (1993: 431–49).
14. Joanna Hodge, in her paper, 'Irigaray Reading Heidegger' (1994), reads Irigaray's work as 'imitating' Heidegger, in a manner that is not reductive. Hodge, who is more than familiar with the works of Heidegger, thus does not automatically assume that to construe philosophy as the affirmation of sameness and the repression of difference derives from a dependency on Derrida. She acknowledges and highlights Irigaray's understanding of Heidegger's reading of the philosophical tradition, yet argues that Irigaray also has a thorough, independent knowledge of that tradition which 'enables her to keep a critical distance from his views' (1994: 201).
15. In the same paper Hodge emphasizes Irigaray's adoption of a 'continental' practice of interiorizing references rather than making explicit ones in the form of footnotes, etc. She draws a distinction between a classical and a hermeneutical inflection to this convention. The classical inflection assumes a standard canon in an esoteric manner; the hermeneutic inflection derives from a refusal to conform to the 'weapons of persuasion' that are footnotes in a way which questions the notion of authority (1994: 200). She rightly situates Irigaray in the latter camp, but in my view Irigaray's style and method, if not intention, also lead her back towards the former.

16. Chanter also makes this point and interprets Irigaray's engagement with and use of the language of certain philosophies as an acknowledgement of her debt to them (1995: 217). This contrasts with those who have interpreted Irigaray's style as one lacking acknowledgement of her sources. Chanter is certainly extremely sympathetic to Irigaray's thought, although her explanation of Irigaray's method is equally indicative of Chanter's own familiarity with the phenomenological tradition and the hermeneutical practice Hodge outlines.
17. I refer to Moi's book and to her criticisms at various points throughout this study because it has been relatively significant for the general reception of Irigaray, especially through literature courses. It is true that it was written at a time when Irigaray's work was only beginning to be appreciated in Anglo-American circles. However, because it provides one of the most accessible commentaries upon 'French feminism' it remains a textbook in use and for that reason I consider it helpful to respond to some of Moi's criticisms.
18. I agree with Whitford that in English the adjective 'feminist' is an appropriate description of Irigaray's work since she is committed to women's struggles (1991a: 11). However, it is a contentious and politically contested word in the French context, rejected by the *Psych et po* group and accepted by materialist feminists such as Plaza. For its critics, feminism is a movement aimed at obtaining equality with men, and is accused of operating on a patriarchal model of identity whose idealist subject presupposes a sameness that suppresses difference and its own masculine character in the guise of neutrality: feminists are women who wish to become men. In an interview published in *Women Writers Talking*, Irigaray seems to be relatively open-minded regarding the word, wary of its potentially complicitous status if used in equality politics, but aware of the need to reclaim rather than denounce it (1983: 233). This caution was again manifest more recently in an interview with Elizabeth Hirsh and Gary Olson when she was asked if her particular mode of argumentation was a feminist intervention. Irigaray clearly wishes to contextualize and define the word 'feminist' before speaking of it, although overall it appears that she views it as a term which labels at the expense of enabling constructive progress: 'I don't know what's meant by 'feminist'. Or, let's say, more exactly, and there are many uses of this word, that it constrains me to be called simply 'feminist' knowing that I don't have rapport with many other feminists.' (1995: 100).
19. If subject to critical reflection, the aversion to the notion of the 'natural' cannot be reduced simply to the idea that it is unchanging; since Darwin at least the notion that nature evolves has become part of popular lore. What is more central to emancipatory feminism is the subject of Enlightenment thought who is free over and above nature to make rational choices on the basis of a distinctly human trait, his self-consciousness. Hence, the prominence given to existential choice in de Beauvoir; change in and of itself is not sufficient, it is the freedom to choose change which is valued.
20. For a classic anti-essentialist argument, see Ann Oakley, *Sex, Gender and Society* (1972). Oakley argues that sex is a biological term which can be over-ridden by cultural learning; masculinity and femininity are learnt through the gendered roles society imposes upon them.
21. This is the thrust of Lynne Segal's objections to essentialism in *Is the Future Female?* (1987). Segal's wide-ranging and important book was written in response to the danger she perceived in feminism in that by re-valuing the female and appealing to the experiences of women, the movement risked reinforcing the ideas of sexual polarity it had aimed to challenge (1987: xii). She is particularly critical of the North American radical feminists, Mary Daly and Andrea Dworkin, for their ascription of an essential violence to men and an essentially nurturing role to women. In many respects her brief

- criticisms of Irigaray and Kristeva are secondary to this emphasis. This suggests to me the possibility that in some cases Irigaray's early thought was read in the context of the growing influence of North American radical feminist thought in the late 1980s. By clearly calling for the necessity of sexual difference and yet writing in obscure language, Irigaray could be aligned with the general tendencies of these Americans cited at that time and the complex nuances of her thought over-looked. In a rare reference to North American feminists, Irigaray is sympathetic to Daly's 'separatism' and her desire for sisterhood, but stresses her own preference for a mixed-sex horizon. Significantly, she is critical of Daly's turn to female Goddesses: 'Sans me sentir en accord avec ce que propose Mary Daly, qui me paraît souvent en retrait sur ce à quoi les femmes peuvent prétendre comme relations au divin...' (1987a: 435).
22. De Beauvoir herself does not subscribe to some simplistic division between body and culture as such. In *Le deuxième sexe* she quite explicitly draws upon a phenomenological notion of the 'lived body'. Indeed, one of the few benefits she accords to psychoanalysis is its emphasis upon, 'le corps vécu par le sujet' (1949, Vol. 1: 78). However, she argues that ultimately sexual difference is merely the conditions of existence turned into an apparent essence. The body is 'vital' but has no necessary determinants: 'La présence au monde implique rigoureusement la position d'un corps qui soit à la fois une chose du monde et un point de vue sur ce monde: mais il n'est pas exigé que ce corps possède telle ou telle structure particulière' (1949, Vol. 1: 40).
 23. Irigaray's aversion to the *concept* is another factor she has inherited from contemporary French philosophy. Bataille, for example, objected to its philosophical and idealist presuppositions in its denotation of static ideas and used instead the word *notion*, as in the title of his celebrated essay, 'La notion de dépense' (Bataille 1967). Here I often use this word in relation the ideas Irigaray articulates, not so much for its vagueness but because of the sense of a resistance to strict definition and certainty that it conveys; the notion may be relatively rigorous in its operation in a discourse or text but appears vague when defined for what it *is* if it is not ensconced in such contexts. Whitford specifies three potential objections on Irigaray's part to the 'concept'. Firstly, the 'concept' is a symbolic concept, which depends upon a division between the ideal and the sensible. Secondly, the concept is thematic, speaking *about*, rather than speaking *to* or *with*. Thirdly, the concept immobilizes what should be mobile (1991a: 155–56). Since Irigaray locates the feminine in patriarchy on the side of the sensible and the fluid, and she believes it will come-to-be in inter-discursive language, it follows that Irigaray should define the concept as fundamentally masculine.
 24. See, for example, Chapter Three, note 11, regarding the lack of a straightforward correspondence between the French *sexe* and *genre* and the English, *sex* and *gender*.
 25. It cannot be said that the question of 'essence' has not been a significant one in the history of French feminist discourse generally, however, for it was indeed de Beauvoir's main objective to counter the notion of an essence of femininity which might support the ideal of the eternal feminine. Monique Remy describes the debates of the early MLF as being: 'Sur les relations entre lutte des classes et lutte des sexes, sur l'essence ou la non-essence de la Féminité ...' (1990: 36). Irigaray's post-Heideggerian thought questions such dichotomies. Thus, if Irigaray is confused by the terminology of 'essence' and 'essentialism', it is probably because her thought assumes the necessity of situating such concepts to ascertain their meaning before engaging with them.
 26. Butler's later work, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993) withdraws from what is in effect a repudiation of the sex/gender distinction in *Gender Trouble* to rethink its validity. Here she argues that even if sex is constructed, it still cannot be conflated with gender performance.

27. Naomi Schor (1995) argues that intellectual advocacy of the universal is characteristically French, and she cites Pierre Bourdieu in support of her view that French culture is inherently universalistic in that it is founded on the universal model of revolutions, the French Revolution, which is of course paradoxical for its nationalistic specificity (Schor 1995: 17–18). She also states: 'French feminism is shot through with French universalism'. To the extent that Schor is correct, this would compound Irigaray's position as a French thinker, and Schor goes on to discuss Irigaray as a universalist French feminist thinker. However, I think it is important to stress which 'universalism' is at stake: whether we are engaging with the concept of eternal universal ideals characteristic of Platonic and Enlightenment thought or the ideals of an evolving universality prevalent in twentieth century French thought after Kojève's influential reading of Hegel (Kojève 1947). Schor does discuss Irigaray's reading of Hegel, but I cannot agree with her when she argues that Irigaray is explicit about her reading of Hegel in order to make her status as a philosopher more credible and in order to work on the universal (1995: 32). From *Speculum* onwards, Irigaray's status as a philosopher is not problematic as far as she herself is concerned, and her reading of other philosophers is determined by their place within the evolution of her own *œuvre* rather than by submitting to the judgements of the 'they'. Hegel's universal is important for Irigaray not simply because those in the 'continental' tradition need to engage with Hegel, but because Irigaray actually embraces much of Hegel's thought, as I argue in Chapter Three.
28. Irigaray's position regarding the meaning of sexed universals and how they come about is inevitably complex and nuanced and cannot simply be clarified in a few lines; I attempt to address some of these issues in this study. It is certainly not simply a question of adopting a political or ideological *position* as a subject, for she does address the philosophical question of how the very 'position' of the subject is conceived and what the means are for such a conception. As Mortensen argues: 'Irigaray does not exclusively understand the problem of positionality in ideological terms. Rather, she raises the problem as an ontological foundational question concerning the Being of the speaking subject' (1993: 20). Mortensen's reading of Irigaray focuses upon her relationship to Heidegger, and I agree that Heidegger is one of the decisive philosophical tap-roots for Irigaray. However, in my reading, Irigaray's work it is as interested in the 'political' as it is in the 'ontological', and I think Mortensen is going too far when she says that 'this question [of the ontological possibility of *parler-femme*] cannot be broached through or subsumed under any ideological or historiological concern' (1993: 20). I think Irigaray does view the relation to the ontological and creating a *parler-femme* as political questions — questions which can be viewed as a form of 'ideology' and can pertain to 'historiological' concerns. The difference here is perhaps one of degree and emphasis, and is also manifest in Irigaray's work. At times, Irigaray veers towards the Heideggerian disavowal of immediate political issues in favour of an attentiveness to 'Being' as a fundamental questioning that makes possible other questions (and change, in Irigaray's case). This enables her to take a somewhat high-minded approach to feminism, arguing that what is at stake for women concerns a stage in world evolution and not the competitiveness of the prevailing culture (1990a: 14). On the other hand, Irigaray's own political action regarding women's rights, her concern for sexed rights, her stress on how women can create a culture of exchange between themselves, and many other instances all manifest her belief that change will not simply come of waiting alone. She wrote in 1987: 'Une identité féminine remet en question l'ontologie mais elle ne peut se définir qu'en allant jusqu'à cette remise en question. Les autres stratégies sociales sont valables et partiellement efficaces' (1987a: 436).

29. Spivak also mentions the issue of Irigaray's universalism and points to the necessity of two universals for Irigaray (1992: 75). I agree with Spivak when she interprets this as an assertion which does not pertain to biological fact, but I cannot agree with her view that instead Irigaray is positing sexual difference as the 'undecidable'. Spivak uses this term following a quotation from an English translation of Irigaray's essay, 'Sexual Difference' (Moi 1987), in which Irigaray refers to the other of sexual difference as 'unknowable'; the French is 'inconnaissable' (Irigaray 1984: 20). While Spivak raises some insightful points regarding Irigaray's reading of Levinas, I cannot follow Spivak's argument. She appears to read Irigaray through Derrida and thus states: 'If Derrida had dared to think of minimal idealization, Irigaray dares minimal alterity' (Spivak 1992: 76). But in my view the passage quoted by Spivak is an affirmative statement of the absolute alterity of the other of sexual difference, defined rather unambiguously as unknowable and evoking wonder and passion. It is not defined as an undecidable otherness that must be 'conventionally assumed' (Spivak 1992: 76). Perhaps Spivak is arguing that by positing only one form of fundamental alterity, sexual difference, rather than a multiplicity of differences, Irigaray's claims are minimalist. Yet Irigaray's claims for sexual difference are far from minimalist, as discussed below. Is there not something rather conventional about the way Spivak positions Irigaray's 'dare' as one that has followed the daring of Derrida, both in terms of the conventions of boy-girl relations and in terms of the academic reception of Irigaray, as I argued in relation to Moi?
30. *Inchiesta* 85/86 (July–December, 1989). The introduction by Irigaray, 'Dio: chi? Dio: che cosa? Il divino concepito da noi', provides the title of a French edition of this collection which is listed as forthcoming in Whitford (1991a). This version, *Dieu Qui? Dieu Quoi? Le Divin conçu par nous*, was to be published by Grasset but as far as I am aware no such publication has yet appeared. The two books published in Italian in 1994 were published by Bollati-Boringhieri, (English translations forthcoming from The Athlone Press), while the 1997 text was published by Manifestolibri. *Essere due* has subsequently been published in French as *Être Deux* (1997).
31. On the whole, Irigaray has been wary of personalizing her work and of autobiographical narrative, in contradistinction to de Beauvoir. This is in part because of the dangers of personalizing the issue of sexual difference which she believes deserves 'objective' consideration in that the laws of sexual indifference lay down the law. It is also because the question of a woman's private life tends to receive attention in a way that a man's does not. In an interview with Kiki Amsberg and Aafke Steenhuis in 1983 (trans. R. van Kreiken), she refused to say anything of her life in general because she believes that people generally ask this sort of thing of women and not of men, and because she wishes people to 'take what they will' out of her books (1983: 192). However, in a piece entitled, 'Ecce Mulier?: Fragments' in Burgard (1994), Irigaray does mention her father and mother, albeit in fragmentary fashion, and we learn that the passion for Italy comes from her father, an exiled Italian aristocrat: 'Je dois, peut-être, à mon père mon goût pour l'Italie. A peine franchie cette frontière, je ris, je pétille [...] Ainsi, dans certains lieux d'Italie, brusquement me vient cette évidence que je suis chez moi. Et personne ne m'enlèvera cette certitude qu'il se passe là quelque chose d'une rencontre avec mes ancêtres [...] L'attrait pour certains Italiens a sans doute ce poids mystérieux. Quelque chose de nécessaire et d'infallible y a lieu. Rien d'une séduction qui puisse se réduire, se résoudre. Il y est plutôt question d'une attraction terrestre' (1994: 324). Along with her mother, a Northern French peasant, the two form an: 'Etrange couple. Entre eux. Et en moi. La France et l'Italie y sont en perpétuelles tractions. Et si l'essence de ces cultures et celle de leurs relations me retiennent

tellement, c'est pour une part que je m'y cherche. Les questions se focalisent surtout sur les harmonies entre le coeur et la raison' (1994: 326–28).

32. Holmlund's account is typical (1991). Because Irigaray describes patriarchy as a male homosexual order, and explicitly criticizes Freud in *Speculum* for his denial of a model of female homosexuality that is not reducible to the latter, Holmlund interprets the figure of the lesbian as the 'linchpin for Irigaray's deconstructions of and dialogue with male philosophers' (1991: 287). Where Irigaray usually refers to 'les femmes' and only refers to the lesbian in specific instances, Holmlund takes 'les femmes' to be referring to the figure of the lesbian (Holmlund 1991: 228; cf. Irigaray 1977a: 74). Yet, for Irigaray, the idea that to speak of a possible culture and desire between women necessarily implies the figure of a homosexual sexual practice is a symptom of patriarchal thought, which places 'sex' on the side of the feminine and refuses to admit of a sexed culture that does not reduce sex to sexual relations narrowly-conceived. Not surprisingly, then, Holmlund finds a shift in Irigaray's work after *Ce sexe*, when she claims that her interest in analysing lesbian relationships 'waned' (1991: 289).
33. As de Lauretis points out, the aversion to the term 'separatism' is probably due to the fears of women who risk losing heterosexist privileges and community identity by such an association (The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 1990: 7). However, because of its closer alignment with sexual practices it may also be due to its sense of exclusion of heterosexual women and the denial of relationships with men. Conversely, the aversion is probably symptomatic of a profound homophobia among some heterosexual feminists and society at large.
34. De Lauretis quotes from articles published by Ida Dominijanni and Simonetta Spinella which speak of the desire not to split the movement around the issue of sexual choice as a 'major cause of opacity' in Italian feminist debates and of a theory 'that starts from me but in some oblique way avoids me' (The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, 1990: 16). De Lauretis herself is clearly doubtful about the theory, and suggests a link between Irigaray's public refusal of the promotion of homosexuality to the status of a political problem and her acceptance by the leaders of the Italian Communist Party, since the refusal occurred 'not coincidentally a few months before delivering an invited address to the 1989 National Congress of the Italian Communist Party' (1990:16, my emphasis).
35. See her letter to de Lauretis, (The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, 1990: 17–18) where she denies that lesbianism and the issue of sexual choice can be a foundation or a principle of freedom because she argues that female freedom is symbolic and not an actual behaviour.
36. When discussing her elemental texts in *Le corps-à-corps avec la mère* Irigaray makes clear that different styles of writing are required for different texts, and that her intended (but as yet undelivered) text on Marx would have to differ from her texts on Heidegger and Nietzsche: 'Il s'est vite révélé pour moi évident que ce ne pouvait pas être le même type d'écriture que pour Nietzsche et Heidegger... Pourquoi la différence de tons dans les livres? Elle est d'une certaine façon prescrite par l'œuvre de Nietzsche elle-même...' (1981: 44).
37. The question of comprehension and assessing the level of comprehension is of course a complex matter. It is a mistake to assume that only those who have a 'mastery' of the difficult technical points and language of Irigaray's thought have understood it in the sense of appreciating it for what it may or may not offer to individuals and their culture. That would really be to reduce thought to the determinants of a closely-policed academic discourse and to deprive it of any potential historical effectiveness. Irigaray herself claims: 'Ce que je transmets est imperceptible' (1994: 218).

38. Irigaray is supported in her work on sexual difference in language by the *Centre National de Recherche Scientifique* in Paris, where she has a research post.
39. See also her responses in her interview with Jardine and Menke where she manifests irritation with the misunderstanding of *Speculum* she discerns in their questions (Irigaray 1990a: 72).
40. The title of Ellen T. Armour's unpublished doctoral thesis, 'Deconstruction and Feminist Theology: Toward Forging an Alliance with Irigaray and Derrida' suggested to me an engagement with Irigaray's notion of the divine. However, she barely mentions the divine in connection with Irigaray, which is raised only briefly in her conclusion (1993: 365). Her main aim is to bring together the work of Irigaray and Derrida in order to criticize the liberal humanist subject in the work of the prominent U.S. thinkers, Mary Daly and Rosemary Ruether. She uses the thought of the former two to criticize the essentializing aspects of the latter's discussions of woman.
41. Stockton, in *God Between Their Lips* (1994) relates Irigaray's material body to notions of 'God' in Victorian writing, and specifically to the writings of Charlotte Brontë and Eliot. Her approach is interdisciplinary and inter-textual and she discusses the important issues of Irigaray's materialism and her 'spirituality'. However, Stockton focuses exclusively upon Irigaray's earlier work in *Speculum* and *Ce sexe* because, as she explains, she wishes to read Irigaray as a 'feminist theologian of lack', which she argues is Irigaray's position in her readings of Freud and Lacan (1994: 26). Stockton thus posits a break in Irigaray's thought and interprets her as affirming on behalf of women the lack Freud and Lacan attribute to them. I disagree with both of these positions. As I have argued, I accept Irigaray's own view that there is not a break in her work, and I argue in Chapter Three that she re-places 'the nothing' with the feminine. Grosz, in her *Sexual Subversions* (1989), puts forward a lucid discussion of Irigaray's ethics of alterity which raises the question of Irigaray's divine in the context of her relation to the work of Feuerbach and Levinas, who both conceive of God as a form of alterity affirming the human. Grosz also situates her discussion in relation to Irigaray's 'elemental' texts and her interpretation of the Greek pantheon. Although Grosz does briefly describe Irigaray's analysis of patriarchy as a system of exchange in which women are the commodities of that exchange, she does not relate her discussion of Irigaray's subsequent claim regarding the need for a female divine to this prior critique of patriarchal forms of exchange. What is more, she does not focus upon the necessity of the universality of the divine for Irigaray since she emphasizes the element of choice in creating the divine. She argues: 'The divine is the projection of self-chosen ideals, paths of development to a chosen 'perfection'. God is, for Irigaray, the ideal or perfected self-representation of a desiring subject' (1989: 180). Grosz's interpretation does not, of course, consider Irigaray's work published after 1989, which includes much relevant material regarding her proposals for female divine ideals. Deutscher (1994), on the other hand, does refer the question of Irigaray's notion of divinity back to her critique of patriarchy as a system supported by an abstract, transcendental divine. Her essay is an excellent outline and explication of the general structure of Irigaray's argument regarding the divine. However, the arguments are not contextualized and she does not engage with them in the textually-specific manner deployed here. Nor does she go on to consider Irigaray's specific proposals for a female divine and her 'adoption' of Christianity. Her emphasis is upon the explication rather than evaluation of Irigaray's position, whereas my aim is to explicate *and* evaluate that position.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RELIGION OF PATRIARCHY

Irigaray defines patriarchy as a historical and masculine system devoid of value in the feminine. She treats patriarchy as a religious system in which its particular religions are merely symptomatic manifestations of this profound system of value from which the patriarchal conception of the subject ensues. My aim in this chapter is to show that a notion of the divine as transcendent and hypostatized in the form of 'God' is the object of her critique of patriarchy given its structural significance to the constitution of the masculine subject she identifies in her earlier work. For this purpose, I set out her critique in relation to her engagement with Marx's analysis of value in commodity exchange, an exchange which is guaranteed by a form of value that corresponds to a metaphysical conception of God. I consider how this exchange is taken to operate at both the level of the capitalist economy and of the subject, and I pursue Irigaray's argument that it is truly the exchange of a patriarchal economy. By making the function of divine value a gendered matter in this way, I believe that Irigaray opens up the potential for the universalist philosophy she advocates in her later work.

Marx's analysis of forms of value and commodity exchange, which he presented in the first section of *Capital* (1977),¹ is central to Irigaray's reading of historical materialism.² This is partly because her engagement with historical materialism is somewhat limited. References to Marx and Engels emerge towards the close of the first section of *Speculum*, 'La tache aveugle d'un vieux rêve de symmetrie', in which she critiques Freud's writings on femininity. These references are apposite to her discussion in that section of *Speculum*, in the sense that they raise the question of the need for psychoanalysis to undergo a socio-historical critique, but as Plaza argues, they gesture towards this need rather than meet it (1978: 16).³ A book on Marx promised in *Le corps-à-corps avec la mère* has yet to be published (1981: 43), thus her most sustained engagement with historical materialism remains her essay in *Ce Sexe*, 'Le marché des femmes'.

Despite their relative paucity, Irigaray's writings on Marx form a significant and important pillar in her *œuvre*, providing a succinct and detailed presentation of her analysis of patriarchy that facilitates an emphasis upon the divine as value. The essay in *Ce Sexe* sets out her position regarding the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy, and entails her argument that both are structurally dependent upon the same masculine construction of divine value

from which their isomorphism ensues. The notion of an isomorphism between capitalism and patriarchy is not deployed simply as a somewhat vague 'shaping' of one in relation to the other which is liable to produce analogous symbolic representations, in the sense that, for example, capitalist architecture might take phallic forms. It is rather a complex notion pertaining to the relationship between psychic and socio-economic development that itself depends upon a theoretical conjunction of structuralist and dialectical thought in analyses. This theoretical conjunction is put forward and explicated by Jean-Joseph Goux in *Économie et Symbolique* (1973), a text published slightly prior to Irigaray's essay on Marx. Goux's analysis fuses Marxism and psychoanalysis, and I use his text to assist in an appreciation and evaluation of Irigaray's position since Goux explicates where Irigaray alludes. I emphasize the Marxism in their analyses, rather than the psychoanalysis, not because I attribute to the former a theoretical preference, as does Goux, but because my aim is to consider Irigaray's engagement with Marxism. Although Goux's work is helpful in this, I am not suggesting that Irigaray can be reduced to Goux, and indeed, the difference between their analyses is equally instructive. However, by drawing upon the theoretical position explicitly elaborated by Goux one can better understand the theoretical process by which Irigaray manages to conflate patriarchy and capitalism and to argue that the concomitant construction of divine value subtending the subject is a masculine one.

Patriarchy and Capitalism

Irigaray's intervention regarding the relation between patriarchy and capitalism emerged from a political debate among contemporary feminists.⁴ Unlike the debate that had arisen a century earlier concerning patriarchy, which was focused upon discussions of comparative law among anthropologists and sociologists,⁵ the debate that arose in the late 1960s was principally motivated by a political desire to ascertain the cause of women's oppression. It was a debate initiated and nourished by the realization of the enduring and pervasive nature of inequality between the sexes. For while in 1949 Simone de Beauvoir could anticipate the transformation of women's inferior status as Other in *Le deuxième sexe*, a younger generation of feminists was inspired as much by the inaccuracy of her forecast as by her assertion of female independence. Hence, the concept of patriarchy provided a pivotal theoretical question in the 1960s and 1970s before giving way to, and to some extent giving rise to, the essentialist debates of the 1980s.⁶ In highlighting the issue of paternal law and its correlate, male domination, the notion of patriarchy facilitated theoretical analyses which positioned the question of gender centre stage.

Definitions of the concept of patriarchy and of its implications for gender relations and social development are many and varied. Working concepts range from a strictly anthropological one, that of the law of the father transmitted through patrilineal lines of descent, to more general concepts of male dominance throughout society as a whole. It is significant for our purposes that, unlike the debate concerning essentialism, the conceptual antithesis of patriarchy was never primarily its opposite belonging to a theoretical binary bound by the same concept. In this case, one would expect that antithesis to be a concept belonging to a socio-familial schema. Whereas essentialism can look directly to anti-essentialism to provide its theoretical contours and to compound the significance of essence, patriarchy was not generally presented with matriarchy as a competing oppositional concept to sharpen up its meaning and to enhance the significance of socio-familial factors in analysis. While the nineteenth-century writings of Bachofen (1967)⁷ on what are classified as pre-historical matriarchal societies did receive attention in places,⁸ much feminist debate side-stepped the matter of comparative historical analyses of matriarchal versus patriarchal systems. This is understandable on a number of grounds, not least owing to the problem of the historical verification of matriarchal societies and the concomitant risks of mythologizing and idealizing their constituent elements.

It is probably more significant, however, that the principal axis of feminist debate defined as *feminist* debate was the search for an explanatory causal concept to analyse women's enduring oppression. Taking a cause-effect model necessitates a certain mutual exclusiveness on the part of the cause and the effect if the effect is to be exonerated of all participation in cause, otherwise the model breaks down. With the effect, women's oppression, functioning as a shared premise for feminists, seeking its cause led away from women to competing systems of dominance and oppression.⁹ Notwithstanding the existentialist ethics of de Beauvoir, for whom women's responsibility for their failure to assert themselves as subject was always an overriding factor, the question of causation with regard to women's subordination was thus focused primarily around the dichotomy of systems largely conceived of as external to women's identity, that is, of capitalism versus patriarchy. Irigaray's use of both structuralism and psychoanalysis has led her to an analysis of patriarchy which somewhat obviates a causal model of oppression to the extent that cause is designated as a factor that is either external to the subject as a purely objective system or internal to that subject in the form of a purely conscious will. Irigaray's emphasis lies in a critique of the processes that constitute the subject as subject in order to expose their appropriating effects. These processes are at once structurally independent of the subject and yet enacted by him or her at each

moment of subjective realization. For Irigaray, the operations of patriarchy and capitalism are such processes.

Irigaray rejects any critique of patriarchy and its relation to capitalism that depends on a dichotomous conceptualization of them as separate and competing orders. She does not propose an examination of them as forming a complex inter-relating system taking effect in different domains of social activity since to do so would depend upon retaining an ultimately dichotomous conceptualization of their distinctiveness. Moreover, it would allow for a concept of the subject as a pre-existing unified entity moving between such domains to be differently affected by them. For Irigaray, rather, the modern subject is constituted in and by the social and cultural processes of patriarchy and capitalism. In *Ce sexe* she states that what is required is an approach to the issue of class and sexual oppression which treats them in what she terms a 'dialectical' manner. She writes:

Il semble, à cet égard, que le *rapport entre le système d'oppression économique entre les classes et celui que l'on peut désigner de patriarcal* soit bien peu dialectiquement analysé, et à nouveau, reconduit à une structure hiérarchique. (1977a: 78)

Irigaray does not elaborate on her call for a dialectical analysis in order to set out theoretically the precise form of dialectic she has in mind. In general terms, one can say that the analysis she suggests promises — as a *dialectical* analysis — to examine the internal relationship between the two orders in a way that reveals their mutual definition and thereby mutual dependency so that hierarchies of oppression, such as class versus gender, would apparently be rendered obsolete.

In fact, patriarchy assumes a structural and historical primacy in Irigaray's analysis because capitalism is assimilated to it. In support of her argument she cites the claims of Marx and Engels to the effect that the very first class oppression occurs within monogamous marriage as that between a man and a woman, since the labour-power of women constitutes the first property (Irigaray 1977a: 82). Irigaray is mindful that such a mode of argumentation threatens to sustain the hierarchy of oppression debate by engaging in a myth of origins. Such a myth assumes that the return to what is claimed to be primal could explain everything that is deemed to ensue from it since it sets up an uninterrupted sequence of logical causation. She suggests that through their assertion that exploitation within the family is the first exploitation, Marx and Engels tend to relegate this exploitation to an initial phase of history and thereby assimilate it to a mythical origin (1977a: 79). They then leave this exploitation behind them in their analyses and, by implication, assume it has been left behind in history, too. Irigaray is reluctant to accord theoretical significance to what is designated as primary in a way that would entail the as-

sumption that capitalism is a system following on from patriarchy in time. However, she uses this citation of Marx and Engels to lend support to her argument for examining the internal relationship between the two ostensible orders of oppression in a dialectical manner. She does not assume that one order precedes the other, or that the two orders co-exist in a relatively independent and hierarchical fashion. Instead, she takes them to be dialectically related in the sense that the one emerges from the other as its apparent contradiction but is in fact the 'negative' which is both contained within and fashioned by the one.¹⁰ Hence, Irigaray uses the assertion of Marx and Engels to counter their general method, which focuses upon a critique of capitalism, and she posits patriarchy as the positive first term of this dialectic between patriarchy and capitalism. In that sense, as noted, she dispenses with the notion of them as two separate or competing orders and conflates them in a process that privileges the term patriarchy as the expropriation of labour power to and in the name-of-the-father. She explains:

Car l'ordre patriarcal est bien celui qui fonctionne comme *organisation et monopolisation de la propriété privée au bénéfice du chef de famille*. C'est son nom propre, le nom du père, qui détermine l'appropriation, y compris en ce qui concerne la femme et les enfants. Et ce qui sera exigé de celle-ci, de ceux-ci — la monogamie pour l'une, la préséance de la filiation masculine, et singulièrement de l'aîné du nom, pour les autres —, le sera bien pour assurer 'la concentration de grandes richesses dans les mêmes mains, celles d'un homme' et pour 'transmettre ces richesses par héritage aux enfants de cet homme-là et d'aucun autre'; ce qui, bien sûr, 'n'entrave pas le moins du monde la polygamie ouverte ou cachée de l'homme'... [Engels]. Comment, dès lors, peut-on dissocier l'analyse de l'exploitation de la femme de celles des modes d'appropriation? (1977a: 79–80)

According to Irigaray, then, capitalism, like patriarchy, is a mode of appropriation. Capitalism as a mode of production is a historical variant of the fundamental drive to appropriation in patriarchy. Therefore patriarchy, as Irigaray theorizes it, is a mode of appropriation that inevitably entails an appropriative-exploitative mode of production.

The notion of appropriation that Irigaray is operating with here is once again suffused with resonances of different philosophical traditions without being reducible to any one of them. It pertains to the Marxian question of how matter and nature are transformed through the appropriating labour of human beings into forms which provide the means of subsistence for such beings. Yet this question is positioned within the more general phenomenological question of how things appear to beings, and more specifically, within Heidegger's question as to how beings are formed in the appropriation of Being. For Heidegger, the way that Being is appropriated within a given era, its mode, as it were, de-

termines the designation of beings as being what they are, which includes the question of the subjectivity of human beings.

Within her critique of patriarchy, Irigaray thus assumes Heidegger's phenomenological investigations of Being which meditate upon the notion of *Ereignis*, or the 'event of appropriation'.¹¹ Heidegger's thought gravitates around the notion of appropriation in the sense that he draws a fundamental ontological distinction between Being and beings, between what gives Being and what is interpreted as a being ontically. In their constitution as such, beings appropriate Being. Yet they cannot represent Being since for Heidegger Being withdraws as it reveals itself to being; it is inappropriate to representation defined as a truthful correspondence between an entity and its representative. As Mortensen explains:

Ereignis is temporal in its structure and as such it speaks to the presencing and absencing of that which is. Because you cannot say what Being or what Time is, what presences itself cannot be fully dis-closed. Rather, Being is given, Time is given and the only way we can approach this 'givenness', is by awaiting. (1993: 24)

It is the representation of the apparent essence of Being as the fully self-present foundation of a being which is metaphysical for Heidegger, a metaphysics that entails all the reductive processes of making 'proper' by appropriation to a certain foundation that Irigaray evokes. In his attempt to avoid the language of metaphysics and its human subject who wills himself, Heidegger terms the human being 'Da-sein', a 'being there' for whom Being is always a question — a question of interpretation that presents itself differently in different historical eras. For Heidegger, the era of metaphysical thought appropriates Being by reducing it to the 'is-ness' of ontic being: it reduces the difference within Being by forgetting the question of the interpretation and appropriation of Being and effectively threatening to foreclose the unconcealment of Being. Caught up in the objects of being, in the world as it is always already presented to him as 'ready-to-hand', the human subject engages with Being as it has been interpreted. In his metaphysical guise, however, he reduces the world to what it *is*, over and against which stands this human subject (Heidegger 1993). Irigaray's use of the notion of appropriation heeds Heidegger's call to return to the question of Being, which she believes to be beyond the confines of a patriarchal world that takes its objects to be both immutable and man-made. For it is the patriarchal mode of appropriation, which, according to Irigaray, appropriates and reduces all Being to its own property in the name of necessity, and thereby forecloses other possibilities.

Commencing with a form of phenomenological interpretation, then, Irigaray's focus emanates from the position of the human subject who is constituted in and through an interpretative appropriation of what is given as Being, and

who fashions a world from its potential within a certain horizon. Unlike Heidegger, however, Irigaray envisages appropriation as a primal and persistent relation between the relative positions of two potential *subjects* within the cosmos, rather than as an event that is given to being by Being through time. For Being is, in its primal sense, 'matter' in Irigaray's philosophy, and 'matter' is the feminine which beings fail to recognize and consistently forget.¹² Yet for Irigaray this forgetting is not simply a question of ontology, of what is given by Being as an unconcealment of itself. Forgetting is political and has political consequences. Although Irigaray's 'Being' remains unrepresentable as a foundational entity, its forgetting is ultimately a question of the relative and dialectical relationship between subjects in the constitution of subjectivity. For her, this relation is the potential subject–subject relation that is misrecognized and attributed to a subject–object relation in the reduction of Being to a being — a being which is then confused with a divine Being. This argument forms the crux of Irigaray's critique of patriarchy.

Irigaray's analysis is, therefore, concerned in the first instance with the constitution of the subject in a world through a primal *poēsis* as a process of interpretation. The objective processes of human activity and their products, although inextricably related to the latter, are 'secondary'. In her phenomenological analysis, the Marxian definition of man as the being who socially produces his means of subsistence is subsumed as one definition within the processes of the interpretation and appropriation of Being.¹³ Given such a focus, Irigaray does not engage with the classic question of Marxian historical analysis that centres upon modes of production. In fact, she does not examine the capitalist mode of production except as the manifestation of a general mode of appropriation inherent to patriarchy, for she argues that it is the latter which prevails over and above the historical modes of production examined by Marx. She writes, again with the support of Engel's own analysis:

Et la succession des régimes de propriété: esclavagistes, féodaux, capitalistes, n'ont plus modifié le fait que la femme soit possédée par le chef de famille à titre de 'simple instrument de production' et reproduction. (1974: 151)

In her work, Irigaray does not examine class relations in the sense of class as defined by its relationship to the ownership of private property in the means of production. She does not, therefore, enter Marxian debate on its own terms in the manner of her contemporary, Christine Delphy. Delphy defines women as a class, as having a specific relationship to the means of production, since she defines domestic labour itself as a separate mode of production in which women constitute the producing class as housewives and men the exploitative class as husband-owners (1984). Delphy is thus able to maintain a Marxist method of analysis while defining patriarchy as the main enemy, for it is the

patriarch who reaps the benefits of woman's labour in the domestic mode of production. She has been criticized from within Marxist discourse for her use of the concept of the mode of production. Her critics argue that in any given social formation there is only one mode of production whereas Delphy's account assumes two, the capitalist and patriarchal, operating simultaneously (Barrett and McIntosh 1979).¹⁴

From the point of view of Irigaray's analysis, it is possible to argue that such a division only arises because of Delphy's attempt to explain patriarchy in accordance with the patriarchal concepts of Marxist discourse. This attempt reduces sexual relations to an economic concept of class which stages the relations between the sexes in terms of a Marxist definition of a social determined by relations of production. By slipping the patriarch into the category of capitalist and the woman into the category of producer, as Delphy does, the specific question of sexed subjectivity arises only as a derivative of a model of production. The relevance of the masculinity of the patriarch as exploiter in the domestic mode of production is not analysed as such, but is used descriptively to differentiate him from the exploiter in other modes of production. However, without an analysis of the constitution and the effects of masculinity and femininity the resemblance between the patriarch and the capitalist will be envisaged on ostensibly gender-neutral terms, since the sexual difference gestured to by the term 'patriarch' becomes arbitrary. Hence, only something specific to the patriarch as a masculine being in the process of exploitation would warrant the use of this term instead of the term capitalist for the mode of production Delphy theorizes. Otherwise, the domestic mode of production will be a sub-category of the capitalist one, and capitalism will remain 'the main enemy'. Delphy is herself critical of the claims of discourses such as psychoanalysis to explain and account for subjectivity in her definition of a materialist feminism, arguing that it constitutes a form of psychologistic idealism (1981: 74). However, her own focus upon the mode of production does not furnish an alternative account of subjectivity, least of all one defined with respect to gender difference. By contrast, Irigaray's attempt to conflate patriarchy and capitalism centrally revolves around the question of subjectivity. From there she enters Marxist discourse by highlighting the question of the means of production: of what or, indeed, who constitutes the means of production from the point of view of sexual difference. In this sense, Irigaray potentially destabilizes Marxist concepts because her approach reconfigures the notion of class defined in relation to the ownership of these means of production.

Irigaray thus asserts that '*les femmes ne forment pas à strictement parler une classe*' (1977a: 31), and she concurs with de Beauvoir that women are dispersed throughout the social classes as Marxist thought defines these. De Beauvoir goes on to argue that this weakens women's socio-political strength

as they are less liable to develop a historical consciousness of their social position and to assert themselves as subject. This is due not only to their dispersion across social categories but also to their formation as a category which is not exclusively historical (1949, Vol. 1: 18–19). Thus, the ‘biological’ element to the definition of woman as a category is important to Irigaray and de Beauvoir, and it is the Marxist treatment of this factor which distances them both from its orthodoxy. In her discussion of Engels, de Beauvoir makes the following criticism:

Il a essayé de réduire l’opposition des sexes à un conflit de classe: il l’a fait d’ailleurs sans beaucoup de conviction; la thèse n’est pas soutenable. Il est vrai que la division du travail par sexe et l’oppression qui en résulte évoquent sur certains points la division par classes: mais on ne saurait les confondre; il n’y a dans la scission entre classes aucune base biologique. (1949, Vol. 1: 101)

Whereas de Beauvoir accepts the notion of this biological basis as an ineluctable fact of history — a fact which has limited women but is in the process of being transcended such that women too may exist authentically — Irigaray incorporates a critique of the very notion of biology in her critique of patriarchal thought. Thus, while de Beauvoir identifies women as biological in a negative manner and wishes to overcome the ‘biological’, Irigaray ascribes to patriarchal thought an elision of women and biology in terms of matter, nature and body. This is not an unfortunate, somewhat regrettable facet of that thought which may simply be overcome by asserting woman as subject, by emphasizing women’s cultural capabilities and inserting them into the productive economy. It will not be overcome by a movement of women away from their sexed particularity towards a singular cultural universal. Rather, in Irigaray’s critique of patriarchy, it is an elision that subtends the very notion of patriarchal culture, and does so in such a way that any structural rearrangement of its alignment would confound the whole cultural edifice. For Irigaray, this patriarchal edifice depends upon the unrecognized use of ‘matter’ for its own idealized productions.

Like the other philosophers in the Western canon whom Irigaray analyses, Marx and Engels are held to have made a break with ‘material contiguity’ (1977a: 73). In their case it is through their denial of materiality as anything other than the product of a social labour process. Marx makes this clear in his criticisms of Feuerbach in *The German Ideology* (1965), for according to Marx the latter’s ‘sensuous materialism’ fails to see that the world is:

a historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding one developing further its industry and its intercourse modifying its social order according to the changed needs. Even

the objects of the simplest 'sensuous certainty' are only given him through social development, industry and commerce. (1965: 57)

For Marx and Engels, this notion of the always already social, which is given but is the historical product of man's labour, facilitates the reduction of materiality and of 'nature' to a social labour and to its value. According to Irigaray:

Quant à Marx, il se préoccupe beaucoup d'économie sociale mais assez peu de la culture de la nature sauf dans sa transformation en utilités où elle disparaît comme phénomène naturel. (1989a: 34)

Irigaray thus argues that in spite of the initial recognition of the 'natural' exploitation that occurs within the family, Marx ultimately bypasses nature for the primacy of the social. This process is reminiscent of metaphysical and idealist logic, in the sense that what is given is appropriated to the ostensibly necessary forms of a social determined by man himself, but in idealist terms which reduce matter to the forms of the ideal. Natural and social exploitation are therefore divided and hierarchized, such that the former goes unacknowledged and Marx's famous unity of man with nature becomes a unity of man with his product, nature.¹⁵ Matter thus becomes what men have made of it, their product. For Irigaray, the question of matter is never neutral but is always sexed. It is women, as the feminine, who are the matter from which man produces:

Ce qui est à sauvegarder serait donc que l'homme est *le* procréateur, que la *production-reproduction sexuelle* est référible à sa seule 'activité', à son seul 'pro-jet', la femme n'étant que le réceptacle recevant passivement son *produit* même si elle en a quelquefois sollicité, favorisé, voire demandé — par la mise en jeu de ses pulsions à buts passifs — le placement en elle. Matrice — terre, usine, banque — à laquelle sera confiée la semence-capital pour qu'elle y germe, s'y fabrique, y fructifie, sans que la femme puisse en revendiquer la propriété ni même l'usufruit, ne s'étant que 'passivement' soumise à la reproduction. Elle-même possédée au titre de moyen de (re)production. (1974: 15-16)

If Irigaray does not consider women as a class, then, it is because she argues that they themselves constitute a sort of means of production and reproduction which supports the possibility of class relations. They cannot, therefore, be defined through their relation to the ownership of the means of production. In her analysis, they function as the objects upholding the differential relations to the means of production within a mode of appropriation that designates pure matter as a substance or object 'ready-to-hand' for the purposes of supporting idealized form.

For this reason, the principal focus of Irigaray's engagement with historical materialism lies in the question of exchange relations and an analysis of the

commodity in these relations. In Irigaray's use of the terms, appropriation raises the question of exchange over and above the question of production since it relates to the very constitution of subjective identity as a mode of being-in-the-world and does so in a manner that the analysis of production relations tends merely to assume. Exchange is therefore central to the question of identity in Irigaray's thought. Exchange relations facilitate an analysis of the category 'woman' in a way that production relations do not. This is because they highlight the issue of values in the process of exchange (the distinction between use and exchange value), and the manner by which the system of exchange renders material valuable through exchange. According to the terms of Irigaray's analysis, the differential positions of subjects engaged in the process of exchange depend upon the process of appropriation, of using up and exchanging matter between themselves. Hence, the order of difference between those engaged in exchange and those engaged in class relationships is supported by the appropriation of material. Therefore, Irigaray's position is not that the difference of class defined in relation to production is an invalid analytical category, or that it has no reality in subjective experience; it is that this difference is inevitably of a second order when viewed in terms of sexual difference.

The question of sexual difference is thus central to Irigaray's analysis because, as I have argued, her concern is to reveal the fundamental but concealed sexualized schema in patriarchy which functions under the banner of neutrality and to analyse patriarchal thought accordingly. In this scenario, she operates with the clear division of masculine and feminine as producer-exchangers and matter respectively. While this schema ensues from Aristotle's philosophical designation of women as matter and men as form, Irigaray does not reject this dichotomy as simply wrong or a mere ideological delusion. Rather, she endorses it as a functionally operative schema in patriarchal systems. Its veracity is held to be determinant even though its reality is assumed to be historical rather than essential. Already, then, in the first stage of her work, Irigaray makes the question of sexual difference a fundamental one, since the concept of class is envisaged as the product of a more fundamental expropriation imagined along the lines of sex. Without the appropriation of a matter which takes the feminine place in metaphysical reality, she argues, producer-exchange relations could not be sustained. Furthermore, in the way that Irigaray endorses the 'truth' of patriarchal thought to be a relatively accurate reflection of patriarchal history, she reveals her acceptance of the notion of sexual difference defined as a difference between the masculine and the feminine. The concepts of masculinity and femininity have been central to the patriarchal order, and are adopted by Irigaray even if she demands their fundamental reconstitution as the masculine and the feminine. She does not reject the patriarchal cate-

gories of masculinity and femininity on the grounds of their alleged universality for men and women: that is, on the grounds that this division of sexual difference into masculinity and femininity is unnecessarily limited. It is, rather, the universality of masculinity as the neutral and generic gender which is questioned, and the effects of this universality for the constitution of the subject. This is an early indication of the explicit universality she gives to them in the subsequent stages of her work.

The generalized nature of Irigaray's claims is potentially problematic. In conflating patriarchy and capitalism, she does not investigate their historical variants nor indeed the specific conditions of subjects in history. This is an observation and criticism made of Irigaray by Moi, for whom Irigaray's 'failure to consider the historical and economic specificity of patriarchal power', means an inevitable lapse into a metaphysical definition of woman (1985: 148). Moi's observation is on the whole an accurate one and remains true of Irigaray's approach in the work published after Moi's commentary. However, Moi's critical conclusion does not necessarily follow. Mere consideration of history is not a panacea for the ills of metaphysics. Mary Daly in *Gyn/Ecology* (1977) describes the different forms that patriarchal domination can take across time and place in the forms of Chinese foot binding, African genital mutilation, witch burning and Western gynaecology. However, rather than interpret such practices as evidence of cultural diversity in the relations between men and women, Daly cites them as evidence of the totality and universality of male power. Thus, historical specificities can lend support to the endurance of a fundamentally similar, transcendent and arguably metaphysical human subject (Nye 1988: 103). Historical analysis which is premised upon the necessity of human becoming can also aim to support a global philosophical claim regarding the position of women, as is the case with de Beauvoir. Throughout *Le deuxième sexe*, and notably in the extensive section entitled 'Histoire', de Beauvoir accounts for the economic and historical specificities of the condition of women; she evaluates the relative strengths of their position according to different socio-economic and patriarchal regimes, and concludes that *throughout* history woman has never asserted herself as subject and has always been positioned as Other (1949, Vol. 1: 231–34).¹⁶ What is more, de Beauvoir relies upon historical interpretations put forward by intellectuals such as Lévi-Strauss — interpretations which themselves depend upon theoretical systems that Irigaray questions in terms of sexual difference, as I point out below.

As a philosopher Irigaray's task is not that of historians, among whom only empiricists and positivists would claim that history 'speaks for itself.' Her engagement is at the discursive and philosophical level, at the point where the science of history is constituted as meaningful in particular ways and interpreted as such. Inevitably, this type of engagement produces analyses which

are extremely generalized when viewed against the data of historically specific investigations. The generalities of her analysis of masculinity and femininity and her refusal to temper the veracity of such generalizations in her exploratory reconsiderations of these notions are both open to immediate refutation. For, even if her thought is deemed perspicacious, every particular scenario will entail factors that detract from or further complicate its contours, and these factors require consideration in their particularity.

Therefore, although Irigaray's philosophy cannot be reduced to a methodology of reading, neither can it supply a *prima facie* understanding of the whole of human history and human experience without a critical *engagement* with a given particular. Irigaray's claims thus have to be taken at a philosophical level. They cannot account for all the specific appropriations of sexual difference in exchange, even if, as I argue in Chapter Four, any attempt to symbolize the universality of sexual difference is thwarted by these specificities. Irigaray's critique of patriarchy investigates its 'inner mechanisms', as it were, in the way that Marx investigates the 'inner mechanism' of capital. Her critique thus permits an investigation of the fundamental structures of thought and knowledge, and indeed of the idea of history, which otherwise might continue to constitute historical interpretations in accordance with the same structures. In this sense, as a philosopher who thinks historically, Irigaray does not engage in the science of history but rather attempts to question history itself and to pose the problem of historical beginnings and development. Patriarchy is, in Irigaray's thought, one stage in the history of humanity, and one that is entirely conducive to the emergence of capitalist socio-economic structures.

For Irigaray, then, the dialectic between patriarchy and capitalism depends upon the primacy of patriarchy as a mode of appropriation. Their internal relations are articulated via the notion of exchange relations, hence I now turn to her account of the nature of exchange within patriarchy.

Exchange Relations

Irigaray's discussion of exchange is directly relevant to her analysis of the socio-economic and symbolic status of women in patriarchy since exchange is central to her analysis of the subject whom she defines as masculine. Indeed, she defines patriarchal societies as ones founded upon the exchange of women and as 'homosexual' economies.

In order to contextualize and explicate Irigaray's position it is helpful to read her in conjunction with Goux (1973). Goux's text and Irigaray's essay were both written in the early 1970s amidst the renewed interest in bringing together the work of Freud and Marx in French thought. However, rather than

attempt an alliance premised on an ultimately irreducible distinction between psychoanalysis and Marxism, and between the psychological and the social (as had been the project of the Frankfurt School) the tendency in French thought was to emphasize the structural continuity between the two discourses, and between the psychological and the social, via the notion of economy. What is more, the pre-eminent tendency of this new synthesis was concerned not with the failure of the human subject to realize itself but rather with the anticipation or indeed declaration of the end of the human subject. A Nietzschean philosophy affirming the ineluctable overcoming of man provided the welding rods for the synthesis, producing a virulent anti-humanism disdainful of phenomenological and dialectical discourses. Thus, the knowing and self-willing subject was discerned not merely as decentred but rather as destroyed by the economic effects of force, be it the force of the will to power, the forces of production or the drives of the unconscious. Such is the synthesis in Lyotard's *Économie libidinale* (1974) and Deleuze and Guattari's *Capitalisme et schizophrénie, L'anti-Œdipe* (1972), which are anti-dialectical in their assertion of productive desire as an exclusively positive force that, when intensified, will entail the implosion of the order of capitalism and its human subject. Goux, in contrast, proposes a synthesis of Marxism and psychoanalysis that finds its rod not in the notion of force but in a dialectical structure such that his alliance is rooted in the Hegel within Marx. His focus upon economy and exchange emphasizes the position of the subject as both active and constitutive in socio-economic structures and forms of economic value, rather as Irigaray centralizes the subject within the process of appropriation.¹⁷ However, while Goux attributes a certain primacy to historical materialism in his preference for Marx's analysis of value as the structure that contains the germ of all social relations (1973: 12), Irigaray maintains that both psychoanalysis and historical materialism have failed to make a break with the concealed schema of sexual indifference characteristic of patriarchal thought (1990a: 27).

In keeping with a certain prevailing intellectual context, then, Goux's *Économie et Symbolique* revolves around the redefinition of the notion of economy. Economy is relieved of its restricted definition as the exchange of goods and services proper and is extended to incorporate the full range of social, psychic, economic, energetic and linguistic processes. Goux's particular project is to counter these increasingly technocratic tendencies which reify economic relations and herald the reign of market imperatives. This has the effect of denying what Goux terms the active and living subject, the material subject whose materiality, in the form of labour and libido, is productive and symbolic. The denial of this subject, he argues, reduces relations between subjects to one between things. Against such a dominant ideology, he proposes a further reflection on dialectical thought to facilitate a general enlightenment. He writes:

Cette thèse est singulièrement virulente et nécessaire aujourd'hui surtout, où l'idéologie réellement dominante n'est plus un idéalisme spiritualiste de type hégélien, mais bien, de plus en plus, un *économisme technocratique*. Nous sommes loin de Hegel, de l'Idée qui mène les peuples. (1973: 9)

Goux's distancing of Hegel here is intended to signal the difference between his own point of departure and that of Marx, to whom Goux turns in order to counter technocratic imperialism and upon whom he relies for his dialectical model. Marx was obliged to invert Hegel's idealist philosophy in order to lay down the tenets of historical materialism. Goux, by contrast, is obliged to invert technocratic economism in order to lay down the economy of the constitution of the subject via a return to the letter of Marx for whom, he argues, economic relations were always already social relations. Rather than a factual matter of object exchange, economy is a matter of inter-subjective exchange, a material exchange of value that counters the idealistic exchange of consciousness in Hegel's dialectic between self and other.¹⁸ However, Hegel haunts Goux's text in his consideration of dialectical logic, for according to the latter's own analysis it is an ideal absolute on the Hegelian metaphysical model which symbolizes and supports the technocratic economism he abhors. His point of departure is thus not so far from Hegel, since the alienation through reification of the human subject in exchange he identifies is but a further manifestation of the determinations of the absolute. That this absolute presents itself as a neutral necessity and a secular imperative in the form of a universal standard of equivalence for exchange does not prevent it from occupying the *place* of 'God', as I explain below.

Irigaray's critique of patriarchy similarly identifies a danger in the technical and technocratic imperatives of contemporary patriarchy which live on as the consequence of its metaphysical imperatives. According to her analysis, the idealism of a single and absolute guarantor of exchange is a 'same' to which differences are reduced, thereby erasing the difference of matter. It is an analysis which is again close to Heidegger's 'questioning' of technology in the way she assesses the dangers of the dominance of a technological/technical economy which surpasses the control and, indeed, the comprehension of human subjects.¹⁹ Heidegger argues that the essence of technology as *technē* is simply another mode of revealing Being, but that the ever-increasing threat of modern technology means it challenges rather than reveals. As a result, nature's energy and indeed all beings are harnessed as a mere 'standing reserve', and risk being enframed for technological purposes. The danger that Heidegger delineates resides not in the technical and in technique as such. Rather, it lies in modern technology (given by Being) which risks cancelling out all other possible modes of revealing Being, and thereby reducing Being to the metaphysical state of what technological beings *are*. Yet for Heidegger, the conviction of

human beings that they might control or reverse this process is but another manifestation of this reduction of Being to the action of beings (1996: 311–41). Hence, that which is defined as an alienation of the human subject for Goux, is given as a metaphysical reductiveness in being of Being for Heidegger, while for Irigaray it is a reduction of the human subject by the masculine subject to the same masculine divine Being.²⁰ She writes: 'Or la technique, le mystère du règne de la technique s'explique peut-être à partir d'une subjectivité masculine inconsciente d'elle-même' (1997: 135).

In order to counter the increasing alienation of the human subject by the technocratic economy (or, in Irigaray's terms, by the hold technology has over humankind) Goux proposes a theoretical approach which draws the human subject back into the analysis. This approach he defines as logico-historical, and it involves a convergence of structuralism and Marxism (1973: 10). It produces the convergence of historical and structural argument that Irigaray deploys. Goux accepts the structuralist dictate that human cultures reveal 'universal' structures which constitute order and identity synchronically. Thus, corresponding structures operate across what is otherwise defined in liberal thought as divisible domains of cultural activity and they transcend the friction of what is termed content: they have a consistent logic. This enables him to nominate a basic structural model of exchange — in this case, the one developed by Marx in his analysis of commodity relations — and to apply it to apparently diverse contexts. He deploys Marx's analysis of commodity relations because he argues that its dialectical contradictions and phases of development contain the germ of all processes of exchange and social relations (1973: 19). In the same way, and in relation to the question of commodity exchange, Irigaray finds the germ of all social relations in the relations between the masculine and the feminine as a subject–object but potential subject–subject relation. Irigaray repeats a basic structural argument, which is that patriarchy uses women's bodies as nature or matter to support its own idealist masculine subject, and does so in the context of a whole series of discourses. For both Goux and Irigaray, then, the 'sujet est toujours sujet de l'échange' (Goux 1973: 35), and the economy of commodity relations thus provides them with a model of exchange relations for the constitution of the subject. In such a structuralist model, the relative *place* of the subject in exchange overrides the concept of subjective will — understood as self-willing — in the consideration of subjective identity.

On the other hand, Goux is critical of structuralism for its fundamental antipathy to Hegelianism: its approach to economy as purely a series of structures which denies the libidinal investment of the 'active' subject; its affinities with formal logic which reify differentiations rather than subject them to a dialectical dynamic; its overly synchronic approach to culture at the expense of diachronic analyses (1973: 10). While the subject is a certain logical structure for

Goux and for Irigaray, it cannot simply be approached synchronically. Goux explains that the universality it manifests has evolved as a result of the dynamic interactions of active subjects whose vital activities in the form of labour or libido constitute the basis of exchange. Thus, the specific structure constituting subjectivity corresponds to particular historical eras according to the place of an era in the course of human evolution and the exchange activities of its subjects. This notion of an evolved and evolving universality is equally important in Irigaray's thought; the universal is not immutable and eternal but is itself constituted by the subject (who is only constituted in exchange) within a given historical era. Thus, for both Goux and Irigaray evolution is never the outcome of a mechanistic process that can be reduced to the growth of material productive forces. The subject Goux envisages is historically formed via historical relations, yet not in the deterministic fashion put forward by mechanistic Marxism, of which he is equally critical. He argues that the Marxist base/superstructure model of society merely repeats the dichotomy of bourgeois political economy whereby economic relations are viewed as restricted to one sector and cultural activity occurs elsewhere, albeit that the former makes of its economic base a determining factor in relation to the superstructure. For Goux, subjectivity is not determined by economic processes external to the constitution of the subject; rather the vital investments of the subject are themselves a historical economy of exchange relations which constitute subjectivity (1973: 10–12). This is the sense Goux attributes to Marx's insistence that the relation between objects is truly a relation between men:

Cela ne signifie pas, bien entendu, que les rapports économiques de production soient des rapports intersubjectifs au sens psychologique; mais outre que les rapports intersubjectifs ont, comme l'a montré Freud indirectement, une logique rigoureuse qui échappe à tout 'subjectivisme' superficiel, cela signifie que tout le poids de la révolution théorique de Marx consiste à refuser d'autonomiser le niveau économique comme une structure sans agents vivants ou comme un secteur isolable de l'activité humaine, et à montrer au contraire qu'elle constitue un *rapport entre sujets vivants*, rapport fondamental qui peut permettre de comprendre tous les autres *rapports* sociaux, quels qu'ils soient. (1973: 10)

According to Irigaray, it is indeed the exchange of objects between men that comprehends patriarchal social relations because patriarchy is an exchange of women as objects between men.

In her critique of patriarchy, Irigaray thus shares Goux's position, nominally accepting structuralist thought that yet requires a historical and dialectical treatment. Her essay, 'Le marché des femmes' commences by invoking Lévi-Strauss's structuralist assertion in *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* (1949) that the exchange of women between kinship groups constitutes the first

and elementary form of human exchange in the sense that it marks the passage from nature to culture by the prohibition of incest. Irigaray accepts this claim both for its historical validity and for what it may reveal of the place of the subject in the processes of exchange. However, she does not accept the objectivist, neo-functional neutralism of structuralists such as Lévi-Strauss who make universalist claims — particularly regarding the sexualization of discourse — without subjecting their thought to a reflective critique of their own universalist pronouncements.²¹ As noted, Irigaray's method is not to question the empirical truth of Lévi-Strauss's claims in the way that field anthropologists have done. As a philosopher, her concern is the discursive field of representations that make such a definition and claim to truth possible and as a psychoanalyst her concern is to interpret what such representations reveal of the investments made within them. Rather, Irigaray mocks Lévi-Strauss's blindness to this investment of active subjects, which she argues reveals not objective necessities in the processes of cultural formations but rather systems of dominance. She writes:

Pourquoi échanger les femmes? Parce qu'elles sont des 'commodités raréfiées et essentielles à la vie du groupe', affirme l'anthropologue. Pourquoi ce caractère de raréfaction, étant donné l'équilibre biologique entre naissances d'hommes et de femmes? Parce que 'la tendance polygame profonde, dont on peut admettre l'existence chez tous les hommes, fait toujours apparaître comme insuffisant le nombre des femmes disponibles. Et, même si les femmes sont en nombres équivalentes aux hommes, elles ne sont pas toutes également désirables, et, par définition, les femmes désirables sont une minorité'... (Lévi-Strauss) Les hommes sont-ils tous également désirables? Les femmes n'ont-elles aucune tendance à la polygamie? Questions qui ne se posent pas à l'honnête anthropologue. A fortiori: pourquoi les hommes ne sont-ils pas objets d'échange entre les femmes? (1977a: 167)

Irigaray accepts the contention that culture is upheld by the exchange of women insofar as it is a description of patriarchal culture. She thus accepts Lévi-Strauss's claims but demands a historical and dialectical treatment of his contention. Her argument is that exchange relations are historical, and if men are not the objects of exchange between women it is because the process of *patriarchal* exchange requires that women be the means of exchange between men, who derive and constitute their own subjectivity on the basis of this exchange. This process is not necessary or essential to culture *per se*, according to Irigaray (1977a: 168), but is characteristic of patriarchal culture which is a particular mode of appropriation defining a stage in human development. Since Irigaray believes that patriarchy succeeds eras that may be termed gynaeocratic, for her it follows that patriarchal culture would imagine the formation of culture as the passage from nature to culture via the exchange of women. This is because patriarchal culture designates the predominance of women as a

'natural' state which is only overcome by the mediations of men in exchange. In assigning gynaeocratic cultures to pre-history, patriarchal thought can erase them by eliding women with a nature which has been surpassed by the naturally cultural status of a culture dominated by men (Irigaray 1989: 113). This process is both a historical event and a structural element of patriarchal thought; it was actively 'forgotten' and is now continuously, and rather passively, 'forgotten'.²²

The exchange relations of patriarchal culture are defined by Irigaray as being monopolized by *l'hom(m)o-sexualité*: a culture that is 'homosexual' since exchange only takes place between subjects of the same sex, that is, between men (1977a: 168). Human subjects (who are men) exchange matter-bodies (which are women) as their products; men operate in a society defined as *l'entre-hommes*, a between-men society. This is a principal feature of Irigaray's characterization of patriarchy: that women are exchanged as objects and objects are exchanged as women, and it is this exchange which constitutes and upholds the entire cultural order.

The historical fact that heterosexuality became the moral norm of patriarchy, and that homosexual practices became prohibited by law, in no way deters Irigaray from her thesis of the homosexuality of patriarchy. Indeed, she argues that the norm of heterosexuality is an inevitable and necessary development for the maintenance of the *hom(m)o-sexuel* order (1977a: 189).²³ Heterosexuality as a moral imperative enables the question of the libidinal investment of active subjects to be ostensibly displaced from the domain of economic exchange proper and located in the realm of 'sex'. Since patriarchal culture places sex on the side of nature, it is women who are sexed while men are able to remain naturally cultural and apparently neuter in their own sex. They are thus able to operate economic exchanges that seem to take place beyond nature in two senses: first, as subjects they have disinvested themselves of libidinal desire in economic exchange (a desire which is directed towards 'sex'); second, the means of their exchange is always some natural matter which they have invested with added cultural value in order to exchange it. Since women, as *the* 'sex', provide the natural depositories of desire (and the place of discharge for the accumulated tensions of men's repressed desire) and since they provide the matter of exchange between men, they themselves cannot engage in exchange. If they did, this patriarchal system of exchange would collapse for it would have no means by which to function, and the neutrality of masculine subjects could not be sustained (1977a: 190).

Irigaray describes this scenario as the realm of the *semblant*, whereby there is a semblance of neutrality in economic relations and a pretence of exchange in heterosexuality. *Seblant* is a homonym for *sang blanc*, white blood, which she distinguishes from *sang rouge*, red blood (1977a: 189). White blood signi-

fies an unconsummated relation, a relation operating according to social-symbolic rules but which is effectively a pretence, a social smoke screen that veils the corporeal and familial engagement of red blood relations. For it is, she argues, always himself that man seeks to find in his relations through and with the body of a woman:

Homosexuelle donc toute gestion économique. Celle aussi du désir, y compris pour la femme. Celle-ci n'a lieu que comme possibilité de médiation, de transaction, de transition, de transfert... entre l'homme et son semblable, voire entre l'homme et lui-même. (1977a: 190)

As a consequence of this patriarchal homosexuality, Irigaray maintains that not only are relations between men and women precluded, but exchange relations among women are rendered impossible (1977a: 183). If women step outside of their function in patriarchal culture they become masculine, as there are no other terms of exchange. Women are faced with what is for them no real choice: either they remain matter-objects or attempt to become masculine. This has serious and dramatic consequences for girls: they must choose between their mother (as matter) and the masculine cultural ideal. Irigaray thus accepts Freud's analysis that girls must reject their mothers in the process of maturation and she interprets the subsequent loss of the mother-daughter relationship as the most serious and damaging outcome of patriarchy for women (Irigaray 1979a). Not only does this loss deprive the daughter of a possible relationship with her mother, but it also means that there are no feminine terms of exchange that would allow women to exchange, and thereby to constitute their subjectivity *as* women.

The somewhat unqualified tone in which Irigaray makes these claims must be understood in the context of the philosophical discourse with which she is engaging. It is possible to accept Irigaray's analysis without needing to refute the historical evidence of homosexual relations between or to deny the existence of cultural and economic activity among them. Irigaray herself only acknowledges such relations in myths, and in myths which betray the vestiges of a pre-patriarchal era.²⁴ This is consistent with her analysis of patriarchy and yet, as Whitford points out, leads to the impression that Irigaray sees nothing valuable in the history of womankind between the Greek goddesses and herself (1991a: 19). Recent reclamations of women's history contradict Irigaray's fatalism if her claim is taken at face value: in the period Irigaray would deem patriarchal, women have engaged in exchange relationships in the broadest senses of the term, both in denial of patriarchal norms and within the patriarchal system.²⁵ This history is significant and deserves a recognition which Irigaray does not accord it in her preoccupation with mythical and philosophical discourses.

However, Irigaray's analysis of patriarchy is probably a useful aid to explaining the phenomenon described by Monique Remy (1990), whereby women's histories and struggles are repeatedly forgotten by each successive generation with the result that every new wave of women's self-assertion assumes that female subversion is being invented rather than repeated.²⁶ For Irigaray's critique of patriarchy addresses the question of tradition and the establishment of a feminine culture which might, as it were, permit the transmission of a culture from mother to daughter. Irigaray raises the philosophical issue of the constitution and status of the subject because she argues that women have been denied that status whatever the economic role and function they have undertaken and regardless of the definition of the subject. By raising the issue of subjectivity, then, Irigaray attempts to tackle the very cultural mechanisms which make it difficult for women's history to establish its own tradition. Since she is operating with an epochal sense of history, she does in fact subordinate historical differences evidenced in women's roles and functions within a particular time to the fundamental structures of interpretation and appropriation that constitute subjectivity across the broad sweep of an epoch. Her avowed emphasis is upon a notion of change that can sustain and endure rather than simply challenge and deny. By addressing the question of subjectivity she believes her thought responds to the continuing lack of a women's culture, which persists in spite of women's movements and legal reforms (1990a: 14). Her analysis stresses that endurance cannot come of mere disintegration but must involve the reconstitution of culture. For this reason, Irigaray argues that until women attain the status of subject, the exchanges they undertake will be defined according to masculine parameters under patriarchy, and will thus either go unrecognized or be recognized in masculine terms (1977a: 192).

Having endorsed the patriarchal dichotomy of matter as feminine and production-exchange as masculine as the historical truth of the patriarchal era, Irigaray thus has to render any historical evidence of female production or exchange as determined by the masculine. Her endorsement of the truth of this dichotomy could not otherwise be sustained. She is left with no option but to propose a radical overhaul of the masculine and the feminine and their respective relations if women's exchanges are not to be continually denied on their own terms. In order to set this process in motion, the form of value sustaining patriarchal exchanges needs to be defined.

Commodities and Value

The question of value is central to Irigaray's critique of patriarchy because value plays a central role in exchange and the constitution of the subject — a

value that can be defined as divine. Since Irigaray describes the status of women in capitalist societies as that of commodities, the question of value may be outlined in relation to Marx's analysis of commodities. Marx describes the commodity as the elementary form of capitalist wealth which both creates value and is defined by value. That the general form of this value assumes the place of a divinity which corresponds with the structure and function of the divine in Christian theism is a point of central significance for my purposes. It highlights the question of divinity and pertains to the structural correspondences between the constitution of value and the constitution of the subject. The question of gender in relation to value draws forth a further structural correspondence, since the evolution of the form of value and its mode of institutionalization may be related to masculinity or femininity as different modes of appropriation and structuration. It is thus possible to pursue Irigaray's argument that there is an internal relationship between capitalist commodity society, as dominated by the value of money, and patriarchal society, as dominated by the Law-of-the-father.

In order to understand what is at stake in Irigaray's analysis of the absence of value in the feminine in patriarchy, it is important to consider the significance and function of the notion of value. Her use of the term, as with her use of much philosophical terminology, is associative rather than specific: it relates to its use in modern philosophical vocabulary without being strictly confined to any particular usage. In this case, it clearly relates to Marx's economic conception of value as wealth and as measure. Yet it is also associated with the abstract symbolic value of the subject asserted by the protagonists in Hegel's master-slave dialectic, in the sense that value can identify subjects and enable them to stake their claims as such in a conflict for mastery.²⁷ A further connotation is Nietzsche's language of value, which names and underlies the self-affirmative belief necessary for the formation and maintenance of a culture as a form of life.²⁸ All of these notions of value are implied in Irigaray's use of the term, although the point of emphasis might vary in different contexts. Value is not, then, simply a quantitative or qualitative measure for Irigaray, and nor is it simply or necessarily asserted by individuals as a mark of their preferences. Rather, as in Goux's analysis, it is held to function in a constitutive capacity, making and defining entities through the very process of valuation. Value is thus integral to the mode of appropriation for Irigaray, and is inherent in the process of exchange. For it would seem that value is produced by a process of valuation and is symbolic; it is formed by subjects as they are formed by it. Given that Irigaray is concerned to develop culture and to reconstitute subjectivity, her critique of patriarchy is, in a sense, a call for a rejection of the patriarchal mode of value which, in her view, *a priori* rules out the possibility of representing the feminine.

In Irigaray's *œuvre*, the question of value thereby relates to the fundamental question of culture and its modalities, broadly defined as the symbolic function. Irigaray derives this term in part from Lacan, but it is clear that in this case too her use of it cannot be restricted to definitions determined by one discourse alone. For Lacan, the symbolic order is the linguistic order that is necessarily split from any 'real' body, and functions according to an abstract privileged signifier which is not the true reflection of any material referent even though it is designated as the phallus.²⁹ Irigaray's position is closer to Goux's here in that both interpret the symbolic function as cultural activity in the broadest sense. Material processes are not split or cut off from the symbolic order but are continuous with it. Goux's definition attempts to go beyond a notion of the symbolic as the order of language and signification by incorporating the basic processes of production and exchange into its function (1973: 30). Thus, he defines the symbolic in materialist terms that makes language, as a system of signification, merely one element in a general process of exchange operating according to a certain modality of value. Irigaray assumes a continuity between language and the sexed body, and between the economy of material exchange and the economy of discourse. The symbolic is always in discourse but corresponds with a materiality defined through images of the material body.³⁰ Irigaray's use of the 'symbolic' thus gestures towards a culture of sexual difference which presupposes a critique of the materialist values to which Goux is committed because for her matter is always already sexed. Nevertheless, Goux's definition of the symbolic sets out the process by which one can interpret Marx's theory of value as a symbolic process of valuation — an interpretation which is integral to Irigaray's critique.

Goux's explanation of the necessity of value for the symbolic system of culture may be summarized as follows: the symbolic function is the possibility of discovering and maintaining an invariant among what is otherwise heterogeneous, of designating the same form or structure over and above its multiple incarnations in the process of identification (1973: 28). Goux supports the Aristotelian premise of an initial harmony or unity of form and matter which is progressively split through the process of cognitive understanding that designates a form dissociated from content, and thereby facilitates intelligent structures which may be applicable to various contents. This process, which reaches its apotheosis in mathematics and logic, is valorized by metaphysical idealism such that a given historical form is taken to represent the transcendent real. For Goux, such a process does not actually represent the real as transcendent, for its reality is but the effect of the process of exchange between active and vital subjects in particular historical situations. Thus, Goux is critical of the structuralist symbolic and its endless chain of substitutable signifiers and contends

that this position is ultimately metaphysical for what it ignores of the force, activity and value entailed in processes of substitution. He argues:

Par ailleurs, oublier la contradiction dialectique que conditionne l'affrontement des activités vitales, c'est accorder au symbolique une autonomie qu'il n'a pas, constituer la 'materialité' de ses opérations en positivité mécanisable, abstraitement logiciisable, c'est finalement instituer le symbolique en 'ordre' ou en 'instance' dans un geste de réduction métaphysique. (1973: 32)

While Goux argues that the symbol does indeed presuppose substitution, this substitution encompasses all forms of exchange which relate to the active investments of human subjects and determines a type of value. To find conformity and to establish an invariant is the faculty of symbolization, yet insofar as this invariant is established at the expense of difference it is an appropriative gesture. The invariant is thus a value, since in the process of substituting invariance for diversity one element rises above the others and becomes their standard and measure. Therefore, the symbolic system is a system of exchange, or a system of replacement and substitution, whereby the value of an invariant arises as a form or structure which provides the standard and measure for force or matter as a point of equivalence. The latter is not, in fact, unrelated to the content of exchange for Goux, since it is the dialectical outcome of a confrontation between competing vital activities. As the identity of opposing forces in exchange, their equilibrium is, however, a momentary unity, subject to socio-historical symbolic change (1973: 33). Metaphysical thought characteristically denies the tensions and contradictions between the equivalent or invariant and heterogeneity, between a designated form and matter, such that an idealist duality is established between them and the equivalent is taken to represent an abstract equality of forms to which matter is reduced. He argues:

Le privilège de l'invariance, de la fixité, de l'équilibre qu'inclut la réification de la valeur d'échange dans l'équivalent universel, est la condition sociale pratique de la conception métaphysique du monde. L'unité passagère réalisée dans l'échange conduit peu à peu à abstraire la contradiction, en hypostasiant l'équivalence, prenant l'équilibre passager pour une simple égalité définitive. (1973: 34)

In his analysis of commodities, Marx exposes the metaphysics of these operations as corresponding to the wealth of capitalist societies in the distinction he makes between use-value and exchange-value. Use-value is defined in relation to the utility of a thing; it is its value in use or consumption, and thus its value pertaining to its physical, material properties, which is inherent in those properties (Marx 1970: 36). Not all useful materials are defined by Marx as

commodities, although all commodities are assumed to have a use-value. In order to be a commodity, a thing must not only be useful but must also be a product of human labour, the use of which will be transferred to another person by means of exchange (1970: 41). In a fashion which somewhat contradicts his objections to Feuerbach's sensuous materialism, certain properties are defined by Marx as useful but as having no value since they are not due to human labour (such as air, virgin soil, natural meadow). Others may be the product of human labour but not a commodity, since the value produced is merely used and not exchanged (1970: 40–41). Use-value is thus in a sense the structural equivalent of matter and of nature, whether that nature is entirely 'natural' (in the sense of immediately given) or mediated by human labour but utilizing a value inherent to the properties of a thing. This is the realm of the variable or heterogeneous, since the material properties of useful things or commodities are held to be incommensurate with one another. Nevertheless, Marx finds in use-values not only the material side of the metaphysical duality but also its hierarchy, for he argues that in capitalist societies use-values function as 'the material depositories of exchange-value' (1970: 36).

The exchange-value of a commodity functions in the realm of the ideal rather than the material. This value is determinant for commodities in their capacity as commodities. Although exchange value needs a use-value for its support, its determinate value operates without reference to or recognition of this material support. Thus Marx argues:

We have seen that when commodities are exchanged, their exchange-value manifests itself as something totally independent of their use-value. But if we abstract from their use-value, there remains their Value [...]. Therefore, the common substance that manifests itself in the exchange of commodities, whenever they are exchanged, is their value. The progress of our investigation will show that exchange-value is the only form in which the value of commodities can manifest itself or be expressed. (1979: 38)

The predominance of exchange-value as the value of a commodity is necessary to the very nature of a commodity defined as an object of exchange; in and through the process of exchange an object becomes a commodity. As societies become increasingly capitalistic, any regulative link between use-value and exchange-value in the process of exchange is severed by the increasing abstraction and reification of money as a measure of exchange. The commodity is thus exchanged at a value defined not in relation to the material properties ('content') of the object since these are incommensurate with those of another commodity. Rather, it is exchanged in relation to an abstract value ('form') which is intrinsic to neither commodity but nevertheless defines a relation of equivalence between them such that they may be exchanged in ac-

cordance with some measure. Exchange-value thus gives rise to an invariant, or to what Marx terms a general equivalent value which, he argues, measures the value of a commodity in accordance with a labour theory of value. Since a commodity is only valuable owing to the useful human labour that has been expended in its production, it is this labour considered abstractly as labour power which creates and determines the value of commodities. Thus, value for Marx is socially determined. The value of a commodity, the elementary form of wealth in capitalist societies, is determined not by its apparent determinants, such as prices and rents, but by what Goux terms the level of labour power invested by active subjects. For Marx, this is a truly universal measure of value.³¹ It is this analysis of the so-called inner mechanism of capitalism which is at issue in Irigaray's critique. A mechanism which, in order to centralize and concentrate capital, makes labour power itself a commodity whose value can be appropriated as surplus value once the necessary labour power for the maintenance and reproduction of labour power has been expended.

Before going on to discuss Irigaray's response to Marx's labour theory of value, it is important to emphasize the structure and function of the general equivalent value because of its centrality to a capitalist onto-theology which Irigaray describes as masculine. The value of the general equivalent is one that is both privileged and transcendent. It is privileged because it is the commodity which embodies the single and universal form of value in relation to which all other commodities are measured: it is the form of value that creates value in a process of valuation. It is transcendent because in order to sustain this function as the absolute value it has to be excluded from the circulation of exchange, failing which it would be a relative value. It is separated from other objects, absent yet underwriting their value as present objects. As an abstract value subtending all other relative values its privileged position readily lends it the appearance of being a *causa sui* because the historical derivation of its form is obscured. Since all nineteenth century commodity exchange was underwritten by the gold standard, gold is described by Marx as having the absolute value of God: it is the guarantor of exchange.³² Thus, Marx speaks of the cult and fetishism of commodities as the desire to accumulate them and thus concentrate wealth in capitalist fashion. Instead of seeing in commodities the social relations between men, the very abstraction of their value from their material properties means that the relationship between them is seen as one between things. Hence, Marx's analogy:

In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of man's

labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities. (1970: 72)

Goux is keen to emphasize that this is not merely a structural analogy but is rather a historical correspondence between modes of production and modes of subjectivity because what Marx here terms an analogy he later authoritatively describes as the reflection of a given state of society (Goux 1973: 39). The God which is the structural equivalent of Gold is thus for Marx a particular conception which finds its historical form in Christianity and its progressive realization in the emergence of Protestantism:

The religious world is but the reflex of the real world. And for a society based upon the production of commodities, in which the producers in general enter into social relations with one another by treating their products as commodities and values, whereby they reduce their individual private labour to the standard of homogeneous human labour — for such a society, Christianity with its *cultus* of abstract man, more especially in its bourgeois developments, Protestantism, Deism, &c., is the most fitting form of religion. (1970: 79)³³

Hence Christianity universally equalizes all subjects in the image of one absolute privileged being who is both their transcendent origin and destiny. Moreover, it is Protestantism which achieves their ultimate individuation as it brings with it a notion of society defined as a collection of discrete individuals who are subjects measured according to a single standard in a direct relation to God.

Irigaray concurs with Marx's assessment of the function of the general equivalent and its role in maintaining an exploitative and illusory cultural or symbolic system by virtue of both its structure and its status as a hypostatized eternal image. She also accepts the historical correspondence between economic forms of value and religious conceptions, although she reverses apparent 'analogies' in order to undermine the status of analogy, as discussed in the next section. However, as argued above, Irigaray does not account for the emergence of this symbolic system in terms of a mode of production as such. Nor does she restrict its field of operation to a period of history defined principally in relation to a particular mode of production. In contrast with Marx, Irigaray concedes a certain promise to Christianity because its doctrines are not limited to its orthodoxy — an orthodoxy which corresponds to the value forms of a capitalist economy. Rather, the equation between the capitalist and Christian abstract individual is the result of an appropriation of the latter by the historical system of patriarchy in accordance with its own structure and value. Once again, then, the universal general equivalent, which for Marx is immanent to capitalism and indeed necessary for socio-economic develop-

ment, is for Irigaray integral to the patriarchal system. As to the necessity of the universal equivalent, Irigaray remains ambivalent, since the way in which she introduces the question of sexual difference enables her to question *whom* the teleology towards universal value will ultimately benefit. Her argument demands a transformation of the very structure of a singular universal general equivalent, not merely its humanization by the labour theory of value in the transformation to a different mode of production. This is a precondition of socio-economic change if the feminine is to cease being exploited and to be accorded the status of subject.

For Irigaray, therefore, although Marx reveals and analyses the mounting intensification of metaphysical processes as a function of the intensification of capitalistic processes, he also relies upon such a metaphysics in his endorsement of a labour theory of value and in the way he construes the constitution of value. Marx is found wanting in his endorsement of value as an abstraction derivative of human labour, and not merely because the labour valorized is characteristically that labour which has, in industrial capitalism, been the activity of men. Delphy's work aims to show that this labour, which entails the production of goods for commercial exchange, is valorized at the expense of the work of women in the so-called non-exchange, domestic economy. For Irigaray, Marx is found wanting because in his very construal of the notion of value he retains the notion of nature, matter and bodies as unproblematically given and present for the value-generating use which is made of them by the homogenizing abstract capacities of human labour. In his account, this matter is still, as it were, pliable and ready-to-hand for appropriation by the human subject notwithstanding its historical rather than mechanistic definition. She writes of Marx:

L'apport et support matériels des corps dans le fonctionnement social ne lui fait pas question, sinon en tant que production et dépense d'énergie. (1977a: 178)

Irigaray is aware that Marx's theory of value, and indeed his theory of surplus value, depend upon accounting for and calculating the amount of labour power necessary for the reproduction of labour as a commodity, and in this sense she does not question his recognition of the material cost of maintaining the body of workers. Her argument is that Marx's labour theory of value is obliged to abstract value from the bodies that produce it, since it is defined through labour power in exchange and is classified as a value which is universal in the sense that it can (however momentarily) extract from the differences of bodies their measure of value in equivalent terms. In terms of her philosophy of sexual difference, such a measure is possible only on the basis of an instituted yet disavowed difference — the difference between bodies in exchange

and the material bodies that support them. In contrast with Goux, her argument is that this is a materiality which is not symbolized by the labour theory of value nor by its remodelling as the symbolic function of active subjects.

Goux argues that the dialectic between the materiality of subject activity and the ideality of its symbolization surpasses the metaphysical split between matter and idea by its retention of the tensions between them. This in turn ensures that heterogeneous differences are necessarily suppressed and yet unified in the symbolic universal (1973: 33). Irigaray's position, however, is that if the symbolic can mop up, as it were, heterogeneous differences into a singular universal, this necessarily has to be at the expense of the material body, for such a body is truly resistant to the abstraction of a universal symbolic value because it is not singular. In order to enter the game of universal exchange measured by value as an abstraction, the bodies of exchange have already left unrecognized their material body and, with reference to a universal, become such that they may be defined as heterogeneous energy which can be channelled towards production. The differences to which Goux refers may indeed usefully be defined in relation to the broad category of the vital activities of active subjects. According to Irigaray, however, these differences and investments are already part of a particular symbolic, one which assumes a universal subject and values its investments accordingly. For Irigaray, therefore, Marx's theory does not operate outside of this symbolic; the supply of bodies (or of matter) is recognized or constituted as valuable only insofar as those bodies are viewed in accordance with a certain model of production which, by definition, devalorizes the body in its divisions between the body and value, between reproduction and production, and in its drive to define value abstractly. While Irigaray applauds the achievement of Marx for his revelation of the social relations behind the reifying objectifications of a market economy, she is thus critical of his notion of the social for its productivist model of economy which is rooted in his labour theory of value. She argues that in its universalism this value must retain a dichotomy between material and value such that it reinforces the problem of the metaphysical hierarchy between the two (1977a: 179).

For Irigaray, then, the metaphysics of the dualism of values is not merely capitalistic; it is principally patriarchal in the way that the establishment of an invariant, or general equivalent, and the process of appropriation to this equivalent, correspond to the economy of masculine sexuality in patriarchal social systems dominated by the Law-of-the-father (1977a: 179). In order to define this economy, Irigaray draws upon Freud's description and analysis of sexuality and libido. For all the inconsistencies, contradictions and untenable assumptions Irigaray finds in Freud's essays on human sexuality in *Speculum*, his thought is held to be symptomatic of patriarchal thought and to offer a relatively accurate account of sexuality in patriarchy.³⁴ When Irigaray refers to

the notion of an economy of masculine sexuality, then, it must be stressed that the form of this economy is not essential to masculinity but is rather the symptom and the realization of a particular historical social and symbolic structure. Given its dependence upon a particular structure, however, that mode of sexuality broadly conceived is assumed to have a certain universality within the bounds of the historical social structure in question. For Irigaray, it is the patriarchal social structure which is held to be essentializing as such, in that this order and its symbolic system are held to reduce all to the dominance of 'le propre', a symbolic system, 'dont l'instrument et le représentant est le nom propre: du père, de Dieu' (1977a: 169). The name-of-the-father in the patriarchal system is the structural equivalent of the figure of God in monotheistic religions. Irigaray stresses their masculinity, not merely in the 'literalness' of their representations as men (although this is important) but also owing to their place in the structure of representation and to their mode or rhythm. She argues that this mode is inappropriate to the feminine body, as I discuss in Chapter Three.

Masculinity, according to Irigaray, privileges visibility, unity, order, form, property, properness and the proper; it appropriates all to 'le Même', the Same (1977a: 85). It establishes and valorizes a single, unitary and abstract standard towards which there is a supposedly inherent linear and teleological tendency, against which all differentiations and differences are measured. It both appropriates and determines the other as its own, positing the other as the negative complement to its positive one. Thus, Irigaray cites Freud's analysis of the psycho-sexual development of the girl and the boy as symptomatic of the dominance of masculinity in patriarchal thought on the grounds that both sexes' development is related to the presence or absence of a single term, the penis, and libido is described as masculine or neuter (1977a: 69–70). Polymorphous libidinal drives are described by Freud as undergoing a successive line of development that culminates in the establishment of genital sexuality as normative and oriented towards reproduction. Thus, Irigaray sees the mode of economy of masculine sexuality as corresponding to the mode of economy of capitalist appropriation:

La jouissance, pour la sexualité masculine, consiste-t-elle en autre chose qu'en appropriation de la nature, en désir de la faire (re)produire, et en échanges de ses/ces produits avec les membres de la société? (1979a: 179)

The specific isomorphism between the capitalist economy and the masculine sexuality of the patriarchal order arises as a consequence of their correspondence as a dialectical process of constituting value. Goux explicates how they may be considered to correspond, and therefore it is worth briefly outlining his account. He describes the development from a natural economy to a money

economy and the development of an individual from identification with the mother to identification with the father (and from a polymorphous to a genital sexuality) in four stages. These follow the four stages of commodity exchange and four forms of value described by Marx (1973: 56).

In the first stage of simple value, there is the initial constitution of the commodity and the self through a specular identifying relationship with its equivalent other. This stage in itself is considered by Goux to contain the germ of all social relations for its basic dialectical model of the constitution of the self and other as self and other in exchange. One potential commodity is thus positioned in relation to another, and in order to recognize each other they affirm an initially equal identity such that they are constituted as similar. However, given their natural heterogeneity, this recognition is only possible if they each take up a distinctive position as two poles of the same expression of value. One commodity thus becomes the relative value, while the other functions as the equivalent value; one commodity sees its value mirrored in the body of the other commodity (1973: 57). The commodity that functions as the equivalent value cannot express its own value but rather becomes the physical support for the expression of the relative value of the other commodity. Thus, through a process of specular identification with the other commodity, the two commodities are recognized as such through an equivalent value.

Significantly, Goux relates this to Lacan's account of the mirror stage of psychic development, whereby the initial sense of self is found only through the image of the other (1973: 58). No commodity can make of its natural form the form of its own value, and must necessarily take as its equivalent another commodity whose use-value serves to represent its value. Similarly, Lacan's argument is that each child must form its identity through a libidinal relationship with its mother, for it cannot project its own body image of itself. The mother serves to provide an image of the child for the child, and is the equivalent value for the child's relative value. This is necessarily alienating for the child since what it gains in terms of self-recognition and identity it loses in terms of its bodily and material continuity.³⁵

The second stage is termed by Marx the total value form. The value of a commodity is represented in the other commodity, but this is extended to innumerable elements, so that a commodity finds itself reflected in many different kinds of commodities (1973: 59). Similarly, the child as a relative form of value finds its value reflected in other equivalents, such as its siblings, etc. This leads to problems, for after the first initial relative and equivalent dual relation, the commodity has a possible infinity of equations. Some commodities will operate as equivalent forms of value and as relative forms of value depending on the equation; this makes for a very contradictory network of expressions of value leading to conflict and crisis since a commodity cannot ex-

press its own definitive value and fix its own price. According to Goux, this is isomorphic to Lacan's description of the stage whereby the child's dual relationship with its mother starts to break down and the child is confronted with *l'autrui*, a world of many others, each of whom returns to him a particular determination (1973: 60). He needs to find recognition in each of the individual others and he is potentially the mirror for others, too. A state of fragmentation and ambivalence prevails.

The third stage intervenes to resolve the state of conflict and ambivalence, which is the general value form. The conflict is resolved via the simplifying intervention of one single commodity as the common ideal and unifier, a commodity which serves to introduce ratio and measure and to facilitate a common denominator such that all commodities express their value in a single commodity which is taken to be a universal or general equivalent (1973: 60). All commodities thus find their relative values expressed in one general equivalent, they all recognize themselves in the same ideal. The value of a commodity and their reciprocal relations can thus be normalized and socially validated, and they are able to enter into a universal circuit of exchange.

With the emergence of a general equivalent commodities acquire a truly social and autonomous determination. This third stage in the development of the form of value is closely related to the fourth, the money form of value. Here the world of commodities converges towards the unique commodity of Gold as its universal general equivalent, which functions as money. Gold takes on the role of embodying the equivalent values of commodities and determining their relative values. It resolves the conflict between commodities in the same way that in psychoanalysis the father intervenes to resolve the Oedipal crisis. It is in the image of the father that subjects find their absolute equivalent, rejecting the chaos of the relative forms of value and the immediate bodily unity of identification with the mother in order to be formed as equivalent individuals within one order.

Like Goux, Irigaray finds in the analysis of commodities a correspondence between the constitution of the subject and the development of a universal form of value. However, she stages it in terms of the masculine and the feminine as modalities or positions intrinsic to the structure of this development. Her position here is similar to the one she takes up in relation to Freud: Freud's analysis of the Oedipal complex both describes a psycho-social reality and yet uncritically incorporates the masculine norm of that reality into his analysis. The forms of value which apparently emerge from the activity of subjects in accordance with a necessary logic of exchange are hence seen by Irigaray to be invested with the value of masculinity. The very structure of the patriarchal system of value ensures that the interests of masculine subjects are automatically served, insofar as the masculine subject is defined abstractly ac-

cording to the parameters of this system. This is because the subject is formed on the basis of an imaginary masculine body which privileges the structural values of unity and identity, symbolized by the Law-of-the-father. The process of identification in the very formation of the ego positions the mother's body as the other. Yet this body is but the material support for an identity which is always already determined by the prevailing symbolic value. As a result, Irigaray argues that it is always the sameness of the masculine order which is reflected back to the potential subject or commodity as the premise for its identity. In the patriarchal order, the recognition of bodily differences is automatically ruled out by the equalizing conceptual abstraction of the prevailing symbolic. The mother's body is judged in terms of the father's; it is mistakenly identified as phallic but turns out to be castrated. This makes the seemingly logical and historical necessity of the intervention of the universal general equivalent something of a sham for Irigaray, because the conflictual differences which it intervenes to resolve are themselves instituted by the very immanence of this form of the universal within the process of identification. The state which Goux characterizes as a fundamental heterogeneity in which all commodities are fundamentally incommensurate is, for Irigaray, a symbolized version of what the 'natural' is taken to be by the patriarchal order. It is a heterogeneity that corresponds to the assumption of the initial polymorphous perversity of sexual drives in psychoanalysis, and the inchoate, undifferentiated magma-like state of the infant's consciousness.

What Goux takes to be a process initiated by two equivalent kinds, is for Irigaray a process enacted by one kind for and on behalf of another kind, such that commodities are the objects of exchange for and among subjects who exchange them. Hence, the mother remains the (patriarchally defined) body which reflects masculine values, and 'normal' girls are ultimately returned to that function. The process of identification and reciprocal recognition is complicated by the question of the objects or means of exchange within this process, a factor which to some extent seems to elude Goux in his attempt to outline the correspondence between the forms of value and the constitution of the subject. This is not a factor that eluded Marx himself, however, and in turning to the question of the 'guardians' or 'owners' of commodities who 'take possession of them', he notes the following in a footnote:

In the 12th century, so renowned for its piety, they included amongst commodities some very delicate things. Thus a French poet of the period enumerates amongst the goods to be found in the market of Landit, not only clothing, shoes, leather, agricultural implements, &c., but also 'femmes folles de leurs corps.' (1970: 84)

While Marx thus alludes to the question of gender parenthetically in his text (an issue I take up below), Irigaray explicitly aligns the feminine and mascu-

line with the positions of object-commodity and subject-exchanger respectively.

Although Irigaray argues that the masculinity of patriarchal sexuality has been historically effective and has served the interests of men, it is not essential to men because it is a phallic model (1977a: 85). Thus, Irigaray accepts Lacan's notion of the phallus as a signifier which is not the possession of any sex. She nonetheless holds that as a form of value it corresponds with the patriarchal imaginary of the male body, which establishes itself as the only form of value and thereby valorizes men.³⁶ Yet Irigaray acknowledges Marx's argument that, in the process of the commodification of labour and society, men are alienated from themselves and from society through the reification of social relations that this process entails. The divinity of the general equivalent and phallus are ego-ideals of unity and self-sufficiency which no-one can possibly attain. Deutscher succinctly explains Irigaray's account of men's 'alienation' thus:

As man's ideal, God must be simultaneously the opposite of man and the image of man's perfection. It is as man's opposite (immortal, where man is mortal, infinite where man is finite, disembodied where man is embodied) that God is figured as man's ideal. God thus confirms man's 'absence of divine self' in the same movement as providing the impossible ideal with which he identifies. Insofar as masculine identity is bolstered by impossible ideals, its identificatory structure is fragile. The radical divide projected between the realms of man and God is precisely what produces God as an ideal other. However, the man/God schism also leaves man 'severed' from his ideal. (1994: 94)

Man is thus split from his ideal, he is like God and yet not him, since God represents the infinite and man the finite. With such a patriarchal divine ideal, man only attains infinity after death, after transcending the limitations of material and earthly existence. Deutscher points to the consequent double split for men: they are separated from their abstract male ideal and from their body. The body is a *place* attributed to women as men attempt to become their abstract ideal (1994: 95). For Irigaray, this 'alienation' derives first and foremost from the denial of woman as the other and the subsequent use of women's bodies to support his ideals. Women's bodies become commodities because they facilitate and subtend a level of abstraction and uniformity which is only made possible by the exclusion of the body of the exchangers themselves from the process of exchange:

Mais en soumettant les corps des femmes à un équivalent général, à une valeur transcendante, sur-naturelle, les hommes ont entraîné le fonctionnement social dans un processus d'abstraction de plus en plus grand, jusqu'à y être produits, eux-mêmes, comme purs concepts: ayant surmonté toutes leurs qualités 'sensibles' et différences

individuelles, ils seraient enfin réduits à une production moyenne de travail. La puissance de cette économie pratique du métaphysique s'expliquerait par le fait que l'énergie 'physiologique' serait transformée en valeur abstraite sans la médiation d'une élaboration intelligible. Aucun sujet particulier n'en réaliserait plus l'opération. (1977a: 184)

Irigaray persistently returns to the question of the body in relation to the means of exchange and the constitution of value. The problem of the body of one potential subject having to serve as material support for the equivalent value-form of the other is that this body is always already sexed in her view, even though it is neutral for Marx and Goux. That Irigaray does not assume an initial heterogeneity of commodities or bodies is significant for her critique of patriarchy and allows for at least two different interpretations. Firstly, she could be gesturing towards a cultural construction of gender, whereby sex and gender are hamstrung in a patriarchal ideology of the masculine as value and the feminine as body. It might then be argued that 'beneath' this ideology there lies the clean slate of a fundamental heterogeneity waiting to emerge. The second interpretation is to say that her critique both endorses the veracity of the patriarchal dualism as operative and assumes that there is another sexual difference waiting to emerge (because it has been erased). I would argue that even in the earlier works Irigaray tends to assume the latter, for the notion that the body is a neutral matter worked upon by human labour, or a site of polymorphous, multifarious drives heterogeneous to the definition of a sexual (genital) order is, for her, I have suggested, the *consequence* of patriarchal thought.

Although Irigaray concurs with Marx's account of the increasingly abstract process of valuation in capitalist societies, she thus makes the issue of gender central to the social relations he finds in reified exchange. Hence Irigaray's argument that the economic and structural processes which constitute the masculine capitalist form of value deny value to the feminine. The consequences of that denial for women remain to be examined.

Commodities and Women

In her analysis of the social roles permitted to women in patriarchal societies, Irigaray asserts that women function as commodities. This claim is in one sense an analogy, yet because Irigaray questions the very term 'analogy' the relationship between commodities and women for her appears to be one of structural analogy *and* historical correspondence.

Irigaray's claim that Marx's analysis of commodities may be understood as an interpretation of the status of women in patriarchal societies (1977a: 169)

thus operates both as a discursive claim and a historical interpretation since it assumes the centrality of discourse to the making of history. She does not explicitly describe this relation as one of historical correspondence. However, she does make it clear that she is not assuming a relation of similarity between them 'as if' they were merely parallel cases or two fundamentally different and autonomous orders with similar functions. She is not, therefore, drawing an analogy and assuming an implicit hierarchy within representation whereby commodities circulate in the realm of socio-economic reality and the notion of women-as-commodities circulates in discourse as a second-order reflection of this reality. Such an analogous relation and its implicit hierarchy is the product of a discourse which assumes an invariance within what are deemed to be different orders — an invariance that privileges one over the other and then suggests a hierarchy between them in accordance with a phallic-capitalist economy. For this reason Irigaray does not use the term 'analogy' as such, and she defends her strategy of seeming to draw an analogy between women and commodities by arguing that the analogy cannot be merely ignored but must be returned to, as it were. She explains in a footnote:

Objectera-t-on que cette interprétation est de caractère analogique? J'en accepte la question, à condition qu'elle soit aussi, et d'abord, posée à l'analyse que fait Marx de la marchandise. Aristote, 'un géant de la pensée' selon Marx, ne déterminait-il pas le rapport de la forme à la matière par analogie à celui du masculin et du féminin? Retourner à la différence des sexes revient donc, plutôt, à retraverser l'analogisme. (1977a: 170)

Going back through the analogy means considering the hierarchical assumptions already implicit in Aristotle's metaphysical division between form and matter, and revealing the stakes of sexual difference in this division which Aristotle makes explicit by analogy. Irigaray is thus claiming that, if her own discussion of sexual relations appears to derive from the seriously economic, Aristotle's own division between form and matter — a division which makes possible Marx's analysis of the value of commodities — itself derives from concepts of the feminine and the masculine. A veiled concept of sexual difference is thus already operative within discourse; it has given rise to the possibility of abstract form and value and has informed social orders by providing the conceptual parameters underlying any economic exchange.

Irigaray's analysis thus assumes that these concepts of sexual difference operate within Marx's own analysis as the unconscious residues of a metaphysical tradition. Her style in the essay, 'Le marché des femmes' is to engage in a detailed textual analysis of Marx's analysis of commodities in the first section of *Capital* in a manner which is typical of much of her work in its first stage. She closely pursues the contours of his argument and integrates quotations

from Marx's text into her own, producing the effect of a reading against the grain which is, nevertheless, seemingly supported by the words of Marx (in translation). Insisting upon the operation of the question of sexual difference in Marx's analysis, her tone can at times appear mocking and ironic owing to her apparent unwillingness to take Marx 'literally' and her readiness to play with the laws of language. In this case, using the French translation of Marx, she is able to play upon the fact that *marchandise* is a feminine noun which thereby shares the feminine pronoun *elle* with *femme* and add comments to Marx's own as if the two nouns were synonymous.

The question of irony also emerges with respect to Marx's own willingness to make sexual remarks in his description of commodities — remarks which are for Marx intended merely as analogous asides — but which, for Irigaray, are slips indicative of an unconscious logic operating in the overall structure of the analysis. For example, she quotes Marx from the French translation of *Capital* by Roy: 'la réalité que possède la valeur de la marchandise diffère en ceci de l'amie de Falstaff, la veuve Eveillé, qu'on ne sait pas par où la prendre' (Irigaray 1977a: 172). Marx's aside is ironic because for a moment he appears to flout in all seriousness the law of economic discourse which prohibits the intervention of rather less serious sexual matters into its exchange, but as irony it merely affirms the law it denies. No-one assumes Marx's aside to be a serious and significant component of his analysis of commodities. In contrast, much of Irigaray's essay may at first appear as mockery in its refusal to accept in a serious manner the terms of this economic discourse, which demand the exclusion of the sexual. In other respects, her essay may appear to be ironic owing to its clear adherence to the laws of economic discourse as expounded in Marx's analysis of commodities which nevertheless flouts the restrictions of those laws.

The mockery and irony of Irigaray's essay is an indication of just how seriously she takes Marx's analysis. This is because her account of patriarchy insists that she, as woman and commodity, cannot enter into discursive exchange and be taken seriously. By definition, she is attempting to bring the issue of the sexual into economic matters since women are placed as the 'sex'. What is more, and as a result of this placing, Irigaray's intervention aims not simply to challenge the respective economic roles of women and men but to expose the 'sexuality' of the economic. This is an oxymoron for patriarchal thought which contravenes its laws and can thereby expect to incur ridicule or derision. Yet, for Irigaray, to engage with economics on its own terms, as an objective discourse of law which may now be considered historical but should not be considered sexual, is to engage with it on masculine terms. As a woman, she anticipates not being taken seriously because she *cannot* be taken seriously; she cannot both be a woman and come-to-be in exchange, because

the standard of exchange valorizes forms of equivalence that deny her difference and her potential forms.

Irigaray's analysis presents women with an impasse which matches the patriarchal absolute; indeed, for Irigaray the former is an outcome of the latter. It is this assertion of the non-existence of women to which Plaza objects (1977); it implies that, if Irigaray is correct, she cannot really speak this truth, because she cannot engage in the linguistic exchange that might make it apparent. It is certainly indicative of how all-pervasive, trenchant and determinant Irigaray believes the sexual division to be; an attribution of a kind of universality to the *sexual* division which she carries through to her transformed notion of sexual difference in the subsequent stages of her work. That she assumes this impasse can be overcome is arguably implicit in her mimicry. She explains:

Jouer de la mimésis, c'est donc, pour une femme, tenter de retrouver le lieu de son exploitation par le discours, sans s'y laisser simplement réduire. C'est se soumettre — en tant que du côté du 'sensible', de la 'matière'... — à des 'idées', notamment d'elle, élaborées dans/par une logique masculine, mais pour faire 'apparaître', par un effet de répétition ludique, ce qui devrait rester occulté: le recouvrement d'une possible opération du féminin dans le langage. C'est aussi 'dévoiler' le fait que, si les femmes miment si bien, c'est qu'elles ne se résorbent pas simplement dans cette fonction. *Elles restent aussi ailleurs*: autre insistance de 'matière', mais aussi de 'jouissance'. (1977a: 74)

While women have been denied the status of subject, and can only speak directly in masculine terms, the subversive mimesis Irigaray is proposing here depends upon an apparent qualification within her analysis. The denial of women, although absolute, has never been achievable. She does not suggest that women have been excessive to male systems of representation in a discursive or 'logical' sense alone. By such a discursive excess women are assumed to form the negative other to the masculine 'one' whose positive instantiation thus somewhat paradoxically creates and depends upon what exceeds it (as its negative) in order to sustain itself. Rather, for Irigaray women are excessive because they represent a truly different kind of matter and *jouissance* to men who appropriated that difference as their own negative other; the otherness in the form of sexual difference was already there but was denied. The notion of the other as negative should be understood, therefore, as the product of the *challenge* of a feminine otherness, a feminine which is denied. It is not the consequence of a 'one' who sets up otherness through his own positive self-affirmation and then 'finds' (and founds) the feminine to locate this unwanted excess. This argument regarding the 'one' implies that, as a result, the feminine is always completely determined by masculinity. In Irigaray's view, potential women have always been outside the determinations of masculinity,

and not simply as *his* negative and lack, although they have only ever entered masculine systems of representation as negative and lacking.³⁷

Mimesis is thus an *initial* 'path' for Irigaray: she believes the only way she has into masculine economies is by affirming the feminine's subordination within discourse (1977a: 74). She uses 'mimicry' and 'mimesis' interchangeably, thus fully exploiting their connotations. Together, they represent that which has been assigned to the feminine by a masculine value that claims the absolute for itself. This consequently entails: the imitative representation of an apparent nature or human behaviour as in the mimesis of art; the representation of the other's alleged words in one's own speech as in rhetoric; the resemblance of one species to another in the anticipation of protection as in biology; the condition of the hysteric who imitates an organic disease in accordance with a bodily morphology rather than anatomy. For Irigaray, women have been situated as mimics and have become hysterics because their 'art' is to function to represent nature for the masculine in accordance with his modalities of value. They use masculine language 'excessively' or rhetorically because it does not belong to them; they copy the masculine in order to remain within the 'species': they express themselves bodily (and pathologically) because there is an interdiction upon their language within patriarchal society. The nature that women represent for men is therefore a copy of a copy, an exchange value; they hysterically mimic the mimesis that men make of nature in order to make of their bodies a representation for the desire of the dominant sex. In and by the acquisition of commodities man strives to return to himself and his 'nature'. Yet, as 'nature', women themselves are also the material source of men's own mimesis — a mimesis which is a reproduction from nature (a use-value) — and it is from here that the potential for reversal and 'playing' with mimesis derives (1977a: 74).

Given that Irigaray's affirmation of mimicry is simply an initial 'path' into discourse, her thought does not remain within the bounds of mimicry and hysteria. She does not propose mimicry as an affirmative celebration of the feminine's capacity to function as a disruptive excess to the self-appropriating masculine order; that would be to remain within the limits and possibilities determined by that order. Nor does she affirm femininity as the truth of a capitalistic-patriarchal and metaphysical system simply because that femininity can reveal the illusion of essence, since the feminine copy (of nature) is a copy of the feminine (as nature), an infinite regress of copies for which there is no grounding original. The feminine 'elsewhere' is not an essence waiting to be unveiled in its truth, but neither is it a constantly shifting series of instantiations devoid of any possible shared horizon. Rather, it is envisaged by Irigaray as a place of the potential feminine located among the scraps and shards — women's lot in an order that leaves them in a state of abandon or

dereliction. In fact, women's role as mimics is actually facilitated and enhanced by the dislocation that remains between their potential and their mimicry: they are not simply taken in by the function of mimicry. For Irigaray, there remains a femininity which can operate mimicry in a subordinate manner, and thus seriously represent what the masculine refuses to take seriously. Alternatively, because of their distance from its operation, women can operate mimicry in a defiant manner, mimicking by mockery the masculine's mimesis. Irigaray attempts to defy Marx by 'copying' his representation of the economic as 'he' would expect; yet she mocks this expectation by not complying with its basic premise, hence through the copy revealing another point of view.

That Irigaray can so effectively *play* with mimesis is in some respects an own-goal for her. Her argument is that women are such good mimics because they are not totally taken in by that function, suggesting that they can both copy masculine discourse and resist it. Yet Irigaray's own 'mimetic' writing entails more than that; it displays a 'mastery' of the masculine discourses with which she is engaging, even though the mastery is not displayed as a discourse 'on' Marx, but is internal to her form of hermeneutics. She is thus able to analyse discourse along with any man, as her own interviews and critical/analytical essays make clear. This does not contradict her view that for the feminine to emerge in discourse, masculine conceptual writing is inappropriate. However, it does beg the question as to whether mimicry is the only path open to her, since the very power of her own mimetic discourse suggests that she has already gone beyond the dichotomy of masculine as concept and feminine as copy. This is not to agree with Moi, for whom Irigaray's mimicry is a 'perfect reproduction of the logic of the Same', because it merely demonstrates masculinity's version of femininity rather than subverting it (1985: 142). On the contrary, it would seem that Irigaray has already gone beyond her own analysis because her writing does not simply affirm femininity in the *hope* of seeing another form arise but rather assumes that other form and relies on it in order to engage with male discourse 'as if' she were the feminine woman it takes her to be.

Nevertheless, although her writing may appear satirical, there is probably less irony in Irigaray than in Marx. For while she does indeed follow the structure of Marx's argument and confirm the laws of which he writes as operative within history, her strategy is not to affirm the ultimate necessity of those laws by simply flouting them. Her aim is to undermine the law of patriarchal society and thought in order to reconstitute subjectivity. Therefore, when Irigaray introduces the sexual to the economic in mocking tones it is with the serious intention of undermining the seriousness of a sexually indifferent notion of economy in order to reconstitute economy in different terms.

The claim that Marx's analysis of commodities and value describes the social status of women in patriarchal societies is ultimately a serious claim and not a question of irony or analogy. It is, rather, a description of the inner mechanism of an economic situation in which the place of women corresponds to the place of commodities in the structure of socio-economic and discursive exchanges.

In her description of women as commodities, therefore, Irigaray argues that women are subject to the same metaphysical split as commodities; they operate as use-value and exchange-value in the economy (1977a: 171). As use-value they supply the matter of the means of exchange between male subjects: they are the womb-matrix and mother-earth, nourishing male speculation (1977a: 74). As exchange value they function in the realm of abstraction yet are fundamentally estranged from that abstraction since it is established as a necessary alienation from their corporeality. This is not only because it is an ideal abstraction but because the ideal does not correspond with their corporeal form. Their body reflects the general equivalent but does not embody it because their body provides the mirror for value formed in an image of masculinity (1977a: 182). Women are therefore split, as far as Irigaray is concerned, and while this is interpreted in Lacanian psychoanalysis as necessary to the constitution of subjective identity, Irigaray argues that the split on the feminine side does not facilitate the passage from nature to culture for women. Men may experience a split between their nature, their corporeality, and their symbolic identity as necessary if they are to engage in speculative self-reflection, although as argued above it is necessarily alienating. For women, however, the prevailing symbolic order is one constituted in terms of the masculine. As a result, they are split between a form of nature and a symbolic in which they cannot achieve symbolic identity as women; they cannot accede to culture.

As use-value, then, women are the material support of symbolic exchanges and of exchange value. Since use-value is purely functional and has no end in itself, it is possible to suggest that for Irigaray use-value represents the ultimate place to which women are reduced in patriarchy. Yet even use-value is not their own as such; it does not 'belong' to them. As noted above, according to Marx, use-value may somewhat obliquely inhere in the nature of a thing, but the use-value that is socially recognized is that which is viable for exchange as the product of the force of human labour. For Irigaray these are the 'products' of women's reproductive function: children and the labour force (1977a: 170). Marx's ambiguity in gesturing towards the possibility of a value beyond the bounds of human labour underlines the ambiguous place of feminine potential in Irigaray's analysis. However, her articulation of this potential is not to be understood straightforwardly as a value given by nature which is

bereft of human culture, for that would once again affirm the dichotomy between nature and culture and place Irigaray's feminine in a potentially essentializing position. Rather, as a place beyond the labour of the masculine, a kind of excess that bespeaks the remnants of an earlier era but which yet remains susceptible to appropriation by masculine labour, it is related to the place of a different value in Marx's discourse on value. What is clear is that Irigaray associates the use-value for exchange with the non-recognition of the feminine, since the women who serve as use-value are merely worth what men make of them.

As exchange value, women are subject to a form of the absolute which is masculine. Women are defined in relation to this transcendental divine which produces them as equivalents in its own masculine image. Hence, women have no ideal to mirror their own value; they are defined according to the law of a masculine God. Irigaray uses this analysis to explain, not to justify or dismiss, cultural stereotypes of Western women which are most notably endorsed by psychoanalysis. Once again, she does not deny the woman of patriarchal thought but locates that woman as the consequence of such a thought. She thus positions the destructive traits associated with femininity in the context of a social situation in which relations between women are inevitably very poor; she does not attempt to disagree with the descriptive fact of such a destructive femininity. Hence, women are deemed to lack essence and to have no intrinsic value; they are hysterical and are narcissistic; they are rivalrous. If women seem shallow and appear to lack moral worth it is the consequence of 'putting on an appearance' to reflect male value. This, in turn, makes them frivolous because (as commodities) they are not required to represent utility (1977a: 173). Their narcissism is also the consequence of putting on an appearance through an apparent lack of immanent value. Since men desire to appropriate signs of value to enhance their standing they need their objects to reflect and embody value for them; as a result women need to display themselves as value. Covering up a lack of immanent value requires an elaborate display to project what men take to be a natural femininity, hence women appear narcissistic. The evanescence of this value means that it is 'fickle and hard to grasp', and owing to this enigma they become fetish objects: women paradoxically represent man's impossible ideal and its alleged embodiment (1977a: 178). The inevitable striving to possess this ideal becomes a polygamous cult. The result for women is that they become hysterics; their bodies express pathologically the split between what they are required to express — the male form of value and an existence for others — and the potential forms of their own bodies within an existence for themselves.

The split in women's value also corresponds to the split within bourgeois society between the public and the private: between the rational public sphere of

regulated exchange and the unregulated private sphere of individual use and self-interest. Irigaray's analysis suggests less that women fit into this division, than that it is a division which they define and facilitate, with the result that there is no clear division because the public depends upon the private. Thus, women are the structural equivalents of the private sphere where use-value reigns, but its utility supports the socially recognized cultural activity of male exchange in the public sphere.

This apparent social division relates to the three social and symbolic roles Irigaray identifies for women in patriarchy: the mother, the virgin and the prostitute (1977a: 180). The mother represents pure use-value that is not exchanged; she is the nature from which man produces at the 'agricultural' stage of development. She does produce and reproduce, but her products are deemed valuable only to the extent that they bear the man's name. Hence, the mother represents a form of private property meant for private consumption; her place is within his house. Indeed, for Irigaray the 'natural' body of woman provides the home and space for the psychic dwelling of man (1984: 17). Although man believes himself to have been created in his own image, he is dependent upon this earthly dwelling he likes to deny behind closed doors. In his view, the mother does not act or will but rather maintains, providing the sustenance for man's intervening form. Although women are ultimately reduced to motherhood in patriarchy, Irigaray stresses that the mother does not have the identity of a woman. She merely provides the body for mirror identification, not the form; because she is attributed no form she is rejected as formless (and castrated) in society. Whereas she is prevented from offering an ideal or a form to her daughter, her ultimate achievement is to reproduce that which carries the mark of value: the son. She cannot enter into circuits of value herself but she is venerated to the extent that she can reproduce that value in a son. Incest is prohibited in order to maintain the abstract value of exchange relations; the son must deny his desire for his mother as a productive nature and valorize the idealized male form, otherwise the abstract distinction between use-value and exchange value would become untenable (1977a: 180).

The figure of the virgin is a form in which women can enter into social exchange, but for Irigaray she represents pure exchange value. As such she does not really exist; she is simply a sign of the relations between men since it is the father who is paid by another man for the potential use-value of the daughter his woman has reproduced (1977a: 168). This exchange value is realized in her use, but such use is a transgression of the law of exchange value because it 'breaks' the threshold between the abstract potential of value and its use by returning the virgin body to a use-value. Given that in his ego-ideal man believes himself split from nature, the return to nature thus appears necessarily violent, a form of violation of himself and his sign of exchange. Since

that exchange value is divine, Irigaray is suggesting that its use is a form of sacrifice. This is because it breaks the split between use and exchange which will ultimately affirm the sacredness of exchange value, because it is only in use that the abstract distinction between them can be realized. For Irigaray, patriarchal religions are characteristically sacrificial;³⁸ once sacrificed, the virgin herself has no value as such and is returned to private property (1977a: 181).

As for the prostitute, in Irigaray's analysis she is a rather more ambiguous social figure who is both tolerated and condemned (1977a: 181). The prostitute represents use which is exchanged, not as potential use but as use which is already used. Contrary to convention, therefore, the more she is 'used' the more valuable is her body in exchange. Her use is thus not 'natural', but is a usefulness created by men in exchange. Irigaray's analysis suggests that in certain respects the prostitute represents the truth of exchange between men and between men and women in patriarchy. She represents a body which is bought and sold for use between men explicitly for non-natural and sexual purposes, but these purposes (and hence the prostitute) must remain hidden. Otherwise, the sham of heterosexuality would be exposed, and the 'homosexuality' of relations between men via the detour of women's bodies would become apparent.

Each of these roles represents symbolically what woman is for man; they are the functional acts to which woman is reduced. They are not forms of female identity for women because they are simply the means to male-defined ends. In accordance with her analysis of the 'inner mechanism' of patriarchy, what is significant for Irigaray is less how particular woman experience and appropriate these roles, than how they function in a masculine order. That she delineates *three* women is significant given the prominence of 'three' in the systems she describes as patriarchal: the three of the Oedipal triangle, the Christian trinity, the three moments of the dialectic. This clearly relates to the three women for man described by Freud: his mother, his lover and his destroyer.³⁹ It also repeats a version of the three Marys of the New Testament: Mary the virgin, Mary the mother, and Mary Magdelene, the latter being unrepresentable as a further instantiation of the same woman because of her ambiguous status as prostitute. In each case this apparent multiplicity in the form of three is returned to the one as mere manifestations of, or moments within, an original unity. In Irigaray's analysis this unity is a male one which determines the functions of woman. In that sense, her delineation of the three roles of women is not reductive because it is once again a description of the functions patriarchy permits women. However, Irigaray's endorsement of this triadic schema of patriarchal thought as operative within the patriarchal social order is again significant for what she retains of that thought. Certainly the

aesthetics of the argument are retained by Irigaray in her later articulations of a female identity. As I go on to discuss, she puts forward suggestions for a female trinity based on the mother–daughter–virgin triad and proposes divine female values in the form of motherhood and virginity, with womanhood as the implicit principle of their unity. Although they are put forward as identities rather than roles, they still limit the identity of woman to three key terms which can be unified, albeit in accordance with a different notion of unity. In this respect, Irigaray's attempts to go beyond patriarchal thought are thus dependent upon her analysis of patriarchy. They are dependent not merely in terms of how she diagnoses the problem of patriarchy, but also in what she carries through from that diagnosis as potential models for the feminine and for sexual difference. Hence, the reductiveness of the descriptions of women in patriarchal thought is not denied by Irigaray but is attributed to the structural and historical consequence of that thought. She thereby challenges that reductiveness but, significantly, retains aspects of the structure of patriarchal thought in her later attempts to imagine a female culture.

For Irigaray, patriarchy produces conditions in which the status of women is profoundly pathological. Masculine value reigns in a godly and omniscient fashion, and in her early work Irigaray can only mimic the femininity offered her. Mimicry is merely one of her strategies, however, and I now examine her attempt to move from a negative critique of patriarchy towards an affirmation of divine value in the feminine.

NOTES

1. The argument in this chapter revolves around Marx's argument concerning the constitution of value and his assertion that this correlates with a given historical state of religious conceptions, rather than with his remarks on religion specifically. As Denys Turner notes, Marx did not write extensively upon religion as such, and what he did write was not developed (1983: 1). Assuming that religion would 'wither away' and irritated with the Young Hegelian pre-occupation with religion, Marx saw no point in developing a polemic against religion. In fact, his polemic against Hegelians such as Feuerbach was in itself a polemic against religion.
2. Irigaray's relation to historical materialism and her analysis of the correspondence between capitalism and patriarchy have not been central concerns in engagements with her thought. Margaret Whitford observes the restricted scope of Irigaray's articulation of the relationship between the material and the symbolic (1991a: 21), and she points to the absence of any extended discussion of Irigaray's relation to materialism. I do not claim to respond here to her call for a 'thorough elucidation' of Irigaray's relation to materialism (1991a: 196). This chapter engages with the issue of materialism as it relates to the question of the divine in Irigaray's philosophy; it is not intended as an exhaustive examination of her relation to materialist philosophy in all its guises. My aim is to focus on her relation to historical materialism in a textually-specific manner. I am, however, indebted to Whitford's suggestion in that volume that Irigaray's writ-

ing on Marx could usefully be read in relation to Goux's *Économie et Symbolique* (1973), as I explain below.

3. Plaza goes on to argue that Irigaray abandons the criticisms she makes of psychoanalysis regarding its biological and anatomical reductionism, and its absence of a critique of the historical determinations of women's destiny. Plaza takes this view because she expects a sociological stance to emerge from Irigaray's criticisms and her invocations of Marx (1978: 6); the history of which Irigaray speaks is as much the history of ontology and the ontological conditions of possible knowledge as they are a reference to the ideological conditions of thought as Marxists would have it. While I am sympathetic towards some of Plaza's complaints because Irigaray's references to Marx and Engels in *Speculum* are extremely allusive rather than explanatory, I believe they themselves lose their validity to the extent that her polemic against Irigaray makes her reluctant to accept the status of Irigaray's discourse as a philosophical text which itself throws into question the nature of the social. It is notable that although Plaza quotes from *Ce Sexe*, she does not refer to Irigaray's essay on Marx contained in that volume. On the other hand, I find Irigaray's occasional polemics against sociology, or the 'logic of the social' (she often writes *socio-logie*), rather dismissive (Irigaray 1987a: 436; 1991: 5; 1996: 219). She does not believe that subjectivity can be 'reduced' to the 'social', in the way that some sociological studies tend to do when investigating women's status in terms of existing social parameters alone. By doing this, she argues, they fail to investigate ontological issues and discourage the creation of the new (1987a: 436). However, in order to imagine and bring about the social transformations Irigaray herself desires, knowledge of the social is helpful and necessary and, I believe, deserves more credit than Irigaray allows.
4. It is also steeped in the Freudo-Marxism which prevailed in French intellectual culture in the early 1970s, as I discuss below.
5. For a discussion of this debate, which compared ancient law with that of existing primitive societies, see Rosalind Coward (1983).
6. The analysis of patriarchy led to assertions of the universality of men's dominance over women, and was thus in some cases predicated upon notions of an essential nature for all men and for all women across time and space in order to explain that apparent universality.
7. Bachofen's extensive investigations of the cultures of antiquity led him to argue that matriarchy was a stage of human culture which cannot be reduced to some vague pre-historical or pre-cultural phase. He argued that, as a cultural system, matriarchy had its own principles and values which are to be distinguished both from the period preceding it, the period of hetaerism and primitive promiscuity, and from the period following it, the patriarchal system which led to matriarchy's demise. He refers to the Lyceans as offering most evidence of matriarchal cultures, a culture in which children were named exclusively after their mothers and only daughters possessed the right of inheritance (1968: 70). He also views human culture as defined by religion: 'There is one mighty lever of all civilization, and that is religion' (1968: 85). Matriarchy is a religious system entailing the law of the material-corporeal; it assumes the unity and harmony of all life and favours peace; it is a regulated naturalism. Its principle is a universal one, ensuing from the universality of motherly love, in contradistinction to the restrictive principle of patriarchy which ensues from the intellectual quality of fatherly love. Irigaray has many thematic affinities with Bachofen, not least a refusal to hierarchically differentiate between myth and history; Bachofen argues that these are merely different modes of expression (1968: 75). Thus, it is not surprising that Irigaray cites Bachofen approvingly in her later work (1990a: 29, 31–32). She does so principally to refute the idea that history is necessarily patriarchal, yet she uses the

- specific details of Bachofen's argument to list the elements of female law which correspond to female subjectivity as she envisages it (1990a: 112).
8. See, for example, Erich Fromm (1970). Fromm discusses the relevance of Bachofen's theory of mother right for the contemporary period and attributes its significance to a number of socio-political changes, including the failure of patriarchy to fulfil its function, the democratic revolution, mounting consumerism, as well as the women's revolution. Hence, Fromm's assessment does not attribute interest in matriarchal systems primarily to the influence of the women's movement.
 9. This dichotomy retained its *puissance* at the fundamental level of analysis and at the level of polemics in spite of the nuances of particular analyses. The mood of more recent feminist thought has altered considerably, ineluctably influenced by the wave of post-modernism and its critique of historical metanarratives which claim universal truths and engage in single factor explanatory strategies; see J.-F. Lyotard (1979). The debate over essentialism is also a product of that wave in the sense that it has questioned the universality and unity of the category 'woman'.
 10. For further discussion of dialectical logic, see Chapter Three.
 11. See Heidegger (1972). Mortensen (1993) comments upon the problems of appropriations of Irigaray's texts which tend to treat her language instrumentally and to *account* for her polysemy, as if it (or indeed any language) yielded itself for our claims and control, when for Heidegger, Mortensen and in some respects, Irigaray, it is always language that claims us (1993: 29-30). This study is equally culpable. However, Irigaray's own linguistic studies into the sexuation of discourse (1985b; 1989b) do not merely suggest a Heideggerian awaiting and dwelling in language because they lead her to propose somewhat deliberate transformations in linguistic usage.
 12. The femininity of matter is discussed further in Chapter Three.
 13. Marx and Engels argue that: 'Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organization. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life' (1973: 19).
 14. Kathryn Bond Stockton also draws this comparison between Irigaray and Delphy, but she does so in order to illustrate the convergence of the two theorists' positions (1994: 64-65). Stockton argues that Delphy's domestic mode of production, although it meets and relates to the capitalist mode, concerns 'productivity that is forged *outside of capitalism's visible circuits of exchange*' from which the husband profits and which provides the crucial link with Irigaray's notion of women as commodities who cannot possess but are possessed (1994: 64). Stockton thus argues that both Irigaray and Delphy stress women's ties to each other as a class, and that consequently they 'join hands' across women's bodies in spite of their apparent differences (1994: 65). However, Delphy does not concern herself with sexuality as such, as Stockton acknowledges, and this is a fundamental point of difference between Irigaray and Delphy. Via the question of sexual difference and its relation to the constitution of subjectivity, Irigaray does not argue that women are outside of the visible circuits of capitalist exchange, even if they themselves are 'invisible'. Her argument is that they are very much within that exchange as the matter that sustains masculine exchange, for the masculine patriarchal subject uses matter (which is sexualized as feminine) to support his abstract and accumulative notion of his self whatever the 'mode of production'. In that sense, *pace* Stockton, Irigaray does not truly treat women as a class as does Delphy even though she assumes their commonality.
 15. The following passage from Marx and Engels' *Feuerbach: Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlooks*, can be cited in support of Irigaray's argument here. In it

they it raise the issue of the relation to the 'natural' in the production of life as one part of a dualism and then do not appear to develop it: 'The production of life, both of one's own labour and of fresh life in procreation, now appears as a double relationship: on the one hand as a natural, on the other as a social relationship. By social we understand the co-operation of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what manner and to what end. It follows from this that a certain mode of production, or industrial stage, is always combined with a certain mode of co-operation, or social stage, and this mode of co-operation is itself a 'productive force'. Further, that the multitude of productive forces accessible to men determines the nature of society, hence, that the "history of humanity" must always be studied and treated in relation to the history of industry and exchange' (1973: 33). Producing oneself and producing children are thus equated by Marx and Engels here by a sleight of hand: although both are equally 'natural' and 'social' (so they do not straightforwardly reduce procreation to the natural alone), the 'natural' is readily assimilated to the determinants of the 'social' on the grounds that humanity's history is one of industry and exchange. Marx and Engels also make this reduction of what is 'natural' to the 'social' by arguing earlier that the 'family' is the first social relationship (and so is naturally social), but that it becomes subordinate to other social relationships as humanity develops and must be analysed in terms of the social (1973: 32).

16. De Beauvoir concludes: 'Si nous jetons un coup d'oeil d'ensemble sur cette histoire, nous voyons s'en dégager plusieurs conclusions. Et d'abord celle-ci: toute l'histoire des femmes a été faite par les hommes' (1949, Vol. 1: 221). It would be perfectly feasible to envisage a similar account of the history of Western women informed by Irigaray's assertion that woman is the other of the other. I am not aware of any such account at present.
17. It is not certain that Irigaray draws on Goux in her work because she nowhere cites his text or makes reference to him, although it is possible that she does draw on him. Clearly, Irigaray again has an independent knowledge of Marx and Freud and does not necessarily need to refer to a text such as Goux's. However, it is apparent that Goux and Irigaray share a common intellectual approach which emerges from this context of a renewed Freudo-Marxist alliance and yet insists upon the significance of the subject. Goux's text is useful here as an aid to explicating Irigaray's position, and, as noted, is used for that end, rather than as an exercise in tracing intellectual debt. That said, Irigaray and Goux have certainly worked in conjunction with one another subsequently, with Goux contributing a paper to the aforementioned issue of *Inchiesta* edited by Irigaray and another, 'L'oubli de Hestia', in the special issue of *Langages* she edited (1987), which Irigaray cites approvingly (1990a: 20). Goux's respect for Irigaray's thought is evident in his article, 'Luce Irigaray Versus the Utopia of the Neutral Sex' (Burke et al 1994).
18. Irigaray's reworking of Hegel's dialectic is discussed in Chapter Three.
19. Although Irigaray's concerns with science and technology follow on from Heidegger, she also expresses her concerns in Hegelian language: 'La technique, en effet, constitue un en-soi que l'homme ne peut dialectiser en pour-soi de part en part. Le règne de l'esprit absolu est devenu impossible. Si l'homme a cru pouvoir maîtriser la nature, il ne peut, de nos jours, accomplir la maîtrise de la technique' (1992: 99).
20. In her early work, Irigaray does not generally use the discourse of alienation, although she does, in fact, mimic it in her discourse on Marx, stating that women are obliged to '[se prêter] à l'aliénation dans la consommation' (1977a: 169). Stockton usefully and succinctly argues that: 'Before post-structuralism, *alienation* conveyed the sense that the dominant culture's allowed relations to one's body fundamentally conflicted with one's real self — from which one was alienated. Now, in a postmodern period, as

- wary of real selves as real bodies, we cannot use any determinate sense of original or essential selves by which to mark (as we desperately need to do) our alienations' (1994: 9–10). Stockton goes on to argue that 'post-structuralists', such as Irigaray, thus project a spiritual faith in the unrepresentable body ('God' as lack or absence) in order not to be 'alienated' from the indeterminacy of what is beyond or escapes patriarchal and metaphysical real, true and present selves. Without wishing to equate Irigaray's thought with a discourse of alienation that has not been through a critique of the 'real' self, I believe that it is nevertheless closer to a Hegelian-Marxist account of history as man's alienation from and then return to himself than Stockton would allow. Indeed, in one of her most recent texts, *Être Deux* (1997) Irigaray does use the discourse of alienation in relation to a discussion of Sartre in order to argue that the relationship to nature needs to be rethought (1997: 162); her method engages with the language of Sartre but does not mimic it. Because Stockton interprets Irigaray as embracing lack, her interpretation of Irigaray's 'feminine' beyond remains within the discourse of lack. She does not allow for Irigaray's evocation of a feminine that lies beyond and anterior to patriarchal conceptions *and* lack, because that would apparently suggest a return to some (bodily) essence of femininity. In Lacanian terms, lack comes about from the necessary split of the subject from the body in order enter language in which the subject comes-to-be. The subject cannot therefore 'be' and return to its body because it can only be formed from the lack of its body: there is no return from lack and therefore lack is not 'alienation' that will be overcome in the Hegelian-Marxian sense. Although Irigaray does not accept the idea of essences to which subjects return, she does seek to articulate a feminine which is appropriate to the female body that is not simply lacking. This is discussed further in Chapter Three.
21. This is also her argument against Lacan. In an article first published in the journal *Critique* in 1977, and later published in *Parler n'est jamais neutre* (1985), entitled, 'La misère de la psychanalyse', Irigaray attacks Lacanian analysts for their presentation of psychoanalytical thought as absolute and beyond historical foundation, and for their ensuing role as defenders of patriarchal culture as if it were the only culture possible. The title is clearly an allusion to Marx's essay, 'The Poverty of Philosophy', where Marx denounces Proudhon for ignoring the historical specificity of economic categories. The argument Irigaray makes here raises similar objections to those levelled against Lévi-Strauss, and it is the infusion of structuralist thought as science into psychoanalysis by Lacan that compounds the problem of ahistoricism in Freud to which Irigaray objects (refer to note 34 below). Dylan Evans (1996) defends Lacan against Irigaray and indeed the tendency to represent the former as an ahistorical thinker by assimilating him to the structuralist movement. Evans cites Lacan's view that the Oedipal complex is not in fact 'eternal' but emerged at the moment of the passage from matriarchy and patriarchy, which is structurally related to the emergence of written history. He also cites Lacan's insistence that the concept of the ego is a specifically modern concept (1996: 37). He explains Irigaray's failure to recognize this discussion of historical specificity in Lacan by hypothesizing that Irigaray was confusing Lacan's thought with the reductionist interpretations of his work among many of his followers. However, this argument does not hold since all of the quotations cited by Evans as evidence of Irigaray's attack upon Lacan (1996: 38) are taken from sections of her article where she is quoting liberally from the psychoanalyst Safouan and commenting in response to these quotations. Irigaray's article is also clearly addressed to 'Messieurs les psychanalystes' in the plural, parodying Freud's opening address to 'Ladies and Gentlemen' in his 1933 lecture on femininity. There is no doubt, however, that Irigaray is critical of Lacan's thought explicitly and implicitly throughout her work, most notably in 'Cosi Fan Tutti' in *Ce Sexe*, where Lacan is quoted as detesting

- History (1977a: 99). Irigaray accuses him not of ignoring history but of refusing to interpret his own discourse in terms of the historical sexualization of discourse. Therefore, although Lacan may (however reluctantly or enthusiastically) refer to and consider historical determinants, Irigaray argues that he refuses to consider history in relation to a notion of history as sexualized. This she sees as further manifested in his refusal to listen to women except on his own phallogocentric terms. The consequence is that while Irigaray takes the patriarchal order and phallogocentric thought to be historically derived, Lacan assumes them to be historically necessary, a necessity which tends to be interpreted universally for want of a structural capacity to allow for the possibility of another order within his thought.
22. Muraro (1994) argues that Irigaray modifies her polemic against patriarchy in her work. She contrasts Irigaray's analysis of the *Oresteia* in *Le-corps-à-corps avec la mère* (1981), where patriarchy is deemed to come about through the violence of an unpunished matricide, with her later assertions that patriarchy has *erased* the traces of its anterior and matriarchal culture (1989a: 113). Muraro draws this contrast as part of her argument that Irigaray's position has changed. Yet it is possible to argue that both are valid for Irigaray: there was and is violence in the seizure of power on the part of men which nevertheless entails a somewhat 'unwitting' forgetfulness of the possibility of the other female culture they have denied.
 23. For further discussion of Irigaray and homosexuality, see Grosz (Burke et al 1994).
 24. See particularly her lecture, 'Le mystère oublié des généalogies féminines' (Irigaray 1989).
 25. An excellent example in the English context is Sheila Rowbotham's *Hidden from History* (1973), in which Rowbotham charts women's struggles for equality and the changes affecting their lives in the modern period until the early twentieth century.
 26. Remy (1990) quotes the following conclusion from a 1985 paper by the historians Laurence Klejman and Florence Rochfort affirming the lack of a collective memory of feminism in spite of attempts to redress this problem by women's groups and historians: 'L'histoire du féminisme, individuel ou collectif, est chaotique et discontinue, de longues plages de silence et d'oubli succédant à des moments d'intense activité. En affirmant qu'il naît à chaque fois qu'il renaît, le féminisme laisserait à penser qu'il n'a pas la mémoire des luttes anciennes qui se sont menées pour l'émancipation des femmes. Ce n'est ni l'intensité de l'action, ni sa durée qui peuvent expliquer cette absence de mémoire [...] Aucune mémoire collective du féminisme ne s'est transmise' (1990: 33). Irigaray perpetuates this amnesia in the sense that, reading her *oeuvre*, one finds little evidence of the history of feminism and of women's history or even of women's interventions in philosophy. Horney, Klein, de Groot, Deutsch, Bonaparte, Brunswick and Dolto are discussed very briefly in her overview of psychoanalytical theory in 'Retour sur la théorie psychanalytique' (Irigaray 1977a), and they are acknowledged for their challenges to Freud's theories of female sexuality and femininity. However, these interventions, while recognized as valuable by Irigaray, are found wanting by her for their inadequate attention to the historical determinants of female psychic development (1977a: 63).
 27. Kojève's (1947) reading of Hegel, which has been seminal for the contemporary French thought in which Irigaray is immersed, focuses upon the master-slave dialectic as a dramatic fight for recognition and value which is born of desire.
 28. For further discussion of Nietzsche's value and its relation to Irigaray, refer to Chapter Four.
 29. Whitford warns against, 'the too rapid reinterpretation of Irigaray's language in terms of the Lacanian framework' (1991a: 54). For discussion of Lacan and the symbolic, see Grosz (1990); Sarup (1992).

30. This is discussed further in Chapter Three.
31. Marx goes on to explain why commodities exchange not at their value but in accordance with their 'prices of production', but this is not particularly germane here. See Giddens (1971: 51).
32. The gold standard was abandoned at the beginning of this century. Goux recognizes this in his fascinating later essay on Irigaray (Burke et al 1994), arguing that an 'ultra-modern' system such as the stock exchange operates according to a regime of generalized equivalence, in which everything is incorporated into 'the systematic play of a commutative economy' that has no guarantee and cannot be embodied or represented as such. The ultramodern may surpass the humanist domination of women by men, but the emergence of a system of an indefinite play of substitution and interchangeability is interpreted by Goux as the reign of the masculine-neutral (1994: 188). He relates this to Irigaray's critique of equality politics and neutrality, arguing that her position is postmodern in its insistence upon the need to go beyond the modern claim to equality between men and women *and* the ultramodern moment of sexual neutralization and purely abstract exchange. The postmodern difference Goux points to is not to be confused with the premodern, which assumed a natural sexual inequality, but rather demands a culture of sexual difference.
33. Engels (1888) argues that the material condition of persons necessarily determines their conceptions. He points to the prevalence of national gods prior to the Roman Empire which were succeeded by Christianity because the world empire needed a world religion (1888: 618).
34. In an interview in *Ce Sexe* Irigaray explains that in his theory of sexuality Freud brought to light the implicit sexual indifference hidden in the notions of science and logic. As much as Irigaray finds Freud and psychoanalysis useful in revealing this sexual indifference, she is again unequivocally critical of his failure to account for the social and historical factors accounting for sexuality. This failure means that women's suffering is interpreted in terms of their individual history and they are returned to patriarchal norms (1977a: 69). Irigaray has been criticized by Sarah Kofman in *L'énigme de la femme* (1980) for her critique of Freud. In the first instance, Kofman objects to Irigaray's use of the French translation of Freud's essay, 'On Femininity' which is a notably poor translation (1980: 14). Although Irigaray maintains that even the most detailed translation would do little to change the meaning of Freud's discourse on femininity (1974: 9), Kofman remains unconvinced and suspects a political conviction in Irigaray's use of that translation. Kofman goes so far as to illustrate how Irigaray's misuse of the translation serves to support her interpretation of Freud in a way that the original German simply cannot (1980: 129–30). She argues that Irigaray wilfully or otherwise neglects the ambiguity and provisional nature of Freud's investigations. She also accuses Irigaray of misinterpreting his treatment of anatomical factors (which he does not interpret as determinant), and of failing to recognize his thesis of a fundamental bisexuality which challenges the sameness and certainty of idealist dictates (1980: 130). Kofman can only be justified in her objections to the use of a translation which omits sections of Freud's writing. However, Irigaray has a valid rejoinder to Kofman's substantive criticisms of her work in her view that Freud simply does not critically incorporate socio-historical factors into his analysis, for all his gesturing towards them. Paradoxically, this may also be an accusation levelled against Irigaray; she redeems herself from it only if her use of the notion of history as epochal is accepted, and thus while she does not offer detailed historical analyses of different family structures, for example, she is historical to the extent that she is engaged in a philosophy which identifies in different epochs a different ontology. On these terms, Irigaray is consistent to argue that Freud does not relate individual women's symptoms

to a given state of society or culture, for he does not raise the question of the impact of the patriarchal era upon women's psychic health.

35. Lacan's account of the mirror stage in psychic development was first developed in his 1936 paper, 'Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je' (Lacan 1966). Its relation to the Hegelian problematic of the dialectic of self-recognition in otherness is discussed by Wilden (1972).
36. As Grosz argues (1991: 142–43), Irigaray has been accused of misunderstanding Lacan on precisely this point. For example, Ragland-Sullivan argued that Irigaray equates the phallus with the penis and with men, thus substantivizing the concept of the phallus biologically and failing to accept the neutrality of the phallus (Grosz 1991: 142). Grosz is correct to point out that Irigaray (like Lacan) refers to the morphology and not the anatomy of the body. Yet body morphologies are either masculine or feminine for Irigaray, they are interpretations of *given* body forms.
37. Although Irigaray believes that women are not entirely taken in by the patriarchal order, she does not accept that simply being a woman allows one to immediately go beyond it (1977a: 157). If women are 'elsewhere', it is as potential women that they remain so and not as women born with a female identity.
38. See her essay, 'Les femmes, le sacrifice, l'argent' (Irigaray 1987b).
39. See the discussion of Freud's 'The Theme of the Three Caskets', Chapter One, n.9.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NEED FOR A FEMALE DIVINE

Irigaray believes that women need ideals which are divine for their own well-being and in order to bring about a new era of sexual difference. This means that the female divine is a fundamental pillar in her attempt to construct a system beyond patriarchy since the argument she makes to support it structurally corresponds to her argument that women need a subjectivity and an identity of their own. Yet, as I argue in this chapter, it is the notion of the divine which is pivotal for Irigaray since she deploys it for its philosophical association with the absolute, as that which constitutes a pre-requisite to subjectivity and upholds the female imaginary and its modalities. Hence she certainly envisages the female divine as the mainstay of the feminine, and may even privilege it in her model of sexual difference.

The Necessity of the Divine for Feuerbach and Irigaray

Irigaray makes the case for a female divine in the context of the arguments put forward by Feuerbach in *The Essence of Christianity*.¹ His thesis is useful to her given his position as a post-Hegelian philosopher, engaged in an anthropological critique of religion, who humanizes the divine without profaning its divinity. Yet there is a rift between Feuerbach's humanist conception of God and Irigaray's gendered notion of the divine owing to the different ways they each reposition the Hegelian absolute. Whereas Feuerbach makes of it a universal human essence that emerges from the 'sensuous materialism' of individuals in their communication, Irigaray makes of it two universalities created by the two genders in relation to sexed matter. The consequences of this divergence are significant in the sense that it leads her away from merely repeating his case on behalf of the feminine and towards further radicalizing the notion of the divine.

Following in the wake of Hegel's magisterial philosophical system, Ludwig Feuerbach's 'philosophy of the future' was envisaged as an anthropological and materialist reworking of the tradition of German speculative thought and the theology it mirrored. He wrote:

The philosophy of the future has the task of leading philosophy from the realm of 'departed souls' back into the realm of embodied living souls; of pulling philosophy

down from the divine, self-sufficient bliss in the realm of ideas into human misery. To this end, it needs nothing more than human understanding and human speech. (1986: 3)

Feuerbach can therefore be positioned in the line of thinkers whose thought is intended to be anti-metaphysical and anti-idealist. He aimed to end the process of abstraction that finds a correlate in a hypostatized eternal Being (or a general equivalent) and to bring thought down to earth, to the level and scope of human existence, without reducing that existence to a mechanistic materialism or a pure empiricism. He believed that through human understanding and human language the miseries of existence might be addressed and potentially changed. His position as an intellectual gives rise to some interesting comparisons with Irigaray, given that he was a radical at odds with established institutional life whose writing attracts charges of hyperbole and lack of rigour. He was also subject to the vagaries of intellectual fashion, enjoying fame and notoriety after the publication of *The Essence of Christianity* in 1841 but then fading into obscurity.² In spite of his importance for twentieth century phenomenology, Feuerbach is traditionally cast as a transitional figure between Hegel and Marx, his critical thought seminal but his positive philosophy lacking. Therefore, Feuerbach has most often played the role of muse for future thinkers, and not least for Marx.

Irigaray also positions Feuerbach as muse, returning to his predicament while side-stepping the obstacle of the Marxian critique. She does so, as we have seen, because she finds Marx's construal of materialism to be within the circle of patriarchy for all its critique of capital. Yet Feuerbach is not cited as a post-patriarchal thinker by Irigaray. His argument for the ineluctable necessity of the divine to the human being does not exceed the parameters of patriarchal thought as Irigaray defines it; it is a humanism that manifests the same patriarchal blindness to sexual difference. Irigaray acknowledges Feuerbach's view that love of the mother of God (and by extension, of woman) is necessary for the love of God and humanity, since it represents a love of nature which Protestants have renounced at the expense of divine love (1987b: 82). However, for Irigaray this acknowledgement of the importance of the feminine to Christianity does not challenge the underlying patriarchal structure of sexual indifference which Feuerbach's humanism supports. She notes of Feuerbach that, 'il semble peu tenir compte de la différence entre femme et mère, ce qui correspond à un état d'identité possible de la femme comme femme' (1987b: 82). However, in her attempt to explore the possibilities and potential of the feminine in order to transcend the singular logic of patriarchy Irigaray uses Feuerbach's argument regarding God and the necessity of divine ideals as a springboard to structure her contention that in order to become subjects women need a female divine. This contention finds its most explicit presenta-

tion in her essay, 'Femmes Divines' (1987b), in which she follows Feuerbach's critique of religion in *The Essence of Christianity* to make the case for a gendered divine. This text is generally considered the most influential of Feuerbach's works and its accessibility extends beyond the technical specialisms of philosophy. Hence, it is considered to lack some of the subtlety of Feuerbach's philosophical argument, and its veiled philosophical attack upon academic speculative philosophy via a critique of theology is developed in later works (Feuerbach 1986). Nevertheless, Irigaray turns to the earlier text to support her argument. The reason for this may in part be the fact that her essay, 'Femmes Divines' was originally delivered as a lecture at the *Centro Donna* in Venice, and perhaps in that case the need to insist and repeat with relative clarity the argument for the necessity of a God would have been more pressing than explicitly engaging with the intricacies of Feuerbach's thought. Here Feuerbach's arguments are discussed much more extensively than in Irigaray's short essay, at least explicitly, because they help to explain Irigaray's claim that it is a *divine* ideal and object which women need. This is essential to her notion of the divine, as she stresses in an interview:

Pour construire notre subjectivité, suffit-il de respirer, de retrouver la nature, ou nous faut-il le support d'idéaux qui correspondent à notre genre, notre sexe. Presque aucune femme n'arrive à comprendre une telle nécessité. (1996: 232)

Irigaray's relation to Feuerbach hence resembles the type of relation that Feuerbach developed with regard to Hegel; she adopts much of the formal structure of the argument but reconstructs and critically transforms it for her own purposes. This form of immanent critique towards a moment of transcendence is integral to Feuerbach's genetic-critical method — a method that jettisons the question of truth and falsity in order to understand the need and desire which gives rise to a proposition.³ Thus, Feuerbach's method assumes that formal concepts belie their origins in human experience, and it is only in that experience that real transformation may occur. Such a focus upon the description of meaning and experience in the realm of the subject-object relation places Feuerbach in the nascent stages of the phenomenological tradition that Irigaray both deploys and subverts. What is more, Feuerbach's emphasis upon the psychological effects and processes of feeling or affect over and above the demands of truth or proof similarly gives rise to certain affinities with psychoanalytical practice and with the therapeutic significance it attributes to the affective reality of phantasy. Such affinities must be qualified, particularly in the light of the contrast between Feuerbach's humanist affirmation of human feeling as the tap root of the progressive self-realization of mankind and the 'darkness' of Freud's unconscious. However, given the role of both phenomenology and psychoanalysis in Irigaray's work, her adoption of Feuerbach's

argument is facilitated by their methodological affinities in disavowing the transparency of the concept for what it reveals of a structured subjective will and desire. Both hold that will and desire form the subject through the projection of its object, an object which emerges from the human subject and yet is divine. Whereas Irigaray stresses that this object is always imaginary and comes through the subject in the form of its gender, for Feuerbach it is the predicate of a universal essence of human being coming from within the subject.

Feuerbach's God is thus the object of human consciousness drawn down from the supernatural place attributed to it by theology. The attraction for Irigaray is Feuerbach's articulation of the structural role played by the divine as an ideal other in forming the human subject and his rejection of its abstract conceptual and immutable status over and against that subject. Hence, Feuerbach's critique of what for Irigaray is the patriarchal metaphysical absolute. Yet in his critique of a metaphysical God as the estrangement of man from himself, and in his assertion of God as man's own object, Feuerbach does not aim to reduce man to his own object in the profane tautology suggested by Marx: 'The criticism of religion ends with the doctrine that "man is the supreme being for man"' (Marx 1972: 75). As Engels complained, Feuerbach does not wish to abolish religion, but rather to perfect it (1888: 47). The identity of subject and object is necessarily religious for Feuerbach because through feeling and love it expresses the infinity and perfection of human ideals. Irigaray is attracted to Feuerbach's argument because she accepts not only that ideal objects are necessary for the process of subject and community formation but also that they are necessarily divine. The ideals are not the products of individual choice or will as such, rather they bespeak a form of transcendence in the process of the subject's interpretative self-projection in them; gender transcends the individual. Furthermore, Feuerbach argues that the essence of religion is an identity of subject and object mediated by love which is beyond purely conceptual definition — a form of identity that inheres in Irigaray's female divine.⁴

Irigaray's assertion of the necessity of the self-other relation, and of self-recognition through otherness (especially as articulated by Feuerbach) confirms her position as an intellectual descendant of Hegel. In his study *Feuerbach*, Wartofsky argues that the God of theology so maligned by Feuerbach may be readily identified with Hegel's ontological absolute, the object of Feuerbach's critique of speculative philosophy (Wartofsky 1977: 176). According to Feuerbach, the Hegelian absolute represents a hypostatized Being, a pure idea of reason and spirit that is eternal and foundational, as the moment from which all others derive. Like the theologian's God, Feuerbach understands the absolute to represent a pure, unmediated beginning entailing the identity of being

and nothing that is without presupposition or cause.⁵ He thus classifies Hegel's idealism as an esoteric theology, and defines the Hegelian absolute as a mystical rationalism (Wartofsky 1977: 170). In his critique of idealist thought Feuerbach aims to end humanity's estrangement from itself in transcendental concepts; he debunks the empty formal foundations of universal idealism and its absolute being in favour of an empirical materialism whereby the particular, in the form of the concrete *individual* being, takes centre stage and constitutes his own universal through communication. Feuerbach does not, for all that, reject the prevailing features of Hegel's thought. Most notably, he accepts the Hegelian conception of religion as a consciousness of the self through an object set over against the self. For Hegel, however, the estrangement that the religious object engenders with its illusion of transcendence over particular beings is overcome by a rational and philosophical *self*-consciousness of the unity of absolute Being (Hegel 1977). Feuerbach draws the cloth of the rationalist absolute from beneath the spirit of Hegel's absolute and his dialectical processes (Wartofsky 1977: 137). The object remains religious because it always emerges from the human as the sentient expression of its essence. Religion is essential because it is in religious feeling that the object is formed, not in the mystical delusions of theology or the illusory rationalism of philosophy which are both an estrangement from the human (Feuerbach 1957: 5). Any object is similarly religious for Irigaray. Both Feuerbach and Irigaray use the language of the dialectic against the abstract universality of Hegel's absolute (Irigaray 1987b and 1992). As Marx argues so acerbically, Feuerbach remains within the realm of Hegel (1973: 11), and so does Irigaray in her insistence upon the necessity of the other as an ideal representation to the self of itself as a universal object.⁶ Yet both Feuerbach and Irigaray withdraw the absolute as a rational conceptual idea from their articulation of the divine.

In place of the absolute as the pure unmediated beginning of logic and reason, Feuerbach and Irigaray each position two actually different beings at the 'beginning' in a structural and historical sense. This is of prime significance for the different ways in which it enables them to engage with the question of the negative, as I go on to discuss. The negative is central to Hegel's notion of the dialectic because it depends for its operation upon the principle of contradiction and determinate negation (Hegel 1977). Hegel's philosophy posits the identity of thought and being, therefore being is determined in and by thought (and its logic), and thought is determined by being. He argues that to posit being as an identity that *is* simultaneously determines that which it is not. Any positive assertion is thus determined by the negative, which is contained within the positive moment such that its own contradiction is established in the process of its self-formation. The logic of reason is to overcome

contradiction, however, and being will move towards its negative other in order to overcome that other, alienating itself in the process from the unity of its original identity. This is the movement of becoming for Hegel: that which is can only be determined by that which it is not, a negative other which being becomes in order to return to itself. Although Hegel finds contradiction at the very essence of being because that being is determined by non-being, reason prevails for him since its logic is driven by the need to overcome contradiction. Hence, Hegel's being unfolds in history as the overcoming of contradiction to return to unity, assimilating all others to itself by a process of sublation. After their contradictions have been dialectically worked through, the original unity of thought and being is realized at the end of history as the absolute identity of man and reason.

For Feuerbach, such an identity can only be the result of the individual's objectification of his individual self-consciousness in the form of universal reason (1957: 9). He therefore argues that being commences with the individual being. Hegel's dialectic is thus interpreted as an exclusively inner process of thought engaging only with itself because it presupposes the identity of Being and thought abstractly (Wartofsky 1977: 185). The difference it determines in its process of negation is merely a difference within thought, it is merely a conceptual difference: the other is the flip-side of the self. Irigaray makes a similar argument regarding difference within patriarchy. For her, the patriarchal self is formed by the masculine subject who first valorizes sameness by abstracting himself from his own body through the assimilation of the other's body and then reconstitutes difference on his own terms as an abstraction. Through abstraction and appropriation, all is ultimately returned to the same hypostatized one. In order to counter this theoretical difference generated by Hegel's absolute, Feuerbach's own dialectic supposes a concrete difference because it is premised upon the empirical difference between one concretely existing individual and another. Between one individual and another there occurs the dialectical process of a positive coming-to-know, which is based upon the material evidence of the senses in communication, not the negative determinations of the ideal concept. Hence, whereas Feuerbach envisages difference as a primal and existential difference between actual empirical beings, Irigaray insists upon the primacy of the absolute difference between the potential of two sexed subjectivities. Feuerbach's beings are different empirically but share an essence that emerges from a sensuous materialism, while for Irigaray potential subjects differ materially in their difference as genders.

A further striking point of comparison between Feuerbach and Irigaray is their emphasis upon language, especially as the medium of communication between two beings or potential subjects that enables their constitution as such. Feuerbach writes:

Language is nothing but the realization of the species, the mediation of the 'I' and 'Thou', the achievement of the unity of a class or species, in virtue of the transcendence of the individual separateness of its members. The word's element is 'air', the most spiritual and universal medium of life. (Wartofsky 1977: 182)

Feuerbach thus argues that identity is not realized teleologically in time as the beginning and end of the reasoned movement of spirit in history (1957: 23). Rather it is achieved through dialogue with other men whereby they meet their essence in the image of the other.⁷ It is similarly within and through language that Irigaray locates being as sexed. The transformation of language is an absolute necessity for the transformation of culture (Irigaray 1990a: 39). Her advocacy of a 'speaking (as) woman' seeks to bring about a meeting of women through intersubjective exchange and to thereby begin to constitute a feminine culture. As argued in Chapter One, Irigaray tends to emphasize speech over writing in her discussions of language because of the encounter with an other intrinsic to the dialogical model. However, speech is also the form of language which comes of breath and is ultimately a formation of air. In her development of the notion of the divine through Christianity and Buddhism, Irigaray approaches Feuerbach's position that air is the most universal element, and yet makes of it the substance of which the universal consists. It is the medium in which spirit subsists, as I discuss below. For Feuerbach, air is the vehicle for the word that permits knowledge of sensuous matter and human affectivity. It is the needs of natural human existence which motivate the dialectic with the other and thus the formation of the 'species' in language.

The foundation of human need for Feuerbach is *Eros*, the need for others. For Irigaray, too, love is divine, although the divinity of love is inspired as much by wonder as by need. Love sustains a difference marked by limit in Irigaray's thought, but for Feuerbach it overcomes difference and the need for negation. With such a position he facilitates the principal objection of his critics, for he obviates conflict, struggle and labour in his psychology of concept formation as universal for the species. Hence Marx's objection in his *Theses on Feuerbach* that his former mentor makes of human essence a kind of abstract indwelling; the essence is a reflection of the concrete relation between the self and other being, yet this essence is not *made* universal but emerges as if from some presumed core of universality within each individual (McLellan 1977: 157). Since the dialectic is not internal to spirit conceived as a being that must overcome the threat of nothing/the other, the value that is human assumes a form of progressive realization without negation. Through dialogue men meet their essence in the image of the other, yet this otherness is not assumed to threaten the concrete individual being as in Hegel's master-slave dialectic: it is rather his opportunity to become human.⁸ Without

negation the difference between two existent beings is thus reducible to a presupposed *universal* identity that does not require the labour of history to emerge. It is a sameness which inheres within them but awaits recognition by the other as the expression of their species' infinity.

In *The Essence of Christianity* Feuerbach argues that the 'human' is defined through its infinite rather than finite consciousness. The human is the being who makes his own species an object of thought, the one who becomes self-conscious in transcending the individuality of sensation in the knowledge of its species character. He writes: 'Consciousness in the strictest sense is present only in a being to whom his species, his essential nature, is an object of thought' (1957: 1). A central pillar for the support Irigaray derives from Feuerbach is his argument that man has an inner and outer life because he makes himself an object for himself. Without the object as a mirror man could not hold himself in his own image as an other in order to reflect back on himself to produce in him the sense of an inner life. Through the infinity of the object as the species essence man is able to know his own finiteness as an individual member of a species whose perfection is infinite. Feuerbach argues that this knowledge man has of himself — which is the history of human consciousness — is found in the history of religion. He takes religious consciousness to be the paradigm of human consciousness. Irigaray's thought supports this argument in the way that it assumes a structural correspondence between the constitution of the divine and subjectivity; God is deemed to be the keystone of a given era's social order (1992: 78). Significantly, she argues that the passage from societies in which women did have a cultural tradition of their own to a patriarchal culture was brought about by men's seizure of the divine and spiritual genealogy, and through their representation of these as masculine (1990a: 19). It is the religious object which is critical. As Feuerbach argues, humanity's distinctiveness is expressed in the phenomenon of religion because the religious object is not just any object: it exists for itself, it is the one where consciousness of the object and self-consciousness coincide:

Man is nothing without an object. The great models of humanity, such as men reveal to us what man is capable of, have attested the truth of this proposition by their lives. They had only one dominant passion — the realisation of the aim which was the essential object of their activity. But the object to which a subject essentially, necessarily relates, is nothing else than this subject's own, but objective nature. If it be an object common to several individuals of the same species, but under various conditions, it is still, at least as to the form under which it present itself to each of them according to their respective modifications, their own, but objective nature. (1957: 4)

Without an object, then, Feuerbach is arguing that man as man does not exist, although against a supernatural God he states that the true and fundamen-

tal object for man is the subject's own nature. Man's objects vary with the varieties of religion, but he argues that study of religion reveals a universal pattern, a universal ground, which is hidden in external form under the imagery of the imaginative constructions to which religions give rise. The structure and content of religious consciousness shows the real or 'natural' subject of human consciousness and it is, therefore, possible to reduce to natural terms the imagery or supernatural form of expression of religious consciousness (1957: 13).

The natural terms to which Feuerbach reduces the supernaturalism of religion are those he identifies as the essence of man: reason, will and love (1957: 3). These provide the immediate and original content of religious consciousness, which do not lie in the pure reason of theoretical reflection, but in human action, need and belief, and they exist as the divine for man since they are sovereign: they exist for their own sake. This content is alienated in theology but, consistent with his purely positive identity, Feuerbach argues that it is a 'content' which defies negation because it is an empirical mode of experience (1957: 6). Religion begins in personal experience which is limited until the 'I' recognizes it as human, recognizing it as experience of the other, the not-me.

In her writing Irigaray has given a number of anecdotal accounts of moments which have affirmed her conviction of the need for sexed divines. These most uncharacteristic references to particular moments and events in her life and the feelings they aroused are perhaps indicative of her agreement with Feuerbach that religion is not in the first instance a matter of theoretical proposition but rather a matter of personal experience of action, need, will and belief. For example, she tells of her trips to India and to Romania just prior to her writing the 'Femmes Divines' paper, and the contrast she found between the two countries: the latter industrially developed but in a state of misery, the former poverty-stricken in many places but nevertheless exhibiting a state of well-being or happiness (1996: 217). This difference, between a dispirited conformity and a sophisticated spirituality, she attributes to the relative absence and presence of a notion of the divine in the culture. A further account is given of an occasion that same year when, in Venice, she chanced upon a statue which initially she assumed to be the Madonna holding Jesus; she was shocked but joyful to find that in fact it represented Mary with her mother, Anne (1990a: 25–26). She explains that she found this representation reassuring because it reveals a chink in the monolith of a patriarchy as the predominance of masculine genealogies and the valorization of the mother-son relation. Yet the symbolic function of her discovery is not limited to a moment of negation, to the denial of patriarchal history as the only history possible. The statue represented for Irigaray the not-me that is yet me, and was thus a recognition and religious symbol of the feminine. Such a statue should

facilitate further representations of mother–daughter genealogies which are vital, in her view, if the state of patriarchy is to be superseded.

For Feuerbach the privacy of direct experience, when mediated by the otherness of its object, emerges into a dialectic of feeling that creates self-consciousness, as human self-consciousness. I know my own humanity only with respect to an other, I am only 'I' with respect to a 'Thou'; he proclaims these two figures a real or existential duality (1957: 2). The 'Thou' must be existentially independent, and it is sense perception rather than a split in consciousness that gives us knowledge of existent 'others', and provides the basis for the development of self-consciousness. So the achievement of self-consciousness is the knowledge of another like myself. Since Feuerbach argues that this is species knowledge, which is knowledge of the other insofar as the 'I' is species-identical with the other, he can claim that it does not then require existential identity with the other, for if 'he' were same as I then the otherness would be an illusion, it would be otherness in thought, and not in objective fact.

Feuerbach's *assumption* of an identity in essence is compounded by his sensuous materialism whereby objectivity is given with respect to the objects of sense. He argues that the objectivity and independent reality of the other as other is given through feelings, and then he privileges the feelings of need and love as they relate to objects that are always human objects and persons. Thus, while he does indeed draw the abstract religious being down to earth in locating the source of human consciousness in the conditions of human existence, characterizing such conditions as love as universal merely assumes an essence. This problem of the assumption of the universality of love is carried through to Irigaray's notion of the divine, as discussed below. Nevertheless, Feuerbach affirms this essence in his valorization of Christianity as the religion to which humanity has progressed in his coming to know himself as man; for Christianity finally embodies the divine in man and preaches the exaltation of love, which he argues is man's highest ideal (1957: 14).

Irigaray embraces Feuerbach's argument for the structural support it can give to a subject constituted not by the determinations and appropriations of a singular being but by the linguistic inter-relationship between actual and different affective beings. Her desire for progress via the reconstitution of subjectivity in history can be thought in terms of relocating and transforming the object which is both separate from and identical with the subject, thus permitting an both inner and an outer life which is essential to just exchange. It is this argument, concerning the very nature of subjectivity and its requirements, that forms the crux of Irigaray's case for the divine, and for a female divine. It is fundamentally an argument concerning the formation of the self and the self's community, and one which cannot be automatically assimilated to some

position regarding a competitive hierarchy between the representation of existing male gods and the female goddesses of antiquity. She is not proposing a contest of icons nor advocating some cultish following of a female god.⁹ At the very least, the symbolic potential of such gods and goddesses would need reinterpreting — a process Irigaray undertakes in her own work, especially in relation to the Greek pantheon.¹⁰ Yet, in her view, such a process of reclaiming the divine in the form of symbolic figures has to be situated in the context of a transformation of the understanding of the structures and functions of religion in a fashion akin to Feuerbach's. Otherwise women risk simply pitting 'their' goddesses against gods in a game where the rules remain unchanged (and patriarchal):

Loin de penser que nous devons nous déifier à nouveau aujourd'hui sur le mode de nos ancêtres et totems animaux, que nous devons faire régression aux déesses sirènes, notamment contre les dieux hommes, il me semble que nous avons certes à inciter à un retour au cosmique, mais aussi à nous demander pourquoi nous avons été arrêtées dans notre devenir divines. (1987b: 72)

For Irigaray, then, that women were halted in their divine becoming is not simply a question of the fact that masculine figures came to represent the divine; the issue is rather that the structure and mode of the divine was thus changed. In the place of a divine becoming a divine Being was established, and this set up a different logical order such that the economies of law and language were likewise transformed at the expense of women (1990a: 19).

This question of the gender of the divine provides the point of her departure from Feuerbach. His argument rightly draws the divine down to the concrete existence of individuals. In the terms of Irigaray's philosophy, however, his individuals are indeed formed by an 'abstract indwelling', as Marx alleged, because they are not defined through their material gender. Feuerbach's sensuous materiality is a materialism that assumes matter to be asexual, and the masculinity of God to be generic. His materialism thus abstracts from the material differences of gender as Irigaray defines them, from the masculine and the feminine. That which is universal for Feuerbach, reason, will and love, cannot be universal for Irigaray because she attributes the universal to the sexual difference of the two genders. Each gender must have its own universal and be formed in its own image if difference is to be recognized. Whether in fact her notion of the universal as mediation and as love in some respect returns her to Feuerbach, or at least to a 'singular' notion of the universal of her two universals, is a point I raise below.

Irigaray's reinterpretation of Feuerbach's argument centres upon a play on the meanings of *genre* in the French translation of Feuerbach, which is translated as 'species' in English. *Genre* has several potential meanings, but here

the play is focused upon its meanings of species or kind and grammatical gender.¹¹ Hence, when Feuerbach argues that without the relation to the infinite through his *genre* (species) man lacks his own finiteness, Irigaray assumes that in affirming his *genre* (gendered kind) as unique and the universal man does not truly affirm his *genre* (species as a gendered kind) and thereby he actually avoids his own finiteness:

Et l'homme, sans doute, ne peut accomplir son essence sans s'affirmer comme séparé en *genre*. S'il n'est pas existant en son genre, il manque son rapport à l'infini et, d'ailleurs, à la finitude. L'évitement de cette finitude, l'homme l'a cherché dans un Dieu unique *masculin*. Le Dieu, il l'a créé de son genre... (1987b: 74)

The avoidance of his own finiteness (and his own material being as a masculine body) has enabled man to define himself in relation to an abstract hypostatized eternal Being, according to Irigaray. Thus she rejects Feuerbach's assertion that the Christian holy trinity can represent the totality and perfection of the human species because it can represent the necessity of the 'I-Thou' relationship in the relationship between Father and Son (with the holy spirit as the principle of their unity) (Feuerbach 1957: 67). Irigaray follows Hegel in arguing that the orthodox Christian trinity represents a dialectical logic in the form of the masculine one Being in three 'persons': the one, his other and his mediating unity. However, for Irigaray this is a patriarchal logic given that it is an otherness and plurality derived from the one: a logic that her own two rhythms attempts to surpass. Furthermore, this logic represents the masculine genealogy as exclusively divine, which is the essence of patriarchy in her analysis. She notes: 'Il n'y pas de Dieu *femme*, ni de trinité féminine: mère, fille, esprit' (1987b: 74) and her own proposals for female divine values in the third stage of her work discussed in Chapter Four are related to this female trinity. This is a further example of Irigaray's retention of some of the structures of patriarchal thought, albeit via their transformation.

Given that, for Irigaray, Feuerbach's singular universal is unable to represent the absolute difference of sexual difference, and that the female divine is consequently erased, she returns to his argument in order to address what needs to be done. She affirms his view that for a community or commonality to be constituted its ideal in the form of a divinity has to be established:

Aucune constitution de subjectivité ni de société humaines ne s'est élaborée sans assistance du divin. Il est des temps de destruction. Mais, pour détruire, il faut que le Dieu ou les dieux existent. (1987b: 74)

Irigaray therefore situates the contemporary predicament and needs of women outside the analysis of the mainstream currents of twentieth century

philosophical thought — currents which have been profoundly influenced by an atheist materialism, a secular rationality and a Nietzschean affirmative nihilism. The prevailing mood has thus been one of a denial or a rejection of the ideal of religion, which has included a rejection of the unity of any humanist subject remaining after the veil of holiness has been withdrawn from its identity. Yet in Irigaray's view women have never had their own God, ideal or identity to destroy — at least during the patriarchal era — and hence at this moment in history they have no standard against which to rebel. They are situated differently in the Oedipal complex: already 'castrated', they cannot assimilate the threat of castration and reproduce themselves in the image of a non-castrated ideal because the issue of castration is not truly theirs (1977a: 61). It might be expected that the masculine ideal divine value should be the target of women's concern, yet clearly this is not the direct outcome of Irigaray's analysis. She is less concerned with destruction than with creation, and in the destruction of a masculine God she believes women risk a kind of military operation in accordance with the parameters of the existing order. Fighting the symbolic 'father' is less significant than representing the 'mother' as something other than pure lack or matter. Hence, Irigaray's emphasis upon the need to create a divine for women in order to counter the structure of the existing order since: 'Il leur manque, il nous manque encore, l'affirmation et la définition de valeurs *pour nous*' (1987b: 84).¹²

It is therefore a female universal in the form of universal female ideals and values that Irigaray believes women need. The creation of such a universal is inherently problematic, as I argue in Chapter Four. However, it is important to stress that in assuming some form of commonality among women Irigaray is not assuming their unity to be immediate or the telos of their becoming. Rather, in following Feuerbach, Irigaray's argument is that without a revaluation of the feminine and a universal female generic, differences between women cannot come about as differences between women. They remain deprived of their individuality and left to a form of plurality which she believes is the many derivative of the masculine one. They are commodities whose differentiation presupposes a general standard of equality; their 'multiplicity' is the dichotomous other of the order and form of the one: 'Ce 'des femmes' constituerait une sorte de multiple chaotique, amorphe, archaïque, auquel, pour donner forme, il faudrait imposer une représentation d'unité' (1987b: 82). They thus require an object as the expression of their infinity if they are to know their own finiteness and to have a standard to enable them to differentiate among themselves. Through such an ideal Irigaray believes women could begin to create and establish an *entre-femmes*, a culture between women that would counter the masculine *entre-hommes*. Irigaray's notion of a women's culture does not therefore automatically assume the unity of sister-

hood as a non-conflictual space of togetherness among women. This culture has to be developed so that women can assume some kind of order and engage in *exchange* between one another, and exchange can only occur via differentiated entities. It is, therefore, with the aim of enriching the differences *between* women as subjects, and of enabling the recognition of the difference between women and men, that she controversially asserts the necessity and universality of a female divine.

Without a divine ideal Irigaray argues that women are left in a state of *déréliction*, a form of 'abandonment' by their Being. It is this state that induces destruction and nihilism on the part of women, as, through the lack of an objective towards which to direct their will as gender, they turn against themselves. This is the kind of participation in being that pertains to particular women but in their particularity they manifest an ontological condition. Hence the simultaneous use of singular and plural in the following statement:

Elle manque d'idéal qui lui soit un but et un chemin pour devenir. Elle(s) se disperse(nt) et devien(nen)t agent(s) de destruction et d'anéantissement faute d'une autre d' elle(s) qu'elle(s) devien(nen)t. (1987b: 76)

For Irigaray, the divine represents an ideal not so much in the sense of an equal standard enabling a judgemental measure; rather it provides an ideal as a goal towards which to direct one's intentionality. It thus forms a horizon in the phenomenological sense, enabling subjects to place and 'gather' their being. With their own ideal other, a female Thou, women would have an interiority of their own in their own image and form so that they could love themselves as a particular woman and as a gender. The universality of *Eros* is only brought about by a self that can in the first instance love itself; otherwise love is an impossibility and becomes a hysterical desire for the other's approval. It is love of self that permits love of the other, yet love of self depends upon an interiority that only comes of a divine other self in the form of one's gender (1984: 70). However, the female divine which would constitute the objective (and subjective) representation of a female universal is not a notion assuming the immediate affective unity of all women. The potential unity has to be communicated within the gender and predicated so that differences between women can be articulated and mediated on female terms. In the same way as for Feuerbach's individuals, the encounter between women for Irigaray represents their opportunity to become women.

The divine as Irigaray envisages it is therefore not a hypostatized Being who determines through decree: it is a process of becoming who you are. It is directed against a moral and personal God as the Being who sets standards of behaviour for other beings. It is more a question, through feeling, of structur-

ing and placing the self in a process of becoming relative to one's own gender and to the other gender:

L'amour de Dieu n'a rien de moral en soi. Il indique un chemin. Il est moteur d'un devenir plus parfait. Il est le trait d'un horizon tendu entre le passé et le plus futur, le plus passif et le plus actif — permanent et toujours en tension. Dieu ne nous oblige à rien, sinon *devenir*. (1987b: 81)

This notion of a female becoming does assume a positive universality among women awaiting its constitution through recognition. As with Feuerbach's conception of the universal, it tends to obviate conflict and struggle because it is not formed by the process of overcoming and negating the other, whether that is an other woman or the other sex. Leaving aside for the moment the question of how the universality of the feminine can come to be represented, the question remains: can the positive affirmation of divine female values be sufficient to overcome a masculine metaphysical divine without destruction or negation, given the quintessentially appropriative nature of the masculine divine? Irigaray's argument for a female divine suggests that she believes it can. In creating a sociality between-women and their own ideal value, women by default challenge the masculine, they pull away the material support from masculine exchange:

Nous affirmer femmes, n'est-ce pas une façon de laisser aux hommes la chance de trouver leur identité masculine, sans prétendre être ou croire devoir être les créateurs et maîtres de la terre et du ciel. En toute neutralité... (1980b: 15)

However, for women to become subjects, and for an era of sexual difference to come about, it is not sufficient for a female divine to emerge; the male subject will need to recreate his own divinity, too:

Il est vrai que, pour que l'œuvre de la différence sexuelle ait lieu, il faut une révolution de pensée, et d'éthique. Tout est à réinterpréter... Tout, et d'abord que le sujet est toujours écrit au masculin, même s'il se voulait universel ou neutre: *l'homme*. (1984: 14)

In the terms of Irigaray's own analysis, there would appear to be little reason for the male subject to do so, because the male subject recognizes neither his exploitation of women nor his own estrangement from his body. Yet Irigaray's model of change is not premised upon the goal-oriented actions of the self-willing individual and the choices made by individuals in *conscious* recognition of their apparent shortcomings. Change is both an ontological and historical development and it is willed. Irigaray thus incorporates several possible models of change in her thought. In one sense, fundamental change is

necessarily an ontological question and emerges from the different interpretations different eras give to the meaning of Being. Therefore, for sexed being to be recognized all the parameters of being will need to be reinterpreted in accordance with possibilities that are always determined ontologically. In another sense, Irigaray supports the idea of Being as a progressive dialectical unfolding of itself within History; the era of sexual difference is a further stage in that development although not its *telos*. She does not deny, however, the notion that transformation requires an affirmative will, not the will of a linear means-end project but one that affirms difference now for its potential to open out a different future. Hence, history evolves in accordance with its own necessity and yet it must also be willed by the 'active' subjects of history.

Unlike Feuerbach, for whom humanity progressively realizes itself in history via the progressive humanization of its divine ideal, Irigaray acknowledges the role of conflict in history — in the defeat of gynaeocratic cultures, for example. However, she does not advocate conflict or destruction for and on behalf of the feminine; conflict is not *necessary* for the evolution of history (1992: 14). She appears to accept the dialectical argument that transformation owes much to the internal 'contradictions' of any given order. However, rather than change being precipitated by a contradiction between opposites in conflict, Irigaray turns contradiction into limit and believes that patriarchy will be surpassed owing to its own limitations. She argues that patriarchy meets its limit in nature (1990a: 32, 1992: 32), which can be understood in various ways. Firstly, in a political sense, patriarchy's exploitation of nature is reaching its limit in the current ecological crises. It can no longer sustain that exploitation indefinitely without recognizing and repaying its debts to nature and re-ordering its relation to nature. Secondly, the masculine subject's belief in his own totality is denied by the sexual difference found in nature. Thirdly, 'nature', to which it has always deposited women, poses a limit upon patriarchal totality in the affirmation of a female will and divine which are likely to emerge at the point where patriarchy is weakened by its other limits.

Irigaray's use of Feuerbach to support her case for a female divine is very much an acceptance on her part of the emphasis he accords to love over conflict in human relations. Whether love can have the capacity to respond to the limits of patriarchy and transform it seems improbable given Irigaray's own analysis of its enduring appropriative form. However, given that Irigaray is a theorist of change she is undeterred from the task of envisaging a different future. She transforms contradiction into the limit which is marked out by sexual difference by making 'love' the motor of the dialectical relations she envisages between the sexes — her 'rhythm of two'.

The Rhythm of Two and the Negative

In the model of sexual difference Irigaray proposes, both the masculine and the feminine would have their own divine ideals. For Feuerbach, divine ideals are predicates of the species' infinity which are positive and knowable because he denies the negative; Irigaray's proposed ideals are positive and 'knowable' and yet, because they are two, they are both 'knowable' to their own sex and yet unknowable for the other, supported by a negative which comes between the two. Thus Irigaray's dialectic of the rhythm of two articulates and affirms a potential way to an era of sexual difference. Given the emphasis she gives to the two, especially in the second and third stage of her work, I believe that Irigaray is better understood as an advocate of the two rather than as an advocate of multiplicity. This thought of the two is both extremely radical and highly speculative and is 'grounded' in the love between the sexes, leading to her call for sexed civil laws corresponding to the two. Like Feuerbach, Irigaray assumes a certain universality to love which could only be sustained by the realization of divine ideals.

Feuerbach denies the role of the negative in the constitution of divine ideals because he argues that if religion exists then God must be known and attributed positive predicates. Predicates, or attributes of being, are essential for Feuerbach in that they give rise to existence; the essence of a subject is defined through the predicates that define him: 'Subject and predicate are distinguished only as existence and essence' (1957: 19). Those predicates arise from what is infinite to the human species, the qualities that are found in the other as the same as the self and which allow one individual to recognize himself in the other. Such infinite qualities represent the perfections of human consciousness. To the extent that human being *is*, it is self-conscious, and to be self-conscious is to have knowledge of oneself, a knowledge that can only express the infinity and limitlessness of human consciousness because there is no knowledge for man which is beyond his consciousness. Man cannot know of nothing because knowledge of nothing is a logical impossibility: the 'nothing' of which man believes he knows will always be something of his creation. Feuerbach does not support the Hegelian argument that human consciousness is the knowledge of a universal reason of the world which realizes itself through that consciousness. Rather, he argues that it is a limited consciousness because it is limited to the human's knowledge of himself. Nevertheless, that limit is man's own infinity. He cannot *be* and know the world except through his own consciousness:

Man cannot get beyond his true nature. He may indeed by means of the imagination conceive individuals of another so-called higher kind, but he can never get loose

from his species, his nature; the conditions of being, the positive final predicates he gives to these other individuals, are always determinations or qualities drawn from his own nature — qualities in which he in truth only images and projects himself. (1957: 11)

The subject, whether considered human or divine, is thus only defined by its predicates which are themselves divine because they constitute human-divine subjects. For Feuerbach, then, there can be no subject without predicate, and predicates can be known. He thus argues against the negative theology which contends that God is subject but cannot be known because to attribute qualities to God is to unacceptably limit the divine. Without such predicates Feuerbach argues that God cannot be made an object to the mind and is therefore denied existence; only by means of positive predicates can subjects come-to-be:

He who earnestly believes in the Divine existence is not shocked at the attributing of even gross sensuous qualities to God. He who dreads an existence that may give offence, who shrinks from the grossness of a positive predicate, may as well renounce existence altogether. A God who is injured by determinate qualities has not the courage and the strength to exist. Qualities are the fire, the vital breath, the oxygen, the salt of existence. An existence in general, an existence without qualities, is an insipidity, an absurdity. (1957: 15)

Nor does Feuerbach subscribe to the Kantian distinction between conceptions of God in-itself and God as he exists for the subject. The belief in an existence which transcends the human is an illusion because of the very limitations of human knowledge; the object in-itself assumes that consciousness can perceive an existence *other* than as it appears to the human, an impossibility for Feuerbach as we have seen (1957: 16). True divinities make no such split between knowledge and existence, between subject and object: 'they have no conception of that which they are not' (1957: 18).

Irigaray, by contrast, makes the perception of what one is *not* the linchpin of her dialectic of two sexed divines. This does not deprive her divines of infinity, however, nor of limitation, because each sex is deemed to require positive predicates formed from among their own kind as their infinity but which represent the limit of that kind in the face of the *other* kind. In seeking a determinate existence for the feminine Irigaray is therefore seeking the projection and affirmation of female ideals as predicates which would allow *her* to come-to-be and be represented. Irigaray's divine is not in that case a form of negative theology because the female divine can be 'known' in the sense that it can be predicated and requires representation.¹³ This knowledge is not, however, a conceptual understanding of a lucid self-consciousness because the divine is

constituted within processes, practices and symbols that defy the stasis of a concept. The female divine would thus never be totally accessible to women as a self-present concept, even though it can be predicated as part of a process of becoming. Yet knowledge of the divine as the feeling of its completeness is never possible for Irigaray (as it is for Feuerbach) because in her model there are two divines. The other divine cannot be known, only perceived. It is not an object unknown in-itself, because its existence depends upon the other and it is therefore encompassed within the horizon of human culture. That is not a conceptual dependency, however, but one that is generated by the 'objectivity' of the other as a subjective and material being. Similarly, the nothing exists but it does not belong to knowledge as such, it is not a conception. Irigaray positions the nothing as a space or interval between, which is not known as such but which requires recognition if the other is to be. It is this notion of the divine which she articulates in her two rhythms.

With the notion of two rhythms, then, Irigaray is exploring what in some ways may be considered her logic of sexual difference, the bones for the flesh of her philosophy, yet logic is in many respects a misnomer since Irigaray's logic contravenes the laws of logic as such. Her thought attempts to dialectically thwart both the law of non-contradiction and the very premise of contradiction; the structures she proposes are never proposed as idealized forms applicable to any content but are rather *sensible* forms indistinguishable from the flesh. These sensible forms constitute divine forms which Irigaray calls a sensible transcendental (1984: 124); the transcendental is not the ideal as *opposed* to the sensible but it is within the sensible as that which arises through the matter of sexed bodies. Highlighting her philosophy of two as a philosophy of two *rhythms* thus emphasizes that the structures of sexual difference she envisages are primarily structures of process, flow and becoming in which form and content are united in a regulated harmony. Rhythm is bodily and not bound by the rigid edges of conceptual thinking; it is integral to the musical form of mimesis which she argues is particularly apt to the feminine.

With her two rhythms philosophy Irigaray therefore makes the truly radical gesture of her philosophy of sexual difference which, because it is a speculative and creative philosophy, cannot be judged without considerable assimilation and assessment over time. It represents a fundamental transformation of the one and the many of Western thinking and religion because she starts counting at two. The one is not bypassed but rather denied; she discounts the possibility of a positive one which always repeats any factor in multiplication: 'ce un n'existe pas' (1992: 65). As we have seen, Irigaray's critique of the one is central to her critique of patriarchy and she emphasizes that the female sex cannot be reduced to that one. The totality of the one claims for itself a unity

and primacy which can only be sustained by an idealized mathematical logic and which fails to recognize the female sex.

One consequence of this critique has been a problematic tendency in Irigaray reception to read her as a kind of advocate of multiplicity. Moi argues that Irigaray's 'theoretical programme' is to recognize the multiplicity of women. This is a programme destined to fail according to Moi because: 'The paradox of her [Irigaray's] position is that while she strongly defends the idea of 'woman' as multiple, decentred and undefinable, her unsophisticated approach to patriarchal power forces her to analyse 'woman' (in the singular) throughout as if 'she' were indeed a simple, unchanging unity, always confronting the same kind of monolithic patriarchal oppression' (1985: 147). Moi herself draws upon the logic of the one and the many here by assuming that Irigaray's evocation of multiplicity must be the alternative to the patriarchal definition of woman as one unity. Yet Irigaray's critique of patriarchy insists upon the patriarchal denial of any unity to woman and argues that patriarchy attributes a kind of multiplicity to women which prevents them from attaining their unity. Moi confuses Irigaray's diagnosis of patriarchy with a remedy for it; it is the patriarchal order which has attributed to woman the same place of the nothing, thereby reducing her 'essence' to a difference and fluidity which cannot find unified form. Irigaray's mimicry *plays* with this essence in her early work. She does not immediately assume the multiplicity of woman nor simply affirm it as an automatic transgression of the patriarchal monolith. Nevertheless, reading Irigaray as an advocate of multiplicity has not been limited to her critics. It has been an important element in the work of sympathetic readers keen to save her from accusations of essentialism: Irigaray does not assume an essence of femininity because the feminine is multiple and cannot be unified (and therefore essentialized). The 'essential' is thereby equated with unity and identity, whereas for Irigaray, the question of 'le propre' makes of the masculine a unity and the feminine a historical nothing because it is not one thing. Carolyn Burke has argued that Irigaray is not engaging in biological (or anatomical) arguments when she discusses her figure of the two lips, rather: 'It implies plurality, multiplicity...' (Burke et al 1994: 51). Yet this multiplicity is potentially 'proper' to the patriarchal feminine body unless it is interpreted differently. Even critics who qualify Irigaray's evocation of multiplicity stress its significance in her work. Grosz writes: 'Both Irigaray and Kristeva affirm a polyvocality, plurality and multiplicity lying dormant within prevailing representational systems' (1990: 173). Grosz does go on to argue that Irigaray can be contrasted with Kristeva by arguing that this multiplicity has hitherto been attributed to the female sex alone. But by equating the multiplicity of Irigaray and Kristeva here she unhelpfully assimilates their two

notions of the multiple as one; Kristeva accepts the notion of initially polymorphous sexual drives whereas Irigaray is critical of it, as I point out below.

Whitford significantly draws an important distinction between postmodern ideas of multiplicity and the multiplicity associated with Irigaray's feminine (1991a: 23). Postmodern forms of multiplicity assume a heterogeneous flux of continuous becoming that can never be contained within a unity or restricted to a given number; as a sexual difference it is an infinite multiplicity that goes beyond any limit of sexual difference to the masculine and the feminine.¹⁴ Yet Irigaray's discussion of multiplicity in her earlier work is *related* to the question of sexual difference, it is not advocated as something immediately or even potentially beyond sexual difference. One form of multiplicity attributed to woman is the apparent difference of the many commodities whose different values are but a hierarchical *measure* in accordance with the one general value. This is a multiplicity determined by the one. In *Ce sexe* Irigaray argues that the multiplicity analogous to Freud's polymorphous perversity has little to offer women; it is the initial heterogeneity assumed by the telos of the normative genital order in Freud's sexual model (1977a: 137). The correlation between woman and multiplicity is therefore not automatically liberating for Irigaray; there has always been a multiplicity necessary for the one. She does not deny a form of multiplicity to women but asks: 'une multiplicité, sans réarticulation de la différence des sexes, n'est-ce pas une multiplicité qui barre, enlève, quelque chose de la jouissance pour la femme?' (1977a: 138). Given this emphasis upon the necessity of a rearticulation of sexual difference, Whitford argues that if multiplicity is to be celebrated it must be after the advent of sexual difference (1991a: 23). Yet the question of the 'celebration' of multiplicity as such belongs to an ultramodern discourse to which Irigaray does not subscribe. It suggests an affirmation of the limitless after the one rationality of the modern has been intensified and finally released from its onto-theological residues in the form of a single purpose. It is a limitlessness that ostensibly depends upon no given form of embodiment; an abstraction because it can take any shape.¹⁵ Irigaray argues that multiplicity in a system devoid of the two is but a further manifestation or instantiation of the one. It is the two which is increasingly desired by Irigaray as her work progresses. Therefore, rather than agree with Whitford that multiplicity is the *key* to understanding Irigaray's work, I would argue that her philosophy of sexual difference is better characterized as a philosophy of two. While multiplicity can come of the two, the two is primary for Irigaray because the multiplicity of sexual difference itself would depend upon and take the two forms of sexual difference. Any immediate affirmation of multiplicity risks the deadly perpetuation of the one in Irigaray's view: 'Encore dans l'ombre se tient la révélation que ni la

nature ni le sujet ni l'absolu ne peuvent être uns, et que le multiple risque d'aboutir à la mort' (1992: 223).

In the rhythm of two which Irigaray articulates most explicitly in the third stage of her work, she thus rejects the universalist thought of the one and the many in both its monotheistic and ontological guises. She also rejects the dialectical version of this relationship which insists upon the dynamic between the *one* and its other which is a model for the many others. But rather than abandon dialectical thought, Irigaray argues that she wishes to dialectize the dialectic (1992: 98). She turns to the language of Hegel in order to begin to articulate her two rhythms. Hegel's dialectic between self and other has set the parameters for conceiving identity and difference and, through his master-slave dialectic, his thought is crucial in considering the problem of recognition. Furthermore, Hegel's thought makes reality historical and draws the transcendental subject into history via his actualization as positive instantiations at successive moments in this history; thus change and indeed progress take centre stage. Given that Irigaray wishes to envisage sexual difference as a new era in our historical development as a recognition of otherness, she wishes to use the dialectic to create new forms of subjectivity after the twentieth century assault on humanism and the 'end of man'. Hence, instead of bemoaning the ineluctable ties of the dialectic, or indeed cutting loose those ties, Irigaray has proclaimed her allegiance to the Hegelian tradition.

The central twist of Irigaray's reworking of the dialectic is that, rather than see gender differences in terms of a certain logic of difference (which is a pattern to be found here, there and everywhere), she interprets the logic of difference in terms of the rhythm of gender. Hence, like Hegel, her method is ostensibly not a formal logic but a process fashioned by the 'content' of her object. For Irigaray, however, the matter of any enquiry is always already marked by gender; it is never a neutral material where spirit forges its mark or leaves its trace. This means that she accords the two marks of gender a priority of an ontological kind, they simply will not wash off or be eroded in the name of neutrality or multiplicity. The masculine and the feminine are not transcendental ideals, in the sense of timeless forms of which their respective members are mere sensible copies, nor are they metaphysical entities, the essence of which grounds and determines mere beings. Neither determinant nor eternal, they are nevertheless *given* rhythms which require appropriation and cultivation by sexed subjects (1992: 168).

What is given is thus never a moment of pure, unmediated oneness, a positive identity that is total and absolute as with the first term of Hegel's dialectic. This unsullied unity was for Hegel but a cognition of what emerges elsewhere mythologically, such as Eden before the Fall (1977: 468), or, in terms

relevant to Irigaray's discourse, existence *in utero* which is represented as functional. For Irigaray, such a notion of oneness is derivative of the illusions of the masculine patriarchal subject who has failed to recognize the material existence of the other in his abstract assumption that he represents total being; in short, the subject who has failed to recognize his limit and subsequently experiences this life as an exile from his divinity. She writes: 'Et, en devenant un dieu, n'aurais-tu fait le choix de ton déclin? Et moi je n'étais pas capable encore de manifester mon apparaître' (1997: 25). From this failure there ensues the structural determinants for the unfolding of Hegel's dialectical history, which Irigaray accepts as a reasonably accurate account of patriarchal reality. What she challenges is the necessity of Hegel's construal of negation as contradiction. As we have seen, for Hegel the oneness needs the tension and conflict presented by the other to become actual in history and to progress, otherwise it is doomed to remain in the simple positive state of nature. Since the masculine subject believes himself to be total being it is therefore from within himself that otherness must emerge. It is the one identity which prevails in Hegel; difference is but an other determined by the prevalence of the one; identity, though containing its difference, is both prior to and the teleology of difference. The desire for the other is thus a desire for one's own other and a desire to return that other to one's self; a very solitary passion according to Irigaray (1992: 68). She argues that this is a nostalgia for the one — a one that has never actually been — which has supplanted the desire between the two (1997: 104).

In common with the prevailing tenets of contemporary French thought, Irigaray rejects any totalizing notion of identity prior to difference: difference is always already in play and no identity can make claims to the absolute.¹⁶ In denouncing the singular, she sets up her notion of originary difference without the one; difference is not contained within or internal to the absolute but rather absolute difference exists without or external to the absolute as one. Difference is always already there but so is potential identity in the form of the two genders. Identity is marked by gender, rather than by the illusion of mere difference as such. By rejecting the singular, she retains the moment of identity as constitutive but not totalizing. Starting from the premise of two, then, Irigaray's model attempts to dispense both with the one that needs to establish its other for the purpose of its negation, and the one which is found to be so suffused with difference that it cascades into a multitude of difference offering no possible unity. As noted, the necessary split is found not within the subject but between two already existing subjects; otherness is not to be determined from within but is an absolutely other existence to be recognized as such (1992: 161).

This means that Irigaray reconstrues Hegel's notion of the negative in two ways. In the first instance, it is no longer a contradiction to be overcome but rather a limit to be respected. Each gender is determined by the other in recognizing its existence as a limit on its claim to represent being. Hence, being sexed implies the negative of *not* being and never being the other sex (1997: 63). Through the recognition and respect of not being the other, each sex is always presented with an other to endorse the limit of its own being. It is therefore obliged to recognize its own finitude and to realize its gender in becoming and fulfilling that gender:

La limite de l'appartenance à un genre n'est pas seulement limitée à ma présence — dans le monde, vis-à-vis de l'autre, des autres —, elle est aussi limite qui dessine un horizon d'intériorité. Parce que je ne suis pas toi, je puis retourner en moi, me accueillir, penser. (1997: 68)

This dialectic between two sexed beings Irigaray holds to be operative at all levels (psychological, social, political); it is a basic structure providing the germ of all social relations in a new era of sexual difference. Moreover, it is not merely envisaged as the structure for heterosexual relationships; she claims that it would provide the fundamental model of relations for same-sex relationships, too (1997: 64–65). As discussed earlier, Irigaray believes that during the patriarchal era heterosexual relationships have been a foil for the 'homosexual' relations among men and that homosexual (same-sex) relationships have been ineluctably defined relative to the sexual indifference of the patriarchal order. She argues that if same-sex relationships are to avoid the relations of appropriation, fusion and dominance characteristic of patriarchy then they too require a model of radical non-assimilable otherness so that as subjects they may love one another while leaving the other to her or his subjectivity. Irigaray reiterates the boldness of her claims for sexual difference as well as the primacy she attributes to it by maintaining that it is only in the relation between man and woman that this model of absolute otherness is to be found (1997: 64). She is not denying or attempting to reduce homosexual relationships with such a claim, because she is not necessarily discussing relationships at the level of sexual practice and choice in the narrow sense. Nevertheless, she is once again reducing homosexual relationships to the heterosexual model, albeit in an attempt to articulate a *place* for everyone. Irigaray defines subjects as necessarily masculine or feminine because of their incarnation within sexed bodies and because of the different relationships this entails for their relationship with the body of the mother (1992: 69). Such a position inevitably makes relationships of sexual 'choice' somewhat secondary for the constitution of sexed identity; homosexual relationships can only be truly defined thus because men and women have already acquired a sexual

identity which can make their relationships same-sex. Against models of sexual multiplicity, Irigaray goes so far as to state that:

Certes, je peux décider de devenir une femme en suspendant la relation empirique avec l'autre genre — à cause d'une impossibilité historique, par exemple —, mais je ne peux pas nier ni ne pas tenir compte, dans mon devenir, de la relation à l'autre genre, qui fait partie de la relation à mon genre. Être femme implique nécessairement — pour ce qui concerne l'essence et l'existence humaines — être en relation avec l'homme, du moins au niveau ontologique. (1997: 64)¹⁷

This ontological difference between men and women is 'inscrite dans le pré-donné de mon corps' (1997: 64). I will go on to discuss the status of this 'pre-given' body, but here it is important to stress that for the purpose of articulating a reformed dialectic Irigaray proposes that the masculine and the feminine are considered as two different *kinds* of being. They do not therefore contradict one another because they have always already been absolutely different: they are not binary, dualistic, complementary or supplementary to one another. Having made that assertion, Irigaray argues that the other remains a mystery for each sex; the other cannot be *known*, only perceived. Each sex may thus engage in a phenomenology of perception with the other, and may indeed perceive in the other something that escapes the other her or himself, but the otherness of the other cannot be contained and assimilated to a conceptual understanding (1992: 163).

This *absolute* otherness of the other is profoundly problematical and yet it is vital for Irigaray's model of sexual difference. It enables her to propose sexed forms of identity which cannot entail the risk of totalitarianism because recognizing sexual difference is to recognize the absolute difference of the other. However, it is possible that the *absolute* difference of the other risks canceling out any dialectical relation between them. If sexual difference is given and absolute, why is the relationship with the other necessary or even feasible? How and why should an absolute depend upon an other, since the absolute is understood to be self-sufficient and complete in itself? Assuming that the masculine and the feminine of sexual difference have always been radically other to one another would appear to justify or at least explain masculinity's appropriation of the other as his own femininity in patriarchy. For if his difference from the feminine is absolute, it is probably impossible for him to approach the other on her own terms. The gulf between them suggests a void of possible relationships and an absence of desire for something that cannot even be *known* as the unknown.

Irigaray's assertion of the absolute difference of the sexes remains a potential justification for such a universe in which each sex orbits its own sun without reference to the other. However, her model of sexual difference attempts

to rule out such an interpretation because the absolute itself is modelled upon sexual difference. As I stressed above, Irigaray's notion of the absolute should not be reduced to Hegel's absolute. The absolute is never singular or indeed complete in itself because it is two. These two are mutually dependent, not because one defines the other as its own negative other, but because each one needs the limit the other represents to provide the boundary of its own being: 'Le fait que tu sois, m'impose des limites. Je suis toute, peut-être, mais non le tout' (1997: 32). The other is not, therefore, nothing; the other is a positive other which is not simply positive (1992: 16). For Irigaray's dialectic the labour of the negative remains central but instead of being attributed to the other as a negative within the determinations of the one, it is situated between the two sexed terms. Difference is therefore not created by the labour of the negative after and from within a purely positive moment in Hegelian fashion. For Irigaray difference is given, although that difference can only be realized and sustained by the nothing between (1997: 118). The nothingness is therefore shared by the two and, significantly, it cannot be overcome but allows for sexual difference to be refounded. Hence, on the basis that a woman is not a man, she can begin to become who she is.

The negativity 'between' allows for a relationship between man and woman which 'a lieu sur fond d'un fond sans fond' (1992: 169). Sexual difference is not a construction across an engulfing abyss or a cold void; it is not built upon nothingness as if in denial or defiance of it. Rather, sexual difference is given and built in relation to a negative which inheres within that difference only if the negative is recognized and respected. This *between* of the genders is therefore the space of mediation that gives rise to sexual difference and is therefore considered divine by Irigaray:

Je découvre alors le divin entre nous, conçu par nous et non englobant, se tenant entre l'un et l'autre. Nous l'engendrons, enfin adultes. Naissant à une autre époque de notre histoire, Dieu se révélerait comme l'œuvre de l'homme et de la femme. (1997: 29)

Between the two genders there arises sexual difference as the sensible transcendental whereby transcendence is horizontal rather than vertical. The transcendent is returned to the subject and brought down to the human level in relations that are equitable rather than hierarchical. But because it depends upon an incarnated and absolute other, the transcendent remains transcendent, it is never entirely reducible to the predicates of one subject since it always goes beyond any one subject. In the mediated relationships between men and women which recognize their sexual difference Irigaray thus finds the universal: 'La différence sexuelle est sans doute le contenu le plus adéquat de l'universel' (1992: 84).

That Irigaray considers the negative as a limit which is given brings us to the second way she reconstrues Hegel's negative. Because her difference is already given, she argues that 'natural immediacy' as such is never one (1992: 84), and therefore that the negative is not an essential characteristic of human consciousness alone. Nature itself contains a negative in the form of gender as limit (1992: 65). In making this claim, which is highly inflammatory for the support it could give to an essentialist argument, Irigaray actually displaces herself from such an argument. She reverses the assumptions regarding the meaning of 'nature' that would allow an essentialist to claim her as one of their own. For an important element of Anglo-American anti-essentialism is to argue that what empiricism takes to be given and determinant in the form of nature is in fact a conceptual *construct* of human understanding. Irigaray, on the other hand, argues that when she uses the term 'nature', she is not referring to nature as it is commonly understood by her own philosophical tradition, as in the *concept* of 'human nature'. Such concepts are indeed granted the status of concepts of a reality that can only be rationalized and conceptual in Hegelian terms. Rather, she argues that she is attempting to invoke 'nature' as that which is anterior to and beyond the human, a nature which is given and which cannot be captured or determined by the constructs of conceptual understanding (1980b: 14). This is a nature which would likewise elude the facts of a pure empiricism because it cannot be known as a given fact.

At one level, in claiming that the natural itself contains a negative in the form of sexual difference Irigaray is merely arguing that plants and animals depend upon sexual difference for their survival. This is nevertheless a highly contentious argument since the patterns of sexual difference among plants and animals are infinitely variable and indeed it is claimed that certain species reproduce in the absence of sexual difference, as de Beauvoir argued in her analysis of biology (1949, Vol. 1). Yet at this level Irigaray would agree with de Beauvoir in that, as phenomenologists, they both deny the validity of extrapolating from the world of plants and animals in order to define and analyse the human. Rather, Irigaray is arguing that in defining the limit of sexual difference as the negative, the dominion of man as he who reigns over nature is undermined. The unmediated, simply positive, state of nature that is man's own conception but which he fails to recognize as such is a mythology, and one which is revealed as inessential by a nature that already contains differentiation by the negative (1997: 126).

On another level, the view that nature contains the negative is integral to Irigaray's dialectic of sexual difference because she is arguing that each sex is 'given' a nature which must be developed if they are to realize themselves. Hence, while Hegel is held to articulate culture and progress as a teleological process between one kind of subject and its own goals, thus entailing a sub-

ject-object relation, Irigaray attempts to articulate a dialectic between two genders as a subject/subject relation with no finality. Because the negative sustains different identities, there is no negation of negation (1992: 168). In that case, difference is both horizontal and vertical and the two genders find their limits in two ways. They are limited without by the other gender and within by what is given to them as their gender: the historicized nature-subject. Irigaray therefore argues for a dialectic on two sides, not of two from one, or of two after one, but a two which is absolute because it refuses to combine as one and necessitates mediation on two fronts, both within and without.

On the basis of this double mediation Irigaray attempts to escape the division of subject and object while still providing the necessary division between the one and its other through which identity can be determined and limits maintained. This she supports by claiming the subject-object relation can become one between subjectivity and objectivity. Objectivity is given in the pre-given forms of the two sexed bodies which, when recognized, provide the ideal and the limits towards which each sex directs its becoming. These constitute the universals of sexual difference and also mark the objective limit of the other gender; they cannot be objects because they represent incarnated subjectivities (1997: 42). Hence, Irigaray is arguing that a woman's objectivity is a universal female form which, as an incarnated divine, allows her to form and sustain her identity as *in-fini* (infinite and yet unfinished, 'to be'). However, such an objectivity can only be made objective from the perception of the masculine. It is the masculine's recognition of the feminine as objectivity which sustains it thus, otherwise it has no true objectivity and remains within the tautology of a subject defining itself through its own predicate. The masculine's recognition of the feminine provides women with a form of exteriority to uphold their objective ideal. Female interiority is formed by an ideal divine on their own terms but that only comes about on the basis of the absolute otherness of the masculine.

Therefore, Irigaray's argument for the necessity of a female divine involves the absolute necessity of a transformed male divine. Women need a divine ideal but equally they need the other in order to recognize that ideal if it is to be maintained. She thus reformulates Hegel's notion of freedom as the knowledge of necessity into a 'knowledge' of the necessity of limit by defining oneself through predicates in order to place oneself: 'Ma liberté est et reste liberté seulement si l'autre demeure transcendant à moi, et si je respecte sa liberté' (1997: 167). He or she becomes what he or she is, rather than what he or she is not, despite the fact that becoming is defined relative to the not, the negative. A subject is thus only 'free' to become what he or she is *owing to* rather than in spite of the other. The desire to become what one is and to free the

other for her or his becoming in Irigaray's dialectic thus supplants the desire to overcome the other in Hegel's master-slave encounter; she desires to recognize the other as absolute rather than struggle to find self-recognition in absolute otherness. This means that, in place of Hegel's violent sublation of difference, Irigaray proposes fidelity to difference.

Irigaray's dialectic thus replaces the necessity of conflict with the necessity of the divine. She presupposes the possibility of a form of recognition which has always been immanent within human culture and could be realized in an era of sexual difference. Her argument *assumes* and indeed requires that the masculine *will* recognize the objectivity of the feminine, and therefore recognize her as a subject rather than reduce her to an object. It therefore allows for the possibility of a form of recognition at the outset which, given her argument that masculinity has begun to meet its limits, is possible once again. Rather than entail the reconciliation of the master-slave dialectic, Irigaray's thought offers an alternative to it.¹⁸ Like Feuerbach, she assumes a kind of universality in the relation between beings which makes the need for conflict redundant, and that universality is the love between the sexes as the expression of the universality of sexual difference. Instead of perceiving the other as an opportunity to have one's self recognized by conflictual overcoming, the other represents an opportunity to become through love, a love which is inseparable from sexuality and sexual desire (1984: 69). Irigaray thus makes love of the other in sexual difference the motor of the dialectic, although in her case the love between the sexes does not represent an 'abstract indwelling' which *unites* the two in a positive infinity. For Irigaray, love constitutes the rhythm of the two as an attraction towards the other that nevertheless allows the other to remain her or himself:

Jamais te connaître, seul l'amour consent à une telle nuit. Entre ceux qui s'aiment, subsiste un voile. Dans la solitude, cheminer avec une lampe peut-être est nécessaire, mais dans l'amour? Une telle nuit correspond-elle à une foi aveugle ou au respect de ce que je ne connaîtrai jamais? Et n'est-ce pas ce non-su qui permet que nous restions deux? (1997: 23)

It is through the love of the other that Irigaray proposes to sustain absolute difference; love transcends beings by sustaining the gap between them yet it is that which draws one to the other for mutual definition. She acknowledges that to be capable of such a relationship the love for the other must be strong, even absolute (1997: 28). Love itself is thereby divine for Irigaray; love sustains the mediations between the two genders because it makes possible their alliance and yet in her account is the only movement that can let the other be. Against the darkness of psychoanalytical and phenomenological accounts of love as the desire to consume the other, Irigaray's account of love is therefore

much closer to Feuerbach's Christianity whereby love gives rise to the other. Yet it is once again sexual difference that defines love, because the universality of love only comes about between the two.

It is unclear whether Irigaray paradoxically considers this to amount to 'one' love, as the love of sexual difference which would thereby represent *the* universal of the two sexed universals. Her account tends to support this view because she uses love as the motor of a potentially universalistic model for human relations. Yet given that sexual difference is always two, any such love will always occur at two different poles, and it is possible that the masculine love for the other would not take the same form as the feminine's love for the other. Nevertheless, Irigaray's model of sexual difference assumes that they each *share* a desire to be with the other without becoming or consuming the other. She emphasizes that this love cannot be a love of so-called pure instinct or of an energetic discharge, one that emanates from a version of the natural that is seemingly bereft of culture (1992: 216). Nor does she advocate this love as a means-end relation such that it could be reduced to reproduction, for example, with the child representing the third and unifying moment of his or her parent's love (1992: 97–98). Rather, for Irigaray, love is divine because it supports sexual difference and the alliance between the sexes as an 'end' in itself. If it is to support a culture of sexual difference, it is a love which should always be communicated in language. At a certain level, therefore, the two genders must at least share a language (*une langue*) which is compatible for communication between them even if, as Irigaray claims, the ways they use language (*langage*) will not be the same. The challenge of Irigaray's model is that the two sexes must share love and language to enable exchange between them, but love and language must take different forms for each sex if absolute otherness is to be recognized and respected. In order to begin to initiate the necessary transformations, Irigaray has herself put forward proposals to transform linguistic usage, as she explains with regard to her attempts to make the verb 'to love' an intransitive one:

Loin de vouloir te posséder, dans la relation à toi je maintiens un 'à' pour assurer l'indirection entre nous — 'j'aime à toi', et non 'je t'aime'. Ce 'à' garde le lieu d'une transcendance entre nous, d'un respect imposé et voulu, d'une alliance possible. Tu ne te trouves ainsi réduit à une chose factuelle ni à l'objet de mon amour, et pas davantage à un ensemble de qualités qui fait de toi un tout perceptible par moi. Je m'arrête plutôt devant toi comme devant un autre irréductible à moi, en corps et en esprit, en extériorité et en intériorité. (1997: 39)

Irigaray's model can only be considered a utopian one which pursues Hegelian thought by substituting the universality of love for the universality of conflict. Indeed, both the Hegelian model and Irigaray's are idealistic in the

sense of proposing a certain model as the one that provides the basic structure of human relations; it is probably equally unsatisfactory to assume that all human relations are inherently conflictual. To the extent that Irigaray's model attempts to demonstrate an alternative to the model of human relations as necessarily consuming and appropriating, it is effective. However, Irigaray's claims go beyond the view that not all relationships can be assimilated to Hegel's model since she is proposing this love as an ontological condition, as it were. Only on the basis of the love between the sexes can the two genders come-to-be in Irigaray's thought, and only if they come-to-be as sexed can they realize themselves as human beings (1997: 47). Quite apart from the implications this model has for homosexual relationships, as pointed to above, it is based upon an audacious hypothesis that love between the sexes as love of the other sex *qua* other is universal and can obtain an ontological status. There is little evidence to suggest that this is the case, and certainly Irigaray does not furnish any. Her own analysis of patriarchy does not allow for what may appear to be loving relationships between men and women as possible examples, because these relationships are considered to be compromises within the appropriating patriarchal model (1990a: 22). Of course, Irigaray's discourse does not simply pertain to individual relationships, although it can only be bound within those otherwise it would be an abstract love. However, in attempting both to transform love from a desire for unity into a desire for otherness and to make of this love a question of ontology Irigaray makes the historical realization of her model appear an impossibility, or at least an improbability. The fragility of love can only be compounded in a structure which makes of it both the source of attraction towards the other and the motive for withdrawal from the other.

Although love provides the universalistic basis of Irigaray's model, she does not propose to leave her dialectic of the sexes to the realm of love under patriarchy, that is, to the private and familial realm. As noted, love and the dialectic are held to operate at all levels. Hence, the love between the sexes is to receive public and symbolic recognition which will both embody it in institutional form and protect its fragility. Irigaray thus proposes to transfer her rhythm of two to the civil realm. She takes Hegel's argument that for the person to be as such requires the person's definition in civil law (1942: 50), and argues that woman has no status as a political subject. She points to the fact that woman was defined exclusively as wife and mother in the Napoleonic Civil Code, and the male citizen was himself defined primarily in relation to property ownership (1992: 205).¹⁹ This definition has not been fundamentally altered in French law and what Irigaray proposes amounts to a fundamental overhaul of French and indeed European definitions of citizenship. Rather than continue to chip away at universal definitions of the citizen, which many feminists have argued presuppose a male subject in the public sphere who can

actually only maintain this status through the support of woman in the private sphere,²⁰ she advocates a sexed definition of citizenship in accordance with two gendered universals. Taking the generic sexed body as the starting point, citizenship is given as a birthright; having recognized this given, civil law should be concerned to respect the rights of concrete men and women as such. The person is thus always tied to the materiality of gender, therefore Irigaray argues that it cannot become an abstraction, the one individual whose definitional content can be filled with interchangeable variables: property, family, state. Nor can it be set adrift, transgressing all boundaries for, as we have seen, it is limited by gender. In place of the law of property, then, she proposes a law of persons, and in place of respect for the nation, she proposes respect for the other. Hence, each sex should have rights which are appropriate to it, and the two genders provide the pegs on which a woman or a man hangs her or his civil identity (1992: 87). Her own proposals — relating to women's rights to maternity and to virginity — are more ideas cast out to draw up the potential of sexed laws than a programme for action. However, they do correspond with the divine ideals Irigaray proposes for women, as I go on to discuss in Chapter Four.

It is only through such ideals that Irigaray's model of sexual difference could come about and ensure the political/individual recognition and love of the other who is always absolutely other. Although it is possible to debate whether such absolute otherness is theoretically feasible given its relation with the other and the requirement that the two sexes *share* together, this is not presented as simply a theoretical question by Irigaray. It pertains to future possibilities which are not programmed in advance and which cannot be *decided* in advance. Whether her universal love of sexual difference is simply a utopian hypothesis or whether it awaits recognition is therefore a question that has to be resolved historically. Sexual difference will only be realized by the creation of sexed ideals appropriate to each sex and supported by law. This is a historical process which Irigaray's thought intends to initiate, but clearly it cannot determine the progress or success of that process.

If the divine of sexual difference is ever to be realized as an alliance of two absolute others, then each sex needs to begin to define its own ideals as sexed and to articulate sexed universals to support them. I now turn to Irigaray's attempts to articulate a different notion of the feminine which will support the sexed ideals she proposes for women.

Modalities in the Feminine

Throughout the second stage of her work Irigaray puts forward suggestions for modalities in the feminine — for ways of discussing and articulating the feminine beyond the patriarchal order. This has been interpreted as Irigaray's attempt to create a female imaginary, although I propose that ultimately the imaginary is incorporated within and supported by her notion of the divine.

Irigaray has always argued that the masculine scene of representation is unable to represent the female body and the feminine. This is not simply an argument relating to the legitimacy of representation, in the sense that men are unable to 'stand for' women's interests and accurately convey their experiences, although it does on the whole support that position.²¹ It is an argument pertaining to the very modes and structures of representation and the parameters of discourse established to represent reality and truth. It concerns the dominant language and metaphors of truth, and, indeed, the notion of metaphor itself as a term within this dominant discourse insofar as metaphor is assumed to 'stand for' the real and surpass other linguistic processes, such as metonymy. Hence, for Irigaray representation for and on behalf of the feminine cannot be undertaken on the same terms as the masculine. What is given as the feminine cannot be objectified and idealized in the same way that the masculine is, and certainly not in accordance with patriarchy's masculine model. This is partly because the masculine is not appropriate to the feminine, and also because in order to support its forms of representation the masculine has already appropriated the feminine to them. Consequently, although the feminine is given within patriarchy, the dominant masculine model cannot return that feminine to herself on her own terms — it cannot 'reflect' her back to herself — since the feminine role is to support the reflection of his identity. For Irigaray, 'she' is always reflected back to herself as 'he' sees her.

Irigaray's position as a phenomenological and psychoanalytical thinker is manifest in this argument. 'Reality' is not something that is represented objectively by a neutral observer as a relation of verisimilitude between the image and the entity it mirrors. Nor is it found in the empirical observations of a subject in accordance with *a priori* categories, as if such categories themselves could be cleansed of all historical conditions and marks of gender. Truth and objectivity do not appear to a neutral rational subject who stands over and against that reality. The subject is himself formed by his interaction with the object and the other subject within an interpretative horizon for constituting its truths. The world of the subject is thus 'lived' and 'revealed' through interpretation, it is the product of a projection, a *poēsis* or an imaginative understanding before it is accountable as identifiable knowledge and fact.²² Hence, it is possible to argue that man's world is and can only be in the first instance

'imaginary'. The distinctive element in Irigaray's thought is that she radicalizes this imaginary world by introducing gender to the ostensibly neuter, if not in this case neutral, subject.

Margaret Whitford interprets Irigaray's attempts to create modalities of and in the feminine in relation to her deployment of the term 'imaginary'; Whitford views the poetic ruminations of Irigaray's second stage in particular as an attempt to create a female imaginary.²³ This is a useful way of comprehending her elaborations of the feminine because they are inherently difficult to apprehend and assess given that they are explicit attempts to gesture beyond established forms of representation and understanding. They defy precise conceptual definition and articulation in a meta-language; they 'are' the processes of their enactment and find their privileged milieu in communication. Consequently, they are also difficult to situate in relation to a specific context of discourse as they simultaneously draw upon and extend beyond many discourses.

Whitford therefore argues that the imaginary is an associative term in Irigaray's thought which draws upon the phenomenological and psychoanalytical traditions in their broadest senses. She lists several possible sources for Irigaray's imaginary, including Lacan, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Bachelard and Castoriadis (1991a: 53–55). However, Irigaray's position is distinctive because for her the imaginary is always sexed. This means that the imaginary is nothing outside the relative structures of its modalities; it is not a basic structure which can then take male or female forms because the very notion of an imaginary itself is sexed. As Whitford explains, Irigaray envisages it as an unconscious (psychoanalytical) *and* a conscious (phenomenological) structuring process, and she tends to conflate the two (1991a: 54). In fact, Irigaray often defines this opposition itself in relation to a masculine imaginary for which women are the 'unconscious' to the masculine conscious (1977b: 70).

Irigaray does draw upon the Lacanian concept of the imaginary as the projection of an unconscious phantasy formed during the mirror stage of psychic development. She uses this psychoanalytical definition of the imaginary as a necessary constituent in the process of the formation of the subject that entails forms of bodily identification with an other which are not the acts of a fully self-conscious and willing subject. Yet, as Whitford stresses, Lacan's language is not the exclusive source of Irigaray's own (1991a: 57). She also draws upon Merleau-Ponty's 'imaginary' as the structure that informs the conceptualization of the world in the phenomenology of perception, revealing certain implicit forms of ontological commitment within any structure of consciousness. Sartre's concept of the imaginary, as the intentional object of an imagining (rather than perceiving) consciousness, is another influence. Hence, poetry and myth manifest and contain the imaginary, and Irigaray looks to them to reveal the imaginary underlying a given cultural order to which they

give expression. Castoriadis also deploys the imaginary as that which is found in a primordial creative source (a 'magma') and which structures a social formation — a notion close but not equivalent to Irigaray's own according to Whitford (1991a: 56).

Irigaray's imaginary is itself, therefore, an imaginative notion deriving from a philosophical tradition and yet inextricably embedded within her own thought. It is a psychic and social formation; although largely 'unconscious' in the sense that it structures who we are in such a way that we cannot step out of it, this formation can be made visible in poetry and myth. The imaginary is passional and structured in accordance with the morphology of the body. It is significant for the formation of an identity; it is projected in representations and yet cannot be entirely captured by them in the form of logical explanation.

For our purposes, it is significant that the function of the term 'imaginary' in Irigaray's thought corresponds very closely to her notion of the divine. Both are associative terms or 'cluster concepts' which evoke a structuring process and certain modalities that cannot be reduced to existing concepts and yet borrow from these concepts to suggest their transformation. They are each, in their female modes, deemed necessary to the coming-to-be of the feminine by Irigaray and to the revelation of a world as sexed. The imaginary and the divine appear to ensue from what is given and yet involve the will as a creative and defining projective element. Both entail processes of identification considered necessary to the formation of an identity and subjectivity — processes which are envisaged as the identity of a subject with its object as subject. Hence, it is possible to argue that Irigaray's case for a female imaginary and for a female divine constitute corresponding, if not interchangeable, arguments. This is supported by the corresponding structure we find in her argument regarding the masculinity of their prevalent forms and the need to create female forms: the masculine divine and imaginary appropriate the feminine as matter to support their own idealized productions in accordance with the perceived morphology of the male body.

To a certain extent it is possible to separate Irigaray's arguments if we consider the divine as the symbolic form of the imaginary which provides the ideal for imaginary identification. Irigaray's attempts to reclaim certain female figures, such as Mary, as symbols of the female divine could support this argument. However, Irigaray's divine is never merely a sign: it is a process, and a process of becoming in which becoming itself is considered divine. The imaginary and the symbolic cannot strictly be divided in her thought as a division between bodily identification and linguistic subjectivity, the body and language, the sensible and the intelligible. In contrast with Lacan, she attempts to imagine the imaginary and symbolic as continuous rather than assuming a necessary break between them. Elements of her female imaginary,

such as 'air' and the 'two lips' model, are deemed to approach the divine, as I discuss below. In that sense, Irigaray's articulation of the female imaginary and the female divine do indeed appear to be very close. Nevertheless, the very history of the terms imaginary and divine and their location within different discourses suggests some significant differences in their function. These differences do ensue from the partly symbolic function of the divine, in that it provides the symbolic form of the material processes of the imaginary.

In many respects, Irigaray's 'imaginary' corresponds to Feuerbach's concept of religion and to the place of religion in the history of humanity. Feuerbach, as we have seen, argues that religion emanates from an immediate need on the part of a sensuous, thus feeling and loving, human being to identify with its other. This is a movement prior to the conceptual and analytical arguments typical of theology and philosophy, which tend to hypostatize God as an ideal concept. Religion represents the childhood of humanity for Feuerbach, and yet theology cannot grasp the essence of religion (1957: 13). Similarly for Irigaray, the imaginary is a movement of a projective need for bodily identification: it is a moment in the psychic development of the child and yet remains a structuring element in psychic and cultural existence. It is the prior condition of all conceptualizing which itself resists conceptualization and yet supports it. Whitford explains: 'Irigaray seems to be positing that to rethink the cultural imaginary it may be necessary to bypass the sophistication of theoretical constructions, whose imaginary is so well and deeply concealed' (1991a: 60). However, in making the case for a female imaginary Irigaray's thought owes much to the technical concepts of philosophy and psychoanalysis. It is possible that, in making the case for a female divine, she taps into a cultural discourse in the form of the language of religion which has a much wider currency than philosophical discourse. Certainly her articulations of a female divine around a reinterpretation of Christian figures and mysteries promise to resonate within contemporary culture more readily than her articulations of modalities of the female imaginary in the form of an 'elemental' discourse, as I discuss below.²⁴

This is entirely a question of interpretation, but it is clear that Irigaray unashamedly attempts to evoke the feeling and love of Feuerbach's religion with her argument for the divine. It is very much a critique of conceptualism of philosophy and theology similar to Feuerbach's. I suggest that in making a case for a transformed divine Irigaray's language lends itself to the imaginary more than it does when advocating a female imaginary, particularly where political strategy is concerned. In that sense, it is possible to argue that her evocation of a female divine takes precedence over the argument for the imaginary as a stimulus for communication between women, as this argument evokes the 'religious' or affective essence of subjectivity which acts upon and

within what philosophy terms the imaginary. That is not to suggest a hierarchy in what are highly allusive and associative terms. However, it is to suggest that for Irigaray the notion of the sexed divine is necessary in order to enable the imaginary to arise and sustain itself as sexed. It is significant that she draws upon the language of the divine for its association with notions of necessity, universality, transcendence and perfection. To speak of the divine is to speak a language already familiar within a patriarchal cultural inheritance. It is also to raise affective issues, while providing the means of channelling that affect towards an appropriate ideal. The perfection and transcendence of the divine thus provide the structuring ideal which support the operation of sexed modalities. Therefore, I suggest that although the divine can only be imaginary for Irigaray, it also upholds the imaginary as that which supports each sex's mode of perfection for itself and its transcendence in the difference of sexual difference. Irigaray's divine is in certain respects an imaginary symbolic which does not need to break imaginary identity in order to form the individual subject, because that identity is never absolute. According to the terms of the sexual difference she envisages, identity is always mediated by the absolute difference of the identity of the other gender.

The problem with the prevalent Western cultural imaginary for Irigaray is that it is supported by a transcendental masculine divine value which does not recognize itself as such, especially when it ostensibly ceases to believe in its transcendental divine. As Whitford points out, for Irigaray 'the imaginary either bears the morphological marks of the male body, whose cultural products are characterized by unity, teleology, linearity, self-identity, and so on or it bears the morphological marks of the female body, characterized by plurality, non-linearity, fluid identity and so on' (1991a: 54). There is often ambiguity in Irigaray's writing as to the extent to which this female body represents a 'feminine' that could go beyond the masculine imaginary. For the consequence of this male imaginary is that it valorizes a rationality premised upon the masculine qualities Whitford lists at the expense of an irrationality defined in relation to the non-linear and fluid feminine qualities. Hence, the feminine thus described is in many respects determined by the masculine imaginary itself, and it is this masculine imaginary which is integral to the rationality of the modern knowing subject. Irigaray argues that the ideals of modern science and its subject (who is a 'neutral' observer of fact over religious and imaginary conceptions) support the universalist 'religion' of the masculine imaginary in spite of the apparent death of God:

Chaque univers scientifique semble avoir sa vision du monde, ses enjeux, ses protocoles d'expérience, ses techniques, sa syntaxe. Il apparaît isolé, coupé des autres. De quel point de vue, dès lors, *survoler* ces différents horizons pour trouver les lieux de rencontre, des intersections praticables, des passages possibles entre? *De quel droit*

se donner un point dehors? Comment se le donner? Historiquement, il y a eu Dieu, transcendant à toute *épistémé*. Mais si, quand 'la science est au pouvoir, Dieu est mort' (Nietzsche), d'où rassembler ces mondes? Mon hypothèse sera donc que le lieu de questionnement commun est *dedans* et non *dehors*, sous-jacent et non simplement transcendant, aussi 'sous terre' et non seulement 'dans le ciel' très profondément enfoui et non renvoyé à quelque caution absolue non interrogeable. (1987c: 65-66)

The 'underground' to which Irigaray refers here is a form of passion, the affectivity that is structured in accordance with a masculine imaginary. She shares Nietzsche's critique of the epistemologies of empiricism and positivism for their claims to be free of passion and religion. For Nietzsche, the ideal of modern science is itself a form of religion, its apparent objectivity but an enthusiasm for rationality which interiorizes faith and makes of value a seeming non-value in the form of utility. The idea of the disinterested observer is an absurdity for Nietzsche because he argues that to a pure knowing being, knowledge would be indifferent (Valadier 1974: 33-37).²⁵ Similarly, for Irigaray knowledge is always a matter of the passional, whether that is a passion utilized in denial of the passional or one that encompasses the passional. In the methodology of modern science she discerns the disavowing passion of the masculine subject for internalized ideals that correspond to the idealized forms of his imaginary body. These include: positing a world before the subject, projecting an ideal model upon it in an 'objective' fashion, declaring the model imperceptible despite the privilege the model ascribes to the visible, proving the universality of the model and the utility of its discoveries which are counted as progress. Her argument is that: 'Ces caractéristiques font apparaître un isomorphisme à l'imaginaire sexuel de l'homme...' (1987c: 73).

Thus, from her early work Irigaray has criticized the assumptions of science as the discourse which sets the standard of truth in the modern world and has interpreted the epistemology of scientific discourse as an onto-theology of the masculine (1987a: 221).²⁶ Her essay in *Ce sexe*, 'La "mécanique" des fluides' is a critique of 'science' for its neglect of the mechanics of fluids compared with the mechanics of solids, which she argues is complicit with a masculine model of rationality.²⁷ The language of science has traditionally granted precedence to solids, and has excluded from its mode of symbolization certain properties of real fluids because the conceptual language of science cannot incorporate these properties without idealizing them:

Or, si l'on interrogé les propriétés des fluides, on constate que ce 'réel' pourrait bien recouvrir, pour une bonne part, *une réalité physique* qui résiste encore à une symbolisation adéquate et/ou signifie l'impuissance de la logique à reprendre dans son écriture tous les caractères de la nature. Et il aura souvent fallu réduire certains de ceux-ci, ne les/l'envisager qu'au regard d'un statut idéal, pour qu'ils/elle n'enraye pas le fonctionnement de la machinerie théorique. (1977a: 105)

Although fluidity as such cannot be incorporated, a 'theoretical' fluidity has served to provide the space or interval between linguistic concepts which supports the possibility of their individuation and has been necessary for the clarity of rationality. This mathematical process has been undertaken at the expense of any relation to '*la réalité des corps*' (1977a: 108). Of course, for Irigaray the 'reality' of bodies presupposes the possibility of corporeal sexed identities and their harmonious interchange; she is not advocating the body as an explosive force of energy to destroy and defy all identity and rationality. Such a position would be consistent with the disintegrative forces of an apparent multiplicity, and Irigaray analyses it as symptomatic of contemporary science in many domains of knowledge. After a critique of their own absolute truth and search for solidity she argues that scientists are increasingly turning to models based upon chance, multiplicity and disintegration — models which seem to depend upon negativity and splitting rather than any reformulating of the solid/fluid distinction. She cites as examples 'big-bang' theory, entropy theory, the Freudian death drive and the pre-occupation of the physical sciences with ever-smaller particles that defy the human senses (1987a: 219–20). The subject is still absent from these formulations which appear to have replaced the non-human inertia of the solid with the post-human force of energy.

Irigaray attempts to reinterpret the solid/fluid distinction in order to return to the 'reality' of bodies. In '*La "mécanique" des fluides*' she uses the terms 'woman' and 'fluidity' almost interchangeably, while the masculine is asserted as the modality which establishes a rationality that reabsorbs the fluid in a solidified form. This process is related to the masculine morphology of the male body and its image of the phallus which is seen to reabsorb fluidity in a like manner (1977a: 108–109). Significantly, Irigaray attempts to describe a different language of fluidity, one which cannot be heard or understood in the forms of scientific discourse. She thus evokes the possible qualities of the feminine, in terms which are worth quoting in full:

Que c'est continu, compressible, dilatable, visqueux, conductible, diffusible... Que ça n'en finit pas, puissant(e) et impuissant(e) de par cette résistance au nombrable; que ça jouit et pâtit d'être plus sensible aux pressions; que ça change — de volume ou de force, par exemple — suivant le degré de chaleur; que c'est, dans sa réalité physique, déterminé(e) par des frottements entre deux infiniment voisins — dynamique du proche et non du propre, mouvements venant du quasi-contact entre deux unités peu définissables comme telles [...] et non énergie d'un système fini: que ça se laisse facilement traverser par des flux en fonction de sa conductibilité à des courants venant d'autres fluides ou s'exerçant à travers les parois d'un solide; que ça se mélange avec des corps d'état semblable, s'y dilue parfois de façon quasiment homogène, ce qui

rend problématique la distinction de l'un(e) et de l'autre; et d'ailleurs que ça se diffuse déjà 'en soi-même', ce qui déconcerte toute tentative d'identification statique... (1977a: 109–10)

This description of the fluidity of the feminine suggests how modalities in the feminine might operate. It emphasizes the feminine's flowing and continuous nature, its lack of differentiation, static identification and 'essence' (*le propre*); it suggests merging relations and a form of homogeneity. Interpreted this way, it is indeed a description that does in many respects conform to a patriarchal definition of femininity; it is a very *watery* fluidity. Yet Irigaray's description is not simply an affirmation of patriarchy's negative femininity. It leaves open a double possibility: it is a description both of how the feminine is understood in masculine terms and how that understanding may be surpassed. What is taken to be negative by the masculine is hence turned into a positive property by Irigaray in order to reveal something latent, not something arbitrary.

Here the fluid is not necessarily watery because it is also described as viscous, a description that links it to Irigaray's later notion of the mucous discussed below. Viscosity is semi-fluidity, suggesting a substance that comes between the solid/fluid dichotomy. That which is viscous is glutinous, it has its own internal dynamic which can resist transformations to its structure despite its apparent lack of form. The 'fluid' is thus not indeterminate as such, nor is it actually homogeneous and it may be identified. However, it is determined in the sensible through the interaction of closely related and yet discernible elements which flow from one to the other without the demarcation of a solid barrier. There lies in this description of the feminine the positive qualities Irigaray attributes to the feminine as she elaborates it: the significance of the *near* and *touch*, its *sensible* and *passional* basis, its *infinite* status and its continuous *becoming*. Scientific logic, which privileges the visual, the solid and idealizable, struggles to represent this materially fluid movement. Irigaray argues that the fluid is a 'substance' apt to convey sound (1977a: 110), and thus its voice 'flows' with a musical mimesis that goes beyond the identity of masculine subjectivity and his mimesis of adequacy: 'Qu'il figera donc, glacera, dans ses catégories jusqu'à la paralyser dans son flux' (1977a: 111).

The problem of masculine figures and modes of representation thus described is typified for Irigaray in the 'icy' and immobilizing representations that the mirror produces. She highlights the problematic of the 'mirror' throughout the first and second stages of her work because it is a dominant metaphor for representation in the Western tradition.²⁸ For Irigaray, the concept of the mirror has either explicitly or implicitly functioned to uphold the concept of representation as a static and symmetrical copy of the real as well

as a concept of the subject who is capable of self-consciousness through the copy of itself in its reflecting self-image. The mirror is the mechanism which establishes and consolidates the significance of the visual and of objectivity (the distinction between the subject and the instruments of reflection) for the knowledge and self-knowledge of the subject. In the first stage of her work, Irigaray's main objection is to the use of a flat mirror for representation:

Quant au privilège de la symétrie, il est corrélatif de celui du *miroir plan*: qui peut servir à l'auto-réflexion du sujet masculin dans le langage, à sa constitution comme sujet du discours. Or, la femme, à partir de ce seul miroir plan, ne peut advenir que comme l'autre inversé du sujet masculin (son *alter ego*), ou comme lieu de surgissement et de voilement de la cause de son désir (phallique), ou encore: comme manque, parce que son sexe pour la grande part, et la seule historiquement valorisée, n'est pas spécularisable. Donc, dans l'avènement d'un désir 'féminin', ce miroir plan ne peut pas être privilégié et la symétrie ne peut pas y fonctionner comme dans la logique et dans le discours d'un sujet masculin. (1977a: 127)

The only historically valorized part of her sex that cannot be represented in a flat mirror are women's sexual organs, and on one level Irigaray means quite literally that these cannot be seen in this mirror (1977a: 115). Hence the revelation by psychoanalysis that woman is seen as castrated or as a defective male, and the representation of woman in philosophy as unformed, as nothingness and lack. For Irigaray, only a different kind of mirror, such as a speculum, could represent woman and thwart the assumptions of linear symmetry in the mirror metaphor. Furthermore, such a mirror would make apparent the effects of the instruments or modalities of representation in a way that the flat mirror tends to obfuscate with its deceptively accurate symmetrical image of an appearance as a copy of reality.²⁹

Raising the issue of the means of representation highlights a related problem as far as Irigaray is concerned, which is that women have always been positioned as the providers of the tain of the mirror (1977a: 147). Presumably, if women were to step aside from that role the solidity of the mirror's reflective representations would disappear. Once again, this relates to Irigaray's argument that the bodies of women provide the matter for the masculine's conceptual idealism, that he uses her to reflect back to himself his own self-image.³⁰

In the second stage of her work Irigaray becomes increasingly ambivalent as to whether any shape of mirror could adequately convey the feminine even if women were to grasp a mirror for themselves. The mirror is intrinsically an instrument of re-presentation that privileges the visual and the solid. In 'Femmes Divines' she writes: 'Le miroir, et d'ailleurs le regard, s'utilisent fréquemment comme armes ou instruments non tactiles, étanches, interrom-

pant la fluidité du toucher, y compris celui du regard' (1987a: 77–78). The mirror 'holds' its image and cannot capture movement or touch, modalities that Irigaray privileges for the feminine. Moreover, as an instrument of self-reflection, the ideal the mirror has presented to women has been the ideal of beauty. The mirrored form of beauty is a destructive ideal that has been imposed upon women: 'Le miroir presque toujours nous sert de moyen pour nous réduire à une pure extériorité' (1987a: 77). Women's beauty has been to shine for the other; in Irigaray's view it is not an ideal that returns a woman to herself to create an inner life, the precondition for the divine ideal. She believes that the consequence of such an estranged self-reflection is the secondary narcissism of women in patriarchy. As we have seen, women's make-up and clothes adorn them like the dazzle of the commodity, representing the signs of exchange value while simultaneously covering over their lack of intrinsic value which could only be provided by a divine in their own image.

Nevertheless, Irigaray does also suggest that a certain mirror image can be useful for women for its representation of a goal and for the possibility it provides of helping them to emerge from the fluidity of water (1987a: 78). She appears to view the mirror ideal as a potential means to create divine ideals in accordance with modalities more adequate to women. Hence, rather than perpetuate the femininity of patriarchy, which is a watery fluid that can solidify in the icy form of the mirror, Irigaray attempts to develop her own language for the feminine and for its emergence as form:

Après l'enveloppe pleine d'eau de notre séjour prénatal, nous avons à construire, peu à peu, l'enveloppe d'air de notre séjour terrestre, air encore libre à respirer et à chanter, air où se déploient nos apparences, nos mouvements. Nous avons été poissons. Nous aurions à devenir oiseaux. Cela ne peut se faire sans ouverture et mobilité dans l'air. (1987a: 78)

Here she is suggesting that with the creation of their own divine women might come-to-be or be born as women. They would pass from the ante-natal conditions of a patriarchal fluidity in which they are apparently submerged with the mother into the flow of *air* in which everyone must breathe for themselves.

Air is the element that comes closest to the divine for Irigaray. She states of air that: 'Il m'est idéal. Pas besoin d'idoles. Une bouffée d'air frais, et le monde change de consistance. Toujours matériel, il se subtilise, se transsubstantialise. L'idéal, pour moi, est fait d'air pur' (1994: 216). This statement could in many respects contradict her view that women need a divine ideal of their own, since it is not immediately apparent that the element of air bears any necessary relationship to either of the sexed subjects of sexual difference. Irigaray herself suggests that air appears to be a universal element in nature, although because the quality of air varies she concludes that it is not a univer-

sal material but is rather that which makes the possible the universal (1992: 68), by which she means the sexual difference of 'life'. Air as the ideal also sits awkwardly with Irigaray's insistence upon the necessity of ideals which reflect the morphology of women and men. However, it could be interpreted that for Irigaray air is the element in which beings subsist as divine and become divine beyond the representational image in which subjects see themselves as an ideal other. Hence, beyond the mirror ideal, air is the material and universal element that forms the breath of life and the word for communication *between*. Beyond the forms of identity it is possible to envisage now, air could provide the matter for the as yet unimaginable forms of sexual difference which I point to below — forms which have completely surpassed any remnants of a mirrored self. Indeed, given that air flows from within and without in both the body and language, it is deemed a necessary material for sexual difference whose rhythm corresponds to the rhythm of feminine modalities. Whitford draws a correspondence between air and a possible female imaginary because they both are 'mobile and immobile, permanent and flowing, with multiple temporal punctuations possible' (1991a: 163). Yet the breath of air is necessary for the constitution of the divine. In Irigaray's thought air thus represents an imaginary symbolic divine as discussed above: in different respects it is substance, mode and symbol. However, just as it cannot be the universal, so it cannot represent the universality of sexual difference, and Irigaray's description of air as the ideal must be qualified by the necessity of gendered ideals she outlines in the second stage of her work.

Irigaray's idealization of air emerges from her thought of an elemental materialism and manifests some of the problems relating to that thought, particularly the relationship between an elemental materialism and the articulation of sexual difference as two-poled. Her use of the language of the elements is, in many respects, one of the most obscure aspects of her thought yet it is also one of the principal means she develops to articulate the feminine and sexual difference. Using the language of the four elements, earth, air, fire and water, she has attempted to develop a new 'poetry' of thought as an alternative modality for speaking of sexual difference. Hence Whitford explains this language of the elements as a way of imagining a different imaginary (1991a: 60), and Grosz explains it in relation to the need to articulate a materialism outside of the dominant scopic economy which cannot represent women's bodies (1989: 170). Irigaray explains the writing of her elemental texts thus:

En écrivant *Amante Marine, Passions élémentaires, L'oubli de l'air*, je pensais faire une étude de nos rapports aux éléments: l'eau, la terre, le feu, l'air. Je voulais retourner à ces matières naturelles qui constituent l'origine de notre corps, de notre vie,

de notre environnement, la chair de nos passions. J'obéissais à une intuition profonde, nécessaire, obscure même si elle est partagée par d'autres pensées. (1987b: 69)

The elements are thus a point of return as well as a point of departure for Irigaray. They focus on the passional in creation and what ostensibly forms us in defiance of the elementary particles of the physical sciences that surpass comprehension and feeling. As she acknowledges, recourse to the elements is not unique to her philosophy of sexual difference. Bachelard investigated the poetry of the elements, arguing that they are the basic categories of the imagining mind and that all writers have a preference for one element over another.³¹ In her 'elemental' texts Irigaray conversely takes each philosopher back to what his own philosophy suppresses in spite of itself, hence to Heidegger's *forgetting* of air and to Nietzsche's *fear* of water. These two texts were to have been joined by another on/with Marx written in relation to fire; all three are thinkers who have attempted to go beyond metaphysics and whose thought is decidedly contemporary.

While the profundity of Irigaray's engagements cannot be doubted, her schema can appear somewhat contrived. For example, it is debatable whether Nietzsche's poetry did actually suppress sea waters and express fear and resentment of fluidity (even if Nietzsche does express fear of women and femininity).³² David Krell argues that the sea might constitute a very consoling milieu for Nietzsche's eternal recurrence of the same, a recurrence which is interpreted as a metaphysical refusal to recognize the other in the first section of *Amante Marine*:

Might the sea — the wine-dark, life-giving sea — be the counterelement of transiency; might it be the symbol of the eternity sought for all things? Recall Nietzsche's note from the winter of 1887–88, which identifies the sea as a source of consolation (*Trost*): 'Ought one to pour the costliest unguents and wines into the sea? — My consolation is that all that was is eternal: — the sea spews it forth again.' (Krell 1994: 104)

On the other hand, the thought of the eternal return is also called the 'greatest weight' by Nietzsche.³³ Both Bachelard and Irigaray agree that Nietzsche is an aerial or ascensional thinker who is not a lover of the earth in spite of his proclamations to the contrary.

The point here is that Nietzsche and Heidegger privilege some elements over others, while in each case Irigaray links the neglected or disavowed element to a neglect of the feminine. However, when they privilege an element this is not necessarily interpreted as a recognition of the feminine by Irigaray. Nietzsche's desire for air and movement in his ascent and descent of moun-

tains is interpreted as an economy of erection and detumescence by her in contrast with the coming and going fluid flux of feminine *jouissance* (1981: 49). This raises the question as to whether she views the elements as such as feminine, or whether they are only feminine to the extent that they function as the disavowed. In an interview discussing nature Irigaray suggests that in general terms the elements and the feminine are coterminous: 'Éléments matériels, physiques, indispensables à la vie, constitutifs du corps et de son milieu, le plus souvent refoulés des discours qui font loi. Comme le féminin?' (1980b: 14). The elements are feminine in that they evoke a primordial matter that has been forgotten. Earth and water, both feminine nouns in French, are analysed as potentially feminine by Irigaray for their fertility and fluidity respectively. Air is a masculine noun but can be associated with the feminine for its mobility and flow, as noted. Fire, also a masculine noun, is more problematic for its association with a consuming and destructive passion, an ostensibly masculine passion in the terms of Irigaray's thought. It is possible to speculate that the difficulty of aligning fire with the femininity Irigaray attributes to the other elements has contributed to the non-appearance of her book on Marx.³⁴

Regardless of whether Irigaray's series of elemental texts is somewhat contrived, her deployment of an elemental language is a philosophy of matter that arises throughout the second and third stage of her work. As a return it returns to pre-Socratic ideas of matter prevalent before the establishment of the Greek *logos*. Irigaray can thus again be interpreted as pursuing her own course along Heidegger's path; they each return to the pre-Socratics as a world prior to logocentric reason in order investigate what it can reveal of Being. Grosz explains that Irigaray draws upon an Empedoclean materialism of four elements, an elementalism also found in medieval alchemy (1989: 168). Empedocles believed that matter is made up of the four elements which constitute the basic substances of things. These elements intermingle or form alliances with other elements to create objects in a constant process of becoming. Empedocles describes their alliances as based upon love, and their disintegration as due to conflict or hate:

At one time they grew to be one alone of the many, at another again, they grew apart to be the many of the one — fire and water and earth and the immense height of air, and cursed Strife apart from them, equal in every direction, and Love among them, equal in length and breadth. (Grosz 1989: 168–69)

For Irigaray, it is the imagination of the passional basis of being in the elemental that brings matter back to the 'human' dimension and to the alliances and attractions characteristic of sexed being. The question arises as to whether this constant process of the mingling of the elements and their continuous becoming does correspond to a schema of sexual difference as a double polarity

of the masculine and the feminine. Whitford argues that for Irigaray the four elements are subtended by the more basic schema of sexual difference of male and female (1991a: 56). Yet it is not clear how the four elements relate to the two sexes, or in which combination and form they may constitute the two sexes *conceived* as two absolute others. Empedocles's description of the constellation of the elements as a continuous flux lends support to a philosophy of the one and the many, and to notions of sexual multiplicity in a continuous becoming.³⁵ What is more, the dynamics of love and hate as two aspects of the same affect are assessed by Irigaray to be symptomatic of a patriarchal masculine economy (1981: 48). The formation of combinations of four elements does not in itself bear a more direct relation to sexual difference than do the ever-smaller particles of modern physics. It is true that the passional language associated with the elemental enables the stakes of sexual difference to be evoked in the language of fertility, creativity, love, conflict and death in a way which is denied by the language of the neutral and non-willing particles. Yet the association between the elements and sexual difference as a difference of two absolutely other beings is a form of elemental materialism that has to be developed by Irigaray. As we have seen, she has restricted her articulation of the elemental to the feminine pole to the extent that, in many respects, it would appear that to speak of the elemental is to speak of the feminine alone.

The status of the elemental and its relation to sexual difference thus remain uncertain. Grosz argues that Irigaray's elemental materialism is not an ontological commitment designed to replace the elementary particles of modern physics. She contends that it is rather a strategic use of a certain discourse that reveals the possibilities of alternative ontologies, an arbitrary schema revealing the historical arbitrariness of received and dominant representations (1989: 171). Yet while the elemental does reveal other possibilities, it would not appear to be arbitrary. For Irigaray, all ontologies are evidence of a form of interpretation, of a certain form of imaginary commitment that reveals a sexual interpretation which can not be truly indifferent to sexual difference. It is therefore not a coincidence that she develops an elemental materialism in relation to categories of thought that prevailed prior to the installation of Western reason and which are suffused with the passional. She describes the elements as a form of the nature she seeks anterior to and beyond the Western socio-cultural tradition (1980b: 14); they are therefore integral to her overall account of sexual difference. This is a structural and historical consideration that aims to have creative structural and historical effects.

Rather than focus on the question of its ontological status, Whitford suggests several possible functions for the elemental. She argues that it provides an alternative language for others to develop and exchange; the simplicity of the language of the elements facilitates an alternative talk of the basic pas-

sions (1991a: 62). This is undoubtedly an aim of Irigaray's work, and yet the poetry she deploys in this regard is ironically some of her most obscure. The radical otherness of the language of her poetry here can deter and defer its comprehension and deployment.³⁶ In a technical era, both men and women are more familiar with the seemingly sexually 'neutral' language of technology than with a marine or aerial poetry of sexed passions. Moreover, rather than providing an object for communication among women, Irigaray's elemental texts on Nietzsche and Heidegger are engagements *with* these thinkers to such a level of intimate detail that reading them can indeed appear like intruding on a lover's conversation. A further function for the elemental Whitford points to is that they allow one to conceive of the body in different terms without confusing the imaginary with the real body which can always be appropriated by the scopic logic of patriarchal representations (1991a: 62). Irigaray nevertheless also uses the language of the elemental in relation to her reinterpretation of 'real' bodies — bodies which are formed in accordance with a recognizably female or male morphology.

Rethinking imaginary bodies is fundamental to Irigaray's attempt to construct modalities in the feminine. Since reality, including the reality of scientific knowledge, is always based in an imaginary understanding, and since the imaginary is always bodily and material, in her view it is important to imagine the body and the imaginary in terms appropriate to the female. She thus articulates the feminine in relation to the female body, which is always an imaginary reality of a pre-given form. This cannot be an essentialist position because anatomy does not determine identity as if anatomy could have a form and meaning beyond the imaginary and language. Yet it is not simply a question of discourse if language and discourse are assumed to function outside the structures of the imaginary and its forms since these always correspond to some morphology of the 'real' body. Hence, she has articulated the feminine in relation to the image of the 'two lips'.³⁷ She describes this now celebrated two lips image thus:

Tenter de trouver-retrouver un imaginaire possible pour les femmes à travers le mouvement de re-touche de deux lèvres [...] ne signifie pas un recours régressif à l'anatomique ni à un concept de 'nature', et pas davantage un rappel à la norme génitale — les femmes ont plusieurs fois deux lèvres! Il s'agit plutôt de rouvrir le cercle autologique et tautologique des systèmes représentatifs et de leurs discours pour que les femmes puissent parler leur sexe. (1985: 272)

The two lips of 'Quand nos lèvres se parlent' are thus a symbol of the female imaginary (Fuss 1989: 67), but they are also an imaginary symbol. This potential female imaginary is an economy of a potential female body and a potential female language that Irigaray argues might enable women to speak

(of) their sex. The word 'sex' here conflates the notions of the sexed body, women's genitals and their language to articulate a mode that might be defined as feminine. Its language is in the first instance *passional*, a question of the love and the form of its expression between 'I' (je) and 'you' (tu):

Quand tu dis je t'aime — en restant ici, proche de toi, de moi —, tu dis je m'aime. Tu n'as pas à attendre que cela te soit rendu, moi pas davantage. Je ne te dois rien, tu ne me dois rien. Ce je t'aime est sans don, ni dette. Tu ne me 'donnes' rien en te touchant, en me touchant: te retouchant à travers moi. Tu ne te donnes pas. Que ferais-je de toi, de moi, ainsi repliées sur un don? Tu te/me gardes autant que tu te/me répands. Tu te/me retrouves autant que tu te/me confies. Ces alternatives, ces oppositions, ces choix, ces marchés n'ont pas cours, entre nous. Sauf à répéter leur commerce, à rester dans leur économie. Où nous n'a pas lieu. (1977a: 206)

The model of the two lips suggests a feminine mode that defies individuated identity (I as a unity) and contradiction (I as opposed to you) in favour of an identity of two (I as you but not the same, we).³⁸ In place of the dichotomies of singular and multiple, and solid (hard) and fluid (soft), for imagining bodies, Irigaray's female body gives rise to a 'twoness' that can tolerate difference and come between solidity and fluidity as the mucous.

The twoness of the feminine therefore does not privilege the unity of the same which can be added up as two individual ones, it is: 'Un drôle de deux' (1977a: 207). In certain respects it does contrast with the sexually different two of the masculine and feminine universals which are two absolute others, although they are clearly related. The two is as necessary in the feminine as it is to the two others of sexual difference: 'nous ne sommes que par deux' (1977a: 215). It is a two, like the two others of sexual difference, which is not created by the doubling of a singular and true original self in the form of a mirror because: 'Avant toute représentation, nous sommes deux' (1977a: 215). However, rather than providing a limit for each one and a transcendence between the two, on the feminine side the two is a differentiation within a one which is a one of an infinite 'twoness'. It is the nearness of the two which is stressed, not the distance between them.

Nevertheless, in other respects the two on the feminine side is remarkably similar to the two model of sexual difference. Both depend upon the two, which because of the two can never amount to the patriarchal *same* one or the one and the many. This is not to say that the feminine cannot be many on its own terms, but that it is only between the two that Irigaray believes the expression of a plurality to be possible. Thus, the feminine model is not a limitless multiplicity beyond the forms of any sex, for plurality depends upon a model of two-as-one or one-as-two: two lips as one pair, one body as two pairs. As Irigaray explains: 'La femme resterait toujours plusieurs, mais

gardée de la dispersion parce que l'autre est déjà en elle et lui est auto-érotiquement familier' (1977a: 30). Although the form of this model can never be definitively achieved because it *becomes*, she states that 'ce qui n'est pas dire qu'elle soit jamais univoquement rien' (1974: 284). Thus, in place of the image of women's erogenous zones as lack and the 'trou-enveloppe' which will house the penis (1977a: 23), Irigaray suggests the two lips image as something which is not a hole or nothing for all its lack of singular identity, although it may appear so. It is something that defies the identifying mediation of the one and the nothing in the form of a placental economy and contains its own substance as the mucous.³⁹ Individuation is not therefore based upon separation but relative distinction; the two are always *connected* but never completely merged or fused as the same. The 'entities' are in proximity; they are so near that knowledge of each other is based upon touching (*la retouche*), a touch which is not necessarily visible or mediated by a third party or detachable object; mediation is within the two.⁴⁰ They are not therefore entirely indistinguishable and there is always movement between the two. It is a form of fluidity which flows from one to other but to those who are within the flow, rather than observing from outside, that flow is itself a form of exchange and not a simple intermingling. Each thus 'keeps' their self in what is nevertheless an economy modelled upon 'pouring forth'; it is not a gift-giving economy or measurable exchange for these depend upon calculated debt and return and an immeasurable guilt. Rather the economy is one of openness: not the openness of a gulf or chasm and its loss, or of an infinite beyond and its complete withdrawal, but rather a half-open coming and going:

Les lèvres? L'ouvert, l'in-fini, non le recul indéfini d'un impossible à vivre mais l'entr'ouvert ici maintenant tout le temps. La *retouche*? Le plus subtil retour qui progresse sans revenir en arrière, sans boucle ni nœud, qui ressent sans ressentiment. (1985: 298)

This somewhat utopian feminine mode based upon the two lips model is often interpreted as emphasizing mutuality and continuity among women.⁴¹ The emphasis upon continuity is then contrasted with Irigaray's later stress upon the need for mediation between women which is considered to mark a shift in her thought (Deutscher 1996: 9). In many respects there is a shift in emphasis, although it is difficult to sustain the view that it marks a break in her projective modelling of the feminine. In focusing upon modalities in the feminine as potential forms of mediation between women, Irigaray is following through her earlier work of allowing the feminine to emerge by proposing ways in which the feminine can then begin to constitute a culture in the feminine. It is a question, then, of making the imaginary function as symbolic or divine, a question of different levels. The feminine mode described above in fact con-

tains within it a form of mediation in accordance with its own economy, but it is one that requires an objective form if it is to be sustained and recognized in a social form.

Here my argument is similar to Whitford's, who argues that the two lips image is a figure for contiguity and, by extension, for the maternal genealogy which has been left out of the social contract (1991a: 171–73). She further argues that: 'At the same time, however, Irigaray points out that simple contiguity is not enough; the problem is the transition from contiguity to another symbolic figure which would enable the contiguity of the unsymbolized mother-daughter relationship to take a mediated, symbolized and social form' (1991b: 101). However, I differ from Whitford to the extent that she is suggesting that feminine mediation is only brought about by the symbolic, that is, to the extent that she believes that Irigaray's two lips do not themselves propose a female form of mediation. Irigaray's utopian bodies assume a continuity between 'imaginary' and 'symbolic', and her later stress upon mediation is a stress upon the need to recognize at a different level that which already exists as a model of mediation in the feminine; it is not to introduce mediation to something that does not itself suggest a model of mediation. Therefore, the 'tu' that is revealed in the first stage of Irigaray's work, to whom she addresses her essay '*Quand nos lèvres se parlent*', becomes the necessarily divine 'Tu' she seeks in the second and third stages of her work.

This argument is supported by Irigaray's articulation of the placental economy which emerges as her work progresses. She presents the placental as an economy which refutes the apparent lack of mediation in female forms, and specifically the idea of the feminine as unmediated or in a state of fusion:

Si parler de relations fusionnelles est relativement courant, encore faut-il interpréter diversement ce qui se joue dans cette fusion. L'habiter placentaire et l'adhérence du placenta au ventre de la mère s'économisent autrement et se libèrent différemment. (1985b: 296)

The placental economy provides a potential model of ethical relations for Irigaray, because it exemplifies the female body as an economy of tolerance: one which can engender difference in itself and respect growth (1990a: 55). Via her interview with the biologist Hélène Rouch in, '*À propos de l'ordre maternel*' (Irigaray 1990a), she attempts to demonstrate how the prevalent patriarchal (and especially psychoanalytical) understanding of the body is indeed informed by an imaginary which can be countered by the science of biology itself. It is not assumed that the truth of biological fact can correct the untruths of a cultural imaginary. Rather, Rouch emphasizes the incongruity between psychoanalytical conceptions and what is currently understood as biological fact. She also underscores the sexual politics of certain male thinkers' reluc-

tance to reconsider the imaginary in the light of current biological considerations (1990a: 50). Irigaray's position as interviewer implicitly endorses Rouch's case.⁴²

Rouch argues that the patriarchal imaginary insists upon an identity model in which relations are either based on sameness (and are in a state of fusion) or difference (and are oppositional), so that unity or conflict ensue. In particular, the notion of fusion suggests a necessary and probably traumatic break or split from the primal unity (intrauterine existence, earthly paradise) in order to allow for the individuation of the subject (1990a: 52). The placental economy, on the contrary, reproduces very closely the economy of the two lips. The maternal body and the foetus are a two-as-one or one-as-two model whose mediation is ensured by the placenta, a mediation that only arises because the two are always already related although the placenta ensures that they always remain distinct. Rouch explains that the placenta is formed by the embryo and imbricated in the uterine mucosa, but that it cannot be described as half-maternal and half-foetal because, although formed by the embryo, it behaves as if were relatively autonomous. It mediates between the woman and the foetus in two ways: by preventing the fusion of their respective tissues and by regulating the exchange of substances between them while at the same time modifying the maternal mechanism (1990a: 46–47). The 'flow' between the two is a pouring forth which does accord with a regulatory economy then, even if it is difficult to 'see'; the two keep themselves but are in a touching proximity. It is fundamentally an economy of respect for the self and for the other which Rouch compares to a successful organ transplant. However, in the case of the placenta it is the initial recognition of the foetus' otherness for the maternal body which blocks the latter's immune system from triggering a reaction against that otherness:

Le placenta n'est donc pas un système d'emblée protecteur, qui supprimerait toute réaction de la mère en l'empêchant de reconnaître l'embryon-fœtus comme autre. Au contraire, il faut qu'il y ait reconnaissance par la mère de l'autre, du non-soi, et donc une première réaction de sa part pour que les facteurs placentaires soient fabriqués. La différence entre le 'soi' et l'autre est pour ainsi dire indéfiniment négociée. Tout se passe comme si la mère savait toujours que l'embryon (et donc le placenta) est autre, qu'elle le faisait savoir au placenta qui produit alors les facteurs permettant à l'organisme maternel de l'accepter comme autre. (1990a: 50)

The placental economy is therefore put forward as an imaginary female economy by Irigaray, one which corresponds to the two lips mode and yet, with the emphasis it places upon mediation, suggests a model for an ethics of respect for the self and the other for women. These modalities are linked by a further image Irigaray draws from a female morphology: the notion of the

mucous. Mucosity is contained *within* the forms of the lips and the uterus; it is a substance whose properties and qualities embody Irigaray's feminine which cannot be seen in the flat mirror nor captured by any mirror. The mucous is closer to fluidity than to solidity, yet it comes between the two like the viscous. It can expand and contract, but not necessarily in terms of shape or in a quantifiable manner. It has no solid permanence and no given form, yet it constitutes the primal material tissue or membrane upon which solidity and permanence ground their form (1984: 107). The mucous is at or beyond the feminine threshold which denies dichotomous male conceptions:

[...] le sexe féminin. Seuil d'accès au *muqueux*. Au-delà des oppositions classiques de l'amour et de la haine, du fluide absolu et de la glace — seuil toujours *entrouvert*. Seuil des lèvres, étrangères aux oppositions dichotomiques. (1984: 24)

If the mucous is that which lies beyond patriarchal conceptions and is at the threshold of the feminine, Irigaray is evidently suggesting that the mucous can evoke and symbolize the other of the other. She argues that it could represent the other feminine which goes beyond the watery transparency of the masculine's *concept* of fluidity (and femininity) and thus provide a 'definition' of the feminine which cannot be grasped like a closed object but which nevertheless amounts to being something (1984: 108). In spite of the role of the mucous within the lips and the uterus, Irigaray does not reduce it to the position of the nothing or the 'hole' that must be filled in masculine economies of consummation or reproduction. Rather, she argues that it acts in the service of love, singing and breathing, an action which is never completed but comes and goes in the half-open (1984: 108).

With the notion of the mucous Irigaray is pursuing her desire to create a female imaginary and its modalities in relation to the morphology of the female body by reclaiming even its most abject element to symbolize a culture in the feminine. As Whitford argues: 'The purpose of the mucous is to initiate extensive resymbolization of Western culture' (1991b: 103).⁴³ The mucous, along with the two lips and the placental economy, aim to articulate the feminine and an alternative bodily imaginary that both expose the masculinity of the apparently neutral imaginary and revalue the feminine. As imaginary modalities they constitute the divine, and they represent Irigaray's attempt to imagine the female body as divine and to imagine the divine in the forms of the female body. For Irigaray, the mucous partakes of the female divine because to affirm its form of touch and its properties 'générait la transcendance d'un Dieu étranger à la chair, d'un Dieu de vérité immuable et stable' (1984: 107). Similarly, the touch of the two lips is interpreted as approaching the divine: 'lorsque je parle de la 'retouche' des lèvres, j'indique un cheminement possible vers un divin féminin' (1996: 243). They each evoke a feminine economy

and form which facilitate exchange on female terms, a form of 'placental' exchange.

It is important to stress that, for Irigaray, this feminine economy of exchange which she elaborates on the basis of the forms of the female body are not truths of *correspondence* but interpretations which can be subject to further or different interpretations. Rather than assert the truth of the body, then, her method is to affirm female divinity in and through the female body, but she does not *in principle* rule out other interpretations of the female body with the same aim. Since for her the imaginary and any form of tacit understanding necessary for conception and perception are always already bodily, any such affirmation of divinity can arise only from bodily morphologies. Attempts to go beyond the materiality of the body are abstract and idealist not because they are successful in transcending the body (for the patriarchal divine is an abstraction from the male body), but because they fail to recognize their own bodily assumptions, including the materiality and rhythm of the body they utilize.

The problem posed by Irigaray's modalities in the feminine is the extent to which her model of sexual difference is itself constructed in terms of the feminine of the female body, rather as she argues that the sexual indifference of patriarchy is constructed through the masculinity of an abstract male body. This would mean that the apparently absolute masculine other would itself be incorporated into a structure of relations with its other that is a feminine structure, hence somewhat compromising the absolute otherness of the masculine, since its place would be determined by the feminine. Certainly, Irigaray's use of an elemental materialism in order to articulate the passionate language of bodies deploys that elementalism for its apparent femininity. She thus leaves to a developing masculinity, one formed in recognition of sexual difference, the options of elaborating a different language of materiality or of articulating itself through a language of the ostensibly feminine. While it could be argued that this is not Irigaray's dilemma, because as a woman it is not her task to redefine the masculine, her model of sexual difference does of necessity suggest a place (if not an identity as such) for the masculine. And as a model of two, the twoness of sexual difference is certainly close to the two-in-one of the feminine. In each 'instance', relations are centred upon touch and becoming; the unity of being is surpassed by the irreducibility of the two which nevertheless cannot be divided by the line-edge of a concept or barrier. The two is never fused and each one is always distinguishable from the other but not as an oppositional or complementary duality. Perhaps a significant difference between the 'twos' is that whereas the feminine two are near, the two of sexual difference are maintained by distance. In order to keep that distance, however, Irigaray's model depends upon a transformed and non-appropriating

masculine, one which has thus already complied with the non-appropriative mediations of the feminine. How can the masculine then remain absolutely other? In many respects, Irigaray's ruminations concerning a possible future model of sexual difference do stem from an acknowledgement of this problem, yet her responses privilege the feminine.

There is no doubt that Irigaray elaborates a placental economy on the basis of the female body as a place to generate alternative understandings of inter-subjective relations, and she privileges the feminine of the female body as a potential model for an era of sexual difference. This is because she argues that the placental economy demonstrates tolerance of the other and the female body gives equal chances to both the males and females conceived within it (1990a: 55). Furthermore, she argues that because a woman is born of a body similar to her own, she is privileged when it comes to establishing relations between subjects because the subject-object duality is not such an automatic part of her identity. This is a reversal of Freud's claim that the development of a girl is necessarily more problematic than that of a boy because she must reject her mother as a castrated object in order to form an identity which is, in effect, an attempt to defy what she will become in the image of the mother. Rather, to be born a girl is a grace because, beyond the masculine issue of castration, the girl and her mother are subjects for one another without the distance of a potential objectification that a boy will experience (1997: 105). This argument assumes, of course, that women will have already obtained the status of subject, something that could only have come about with an era of sexual difference. However, the important factor here is that, on the basis of their bodies, Irigaray suggests that it is the task of *women* to rethink the negative and its implications for identity:

Il appartient peut-être aux femmes de la penser. Elles, qui génèrent en elles-mêmes l'autre genre, sont peut-être plus à même de concevoir le deux de la subjectivité, du genre, et non seulement l'un. (1997: 65)

The attribution of a certain historical responsibility to women is merely suggested here but by dint of the sheer repetition of this suggestion in her work it acquires the force of an affirmation (Irigaray 1990a: 14). From the standpoint of a critique of history as patriarchal, the potential of that which might come-to-be as the feminine bears the weight of history for Irigaray. Women appear as the privileged 'agents' of change at this historical junction.

Yet without a simultaneous movement on the part of the masculine, the feminine of sexual difference risks inevitable appropriation by patriarchy. On the other hand, it risks imposing itself as the very model of sexual difference, thus suppressing the otherness of the masculine and its potential transformation which the model requires in order to come-to-be. This is because, as ar-

gued above, without the mutual recognition of absolute otherness neither the masculine or the feminine can sustain themselves. Assuming that her own model of sexual difference is desirable, it cannot operate according to its own dynamic if the feminine and women are privileged in this way because the model will implode. It is possible that Irigaray overcomes this apparent dilemma in her thought by suggesting that the feminine is a bridge to an era of sexual difference. Her notion of the feminine does tend to evoke a model of sexual difference on its own terms but since the feminine is the bridge to a new era it needs to propose models that will themselves develop in ways as yet unimaginable as the absolute otherness of the two sexed others is realized. The model that Irigaray is proposing may thus be projective: affirming the feminine of sexual difference affirms a difference that will evolve through that affirmation and probably beyond it. This interpretation is in many ways supported by Irigaray's interpretation of Christ as a bridge (albeit unrecognized) to a new era, as I discuss in the next chapter.

NOTES

1. Grosz situates her discussion of Irigaray's notion of the divine alongside Levinas's Judaic conception of the divine as well as alongside Feuerbach's Christian conception of it. She argues that Levinas's conception of alterity is central to Irigaray's understanding of relations between sexually different subjects (1989: 142). She does not, however, engage in a comparative critique of the two thinkers, nor does she discuss Irigaray's own specific engagement with Levinas in her essay, 'La fécondité de la caresse' (Irigaray 1984). Irigaray's second essay on Levinas, 'Questions à Emmanuel Levinas. Sur la divinité de l'amour' (1990) came after Grosz's publication. Chanter (1995) does examine Irigaray's critique of Levinas following a lengthy exposition of the latter's thought. However, she does not focus on Irigaray's relationship to Levinas in terms of the divine, merely noting that the divine 'appears as a focus' in much of Irigaray's work (1995: 217). It would be instructive to combine consideration of the Judaic notions of the divine as Grosz defines them with Irigaray's critique of Levinas in the context of his thought as outlined by Chanter. For a subtle critique of Irigaray's refusal of Levinas's notion of the feminine and voluptuousity, see Ince (1996). I do not focus on the question of Irigaray's divine in relation to Levinas in this study because I believe her engagement with Feuerbach is more central to my aims. It is in this context that Irigaray explicitly articulates her case for a female divine as the support for a female subject and identity; the ethics and divinity of love are raised in numerous contexts in her work. Irigaray has recently commented further upon Levinas, stressing the differences between their respective notions of the feminine (1997: 48–50).
2. See the description of Feuerbach and Karl Barth's 'Introductory Essay' in *The Essence* (1957). It is perhaps premature to suggest that interest in Irigaray's thought has waned, particularly as her philosophy is still in the process of being understood and serious studies of her work have appeared very recently. However, Penelope Deutscher wrote in 1996: 'A certain datedness is sometimes attributed to Irigaray, as expressed by a colleague who spoke of how she had once gone through an Irigaray phase, and by another who asked what I get out of Irigaray's work *these days*' (1996: 7). No doubt this sense of Irigaray's thought as *passé*, or as a set of ideas to which

fans might adhere at a particular stage of their development, is in part the consequence of the productivity requirements that have been imposed upon academia which encourage a consumer culture. However, it is probably also due to the increasingly religious tone in Irigaray's work from the second stage onwards which has led to the 'Irigaray anxiety' Deutscher discusses.

3. See the translator's introduction to *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (1986) and Wartofsky (1977: 141).
4. Engels (1888) complains that Feuerbach cannot simply accept mutual relations based upon 'reciprocal inclination' between human beings (such as sex, love, friendship, etc.) as what they are in themselves; rather he has to consecrate them in the name of religion because the etymology of 'religion' links it to the notion of 'bond'. Hence, any form of bonding is a form of religion for Feuerbach (1888: 602). This religious sentiment cannot account for world history according to Engels, because it takes no account of the class antagonisms of society; simply proclaiming exhortations to love does not resolve the problems of inequality or of interactions with others. It is difficult to deny the force of Engel's argument, yet Irigaray's *return* to Feuerbach and to love in the aftermath of the fall of the East European Communist states is perhaps symptomatic of the limitations of Marx and Engel's own analysis.
5. Theodor Adorno is critical of this argument which is typical of left-Hegelians such as Feuerbach (Adorno 1993: 53–87). Adorno rejects the reading of Hegel upon which Feuerbach's critique of Hegel rests. He argues that to assume that Hegel's dialectic is a *system* which *begins*, and begins with an unmediated concept of being as a whole, is to misunderstand the notion of experience in Hegel. All immediacy, including that presumed by the empiricist concept of experience, is essentially mediated. Hegel's dialectic does not 'begin' with abstract unity but is suffused in experience which partakes of the whole in that it is necessarily mediated. Adorno writes: 'The system [Hegel's] is not to be conceived in advance, abstractly: it is not to be an all-encompassing schema. Instead, it is supposed to be the effective centre of force latent in the individual moments. They are supposed to crystallise, on their own and by virtue of their motion and direction, into a whole that does not exist outside of its particular determinations' (1993: 56). This argument does not deter him from his own critique of Hegel's notion of identity, which, Adorno argues, is the 'beginning' and 'end' of Hegel's system, a notion which potentially falters in the face of experience: 'There is no guarantee, of course, that reduction to experience will confirm the identity of opposites within the whole that is both a presupposition and a result of the Hegelian method. Perhaps the reduction will prove fatal to the claim of identity' (1993: 56–57). Yet this somewhat qualifies Adorno's former criticism, for the problem both Irigaray and Feuerbach find in Hegelian thought is the assumption of an identity which 'experience' cannot support. Hence, they argue that Hegel's system is abstract because his notion of identity is abstract.
6. Compare the comments of Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*, for whom both Hegel and Feuerbach remain bound to the illusions of religion: 'The Old Hegelians had *comprehended* everything as soon as it was reduced to an Hegelian logical category. The Young Hegelians *criticized* everything by attributing to it religious conceptions or by pronouncing it a theological matter. The Young Hegelians are in agreement with the Old Hegelians in their belief in the rule of religion, of concepts, of a universal principle in the existing world. Only, the one party attacks this domination as usurpation, while the other extols it as legitimate' (1973: 17).
7. Feuerbach's thought is nevertheless steeped in the philosophy of consciousness and his understanding of language comes prior to the 'linguistic turn' of the twentieth century. In *The Essence* he draws the humanist distinction between man and brute on

- the basis of the distinctiveness of their relative consciousness (1957: 1). Human consciousness is thus formed through language but it takes precedence over language, which is the vehicle and container of consciousness. After the linguistic turn, language has become the pivotal factor to which consciousness is reduced or through which consciousness is 'denied'.
8. Hegel's famous master-slave dialectic is found in the section, 'Lordship and Bondage' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977). Kojève's (1947) influential 'dramatization' of this dialectic as a *desire* for the recognition of value between competing protagonists has undoubtedly influenced Irigaray's understanding of Hegel. While the master-slave dialectic is important for any reading of Hegel, including Irigaray's, I emphasize the question of the negative in this chapter because I believe it raises more directly the way that Hegel's dialectic is reinterpreted by his successors in this case (although the determinations of the negative are integral to mastery and slavery). What is more, the master-slave dialectic has received extensive consideration in critical literature, the negative less so; for example, Grosz (1989) discusses the former but not the latter.
 9. Any religion nevertheless risks icons, and Irigaray's suggestion that Mary might represent the divine for women, as discussed in Chapter Four, entails the risk of her becoming an icon of sexual difference.
 10. See, for example, 'Le mystère oublié des généalogies féminines' (Irigaray 1989) where Irigaray argues that Aphrodite was the female embodiment of love and tenderness rather than a figure who incited sexual debauchery. Grosz (1989:162-68) discusses Irigaray's use of the women in Greek mythology, particularly Ariadne, Athena, Korè and Persephone, the figures prominent in *Amante Marine*. I agree with Grosz when she states that: 'Irigaray does not simply discuss their mythic representations within Greek texts, but tends to analyse the ways in which such figures function (as metaphors, references, points and images) within more recent writings' (1989: 163). However, I do not agree with Grosz's argument that such female figures 'do not represent a pre- or non-patriarchal narrative' (1989: 162), if by that she means that they merely represent a discursive 'excess' within patriarchal accounts that has no relation to the position of women in 'pre-history'. Irigaray's account of the exoneration of Orestes for the murder of his mother Clytemnestra in *Le corps-à-corps* interprets this myth as a narrative that still structures our imaginary and yet symbolizes the historical erasure of female cultures. It was necessary for the son to kill his mother if the reign of God-the-Father was to be established (1982: 17). This is a historical *and* structural/imaginary event for Irigaray. She states this explicitly in 1986, when in her lecture, 'L'universel comme médiation' she argues that our societies were initially gynaeocratic, ordered by a female religious power associated with the cult of Aphrodite (1987b: 143). See also 'La nécessité de droits sexués', where Irigaray states explicitly that Antigone's fate represents a passage to patriarchy since she is prevented from respecting blood ties with her mother, which are themselves of a religious nature (1987b: 14).
 11. In *The Irigaray Reader* (1991c), *genre* remains untranslated. Its connotations relevant to Irigaray's usage are listed as grammatical gender, kind, sort or race (human race), species (animal) and genre (literary or artistic). It is suggested that the most significant meaning is *kind* (Whitford 1990c: 17). Irigaray explains in *Sexes et Parentés* that, although *genre* does refer to the difference between the sexes and grammatical gender, it is often reduced to the latter. Since she believes that grammatical gender does not adequately represent sexual difference (but privileges the masculine) she often uses the word *sexe* instead of the word *genre* in order to emphasize the difference between men and women (1987b: 142). Her use of *sexe* cannot be reduced to the sexual organs

as is frequent in French, and is closer to the English word *sex*. Clearly, neither *sexe* or *genre* strictly correspond to the division of sex and gender in Anglo-American discourse.

12. One of the distinctive features of the Italian feminism influenced by Irigaray's thought has been its theoretical shift away from a caricatured 'anti-men' stance towards a focus upon defining a female symbolic. If this is understood as a focus upon creating and asserting what it means to be a woman, then it merely represents the shared focus of most progressive women's movements. But in the Italian case the female symbolic is distinctive for the particular emphasis it gives to the mother. This appears to be not simply a case of 'refinding' one's mother (whether biological or symbolic) and developing that relation. Rather, it is a question of defining women's personal anger against and frustration with men as emotions displaced from the relationship with the mother (De Lauretis 1989).
13. For want of space, I do not develop my discussion of Irigaray's divine by engaging directly with debates concerning negative theology, although that could be an instructive line of inquiry. This is especially true for readings of Irigaray as a deconstructionist given that the question of negative theology has recently resurfaced in relation to the work of Derrida. Hart (1989) discusses Derrida's thought as a negative theology, while the broader issues of negative theology and its relation to contemporary thought are raised throughout the collection edited by Berry and Wernick (1992).
14. Two of Irigaray's contemporaries who would not wish to be 'named' at all, especially in relation to the post-modern, are Derrida and Deleuze. Nevertheless, from what they take from Nietzsche their philosophies provide some of the principal hammer blows for a post-modern philosophy. Both are attracted to the 'feminine' but are critical of feminism for its concern with the identity of woman and indeed gender identity. Thus, Braidotti argues that for Deleuze, 'the entire process of becoming aims at moving beyond sexual dualism or gender dichotomy. The nomadic or intensive horizon is a subjectivity beyond gender in the sense of being dispersed, not binary; multiple, not dualistic; interconnected, not dialectical; in constant flux, not fixed' (1994: 117). Whitford describes the conception of sexual difference which Derrida has given in relation to the question of feminism as phantasmatic because he elides the problem of sexual difference by articulating a sexual multiplicity that abolishes it. Thus, Derrida states: '... I would like to believe in the multiplicity of sexually marked voices. I would like to believe in the masses, this indeterminable number of blended voices, this mobile of non-identified sexual marks whose choreography can carry, divide, multiply the body of each 'individual', whether he be classified as 'man' or 'woman' according to the criteria of usage...' (Derrida, quoted in Whitford 1991a: 83).
15. See Goux's characterization of the ultramodern (1994).
16. This critique of identity and the apparent dialectical necessity of identity is outlined in Descombes (1979), who discusses the thought of Derrida and Deleuze as identity critiques. In place of the origin as one and original Derrida argues for the logic of the supplement and an originary delay, which he terms as *différance*. Through this notion of difference as difference and deferral Derrida argues that any initial unity is always already different in itself; it is only through the second or its supplement that the first one can be considered primary or unified. Hence, identity has never been nor never will be realized; it is different to itself and deferred in the very process of identity formation (Descombes 1979: 169–71). Deleuze condemns the conceptual difference which inheres in the concept of identity, one which returns multiplicity to the one and disavows the difference between identity and non-identity, between the intelligible and the sensible. In its place, he proposes an 'empirical' and nomadic philosophy of a repetition which is the production of a non-intelligible difference rather than one that

reproduces the same concept (1979: 180–82). From the perspective of Irigaray's thought, it is possible to argue that, in smashing the one in Nietzschean fashion to produce an eternal reinstantiation of the multiple, Deleuze merely empties the concept of the one to give its substance to the many. And in merely jettisoning the one for its failure to realize itself except as/in and through its difference Derrida ultimately sticks to the difference of and within the one.

17. This reference to human essence should not be automatically equated with an essentialism. The quotation is taken from a section of *Être Deux* where Irigaray is situating her discussion in the context of the work of various phenomenological thinkers, notably Sartre. Sartre most famously defined man's essence as his existence, which itself constitutes a critique of the essentialism that has been attributed to Irigaray.
18. On several occasions in *J'aime à toi* (1992) Irigaray suggests that she reads the relative positions of men and women in patriarchy as those of master and slave respectively. Yet her analysis of patriarchy would imply that this 'fight' is truly one between men, a fight between a masculine self and *his* feminine other. De Beauvoir's position is similar, for in the 'Introduction' to *Le deuxième sexe* (1949) she rejects the master–slave dialectic as a definition of the male subject's relationship with his female Other. Overall, Irigaray questions the necessity of mastery and slavery.
19. The Code of 1804 deprived married women of any legal rights and responsibilities. As Stetson (1987) argues, the extensive reforms to French Family Law undertaken between 1965 and 1975 largely replaced the patriarchal assumptions of the Code in favour of equality (1987: 87). As far as Irigaray is concerned, such reforms are welcome but still they are not radical enough because there has been no attempt to positively define female citizens as women.
20. See, for example, Carole Pateman (1988).
21. In places Irigaray shows her support for the idea of equal representation in the sense that one of the rights she proposes for women is that they should be represented in equal number in all civil and religious decision-making processes (1990a: 111). However, she has always been wary of simply inserting women into these institutions without their transformation, since without this, she believes women will be obliged to exchange on men's terms, as we have seen. She argues that certain women are already manipulating situations to their own benefit by their use of a politics of equality and victimization (1992: 15).
22. See Merleau-Ponty's essay, 'What is Phenomenology?', in *Phenomenology of Religion* (Bettis 1969).
23. In many respects, Whitford's argument against the essentialist reading of Irigaray lies in the emphasis and interpretation she gives to Irigaray's notion of the imaginary. She writes: 'Either the imaginary has been ignored altogether, in which case Irigaray is mistakenly described as a biological essentialist, or else it has been interpreted as purely and simply a Lacanian concept, in which case the conclusion is that Irigaray has misunderstood or misread Lacan, and has not taken on board the implications of his theory...' (1991a: 57). In her essay, 'Reading Irigaray in the Nineties' (1994) Whitford argues that the division between symbolic and imaginary in Irigaray's work should not be seen as mutually exclusive, and suggests that the symbolic is a form dependent upon an imaginary content, while the imaginary depends upon a symbolic structure (1994: 28). I agree with Whitford's argument, but although I believe the 'division' between form and content to be a useful way of distinguishing the imaginary and symbolic, I think it is important to stress that, for Irigaray, form and content are mutually determinant, too. On the whole, Irigaray uses the ideas of symbolic and imaginary rather loosely, although the symbolic tends to emphasize representation and the imaginary, unrepresented processes.

24. This does not contradict my argument in Chapter Four, where I claim that, in adopting Christian symbols, Irigaray is advocating very particular cultural ideals in order to attempt to constitute a female divine. I am arguing that the discourse of religion in which Irigaray engages is more accessible than much philosophical discourse. However, while I follow Nietzsche's and Irigaray's argument that Christianity is central to the cultural inheritance of the West, I argue that to actively promote its symbols as potential ideals for women is to risk reinforcing both the imperialism of Western culture and the cultural and political preferences of those committed to Christianity.
25. As Valadier argues, Nietzsche puts forward this critique of modern science as a symptom of the need to create new values in his early work and his critique of Strauss. Nietzsche argues that modern science is a veiled form of Christianity which ensues from an impossible nihilism. The claim to the absence of will in science, entailing the postulate of the pure knowing being whose knowledge is objective and devoid of subjectivity, is a devious illusion and itself a form of faith. Those (such as Strauss) who purport to deny the religious find a new faith in science, which Nietzsche claims to be the continuity of Christianity in the modern world. It is Christian because of its process of interiorization; modern science deems religion irrational on the grounds of its faith in a God-given order and the enthusiasm of subjects for this order, yet this faith is interiorized in the work of reason which constitutes its motor. Thus, it is not cool objectivity but rather enthusiasm under the control of reason that animates the horizon of the rational, which, in turn, aims to control the earth and reality. See Valadier (1974).
26. Irigaray's lecture, 'Une Chance de Vivre', given in Tirrénia at a conference of the women's section of the Italian Communist Party, interprets the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear plant as a consequence of the masculine scientific imaginary and its 'technique' of control and destruction at the expense of respecting the balance of nature. This analysis compounds the sense of historical importance Irigaray attaches to her thought, in that she believes that the culture of the singular universal and the neuter is leading to the infertility if not destruction of the earth. Irigaray appears to be offering a historical choice not unlike the one posed by Marx in *The Communist Manifesto*, although instead of 'socialism or barbarism' we are now faced with the option, 'sexual difference or self destruction'. The essay was published in *Sexes et parentés* (1987) and reprinted in *Le Temps de la Différence* (1989), a *livre de poche* publication clearly intended for a wider readership.
27. In fact, the essay is principally a critique of psychoanalysis and Lacan, although she is attempting to reveal the correspondences between concepts of fluidity and solidity and Lacanian concepts. So while she mentions Frege, she refers to no other philosopher or scientist and suggests the reader refer to texts on fluid and solid mechanics. Irigaray's argument here is both complex and apparently simple; complex because she is engaging with physical concepts and yet apparently 'simple' because she is drawing a potentially caricatured parallel between the feminine and the fluid and the masculine and the solid. Hence, I suggest that this is just the sort of essay in which Irigaray's allusive 'style' fails the force of her argument. A greater degree of explication and exposition on her part would have assisted the reader's appreciation of her argument. The approach here veers towards the classical inflection of the practice of interiorizing references (see Chapter One, n.15).
28. As Whitford argues, whenever Irigaray examines the idea of the mirror in *Speculum*, she is engaging with Lacan's theory of the imaginary (1991a: 65). Given that *Speculum* is a philosophical critique of psychoanalysis and as well as a 'psychoanalysis' of philosophy, it is also true that Irigaray engages with Lacan's theory of the imaginary for what it reveals of its ancestry in speculative philosophy.

29. As I point out in Chapter One, Irigaray has recently attempted to emphasize the meaning of 'speculum' as an instrument of discourse rather than simply a gynaecological instrument.
30. Whitford points out that Irigaray repeats this argument: 'Whether the topography of the male subject is conceptualized in terms of reflection (Hegel, Lacan), space and time (Kant), dwelling (Heidegger, Levinas) or *différance* and *espacement* (Derrida)...' (1991a: 155). Here I discuss only the question of reflection and the mirror because it pertains to the question of otherness and recognition in speculative philosophy.
31. Whitford refers to this connection with Bachelard (1991a: 55), as does Krell (1994: 186). In *L'Air et les songes: Essai sur l'imagination du mouvement* (Paris: José Corti, 1943), Bachelard explored a 'physiology of the imagination' based upon the four elements. The element of air was deemed to offer little to the material imagination, thus Bachelard considered it in relation to a phenomenology or psychoanalysis of the imagination of *movement* (Krell 1994: 186). This connection between air and movement probably helps to explain why Irigaray considers air to be divine, since the divine is always becoming.
32. Nietzsche makes numerous misogynistic remarks about woman and women in his works. This has been the subject of much recent debate (see Burgard 1994). A prevalent tendency in French thought has been to analyse Nietzsche's discourse 'on' woman as discourse, rather than as a set of doctrines or substantive ideas about women. Much of this analysis has ensued from Derrida's consideration of Nietzsche's 'woman' and truth in *Éperons* (1979). Graybeal (1990) adopts this tendency in her Kristevan analysis of Nietzsche (and Heidegger) and the feminine. Such an approach tends to save Nietzsche from accusations of a rather 'human' misogyny and to make of his less than original comments 'on' woman a sophisticated philosophy. But more importantly, it tends to obviate the feminist question. Either 'woman' is a metaphysical entity that is jettisoned by the 'feminine' or she is reduced to the 'feminine'. As Whitford (1991a) and Battersby (1989) argue, eliding the question of woman with the 'feminine' can ignore the former by reducing woman to a 'feminine' which is appropriate to men and in fact an apparent characteristic of their romantic genius (Battersby). Irigaray's thought as a whole is an engagement with this issue of discourse and the question of its relation to actual women.
33. For a discussion of Nietzsche's eternal return, see Nehamas (1980).
34. Irigaray explains that she would have examined fire in relation to Marx by differentiating between the technical/industrial use of fire and the fire of desire (1981: 45). Philippa Berry in a fascinating paper suggests that *Speculum* itself may be the missing fire book, in which fire is not only the fire of sexuality but also of *esprit*, because she reads Irigaray's use of the 'burning glass' as its central motif (1994: 230). Irigaray does associate fire with female desire in *Speculum* because of the capacity of the burning glass to enflame the cool reflection of Platonic reason. Yet the burning glass is principally the place of the 'mysteric' for Irigaray, the figure of the hysterical female mystic who is the only female figure permitted a public place in patriarchy beyond the commodity role (see, 'La Mystérique' in *Speculum* 1974). Irigaray's analysis of the 'mysteric' is extremely complex, but the mystic's ecstatic passion is still a feminine excess relative to masculine reason. The fire of her passion would invoke Irigaray's 'elemental' fire, but the elemental texts are an attempt to reclaim something before and beyond masculine reason and thus one could expect the book on Marx to have dealt with a fire that 'burns' in a different way to the mystic's passion.
35. Hence, Grosz argues that it 'anticipates' Nietzsche's eternal return as an infinite flux of continuous becoming (1989: 169).

36. Very little of the academic writing upon Irigaray and in response to her appears to focus on her poetry. This is partly because she is still in the process of being understood and established as a serious thinker, and partly because in many respects the only adequate response to her poetry is a form of poetry. Two critics who have assimilated the poetry of Irigaray's thought in their own writing on her are David Krell (1992 and 1994) and Phillipa Berry (1994).
37. Whitford (1991a: 171–73 and 1991b) provides an excellent account of the reception of Irigaray's image of the two lips. I agree with her view that the proliferation of readings of the two lips is a sign of the success of this image as a symbol for exchange among women. Whitford cites readings of the two lips which privilege its symbolic rather than referential function. For example, it is interpreted as a poetics of the body whose function is inter-discursive rather than referential (Gross 1986a and Gallop 1983); it is interpreted as a manoeuvre within the Lacanian symbolic, a privileged signifier to counter the Lacanian image of the phallus and whose relation to the labia is as arbitrary as is the relationship of the phallus to the penis (Fuss 1989 and Berg 1988). Since Irigaray argues that the relationship of the phallus to the penis is not arbitrary, this latter view cannot be sustained. My view is that, although Irigaray is not talking about 'literal' biology (a concept that has no validity for her), the relationship of the language of the two lips to the body is not arbitrary. Language creates and contains its referent and thus 'refers' to it with a material imagination of the body. In the most obvious terms, it is not proposed as a 'body-language' for men.
38. I do not agree with Grosz when she argues that the 'I' and the 'you' are indistinguishable, because in her essay Irigaray does write in the first person singular and address a second person, even if she does at times write in the 'I–you' mode to which Grosz points (1989: 126). The division between 'I' and 'you' is what enables a truly two or plural 'we' to come about for Irigaray, a 'we' that is not in the first and last instance singular. Hence, I would not suggest that the two are 'fused' as Grosz does, although I would agree with her view that the two 'can now take up a discursive and sexual space without need of men's mediation. This is a space of exchange without debt, without loss, without guilt, a space women can inhabit without giving up a part of themselves' (1989: 126).
39. While the lips are not fused, I cannot agree with Stockton (1994) when she argues that Irigaray is a theologian of lack because she places 'God' as lack between the lips. This is Irigaray's reading of a patriarchal vision of women's lips, as Stockton acknowledges, and yet she interprets Irigaray as generally affirming lack because it can reveal that something of women's bodies is concealed. She argues that Irigaray 'makes visible' women's (usually invisible) lips in order to show how their very space, lack and gap makes possible their pleasure, hence: 'castration, by this alternate logic of loss, converts to (auto)erotic pleasure' (1994: 28). Stockton thus appears to read Irigaray as a deconstructive thinker who 'can forge a deconstructive pact to leave the body's essence indeterminate (by arguing that what is concealed is a crack)' (1994: 28). Yet a crack is a split or wound within a single form and this is how Irigaray interprets the masculine view. It is an indeterminate fissure within solidity rather than an alternative such as the 'connected two' she affirms, whose indeterminacy as neither one or the other she values but who need only be described thus in relation to a logic still based within a masculine determinate thought. Stockton's argument is based on a reading of *Speculum*, and especially the highly ambiguous writing of the chapter 'L'Incontournable volume'. My brief comments here do justice neither to Irigaray's text nor to Stockton's analysis, although I do wish to signal my concern with her reading. Where Stockton reads Irigaray's engagement with the nothing and the lack of women's genitals as an affirmative revaluation of them to reveal the indeterminacy of

woman, I read Irigaray's 'nothing' in terms of the nothing of masculine discourse for which woman is the indeterminate. For example, Irigaray argues that woman is an excess to identification: 'Mais cet excès (n') est rien: la vacance de la forme, la faille de la forme, le renvoi à un autre bord où elle se re-touche sans/grâce à rien' (1974: 285). I do not interpret this statement as saying that the nothing is something as a crack or fissure which enables woman to touch herself because of the lack between the lips. Lack between the lips is the other side of the coin to the masculine's model of fusion. In my view, it is possible to interpret this sentence as saying that the feminine, which is excessive to male identity, is nothing for that identity because the feminine is seen as formless (or a break in form) and without mediation. It is seen as fused (the immediate unity of a continuum without individuation) because it can return to itself without anything and thanks to nothing (such as the object of mediation needed for men's autoeroticism). Or it is seen as a yawning gulf (nothing) for the same reasons. Yet this nothing is not nothing: it is the feminine other who functions as something (the negative, lack of form, lack of mediation) for identity logic. Irigaray's other feminine is only an apparent lack for the other; for woman herself she is something different, as I believe Irigaray makes clear in 'Quand nos lèvres se parlent.' Put very simply, the 'God Between their Lips' which Stockton discusses may be interpreted as lack in Irigaray's early work, but even there Irigaray is suggesting an economy other than that of having 'it' or not, and the mucous becomes the obvious alternative.

40. Irigaray's statement in *Ce sexe* that in her autoeroticism woman touches herself without the need for mediation in many ways contradicts my claim here (1977a: 24). It may be that what she describes as contiguous (1977a: 28) is later deemed to require mediation (see note 45 below). However, both of these descriptions cited are positioned in the context of a description of masculinity, whose autoeroticism requires an object for mediation and whose language of identity can find no sense, only contiguity, in what 'she' has to say. I find that when Irigaray evokes a possible feminine 'we' in her early work which is an imaginary elaboration explicitly 'beyond' the parameters of masculine discourse, she evinces an economy which is later articulated as a mode of female mediation, as I go on to discuss.
41. This is an argument made by Mary Jacobus. See Whitford (1991b: 101).
42. Weinbaum (1994) puts forward a sophisticated reading of the status of the participants and of their discourse in this apparently straightforward interview. It is interpreted in terms of Irigaray's strategy of mimicry, as a mimetic renarrativization of the mother's body. Irigaray's questions are held to be miming Rouch's presentation of the maternal body as something that can be known in order to reveal 'the irresolvable tension between the maternal body's materiality and its representation' (1994: 117), a representation that must be 'endlessly deferred' because the relationship between the two is always tenuous. Weinbaum bases her argument on Elizabeth Weed's rather dubious claim that virtually no text of Irigaray's can be read outside of her mimetic practice (Weinbaum 1994: 111). Rouch does not in fact suggest that the maternal body can simply be known, since she explicitly refuses a true/false model in her account (1990a: 52). In my view, she proposes alternative imaginary knowledges of the body which assume not that the truth of the body must be deferred, but that this truth is always imaginary and political. While these imaginaries are never simply given, in contrast to some endless deferral they may be affirmed. In my view, Irigaray's interview endorses Rouch's position. She is notably uncritical of Rouch and significantly includes Rouch's 'knowledge' within her own text. If Irigaray leaves to Rouch the biological explanation of the role of the placenta, this is not because she is appropriating Rouch's biology to her 'own' psychoanalytical discourse. Rouch herself makes the connection between these discourses, and Irigaray's role as interviewer does not seem

to be to emphasize anxiety and the uncertainty of representations on the basis of Rouch's knowledge, but merely to allow Rouch to make her own argument regarding what those representations reveal. Weinbaum's essay does nevertheless raise the important question of the implications of such discourses and models for highly sensitive and politically-charged abortion debates and legislation.

43. I am indebted here to Whitford's discussion of the mucous (1991b). I agree with her when she argues that the mucous is a nodal concept linking every part of Irigaray's work. However, I would not privilege the mucous over other notions, such as the two lips, as Whitford appears to do, partly because these notions refer to each other both bodily and textually. What is more, many of Irigaray's notions seem to conflate and connote different aspects of her work and to simultaneously repeat and articulate the entire range of her philosophy. The mucous is explicitly attributed tremendous symbolic significance by Irigaray, especially in *Ethique* (1984), where it is connected with the transition to a new age and with new conceptions of time and space and identity (Whitford 1991b: 106). However, this is also the function of the female divine in Irigaray's view, a divine which is not exclusively defined in relation to the mucous. When asked about what she means by the female divine in a 1996 interview, Irigaray refers to a range of her writing but does not mention the mucous (1996: 243–44). For further discussion of the mucous, the placenta and their relation to the angel, which draws upon Whitford's work, see Schwab (1994).

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ADOPTION OF CHRISTIANITY CONTRA NIETZSCHE

Irigaray's treatment of certain Christian concepts, mysteries and figures is significant for her philosophy of the divine because of the way she adopts Christianity in order to attempt to create a female divine and subjectivity. Her adoption of Christianity is extremely challenging; it reveals the radicalness of her thought and is representative of her creative ability to carry through the consequences of her analysis of patriarchy. However, while this adoption is entirely consistent with her *œuvre*, I argue that it also highlights problematic issues within her philosophy: not least the need to make of gender differences a form of two universals if her logic of sexual difference is to hold. Nietzsche's insistence upon the failure of any universal to realize itself as anything other than a particularity is pertinent to these dilemmas in Irigaray's thought. Indeed, by considering her assessment of Christianity and of Christ in relation to Nietzsche's reaction to them, I aim to sharpen the focus on what is at stake in her proposals for a female divine. Evaluating the potential of Irigaray's divine ideals leads me to conclude that filling gender universals with divine predicates is necessarily particular to a given culture.

Christianity for Nietzsche and Irigaray

Irigaray's most extended discussion of Christianity and Christ is given in the final section of *Amante Marine* (1980a), 'Quand naissent les dieux', which is an engagement with the Gods endemic to Nietzschean thought (Apollo, Dionysus and Christ). I am not directly concerned here with her response to Nietzsche's philosophy in general because my aim is to focus primarily upon the question of Christianity.¹ Nietzsche assesses Christianity as a metaphysical religion which has institutionalized the weakness that he believes is inherent to the *ressentiment* of the modern subject. This diagnosis, which leads to his call for the revaluation of all values, is a source for Irigaray's own reinterpretation of Christ's message as a *way* which has been distorted into a form of doctrine by patriarchal culture.

Irigaray's discussion of Christianity is thus suffused with a profound reading of Nietzsche's critique of the religion, not only in the way that it takes up many of the critiques and issues he raises in relation to Christianity, but more significantly, in the way that her writing responds to the detail of his text.

Rather than write *on* Nietzsche as if he were a purveyor of concepts, Irigaray responds to the particular style of his writing as a language that enacts the meaning of its content. The poetry of her writing is thus informed by the poetry of Nietzsche's own writing, and she engages with it while explicitly making little reference to it. This engagement draws her close to Nietzsche but sees her develop an alternative account of the possibilities offered by the Christian tradition, an alternative which is nurtured by the belief she shares with Nietzsche that the figure of Christ was greatly misunderstood and denied by the religion established in his name.

That both Irigaray and Nietzsche give Christ a sympathetic reading in view of this belief is partly attributable to their own status as figures in the history of philosophy who were or are aware during their own lifetimes of misunderstandings of their respective *œuvres*, both of which are arguably highly susceptible to distortion. This led Nietzsche to write for those 'with the ears to hear him', for an imaginary esoteric group designated as 'free spirits' and to assert that: 'Some are born posthumously' (1968: 114). It has led Irigaray to turn increasingly towards her receptive Italian audience with whom she feels able to pursue a dialogue concerning sexual difference.²

A further reason for the sympathetic hearing given to Christ is the sheer *degree* of contrast Nietzsche and Irigaray find between his speech and the religion established after him, with the former being identified as ostensibly open and radical, and the latter as a reaffirmation of hierarchy and metaphysical duality. Irigaray's closeness to Nietzsche in this respect arises from their shared aversion to the religion of the established Church, and indeed, to the concept of *established* religion *per se*. But whereas Nietzsche's aversion leads him to advocate going beyond Christianity by way of affirmative rupture, a going beyond which cannot be a return to Christ since he is defeated by Dionysus in Nietzsche's pantheon, Irigaray proposes a return to Christ as a way to a progressive reinterpretation of Christian concepts and the creation of new values.³

For Nietzsche, the creation of new values necessarily entails destruction. Given his avowed desire to destroy Christian values, his condemnation of Christianity is infamous, reaching heights of vitriol rarely surpassed. The following passage is typical:

I condemn Christianity, I bring against the Christian Church the most terrible charge any prosecutor has ever uttered. To me it is the extremest thinkable form of corruption, it has had the will to the ultimate corruption conceivably possible. The Christian Church has left nothing untouched by its depravity, it has made of every value a dis-value, of every truth a lie, of every kind of integrity a vileness of soul. (1968: 186)

Such rhetorical language, which is characteristic of Nietzsche's style, is produced less with the intention of creating argumentative proof on the basis of

rational argument than with creating a rhetorical force which will have the effect of demonstrating the gulf between existing beliefs and an affirmative will that does not stand in denial of life. This is because for Nietzsche 'life' is what he terms the will to power, a complex notion of constitutive force which is the power of growth and becoming that is not to be confused with an authority *over* on the part of already constituted entities, as envisaged in the modern subject's will to reason and control (1973: 29–31). Nietzsche holds that the will as the will to power is, in fact, denied by the modern rational intellect, a denial that begins with religion but which is reinstated by metaphysics in the guise of reason. For Nietzsche, therefore, as for Feuerbach, religion is both an understandable facet of human experience and one that arises from a certain feeling and need; it is not, in the first instance, an intellectual fact but rather a matter concerning the will (1967: 86). However, given the place Nietzsche accords the will as constitutive force, the need he discerns at the heart of religion is more ambivalent than the one asserted by Feuerbach; it is not simply the positive need to find represented in the other the feeling of one's perfection. According to Nietzsche, this need arises from the power of an affirmative will — a will which actually constitutes a being although it is experienced as overwhelming and other. Thus, it creates a fearful feeling which is dealt with by its projection onto an imagined deity:

In summa: the origin of religion lies in extreme feelings of power which, because they are strange, take men by surprise: and like a sick man who, feeling one of his limbs uncommonly heavy, comes to the conclusion another man is lying on top of him, the naive *homo religiosus* divides himself into several persons. Religion is a case of '*altération de la personnalité*'. A sort of feeling of fear and terror at oneself — but also a feeling of extraordinary happiness and exaltation. (1967: 86)

Nietzsche's account of the emergence of religion thus entails attributing to its adherents a certain weakness with respect to the will, a weakness which arises in response to a superabundance of life which is for all that affirmed in the creation of the divine. Already, then, an element of denial born of weakness enters into the creation of a religion, the denial that both displaces the vitality of the will and makes possible the division of the self that is necessary to self-consciousness. For the abundance of the will as the force of life is halted and denied in its will to overcome, and this is harnessed to constitute the unity of the human being who then paradoxically underwrites that unity (and manages to deny it as an ultimate limitation) through the image of itself as an absolute being. Whereas for Irigaray limitation is necessary as the ineluctable consequence of a positive affirmation of being in the form of each gender's encounter with its irreducible other, for Nietzsche limitation arises as

a consequence of a *weakness* within 'life' which turns life into division and otherness (body and soul, God and human, culture and nature).

In spite of this weakness in the face of the will, Nietzsche on the whole affirms the instinctual necessity of religion to the extent that a religious conception remains particular to a group or nation as the (albeit displaced) expression of its superabundance. The need for a God is thus not denied by Nietzsche. He is not an atheist, since for him a God symbolizes the force and values attached to particular forms of life as evidence of their affirmation in a power beyond the human, even if it is this God which sustains the deluded assumptions of a self-willing human being.⁴ Nietzsche does not accept that there is any reason to deny the divine just because the Christian God is incredible through its inadequacy. Such a logic, he argues, merely consolidates the Christian assertion of its one God as the only God (1968: 162). By a different method, therefore, Nietzsche draws the same conclusion as Feuerbach and Irigaray, which is that a God is necessary for the creation of a people:

A people which still believes in itself still has its own God. In him it venerates the conditions through which it has prospered, its virtues — it projects its joy in itself, its feeling of power on to a being whom one can thank for them. He who is rich wants to bestow; a proud people needs a God in order to *sacrifice*.... Within the bounds of such a presupposition religion is a form of gratitude. One is grateful for oneself: for that one needs a God. (1968: 126)

In Nietzsche's account of religion, the kernel of weakness at the heart of religion becomes pivotal when this affirmative religion is in the descendancy, and it is at this point that the deity and religion which are *profoundly* antithetical to life arise. Thus, when a group or nation loses faith in itself or is otherwise in decline but wishes to sustain itself, it alters its conception of God into what Nietzsche calls a metaphysical conception.

Nietzsche's general approach to the question of metaphysics is in many respects a precursor to Irigaray's. Rather than focus in the first instance on a specific doctrine narrowly conceived, they both assume that the doctrine results from the psychological investments and commitments of a given thinker. Irigaray's 'psychoanalysis' of philosophers reveals these investments to be the outcome of structural determinants surpassing the individual, which are always gendered. Nietzsche's 'psychology' of philosophers also exposes their investments as a response to a generalized condition, which he sees as determined by the state of religion. Thus he argues that metaphysics is a doctrine introduced to save religion. It preserves a deity which no longer accords with the will of a people and attributes certainty to it so that it is able to sustain in a practical manner a particular way of life. Metaphysics hence introduces a kind of reason to religion which makes of its weaknesses a necessity and its fanta-

sies a real world where there rests an apparently universal and eternal truth in order to make sense of a certain failing form of life (1984: 79–80). As with Irigaray's return to the pre-Socratics, Nietzsche raises the issue of a wasted potential in the history of culture. He argues that the potential of reason as evidenced in early Greco-Roman culture was distorted by metaphysics into a commitment to believe in a reason which is other-worldly yet against which the allegedly inferior reality of this world is tested (1984: 85). The ultimate consequence of this process is the institutionalization of a *ressentiment* against life and the body. These are turned against themselves, and the sufferings of life are not tragically affirmed but are taken to be an error of this world, or as a punishment emanating from the higher world where suffering has been eradicated.

Christianity is for Nietzsche the metaphysical religion *par excellence*. His interpretation of Christianity cannot be restricted to an ontological or epistemological critique, but must of necessity involve a history of the religion, however schematic it may appear to scholars of religion.⁵ This is because Nietzsche identified in his contemporary period an existential malaise and a dearth of culture which he analysed as the inevitable consequence of the historical success of Christianity. In that way, Nietzsche's critique of Christianity as a metaphysics is imbricated in the existential problematic he identified as a general cultural phenomenon, hence the sense of urgency evidenced in his tone.

It is thus significant for Nietzsche's overall assessment of Christianity that in his interpretation it is a movement that arose out of the decline of Judaism. For Nietzsche, Christianity has never been a counter-movement to Judaism but is in fact its logical consequence that ensured the persistence of Jewish morality (1968: 134). This is not a racist assertion in the sense that Jewish morality is defined by Nietzsche as a specific cultural appropriation of the will to power, one which arose from the enslavement of the Jews. Living under impossible conditions the Jew's route to self-preservation became an affirmation of what Nietzsche terms *décadent* values, the rejection of ascending values and self-affirmation in this world. Through the creation of another world which could offer a judgement against the latter it was possible to prevail against their enslavement. Thus, Jewish survival was ensured by means of their abstract God whose demands, rewards and punishments enabled a form of life to continue in unfavourable conditions. According to Nietzsche: 'Christianity arose on a soil where natural value had been falsified' (1968: 139). He does not mean by this that some given blue-print for good behaviour was being denied. Rather, the opposite: that the inchoate forces of a 'natural' will to power as a constant becoming were being harnessed for the fulfilment of the will of some imaginary pre-given Being. Yet for all his cant against

such an 'evil eye morality' (1968: 135), Nietzsche does at least find in the affirmation of the Jewish God the affirmation of the reality of a people since it is a national God they celebrate whose values relate to a form of life.

The Christian God, on the other hand, resents even this reality and its means to power via national self-preservation (1968: 139). In Nietzsche's account, Christianity arose as the affirmation of the values of the weak against the power of the masterly (in this case, the Jewish priests), splitting the God who demands into a duality of good and evil, attributing evil to the master's God and good alone to the Christian God. Such a split both conforms to the dualistic worlds of Jewish consciousness with its *ressentiment* against the earthly world (and its hope for salvation in the beyond) and weakens that conception of God with its universality and goodness which can in Nietzsche's view conform to no reality since the forces of life demand a certain 'evil' (or hardness) for existence to be possible (1968: 127). Hence, the dangerous insipidness of the Christian God for Nietzsche. Having exalted goodness alone God becomes highly abstract via a universality which by definition cannot affirm any particular form of life owing both to its generality and to its necessary denial of the *multiplicity* of force entailed in the affirmation of forms of life. He writes:

Formerly he [God] represented a people, the strength of a people, everything aggressive and thirsting for power in the soul of a people: now he is merely the good God... There is in fact no other alternative for Gods: *either* they are the will to power — and so long as they are that they will be national Gods — *or* else the impotence for power — and then they necessarily become *good*... (1967: 126)

Having ruled out a particular affirmation, the universalization of the deity in turn leads to the conception of a personal God in order to facilitate a relation to him that is henceforth a largely private one. That believers turn to this deity is evidence of their weakness; the weak establish a god who symbolizes love in order to affirm the need they have for submission (1968: 126). The weakness of Christianity is further evidenced in its advocacy of pity for suffering, a pity which does nothing to alleviate suffering but in fact weakens man with its 'active sympathy for the ill-constituted and weak' (1968: 116), making it a *décadent* religion. According to Nietzsche's analysis, the historical effect of this weakness has been powerful nevertheless through the manner of its institutionalization by Paul. Nietzsche is unequivocal in his assertion of the cruelty of Christianity, with its duality of imaginary causes in the form of God, soul, ego and free will, and its imaginary effects in the form of sin, redemption, grace and punishment, all of which depend for their operation upon the conscience of a consciousness formed in denial of the will (1968: 124). Each of the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity is denounced by Nietzsche as a concept merely likely to enhance the conditions favourable to an adherence to

Christianity, such as suffering and weakness (1968: 133). This is also his interpretation of the Christian preference for chastity and the divinization of love: chastity merely intensifies the religious instinct of renunciation and love is the 'state in which man sees things most of all as they are not' (1968: 134). Since Christianity is a doctrine for the weak, it necessitates a doctrine of equality which denies the difference Nietzsche identifies between lower and higher values, between base and noble forms of life, as those which resent life's reality and those which embrace the culture of its becoming.

The success of Christianity is therefore a catastrophe for Nietzsche. He contrasts its apparent anti-intellectualism with Greco-Roman culture and holds it responsible for the decadence of modern man generally (1989: 52–54). Yet the contemporary problem Nietzsche identified, the question posed in perhaps his most famous assertion that 'God is dead', is that of a passive nihilism; while the beliefs of Christian metaphysics were no longer held to be true in Europe, in Nietzsche's diagnosis of his contemporary era its nihilistic metaphysical system of values remained in place. Hence, Nietzsche's call for the overcoming of mankind as the being of denial and metaphysics, and for the revaluation of all values. It is paradoxically a call often expressed in the most rancorous tones since it seems as if Nietzsche felt he were shouting into a void:

That the strong races of Northern Europe have not repudiated the Christian God certainly reflects no credit on their talent for religion — not to speak of their taste. They ought to have felt *compelled* to have done with such a sickly and decrepit product of *décadence*. But there lies a curse on them for not having had done with it: they have taken up sickness, old age, contradiction into all their instincts — since then they have failed to *create* a new God! Almost two millennia and not a single new God! (1968: 129)

Irigaray's assertion of the need for a female divine responds to this scenario as set out by Nietzsche. She similarly assumes a correlation between her diagnosis of the psychological conditions of patriarchal thought and her prognosis for the generalized cultural crisis she identifies. Thus, rather than continue to dwell in an existence that is primarily defined as an aftermath, a 'post' condition in which critical thought merely deconstructs or describes, she wishes to see the creation of new values. As part of this process, Irigaray is aiming to open up Christianity to the potential benefit of women as they begin to attain the status of subject. The sense of a *parousia* which is either imminent or actually in process pervades the second and third stages of her thought; all the signs are that patriarchy is crumbling and we are at the end of that era. Given the association Nietzsche draws between Christianity and metaphysics — a metaphysics that Irigaray classifies as patriarchal — her re-interpretation of

Christianity is thus necessary both to a critique of the patriarchal order and to going beyond that order. However, Irigaray does not reject Christianity in the process because of the evolutionary rather than revolutionary approach she has to history and cultural change. Her thought assumes the necessity of developing from the basis of given historical conditions rather than projecting blue-prints into the future or attempting to will the future by means of rupture and traversing a void. She writes of the *parousia*:

La parousie correspond-elle à l'attente d'un avenir non seulement comme *utopie*, ou *destin*, mais comme acte *ici maintenant*, construction volontaire d'un pont dans le présent entre le passé et le futur? (1984: 139)

Irigaray's own interpretation of the history of Christianity thus challenges that of Nietzsche. Although the assumptions and positions she adopts in relation to this history are nowhere set out in the form of a historical study, these are nevertheless significant since they also inform her interpretation of Christian concepts. Yet it is possible to read the manner of her challenge and her own interpretation as informed by Nietzsche's critique, as if, in remarks made not only in *Amante Marine* but in other texts, too, she were responding to the generalizing force of his rancour against passive nihilism.

Irigaray does not explicitly accept the reduction of Christian culture to one tradition which is the ultimate effect of Nietzsche's interpretation, nor does she accept the reduction of Christianity to Judaism as if the differences between these traditions were less significant than their shared monotheistic abstract God (1987a: 421). Furthermore, she questions the division of history into Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman traditions as if marked and sustained differences could be made between them in a way which would enable one to straightforwardly conclude or operate with the assumption that one tradition is more cultured than the other, or more patriarchal than the other. From the perspective of a critique of patriarchal culture, Irigaray is just as concerned with what both traditions reveal of the remnants of previous gynaeocratic cultures, and their suppression of these, as she is with measuring an apparent opposition between two traditions which in their very historical delineation as such reveal the prejudices of the modern age, with its penchant for dichotomies (between belief and reason, for example). Thus, in order to understand the cultural inheritance of the West, she advocates that we pose the question of 'notre histoire indo-européenne, de nos filiations orientales, de nos rapports à ces branches de notre civilisation où le statut du féminin, et d'ailleurs du masculin, comme divin est différent' (1987a: 422).

Irigaray's commitment to recasting the understanding and temporalization of broad sweeps of Western history reflects the intellectual credence she gives to forgotten gynaeocratic cultures and is one significant element in her rejection

of Nietzsche's outright condemnation of Christianity. For the Christian tradition, she argues, appears to be one that has, in spite of its morality, harnessed a certain creative cultural energy. At the very least, it has not been able to suppress this energy:

Que signifie l'événement de l'incarnation après les métamorphoses de la présence de Dieu dans la tradition judaïque, le triomphe décadent de la mesure dans la culture grecque? Le verbe fait chair, que veut-il dire? Pourquoi une telle portée de sa prophétie? Et, malgré toutes les horreurs et répressions que l'on sait, d'où viennent ces œuvres d'art qu'elle a produites? Quelle énergie les a épanouies et ménagées, à travers les siècles, comme des lieux où souffle et subsiste le divin? Le légalisme, le jugement, voire le ressentiment chrétiens peuvent-ils rendre compte et revendiquer cet enthousiasme et cette exubérance dans la création? Ou cette inspiration se déploie-t-elle envers et contre tout 'moralisme'? (1980a: 191–92)

Questioning the meaning of incarnation, Irigaray thus indicates the pivotal role this notion plays in her assessment of Christianity; a notion which she argues emerges and sustains itself within the Christian tradition in spite of the metaphysical treatment it is accorded. In order to develop her thought regarding the significance of incarnation, however, Irigaray deploys Nietzsche's denunciation of Christian concepts to provide herself with a definition of Christianity against which she is able to propose an alternative interpretation. His determination of Christianity as a certain metaphysical orthodoxy facilitates one notion of tradition against which she is able to determine and clarify her own account. In that sense, Irigaray actually veers close to reducing Christianity to a single tradition in her assessment of it as does Nietzsche, rather as she attributes to patriarchy a single prevailing structure.

Irigaray's alternative account of Christianity is based upon a theology of incarnation and love which is staged specifically in opposition to Christianity as a religion defined in relation to the notions of salvation and pity. Such a manoeuvre is not intended as a mere shift in emphasis on Irigaray's part, but is aimed at a complete reconstitution of Christian dogma as typified by Nietzsche so that concepts antithetical to life, such as salvation and pity, are no longer relevant to its practice. In the process, Irigaray's method is to reverse and reclaim many Christian concepts rather than merely reject them. Thus, along with Nietzsche she rejects the Christian notions of sin and redemption if they assume a duality of worlds in which salvation from the inherent errors of this world is promised in the form of redemption in the beyond. But whereas for Nietzsche such a schema is interpreted as merely consolidating the power of the priest (1968: 164; 1989: 128), for Irigaray this power lies in the hands of the patriarch as the embodiment of a masculine

subject who has ostensibly rejected embodiment. Irigaray thus introduces the notion of sexual difference to the way 'original sin' is staged, asserting a more fundamental difference within the scenario that stages an 'apparent' difference between the genders by attributing to woman responsibility for the division of heaven and earth, and for the distance that exists between the patriarchal man and his God. Irigaray suggests that it is the fundamental duality of the dissociation between human and divine which is itself 'sinful', in the sense that it errs against the incarnation which she believes woman is proposing:

Le 'péché originel' ne consiste-t-il à dissocier humain et divin. A constituer Dieu en entité distincte et transcendante. La sortie du 'paradis terrestre' correspondant à la volonté de connaissance de Dieu comme tel. Au désir de produire comme réalité 'supra-sensible'? Dieu — Différent? D'où proviendrait le mal, au commencement. Péché contre l'incarnation auquel une femme entraînerait l'homme? (1980a: 185)

This interpretation of 'original sin' is therefore typical of Irigaray's reading of Christianity. While Nietzsche rejects the concept of sin as entirely nihilistic, she attempts to reverse it and transform its meaning through her notion of sexual difference, pointing significantly to the possibility of a prior notion of incarnation.⁶

In a similar vein, Irigaray distances herself from any Christian call to the weak and impoverished, partly because of the effect of making weak this affirmation of value can have, as Nietzsche asserts. Nevertheless, a further significant factor in her refusal to join Nietzsche in his condemnation of Christianity is revealed by the fact that, although her approach assumes Nietzsche's disdain for the sentimentality of a Christianity that exalts weakness, she does not engage with Nietzsche's discourse of weakness and strength on his philosophical terms. In *The Genealogy of Morals* (1989) Nietzsche's definition of weakness and strength in relation to different cultures of the will to power leads him to differentiate between the strength of the noble, whose aristocratic values actively affirm the will to power as an abundance of life and becoming, and the weakness of the 'herd' who negate this will by their reactive affirmation of eternal being and equality. Yet Irigaray does not operate with a conception of force (or Being) as defined by the will to power which is either beyond or indifferent to the subject and the subject's relation to the other. For Nietzsche, the subject, however defined, is an illusion, since he argues that the 'soul' of religious discourse is in fact an effect of the body, and that which modern rationalist thought defines as the 'ego' is an effect of grammar which because it places an 'I' before its verb mistakenly invokes a doer behind the deed. This doer is an effect of the will to power (1961: 61–63; 1973: 28).

Irigaray's thought, as we have seen, emphasizes not a 'doer' nor a certain force but a phenomenology of subjectivity as that which reveals a world. Iri-

garay's commitment to the notion of the subject as an intersubjective subject is once again apparent in the way that her thought cannot assume weakness to be defined merely in relation to a notion of will as something of an objective force but must also be deployed in the relation between two others as potential subjects. In that sense, Irigaray is able to adopt a more receptive approach to the potential of Christianity and religion because she does not attribute to it any of the necessary ambivalence that Nietzsche finds in the creation of a deity; she does not establish a given notion of force which is so defined that any religious conception entails an element of *fundamental* weakness because it must deny that force. Rather, the fundamental element for Irigaray is the relation between two always already different beings which yet require recognition as divine. If the question of weakness can be said to arise, it does so in relation to the constitution of value, insofar as 'weakness' could be identified as a failure or inability to recognize the other being.

To the extent that Irigaray's thought can accommodate the problem of weakness, it could be argued that for her 'weakness' would be a failure to recognize the other which is symptomatic of the way patriarchal divine value is constituted, especially as it becomes metaphysical. Thus, the phenomenon that Nietzsche describes as metaphysics in its broadest sense becomes, in Irigaray's thought, symptomatic of the psychology of the patriarchal type who sets up the world of semblance against blood relations and who manifests a profound *ressentiment* in his inability to accept and recognize the difference represented by the other sex. As outlined in Chapter One, the metaphysical division of material from spiritual is equated by Irigaray with a feminine and masculine division, a division which arises from the 'weakness' of the masculine in the face of the other. The 'force' in question is the other sex this time, and not the will to power as such. Whereas Nietzsche attributes to the will to power the overwhelming force that elicits the creation of a transcendental deity as divided from man, in Irigaray's thought it is the masculine subject who affirms his being as divided from the power the other represents but who then assimilates it to himself as his own value in denial of the other. Only through his use of the other's unrecognized body is he able to represent himself as transcendent and above the body-world.

In Irigaray's account, therefore, the gratitude for the apparent gift of 'life' to which Nietzsche refers in the quotation above, which is asserted as a superabundance of force by him but which is defined in the Christian tradition as grace, is not freely given. It entails the element of exploitation and appropriation of the feminine which then goes unrecognized by metaphysics and by Nietzsche. For Irigaray, Nietzsche's notion of the will to power as an inchoate and heterogeneous force assumes a fundamental continuity in this heterogeneity that denies the difference of the other. This corresponds to the idea of a

primal unity and its denial which patriarchal thought deems necessary. Both assume a primal state of non-differentiation from which a subject is subsequently and necessarily divided in order to be constituted as such. Such a process suppresses what Irigaray takes to be the *given* difference, sexual difference, and then re-articulates difference in patriarchal terms as a division between god and world so that a sacrifice is deemed necessary in order to break this division and to return to the original unity or force. Hence, Nietzsche's description of sacrifice as a self-affirmative thanksgiving, which in the terms of Irigaray's analysis can only be the overcoming of a division to return to a sameness that itself contains a prior denial in its denial of sexual difference. In that sense, Irigaray argues that Nietzsche's notion of the eternal return of the same does not encompass the feminine other, making his thought complicit with metaphysical conceptions and their denials.⁷

In spite of the fact that Irigaray finds in Nietzsche's interpretation of Christianity a certain complicity with the tradition of patriarchal metaphysics, she concurs with his emphasis upon 'culture' as that which is determinant for a religious tradition. Her interpretation of the Christian tradition in terms of a theology of incarnation and love insists upon the significance of culture as the key to its reinterpretation. In her writing on Christianity she thus claims to be proposing a cultural interpretation of the New Testament which differs from 'socio-economic' interpretations put forward by socialists and some feminists (1987a: 425). She distinguishes her position from interpretations which read the New Testament sociologically and construe Christ's interventions as a concern for social justice in social relations.⁸ That women may be specifically construed as an impoverished group in economic terms is a factor Irigaray is willing to accept but one she regards as unhelpful as far as women's liberation is concerned. To argue that women are 'des pauvres parmi d'autres' is to risk, she believes, reinforcing the dominant tradition's use of poverty in its rhetoric of salvation, and it perpetuates the presentation of the figure of Christ as the saviour of the poor (1987a: 425).⁹

In contrasting her own 'cultural' interpretation with 'socio-economic' interpretations Irigaray is perhaps engaged in a process of attempting to clarify her thought by distinguishing it from other positions. However, the subtlety of her thought is inevitably impaired by this, as it does make it more susceptible to misinterpretation. What is more, her stance here appears to contradict the position outlined in her earlier work as discussed in Chapter One, in which this division between 'culture' and economy is denied. Yet it remains the case that Irigaray's *œuvre* as a whole treats the question of sexual difference as an economic question in the broadest sense. This specific rejection of socio-economic accounts of the status of women is a rejection of theories that assume the economic to be a process of material or social exchanges which are not

also constituted by the process of their valuation and symbolization in the cultural order. Nevertheless, she risks perpetuating and reasserting this division by stating of women's exploitation that 'cette exploitation est fondamentalement culturelle et secondairement socio-économique' (1987a: 425). In the context of her philosophy of sexual difference, such a statement may be interpreted as invoking her argument that women are exploited as the representative of matter and that the feminine is not recognized as subject in the cultural order since it is the sexed body reduced to nature. It is thus a further insistence upon her argument that it is this non-recognition which is the most profound form of exploitation. Indeed, she reaffirms the primacy she gives to the question of sexual difference over other differences by stating that: 'L'exploitation des femmes, comme moitié de l'humanité, représente plutôt l'exploitation humaine qui rend possible les autres' (1987a: 425). Once again, it is not that 'socio-economic' differences are not important, it is that they are returned to the cultural question of sexual difference by Irigaray.

Her focus upon a theology of incarnation is therefore aimed at exposing this issue of the sexed body and is a further attempt to draw forth the exploitation of women as matter on its own terms. Through incarnation matter would no longer be defined as formless or inchoate; nor would it be possible to ostensibly form and order it through a moulding process in which it would shape itself to the contours of an ever-repeatable incarnated ideal. 'Matter' always already has its own form for Irigaray — form which cannot be extracted and idealized as beyond matter but which inheres in matter. Matter is always shot through with gender, fundamentally defined as masculine or feminine. Incarnation as the embodiment of what is divine could not therefore be the meeting of a single divine and a single body as promised by Christ, for this single body could not account for the sexual difference inherent to matter. Hence, Irigaray's notion of incarnation proposes a double incarnation of two divines in accordance with the sexed body which is either male or female. It is through this notion of incarnation as sexed that Irigaray aims to bring about a recognition of women, entailing respect for their sexed bodies (as well as those of men). She envisages that the social outcome of the symbol of the incarnated Christ would be to encourage respect for the incarnation of all bodies as potentially divine. Indeed, it is feasible to imagine the effect of this incarnation as a viable alternative to a moralistic definition of Christianity which measures itself on its generosity towards the poor, and as a counter to a socialism which insists upon 'economic' factors as the only valid considerations in analysis. It would also avoid defining and dividing the category of woman in accordance with socio-economic measures which are not primarily defined with respect to women and, indeed, avoid 'measuring' women in relation to any socio-economic factors given their inherent tendency to quantification.¹⁰

Problems remain, however, with the way Irigaray adopts the theology of incarnation in terms of sexual difference. It depends upon her assertion of the universality of gender and her attribution of a kind of universalism to all women who are defined as potentially divine in relation to their sexed bodies. What is more, by attributing divinity to the sexed bodies of women and men, she reasserts the primacy of a sexual difference conceived as double-poled. As argued in Chapter One, this universalism is not an essentialism because it does not depend upon the concept of a determinant eternal essence which can form the ground and determine the form of any being. The universality of sexual difference for Irigaray is given and yet remains to be cultivated. It is already and has always already been incarnated but awaits a culture able to recognize that incarnation, hence the need to constitute divine ideals.

The problematic tension in Irigaray's proposals for the recognition of the incarnation of sexed divinities is akin to the problem Nietzsche identifies with the apparent universality of Christian doctrine. Both Nietzsche and Irigaray rule out the possibility of a divine ideal defined metaphysically, an ideal that emanates from a transcendental eternal Being who can determine the value of beings. However, they each hold that the divine transcends the will of the human as a being who believes himself able to determine and control his own existence. Thus, the force of the will to power and the primacy of sexual difference are ineluctable in spite of their denial by the modern and patriarchal subjects. Nevertheless, for both Nietzsche and Irigaray the divine has to be willed. For Nietzsche, this willing is an affirmation of the will to power that will overcome man's need to sustain and value himself as an absolute (and universal) being if denial is eradicated from the affirmation. Henceforth, a self-overcoming multiplicity could prevail in defiance of the 'grammar' that must represent a causal doer behind what is. For Irigaray, the divine must be willed by potential subjects who will affirm the primacy of an inherent sexual difference if they do not deny the other, although this willing relies upon appropriate cultural mediations and symbolic representations to *sustain* the recognition of this difference as non-appropriative. The difference of sexual difference is not willed in the sense that it is pre-representational and given. But if women and men are to realize their divines and to recognize the incarnation of sexual difference, the gender of sexed bodies has to be predicated and affirmed by women and men as an effect of the cultural process. Hence, the need for symbols and predicates of the divine which are necessarily housed within language. Irigaray's notion of the divine thus requires symbols appropriate to the body-matter of each sex and a 'double syntax' that can correspond to the rhythm or logic of each sex. The problem of cultivating universalist gender divines lies in the question as to whether any predicate or symbol can be universal in the sense of signifying something that at a certain level will pertain

to all women or to all men across cultures because of the very different way languages operate to structure subjectivity and to 'house Being'. These differences are acknowledged by Irigaray herself and are indeed assumed in her own linguistic research, which has investigated the different ways sexual difference manifests itself in several European languages (1989b). In what ways can gendered divines be predicated as universals when their predicates are linguistic signs and images that, at the very least, will be subject to various appropriations according to their already existing meanings in different cultural conditions? This is true even for predicates that draw upon a dialectic between nature and culture since, as language, predicates are ultimately dependent upon the culture of a particular language.

Thus, although the primacy of sexual difference is pre-representational, Irigaray is certainly not proposing a notion of the divine that defies representation, because gender has to function as a form of objectivity in her account, an objectivity which can only be sustained by symbolic recognition. This raises the question as to who, which women and men, will assert predicates and symbols of gendered divinities and, more particularly, as to how these predicates and symbols are to attain the status of universality in this process. It seems as if Irigaray's thought requires an *a priori* acceptance of the primacy of sexual difference, and of the second order status of other forms of difference, if we are to accept that the process of recognizing sexual difference through defining divine ideals will not raise the problem of contestation, whether that is in terms of the ideal itself or in terms of its appropriation. Although Irigaray appears to be aware of the need to work out and develop divine ideals in a process that could become contestatory, if not conflictual, her conviction that it is possible to designate universals of gender is something that has yet to be proven. Since the predicates and symbols of divine ideals will ineluctably be entrenched within already existing cultural traditions (something Irigaray's adoption of Christianity affirms), it is just as feasible that they would function as particular affirmations of gender within particular forms of life that threaten a kind of cultural imperialism if they gesture towards universality. Hence, the definition and meaning of these relatively-defined divine predicates will vary across cultures and as a result they will strain to be of the universal except if defined within the confines of a particular culture. Or, in order to allow for other differences, they will be so open to interpretation that they in effect lose the sense of the absolute and the divine necessity which Irigaray wishes them to convey. In which case, it is difficult not to heed Nietzsche's warning that deities (and their values) become weak and ineffectual as they strain towards the universal because they must be so general and 'inoffensive' in order not to deny significant differences which are constitutive of an 'affirmative' form of life. Although Irigaray's two universals do

in their very structure recognize sexual difference, other differences within each gender must be denied or at least precluded in this fashion to rule out the probability of continuous contention. What is more, by presenting different and potentially contradictory definitions of the masculine and feminine across cultures the whole premise of the significance of the primacy of gender difference could be thrown into doubt. To the extent that they claim a status of universality divine ideals risk being either imperialistic or so general as to be unable to affirm any particular form of life, including the specificity of each gender. Unless the universals implode, as it were, and function as interior states of divine being that cannot accede to a symbolic representation.

The tension in Irigaray's thought between what is given as sexual difference (which is pre-representational), and what needs to be made of this difference, is a tension that resides in her interpretation of the figure of Christ as divine. In particular, the issue of divine interiority emerges in the respective responses of Irigaray and Nietzsche to the figure of Christ, and especially in the way that they interpret his relation to Buddhism, as I now go on to discuss.

The Figure of Christ: Incarnation and Interiority

Both Irigaray and Nietzsche find Christ to be a figure who refutes the doctrine that ensued from his teaching. But whereas Nietzsche believes his betrayal to have been the inevitable consequence of that teaching, Irigaray argues that his teaching simply lacked the historical conditions favourable to its reception. Their assessments of the divinity Christ represents is conditioned by their respective assessments of his closeness to the figure of the Buddha. The 'inner spirituality' they consequently discern in Christ's divine is rejected as nihilistic and unworldly by Nietzsche, whereas Irigaray embraces it for its model of creating a divine interiority. Irigaray's thought moves uneasily between her evocation of this interiority and the need to create symbolic divine ideals, leading her to reject Christ as a figure of the divine for women because he is a masculine figure.

That Nietzsche and Irigaray turn to the figure of Christ in their opposition to Christian orthodoxy is not a sign that they seek a further reason to condemn the Christian tradition for its betrayal of the message of Christ, as if by returning to the point of origin the essence of its truth might be discerned for the purposes of measuring against it the adequacy of that which ensues.¹¹ Although the betrayal is emphasized by both thinkers, their return to Christ is undertaken more to examine the possibilities he may represent for the future given the state of cultural crisis they each diagnose. Thus, as far as Nietzsche is concerned, his assertions concerning Christ are not engaged in a discourse

of truth but rather aim, through a reading of the Gospels, to delineate the 'psychological type' Christ represented and to consider whether such a type is still possible given Nietzsche's typology of contemporary metaphysics (1968: 140). Irigaray follows Nietzsche in this process by focusing upon a reinterpretation of Christ's message and asserting his status as a symbolic figure of incarnation. She is interested in assessing his status in relation to the possibility of a culture of sexual difference, rather than seeking an objective 'truth' of Christ.¹²

Neither Irigaray or Nietzsche find the meaning of Christ in the Crucifixion. Nietzsche declares it the end of tragedy for Western culture, with the pathos of redemption attempting to justify life by substituting reconciliation for affirmation: Irigaray sees it as possibly the last great tragedy founding the West, with Christ's message of reconciliation being taken over by irredeemably opposed couples of opposites, such as good and evil and truth and error (1980a: 180). The salvation promised through the Crucifixion is also interpreted by both as an intention attributed to Christ's death only retrospectively (Nietzsche 1967: 101; Irigaray 1980a: 182). For Irigaray, this death was an 'accident', not the teleology of his life, and, along with his passion, was the only reference point for any suffering on the part of Christ (1987a: 430–31). Similarly for Nietzsche, Christ's passivity in the face of his death was not the consequence of his submission to some pre-ordained event but was, rather, consistent with his message that defiance merely validates false judgement. Hence, by his acceptance of his fate Nietzsche can conclude that Christ's peace was a 'yes' to life, but he criticizes it as a weak affirmation in the face of suffering and resentment, a weakness that reveals the source of Christ's downfall and of his danger — his *naïveté* (1968: 148). For Irigaray, the ambiguity of Christ's death was indeed snatched up by the weak and rancorous who reduced his meaning to either/or dualities around such notions as heaven and earth and good and evil, but this does not make Christ a naïve figure, since she interprets his way of life as approaching wisdom (1987a: 431). Rather, the decisive factor in Irigaray's interpretation of Christ is her assertion that he was untimely (1980a: 191).

By her reinterpretation and re-evaluation of the figure of Christ as the one who may indeed be reincarnated at a more timely moment, Irigaray is endorsing the notion of a *parousia* and compounding the anticipation of cultural change prevalent in her work following her critique of patriarchy. She appears to find in the figure of Christ and the symbols of Christianity a truly fertile field for the creation of ideals that she believes to be appropriate to women and which may assist them in developing their subjectivity.

The notion of a 'second coming', then, is concordant with the direction of Irigaray's thought, particularly given that her characterization of the dominant

interpretation of Christ in the Christian tradition accords with the principal features of the culture she describes as patriarchal. Thus, she argues that Christ is identified with the Word of the Lord, with the *logos*; his body is viewed as a mere container for spirit and his life a mere bridge between the sins and hazards of temporal existence and his becoming one with the Word in eternal life. The orthodox notion of incarnation is rejected as an illusion by Irigaray since materiality and divinity, flesh and spirit are not truly brought together because the embodied *logos* of Christ's divinity is interpreted as a temporary measure. Irigaray questions its status as a divine incarnation since it is an incarnation taken from becoming:

Quelle incarnation, et du rapport au divin, peut ainsi se soustraire au devenir? Tributaire d'une langue éternellement la même? Les scribes, traducteurs, commentateurs ou prêtres de cette langue étant seuls susceptibles de décrypter une Vérité une fois pour toutes révélée. Seuls interprètes valables d'une tradition à jamais fixée dans un texte qui fait loi. (1980a: 180)

Thus, the dominant tradition asserts truth as transcendental and eternal, bound in an eternal *logos*. Irigaray argues that as a result it interprets Christ's purpose as one of showing acceptance of suffering in life in order to ensure deliverance from life into its truth after death. With God so distant, this life is viewed as a place of deportation and exile, whereby knowledge of God means following him in the form of an inferior representation of him and uniting equally with other men before this deity. The place of man is between nature and God, tied to the father's will (1980a: 176–86).

Irigaray's assessment of the place of women in this scenario corresponds to the position of women as she defines it in her critique of patriarchy, sustaining her analysis of orthodox Christianity as a tradition corresponding to patriarchal and metaphysical traditions. Thus, women cannot appear as female subjects in Christian myth but have to remain the material support of the transcendental deity and his inferior instantiations, reflecting his masculine values. They are reduced to the same supporting functional roles of virgin, mother and prostitute as symbolized by three Marys, the female commodity figures whom Irigaray argues men use for exchange among themselves. Women are positioned as commodity-objects who seek exchange through the transcendental masculine value because the feminine has no value or cultural means of its own. What is more, Irigaray has attempted to illustrate the trenchancy of this theological-social-psychological pattern through her linguistic research. From responses obtained in linguistic tests put to a cross-sample of women and men, she concluded that in very few of the responses were women actually positioned as communicating subjects, particularly with other women (1992: 131). Most of the responses from both men and women

were directed towards a masculine *you* or *he*, or *He* or *they*. Irigaray argues that, by privileging *he* in language, women lose their own subjectivity in the very process of seeking intersubjective exchange. The lack of reciprocity they meet in the form of men's responses she explains as a function of the privilege men's language accords relations to the object or to abstract ideals, or by extension, a function of the transcendental and metaphysical nature of masculine divine value (1992: 150). Just as women seek the masculine other in speech and attempt to communicate with *he* (an attempt which fails since it is not reciprocated), so Irigaray argues that the women in Christian myth are shown to be seeking the masculine other in the form of Christ and the value he represents. According to Christian orthodoxy, it would seem, however, that his interest in them is instrumental given that his primary objective is to represent and return to the abstract ideal of his Father (1980a: 176).

Against this tradition, Irigaray presents Christ as a figure who ostensibly gestures beyond these patriarchal norms and who, by representing a theology of incarnation and love rather than preaching salvation and pity for the poor, may be reclaimed for an era of sexual difference. In this case, Christ's incarnation does not mean the redemptive submission of flesh to Word, but is taken to represent the eternal embodiment of the divine via the cultivation of physical rhythms, energies and breath, and the transfiguration of the body in speech. It is a notion of incarnation that owes much to Eastern philosophy, as Irigaray is keen to emphasize: it focuses on religious practice rather than text; on religious poetry and chant over the truth claims of the *logos*; and on a notion of transcendence as a continuous passage between natural and spiritual time rather than as entailing a necessary break between them (1996: 218). In order to develop this notion of incarnation as part of her concern to explore the historical links between Western and Eastern cultures, Irigaray points out the resemblance between the myth of the life of Christ and that of the Buddha, most notably that in both of their lives '*le devenir de l'esprit ne s'y sépare pas de celui du corps*' (1987a: 426). Spirit is thus not something descended from on high in a hierarchical topography and attached to matter, as is the exchange value attached to commodities. It is, rather, immanent to the body and inseparable from it, in the way that Irigaray argues that the Word of Christ cannot be separated from his body, and that every stage in his life is presented as an event of the body (1987a: 426). The spiritual practice she advocates is thus an attempt to draw together, for the purposes of self-development, the self's corporeal being and the being of sexual difference. This being is 'cosmic' in the sense that it transcends individuated being and yet can only reside within it; it is related to a 'cosmic' idea of time, one which goes beyond the linear and progressive concept of time prevalent in patriarchy.

The association between Christ and the Buddha is one that Nietzsche also makes, except that for Nietzsche it merely consolidates his assessment of Christ as unworldly or naive. Nietzsche pairs the religions of Christianity and Buddhism as nihilistic: the former with its *ressentiment* against life and the latter with its apparent weariness with life (1968: 129), whereas Irigaray's pairing of them via their incarnated divines envisages only life enhancement. In Nietzsche's view, the fact that the figure of Christ bears no relation to a religion of *ressentiment* does not save him from tendencies associated with the nihilism of the Buddha. He assesses Buddhism as a religion for the end of a civilization, but instead of attempting to save that civilization with a metaphysics or attempting to create new values, Buddhism emerges with an offer of a possible state of inner perfection for particularly intellectual and sensitive human beings (1968: 129). Concomitant with the age of the Buddhists' host culture, and their weariness with the excessive objectivity that ensues from this, is their absence of a concept of God and their indifference to any moral system. Hence, suffering replaces sin as that which must be overcome for the Buddhist. But Nietzsche interprets as a will to nothing the 'hygienic measures' of the body put forward by the Buddha — measures designed to overcome depression and suffering with the goal of attaining a state of grace that is absolutely still, cheerful and devoid of desire (1968: 131). He concludes that Buddhism's aversion to metaphysical concepts and its acknowledgement of the inherent nature of suffering in life, rather than as punishment for a sinful life, does make it more realistic than Christianity. However, its egoistic turn to the achievement of grace as that which can overcome suffering is a turn away from action in the world and a denial of life as the becoming of the will to power.

It is this disengagement from the world into a private, inner world which leads Nietzsche to reject the figure of Christ as divine, for although Christ's inner world is a peace that does not deny the world, he assumes that it is the only reality (1968: 146). Thus, for Nietzsche, Christ does not deny as such because he does not need to, he simply recognizes no contradiction. His 'glad tidings' are that opposites no longer exist and that the distance between God and man is to be abolished with a kingdom of heaven that is a condition of the heart. This kingdom is not found through faith and struggle but rather exists for those who wish to return to what Nietzsche terms 'a certain childishness in the spiritual domain' (1968: 144). Christ thus has no formula for drawing distinctions between people, all are one and have equal access to his faith which is never proven but is rather assumed. It is lived in a life which simply bypasses the whole drama of guilt and punishment of Jewish metaphysical reality. Hence Nietzsche's assertion that Christ was betrayed, since no system of belief can be established on the basis of his teachings; he is an anarchist. By

Christ's advocacy of a life that withdraws to this inner world which fails to recognize the reality of suffering, Nietzsche is led to define him as a nihilist. Christ is not vengeful but he does not engage with life, and it is this indifference to history that makes Christ's 'psychological type' ever possible:

Even today *such* a life is possible, for *certain* men even necessary: genuine, primitive Christianity will be possible at all times.... *Not* a belief but a doing, above all a *not*-doing of many things, a different *being*... (1968: 151)

Christ and Buddha thus symbolize a form of benign, inner worldly nihilism for Nietzsche, one that may offer a potential and nihilistic way of life but one which does not, in his view, affirm life. They show a way but, because it is only found within, for Nietzsche it is a way to nothing. Hence, the teachings of Christ cannot authentically be transposed into any socio-political or cultural system, except perhaps an anarchistic one.

In contrast, Irigaray's assertion that Christ was untimely contains within it the judgement that Christ's message is not inherently unworldly and that it is possible to adopt his message within a new cultural formation. As with her critique of patriarchy, the reception of this message and its realization is not primarily dependent upon a wilful, combative overcoming of existing conditions. It is more a question of the historical emergence of conditions favourable to this realization, conditions which can only be enhanced by the actions of individuals but which cannot be created or determined by them. Thus, Irigaray's position is that the incarnated divinity Christ represents should not be interpreted as nihilistic. This position rests upon her interpretation of the will and her rejection of the notion that there is an inherent tendency towards nihilism in Eastern thought and religions:

La plupart des interprétations qui circulent en Occident sur les pratiques orientales sont erronées ou partielles, y compris en ce qui concerne le renoncement au vouloir. Le pratiquant, en Inde, a bien une intention mais celle-ci correspond à un mode de l'intentionnalité un peu oublié en Occident: se concentrer, devenir de plus en plus attentif, par exemple. Il ne s'agit pas d'un vouloir consacré à l'acquisition, plus ou moins conquérante ou compétitive, d'un objet. A notre culture, un tel geste peut apparaître comme une non-intention, mais il représente, en fait, une intention tournée vers la constitution d'une intériorité, notamment en rapport avec le cosmos. (1996: 226)

Irigaray thus attributes nihilistic interpretations of Eastern thought to those in the West who confuse the absence of an acquisitive will in Eastern practice with the absence of will *per se*. Nietzsche is similarly scathing regarding the Western notion of the will as necessarily object-orientated and accumulative and his notion of will as the will to power also challenges that definition. In

the discussion from which the above citation is taken, Irigaray is not explicitly engaged in discussing Nietzsche's thought, thus it is very possible that she does not include him in her statement. However, Nietzschean discourse is in evidence in this discussion in the way that she goes on to bemoan the practice of much contemporary Western Buddhism which 'va souvent de pair avec un nihilisme non affirmatif, avec la destruction pure et simple de toutes les valeurs' (1996: 227). She interprets such a desire for nothingness, which is manifested in contemporary nihilism and a fascination with the void, in terms of the 'psychological type' of the patriarchal masculine subject. It is thus symptomatic of men who have not resolved their separation from their mother, a state that, as we have seen, ensues from the philosophical metaphysics which demands a split between nature and culture, and the abandonment of women to this nature that is nothing in patriarchal terms. She argues that, by continuing to mourn nostalgically for a state of unity with the mother, or indeed, in desiring to transcend or transgress the limits of their individuation in order to return to the nothingness of this imagined unity, men do not learn how to live an autonomous, embodied existence (1996: 241).

Accepting the reality of nihilistic interpretations of Buddhistic will, Irigaray nevertheless wishes to adopt aspects of Eastern thought on the grounds that it does propose an affirmative will since the will is directed towards creating an interiority. This factor merely compounds its nihilism for Nietzsche. The will as the will to power could never support an inner condition of peace and harmony in his view since, as the force of life, it is an energy that cannot be identified, unified or harnessed for a form of perfection that is a denial in its attempt to still 'internally' the fundamentally inchoate, multiple nature of its becoming. For Irigaray, Nietzsche's notion of the will here is itself the product of the patriarchal thought of the same which must contrast the unified will of an absolute being or value with its other as that which interminably becomes in a state of destructive multiplicity. She uses Eastern thought to help her to surpass this two-sided coin of Western thought. Body and mind, individual and cosmos, nature and culture are linked and united through the medium of breath and the yogic and other daily practices the cultivation of breath proposes. Hence she states: 'L'absolu, en Inde [...] serait en quelque sorte de co-respirer avec l'ensemble de l'univers, d'arriver à cette complétude sans coupure' (1996: 216).¹³

As an example of how the divine might be approached as a condition of interiority that is not nihilistic, Irigaray suggests a form of phenomenology of perception that seeks to find perfection through concentration and to renounce states of dissipation. This, she argues, is exemplified in Buddha's gaze upon the flower (1992: 49; 1997: 45). She advocates the attitude of the Buddha as he gazes upon the flower, and particularly the culture of the senses this entails,

as a potential spiritual model for the subject's becoming, a model that entails neither attaining some void nor breaking the bounds of a unity by the affirmation of multiplicity (1992: 49). Rather than a will to nothing that might eradicate the willing subject's subject-object distinction, concentration is in fact envisaged as a way to ensure 'le rassemblement du multiple' (1992: 49) and to enable a subjective becoming that is not directed towards an expropriation of the object. The gaze enables a form of contemplation which is both material and spiritual, and the choice of a flower as an object of contemplation is particularly apt in Irigaray's view, since it exemplifies the kind of flowing, spiritual becoming around an evolving material form which she articulates in relation to the incarnated Christ. She states of the flower:

Elle bouge selon le vent sans rigidité. Elle évolue aussi en elle-même: elle croît, fleurit, repousse. Certaines, les plus attachantes à mon goût, s'ouvrent au soleil levant et se ferment le soir. Chaque saison a ses fleurs. Les plus vivaces entre elles, les moins cultivées de main d'homme, connaissent l'éclosion sans perdre leurs racines; elles vont sans cesse de l'apparaître de leurs formes aux ressources de la terre. Elles survivent aux intempéries, à l'hiver. Ce sont peut-être celles qui peuvent le mieux nous servir de modèle spirituel. (1992: 49–50)

From such a passage it is possible to interpret Irigaray's perception of spiritual interiority as one which draws together different energies (of earth and matter) for a form of rhythmic becoming that neither denies nor tries to control its environment but moves in harmony with it. The unity of this interiority is not one of an individuated unit that stands over and against external factors. It apparently flows from within to without and finds sustenance and support for its spiritual or energized form from this very process. This rhythmic model leads neither to a void nor an individuated entity, then, and it elicits a notion of the divine as a process which consequently eludes precise conceptual definition and yet nevertheless everywhere exists as an attainable state or form within the process. Significantly, this is a notion of the divine that conforms to Irigaray's articulation of the feminine as discussed in Chapter Three, and thus is a divine *in* the feminine, as it were. Furthermore, this 'feminine' form within movement corresponds to the interpretation she gives to the incarnation of Christ as the figure of the divine:

Le divin n'est pas localisable comme tel, imaginable ou pensable comme tel, appropriable comme tel... ne serait-ce sa prophétie? Il irrigue qui le reçoit et s'en inspire. Il habite partout et nulle part. N'a pas de demeure fixe. Il quitte le temple pour la nature, la maison pour la cité, le lac pour le désert, la contemplation pour l'action, la mesure pour la passion... Mobile et persistant. Attentif, dans l'abandon de toute fidélité figée. Passant à travers tout cadre fixé, toute loi inscrite, tout énoncé prononcé.

Circulant sans arrêt dans tout et, en même temps, cheminant tenacement sans se laisser dévoyer. Accomplissant la volonté d'un Autre? Incarnant la transcendance? Non réductible à un 'fils' obéissant à un 'Père' — paradigme séculaire. Mais homme rassemblant, en lui, toutes dimensions. (1980a: 196)

Irigaray thus attempts to articulate a notion of the divine through the cultivation of a condition of interiority. This inner divine exists in a perpetual state of becoming, it is not an abdication of the will nor an assertion of it over the other-object. She argues that it does not lead to the void nor entail the division and hierarchy of patriarchal individuation. Rather, it is a notion of a divine that exists in proximity, as did the figure of Christ, whose principal gesture, she emphasizes, was one of touch (1980a: 194).

The question of the relationship *between* is thus extremely significant for Irigaray's refutation of the nihilism of Eastern thought and for her presentation of Christ as the incarnation of a divine heralding a new type of existence. As a kind of dialectical thinker, it follows that for her the process of creating an interiority cannot be extracted from the fundamental condition of intersubjectivity which she argues has been forgotten or misrecognized in patriarchal thought. Yet she also stresses that the condition of interiority created by the kind of sensible perception she advocates is necessary if this intersubjective condition is to be transformed both at the level of the couple and, by extension, at the level of the community. For it is only through a culture of perception which creates an inner divine as the gathering of a self's gendered becoming that each gender can come-to-be and represent a subject for itself and represent the other subject for the other gender:

Une telle culture de la perception modifierait nos rapports amoureux, qu'ils soient intimes ou communautaires. En fait, il n'y a pas rupture entre l'intersubjectivité au sens strict et l'intersubjectivité dans la collective, et les changements souhaitables dans les rapports entre homme et femme, hommes et femmes, participent à un changement utile pour l'ensemble des relations sociales. (1997: 46)

Her model of sexual difference as a rhythm of two between men and women anticipates a sort of epiphany. Hence, Irigaray's reinterpretation of the biblical imperative to go forth and multiply, which she takes to mean not the patriarchal compulsion to procreate, but rather the enhancement of life through the creation of an interiority as the transfiguration and resurrection of bodies through words (1980: 182).¹⁴ In this respect, she subscribes to the Christian and Buddhist view that women and men may be born again, but in this case born for the first time as women and men in a continuous process of renewal.

While for Nietzsche no culture or system can follow from an authentic Christ, the problem Irigaray raises is indeed the extent to which the divine in-

teriority she finds in Christ is able to engender and support a new cultural system. How is this divine which is not 'localisable comme tel, imaginable ou pensable comme tel, appropriable comme tel' (1980: 196), to be articulated in terms of predicates and to be symbolized? And can the love between women and men form the basis of a new cultural order and its laws? Clearly, as we have seen, the culture she envisages as supported by an incarnated divine would not be guaranteed by a single transcendental being or value that subtends the law of its exchange. However, there are moments when this resistance to patriarchal law appears to resist the rationale of any law and civil code in spite of the fact that in her more recent work reform of the law is deemed essential to the creation of a sexed culture (1992). Such a resistance to legal definitions is evident in the way that Irigaray is drawn to the figure of Christ as one who disregards the law and symbolizes the triumph of spirit over letter and of love over *logos*:

Figure de l'amour transgressant les limites de l'histoire, de la loi, de la lettre déjà écrites. Rouvrant et faisant circuler le flux de la vie à travers ce qui la capte, l'enferme, la retient — tombe, masque, signes... Mais, qui brise le scellé de la lettre, subira l'effraction en retour? Crucifié pour un mot? Tel un mot? Ou un symbole? Alors — ou parce que? — l'usage qu'il en faisait se voulait approche parabolique. Jamais définitive, jamais achevée. Jamais définitivement atteinte dans son sens ni totalement décryptée? Révélation d'un encore à venir qui cherche sa figure? Son alliance? (1980a: 192)

Thus, the very contradictions of Christ's speech and the absence of logical reasoning it entails are taken to embody a form of wisdom by Irigaray, one that can lead to the liberation of the spirit (1987a: 426). Christ's divine inheres in a language which is never definitive or complete and she interprets that as a defiance of the language of Jewish law laid down in tablets of stone, and as an openness to the becoming of life that cannot be captured by law. However, the law in question here is indeed patriarchal law, a factor made evident by the affinity between Irigaray's interpretation of the language of Christ and the language she deploys. She embraces Christ's parables as a language like her own that cannot be reduced to established pure reason. The style of her engagement with the history of philosophy shows that she is intimate with the *logos* and its texts. But she is neither determined nor confined by these, since her direction is always to go beyond with a language and a writing intended to defy established reason. Given that she identifies the same process in the language of Christ, she asserts that he is not a teacher of metaphysics, one who declares the *what* of existence, but rather (as Nietzsche asserts) one who shows the way. He did not preach moral dogma or compulsion and there is no obligation to follow him and no strict discipline or enforcement (1987a: 423).

Despite the fact that Irigaray approves of Christ's defiance of definition and law as she interprets it, she does not believe that this rules out the possibility and necessity of ethics as a system of relating to the other. She envisages an ethics of sexual difference determined by respect for the other, and she finds examples of such an ethics in the life of Christ. Thus, in the event of the Eucharist she discerns not moral compulsion but a relational ethics that is enacted through the example of sharing what is given. Rather than taking the Eucharist to be an initiation to an obligatory rite under the threat of sin, then, she interprets it as an invitation to its participants to continue sharing the fruits of the earth after Christ's death (1987a: 423, 1996: 225). For Irigaray, there is no sacrificial element to this event, because Christ blesses and shares not what has been sacrificed but what is 'given' by the earth, a factor which leads Irigaray to suggest a possible link with the cultures of gynaeocratic traditions (1987a: 437). It is significant that these traditions are often defined by the absence of any written law. Although many historians consequently refute the notion of a matriarchal or gynaeocratic law and hence the possibility of any gynaeocratic cultural order, Irigaray again insists that such cultures did prevail by arguing that they did have a cultural order (1987a: 422). Since she believes it was a system which defied moral and legal abstraction and was more attuned to the earth and material value, she therefore argues that its order somewhat defies evaluation in accordance with a patriarchal concept of order (1990: 111–12). In the same way, she argues that the teachings of Christ cannot be separated from the body animating them, and that they do not withstand abstract evaluation for: 'Même ses paroles visent à toucher plutôt qu'à prouver ou convaincre' (1980a: 194).

Irigaray's notion of ethics clearly envisages the possibility of a different kind of ethical order, one which is premised upon the development of an interiority and supported by respect for the otherness of the other. While this may appear utopian, as discussed in Chapter Three, it is nevertheless an order that does recognize the *history* of conflict and violence in human relations. However, it attempts to obviate the issue of conflict in and through its very structure, rather than establish structures to deal with the anticipation of conflict viewed as intrinsic to human relations. Christ's assumption of non-conflictual relations is derided by Nietzsche, and he pours scorn on his 'peace' for its immediacy and simplicity, whereas Irigaray's notion of ethics is very much a theoretical response to a prior recognition of the reality of conflict. Still, Nietzsche's analysis of the problems of conveying the message of peace and of creating a new cultural order are pertinent to the case of Irigaray for what they reveal of the problems of reception.

For Nietzsche, it is the very simplicity of Christ's symbolic speech which exemplifies his *naïveté* and the impossibility of creating a cultural order from

his teachings. Nietzsche also distinguishes Christ's 'truths' from the ostensibly rational concepts of philosophical idealism since he interprets those concepts as metaphors which have congealed and forgotten their metaphoric origin. By contrast, he interprets Christ's truths as symbols that aimed to break the metaphoric process and to indicate personal experience as the meaning of his speech. However, Nietzsche finds Christ's symbolic language to be devoid of internal logic and of the sophistication of a style which might deter the possibility of immediate comprehension. He thus views its equivocation as an inevitable opening to distortion in the violent aftermath of its reception.¹⁵ Mere inner cohesion and openness to life and to the other are not sufficient to deal with the problems of reception in the existing culture. Nietzsche dramatizes this problem of reception in his own heroic figure of Zarathustra who, after a period of meditation, descends from the mountains in order to speak openly to the market-place crowd only to find that by simply stating his message that 'man is something that should be overcome', he is jeered and ridiculed (1961: 41). This kind of fear, jealousy and *ressentiment* of the other is born of a certain weakness which Nietzsche believes to be intrinsic to the culture of mankind and cannot, therefore, be overcome by the simple transmission of a message. Zarathustra soon abandons his love of mankind and his desire to redeem its masses and concludes: 'I am not the mouth for these ears' (1961: 45). Christ's authentic attempt to bestow upon others a simple acceptance of the true oneness of life did not account for the trenchant divisions in which these others are formed as subjects. Therefore, Nietzsche argues that the history of words was used to deform Christ's speech because of the fear engendered by his radicalness, and his poetic transparency was transformed back into systemic scripture (1968: 142–47).

Irigaray's own style has more affinity with Nietzsche's writing than with Christ's symbolic speech, for it is not the expression of personal experience as such but rather a different logic or syntax that she seeks to attain by her innovative writing which also attempts to enact the meaning of its content. Nevertheless, she concurs with the endorsement of the value of love over the sophistry of logic in her interpretation of Christ as a figure of the divine. Christ believed that love can reconcile antagonisms and, as we have seen, Irigaray likewise cites love of the other as the redemption of a humanity trapped in the opposed couple, man and woman. She thus retains the Christian notion of love as a predicate of the divine, a love that is not immediate in her case but mediated through a dialectical structure. Whether this love can resist appropriation by masculinity and sustain sexual difference is an open question. Irigaray's language itself exposes her model of difference to distortion. This is because of the way she reappropriates established cultural notions and terms such as 'love' (for a love of the other), which are in consequence prone to ready reas-

simulation to their traditional connotations (as a love of the one). As noted, this is also symptomatic of predicates of the divine which, in order to be universal, are vague and general and thus open to varied interpretation and misinterpretation. Nietzsche's awareness of these problems does not actually save him from being misunderstood. However, it does lead him to be disdainful of any such exaltation of love, believing Christ's love to once again manifest appalling immaturity with its immediate openness to and acceptance of life. For him, love 'becomes the happiness of the self-preserving herd' (1967: 107), in the way that it traditionally encourages contentment and a lack of desire to overcome.

Irigaray is aware of the stigma of *naïveté* which may be attached to the discourse of love,¹⁶ and she consequently takes up Nietzsche's assertion of Christ's immaturity by comparing Christ with the figure of Dionysus. Her interpretation places Dionysus in the position of a child, one whom we can interpret as being in a continuing and unresolved Oedipus complex. Thus, in her assessment, Dionysus is caught between a violent passion for return to the mother, which induces madness, and the cold form and appearance of Apollo's patrician individuation. In order to break the 'tombs' of Apolline individuation, Dionysus needs to sacrificially violate the flesh, which for Irigaray is merely a paroxysm that momentarily draws together contradictions only to leave them reaffirmed after they have violated corporeal individuation (1980a: 176). In contrast, she interprets Christ's love as a mature one that respects the borders of the body and which 'touches' to liberate spirit for the self. It does not free the spirit for the appearance of Apollo's form or for Dionysus' dithyrambic ecstasy; this ecstasy is interpreted as a form of the negating void.¹⁷ The figure of Christ is not, therefore, infantile in his love; Irigaray affirms him as the embodiment of a divine who is love for the other, and she even heretically suggests that he might be the symbol of shared flesh against the orthodox presentation of his solitude (1980a: 182). While the women in the cult of Dionysus were generally exploited by their master, Irigaray asserts the value of Christ's love by arguing that he disregarded the patriarchal norms of his time by showing respect for women, and by being open to the other (1987a: 426).¹⁸

Irigaray's Christ therefore evokes a divine that bears little relation to the one put forward by Pauline Christianity, nor is he naïve in the manner of Nietzsche's assertion. 'Christ' is a figure whom she respects and whose way she might wish to follow as an opening to historical progress. He symbolizes a way of being as a mode of incarnation and he speaks of the creation of an interiority as a way of approaching the divine that can be enhanced by some of the practices of Eastern thought. This mode of being and its rhythm and structure appear to correspond to Irigaray's notion of the potentially other feminine.

Hence, Christ is not only the feminine of God: 'Ce plus féminin de tous les hommes qui est le Fils' (1974: 249). In Irigaray's account, he could also be interpreted as a divine *in* the feminine. However, as a masculine figure, Irigaray does not advocate Christ as a representation of the divine for women, since he cannot be the symbol *of* the feminine divine. For that, a female figure is required. The notion that Christ could symbolize the divine for women would, she argues, support the view that Christ embodies a totality, representing mankind in a generic and androgenous fashion. Whereas for Nietzsche mankind is a bridge, for Irigaray it is Christ who was a bridge between an incarnation of a masculine/neuter divine and its beyond in a new form of spirit as the incarnation of two sexed divines.¹⁹ This new form of spirit is only made possible by Christ's own refutation of his totality in his assertion that his departure is necessary if spirit is to enter the world (1987a: 423). His 'return', she suggests, would be via a spirit in the feminine that could bring about the new era of sexual difference:

'Je reviendrai à la fin des temps', dit le Christ, époque où l'esprit adviendra à l'épouse pour sceller l'alliance du ciel et de la terre. Nouvelle Pentecôte, ou le feu — mêlé au vent? — sera redonné au féminin pour l'accomplissement d'un monde encore à venir? (1984: 139)

In spite of the fact that Christ's inner divine corresponds to Irigaray's evocation of the feminine, and that he may return as the feminine, she argues that the specificity of the feminine divine has to be represented in the female corporeal form if it is to bring women to a sexed incarnation and to enable them to represent female genealogies. Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference asserts that the feminine and the masculine need representations in and of themselves in their corporeal form, otherwise their incarnation could be interpreted in a manner akin to patriarchal conceptions, with gender as a form of neutral sign floating between and above different bodies which is incarnated by them in a temporary and arbitrary manner. As we have seen, in her account if incarnation is to come-to-be and be recognized, then each sex must have its own incarnation, and it is the woman-man couple which becomes divine.

This raises the problem of representation. Her evocation of a feminine divine is not especially problematic to the extent that it is and is able to remain pre-representational in the sense of defying conceptual definition. Irigaray is certainly not trying to represent the divine as a concept that determines by transcending process and movement. However, in turning from the issue of a mode of interiority to the need to create and sustain ideals for the self and for the other as a representation of otherness she has to relate these ideals to the female corporeal form if this same interiority is not to be a potential divine for men, too. Otherwise, the modes of the feminine and the masculine as 'inner

divines' could be adopted by men or women in an arbitrary fashion. This would render untenable the universality of sexual difference as an absolute difference between the masculinity of men and the femininity of women, for then both men and women could potentially identify with the other gender's inner divine condition. Indeed, her very description of the divinity of Christ illustrates how men may be 'feminine' in accordance with her own use of these terms, bringing her very close to a division between sex and gender. Hence, Irigaray has to tie her evocation of the divine to a sexed corporeal symbol, and she 'adopts' the figure of Mary for this purpose with respect to the female divine.

The apparent 'femininity' of Christ is explained by Irigaray both in relation to the patriarchal feminine and the female divine that Mary represents. However, this does not entirely resolve the problem of representation, unless we accept her interpretation of Christ as an incomplete figure of incarnation, a bridge to an era of a double and sexed incarnation. The possibilities this interpretation raises are developed in Irigaray's affirmation of the divinity of Mary.

Mary and the Annunciation

Irigaray's attraction to the symbolic potential of Mary as a figure of the divine for women entails rejecting the Mary of the established Church and re-interpreting her symbolic ideals. There are inherent problems in attempting to make such ideals universal, and these manifest themselves in Irigaray's articulation of the predicates of the female divine in the form of virginity and motherhood. As with her reinterpretation of the meaning of events such as the Annunciation, her suggestions are extremely illuminating and rich with creative potential. However, this potential is only likely to resonate for those already within the cultural tradition of Christianity, illustrating the particularity of any projected divine ideal.

The figure of the Virgin Mary is evidently an established ideal for women, particularly in Roman Catholicism, and it is probably the historical endurance of this ideal that attracts Irigaray to her. In the same way that Christianity has arguably distorted the message of Christ, the exaltation of the Virgin Mary in Christian tradition appears to be a diversion from the Gospels. Marina Warner makes this point in her discussion of the myth of the Virgin Mary, arguing that she is a mythical figure in Barthes's sense because she has been immortalized as an immutable ideal in a process whereby history has naturalized what is in fact a historical creation (1976: 333–35). Warner points to the fact that Mary is barely mentioned in the Gospels as evidence of this disjunction between the historical emergence of the cult of the Virgin and the apparently eternal nature

of Mary's role as an icon of feminine perfection. Thus, Warner delineates the changes to her status and values. Exalted as a virgin since the third century (when celibacy was declared more blessed than marriage), and then as a virgin and mother since the sixth (when her status as a figure of the supernatural reconciliation of opposites attested to her sacredness), she became a mediaeval cult figure and a mythic ideal used by the Church to morally exhort women to view motherhood as their divine purpose (1976: 336). Thus, while the figure of Mary and the values she represents are now sedimented within Christian culture, it is nevertheless clear that her values and the specific meaning attributed to them are subject to historical variation.

Given that the Virgin Mary is a sedimented ideal within Christian culture, she corresponds to what Irigaray considers to be the culturally given feminine, a feminine that nevertheless has to be cultivated in a manner appropriate to women. Yet Irigaray also appears to approach the Virgin Mary as a vestige of the 'forgotten feminine', and her method is to reclaim Mary as a representation for women by a process of reversal and reinterpretation. Her act of reclaiming, while evidently rooted in Christian culture, also relates to the forgotten gynaecocratic traditions which Irigaray detects in early Christianity and which cut across the Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman cultural division. Thus, she suggests that the way that women are described in the Bible is reminiscent of the cult of Aphrodite (1987a: 424). At the level of an epochal notion of history, then, Irigaray's re-evaluation of Mary is not strictly limited to a discourse within Christian culture because, although she accepts the central importance of Christianity to modern culture and to its conception of the subject, she views feminine divinities like Mary as a vestige of a culture suppressed by patriarchal traditions. Following her critique of patriarchal culture, and as part of her attempt to create new values, Irigaray therefore proposes that the truth of Mary be subject to a revaluation and new values created in her name. The figure of Mary offers Irigaray the symbolic potential she requires for a feminine divine in the form of a symbolic mother of daughters, and Irigaray even goes so far as to suggest that a re-appropriated Mary (as woman-mother and lover) could be the saviour for women in an era of sexual difference (1996: 185–207).

The Mary whom Irigaray exalts is not the Mary of orthodox Christian tradition, then, a Mary whom many feminists have repudiated as being oppressive for women. Isherwood and McEwan conclude that she can only be a negative influence upon women because, as virgin and mother, she embodies an impossible ideal for any actual woman. Portrayed as beyond sex, and yet described biologically, they argue that Mary denies the sexuality of women by which they are yet defined (1993: 53). As the mother of God, they claim that Mary is divided from ordinary women who are by definition inferior to her (1993: 54),

an argument that positions Mary as a transcendental divine in the hierarchical dualities of Christian metaphysics. In their view, the confusion caused by her contradictions does nothing to engender a sacredness for women. They argue that the cult of Mary as mother tends to be more widespread in poor countries (leading to repeated pregnancies), and that the cult of virginity endorses the debasement of sexuality and exalts celibacy, which helps women neither to develop their autonomy or to create equal and respectful sexual partnerships (1993: 56). For Isherwood and McEwan, then, the image of Mary as meek and mild has nothing positive to offer women, since she is an archetypal victim who submits to the will of God (1993: 58).

Irigaray's interpretation of the Mary transmitted by Christian tradition concurs with much of the above except that for her Mary symbolizes the position of 'ordinary' women in patriarchy. She is not detached from ordinary women through her apparently divine status. Mary thus symbolizes the role of woman as the material *mediator* between the abstract masculine ideal and his discrete instantiations. Hence, her interpretation entails a critique of the limitations and the negative influences of the role models Mary represents but goes further, examining the way that Mary functions to structurally support the entire Christian theological order. In that way, as we have seen, her interpretation of Mary's position in the Christian order corresponds to Irigaray's interpretation of the position of women in patriarchy. As a result, overcoming that position entails more than simply changing roles for Irigaray because it requires a complete reconstitution of the way identities and subjectivities are structured.

According to Irigaray, the Mary of Christian tradition is the material support of the masculine genealogy of holiness. As the material mother figure she is a mediator between the word of God and the flesh, between the Father and his son, merely a material receptacle through which the one passes over into the other. She is not represented as a speaking subject, although Irigaray argues that her unspoken assent to the Annunciation is the 'yes' sustaining the whole Christian and patriarchal order. Against Nietzsche's affirmation, she argues that for a woman such as Mary to affirm a form of life that is patriarchal is indeed an affirmation of a life that transcends her individuated being. But this transcendence stands over and against her own potential form of life and is therefore also a denial of life:

Mais son 'oui' sous-tend la culture chrétienne. Elle n'existerait pas sans lui. Et, si l'on interroge la nature de ce *fiat*, peut-être le fondement de siècles de christianisme doit-il se réévaluer. Car, selon l'interprétation traditionnelle, son 'oui' est aussi bien un 'non': non à sa vie à elle. A sa conception, sa naissance, sa croissance, sa génération, son épanouissement. Non à tout, sauf à la Parole du Père. (1980a: 178–79)

Irigaray thus interprets Mary's assent as symbolic in the way that it denies not only her own life but also the lives of other women, too. Since she is positioned as the material substrate of the system of exchange between men which consequently cannot afford to represent women, they are inevitably absent from the divine and are not represented in the Holy Trinity. Hence, Irigaray's argument that the genealogy of women goes unrepresented.

This 'truth' of Mary's symbolic assent leads Irigaray to elaborate her view that the sacrifice of the Crucifixion both contains and veils a prior sacrifice. She argues that the Annunciation and the Crucifixion are related in that the latter may be seen as a re-enactment of the former (1980a: 178–79). This argument corresponds to her insistence upon the historical and structural significance of 'forgotten' gynaecocratic traditions and to her insistence that the murder of the mother is more primal than the murder of the father in the founding of civilization as accounted for by Freud, and yet it is not symbolized and no ritual is enacted to represent it (1981a: 19). Thus, she argues that the patriarchal order appropriated and continues to appropriate these feminine traditions (corresponding to the mother) in order to establish its own abstract and hierarchical tradition (corresponding to the father), but that it denied and continues to deny its own sacrificial use of them. In the case of the Christian tradition, the Crucifixion is the sacrifice which represents the need that ensues from a patriarchal dualistic metaphysics to break the bounds of the body in order to open the way to the infinite. However, Irigaray interprets the wound in Christ's side at the Crucifixion as mimicking the female vagina, where Mary was herself 'wounded' by the violence of God compelling her to be the receptacle for his Word.²⁰ Thus, Irigaray argues that Mary is crucified by the Annunciation, and yet this death goes unmarked. Her own sacrifice is to become the receptacle for the other, and her life is a living death that cannot thereby assume an evolution but must assume the state of a suspended eternity on earth before being simply topologically transferred into actual eternity:

A la vierge, toujours vivante parce que morte à sa génération pour devenir simple véhicule de l'Autre, correspond, en une sorte de représentation mimétique, le meurtre de celui qu'elle aime. Celui à qui elle donne chair doit être sacrifié, en son corps vivant, pour accéder à la transfiguration digne du Royaume. Une deuxième fois, la vie s'inverse dans la mort, qui s'enseigne comme la vraie vie — la Vie. (1980a: 178)

Hence, Irigaray argues that the sacrifice of the Crucifixion is but a mimetic representation of the sacrifice of the feminine that has already occurred. This sacrifice distances and divides women and men from their divinity in Irigaray's account because it deprives women of their feminine selves and men of a feminine otherness. Such a division from divinity is described in terms of a hierarchical separation from an eternal Being in space and time according to

Christian tradition. Thus, Irigaray argues that the orthodox tradition interprets the desire to return to the feminine, to a womb-matrix nature, as it were, as the temptation of hell beneath the world, and that it then it appropriates this desire in order to represent it as a desire to return to the heavenly love of the Father above the world (1980a: 177).²¹

In order to appropriate this desire for the forgotten feminine as being in fact a desire to reflect and be with the masculine, a version of the feminine has to be represented in the drama of sacrificial return to satisfy that desire. However, in Irigaray's assessment this feminine is represented on masculine terms as a mere functional and disposable means between man and his God. In the orthodox account of the life of Christ he thus appears as a feminine figure in many respects; his death is one of *submission* to his fate which is determined by the *will* of another, and his corporeal integrity is violated and destroyed to make way for the passage to the divine. However, because the feminine has already been sacrificed and her body used as matter, the feminine of this patriarchal sacrifice is represented in the form of a masculine feminine who is subsequently able to discard matter and corporeality as feminine and ascend to the truth of an absolute masculine Being. In Irigaray's account, therefore, the figure of Christ is the other of God and determined by him, while Mary is there to give him matter, she is the other of the same. Therefore, despite her own death being a prior condition of his sacrifice, Irigaray notes that Mary is merely represented alongside him as *his* feminine other, and attributed the values of patience, gentleness and chastity (1980a: 179). Her life having been reversed into death, she cannot love herself, love the other or love God; she denies herself and obeys God through serving others. Hence, she is to be seen caring for/holding the boy child and attending the dead man with no possibility of a relationship or adult love in return (1980a: 178). Irigaray concludes that the co-redemptive couple of Mary and Jesus in the dominant tradition represent a patriarchal couple in the way that they represent the primacy of the generational model, the valorization of the mother-son relation and woman reduced to motherhood (1980a: 179). They thus entail a model of human relations prevalent in patriarchal history.²²

In her desire to reverse this patriarchal and orthodox interpretation of Mary, Irigaray suggests in *Amante Marine* something much more radical with respect to the mimicry of Christ and the role of Mary. In the tradition of Christ's sacrifice she detects a patriarchal femininity that, as outlined in Chapter One, mimes the mimesis of the masculine; in order to return man to the imagined unity of his divinity Christ needed to embody the feminine sacrificial object by a strategic mimicry of a masculine-determined feminine. This places the figure of Christ very close to the position of the feminine other in patriarchy. However, Irigaray also suggests a further possibility, which would indeed

place Christ in the position of representing the remnants of the femininity that for Irigaray remain resistant to patriarchal appropriations, the other of the other. She finds this possibility evidenced in the manner of Christ's *becoming* which, as we have seen, is not defined by her as a teleology towards death. Through the screen of the patriarchal Christ, Irigaray discerns another interpretation of his divinity and she argues that he may have mimed the other feminine which proved so unacceptable in his lifetime. In which case, Irigaray is not arguing that Christ is the incarnation of a feminine divine (for as a masculine figure there would remain a division in his incarnation); instead she puts forward the possibility that he mimes the divinity his mother represents. In which case, Mary would be divine in her own right, a divine status defined not through her role in the life of Christ, but rather in relation to herself. In this respect, Irigaray questions the status of Mary's role as the mother of Christ. Rather than simply enacting the role of biological mediator between a Father and his son, giving matter to the father's form, Irigaray proposes the possibility of a non-literal interpretation of her maternity: 'Elle n'est, peut-être?, la "mère" du Sauveur qu'en tant qu'elle incarne, la première, l'avènement historique qu'il est. Ou qu'il devient' (1980a: 178). Mary is the divine whose divinity Christ mimes. Hence, Irigaray suggests that she was the one whose 'work' was to give body to the divine presence and that in her tending of Christ *she* in fact whispers to him the 'Word'. Thus, in Irigaray's speculation as to the meaning of the divine for Mary we find an evocation of the divine corresponding to the one she finds in Christ, one which contrasts with the abstract and distant orthodox Christian God:

Et si, pour Marie, le divin n'advenait que dans le proche? Le si proche qu'il en demeure innommable. Ce qui n'est pas dire rien. Mais l'avènement d'une réalité étrangère à toute identité déjà existante. Rapport en un lieu plus mystérieux que toute proximité localisable. Effusion en deçà et au-delà de toute peau refermée sur elle-même. Attouchement-accouchement, et sans blessure, du plus profond de la chair. (1980a: 183)

Here again, then, the divine is feminine. It is imagined in relation to proximity, as a mode of interiority that of necessity reconstitutes identity and yet defies conceptual definition as such. Irigaray emphasizes its intersubjective, experiential nature; it is not a personal god, and cannot be formed into a church or establishment (1980: 172). She does not, therefore, envisage it as a private and individual experience but rather one that relates to the innermost sense of self as that which surpasses individuation without violence, for this inner and outer are always already related; there is no impermeable boundary to transgress.

That the figure of Christ so effectively mimics this divinity that is defined as feminine and imputed to Mary's divine potential in Irigaray's interpretation once again begs the question as to why it is apparently so necessary for this feminine divinity to be symbolized by a female body, unless some significance is being accorded to the origin and ownership of a mode of the divine? Irigaray clearly does believe it is important to stress the historical existence of female deities in order to contest their obliteration from history; however, she does not stress the latter mode of argumentation, which would entail a discourse of proprietary rights tied to the apparent origin of a conception. Rather, I have argued that, for Irigaray, the need to tie her notion of the feminine divine to a symbolic female body ensues from her specific notion of incarnation and the primacy she attributes to sexual difference. In that way, Irigaray moves from the elaboration of a mode of interiority to positing predicates as potential divine values for a culture in the feminine which must affirm a potential female universal. As I have argued, these predicates are weakened by these requirements, for they are stretched beyond their given cultural context in an unsustainable manner. This is the case for the divine values Irigaray proposes in relation to Mary as she attempts to turn Mary's roles into predicates of a universal female divine.

As we have seen, Irigaray finds the position of Mary in the Christian tradition to correspond to the position of women in the patriarchal order. Thus, the roles to which Mary is reduced in the staging of the tragedy of Christ are those determined by a patriarchal definition of feminine nature since women are reduced to nature in its metaphysics. Hence, Irigaray points to the reduction of Mary to a nature which is represented by biologically-determined symbols of woman in the form of the virgin and the mother. The status of virginity and motherhood are literally defined according to a biological imaginary of the body, the physical presence or absence of the hymen and the production of a child (1996: 188). It is to these ideals that Irigaray turns in order to create divine values for women, and in this respect she does carry through patriarchal conceptions to her elaboration of a potential female divine.

Rather than discard virginity and motherhood as being simply reductive ideals for women, then, Irigaray seeks to reinterpret them because they appear to accord with all the elements required by her thought for the creation of a gendered divine. They represent a form of given femininity (albeit a reductive one) in the patriarchal and Christian tradition; they resonate with echoes of a 'forgotten feminine' as ideals associated with female deities in gynaeocratic cultures; and they relate to the specificity of a female sexed body as the place of a divine incarnation. As argued above, that which is specific to the feminine divine as an incarnated divine must pertain to the specificities of the female body, otherwise Irigaray's claims regarding the primacy of sexual difference

that yet requires symbolic recognition cannot hold. However, central to Irigaray's reinterpretation is the creation of a different imaginary of the female body which challenges the reductive and mechanistic culture of biological conceptions prevalent in patriarchal thought. Consequently, she proposes notions of motherhood and virginity that are not restricted to some biological and testable rite of passage but which aim to create a morphology of the body whereby the womb is not reduced to a receptacle nor the hymen reduced to a strictly present or absent threshold.

For Irigaray, the status of virginity is not therefore dependent upon the status of the hymen. Rather, she interprets it as a matter of fidelity to the self. She defines the virgin as someone who cultivates her own spiritual interiority as a woman and is faithful both to her own individual identity and to her gender (1996: 188); in effect, the virgin is someone who embraces the mode of the divine as Irigaray has defined it. She describes the value of virginity thus:

la virginité ne doit pas alors signifier privation ou abstention de la réalisation de soi par une femme soumise au bon vouloir et au devenir d'un homme mais aptitude de la femme à conserver et cultiver son identité pour en offrir les qualités en partage à l'homme d'une manière ou d'une autre. Cette dimension de virginité psychique de la femme, gardée et cultivée dans l'amour et le désir avec l'homme, est sans doute une des richesses spirituelles les plus extraordinaires de l'humanité. (1991: 13)

This reinterpretation cuts back through Christian moralism to pagan conceptions of virginity in which the virgin was not chaste but symbolized autonomy and choice, and virginity conferred notions of strength and ritual purity (Warner 1976: 47). Hence, Irigaray's notion of virginity is not intended to enforce judgementally-defined behaviour, but rather it aims to represent an ideal for the gendered self in the process of becoming and in the relationship with the other gender. Virginity would thus be an enabling ideal, one that provides an anchor for a female identity and accords it with the value it requires if it is not to be readily subject to dismissal, denigration or indifference. The potential of such a divine value for Irigaray should not be underestimated. She writes: 'Il est possible que ce qui paralyse le devenir de l'esprit à notre époque est le manque de tradition positive concernant la valeur de la virginité pour la femme' (1991: 13).

As a valued ideal in the process of becoming, Irigaray's notion of virginity can be respected for its attempt to go beyond patriarchal concepts and a simple critique of them, although quite clearly it is intimately related to those concepts and her critique of them. What is more, within a contemporary and Western context the perpetuation of virginity as an ideal inevitably resonates more for those within the Christian tradition, for it is the Christian tradition which has prevailed in transmitting a culture of virginity.²³ This sense that Iri-

garay is engaging with a specific cultural tradition, and even more narrowly with those who retain a commitment to that tradition, is compounded by two factors. Firstly, Irigaray defines virginity in relation to the figure of Mary as the symbol of the female divine for women. Secondly, she defines virginity in relation to a notion of *fidelity* rather than autonomy or purity, and it is the Christian tradition which has appropriated virginity to a system of truth and adherence.

Although Irigaray does not advocate virginity as a reductive and determinant ideal premised upon a metaphysical notion of truth as eternal necessity, she does define virginity as an ideal of fidelity to one's self and to one's gender which means an adherence to a cultivated nature, as it were, one that is always becoming. Yet this merely accentuates the problem of defining the predicates of one's gender, however temporal they may be, because she does not define the female gender through virginity. She defines virginity as a predicate of the female divine, and virginity means fidelity to one's gender, which is predicated upon the notion of virginity. It would appear that Irigaray's notion of virginity (which is derived from the particular culture of Christianity) needs to be more specific if it is to affirm the female gender. Otherwise, it risks becoming tautologous. On the other hand, as more specific affirmations arise, entrenched differences are likely to emerge that would render the universality of any predicate of a female divine impossible. In that case, it is quite likely that Irigaray's proposal for the ideal of virginity would be rejected, especially given its patriarchal ancestry and its association with a judgemental and commercial evaluation of the body. While her thought leaves wide open the potential for other divine ideals, the same objections will apply in the process of those ideals becoming universal. Furthermore, without any definition of the female body inherent in the notion of a virgin, since it is defined as fidelity to a gender that yet awaits its realization, the virgin ideal could apply equally to men. This is affirmed by Irigaray in a recent French text:

La virginité, dans cette perspective, ne se réduit pas à une réalité naturelle, ne s'attribue pas seulement au féminin ou au neutre, mais pourrait représenter l'autre nom de la fidélité de chaque genre à soi-même, dans le respect de l'autre genre. (1997: 198)

This double claim on the divinity of virginity would contradict Irigaray's attempt to reclaim virginity as an aspect of the 'forgotten feminine' and as a particularity of the female divine. However, while it is possible to accept that in a culture of sexual difference women and men would each have their own different ideals of 'virginity', they would each require further and more specific elaboration than that of fidelity to one's gender if they were to remain sufficiently distinctive to support and sustain the absolute difference of a cul-

ture of sexual difference. Hence, it is difficult to accept that the universality of sexual difference can be represented in universalist terms. For at some point the notion of gender requires a more particular elaboration that, if it occurs at all, will only occur within the parameters of existing cultural differences arising from the differences between histories, languages and religions.

Irigaray's reinterpretation of the ideal of motherhood lends itself to greater specificity in the way that it is defined through a series of cultural practices. Once again these practices are not strictly related to motherhood defined as the literal act of giving birth, although the choice of motherhood as an ideal relates directly to patriarchal norms. Irigaray does acknowledge that the possibility of biological motherhood is important to a woman's identity: 'le corps féminin doit être identifié civilement comme vierge et potentiellement mère' (1992: 110). However, she extends the notion of motherhood to include 'spiritual' mothering. This may entail a whole series of cultural practices, such as representing the female gender for the young, affirming female genealogies or nurturing creatively. 'Spiritual' motherhood takes precedence in Irigaray's elaboration of divine ideals. She writes of the value of motherhood that it 'n'est pas proprement humaine' (1991: 13), by which one can only assume that she is referring to the patriarchal definition of motherhood which is reduced to a pure use-value. Hence, Irigaray envisages 'spiritual' motherhood to entail exchanges between women that are not restricted to the masculine values of exchange and to its biological definition of motherhood; it is a culture of nurturing the feminine among women.

'Spiritual' motherhood is also aimed at recognizing the differences between women on a 'vertical' plane, differences in age, experience, cultural and intellectual ability and so on, differences which are only recognized as a basis for competitiveness between women in patriarchal culture rather than for their nurturing potential between one woman and another. This notion of a 'spiritual' motherhood and its role in developing a female culture has been extensively pursued by Italian feminists, specifically in the practice of *affidamento* (entrustment). Mirna Cicioni (1989) explains that *affidamento* is a specific cultural practice that emerged in Italy in the late 1970s, particularly in connection with the Italian philosophers influenced by Irigaray (the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective and the 'Diotima' group). Hence, Irigaray's thought provided the impetus, if not the detail, for such a practice. Premised upon a theoretical assumption of the commonality between women (and the universality of sexual difference), it yet recognizes their differences, and defines these in terms of competence. The practice of *affidamento* therefore entails a relationship between two women which is freely entered-into for the purposes of achieving a particular goal in a public or professional capacity. While it is a hierarchical model in the sense that one woman offers to another

the skills or knowledge she has, it is envisaged as a 'vertical' exchange since the more competent woman is also expected to listen to and learn from the other in this process. Thus, it is envisaged as a symbolic mother-daughter relationship and is one possible form of the 'spiritual' motherhood Irigaray advocates. As Cicioni points out, *affidamento* is a specific form of cultural exchange that is not based upon friendship or desire but upon providing models for identification and sharing knowledge so that women can achieve their goals in society. It is a recognition of one woman's public expertise and the need for that to be translated into social relations for the benefit of another woman and women generally (1989: 77).

The idea of a 'spiritual' motherhood and its development in the form of practices such as *affidamento* may indeed assist women to develop a culture that is favourable to them, particularly by addressing the problem of sustaining a culture in the feminine and by providing models for younger women to identity with. However, as an ideal it entails many risks, not least the problem of representing the female gender in an ostensibly authoritative position, for once again, this will tend to assume a universality that is inevitably open to varied and probably contradictory interpretation. This issue has already arisen in relation to the practice of *affidamento*, as Cicioni notes. There have been objections to its premise of a commonality among women as well as to its emphasis upon the strengths of women at the expense of recognizing their weaknesses. Furthermore, the way *affidamento* is structured does not necessarily allow for the evolution required if the 'daughter' goes beyond or disagrees with the 'mother' (Cicioni 1989: 80). Irigaray herself appears to believe herself to be the victim of a somewhat involuntary mother-daughter relationship in her relationship with some Italian feminists who 'adopted' her as their mother only to reject her as her thought developed towards its third stage (1992: 16).

The ideal of 'spiritual' motherhood promises to repeat many of the conflicts and difficulties of biological motherhood, partly because of its structural correspondence to the latter. While it responds to the need for a model for female identification and authority at a social level, it is problematic in its interpretation of Mary as a symbolic *mother* over the representation of providing a symbolic *woman* for identification. Clearly, by advocating spiritual motherhood as a divine ideal Irigaray is recognizing and emphasizing the necessary continuum between the 'social' and the 'natural', and between psychic and social identification and development. Further, it is an ideal that corresponds to the morphology of the female body and, as with the figure of Mary, is an established ideal that will thus provide its reevaluated form with a given context for its reception. Yet Irigaray's own critique of the reduction of woman to motherhood lends support to a critique of such a proposed ideal which im-

poses upon relations between women this notion belonging to a familial genealogy. The social representation of woman as subject should not necessarily come about via the form of motherhood, even if to attain that status girls need to find a subject in their own biological mothers. Irigaray appears to model spiritual motherhood on biological motherhood, at the expense of the latter, in order to avoid a reductive ideal of motherhood. Yet by advocating 'motherhood' as an ideal, and by divorcing it from the maternal processes of the body, Irigaray risks opening up this ideal to the authoritarian and assimilatory tendencies typical of patriarchal fatherhood while yet leaving biological motherhood in a state bereft of culture.²⁴ Therefore, without the ideal of womanhood to transcend these divisions, Irigaray's proposal risks reinstating the hierarchy between nature and culture in the forms of biological and spiritual motherhood.

Irigaray's assessment of the relative status of virginity and motherhood responds to such reservations by in effect placing virginity in a position corresponding with a 'womanhood' that transcends the question of motherhood. It is the third term, as it were, of her female holy trinity. Against the biologically-defined ideal of virginity and motherhood, the contradictory impossibility for women, her interpretation of them makes both possible and yet attributes to virginity a certain primacy over motherhood because the virgin is the one who remains faithful to herself both in love and in childbirth. She thus cites the belief that Mary was herself born of an immaculate conception to support her own claim that, since she was conceived without sin, Mary can be held to be the spiritual mother of Christ before being his natural mother (1996: 189).²⁵ She writes:

C'est avec son âme 'vierge', autant sinon plus qu'avec son corps, que Marie enfante Jésus. La figure qu'elle peut représenter pour nous est celle d'une femme qui reste fidèle à elle-même dans l'amour, dans l'enfantement. En cela, la virginité de Marie surpasse, en dignité divine, la maternité. (1996: 188)

Clearly, such a hierarchy has to be understood in the context of the subtleties Irigaray gives to her notion of the divine, so that it is not a method of judging the roles women undertake but of affirming particular aspects of their becoming. She is arguing that motherhood in its broadest sense is one aspect of the life of a woman to which she cannot be reduced for all its divine status, and that it is her virginity that provides her with her subjectivity (as a fidelity to the self in the process of becoming).

As argued above, the notion of virginity alone is too general to affirm the particularities of a gender or even gender as two particulars. The problem of affirming woman as subject through divine predicates requires further elaboration at both a theoretical and political level. Irigaray demonstrates both her

creative ability to articulate her notion of a female divine and its specificity to a Christian culture in the way that she uses virginity to reinterpret the Annunciation. Since the virgin is no longer defined through a reductive definition of the body, but comes-to-be in the language of a gendered culture, she is 'capable de recevoir la parole de l'autre sans l'altérer' (1996: 188). Through the virgin's relationship to speech Irigaray puts forward a reinterpretation of the meaning of the Annunciation as a way to celebrate Mary and the double divine. She states that its customary interpretation presents a representative of an omniscient God announcing to a poor, young woman his will that she give birth to his son, an act she has no choice but to accept since she is in effect his property. Feminists such as Mary Daly have defined such an act as rape and consequently concluded that as victim, the figure of Mary offers nothing positive to women (1977: 85). In contrast, Irigaray once again attempts to reclaim the Annunciation for women. She views it as the potential symbol of the words shared between a man and a woman prior to their sexual engagement and to conception (1992: 221). Thus, she proposes this reinterpretation of the word of God which is brought to Mary by an angel:

Marie, toi qui, dès ton adolescence, es divine, parce que tu es fille née d'une femme fidèle à elle-même — Anne, dite celle qui a conçu sans péché —, donc toi qui es apte à l'intersubjectivité, expression de l'amour entre les humains, veux-tu être mon amante et que nous ayons un enfant ensemble, car je t'en trouve digne même si tu es jeune, inexpérimentée et sans biens. Mon amour et mon fils ne peuvent être rédempteurs que grâce à ton *oui*. Sans ta parole, nous ne pouvons être rachetés ni sauvés. (1992: 220)

While Irigaray is aware of the limitations of this scenario, because it is primarily concerned with conception (and of a son at that), the purpose of such a reinterpretation is to begin to establish what she terms a culture of sexuality. Sexuality need not be reduced to a 'natural' process of energetic discharge, or, indeed, to the enactment of one subject's will over matter. Thus, for Irigaray the words of the angel above would be the mediation between the sexed divines as an expression of their culture of sexual difference, as well as the realization of the Buddha's will to renounce proprietorship. They would also be the willing of an intersubjectivity between two irreducible beings. Thus, the divine still inheres in the word but here it inheres in the words *shared* between the two sexes, expressing their will to alliance between them that is, for Irigaray, the true incarnation of word and flesh (1992: 221). She thus reverses the structure and meanings of the Annunciation as an event of the incarnation of her woman-man divine couple against the interpretation of it as the submission of the feminine Mary to the will of the masculine God.

Irigaray's reinterpretations of virginity and motherhood and of mysteries such as the Annunciation reveal the creativity of her thought, but they also reveal the limitations of any projected ideals of gender. In spite of her incorporation of elements of Eastern thought, when it comes to proposing symbols of the divine Irigaray is clearly working within the Christian tradition, and such ideals will resonate for those within that tradition. Although her notion of virginity is so broadly defined as to allow for multiple interpretations and practices, it thus risks asserting nothing specific to the female gender. Nietzsche's analysis of the problems of universalism in any affirmation of God are particularly apt to consideration of Irigaray's strategy here, as I have tried to show. For although Nietzsche's philosophy ignores the possibility of a radical alterity with its value destruction and affirmation of the 'objective' force of the will to power, he does highlight the inevitable particularity of any divine ideal that has the strength to sustain a form of life. His consequent rejection of Christianity contrasts sharply with Irigaray's reclamation of the forgotten of that tradition, namely two primal gendered subjectivities. Whether these particular subjectivities can be sustained as universal forms remains doubtful, but the richness of Irigaray's interpretations of the tradition of Christianity provides a fertile ground for that possibility.

NOTES

1. See Mortensen for a discussion of their relationship (1993). Mortensen does not deal with the specific question of Irigaray's interpretation of Christ and Christianity but reads *Amante Marine* in relation to the philosophies of Nietzsche and Heidegger and the question of the feminine. Mortensen shares the view of Hodge and Chanter that: 'Heidegger's work constitutes the veiled sub-text which informs not only Irigaray's reading of Nietzsche, but also those readings of the two dominant father figures that are echoed in her work, namely Derrida and Lacan' (1993: 16). See also Kelly Oliver, 'The plaint of Ariadne: Luce Irigaray's *Amante Marine de Friedrich Nietzsche*' (1993), who reads *Amante Marine* in conjunction with Derrida's *Éperons* and does outline Irigaray's assessment of the 'birth of gods' in the final section of her essay. My focus upon Christianity does not reflect an assumption that the thought of either Nietzsche or Irigaray lends itself to such thematic bracketing. The style of my engagement with Irigaray's engagement with Nietzsche in *Amante Marine* is completely inappropriate to that text because it is not a 'thesis' or a proposition but a poetic encounter with Nietzsche whose remarks do not straightforwardly lend themselves to asserions on a theme. Hence, David Krell's decision to 'remark' on *Amante Marine*: 'Inasmuch as Irigaray thinks and writes in fragments — they are sometimes extended fragments, but they are always nonetheless nodes of fragmentary writing — it is difficult for a reader of *Amante Marine* to submit to the discipline and rigor of an 'essay' or 'commentary'' (1994: 186). Since I do not confine my discussion to *Amante Marine* and my aim is to impose the question of the feasibility of Irigaray's proposals for a female divine upon her discussions of Christianity, then my 'style' may be accorded some justification.

2. This is evident in the opening remarks Irigaray makes to the Italian philosopher, Luisa Muraro, in her interview with Muraro in *Je, tu, nous* where Irigaray declares the reassurance she finds in the fact that they share a belief in the necessity of sexual difference (1990: 117). In contrast to Nietzsche, however, there is no sense of a fatal premonition in Irigaray's writing that her thought might be co-opted by destructive and terrible forces. Nietzsche wrote in *Ecce Homo* that his destiny was to be associated 'with a crisis without equal on earth, the most profound collision of conscience' (1989: 326). Nietzsche's writings were in fact distorted by the German Nazis and used for their propaganda purposes; it is an association which his defenders fought hard to shake off, most notably Georges Bataille. However, as Keith Ansell-Pearson explains, while Nietzsche advocated aristocratic values and abhorred the humanistic sentiments of Christians, socialists and liberals, his thought denied justifications premised upon nationalistic or racist grounds since he insisted that all individuals are formed by 'culture' (1994: 23–43). In that sense, it is indeed a complete distortion of his thought to accuse it of anti-Semitism in a racist vein; his negative hyperbole against Jewish culture is raised in the context of pressing his argument that there is an essential continuity between the Christian and Jewish cultures which stood in denial of the German Christian anti-Semitism of his time (1968: 134, translator's note). However, Nietzsche's distaste for this Jewish-Christian culture cannot be underestimated (Nietzsche 1989: 35); read in a post-Holocaust context his language appears inflammatory and unjustifiable for one allegedly critical of anti-Semitism. While Nietzsche cannot be held responsible for the historical reception of his work, any more so than can Irigaray for the reception of her work, the problem of reception remains, as I go on to discuss below. Irigaray, in fact, appears to pay less heed to the dangers of distortion than did Nietzsche but if she projects no sense of fatalism in this respect it is probably because she has not descended to the level of self-aggrandisement characteristic of *Ecce Homo*. The fate which preoccupies her is the fate against which her thought is directed: a future of sexual neutrality. Nevertheless, Irigaray interprets herself as potentially a major figure in the history of philosophy, and in remarks made in response to *Ecce Homo*, 'Ecce Mulier? Fragments' (1994), she contrasts her own claims in relation to Nietzsche's: 'Dire que j'ai fait à l'humanité "le plus grand cadeau" me déplairait. Comparer n'est-ce déjà confondre? Et un cadeau n'est jamais qu'un cadeau. Je préfère lui avoir dévoilé un horizon' (1994: 216). This essay does manifest Irigaray's growing preoccupation in her later publications with her sense that she lacks respect and recognition as a thinker, a problem she attributes to her position as a woman thinker (1992: 25–28; 1994: 219–21).
3. Morny Joy, in her article 'Equality or Divinity?' (1990) puts forward a critique of Irigaray's thought regarding the divine which is articulated primarily in response to Irigaray's review of the French translation of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (Crossroads: New York, 1983) and which places Irigaray in a 'revolutionist' camp with respect to Christianity. Joy is generally critical of Irigaray on a number of grounds, not least Irigaray's excessively theoretical approach, her indebtedness to the 'maverick thinkers' Derrida and Lacan, and her lack of scholarly attention to the context in which Schüssler Fiorenza's book was written, namely North American feminist studies of religion. While the first two objections are symptomatic of a general trend of reading Irigaray which does not seriously engage with her thought, the latter is a valid objection. However, Joy herself similarly inappropriately assimilates Irigaray to a 'foreign' context by classifying her according to a division of feminist religious thinkers established in the North American context. In this way, Joy positions Irigaray along with thinkers who are deemed to hold revolutionist as opposed to reformist views with respect to Christianity since they

'view the Jewish and Christian traditions as irredeemably patriarchal and concentrate their efforts on affirming female experience and principles' (1990:16). This is clearly denied by Irigaray herself in her article (1987a: 422), where she explicitly refutes the division along patriarchal lines that Schüssler Fiorenza draws between the Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman traditions. Joy positions Irigaray in this manner because Irigaray is making a claim for women not merely to share in the divine but to represent it, thus affirming something specific to the feminine which must (according to Joy's chosen classification) entail a rejection of Christianity because it is a patriarchal religion. Thus, Joy reads Irigaray as rejecting equality in the established religions in favour of a female divinity (hence the dichotomy posed in the title of Joy's article) and she is, with some justification, critical of the simplicity of this division. Given that Irigaray does not subscribe to the view that affirming a female divine must entail a rejection of the Christian tradition, her construal of this dichotomy does not accord with Joy's characterization of it and therefore Joy's conclusion that the dichotomy requires a more complex assessment is the position from which Irigaray commences.

4. Nietzsche is well-known for the apparent contradictions in his thought. In *Ecce Homo*, for example, he writes: 'religions are affairs of the rabble; I find it necessary to wash my hands after I have come into contact with religious people.— I want no "believers"' (1989: 326). His conception of the *Übermensch* may be interpreted as a rare being who can overcome religion and 'herd' morality in order to assert and create his own values, thus either as an individual aristocratically and classically conceived (Ansell-Pearson 1991) or as a being who reduces Being to his own values (Heidegger 1961). While Nietzsche clearly did value the individual who can stand over and against modern (Christian) morality and while he did not want 'followers' of his own thought, his aversion to religion must be located primarily in his aversion to Christianity and the institutionalization of religious instinct. Thus, in the section from which the above quotation was taken he goes on to criticize the Christian religion once again and at the end raises his own 'God' against it: 'Have I been understood?— *Dionysus versus the Crucified*' (1989: 335).
5. See Walker (1991) for an elaboration of this point.
6. Irigaray develops her reinterpretation of the notion of 'sin' in *Le souffle des femmes* (1996), by developing the notion of the divine in relation to an ethics of sexual difference articulated in terms of 'sin' and 'grace'. These are not put forward in the form of commandments, nor are they envisaged as rules to control or deny the self, they are intended to offer guidelines for the development of the self. Hence, Irigaray writes the words *sin* and *grace* in inverted commas. They are not analogous to traditional concepts of sin and grace in the sense that they do not refer to a God of truth and falsehood. She argues that their horizon is one of ethical relations between subjects for which the enduring point of reference is gender (1996: 190). 'Sin' is therefore defined in relation to two poles of reference, the relation to self and the relation to one's gender. It is 'sinful' to subject oneself to the desire of the other gender without returning to one's own gender and self. It is not to be who I am (1996: 190–99). By extension, to use language as if it were neuter and to lack respect for nature are also 'sins'. 'Grace' is defined as becoming who you are; thus to be born a girl is an act of grace which must be recognized and culturally developed. To become who you are is thus close but not equivalent to a Nietzschean affirmation, since Irigaray's becoming is always tied to a dialectical relation with the other, such that grace in the feminine entails love of the self and love of the other (1996: 200). Hence, Irigaray proposes that the celebration of feminine grace should entail privileging a mode of 'being with' and the language of intersubjectivity.

7. This is Irigaray's argument which is explored throughout the entire first section of *Amante Marine*, 'Dire d'eaux immémoriales' (1980a).
8. This is in fact her reading of Schüslerr Fiorenza's argument in *In Memory of Her*, in her article, 'Égales à qui?' (1987a). Rather than manifest a desire to criticize Schüslerr Fiorenza specifically, Irigaray's objection seems to be directed at 'socio-economic' interpretations generally, as I go on to discuss.
9. In adopting this position Irigaray is not oblivious to the effects or reality of economic poverty. Indeed, much of her writing appears to assume an audience or context of reception which is already versed in the writings of Marx and Engels and familiar with the concerns of European democratic socialism. Given this context of engagement, Irigaray's statements are aimed at shifting the focus of debate rather than supporting a liberal economic agenda, although out of context they might be co-opted for such a purpose. However, among her actual or imagined interlocutors Irigaray is clearly more interested in a discourse which considers the question and status of women in terms of divinity and identity rather than considering them purely in terms of their social roles or economic status. From this perspective, the approval she gives to Christ's disapproval of idolatry of the poor (1987a: 425), is a rejection of the hypocrisy of much Christian benevolence and charity which are facilitated by gross inequalities of wealth but are nonetheless often promoted as the complement to a rigorously liberal economics.
10. As pointed out in Section One, in *Le deuxième sexe* de Beauvoir argued that women cannot be divided along the lines of class when considering their exploitation. Nevertheless, in accordance with the existentialist philosophy of that work, de Beauvoir does in a fashion 'measure' women in terms of an existentialist concept of freedom. This, very briefly, is the freedom gained through the necessity of assuming risk, the risk of one's life via a self-projection across the void of mankind's contingency in order to assert an existence that is for the self and not for the other. Those who refuse to engage in risk thereby exist in a form of inauthentic *mauvaise foi*. This concept of risk as the measure of a human being is related to the economic by de Beauvoir in the way that she defines the roles of wife, housewife and mother as being quintessentially for the other. Thus, to the disdain of many Marxists, she argues that bourgeois women are in many respects less free (and therefore more enchained) than working women since they do not engage in the system of economic exchange on their own terms and have not truly risked the freedom of economic independence from men. However, this attempt to 'measure' women is arguably inappropriate to them also, since the way risk is defined as a conscious, goal-oriented activity in relation to the active choices of a willing individual subject relates more to the masculine subject than to any feminine one. As a result, de Beauvoir can exempt childbirth from the category of risk since ostensibly it is not a risk in which the stakes are the meaning of one's life, and she can ultimately dismiss the challenges and economic value of domestic work (1949). Irigaray's philosophy of the divine is not primarily concerned with establishing some measure of women or quantifying their value. It is primarily concerned with allowing women to develop as women although, as I go on to discuss, this could also be construed in judgemental terms.
11. John Walker, in his article 'Nietzsche, Christianity, and the legitimacy of tradition' (1991), states that for Nietzsche, Christianity does remain paradoxically connected to the authentic teaching of Christ. Walker argues that, for Nietzsche, Christ's teaching advocates the absolute negation of worldly experience which intellectually concurs with the core belief of the Christian tradition that spiritual truth is never of this world (1991: 20). Walker goes on to state that, with such an ascetic ideal, any positive realization of Christianity in the world has to be inauthentic, whatever its sincerity, for it

cannot be of this world and remain true to its spiritual truth. In my view this reading gives insufficient attention to the role Nietzsche attributes to *ressentiment* in the formation of the Christian Church. While Christ is, according to Nietzsche, naïve with respect to worldly experience, this emanates from an anarchistic indifference to the world which is turned towards an *inner* spirituality, rather than from a rancorous rejection of the world turned towards a spirituality in an imaginary beyond. Thus, the hypocrisy of Christianity as an objective form of life is not particularly a question of an attempt to make this-worldly something that is essentially other-worldly as Walker argues, it is more a matter of the will to inaction that Christ's teaching advocates being incompatible with the affirmative will that is required for all action and leadership. Hence, I argue that Nietzsche does not find in Christ's teachings any relation to the actions of the Christian Church, except to the extent that the events of Christ's life and his symbolic speech provided the material for a misinterpretation of his notion of the divine.

12. For this reason I do not assess the claims of either Irigaray or Nietzsche against historical and empirical studies of Christ, or even against the texts of the Gospels themselves. To contextualize and expand Irigaray's and Nietzsche's positions in this way would be potentially illuminating.
13. See Irigaray's book *Entre Orient et Occident* (1998) for further elaboration of her relation to Eastern thought. She has written elsewhere of the value of practising yoga, although she acknowledges that she has more to learn (1991). She cites favourably elements of the Buddhist tradition (the gaze) and the Hindu tradition (*chakras*), without necessarily distinguishing between them. When questioned about the Buddha's sexism and India's patriarchal social system her response suggests that she believes the tradition of Buddhism deserves a nuanced reading similar to her reading of Christianity. She states: 'Le Bouddha est une figure de transition complexe et le bouddhisme nous empêche souvent de percevoir sa fidélité aux cultures autochtones. Peut-être vaut-il mieux se tourner vers d'autres figures spirituelles, Vichnou par exemple, les dieux couples, et réfléchir aux rapports de ces dieux au cosmique' (1996: 227).
14. Irigaray does not wish her affirmation of life to be confused with pro-life anti-abortion attitudes which she believes manifest a fetishistic cult of the embryo (1980a: 181). For a discussion of her thought in relation to the politics of reproduction, see Weinbaum (1994).
15. For further discussion of this point, see Valadier (1974: 420–25).
16. Irigaray responds to the general accusation that she is asking the impossible in a discussion of her proposal for a dialectic for the two sexes of which love would be the motor (1992: 25–26). She denies that she is a utopian thinker, but admits that she desires what the current order decrees as impossible since there is no other non-nihilistic avenue open to her: 'Je suis donc une militante politique de l'impossible' (1992: 26).
17. As Kelly Oliver argues, Dionysus and Apollo are interpreted as defending themselves against the feminine by Irigaray. Dionysus' 'waters' are the chaos of a masculine passion bereft of a mother and Apollo's forms 'turn fluid nature into solid forms', stealing his sister Artemis' light (1993). Oliver points out that it is Mary who provides a third way between these two alternatives, although she does not discuss the role Irigaray attributes to Christ as the miming bridge between the former dichotomous gods and the figure of Mary.
18. Irigaray rejects any attempt to make the role of women central in the Gospels. In her view, they are not central, but neither are they excluded. This is consistent with her assessment of the position of women in patriarchy. Furthermore, she finds in the way women are presented possible remnants of earlier gynaeocratic cultures, and cites Mary Magdalene's anointment of Jesus as a public testament of her love for him out-

- side of the tradition of marriage typical of previous gynaeocratic traditions (1987a: 424). She is alluding to her questioning of Christ's status as divine, as I go on to discuss below in relation to Mary.
19. In her description of Christ as a bridge, Irigaray is interpreting the figure of Christ as a necessary passage between one form of divine incarnation and the next. Her ultimate rejection of Christ as a figure of the divine for women in favour of Mary does not therefore leave Christ as a figure of the divine for men, because Christ is a bridge to the realization of the divine in an era of sexual difference. She does not discuss whether Christ could potentially become a figure of the divine for men. She proposes Mary as a symbol for women, but presumably the symbolization of men's divine has to be established by men, albeit a symbol that is relative to the female one.
 20. Krell suggests some interesting reference points for this interpretation of Irigaray's, including the proposal that it could be a reply to Augustine, who argued that every deceased Christian woman must be fitted with a 'Christic phallus' before she may be assumed into heaven. He also wryly remarks: 'She does not speculate that it may be the very sheath from which the rib of Adam was removed' (1994: 199). The 'femininity' of Christ is first invoked by Irigaray in *Speculum*, where she also alludes to the correspondence between the virgin Christ's 'gash' or 'hole' and female genitalia, described in like manner by psychoanalysis. 'Her' love for Christ in his suffering is also an act of self love, in that he provides for her a path of redemption. Thus, Irigaray interprets 'her' silent divine passion to be within the space of this laceration as a way towards herself, towards her own 'sex' which she 'sees' as that which she will be unable to express within patriarchal logic (1974: 249).
 21. See also 'Le corps-à-corps avec la mère' where Irigaray argues that the 'religious' desire for the mother is reduced to the function of satisfying need by paternal law (1987b: 23).
 22. To my knowledge, Irigaray does not discuss the problematic figure of Joseph, whose potentially erotic and fertile relationship with his wife was impeded by the intervention of his abstract and transcendental representative. The patriarchal concern with the relationship between a heavenly idealized God and his maternal matter on earth in Christian myth diverts attention from the earthly relationship between Joseph and Mary which is not generally represented as 'fertile' in any sense.
 23. This argument could be usefully developed in a comparative way in the form of an analysis of the relative status of virginity in contemporary cultures. My focus on Irigaray's philosophy of the divine is necessarily narrower, however. My main contention is that Irigaray's writing is principally engaged within the parameters of Christian culture in the way that she explicitly advocates Mary as a figure of the divine for women. While this is explicit in the context of her collaboration with a Christian group, *L'Action Catholique Générale Féminine* (Irigaray 1996), and thus it may be claimed that the 'we' for whom she is reclaiming Mary are already Christians, her discussion of Mary in *Amante Marine* equally indicates that she is or could become a divine figure for women. In addition, her notion of virginity as *fidelity* appears to owe more to Christian notions of faithfulness to an ideal and to the integrity of the unviolated than it does to ancient notions of virginity as conveying power. What is more, it is possible to speculate that a comparative analysis of the status of virginity would support my argument that the appropriation of Irigaray's ideals within existing cultural traditions is likely to lead to such diverse and contradictory interpretations that the unity of this ideal would be fallacious or even destructive in its assumption of unity.
 24. In her somewhat idiosyncratic discussions in *Je, tu, nous* Irigaray states the following of motherhood: 'Ce métier est le plus intelligent et le plus subtil qui soit' (1990: 97). She goes on to state that it would nevertheless be a more accomplished job if women

had an identity of their own. It is this lack of identity and the imposition of maternity upon women that she uses to explain a complaint made to her by a young woman that: 'Toutes les mères sont un peu méchantes' (1990: 126). She argues that mothers form a defensive clan after having experienced the painful initiation ceremony of childbirth, making others pay for this trauma. This sort of suggestive discussion may raise valid points but it is worthy of a journalistic article and does nothing to enhance Irigaray's *œuvre*. She does not rigorously investigate the phenomenon she is commenting upon since to do so would involve reference to the behaviour of women without children in the society that imposes this burden upon them. Apart from some rather dismissive remarks regarding the need for fertility treatment and the problems such treatments raise (1990: 127–28), she does not reflect or comment upon the behaviour of non-mothers (or indeed, non-fathers) in patriarchal culture, she merely identifies the potential mother in the form of the virgin.

25. Warner argues that the notion of virgin birth was in fact widespread in ancient Middle Eastern and African cultures as a symbol of the power of the deity; those born of a virgin were deemed divine. The doctrine of Mary's virginity is not written in the scriptures, it was fundamentally a requirement of pagan divinity. Hence, that Mary was herself born of a virgin would make her divine. Christian culture transformed the symbol of virginity's strength into doctrine by insisting upon the chastity of the mother-goddess and this in turn had the effect of subjugating women (1976: 33–48).

CONCLUSION

It has been my aim in this study to show that Irigaray's claim that a female divine is necessary if women are to become subjects poses numerous complex and interesting intellectual challenges. Hence, I have read her philosophy of sexual difference through the question of the divine. I have attempted to demonstrate the significance of the divine for any understanding of her thought and its relevance at each stage of her work. In the process I have put forward a reading of Irigaray as a universalist thinker who desires to bring about an era of sexual difference structured by two sexed divines, the feminine and the masculine. While not refuting her philosophy of sexual difference, I have criticized the feasibility of its realization through universalist divines.

This criticism relates to the further challenge we must confront with any philosopher of change, which is the dynamic element of their thought that anticipates or demands the evolution of history. Ever since Marx there has been a tendency to demand the freedom of critical thought from the lure of intellectualism and to give it some concrete relevance in the world. Yet so often the apparent freedom of engagement with the world has meant that thinkers settle on inhabiting the cul-de-sacs of conventional wisdom. Luce Irigaray is a thinker who remains steadfastly committed to pursuing the pathways of her one poem — the necessity of sexual difference — but who persistently creates imaginative new worlds of thought. Thus my emphasis has been to show that she is a radical and distinctive philosopher of sexual difference within the phenomenological, dialectical and psychoanalytical traditions, best appreciated in the context of contemporary French thought as a whole. Her philosophy does not automatically fit into the anglophone debates on essentialism, however useful the appropriation of her work has been to those debates. As a universalist thinker, her thought manifests much of the sweeping grandiosity characteristic of French tradition which demands the articulation of structure before the fact and appears to fly in the face of the insistent and sometimes wearisome empirical complexities of 'life' itself. Yet the insistence upon complexity in her writing leads many to bemoan it, a criticism which suggests that some are content with a thought that is more readily accessible than 'reality', thus perhaps reducing critical thought to conventional habitats.

Given the breadth and scope of Irigaray's thought, I have attempted to emphasize its relevance to questions pertaining to the cultural order and its 'economy'. Her critique need not be restricted to textual analyses, however valuable

these may be, since it has the potential to inform social and cultural investigations in the most general sense. Hence, I set out Irigaray's analysis of patriarchy as an economy guaranteed by divine value in the masculine which has pretensions to a single universality. Her analysis is unequivocal: patriarchy is an appropriative order that erases value in the feminine by denying the potential feminine subject and using her as matter or body for its idealized productions. This is a structural argument, one that admits the evolution of structure in history and therefore cannot be considered ahistorical. Again, in keeping with a certain philosophical tradition, Irigaray's own work lacks the specificity of historical analyses, yet it could provide the structures and parameters for historical investigations. The outcome of these investigations need not necessarily concur with all of Irigaray's own conclusions. For example, my own view that she believes feminine value to be less undecidable than immanent in patriarchy is a question that might yield an informative study in a more specific context. However, my assessment of Irigaray's analysis stresses her acceptance of the categories of masculinity and femininity within patriarchy and their necessity to her philosophy of sexual difference, thus such categories would constitute the essential elements of any investigation undertaken in pursuance of her thought. It is to be hoped that as the full implications of a philosophy of sexual difference filter through, further studies will be undertaken which take seriously its implications even if the question of its truth is suspended rather than accepted.

Irigaray's own response to her critique of patriarchy has been to call for a female divine, which is a call for the *creation* of a female universal to found a culture between women and to enable the possibility of exchange between them. This is very much a response informed by a philosophical analysis steeped in the history of philosophy, as I stressed in examining her use of Feuerbach to support her call. It is an open question whether Western audiences are prepared to listen to such a call given its tone of religiosity; in Italy, at least, religious language does not appear to be a barrier to her thought. Irigaray is not a populist, however, and for her the requirements of a language of truth will always surpass any attempt to pre-empt the demands of a mass audience. This is evidenced in the dialectical model of sexual difference she proposes which is at once imaginative and rigorous, attempting to further Hegelian thought in the name of sexual difference. Her model of sexual difference as a model of two sexed divines involving two absolute others is, I believe, a truly radical attempt to bypass the one and the many. I also believe that it provides a useful key to understanding her thought as a rhythm of two rather than a separatism or multiplicity. However, any response to this model

must be informed by an assessment of the utopianism of Irigaray's notion of love, and the question of whether the two can truly have a dialectical relationship without sharing a single term of mediation. The latter is, perhaps, a matter of technical philosophical debate; the former less so, although a decision on either is ultimately as much a matter of history as of debate *per se*. Certainly, any informed debate here would be premised upon a particular understanding of history as an evolutionary process. In this respect, I have cast doubt upon the privilege Irigaray appears to attribute to the feminine, not only as the apparently favoured mode for articulating the model of sexual difference itself but also as an 'agent' for bringing it about. Even if history will decide this matter, my argument remains that this privilege threatens to undermine her philosophy of sexual difference as a model of absolute otherness.

Irigaray's own proposals for female ideals to bring about the female divine will provide fertile ground for thought and in some cases, for action. I have in this study indicated my fascination with her re-interpretations of Christianity, as well as my unease with her use of the Christian tradition in the context of attempting to create *universal* symbols of a female divine. In this respect, I am drawn to Nietzsche's arguments against the universality of the Christian God to support my doubts regarding the feasibility of universal sexed divines. My principal concern is the ineluctably general nature of these universals, of which the ideal of virginity is a case in point. However, given the historical importance of virginity, differently defined, across many cultures, it would be interesting to consider further Irigaray's proposal as a general ideal. Nevertheless, it is my belief that any potentially universal ideal will reveal the particularity of a given culture, which is evident in Irigaray's choice of Mary as a symbol of the divine for women, for example. No universal can be anything but particular. The debate to be pursued in this case is how far this confounds the claims of universality intrinsic to Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference.

Irigaray has interpreted the figure of Christ as a bridge to an era of sexual difference in which women will find their female divine value and men their incarnation at last. These divines would be passionate and intimate for the subject and her or his other. While many may balk at such a spiritual discourse, and others still may reject its spirituality as heretical or even atheist, it needs to be emphasized that Irigaray's divine are ideals that aim to give people a place in the world as men or women. Her philosophy is, in this respect, admirably positive and creative; it stands out against modern rationalism, ultra-modern multiplicity and *fin de siècle* pessimism. It would undoubtedly be fruitful if Irigaray's aim to create a creative discourse and debate regarding

possible divine ideals were to commence. Yet whether the feminine can bear the weight of historical responsibility Irigaray attributes to 'her' remains to be seen. The feminine can only engender sexual difference by always leaving space for the absolute otherness of the other — an awesome task. It may be that Mary and her feminine value are themselves bridges within Irigaray's model of sexual difference which will constitute a bridge to another era of sexual difference as yet unimaginable. Certainly, I do not believe that to cast doubt upon the feasibility of Irigaray's proposals for sexed, divine ideals is to reject the fundamental nature of sexual difference. However, it seems unlikely that such ideals could be realized as actual universals and more likely that they will take shape in accordance with a multitude of cultural traditions. Yet this issue is one which the question of the divine attempts to open rather than resolve, for any realization must be historical as well as theoretical. The potential of the opening is there because for Irigaray the divine is a becoming that is always becoming.

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THIS STUDY EXAMINES Luce Irigaray's *œuvre* through the question of the divine, focusing upon her contention that women need a female divine if they are to become subjects. It attempts to demonstrate that the issue of the divine should not be considered as one aspect of her thought but that it is central to her philosophy of sexual difference. Hence Irigaray's critique of patriarchy is presented as a critique of the dominance of a religion of masculinity that favours a single universal. Her proposal for two sexed universal divines is explored, along with her specific suggestions for female divine ideals. Particular emphasis is given to her engagements with Marx, Nietzsche, and Hegelianism, and to the mode of her adoption of Christianity. The study applauds the radical profundity of Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference, while remaining critical of the universalism in her notion of the divine for the doubt it casts upon the realization of a sexed culture.