Irigaray And Deleuze: Experiments In Visceral Philosophy

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Introduction

Body Talk

We live in a world in which the specific form our bodies take very much matters; sex, race, physical anomalies, and any physically marked differences from or convergence with the dominant "norm" have ramifications that extend into every part of our lives. Not all corporeal differences are equally significant. Whether I have brown or black eyes does not matter as much as whether my skin is black or white. In addition, corporeal differences that are perhaps less tangible since they are not genetically determined — the way one carries oneself, the way one speaks, behaviors that betray one's class — can also have a deeply pervasive impact which is difficult to escape and which forms an inevitable part of the fabric of one's life. Whatever one's politics or beliefs about what it means to be human, the specific body one inhabits inevitably affects the path one's life takes. Our bodies have social significance with which we are
forced to come to terms. They enter into our senses of identity, the ways we behave, and the ways we interact with others. To theorize the body, then, means in part to refuse to ignore this aspect of social existence on the misguided assumption that we interact as if we were all equally human and that what this means is not inextricably linked with the specific forms our bodies take.

That said, however, it is tricky to know how to take this body into account. Do we assume that anyone who is female has one kind of body and that anyone who is male has another? Do we assume that race is clearly demarcated in specific ways? How do we theorize this body, how do we account for its role in subjectivity, how do we account for its effects? How do we account for how and when it enters into our own senses of identity as well as the way it enters into how others perceive and treat us? Lately there has been some very interesting work done on the body by feminists as well as many others.1 Western culture tends to associate women with the body in a reductionistic way that makes women seem somehow less than human; feminists have explored this assumption by exploring the connection between human “nature” and embodiment. If women are more identified with their bodies than men with theirs, why is this the case, and is it really because women are less able to reason beyond the contingencies of the flesh and the impermanence of sensuous existence?

Despite the association of women with the body, it is by no means an area of life that philosophers have entirely neglected. Hegel and Marx emphasize the role of human labor in the development of consciousness, Husserl and Heidegger return to the lived experience of perception to ground philosophy, and Nietzsche and Freud claim that the body and the physiological aspects of living are crucial to human consciousness in ways of which we may not be aware. More recently, theorists of various disciplines have attempted to theorize the body itself. Psychoanalysis has continued to develop accounts of conscious experience as it emerges from the initial corporeal organization of the subject in relation to her or his parents. Literary theorists, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and philosophers have also tried to account for the variety of ways in which the human body has been represented over the centuries and to theorize its significance for human life.

In her groundbreaking book *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz presents a compelling agenda for an approach to the body that would provide new insight into the puzzles of various kinds of dualisms in the philosophical tradition as well as into alternative conceptions of subjectivity, gender relations, and the relationship of self to other. According to Grosz, traditional
approaches to the body include investigating the body as an object of the natural sciences, construing it as a kind of tool of consciousness (or a vessel occupied by an “animating, willful subjectivity”), or conceiving of it as a passive medium of expression that renders communicable what is essentially private (Grosz 1994c, 8). All these approaches imply a mind/body dualism. Theories that reduce human consciousness to physiological processes, as well as those that depict consciousness as either a disembodied process or the effect of a mental thing, fail to capture the ambiguity of human existence. Human beings come to experience the world as conscious, sentient, embodied subjects through a process in which no clear distinctions can be made between mind and body, thought and matter, reason and emotion, interiority and exteriority, or self and other.

Philosophy has tended to replicate the mind/body dualism by elevating a disembodied mind and disavowing the body. In addition, it has excluded the feminine by implicitly coding it as aligned with the unreason associated with the body. Grosz suggests that to overcome the blind spot created by the refusal of the body and the feminine, philosophers should regard the body “as the threshold or borderline concept that hovers perilously and undecidably at the pivotal point of binary pairs” (Grosz 1994c, 23). That is, rather than revalorizing the body as the unprivileged term of the various dichotomies with which it is associated, she suggests theorizing the body as a unique kind of object which problematizes binary oppositions. She evokes the metaphor of a Möbius strip to model “the inflection of mind into body and body into mind” and the “ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another.” It is the body viewed as this kind of peculiar object that is neither simply a psychical interior nor a corporeal exterior but something with a kind of “uncontrollable drift of the inside into the outside and the outside into the inside” (xii) that would provide a perspective from which to rethink the opposition between inside and outside, private and public, self and other, as well as other binary pairs associated with the mind/body opposition (21).

Confronting the ambiguity of the body entails questioning the “natural” coherence and solidity of bodies and complicates our understanding of the social identities “attached” to those bodies. If bodies are not corporeal containers for consciousness but are instead fully implicated in the dynamic process of social living, then our tendency to consider our bodies the preserve of the “natural” part of our identities is false. Our embodied selves are as implicated in our specific historical situation as the social selves of our conscious experience. This means that there can be no easy distinction between body and mind; the notion of a body with determinate
boundaries, just like the notion of a psychic self, is the constituted effect of
dynamic forces which are always in movement.

With the "linguistic turn" toward philosophical questions about the
nature of language and the discursive subjectivity of language users, theo-
rists of various kinds have elaborated how human subjects are implicated
in systems of signification. At times this work has tended toward, or been
read as tending toward, a conception of the human subject that is socially
situated only with respect to the abstract signifiers of a system of social
significance. Such accounts tend to drop out the embodied subject in
order to concentrate on the speaking subject who is able to situate herself
within the matrix of linguistic systems of meaning. An important aspect
of human subjectivity is one's situatedness within symbolic systems and
one's ability to produce words that will be recognized by others as the
words of a subject who "makes sense." Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault,
Luce Irigaray, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari have created theories of
subjectivity that emphasize the implication of such discursive situatedness
in corporeal practices that are equally situated and yet entail an extraling-
guistic dimension of meaning. Their work provides some of the exciting
approaches toward conceptions of humanity that are able to account for
"the inflection of mind into body and body into mind" which Grosz has
in mind. The conception of the human subject which emerges from their
work is that of a problematic intertwining of contingent and often con-
flicting social identities assumed at the level of imaginary identifications
involving a morphology of the body (that is, an ongoing materialization of
the body in the specific forms that it takes), as well as at the level of con-
scious thought. The body of such a subject is not a stable entity with un-
ambiguous boundaries, but a temporal becoming which is always cultur-
ally mediated and integrally linked to the equally dynamic process of
psychic selfhood.

In this book I focus in particular on the work of Irigaray and of Deleuze,
sometimes in collaboration with Guattari, in order to engage in a project of
overcoming mind/body dualisms which have been detrimental to women
as well as other "marginalized" groups, and in order to elaborate a vocabu-
lar-y for talking about ourselves in relation to the world and human others
in terms of the dynamic flow of a process of being that is corporeal
as well as discursive. I approach this project from a perspective informed
by feminist writers who, like Grosz, call for an account of how the body
comes into play in the production of the knowledges that inform our self-
understanding and our conceptions of what is desirable as well as what is
possible for human relationships and ethical community; but it is from Iri-
garay's work that I derive the main inspiration for the form my project takes.³

Irigaray argues that contemporary culture is bifurcated by a sexual division of labor in which the body and the “natural” are relegated to the feminine and the more “cultural” products of symbolic significance are relegated to the masculine. She further argues that this bifurcation has serious ethical implications which have led to an impoverished life for us all and have encouraged us to create symbolic support for feminine subjectivity. Such support would make possible a genuine dialogue between two kinds of subjects. Genuine communication between two genders could lead to undermining the body/mind bifurcation of contemporary culture, foster practices of perception in which all subjects took responsibility for integrating body and mind, and open up important ethical and political opportunities for a new way of life. In this book I develop Irigaray's account of a (masculinist) specular economy of subjectivity which fosters divisive mind/body dualisms, and I explore Irigaray’s work, along with the work of Deleuze, to develop a theory of embodied subjectivity that could provide an alternative to contemporary forms of specular subjectivity. Deleuze argues that we need to encourage experimentation with nomadic subjectivity. Human life is organized into strata which are implicated with nonhuman strata of life. Nomadic subjects can destratify from rigid forms of organization by creating “planes of consistency” that put heterogeneous elements of existence into continuous variation. I appeal to Deleuze's reading of Foucault to highlight how nomadic subjects can integrate discursive and nondiscursive aspects of social life. Deleuze’s work provides an important resource for characterizing how subjects can foster creative engagement with the world of dynamic becoming of which they are an integral part. I elaborate Irigaray’s theory of specular subjectivity as a useful description of some aspects of contemporary social life. Understanding ourselves through such a description could suggest alternative ways of being. Thorizing those alternatives, on my view, constitutes a positive step in making them a reality.

Because terms such as 'human nature', 'self', 'woman', and 'man' imply static substances (with or without changing attributes), they fail to capture the dynamic quality of the process of being-subject these theorists emphasize. Although the terminology used to describe this process is by no means uniform, various writers have contributed new terms for that process as well as new ways of understanding more traditional designations for human selfhood. I use the term 'subject' to refer to a grammatical position the 'I' can take up with respect to conventional meaning and 'self' to refer
to the reference point or image by which a human being can orient the developing narrative of her life. Since the self of a narrative seems to take on a specific form by accruing qualities and characteristics in the living of a life, 'subject' seems to be the more appropriate term for indicating a social self in the context of positioning itself vis-à-vis a larger social field that is importantly oriented through language as well as other systems of social significance. ‘Subjectivity’ refers to the notion of the subject as a process that must continually repeat itself in order to maintain a specific form and an ‘economy’ or ‘structuring’ of subjectivity to the various means by which a subject can regulate and stabilize this process of being a subject.

Grosz has described the project of Luce Irigaray as that of “rethinking knowledges as the products of sexually specific bodies” (Grosz 1995, 41). Irigaray demonstrates through readings of key philosophical texts that the supposedly sexually indifferent status of knowledges (i.e., their claims to be universal rather than the product of masculine interests) is linked with a “culturally inscribed correlation of men with the category of mind and of women with the category of body.” It is due to the association of women with the body, the irrational, and the natural that men can take on the position of subjects of “pure” knowledge: “By positioning women as the body, they can project themselves and their products as disembodied, pure, and uncontaminated” (42). It is the project of this book to investigate ways of overcoming the detrimental impact of mind/body dualisms that privilege the former at the expense of the latter. In keeping with this project, I introduce the terms ‘conceptual logics’ and ‘corporeal logics’ to mark the pervasive impact of such dualisms in contemporary culture. Both Irigaray and Deleuze challenge any conception of the human subject as a unified, rational agent and instead theorize subjectivity as the effect of a dynamic process involving heterogeneity and difference which includes corporeal as well as psychic elements. They challenge conventional notions of perception which assume that objects of perception are similar to other objects perceived in the past, as well as notions of conception which assume that objects of thought must conform to already established norms. Both challenge the traditional model of thinking and instead theorize thinking as always encountering what is singular and unprecedented. I follow Irigaray and Deleuze in conceiving of philosophizing as a practice — one that does not necessarily give clear-cut results, but one that sets us on a path of experimentation and receptivity to the unknown. Questions concerning the body, its relationship to mind, and the nature of embodied subjectivity lead each of them to a critique of traditional notions of identity and representational thought. For both, the body and the self are not the contained
objects they may appear to be, but are rather the effects of processes of which we are more or less unaware. Investigating these processes enables us to rethink our engagement with them and instigate new experiences in embodied living.

In keeping with the challenge of their theories to traditional notions of the body as well as of the mind, I use the term ‘corporeal logics’ to refer to the background processes informing the perceptual awareness of sensation and what are traditionally known as the “irrational” processes of mood, intuitive “gut” feelings, and emotions, and I use the term ‘conceptual logics’ to refer to the background processes informing the conceptual awareness of what are traditionally known as the “rational” processes of logical and articulate thought. Referring to both sides of the mind/body dualism in terms of a logic underlines the socially situated nature of such logics and the insight that “natural” bodies are as informed by social processes as are minds. Maintaining a distinction between the two through the use of the two terms underlines the pervasive cultural bifurcation Irigaray insists upon, which relegates products of the “mind” to one group in society and products of the “body” to the other. Although I am not as convinced as Irigaray that gender is the only or even the most important way to mark the groups associated with these dualisms, I believe she is right to insist that theorizing the mechanisms of this dualism is crucial to our struggles to create a more ethical future.

Distinguishing corporeal and conceptual logics speaks to the way in which contemporary meaning systems are arranged in keeping with mind/body dualisms; we actually do tend to separate our understanding of life according to this split. What we know on a rational, cerebral level is not what we know on an emotional, corporeal level. The gap between a subject’s conceptual and corporeal logics can be profound since the realms of conceptual and corporeal “sense” not only are oriented in different directions but are also likely to diverge ever more widely, especially in a culture that emphasizes mind/body dualisms. Both Irigaray and Deleuze are engaged in a project of transforming how we think, speak, and live. In the reading I give here of their work, I emphasize how this transformation involves reconnecting our bodies and minds at the corporeal level as well as at the level of discursive systems of meaning and note the beneficial effects the integration of what we might call somatic knowledge with conceptual knowledge could have for a culture intent on valorizing the latter at the expense of the former.

My exploration of the body is in part a response to the sense of alienation that seems to pervade contemporary cultural life and that was so
compellingly diagnosed by Nietzsche. Nietzsche taunts the person who thinks that his self is just his consciousness or rational capacity. For Nietzsche, this part of the self is just the “little self” — a small effect of a much larger self that is “the body.” In denying this larger self, we not only deny the greater part of who we are but also close off possibilities of living. This larger self turns out to be the effect of natural and social forces extending beyond us that only contingently converge to manifest a given individual. This Nietzschean theme is picked up by Heidegger, Irigaray, and Deleuze. The work of Irigaray and Deleuze emerges from a French philosophical tradition marked by the Cartesian influence which led to a specifically French reaction to Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger as well as Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud. Heidegger’s interest in Nietzsche prompted a French resurgence of interest in Nietzsche. Whatever their disagreements with this tradition — Irigaray’s break with the Lacanian community or Deleuze’s insistence on doing his commentaries on “maverick” philosophers such as Nietzsche, Spinoza, and Bergson rather than Descartes, Hegel, and Heidegger — the questions and issues that emerge in their work bear the marks of that tradition.

To set the scene for my reading of Irigaray and Deleuze, I briefly present the role of the body in Heidegger’s work in the next section of this introduction. I am interested in why he seems to draw back from what we might call “body” talk despite his insistence on our Being-in-the-world. I also explore his notion of following the path of genuine thinking. I claim that this path entails integrating corporeal logics with conceptual logics and so engages one in what we might call a corporeal practice of thinking. Irigaray’s and Deleuze’s projects, different as they are, both involve a shift in thinking that must take place on a corporeal as well as a conceptual level. Reading Irigaray and Deleuze in light of the notion of thinking as an integrative practice meant to bring about a transformation in corporeal morphology as well as cognitive understanding provides an approach to their work that has provocative implications for reconceiving ethical self-other relations.

In the final section I motivate a project that would foster a way of thinking, speaking, and being that integrates conceptual thought with corporeal logic, and I briefly sketch out the resonances between Irigaray and Deleuze in light of such a project.

**Heidegger and the Body**

Heidegger’s notions of curiosity, idle talk, and ambiguity in *Being and Time* are interesting when examined in light of the discursive notion of
subjectivity that emerges in poststructuralist accounts of human selfhood. Saussurean linguistics, Lévi-Straussian anthropology, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and Foucauldian notions of the subject could be read as indicating that human subjects are the effects of social systems of significance that require human beings to take up a position as a speaking subject with respect to other social subjects. The specific form that one's subjectivity takes would then be contingent on how one's position in the larger structural whole of human significance relates to other possible positions. The notions of curiosity, idle talk, and ambiguity which Heidegger delineates in Being and Time refer to the ease with which a speaker of language can take up perspectives with respect to what it is possible to say. His interpretation of these notions suggests that one can take up such a perspective without seriously considering the choices involved in thus positioning oneself. When one is curious in a superficial way, engaged in idle talk, or deliberately ambiguous rather than taking a stand, one is adopting a free-floating attitude that can easily shift. There is no resistance or friction in such shifts; one moves easily from one attitude to the next. Even those obstacles set up by cultural mores and taboos do not have to be respected in idle talk. One's actual social position or locatedness can be waived without loss of "meaning" at the level of public discourse. That is, one can engage in many forms of conversation with others without having to confront one's own situation as an embodied human being (Heidegger 1962, ¶35–38).

On Heidegger's account, relating to one's own death brings one back to one's own embodiment and the physical limitations of being in time and space — and in particular a specific culturally encoded time and space. Confronting one's mortality means, in part, confronting the disintegration of one's bodily boundaries. When one dies, one will not only no longer have possibilities in the sense of having a position in a cultural matrix; one will also no longer have sentient experience. On the one hand, Heidegger's Dasein (his term for human existence) has possibilities that "make sense" in relation to the meaning systems of a specific society. On the other, insofar as Dasein is living "authentically," possibilities are manifested within the constraints presented by a uniquely embodied situation. Authenticity, then, insists on a kind of situatedness that involves both the discursive meanings of a cultural field of significance and the corporeal experiences of an embodied subject.

Dasein as Being-in-the-world is always projecting itself toward a future about which it cares. The 'they' — Heidegger's term for public discourse which dictates what "one" should do in a given situation — provides Dasein with a range of meaningful cultural projects from which to choose.
Projects that do not fully engage the *Dasein* living them out are inauthentic. Heidegger's uncanny "call" of conscience which prompts "authentic" commitment to one's choices (as opposed to the evasive irresponsibility of someone who views her choices from the perspective of, for example, idle talk) could be read as a call to attend to the corporeal logic of the body.7

Conscience summons Dasein's Self from its lostness in the "they." The Self to which the appeal is made remains indefinite and empty in its "what." When Dasein interprets itself in terms of that with which it concerns itself, the call passes over *what* Dasein, proximally and for the most part, understands itself as. And yet the Self has been reached, unequivocally and unmistakably. . . . The caller is unfamiliar to the everyday they-self; it is something like an alien voice. What could be more alien to the "they," lost in the manifold 'world' of its concern, than the Self which has been individualized down to itself in uncanniness and been thrown into the "nothing"? (Heidegger 1962, 317–22, ¶56)

The call away from the 'they' could be conceived as a call toward a heterogeneous logic that speaks of the dynamic formations of a body in process. To turn away from this call is to turn away from what moves us at the level of bodily fluxes and flows — the fleeting sensations, emotions, and half-thoughts of the more decidedly corporeal aspects of human selves. This call is reticent and silent in the sense that it does not and cannot utilize the same logics as those of language. The call summons *Dasein* away from the public discourse of the 'they,' because the same things that are meaningful to the subject at the symbolic level of conventional social significance are not necessarily meaningful at the level of that subject's corporeal logic. Different words evoke emotional resonance in keeping with an experiential fund of encoded experience which relates to the biography of the individual. This biography has both corporeal and conceptual components. Authenticity involves an integrative act of bringing together the two levels of corporeal and conceptual meaning in a vitalizing way. It thus adds an emotional richness to authentic living that the dispersed living of inauthentic life cannot have.

Heidegger's notion of mood indicates the corporeal rootedness of the prereflective understanding more primordial than our theoretical understanding of life. The 'they' cannot dictate *Dasein's* mood. Anxiety is explicitly analyzed by Heidegger as a mood that speaks to the ultimate lack of discursive foundation for any specific project *Dasein* may choose (Heidegger 1962, ¶40). Heidegger's notion of the call could thus be read as a call to rethink our engagements with the projects that are meaningful to us because
of the ‘they’ in a way that incorporates direction from the corporeal logics of an embodied subject who has had to develop a determinate physical form as well as a psychic self. Heidegger’s mystification of the gap between the ‘they’ and the uncanny call pulling one away from the ‘they’ could be the first step toward the reactionary suggestion to uphold the “destiny” of one’s traditional culture, for example, as manifested by the Nazi Party of Heidegger’s cultural situation; such mystification tends to leave only the already articulated possibilities of the tradition as opportunities for authentic action. Developing a richer vocabulary for corporeal processes might provide symbolic support for creative integration of corporeal and conceptual logics that could generate new choices in authentic living.

We will find that Irigaray and Deleuze also appeal to silence for creative rejuvenation. Irigaray advocates listening to silence (see Chapter 4). Deleuze advocates approaching the gap between mute word and blind thing that intimates something beyond both corporeal and conceptual logics (see Chapter 8). Irigaray’s feminine subject is receptive to the sensible transcendental. This transcendental is immanent in all sensous experience and yet is transcendent in the sense of eluding any determinate form experience takes. Deleuze’s nomadic subject is receptive to the imperceptible. The imperceptible is also immanent in conscious experience; molecular becomings occur at thresholds below the level of the perceivable and conceivable and yet can set into motion new formations of both. Irigaray’s sensible transcendental opens subjectivity to a feminine divine which is a horizon of dynamic becoming. Deleuze’s becoming-imperceptible opens subjectivity to a virtual chaos of incompossible becoming. A practice of thinking that entails integrating corporeal and conceptual logics entails, for Irigaray and Deleuze as well as Heidegger, receptivity to an immanent “beyond” in which binary oppositions no longer hold.

One of the theses of this book is that we can and should attempt to theorize more of the corporeal aspect of being human into conscious awareness. An elaboration of corporeal logics could provide a vocabulary of the body that would allow us to symbolize and integrate more of the extralinguistic realm of embodied living into our consciousness. Since symbolizing corporeal logics must always pursue a dynamic process, such a project would entail the transformation of Western representational thought into another, perhaps more life-affirming, form of thought. Heidegger, like Irigaray and Deleuze, suggests that thinking, speaking, and writing can and should involve something like a transformative practice. None of these thinkers is interested in thinking and writing practices that merely pass along information. They are all looking for some
kind of qualitative change in the lived experience of their readers as well as in themselves. One way that this is expressed is through an emphasis on the path of thinking, or the process of reading, speaking, and writing, as opposed to the results produced in the content of the thinker’s thought. They direct our attention to thinking and writing as practices with transformative possibilities rooted in material processes not all of which are accessible to conscious awareness. Focusing attention on these processes through the notion of the body, rather than the notions of the unconscious or of Being, has the advantage of calling our attention to the fringes of our own awareness. It emphasizes the potential accessibility of these processes without at the same time minimizing their strangeness or the bizarre effects they could have on what it is that we think we already know.  

**Conceptual Thought and Corporeal Logics**

The Freudian notion of drives suggests that they are neither completely biological nor completely cultural. Thus, for psychoanalytic theory, and particularly Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, the body can provide a kind of link between soma and psyche, the place where body and mind meet. That theorizing this link turns out to problematize the distinction between body and mind does not diminish its importance for understanding how the body/mind distinction emerges. One could argue that Heidegger attempts to overcome mind/body dualisms but reintroduces one by privileging a radically other “call” stripped of its corporeal roots in material process. Irigaray stresses the importance of acknowledging and representing sexual difference in a cultural economy that aligns matter-nature-body with the feminine and divinity-culture-mind with the masculine. Deleuze elaborates perceptual and conceptual forms of organization and advocates pushing each to its limits in order to encounter the outside that can transform both. All three assume a form of the mind/body split that can and should be continually bridged in an integrative practice. I have, somewhat crudely, referred to two levels of human subjectivity as the corporeal and conceptual levels in order to characterize the dualism with which we live. Although I will discuss these two levels at times as if they were nonproblematically distinct, they not only are theorized quite differently by different theorists but also are inextricably linked. My characterizations of Irigaray’s and Deleuze’s work should make clear just how problematic and ultimately arbitrary any distinction between the two must be. Although Irigaray’s and Deleuze’s approaches may suggest different ways of under-
standing the distinction and relationship between body and mind, both nevertheless advocate a way of thinking and being that would explore the connections between the two in the context of encountering what lies beyond both.

The French poststructuralism that emerged in the wake of and in response to phenomenology and existentialism looked for the affective roots of language and held out hope that cultural politics, and in particular avantgarde literature, could achieve what Marxism could not: a shift in consciousness that would lead to significant social change. This French line of thought suggests that language does not simply describe human reality but is an important constitutive factor in conscious experience. Stylistic innovations can be crucial to introducing new ways of thinking and being that can transform our awareness. In the work of Irigaray and Deleuze, the concern with style becomes accountable to a reality that lies beyond the perceivable, conceivable reality of conventional conscious experience. Innovations in style respond to what lies beyond the familiar. It is only insofar as such innovations emerge from "authentic" encounters that they speak to something of genuine significance rather than simply engage in empty play. Philosophy for both becomes not simply a form of communication but a practice that asks basic questions about life and reality and breaks down dualisms in order to intensify the experience of living and bring us back in touch with what most strongly moves us.

For Irigaray and Deleuze, writing theory is a practice that brings — or should bring — the writer into more intense immediate contact with herself and the affective materiality of her existence, which feeds and motivates her words. Writing and reading is effective insofar as it is able to intensify the sense that one's experience is meaningful in a fully somatic sense of the word. Repeating what has already been said is not likely to instigate the kind of thinking that enlivens one's sense of meaningful connection with the world. It is stylistically evocative language that emerges from encounter with the world that can have this effect. And it is because of the way the unconscious fills in the gap provoked by the failure to stick to the letter of conventional meaning that this effect comes about. The response to aporetic suspensions of conventional meaning can evoke somatic responses that adhere to corporeal rather than conceptual patterns of response. Such responses can destabilize our physical forms as well as our psychic selves. This destabilization in turn can initiate fresh integration of corporeal and conceptual levels of subjectivity. Irigaray and Deleuze suggest that confrontation with the limits of what is perceivable (through corporeal logics) and what is conceivable (through the conceptual logics of

Introduction

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discursive systems of meaning) leads us to an infinite beyond both that is our most important resource in the rejuvenation of human life.

Neither Irigaray nor Deleuze believes that there is something like a pure experience that can be unearthed and experienced once we have removed the blind spots and distortions of contemporary culture. There is no touchstone, no ultimate base on which we can build a more veridical or authentic experience. There is no body that has access to a pure realm of sensation, and there is no transcendent realm of forms to which we can refer our thinking. To avoid reference to a foundational transcendent, Irigaray and Deleuze attempt to invent a new way of thinking and writing. Irigaray characterizes and critiques a masculine form of subjectivity in order to gesture toward an alternative form of subjectivity. This alternative form of subjectivity would produce an individual with a heightened state of consciousness who would be more in the present, more attuned to the body with its "natural" rhythms, less rigid, and more ethical by virtue of a heightened awareness of and flexibility toward others with all their differences. Her notion of a sensible transcendent indicates an immanent form of transcendence that could foster receptivity to difference without dictating the specific forms that difference should take. Deleuze too is trying to promote an alternative image of thinking that would result not just in a different way of thinking but in a heightened state of consciousness. Like Irigaray, he is interested in promoting a way of living that does not erase or deny the multiplicity of life but instead receptively and creatively affirms it. The notion of the nomadic subject that he creates in tandem with Guattari evokes an individual who continually reinvents herself through ongoing attunement of the fluxes and flows of material life to the specific contingencies of social existence. The notion of becoming-imperceptible implies continual confrontation with the limits of conventional perceptions and conceptions of life and the invention of new modes of being through the pursuit of the immanent unfolding of desire.

Irigaray and Deleuze diagnose and attempt to provide a cure for the cultural problems that they perceive. They offer images of subjectivity and thinking that incorporate aspects of the "unconscious" and assume a much richer kind of connectedness to our world and others than do traditional conceptions of the self. Their attempts to elaborate what I have called corporeal logics into their account of human existence, as well as their attempts to conceive of practices that could integrate corporeal and conceptual levels of subjectivity, make their work an ideal resource for creating a model of subjectivity that could overcome the mind/body dualisms that impoverish contemporary culture.
Developing an embodied theory of subjectivity will turn out to require developing a theoretical method that encourages a self-transformative process on the part of the theorist. Theorizing embodiment involves re-thinking not only who we are but also how we think about who we are. And since this integrates into the thinking process aspects of being human that have often been pushed to one side, at least in the Western tradition of philosophical thought, it stands to reason that the how of this thinking should be as radically affected as the what of that thinking in the process.

My perspective here is ultimately a feminist one, with all the benefits and limitations that such a perspective implies. Although I have tried to be sensitive to other kinds of embodied differences, and although I believe that an image of thinking premised on a logic of difference rather than a logic of identity would be beneficial for other kinds of differences, for the purposes of this project I have been especially interested in considering the gender inflections that emerge as one explores and experiments with the dissonances and resonances between Irigaray and Deleuze. I believe that the specular economy elaborated by Irigaray with respect to masculine subjects and feminine others, however, could also be elaborated with respect to active subjects and supportive others who are divided across axes of difference other than that of gender.

The impetus for this project is the desire to work toward a social reality in which the participation of all human beings would be fully supported and recognized. The way we think about how human beings come to be and maintain social selves has important repercussions for questions about what constitutes an ethical social order. Shifts in consciousness and social practices on the part of specific groups of people cannot help but affect the social field as a whole. Such shifts can cause disruption, dislocation, and disorienting rifts in social meaning. A theory of embodied subjectivity can help us map corporeal connections among people and thus indicate how different forms of subjectivity are interdependent and mutually informing. Challenging traditional boundaries among bodies and among minds as well as between bodies and minds allows us to rethink the interdependent nature of subjectivity. Insight into how cultural practices and discursive systems of meaning inform subjectivity could suggest strategies for facilitating constructive change. For Deleuze and Irigaray, thinking, speaking, and writing, if done creatively, can transform us not only at the conceptual level but at the level of corporeal morphology as well. Insofar as we are able to engage in a practice of thinking, speaking, and writing that overcomes the mind/body split, we will be able to break out of forms of life.
that have already been lived and thought and to invent new forms of life more suitable to our present circumstances.

Irigaray not only lays out a theory of masculine subjectivity with its specular, feminine other, she also seeds her entire corpus with hints of an alternative feminine subjectivity — one that eludes the masculine perspective as well as one that has not yet, perhaps, been achieved. In fact, the category of the “feminine” is neither straightforward nor unitary for Irigaray. In addition to depicting the feminine other as seen by the masculine subject, Irigaray depicts the feminine other co-opted by masculine subjectivity (that is, the feminine other who buys into the way the masculine subject views her), the feminine other of the masculine subject as she is apart from the masculine subject’s perspective, and the feminine other in the process of articulating herself as a subject and thus providing an alternative paradigm for subjectivity that may not yet be actualized. In Chapter 1, I lay out Irigaray’s project and give an overview of these various conceptions of the feminine.

In Chapter 2 I explore Irigaray’s attempted dialogue with Nietzsche in *Marine Lover*. At the same time that Irigaray is clearly drawn to Nietzsche’s “deconstruction” of sense experience which inevitably also challenges the subject of that experience, she also chides him for not going far enough. If anyone should have succeeded in evoking the body, one might think that it would be Nietzsche. After all, he advocates being true to the earth and speaking honestly of the body, and he paved the way for just the kind of challenge to traditional conceptions of the subject that Irigaray herself would seem to want. Yet in much of *Marine Lover* she derides him for his blind spot when it comes to the feminine other. Irigaray “argues” that despite his acknowledgment of how the category of the feminine works vis-à-vis the masculine subject, he is no closer than other masculine subjects to being able to conceive of the feminine subject apart from the masculine economy. For Irigaray, this blind spot ultimately leads him to a somatophobia similar to that which haunts masculine subjects less inclined toward taking the first approach to articulating the feminine. By enacting the role of the feminine other emerging from Nietzsche’s texts in an attempted dialogue with Nietzsche, Irigaray gives a voice to his feminine other. With an examination of *Marine Lover*, I investigate the possibility of shattering mirrors by enabling the mirror to speak, and I explore Irigaray’s elaboration of Nietzsche’s feminine other at the threshold of claiming her subjectivity.

In Chapter 3 I examine Irigaray’s notion of the “sensible transcendent-
tal" — a realm that can never be captured in language and yet with which we are always in direct contact — through a reading of “La Mystérique” (a section on medieval mystics in *Speculum*), her evocation of intrauterine experience in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, and her depiction of angels of passage and a feminine divine in *Sexes and Genealogies*. In living toward the horizon of the sensible transcendental, one dissolves one’s perceptions and self-same-identity. For Irigaray, however, such dissolution is contained through attentive response to that which is always contiguous to conscious awareness; by attending to the gap between corporeal and conceptual logics, especially in relation to an embodied other, one can find the point of contact that can lead to rejuvenating transformations of both.

In Chapter 4 I address Irigaray’s proposal for shattering mirrors as it emerges in *Sexes and Genealogies* and *I Love to You*. Irigaray insists on getting the masculine subject to acknowledge the feminine other in her push toward a new kind of subject in part because implicit forms of feminine subjectivity are, according to Irigaray, our best bet for rejuvenating culture. Since the masculine economy of subjectivity requires feminine others, empowering women by fostering their active subjectivity (according to the masculine model) not only is impractical but also would obliterate an alternative economy of subjectivity that already exists in nascent form. It is dialogue between two different subjects that could usher in a new, more ethical way of life.

I then turn to Deleuze. Although Heidegger was not operating out of a psychoanalytic framework, his influence on the Lacanian reading of Freud which influences Irigaray’s work is clear. Deleuze, like Irigaray, albeit from a different perspective, challenges this tradition and investigates certain philosophers who are “deviant” in one way or another in order to create a conception of thinking, speaking, and writing that evokes the body in a way that moves beyond a psychoanalytic framework. He contrasts the traditional image of philosophical thought (which he argues is so limiting as to kill genuine thinking entirely) and creates his own conceptions of nomadic thinking, speaking, and writing that do not just provide an alternative to the traditional ones but create an alternative conception of subjectivity in the process. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari contest the Lacanian account of (masculine) subjectivity and develop a model in which molecular flows stabilize into the molar aggregates of human subjects with recognizable bodies and selves. They advocate a project of schizoanalysis that would thwart social hegemony and foster experiments in nomadic living. In other works by Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari, these experiments go by the names of “becoming-imperceptible” and even...
“doing philosophy” (among others). In Chapter 5 I discuss the model of subjectivity Deleuze and Guattari present in *Anti-Oedipus*, give a preliminary sketch of their conceptions of becoming-imperceptible and philosophy, and explore these experiments as projects in symbolizing viable alternative models of subjectivity.

In Chapter 6 I present Deleuze’s version of Nietzsche. The main difference in Irigaray’s and Deleuze’s readings of Nietzsche has to do with Nietzsche’s notion of the eternal return. Irigaray insists that Nietzsche’s eternal return involves a notion of the repetition of the same. Because of his failure to acknowledge the creative contribution to becoming made by the feminine, he can never enter into a real relationship with the feminine other upon whom his identity depends. Deleuze, by contrast, insists that Nietzsche’s notion of the eternal return is not about the repetition of the same, but rather involves a repetition of difference which is ultimately based on a logic of difference rather than a logic of identity. The Dionysian subject of the eternal return has no need of affirming a self-identical self and is instead engaged in an ongoing process of metamorphosis. This audacious experiment in subjectivity, however, entails the dissolution of personal identity. Comparing the two conceptions of the eternal return brings out the dilemma of stabilizing a self out of dynamic processes of becoming.

In Chapter 7 I elaborate on the model of subjectivity Deleuze and Guattari develop in *Anti-Oedipus* by extending this model to include the model presented in their book *A Thousand Plateaus*. In the latter work, desiring-machines become assemblages and schizoanalysis becomes destratification. Their conceptual innovations enrich their initial model and provide a vocabulary for nomadic experiments which resonates in interesting ways with Irigaray’s very different presentation of feminine experiments in subjectivity. I further draw out these resonances by exploring the trajectory of becoming-minority (as it emerges in Deleuze and Guattari’s book *Kafka*), becoming-woman, and becoming-imperceptible, and the notions of a line of flight and the body without organs.

In Chapter 8 I appeal to Deleuze’s reading of Foucault to highlight how destratification can be a practice that integrates corporeal and conceptual logics, and I suggest that the notion of a Foucauldian ‘diagram’ (or the construction of an ‘abstract machine’ as described by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*) can provide a useful tool for putting individual projects of destratification into the context of a larger social field in which we may want to select certain lines of flight rather than others. In addition, I suggest that Irigaray’s work could be read as a diagram of sexual differ-
ence, and I advocate multiple mappings of the social field. I then give a reading of Deleuze and Guattari's notions of philosophy and art as it emerges in *What Is Philosophy?* in order to develop further their notion of the virtual as the counterpart to Irigaray's notion of a feminine divine. Irigaray insists on the receptivity to the divine of a living subject in continual contact with embodied others in a sensual world; Deleuze and Guattari lay out approaches to the virtual that may provide new perspectives on such living.

In Chapter 9 I attempt a synthesis of Irigaray and Deleuze. Irigaray's conception of the sensible transcendental and Deleuze's conception of becoming-imperceptible entail a critique of traditional notions of perception and representation as well as of the subject. These critiques are developed in tandem with new theories of subjectivity that symbolize the process of challenging conventional norms of perception and conception which subjects must continually undergo in order to integrate the dynamic becoming of life. Both theorists suggest that there is a realm of the infinite that is immanent in our sense perception — an inexhaustible realm that is "outside" our ordinary experience and yet always there at the edges of our feeling, thought, and perception. I consider the dilemmas raised for personal identity by the receptivity to dynamic becoming advocated by Irigaray and Deleuze, and I suggest ways to combine Irigaray's concern for personal identity with Deleuze's detailed account of the pre-personal singularities of life processes. At the same time that Deleuze acknowledges that others are always implicated in our flights, he does not insist on recognition of the feminine other in the way that Irigaray does. And at the same time that Irigaray insists on the feminine other, she does not allow, perhaps, the same range of lines of flight as Deleuze. Reading the two together opens up new ways of thinking about subjectivity, self-other relations, and mind/body dualisms.