A Revolution of Love: Thinking through a Dialectic that is Not "One"

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Luce Irigaray argues that the way to overcome the culture of narcissism in the Western tradition is to recognize sexuate difference and to refigure subjectivity as sexuate. This article is an attempt to unpack how Irigaray's philosophical refiguring of love as an intermediary works in this process of reimagining subjectivity as sexuate. If we trace the moments in Irigaray's philosophy where she engages with Hegel's dialectic, and rethinks this dialectical process via the question of sexual difference and a refiguring of love, a clearer reading of her work as groundbreaking and ultimately refiguring our (Western) ontological structures becomes possible. Consequently, if we do not understand Irigaray's radical reformulation of love, we will miss her larger ontological project and fail to properly appreciate her comments on other types of difference—for example, differences of race, tradition, religion. This article argues that as we begin to appreciate the ways in which Irigaray refigures both love and thought as the intermediary, an intermediary that fundamentally disrupts phallocentric binary logic, we can begin to imagine how refiguring the most intimate human experience of love can lead us toward the realization of an ethical political community in which difference in all forms is nourished.

Luce Irigaray argues that the emergence of an autonomous feminine subjectivity supported by an appropriate feminine imaginary and symbolic would enable us to establish a culture of sexuate difference and a "new era of History" (Irigaray 1996, 64).[1] For this to happen, we must, as sexuate subjects, pass through our own narcissism and recognize that we are always in relation with the other. In doing so, we call into question the omnipotence of the (masculine) individual subject in a culture of narcissism that, according to Irigaray, founds and structures the Western tradition. Irigaray recognizes that the structures of the imaginary and symbolic are crucial for subject formation, but she reimagines autonomous feminine subjectivity according to a different symbolic/imaginary economy, in which the feminine subject would enter culture without sacrificing the relation with her sexuate body.[2] The imaginary/symbolic

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economy of the feminine would recognize and value a fluid, open, and nonsacrificial relation between body and culture. Language plays a fundamental part in actualizing this new economy "because language and its values reflect the social order and vice versa" (Irigaray 1996, 66). This is why, throughout her writings, Irigaray plays with and evokes symbolic images tied to the female sexuate body. In doing so, she seeks to undermine the phallocentric logic that privileges the phallic One, and requires the single masculine and narcissistic subject to repress his relation with the maternal body. Irigaray argues we must rethink the fundamental structures of existence that continue to perpetuate this split between body and culture and, moreover, refigure our relations with the maternal body as the origin of life. We must learn to appreciate the relation between body and culture and revalue our relations between the *two* in terms that are nonsacrificial. Because for Irigaray language structures culture, she seeks a new language that is appropriate to the female sexuate body. Irigaray thus uses the image of the two lips and the placental relation between mother and fetus in her writings to demonstrate the links between body and culture, and between body and language. She also highlights what a logic, culture, and language might look like if they were to be structured as an open two-way passage between two in which neither of the two is sacrificed.[3] Irigaray's poetic and dialogic writing style mimics the qualities of fluidity and openness she sees connected to the feminine body. In her earlier work, Irigaray uses the strategies of mimesis in her images of the two lips that are themselves always touching and always open in a way that disrupts a phallocentric binary logic since they cannot be reduced to an either/or (nature/culture) dichotomy.

In this article I suggest that we must read this refiguring of the nature/culture relationship alongside Irigaray's reworking of the dialectical process that she first hints at as a redoubling of the Hegelian dialectic in *Speculum*.[4] In *Speculum*, Irigaray contends that a dialectical struggle for self-consciousness occurs only for the masculine subject. We must recognize that a dialectical process needs to occur in the creation of feminine subjectivity, and due to the openness and fluidity of her sexuate body, this dialectic must be refigured in terms that are nonsacrificial and that fundamentally disrupt phallocentric logic.

Tracing the Dialectic—Irigaray with Hegel

This article will first trace three moments in Irigaray's philosophy where she engages with Hegel's dialectical thinking in *Speculum*, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, and *I Love to You*.[5] In the first moment, in *Speculum* Irigaray uncovers how the feminine is necessarily reduced to the unconscious and to inert nature in the Hegelian dialectical narrative of the (masculine) subject's journey toward self-consciousness (Irigaray 1985). Consequently, Irigaray calls for the recognition of a double dialectic appropriate to both a masculine and a feminine subjectivity. The second moment occurs in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* when Irigaray begins to focus on (re)thinking the interval *between* the binary terms *nature* and *culture*, *masculine* and *feminine* (Irigaray 1993a). Importantly, Irigaray reimagines this dialectical process via the question of

sexual difference and a refiguring of love as intermediary. The third moment in the development of Irigaray's work is when she returns to Hegel in *I Love to You* (Irigaray 1996). Irigaray describes how, in returning to Hegel, she actually uses his work as a point of departure to develop what she "wanted to say about a double and even triple dialectic: one in the masculine, one in the feminine and one between the two" (Irigaray 2004, 3). She notes, "I depart from Hegel but use the dialectical process in a different manner: now it is in the service of intersubjectivity" (3).

In "The Eternal Irony of the Community," a chapter from *Speculum of the Other Woman*, we can see the initial challenge Irigaray makes to Hegel's dialectic and the call for a redoubling and reworking of the dialectic. In this chapter Irigaray points out, via a reading of Hegel's engagement with Sophocles' *Antigone*, that the relation between men and women can be read in terms of a Hegelian master/slave dialectic. Irigaray argues that this notion of the Hegelian "Self" and the process by which self-consciousness is reached is tied up in this oppressive relation between the sexes. In Irigaray's reading of the dialectic, the male subject becomes the "one," the master, and his dialectical struggle for self-consciousness is founded upon the obliteration of the feminine other. In this structure the feminine remains unconscious and has no access or passage to subjectivity. Irigaray ironically explains:

> *What an amazing vicious circle in a single syllogistic system.* Whereby the unconscious, while remaining unconscious, is yet supposed to know the laws of a consciousness—which is permitted to remain ignorant of it—and will become even more repressed as a result of failing to respect those laws. But the stratification, on top/underneath, of the two ethical laws, of the two beings-there of sexual difference … comes from Self, of itself. The movement by which the mind ceaselessly sublates necessity, climbing to the top of its pyramid more easily if the other is thrust deeper down the well. Thus the male one copulates the other so as to draw new strength from her, a new form, whereas the other sinks further and further into a ground that harbors a substance which expends itself without the mark of any individualism. (Irigaray 1985, 223)

Within this binary logic (that Irigaray describes here as "on top/underneath"), in the struggle for self-consciousness, the feminine, as the unconscious substance from which the male "Self" emerges, remains "underneath" and moves "further and further" away from any form of subjectivity. Irigaray refers to this repression of the feminine as a rape that goes unrecognized, and argues that if the single-dialectical relationship remains the sole way of expressing or structuring the relations between men and women, nonhierarchical sexuate difference will never be recognized in this culture. Sexual *in*difference—the silencing of sexuate difference—is exemplified here by the rape of the feminine that goes unrecognized. This is why Irigaray's critique is swiftly followed by calls for change. Irigaray notes that change can come about only if we rethink subjectivity in terms of a double dialectic. She writes, "Which is as much to say that the crime [of rape] can easily occur unnoticed and that the operation may never be translated into a fact. Unless each of these/its terms is doubled

so radically that *a single dialectic is no longer sufficient to articulate their copulation*" (223).

Irigaray understands this problem of sexual *in*difference and rape as the result of a masculine "Self" having the resources that enable "Him" to dialecticize to some extent, whereas the feminine does not. Irigaray thus calls for a double dialectic in which the masculine and the feminine can articulate their own *different* struggle toward self-consciousness, toward recognizing two sexuate "selves" in culture. Calling for a double dialectic, Irigaray is challenging the universal (masculine) subject of Hegel's philosophy to recognize his sexuate body, his sexuate self. Irigaray's demand for a double dialectic thus makes it possible for the feminine subject to begin to move from a place of repressed material substance toward a sexuate subjectivity. Irigaray notes:

> masculinity—in man and possibly in woman—will to some extent be able to dialecticize its relationships and identificatory allegiance to the maternal, including a negativization of female singularity, but this would not be true for femininity, which is aware of no difference between itself and the maternal, or even the masculine, except one that is mediated by the abstract immediacy of *the* being (as) or by the rejection of *one* (as) being. The female lacks the operation of affirming its singular and universalizable link to one as self. (Irigaray 1985, 224)

In Hegel's narrative, the feminine has no dialectical process that enables her to affirm her Self in culture and to recognize the passage between her sexuate body (singular) and her symbolic (universal). Consequently, she has no identity separate from the maternal (hence the importance of the representation of mother–daughter relations), and also no awareness of her difference from the masculine. Neutrality and universality conceived of as sexual *in*difference reign supreme within the Hegelian dialectic, and Irigaray seeks to create a new culture in which the dialectic can be doubled and worked out within each sexuate subjectivity.

In *I Love to You*, the development of Irigaray's engagement with Hegel's thought deepens (Irigaray 1996). Here we see Irigaray working out the concept of sexuate difference that she refers to as "the labor of the negative" and it is this intersubjective relationship that is articulated in detail in *I Love to You*. For Irigaray, an autonomous feminine subjectivity would be able to articulate her own dialectical struggle for self-consciousness, between a feminine "I" and a feminine "you." Intimately connected to the creation of feminine subjectivity and her own sexuate dialectic is the intersubjective, nonsacrificial, dialectical relation that this feminine subjectivity has with masculine subjectivity. It is in *I Love to You* that Irigaray articulates in detail how the double dialectic and intersubjective dialectical relations work together, and I believe this is why she refers to it as a decisive moment in her work (see Irigaray 2004, 3). The emergence of an autonomous feminine subjectivity requires establishing and acknowledging a limit for both masculine and feminine subjects. This process of acknowledging the limits to subjectivity in the emergence of sexuate subjectivity is what Irigaray refers to as "the labor of the negative." It is this idea of the limits to

sexuate subjectivity that is connected with the recognition and relation to the sexuate other. The realization that subjectivity is sexuate plays a part in realizing "I/you" are not the whole of the world; the masculine subject is no longer omnipotent. And in this sense, the refigured relation of love between the masculine and feminine is a third kind of intersubjective dialectical process. This third dialectic is thus part of the realization of a double dialectic in which the sexuate subjectivities come into Being-Two. The decisive moment seems to be the unfolding of the process and becoming-two of sexuate difference.

And, although Irigaray suggests that it is in *I Love to You* that a decisive unfolding occurs in the articulation of the intersubjective dialectical process between sexuate subjects, I believe we can see her beginning to sketch the relation between the double and intersubjective dialectical process—or the nontraditional ontology of sexuate difference—in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* and, in particular, Irigaray's reading of Diotima. In Irigaray's engagement with Diotima, we see how the relation between feminine and masculine subjectivity is reimagined as a nonsacrificial relation of love and as a radical challenge to the Hegelian master/slave relationship that she outlines in *Speculum*.

Diotima's Dialectic—Refiguring Love, Within and Between Us

The dialectical process that Irigaray articulates in her reading of Diotima's speech in "Sorcerer Love" from *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* explores the intersubjective dialectical relationship between the sexuate subjects. Irigaray suggests that Diotima's teaching presents a challenge to a traditional Hegelian master/slave dialectic because she introduces a dialectical process in which a radical notion of *love* as an intermediary relation between the two is the goal. This notion of *love* as an intermediary between two is preferable to a master/slave struggle that ends in sacrifice of one of the terms (Irigaray 1993a, 20).

When Irigaray turns to Diotima's dialectic, she introduces her refigured dialectical relation of *love as intermediary* between two terms—for example, matter–form, nature–culture, sensible–transcendental, wealth–poverty, or ignorance–knowledge—that, unlike Hegel's dialectic, does not end in a synthesis of two terms into a complete whole or "Absolute." Rather, for Irigaray, *love* remains the *passage between* the two terms. One term does not pass into or assimilate with the other, and struggle does not have to end in the death of the other. Irigaray suggests that from the very outset, Diotima "establishes an *intermediary* that will never be abandoned as a mere means, way or path" (Irigaray 1993a, 20). Diotima's dialectic unveils the necessity of love as the intermediary that permits progression between the two terms without sacrificing either. Moreover, on Irigaray's reading of Diotima, love does not have to be sacrificed in order for the philosopher to gain knowledge, or for the subject to become self-conscious. Irigaray notes: "It is love that leads to knowledge . . . It is love that both leads the way and is the path. A mediator par excellence" (21). This reimagined dialectical relation of *love as intermediary* between, for example, ignorance and

knowledge, provides the context for a critical engagement with what it means to think, to be a philosopher, and to do philosophy in the Western tradition. Irigaray's engagement with Diotima challenges us to consider how we conceive of philosophy in the Western tradition. Her reading of Diotima enables us to ask what the implications might be for teaching and learning in this tradition if one can only ever be *either* ignorant *or* wise. Furthermore, the concept *love as intermediary* enables Irigaray to imagine each sexuate subject as having a refigured, nonhierarchical, and nonsacrificial nature–culture relation and thus to refigure subjectivity as sexuate.[6]

To give this notion of *love as intermediary* more context, consider, for example, the chapter "Sexual Difference" in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, which is situated prior to the unfolding of Diotima's dialectic. In this chapter Irigaray writes that we do not yet have an ethics of sexual difference and, as such, (ethical) love between the sexes is "yet to come about"; importantly, this love must come "from the most intimate to the most political" (Irigaray 1993a, 17). Thus, for ethical relations of love to emerge between and among the genders we require a notion of love that embraces the two—sexuate subjects as well as the passage between the most intimate and the most political—without the sacrifice of either term. We require a conceptualization of *love as intermediary* in order to bring together binary terms and disrupt the logic of phallocentrism.[7]

Irigaray suggests that Diotima demonstrates that love is neither beautiful nor ugly. It preserves the third term that allows the passage or progression—between nature and culture, between body and mind, between ignorance and knowledge, or between the sensible and transcendental.[8] It is the intermediary of love, the space that this love makes between two, that allows the two terms to exist without sacrificing one for the other. Irigaray contends:

> Therefore, between knowledge and reality, there is an intermediary that allows for the encounter between the two. Diotima's dialectic is in at least *four terms*: the here, the poles of the encounter, and the beyond—but a beyond that never abolishes the here. And so on, indefinitely. (Irigaray 1993a, 21)

The point Irigaray is making here is important. These four terms of Diotima's dialectic fundamentally rework the Hegelian master/slave dialectic into a dialectical relation that values a nonsacrificial love relationship between two terms that are not understood as opposites struggling against each other. This refigured dialectical relation is redoubled, as Irigaray argues in *Speculum*, and a dialectic with four terms is created. Alongside this feminine subjectivity, with her own dialectical struggle toward self-consciousness, is the dialectical relation that this refigured feminine subjectivity has with a refigured masculine subject. The four terms can be understood as follows: "the here" might be thought of as the singular particular feminine (or masculine) subject, "the beyond" might be thought of as the universal or symbolic representation of the feminine or masculine subjectivity. Thus, "the here" and "the beyond" can be understood as constituting the dialectical nature–culture relation of feminine (or masculine) subjectivity, and in this sense can be understood as a vertical dialectical

relationship. The "poles of the encounter," I believe, refer to the relation between these two sexuate subjects (although these relations are always constituted by the vertical dialectical relations specific to each sexuate genre), and in this sense it is also a horizontal intersubjective relationship between the masculine and feminine. Thus, if we recognize that sexuate difference is the intersection of these four terms of Diotima's dialectic, we can begin properly to understand the radicality of Irigaray's philosophy. We must understand Irigaray's radical reworking of the dialectic as the redoubling and crossing over of the vertical and horizontal in order to fully appreciate her remarks on love between the sexes. The fluid and evolving relationship between the vertical and horizontal is central to the work of sexuate difference.[9] Because the refiguring of feminine subjectivity, and accordingly sexuate subjectivity, means that each masculine and feminine subject has renewed links with nature and culture appropriate to their own gender, the link that reunites the masculine and feminine is *both* horizontal and vertical—it is *both* natural and cultural. This means that woman cannot be reduced to object or to nature because there is a nonsacrificial relation between nature–culture for both feminine and masculine subjectivity. The link reuniting the two operates on both a horizontal intersubjective plane and a vertical intrasubjective plane; these two aspects are intimately connected to each other in the working out of sexuate difference. Irigaray notes:

> The link uniting or reuniting masculine and feminine must be horizontal and vertical, terrestrial and heavenly . . . it must forge an alliance between the divine and the mortal, such that the sexual encounter would be a festive celebration and not a disguised or polemical form of the master–slave relationship. (Irigaray 1993a, 17)

It must be noted, however, that this linking together of the "terrestrial and heavenly" or "horizontal and vertical" is not a synthesis or fusion of the two terms or subjects. Rather, there is a nonsacrificial dialectic at play here, and Irigaray suggests that in order to prevent the reduction of the two (or four terms) to the One or Absolute, we require "a limit that the other may or may not penetrate" (17). Irigaray writes that "in order for an ethics of sexual difference to come into being, we must constitute a *possible place for each sex, body, and flesh to inhabit*. Which presupposes a memory of the past, a hope for the future, memory bridging the present and disconcerting the mirror symmetry that annihilates the difference of identity" (18; my emphasis). Thus, in thinking through the ethical relations of sexuate difference, an ontological questioning and rethinking of place and temporality occurs. Irigaray argues that as woman-mother is reduced to an inert nature, she remains the place, the home, for man and she has no place or home of her own. Woman-subject is in exile in the Western tradition. Thus the refiguring of feminine subjectivity reimagines the relationship that both men and women have with their own bodies, their own place(s), their own home(s). Consequently, in her questioning of the relation between place and temporality, Irigaray's conception of subjectivity becomes a "rhythmic becoming" (42). In this questioning, Irigaray uses the image of the female sex as a threshold and as a way in which to conceive an alternative logic that would allow a flourishing of

nonsacrificial, nonhierarchical sexuate difference described above. She suggests that perhaps

> we are passing through an era when *time must redeploy space*? . . . A remaking of immanence and transcendence, notably through this *threshold* which has never been examined as such: the female sex. The threshold that gives us access to the *mucous*. Beyond oppositions of love and hate, liquid and ice—a threshold that is always *half-open*. The threshold of the *lips*, which are strangers to dichotomy and oppositions. (18)[10]

Irigaray's use of the imagery of the female sex, in its confounding of binary oppositions, thus propels us toward a new logic.

I Love to You: The Failure of Hegel's Labor of Love

In *I Love to You* Irigaray engages with Hegel's writings on the relationship between the sexes, noting that he is "the only Western philosopher to approach the question of love as labor" (Irigaray 1996, 19). Irigaray thus suggests that an engagement with Hegel's work might explain the reasons for what she understands as the current lack of "ethical relations between the sexes" (20). However, in her return to Hegel, Irigaray finds that he defines the relationship between the sexes as it is traditionally defined in the Western tradition, and that his thought thus remains governed by the male imaginary at work within the culture of narcissism. Hegel's thought on the love relationship between woman and man is framed and situated within the traditional heterosexual family relationship, in which woman's role is reduced to wife and mother. As a result, woman has no passage to her own sexuate self-consciousness, and she is barred from realizing an autonomous feminine subjectivity in culture. Irigaray points out that beyond the realm of the family, "Hegel shows little concern for granting each gender its own identity, particularly a legal one, even though he states that the status of the human person depends upon his or her recognition by civil law. From his perspective, then, sexed law should pertain only to the family. There would be no sexed identity for the citizen" (22).

Irigaray emphasizes how Hegel is interested in the "labor of love" between the sexes only within the context of family relations. She notes that within Hegel's system, "woman is wife or mother" and the only access she has to culture is via this abstract duty that, as it is always defined in relation to a man, allows no access to an autonomous feminine subjectivity that is appropriate to her singular sexuate experience (22). Woman remains within the familial realm and has no access to citizenship. There is no possibility of an autonomous feminine subjectivity that has access to a culture, language, law, or divine appropriate to her as a woman.[11] Importantly, Irigaray suggests, in Hegel's system woman is always situated within the horizon that is defined by man, and as such, as wife or mother, is always in the service of the masculine universal. As a consequence, woman does not, on Irigaray's reading, have

access to the dialectical struggle for self-consciousness that ends in (neutral) civil identity for the masculine citizen. Irigaray stresses that for woman

> the universal comes down to practical labor within the horizon of the universal delimited by man. Deprived of a relationship to the singularity of love, woman is also deprived of the possibility of a universal for herself. Love, for her, amounts to a duty—not a right—establishing her role within humankind where she appears as man's servant. (22)

Alison Stone notes that for Hegel the family is a "natural ethical community . . . based first and foremost, on the natural sexual relationship between husband and wife" and that "only men progress out of the family into political life" (Stone 2006, 166–67). Thus, the wife remains within the "natural" sexual relationship and the husband progresses out toward culture. Importantly, as Stone points out, for Hegel, this brings the two spheres of nature/culture (or family/politics) into conflict:

> women cannot identify with the political community and consequently can see no validity in actions which promote its good, while conversely men can see no validity in actions promoting the good of families. Hegel finds in Sophocles' *Antigone*, to which he alludes, the perfect illustration of the problem. (167)

Stone notes that the polis, on Irigaray's reading of Hegel, "emerges from men's deliberate break with the family" (171).[12] Irigaray's critique of Western culture demonstrates how in a culture of narcissism the young boy must repress his desire to remain in a sensual relationship with his mother in order to enter culture as a masculine subject. This narcissistic masculine subject is supported by his projections of omnipotence that protect (and cover over) his unconscious repressed desire (or need) for his mother. Stone suggests that Irigaray presents Oedipus as Hegel's exemplary political agent: an agent cut off from all family ties (including the maternal body) and bound by his civic duty (172). Furthermore, there is also no opportunity for an ethical relation of love to occur between mother and daughter, or between and among women.[13] Without a passage between the singular and the universal dimensions of feminine subjectivity, the love between mother and daughter cannot be articulated. Mother and daughter can never be in relation as autonomous feminine subjects; the daughter can only take her mother's place in patriarchal culture.

Irigaray argues that it is due to the repression of the maternal body by the masculine subject that the relationship between the sexes, even in Hegel's labor of love, is reduced to the master/slave relationship. Alluding to the point that the (masculine) "Spirit" is unable to remain in relation with matter or the maternal, Irigaray suggests this type of (masculine and single) struggle toward Spirit/Self has only death as its horizon. On this point Irigaray notes:

> The capitalization of life in the hands of a few who demand this sacrifice of the majority. More especially, the capitalization of the living by a male culture which, in giving itself death as its sole horizon, oppresses the

> female. Thus the master–slave dialectic occurs between the sexes, forcing woman to engender life to comply with the exigencies of a universal linked to death. (Irigaray 1996, 25)

Irigaray asks again, as she did in *Speculum* and in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, how can we escape this situation? How can women and men escape this master–slave dialectic that structures their (non)existence (and silencing)? That reduces woman to nature and man to culture? How to escape this relationship between opposites that only ends in death? Can we rethink this as a relation in which life rather than death would flourish? Irigaray thinks we can and proposes an ethical relation of love between two as preferable to the master–slave dialectic "with death as its master" (26). Irigaray asks:

> So how can we get away from such an abstract duty, from the sacrifice of sexed identity to a universal defined by man with death as its master, for want of having known how to let life flourish as the universal? How can we discover for ourselves, between ourselves, the singularity and universality of love as the natural and spiritual realization of human identity? (26)

In *I Love to You* Irigaray asks how we can rediscover love as sexuate difference in the four terms articulated in her early reading of Diotima in "Sorcerer Love." How can we discover a love that is both natural and spiritual, that is both sensible and transcendent, that is nonsacrificial and ethical, that recognizes love as the intermediary? And how can we discover the relation of love that is "for ourselves" as sexuate subjectivities, and "between ourselves" as sexuate subjectivities? As Irigaray suggests, love understood as the fluid, open, and complex dialectic of four terms is the "realization of human identity" (26). Nature and culture must be in relation within each sexuate subject and between sexuate subjects. Irigaray argues we must recognize that the dialectical, nonsacrificial process occurs on the vertical level, and between and among sexuate subjects on a horizontal plane. This is why a revolution in loving is central to Irigaray's project, and this love cannot be reduced to a heterosexual relationship within the traditional Western nuclear family that is played out in a traditional master–slave dialectic that ends in the death/repression of the consciousness of the other, the woman-mother.

At the end of the chapter "He I Sought but Did Not Find" in *I Love to You*, Irigaray suggests that a refiguring of the process of Hegelian recognition is needed to bring men and women face to face in order to bring about ethical relations between them. Irigaray begins the next chapter asking "How are we to outline the process of recognition?" (Irigaray 1996, 103). She answers:

> I recognize you, thus you are not the whole: otherwise you would be too great and I would be engulfed by your greatness. You are not the whole and I am not the whole . . .
> I recognize you means that I cannot know you in thought or in flesh. The power of a negative remains between us. (103)

Irigaray notes that within the Hegelian system it is through a process of recognition that the master–slave dialectic is overcome. For Irigaray, however, we must practice a "sort of recognition different from the one marked by hierarchy, and thus also genealogy" (105). Irigaray notes:

> Only the recognition of the other as sexuate offers this possibility. Between woman and man, man and woman, recognition requires the labor of the negative. Mastery of, substitution for, thereby become impossible processes given the respect for what is, for what exists. (105–106)

Using a reworked notion of recognition and placing the labor of the negative between the two sexuate subjects, Irigaray outlines an ethical intersubjective relation between the two. Using a refigured Hegelian negative as a way to conceive of this relation of recognition, Irigaray envisions a framework that challenges the master–slave dialectic and the narcissism of the masculine (liberal) subject because "he" no longer has an object upon which to project his phantasies of omnipotence. In other words, this traditional masculine subject is refigured when recognizing the limits to his own subjectivity.

Gail Schwab emphasizes the importance of the labor of the negative in Irigaray's later work and notes that "despite myriad misconceptions," sexual difference "is not about predetermined, stereotypical ('fossilized,' as Irigaray writes) identities for heterosexual couples, but rather *about coming to the other through the recognition of the negative in the self*" (Schwab 1998, 81–82; my emphasis). Moreover, Schwab writes, "in sexual difference, the experience of the negative leads to a joyous access to the other, to noninstinctive, non-drive-based relations: to true intersubjectivity" (82).

The negative thus enables a way to conceive of the limit to sexuate subjectivity, a boundary that allows a return to self (a return to a possible place, a return home?) that is necessary for feminine subjectivity and the creation of ethical loving relations between and among women. Moreover, the labor of the negative and mediation between the two in sexuate difference allows the two to be, and to become, in nonsacrificial relation.

The motif that Schwab describes above as a "joyous access to the other" is taken up in a recent discussion between Catherine Malabou and Ewa Ziarek. Their article explores Irigaray's reformulation of the dialectic in *I Love to You*. Malabou and Ziarek contrast the sacrificial logic of Hegel's master–slave dialectic with Irigaray's refiguring of the dialectic that proposes "the possibility of happiness as the horizon of interpersonal and cultural ethics" (Malabou and Zairek 2012, 14). They demonstrate how Irigaray's use of the negative in reformulating the process of recognizing the other, that "I am not all," initiates felicity, joy, and happiness. Malabou and Ziarek suggest that it is thus not lack that undergirds desire or drives intersubjective relations but rather joy. Thus they argue that the process of recognition and the work of the negative in sexuate difference are reframed in Irigaray's philosophy as felicity rather than death. Moreover, Malabou and Ziarek support my reading of Irigaray's diagnosis of a narcissistic masculine subject when they suggest that Irigaray's recognition of limit in the emergence of sexuate subjectivity, that "I am not all," is a positive, joyous revelation

that "negates the aggressive projections of the other" and "prevents the reification of existing gender and racial stereotypes" (Malabou and Ziarek 2012, 15–16). Furthermore, Malabou and Ziarek's article suggests that the reworking of the labor of the negative in Irigaray's work requires a reworking of the nature–culture dialectic, which is what I have demonstrated in my reading of Diotima. Thus my analysis of Irigaray's Diotima might be read fruitfully alongside the claims they make regarding Irigaray's refiguring of the Hegelian negative in *I Love to You*. Recall the four terms of Diotima's dialectic:

> Diotima's dialectic is in at least *four terms*: the here, the poles of the encounter, and the beyond—but a beyond that never abolishes the here. And so on, indefinitely. (Irigaray 1993a, 21)

Sexuate difference is situated in "the here," the present, what actually exists in this moment: two sexuate bodies with their own relations to genealogy and the beyond, which cannot be substituted for one another. They are irreducible and transcendent to one another in this relation that is vertical and horizontal. In this way, sexuate difference is universal (as it fundamentally rethinks the relation between universal and particular), and consequently may provide a foundation for a global model of ethics that challenges existing gender and racial stereotypes, as we see Schwab and Malabou and Ziarek suggest.

Although this notion of the limit in the emergence of subjectivity is crucial in order to appreciate the radicality of Irigaray's work, another aspect of this rethinking of recognition and ethical communication between the two is the motif of attentive listening. Although Irigaray argues that you can never "know me"—because to know me means to appropriate me—you can, however, still "perceive the directions and dimensions of my intentionality. Importantly, you can help me become while remaining myself" (Irigaray 1996, 112). In order to perceive my intentionality ethically, Irigaray suggests we need to cultivate silence and learn to listen attentively (116). Irigaray writes: "I am listening to you: I perceive what you are saying, I am attentive to it, I am attempting to understand and hear your intention. Which does not mean: I comprehend you, I know you" (116). Accordingly, we begin to appreciate how a radically refigured notion of love as the passage between, for example, ignorance and wisdom occupies the space of silence required for attentive listening and ethical communication between the two.

Keeping in mind this notion of attentive listening, I return for a moment to Diotima. At the end of "Sorcerer Love" Irigaray wonders whether it could be beauty itself that Diotima proposes contemplating, and if this is the case, "one would have to go back over everything again to discover it in its enchantment" (Irigaray 1993a, 33). Michelle Boulous Walker suggests that Irigaray's reading of Diotima provides us with an example of an open reading, a reading "that refuses to totalise its encounter with the other" (Boulous Walker 2006, 231). Boulous Walker writes: "Irigaray's reading remains—up until the very last sentence—a readiness to re-read" (231). This readiness to reread enacts a mode of attentive listening and the "always evolving" nature of Irigaray's thinking that I am trying to capture here.[14] Moreover, the way in

which Irigaray performs the ethical engagement with Diotima in this chapter is an example of the actualization of Irigaray's writing and philosophy as an *intermediary* between ignorance and wisdom. This is an important point to consider when reading Irigaray's work and especially in the context of this special issue on Feminist Love Studies. What does the performance of Irigaray's philosophical writings evoke when one considers what she is suggesting about love in her reading of Diotima? This readiness to reread suggests an openness—an attentive and ethical listening—that defies the either/or, us/them, true/false logic that undergirds Western thought. In connecting the reconceptualization of love between and among men and women with philosophy, wisdom, and thinking, Irigaray's refiguring of love challenges the very way we think and the way in which we read, practice, and perform philosophy; it challenges us to think, to be, and to become *differently*.

The project of uncovering the repressed feminine and the creation of an autonomous feminine subjectivity that Irigaray began in *Speculum* continues to be a central part of her philosophical and ontological project. What I hope to have highlighted here is the way in which the refigured, dialectical, nonsacrificial relation of love between two autonomous sexuate subjects is the founding of sexuate difference. This dialectical relation is structured in the terms Irigaray explores in Diotima's dialectic and *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* and articulated in much more detail in *I Love to You* "as the coming to the other through the recognition" of the sexuate dialectical struggle within feminine subjectivity (Schwab 1998, 82).

We must therefore take Irigaray seriously when she announces the importance of love in the final chapter to *I Love to You*. Irigaray writes:

> At this time—of the globalization and universalization of culture—but when this globality and universality are now ungovernable and beyond our control, making us divided and torn between differing certainties, opinions, dreams or experiences, it seems appropriate to return to what is governable by us here and now: love. (Irigaray 1996, 129)

Notes

My thanks to Michelle Boulous Walker, Bryan Mukandi, Martyn Lloyd, the editors of this special issue, and the anonymous reviewers of this manuscript for their encouragement and invaluable suggestions on earlier versions of this article.

1. In her more recent writings, Irigaray moves freely between the use of the terms *sexuate* and *sexual* to refer to the philosophy of sexual or sexuate difference. I believe she does this in order to move away from rigid definitions at work in binary logic and to prevent sexual difference being reduced to biological difference. Rachel Jones suggests that the difference between the use of *sexuate* and *sexual* in Irigaray's writing is linked to the relationship or double bind in her work that occurs, and becomes clear especially when reading her work as a whole, between the critical and the more constructive aspects of her philosophy (Jones 2011). Jones suggests that sexual difference refers to that forgotten

sexual difference in Western culture that Irigaray seeks to unveil and uncover in her earlier works, such as *Speculum*, whereas sexuate difference corresponds to the more constructive and positive relationship that we (as women and as men) must now take up with regard to sexual difference (Jones 2011, 4). I agree with Jones on this point and will follow Jones and Irigaray by moving between the terms *sexuate* and *sexual* difference in this article.

2. For an introduction to some of the major philosophical themes in Irigaray's work, see Margaret Whitford's *Philosophy in the Feminine*, which includes, in chapter 3, a thorough explanation of Irigaray's appropriation of the Lacanian terms *symbolic* and *imaginary* that I refer to here (Whitford 1991). For an explanation of how Irigaray's work can be read as a critique of the Western culture of narcissism or what Irigaray refers to as the "love of Sameness among men" (Irigaray 1993a, 100–101), see Whitford 2003.

3. See Jones 2011 and Boulous Walker 1998 for a clear exposition of how Irigaray uses the image of the "two lips" to rethink the structures that govern the problematic relations in Western philosophy between body and language and/or nature and culture. Irigaray's use of the placental relation receives less attention in the secondary literature. For a clear exposition, see Irigaray 1993b; Schwab 1994; and Jones 2011.

4. As we will see later in this article, my claim here is supported by Catherine Malabou and Ewa Ziarek. They write that in Irigaray's work the "non-sacrificial negative requires a redefinition of the nature/culture dialectic in the context of the negativity of sexual difference" (Malabou and Ziarek 2012, 17).

5. Adrian Switzer notes that generally the secondary literature on Irigaray and Hegel frames "Irigaray's engagement of Hegelian thought through the particulars of his treatment of *Antigone* in the *Phenomenology*" (Switzer 2008). Although I begin with Irigaray and Hegel in *Speculum*, my focus is not Irigaray's engagement with Hegel's treatment of *Antigone*. Rather, my aim in this section of the article is to trace the development of Irigaray's engagement with Hegel's dialectic and explore how this relationship has evolved in her work. See Switzer 2008 for examples of secondary literature on Irigaray and Hegel's *Antigone*.

6. Donna Haraway's cyborg, for instance, inhabits and reworks the relation between nature and culture that we might liken to the nonsacrificial nature–culture relation that Irigaray evokes here (Haraway 2000, 292–93). See Toye 2012 for an illuminating discussion of how we might productively read Haraway and Irigaray alongside each other, especially, as Toye notes, "in terms of conceiving 'the cyborg' as an ethical figure in terms of Irigaray's ethical concept of the 'interval between'" (Toye 2012, 185).

7. Rather than reading Irigaray's focus on the *two* as heternormative or essentialist, we must understand the focus on the *two* of sexuate difference as part of Irigaray's overall ontological challenge to the logic of Sameness that she claims undergirds Western thought (Cheah and Grosz 1998; Grosz 2011, 100). Irigaray's intention is to break open these ontological foundations that support the economy of the same within which any relation of difference from the One (the single masculine narcissistic subject) can only be formulated hierarchically (Irigaray 2000, 122). For Irigaray, it is the recognition of (at least) two autonomous, sexuate subjectivities that can challenge this logic of Sameness. Recognizing that Being is (at least) two opens up the way for an ethico-political ontology that can potentially nurture difference in all its forms. As

Malabou suggests, "There are not just two genders; there is a multiplicity of genders. Masculine and feminine can refer to several of these gender identities at once, without referring to originary anatomical or social givens" (Malabou 2011, 6). In an effort to counter the criticisms of heteronormativity and essentialism, this article aims to highlight how once we appreciate the centrality of Irigaray's dialectics that are continually being worked out in the relation of *love as intermediary*, one can understand how the recognition of sexuate difference (and sexuate subjectivity) is crucial for any ethical loving relations between and among human beings. As Elizabeth Grosz notes, regardless of your gender or sexuality, "The body of the lover in any sexual relation is never a matter of indifference, and even . . . in the case of bodies that are not clearly classifiable as male or female—the form, nature, and capacities of the body are crucial elements of sexual attraction" (Grosz 2011, 108).

8. Irigaray's sensible-transcendental is a central term in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* that brings the traditionally binary pair of body and spirit together in a nonsacrificial way (Whitford 1991, 48). The notion receives renewed attention in *Between East and West* when Irigaray advocates the practice of yoga as a way of becoming an embodied, sexuate divine (Irigaray 2002). See Byrne 2008, 22; Jones 2011, 126–29; Roberts 2015.

9. See Deutscher 1994 and Schwab 2011 for more on the link between the vertical and horizontal in relation to the theme of divinity in Irigaray's work. Roberts 2004 provides an illuminating analysis of how we ought to read Diotima's dialectic and Irigaray's ethics of sexual difference in relation to Tantra.

10. As Michelle Boulous Walker points out, this labial logic is crucial in Irigaray's work because it uncovers and "deconstructs the oppositional nature of the self–other relation . . . The singularity of the labia is always *double*, never one. This labial logic confounds oppositional thinking" (Boulous Walker 1998, 157). Linnell Secomb's work also explores Irigaray's use of the two lips. Secomb suggests that Irigaray's "strategy involves rather a movement back and forth, between, or simultaneous insistence on, proximity and difference: the two lips are, for example, both a sign of sexual difference and an image of proximity" (Secomb 2007, 103).

11. This is one of the reasons behind Irigaray's call for sexuate rights. See Irigaray 2000.

12. This wish to break with the family is given some psychoanalytic context by Stone, and we can read this in light of the diagnosis of a culture of narcissism in the West. Stone writes: "in *Sexes and Genealogies* . . . [Irigaray] clarifies that this wish stems from their infantile difficulties in separating from their mothers, given the reality of sexual difference (SG, 136/150). These difficulties . . . lead boys to disavow their early intertwinement with their mothers and, at the same time, their corporeality" (Stone 2006, 171).

13. Irigaray notes: "Even the love between mother and daughter is forbidden in the sense that it reminds the daughter, the woman, of the singularity of the female gender she has to renounce, except as an abstract duty imposed upon her by a culture that is not hers and inappropriate for her. The girl's only reason for being is to become a wife and mother" (Irigaray 1996, 26).

14. For more on Irigaray's attentive listening and reading, see Boulous Walker 2016.

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