

Panel: *Understanding Difference: why poetry matters*

Convenors: Professor Timothy Mathews (UCL), Dr Sharon Morris (UCL).

Luce Irigaray's feminism urges us to believe in the power we have as individuals as well as communities to reorganize our lives on the basis of mutual understanding rather than conflict. As sexuate subjects, for Irigaray we have the uniquely human opportunity to understand each other in terms of what divides and separates us. Sexual difference is insurmountable, our bodies speak this truth to anyone who will hear. But sexual difference, specifically, fundamentally, allows human interaction of respect, rather than domination, appropriation or assimilation. Her work distinguishes itself from the other major theorists of her generation, especially in French, in refuting notions of an inevitable pull, both ideological and psychoanalytical, to one-ness, to cultural and institutional narcissism in all its forms. Nor does Irigaray accept a purely metaphysical account of difference which deprives it of the living, bodily reality of sexed, human relations. Her understanding of sexual difference and sexuate being has the power to reorientate social interaction towards freedom and understanding, in domains including education, the environment, architecture, cultural and inter-cultural relation as well as the loving relation itself. But it is an understanding which depends on nurturing a poetic way of thinking, hearing, seeing, feeling; depends on it, calls on it, requires it, reminding people all the time of their capacity for it. If sexual difference is a given, existentially, biologically, then the freedom it affords us is also beyond our understanding, beyond our capacity to see beyond our own body. And still we know the difference separating men and women.

Poetry allows that difference we know but cannot grasp to be understood; not only understood, but shared. This strand will delve into the power of poetry to create understanding of what lies beyond the understanding of any one person, thinker, practitioner. It will engage with the poetic qualities of Irigaray's own writing: the unique rhetoric of her theory and its ways of engaging with readers; and the voice of her own poetry. It will also engage with the experiences of translation: inter-lingual translation, as well as the light translation can shed on the passages from bodily to verbal experience. It will also explore the necessary part of poetry in the work of other theorists and thinkers of the human.

Papers, poetry performance and fine art proposals (including moving image, installation) are invited from scholars and practitioners that address: the poetic qualities of thought itself; the movement of thought; the mobility of the ways in which difference is represented and understood. Work on poetry in thought about difference will be showcased alongside the work of creative artists addressing sexuate being in their practice: in their materials, in their ways of engaging with viewers or readers.

Submission requirements: By **23rd April 2010** please email t.mathews@ucl.ac.uk a 300-500 word abstract in a proposal document (word/PDF), and a second name/affiliation/30 word bio document (word/PDF) for blind review. For performance and fine art responses please note: respondents are responsible for obtaining the funding for making, exhibiting and transporting themselves and their work to the venue, and the exact presentation of the work will be decided in negotiation with the convenors, who will make the final decision in the last instance. Please also note: Notification of acceptance sent out Friday 28th May. Final submission of papers/ presentation content, Friday 17th September.