



# Welcome to the 8<sup>th</sup> Conference of The Irigaray Circle 2017



## *A Sharing of Speech: Scholarship on or Inspired by the Work of Luce Irigaray*

The Institute for Theological Partnerships at the University of  
Winchester, UK: 23rd-25<sup>th</sup> June 2017



## The Irigaray Circle



The Luce Irigaray Circle is an interdisciplinary society dedicated to stimulating and supporting scholarly and creative endeavors that are inspired by or informed by the philosophy of Luce Irigaray. The Circle was established at Stony Brook University in 2006 by the philosophers Sabrina L. Hom, Serene J. Khader, and Mary C. Rawlinson.

The Circle supports scholarship on the philosophy of Luce Irigaray, but it also promotes scholarly and creative work that develops the main themes of Irigaray's philosophy in new directions. These themes include, but are not limited to, the rethinking of philosophical concepts and the history of philosophy in relation to sexual difference, investigations of ethics and bioethics that provide new figures of agency informed by sexual difference, analyses of contemporary social and political issues in relation to sexual difference, attempts to rethink the infrastructures of life such as food, architecture, or transportation to provide a more livable future, investigations of the role of literature and art in philosophical thinking and practice, and reconsiderations of spirituality that take sexual difference into account.

Scholars and artists from all disciplines who are interested in the Circle's activities and research are invited to join the Circle.



### Conference venue details

The 8<sup>th</sup> conference of the Irigaray Circle *A Sharing of Speech: Scholarship on or Inspired by the Work of Luce Irigaray* is being held at the West Downs Centre, Romsey Road, Winchester, Hampshire, SO22 5HT. (Conference office Tel: +44 (0) 1962 827322).

#### West Downs Centre



The West Downs Centre was originally an 18<sup>th</sup> Century boy's boarding school. The building was refurbished in 2001 to become a light and modern conference centre whilst retaining many of its original Victorian features. The Grade II listed building has grown into a busy and versatile conference centre, offering delegates flexible conference and dining space conveniently located under one roof, with accommodation options available nearby. The University of Winchester is split across two campuses, the other being King Alfred Campus, both within close proximity to Winchester city centre.



#### About the Institute for Theological Partnerships (ITP)

The Institute for Theological Partnerships was set up by the Vice Chancellor in 2009 as the outward theological face of the University of Winchester under Director, Lisa Isherwood, Professor of Feminist and Liberation Theologies. ITP has its main aim in the promotion of theological debate in the wider community within the context of politics, ethics, economics, human understanding, mind and body and the lived environment.

#### ***Women Dancing with Gaia: Feminist Theological Visions***

Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> June – Monday 31<sup>st</sup> July 2017,

The Link Gallery, West Downs Centre, University of Winchester SO22 5HT

We would like to invite you to the opening night drinks reception for the 2017 ITP art exhibition *Women Dancing with Gaia: Feminist Theological Visions* from the Feminist Theology and Art Forum on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> June from 6pm followed by dinner at 7pm.





## Plenary Session I

### Ellen Mortensen

#### *Irigaray and Deleuzian Affect*

In *The Way of Love* (2002), Luce Irigaray undertakes a poetic gesturing towards a new language that pays heed to fundamental differences between the (two) sexes, all the while safeguarding a relation to the self, to the other, and to the world. In so doing, Irigaray partly follows the path of Heideggerian ontological thinking on the four-fold, i.e. the crossing of the mortals and divinities, the earth and the sky.

In her attempt, however, to touch elemental Being beyond the horizon of Heidegger's language of death, nothingness and sameness, she is in search of another saying, a fluid, incomplete and ever-changing language of difference and becomings, one that is energized by the elements of fire, earth, air and water. In this gesture, Irigaray moves into the vicinity of Deleuze and Guattari's thinking on affect, which speaks to the intensities that permeate and mobilize, not only the language of philosophy, but also the world in which we dwell. Philosophical connections between Irigaray and Deleuze and Guattari have previously been addressed by among others, Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz and Tamsin Lorraine. Albeit in different ways, they have all explored points of convergence and productive differences between these thinkers.

In my reading of *The Way of Love*, I seek to touch upon not only the Heideggerian legacy of Irigaray's ontological thinking, but also her experimental thinking on the affective interconnectedness between the ontic and the ontological in what she calls the sensible transcendental. Affect traverses and intensifies all that emerges in the four-fold, including what has been forgotten and what is yet to come. She thus attempts to find a path of thinking—by way of poetic musings—that is in touch with the elemental ground that may engender a language of sexual difference, a saying that secures an interval of silence, which is not nothing (as Heidegger claims), but a silence that is steeped in flesh and immanence, and thus holds the promise of future becomings. For Irigaray, only a language to come, where listening may occur in the interval, could affectively bridge the worlds of two different sexes.

**Ellen Mortensen** is Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Bergen, Norway and Academic Director of the Holberg Prize. She is the author of *The Feminine and Nihilism: Luce Irigaray with Nietzsche and Heidegger* (Lexington Books, 1994), *Touching Thought: Ontology and Sexual Difference* (Lexington Books, 2002) and the editor of *Sex, Breath and Force* (Lexington, 2006) and *Kjønnsteori* (2008). She has also published a number of articles on feminist theory, gender theory, aesthetics, and French, Anglo-American and Scandinavian modern literature. She is currently working on a project on literature and affect.



## Plenary Session II

### Lucy Bolton

#### *Revisiting Race: Irigaray, Intersectionality and Monster's Ball*

In this paper, I will examine Luce Irigaray's thinking about female subjectivity and sexual difference in relation to intersectional feminism, and consider its adequacy in relation to questions of race. Irigaray has stressed sexual difference as the prime difference between subjects, but this binary way of thinking, and its association with second wave feminism, is now considered to be outmoded and inadequate. Intersectional feminism rejects feminism that is white, middle-class, cis-gendered and able-bodied, and demands all forms of difference are included in discussions of identity, including sexuality, race, ethnicity, age, ability and – usually – class. Irigaray's work has continued to develop since *The Way of Love*, but as her most recent work asserts, she remains committed to an insistence upon fundamental sexual difference.

Because of her insistence on this binary, and her immersion in the European tradition, she has been often criticised for speaking only of and to white western women, with a Eurocentric message (Deutscher; Spivak; Bloodsworth-Lugo; Kimmerle). She has of course worked on 'Eastern' religions, and maintains an investigative approach to philosophical traditions, going back to ancient Greece, but her grounding and analysis remains linguistic and binary. In previous work, I assessed the ways in which Irigarayan thinking might enhance understanding of cinematic women as they attempt to create and sustain subjectivity. In *Monster's Ball*, the lead character Leticia (Halle Berry) is a black woman, whose experience is circumscribed by the facets of her identity: her gender, her race, her age, her class, and her financial circumstances. How can the work of Irigaray, located in the binary of sexual difference, further an understanding of the racist and sexist society of the film world, including relations between men, and the extent to which Leticia is able to create and preserve her subjectivity? If, as I suggest, this might be achieved by a phenomenological encounter with Leticia's lived body, then how can we avoid other binaristic forms of thinking which are focused on the body and which have traditionally been applied to whiteness and blackness? I will reconsider the phenomenological approach in light of further strides in intersectionality, and consider the possibilities for Irigaray and intersectional feminism now, assessing the points of meeting and departure.

**Lucy Bolton** is Senior Lecturer in Film Studies at Queen Mary University of London. Her research lies in two fields, film philosophy and film stardom. She has written many articles and book chapters on the relationship between Luce Irigaray and cinema. She is the author of *Film and Female Consciousness: Irigaray, Cinema and Thinking Women* (Palgrave Macmillan 2011; 2015), and the co-editor of *Lasting Screen Stars: Images that Fade and*



Personas that Endure (Palgrave Macmillan 2016). She is currently writing a monograph for Edinburgh University Press on contemporary cinema and the philosophy of Iris Murdoch.

## **Panel 1: Taking Irigaray to the Movies: Feminism, Politics, and Contemporary Cinema**

### **Mary Rawlinson**

*"The Truth Don't Matter Like It Ought To": The Politics of Narration in Luce Irigaray and Frank Miller's Sin City*

Irigaray often writes in an apocalyptic tone, arguing that we humans have created a world that is inimical to our health and happiness. At the same time, she calls for new narratives of human experience that would evoke a more just community and a more sustainable coexistence on the planet.

Frank Miller's *Sin City* explores this relation between narrative and justice. It demonstrates how injustice thrives in the gap between false public narratives and material reality. It also suggests new collaborations across race and gender that might be effective in addressing injustice in a world where the very institutions that are tasked with protecting the vulnerable instead exploit them

**Mary C. Rawlinson** is Professor and Chair in the Department of Philosophy at Stony Brook University in New York. Her recent books include *Just Life: bioethics and the future of sexual difference* (Columbia University Press, 2016), *Engaging the World: Thinking after Irigaray* (SUNY Press, 2016), *Labor and Global Justice* (Lexington Books, 2014), and *Routledge Handbook of Food Ethics* (2017). Rawlinson was the Founding Editor of *IJFAB: International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics* (2006-2016) and the Co-founder and Co-director of the Irigaray Circle. (2007-2017).

### **Laura Roberts**

*Undoing Stereotypes on Screen: Feminine Subjectivity From the Margins*

Using Céline Sciamma's 2014 film *Bande de filles* (Girlhood) this paper explores Luce Irigaray's call for positive representations of feminine subjectivity. First I shall briefly explore Irigaray's demand for the recognition of a non-hierarchical sexual difference in order to contextualise her call for positive representations of autonomous feminine subjectivity. Following the work of Lucy Bolton, I suggest that Irigaray's work on feminine subjectivity provides a useful lens through which to consider the representation of women in film. Viewed through this framework *Bande de filles* provides an interesting example of what positive representations of feminine subjectivity, with all its contradictions, might look like. I argue that this film disturbs many stereotypical tropes of gender, race and class, and when viewed via the lens of Irigaray's double-pronged approach, her critical and creative aspects,



we can read this as a coming of age film as well as a critical moment toward undoing troubling stereotypes of young women. Furthermore, the ways in which the film portrays the lived experiences of these young women of colour provides an opportunity to think further about how race, ethnicity and class works within Irigaray's philosophy of sexuate difference.

**Laura Roberts** received her PhD in Philosophy from The University of Queensland, Australia, where she currently teaches Philosophy and Gender Studies.

### **Gail Schwab**

#### *Reading Irigaray/Watching Almodóvar*

In this paper I will attempt to make the case for an Irigarayan analysis of the films of Pedro Almodóvar. I will be presenting three basic arguments: 1) that Irigaray and Almodóvar have much in common, not only their democratic goals, but also the way they both go about trying to achieve them through their respective media of philosophy and film; 2) that Almodóvar's films, generally a mélange of generic and thematic profusion and indeterminacy, can best be elucidated in terms of a "cinema of inter-subjectivity"—a concept elaborated by Caroline Bainbridge and Lucy Bolton in their arguments for an Irigarayan feminist cinematics.

Watching Almodóvar cannot simply consist of the passive consumption of narrative and images; it requires sustained active efforts of the spectator similar to those the Irigarayan philosophical text demands of the reader; and 3) that several crucial Irigarayan projects and themes are central to Almodóvar's films, including: the depiction of both the vertical (genealogical) and the horizontal axes of female relations and the elaboration of a woman-to-woman sociality; the demand for access to justice for women and children against whom crimes have been committed; the recuperation of alternate means of expression for women not traditionally accepted as "high art" or as part of the symbolic order—e.g. sewing, cooking, knitting, embroidery; the re-reading and re-interpretation of cultural mythologies, and/or the reconsideration or the re-casting of history or past events...

**Gail Schwab** is Professor Emerita and Adjunct Professor of French in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at Hofstra University and former Associate Dean of the Hofstra College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. She has published widely on the works of Luce Irigaray, in areas as diverse as psychoanalysis, linguistics, law and equivalent rights, spirituality, Greek tragedy and mythology, and Irigaray's relationship to French existentialism (that is, Sartre and Beauvoir). She has been co-director of the Luce Irigaray Circle for many years.

### **Panel 2: The Element of the Body**

**Ana Laura Funes**



*Liṅga and Sūkṣma: A Feminist Phenomenological Analysis of the “Subtle” in Classical Sāṃkhyan Philosophy of the Body*

The notions of liṅga and sūkṣma (both words translated as “subtle”) in Sāṃkhya philosophy have usually been understood in a metaphysical way. Mikel Burley proposes a fruitful Kantian and phenomenological reading that avoids the problems of a cosmogonic, causal narrative between subtle and gross realms. However, when applied to the notion of “subtle body”, his interpretation seems to also get rid of the cosmic—albeit not necessarily metaphysical—narrative that is so unique to Sāṃkhyan phenomenology of embodiment. In this paper I argue that preserving the cosmic dimension of the narrative through the lenses of feminist phenomenology, in particular that of Luce Irigaray, can help us see the relevance of a dimension of the body that is usually overlooked in interpretations of this Indian school: the cosmic dimension that places feelings, dispositions, and emotionality as essential in the articulation of the relation between intersubjectivity, affective life, and bodily self-awareness.

**Ana Laura Funes** is Clinical Assistant Professor of Yoga Studies, Bellarmine College of Liberal Arts at Loyola Marymount University.

**Ciara Merrick**

*Breathing Encounters of Peace*

Catholic or Protestant, white or black, male or female, working class or upper class, indigenous or settler, Palestinian or Israeli, ‘us’ or ‘them’. Across space and throughout time, violent conflict is commonly located in the politically motivated process of ‘othering’. The other, constructed in a spatiality and temporality of violent appropriation, binary narratives and structuring political subject-work, exists in a vacuum: an empty space void of air and gasping for breath. Anchored in a vacuum, the other’s essential essence is determined by the self who, with this very act of dominance and power, essentialises their own body. Between these two fixed identities exists a necessary nothingness (Grosz 2011; Hill 2012), which differentiates the two upon an impassable binary fault line whilst simultaneously reducing this dichotomous difference to sameness. In conversation with the philosophical thinking of Luce Irigaray, this paper explores the potential for alternative, everyday embodiments of peace-weaving that arise when the void in-between the self and the other is filled with the shared breath of difference.

Although Irigaray’s work is inherently political in nature, she is not commonly read as a political theorist. However, I argue Irigaray’s work, and particularly how she conceives the encounter as a relation of differentiation in proximity (Butler 1993), offers a novel approach from which to think how everyday acts of peace-weaving are re-spatialising the political and, so, prospectives for understanding peace. I argue Irigaray’s work gives us three concepts for thinking in the encounter: difference, breath and sharing. In thinking with and, what is more,



by pushing Irigaray's philosophy beyond her (Whitford 1991) we can begin to conceive how an encounter formed in breath, the element of originary excess which crosses the limits of different worlds to create a sharing in-between (Irigaray 2002), actualises micro-political enchantments of difference that rupture the embodied legacies of violent conflict.

**Ciara Merrick** is a PhD candidate of Geography at the University of Bristol.

## **Bon Mott**

### *Lightning is Created from the Fifth Element: Plasma*

Lightning is created from the fifth element: plasma. It navigates feminist art through intersecting themes of "energy", "being", "the intangible", "the liminal" and "the in-between". When Bon Scott, the singer songwriter of the Australian group AC/DC, was asked if he was "AC or DC"— abbreviation of alternating and direction current — he answered: "Neither, I'm the lightning flash in the middle". Plasma, an electrical conductor derived from positive and negative ions, allows lightning to be seen through electrical forces.

The symbology of the lightning flash in-between incites Gilbert Simondon's philosophy of the "Obscure Zone". Lightning passes through, and structures itself between ionized corridors of air within an energy system providing "vital" and psychic possibilities" of "collaboration between humans and technology", creating an internal resonance which cannot be grasped.

For philosopher Luce Irigaray, between-two is "the interval" where thought and life can collaborate. "'The interval' is full potential, consisting of "attractions, tensions, and acts between form and matter. Any attempt at a definition of the interval would amount to suppressing the interval's specific dynamics" (Rebecca Hill, 2014).

Carl Jung's alchemical conception of "Transference" and "Prankster" combine with Scott's humour and "double entendres" and transmute Bon Mott to perform as a hybrid ghost/energy figure. The lightning in-between is my creative practice—inspired in this instance by the work of Luce Irigaray—employing the media of sculpture, film, photography, lighting effects, vocals, sonic looping, choreography, and performance art. Cinematographic narratives and music composition of the films "Under The Skin", "Night of the Hunter", "Mulholland Drive", and "See the Sea" provide visual and aural guidance. By layering film projections and images of Mott's choreography upon Mott's performance, there is an invocation of the ghost. Irigaray's definition of the ghost is the relation between two and la terre/mère: "she who knows how to re-turn (upon herself)".

**Bon Mott**, a visual and sound artist, is a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne.



### Panel 3: Rethinking the Subject

#### Irving Goh

##### *Le rejet de Luce Irigaray, or, the Reject and Plant Life in Through Vegetal Being*

This paper will look at one of Irigaray's latest works, *Through Vegetal Being*, written in quasi-dialogue with Michael Marder. It will consider Irigaray's taking into account of plant life in her philosophy, and put that in relation with her continued insistence on the notion of the "subject," or more specifically, on the engendering of the world, if not a better world, by at least two "subjects," one feminine and the other masculine. Despite Irigaray's good intentions for both feminist thought and the future of the world, I would argue that her taking recourse to the "subject" risks subordinating plant life to more human concerns. I propose, then, to articulate what I have called the "reject," instead, when thinking about plant life. In a way, *Through Vegetal Being* recounts in large part, after all, Irigaray's rejection (*rejet*, in French) from social, cultural, and institutional circles, which had precisely led to her (re)turn to plant life. More critically, though, and if one allows the translation of "reject" into *rejet* in French, the articulation of "reject" might break with anthropocentric and/ or anthropomorphic tendencies and give plant life due recognition or even eminence, since *rejet* in French also bears a botanical sense, signifying a new growth springing forth from an existing stem of a plant. There are e(thi)co-philosophical stakes in articulating the "reject," in other words, and I will elucidate them no less in my reading of *Through Vegetal Being*.

**Irving Goh PhD** President's Assistant Professor of Literature, National University of Singapore.

#### Yanbing Er

##### *Anticipations, Afterlives: The Temporal Reorientations of Sexual Difference*

This paper focuses on anticipation as a critical mode for theorising feminist temporalities. I draw from earlier readings of Luce Irigaray's conceptual paradigm of sexual difference to examine how its articulation of a feminist future that is inherently unknowable might contribute to recent debates on the temporalities of feminist thought. My paper presents two broadly intersecting lines of argument. I first emphasise the continued centrality of sexual difference as an anticipatory framework for thinking feminism, but – or perhaps, especially – through a contradictory retrieval of the term in a necessary renarration of the contemporary contours of its significance. Secondly, I build upon Drucilla Cornell's contentions in *Beyond Accommodation* (1991) that the unknown futurity inaugurated by the trajectories of sexual difference demands a dimension of inquiry that is inevitably aesthetic. This paper accordingly positions Cornell's claim alongside several observations on the focal displacement of literature as a site of feminist theorising in recent decades, to argue that the afterlives of the



literary that endure in contemporary feminist theory carry a compelling resonance to the complex potential of anticipation that sexual difference puts forth for feminism.

**Yanbing Er** PhD is a lecturer at the School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures, University of Edinburgh.

### **Wesley Barker**

#### *Body in Rhetoric, Body as Rhetoric: A Theological Ethic of the Lips*

In consideration of how conceptions of the material-discursive distinction shape religious commitments to particular ethical and political action, this paper explores Irigaray's invocation of fleshy language as a rhetorical device that explores the slippage between materiality and discourse in order to elicit the fullness and ambiguity of embodied eros. Specifically, I revisit Irigaray's "lips" playing in/with the eroticism of language and pleasure, as a way to evaluate the ethics of rhetorically destabilizing bodies for theological futures.

"When Our Lips Speak Together," is perhaps the most famous exaltation of lips in Irigaray's work; however, she also uses the language of lips to make an explicitly theological turn in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Here, the use of the lips to make the theological turn rhetorically frames the relationship between discourse and the body in eros as indeterminate incarnation, incarnation that is always becoming, always reaching, never grasping. Irigaray's use of the lips mark the pleasures of flesh becoming words in speech. And that she uses these lips, these flesh-become-word, to turn to the word become flesh of incarnation invites the reader to remember that bodies are incarnations. The fleshy lips articulate a space for thinking about becoming a subject in accordance with one's desires through a play with rather than an outright rejection of discursive constraints; the lips invoke the space between the discursive and the material using the fleshiness of rhetoric to shape a space for thinking erotically, maintaining the space that prevents two from being collapsed into one. Tracing Irigaray's lips along these thresholds of flesh, desire, and language, this paper concludes that a theological ethic of the lips would be one that reads this intertwining as flesh and signification reaching for one another without determining each other in the sweet bitterness of eros.

**Wesley Barker** is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies, Department of Liberal Studies, Mercer University.

### **Plenary Session III**

**Yvette Russell***The Force of Sexual Difference: Rape, Law and Woman's Voices*

In his 1989 lecture 'Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"', Derrida claims that deconstruction is the ultimate 'threat to droit, or law or right, and ruins the condition of the very possibility of justice'. It is deconstruction that exposes the 'walled up silence' in the violent structure of the founding act, that destabilises and complicates 'the opposition between law, convention, [and] institution on the one hand, and nature on the other...' In this paper I confront the Force of Law in the context of my own research into the law of rape in England and Wales and the courtroom space of the rape trial. The deconstructive impulse in which Derrida sees justice, I argue, must account for the erased voices of women upon whose bodies the weight of the law draws its legitimacy. The paper considers the failure of liberal law reform initiatives to account for the 'justice gap' in the reporting, recording, prosecution and conviction of rape. I argue that the law is complicit in its own failure because it is structurally invested, for its own survival and coherence, in the exclusion and erasure of woman's voice, which represents the possibility of a plural form of being and thinking and is thus a fundamental challenge to the legitimacy of law. I revisit Elizabeth Grosz's reflections on the 'Force of Sexual Difference' (2005) in light of Irigaray's latest work in *To Be Born* (2017) considering what it might require of law to end rape. Returning finally to the question of judgment, I draw on Peter Goodrich's (1996) research on minor jurisprudences and the 'Courts of Love' in France, first recorded in the twelfth century. I consider what it might mean to orientate oneself towards an alternative genealogy of the common law and to adjudicate according to principles not fundamentally underpinned by the monistic imagination of sexual indifference and the phallogocentric logic of positive law.

**Yvette Russell** is a lecturer in law at the University of Bristol Law School. Her research intersects the areas of criminal law and feminist philosophy. Her principal research interest is the law of rape in the UK, and her current project is an Irigarayan analysis of legal discourse in and around the rape trial and in historical context. Her research and teaching focuses on the theoretical elements of feminist scholarship, and in particular French poststructuralist and queer theories, as well as critical race approaches. Yvette is a Co-ordinating Editor of the international law journal *Feminist Legal Studies*.

**Panel 4: In Relation to Nature**

**Emily Holmes***Becoming without Sacrifice: Women, Religion, and the Vegetal in Contemporary Food Ethics*

This paper addresses the question of sacrifice in the context of contemporary food ethics with reference to feminist theory. In various contemporary food writers, the language and imagery of sacrifice at first appears to offer a plausible explanatory framework for an ethical approach to (meat) eating in which the life of the animal is respected, even made sacred, offered both to God and for human sustenance. Drawing on feminist thinkers such as Nancy Jay and Luce Irigaray, I suggest that the symbolism of sacrifice, uncritically invoked, must be treated with caution in light of its gendered associations, lest food theorists reenact gendered forms of violence in their efforts to resolve the ethical dilemma of eating animals. While religious and theological language is frequently used to convey the depth of meaning in the production and consumption of food, the language of sacrifice in particular risks reinforcing the power of the male priesthood (Jay) and reenacting an originary maternal sacrifice (Irigaray). This paper suggests as an alternative that the language of givenness (an economy of the gift without sacrifice or loss) might better convey the profound transformation of death into life that occurs through the process of eating. In a Christian theological context, this perspective further entails an interpretation of the Eucharist as meal of confession (of the violence of our hunger) and thanksgiving (for the givenness of food/life) rather than as a reenactment of an atoning sacrifice. I conclude by exploring these religious concepts in light of Luce Irigaray's recent writings on becoming in the context of the vegetal world.

**Emily Holmes** is Associate Professor of Religion at the Christian Brothers University.

**Marcia Morgan***Rethinking "Nature": The Relationship of Luce Irigaray's Works to Environmental Philosophy*

In this paper, I will explore and analyze the relationship between the writings of Luce Irigaray and environmental philosophy as a means to rethink the concept of "nature." Much work has been done in the tradition of critical theory to elaborate the problematic of the constructiveness of "nature." For example, Andrew Biro has underscored the antinomy embedded within our contemporary predicament as we seek to avoid essentializing nature, on the one hand, and yet aim to limit domination over nature, on the other hand. Two recent books, outline and develop this problematic compellingly: Steven Vogel's 2015 publication, *Thinking Like a Mall*, and Biro's 2005 monograph, *Denaturalizing Ecological Politics: Alienation from Nature from Rousseau to the Frankfurt School and Beyond*. Additionally, in his early work, *Against Nature*, Vogel made clear that we have been well instructed by the early critical theorists (including Lukács and the Frankfurt School thinkers) that there is no given "nature." Vogel concludes his monograph by turning to the work of Juergen Habermas



and discourse ethics, entering what we could call a theory of communicative authenticity in our engagement against any domination over human nature or the natural environment. In contrast to Habermasian discourse ethics, I turn to the “silence” in and of Irigaray’s literary constructions as an antidote to the antinomy inherent within environmental philosophy characterized by critical theory. I aim to understand alternative measures to philosophize “nature” and human ethical engagement with it, in order to present a more robust framework than that permitted by a project limited only within the constraints of critical theory of nature.

**Marcia Morgan** is Associate Professor of Philosophy, Director of Women's & Gender Studies, Muhlenberg College.

### **Héctor Ramos**

#### *(Nature) In Excess of Specularization*

In this paper, I illustrate how in Irigaray’s “early works” of the 1970s, exemplified by *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex Which Is Not One*, written before what has been identified as Irigaray’s move to a realist essentialist conception of woman and a more explicitly expressed philosophy of nature, Irigaray is already clearly committed to a conception of nature which is connected to and supportive of her critique of monosexual culture and thought and the erasure of sexual difference in the Western tradition. I interrogate Alison Stone’s claim that in the early period of Irigaray’s work, the latter’s affirmation of natural sexual difference is subordinated to a political essentialist project which deploys this identity against on the erasure and devaluation of female identity by western culture and thought. In contrast to this claim, I affirm that Irigaray’s critique of this erasure and devaluation, including her mimetic and critical engagement with traditional philosophy, is informed by her commitment to a conception of nature, a nature which monosexual economies and systems of symbolization have endeavored to render invisible because they cannot incorporate it. Furthermore, I show how conceptual economies centered around the self-same subject and the related ideal of form held above matter, are unable to accommodate nature into their systems of symbolization, instead rendering invisible nature and the female bodies existing in nature, and incorporating a specularized version of these realities into these systems to strengthen that very economy which disavows the existence of these realities. Additionally, I explore an illustrative case of Irigaray’s early project of mimetic critique of Western monosexual culture and thought is conducted against a commitment to a conception of nature in her engagement (in *Speculum*) with Platonism, the paradigmatic economy of the Idea, foundational for Western intellectual tradition and its erasure of sexual difference.

**Héctor Ramos** is a PhD student in philosophy at DePaul University.



## Panel 5: Irigaray and the Built Environment

### Michael Lucas

*She Speaks in Threes: Irigaray, Immanence and Transcendence at the Threshold between Phenomenology and Speculative Realism in Teaching Architecture*

In *Forgetting the Air* in Martin Heidegger Irigaray discerns Heidegger's metaphor of ground to have hidden limiting hierarchy. This allows her to expand the spectrum of immanence within phenomenology to include gendered space within every situation. This momentum was sustained into architectural realms [Rawes, Wheeler], and one of the dominant threads of architectural theory the last generation has been a weaving of a reawakened phenomenology, embodiment [Weiss, Grosz] and affect [Lavin]. Metaphors of passage, flow, touch, sensing, immersion, are common in design student discourse.

Harman has posited a differing critique of Heidegger, challenging the anthropocentric undercurrent in his phenomenology as inadequate to describe a world beyond self, complexified by eco-phenomenology [Toadvine], with definitions of nature inadequate, and clouded by complex hyperobjects [Morton] such as weather. In this zone Harman and others begin a project of a flattened ontology within speculative realism where both objects and relationships/networks [Latour] are liberated from their hierarchic moorings.

Architectural design, like language, uses representations as proxies for corporeal and material realities. Ideas and representations manifest as objects entering as interventions into world measurable and immeasurable. Design allows for a unique form of knowledge and affordance in support of existential phenomenology, where creativity dislodges conventional thinking. As architects re-embrace a problematic concept of objects via speculative realism, what cautionary words can the study of Irigaray offer to designers at the threshold between phenomenology and speculative realism? In Irigaray's concept of the sensible transcendental [Haynes, Tilghman] Rendell reflects, 'From this threshold...it is possible. to be attentive to the concerns of theory and at the same time consider modes of practice... She speaks in threes. 1 and 1 is three...her speech is tripled'.

The talk will be illustrated by work conceptualized, developed, and realized at full scale by students in their initial year of study of architecture.

**Michael Lucas** is Professor of Architecture / Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, California Polytechnic State University.

### Claire Potter



*Inversions, Volumes, Negativity: Lines of Dialogue Between Irigaray & Zaha Hadid*

This paper will examine the architectural work of Zaha Hadid in relation to the feminist philosophy of Luce Irigaray, drawing most notably upon Irigaray's *Speculum* in order to suggest a radical structural, as well as intrinsic, dialogue between the two lines of thought and practice. Exploring the sense of an uncontainable volume in Hadid's most recent work in Baku as well as her early interests in exploding and floating weights, this paper will seek to draw parallels with Irigaray's early thought on envelopes, inversions and volumes as well as her later work on poetics, nature and relational difference. If we can measure Hadid's work in the increments that lean, work away from and against the vertical/horizontal plane and between form and matter, we can also find examples of these inclinations in Irigaray's practice that recognises as well as reasserts the presence of a negative interval in the Aristotean topos of place and hylomorphism. By reading Hadid's work through the lens of an Irigarayan practice and by extending Irigaray's reading of Aristotle's hierarchy of form and matter, this paper argues for not only lines of dialogue across discourses – architecture and feminist philosophy – but, more importantly, for ways in which our thinking can be translated into a concrete expression, such as Hadid's, of shared relational and dialogic place that preserves the experience of negativity and depicts a profound sense of the maternal.

**Claire Potter** is a designer based in the UK.

**Louise Burchill**

*Irigaray: Architecture in the feminine?*

Elizabeth Grosz's "Women, chora, Dwelling"—essentially an elaboration of certain tenets of Luce Irigaray's work—has often been situated as seminal to contemporary feminist perspectives on space and architecture. Focussing on the Platonic notion of *chôra*—the inaugural concept, within the Western tradition, of space in general, as distinct from the space occupied by any particular thing—, Grosz argues Plato to have no less forged thereby a "founding concept" of the "disembodied femininity" that, associated within our tradition with determinations of space as homogeneous and undifferentiated, has served as the ground or "mute substratum" for the production of our man-made world. Particularly indicting architecture and the built environment, in this regard, for their "appropriation and disenfranchisement of femininity," Grosz concludes that *chôra* offers no resources for rethinking space, time, and dwelling, and specifically queries the value of Jacques Derrida's reconceptualization of *chôra*, space and spatiality for a feminist approach to architectural theory and practice. Theorists seeking to rethink space, time, and dwelling in a manner that would no longer erase, or distort, women's specificity would better turn, she argues, to the work of Irigaray, whose analyses of our culture's constitutive non-recognition of the debt it owes to the "maternal-feminine," qua the primordial space from which all subjects emerge,



underlie Grosz's description of chôra as veritably emblematic of the "endless metaphORIZATION of femininity" that serves as "the condition for men's self-representation and cultural reproduction."

By revisiting Grosz' text, alongside those of other feminist and/or architectural theorists and practitioners mobilizing the thought of Irigaray, I would like to propose a different reading of chôra, architecture, and "the feminine" that, while claiming chôra could, in its feminist implications, open up a radically new approach to architecture, nonetheless accredits Irigaray to have offered us the "foundations" of an architecture in the feminine.

**Louise Burchill** is Visiting Lecturer in Contemporary French Philosophy, Aesthetics, & Feminist Thought at the University of Melbourne.

## **Panel 6: Trans Identities and Queer Births**

**Athena Colman**

### *The Existential Scratch of Sexual Difference*

With the emergence of the discipline of trans-studies, which has sought to theorize trans-identities in their multiplicity, it would that Irigaray's positing of the question of sexual difference as ontological difference has been outstripped by the specificity of the phenomena she sought to attend to: embodied sexual difference. And yet, rather than lay the question of sexual difference to rest, trans discourses and experiences continue to be haunted by the age old hierarchized binary oppositions theorized decades ago. For instance, Julia Serano detects the assumption of the inferiority of women and femininity operative in many instances of 'transphobia.' Her analysis of 'trans-misogyny' extends feminist insights: "In a male-centered gender hierarchy, where it is assumed that men are better than women and that masculinity is superior to femininity, there is no greater perceived threat than the existence of trans women, who despite being born male and inheriting male privilege 'choose' to be female instead." Thus, it would seem that we must tarry a little while longer with the question of sexual difference.

This paper enacts that tarrying by remaining with the ontological stakes of sexual difference - through a response to Irigaray posed by Merleau-Ponty's thinking as it is developed in his later thought. While there is significant work on Irigaray's engagement with Merleau-Ponty, in what follows, I draw out Irigaray's thought in the moments where I find her closest to Merleau-Ponty, deploying resonances in their thinking as a way to open up an account of the ontological emergence of gender that attends to the specificity of its arising. It is Irigaray's vigilance to the question, which illuminates - for reasons philosophical, phenomenological and political - that a thinking is required which speaks to trans-identities, gender variance, and the existential scratch of sexual difference.



**Athena Colman** is Graduate Program Director and Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, Brock University

**Rachel Jones**

*Placental Economies and Queer Births: Revisiting the Sensible Transcendental*

One of the most intriguing ideas in Irigaray's corpus to date is that of the sensible transcendental. In this paper, I will revisit interpretations of this idea by key commentators such as Whitford, Lorraine, and Ingram. While drawing on their insights, I will suggest that we need to situate Irigaray's generative coupling of the sensible with the transcendental in relation to the specifically post-Kantian aspects of her project in order to fully appreciate the ways in which each term re-inflects and transforms the other. Deliberately—and by Kantian standards, improperly—blurring the relation between the transcendental and transcendence, Irigaray's 'sensible transcendental' needs to be situated within her elemental, non-hylomorphic rethinking of both materiality and sexuate difference.

To develop this claim, I will appeal to Irigaray's suggestive work on the 'placental economy', a figure that appears intermittently throughout her writings, from its most explicit introduction in *Je tu nous* (1990) to *Sharing the World* (2008) and most recently, *To Be Born* (2017). By reading this figure back through the project of *Speculum*, I will suggest that it plays a crucial role in Irigaray's answer to the question: 'But what if the "object" started to speak?' Non-oppositional, fluidly mater-ial placental economies provide us with a model of relationally constituted, singular existents who are neither subject nor object, active nor passive, but always somewhere inbetween, incorporating difference/s through the generation of relations.

Approached in this way, the figure of the placental economy offers an account of pregnancy, gestation and birth as queerly generative, resisting a logic of the Same in ways that are at odds with both (neo-)liberal individualism and reproductive heteronormativity. The problematic reinscription of the heterosexual couple in some of Irigaray's later writings is thereby undercut and displaced by the queer coupling of the sensible with the transcendental that the placental economy instantiates.

**Rachel Jones** is Associate Professor of Philosophy, Women & Gender Studies, George Mason University

**Luara Karlson-Carp**

*Irigaray's Ethics of Sexual Difference and the Transgender Other*



Irigaray's ethics of sexual difference is based in an ontology of irreducible difference between man and woman. Without the cultivation of this difference, we are precluded from encountering the alterity of the other as other, instead caught in a specular maze of reflection and projection. For Irigaray, sexual difference is the ultimate anchor of alterity. An ethics based in the unknowability of the sexually different other therefore engenders the possibility of a non-hierarchical encounter with alterity. The emergence of such an ethics would support the recognition of otherness beyond sexuate alterity, paradigmatically enabling the capacity for encountering all forms of otherness.

However, does this ethic of alterity extend to the transgender other? In a socio-political climate where the violent othering of trans-bodies is legitimated via discourses that stipulate which sexed bodies count as "real" men and women, to insist upon an ontological understanding of sexual difference seems profoundly unethical. The application of Irigaray's ethics to the transgender other is caught in a paradox: if the ability to encounter otherness as such is predicated upon the cultivation of sexual difference as ontological difference, transgender subjectivity would seem to directly contravene such cultivation. Yet the transgender other is in dire need of an ethical encounter, as rates of violence against this community show.

In this paper I ask whether it is possible to think the transgender other within the terms of Irigaray's ethics of sexual difference. Moving through Lacanian imaginings of transgender subjectivity as aligned with the feminine logic of the hysteric and Irigaray's later engagement with Heideggerian ontology, my paper will seek to reveal both the promise and concrete limits to Irigaray's ethics of sexual difference — hoping to prove that this question is not only generative for Irigarayan scholarship but for transgender studies, queer theory and gender studies more broadly.

**Luara Karlson-Carp**, School of Social and Political Science, University of Melbourne.

## **Panel 7: Reading with Irigaray in Film and Literature**

### **Elsbeth Mitchell**

#### *The Girl: Irigaray and the Moving Image*

The girl is a critical point for the revolution of culture, according to Luce Irigaray. Following this we can productively trace Irigaray's engagement with the girl over several decades through her philosophy. This ranges from her important critiques of the Freudian little girl in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, to later considerations of Antigone, Persephone/Kore and the little girl's dialogue with the mother. These texts take up and question the discourses of myth, linguistics, psychoanalysis and philosophy with clear attention to the girl but also through an



engagement which is framed by her primary philosophical concern — the question of sexuate difference.

Engaging with a shift in feminist film theory that takes up Irigaray's writing in the context of narrative cinema, this paper explores how Irigaray's emphasis on sexuate difference in relation to linguistics, corporeality and gesture offer a way to read the encounter with girls on screen. Specifically, this paper offers a reading of the films of Chantal Akerman in conversation with Irigarayan philosophy to address the figure of the girl. By doing so it aims to signal to the importance of closely reading for the specificity of the girl in cultural practices of this kind. The paper then suggests how films such as Akerman's speak to, and intervene in, the important feminist and philosophical debates surrounding sexuality, desire, subjectivity and screen-based practices.

**Elsbeth Mitchell** is a PhD candidate at the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies, University of Leeds.

### **Tessa Nunn**

#### *Hail Mary's Lips, he said*

Jean-Luc Godard's films pose many problems for feminists; yet, they are rich sites for exploring the problems of patriarchal societies. His controversial 1985 film *Hail Mary* (*Je vous salue Marie*) provides particularly interesting representations of the maternal, emphasizing its connections to fluidity, the divine, and nature. But he designates men as the masters and lawmakers defining and representing these three concepts. The film's female protagonist follows the rule of nature as a body but remains an object of the rule of masculine law.

Using Irigaray's texts on the repression of the maternal and borrowing her strategy of inhabiting a work upholding patriarchal traditions, I explore and pinpoint *Hail Mary's* failure to acknowledge women in their sexual difference. Despite creating a film about a mother, Godard fails to acknowledge any debt to the maternal. He instead reminds us that men establish law, conquer nature, determine religion, and efface maternal genealogies. The film's central character Mary, a modern-day Virgin, lacks access to language. As is the case for many of Godard's female characters, she cites texts written by men instead of producing a discourse unique to her character. The film prioritizes her physical body as an object over her voice as a speaking subject. The film's final shot, a close-up of Mary's lips as she hesitatingly puts on lipstick, summarizes the constant phallic presence disrupting her attempts to speak, to become, to experience pleasure.

Through my analysis of the film, I demonstrate the importance of Irigaray's work for cinematic representations/repressions of the maternal and its implications for women gaining



subjectivity in cinema. Why has cinema failed to represent the maternal? How has this failure prevented women from gaining subjectivity in films? How can Godard's failure to represent the maternal help us reconsider the role of cinema in positively acknowledging sexual difference?

**Tessa Nunn** is a PhD student in Romance Studies at Duke University.

### **Lior Levy**

#### *Hedda Gabler and the Effacement of Feminine Identity: Reading Ibsen with Irigaray*

In "Notes for a Modern Tragedy," written in preparation for *A Doll's House*, Ibsen proclaims: "A woman cannot be herself in modern society. It is an exclusively male society, with laws made by men and with prosecutors and judges who assess feminine conduct from a masculine standpoint." Written eleven years after *A Doll's House*, *Hedda Gabler* dramatizes this very claim, representing the dire consequences women face when they cannot be themselves. Drawing on Irigaray's readings of the Greek tragedies, and returning to *Hedda Gabler* via these readings, the paper argues that Ibsen's play – the only one of his plays named, like *Medea*, *Antigone*, and *Electra*, after its female protagonist – ties together genre and gender. Since *Hedda* cannot have a female self, she cannot be herself. Thus, she must die.

On Irigaray's reading of Greek tragedies, the death and demise of their heroines attest to the inability to represent women as women – or, as Ibsen says, the inability to allow women to be themselves – in the existing phallogocentric culture. Following Irigaray, the paper argues that gender and genre are not two distinct epistemic categories through which we can understand *Hedda Gabler*, but that the impossibility of articulating female personhood, indeed the impossibility of living as a woman, determines the course of the play and structure our interpretative possibilities. Focusing on the opening and final scenes of the play, I demonstrate that *Hedda*'s appearance onstage becomes a trope through which Ibsen investigates her ability to appear as an intelligible person, to herself, to other characters, and ultimately to us. Frustrating our ability to make sense of *Hedda*'s figure, the play draws attention to the roots of this inability in the operation of the phallogocentric order. Like the Greek tragedies, *Hedda Gabler* questions the sexually indifferent cultural order, under which women cannot be themselves.

**Lior Levy** is Assistant Professor at the department for Philosophy of Literature, University of Haifa.

### **Karen Burke Memorial Prize Lecture**



## **Ruthanne Crapo**

### *A Living Ecology of Respect: Practicing an Irigarayan Ethic*

In our current global order, as Vandana Shiva aptly notes, women, children, and the environment are often last. However, scholars in environmental ethics rarely analyze the metaphysical connection Luce Irigaray reveals between sexuate ontology and sexuate ethics, or why those who develop arguments for ecological respect ought to consider the matter of sex and why sex matters. This presentation suggests that Irigaray's critique of the present sexual economy and her subsequent formation of sexuate difference as a necessary condition to develop an ethical limit are fruitful and under analyzed sources for environmental ethics and ethical decision-making. In this presentation, I delineate the beginnings of an Irigarayan ethic to demonstrate how her concepts can have practical application toward rethinking existing environmental dilemmas. I place her work in conversation with ecological feminism, offering a "living" universal as a way to reconcile other differences, such as race, class, age, orientation, and ability. As we seek to mitigate the environmental degradation that harms disproportionately those deemed "other," I argue Irigaray's work offers a way to share our world justly and felicitously in its all wonder.

**Ruthanne Crapo** is a Professor of Philosophy at Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MCTC). Ruthanne's research areas include contemporary continental philosophy, philosophical anthropology, social feminist philosophy, philosophy of religion, ethics, environmental ethics, and environmental justice.

## **Panel 8: Irigarayan Politics of Birth and Death**

### **Maria Fannin**

#### *What a child can teach us: reflections on Luce Irigaray's To Be Born*

Luce Irigaray writes in her recent book *To Be Born* that the child gives birth to itself. Her claim that the child is usually perceived as a helpless and vulnerable being wholly dependent on another and is not only a bundle of needs but a living, breathing, expressing and feeling human being, challenges us to think in new ways about the child. First, the dependency of the child on the mother is one of the tenets underlying much maternalist thinking. In this view, mothering and attending to the needs and dependence of another is an embodied and day-to-day practice of care that can underpin a particular way of think that is philosophical. Caring for a dependent other requires considering the other's needs for someone else to provide the most basic and essential requirements of life: food, shelter, warmth, and comfort. Luce Irigaray's call to consider the child as more than a bundle of needs suggests that in the child's very first breath outside the maternal body it already possesses the fullness of its human potential for desiring, seeking pleasure, experiencing frustration, and exploring the world.



This directedness of the child challenges the emphasis in some sociological theories of mothering on the child's passivity because it attributes to the child an agency that the child is rarely granted. It invites us to see the child through a different perspective, to see the child as frustrated by the limits placed on its desire for becoming, stymied in its exploration of its body and its difference from others and left without the beneficial teaching of many of the most important elements of life. This paper reflects on Luce Irigaray's elaboration of the relationship with the child at birth, and on what the child's birth can teach us.

**Maria Fannin** PhD is a Senior Lecturer and Research Fellow in Geographical Sciences at the University of Bristol

### **Sabrina Hom**

#### *White Nationalism as Phallogocentrism: Irigaray and the Curious Case of White Supremacist Miscegenation*

The idea of a mixed-race white nationalist, or a white supremacist in an interracial relationship, seems at first like a joke. But from far-right Dutch politician Geert Wilders to the racially motivated mass murderer Elliot Rodger, both mixed-race, from neo-Nazi, alt-right and white nationalist leaders like Mike Enoch (revealed to be married to a Jewish woman), John Derbyshire (married to a Chinese woman) and Richard Spencer (known for dating Asian woman), this phenomenon is quite common, and understanding it is useful to understanding resurgent white nationalisms.

This phenomenon can only be understood if we also understand that white supremacy is always white male supremacy, an intrinsically patriarchal worldview. While Irigaray's analyses are sometimes critiqued for centering on sex and sidelining concerns of race, her framework for thinking reproductive labor, phallogocentrism, and blood proves useful in understanding the intrinsic patriarchy of white supremacy. At the same time, applying such an analysis to white supremacist communities also leads us to new insight about the workings of patriarchy.

In my paper I will argue that Irigaray, like most other theorists who theorize women's reproductive labor within patriarchy, lacks an analysis of the bifurcation of the maternal. Within her analysis, women reduced to the maternal function are indistinguishable even by generation. On the contrary, "the maternal function" is bifurcated, along lines that are generally raced and classed. This bifurcation creates two classes of mothers: those who produce heirs to the family property and the family line, and those who produce property (in the case of enslaved women) or children who are otherwise outside the line of inheritance. This interpretation explains both the vehement commitment to control white women's sexuality and their sanguinity toward white men's sexual relationships with nonwhite women--especially those women who, like Asian women, have been stereotyped as



submissive and traditional. An Irigarayan perspective, supplemented with an understanding of the racialization of maternity, helps us to understand how, as Rachel Johnson puts it, “sexism and white supremacy are deeply intertwined and mutually reinforcing.”

**Sabrina Hom** is Assistant Professor and Coordinator of the Women's and Gender Studies Program, Georgia College and State University.

### **Chung-yi Chu**

#### *Irigaray's Return to the Forgotten Beginning*

Luce Irigaray's penultimate publication *In the Beginning, She Was* (2013) could and should be read as a continuation of her critique of Western patriarchal system with a twist of some constructive thoughts.

Unlike Julia Kristéva who claims “In the beginning was love” in her book “*In the Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*” (1987), Irigaray shows a less ambivalent attitude toward the nature, woman, Goddess figure. Whether the “She” in her book title refers to Goddess, or to the child's mother, she insists on acknowledging directly the necessary and ineradicable presence of the feminine.

Hence in this sense, Irigaray's return to our cultural fountainhead is extremely meaningful and significant. The Other (as God or Goddess) in every culture is imagined differently. Yet with no proper departure, humans also could not have proper return. As Irigaray criticizes the current return mode after estrangement in her article “The Return,” she finds this “return” does not really work. As she sees Ulysses in *The Odyssey* spends ten years wandering around to return “home,” she still finds him extremely self-centered as well as self-affected.

But what is a proper departure? How can we reclaim life when a lot of people believe along with Heidegger that being is “being toward death”? Irigaray advocates an authentic return in order to rejuvenate the already closed as well as open self. To do so, to “remember” one's birth properly would be indispensable. Yet how can this be achieved? I shall try to elaborate her return to the kind of beginning forgotten by most people.

**Chung-yi Chu** is a Professor at the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, National ChungHsing University (NCHU).

### **Panel 9: Aesthetic Practices**



## **Jeff Stewart**

*More Prose than Philosophy: Irigaray and the Possibility of Writing*

*'The one we love also gives us words'*

Some time ago Luce Irigaray edited a paper I presented for publication in one of her books of Teachings. Her comments highlighted the distance, or abstractness that my writing was actually engaged in while purporting to be doing otherwise. Irigaray suggested I could perhaps locate the writing deeper within the real, within this becoming world, and my own lived relations with others – more directly with this day and this night. What she said is a constant reminder of what may be possible in the writing of theory, but also in prose or poetry, and the very real difficulty of that possibility. My paper will turn to Irigaray's writing to help say what it may be to write this difficulty, while also introducing a number of my own prose poems from nature and living with others. This prose will not be used as an illustration of any particular theoretical understanding, but rather in speaking for itself act as interruptions to those theoretical moments. Moments that will expand upon the possibility of Irigaray's writing on nature's saying of itself; the significance of Irigaray naming her poems everyday prayers; and the importance of attention as noun and attending to, as verb to writing towards the saying of the real and its becoming; and the possibility of being present with the act of writing through lived experience.

By writing both critical responses to Irigaray's thinking, and a number of prose pieces that arise, in part, from the affect of that thinking, I hope to begin to enact a response to Irigaray's initial criticisms, and see where this takes the writing and myself, with the listener/reader.

**Jeff Stewart** is an Independent Scholar and Artist based in Australia.

## **Anna Bunting-Branch**

*The Linguists: Suzette Haden Elgin/Luce Irigaray*

This twenty-minute presentation explores the influence of Luce Irigaray on the construction of Láadan, an experiment with 'women's language' (1) staged by writer and linguist Suzette Haden Elgin in her science fiction trilogy *Native Tongue* (1984-1994). The relation between Elgin and Irigaray is framed in the context of fandom with reference to my own feminist fan fiction, a short animation titled *The Linguists* (2017).

The presentation elaborates on Elgin's brief citation of *This Sex Which Is Not One* (2) to explore how Irigaray's early work informed her thinking about language and sexual difference, the structuring of reality, and the perceptions of women. The presentation addresses a number of political and methodological resonances between Elgin and Irigaray. Firstly, their shared commitment to 'language work' (3) and the transformation of existing



modes of linguistic relation. Secondly, how the poetics of the hole or gap – as representative of perceived feminine lack – is employed by both Elgin and Irigaray to enable speculations about what different ways of thinking and speaking remain possible within existing language structures. Thirdly, their concern for gendered discourse, and the productions of genre.

Moving towards its conclusion, the presentation addresses Elgin’s use of genre – and specifically the fan communities of science fiction – as the site of her Láadan experiment. The presentation considers what it might mean to frame Elgin’s relationship to Irigaray’s thought in fannish, rather than academic terms. What does it mean to relate to academic practices as a fan? What can the model of fan production offer to academic practice? Addressing Anna Bunting-Branch, *The Linguists*, HD video with sound, 2017 critiques of Irigaray’s work, the presentation concludes that just as the creation of fan fictions known as “fix-it fic” can transform dominant narratives into new feminist productions; so too can it offer a model for generative, critical engagement between different feminist practices. A genealogy of fannish relations will be contextualised with reference to a piece of my own artwork, *The Linguists* (2017). The presentation will end with a screening of this short animation, which was inspired by the work of Luce Irigaray and Suzette Haden Elgin’s Láadan experiment.

**Anna Bunting-Branch** is a PhD candidate at the Slade School of Fine Art, UCL.

### **Nicole Lenzi**

#### *The Fluid Feminine*

Eastern philosophy and Luce Irigaray’s *Elemental Passions* have influenced my drawings and installations. In both Irigaray’s work and Lao Tzu’s *Tao’s Te Ching*, male and female are interdependent. The *Tao* and *Elemental Passions* are both perpetuated by yielding to the feminine. The poetic texts evolve forward because of this mutual relationship.

In these excerpts from *Elemental Passions*, the feminine speaks to the masculine to interplay. Irigaray writes, “The framework you impose and posit as a given is your skin... For me, nothing is ever finite. What does not pass through skin, between our skins, mingles in our body’s fluids. Ours. Or at least mine. And mine is continuous with yours...” (Irigaray, 1992) She continues this later in the text, “Everywhere you shut me in. Always you assign a place with me... You frame. Encircle. Bury. Entomb? Only a spiritual body could escape.” (Irigaray, 1992) In both quotes, the fluid feminine force urges the masculine energy to open and conjoin.

A similar phenomena happens in my expanded drawing installations; *Time Lines*. When a drawing expands into the space; it depends upon the angles, light, and curves of the architecture to thrive. The space is the masculine force in the work; hard edged, unmoving,



and solid. The drawing becomes the female energy that openly and fluidly spreads within its environment, merging both together.

**Nicole Lenzi** is an artist based in the United States.

## **Panel 10: Feminist, Mimesis, and Speculation**

### **Jonas Green**

#### *Mimesis and Female Jouissance: Exploring Difference through the Body*

Mimesis as a term and a strategy in Irigaray's work has mainly been interpreted as a means of undermining the phallogocentric logic that excludes the feminine, however, Irigaray also hints at a specific feminine experience of sexuality as physical experience (Irigaray, 1985). Her exploration of feminine jouissance has been dismissed as essentialistic (Moi, 1987) or as a misreading of Lacan (Mitchell 1982). The crime that Irigaray commits is to use a terminology to describe the relation between the norm and the excluded that is still burdened by these norms.

The process of mimesis in Irigaray's work, however, should not be reduced to performative reproductions of discursive tropes; by using sexed language without offering the escape of ironic deconstruction of this sexed language, Irigaray's texts engages the flesh. Irigaray's mimetic process avoids the detachment of deconstruction as defensive mechanism by developing a method of deconstruction that does not only engage in fissures and lacunas of texts, but that inhabits texts in a way that their shorings will not hold (Weed, 2010).

In my research I focus on spectatorship as a theory for the engagement with film/fantasy as a process of masochistic displacement of desire. Relating spectatorship to mimesis enables a corporeal and a tactile reading of the relation between viewer and fantasy. This process uses sexed language as a means to ensure that the text still hurts, that the discrepancies are still felt when we engage in the mimetic process. Through a close viewing of the film *8 Women* (Ozon, 2002), I explore the mimetic deployment of gender through re-discoveries and re-negotiations of difference as embodied, sexed experience. I argue for the value of a sexualised language and for a tactile and corporeal inhabiting of sexualised gender in order to explore the fluidity within these fantasies.

**Jonas Green** is a PhD Candidate at the Department of Psychosocial Studies, Birkbeck, University of London.

### **Steinunn Hreinsdóttir**

#### *Irigaray's Mimesis as a Radical Deconstruction of the Feminine*



Luce Irigaray has been at the forefront of disclosing how Western philosophy and psychoanalysis have covered over sexual difference, which means that philosophy is monosexual, giving a priori value to logocentrism based on a masculine viewpoint, logic and objectivity. The feminine has been non-existent as a doer in language. Luce Irigaray has done especially interesting work in revealing a latent, hidden feminine meaning within classical texts of philosophy, in order to make space for a subjectivity that is one's own, grounded on embodied, lived experience. She deploys the most critical and creative tool, mimesis, in her reading of canonical texts of philosophy to deconstruct and loosen up the myth of the given. Mimesis is a sort of "cover up" in language that establishes a transformative interim-space, where transcendence can take place. It is grounded on the human desire to perceive ourselves and the world and to form our lives. Her philosophy aims to even out the binary of the sexes into a horizontal intersubjectivity by excavating the female subject in philosophical texts and concepts.

In Irigaray's most lyrical text, "When Our Lips Speak Together", she displays the mimetic method in deconstructing the monopoly of the male subject position in a linguistic play with multiple voices and perspectives. The two pairs of lips are a counter symbol to the Freudian "lack" and a positive female imaginary, implying movement, openness, proximity and care. The purpose of her mimic method is double, firstly to transform patterns of the imaginary and the symbolic, and secondly to create subjectivity that is our own. Mimesis is thus a creative thinking that is deconstructive and creative at the same time. Applying mimesis opens for the unexpressed and hidden, as well as for emotional and critical aspects, creativity and productive energy. The lips illustrate also two wills of equal strength, conflict-free communication without exclusion or dominance (one lip never excludes the other). They symbolize intersubjectivity based on utopian ideal about real sexual difference based on equality, mutual respect, unity and justice. My account is that Luce Irigaray's utopia is not an idealistic static one, but dynamic, linked to our endless striving for a realistic grasp of who we are and how we experience being in the world.

**Steinunn Hreinsdóttir** is a PhD student in philosophy at the University of Iceland.

### **Isabell Dahms**

#### *Speculation and Feminist Thought: Hegel and Irigaray*

Starting from Hegel's understanding of the term, this paper will examine the contemporary relevance of the concept of speculation for feminist analysis and critique. Hegelian speculation can be understood as a re-elaboration of the teleological principle. Arguing that mechanical causality cannot conceptualize reciprocal, dynamic relations adequately, but can only deal with facts, Hegelian speculation attempts to create a system of thought that



discloses unfolding relations in their totality – according to their logical, natural, social and historical aspects.

I would like to propose that Hegelian speculation, because it makes relation the first object of analysis, can provide a resource for understanding the concepts of sex, gender and sexual difference. It also allows to address the question of the necessity of a philosophical system and of systematicity for feminist thought. If sex and gender structure every aspect of social life, then do we need a speculative analysis to make sense of these phenomena? How can we rethink systematicity for feminist thought, without universalizing one account of woman's experience?

I propose reading Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman*, in view of these questions. While Irigaray addresses the limits of Hegelian speculation, and proposes a re-interpretation of this term, her methodological approach is not dissimilar from Hegel's. Irigaray argues that sexual difference, and the oppression of women under patriarchy, can only be understood from within an entire conceptual framework of unfolding relations, a framework that investigates the juncture between the social, the biological, and the epistemological aspects of oppression. Offering a rich and systematic account of the workings of patriarchy, Irigaray however leaves the privilege of white and/or middle class women, which is no less structural, unacknowledged. She too is subject to the universalizing impulse that she critiques in Hegel and other thinkers, but that she also successfully deconstructs in parts. This paper will engage with this tension and will explore if and how speculation provides a necessary methodological means for understanding sex and gender.

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### **Belinda Mitchell**

#### *Thickness of Time*

Buildings decay and mutate, they are made of hybrid assemblages of material sourced from near and far.... 'they are emergent mosaics of various temporalities, collages of matter characterised by an incessant becoming'. We are interested in the perdurance or life expectancy of a thing, or how long it can be kept going. This thinking supports us to shift away from reading of historic buildings through stratified histories to one where space, time, materials and people are intertwined in an unfolding process.

Our work uses an uninhabited 16th-century timber-framed manor house as a case study. Here we propose that the house is experienced all the more poignantly as it hangs in a transitional state prior to any programme of restoration and reuse which aspires to implement a unifying scheme leading to a fixed and static end point. In particular, we examine the on



going processes at work in a decaying timber floor joist and the affective capacities elicited by the natural and cultural agencies at work and the absences and presences that the timber suggests. We do this through amassing creative exchanges using drawing, writing, and dialogues with the space and timber to prompt new modes of understanding historic interiors.

We propose to use the conference as a site of exchange where we open a conversation about the decaying floor joist through responding to Luce Irigaray's texts, her thinking and vocabulary of difference, of form and shape. We aim to do this through a 30 minute creative writing session and a 10 minute space for reading and sharing the multiple voices of the participants imaginative responses.

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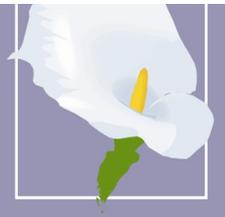
## Plenary Session IV

### Tina Chanter

#### *Irigaray and Disidentification*

Drawing on the work of Sara Ahmed, Anne McClintock José Esteban Muñoz, Jacques Rancière and others, I explore my relationship to Irigaray's work, and the questions and themes it privileges, under the heading of disidentification. On the one hand I pay tribute to the philosophical importance of Irigaray's work. On the other hand I attempt to articulate an approach that, in the words of Muñoz 'neither opts to assimilate . . . nor strictly opposes' her corpus (1999, 11). Rather, by adopting the strategy of 'disidentification' I ask what it might mean to work 'on and against' Irigaray, to try 'to transform' its 'cultural logic from within' (1999, 11). For Muñoz to 'disidentify is to read oneself and one's own life narrative in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to "connect" with the disidentifying subject. It is not to pick and choose what one takes out of an identification. It is not to wilfully evacuate the politically dubious or shameful components within an identificatory locus' (1999, 12). What might it mean to disidentify with Irigaray for a subject who is culturally coded to connect with her work, but who finds herself displaced from it through intellectual and political commitments to what can be broadly indicated under the umbrella heading of what Kimberlé Crenshaw and others have called intersectionality?

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Heidegger (Stanford UP, 2001), and *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray's Re-writing of the Philosophers* (Routledge, 1995).